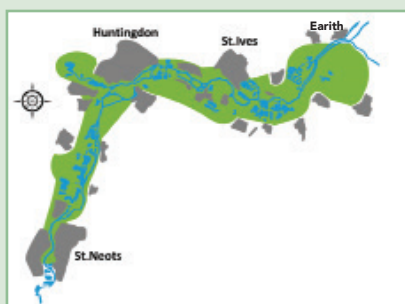


The Great Ouse Valley Trust (GOVT) is a charity with the objective 'To promote for public benefit the conservation, restoration, and enjoyment of the landscape, wildlife and heritage of the Great Ouse Valley and environs in the county of Cambridgeshire.' The area is nationally recognised and valued for its wildlife, leisure, natural and heritage attractions which contribute to the county's natural green spaces.



Our Partner Members contribute knowledge, expertise, resources and energy so that together we can champion the unique appeal of the Great Ouse Valley.

To become a Supporter or make a donation, please visit our website. Here you will also find news of our current projects, our media coverage, planning issues and much more.

All photographs in The Valley are by GOVT unless otherwise indicated.

SAVE THE DATES!

5 April 2025 PARTNER MEMBERS MEETING AND AGM
10.30 Grafham Village Hall

Van Diemens Way, Grafham PE28 0GB
Guest speaker Trustee Mizuro, owner of the St Ives Electric Riverboat Company, on *Tales of the River Bank*

20 July 2025 WOW! DAY

Come and **W**alk the **O**use (Valley) **W**ay with us. Organised walks, long and short, for all ages. See page 2.
Information point venues to be advised

Like and follow us on Facebook and visit us on www.greatousevalleytrust.org.uk



WE COMPLETE OUR WORKSHOPS

Engaging with the community

Over the last two years the Trust has brought together all sections of our community to look at the future of the precious landscape of the Great Ouse Valley. The workshops have covered each section of the valley, starting with Huntingdon to St Ives, continuing with St Ives to Earith and concluding last year with Huntingdon to St Neots. Each event was a full day of intense study and discussion, which proved to be hard work but very enjoyable. Attendees represented a broad spectrum of stakeholders from Parish and Town Councils, local conservation groups, landowners, businesses, Rotary groups and the District Council.



Workshop engagement

Masses of data from all three workshops was accumulated and analysed by our team led by Dr Jade Gunnell, who used her unique community engagement skills to organise and structure these events. We have tried to ensure that the aims and hopes of all those who use and value our landscape could be understood and brought into focus.

Four key themes to help us focus our project development have emerged:

1 ACCESS, 2 MORE NATURE, 3 WATER and 4 LANDSCAPE DESIGNATION.

In this edition of *The Valley* we look at each of these in turn to check what we have achieved already, see what is happening now and, most importantly, what we hope to achieve in the future.

1 ACCESS

Our task is to improve access to the landscape for all segments of our community, young and old, abled and disabled, walkers, cyclists, runners, anglers, boaters and horse riders, and to encourage awareness of our natural world and heritage.

Electric riverboat visitor service

We are mindful of the impact of cars and how they are accommodated within the landscape. On holiday weekends Houghton Mill and the nearby village lanes can be overwhelmed with parked cars. We have been instrumental in working with the St Ives Electric Riverboat Company to provide a service from St Ives to both Houghton Mill, and The Manor at Hemingford Grey, thus reducing the car parking at these two sites that are so popular. It is hoped that the boat service might be extended to other sites in the future.



Electric Riverboats help to improve access

Celebrating and improving the Ouse Valley Way

We have long been working with the County Council, the Parish and Town Councils and other groups for several years to celebrate and promote the Ouse Valley Way long-distance footpath, and ensure that it's kept open for everyone throughout the year. We formed the Ouse Valley Way Management Group that now meets twice a year to monitor the maintenance of the path, and finds ways to ensure that its condition improves each year.

Continued on page 2.

The Ouse Valley Way is one of our greatest assets. Alex Foxfield, who is well known for his explorations of extreme mountain paths in far-flung parts of the world, walked the entire 151 miles of the path during lockdown. He was very impressed with what he found. He says on kamoot.



Our beautiful riverside long-distance footpath

com, 'The Great Ouse is one of England's finest and longest rivers - it is a watercourse that has shaped the gentle lands through which it flows, forging their often unique character and fascinating history. Winding through this gorgeous land, hand in hand with the river, is the Ouse Valley Way long-distance trail.'

And now we are nearly all set for our WOW! Walk the Ouse (Valley) Way Day on 20 July. On the day we want to bring together many of our Partner Members to help promote the path. We will encourage everyone to get out and walk some of the footpath, whether it's the full 24 miles through our area, or just half a mile, as a celebration of its 35-year existence. We hope that each village and town on the route will organise circular walks on the day, and provide information about the natural world with special rewards for children who can complete defined sections. If the day is a success we would hope to make it an annual event. Watch out for more information on our Facebook page and website.

Flooding on The Busway cycle path

The Trust is committed to promote Active Travel (making journeys in physically active ways) wherever possible. The Busway path has long offered a great opportunity to reach the valley from Cambridge and its suburbs by bike and by foot. It gives direct access not only to St Ives but also to the wonderful Fen Drayton Lakes Nature Reserve run by our Partner Member, the RSPB. It is an important commuter route as well as a leisure route for horse riders and family jaunts.

However, flooding has always put a short section of the path near Swavesey out of action for some weeks each year. And in recent years this has become a real issue with the path impassable for several months at a time. Cyclists and walkers can travel over half way along the path from Cambridge before they discover that it's blocked. Some then put their lives at risk by travelling along on the concrete busway itself.

Action is needed to raise the path above flood level, or to provide a boardwalk structure above the flooded



Busway path section flooded

section. **The Trust feels that this is the most urgent access issue that we have at the moment, and should be given priority over other Active Travel infrastructure projects.**

2 MORE NATURE

Our task is to create a richer natural landscape where wildlife can thrive and increase, and where the existing beauty of our landscape can be enhanced and improved. We are working on initiatives and have had success in a number of areas.

Trees, woodland and daffodils

Planting trees and woodland has been one of our main aims in recent years. We can look to the success of our Community Wood next to the Ouse Valley Way in Godmanchester, which we continue to manage and plant with additional native trees that have been donated. We have continued with our programme to plant the rare Black Poplar in various locations, notably in West Meadow opposite Brampton Mill. We have worked with Suez Recycling, Recovery and Waste Management UK to plant woodland on reclamation sites, and a new tree belt is to be planted later this year. This will be a very important visual improvement to the landscape.



A host in the making

Our friends at CPRE, The Countryside Charity, donated two sacks of daffodil bulbs, and they have been planted by volunteers along the Ouse Valley Way and along National Cycle Route 51.

Action on Noble's Field

This year we have worked with our Partner Member, the Trustees of Nobles Field, to plant 14 very large standard trees on this wonderful site off The Thicket in St Ives. This was achieved with a grant from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority that was administered by the Cambridge Community Foundation and Natural Cambridgeshire. In a very brief window of opportunity, between freezing weather and extensive floods, our team of volunteers planted Black Poplar, Alder, Oak, White Poplar, White Willow and Crack Willow trees. Their size meant it was a major enterprise to move them across the site, but they will be a wonderful enhancement to the riverbank which is seen by so many.

We can also report that Noble's Field was selected as one of ten sites in the area to receive a biodiversity audit



The new trees on Noble's Field

as part of the Biodiversity for All project, again funded by the Combined Authority but administered this time by our District Council. After two meetings on site with the HDC ecologist and Trustees from the Noble's Field Trust, we are delighted to confirm we have been encouraged to apply for a maximum grant of £8,000 to carry out the works agreed. These include diversifying the scrub habitat to reduce the encroaching Bramble beds, Blackthorn and Nettle areas, creating wildflower strips, erecting bird and bat boxes, tidying up the large fallen tree to create deadwood piles, and creating a new information board. We hope to begin the work next month and complete it later in the year, after the bird-nesting season.

Future plans

We have plans to work with landowners, the Freeman of Godmanchester and the District Council to improve flower meadows, restore hedgerows and nature connectivity. And, we are passionate about the need to tackle climate change. The solar farm built at the St Ives Park and Ride by Cambridgeshire County Council is a great example of what can be achieved with car parks. However, we will campaign vigorously against any solar farms on our precious wildflower meadows in the valley while massive industrial roofs and tarmac areas remain available for this purpose. The County Council has shown what can be achieved.

We now hope other local authorities and private companies will follow suit with plans for their own car parks.



A solar panel win-win at St Ives

3 WATER

Our task is to provide accurate testing of water quality in our stretch of the river, monitor invasive species, and provide our findings to the new national database that is currently being developed.

We test the water

While our river water quality is often excellent and safe for bathing, we continue to be concerned about it. We know about phosphates and nitrates in fertilisers that are washed into the Ouse from surrounding fields. These accelerate weed growth and reduce oxygen levels to affect wildlife. Their levels vary and are sometimes double those recommended. But we are becoming even more concerned about storm-water discharges. These carry E.coli and Enterococci bacteria from overloaded waste-treatment centres. When these levels spike during high rainfall and river levels they can pose a serious health risk to all water users. Our own sampling for Coliform bacteria showed instances in September, November and December last year when readings changed from 'Excellent' previously, to 'Poor/Fail', with up x18 times for E.coli. We are working to evidence the sources of these discharges. All our sampling results are shared with Great Ouse Rivers Trust and EarthWatch for entering into their national water quality databases. We are expanding the volunteer testing-team and advising other parties in other localities on techniques and procedures.



Testing, not fishing!

Our second film night

In October we again teamed up with the Screen St Ives community cinema for a special showing of the environmental film *Pure Clean Water*. This followed the success of *Six Inches of Soil* shown earlier in the year which had brought together a diverse audience including farmers and landowners to discuss the challenges of sustainable nature-friendly farming.

Pure Clean Water expertly told the story of the Cambridge chalk stream and the crisis resulting from excessive extraction. The film included interviews from historians and conservationists and showed the importance of the chalk stream to the city and the university. Following the film we had a thought-provoking Q&A session with our team of experts: Tony Eva, who made the film; Charles Dalleywater, local farmer and Chair of the Alconbury Flood Group; and Phil Rothwell from the Great Ouse Rivers Trust.



We love to screen environmental films

4 LANDSCAPE DESIGNATION

Our task is to achieve full National Landscape designation for the Ouse Valley and Washes and, as a stepping stone to this goal, to achieve designation as a Valued Landscape (Regional Park) from Huntingdonshire District Council and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA).



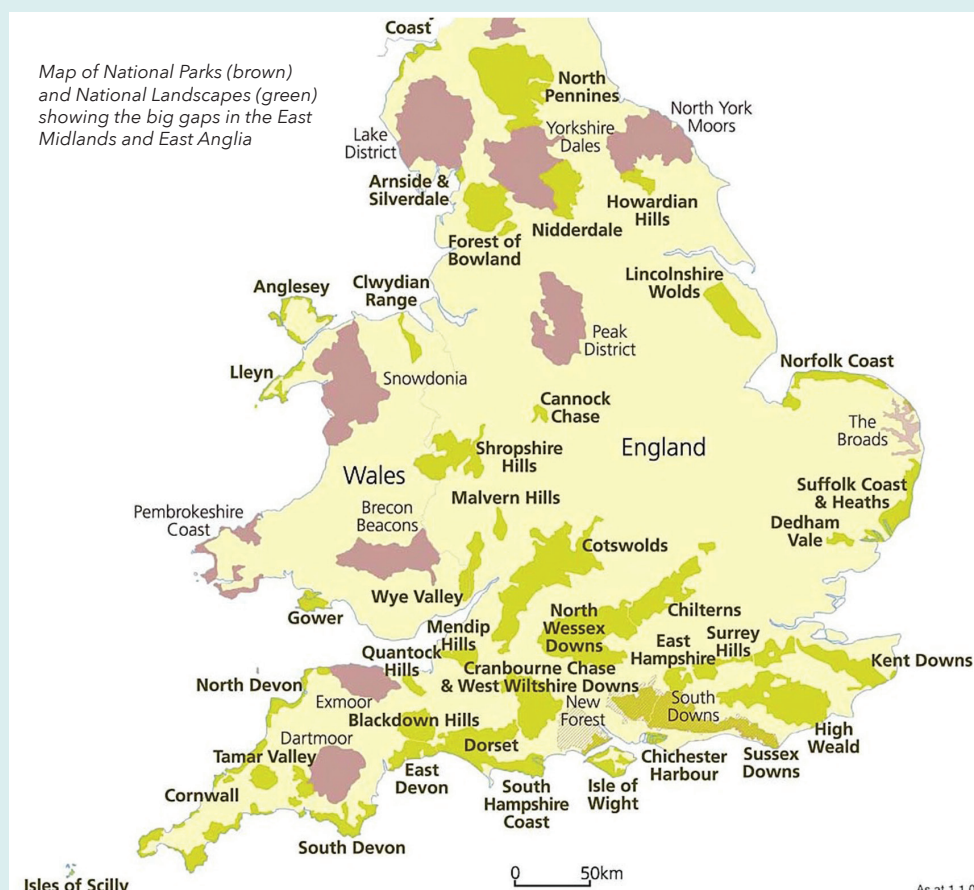
Our beautiful landscape scenery

Our long-term ambition

The Trust originally grew out of the determination of a small group of enthusiasts 2014 to achieve official Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB) status for the valley. It has long been recognised that many of the aims of the Trust would be greatly accelerated through national designation. In 2023 the Government officially renamed AONBs as National Landscapes, and since then our focus has been to assemble all the data needed to make the case for designation. We would then become the only inland National Landscape in the whole of the East Midlands and East Anglia, something which Natural England's own published maps had shown to be their own long-term ambition. Last year we got the full support of the Mayor, Dr Nik Johnson, and the Board of the CPCA to work with us towards designation. Now we can report the great support we are also getting from the District Council.

Exciting news: our partnership with Huntingdonshire District Council

We are pleased to be working with HDC to continue to develop the case for a self-designated area to identify, celebrate and promote our important landscape for nature and communities in Huntingdonshire. The aim is to set out the case for self-designation to enhance the area's biodiversity and improve accessibility for leisure use. We also want to harness community



involvement to promote and shape the unique landscape and character of our towns and villages to deliver economic benefits, support the local environment, and contribute to our overall well-being.

Huntingdonshire Pride in Place

The Trust was pleased to participate and exhibit at the HDC 'Pride of Place' event at One Leisure, Burgess Hall, in November. We also joined Cllr Richard Slade, the Mayor of St Neots and founder of the Neotists, and Paul Sweeney, the Business Improvement District (BID) Manager in Huntingdon, in preparing a report to HDC on the benefits and future possibilities for tourism in the district.



The Pride in Place event

INTRODUCING OUR NEW TRUSTEE

We welcome Francis Mizuro. Following a long career in large-scale commercial horticulture Francis is now the proud owner of the St Ives based Electric Riverboat Company. He is passionate about all aspects of the river. He will bring to the Trust a wealth of knowledge about both nature and boats, as well as the experience of running a successful business that is already contributing to the life of the valley. Come and hear his talk on 5 April – see page 1.

