

# GREEN LANES PROTECTION GROUP

*The Green Lanes Protection Group (GLPG) is an alliance of 21 organisations representing the interests of over 350,000 walkers, cyclists, horse riders and country lovers who wish to preserve and protect the nation's precious network of green lanes.*

## **New legislation on off-roading is now on the political agenda**

### **What has been happening: the Deregulation Bill**

Over the last 18 months organisations opposed to the use of green lanes by recreational motor vehicles have been using the opportunity of the Deregulation Bill to put pressure on the government to take action to protect green lanes from the damaging effects of off-roading. We gave written and oral evidence to the Joint Committee on the Draft Deregulation Bill and at every appropriate stage of the Bill to date sympathetic MPs and Lords have tabled an amendment seeking to restrict off-roading. This resulted in four debates in Parliament.

The Deregulation Bill aims to reduce the costs and burdens of current legislation. The amendment we have been tabling called on the government to identify and report on the costs and burdens arising from recreational motor vehicle use of unsealed highways and to bring forward legislation to deal with them.

As a result of this pressure, the government has a) acknowledged that there is a problem, b) accepted that something must be done about it, c) agreed to set up a new stakeholder working group to advise on possible solutions and d) has said there will be full public consultation once the working group has reported.

### **The new stakeholder group**

GLPG has also been lobbying the government about the composition of the working group, the timescale for its work and the fact that it is unlikely to be able to reach a consensus solution. The government has now agreed that:

- The group will be set up on completion of the passage of the Deregulation Bill
- Will have a limited life of 18 months
- Will be free to produce majority and minority recommendations if necessary
- Will include representation from the National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the National Trails.

### **The government has also said that the working group will:**

- Have an independent Chair
- A secretariat organised by Defra and Natural England
- Will contain a balance of interests across all sectors
- Will include representatives of different types of user of rights of way
- Will set its own terms of reference
- Will be expected to 'look at all the issues in the round and include assessments of any economic and social benefits of the current recreational use of unsealed roads as well as an assessment of the costs and burdens'.

GLPG expects to be on the working group but this is not yet confirmed.

## **Key quotes from Parliamentary reports and debates on off-roading during the progress of the Deregulation Bill**

### ***Report of the Joint Committee on the Draft Deregulation Bill, December 2013***

#### **Paragraph 147 *BOATs and UCRs***

‘The additional provision which elicited by far the greatest number of responses [to the call for evidence on the draft Bill] was that Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) and unsealed Unclassified County Roads (UCRs) should be re-classified as Restricted Byways and closed to vehicular traffic. Over one third of responses to our Call for Evidence urged support for this reform’.

#### **Paragraph 154: government urged to take action**

‘Given the level of public interest in rights of way...we drawn to the attention of the Government the wider rights of way concerns raised in the course of this inquiry and urge them to take action to meet them’.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201314/jtselect/jtdraftdereg/101/101.pdf>

### ***Government Response to the Report of the Joint Committee on the Draft Deregulation Bill, January 2014***

#### **Paragraph 80: government recognises pressure for new legislation**

‘There is clearly considerable debate on the need for further reform to the legislation governing the use of motorised vehicles on public rights of way and minor unsealed roads, especially in National Parks. We have sympathy with the concerns of those who have put forward proposals to protect routes that are vulnerable to damage by motorised vehicles’.

#### **Paragraph 81: government says there will need to be full public consultation before any new legislation is formulated**

‘Defra considers that any change to the current government framework for managing motorised vehicles should be the subject of a full public consultation. We believe that this issue needs to be fully debated and a separate package of policy measures formulated for implementation, through legislation if necessary, when a suitable opportunity arises’.

<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/joint-committees/draft-deregulation-bill/36777%20Cm%208808%20embargoed%20to%20midday%2030%20Jan.pdf>

### ***House of Commons Committee, Hansard 25 March 2014, column 613***

#### **Tom Brake MP for the government says the government will set up a working group**

‘The proposal is that DEFRA will work with Natural England to organise the founding of a group with an independent chair and a secretariat, and invite

stakeholders with the relevant experience and expertise to join the group. The group will contain a balance of interests and cross all sectors, and will be expected to come up with its own terms of reference’.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmpublic/deregulation/140325/pm/140325s01.htm>

***House of Lords, Hansard, 28 Oct 2014: Column 438***

**Lord de Mauley for the government accepts that consensus within the working group may not be possible and agrees an 18 month life for the group :**

‘Clearly, consensus would be the preferred outcome but of course we recognise that ultimately this may not prove possible’.

‘The original stakeholder working group took 18 months to reach its conclusions and there is no reason why we should not set a similar timeframe for another’.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansrd/text/141028-gc0002.htm>

***House of Lords, Hansard, 5 February 2015, Column 599***

**Lord de Mauley sets out on behalf of the government more details of the motor vehicles working group, including representation from the National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the National Trails**

‘The Government plan to set up such a motor vehicle working group, with an independent chairman, as soon as possible after the Deregulation Bill has completed its passage. My department will work with Natural England to organise a secretariat, and it will invite stakeholders with the relevant experience and expertise to join the group. We propose to invite interested organisations to put forward their suggestions for suitable members. In response to my noble friend Lord Bradshaw’s specific question, I say that a key principle is that the group should contain a balance of interests across all sectors. We plan to have members who can represent the interests of national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty, national trails as well as all the different types of users of rights of way.

‘Within such a group, recognised professionals can explore all the viable possibilities and their likely consequences. Resolutions arrived at in this way, based on agreement and mutual interest, are likely to result in less conflict and reduce the need for enforcement. Solutions will work best if based on compromise, and I have been assured by those representing the anti-vehicle groups that it is not their intention to change the legislation in relation to allowing motor vehicle trials and competitions...

‘My noble friend Lord Skelmersdale raised a point about access for disabled people to the countryside. This is a complex issue with many different aspects, which is why it needs to be considered carefully by a working group and fully consulted on.

‘My noble friend Lord Bradshaw asked about timing. I have said that the stakeholder working group will start its work upon completion of the passage of the Bill. We will set a

target time for the group to report. The original stakeholder working group took 18 months to report and I believe that a similar timeframe is realistic for this group to work to. I can confirm that a public consultation will follow the report.

'While the group needs to have a clear remit, it will be invited to come up with its own terms of reference. I expect that it will look at all the issues in the round and include assessments of any economic and social benefits of the current recreational use of unsealed roads as well as an assessment of the costs and burdens.'

### **GLPG February 2015**

*The Green Lanes Protection Group presently represents the following organisations: Allen Valleys Action Group, Battle for Bridleways Group, Brecon Beacons Park Society, British Driving Society, Cambrian Mountains Society, Campaign for National Parks, Campaign to Protect Rural England, Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales, Country Land and Business Association, Cyclists Touring Club, Exmoor Society, Friends of the Lake District, Friends of the Ridgeway, Green Lanes Environmental Action Movement, Long Bostle Downland Preservation Society, North Wales Alliance to Influence the Management of Off-Roading, Peak & Northern Footpaths Society, Peak District Green Lanes Alliance, South Downs Society, West Somerset & Exmoor Bridleways Association and Yorkshire Dales Green Lanes Alliance.*