Haslingfield and Harlton Eco Group

Annual Report

February 2024 – March 2025

Summary

Our fourth year of work as a constituted organisation was once again full of activities and outreach. Co-operation, collaboration and resilience have been our keywords this year, with the intention of saying a sustainable, eco-friendly "yes, and" to activities already taking place within our villages and our county.

With four of our members also on the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee, a lot of our energy has gone and will continue to go into that project, which is entirely appropriate as a neighbourhood plan is highly relevant to local sustainability and resilience. We also worked closely with Sustainable Shepreth this year, with members helping out at their Repair Café and Eco Fair as well as partnering on a new South Cambs wide initiative emerging from a Greenpeace Day of Action event.

We continued our regular schedule of attending almost all the Haslingfield Parish Council meetings and providing input into their Climate Emergency and Biodiversity plans. As the chair, Michelle also attends the monthly online Climate Leaders meetings, which attract eco group members from across Cambridgeshire and beyond. Several H&H eco group members attended the County Council Community Energy Stakeholders meeting on 24th April, a Climate Fresk event at the Grand Arcade on 26th October, and the SCDC Local Climate Action Conference 2024 on November 19th.

Highlights of the past year include: the beginnings of a biodiversity project with the Haslingfield Parish council, which so far has included installation of six swift boxes on the Village Hall; partnering with Cambridge Sustainable Food for a Disco Soup event as part of the Haslingfield Scarecrow Festival; our fourth Cambridge Nature Festival event, a popular orchid walk to the Haslingfield Quarry; an online event on "The People's Microgrid", as a follow-up to our Re-Imagining Community Energy event; and the launch of our first tree trail, sponsored by the Haslingfield Parish Council.

It wasn't all hard work – we are now holding monthly pub socials at the Harlton Hare and Hounds (3rd Friday of each month, 8 pm) and our Village Society Quiz team, ingeniously named EcHHo by the organisers, made it a hat trick by winning for the third time in February!

Below are some more detailed highlights of our eventful year.

I'm a Climate Voter/Greenpeace Day of Action

As the 2024 UK Elections approached, Greenpeace asked volunteers to take part in a door knocking exercise, talking to voters about whether concerns about climate change and the environment would influence their voting choices. People were given the opportunity to hang a non-partisan "I'm a Climate Voter" poster up in their windows and sign up to receive an email which would highlight the environmental policies of each party. Under the leadership of Sustainable Shepreth convenor Elisabeth Spain, who has close ties with Haslingfield, four sessions of door knocking took place here in Haslingfield, involving five members of the eco group plus visitors from other villages. Those of us who took part found it surprisingly enjoyable. People were mostly receptive and almost always friendly, and even where they didn't agree that climate was a significant issue for them, good, constructive conversations were still had.

After the election, the Climate Vote project segued into a nationwide Day of Action, on which groups were encouraged to meet their MPs and make their concerns clear. Members of our group helped Elisabeth to organise and facilitate the South Cambs Day of Action, which took place at Shepreth Village Hall on October 12th, 2024. About 37 people attended and were given the opportunity to present our MP, Pippa Heylings, with their questions in person. The event demonstrated to MP Heylings how much many of us care about good environmental policy and she has taken many of our suggestions to discussions in Westminster and abroad. A follow-up event will take place in July 2025.

Haslingfield Tree Trail

The Haslingfield Tree Trail is the first of what we hope will be several guides to walks around our lovely village, pointing out some of the special trees we are so lucky to have here, including the sycamore which local artist Liz Hales painted for the cover, and the unusual Tulip tree in the Methodist Church garden. Inspired by a similar project in Bassingbourn, and begun in April 2024, the project involved input from several villagers, and the design skills of group member Colin Stroud. Launched at the Autumn Fair in October 2024, and sponsored by the Haslingfield Parish Council, copies are available by writing to hnheco@gmail.com.

A People's Microgrid: Smart Local Energy Systems for a Community – online talk

Following on from our Re-Imagining Community energy event in 2023, we again partnered with Cambridge Carbon Footprint to organise this online talk on 11th April 2024, which was attended by more than 40 people from around the entire country (and at least one from abroad!). Led by energy engineer Mike Barker of www.EnergyFlexibility.org, with special guests Orla Gibbons and Chris Parkin from the County and District Councils, the talk explored the potential of smart local energy microgrids to empower communities.

A microgrid can be anything from a smart system that enables you to use your home energy efficiently to an integrated generation, storage and energy management system that enables a business to go off-grid.

The talk imagined a power station centred on the village rec, with two small windmills, a solar array on the hall roof and over the car park, and battery storage - all powering a three bay EV charging station. Our village is actually prohibited from erecting wind turbines because they could disrupt the Lord's Bridge radio telescope array, so this was just an example of what might be possible in other places and an introduction to the concept of behind the grid energy production and distribution. We are still looking into community energy options for our community, and are in touch with the organisers of projects in Grantchester and Shepreth.

Haslingfield Cubs Biodiversity Session

The Cubs invited us to organise a session explaining the wildflower project we have been running on the Haslingfield Wellhouse Meadow. On the 7th of June, group members Michelle, Pippa and Robert introduced the Cubs to the definition of biodiversity and why we need it and then had a wildflower search in which children learned the names of some of the wildflowers we had planted or which had wild-seeded in the bonfire area. We also made wildlife shelters out of branches and twigs, and raked some mown areas to help remove the excess nutrients which wildflowers can't cope with.

Cambridge Nature Festival – Orchid Walk

For the third year in a row, we organised a walk to our County Wildlife Site, the Haslingfield Quarry, for the Cambridge Nature Festival. Led by Parish Councillor Clive Blower, the walk took place on 16th June 2024. Twenty-nine people from all over the county came to see bee orchids, man orchids (we are one of only two sites in the three counties which have them), twayblades, pyramidal and common spotted orchids. Attendees were also treated to a little bit of history about this very special space.

Haslingfield Biodiversity Project – Swift Boxes

The discovery that the County Council was offering biodiversity grants led to a meeting between Parish Councillors Ann O'Brien and Liz Hales and our members Pippa Keynes and Michelle Golder to discuss whether we could put together a fundable project. This is still ongoing, and so far has led to a conversation with former district ecologist Rob Mungovan and an on-site meeting with South Cambs District Council officer Geoff Clark, Housing Services Manager for Wisbey's Yard, on January 13th. We met to discuss maintenance of the Wisbey's Yard pond, which is silted up and overshadowed by trees. We agreed to try to fund a survey of our watercourses and Geoff undertook to raise the question of maintenance with their environmental team. We were also able to point out the very rich wildflower verge on the corner of Wisbey's Yard and High Street, and Geoff said he would flag this up with their team which is specifically looking to be notified of sites like these. At the time of writing we are looking for ways to fund the survey of our local waterways, including ponds and streams.

In the meantime, we partnered with the Parish Council to fund the purchase of swift boxes to go up on the Village Hall. After receiving permission from the Badcock Trust, and support from Action for Swifts, six boxes have now been installed above the car park. We hope within a few years that they will attract this highly endangered and spectacular migratory bird, to add to the colony which we already have near the school. The first birds are expected back in the UK around May.

Neighbourhood Plan

With four members of the Eco Group also on the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee, we are demonstrating our commitment to the best future possible for our community. There is so much of relevance in a neighbourhood plan – we can specify high standards of building sustainability in new builds and renovations, address sustainable travel, and protect biodiversity and our green open spaces. The latter two, as well as resilience to climate change, were among residents' top concerns as revealed in the Neighbourhood Plan survey conducted last year.

Members Sheena and Michelle have organised two of the "tea party" conversations held so far, Sheena on Transport and Michelle on Biodiversity and Resilience. Both led to very interesting and positive conversations with a wide variety of residents. It's a lot of work, but even just the process, as we learn about planning and meet new residents, has been helpful and positive. More volunteers needed!

Haslingfield Parish Council Climate Emergency Plan and Biodiversity Strategy

Members of the Eco group provided Haslingfield Parish Council with draft plans and strategies for both Climate mitigation and resilience and biodiversity. These can be viewed on the Environment/Useful Resources page of the Parish Council website https://haslingfieldparishcouncil.gov.uk/environment/useful-resources. We are currently drafting ideas for the 2025/6 climate emergency plan. We have presented reports on our activities to Harlton Parish Council at their AGMs over the past few years and will share these ideas with them as well.

Green Spaces – Wellhouse Meadow, Community Orchard, Let it Grow, Scything Workgroup

We have continued with our care for the Community Orchard, including twice yearly pruning sessions, and the Let it Grow WhatsApp group is revving up again with many spring flowers being shared. We have also seeded the bonfire area again with a mixture of annual and perennial flowers, mostly collected from member's gardens. Member Robert Jezek has taken on our most ambitious wildflower project yet in a triangle shaped section of the Wellhouse Meadow, opposite the orchard. He and other volunteers have hand dug some of the nettle, kept it close mown and raked to further discourage overgrowth, and scattered seed. Meanwhile, with a supporter from Sawston, Mike D., and the help of Jim McVittie, an expert scyther, we have formed a county-wide scything workgroup which will regularly scythe the whole

section we look after. Our first session took place on December 1st and our second on March 30th. More sessions will follow, organised via a Google Group. We hope for positive results within a few years.

Friends of the Rhee – *E. coli* Testing

Friends of the Rhee is in full flow again, with a new project launched by founder Lara Hawkins. With the support of the Parish Council, the group is carrying out testing of the Rhee's waters for E. coli bacteria. The immediate and longer-term objectives of this project are to:

i. Assess water quality: Conduct regular sampling of local stretch of river Rhee to monitor E. coli levels.

ii. Promote stewardship of local environment: Engage the community in pollution monitoring of the local river and empower individuals to take action.

iii. Protect public health: Provide data to inform local stakeholders regarding use of river.

iv. Raise awareness: Inform the community about the importance of water quality and the risks associated with contamination.

Other Events

6th July – Leaf Pounding at School Fete

With the help and inspiration of Forest School teacher Solveig Symons, members Michelle and Lucy ran a stall at the Haslingfield Primary School fete. Our activity involved pounding leaves and flowers onto cloth and proved very popular!

14th Sept – Disco Soup

Cambridge Sustainable Food joined us to chop and bop and we made vegetable soup and soda bread at the Village Hall as part of the Haslingfield Scarecrow Festival.

29th Sept – Apple Pressing

Member Colin Stroud invited us all to join him in the garden of the Old Vicarage to have a go at apple pressing. Using apples from our gardens as well as the community orchard, we made and bottled more than 30 liters of fresh apple juice. We were joined by residents as well as guests from Girton and other villages.

25th January – Little Owls Jumble Sale

At the invitation of the Little Owls, three of our members showed up after the sale to help their team sort recyclable materials and deliver donations to Emmaus. The amount of straight to the tip

rubbish generated by jumble sales has been flagged up to our group more than once, and we want to do what we can to support groups that rely on these sales for a major part of their fundraising. This could also be seen as an opportunity to encourage people not to buy the kind of unrecyclable, easily broken, often plastic items which inevitably turn up at jumble sales but rarely do sell. The Little Owls had thought their afterplan out thoroughly and produced much less rubbish than previous sales have done.

Eco Book Group

A new Eco Book Group has formed and is meeting four times a year. Our first book was *Inflamed*, by Rupa Mary and Raj Patel, and our second *Braiding Sweetgrass*, by Robin Wall Kimmerer.

Communication by the numbers

Facebook Page - 309 Followers

WhatsApp Group - 39 members

Newsletter - 161 subscribers

We regularly contribute articles to Church and Village and the Haslingfield Parish Newsletter, and provide a monthly report to the Haslingfield Parish Council and an annual report to the Harlton Parish Council

Coming up

6th April – Screening of the chalk streams film *Pure Clean Water*, Haslingfield Village Hall

14th June – Haslingfield and Eversden Repair café, Haslingfield Village Hall

15th June – Haslingfield Quarry Walk as Part of Cambridge Nature Festival

5th July – 2nd South Cambs Climate and Nature Forum with MP Pippa Heylings, Foxton Village Hall

See our website, https://www.hheco.co.uk/whatson, for event details.

Report prepared by Chair, Michelle Golder, 13th March 2025