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Dear Mr. Palmer/James

### **An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in Cambridgeshire**

I am writing in connection with the application we (now the Great Ouse Valley Trust – GOVT) made some time ago (June 2014) to Natural England (NE) for the Great Ouse Valley and the Ouse Washes to be designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This proposal had widespread local support, including that of our M.P. Jonathan Djanogly and our previous M.P. Sir John Major.

We understand that our application went through the process to become one of 10 to be reviewed for support. Unfortunately, austerity then hit the country and NE were unable to progress any new AONBs. In 2019, the Glover report called for a radical shake-up of the running of National Parks and AONBs. Needless to say, then came Covid.

But this week the Government are to announce a further £40m for Green Spaces in England, and as part of this package the process for designating new National Parks and AONBs will start in 2021. Thus the time is now to re-energize the bid for AONB status for the Great Ouse Valley and Washes.

So we are asking for your advice – and, we trust, your support – as to how we can take this matter forward. We feel it is essential to establish a strong recognition at local/regional level for the Great Ouse Valley in order to give momentum for its advancement at national level.

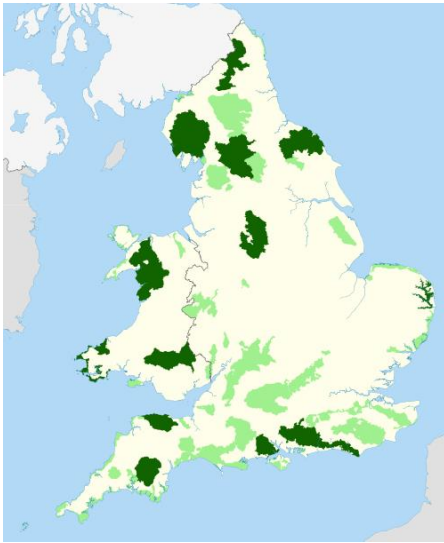
We must champion the best of our green spaces and demonstrate how Cambridgeshire leads the way in putting Nature at the start and heart of its development plans.

We need to ensure that the precious landscape of the Great Ouse Valley and Washes **is** a legacy for future generations.

1. There are currently 34 AONBs and 10 National Parks in England. The Government's press release calculates that over 66% of the population live within half an hour's travel of one of these areas. But that is definitely not the case for most of Cambridgeshire's residents – particularly Huntingdonshire. (see the map below which shows the void of designated landscapes in central and eastern England).

The Glover report stressed the need for equality and opportunity; these landscapes must be accessible to all. In Cambridgeshire they are not.

2.



National Parks shown in dark green and AONBs in light green.

3. In September 2020, in the Leaders' Pledge for Nature, the Government promised to increase the current amount of 'protected' land from 26% of the national land total to 30% by 2030. The extra 4% is calculated as 400,000 hectares of land. The area in Cambridgeshire that we propose be designated as an AONB is c10,000 hectares.

The Great Ouse Valley in Cambridgeshire and the Ouse Washes already has numerous designations for wildlife (see Appendix 1). Many parts of the valley are included in Conservation Areas of villages and towns, and here is the largest concentration of Listed buildings in Huntingdonshire, reflecting the area's rich cultural heritage. For people, it is a beautiful place with remarkable resources – for example, there is far more open water here than in the Norfolk Broads National Park, and the broad meadows offer wonderful open scenery with footpaths and bridleways.

Cambridgeshire continues to be one of the faster growing counties in the UK with much new housing and enterprise. But we all recognise that if Cambridgeshire is to be a successful place to live and work, then green spaces must be close by. The area of the Great Ouse Valley is able to provide a 'green lung' to those living in the expanding towns and villages around it. The huge increase of the use of the river and meadows during the Covid pandemic shows how residents value this natural area for their quality of life.

4. In September 2020 Natural Cambridgeshire launched plans for 'Doubling Nature' and a 'Pledge for Nature'. Recognizing that the county has one of the smallest areas of land managed for nature in the country, relative to size, Natural Cambridgeshire commits to work to increase rich wildlife habitats and natural green space in Cambridgeshire from 8% to 16%.
5. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Future Parks Accelerator Project is a welcome initiative looking at new ways and collaborative working to deliver, manage and fund parks and open space in our region.
6. The Masterplans commissioned by the CPCA for the 2019/20 Prospectus for Growth for the Huntingdonshire market towns of St Neots, Huntingdon and St Ives identified the importance of the river and river-side setting for the development of these towns.

The question is how to bring all the initiatives, enterprises, plans, etc, together to protect the Great Ouse Valley and Washes **as a whole** – a special place for people and wildlife, for heritage and recreation? It unquestionably meets so many regional and national objectives.

An extra energy is required to drive forward and make things happen. For example, the concept of the London National Park City seemed very bold and radical when it was launched in July 2019. A year on, it makes sense and resonates - people understand that nature is for all of us, wherever we live. Cambridgeshire must be part of this.

#### In summary

The Trust hope we can meet with you (Virtually or in Reality as circumstances permit) for your advice to carry forward the application to Natural England. We also need to understand the best way to garner support from all those who are dedicated to the future of both the environment and the economy of Cambridgeshire.

And so we would be very grateful if you can suggest some suitable dates for an early meeting.

With best wishes

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Chair, Great Ouse Valley Trust

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#### **Appendix 1**

This area – along the River Great Ouse from St Neots to Earith, and along the Ouse Washes to Downham Market is of the highest landscape and wildlife quality. One of the area's meadows - Portholme - represents 7% of the UK total of traditional flood-plain meadows. Large parts of the area are already designated. At international level, the Ouse Washes is a Ramsar site (internationally important wet land), a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protection Area (SPA) as defined in the European Union's Habitats Directive for areas necessary for migratory birds, many of which are endangered. Portholme is also an SAC and one of only five lowland hay meadow sites identified as being of international importance. At a national level there are 30 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), then 31 County Wildlife Sites (the River Great Ouse being one of these), two Local Nature Reserves.