

News Update from the Chair – April-May 2021

At last the unseasonable cold and damp April and May weather has come to an end and summer has arrived on cue at the beginning of June. The visitor honeypots of the Ouse Valley have once again become a huge attraction. The use of our landscape for all kinds of leisure activities is very encouraging but does of course produce its own challenges with car parking becoming a real issue over the holiday weekend in many places.

Energy and zeal

There is a great burst of enthusiasm and call to action from many of our Partner Members keen to get involved in actual projects on the ground. There is a great desire to restore meadows to their former glory, to reinstate lost hedges, plant riverside trees, improve water quality and much more - and there is no lack of support from our volunteers. The real issue is the identification of landscape and biodiversity projects that are achievable. These can only be accomplished with the cooperation of landowners and farmers. Many of them are waiting on the new post Brexit Government scheme to promote environmental benefit in farming, and are reluctant to promote new initiatives until they have some clarity on the details.

Black Poplar progress

A local farmer, however, Alf Peacock, has been a great supporter of GOVT. The Trust has begun to plant native Black Poplars on his hay meadow opposite Brampton Mill and volunteers have successfully carried out the first planting using 'cactus' cattle protectors. For this project we have been grateful for a £2,000 grant from Astra Zeneca. We continue to work with local landowners, and with FWAG (Farmers Wildlife Advisory Group), to find more sites for riverside tree-planting to support the Woodland Trust initiative to 'Cool the Rivers'.

Clearing the way - and the Pennywort

We are confident there will be plenty of opportunities for volunteer groups to engage in new planting and habitat restoration in the future. In the meantime, there is much work to do on clearing footpaths, especially on the Ouse Valley Way. Huntingdon Rotary is clearing the path between Bromholme Lane and River Lane, but there are many other sections that need attention. In fact, a great many of our public footpaths need work and our Partner Members are rising to the challenge. Please let us know about all the individual projects that you may be undertaking so we can publicise them and offer help as needed. Here we must mention the initiative of Partner Member Southoe and Midloe PC who have taken advantage of our offer to provide special waymarkers for the the OVW through their parish and which they have already installed. Well done Southoe! Brampton PC too have been quick off the mark with improvements to their section.

The battle by the Environment Agency and many volunteer groups to stop the spread of Floating Pennywort has been very successful in the upper sections of the river, but now needs to continue downstream. There is an opportunity for our Partners Members and Supporter volunteers to engage in the recording of any new Pennywort sitings. Please see this link to Rivercare - [Pennywort Alert \(rivercare.org.uk\)](https://rivercare.org.uk) for more information and details.

Important new Trust developments

This is a pivotal moment for the Trust as we embark on new ventures. We have had much success over the last two years, for example: overturning the decision to build a new, elevated river crossing; Black Poplar planting projects; and working with the County Council to upgrade the Ouse Valley Way and the information boards. Now we are looking to move to another level, working with our Partners and Natural Cambridgeshire to create a Great Ouse Valley Landscape Partnership, giving the opportunity to apply for larger sums and to employ a coordinator. This will be discussed more fully in June.

Following the presentation by Barry Bendall of the Rivers Trust at our AGM in April we are now in discussion to move towards GOVT becoming the Rivers Trust representative for our Great Ouse. It has previously been unrepresented! This will mean that we would work to improve the water quality and biodiversity of the river with the support of the Rivers Trust as the national body.

Publicity

We offer special thanks to St Neots Town Councillor Stephen Ferguson for his donation of £2,000. He raised this from his walk as Town Mayor of the entire Ouse Valley Way from Buckinghamshire to Kings Lynn in appalling weather last year. We trust your blisters have healed Stephen!

The latest edition of the Inland Waterways Association *The Great River Ouse and its Tributaries* has just been published. Its author, Chris Howes is a Supporter of the Trust and the book includes a brief summary of the work and aims of GOVT. The book is the standard document for all those who use the rivers for leisure in all sorts of craft. It is published by Imray at £14.95 and is available from all good bookshops and marinas, or from Imray online.

AONB on-going

The Trust's working party on the application for AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) status has produced a further document to upgrade the original 2016 application to Natural England. We are awaiting the much-delayed formal response from Natural England to the Glover Report recommendations.

We have a vacancy

Graham Wilson has been a GOVT Trustee since our inception and has been a vital link with the County Council and a great campaigner against the third river crossing. Following his recent re-election as a County Councillor, and his appointment as Chair of Audit and Accounts for the new Combined Authority administration, he feels he will no longer have sufficient capacity to continue as a Trustee. The Trust wishes him well in his new role. If you feel you have a special skill and enthusiasm to become a Trustee please contact me for a chat.

Finally

There is a great deal for the Trust to achieve this year but with foreign travel all but eliminated this summer I am reminded just how fortunate we are to have such a wonderful landscape to enjoy on our doorstep.

[All photographs by GOVT]

Graham Campbell, June 2021