# Life or Death on your walk: Why Britons are calling for thousands of new paths

**Friday 27 December, 2024**

Planning a walk? This winter break millions of people will be stretching their legs but might be taking their lives in their hands.

Imagine for a moment you want to walk home from visiting family, a pub, place of worship, hospital, school or shop.

The problem is, the only way to go means walking on narrow or busy roads that are surrounded by privately owned fields. There is no pavement or footpath.

Should walking down the road be your only option?

A new ground-breaking poll for Slow Ways has found that the majority of people in the country think it shouldn't be.

7 in 10 UK adults (71%) think that it should be allowed to walk along the edge of fields that are privately owned, as long as they are respectful and responsible, if the only other option is to walk down a narrow or busy road with no pavement or legal footpath.

"Going for a walk in the countryside can mean risking narrow lanes, blind bends and fast vehicles," explained Dan Raven-Ellison, founder and CEO of Slow Ways.

"According to the Department for Transport, two pedestrians die and 34 are seriously injured by vehicles on rural roads each week.

The government can save thousands of lives and bring millions of people so much joy by ensuring there is always a safe way to walk."

The poll also found widespread support for an extensive upgrade to paths and access in the UK.

According to the poll by YouGov, 70% of people support the creation of a national walking network that enables people to safely walk to any address in the UK, with new paths and walking routes being created on private land where necessary.

Slow Ways is a grassroots initiative to develop a national walking network that Raven-Ellison started in 2020.

"Slow Ways is founded on the principle that we should always be able to walk safely and enjoyably to the places we need to get to. We have that expectation for driving places. We should have the same expectation for walking, which is the healthiest, greenest, most inclusive, most affordable and – I think – most enjoyable way of getting around.

"We know there is a need for this. Over the last three years thousands of volunteers have been helping to develop the Slow Ways national walking network. Thanks to their efforts, making use of existing rights of way, we have mapped thousands of walking routes that connect Britain's towns, cities and national landscapes.

"We know from our work that there are no safe or reasonable footpaths to thousands of Britain's shops, pubs, schools, villages and homes. The only option people have is to walk alongside traffic on roads and lanes – many of which have replaced the paths people used to travel on foot.

"Like many people, I have experienced the dangers of narrow lanes, fast cars and large lorries first-hand.

"The current situation is no-good for walkers or drivers, neither of whom want to surprise or scare each other at any time of the year.

"The government can make walking places safer and more direct, enjoyable and inclusive for us all.

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While hikers would benefit from improved access, the people who would benefit most of all would be the 10 million people who live in the countryside and feel these issues day-in-day-out. Many people who live in rural areas are surrounded by fields, but effectively live on islands that they can only venture in or out of by car."

The poll suggests that intervention to make walking safer would not only be popular but would also benefit large numbers of people.

40% of respondents said they were likely to walk more if such a walking network existed. Slow Ways calculated that, projected nationally, that could mean helping 27 million people (40% of the UK's population) to walk more.

"What a gift to the nation it would be if the government ensured there was always a safe way for people to walk home, see loved ones, be healthy or enjoy connecting with nature.

"Walking can improve our health, save us money, tackle the climate crisis and spread money through the economy. Not helping people to walk to where they want to go just doesn't make sense!

"It would be a wonderful and inspiring legacy that people could enjoy for generations to come.

Slow Ways is calling on the government to work with people, groups and organisations across the country to develop an inclusive, extensive and easy to follow national walking network, including this big upgrade in access.

They are inviting the public to help by signing up to volunteer with Slow Ways by sharing and checking possible walking routes between towns and cities, an effort they will be intensifying by connecting more places across the country later in 2025.

You can find out more and contribute to Slow Ways on their website www.slowways.org.

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