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Opinion

Great Ouse Valley Trust



‘Mayor’s road plan to attract Marshall will destroy valley’

While the public gaze is understandably concentrated on the health and wellbeing of our nation and our loved ones, we all need to be aware of the threats to our democratic decision-making that the current crisis facilitates.

James Palmer, the mayor of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, continues to try to attract Marshall Aerospace to the RAF Wyton site by promoting the ridiculous idea of a new, elevated dual carriageway across one of the most important and precious landscapes in the East of England.

This in spite of Marshall’s declaration that the road network around RAF Wyton is perfectly adequate for its needs and that no new road is needed. It will not affect its decision to move to Wyton one way or the other. He continues to push for this new road link in spite of a huge groundswell of public opinion against it.

At the Combined Authority board meeting, held electronically last Wednesday, reports that still include the third river crossing

were tabled and approved. The Trust is worried that important decisions will be taken while the public is otherwise engaged with the coronavirus.

The Great Ouse valley running from St Neots to Earith provides one of the last green spaces through which we can roam virtually at will in Cambridgeshire. This magnificent landscape is on the government’s list of potential Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Its silvery river snakes down a valley strewn with nature reserves like pearls on a necklace, it has one of the largest areas of wet meadow in the country, and more water and riverside habitats than the Norfolk Broads.

And yet despite all these benefits to wildlife, people and health, it has little by way of protection in local council policies – and worse still is now at risk from a major new road. In fact, a high-level bypass across some of its most magnificent and rare landscape, linking Wyton to the A14. And, in short, an act of irresponsible vandalism that you would have thought unthinkable in these

environmentally enlightened times.

Cambridgeshire has been slow to engage its local government thinking on new environmental imperatives. It has a woeful lack of green space and woodland and few, if any, policies that protect what little we have. It has been late to the table on climate change thinking and now, through major growth initiatives, we risk losing what little precious green space we have left.

The government’s stated policy is to leave the natural world in better condition than it inherited, but this is just national promotional guff unless backed up by local action.

In Cambridgeshire we have a mayor pushing for growth at all costs and with no policy or stated ambition to protect our countryside.

Consultation with affected communities is minimal to the point where local people only wake up the risks when it is too late.

The impact on our climate of transport proposals is largely ignored and these are proceeding in apparent ignorance of the impacts of the Paris Agreement and its recent application to major

infrastructure projects. Decisions are being taken that completely ignore the economic value of the Great Ouse Valley and its landscape. Cafes, pubs, camp sites, hotels, marinas, boatyards, caravan parks, historic houses and nature reserves draw visitors from a massive distance. And yet this precious natural asset is to be sacrificed on the altar of yet another road and thoughtless local government decision-making.

The physical and mental health of our nation has never been at such levels of risk as it is today. The well-documented health-giving benefits of social interaction and contact with fresh air and open space are largely forbidden to us. But this will come to an end one day, and sooner rather than later, if we stick to the guidance. But what sort of world will we wake up to? How much of our national institutions and our social fabric will have changed forever? More than ever, for sure, we will need the comfort of family, friends and the green spaces of our nation from which to draw strength, resolve and well-being for the future.