

Countryside Update

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New White Papers Pose Challenge for Countryside Campaigners

Countryside Protection and Environmental Campaigners have launched a major Call to Action following publication of two key policy documents by the government. Proposals contained in the Energy and Planning White Papers could drastically alter the landscapes enjoyed by walkers and seriously damage commitments to tackle climate change – and remove the right of local communities to have their say on these changes.

In an attempt to 'streamline' decision-making on major developments such as roads and power stations, a new, independent Planning Commission will be empowered to grant planning permission based on 'National Policy Statements' drawn up by government ministers. The rights of local people to influence the different stages of proposals will be watered down or removed completely. Members of the 'Planning Disaster' coalition will be holding a 'fortnight of action' between 30th June and 14th July to raise awareness and public opposition to these proposals.

TAKE ACTION: Visit www.planningdisaster.co.uk to respond to the Planning White Paper, or sign the enclosed postcard. Contact Ramblers Central Office for more information and postcards to distribute, and encourage other Ramblers – at a meeting or on a led walk – to do the same. Email countryside@ramblers.org.uk or call 020 7339 8500 for more.

Planning White Paper: Key Points

'Planning for a Sustainable Future' has been signed by four cabinet ministers (Communities, DEFRA, Transport and DTI), indicating the wide sweep of policy it covers:

- a new Planning Commission to decide Major Infrastructure Projects (MIPs) including roads, airports, power stations, ports, incinerators and reservoirs
- 'National Policy Statements' drawn up by ministers to identify need for MIPs
- Easing 'permitted development' conditions for household extensions and microgeneration of electricity
- Planning Policy Statements (PPS) review.

Energy White Paper: Key Points

'Meeting the Energy Challenge' has twin aims of reducing carbon emissions and achieving energy security. As well as the headline recommendation to allow new nuclear power stations to be built by private companies, the paper proposes:

- Energy saving measures including 'smart meters' in homes: welcomed by the Ramblers.
- Reform of the Renewables Obligation: a long-standing Ramblers demand, but disappointingly not before 2009.
- Investment in renewable energy: encouraging a range of technologies, but still a concerning emphasis on on-shore wind.

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To: Area and Group Countryside Secretaries; Area Secretaries; Countryside Update members; Extra Countryside Secretaries

Contact: England: Patrick Grady, 0207 339 857, patrickg@ramblers.org.uk • Wales: Martin Dowson, 029 2064 4308,

martind@ramblers.org.uk • Scotland (Wildland Campaigner): Davie Black, 01577 867742, davieb@ramblers.org.uk

To add someone to the circulation list please email countryside@ramblers.org.uk

Ramblers join Climate Change campaign

Stop Climate Chaos, the UK-wide coalition campaigning for government and personal action to tackle global warming, has signed up the Ramblers' Association as its latest member. Following a debate at Ramblers General Council in March, the Board of Trustees gave the green light to joining this growing and influential campaign.

Over 50 other environmental and international organisations have already joined, including Friends of the Earth, Oxfam, the RSPB and Campaign to Protect Rural England. The campaign has already had a major success, when it successfully lobbied for a Climate Change Bill to be included in the 2006 Queen's Speech.

The public face of the campaign is 'I Count' – www.icount.org.uk - which encourages members of the public to commit to doing their bit to reduce carbon emissions and call for political action. Nearly 90,000 people have already pledged to take action – from using their car less to emailing the Prime Minister. In November 2006, Ramblers members were among the 25,000 people who rallied in Trafalgar Square at the first 'I Count' demonstration. This year, music lovers at the Glastonbury festival will be asked to sign the pledge.

You can find out more by visiting www.icount.org.uk, www.stopclimatechaos.org.uk or www.ramblers.org.uk/climatechange. Separate wings of the coalition have been set up in Wales and Scotland to lobby the devolved administrations, and the Ramblers will be able to play its part in both of these.

The internal Ramblers consultation on developing a climate change strategy continues, with a deadline for responses of 17th August. Visit www.ramblers.org.uk/climatechange or call Central Office for more information.

Countryside Round-up

Ramblers volunteers from [Hertfordshire](#) and [Essex](#) have united to oppose expansion of Stansted Airport. In a submission on the opening day of the Public Inquiry, they cited global warming, damage to the countryside, and the effects of noise and air pollution on local walkers as reasons to reject permission for an extra 10million passengers through the airport each year.

[East Yorks & Derwent](#) Area have voted not to oppose a straw-burning power station in Holderness. The area is threatened by many giant windfarm developments, but the damage to visual amenity by this development was judged to be less severe.

In [Dorset](#), the Weymouth Relief Road has entered a legal minefield after the District Council voted to approve the scheme, despite being aware of the regional government office's intention to call-in the proposal.

Farewell to Robert Allen

Many Ramblers Countryside officers will have had contact with Robert Allen, who has volunteered with the campaigns team in Central Office for the past 18 months. He played an invaluable role sending out (and keeping track of) planning documents and local consultations received in Central Office to the relevant Groups and Areas.

Sadly, time pressures and other commitments have meant that Robert has moved on from this post.

Staff were able to record their thanks for his help at a farewell lunch in May. Former Countryside campaigner Sarah Williams even sent a 'telegram' to wish him all the best.

There may be some short-term 'disruption of service' for those used to receiving documents via Robert. Please do bear with us as we decide how best to replace this role.

What's New on the Ramblers Countryside Protection web pages

Keep checking www.ramblers.org.uk/countryside for the latest news and updates on countryside protection issues. The 'Responses' section contains an archive of submissions made by the Ramblers to consultations run by government and other institutions – these can be a useful guide to our 'latest thinking' on key issues. The main page will always feature a link to key online or email campaign actions you can take to support our campaigns. If you have any ideas or suggestions for the website, please get in touch!