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November 2025

Dear supporter,

Please help us reboot our legal-action fund

We make no apology for coming to you again with a request to support our legal-action fund, because we know that this fund makes a difference. With the money behind us we can move swiftly when we see legal wrongs which we must challenge, or when our members appeal to us for help. You have been hugely generous in enabling all this to happen, but our fund is once again dwindling, and we need to replenish it.

Our case officers and our enforcement officer (who sometimes acts as our lawyer in court and thus saves considerable costs) have been working tirelessly with lawyers to bring cases to court—whether for the society alone or in partnership. Here are some examples.

- We intervened to support the Dartmoor National Park Authority in its landmark camping-case in the supreme court—and we won. This confirms a right to backpack-camp on Dartmoor's commons, opening the door to amendments to the law to extend that right.
- We successfully challenged West Northamptonshire Council's misuse of a temporary traffic regulation order to close footpaths which were illegally obstructed at Staverton. The council conceded and the paths have been reopened—a lesson to all highway authorities that try to shirk their duties.
- We won an order in Bristol County Court requiring the owner of part of Patchway Common in South Gloucestershire to remove an unlawful wall, built on the common without consent.
- We have pledged financial support for a case in Cornwall, to be taken jointly with the Ramblers, where one of our volunteers has served notice that a path is out of repair. We expect to have to fight this in the magistrates' court.
- Last year's contribution to the Gower Society for legal representation in our joint fight to prevent the exchange and development of 2.8 hectares of Clyne Common, Swansea, for housing paid off. The exchange was refused and the much-loved common saved.

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

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We have also backed many members' cases. They include the following.

- We gave financial help to a challenge in the high court to Plymouth City Council's planning permission for houses on Wilmot Gardens (an open space); the case was won, and the council refused the planning permission on consideration for a second time.
- We have pledged funds to Protect Brockwell Park; this local organisation is going to court to fight the continued abuse of this public park in south London for damaging commercial events.
- We are supporting the Friends of Wortham Ling in Suffolk in their bid to clarify who has duties to manage the common under part I of the Commons Act 1899.
- We are obtaining advice on whether we can challenge the failure to follow proper procedure in an exchange of common land in Gloucestershire.

With the British Horse Society and the Ramblers, we continue to pursue surveying authorities who fail to process and determine applications to add paths to the definitive map in accordance with the law.

And we are backing our energetic local correspondents to take action against the failure of highway authorities to reopen blocked paths—for instance a case of illegal stiles on a footpath in Wiltshire has started its journey through the courts.

We need to be ready to swing into action as soon as a case comes to our notice: time is always short. We may have to get counsel's opinion as to the likely chances of success, explain the case, and the risks, to the legal committee and trustees who decide whether we should go ahead, and then prepare papers for court—or brief our legal team to do so. We normally proceed only when the chances of success are more than 50 per cent but, even when we lose, we learn how we might win another time.

Please enable us to continue to fund legal action where it is needed, and to support our members in fighting their legal battles. Please contribute to our legal-action fund now.

Yours sincerely



Kate Ashbrook
General Secretary

PS: We are pleased to accept donations to this appeal as follows:

1. *Online at www.oss.org.uk/appeals/*
2. *By bank transfer to Account: 00035916 Sort Code: 40-52-40 (please quote AUT25 plus your membership number as the reference)*
3. *By cheque in the post using the enclosed envelope.*

PPS: We have been using the law for 160 years. Your gift enables this vital work to continue.

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