

## Question: from The Great Ouse Valley Trust<sup>1</sup>

Will the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority support the application for the Great Ouse Valley (in Cambridgeshire) and Washes to be designated as a new National Landscape? Designation of this landscape will enable it to be managed holistically by partnership-working, and ensure that its rich natural heritage is protected and enhanced for the benefit of people and nature.



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**Cambridgeshire** as a county has the least tree cover and the least land managed for nature in England. Its large areas of intensive agriculture provide little access for public recreation. Cambridgeshire is one of fewer than ten counties in England not to have, or share, a National Park or National Landscape within its boundaries. In this area of central and eastern England there is a dearth of protected landscapes.

The county is now seeing considerable built development, with calls for much more growth. For all these reasons, there is a genuine need in Cambridgeshire to provide and encourage public recreation and access to the countryside, whilst at the same time protecting and enhancing the nature-rich areas that do exist within the county.

In 2014 a submission was made to Natural England that the Great Ouse Valley and Washes be designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) - since renamed National Landscapes (NL). There is no doubt that this special area meets the criteria for such designation, with its significant landscape value derived from a combination of factors such as its distinctive identity, scenic value, relative wildness and tranquillity, cultural heritage and especially its environmental wealth.

In order to ensure the conservation and enhancement of its ecological assets, as well as the provision of the area as a place for people's well-being, the area requires overall recognition and management. Otherwise, it is at serious risk of being eroded or fractured.

The Great Ouse Valley and Washes area remains as a 'proposed NL' with Natural England.

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<sup>1</sup> Great Ouse Valley Trust (GOVT) A registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation: Number 1179977

## **Context**

**'England needed more, bigger, better and joined-up spaces for nature.'**

***Lawton principles, 2010, from Making Space for Nature***

### **Nationally:**

- 25 Year Environment Plan and the first revision in the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 committing to Nature Recovery Networks
- Environment Act 2021, including Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), Biodiversity Net Gain
- The commitment of 30% of land to be nature by 2030 - 30by30
- The Glover Report (2019) put forward 27 Proposals to improve National Landscapes. The Government responded in January 2022, and included a further consultation on some of the proposals raised. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty - now National Landscapes - combined with National Parks and become Protected Landscapes
- Green Infrastructure (GI) Principles and Benefits, introduced by Natural England in January 2023: *Green infrastructure is often described in terms of the functions it performs such as improving air quality and the associated benefits it brings as a result, such as improved health outcomes. The goal of good green infrastructure should be to achieve multifunctionality. The extent will depend on local circumstances and priorities, but planning for and delivering a measurable increase in multiple benefits should always be the goal.*

### **Regional Targets - Cambridgeshire and Peterborough:**

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) aims:

*The LNRS should aim for more than a mapping of nature areas and establishing a set of priorities for enhancement. It needs to facilitate delivery of bigger, better and more joined-up biodiversity. Secondly it has to remain dynamic to respond to changing circumstances. Thirdly, it needs to reflect the diversity of landscapes, nature and communities across the Combined Authority area (including urban areas). Finally, it needs to draw input from existing evidence base including local biodiversity strategies and data kept by the Environmental Records Centre and the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Parks Partnership.*

*There are significant public health benefits of access to nature as referenced in the 2022 Health & Wellbeing Integrated Care Strategy for the area. [link to strategy](#) Environmental & Climate Change Implications: The LNRS aim is to enhance (and thereby recover) biodiversity and nature, contributing to tackling the biodiversity crisis. Solutions can have wider environmental and other benefits, including flood resilience, water management, carbon sequestration and storage.*

## **Justification**

1. Members of the Great Ouse Valley Trust (a registered charity since 2018 with 9 Trustees) were invited by Natural England in 2014 to submit an AONB application supported by:
  - Sir John Major
  - Jonathan Djanogly MP for Huntingdonshire
  - Cambridgeshire CC
  - South Cambs DC
  - Hemingford Abbots PC
  - Houghton & Wyton PC
  - Earith PC
  - Hemingford Grey PC
  - St Ives TC
  - Offord Cluny and Offord Darcy PC
  - Swavesey PC
  - Holywell-cum-Needingworth PC
  - CPRE et al support in HDC Local Plan consultation
  - Sustainable Eel Group
  - Buglife - The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
  - Ramblers Association, (Cambridge Group)
  - Godmanchester in Bloom
  - Huntingdon and Godmanchester Civic Society
  - Hartford Conservation Group
  - Huntingdonshire Fauna and Flora Society
  - Friends of Holt Island Nature Reserve
  - Huntingdon Fungus Group
  - RSPB
  - Wildlife Trusts
  - Cambs Bird Club
  - Friends of Paxton Pits
  - FWAG
  - Friends of Portholme Meadow
  - Cambs Conservation Volunteers
2. Natural England recognised the Great Ouse and Washes AONB proposal as the top proposal for ‘plugging the gap’ in the national distribution of designated landscapes and third in ‘levelling up’ – i.e. having the closest proximity to areas of deprivation and being more than 15 miles away from existing designated landscapes.
3. Much of the area is already recognised -
  - i. by Natural Cambridgeshire as a Priority Landscape
  - ii. by WLT as a Living Landscape
  - iii. Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership with HLF grant (finished)
  - iv. New funding is now allocated to support Priory Farm (B4A), Ouse Washes Landscape Recovery grant (DEFRA)
  - v. Land use – much of the priority habitat is already under public or nature organisations’ ownership.
  - vi. Private finance initiatives are starting.
4. The Great Ouse Valley and Washes covers 285 sq km.  
There are Nature Conservation areas of 1x RAMSAR, 2x SAC, 1x SPA, 2x LNR, 7x SSSI, 31x CWS

There are c2000 ha of current and proposed wetland, (compared with the Norfolk Broads at 915 ha).

The great stretches of floodplain meadows are nationally important.

The area has a rich built, cultural and artistic heritage. There are many Conservation Areas and over 700 listed buildings within the whole area.

## **Benefits**

The Great Ouse and Washes meets the Green Infrastructure Benefits of:

- i. **Thriving nature and biodiversity gains, creating nature-rich places**  
Overall: areas for improvement have been identified – these could be more than 1754 ha  
Wildlife Trust mapping, 2023, identifies the potential to restore approx.
  - 412 ha of floodplain meadows,
  - 62 ha potential wet woodland creation,
  - 168 ha possible floodplain wetland mosaic habitat
  - plus 700 ha of reedbed creation
- ii. **Climate change resilience** and contributing towards zero carbon targets  
Natural Flood Management schemes,  
Improve floodplain meadows  
Nature friendly farming  
River quality monitoring
- iii. **Health and well-being** with active travel routes
  - Access for all: the Long Distance Footpath of the Ouse Valley Way, national and local cycleways, bridleways, footpaths, boats, recreational users of the river.
  - Awareness and engagement with the environment,
  - Education, citizen science
  - Volunteering for local people; for example, as River Wardens, Tree wardens, summer countryside wardens etc
  - Social prescribing
- iv. **Economic** As proposed in the Glover Report, Designated Landscapes need to look at a new blended funding, which in addition to statutory funding, will include grants and donations, Private finance (Natural Capital marketplace, BNG, NFM) and Public finance through – ELMS, stewardship schemes, farm clusters growing food and growing nature,  
Designation of an area will bring increased visits with income generation. It will attract new businesses to the area (cafes, hotels, pubs, caravan and camp sites, restaurants, boat hire trips etc ) . By creating a Sense of Place, it will attract people to live here with a resulting increase in house prices (2021 Sunday Times concludes that a good place to live brings a 40% + premium).

