



## Stephanie Bruce-Smith

Call: 2021

### Practice areas:

**Public Law, Planning, Highways, Commons and Open Spaces, Environment, Compulsory Purchase and Compensation, Licensing, Rating**



## Practice Profile

Stephanie has a broad public law practice, with a particular focus on planning, environmental and highways law. She is currently ranked as one of the top 10 planning barristers under 35 in Planning Magazine's Planning Law Survey 2025.

She has extensive advocacy experience, having acted for all parties to a legal challenge (claimants, defendants, interested parties and interveners) and representing clients in the High Court, Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court. Her clients include NGOs, landowners, developers, local government, statutory bodies, residents' groups and private individuals.

Stephanie welcomes instructions across all of Chambers' practice areas and is happy to work on a pro-bono basis in appropriate cases.

Recent / significant cases include:

### Supreme Court:

- *Darwall and another v Dartmoor National Park Authority* [2025] UKSC 20 – represented the Open Spaces Society (led by Ned Westaway, alongside Esther Drabkin-Reiter) in a challenge which concerned whether access to the commons “on foot or on horseback for the purposes of open-air recreation” under the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 includes the right to wild camp, (acting pro bono).

### Court of Appeal:

- *Darwall and another v Dartmoor National Park Authority* [2023] EWCA Civ 927, [2024] 2 WLR 297 – represented the Open Spaces Society (led by Richard Honey KC alongside Ned Westaway and Esther Drabkin-Reiter) in the Court of Appeal (see facts above).

### High Court / Divisional Court:

- *Rose (on behalf of Friends of Mill Road Bridge 2) v Cambridgeshire County Council* [2025] EWHC 1715 (Admin) – represented the claimant in a challenge to the lawfulness of decision to close a bridge to private cars;
- *Ross v Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government* [2025] EWHC 1183 (Admin) – represented the claimant (led by Annabel Graham Paul) in a challenge to a decision to grant planning permission for a 49.9MW solar farm, in which a central issue was whether NPS policy EN-3 permitted the “overplanting” of solar panels for reasons other than panel degradation;
- *R(Friends of the Earth, Jordan & Paulley) v Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs* [2024] EWHC 2707 (Admin) – represented the defendant (led by Mark Westmoreland Smith KC alongside Charles Streeten) in a challenge to the legality of the third National Adaptation Programme (“NAP3”) under the Climate Change Act 2008;
- *R(Gurajena and Benta v London Borough of Newham* [2024] EWHC 1745 (Admin) – represented the defendant local authority in a case concerning the requirement to reconsult following the amendment of plans as part of a planning application;
- *R(Parkes) v Dorset Council* [2024] EWHC 1253 (Admin) – represented the third interested party (led by Richard Honey KC) in a case concerning the jurisdictional limit of “land” under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990;
- *Wesson, Chair of Friends of Mill Road Bridge v Cambridgeshire County Council* [2024] EWHC 1068 (Admin) – represented the claimant in a challenge to a traffic regulation order (‘TRO’) under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, including representing the Claimant in two application hearings in respect of applications for summary judgment, strike out, security for costs, interim relief and Aarhus costs

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## Public Law

Stephanie’s recent public law work includes representing clients in cases raising difficult points of public and international law, including the application of human rights to environmental claims.

Notable public law cases include:

- *Friends of the Earth & Ors v Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs* [2024] EWHC 2707 (Admin) – a challenge to the legality of the third National Adaptation Programme (“NAP3”) under the Climate Change Act 2008 (led by Mark Westmoreland Smith and Charles Streeten)
- *R(Parkes) v Dorset Council* [2024] EWHC 1253 (Admin) – a challenge regarding the jurisdictional limit of “land” under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (led by Richard Honey KC)

In addition to court work, Stephanie regularly advises clients on public law matters. Examples of public law issues arising as part of Stephanie’s practice include:

- Procedural fairness
- Adequacy of reasons
- Apparent bias
- Duty of candour and the appropriateness of specific disclosure
- Mistake of fact
- Fair consultation
- The meaning and scope of the public sector equality duty (PSED)

Stephanie also regularly speaks on public law topics. Recent talks include:

- Judicial review costs and procedure update (FTB Public Law webinar, 4 June 2025)
  - Disclosure and the duty of candour in judicial review (FTB Public Law webinar, 22 November 2024)
  - ADR in Judicial Review (FTB Public Law webinar, 17 February 2025)
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## Planning

Stephanie's planning practice covers all areas of planning law, including judicial reviews, planning statutory reviews and planning appeals. She appears in court and at inquiries, both in her own right and as junior counsel, in addition to advising clients at all stages of the planning process.

### Court work

Stephanie has significant Planning Court experience. Recent cases include:

- *Ross v Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government* [2025] EWHC 1183 (Admin) – represented the claimant (led by Annabel Graham Paul) in a challenge to a decision to grant planning permission for a 49.9MW solar farm, in which a central issue was whether NPS policy EN-3 permitted the “overplanting” of solar panels for reasons other than panel degradation;
- *R(Parkes) v Dorset Council* [2024] EWHC 1253 (Admin) – represented the Third Interested Party (led by Richard Honey KC), in a case which established that the sea bed was not “land” under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990;
- *R(Gurajena and Benta) v London Borough of Newham* [2024] EWHC 1745 (Admin) – represented the defendant in a case which clarified the meaning of “adjoining” under the DMPO and the requirement to reconsult following the amendment of plans as part of a planning application.

### Inquiries and hearings

Stephanie is also regularly instructed as sole counsel and as junior counsel in planning appeals and public inquiries. Recent work includes:

- Royal Mint Court (2025), a public inquiry on the redevelopment of Royal Mint Court for use as the new Chinese Embassy (led by Morag Ellis KC)
- 1 Alie St (2025), a s.78 appeal against the refusal of permission for a change of use of part of a building from Class E use to flexible Class E / Class F1 use (sole counsel)
- Land at Icknield Way and Sears Drive (2024), a s.78 appeal against the refusal of planning permission for the erection of a Class E discount foodstore (led by Craig Howell Williams KC)
- Land at the Former Animal Health Trust Research Centre (2024), a s.78 appeal against the refusal to grant a certificate of lawful use (led by Douglas Edwards KC)
- 7-15 Blount Street (2024) a s.78 appeal against the refusal of planning permission for purpose-built student accommodation (sole counsel)
- Land to the north of Rosthwaite Farm (2024), a s.78 appeal against the refusal of planning permission for a farm diversification scheme (sole counsel)
- Land at New Oaks Farm (2023), an enforcement inquiry concerning the alleged unlawful change of use of a caravan to residential use (sole counsel)

### Advisory work

Stephanie's advisory practice covers all aspects of planning law. She has recently advised clients on matters including:

- Changes to a planning permission under s.96A TCPA 1990
  - The lawful implementation of a planning permission
  - Local occupancy conditions
  - Costs in planning appeals
  - Lawfulness of enforcement action
  - Consultation obligations
  - Incomplete developments
  - Permitted development rights
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## Highways, Commons and Open Spaces

Stephanie is regularly instructed on matters concerning highways, commons and open spaces. She has developed a particular expertise in traffic regulation orders.

Recent cases include:

- *Rose (on behalf of Friends of Mill Road Bridge 2) v Cambridgeshire County Council* [2025] EWHC 1715 (Admin) – represented the claimant in a challenge to the lawfulness of decision to close a bridge to private cars;
- *Darwall and another v Dartmoor National Park Authority* [2025] UKSC 20 – represented the Open Spaces Society (led by Ned Westaway, alongside Esther Drabkin-Reiter) in a challenge which concerned whether access to the commons “on foot or on horseback for the purposes of open-air recreation” under the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 includes the right to wild camp;
- *Wesson, Chair of Friends of Mill Road Bridge v Cambridgeshire County Council* [2024] EWHC 1068 (Admin) – represented the claimant in a challenge to a traffic regulation order (‘TRO’) under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

She has also been instructed on several rights of way matters and has assisted other members of chambers in areas including town and village greens and the diversion of bridleways under the Transport and Works Act 1992.

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## Environment

Stephanie has a thriving environmental law practice and has acted in several significant environmental law challenges in recent years. These include representing the intervener in *Darwall and another v Dartmoor National Park Authority* [2025] UKSC 20 (on whether access to the commons for the purposes of open-air recreation included a right to wild camp) and acting for the defendant in *Friends of the Earth & Ors v Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs* [2024] EWHC 2707 (Admin), in which the landmark decision of the European Court of Human Rights, *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz v Switzerland* was considered by the High Court.

Stephanie has advised clients across a broad spectrum of environmental matters, including:

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)
- Habitats Regulations Assessment

- Human rights & climate change
- Environmental Permitting
- Fisheries
- Waste
- Water

Recent advisory work includes advising on the interpretation of the Water Framework Directive Regulations and the Farming Rules for Water. She has also recently advised clients on waste management and related matters.

Stephanie writes and speaks on various environmental law issues. She gave a case law update at the UKELA Conference 2025 and regularly speaks at FTB's Quarterly Environmental Law updates.

She is a regular contributor to FTB's Environmental Law Blog. Her recent posts include:

- [Inter-American Court of Human Rights' Advisory Opinion on "Climate Emergency and Human Rights": an Overview](#) (with Emma Rowland), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 10 July 2025.
- [A Finch in the coalmine? Friends of the Earth v SoS Levelling Up, Housing and Communities & others \[2024\] EWHC 2349 \(Admin\)](#), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 24 October 2024
- [Specific Disclosure of Ministerial Submissions: the Cumbria Coalmine Case](#), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 20 February 2024
- [Habitats Protections Under Fire: Part 2 – The Energy Act 2023](#), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 20 December 2023
- [Habitats Protections Under Fire: Part 1 – the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023](#), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 1 December 2023
- [Darwall v Dartmoor: open-air recreation re-defined?](#), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 21 March 2023
- [Torres Strait Islanders Decision: Admissibility, Article 6 and Adaptation](#), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 19 January 2023

Stephanie is a member of UKELA's Marine Working Party.

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## Compulsory Purchase and Compensation

Stephanie has a growing practice in compulsory purchase and compensation both in her own right and as junior counsel.

Recent work includes:

- Representing an acquiring authority (as sole counsel) in a compensation claim;
- Representing an acquiring authority in a compensation claim, led by Richard Honey KC and Caroline Daly;
- Advising a client on the scope of provisions in the Acquisition of Land Act 1981, led by Rebecca Clutten;
- Representing an objector at a CPO inquiry, led by Annabel Graham Paul.

Stephanie also assisted with a range of compulsory purchase and compensation matters during her pupillage under the supervision of Rebecca Clutten in 2022-23. These included researching points of law and assisting with the legal review of documents in preparation for a CPO.

On 3 April 2025, Stephanie joined Caroline Daly and Daisy Noble at a London Women in CPO event to provide an update on the Government's Compulsory Purchase and Compensation reform agenda.

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## Licensing

Stephanie has a busy licensing practice and is frequently instructed to represent parties at review hearings for a range of premises, including nightclubs, bars and off-licenses.

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## Rating

Stephanie has been instructed on several rating and council tax matters. Recent instructions include:

- representing clients in disputes regarding the non-payment of rates;
  - advising a client on an appeal to the valuation tribunal (VTE) on a Council Tax matter.
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## Qualifications

- The University of Law, BPC (very competent) (2021)
  - University of Oxford, BA Law (Jurisprudence) (First) (2020)
  - University College London & SciencesPo Paris, BA European Social and Political Studies: Dual Degree (First) (2016)
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## Academic Awards, Scholarships and Prizes

- Mistress of Moots, The University of Law
  - Wilfred Watson Scholarship, Gray's Inn
  - Exhibitioner, Merton College, Oxford
  - Fowler Prizes for performance in internal examinations, Merton College, Oxford
  - Allen & Overy Second Year Law Prize, Merton College, Oxford
  - Sessional Prize, University College London
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## Mooting, Debating and Other Advocacy Experience

- Winner UKELA Lord Slynn of Hadley (Senior) Moot (2021)
- Winner HSF Disability Mooting Championship: Oxford v Cambridge (2019)
- Quarterfinalist at the international rounds of the Price Media Law Moot Court, representing University

## Other Relevant Experience

Prior to commencing pupillage, Stephanie worked as a paralegal at Town Legal LLP, researching and assisting with the drafting of advice on planning issues including:

- Implementation of planning permissions;
- Interpretation of a planning permission;
- Permitted Development rights;
- Changes of use;
- Enforcement time limits.

While at Town Legal, Stephanie also worked on two enforcement appeals and a related judicial review challenge, gaining considerable experience in this area.

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## Memberships

- Administrative Law Bar Association (ALBA)
  - Compulsory Purchase Association (CPA)
  - Planning and Environmental Bar Association (PEBA)
  - UK Environmental Law Association (UKELA)
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## Publications

- [Inter-American Court of Human Rights' Advisory Opinion on "Climate Emergency and Human Rights": an Overview \(with Emma Rowland\)](#), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 10 July 2025.
- [A Finch in the coalmine? Friends of the Earth v SoS Levelling Up, Housing and Communities & others \[2024\] EWHC 2349 \(Admin\)](#), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 24 October 2024
- [Specific Disclosure of Ministerial Submissions: the Cumbria Coalmine Case](#), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 20 February 2024
- [Habitats Protections Under Fire: Part 2 – The Energy Act 2023](#), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 20 December 2023
- [Habitats Protections Under Fire: Part 1 – the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023](#), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 1 December 2023
- [Darwall v Dartmoor: open-air recreation re-defined?](#), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 21 March 2023
- [Torres Strait Islanders Decision: Admissibility, Article 6 and Adaptation](#), FTB Environmental Law Blog, 19 January 2023
- Book review "Dina Lupin Townsend: Human Dignity and the Adjudication of Environmental Law", (2020) 121 UKELA E-Law 21

- 'Open Doors and How to Shut Them: Omissions Liability for Public Authorities' (2020) 9 OUULJ 55

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## **Languages**

Stephanie is fluent in Spanish and French, and speaks conversational Italian