

GLEAM



Green Lanes Environmental Action Movement

www.gleam-uk.org

A newsletter for those interested in protecting ancient ways from the ravages of recreational motor vehicles.

SPRING 2026

From the Chairman, Ian Ritchie

One of the joys of chairing GLEAM is that it is a single issue organisation that has a clear objective that I passionately believe in. As members I am sure you share my commitment to our cause but in case you have any doubts I urge you to look at a new feature on our GLEAM website – videos.

My fellow GLEAM team members have done a brilliant job in bringing together examples from all round the country of off-roaders destroying green lanes in their selfish quest for 'fun'. Ironically we have been aided in this by the off-roaders themselves. They love to record their 'adventures' on video and then post the results in the public domain on the internet.

Click here <https://www.gleam-uk.org/videos/> and watch in horror as you see examples in National Parks, National Landscapes and in other areas. On the clips with audio, listen to the way the off-roaders revel in the damage they are doing to routes which should be some of the best preserved in the English and Welsh countryside.

Our cause is just, popular and important. With the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERCA) we went some way to solving the problem, making 3000 miles into Restricted Byways. We must finish the job and achieve a ban on off-roading on the remaining 7000 miles of green lanes.

I write this piece on the day of the King's Speech to Parliament at a time of political turmoil. Having a clear vision differentiates us from some of the criticism directed at Sir Keir Starmer's government. We also have a clear view on how to achieve our vision. It has to be through primary legislation, a view that is reinforced in the next section of this Newsletter. Just as with NERCA we need an Act of Parliament. And in that regard the King's Speech is a disappointment.

For some time government has been talking about a possible Access to Nature Bill. Although such a Bill would be unlikely to include a provision to ban off-roading we were optimistic that we could add an amendment to the Bill and garner cross-party support for it. However Access to Nature is not amongst the 37 Bills announced in the King's Speech and it is hard to see anything in the programme to which we could attach our

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amendment. I and my colleagues will be giving more thought to this but for the moment it seems to me that we must continue to build our case against off-roading and use every opportunity to present it to MPs, Peers, Members of the Senedd and the public. In this regard we are preparing a hard-hitting brochure which we will launch shortly and members will be sent an early copy. Watch this space!

The fight goes on and I urge you to keep the faith – we will prevail!

New legislation needed, building on the success of legislation 20 years ago

The latest (February 2026, available at <https://ridgewayfriends.org.uk/february-2026-newsletter/>) issue of the Friends of the Ridgeway's newsletter includes a powerful article on the need for new legislation to protect green lanes (byways open to all traffic and unsealed unclassified roads) from recreational motor vehicle use, to "*negate the need for TROs and .. result in repairs lasting for a long time, as well as increased pleasure for a great many people.*"

Friends of the Ridgeway have also carried out a survey of sections of the Ridgeway National Trail in West Berkshire and Oxfordshire where recreational motor vehicle use became illegal in 2006, as a result of the re-classification of roads used as public paths as restricted byways (legislation passed in 2000 but not brought into effect until 2006, as part of the government's resolve to stop historic rights created by use by horse-drawn vehicles conferring rights for recreational motor vehicles). This survey compared the surface condition of these sections, as shown in photos from the 1990s, with the present day. They show that the damage caused by motor vehicles has disappeared or been significantly ameliorated, and that the surface and verges have largely re-vegetated, so that these sections of the Ridgeway are once again truly green lanes.



Ridgeway in West Berkshire, near Gore Hill, SU 491 834: comparison between March 1994 (left) and March 2026 (right). The width damaged by off-roaders was 3 times the width of the used track today; the 2006 legislation allowed most of the width to re-vegetate and the ruts to be filled.

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Oxford University's Biology Department started a project in 2018 to find out what conditions would best favour the growth of wild flowers in calcareous grassland. The researchers are using the re-vegetated wide verges of a restricted byway section of the Ridgeway in West Berkshire for this project because their nutrient-poor soils favours wild flowers and the consequent improvement in biodiversity. This project would not have been possible when recreational motor vehicles damaged the verges, but it is now, when reclassification as restricted byway has returned this section of the Ridgeway back to its historic origin as a drove road.

Rivers aren't roads

In January 2026 Hampshire CPRE (Campaign for Rural England) and local residents held a protest against the use of a 200 metre section of the River Meon by off-roaders, in the village of Droxford, in the South Downs National Park. The protest was reported by the BBC (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gr1jx2453o>), the local newspaper (the Meon Valley Times), and the Daily Mail and the Times. The local MP, Dr Danny Chambers, spoke at the protest and started an early day motion in Parliament calling on government and the local authorities to stop this use by a traffic regulation order (TRO). But so far the local authorities which have the power to make a TRO, Hampshire County Council (HCC) and South Downs National Park Authority have not done so. HCC say they need to do traffic and ecological surveys for seven to nine months and that further legal advice would be needed, before they could decide to make an experimental TRO, as requested by the local County Councillor.

The River Meon is a chalk stream, a rare environmentally sensitive habitat which supports wildlife such as water voles, otters and trout; driving motor vehicles through this section damages the river bed and risks pollution, which threaten its biodiversity and hence the whole ecosystem of the river.

The Green Lane Association (GLASS) said motorists should not be banned from this green lane because driving this section provided access to the countryside and the health benefits of being out in nature for the elderly and disabled. But we cannot see how driving through a river in a convoy of motor vehicles, whose wash hides and erodes the river banks, is beneficial access to (or for) nature and the countryside. Especially as, in this case, there is a public footpath, with footbridges, along the river bank, which bypasses the river stretch of this green lane, and so provides dry, tranquil and non-damaging access to nature and the countryside for walkers and users of mobility aids.

Off-roader opposition to local democracy

The off-roader organisations, the Green Lane Association and the Trail Riders Fellowship, are increasingly using their financial and legal resources to challenge (or threaten to challenge) traffic regulation orders (TROs) made by highway authorities, TROs requested by and/or supported by local people through their community, parish or town councils. These challenges, and the threats of such challenges, are over-riding and opposing the local democratic processes which should underpin TROs.

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The Green Lane Association (GLASS) have recently published a cartoon video in which they celebrate their success in winning three court cases against a highway authority, gloat about the amount of money this authority has lost in these cases and warn other authorities that the same could happen to them if they make TROs.

The three court cases all relate to a green lane, Sandy Lane, about 700 metres in length, which runs through woodland in Aspley Heath, Bedfordshire. The topsoil and subsoil of this lane have been badly eroded by off-roader use, leading to its level being 6 feet below its original level in some places. Damage to tree roots has meant that the landowner has had to fell some long-established trees. This damage and anti-social behaviour (e.g. fly-tipping, noise and removal of fencing to fill in ruts) by motorists led the parish council to ask the highway authority, Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC), to prohibit use by off-roaders. CBC made an experimental TRO in March 2024 but GLASS and the Trail Riders Fellowship (TRF) got this order quashed by the High Court because the Council had not consulted them. CBC tried again with another experimental TRO made in March 2025, again supported by the parish council; GLASS responded to the consultation, arguing that a TRO, even a time-limited, experimental, TRO was unnecessary, but the TRF did not even bother to respond. (A report to the parish council in October 2025 showed that 97% of residents asked wanted the TRO to continue, i.e. to be made permanent). Both GLASS and the TRF then challenged the TRO in the High Court and succeeded in January 2026, on the grounds that the nature of the experiment was not clear, that there was inconsistency between the reasons given in the CBC report recommending the second TRO and the reasons given when CBC made it, and that CBC did not conduct the balancing exercise required by the TRO legislation between the restriction on use and other factors such as amenity. This last ground is particularly ironic, given that GLASS and the TRF had won a third challenge in the High Court about whether the parties' costs should be capped under the Aarhus convention in the Sandy Lane case, because the balancing exercise and other aspects of the TRO legislation include environmental considerations such as the visual amenity of the area affected.

Since the second experimental TRO was quashed in January 2026, fly-tipping, noise and surface damage have restarted.

Erosion of topsoil and subsoil due to off-roader use of Sandy Lane, 2017



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In Devon, the Trail Riders Fellowship (TRF) are putting legal pressure on Devon County Council to change a TRO on the unsealed single-track section of Rydon Lane, near Exeter, to allow motorbike use. Devon County Council improved this section (about 1.3 kilometres) of the lane, by resurfacing and by work on a ford, to provide an active travel route for walkers, cyclists, horse-riders and wheelers (i.e. people using mobility aids) between Woodbury village, Exton village, the Exe Estuary Trail and Avocet railway line, and onward to Exeter (e.g. for Woodbury residents using the bus between Exton and Exeter). The county council wanted to ensure that Rydon Lane was safe for these non-motorised users, so decided to make a TRO prohibiting motor vehicles in 2024. They considered that the TRO would enable greater participation in active travel by older people and those with disabilities, and allow those reliant on walking and cycling to access jobs, education and social activities more easily. Traffic survey counts have shown an increase in pedestrian and cycle use since the TRO was made in November 2024.

The TRF have challenged the TRO in the High Court, arguing that there is no adequate evidence that Rydon Lane would be dangerous in the absence of the TRO and that a permit-based TRO could be used to allow motorbike use. As a result, in March 2026, the relevant county council committee considered a proposal by officers to advertise a variation to the TRO to rescind the prohibition of motorcycles and to set a speed limit of 20 mph on the lane. (Officers considered a permit-based TRO would not work because it would not be practicable to enforce against motorised use by non-permit holders.)

However representatives of the parish council and the district council spoke against the proposal in the public participation section of the meeting, and members of the committee raised concerns about the proposal e.g. that allowing motorcycle use contradicted the county council's priority to encourage active travel and would deter walking, cycling and public transport use and that the restricted width (2.4 to 2.5 metres in places and no passing places) and blind bends on Rydon Lane meant that motor vehicles posed a danger to non-motorised users, even if the 20 mph speed limit could be enforced. (The Highway Code says motorists should leave at least 1.5 metres space when passing cyclists and at least 2 metres when passing horse riders and walkers.) The committee decided (with one vote against) not to seek to vary the TRO, despite receiving legal advice that the TRF were likely to continue their challenge.



Photo to show resurfacing and narrowness of Rydon Lane, April 2026. It would be impossible for a motorcyclist to pass a walker, cyclist or horse rider safely.

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Lincolnshire County Council have recently (January 2026) succeeded in the High Court against a challenge by the TRF to a TRO on green lanes, Sewstern Lane and The Drift, which make up about 8.1 kilometres of the Viking Way, a long distance walking route of 237 kilometres between Barton-upon-Humber and Oakham. The county council decided to make the TRO in 2024, because the lanes had been badly damaged by recreational motor vehicle use, making them unusable in many sections by non-motorised users and resulting in multiple complaints each year from the parish councils, county councillors, walking groups and other path users. When the county council consulted on the TRO proposal they received 61 representations in support from the local communities, and 53 objections. The TRF challenged the TRO in the High Court on five grounds, including that there was no evidence that motorcycles had caused any damage, that the county council's rejection of a permit-based TRO was irrational and that the TRO was made for an improper purpose, i.e. to secure a public vehicular highway exclusively for walkers and horse riders, effectively downgrading it to a bridleway. But the judge rejected all five grounds. There was evidence available in the consultation documents that motorcycles had damaged the lanes, not just 4x4s e.g. photos which showed deep single ruts, deep enough to reach the foot rests of a motorcycle. The county council's decision to reject a permit-based TRO was not irrational, but was because they do not have the resources to manage and enforce a permit-based TRO. The judge found that the TRO purpose, to protect the lanes from further damage which had given rise to danger to users and allow restoration of the surface, was consistent with the county council's aim to promote the Viking Way as a walking route, and fell within the TRO purposes specified in the legislation, the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

The photos below and overleaf show the off-roader damage to these parts of the Viking Way in 2012 and 2015.

This photo, taken in 2012, shows off-roader ruts across the whole width of Sewstern Lane.

Lincolnshire County Council found that the ruts on this section were up to 0.8 to 1 metre deep in 2022, and that it was largely inaccessible to non-motorised users as a result.

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This section of The Drift was almost impossible to walk in 2015. Lincolnshire County Council found in 2022 that the deep (0.5 metre) ruts flooded all year round, making this section inaccessible to non-motorised users. Photo © Andy Stephenson (cc-by-sa/2.0)



The consultation documents included a comparison with a TRO made in 2014 on another section of the Viking Way by Lincolnshire County Council, at the request of Natural England. This section is part of a site of special scientific interest (SSSI), designated for its species-rich, calcareous grassland, vegetation which had been badly damaged by the ruts made by recreational motorists. After the TRO had been made, the county council filled in the ruts with locally sourced limestone, restoring the highway for non-motorised users. They also report that the absence of motor vehicles has allowed the re-colonisation of the verges by meadow species, improving the biodiversity of the calcareous grassland and thereby contributing to the recovery in condition of this part of the SSSI, as assessed by Natural England in 2022.

These three cases show that GLASS and the TRF take any opportunity to use their resources to challenge TROs in the High Court, even when there is strong support from the parish councils and other local people for the TRO through the consultation process and via their elected representatives. Even if the authority which made the TRO wins, they will still have had to spend time and money on resisting these challenges.

Mass off-roader events at Christmas/New Year

Some off-roader groups use these holidays as an excuse to organise mass events on green lanes which lead to illegal use and more damage to the lanes. Some examples from Christmas 2025/New Year 2026:

An event on Salisbury Plain where the organiser (from a firm selling rooftop tents) said "*If anyone got stuck there was a call out time of around 25 seconds*" i.e. another motorist would winch the stuck vehicle out. This group also used a green lane which had a voluntary restriction on motor vehicle use during the winter to prevent surface damage. Motorists in another group, a Land Rover Club, using the green lanes on Salisbury Plain at the New Year, also got stuck and had to be winched out by their colleagues. This club is listed on the Green Lane Association's (GLASS's) website as one of their supporters, but appear to be ignorant of GLASS's code of conduct which says the use of winches on green lanes is inappropriate and should not be required.



4x4s having to be winched out on Salisbury Plain green lanes, January 2026

A large group of motorcyclists organised a ride of green lanes in the Llangollen and Ceiriog Valley areas of North Wales just before Christmas 2025. Their video of the event described it as "*Christmas Carnage*" and "*roaring engines, muddy madness*". But they didn't mention the police request for information following a crash on one of the tarmac roads linking the green lanes which left one of the motorbikers in hospital with serious injuries, and where another motorbiker left the scene of the crash before the police arrived (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cr4dvweddr4o>). The video shows the motorbikers driving illegally off one of the green lanes, in the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape, damaging the hillside and ignoring the signs put up by the National Landscape, the police and the highway authority, warning that such use is illegal.

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