



OPEN SPACES SOCIETY STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2027

OSS vision

Everyone can enjoy public paths and open spaces through exercise of their rights.

OSS mission

We work to protect, increase, enhance and champion the common land, village greens, public paths and open spaces in 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 current plan was adopted in 2018 to run until the end of 2024. The trustees undertook a mid-term review of the plan in 2021-22 and decided to roll it forward from 2022 to 2027 with a mid-term review in 2025. In the period since 2018 the society has had many solid achievements. We have:

- developed our commons re-registration project, and applied to register 78 commons in England;
- pursued two legal cases through the court of appeal, and more in the lower courts;
- launched our Grant a Green campaign to promote voluntary registration of greens;
- published charters for protecting and creating open spaces in England and Wales;
- been represented on three expert groups advising the Welsh government on its proposed access reforms;
- expanded and improved the information on our website;
- provided a microsite of our lantern-slide collection;
- created a new post of case officer (rights of way);
- organised an event for our local correspondents to take place in 2022;
- published new editions of *Our Common Land* and *Getting Greens Registered*;
- updated our investment policy, and began to develop a policy on renewable energy in response to the climate crisis.

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 three 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 continue to invest this money in the society and its work, to expand our influence and reach. We shall also pursue cases in the courts where they meet our criteria for legal action.

6 There is much uncertainty in the world. Climate change is an enormous factor which must permeate our thinking. Green spaces, at the heart of our work, have a positive effect on the climate crisis. The pandemic has demonstrated the value of paths and open spaces for people's health and well-being, and has generated additional support for and interest in the society's work. We must capitalise on this opportunity. The society wants to see the new agricultural payments in England and Wales 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 The Westminster government says it will revoke the 2026 deadline for recording paths on definitive maps in England, but we must not let up the pressure for recording historic routes, and must continue to press the surveying authorities to process the applications. The deadline for re-registering lost commons in Cumbria and North Yorkshire is 2027, and we are giving priority to this time-limited work.
- 8 The pandemic has led to a change in working arrangements, with more people, including our members of staff, working from home more of the time. We have created the new post of case officer (rights of way) but we still need to increase our capacity to deal with all the potential work, and to prioritise casework. We must support our existing local correspondents and recruit more.
- 9 As the laws in England and Wales increasingly diverge, we shall consider how 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.

Structure of the plan

- 11 This plan sets out the strategic themes which influence all our activities, followed by strategic goals linked to our charitable objects.

Overarching themes which influence all our activities

To be able to deliver the campaigning objectives outlined below, the Open Spaces Society must ensure that it is an effective, efficient and sustainable organisation. We have identified four strategic themes of 'enabling activity' to underpin and apply to every part of our work.

Strategic theme 1 Climate change

Vision for 2027:

The society understands how it can play its part in mitigating the climate crisis and being an agent for positive change.

- ST1.1 In all our work we shall recognise and promote the positive impact that green spaces have on climate change. We shall make responsible choices to minimise and mitigate adverse impacts on climate, and ensure that all policy and operational decisions are mindful of climate implications. We shall promote schemes which sequester carbon, alongside environmental protection.

Objective

ST1.2 We shall take account of climate change in all our decision-making.

Strategic theme 2

Diversity

Vision for 2027:

The society has broadened its reach and membership significantly.

ST2.1 We shall seek to understand, and where appropriate, reach out to those parts of society that are under-represented within our membership, staff, volunteers or trustees, and potential members outside our existing network. We shall work to ensure that the enjoyment of open spaces is available to all.

Objective

ST2.2 We shall learn from relevant groups and endeavour to extend our reach.

Strategic theme 3

Build the capacity of the society to deliver its mission

Vision for 2027:

The society has the human resources, physical infrastructure, and financial security to deliver its mission.

ST3.1 The society will ensure that its work will continue beyond the timescale of this plan and well into the future.

Objectives

ST3.2 We shall ensure we have:

- i. a succession plan for staff, trustees, and other volunteers;
- ii. training programmes for staff, trustees, and local correspondents;
- iii. the necessary financial resources;
- iv. appropriate, secure office accommodation.

Strategic theme 4

Engagement and education

Vision for 2027:

The society's profile and reputation are higher among policy makers and others working in related areas and it is better known, and respected more widely.

ST4.1 The society will direct more of its communication effort:

- i. on policymakers and on those working in the environmental sector, endeavouring to raise our profile and have greater impact;

- ii. on new audiences, to broaden our reach and achieve our charitable objects over a greater breadth of society.

Objectives

ST4.2 The society will:

- i. increase awareness of the importance of public open spaces and paths;
- ii. increase understanding of people's rights to open spaces and paths;
- iii. increase its profile in the public domain;
- iv. in all our written work, publicity, digital communications, and press releases:
 - a highlight the importance of public open spaces and paths to public wellbeing;
 - b take opportunities to increase people's understanding of their rights to open spaces and paths;
 - c emphasise the seminal role OSS plays in the protection of such rights.

OSS Strategic Goals 2022 – 2027

Our Strategic Goals for 2022-27 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 2027

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 commons, greens and other open spaces without obstruction or encroachment, recognising their social, recreational, leisure, historical, environmental, educational and ecological value.

Objectives

- SG1.1 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.
- SG1.2 OSS will campaign for a legal duty on local authorities to take enforcement action against unlawful works on common land and town and village greens.
- SG1.3 OSS will take or support legal action to enforce the law on commons, greens and other open spaces and to protect them from misuse.
- SG1.4 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 and will campaign for the re-registration provisions to apply throughout England.

- SG1.5 OSS will respond to all applications for works on, exchanges of, and re-registration of common land and town or village greens.
- SG1.6 OSS will encourage registration of qualifying spaces as town or village greens:
- 1 by encouraging local correspondents, members and supporters to survey land in their communities and apply for registration;
 - 2 by encouraging landowners such as parish and community councils voluntarily to register such spaces.
- SG1.7 OSS will continue to be respected as a well-informed resource by those with responsibility for open spaces, both statutory and voluntary.
- SG1.8 OSS will inform landowners and commoners of their rights and obligations.

Strategic Goal 2

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

Objective

- SG2.1 OSS will develop and implement a campaign for proposals for major development 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 2027

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.

Objectives

- SG3.1 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.
- SG3.2 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

- SG4.1 OSS will campaign (with partners) for highway authorities to fulfil their statutory responsibilities with regard to signposting rights of way as required by law.
- SG4.2 OSS will support the development of a tool to help members (and members of the public) report obstructions, defective and missing signposts, and bridges and paths out of repair.
- SG4.3 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 2027

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

- SG5.1 OSS will lobby relevant bodies in England and Wales to include protected open spaces, and pedestrian, equestrian and cycle links in planning guidance and provide and promote advice to others on achieving this.
- SG5.2 OSS will campaign for statutory funding for public open spaces in England and Wales and for local authorities to have a statutory duty to maintain them.
- SG5.3 OSS will campaign for 'environmental net gain' in the 25-year Environment Plan (in England) to include provision for public open space, and that such space be included in conservation covenants.
- SG5.4 OSS will campaign for a new statutory scheme of conservation obligations in Wales.

Strategic Goal 6

Any future subsidy system provides for public access to be funded as a public good.

Objectives

- SG6.1 OSS will work with others to develop and implement a campaign to persuade the Westminster and Welsh governments to include provision for public-access payments in any new 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 2027

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, areas of outstanding natural beauty and other special countryside in England and Wales are well protected and people know their rights there and are encouraged to exercise those rights responsibly.

Objectives

- SG7.1 OSS will keep abreast of what is happening in national parks through our membership of the Campaign for National Parks.
- SG7.2 OSS will respond to threats to designated and other landscapes where they have an adverse impact on our interests and charitable objects.
- SG7.3 OSS will continue to work with others to make the England Coast Path and associated access land as good quality as possible.
- SG7.4 OSS will provide advice and assistance to the National Trust and other environmental landowners to ensure that they manage their land to the benefit of the public.