

OPEN SPACES SOCIETY DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-2024

OSS vision

Everyone can enjoy their rights to public paths and open spaces

OSS mission

We work to protect, increase, enhance and champion the common land, village greens, other open spaces and public rights of way of England and Wales, and the public's rights to enjoy them.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 The Open Spaces Society was founded in 1865. It has a remarkable legacy, being Britain's oldest national conservation body, the only national society which seeks to protect and preserve all kinds of public rights of way, commons, greens and open spaces for all kinds of users. Two of its founders went on to found the National Trust in 1895.
- 2 The society has played a key role in protecting high-profile sites like Hampstead Heath, Epping Forest, Wimbledon Common, Ashdown Forest and the Malvern Hills; fought for the re-instatement of common land which had been used for wartime defence and food production; was active in the genesis of national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty and definitive maps of public paths under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949; promoted the registration and protection of common land and common rights under the Commons Registration Act 1965; pursued initiatives which led to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (right to roam), and more recently has led the effort to re-register 'lost' commons. It has always been at the forefront of campaigns to protect and promote greens, commons and rights of way and it inherits an outstanding reputation based on solid achievements.
- 3 The society is governed by a board of volunteer trustees who must take account of the charitable objectives as set out in the articles of association. It employs a small number of staff and contractors. It has one office in Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire. Our other volunteers are local correspondents, appointed for their knowledge and expertise to represent the society in their localities and to report quarterly on their work. The society is flexible, fleet of foot and not bureaucratic.
- 4 The period of our current strategic plan, *Choosing Direction*, ends in December 2018 with many solid achievements. These included:
 - campaigns to:
 - toughen Local Green Space in England;
 - give greater protection to Welsh village greens;

- encourage participation in a project to research and apply for historical paths to be added to the definitive map before 2026;
 - celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Countryside Act 1968;
 - clarify the law on commercial events on urban open spaces;
 - celebration of our 150th anniversary in 2015, with events and the publication of four books;
 - appointment of an additional part-time case officer, and a project officer for the re-registration of commons project;
 - new look, new logo and improved website;
 - a survey of our membership;
 - revision of guidelines for local correspondents and two training events for them;
 - casework strategy to regulate how we deal with and prioritise casework;
 - our collection of 1,083 glass lantern slides catalogued.
- 5 This new plan does not propose a change in direction but it updates and rolls forward the work we have been undertaking over the last five years. During that time, the society has been immensely fortunate to benefit from substantial legacies. In the five years of the next plan we intend to invest this money in the society and its work, to expand our influence and reach. It will enable us to take on projects which will have a lasting influence and help us to develop our profile.
- 6 There is much uncertainty in the world, generated by Brexit in particular, but we shall aim to make this an opportunity. Agricultural payments can be redirected to providing more and better access and to protecting the cultural heritage of commoning. A new regulatory system to ensure that farmers and land managers respect the law on their land would reduce the burden on hard-pressed highway authorities.
- 7 By the end of the current strategic plan the deadline for recording paths on definitive maps in England will be perilously close, and we plan to have contributed significantly to getting the maps up to date. The date for re-registering lost commons in most of the English pioneer areas will have passed so we shall give priority to researching and applying for commons in those areas.
- 8 We shall consider how to invest in our organisation, and to increase our capacity and our office accommodation to meet our objectives and to ensure we have a succession plan for trustees and staff. We must support our existing local correspondents and recruit more. Our revamped website, which will be ready in the first part of 2019, will be crucial in this.
- 9 As the laws in England and Wales increasingly diverge we shall plan to expand our capacity in Wales in order to be even more effective there.
- 10 As always, we are keen to work with others to achieve our common goals, and are grateful to all who continue to support our vital work.

OSS STRATEGIC GOALS 2019 - 2024

Our Strategic Goals for 2019-24 are linked to our four charitable objects.

Charitable Object 1

To protect common land, open spaces and town and village greens from encroachment and, subject to the rights of the commoners, to secure their use by the general public.

Vision for 2024

All public bodies actively enforce legislation in a timely manner to protect and maintain commons, greens and other open spaces for the public, and acknowledge their social, recreational and other values. There is widespread public awareness of their rights over such land.

STRATEGIC GOAL 1

National and local government bodies enforce legislation to uphold and protect the rights of the general public to existing commons, greens and other open spaces without obstruction or encroachment, recognising their social, recreational, leisure, historical, environmental and ecological value.

Objectives

- 1.1 OSS will inform planning authorities and town, parish and community councils of the designations of commons, greens and public open spaces and their responsibilities to protect them.
- 1.2 OSS will take or support legal action, if appropriate, to require public bodies to enforce the law on commons, greens and other open spaces.
- 1.3 OSS will identify commons for re-registration in each of the English pioneer areas and in Wales, and make applications to register all those for which a good case can be made by the deadline. OSS will take appropriate similar action in relation to subsequent defined areas.
- 1.4 OSS will respond to all applications for works on, exchanges of, and re-registration of common land and town or village greens.
- 1.5 OSS will encourage registration of qualifying spaces as town or village greens:
 - a. by encouraging local correspondents, members and supporters to survey land in their communities and apply for registration;
 - b. by encouraging landowners such as parish and community councils voluntarily to register such spaces.

- 1.6 OSS will continue to be respected as a well-informed resource by those with responsibility for open spaces, both statutory and voluntary.

STRATEGIC GOAL 2

OSS will influence legislation and planning guidance to protect existing public open spaces, and access to them.

Objective

- 2.1 OSS will develop and implement a campaign for major development plans to be required to include provision of open spaces protected through registration as town or village greens and, in England, Local Green Space.

Charitable Object 2

To protect, preserve and enhance existing public paths and carriageways used mainly as public paths and to secure their proper recording, maintenance and signposting for the benefit of the public.

Vision for 2024

All public rights of way are recorded, well maintained and correctly signposted.

STRATEGIC GOAL 3

OSS will ensure that applications are made to register historic and other routes on definitive maps before deadlines.

Objectives

- 3.1 OSS will encourage and support its local correspondents, members and others to identify unregistered paths and ways, and apply for their inclusion on definitive maps.
- 3.2 OSS will work with partner organisations to publicise the importance of this endeavour and the availability of information on the OSS website

STRATEGIC GOAL 4

Statutory authorities record, maintain and signpost all public rights of way, to ensure public rights of access and movement for quiet enjoyment on paths are upheld and that all are fully accessible to the public.

Objectives

- 4.1 OSS will campaign (with partners) for highway authorities to fulfil their statutory responsibilities with regard to signposting rights of way as required by law.
- 4.2 OSS will support the development of a tool to help members (and members of the public) report obstructions, defective and missing signposts.
- 4.3 OSS will take or support legal action, if appropriate, to require public bodies to enforce the law on public paths.

Charitable object 3

To secure the creation and preservation of new public paths, open spaces and access to and over open country for the benefit of the public.

Vision for 2024

All new major developments and the post-Brexit agricultural funding system include provision for protected public open spaces, public rights of way and public access.

STRATEGIC GOAL 5

All major building-development includes provision and designation of adequate-sized, protected public open spaces and paths which have the potential to increase the health and well-being of residents. This includes not only preservation of existing rights of way but also the creation of new rights of way to promote non-motorised use.

Objectives

- 5.1 OSS will lobby relevant bodies in England and Wales to include protected open spaces and pedestrian and cycle links in planning guidance and provide and promote advice to others on achieving this.
- 5.2 OSS will campaign for statutory funding for public open spaces in England and Wales.
- 5.3 OSS will ensure that 'environmental net gain' in the 25-year Environment Plan (in England) includes provision for public open space, and that such space be included in conservation covenants.
- 5.4 OSS will campaign for a new statutory scheme of conservation covenants in Wales.

STRATEGIC GOAL 6

The post-Brexit subsidy system provides for public access to be funded as a public good.

Objective

- 6.1 OSS will develop and implement a campaign to persuade government to include provision for public-access payments in the new post-Brexit agricultural policy, and to establish an effective regulatory scheme.

Charitable object 4

To protect the beauty of the countryside and to promote its fullest enjoyment by the public.

Vision for 2024

The countryside is better understood and appreciated for its beauty, landscape, cultural heritage and opportunities for quiet recreation, and more people understand, exercise and defend their rights to enjoy it.

STRATEGIC GOAL 7

(Strategic goals 1, 2 and 3 largely cover this object.)

National parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty in England and Wales are well protected and people know their rights there and are encouraged to exercise those rights responsibly.

Objectives

- 7.1 OSS will keep abreast of what is happening in national parks through our membership of the Campaign for National Parks.
- 7.2 OSS will respond to threats to designated and other landscapes where they have an adverse impact on our interests and charitable objects.

continued

OVERARCHING STRATEGIC GOAL 8

In order to help achieve all the above OSS will develop an effective information and communications programme.

Objectives

OSS will:

- 8.1 increase public awareness of the importance of public open spaces and paths;
- 8.2 increase public understanding of people's rights to open spaces and paths;
- 8.3 increase OSS's profile in the public domain;
- 8.4 and in doing the above ensure they have measurable targets.

Note

There will be a further section of the plan setting out how we propose to strengthen our organisation: raise our profile and reputation among relevant decision makers and others and provide the human resources (staff, trustees and volunteers), physical infrastructure and financial security to deliver our mission.

END

25 October 2018