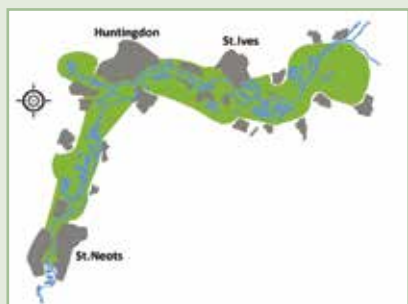


The Great Ouse Valley Trust (GOVT) is a charity with the objective 'To promote for public benefit the conservation, restoration, and enjoyment of the landscape, wildlife and heritage of the Great Ouse Valley and environs in the county of Cambridgeshire.' The area is nationally recognised and valued for 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.

SAVE THE AGM DATE Saturday 22 April 2023

Talk by Bridget Flanagan and Keith Grimwade

The Watermills and Landscape of the Great Ouse – Brampton to St Ives

Further details to follow

Like and follow us on Facebook and visit us on



www.greatousevalleytrust.org.uk

FOUR YEARS ON

Going to the next level

This is a really exciting time for the Trust. It is four and a half years since we held our initial conference when our aims to promote, protect and enhance our unique landscape were agreed. We are now well set up for the next phase to ensure that the Great Ouse Valley is fully recognised for its special qualities.

What is the next move for Trust as we enter our fifth year? The Trust has undoubtedly achieved a great deal since its small beginnings in 2018, but we recognise that the time is right for our local communities to help us develop a practical action plan that would result in real benefit to our landscape. Dr Jade Gunnell had already helped us prepare a 'community engagement strategy' funded by Natural England via Natural Cambridgeshire. We asked her to take this forward making use of our new funding from the Trust's successful National Lottery bid. It was agreed to focus on the central part of our area from St Ives to Godmanchester as a 'trial run' before we carried out similar activities in the north, between St Ives and Earith, and in the south, between Huntingdon and St Neots. The work in these areas will start later this year.

THE WORKSHOP

Your input recorded

Last September a full day 'community workshop' was held at Hemingford Abbots Village Hall with around 40 enthusiastic participants from all the stakeholders. They included community groups, the national conservation bodies, parish and town councils, local council officers, farmers and landowners. We were especially pleased to welcome enthusiastic farmers, who we recognise are crucial to any proposals we have to improve our landscape.

The workshop, which was brilliantly overseen by Jade, required everyone to focus hard on what we wanted to achieve and, more importantly, how it could be achieved in practice. Discussion was intense and there was a level of exhaustion by the time we wound up at 4.30 pm! The result, however, was that the Trust now has clear themes and projects, and our success can be measured on how these play out.



Delegates and Trustees hard at work



The inevitable photo call

The key projects to emerge from the workshop were:

- 1 Increasing the Great Ouse Valley tree canopy
- 2 Improving the quality and health of the river itself
- 3 Enhancing the flood meadows
- 4 Encouraging access and exploration
- 5 Continuing to press for national recognition of our unique landscape.

WE NEED MORE TREES!

Increasing the canopy

The Trust has already planted many trees over the last four years. Around 1,500 native tree whips were planted at the community wood (Kings Grove), next to the Ouse Valley Way by the A1307, in December 2021. Thanks to a big effort by the community to mulch and water during last year's dry, hot summer many have survived, and a further 110 have been planted this year. In addition, we have planted larger trees to supplement the whips. Our plan to 'cool the rivers' by planting new trees opposite Brampton Mill is continuing for another year.



Mulching is a community effort

PHOTOGRAPH BY GODMANCHESTER ACADEMY

Following the workshop, the Trust is now looking to appoint a landscape architect, or arboriculturalist, to help us map all the potential tree planting sites and to advise on the most suitable species. We already have a lot of experience in young tree protection using 'cactus' tree protectors. Another aspect of the tree canopy will be how we can restore the ancient White Willows that still survive throughout the Valley, but have been much neglected in recent decades.

Our tree project will require us to work very closely with Huntingdonshire District Council. The Trust is really grateful for all the brilliant support we have already received from Neil Sloper and his team at HDC on many projects, including the community wood. We hope our cooperation can continue as we develop our new ideas.

THE HEALTH OF OUR RIVER

We hear from the experts

Everyone is concerned about water pollution and its effect on wildlife. And is the river safe to swim in? These issues were addressed in November when Kye Jerrom from the Environment Agency, and John Brewington from the national Rivers Trust, gave two brilliant presentations to a packed room in St Ives Corn Exchange.



John Brewington's selfie with Kye Jerrom in the front row

Kye gave us an enthusiastic account of health of the river as a fishery from his perspective as a keen angler. And John confirmed the exciting news that GOVT is now part of the new Great Ouse Rivers Trust (GORT), along with our friends in Bedfordshire and north to the Wash, and so also responsible for the care of the whole river and its tributaries. There is a lot of work to be done especially in the practical testing of water quality. We hope to have a team of water samplers ready to go later this year.

OUR PRECIOUS FLOOD MEADOWS

Protecting their biodiversity

Are our flood meadows the best they can be for wild flowers and biodiversity? The loss of more than 90% of traditionally managed wild flower meadow since the 1930s has been well documented. Those that remain are often of poor quality. The flood meadows are an important part of the Great Ouse landscape. There is a lot of data about the quality of the plants in our meadows, and we are working with the Wildlife Trust to bring this all together prior to producing a plan for the restoration. Action will follow soon, we hope.



PHOTOGRAPH BY IAN JACKSON

ACCESS FOR ALL

Discovering the beauty of the valley

We want our footpaths to be accessible and in good condition for the physical and mental wellbeing of everybody of all ages and backgrounds. And so we continue to work with the County Council Highways department who are responsible for all our paths and bridleways. Unfortunately the Rights of Way Officer post at the County has not been filled over a year since the previous incumbent left her post. This means that there is an even greater reliance on volunteer groups carrying out nettle and bramble removal. Consequently, keeping the footpaths open throughout the summer is very challenging.

Our plan to re-route a section of the Ouse Valley Way long-distance footpath has proved difficult to fulfil, but we are not giving up. Our aim is to get the path from Holywell to St Ives to follow the river rather than along Meadow Lane which is busy with HGVs. (See below for our on-going concerns about the collapsing OVW section under the A14 bridge.)

NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Our campaign continues

The Trust has campaigned for years for the Valley to be formally recognised as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Recent letters we have received from Natural England have not led us to be optimistic on this front. Everything is on hold while the Government continues to look at new landscape designations, especially around Urban Parks. The old AONB title is now thought to be out of date. We are seriously considering moving towards the idea of a 'self-designated' special landscape, but we will continue to press Natural England for support. We firmly believe the unique nature of our valley deserves recognition of some kind.

HOLDING NATIONAL HIGHWAYS TO ACCOUNT

Denying obligations is unacceptable

We have been working with National Highways (previously Highways England) to ensure that they fulfil their obligations to the environment on three key issues:

1 Dealing with the collapsing bank under the A14 between Brampton and Buckden

We are at loss to understand why money was not allocated to this as part of the main budget for the A14. The funding necessary should not be coming from a legacy fund. The maintenance of a safe pedestrian route on a very well-used national long-distance footpath is a fundamental item. Clearly the cost is extremely minor in comparison with that of the whole project.

2. The loss of the new trees in the drought of 2020

National Highways has received awards for the environmental improvements emanating from the A14 project. However, there does not appear to have been a proper tree-replacement programme three years down the line.

3. The failure to remove plastic tree protection most notably along the A428

We have been told that the National Highways official policy is to remove all the plastic between three and five years after planting. Funding is allocated for this purpose but this money inevitably gets diverted to more urgent matters. As a result the plastic remains in place indefinitely causing visual intrusion and environmental damage. GOVT Partner Members have done their best over the years to remove plastic tree guards, many of which have been in place for more than 15 years, but it is now time for National Highways to do their job. In the meantime we have started discussions with a local hemp farmer about the possibility of tree guards being made from biodegradable hemp.



Malcolm Cohen from Partner Member Godmanchester in Bloom does his bit

PHOTOGRAPH BY CARLIE CAMPBELL

A WATCHFUL EYE

Ensuring the right plan is in the right place

The Trust will always support new development that respects the landscape, and we keep an eye on applications to try and ensure that planning policies are upheld. We were quick to spot the illegal destruction of mature trees on a site in Huntingdon last year, and were able to get HDC to take quick action to stop further damage.

The unexpected appearance of a cleared and fenced part of the river bank along the Thicket Path in St Ives, bearing the sign 'The How Private Mooring', caused much discussion of late. There is currently no planning application for such a mooring and HDC Planning Enforcement has opened a Planning Investigation Order. It has requested The How developers, Stay New Homes, to apply for retrospective planning, and we understand this has now been received. Far from being a 'rubber stamping' exercise this is following normal due process in cases like this, and HDC will evaluate the application on the same basis as if it were submitted

normally. While the Environment Agency determines a Flood Risk Permit, we await to see the outcome regarding the imposing industrial fence which is not in keeping with the surroundings, and which should not exceed one metre in height next to a highway, in this case, the Thicket Path. Additionally, as is clear to see, a number of trees by the bank enclosed by the fence have been removed in what is a protected tree area. And lastly, there is the precedent. What message does this send to other developers whose prime motive is not conservation but profit, and who ignore planning rules?

So far, there has been no actual mooring or pontoon constructed or in use, and intriguingly, the sign has now also rather mysteriously vanished! We will watch closely and update on any new developments.



PHOTOGRAPH BY IAN JACKSON

SPREADING THE WORD

Publicity and promotion

The Trust takes every opportunity to spread the word about our wonderful landscape with, among other things, interviews on Huntingdon Community Radio, Media Releases and presentations to local community

groups. Regular readers of the Hunts Post will know that we have a monthly 'Columnist' feature. The Editor has said, *'We all look forward to reading the column and I believe it really does add something to our print and online content.'*

AND FINALLY ...

Huntingdonshire Futures: place strategy

The Trust has attended the November workshop for the District Council's project to look at the future progress of the district. The emphasis is on 'place making' to give real identity to our area. At the very centre of this strategy is undoubtedly the unique landscape of the Great Ouse Valley. This, more than anything else, gives us our identity and defines where we live.

Our partnership working

We have a special partnership with other groups who are committed to the wellbeing of our landscape. This was instigated by Natural Cambridgeshire and our partners are the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, The Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust, The National Farmers Union, The Farmers Wildlife Action Group, Huntingdonshire District Council, The National Trust and Natural England. We have some great projects going forward including looking at the potential for a visitor centre at Fen Drayton Lakes, and new footpaths to link up with the Old Ferry Boat at Holywell, with perhaps a revival of the old chain ferry!

NEW TRUSTEE

We are delighted to welcome **Michael Krause** to our Board. Michael has worked in nature conservation for over 20 years, picking up a wide range of experience from his time at Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Plantlife International and Fauna & Flora International, particularly in fundraising, finance and partnership building.

