

# Countryside Update

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## Reducing Traffic in the Countryside?

The Pembrokeshire Greenways partnership recently held an event to promote the success of the community transport scheme to local authorities throughout Wales. The scheme which serves the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path as well as local communities, facilitates linear walking routes without the need for cars at either end. The scheme has grown from strength to strength by being supported by a combination of walkers, holidaymakers and locals. New bus routes in the Preseli Hills have been initiated and have regenerated walking routes accessible from villages and well-positioned bus-stops.

Pembrokeshire even has a vision as a green county, where, once you arrive you can leave your car behind and go anywhere conveniently on public transport. The coordinator of the Greenways project (which is supported by the Welsh Assembly Government) has challenged other local authorities to follow their lead and set up similar initiatives in their areas.

The whole public transport issue is clearly on the agenda again, with many areas trying individually to do the same thing. A consultation on sustainable transport in Snowdonia (the Green Key Initiative) has been responded to

from Ramblers' Wales area members. Ramblers Wales Office has also been party to a group working with the Assembly on the Walking and Cycling Strategy. Through this we have also been able to support the demand for improved quality and quantity of facilities at transport interchanges for walkers and cyclists. The strategy will act as a key consideration as Welsh authorities develop their plans and should help in the drive to make using public transport more attractive and accessible for those on foot.

## Energy

Ramblers' Wales has submitted evidence to the Welsh Affairs Committee, who in the session until mid-2006 are undertaking an inquiry into Energy in Wales. The inquiry is covering the portfolio of all energy types including the various renewable forms and will focus on UK policy and its relation to the National Assembly for Wales. Our submission focused on 4 elements:

- That energy conservation should be considered as part of the portfolio of technologies in the inquiry;
- that to achieve CO2 reduction targets resources should be allocated to each technology to drive their development (in turn requiring a revision of the renewables obligation);

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- that monitoring against predicted CO2 reduction is necessary to advise any energy strategy;
- and that the planning framework should be able to protect the environment from inappropriate development (such as industrial scale wind farms) in the countryside.

In the mean time, Ramblers' Wales members have been making submissions to a number of Environmental Assessments which are at the scoping stages for potential on-shore windfarms. This is likely to increase as the plans for the Strategic Search Areas designated in Wales for renewable energy generation.

As part of its energy strategy the Assembly has also proposed to establish an Energy Forum to examine and advise on issues affecting clean energy generation in Wales. This is a welcome initiative, however, as part of Wales Environment Link we have had to lobby for the inclusion of appropriate environmental NGO to be part of the Forum!

## Planning

Wales Spatial Planning has identified some areas of South Wales as a key area for economic development. Proposals for various 'regeneration projects' around Merthyr Tydfil (closely related to coal recovery) have met with considerable public opposition. An area of Common Land at Ffos y Fran has recently been reprieved when a High Court judge in London quashed a Welsh Assembly Government decision to back a 17 year coal extraction programme. Ramblers' Wales members have also objected at public inquiry against a 300 hectare redevelopment at Rhyd y Car. This area although technically brown-field is well established with mature woodland and heath land plants and has become a valuable habitat for wildlife and an important and accessible asset to the local community.

These issues stress the importance of keeping up to date with local /unitary development plans and the value of making our voice heard as part of wider community campaigns.