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Dear Member

The cost of the courts: the price of justice

The society often gives financial support to members who are fighting cases in the courts; we have done this now for many years and there have been some notable successes. The reasons for our support are various—to clarify the law on new village and town greens and common land and to remove intimidating and illegal gates from a public path, for example.

For individual members of the society and for small inexperienced local groups, going to court can be intimidating because they face the prospect of escalating and uncertain legal bills. We are sadly aware of paths, greens and commons which ought to have been defended but were not because the people involved could not risk the cost, but the other side could. There is always this imbalance to be overcome.

When and where we can, we give help. And now we want to put this help on a planned and more efficient footing. We have therefore set up a legal committee to consider applications from members for grants toward their legal costs. As before, we shall only consider supporting cases which raise issues of more than local significance, ie where victory in the courts will set a precedent for the public benefit by permanently improving the law. There must also be a reasonable (more than 50 per cent) chance of success.

The committee is to be backed by a legal fund so that it can make consistent and justifiable decisions. At present we give or pledge money from unbudgeted income, at times a hit-and-miss way of doing things. So a very good case may go unsupported. With a committed fund we can plan matters better.

Will you help us to set up this legal fund so that we can enhance our giving of this vital support to members to maximum effect?

Please visit our website at <http://www.oss.org.uk/appeals>. Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely

Tim Crowther
Chairman