

Countryside Update

February 2005 (issue no. 63)

Planning Policy Statement 1 launched

The final Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1) was issued earlier this month and was warmly welcomed by the Ramblers' Association and other environmental NGOs.

The Ramblers' Association had responded to the consultation through Wildlife and Countryside Link and thought that in the original consultation document several elements were missing. It looks like the ODPM have listened to the views of the NGOs and strengthened the final document.

PPS 1: Delivering Sustainable Development has many elements of planning policy which we have been lobbying for. For example a recognition that design has an integral part to play in the planning system and if an application does not 'take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area' it should not be accepted.

The elements which were missing from the consultation document which have now been accepted include:

- How conservation and environmental protection can be beneficial
- The importance of protecting and enhancing the landscape and wider countryside
- How planning plays a part in managing change in the wider public interest.

Of course the important thing now is to make sure that the change in policy at the top is reflected in policy decisions on the ground

The Community Renewable Initiative

Sarah recently attended a conference looking at the Community Renewables Initiative. This is an initiative being run jointly by the Countryside Agency and the DTI.

The initiative looks to provide support and suggestions for funding for small scale renewable energy schemes which can help to provide renewable energy for a community project.

There were lots of inspiring projects from round England, including a school which uses the energy to power the school and provide education for the children. This was having a ripple effect through the village with lots of families looking at schemes for their own homes.

These are entirely the sorts of renewable energy schemes which the Ramblers' Association supports and, where possible, should be encouraging. If you know of a community project near you that you think could benefit then think about getting in touch with them. It might take a while but these schemes are an important contribution to the fight against climate change.

You can read more on the website <http://www.countryside.gov.uk/NewEnterprise/Economies/CRI.asp>, or you can contact them by

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Integrated Agency Bill issued

Defra have just issued the consultation on the draft Bill, entitled the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill. The Bill will seek to merge English Nature and parts of the Countryside Agency and the Rural Development Service. Some of the Countryside Agency will become the Commission for Rural Communities

The Bill will also seek to implement some of the suggestions in Defra's document Use of Mechanically Propelled Vehicles on Public Rights of Way, which is their response to the consultation issued last year.

The Ramblers' Association is monitoring the development of the Bill closely to make sure that the importance of access and recreation in the countryside is given the importance it deserves.

Countryside Guidance Notes

Last year we issued updates to the Countryside Guidance Notes, which are in a dark blue folder. We know that many of you find these very useful, but it may be that you have a copy you no longer need (perhaps you are no longer the Countryside Secretary or are no longer active).

Our supplies at central office are running very low again and we would be extremely grateful if you could send back any copies that you aren't using, or pass them on to your local group or Area if you are resigning from a post, so they can be sent on to the relevant volunteer.

It's worth mentioning that to produce these is very time consuming and expensive, so we like them to go to as many good homes as possible!

Use your paths

There has been some great news from the footpaths campaigns team who are organising the walks for the Use Your Paths week, which some of you may be aware of.

As with all walks, the footpath campaigns teams have been encouraging members to organise walks using that are accessible by public transport and so far over 80% of the walks that have been submitted have fulfilled this.

Better use of public transport is essential to ensuring that the countryside is protected from further damaging road building and it is also important to make sure our walks are accessible to as many people as possible.

Airport announcement expected

At the time of writing the decision on the judicial review into the Government's White Paper on aviation was expected to be announced on the 18th February, so it could well have been announced by the time you receive this.

The judicial review will be looking into whether the Government fully considered all options when consulting on the White Paper. If it is found that this was not the case, there is a possibility that the White Paper will have to be redone, hopefully (although not a strong probability) that it will be more in line with what environmental campaigners would like to see.

The campaign against expansion will continue whether the decision finds in their favour or not, so there is still lots of opportunity to get involved.

A new Parliamentary Officer

The Ramblers' Association have employed a new Parliamentary Officer to help them campaign in the run up to the General Election, which is expected in May this year.

Louise will be helping us to identify friendly MPs who could help us campaign after the General Election. She will be working on issues including coastal access, the promotion of walking and renewable energy.

Campaign Successes

If you have recently been involved in a campaign which you think may be of interest to other readers of Countryside Update, we would like to hear about it.

The campaign could be something like a public inquiry into a planning application, or maybe you have persuaded your local councillors or MPs to support your cause and this has helped you to achieve good policies in your area, something which is of relevance both locally and nationally.

