

# DECLARATION of the RIGHTS of the RIVER CAM

## *Knowing that rivers are essential to life:*

Rivers are essential to all life. They support a glorious diversity of species and ecosystems, feed wetlands and other aquatic habitats, deliver life-giving nutrients to coastal estuaries and oceans and carry sediments to river deltas that should be teeming with life.

Rivers play a vital role in the Earth's water cycle. This requires careful maintenance of their surrounding river catchments, floodplains, and wetlands.

People are dependent on rivers for clean water for drinking and sanitation, fertile soil, food sources, recreation and culture, and nourishment of the human spirit.

## *Recognising that our river is under threat:*

The threats to our rivers are connected to the climate and biodiversity emergencies threatening all life on earth.

Our river is polluted with raw sewage, agricultural run-off of herbicides, pesticides and nutrients, and plastic and other waste from industry and human lack of care. Such pollution endangers the health of the river ecosystems, human health, and our interaction with the river.

Consistent flows are vital to the survival of the River's ecosystems and the ecosystems of its surrounding banks and wetlands. The excessive abstraction of water from the aquifers that feed the River Cam and its tributaries has dangerously reduced its natural flow and threatens its future as a globally treasured chalk stream.

The River has been adversely affected for generations by human changes to its banks, and encroachment on its flood plains. A planned massive increase in buildings and infrastructure will further fragment habitats, reduce biodiversity, imperil fish populations, and the retention of sediments and nutrients, fundamental to downstream ecosystem health. It will directly affect the flow of the River and its streams, and the level of ground water. It will exacerbate climate change which rebounds on river health, through excessive use of cement and concrete.

National and international laws are inadequate to protect the health of rivers and river basins. These laws fail to ensure the provision of adequate supplies of clean water to present and future living things and their ecosystems.

## *Acting in solidarity with communities across the earth*

We act in recognition and respect for the Indigenous communities and people of all faiths and none, who have long held that nature, has rights, and that rivers have a special place in the recognition of these rights. We recognise the sacrifice that many have made, killed in their defence of nature and that in declaring rights of our river we act in their support.

We are part of a growing worldwide movement seeking to reverse environmental degradation through the recognition of nature rights, including river rights. In sharing rights with rivers, we show our determination to end the human exploitation of nature and, instead, to live in harmony with it.

## *Declaring the rights of the River Cam*

We therefore declare that the River Cam, its tributaries, and aquifers have the following rights arising from their very existence in nature:

- ♣ The right to flow and be free from over-abstraction.
- ♣ The right to be free from pollution.
- ♣ The right to perform its essential functions of flooding, moving sediment, recharging groundwater and sustaining biodiversity.
- ♣ The right to feed and be fed by sustainable aquifers.
- ♣ The right to native biodiversity.
- ♣ The right to restoration.
- ♣ The right to maintain its connections with other streams and rivers.

In declaring the rights of the River Cam, we are, at the same time, declaring the rights of all rivers. We acknowledge especially, the rights of the River Great Ouse and its tributaries which the Cam meets at Ely and which carries the waters of the Cam to its estuary in the Wash.

## *We pledge to act as Guardians of the River Cam*

reducing the threats to its health and survival. We call on all people to engage with the River in a relationship of respect and stewardship and to cease its exploitation.

*Midsummer Day 21st June 2021*