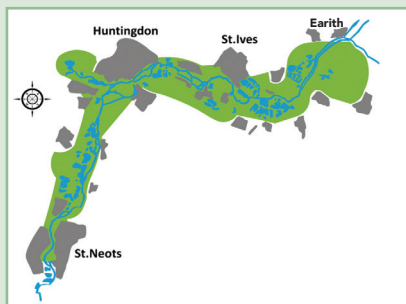


The Great Ouse Valley Trust (GOVT) is a charity with the objective 'To promote for public benefit the conservation, restoration, and enjoyment of the landscape, wildlife and heritage of the Great Ouse Valley and environs in the county of Cambridgeshire.' The area is nationally recognised and valued for its wildlife, leisure, natural and heritage attractions which contribute to the county's natural green spaces.



Our Partner Members contribute knowledge, expertise, resources and energy so that together we can champion the unique appeal of the Great Ouse Valley.

To become a Supporter or make a donation, please visit our website. Here you will also find news of our current projects, our media coverage, planning issues and much more.

All photographs in The Valley are by GOVT unless otherwise indicated.

SAVE THESE DATES!

GOVT AGM 20 April 2024
10 am Offord Village Hall. See page 4

Third Workshop
3 October 2024

9.30 am Brampton Memorial Centre
See page 2

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www.greatousevalleytrust.org.uk



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Joined-up thinking

What a year we have had. One of the Trust's main functions is as a 'facilitator' to bring together all the various groups that have a real interest in our glorious Ouse Valley landscape. Our stakeholders include local authorities, farmers, landowners, boaters, canoeists, paddle boarders, walkers, runners, cyclists, fishermen, historians, ecologists, Rotary clubs, the Environment Agency, Anglian Water, and national organisations such as the Wildlife Trust, National Trust and RSPB.

Joining together we believe we can decide on real actions that will promote, protect and enhance the landscape. Hence the success of our Community Engagement 'Living Landscape' workshops. Two have now been completed and we are looking forward to our third to focus on the Huntingdon to St Neots stretch of the river.

FIRST WORKSHOP REPORT

What have we achieved so far?

In September 2022 the focus was on the St Ives to Godmanchester stretch. Five key projects emerged. Here are our actions and plans for each:

1 Increasing the tree canopy

- Our consultant Mayhew Associates produced mapping to identify all the potential sites for new tree planting along the green corridor.
- We continue with our riverside Black Poplar planting and developing our first Community Wood adjacent to the Ouse Valley Way.
- With our friends at Noble's Field, the beautiful riverside community asset in St Ives, we have developed a schedule for more



We need to look after our Ancient Willows and plant new specimens

native trees, including Black Poplar, White Willow, Alder and Oak.

- We propose to work with the Biodiversity for All initiative at Huntingdonshire District Council and with the Godmanchester Freeman to

plant trees and restore the hedges on Westside Common (see page 4).

- We want to replace trees that were illegally removed on the Portholme Meadow Island in Huntingdon.
- There is potential for another Community Wood on Houghton Hill between the new housing developments.
- We want to plant trees to 'fill the gaps' along the river valley to ensure that views from the meadows retain their green backdrop.
- Following the successful planting of new woodland on restored landfill sites (with the Suez Group) we have approached a second landfill company to offer to plant more woodland on another site that is currently being restored.

2 Improving river health

- We invited Chris Gerrard from Anglian Water to our October Partner Member meeting to talk about Water and Wildlife - water conservation and its use to help nature recovery and flood management.
- We have just received our first river water-quality testing kits from our friends at Bedfordshire's Great Ouse Valley Environmental Trust (GOVET). We have a small nucleus of volunteers for this work. We are on the waiting list for RiverFly training.

Continued on page 2

... First workshop report Continued

- River Warden Training with the Environment Agency is programmed and we have volunteers to help monitor and inform the EA. Training will be completed shortly and further River Wardens recruited in nearby areas.
- Last year we joined RiverCare who donated equipment and insurance to enable us to do four boat-based litter picks between St Ives and Houghton with two teams of volunteers. We will replicate this in 2024 and expand our range, plus organise footpath-based litter picks alongside the river.

3 Floodplain meadow restoration

- We are working with the Wildlife Trust and local farmers to help improve the quality of our wildflower meadows.

4 Better access for all

- We have had a year of intense negotiations with Cambridgeshire County Council, and numerous meetings with the new County Council Green Management Team, with invited walkers, runners and others with a special

interest in our footpaths and bridleways. Our focus has been on the Ouse Valley Way (see page 3), but we are also pushing hard for more funding for all our other routes.

- Accessing our main attractions like Houghton Mill and The Manor at Hemingford Grey can be difficult in the holiday season. We have worked to trial electric boat trips from St Ives to both these places to try and help reduce parking pressures and improve access.
- The Cambridge-St Ives Busway (and bridleway) is a great way to get to the Valley by bus, bike, foot or even horse. This helps to reduce dependency on cars. We want to work with RSPB to develop a Fen Drayton Visitor Centre at the bus stop to allow people of all abilities to access the nature reserve (and even, in the long term, a ferry from The Old Ferry Boat Inn at Holywell).

5 Formal protection and designation

- We have campaigned for years for official recognition of our beautiful Valley. Now, at last, we can report some progress (see page 3).

MORE WORKSHOPS

We address other sections of the Valley

For the second workshop we focused on the St Ives to Earith stretch and gathered in January at Bluntisham Village Hall. Attendees

representing the Parish Councils, local groups and businesses, farmers and landowners, plus the RSPB and the Wildlife Trust, assembled for what was again a full day of concentrated but enjoyable effort.

We were fortunate once more to have Dr Jade Gunnell to oversee proceedings. Jade is an ecologist and



Stakeholders contribute their ideas in Bluntisham, and celebrate (below) a productive day

naturalist with a PhD in Community Engagement strategy (citizen science). She has recently been organising the national biodiversity schemes for the Natural History Museum.

The workshop proved to be another rewarding experience for all the participants. After much debate and post-workshop analysis, a number of projects emerged for the Trust to take forward, and these will be fully reported in the next edition of The Valley.

Our third workshop will be held in the Brampton Memorial Centre on 3 October and will cover the area between Huntingdon and St Neots. It will be a full-day event and we will once again be inviting Parish and Town Councils, farmers, landowners, local groups and our national bodies, to join the conversation and arrive at projects to take forward. From our experience from the first two workshops we can be confident that this will not just be a 'talking shop'. We really do mean business, and Jade's expertise makes sure everybody has a say and it is noted!



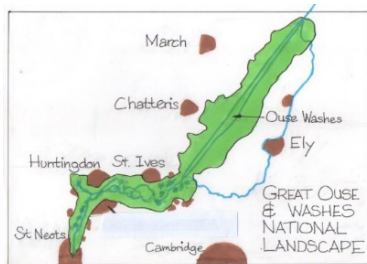
A NEW NATIONAL LANDSCAPE?

We have high hopes!

The United Kingdom now has two types of 'protected' landscapes: the National Parks, such as the Lake District and the Norfolk Broads, and the National Landscapes (previously called AONBs), such as the Chilterns and Dedham Vale. As the Government is committed to protecting 30% of our land area for nature by 2030 (the 30 x 30 policy) it is actively looking at locations for new National Parks and National Landscapes. Nearly all the existing protected landscapes in the UK are either on the coast or in the uplands in the north, south and west of the country.

There are no protected landscapes in the vast area of England in the East Midlands and East Anglia. In fact, there is no formally protected landscape at all in the countryside stretching from the Peak District National Park in the west, to the Suffolk Coast National Landscape in the east. Our local landscape along the Great Ouse Valley may not be as spectacular, nor have the moors and mountains of Dartmoor or Snowdonia, but it is really just as important. It should be valued for the unique tranquility and beauty of its meadows, wetlands and ancient towns and villages.

Natural England, the Government body that looks after our natural world, agrees and is keen to see more protected landscapes in our part of England: a sort of 'levelling up'. We now know that the Great Ouse Valley, combined with the Ouse Washes, is very high on the list of potential National Landscapes, whichever party wins the next election. In fact, it is now shown on Natural England maps as a potential National Landscape.



The area proposed for a new National Landscape

Why do we want to be a National Landscape?

First, what have we got? The Great Ouse Valley is one of the most beautiful areas in the East of England. It has tranquil meadows with Portholme Meadow the largest wildflower meadow in the country. It has Ancient Willow and Black Poplar trees. It is great for boating, walking, running, fishing and horse-riding. Yet it is a long, narrow piece of precious landscape surrounded by acres of barren prairie farming, and rapidly expanding towns and villages. It has an amazing history of water mills since Roman times and many listed buildings. The Ouse Washes to the north are a vast wetland designed in the 17th century to drain the fens, reduce flooding and produce rich arable soils. The Washes are unique in the world and welcome migrating waterfowl in huge numbers every year. Add in the numerous gravel extraction lakes alongside the river, and our Valley and the Washes combined offer twice as much water as the Norfolk Broads!

However, Cambridgeshire has the least area of land managed for nature in the UK, and the least tree cover. But despite this, the Great Ouse Valley and the Ouse Washes are vitally important for nature biodiversity and for recreation, physical and mental health.

So, recognition and designation as a National Landscape would bring many benefits. It would put us on the map, give us a degree of protection from over-development, and ensure that our area continues to be a great place to live. It would bring in new funding to help local businesses thrive, and to help bring in more visitors to spend in our local shops and pubs.

So what next?

The idea of our wonderful landscape gaining a special designation was first proposed in 2013. However, years of austerity has meant that the Government did not allocate resources for the formal consideration of new landscapes by its experts. But this is all set to change. Natural England is once again looking seriously at new designations. Now is the time for action! And you can help! Your organization can add its voice to support our submission. Please send an email to give your organisation's support to graham.campbell1@gmail.com

CELEBRATING THE OUSE VALLEY WAY

One of our greatest assets

Many people have attempted to walk the whole 151 miles of our long-distance footpath. Some years ago Cllr Stephen Ferguson, then the Mayor of St Neots, completed it on consecutive days in terrible weather in late winter. One of our local runners has even talked about setting a record for the whole distance (but has yet to book a date).

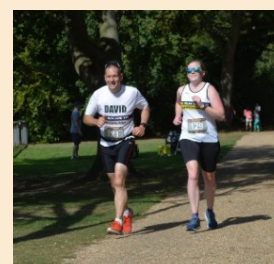
For most of us the path can be walked in small sections. It was formally recognised and way-marked in the 1990s by Huntingdonshire District Council. It starts at Syresham in Northamptonshire, passes through the wildflower meadows of Huntingdonshire and the



big skies of the Fens, to Ely and then Kings Lynn.

The original information boards en route through Cambridgeshire were all updated and renewed in 2020 by the Great Ouse Valley Trust. Funding was provided by Cambridgeshire County Council who are now required to look after the path, following the transfer of maintenance responsibility from Huntingdonshire District Council. After much lobbying from the Trust about the poor state of the path, we have now set up twice-yearly meetings with the County Rights of Ways Officers and representatives of all users of the Ouse Valley Way, to ensure that adequate funding is available for on-going maintenance.

The section from Earith to St Neots just happens, luckily, to be the standard marathon distance and the annual event was successfully held again last September after an absence during the pandemic. The marathon organisers led teams of volunteers to ensure that the path was clear and in tip-top condition for the day of the event. But it was, literally, a close run thing!



Photograph by David Newton

NATIONAL HIGHWAYS: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Our campaigning success - of sorts

We are pleased to see that National Highways have begun to replace the thousands of trees that died in the first two years after planting along the A14. However, the situation with redundant plastic tree guards is not so good.

Following our two-year campaign to get National Highways to fulfil their responsibilities to remove hundreds of thousands of redundant plastic tree guards along the A428, we were initially pleased to note from the Hunts Post that they have organised some volunteers to start the process. However, this is a drop in the ocean compared to what is needed.

National Highways' own management plan states that all tree guards should be removed within five years of planting. This shouldn't be a job for a few volunteers. With the support of our MP Jonathan Djanogly and Cllr Stephen Ferguson, we are continuing to press for significant, rather than piecemeal, action from National Highways on this important issue.



The offending National Highways litter

WORKING WITH OUR DISTRICT COUNCIL

We make proposals

Huntingdonshire District Council has been very active in promoting the natural environment and we have been pleased to be involved with its projects. It is completing a full biodiversity audit for all its open spaces and parks.

The Council manages 1,534 hectares of green space, 42.8 hectares of woodland, and a managed tree canopy of 400 hectares. In

November it organised a very successful Climate Conversation Conference in St Ives under the excellent chairmanship of the Council's Executive Councillor for Climate and Environment, Lara Davenport-Rae. Many new projects and ideas were discussed, including proposals from GOVT for more tree planting and solar farms on existing car parks.

The Council is also well advanced in its strategy for Local Nature Recovery.

Part of HDC's work has been in the Biodiversity for All initiative following the successful £1.35 million bid to the Cambridgeshire and

Peterborough Combined Authority. The aim is to 'accelerate the delivery of measurable biodiversity net gain in Huntingdonshire.' The programme has included the opportunity for Parish and Town Councils, landowners, schools and community organisations to help improve the levels of biodiversity on their land.

For more details go to www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk or email biodiversity@huntingdonshire.gov.uk



NATURE FRIENDLY FARMING

Our next AGM talk topic

We are really pleased that Martin Lines, Chief Executive Officer of the Nature Friendly Farming Group, has agreed to speak at our AGM on 20 April 2024 at 10 am in Offord Village Hall. We are all aware of the intense pressure on our farmers at the moment as they try to negotiate the new subsidy systems and the Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme. It will be great to hear how farmers are seeking to improve the natural environment whilst still achieving a profitable business. Don't miss it!

