

# Countryside Update

## November 2007 (issue 78)

### Pressure builds on Planning Reform

Environmental campaigners are braced for a major battle over changes to the way significant developments such as roads and airports are decided. A new Planning Reform Bill is expected to be published shortly after the Queen's Speech on 6<sup>th</sup> November, based heavily on the contents of the Planning White Paper discussed in the last Countryside Update.

Over 30,000 responses to the consultation on the White Paper were submitted to the government, with the vast majority coming from supporters of the Planning Disaster coalition which includes the Ramblers' Association.

Proposals for an independent Planning Commission with power to approve major roads, airports and power stations on the basis of national policy rather than local need have alarmed countryside organisations. Other members of the coalition include the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Friends of the Earth and the RSPB.

**TAKE ACTION:** Visit the website [www.planningdisaster.co.uk](http://www.planningdisaster.co.uk) for the latest news on the campaign and to send an email to your MP asking them to oppose these damaging reforms of the planning system. The website also features an interactive map that shows some of the potential projects that could be rubber-stamped if the reforms go through. What's in your area?

### Sting in the Tail for the South Downs

Good news came at last for the South Downs Campaign when the government published its Inspector's report in July, which recommended the National Park be established.

The news was qualified, however, by the Inspector's decision to recommend that a large part of the existing Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the 'Western Weald' be excluded from the boundary.

The government had also asked for responses to this announcement within a six-week period – but some intense lobbying by the Ramblers and others saw the deadline extended into September. We have supported the strong cases made by the South Downs Campaign and South Downs Society for the retention of this spectacular area of countryside within the National Park. Copies of the submission can be found at [www.southdownscampaign.org.uk](http://www.southdownscampaign.org.uk).

The next step is likely to be a reopened Public Inquiry to consider the case of the Western Weald in more detail. The government has said it hopes to make final confirmation of National Park status for the Downs by autumn 2008.

**TAKE ACTION:** support the campaign by signing the online petition at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/western-weald/> – and encourage others to do the same.

**Circular Number:** 07/108      **Date:** November 2007      **For:** Information and Action

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## Ramblers and Climate Change

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to the consultation on a Climate Change Strategy for the Ramblers' Association.

A draft strategy was presented to the Ramblers Board of Trustees in October, who intend to discuss the paper further in light of the wider Ramblers strategic plan. A paper on Climate Change will then be presented to General Council in March 2008.

The Queen's Speech is also expected to announce new legislation to set targets for reducing UK carbon emissions in the coming years. As part of Stop Climate Chaos, the Ramblers wants to make sure the Climate Change Bill is as strong and effective as possible. A major demonstration on the issue is planned for 8<sup>th</sup> December in London as are various events around the country. **TAKE ACTION:** Support the campaign by visiting [www.icount.org.uk](http://www.icount.org.uk) or [www.ramblers.org.uk/climatechange](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/climatechange).

## Countryside Guidance Notes

As Countryside Update goes to print, the finishing touches are being made to a completely revised and updated edition of the Countryside Guidance Notes.

The new pack is designed for all Ramblers volunteers and members who want to help achieve our aim of 'protecting and enhancing the beauty of the countryside'. Notes explain the planning framework and how to get involved, as well as outlining government and Ramblers policy on major developments which affect the countryside, such as roads and power stations.

A copy of the pack will be sent to all existing Countryside Secretaries or Officers at Group and Area Level. The whole pack will also be available in pdf format on the countryside pages of the Ramblers website. Watch this space!

## All Change for Ramblers Countryside Staff

Martin Dowson, Countryside Campaigner in Wales finished work with the Ramblers' Association in July, returning to his native Sheffield. Central Office Countryside Campaign Manager, Patrick Grady, will leave the Ramblers on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, returning to Scotland.

Until announcements are made about replacements, any enquiries should be directed to [countryside@ramblers.org.uk](mailto:countryside@ramblers.org.uk), or by phone to Central Office (0207 339 8500) or Cardiff (029 2064 4308).

## Flurry of Windfarm Activity

Wind power has been in the news again recently, with a number of government decisions on major proposals.

Nine months after the Public Inquiry closed, campaigners in Devon finally heard that permission had been given for the construction of 22 wind turbines at Fullabrook Down, which will be the largest such development in the county. Local Ramblers had opposed the scheme on the grounds that it would harm the beauty of the local countryside, especially views from the nearby North Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Meanwhile, Ramblers groups in Hertfordshire, Essex and Lincolnshire have chosen not to object to various smaller windfarm proposals, in line with Ramblers' Association policy. Kent Area had also chosen not to object to the land-based infrastructure needed to support the massive Thames Array project, which will be the world's largest off-shore windfarm.

The future direction of renewable energy across England will be influenced by the Energy Bill, expected around the same time as the new Planning Reform Bill (see front page). Government has committed to reforming the Renewables Obligation subsidy system which is driving onshore windfarm construction at the expense of a broader range of renewable energy – but not until 2009. Keep up to date with our campaign at <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/energy>.

Ramblers Scotland will also be out in force at the Scottish National Party conference to lobby members of the newly-elected Scottish Government on the Beaulieu-Denny powerline. This proposal threatens a vast swathe of the Scottish Highlands, including part of the Cairngorms National Park, with super-pylons up to 220ft high. A Public Inquiry is ongoing.