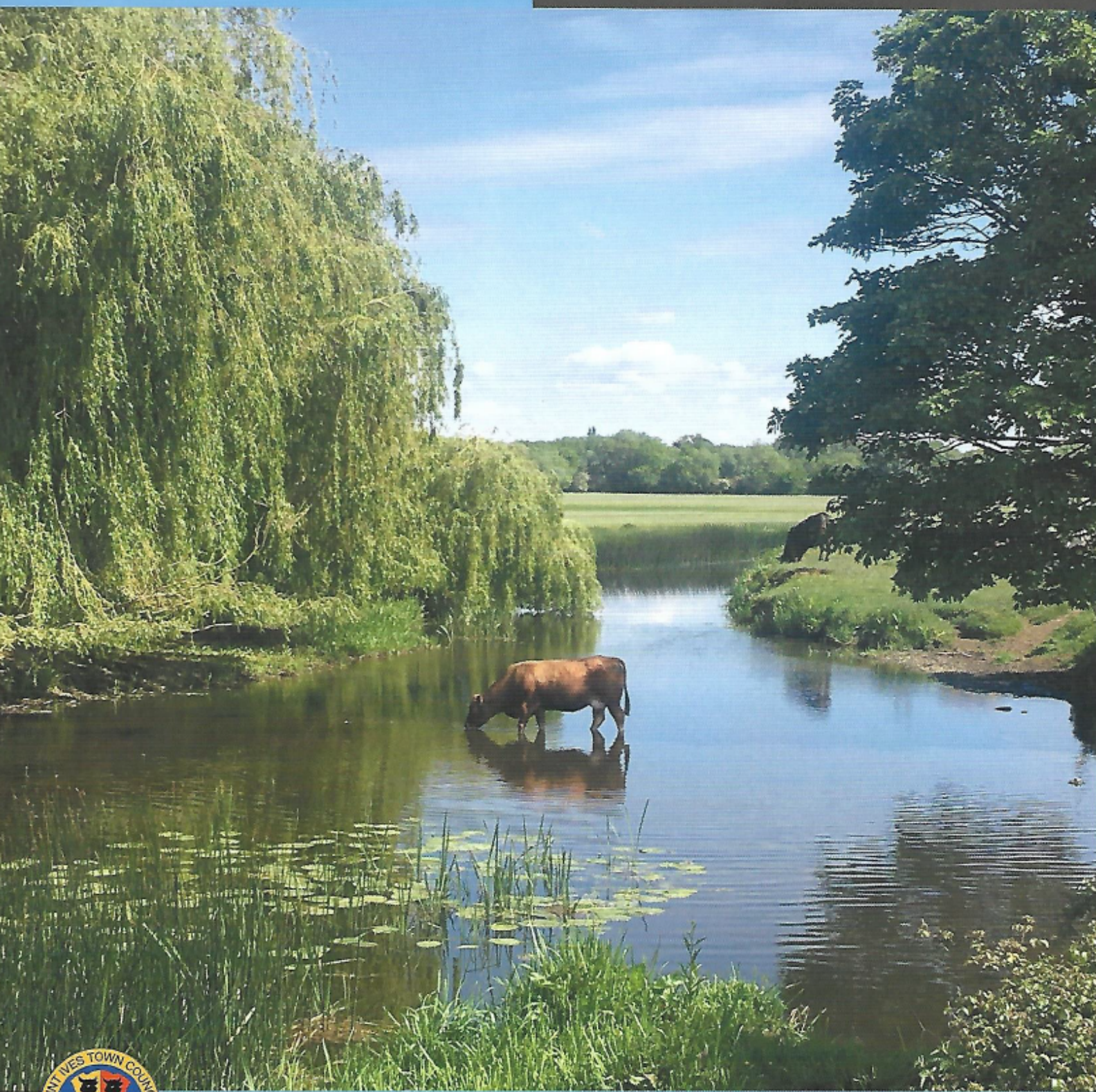


# THE Bridge

COMMUNITY EDITION

- Festival Events St Ives
- St Ives in Bloom
- The Great Ouse Valley Trust
- St Ives Cares



News, views, events and more from your Town Council

# The Great Ouse Valley Trust

Celebrating and protecting our wonderful landscape

By Bridget Flanagan, Trustee

**The Great Ouse Valley Trust works for our space and our place. The Trust was set up in 2018 with its mission to 'promote, protect and enhance' the wonderful countryside along the Great Ouse in Huntingdonshire.**

This is a special kind of landscape – a level country with big, open expanses of green and blue space. Beautiful meadows and large, quiet lakes are all connected by the slow river.

Surrounded by areas of intense agriculture, the river valley has places of high ecological value. For example, Portholme Meadow and the Nature Reserves at Godmanchester, Paxton Pits, Fen Drayton and Holt Island in St Ives. But it also has the places that people need – to walk, cycle, go boating or fishing, and simply connect to nature.

## How we started

The Trust grew out of the group who had campaigned for Natural England (NE) to designate the area as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). That campaign, which started in 2016, is ongoing, but the decision by NE has been beset by reduced government funding and other political priorities.

So, rather than wait for a decision from the top, the Great Ouse Valley Trust was set up at the grass roots level, with local people championing the area. And now, as we raise awareness and increase knowledge of our area, we are hugely encouraged to find that people are very keen to protect what is precious to them.

The aim of the Trust is to be as inclusive and representative as possible. The organisation is run by seven trustees who come from quite a stretch along the river – St Ives, Houghton, Hemingford Abbots, Huntingdon, Godmanchester, Brampton and Offord. Then there are the voting Partner Members; which include almost all the Town and Parish Councils along the river, and many other organisations who are directly involved – such as the National Trust, RSPB, Civic Societies, Rotary Clubs, and Angling Associations; as well as local volunteer groups and businesses.



## Progress to date

So, what has the Trust done so far? We have worked with councils and local groups to achieve new woodland. At Godmanchester some 800 trees were planted by schools and community groups in autumn 2021. A good relationship with local farmers and a grant from AstraZeneca has allowed us to plant rare Black Poplars on the river banks opposite Brampton Mill. This three-year initiative is also part of the Woodland Trust's project to 'cool the rivers' in response to climate change.

Last year we redesigned and replaced all the information boards along the Ouse Valley Way. The County Council had received grant monies from the A14 Legacy Fund, but were unable to achieve the project in time, so we were delighted to do it for them.

At a time of reduced public spending, the poor condition of the long-distance footpath has become a serious concern, and so the Trust is negotiating the use of teams of local 'Green Volunteers' who will keep the brambles and nettles at bay.

To get bigger jobs done requires some strong publicity and persistence; our letter-writing and dramatic photos in the press, plus the irate voice of Stephen Ferguson, County Councillor and Mayor of St Neots, finally galvanised the Environment Agency and National Highways to repair the footpath collapse under the A14 bridge at Offord.

The Great Ouse Valley is a place with a distinct character, and we feel strongly that it should be considered as a whole, rather than as separate parts. Planning matters, therefore, have an impact beyond their immediate locality. The Trust vigorously opposed the 'Huntingdon Third River Crossing' – a proposal by the Combined Authority for an elevated road linking



Hartford and Godmanchester – and we were delighted when this was scrapped in June 2020.

At Buckden a 26-hectare solar park is currently being considered on riverside meadows categorised as Flood Zone 3 – essentially part of the functional flood plain. The Great Ouse Valley Way runs through the field. The Trust supports the neighbouring Parish Councils who question whether this is the best place to build these many thousands of solar panels.

### **Increasing awareness**

After just four years – and two of those during the pandemic – the Trust has built significant momentum. A monthly column in the Hunts Post, a lively website and Facebook page, and a quarterly newsletter – ‘The Valley’ – are just some of the ways we communicate.

We lead the sub-group of Natural Cambridgeshire working on the Priority Landscape of the Ouse Valley. We are negotiating with various groups in Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire to set up a Rivers Trust for the Great Ouse.

Above all, we are bringing people together and engaging our communities along the river. The Great Ouse Valley is our place – now and for future generations.



***An Ouse Valley backwater showing rare Black Poplar trees.***  
*Photograph by Graham Campbell*



***We are blessed by wide open beautiful spaces in the Ouse Valley.*** *Photograph by Bridget Flanagan*