

**Love our Ouse**  
**25th February 2025**

**'First River in UK to have its Rights Recognised'**

Love Our Ouse welcomes Lewes District Council's decision to support a Charter of Rights for the Sussex River Ouse - the first time a UK council has done so for a river. Whilst not yet legally binding, the Charter provides a visionary framework that reflects both the essential needs of the river in order for it to be healthy, and local communities highest aspirations for it. Such rights include the right to biodiversity, to be free from damaging pollution and the right to a say in decisions which affect it. It sets out a renewed relationship between people and nature in which the river's essential rights are clearly articulated alongside human's duty of care and responsibility to uphold these rights.

Community initiative Love Our Ouse, first introduced the concept at the River Festival in Lewes in September 2022. Lewes District Council passed a motion in February 2023 that committed the council to exploring the production of a '*Rights of River Declaration for the River Ouse*' within 2 years. Love Our Ouse, first introduced the concept at the *River Festival* in Lewes in September 2022. Lewes District Council passed a motion in February 2023 that committed the council to exploring the production of a 'Rights of River Declaration for the River Ouse' within 2 years.

A Charter steering group was set up with participation from Lewes District Council, Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust, The Railway Land Wildlife Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust and the Southwood Foundation has been co-creating the Charter alongside communities and key stakeholders over the last 2 years. This has also included extensive expert legal advice.

Emma Montlake of the Environmental Law Foundation comments:

'It has been a fascinating journey working with the River Rights steering group to bring the Ouse rights charter into being. Having the confidence of legal oversight of an erstwhile band from Hogan Lovells and that of Monica Feria Tinta. So many have played a role. The charter as it now exists, to be defended and promoted by the Council marks a new chapter for the Ouse's ecological health and its own river governance.'

A *River Rights Summit* in November 2023 brought together local authorities, statutory organisations, conservationists, farmers and others to explore the implications for a Charter. Love Our Ouse held River Rights workshops in local communities from source to sea to gauge support, which was overwhelmingly positive in favour, as well as giving people the opportunity to input what rights the Ouse should have .

Since the motion to Council in 2023, other River Rights initiatives have started across the UK and a national River Rights Network has been established. This is part of a rapidly growing Rights of Nature movement across the World.

Love Our Ouse Director Matthew Bird said:

'This is a momentous moment for the river and goes some way towards recognising that the river is an entity in its own right and that its voice needs to be represented in decisions which

affect it. The river faces numerous challenges including pollution, climate change, over use and development. The Charter provides a common framework through which to address these challenges which we hope the other major stakeholders on the Ouse will feel able to endorse. We hope Lewes District Council's decision to support the Ouse Charter will encourage communities throughout the UK to pursue charters for their local rivers.

We would wholeheartedly like to thank everyone who has been on this journey to date which includes significant support from the National Lottery funded Climate Action Project towards our consultation period. Other key local initiatives are showing support. This includes the Weald to Waves initiative headed by the Knepp Wildlands Foundation.

We look forward to working with stakeholders including statutory agencies, communities and landowners along the Ouse catchment to progress implementation of the Charter.

END

### **Notes**

**For the Charter itself** and accompanying background document see attached documents. Also linked here:  
<https://loveourouse.org/rights-of-rivers/>

**For the Lewes District Council Lead Member decision** to endorse the motion 24th February 2025 see here:  
<https://democracy.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?id=1106&LLL=0>

**The original motion** was passed Monday 20th February 2023 see item 11A here -  
<https://democracy.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=431&MId=3657&Ver=4>

For UK River Rights Network see; [RIVER RIGHTS NETWORK - Home](#)

### **Contact**

For further information contact  
Natasha Padbury  
<https://loveourouse.org/>  
[info@loveourouse.org](mailto:info@loveourouse.org)  
Tel: 07966 880 290

### **Social handles:**

Instagram: @loveourouse  
Facebook: Love Our Ouse

### **About us**

Love our Ouse is an exciting community based initiative to link people to celebrate, raise the profile of and upscale positive action for our river from source to sea. We believe the Sussex Ouse has the right to support a rich biodiversity 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 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.