

Cam Valley Forum **Speaking and acting for the conservation of the River Cam**

Chairman's report to the Annual General Meeting on the Forum's work 2018-2019

The Cam Valley Forum has been busy since I took over the Chairmanship from Jean Perraton, last March. The year has been marked by useful discussions and encounters as well as much physical engagement of volunteers with river-related work to improve its environment. My first duty is to thank Jean for her help in my transition to the Chairmanship and to say how delighted we all are that her returning health has made it possible for her to attend almost all our meetings. Long may that continue. Thank you again Jean for your wisdom and guidance.

The Forum has THREE great concerns for the River that need highlighting regularly.

- We are threatened by an enduring loss of ground water for our River's chalk spring sources through over-abstraction and now lowering winter rainfall.
- Our water quality is, over all, 'moderate' and in some long tributaries 'poor', when it could be 'good' or 'high' quality. Pollution (from under-treated sewage and agriculture) is still a problem.
- Massive urbanisation is a continuing threat to green space, environmental tranquility and biodiversity. Unchecked, developers can still be deceitful destroyers of our wild heritage.

At our last AGM we welcomed Catherine Moncrieff (from WWF) who gave us her perspective on the considerable threat to fresh water resources that the world, as a whole, faces. Gross pollution, destruction of catchment vegetation, overuse and waste of water and then inexorable climate change are having a more severe impact on other areas of the world than we may have to face here. However, if Cambridge is to show leadership of *any kind* in sustainable development the least we can do here is (a) to work to improve the management of our own River catchment and (b) to show off with greater 'Earth Optimism'¹ what can be achieved against these odds now. We need our successes; and this is the more so when Cambridgeshire itself is beset with development pressures that threaten to destroy much of the wild nature, peace and tranquility of our environment. Catherine encouraged us to perhaps take a 'Natural Capital'² approach as a way of fighting for what we want to achieve. To this end we and some others locally have made a start.

Your CVF Committee is representative of farming, conservation, heritage, angling, boating, canoeing, wildlife watching, walking and river swimming - to name but few of our interests. We meet roughly every 6 weeks (about 8 times in the year). We have in our number knowledgeable 'river' voices on local heritage, the arts, local planning and development issues. We have had continuing support and contribution to our web pages from Anne Miller and to our Newsletter from David Brooks, our Editor and Membership Secretary, and from Richard Wells, our Honorary Treasurer, who has had a quantum leap in book-keeping to cope with due to our greater annual funding turnover. John Terry's minuting of our meetings has been much appreciated. We are grateful for the occasional attendances and contributions of Peter Landshoff (Cambridge Ahead), Wendy Blythe (FeCRA), Guy Belcher (City Ecology Officer), Daniel Weaver (South Cambs Ecology Officer), Ellis Selway (EA River geomorphologist), Sam Sweeney (EA Catchment Coordinator), Rob Mungovan (Trout Trust), Caroline Wright (City Community Artist) & Tom Larnach (Cam Conservators River Manager) who have individually all spoken and contributed at our meetings this past year. Thanks to all of them.

The Floating Pennywort Battle. During this past year, two of our committee members have continued to give the elimination of this invasive non-native species an immense amount of their time. What is more they have been spectacularly successful. I pay tribute here to **Anne Miller** and **Mike Foley** especially. Anne joined us in 2017 when she realised that Floating Pennywort threatened utterly the viability and enjoyment of the Upper River (from Byron's pool to the Mill Pool). What started initially two years ago with some help from Scudamores and Colin Sparkes of the Conservators has grown into a full scale assault.

Initially Mike and Anne experimented with a variety of rakes and ingenious floating booms to try to reduce it however, despite many efforts to eliminate it in spring 2017, the plant grew extensively that summer blocking the river, from side to side, by the end of the year. The key problem was identified as

strands of weed trapped by tree branches dipping into the river. These remnants are almost impossible to eliminate completely, even from a canoe. Anne fully realised that solving this was going to require professional help to do 'tree works', to remove these branches, and that this would require money. She set about both raising funds and managing a solution. If we were to engage contractors and to run volunteer working parties in our name we needed insurance as well which is costly. Anne and Mike went to great lengths with Clive Brown to organise a public liability insurance cover for our volunteers and the CVF. This we have continued into 2019.

Anne masterminded the fund raising. Peter Landshoff pointed out that we had the opportunity to get funding from Cambridge water's PEBBLE Fund. Trumpington Farm Estates, Grantchester Parish Council, and CVF pledged an initial £1,250 which the PEBBLE fund then topped up with a grant of £4,385. The Environment Agency then matched it; the Cam Conservators and Scudamores provided £500 each and Grantchester Village Trust made another donation of £250. By the time that the work started, in February 2018, it became clear that it was too wet to work from the land so Scudamores also generously provided two giant punts for a total of 110 days for the contractors to work from. Trumpington Farm Company offered to help in removing the 'tree works' debris. (Some of these gifts were acknowledged in the 2017/18 accounts). The tree works then got thoroughly under way and continued for 7 weeks. Work was made difficult at times by the flooding and the cold brought by the 'Beast from the East'. However, the flooding helped by flushing Pennywort fragments down stream and even diluting the nutrient rich water that Pennywort so loves. The frost reduced the bulk and vigour of the Pennywort although it does not easily kill it. Our contractors developed a very efficient method of working from the punts which so impressed the Environment Agency that they gave the project an additional grant of £14,650 to allow treeworks to continue downstream towards Cambridge. As CVF is too small to receive EA funding directly this grant was kindly managed by the Wildlife Trust BCN, who also helped on the placement of 'habitat refuges' for birds and fish. These refuges were protected from Pennywort by booms installed by the Cambridge Canoe Club volunteers. South Cams then granted us £2,880 in the spring of 2018 for two follow up Hit Squads later on. The efforts of our contractors were complemented by an estimated 560 hours of volunteer time over the full year. We ran a major working party together with the Cambridge Canoe Club in July, with a fleet of 11 canoes and a bank party, and a second land based working party in December. A large number of committed volunteers helped on an individual basis by tracking down and removing any remaining strands of pennywort before they could spread. The result is that the Upper Cam is now effectively Pennywort free, although we are aware of a few 'risk' areas where it appears to have taken root, which will need careful monitoring during the 2019 growing season. One of these risk areas is the ditch round Bronze Horse Island in Grantchester Mill Pond, where we paid for a silt survey as part of an investigation into whether it would be worth desilting the ditch to remove the residual Pennywort. This involved detailed discussion with the EA, Grantchester Parish Council and local landowners.

It was splendid that the CVF Pennywort pulling party appeared on **BBC Countryfile** in the Autumn. Mike Foley has been a persistent bankside monitor and remover of Pennywort and has continued our upstream successes further down stream to the Middle and Lower River, to Fen Ditton and beyond. In 2019 we hope to work with the Cam Conservator's River Manager in driving this plant nearer to local eradication downstream of Cambridge. 'Vigilance' is the watchword.

Grantchester issues.

We have been involved in two consultations in Grantchester this year. The Grantchester Mill pond has some deep silt areas that have attracted Floating Pennywort and Himalayan Balsam. Grantchester Parish council is now seeking to agree and facilitate changes there. In the Grantchester Meadows the hot summer of 2018 put pressure on the river banks that are increasingly being eroded by cattle going into the river to drink. We are working with the land owners and Environment Agency to better this situation as it may affect river water quality.

Visits. In June Forum members visited the Mill River Nature Reserve in Shingay-cum-Wendy, with the guidance of Will Garnett. The Mill River (stream) is a tributary of the Rhee and has had its flow impressively improved by remodelling by Rob Mungovan and Ruth Hawksley. In July we had an informative visit to the Anglian Water Recycling (Sewage) Works in Milton. This is impressive and 'state of the art' and its massive treated water out-flow into the River far better than that of many rural sewage

works that are responsible for much phosphate river pollution. We thank Keri Williams, the site manager, for our visit.

The Rush Project. On balance, we are happy that this project, on the stream crossing Fen Causeway, has been greeted with general approval. The flow is both constant and considerable and certainly providing a healthier flow which is encouraging several more fish species to migrate up-river. The scheme is being monitored as it may need more change yet to get it right. Rob Mungovan (Trout Trust) has reported this year a sea-trout being caught in the Rhee: the first ever recorded upstream of Cambridge. We are delighted that local children are engaged now in many activities relating to the Rush.

Networking and Consultation. Members of the Cam Valley Forum Committee have been drawn in to some involvement with major local forward planning issues. Cambridge and South Cambs are now amongst the fastest growing areas in Europe; the juggernaut of an unsustainable urbanisation is sadly rolling over us all. For example, Uttlesford District Council (in Essex) is planning an estate of 5000 houses just over the County boundary at Stump Cross, the effluent and run-off from which might come into the Cam at Hinxton. We are part of the small consultational **Cam Catchment Group** and a wider Cam and Ely Ouse Catchment Group (**CamEO**). These do offer government funding for river improvements that we are able to benefit from. However, at the same time such meetings make us aware that the Environment Agency and Natural England *are floundering* under very heavy staff reductions and cuts to the continuance of good scientific monitoring and work for conservation. *We should not underestimate the threats of combining such austerity measures with wrong-headed societal development goals.* I hope that the CVF will continue to be a *forum* bringing together all those concerned for the River Cam. This requires us to be inclusive, and with an open agenda, and as widely representative of the river interests as is feasible and wanted. It is also important for the Forum to be a *facilitator* for action to safeguard the River Cam and we need to positively express our considered and pragmatic view to both public and private bodies, alike, and to the media. Nevill Wilmer, one of the founders of the Forum, hoped that the River Cam would be honoured with the highest possible conservation status. Let us keep this mission in mind.

Membership. Welcome to new members and volunteers. We have an evolving membership of *Individual Members* or *Life Members* for whose financial support we are always very grateful. Some 25 of our current members have signed in (or re-joined) through our web pages, which encourage web-site visitors to audit their contributory skills. We have a standing list of some 43 volunteers many of whom have done sterling work. **Your River needs your active support!** Our CVF Newsletters go to over 150 individual people, by e-mail, and a small handful of others, by post. Of all these recipients some 35 are individuals who run other community groups or small river groups to whom we are akin. We are delighted, this year, to welcome several new *Individual Members*: Matt Boxall, Quentin Cooke, Alan Coulson, Will Garnett and Sue Holgate. Alan Coulson was co-opted to our Committee last year and speaks for the local angling fraternity. Will Garnett chairs the new 'Mill River Group', an upper tributary on the Rhee with its own new Nature Reserve. Friends of Sheep's Green Learner Pool are new *Supporting Members*. Finally, we are honoured that Prof Keith Richards has upgraded his subscription to being a *Life Member*. Keith is unquestionably the most distinguished worldwide river specialist in Cambridge - his research all sounds highly pertinent to caring for our small but celebrated little River Cam, so we shall treasure his advice when we can get it.

Stephen P. Tomkins (Chairman)
phone 01223 276947 email: spt22@cam.ac.uk

<https://camvalleyforum.uk/>

20th March 2019

-
1. 'Earth Optimism' is part of a growing, global movement. We need to change the conversation from 'gloom and doom' to building a global community of practice around what is working in conservation.
 2. 'Natural Capital' can be defined as the world's stocks of *natural* assets which include geology, soil, air, water and all living things. It is from this *natural capital* that humans derive a wide range of services, often called ecosystem services, which make human life possible.

Cam Valley Forum

ACCOUNTS

for the year ended 31st December 2018

	2018 £	2017 £
INCOME		
Members subscriptions	540	510
Donations	95	15
Sales of books and postcards	6	1
Interest accrued on NS&I deposit	233	113
Interest accrued on Nationwide bond	73	71
Sponsorship and Grants	9,265	2,100
	<u>10,212</u>	<u>2,810</u>
EXPENDITURE		
Postage and office expenses	135	121
Room Hire - Meetings & AGM	38	93
Insurance	651	38
Website	162	-
Audit	30	30
Pennywort Project	6,340	804
Tools and Expenses	318	-
World Rivers Day Exhibition , September	-	282
Donation Kingfisher Bridge Trust	-	50
Donation World Wildlife Fund	50	-
	<u>7,724</u>	<u>1,418</u>
Income less expenditure	2,488	1,392
Accumulated funds b/fwd	14,401	13,009
Accumulated funds carried forward	<u><u>16,889</u></u>	<u><u>14,401</u></u>

Cam Valley Forum

ACCOUNTS

for the year ended 31st December 2018

- continued

	2018 £	2017 £
Current assets		
Cash at Bank – Current a/c	2,471	3,129
NS&I Bond 1.95% to 09 Dec 2021	6,302	6,069
Nationwide 1.4% Bond to 20 Apr 2019	5,276	5,203
Stock, postcards and booklets	-	10
Debtor,	2,880	-
Prepayments	641	-
	<u>17,570</u>	<u>14,411</u>
Less current liabilities		
Creditor, Room Hire, 2017 AGM	-	(48)
Debtor, over payment	-	38
Outstanding cheques drawn	681	-
	<u>16,889</u>	<u>14,401</u>
Net Assets	<u>16,889</u>	<u>14,401</u>
REPRESENTED BY		
Accumulated fund b/fwd	14,401	13,009
Surplus/(Deficit) for year	2,488	1,392
	<u>16,889</u>	<u>14,401</u>
Accumulated funds carried forward	<u>16,889</u>	<u>14,401</u>

Report of the Auditor

I have examined this Balance Sheet and Income and Expenditure Account prepared from the records of the Cam Valley Forum.

I certify that, in my opinion, they give a fair and accurate statement, respectively of the financial position of the Cam Valley Forum, as at 31st December 2018 and of its income and expenditure over the year then ended.

N. F. Heath

Nicholas Heath, MA, ACA, ATII.
Hon. Auditor

14 March 2019