

Protecting the beauty and tranquillity of our green lanes

Lake District Green Lanes Alliance

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Congratulations to Gavin Capstick, new CEO of the Lake District National Park

In October Gavin Capstick takes over as the new CEO of the Lake District National Park. We are heartened by his three priorities for the Lake District:

- supporting nature recovery and agricultural transition
- promoting low impact visiting
- helping people access and learn about the National Park and World Heritage Site

Gavin’s arrival coincides with the publication of UK National Parks’ “Vision for Regenerative Tourism”. We think this is a real opportunity to look afresh both at tourism in general and motorised tourism on green lanes in particular.

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The new vision set out by the UK's 15 National Parks is, to some degree, a recognition of a worldwide problem: the negative impact of tourism on special (and therefore popular) places. In the UK National Parks this problem is given a sharper edge by the difficulty of reconciling their two fundamental purposes: *to conserve the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage* and *to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of national parks by the public*. As is generally known, the NPA is required to give greater weight to the first of these in the event of conflict, but this does not entirely resolve the problem when the sheer number of visitors and the impact of their activities begin to damage the special qualities the Park is seeking to encourage people to enjoy.

“ “ *We need to move from minimising the impacts of tourism to ensuring visitors leave our National Parks as better places.*

UK National Parks

The Vision is a welcome statement of an intent to move to tourism that is *helping give back more than it takes*. The word *helping* is a little worrying; why not just tourism that is *giving back more than it takes*? But this is the blog/press release. The main document sets out the commitment of NPAs to:

Champion and support tourism development that contributes to the enhancement and regeneration of the places and communities in which it operates.

and

Support tourism activity that helps reduce carbon emissions and increases nature-recovery, whilst ensuring National Parks are relevant to everyone's needs.

The press release goes on to highlight a series of case studies of tourism good practice in UK National Parks, which are worth a look to get an idea of how others are tackling this dilemma. Sadly, the Lake District, the largest and one of the oldest National Parks in England, is conspicuously absent. Admittedly there are a number of initiatives that are listed as being

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undertaken by all or most National Parks, but given the critical nature of the problem in Cumbria you might expect the LDNPA to be giving a lead.

However, the incoming CEO, Gavin Capstick, has *low impact tourism* as one of his priorities, so we can perhaps look for a reset. Among other things, he might want to look at the green lanes issue. *Regenerative Tourism in UK National Parks* says that the future focus of NPAs' support for tourism will include (among other things):-

- Measuring (through gathering data, evidence and intelligence of a variety of types) the impact of tourism *on user-experiences, carbon emissions, nature and residents' quality of life*;
- Supporting and promoting low carbon and carbon-free travel;
- Developing nature-benefitting and low carbon experiences.

For green lane use, most of the data, evidence and intelligence is already in place, and recreational traffic on green lanes can hardly be said to be carbon free or nature-benefitting. Surely now is the time to reconsider the LDNPA's approach to this activity.

Looking beyond the remit of *Regenerative Tourism in UK National Parks*, it may also be time to move away from the common, long-held assumption that tourism is the answer to all the Lake District's economic problems. While it undoubtedly brings benefits, like everything they come at a cost, potentially at the cost of losing the very features for which the area was made a National Park and was awarded World Heritage Status. The assessment of the balance of tourism's benefits and costs tends to be ignored for a perceived lack of alternatives, but there are plenty of small scale industries, both low and high tech, that could fit into the Lake District without any undue impact on the special qualities of the place, and that are relatively sustainable, and able to offer more secure and regular employment, better wages and greater prosperity to the local community.

Given that, in carrying out their two founding purposes, the NPAs are also required to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities, perhaps the LDNPA should actively seek to introduce alternatives to tourism and be more imaginative and wide-ranging in the businesses they support.

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What ails our National Parks?

Earlier this year the Campaign for National Parks published a [Health Check](#) report on National Parks in England and Wales. The report sets out the first full assessment of how well the National Parks of England and Wales are supporting nature recovery. The findings are not good news: **only 6% of the total land area of National Parks is currently managed effectively for nature.**

We asked **Ruth Bradshaw**, Policy and Research Manager at the CNP, about the reasons for this alarming state of affairs?

RB: The way the National Park model has been set up is that National Park authorities actually have quite limited ability to influence what happens in most of the land in National Parks.



The majority of land is privately owned and there are very few mechanisms indeed to influence what private land owners do, other than through agri-environment support. Their ability to influence public bodies is limited too, although hopefully that is changing now with the new duty under the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023.

What exactly is this new duty?

RB: Relevant bodies must now seek to **further** the purposes of National Parks. That includes everybody from local authorities to the water and electricity companies that provide public utilities. Before the new Act came in this used to be what's called the duty of regard. There was just a requirement for these bodies to have **regard to** National Park purposes, but that could be done in a way that didn't really have that much of an impact. The new duty that came into force at the end of December last year and which we at the Campaign for National Parks and other NGO's campaigned for, is a duty to seek to **further the purposes** of National

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Parks. It relates to all their decision-making which affects land in National Parks and National Landscapes.

Are there any other big issues National Parks are facing?

RB: There aren't enough mechanisms to influence what happens in a National Park. When the National Park model was first created, there was a big concern about the

urbanisation of the countryside. So National Park authorities were given planning powers which are still a really important part of the mechanisms they have for influence. But that and their management plans are the only two instruments at their disposal. There are now real concerns about the intensification of farming and the way land is managed, but they have few opportunities to influence that.



83% of the public support Britain's National Parks being made wilder 90% said it was important that the abundance of wildlife in National Parks and AONBs increased.

What about budget cuts?

RB: That's a problem impossible to get away from. The fact is that over the last 10 years there have been cuts of 40% for National Park authorities. So they really are in a difficult situation. And the need to deal with that level of cuts has obviously been a big distraction in terms of them focusing more on things like nature recovery.

Can we talk about how to involve people more in the running of National Parks? The CNP is proposing Citizens' Assemblies. How would that work?

RB: Yes, one of the things we recommend in the report is there should be a citizens assembly for each of the National Parks. And this is something we recommended previously in our report on the climate emergency, which we published a couple of years ago. It certainly would include people who live in in the park, but as National Parks, these are places that are for the nation. So there is quite a legitimate interest from people who live outside the parks as well. There's a range of different stakeholders that you would want to involve, land managers and landowners as well to make sure that their voice is being heard.

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One of the issues is that a lot of people maybe haven't got their head round the idea that these places are going to have to change if they are really going to be able to play their role in addressing the climate emergency and the nature emergency.

For example, a lot of National Parks, particularly upland National Parks, are quite open, treeless landscapes. And if we want to see a lot more tree planting we're going to have to talk to people about what that actually means and how places are going to change.

Then there are the challenges around people wanting different things in terms of recreational activities. That means talking collectively about what is appropriate in these places that are supposed to be protected for wildlife and nature as well as being places for people to go out and enjoy the countryside.

What's the CNP's position on off-roading, on the motorised use of fell tracks and forest tracks?

RB: In our response to the Government's consultation on the Glover review a couple of years ago we were very clear that there needed to be more legislation to crack down on motorised vehicle use of green lanes. The need for more legislation to crack down on damaging practices is something we highlight in the Health Check report.

How important do you think the whole notion of tranquillity is in National Parks, not just freedom from noise but also from visual intrusion?

RB: I think it's really important because one of the things about National Parks is the idea of having a huge expanse where you can really get away from things, from the visual intrusion as well as the noise intrusion.

And what's the role of rewilding in National Parks?

RB: There are already a growing number of examples of rewilding and nature-friendly farming initiatives being adopted in National Parks, but there is the potential for significantly more of this kind of activity. We want to see the historic intensive land management and damaging practices, such as the draining and burning of peatlands phased out to make way for the rapid

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expansion of regenerative agriculture and land management, including rewilding and the re-introduction of keystone species such as beavers.

Are National Parks better at planning issues than at focusing on activities that are already happening, off-roading for instance?

RB: It's probably harder to get the National Parks to focus on issues like these, particularly when their resources are so stretched. There are legal mechanisms such as TROs, but then that's something they have to do proactively themselves. Whereas in terms of planning, they're usually reacting to something that's been put to them and they have a statutory obligation to deal with planning applications and that's a big part of their statutory responsibilities. So from that point of view it probably feels like they're more focused on planning.

We are delighted to announce that we have just been accepted as a Member of the CNP Council. This is a great opportunity to work closely with the CNP and its members.

What are your views on the impact of tourism in general on National Parks?

RB: Overtourism is a big concern in certain locations. Most people accept that it's a good thing for more people to get to know the National Parks and to understand them and value them. But if we want that to happen without completely destroying them, then we have to have a way for people to get there and get around more sustainably. So that's one reason why it's important to protect green lanes.

Why the Lake District falls behind

In March this year we wrote to the LDNPA, asking for a reset in the Authority's green lanes policy. One important question we asked is this: why has the Lake District not closed a single green lane to motor vehicles since 2006, when the Yorkshire Dales and the Peak District have made 17 between them?

The reply we received does not explain this conservation gap. The LDNPA wrote:

"It's important to highlight that the figures you have quoted on the number of TROs in comparison to the number of unsealed roads in the Lake District

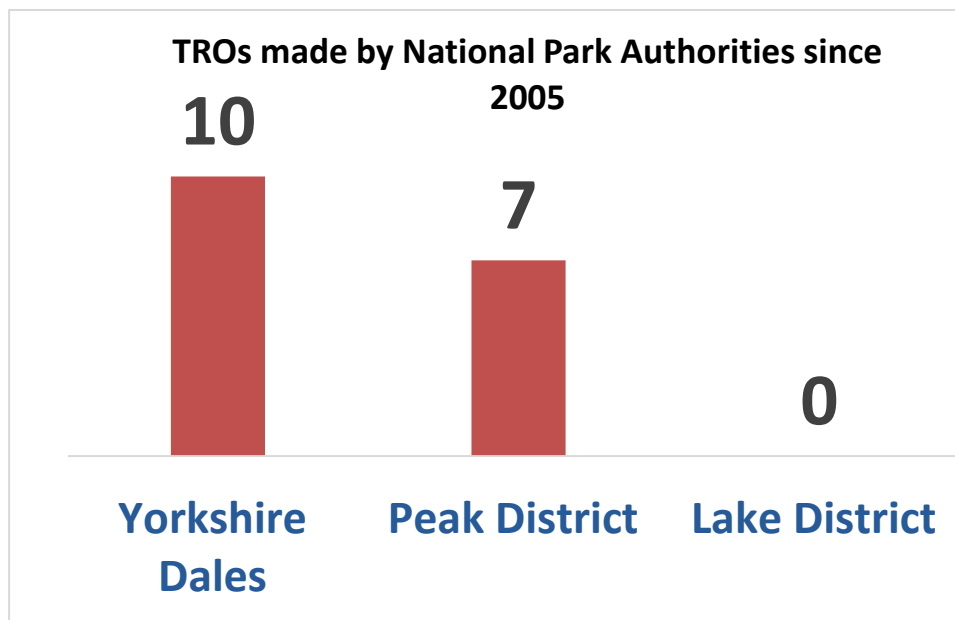
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National Park with other National Parks do not illustrate the whole picture. The data summarised below shows that the Lake District has less unsealed roads open to vehicle traffic as a proportion of unsealed roads compared with the Peak District and the Yorkshire Dales.

- In the Lake District there are 4 operative TROs and around 85 unprohibited unsealed roads and byways;
- In the Yorkshire Dales there are 12 operative TROs and 125 further unsealed roads and byways which have been assessed (to some degree) and where the NPA has decided that prohibition is not the preferred option;
- In the Peak District the figures are 6 and around 250 respectively.

That's not correct. Even in percentage terms the Lake District fares worse than the Yorkshire Dales. In the Lake District there are only **two, not four operative** TROs on green lanes with proven or possible public motor vehicular rights. (The TRO on the High Nibthwaite to Parkamoor unsealed unclassified road U5051 has not been in operation for many years. The TRO on U5531 in Little Langdale is not on a green lane, because most of this road (which runs between the U5527 road and the U5003 road) is sealed with tarmac. This means that there are only two TROs currently operative on green lanes in the LDNP, the permit TRO made by the LDNPA under delegated powers in 2004 for Gatescarth Pass and the seasonal TRO made by Cumbria County Council in 2005 for the section of U5566 through becks at Rusland Pool.)

Out of 85 green lanes in the Lake District only 2% have a TRO. This compares to 9% (or 7% if you exclude two restricted byways) in the Yorkshire Dales.



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The Peak District National Park Authority identified 35 green lanes as potentially unsustainable priority routes. This is almost exactly the same number as in the Lake District, where 36 red and amber routes were identified (see next article). And in the Peak District 54% of these priority green lanes are fully or partially protected, with a further two lanes in TRO consultation. TROs exist for only two of the 38 priority green lanes in the Lake District, the permit and seasonal TRO mentioned above.

It matters little how you look at it, there is a dramatic gap in the conservation of green lanes between the Lake District and the Yorkshire Dales/Peak District National Parks.

Much more important though than these percentages is the methodology. Taking the Yorkshire Dales as an example: after 2006 when new legislation came in, the Authority assessed the sensitivity of all green lanes to motorised use. It used four criteria:

- Ecological sensitivity
- Heritage sensitivity
- Surface sensitivity
- Tranquillity sensitivity

It is now urgent to conduct the same systematic, in-depth audit of green lanes in the Lake District, including environmental and heritage criteria as well as the impact on tranquillity.

Green lane monitoring – a crucial choice

In our last newsletter (April 2024) we explained why we think the LDNPA's current user survey does not ask the right questions to establish how recreational motoring affects the special qualities including tranquillity, and whether a ban on recreational motor vehicles would conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the area.

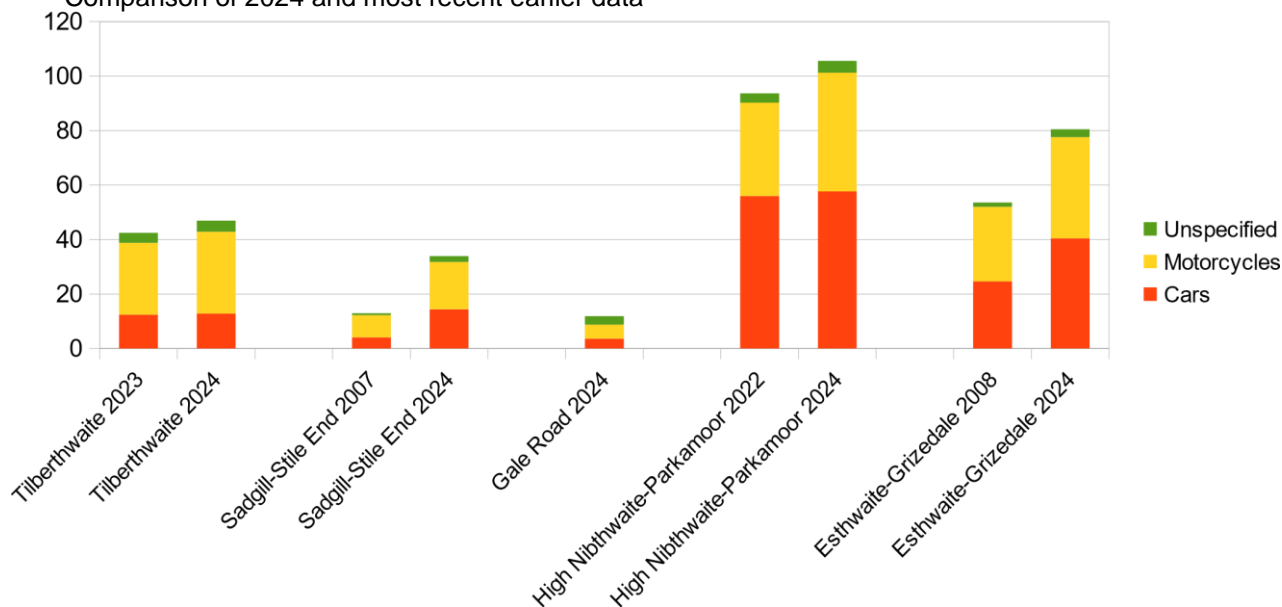
We also have serious reservations about the choice of routes which the LDNPA says it is monitoring. In the 1990s the LDNPA, together with off-roading groups, developed categories for the vulnerability of green lanes, which resulted in a list of 38 vulnerable routes. This included 25 categorised as amber (*"may not be passable in all weathers"*, *"route with moderate use requiring some monitoring/management"*) and 13 as red (*"may be*

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environmental issues plus the potential for misunderstanding or conflict with other users”, “route with significant use requiring significant monitoring/management”).

In December 2023, the LDNPA decided to monitor use and users’ experience on three green lanes, Tilberthwaite (red), Sadgill-Stile End (red) and Gale Road (amber). It makes sense to monitor motor vehicle numbers on the first two routes, as there are earlier vehicle logger data for comparison. But for Gale Road there is no previous monitoring data (other than inspections at infrequent intervals). The graphs below show the 2024 vehicle logger data available so far for these three routes, plus the most recent comparative data for two other (red) routes, High Nibthwaite-Parkamoor and Esthwaite-Grizedale. It would make sense to prioritise these as they are clearly more used by motor vehicles than Sadgill-Stile and Gale Road,

Motor vehicles per week on green lanes monitored in all or part of the first five months of 2024
Comparison of 2024 and most recent earlier data



There is one crucial question the LDNPA needs to clarify: what level of motor vehicle use is acceptable? When we asked them in March 2024 the only response was that more routes would be monitored, resources permitting.

This is worrying. Defra’s guidance for national park authorities making traffic regulation orders (TROs) says that “*The Government considers in many cases a level of recreational motor vehicular use that may be acceptable in other areas will be inappropriate within National Parks and incompatible*

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with their purposes.” But without any clear idea of what levels are acceptable the monitoring makes little sense.

And finally a closer insight into the fascinating history of the many paths and tracks in the Lake District by Alan Cleaver, author (with wife Lesley Park) of “Corpse Roads of Cumbria” and “Get Lost”. The former journalist now lives in Whitehaven and spends his days walking.

Lonnings, corpse roads and green lanes

I moved to Cumbria in 2005 and, having always been a keen walker, quickly became interested in the county's network of ancient paths. But even I spotted early on that deciding the difference between a trod and a lonning, a drovers road and a packhorse trail, a corpse road and a church path, a green lane and a footpath was impossible. There's no helpful dictionary definitions and what one village calls a lonning, another calls a lane. And the definitions also change over time. At the start of the 20th Century we had tramps and meanderings but you don't hear so much about them now.



Lonnings were the first type of path that attracted my attention. Lonning is essentially just a dialect term for 'lane' but in Cumbria most people seem to accept a lonning is a term for a low-level track about a mile long, sometimes but not always leading to a farm. This may be because one suggested origin of the term is from an old word 'loan', meaning 'the quiet place by the farm' where villagers bought milk, eggs etc - so the path to the loan became the lonning. Many lonnings have specific names: Bluebottle Lonning, Dynamite Lonning, Boggle Lonning, Lucy Gray Lonning, Miry Lonning etc. Only a handful are named as such on OS maps. These are usually local names. And they vary from being very narrow trods to tracks on which farm vehicles often travel (and on occasion have developed into tarmacked roads).

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When we are driving everything to the edge of extinction, it seems lonnings are the 'edges' where wildlife is hiding out.

For the most part they are quiet country paths crammed full with wildlife. Walking on Tannery Lonning at Caldbeck my bird identification app, Merlin, picked up 12 different species of birds in just 90 seconds. When we are driving everything to the edge of

extinction, it seems lonnings are the 'edges' where wildlife is hiding out.



I have seen some of these lonnings slowly changing for better or worse. Billy Watson Lonning at Harrington is at least 200 years old but is slowly being nibbled away at by development. I've seen some 'grow' into tracks or even roads. And I have seen a road (Wardle Lonning at Lowca)

return from being a busy tarmacked road into a grassy lonning, thanks to the Distington bypass cutting the road in half. With no traffic travelling on it any more, Mother Nature has been quick to reclaim it. And I've also seen lonnings become hedgerows through lack of use. Squeezy Gut Lonning at Hallsenna, near Gosforth did, in living memory, have cattle driven down it daily. It is now so overgrown, it is impassable. But I'm OK with that. I take a longterm view. If man isn't using a path, then Mother Nature should claim it back.



My map of lonnings can be found [here](#). It shows only named lonnings. Since lonning is just a dialect term for 'lane' then every lane in Cumbria is technically a lonning. But you might enjoy exploring some of the curiously-named ones. You'll notice most are in the north and west of the county. That may be because lonning was more of

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a Cumberland than a Westmorland term. It might be just because I live in Whitehaven and have found it easier to research lonnings in my part of the world.

So should motorised vehicles use green lanes? My instinct says no, and I hope the Lake District National Park Authority will protect at least the most fragile lonnings so that walkers and cyclists can enjoy them without being disturbed by hobby motorists.