

Great Ouse Valley Trust Strategic Plan

Background

The Great Ouse Valley is a remarkable place. Quite outstanding in landscape, wildlife and heritage terms it is largely unappreciated even by those living nearby. The wider public rush past it on the A14. Its watery, reedy, lake and meadow dappled landscape is largely unspoilt by roads so the driver is only tantalised by passing glimpses of a pastoral landscape unable to see its beauty without stepping from the car. The widespread mis-perception that beautiful landscape must involve hills or mountains leads to the Valley being literally and figuratively overlooked.

At the same time man's pressure on the area has significantly increased. One aspect of this has been particularly distinctive, gravel and sand quarries disturb the peaceful rural idyll but the after use can lead to significant changes for agriculture to open water and a mecca for wildlife and people.– the creation of more open water than the Norfolk Broads. Otherwise, mans influence has resulted in loss of quality through development, changes in farming practice, road construction and the erection of intrusive features in the landscape. At the same time, this pressure and increasing population has increased the need for quiet recreation in the countryside, the very thing that the Great Ouse valley provides in abundance..

This concern about habitat quality attrition resulted in local realisation that the The Great Ouse Valley merited designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or its equivalent and that protection from planning and agricultural led changes was essential and long over due.

In consequence an AONB Working Group was formed to apply for and promote AONB status. English Nature requested a formal application to become an AONB from the Working Group. Developing this confirmed the high value of the area and an application was submitted in 2014. This has not yet been determined, in part because the Glover Committee is currently examining National Parks and AONBs, including whether or not more should be designated.

Why Now?

Since then the need for action, with or without an AONB, has increased radically and the Great Ouse Valley Trust has been set up to meet that need.

The need is as great now as it ever has been due to :

- **Climate Change.**
Cambridgeshire County Council's current vision to see the county, as a whole deliver net zero carbon emissions by 2050 (CCC Climate Change Strategy currently out for consultation)
Water availability is a key risk for Cambridgeshire as it is the driest part of the UK. The demand for water resources, given the fact that Cambridgeshire is one of the fastest growing regions in the UK, is putting the natural water resource at risk in terms of water quality, aquatic habitat and biodiversity.
- **Pollution**
Over 5% of Cambridgeshire's population is attributed to air pollution *(CCC CC consultation)
Plastic pollution clogging up our rivers and harming wildlife
- **Population Growth**

Cambridgeshire is one of the fastest growing counties in the UK, this growth necessitates the provision of more housing, food and water, this economic development can cause harm to nature through loss of habitat to make way for new homes or road building programmes

- **Green Spaces**

Cambridgeshire has one of the smallest percentage of land managed for nature in the country, currently only 8.5% of the county is covered by natural green spaces.

- **Infrastructure**

The 'upgrades' to the A14 between Cambridge and Huntingdon, the A428, the A1 will all create more traffic on the road as evidenced by Friends of the Earth. Also there is evidence which demonstrates new roads create more air and noise pollution, are a detractor to beauty and harm wildlife, as they cut across wildlife routes.

However, The Great Ouse Valley Trust recognises that although an AONB designation would be the single most effective measure to conserve and enhance the Ouse Valley it is not the only route to its protection, public appreciation and enhancement which is why the group have worked hard to ensure the Great Ouse Valley is mentioned in the Hunts District council local Plan (up until 2036) as well as Neighbourhood Plans

- **Hunts 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 greeninfrastructure, 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.

- **HDC 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.

- **Neighbourhood Plans**

Houghton and Wyton, Godmanchester and Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plans all demonstrate the value of the natural landscape to the residents who live there:

For example:

- The vision for Houghton and Wyton is as follows:

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 NP

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

(C) 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 NP

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

The Introduction of 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.”

GOVT Vision

The Great Ouse Valley is a fantastic place to live and visit, with off the beaten track areas to explore by foot, cycle or horse. The area is nationally recognised and valued for its wildlife, leisure, natural and heritage attractions which contribute to the county's natural green spaces.

(This is achieved by GOVT being the catalyst which brings national organisations, local communities and individual people together for the common good.)

Mission

- **Enhancement of landscape** – increased Biodiversity
- **Promotion** - sense of place, tourism & local economy, health benefits
- **Protection** – Active conservation & campaigning
- **Access** for all – residents & visitors, disabled
- **Partnerships** and Alliances: Groups working together
- **Increased engagement** – education, volunteering

Strategic Aims over next 3 years?

1. To work with FWAG, Plantlife, WTs and the landowners along the Great Ouse to set up farming practice to improve conservation status of the floodland meadows
2. To improve access to the OVW and develop new circular routes within the area?
3. To have an active Green Army Volunteer Group of X people to work under qualified leaders across the area and river??
4. To have a sustainable fee paying supporter/'friends of' group of X people?
5. To develop tourism via a gateway to the Valley interpretation centre, X events
6. To develop the first Ouse Valley Festival
7. To facilitate X health walks a year

8. To facilitate a youth environment group
9. To develop GOV Brand for use across local businesses
10. To succeed in applying for an overarching grant to fund our aims

2020 Objectives

- A. To raise £20k to fund a part time member of staff to develop our long term aims
- B. To write an Engagement Strategy for all stakeholders and implement part of it (web, FB, partner members, public?)
- C. To work with CCC over the OVW and apply for funding for new interpretation and finger posts, develop promotional materials to promote the long distance walk in Cambs
- D. to develop a generic promotional leaflet for use to promote tourism
- E. To actively promote the risks of any road proposal across the River
- F. To ensure GOVT is recognised within the Climate change strategy
- G. To create an advocacy strategy
- H. To hold 2 events for partner members

Calendar and Financial plan?

Risks

Appendix

Immediate aspirations of different groups

Wildlife Trusts

Recognise the Great Ouse Valley as a living landscape requiring more connectivity . The Trusts own a nature Reserve in Godmanchester where there are still ambitions to improve visitor access to the Peterlake. The Trust also owns the SSSI designated willflower meadow down the Thicket, important for Green-winged Orchid. The Trusts objective is to improved conservation status along the Great Ouse in the flood meadows

RSPB

With Nature Reserves at Ouse Fen and Fen Drayton Lakes
River Crossing/ferry???

National Trust

Houghton Mill.....

Paxton Pits

Holt Island

The Offords Parish Council

- Access to the OVW

Houghton & Wyton

Thicket Wood – Management Plan
Thicket Footpath – verge management

Godmanchester

Planting trees & flowers
Fish pass
Heritage, history boards
Linear park up silver (? St.Ives ?) to A14
Clearing silt

BHS

Access training
Can assist with enhanced bridleway network
DMMO (definite map mod orders)
Deadline 2026 for reclaiming old paths
Riding for the disabled centre

Southoe ferry

Gt Paxton to Southoe
Signage to explain parishes

Jones' Boatyard

Promotion of the river
Public moorings slipways ID signage for plants

Appendix

Hunts landscape and Townscape assessment 2007 (supplementary planning document to Local Plan

The Ouse valley landscape has undergone many changes over the last 50 years, including loss and neglect of water meadows through increased ploughing and a reduction in traditional grazing and haymaking. The area has also seen development of a variety of scales and types, for example, Buckden Marina, the A14 flyover at Huntingdon, several housing and industrial developments, and areas of gravel extraction. All have had an effect on the character of the Ouse Valley, reducing its tranquillity and introducing incongruous features. The high quality and distinctive character of this landscape make it very vulnerable to changes stemming from developments of an unsympathetic design or scale. Floodplains are particularly sensitive environments, and inappropriate development may have environmental impacts and increase flood risk. There are plans for a significant future change in the visual and ecological value of the area around Needingworth/ Over, where there are proposals to transform the Hanson Aggregates quarry into a major open water bird reserve and increase the level of the reed bed habitat. Some key issues