

# Countryside Update

## May 2007 (issue 76)

### Campaigners kept in suspense over Energy & Planning policies

Suspension of political activity during the local council, Scottish and Welsh election period has delayed publication of two major new policy documents expected from the Government. Forthcoming White Papers on Energy and Planning are expected to exacerbate potential threats to scenic and rural areas, by making it easier to gain planning permission for 'Major Infrastructure Projects' against local objections.

The Planning White Paper will respond to recommendations in the Barker Review of Planning and Eddington Review of Transport that both identified local consultation stages as hindering potential economic benefits from large-scale developments including new roads, airports and housing. The Ramblers' Association has teamed up with key allies including CPRE and Friends of the Earth to present an alternative vision of a planning system that has genuine sustainability and participation at its heart. We are prepared to launch a massive campaign to counter any damaging proposals when the White Paper is finally published.

The new Energy White Paper, which could pave the way for new nuclear power stations and ease restrictions on massive windfarms has also been delayed. We are also still waiting for proposals for reform of the Renewables Obligation subsidy system.

### Global Climate Change on the agenda at General Council

Climate change will have an impact on the walking environment – but walkers can help to mitigate its effects. That was the message behind an agreement by Ramblers' Association General Council to develop a strategy on the issue at its meeting last month. As evidence mounts that man-made pollution is contributing to rising sea-levels and global warming, the organisation needs to play to its strengths as a responsible user and defender of our countryside.

Walking is a low-carbon method of exercise, transport and recreation and the Ramblers has considerable experience of introducing the joys of this pastime to new and wider audiences. Footpaths, especially on the coast, are in increasing danger of erosion. Designated landscapes have a role to play as 'green lungs' and 'carbon sinks'. All these issues and more will highlight a 'green thread' running through the work of the Ramblers, especially as the Association's new strategic plan is developed.

The resolution called for full consultation with members on the content of our climate change strategy, and more formal opportunities to input to this will be announced shortly. Discussion at group and area level, and informal feedback to relevant staff and trustees, can of course start immediately, and we look forward to hearing from you.

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## Clear Horizons in Wales

Local groups in South Wales have just completed the last of six 'Gorwel Agored' or 'Clear Horizons' walks. These have taken ramblers and local people up on to the hills to take a last look across the Valleys before major wind farm developments take their toll.

The South Wales Valleys will host a third of all new renewable energy development in Wales, part of a new 'strategic approach' by the Welsh Assembly Government. With turbines up to 180m (nearly 600 feet) on the cards, local people have been raising the profile of this issue ahead of Assembly elections in May.

Up to 200 walkers have turned up in all weathers, evidence of public feeling about the impacts to doorstep walking – and the unique landscapes - for many communities. Thanks go to the Glamorgan Area groups who organised this fantastic campaign.

## Our Common Land

The sixth edition of this popular and useful book by our friends at the Open Spaces Society has just been published. Fully revised and updated, it covers important recent legislation affecting the registration of and access to common land.

As well as detailed but simply explained advice on safeguarding village greens and important local green spaces, the book includes a fascinating history of common land and the role it has played in society over the centuries.

Strongly recommended for anyone with an interest in the law, management and protection of common land, the book is available for £30 (or £19.00 for OSS members) from the Society on 01491 573535 or [www.oss.org.uk](http://www.oss.org.uk).

## Challenges and Changes for the South Downs campaign

The 'Meyrick' case, which had held up designation of the South Downs National Park while the boundary of the New Forest National Park was challenged, has finally come to an end. The Court of Appeal decided on 1<sup>st</sup> February to dismiss DEFRA's appeal against an earlier judgement excluding parts of the Hinton Estate from the New Forest designation. DEFRA are now resuming the designation process for the South Downs.

This means that it is likely the Public Inquiry into the National Park will be re-opened later this year, with a final decision at some point in 2008. We will continue to work as part of the South Downs Campaign to ensure the process moves as swiftly as possible. Any Ramblers living in or around the area are asked to raise the issue with candidates during the local council elections.

Meanwhile, activists in the Downs are concerned at proposals by Glyndebourne Opera House to construct a 90m-tall wind turbine in their grounds. Likely to be visible around the local area and from the South Downs Way, if planning permission is granted it could set a precedent for similar developments not only elsewhere in the Sussex AONB but on other designated sites across the country. Local Ramblers have joined forces with the CPRE and the South Downs Society to oppose the turbine, asking the Secretary of State to 'call-in' the proposal if necessary. Such proposals also show the need for the full protection afforded by National Park status to be extended to the Downs as soon as possible.

Ramblers' Association policy has always been clear that while there is an important role for wind power in meeting our energy needs and reducing carbon emissions, AONBs and National Parks are not appropriate places for such industrial-scale developments.

## Commission for Rural Communities

This agency has been set up to provide well-informed, independent advice to government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs of people living and working in rural England, with a particular focus on tackling disadvantage. Their website has many interesting and topical articles, as well as opportunities for comment and contribution. Visit [www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk) for more information.