

Countryside Update

January 2005 (issue no. 62)

Consultation on MPS 1 issued

The countryside team at central office is currently working on a response to the draft Minerals Planning Statement 1 (MPS 1) which was issued at the end of November.

The Ramblers' Association will be submitting our own response as well as contributing to the response submitted by Wildlife and Countryside Link. We have also been meeting with one of the ministers responsible for planning and some of the statutory agencies.

Although there are some improvements to the draft guidance, compared to the current Minerals Planning Guidance 1, we are still concerned that there are some fundamental flaws as it stands at present.

The draft statement still relies heavily on outdated 'predict and provide' approaches to minerals planning, placing emphasis on making sure that supply meets forecast demand. We are also very concerned that no mention of the importance of access and recreation is made with regards to the protection of the countryside. We will be leading the argument for recognition of this in the final paper.

If you would like to read the consultation paper you can obtain a copy from the website of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister at the following web address http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_planning/documents/page/odpm_plan_032983.pdf

If you don't have access to the internet, you can phone the ODPM on 020 7944 4400 and ask for a copy to be sent to you. If you would like to respond and would like more information or advice on the main points to be raised, please call Sarah at central office.

East of England Regional Assembly rejects its own plan!

In December last year the East of England Regional Assembly voted to withdraw its support of the draft regional plan which is currently out for consultation.

The decision was made because it was felt that central government was not delivering enough money to support transport infrastructure for the proposed new houses in the area. Most of the demand for transport infrastructure was new roads in the region, which would just add to the environmental damage already on the cards with the massive housing development.

Of course this leaves the plan in some uncertainty and acts as another illustration of the gap between central and regional government.

Airport White Paper is challenged in the courts

In December a coalition of organisations held a judicial review of the Government's White Paper on aviation which was issued at the end of 2003.

The judicial review is looking at several different elements of the White Paper, making the argument that the government failed to consult on

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several different options. If anti-expansion campaigners are successful the government may be forced to re-write the White Paper from scratch. A decision is expected in February.

The Office for National Statistics has recently revealed that the deficit between the amount UK tourists spend when overseas and the amount foreign visitors spend in the UK has hit an all time high. People from the UK now spend £28.6 billion when holidaying overseas, yet foreign tourists only spend £11.9 billion in the UK, so that blows any argument about flying being good for tourism out the water!

Consultation on AONB Conservation Boards

Defra have recently launched a closed consultation on guidance for AONB Conservation boards.

The consultation document looks at issues including membership and the establishment and dissolution of a conservation board.

If you have had experience of working with a conservation board and would like to feed your views into the response then please contact Sarah at central office to have a copy sent through to you.

As this is a closed consultation all views and responses must be fed through central office.

Congratulations to Major Collier

The countryside team would like to pass on our congratulations to Major Collier, the countryside secretary for Lincolnshire, who received an MBE in the New Year's Honours List.

Major Collier received the award for services to the countryside, which we are really pleased about. He was one of the founder members of the Lincoln Ramblers Association 30 years ago and had been active in the area for many years before that.

Lobbying your MP

In the run up to a probably General Election, MPs are often particularly aware of the needs of their constituents, particularly if you are in a marginal seat.

Constituency recess will be held in mid-February from 10th to 21st February and this is a great week to lobby your MP locally.

Of course, it can also be beneficial to lobby prospective parliamentary candidates (PPC) at this time, again this is particularly important if you are

in a marginal seat. PPCs want your vote just as much as your sitting MP and you might find they are open to your campaigns, although it is important to make sure these are more than just warm words.

If you can get them to agree to press releases or write letters in your local press then you have printed words which you can call on later. It might also mean that other PPCs will match promises.

Hastings – Bexhill Link Road get go-ahead

There was disappointing news from the government when they agreed to the link road between Hastings and Bexhill. The scheme is very similar to one which was rejected by the same government a few years ago as it was too damaging to the environment.

A coalition of local and national organisations and individuals had fought the proposals, but they were supported by the local councils who argued they were needed for economic reasons.

New Promoting Walking team

By the end of January we will have a new promoting walking team in place at central office. The team will have two people and will look at influencing the promoting walking agenda at a national level and also building links with local and national community groups and organisations.

Simon Waters is the new Head of Promoting Walking and Imran Khan is the new Feet First Initiative Officer. They will be working on developing our policy on how to promote walking in transport and planning and making sure we are at the forefront of discussions on the issue.

Call for articles

We are still keen to hear from people who would like to submit an article about their countryside work. This can be campaign successes or issues you are working on at the moment, or even to see if other campaigners have advice or information they can pass on which would help you.

If you would like to submit an article, please contact Sarah at central office to discuss it.