

Once upon a time a Mammoth was found living in a bog in Oxford. He had lived there since the Ice Age 10,000 years ago. The Government found out and told the Land Owners to look after him. Most of the Land Owners didn't even know he was there. He was frail and thin because the fen where his food plants grew had been overrun with reeds. Every summer bored children set fire to the reeds, destroying what little food he had.

But one day someone came along who recognised what a rare and extraordinary creature this Mammoth was. And this person was an expert on Ice Age bogs and mammoths and decided to become his Keeper.

The Keeper persuaded the Owners to pay someone to cut the reeds and the Keeper's Friends raked them out of the way so that fresh food plants and flowers could grow from the seeds that were dormant in the earth. And these were plants and flowers that the Mammoth had known when he was as young calf in the Ice Age – they were still growing in exactly the same spot, 10,000 years later. And the Mammoth flourished. He ate the fresh green plants and sniffed the scent of the many flowers growing in the valley fen - cream, purple, magenta and white. He drank the special water that fell as rain on the gardens and green spaces around, filtered through the limestone rock, and emerged as springs or wet patches all over his valley. And where the water came out of the ground the plants were crusty, crunchy and delectable because they were coated with the special limestone water.

In the warm sunshine lizards basked on tree stumps, grass snakes on the tussock grass and slow worms coiled in the cool, moist shade. They thrived on the tiny insects, slugs and snails that lived in the fen. Above them dragonflies wheeled and in the evening glow worms' tails shone with eerie light.

An Official Mammoth and Bog Expert came to visit. He said, 'This is the finest Mammoth and Ice Age bog I have seen for many years – maybe the finest in all Oxfordshire – maybe one of the finest in all England. It is so precious it should be recognised as of European Significance.' But only the Keeper was listening.

Then the Land Owners decided they wanted to build houses right next to the Mammoth's bog. 'He'll be fine,' the Developers said, with great authority. 'We are giving him lots of water.' 'In fact', they added, 'it will be even better than before.'

The Keeper and Friends tried to explain that the Mammoth would surely starve as his special Ice Age plants could no longer get their nourishing limestone water from the rainfall-fed natural springs and the new water supply would be poisoned by spills of petrol and oil from the residents' drives. The 'porous' surfaces would become blocked by dust and mud so he would slowly die of hunger and thirst.

But the Land Owners said, 'It is more important to build 10 houses here.' One said, 'We are building 885 houses nearby. Couldn't the 10 families live there?' But the other Land Owners didn't hear him.

So the houses were built and it all came to pass as had been predicted. The rainwater which used to fall on the green field and filter slowly through the limestone rock to feed the plants in the fen was blocked by houses, sheds, greenhouses, patios, barbecues and concrete paths. The water from the roofs ran into a swale or pond, mixed with rotting leaves and rubbish to turn acrid and foul. And the new residents parked their cars on their drives, took them apart, washed them with detergent, changed their oil, and loaded anti freeze. And every time they did this,

chemicals accidentally dripped onto the drive and ran into the swale. And the 'porous' surfaces got blocked with dust and dirt so the springs below the houses ran dry.

And slowly but surely the Mammoth began to lose his fine coat; his tusks fell off and he grew thin as the poisons took their toll and his special Ice Age plants no longer grew there. The water, polluted with debris and chemicals, was not fit for him to drink. The slow worms, grass snakes and lizards disappeared; their food could not live in a poisoned fen. And the glow worms were seen no more.

The Keeper and Friends were distraught. But it was too late. The houses could not be unbuilt. Bit by bit the Mammoth's bog dried out and its plants turned brittle as sticks. Then, one day, the Mammoth died, as his bog had died, after surviving there for 10,000 years.

But the Land Owners didn't notice. It was five years since the houses were built – they had forgotten all about the Mammoth and his fen. They were different people anyway – it wasn't their fault.

And that is the end of the story.
If you have been, thank you for reading it.

If you would like to help look after the Lye Valley's extraordinary fens and wildlife please contact friendsoflyevallye@yahoo.co.uk
Website: <http://www.headington.org.uk/lyevalley/index.html>

The future of the Lye Valley will be decided by East Area Planning Committee. Planning application 13/01555/CT3 Land adjoining Warren Crescent at the Lye Valley SSSI. You can object by emailing: planning@oxford.gov.uk by 22 October 2015.
Then ask your City Councillor what he/she can do to help.