

Rights of River Ouse Template Motion

Our rivers and waterways face numerous and consistent threats from pollution, invasive species, over development, climate change and other human interventions. No stretch of river in England is in good ecological health, and the Ouse is no exception.

Nature is in decline and a lack of joined up policy and toothless enforcement has exacerbated this.

Rights of Nature is a way of rethinking our relationship with nature. All too often nature is defined in relation to humans and their activities. Rights of nature argues that nature should be recognised as existing on its own terms and have the same kind of legal rights that Human Rights give people.

Rights of Nature also recognises the interdependencies that exist between all living things. Some human rights have been extended to corporations globally – a company which is a wholly fictional entity is recognised as a legal entity distinct from its individual decision makers. If we can define a corporation as having rights, then it does not seem a great leap to suggest that nature and more specifically a river has similar rights?

Some rivers around the World including in New Zealand and Ecuador have been given legal rights of personhood and have guardians to represent them in decisions that affect them.

In February 2023 a motion was passed at Lewes District Council that amongst other things committed the Council to exploring with its communities the possible production of a River Rights Charter within 2 years. In the subsequent 2 years a steering group led by Love Our Ouse and including Lewes District Council, Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Railway Land Wildlife Trust, Environmental Law Foundation and Southwood Foundation developed the Ouse River Rights Charter through numerous community consultation events including a River Summit attended by participants from across the UK.

In March 2025 Lewes District Council gave its formal support to the Charter.

In the intervening time 19 other Rights motions across the Country have been passed including at Wealden District Council, Basingstoke and Deane Council, Test Valley Council and the River Wye Catchment. All have cited Lewes as an inspiration.

Seven Parish Councils in the Ouse Catchment have also passed River Rights Motions to support the River Ouse Charter. None of the River Rights motions passed to date have any legal weight. They currently exert moral rights and in addition provide a framework through which to address the river's health.

The river Ouse has been heavily modified over time and faces significant threats including over development, climate change and pollution.

This motion commits Somewhere Town Council to;

1. Endorsing the River Rights Charter agreed by Lewes District Council in March 2025.
2. Implementing the Charter in all decision making within our control that impacts on the river's health including in planning responses, environmental projects, community engagement, land management and partnerships.
3. The Council resolves to work collaboratively with neighbouring local authorities to create a resilient future for the river

(See appendix for the Ouse River Charter.)

'Template Motion' drafted by Love Our Ouse

For a copy of the Ouse River Charter and for further information on Rights of Rivers see [Rights of Rivers – Love Our Ouse](#)