



## River Festival Report 25th September 2022



### Who we are

Love our Ouse is an exciting new community based initiative to link people to **celebrate**, **learn** about and upscale **positive action** for our river from source to sea. We believe the Ouse has the right to support a rich biodiversity of life and a thriving riverside community.

Love our Ouse is about being inclusive and connecting all sorts of people; residents, community groups, recreational users, landowners, farmers and everything in between! We will help prioritise communities who will be most affected by the adverse impacts of pollution, climate change and other threats to river ecology.

We engage in strong partnership working with key stakeholders such as local authorities, environmental organisations and regulators. We hope to benefit existing organisation's positive work by increasing engagement and support as well as create increased accountability for those with statutory duties.

### Event Overview

Love our Ouse partnered with the **Railway Land Wildlife Trust** to deliver a one day, **free** and **inclusive** River Festival event. It was Love our Ouse's official launch and comprised a grand taster of what we are about and wish to develop in the future.

We curated a huge range of activities for people to engage with consisting of our own projects, as well as inviting many external individuals, groups and organisations to participate to create a rich and varied offering. We were determined that there be something for everyone!

## The Festival Team

### Love Our Ouse Directors

Emma Montlake, Natasha Padbury & Duncan Rawson

### Railway Land Wildlife Trust

Headed by Helen Meade & Milly Hawkins

### Steering group member

Cllr Matthew Bird

### Festival team

Catriona Soutar, Lizzie Lower & Lynda Durrant

19 hard working volunteers - thank you!



## Supporters & Funders

Railway Land Wildlife Trust

Lewes Town Council

Lewes District Council

Big Lottery Community Fund

Chalk Cliff Trust

## Participation

We brought together a wide range of Ouse river enthusiasts, supporters, investors, stakeholders, recreational users, experts and revellers to the festival. They included:

[Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust](#)

[Sussex Flow Initiative](#)

[Sussex Wildlife Trust](#)

[Environment Agency](#)

[Southern Water](#)

[Lewes District Council](#)

[South Downs National Park](#)

[Sussex University](#)

[Paul Powesland, Rights for Nature](#)

[The Aquifer Partnership](#)

[Ouse Angling Preservation Society](#)

[Human Nature](#)

[Lewes Climate Hub](#)

[Seaford Environmental Alliance](#)

[Sussex Ouse Restoration Trust](#)

[Strandliners](#)

[Marine Conservation Society](#)

[Lewes Rowing Club](#)

[Jon Mason, story teller and PhD researcher, University of Brighton](#)

[Angels with Attitude Choir](#)

[Tide Mills Community Choir](#)

[Patina - Moving on Parade](#)

[Local guided walk experts Jon Bleach, Jenny Lindop and Steve Homewood](#)

...and more!

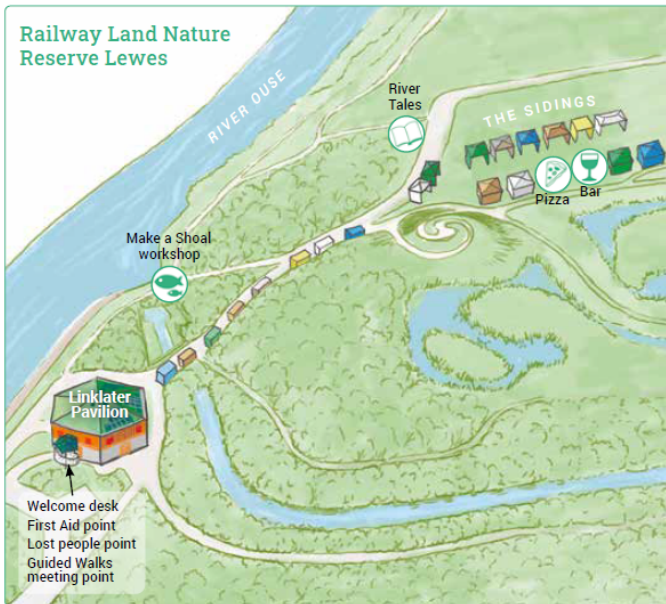


# Event programme

## River Village

**Stalls include:**  
Lewes District Council  
Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust  
Sussex Flow Initiative  
The Aquifer Partnership  
Sussex Wildlife Trust

Ouse Valley Climate Action Project  
Marine Conservation Society  
Seaford Environmental Alliance  
Ouse Angling Preservation Society  
Human Nature  
Lewes Rowing Club  
... and many more



Kindly supported by



Brought to you by



visit: [LoveourOuse.org](http://LoveourOuse.org) [@loveourouse](https://www.instagram.com/loveourouse) [Love Our Ouse](https://www.facebook.com/LoveOurOuse)

**celebrate, learn, act!**

**Sunday 25th September  
11am-5pm FREE!**  
**Railway Land Lewes**

**RIVER SUMMIT**  
Talks by Ouse experts  
Learn about our river and how to act to protect it

**GUIDED WALKS**  
Family fun and activities

**INFORMATION STALLS**  
Interactive River Ouse mapping

Be serenaded by river and sea songs!  
Get involved in the Railway Land's new Nature Links Community Action Project!

**River Revelry 7.30-10pm**  
**Linklater Pavilion ENTRY £6.50**  
A poetic and musical experience!

**love our Ouse**  
A day for everyone to come together to celebrate, learn and take action for our river Ouse

Other activities mentioned: River Tales storytelling, Community Ouse photo gallery, Yummy wood-fired Pat's Pizza, Bar refreshments, Arts & Crafts Help make a shoal!

## River Festival A day for everyone to come together to celebrate, learn and take action for our river Ouse

**River Summit** Join our programme of expert-led talks, and take part in hands-on activities to help shape the rights of our river

### Linklater Pavilion Upstairs Drop-in free talks

**11am An Introduction to the Ouse**  
*Peter King, Director, Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust*  
Overview of the river, the state it's in, the pressures it's under, and some of the solutions available.

**11.50am The Winterbourne and Cockshut**  
*Marcus Taylor*  
A look at two streams in Lewes which, though very short, have had significant effects on the town over the centuries.

**12.30pm The Ouse, A Changing Climate**  
*Matthew Bird, Lead Cabinet Member for Sustainability Lewes District Council*  
A talk outlining impacts on the Ouse from past, present and future climate change and how we might develop catchment-resilient communities.

**PLUS**  
*Stephanie Mills, Project Development Officer, South Downs National Park Authority*  
An overview of the National Lottery-funded community-led climate action project.

**1.20pm Rights of Rivers: Session 1**  
*Paul Powlesland, Lawyers for Nature*  
An introduction to the river's legal status and how it can be granted rights as a living entity.

**2.10pm Rights of Rivers: Session 2**  
*Paul Powlesland, with Emma Montlake, Environmental Law Foundation and Duncan Rawson of Love Our Ouse*  
A facilitated session to assist the audience to draft their own rights of river declaration.

**2.50pm Public participation in environmental decision making**  
*Alex Shattock of Landmark Chambers*  
Find out about opportunities for you to make your voice heard in environmental decisions being made at a local level by our regulators.

**3.30pm Environmental Information Regulations (EIR)**  
*Led by Law Students, Sussex University*  
An important tool in the activist's chest, the Environmental Information Regulations, akin to Freedom of Information (FOI) are useable by anyone wanting to discover environmental information held by any Public Body.

**4.15pm River Question Time Panel**  
*Chaired by Henri Brocklebank, Director Conservation Policy and Evidence at Sussex Wildlife Trust*  
This is your chance to 'ask the experts' everything you'd like to know about our river and how best to take care of it. With representatives from Southern Water, Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust, Sussex Flow Initiative, the Environment Agency and Lewes District Council, alongside the Love Our Ouse team, do take the opportunity to put your questions to our panel and join the debate.

### Linklater Pavilion Downstairs Drop-in throughout the day

**Community Mapping**  
Make your mark in our community mapping session, showing how the river is important to you and flagging up your own key locations. Help build up a picture of the role the River Ouse plays in the heart of local life!

**Nature Links Community Action Project**  
Come and find out about the Railway Land Wildlife Trust's new project, focusing on building links with our blue and green spaces. Share your ideas and discover how you can get involved!

**And much more...**  
Enjoy contributions from Lewes year 6 pupils in Patina's Floating 'Wish Fish' sculpture display, and contribute to our 'Rights of Rivers' action plan, helping draw up a charter to give the Ouse its voice.

### Outdoors Activities

**Guided Ouse Walks**  
**Meet at the Welcome Desk**  
Learn more about the Railway Land Nature Reserve and the river that shapes it. Led by local river-lovers and experts, find out more about this very special location. Places limited, pre-book via eventbrite:



**Book Guided Walks with Steve Homewood:**  
[www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/411475944627](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/411475944627)



**Book Guided Walks with Jenny Lindop:**  
[www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/411492102957](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/411492102957)

**Make a Shoal Workshop**  
Drop-in throughout the day  
Get creative with an artist-led drop-in session for all the family, showing you how to make your own beautiful fish artwork! Our shoal will be displayed close to the mullet's natural gathering point at the Ouse overflow.

### River Tales Drop-in free activities

**11am, 1pm, 3pm Storytelling**  
Listen to the stories the river has to tell us. Local storyteller Jon Mason brings you tales of lives lived by the Ouse, and the dreams and beliefs of Sussex past and present.

**12pm Navigating the River**  
An insight into navigation of the Ouse past and present from experienced yachtsman David Sykes of Lewes Rowing Club.

**2pm Swimmers' Singalong with Tide Mills Choir**  
Tide Mills Choir will serenade us with songs of the river and sea. All welcome to join our performance of Loudon Wainwright 3rd's joyous 'Swimming Song'.  
Lyrics here: <https://loveourouse.org/song>

**4pm The river as boundary and barrier**  
**Meet at the Welcome Desk**  
Local historian John Bleach will discuss various historical aspects about the river from Lewes to the sea, and identify a number of river crossing points - bridges, ferries, fords - that have been in use during the last thousand years or so.

### River Revelry A poetic and musical experience!

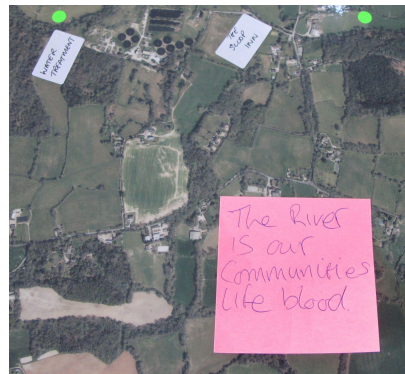
**Sunday 25 September**  
**7.30pm - 10pm**  
**Tickets £6.50**

Book on Eventbrite  
[www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/411502754817](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/411502754817)

# Love our Ouse activities

## Community Mapping

Love our Ouse delivered their first community mapping exercise. It consisted of a large interactive map taking in the whole length of the Ouse and surrounding 4km of land. People were asked to share their concerns, experiences and mark key features of the river by writing on post it notes which they stuck directly on the map.



## Aims and purpose

- Gauge and understand how people interact and connect with their river
- Build a picture of what's important to people
- Identify and build upon key features of the river
- Create a means for identifying problems & solutions
- Identify and sign up interested people/groups to get involved
- Help prioritise, link up & focus learning areas and actions

The brief was pretty broad but was tailored around our three pillars: Celebrate, Learn and Act.

It was a popular activity gathering 128 entries.

## Key observations

- Themes overlap -often over 3-4 at one time and usually consist of a **specific place**, how they **interact** with the river and an **emotional response**. Often includes **wildlife** references too. It's all about **specific experiences** and **connections** with place/nature that were most significant to people!
- The denser areas of comments are at high public use locations e.g. Barcombe Mills and Piddinghoe. These include on/in water activities. Also include more pollution/sewage based comments
- The river is active in hosting a wide variety of recreational activities. Nature spotting was the highest ranking activity at 30%, swimming at 23% and combined kayaking/canoeing/paddleboarding at 13%. Unsurprisingly Barcombe Mills and Southease/Piddinghoe areas were the most densely populated with comments. People mentioned 19 species including invertebrates, birds and fish. Kingfishers were the most popular.
- Solutions/Aspirations include improvements to amenities/water quality to enhance recreational use, suggestions of actions others should take (rather than what they can or are taking)
- Problem and solutions were few with pollution and flooding are the top concern areas

**A full report is available on request!**



## Rights of River Charter

A facilitated session to assist the audience to draft their own Rights of River Declaration. Giving river's legal rights of personhood is an innovative and bold new approach getting traction globally. Love our Ouse are leading in the development of a community led charter to use as a framework for upholding the Ouse's rights to live and thrive as a living entity.



Capturing the output from the River Festival



The right not to be polluted



The right to its own ecology



The right to flow



The right to be consulted

The right not to be polluted



Free of invasive species  
Free of pollutants  
Not to be poisoned  
To be clean  
No plastics

The right to its own ecology



Rich diversity of life  
Life to flow and flourish  
Filled with native species  
Healthy ecosystem with and without its banks

The right to flow



Flowing where the river wants to go  
To flood, to extend, to contract

The right to be consulted



Access throughout the waterways  
To have its voice heard  
To be consulted on planning applications

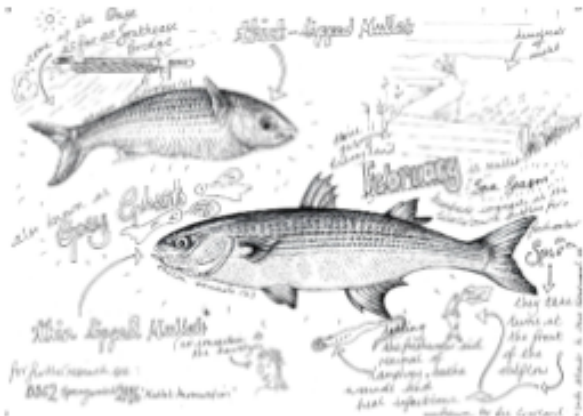
## Swimming Song

Love our Ouse commissioned TheTide Mills Community Choir to rehearse and sing The Swimming Song by Loudon Wainwright III. It is a celebratory ode to outdoor swimmers and even included a verse about the Ouse and swimming in Poo due to regular sewage discharges!



## Create a Shoal workshop

Love our Ouse commissioned local artist Rebecca Garland to deliver a workshop making beautiful paper fish inspired by local species found in the Ouse.





## Talks & Debate

A day of talks on ecology, environmental law, climate change, history and Q&A sessions upstairs in the Linklater Pavilion.









# River Revelry

An evening of live poetry, spoken word and music inspired by the Ouse and the magic of rivers!  
The ticketed event was attended by 100 people.



**River Revelry** ★  
Sunday 25th September  
★ 7.30pm-10pm  
Linklater Pavilion, Railway Land, Lewes

Tickets £6.50

A diverse and eclectic range of music and poetry performance inspired by the river.  
Curated by John May of 'The Happening'.  
DJ set of Watery Sounds plus bar!

All proceeds go to support the Railway Land Wildlife Trust and Love our Ouse projects.

*A social, poetic and musical experience!*

Brought to you by  
**love our Ouse**  
LEWES RAILWAY LAND Wildlife Trust

Book on Eventbrite  
[www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/411502754817](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/411502754817)

[www.LoveourOuse.org](http://www.LoveourOuse.org) @loveourouse Love Our Ouse



## Feedback

*“Congratulations on such a fantastic event! We were very busy all day with interested visitors – in fact the most interest we have had from any event we have attended since 2017. We would definitely like to attend if you have more events in future. Good luck with the next Love Our Ouse venture.”*

Aimee Felus, Programme Delivery Manager  
The Aquifer Partnership

*“It was such a great festival both day and night. I had a great time taking my children along in the day and particularly liked the eco-vibe - ie the lack of 'stuff' available to buy which as a parent, often causes tension for me, both financially, but also in trying to help the children understand they don't need/can't buy it all! The craft activities were lovely and a great opportunity for gentle learning.*

*I loved being a part of the poetry and music evening and it was an inspired idea to bring the arts into Love our Ouse; it works for me as I feel nature and creativity are so closely linked.*

*I like the idea of using the Ouse to inspire writing, poetry, music, painting etc. And I think there are some projects that could work well.*

*Well done team! Great local community activism.”*

Lucy Foss, local resident

*“Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust think this was a fantastic event and well done to all those involved in the organising of it. To have attracted 1600+ people to something like this is a huge achievement and not something I suspect could have been achieved by many others, so brilliant job.*

*The festival certainly enabled OART to showcase its work and we were busy all day talking to people about the river and some of the solutions we are working on. It has connected us with individuals and organisations who probably weren't on our radar and has opened lots of discussions and potential new collaborations. So from our perspective it was brilliant and we couldn't have asked for more (I mean more time to actually look around ourselves would have been great but then being too busy talking to interested people is equally as great).”*

Peter King, Director  
Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust





## Assessment

**It was a truly magical and epic day!** The best launch of Love our Ouse that we could have asked for. We had beautiful sunny weather, an amazing public turnout of **1600 visitors** throughout the day and we've had such a lot of positive feedback since.

The event took an enormous amount of planning, outreach and manpower. It was a huge collaborative effort. It was the biggest Ouse themed event the District has seen. It was delivered in a professional, safe and organised manner.

The event brought together many river related groups that had never met. It was so inspiring to see all these different groups, organisations and individuals all come together to give our precious Ouse pride of place for the day.

We discovered that there are many river focused groups and organisations willing to participate and collaborate.

The event provided means for groups to link up, network and talk to each other.

It was an ambitious, balanced programme that had broad appeal to lots of people.

There was a good combination of cultural, environmental, and heritage engagement elements.

There was plenty of opportunity to learn about the river, its threats and what it needs to be protected, enhanced and resilient.

There were many opportunities for serious debate as well as fun and silly activities too.

There was significant representation from those with statutory duties for the river.

It was clear that there is plenty of appetite for River Ouse themed activities.

We were able to demonstrate that our strengths lie in:

- Curating exciting event programmes
- Collaborating with and coordinating a wide variety of groups and stakeholders
- Community outreach
- Communicating using a number of platforms (digital and print)
- Provision of our own engaging activities

### Special thanks to

Railway Land Wildlife Trust for hosting, supporting and providing such valuable expertise and volunteers in both planning and delivery. We couldn't have done it without you!

Lewes District Council - Cllr Matthew Bird, Bryn Mabey, Jane Goodall and Ellen Miller

John May for curating the River Revelry

Photos credit to Willie Robb

### Contact

Website: [www.loveourouse.org](http://www.loveourouse.org)

Email: [Info@loveourouse.org](mailto:Info@loveourouse.org)

Registered Community Interest Company number 14073301.

