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Media Release 3 APRIL 2023

DYING TREES, ACRES OF PLASTIC TUBES, LITTER AND COLLAPSING RIVER BANK!

The Great Ouse Valley Trust protests at National Highways A14 failures

- *How did they get the tree planting so wrong?*
- *When will they remove the old plastic tubes and litter?*
 - *Will they get the replacement planting right?*
 - *When will they repair the collapsing river bank?*

Graham Campbell, Chair of the Great Ouse Valley Trust, is asking Big Questions of National Highways with regard to the serious environmental impact of the new A14. And it's so not much about the road itself and the effect of HGV emissions on our air quality, but more to do with the vistas of failed trees alongside it, and the miles of abandoned plastic tubes and litter that damage our ecology and blight our landscape. And it's also about the bank erosion under the viaduct at Brampton.



[CAPTION]

At first glance (left) all looks well. But the tree are not. And look the other way (right), and it's a scene of utter neglect and a blot on our Ouse Valley landscape. And this is just one emergency pull-off.

The back stories

In 2018 the new A14 Cambridge to Peterborough Landscaping Project was nominated for the BBC Countryfile Magazine's prestigious 'Conservation Success of the Year Award'. This was in recognition of its attempt to mitigate the impact of 21 miles of concrete road across our countryside. A colossal 860,000 trees were to be planted - twice the number that were to be taken out to make way for the new road. Fantastic, we all thought.

Five years later these trees should be beginning to make a real difference to the disturbed landscape. In fact, there is very little to show for this huge, costly project. The vast majority of the trees have died following successive extremely dry summers. It seems many were planted on heavy clay without any soil improvement, nor any programme in place for watering during the drought. How could National Highways have got it so wrong - even with advice from the very best tree experts? National Highways say they now intend plan to replant 162,000 new trees this autumn following three years of soil surveys to try and find a new solution. **Can we be sure it will work this time?**

Another issue: after two years of campaigning by the Trust, National Highways have still not repaired the collapsing river bank in the undercroft of the A14 bridge at Brampton – part of our county's stretch of a national long-distance footpath, the 151-mile Ouse Valley Way. The enormous bridge has excluded light thus killing the natural vegetation that helps to hold the bank together. Again, not a difficult principle to understand. Such is the damage caused by the erosion the path is in danger of disappearing into the river. **And has been for some time.** What will this mean for the eagerly anticipated Ouse Valley Marathon on 10 September this year?

But these are not the only problems we have with National Highways. Thousands of plastic tree guards were to be removed after three to five years, in accordance with recognised good practice. **However, they still remain in some places 20 or 30 years later.** The plastic is not just unsightly. The problems for wildlife and the pollution of our countryside are very serious. On top of this plastic we also have the general litter that mars all our roadside verges. The A428 is the worst example, but there are many others notably along the Papworth bypass. **When will National Highways follow their own recommendations and remove the redundant tree guards?**

National Highways say they are proposing to use biodegradable tree guards in future. Although this is good news it doesn't address the serious problem of the existing plastic guards and their detrimental effect on the landscape now.

Graham Campbell says, *'We know there are really good dedicated people working on these problems within National Highways. But we feel that time has now come for us to raise our voice to insist on some visible action. We have been patient enough, but our regular enquiries are continually sidestepped. Only when these issues are tackled can the Great Ouse Valley Trust join the tributes to National Highways for a job well done.'*

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[CAPTION]

This is what happens when plastic tree guards are neglected for years. The result is an ugly and dangerous eyesore.



[CAPTION]

Do *you* think the Ouse Valley Way footpath close to the eroded bank and the fence is safe, especially in slippery conditions? Citing lack of funds National Highways have left it like this for over two years, despite constant requests from GOVT and others.

What is the Great Ouse Valley Trust?

The Great Ouse Valley Trust (GOVT) is a charity formed in October 2018 with the charitable 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.'

Partner Members include local councils and recreation clubs and businesses, plus environmental and conservation groups like the RSPB and the National Trust. The Trust's Vision recognises the Great Ouse Valley as a fantastic place to live and visit, with off- the-beaten-track areas to explore by foot, cycle or horse. The area is nationally recognised and valued for its wildlife, leisure, natural and heritage attractions which contribute to the county's natural green spaces. This is achieved by GOVT being the catalyst which brings national organisations, local communities and individual people together for the common good. GOVT's mission covers:

- **Enhancement of landscape** – increased biodiversity
- **Promotion** - sense of place, tourism and local economy, health benefits
 - **Protection** – active conservation and campaigning
 - **Access** for all – residents and visitors, disabled
 - **Partnerships** and alliances: groups working together
 - **Increased engagement** – education, volunteering