

Strategic Plan

Great Ouse Valley Trust

June 5th 2020

1. Background

The Great Ouse Valley in Cambridgeshire, from St Neots to Earith, is a remarkable place; its distinctive landscape contains a significant natural, cultural and built heritage. Unfortunately this is often unappreciated - by its own inhabitants, who fail to value the familiar, and by the wider (car-bound) public who can be unaware of this beautiful water and meadow landscape because much of it is only accessible by boat, bike or on foot. In addition, a prevalent misperception that beautiful landscape requires hills or mountains, leads to the Valley being literally, and figuratively, overlooked.

In the 21C, the Great Ouse Valley in Cambridgeshire is under increasing, sustained pressure. Changes in farming practice are reducing the natural bio-diversity. A rapidly expanding population brings more development from housing, industry and roads – and this is frequently large-scale, intrusive and insensitive. In the short-sighted rush for economic gain, the need for natural green space for the well-being of the population is frequently overlooked or disregarded. The Great Ouse Valley can provide an abundance of superb natural green space – as long as its finite resources are not compromised or further eroded.

These concerns resulted in local realisation that The Great Ouse Valley merited designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or its equivalent. AONB designation would provide the best protection from adverse planning, infrastructure and agricultural-led changes. This was essential and long overdue.

In consequence, an 'AONB Working Group' came together to apply for and promote AONB status for the Great Ouse Valley from St Neots to Earith and also along the Ouse Washes from Earith to Downham Market. A formal application for AONB designation was submitted to Natural England (NE) in 2014. The application has not yet been determined. This is due, primarily, to budget cuts for NE, and also because, since 2018, the governmental 'Glover Report' is examining the system of the UK's National Parks and AONBs, including whether or not more should be designated.

2. Current Concerns

Since the application to NE in 2014, the need for action to protect the Great Ouse Valley - with or without AONB status - has increased radically. As a result the Great Ouse Valley Trust (GOVT) has been formed to meet that need.

The (main) pressures on the Great Ouse Valley are:

i. **Population Growth**

Cambridgeshire, driven by the economic success of the high tech, bio-tech and cluster of advanced businesses centred on Cambridge and its university, is one of the fastest growing counties in the UK. The downside to this boom is the need for more housing, infrastructure and water. Planning is frequently for the short term, with insufficient regard for sustainability and the environment.

ii. **Green Spaces**

Cambridgeshire has one of the smallest percentages of land managed for nature in the country. Only 8.5% of the county is covered by natural green spaces. The meadows and open land of the Great Ouse Valley are thus of enormous value - naturally, aesthetically and functionally.

iii. Infrastructure

More roads bring more traffic. It is evidenced by bodies such as CPRE and Friends of the Earth that new roads do not 'solve' traffic problems. The expansion and new routes of the A14 and A428 between Cambridge and the A1 adversely affect the Great Ouse Valley; they intrude on the landscape, detract from its beauty, increase air and noise pollution, and disrupt wildlife and habitats.

iv. Climate Change.

The flood plain meadows of the Great Ouse Valley are essential spaces for the holding of flood waters to prevent inundation of homes and businesses in times of flood. With the increase of severe weather events, as well as predicted rising sea levels, flood plains must be protected.

At the same time, water availability is a key risk for Cambridgeshire as it is the driest part of the UK. The increasing demand for water resources threatens the natural water resource in terms of water quality, aquatic habitat and biodiversity.

3. Planning for the future

The Great Ouse Valley Trust understands that, whilst an AONB designation would be the single, most effective, measure to protect, conserve and enhance the Great Ouse Valley, there are other things to be done towards achieving those aims. Foremost is securing a positive strategy for the Valley in Planning policies at all levels. GOVT will continue to work hard to ensure that the Great Ouse Valley has strong mention in any emerging Plans.

(It is noted that, until determined, the submission to NE for AONB status remains an active and relevant document.

GOVT has achieved inclusion of the GOV in the Huntingdonshire District Council Local Plan (to 2036), and in several Neighbourhood Plans drawn up by Parish and Town Councils. See **Appendix 1** for some excerpts.)

4. The Introduction of the Great Ouse Valley Trust

The Charity was formed in October 2018 with the charitable 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.

5. The Great Ouse Valley Trust

i. Vision

- The rich natural resource, habitat and environment of the Great Ouse Valley is able to thrive and is secure for future generations.
- The area is valued as a significant part of the county's natural green space.
- The Great Ouse Valley is nationally recognised and valued for its landscape, its natural, built and cultural heritage, and its leisure attractions.
- The Great Ouse Valley is enjoyed as a wonderful place to live and visit, with off-the-beaten-track areas to explore by foot, cycle, horse or boat.

This vision will be achieved by GOVT being the catalyst to bring together national organisations, local communities and individual people to work together towards this vision for the common benefit.

ii. Mission

- **Support enhancement of landscape**
 In order to evaluate the landscape, the Great Ouse Valley Trust seeks to collate existing base line data for the area. This will identify gaps in knowledge and research, and will facilitate future needs and work.
 Through partnerships and alliance working, GOVT will seek to identify priority improvements to the quality of the habitat and species through practical land and water management.
 The Trust will endeavour to ensure that any biodiversity negative impacts will be, at least, balanced, but preferably outweighed, to provide biodiversity gains for the area.
- **Strive for Protection**
 The Great Ouse Valley Trust will defend the valley against inappropriate development or activity which threatens its wildlife and biodiversity, beauty, tranquillity, and accessibility to the public.
 GOVT will engage with Local Authorities and relevant organisations to reflect climate change and its impacts upon the Valley.
 The Trust will promote this special place through positive local planning activity and engagement with elected representatives of local and national Government.
 GOVT will actively seek AONB status as well as other appropriate legal designations to provide the area with the best protection.
- **Work for Promotion & Recognition** – a sense of place, tourism & local economy
 The Great Ouse Valley Trust aims to create a holistic 'Sense of Place' for the Great Ouse Valley. This will encompass the natural heritage and beauty of the landscape as well as the cultural and built heritage of the area.
 This will be achieved through holistic 'branding'. The Great Ouse Valley will be recognised as, and synonymous with, a special landscape of high natural value that is an attractive place to live and visit. This will be to the benefit of all, including local businesses and the local economy.
- **Ensure Access - for all**
 The Great Ouse Valley is an attraction for many different groups - walkers, dog walkers, birders, fishermen, boaters, horse riders, cyclists etc. GOVT aims to ensure that relevant and required information is available for all the various users, businesses, residents and visitors.
 Wherever practically possible, GOVT aims to ensure that access is possible for all abilities and needs.
- **Develop Partnerships and Alliances:** Groups working together
 The Great Ouse Valley Trust will seek to attract Partner Members who share its vision and who will work collectively towards its aims. GOVT will liaise with other groups and bodies who can assist with expertise.
 GOVT will continue to engage with statutory bodies and key groups who can help deliver the vision for the Great Ouse Valley.
- **Increase engagement** – education, volunteering, Friends
 The Great Ouse Valley Trust recognises that knowledge and understanding of a place is fundamental to its appreciation. GOVT will support educational activity and programmes

for individuals and community groups – people of all ages, interests and diversity – that increase knowledge of the Great Ouse Valley.

GOVT will encourage personal involvement by establishing a 'Friends of the Great Ouse Valley' group

- **Create a sustainable organisation**

The Great Ouse Valley Trust needs to develop sustainable income streams to fund the infrastructure of its organisation and the projects it wishes to deliver.

GOVT must raise funds through grants, partnerships and donations if it is to have the capability of protecting the area for future generations.

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As a new organisation, GOVT will ensure good governance is embedded in its management and operations.

Risks to the organisation and the delivery of its objectives will be reviewed on an annual basis.

GOVT Actions & Ambitions for 2020 - 2024

Engagement

- 1 **Partnership Members**
 Increase membership
 Ensure regular output to Partner Members. Begin a newsletter by Email
 Engage with Partner Members to share and increase knowledge
 Hold 2 events /year, e.g. meetings with prominent speakers or on-the-ground with guide
 Encourage Partner Members to hold their own GOV events
 Find a Patron.
- 2 **Raise funding** (say £20k) to run an office (share with CPRE) and employ PT staff.
 Continue requests for individual donations via website and fb.
 Seek larger benefactors – e.g. prominent local individuals and businesses
 Seek start-up grants for specific projects (HLF?)
- 3 Launch a **Supporter / Friends-of** the Great Ouse Valley
- 4 **Volunteers** – develop a volunteer network/database – ‘a green army’. Work with other conservation volunteers to develop expertise, share manpower, collaborate on projects.
- 5 Continue to engage with Natural England and others to pursue **AONB status**

Awareness

- 1 **Publicity & Communication with Website & Social Media.** Facebook, Twitter etc.
 Seek expertise and help to build on and expand success of current work.
- 2 **Publicity and promotion.** Use all opportunities to promote the Great Ouse Valley as a landscape of national importance. Local Radio & TV, BBC Countryfile, features in the Hunts Post, The Villager and parish publications.
 Continue to offer **speakers** to local groups, Rotary, Round Table etc.
- 3 **Further develop the GOVT brand** as the ‘umbrella’ organisation for the Great Ouse Valley as a whole.

Activism

- 1 Continue to **campaign** with others **against 3RC**.
 Seek representation on decision-making groups.
 Lobby elected representatives at all levels.
Press releases to all media to argue the case for GOVT and against 3RC
- 2 Attend and speak at relevant **public meetings** of CPCA, HDC and CCC
- 3 Gain audiences with **decision makers** such as HDC, CC and CPCA.
 (and involve NT, RSPB, CPRE)
- 4 Continue to comment on significant **planning applications**

Projects: Identified and/or ongoing

- 1 **Database** to collate existing baseline data of the GOV
Continue to seek grant aid for this project.
- 2 **Willow planting, restoration of ancient willows and hedge reinstatement** on Eastside & Westside Common (In Godmanchester parish but also the Hemingfords Conservation Area – so community participation)
Project Partners are: HDC, GMC Freeman, Tenant farmers, GMC Town Council, FWAG, GMC Community Association
Seek agreement with EA, NE, if required. Apply for grants - include Looker Fund
- 3 **Ouse Valley Way** Project in conjunction with Cambridgeshire County Council Highways
Continue to act as liaison between CCC and parishes
Surveying of route – 85% complete
Waymarking & Interpretation Boards
Bridge & Bank repairs
Funds available: £35k from A14 plus £10k - both from CCC
- 4 **Ouse Valley Way**
Registering of footpath from Meadow Lane to Busway as a Right Of Way
No cost to GOVT.
- 5 **Ouse Valley Way & GOV Tourist Information**
Production and distribution of leaflets and maps of OVW and also footpaths, cycleways and bridleways in conjunction with Imray and CCC Highways. Ouse Valley Way & GOV Tourist Information
6. **Improving access for horse-riders**
To work with the County Council and landowners to improve bridleway connections and access for horse riding.

Further and Future Projects

1. **Landscape Partnership**
Begin engagement with HDC, NT, WLT, RSPB, CPRE in order to move towards a major Landscape Partnership Project with HLF funding. Apply for Stage 1 & 2. Then implement.
2. **Summer Festival** - Sponsorship needed
Partner members and or GOVT to organise individual events such as
Nature, History & Archaeology walks
Sponsored Walk of the whole (Cambs section) of the OVW in one day.
Photo and art exhibitions
Boating events
Schools projects
OVW Marathon in conjunction with BRJ club
- 3 **Ouse Valley Way**
Work with CCC Highways and Landowners for new route from Holywell to St Ives.
Work with Cambridge tech company to develop the GOV app.

Appendix 1. Local & Neighbourhood Plans – details.

i. Huntingdonshire District Council Local Plan: objectives

- *By 2036 Huntingdonshire's physical environment will support the health and well-being of all its residents, by: Working with our climate, landscape and heritage*
- *To conserve and enhance Huntingdonshire's strategic green infrastructure, including the Great Fen and the belt of ancient woodland north of Alconbury, the River Great Ouse and its associated landscape corridor, Grafham Water and its circle of ancient woodlands and the Nene Valley, and to promote a balance between conservation and public access to, and enjoyment of, these assets.*

ii. Huntingdonshire District Council Local Plan: policy

- *Great Ouse Valley: A proposal within the Ouse Valley Landscape Character Area, defined in the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (see appendix for excerpts) will be supported where it contributes to the landscape, wildlife, cultural and historical value of the area.*

- *the rationale for this policy.....*

The area around the Great Ouse was identified in the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment Supplementary Planning Document. The landscape character area includes ancient habitat comprising flood meadows, woodland and lakes made from restored gravel pits. The area includes many sites designated for wildlife protection, including Portholme, with substantial areas of water and reed bed which will increase following further gravel extraction by 2036. In 2013, an application was submitted to Natural England by a local interest group to designate an area of the Great Ouse valley and Ouse Washes as an Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB).

4.32 An area of particular importance within the Great Ouse area is Paxton Pits. This is a complex of gravel workings of varying ages, including some areas yet to be worked. A reserve management plan was originally prepared in 1999 and updated in 2017. The management plan is centred around the 75ha extent of the Paxton Pits Local Nature Reserve (LNR). The LNR is managed by Huntingdonshire District Council, supported by a large group of volunteers. In 2007 a County planning application was approved to expand the nature reserve to 285 hectares and a reserve management strategy put in place. This is expected to be implemented within the Local Plan timeframe and will include extra lakes and islands, and wildflower rich grassland, together with new footpaths and a circular cycleway. The boundaries of the enlarged area are similar to that shown on the green infrastructure diagram as a SSSI.

4.33 The River Great Ouse and its tributaries follow in part into the Ouse Washes, an important area for birds and many other species, recognised through its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and a Ramsar site. As identified in the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) for the Local Plan the Ouse Washes is in unfavourable condition due to too frequent and prolonged flooding. Where possible proposals within the Great Ouse Valley should seek to contribute to wildlife value, as required by the policy, through the inclusion of green infrastructure, sustainable drainage systems and other measures that can store water in the catchment and contribute to alleviating this pressure on the site.

iii. Neighbourhood Plans

Houghton and Wyton:

We are an active, thriving, dynamic and cohesive community; proud to live in this special landscape which we are keen to share with others.

In order to achieve the vision, it is necessary to protect our special landscape. As the landscape along the Ouse Valley is what makes this such a special place to live and visit, efforts should be made to enhance and protect the views, and to improve and extend the existing habitats and biodiversity.

Objective 1: To protect and enhance the green spaces of importance within the parish and to resist the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land.

Objective 2: To protect and enhance the views identified in the conservation review (2012) that characterise the village.

Objective 3: To retain the separate identity of Houghton and Wyton as a small rural village and avoid any further merging with neighbouring towns and villages.

Objective 4: To protect and enhance the range and distribution of biodiversity in the parish.

Objective 5: To promote the growth in appropriate 'quiet tourism' (i.e. tourism which respects the character of the countryside) in order that the beautiful countryside of the River Great Ouse and meadows may be shared with visitors.

Objective 6: To expand existing agricultural and rural visitor facilities and attractions and develop appropriate new opportunities.

Objective 7: To provide accommodation for arts, crafts and leisure activities to meet the needs of the local community and visitors.

Huntingdon:

When we asked 'what is the best thing about Huntingdon?', the riverside area and the green spaces were amongst the most popular responses, with three quarters of people rating these areas as good or excellent

[This Plan seeks to]

Ensure that the local distinctiveness of the natural, built and historic environments of Huntingdon are conserved and, where possible, enhanced.

Protect and enhance our valuable and well-loved green spaces. The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to safeguard the future of the town's green spaces and look at how these assets can be further enhanced.

Ensure that future housing developments are built with careful consideration to the existing infrastructure, and are sympathetic to Huntingdon's unique character and rich history.

Godmanchester

By 2036, Godmanchester will be an even better place to live, work and visit than it is now -

The town's historic core and rich architecture will have been protected and the beautiful open spaces, particularly along the Ouse Valley, enjoyed by residents and visitors;

The objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan as identified through engagement with the community are as follows:

1. Protect and enhance our beautiful and tranquil countryside and open spaces

Policy GMC1: Development outside the settlement boundary is classified as being in the 'open countryside'. Development in the 'open countryside' will only be acceptable where it is a use which is appropriate to the open countryside and should seek to preserve and protect our best and most versatile agricultural land and land of local environmental value including, but not limited to, The Godmanchester Nature Reserve at Cow Lane12, The East Side and West Side Commons in Godmanchester and the Ouse Valley

Policy GMC5: Making the most of our waterside assets. Development proposals that promote use of the river for quiet and low-impact leisure, wildlife and tourists' pursuits, with low risk to wildlife and habitats, will be supported. Proposals to protect, restore, replace and enhance public moorings and create new public mooring space to encourage safe access to the river and spaces for short stay visitors will be supported. Public access and use will be prioritised over private access and use. Proposals that will create activity on the river will be expected to demonstrate that such uses do not have a detrimental impact on the tranquil environment through the creation of excessive noise or pollution