

Countryside Update

December 2004 (issue no. 61)

Update from Lincolnshire

This month's update comes from Major Collier in Lincolnshire who has been campaigning on footpath issues:

"At Hemingby, near Horncastle in Lincolnshire there is a 1778 Inclosure Award route designated at 30 foot wide. It leads from a road confusingly called Green Lane for 2055 yards over arable fields to the significantly named Market Bridge on an unsurfaced Roman Road. It was ploughed under the Ministry of Agriculture's regulations as an emergency measure during World War Two and has been ever since. Later a bridleway of unstated width followed the route and was recorded on the definitive map although this, in turn, was ploughed out and rarely defined for much of its length. Our complaints eventually reached the Ombudsman and in April 2002 Lincolnshire County Council promised an order would be made 'within a month'. We received the Order in 2004.

We were concerned that the Order stated 15-foot width for most of its length, extinguished a section over the last arable field and used a convenient 13-foot wide farm track to connect to the road. This would give the wilful and persistent offender just over two acres of land at the current price of about £3,000 an acre in this part of the country. There is an obstruction problem with the gardens of four houses and one house where the Inclosure Award route should meet the road. After seeing copies of correspondence details it is clear that it is the landowner who has dictated terms to a compliant Highway Authority. The farmer, under the new cross-compliant procedure may be offered

grant-aid to take headland strips out of cultivation in order to encourage wild-life habitats."

Roundup of the Year

As usual, 2004 has been a mix of good and bad news for the countryside, with some great campaign successes as well as some more worrying proposals on the horizon.

On the transport front, the end of 2003 saw the publication of the aviation white paper. This sets out plans for unprecedented expansion over the next 30 years. About 30 airports around the country now face an increase in traffic to some degree. For some airports, such as Stansted, this could lead to an extra runway and damage or destruction of villages and ancient woodland. Not only will this lead to large areas of countryside being covered in tarmac, but it will also lead to a significant increase to carbon emissions from transport.

You can help by:

- Keeping an eye out for the airport master plans. All airports will have to produce one of these and they should be consulted on. When one is issued for an airport near you, try and respond. Expansion of this scale will have massive impacts for our countryside.
- Join a local campaign group. There are some excellent campaign groups around the country, if you are concerned about development of an airport near you, join forces with others with similar worries.

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Contact Sarah at central office if you would like more information on this.

In summer we saw the publication of the transport white paper, following the Way to Go campaign which promoted better use of public transport and 'soft measures' such as walking and cycling. We were pleased to see a commitment from the government to include the voluntary sector when making improvements for walking and cycling infrastructure.

We had great news on Dibden Bay. Following a long campaign which the Ramblers' were involved in, we saw the proposals to build a new port there overturned on environmental grounds. The proposal would have seen a new port built on an area which fell within the Countryside Agency's proposed boundary for the New Forest National Park. It would also have had a big impact on protected areas.

The announcement came before the announcement into the New Forest and was seen as a good sign that we would have a designation soon. We were right, in June we heard the announcement that the New Forest was to become a National Park, which was great news. However, we were disappointed by the size of the park, which was less than we were hoping for. In fact, it was less than the Countryside Agency had recommended!

The public inquiry into the South Downs will also draw to a close at the end of 2004. The Ramblers' Association has appeared to give evidence into where the boundary should be drawn and also into how the park should be administered.

The next stage of the campaign will be to keep the pressure up in making sure that the need for a South Downs National Park isn't forgotten, especially as we're likely to have a General Election before it's announced. We want to make sure that the designation comes as quickly as possible, with a wide boundary encompassing the different landscapes.

You can help by:

- Keeping an eye out for press stories about the South Downs. If you spot an opportunity to support the park, for example through writing a letter, then try and take it. If it's kept in the public eye it will be harder for the government to ignore it.
- You can also keep the pressure up with writing to your MP, particularly if you live in the area. Ask them if they will be

supporting the South Downs if they are elected (you can also do this with prospective parliamentary candidates).

Of course, 2004 also saw the first ever National Parks Week – let's hope there's more news on national parks to celebrate next year.

Of huge importance to all countryside campaigners, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act was passed in 2004 and we also saw Planning Policy Statements begin to replace Planning Policy Guidance.

One of the biggest changes was the increase in power handed to regional government and moved away from local authorities. Regional Spatial Strategies have been introduced which will have huge implications for development such as housing and transport. These will be decided upon by unelected bodies. After the defeat on the referendum for regional government in the north east, it now looks as if the democratic deficit will remain in place for some time.

You can help by:

- Getting involved in regional consultations. Some Regional Spatial Strategies are being consulted on now. These plans will have huge implications for development in your area and will also cross over RA Areas.

This year we have also seen some public inquiries into huge wind farm developments. The public inquiry into Romney Marsh has finished and the public inquiry into Scout Moor is taking place. Next year will see the public inquiry into Whinash take place. All of these are taking place under the new PPS 22. We will be issuing a new Countryside Guidance Note on renewable energy in the New Year.

What can we look for next year? The consultation on MPS 1 has just been issued and we will be sending in a response, so we should hopefully see that arrive at some point next year. The consultation will be taking place on extending the boundary of the Lake District National Park which could see some beautiful areas better protected. And of course we will probably have a General Election – which gives an ideal opportunity to lobby your MPs and try and get commitments from them on the issues that are important to you. After all, they all want your vote!

A big thanks to everybody who has been involved in campaigns through 2004. Have a great Christmas and successful campaigning in 2005.