

CAM VALLEY MATTERS No.1, 3 June 2013
The Occasional Newsletter of the Cam Valley Forum
<http://www.colc.co.uk/cambridge/cam.valley.forum/>

Chair: Jean Perraton Editor: David Brooks

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The **Draft Local Plan 2014** for (the City of) **Cambridge** sets out some important principles to guide development along the river corridors of the Cam and its tributaries. ‘Policy 7’ states that proposals should:

- include an assessment of views of the river and a demonstration that the proposed design of the development has taken account of the assessment in enhancing views to and from the river;
- protect and enhance the unique physical, natural and culturally distinctive landscape of the River Cam;
- raise, where possible, the quality of the river, adjacent open spaces and the integrity of the built environment in terms of its impact, location, scale, design and form;
- propose, where possible, enhancement of the natural resources of the River Cam and offer opportunities for re-naturalisation of the river;
- enable, where possible, opportunities for greater public access to the River Cam; and
- take account of and support as appropriate the tourism and recreational facilities in the corridor.



Tim Ward

One of the Plan’s most exciting proposals is the designation (Policy 15, Fig 3.4 on page 56) of the area between the Cherry Hinton Brook and Coldham’s Lane as an “**Area of Major Change**”. “The redevelopment of this land.....as an **urban country park** would help enhance” the green-blue corridor shown clearly in the oblique air photograph. “Opportunities could include, but are not limited to, walking, bird-watching, cycling, non-motorised cycle BMX tracks, and other leisure-based uses.”

The green area to the right of the nearest lake and below the Coldham’s Business Park consisted of many acres of tree and scrub habitat which had colonised an abandoned 1970s

landfill site. The Draft Local Plan 2014 map (p. 56) classifies this area both as a “**City Wild Life**” site and as “**Protected Open Space**”.

Nevertheless, earlier this year this tree and scrub was clear-felled by the owners of the land, the Anderson Group, presumably in anticipation of a planning application. The photograph on the left was taken from near the end of Kathleen Elliott Way, looking west. Will this devastation of a ‘protected’ wild green space result in the Business Park being extended?

The Plan is still to be finalised before it goes out to public consultation on 19 July for 10 weeks.

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/draft-local-plan-2014>



David Brooks

CAM VALLEY MATTERS No.2 19 June 2013
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Trumpington Farm Company visit On 13 June twenty members and friends of Cam Valley Forum took advantage of the rare opportunity to visit an astonishingly verdant, sylvan riverside landscape close to the very heart of out-of-sight Cambridge.



The engaging farm manager, David Knott (on the right in the photograph), showed the visitors the newly-created 130 acres of Trumpington Fen wetland habitat on the east bank of the Cam, opposite Newnham. The conservation project, one of several on the Pemberton Estate, is already reaping rewards with its primary aim to 'conserve wildlife and maintain biodiversity on farmland'.

Three years ago the drained fen was taken out of wheat production which used to suffer reduced yields as the result of flooding. Water levels in drainage ditches, carefully

regulated by sluices (see photograph), were allowed to rise. The wetland now consists predominantly of fine grass, sedge, and, from where observed by the group, a carpet of buttercups. The soil is becoming progressively more acid. In the far distance the resident flock of sheep could be made out. The most obvious of the varied wildlife attracted so far are birds which include green plover and little egret. The wetland closest to Coe Fen now supports some 70 snipe. This bird was abundant in Coe Fen (just a few hundred metres away) in the 19C before it was drained and littered with town rubbish. The Forum visitors were treated to a majestic circling fly-past by a full-spanned observer from the heronry.



Wilbraham River Protection Society

On 16 June, mustered at The Temple (see photograph) by their Secretary, Rebecaa Lomas, more than 30 Friends likewise took advantage of special access to private land in order to walk from the source of the Wilbraham River to Hawk Mill. The springs, not usually seen by many, are reminiscent of those at Nine Wells. Dr. T D Hawkins, author of *The Drainage of Wilbraham, Fulbourn and Teversham Fens*, gave the background to the Environment Agency's scheme to augment stream flow by transferring water from a borehole in the Chalk *via* a pipe whose exit in the stream bank he pointed out.

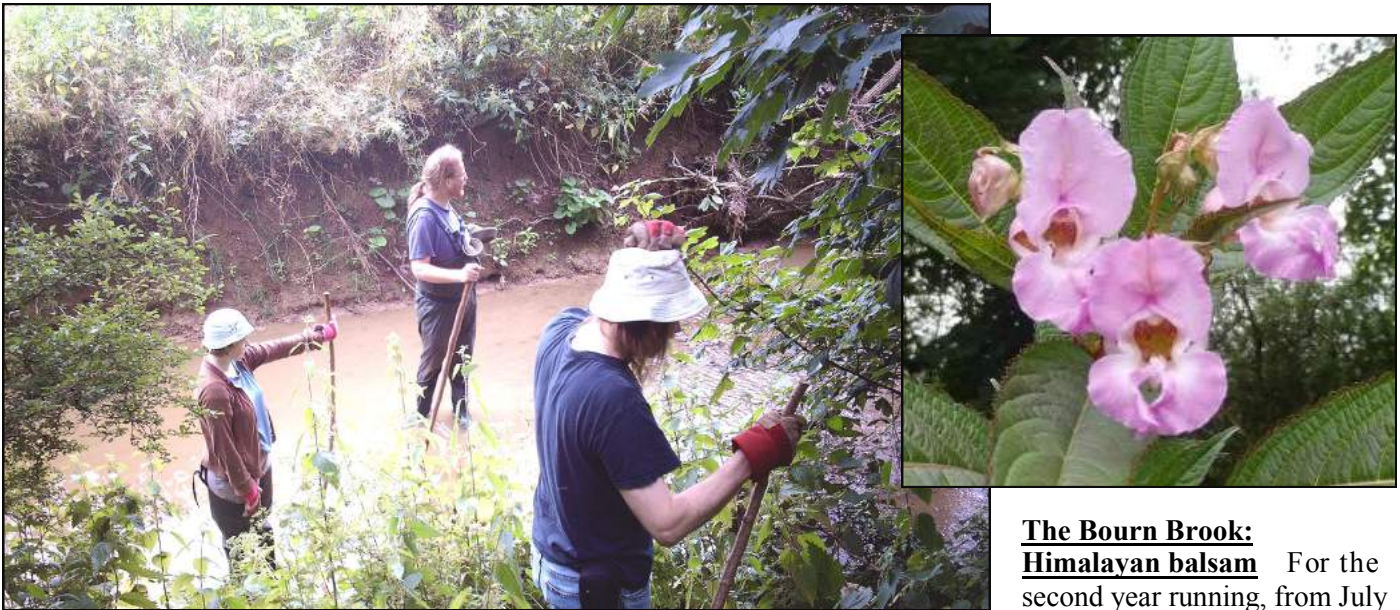
Of particular interest were the complex historical patterns of drainage further downstream and relating to Hawk (water) Mill and Farm. Farmer David White helped explain the Society's recent successful project of diverting all the water from the higher New Cut through a culvert down to the main stream to increase its chances of surviving periods of low rainfall. New Cut had been created in the 19C and was leaking down to the water table.

It should not be said that tea provided by the Secretary at her home, The Windmill, was the highest point of the afternoon but it was a close call.

CAM VALLEY MATTERS No.3 1 August, 2013
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The Bourn Brook:
Himalayan balsam For the second year running, from July until August, whatever the

weather, teams of volunteers have been ‘pulling balsam’ in an attempt to rid the Bourn Brook of this strikingly pretty flower, one of the UK’s most prolifically invasive species. Teams have targeted stretches (along 12 kms) of the stream on its way past the villages of Bourn, Kingston, Toft, Comberton, and Barton to Byron’s Pool where it joins the Cam, and are on track to visit the whole of the brook. The workers in the main photograph near Kingston in July were, at that moment, distracted by the glorious sight of a kingfisher. Groups were led by **Vince Lea, Ruth Hawksley** and **Iain Webb** on behalf of the **Countryside Restoration Trust (CRT), the Wildlife Trust, and Cambridge Conservation Volunteers.**

Bourn Brook and River Rhee (or Cam) Restoration Project The first phase of the survey, which originally covered only the Bourn Brook, but expanded in 2012 to cover the River Rhee, was continued this summer by **Ruth Hawksley (Water for Wildlife Officer of the Wildlife Trust)**. The project aims to improve habitats and control invasive species. Involved have been the Wildlife Trust and CRT in partnership with the EA, local landowners and other organisations, with expert input from Rob Mungovan (South Cambs District Council Ecology Officer. See http://cambridgeppf.org/river/material_21.6.13.pdf). The survey was made possible by funding from DEFRA, Anglian Water and the EA. The River Rhee is maintained by the EA from Byron’s Pool up past Haslingfield, Barrington, and Wendy all the way to the Bedfordshire border.



This year’s survey continued looking for signs of water vole and invasive plants on the River Rhee upstream of the 2012 survey stretch. The project now has this data mapped for the Rhee from Byron’s Pool to the Bedfordshire border near Guilden Morden, plus lengths of the rivers Mel and Shep. A report will be produced later this year. The photograph shows a sinuous stretch of the Rhee with good water vole habitat extending up into the generous field margins.

The project is discussing with EA what, if any, steps to take to control floating pennywort and water fern. Mink control is continuing on the Bourn and Rhee, although there is no trapping in the summer when females are likely to have young.

(See <http://www.countrysiderestorationtrust.com/userfiles/news2011/Minkreport2012CRTwebsite.pdf>)

Sadly, all is not well in these River Cam tributaries. Like many other local rivers, the Bourn and Rhee have few water voles because of American mink and habitat degradation, have signal crayfish rather than the indigenous white clawed species, and are being invaded by alien plant species like floating pennywort, water fern, Himalayan balsam and giant hogweed.

CAM VALLEY MATTERS No.4 5 November 2013
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Towards a strategy for the River Cam

Cambridge Past Present and Future (CPPF) is working with the *Cam Valley Forum*, the *Cam Conservancy*, local councils and the *Environment Agency* to develop a strategy to protect and improve the environment of the river and its tributaries. This ambitious plan will encompass the whole river basin, from the Cam's various sources to its confluence with the Great Ouse just south of Ely. The strategy will guide the policies of those that control the use of the river and the development of riverside land, helping to ensure that the valuable and vulnerable features are protected. It will identify potential projects for improvement and, we hope, unlock funds to make them happen. The working group held a workshop at the end of September, which brought together representatives of groups that have an interest in the river, and whose views will inform the developing strategy. For more

about this initiative and check its progress, see www.cambridgeppf.org and click on 'Cam Corridor'.



Pike under the Piece Inspection through a manhole of Hobson's Conduit running under the corner of Parker's Piece nearest the Catholic Church revealed a resident 18-inch pike seen in the photograph taken by Alan Wingfield, *City Council Drainage Engineer*.

Help for juvenile eels from the Bermuda Triangle The *Environment Agency* has installed an eel pass at Jesus Green lock to enable this endangered species to move up the river past the weir and sluice, a measure expected to increase population in the Cam.

A breach of River Cam bye-laws In October a student was found guilty at Cambridge Magistrates' Court of using the Garret Hostel Lane slipway for commercial punt tours which were banned there in 2012 for safety reasons.

Also, though he had a private registration this did not allow him to collect for charity which he claimed to do. He was fined £150 for each of the two offences and ordered to pay £1,242 compensation plus £958 costs.

World Rivers Day, 29 September This was celebrated on their home ground by the *Whittlesford Society* which had the benefit for the day of access to private land beside the River Cam. A guided walk was organised, not to mention a picnic tea in the river meadow behind the Moat House. In addition to the River Cam's ecology a focus of interest was the search for the position of the original W(h)ittle's Ford by the *Thriplow Research Group* with their resistivity and magnetometry equipment. An archaeological dig into the history of the village was also conducted.

This international event, which evolved from concerns about the threats to the world waterways, is now celebrated in over 60 countries each year on the last Sunday in September. *The Cam Valley Forum* plans to join the *Cam Conservators* and other organisations in a river festival next year which, we hope, will embrace all those who value, enjoy and want to protect the river.

CAM VALLEY MATTERS No.5 12 November 2013
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How it used to be The photograph below (c. 1970, in contrast to the recent photograph on the right) shows the River Cam near the Lammas Land paddling pool just upstream of Fen Causeway. This stretch was once the town

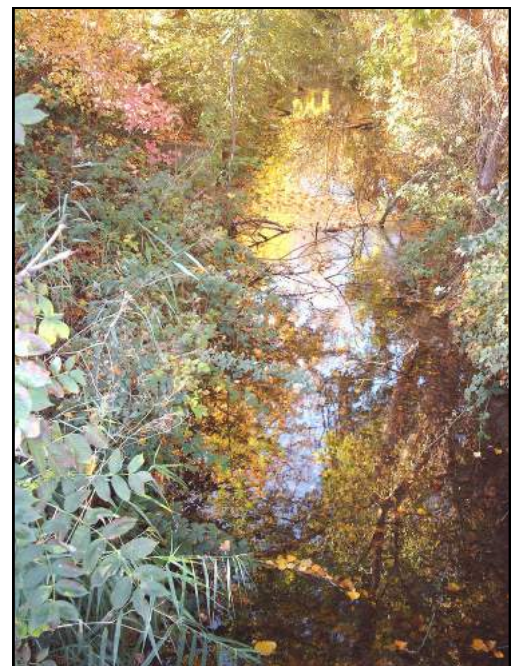


bathing place, where hundreds of men and boys (and later women and girls) swam in the summer. The presence of a 'custodian' trained in life saving, and other swimmers, as well as regular clearance of water weeds by the town council, helped ensure that people enjoyed swimming in relative safety. After the bathing place was closed, swimming became forbidden under the Cam Conservancy's bye-laws, but now the Conservancy no longer forbids swimming between the Mill Pond and Byron's Pool.

In August of this year a 12-year-old boy drowned hereabouts. The recent inquest found that the death was accidental. Though a witness saw the victim 'mucking about' with friends on the riverbank, all that could be done to try to save him was done. It was suggested however that the boy might have survived had there been a life-belt available.

Wilbraham River Protection Society The Chairman's report for the AGM on 21 November (at 7.30pm in Great Wilbraham school) dwells on rainfall and water abstraction. In recent years the flow in the river has followed a different pattern from that recalled in the 1970s and 80s; since then there has been a regular reduction and often a cessation in the flow during the autumn and winter that was not observed before. The Society continues to work closely with the Cambridge Water Company (which abstracts water from the Chalk aquifer which supplies the Wilbraham River) and the Environment Agency (which issues abstraction licences).

Last year the group was invited by the Cambridge Water Company, to nominate a representative onto the Local Water Forum; this group comprises local, interested delegates who are charged with the task of challenging the Cambridge Water Company Business Plan (2015-2020). This is being prepared as part of the regulator Ofwat's Asset Management Programme 6 (AMP6). The Society's involvement will continue until submission of the Business Plan to Ofwat in 2014 and will be providing the Society with a forum through which the case for greater protection of the river flows and the associated environment can be made.



Autumn 2009 at Sainsbury's,

CAM VALLEY MATTERS No.6 10 December 2013
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Paradise scraped The marsh at Paradise Local Nature Reserve (beside the Cam at Newnham) had become dominated by vigorous sedge and was beginning to dry out through succession. The City Council have recently deepened the central area to increase seasonal standing water (see photograph) and increase the diversity of aquatic and marginal plants. Without intervention the marsh will gradually fill with silt and dead plant material (litter) and there will be a succession towards a wet woodland community resulting in a loss of habitat diversity on the site.

The surrounding willow has also been cut back, and coppiced to increase light levels, whilst the majority of the remaining marsh has been cut and raked to remove the litter, the accumulation of which brings about the later stages in a similar succession towards the wet

woodland, and loss, in this case, of the marsh habitat. In addition a large area of nettles growing on a mound by the riverside path have been removed and this area will be managed to allow views into the marsh throughout the summer. In December and January the boardwalk from the Lammas land car park to Owlstone Croft will be extended to retain access throughout the wet winter months. (Guy Belcher)



Cherry Hinton Brook: before.....and.....after

Guy Belcher, the City Council's Nature Conservation Officer, has also been masterminding the clearance of shrubs and saplings along the banks of the Cherry Hinton Brook between Sainsbury's and Cherry Hinton Hall, so that more light reaches the water and the banks thus encouraging a greater variety of wildlife. Friends of the Brook organised their usual litter pick in November (which yet again had to focus on Sainsbury's) and are excited that this year water voles have been making a comeback as in other tributaries of the Cam.



During November a speeding cyclist was hauled out of the Brook together with his bike, haversack, mobile phone, wads of banknotes, and language to make a maiden blush. Nevertheless it is universally acknowledged (by cautious cyclists and pedestrians alike) that Snakey Path is not wide enough.

Route 3 Blockage Hobson's Brook rises at Nine Wells and flows to Conduit Head at the junction of Trumpington Road and Lensfield Road. Here it subdivides and goes underground. Route 3 goes to Emmanuel College Lake and Christ's College Master's garden. At great cost CCTV is being used to locate, and then remove, complete pipe blockages by plugs of tree roots under Parker's Piece. The photograph (by City Drainage Engineer, Alan Wingfield) shows contractors displaying one of the plugs.