

Open Spaces Society's manifesto for the Westminster general election, May 2015

The Open Spaces Society is Britain's oldest national conservation body, founded in 1865. Through our manifesto we call on the next Westminster government to promote and protect people's right to enjoy open spaces close to their homes, as well as our splendid commons and network of public paths.

These are vital to people's well-being, and they support the economy too.

Green space close to home

- Every citizen should have access to good-quality public open space (usually green space) within five minutes' walk of his or her home. This can be provided by the following—
 - Clearly-defined criteria and a process for designating local green space, not just related to neighbourhood and local plans as at present; and support for communities seeking such spaces close to home.
 - A requirement to provide suitable alternative land before public open space is taken for another purpose;
 - Incentives for developers to provide areas of public open space through the planning system and support for local communities to acquire land for public open space.

Town and village greens

- Where an application has been submitted for a town or village green, the land should be protected from development until the application has been determined, with an improved procedure for deciding applications.
- Section 15C of the Commons Act 2006 should be amended or repealed. This effectively prevents the registration of land as a green where ‘trigger events’ have occurred, even though the local inhabitants have had no opportunity to seek such registration.

Common land

- County and unitary authorities should have a duty to take action against unlawful works on common land.
- The whole of part 1 of the Commons Act 2006 should be implemented throughout England so that the registers are finally correct after 50 years.
- There should be a speed limit of 20 mph maximum on all unfenced roads across commons, to enable stock to graze and people to roam in safety.

Public paths

- Routes in regular use should be exempt from the 2026 deadline for claiming public paths, with a commitment to lift this deadline should the new procedures in the Deregulation Bill not prove effective in accelerating and simplifying claims.
- Highway authorities must have sufficient funding to carry out their statutory duties on public paths, as an investment in people’s health and the local economy.
- Grants to landowners should be conditional on all public rights of way on their land being unobstructed.

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For further information contact the Open Spaces Society, 01491 573535, hq@oss.org.uk or visit our website www.oss.org.uk



The Open Spaces Society 25a Bell Street Henley-on-Thames RG9 2BA



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