

# MPs seek strategy to promote walking

PLANNING ISSUE 1426 6 JULY 2001

By David Dewar

The Treasury's investigations into the impact of the planning system on business and the economy could threaten moves for an urban renaissance, backbench MPs warn.

The Commons environment, transport and regional affairs committee claims that "it is a matter of concern" that the Treasury's inquiry into planning is being carried out "with the aim of undoing the important policies to restrain out-of-town development which were put into place in the last decade". "If this were done, it could have severe consequences for the urban renaissance," it adds.

In their report on walking in towns and cities this week, the MPs say that the undoing of existing planning policies would have a harmful impact on congestion and walking. The report calls for the government to help redress the decline in walking by



Walking: call for UK strategy

establishing a national walking strategy. It argues that this would galvanise local authorities into taking the necessary action to promote walking and provide targets for increasing the proportion of walking as a mode of transport.

The committee also criticises the government's ten-year transport plan. It says this concentrates too much on funding large schemes, such as road building, rather than

small-scale improvements which it claims offer better value for money.

Ben Webster, policy officer at the Civic Trust, welcomed the report's findings. "There is too much investment allocated to big infrastructure projects, especially road widening schemes, and inter-urban transport," he said. "Much cheaper improvements can be made to the walking environment, which many more of us use."

Terence Bendixson, president of the Pedestrians Association, said: "The MPs understand far better than ministers the need to give a boost to walking. They have written a missing chapter in the government's ten-year transport plan. They have turned light onto a forgotten public service."

● *Walking in Towns and Cities* is available from The Stationery Office (tel) 0870 500 6622.

● See *Analysis* p10.