

# Planning Bill: Implications for Kent



## *What does the Kent Wildlife Trust do?*

Kent Wildlife Trust works to protect and enhance the natural environment in Kent, and we have **28,000 members** who support our work. Kent is one of the UK's most important county's for ancient woodland, and the North Kent Downs holds some 2% of all the chalk grassland in Western Europe. Kent's coastline is second in length only to Cornwall, and much of our coast and inshore water is of international importance for wildlife. Some 7% of the county is designated as being of national or international importance for wildlife, and a further 7% of Kent's land area is of county importance for wildlife.

## *What is our role within the planning system?*

Kent Wildlife Trust's engages with the planning system to ensure that development does not harm the natural environment, through scrutinising and commenting on both planning policy and planning proposals. We are also working with the planning system to ensure that Kent is able to adapt to the impact of climate change, through, for example, the protection and enhancement of habitat networks in Local Development Frameworks.

Where we consider an application might cause damage to the natural environment, we will seek adjustments to the development to avoid the damage or alternative actions that might mitigate that damage; where this has not been fully addressed, we will normally object to the proposals. The current system allows us to engage effectively to protect wildlife, even where developments go ahead. In the last twelve months, we examined **424 planning applications** and commented in detail upon **195** of these.

## *What benefits have we had from engaging in this process?*

An example of the benefits if this system is our recent engagement with a development proposal that would be classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project under the Planning Bill. The proposal for the London Array Windfarm, both offshore and on the north Kent coast, could have caused significant harm to the natural environment of that area, including potential impacts on habitats of international importance. Through a series of meetings with the developers, we were able to secure, through negotiation:

- Re-alignment of cable routes to avoid particularly sensitive habitats (including some recognised as being of principle importance for conservation under the CRoW Act).
- The proposed works being timed to avoid impacts on internationally important populations of migratory birds.
- Avoidance of impacts on breeding marsh harriers, one of the UK's rarest birds of prey.
- A commitment to enhancement works to benefit biodiversity.

We are seriously concerned that the Planning Bill would remove the opportunity for negotiation of this type, with a potential for huge biodiversity losses.

## *What Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects could affect Kent?*

There are a number of current and proposed projects which would come within the definition of 'Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects' in the Planning Bill. These include:

- Dungeness C Nuclear Power Station – potential impacts upon a SSSI, SPA and SAC.
- Windfarm proposals – a large, terrestrial windfarm is already proposed on Romney Marsh, and more proposals will undoubtedly come forward, particularly on the internationally important coastal sites which offer appropriate wind conditions.
- Channel Tunnel Rail Link – safeguarding of the route for a second link is already under consideration, with potential impacts on ancient woodlands and on water courses already under pressure from abstraction and drought.
- Lower Thames Road Crossing – several potential routes are under consideration: any likely route, and its associated infrastructure, would threaten one or more SSSIs.
- Kent International Gateway – under the current planning system, the site for the proposed rail-freight interchange has been chosen to avoid designated land; under the new Planning Bill, this would not need to be considered at all.

Under the proposals in the Planning Bill, there would not be a system to address the very significant impacts of these projects on Kent's wildlife. We want to be sure that we can engage adequately with any reformed planning system in order to protect and enhance the county's natural environment. As the proposals are currently drafted, we are not reassured that this would be the case, which is why we believe that the Planning Bill must pass our key tests if it is to be enacted.

January 2008



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