

Anger after learning that riverbanks are collapsing due to work on A14

I was furious after reading the column in last week's Hunts Post from the Ouse Valley Trust chairman Graham Campbell, who described how a section of the Ouse Valley Way is collapsing into the river due to the A14 upgrade project.

In October 2020, I walked the entire 152-mile length of the Ouse Valley Way in eight days, four hours, and one minute, raising £2000 for the Ouse Valley Trust in the process.

I can, therefore, confidently declare that the 26-mile section of the Ouse Valley Way between St Neots and Earith is absolutely the best stretch of the whole route.

In the early sections, through Northampton and Buckinghamshire, the River Great Ouse is hardly "great" at all, more just a small brook gurgling through muddy fields.

It becomes a slog through the fens in the latter stages, as the River Great Ouse becomes more of

St Neots mayor, Cllr Stephen Ferguson, writes on the need to find solutions to news that riverbanks are collapsing.



an engineered drainage system than a natural river.

But the Huntingdonshire section is glorious: the mature River Great Ouse twists and turns through the beautiful unbroken countryside.

Between Paxton Pits and Brampton Marina, you can become completely immersed in nature, with only the occasional passing boat to disturb the tranquillity.

After Brampton, the Ouse Valley Way passes beneath the huge

bridge designed to carry the new A14 over the river. Here the peaceful tranquillity is disturbed by the roar of engines.

This is also where the problems start. In the shade beneath the bridge the riverbank is now bereft of the vegetation that once maintained its integrity. This section is now collapsing.

In his column Mr Campbell rightly complains that: "National Highways has done its best to tidy up this area but has yet to find any funding for a long-term solution to this dangerous situation."

Think about that for a moment: the total budget for the A14 upgrade is £1.5 billion, all funded out of the taxpayers pocket, but they cannot - or will not - repair the damage caused by their construction work.

Last July, *The Hunts Post* reported that Highways England and Cambridgeshire County Council were investing £42,500 from into clearance and surfacing works along the river banks.



Vehicles using the 750-metre long River Great Ouse viaduct on the new A14

Picture: HIGHWAYS ENGLAND

Keen to exploit the PR value of this investment - which represents just 0.003% of the entire project budget - a Highways England spokesperson said: "Walkers and riders will enjoy the improvements made along this historic path that will deliver lasting benefits for users and communities. We hope that people will enjoy these upgrades for generations to come and see that our work extends beyond merely upgrading roads."

Less than a year later, the riverbanks beneath the A14 bridge are collapsing into the water. Rather than upgrading the Ouse Valley Way for "generations to come", there is a significant risk that the A14 will sever this "historic path" at its halfway point - 75 miles from its source and 75 miles from the sea.

Over the past few years, most of us have watched in awe at the engineering ingenuity of the A14 project, which included complete motorway bridges being constructed off-site and then wheeled into place.

I am utterly incredulous then that Highways England cannot find an engineering solution to reinforce a relatively small section of riverbank. While I applaud these improvements to our highways infrastructure, which benefit thousands of motorists an hour, these improvements cannot be at the cost of our limited walking infrastructure or our local heritage.

I implore Highways England to find an immediate and urgent solution to this serious problem, completely of their own making.