

# Haslingfield and Harlton Eco Group

## Annual Report April 2025 – March 2026

### Summary

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Our fifth year as a constituted organisation has been one of deepening roots – literally and figuratively. The keywords for this year have been mapping, monitoring, and making connections: connecting our local biodiversity work to the new statutory frameworks provided by the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), connecting with neighbouring parishes through the From the Ground Up project, and connecting residents to the natural world through a growing programme of events and activities.

A major strand of the year's work has been the commissioning and completion of a Haslingfield Environmental Appraisal and Biodiversity Enhancement Report – including eDNA testing of five ponds and a full watercourse survey – which has contributed to some management improvements by the District Council at Wisbey's Yard and the official reporting of Great Crested Newt populations in two Haslingfield sites. Meanwhile, work has continued on the Wellhouse Meadow, with wildflower colonisation slowly expanding and the Cambs Scything Workgroup entering its second scything season with good numbers and exciting plans in place. We were proud to be selected as one of just 25 Cambridgeshire parishes for the County Council's new four-year nature recovery programme, From the Ground Up, and it has already helped us build new partnerships with neighbouring parishes and the County Council team.

On the climate and energy front, we organised a well-attended public retrofitting event, received training on thermal imaging from Cambridge Carbon Footprint and offered free surveys to residents, and were very pleased to see the Parish Council commissioning a professional energy audit of the Village Hall – an action which begins to address Goal 6b of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan 2025, which we drafted. We also continued our engagement with MP Pippa Heylings through the South Cambs Climate and Nature Forum.

With members of the Haslingfield Parish Council, we also submitted a detailed consultation response on the LNRS, contributing our local knowledge and on-the-ground experience to shaping county-wide nature recovery plans. We continued writing regularly for Church and Village and the Haslingfield Parish Newsletter, covering topics from the ecology of summer lawns to the philosophy of jumble sales. We have continued our monthly pub socials at the Harlton Hare and Hounds and our regular reports to Haslingfield Parish Council. This report is also delivered to Harlton Parish Council with our thanks for their continued support.

### Progress on Climate Action

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#### Home Energy: Retrofitting Event and Thermal Imaging

In February 2026 we organised 'Retrofitting for Every Budget – or None!', a well-attended public evening at Haslingfield Village Hall covering low-cost and no-cost steps to improve home energy efficiency, alongside information on renewable technologies, heat pumps and

insulation grants. Three of our members also completed thermal imaging training with Cambridge Carbon Footprint, enabling us to borrow their cameras and offer free thermal surveys to residents from January 2026 onwards. We will continue to offer this service on request.

## **Haslingfield Village Hall Energy Audit**

Goal 6b of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan 2025, which the Eco Group drafted, calls on the Parish Council to commission an energy audit of the Village Hall. In October 2025, a Cambridgeshire ACRE sustainability advisor conducted a full energy audit of the Hall, and found it to be in a reasonably good energy position: modern double-glazed windows throughout, a 3.9kWp solar PV system installed in 2011, and electricity consumption that already sits below the Carbon Trust benchmark for community centres. However it also identified further savings opportunities in gas use – the hall currently uses 36,046 kWh of gas per year, largely due to an oversized hot water cylinder.

The Parish Council has decided to proceed with a staged retrofit, beginning with the upgrade to LED lighting across the main hall and committee room (estimated saving of £384/year with a 5.7 year payback) and installing a destratification fan in the main hall to address heat stratification. The further steps of bypassing the hot water cylinder to use the combi boiler on demand (£52/year saving); and extending the solar PV system with an additional 6.6kWp on the east-facing roof and a 10kWh battery (estimated saving of £2,027/year, 6.4 year payback) will be considered in time. The audit also maps out a longer-term path to replace the gas boiler with an air source heat pump as part of the hall's net zero journey. We hope to work with the Parish Council and hall trustees to help take some of these recommendations forward in the next Climate Emergency Plan.

## **South Cambs Climate and Nature Forum / Engagement with MP**

In July 2025, 25 people from 14 South Cambs villages attended the second South Cambs Climate and Nature Forum at Foxton Village Hall with MP Pippa Heylings, who took questions on chalk streams, the new Planning and Infrastructure Bill, energy pricing and more. A follow-up lobby day at Westminster in July saw nine people, including one Haslingfield resident, meet Pippa Heylings in person.

A further forum took place in February 2026 at Great Shelford Memorial Hall, continuing the valuable dialogue between residents and our MP. A submission on the Cambridge Development Corporation which Michelle had prepared, arguing that development had to first and foremost stay within planetary boundaries of energy and resource use and greenhouse gas emissions, was submitted to Pippa in advance and addressed directly on the day. This submission was also shared with Haslingfield Parish Council and other groups.

## **Community Energy**

We attended an open day in Grantchester on the proposed Grantchester Heat Network, an ambitious zero-carbon district heating scheme using wind, solar and battery storage. We also helped organise a presentation from Shepreth Parish Councillor John Fisher about his community's retrofitting and solar projects, where he revealed that our own 2023 Reimagining Community Energy event had been the original inspiration for his work – a lovely full-circle

moment. The County Council has expressed interest in hearing from communities wanting to develop community solar farm projects and may have land available.

## Thrutopia

As scientific consensus increasingly accepts that warming beyond 1.5°C is likely, we have begun exploring Thrutopia – a framework for imagining and building better futures through change rather than despite it. We organised an introductory session in November 2025 and a follow-up in February 2026, both of which drew a thoughtful and engaged group of participants.

## Progress on Biodiversity

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### From the Ground Up – Parish Selected for County Nature Recovery Project

One of the highlights of the year was the news that Haslingfield is one of just 25 parishes in Cambridgeshire selected to take part in 'Nature Recovery From the Ground Up', a four-year project funded by Cambridgeshire County Council in partnership with Natural Cambridgeshire. Parishes were chosen for having active community groups and a track record of caring for nature. The project will provide advice, expertise and fundraising support aligned to the priorities of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Michelle joined the project's Methodology Team, and Lara Hawkins and Michelle presented at a January 2026 event at Gamlingay Eco Hub, organised by the Cambridgeshire Climate and Nature Forum (CAN) which brought together 14 parishes including Bassingbourn, Duxford and Gamlingay. At the March 2026 cluster meeting we heard from ecologist Grace O'Donovan about baseline habitat mapping and from Parish Online convenor Ian Walters on the mapping tools available via Parish Online. Both offered to help us map and improve our parish's biodiversity. The next step is organising a mapping session with support from the County Council team.

### LNRS Consultation Response

In August and September 2025, we worked with parish councillors and the parish clerk to prepare and submit a detailed consultation response on the Cambridgeshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Our submission agreed with the strategy's scientific foundations while raising concerns about implementation resources, monitoring, and the heavy reliance on Biodiversity Net Gain to fund nature recovery. We also provided detailed, ground-truthed comments and additions to the habitat maps, including:

- Suggesting that the land around Haslingfield Quarry (Chapel Hill) be redesignated as chalk grassland rather than mixed deciduous woodland, and flagging concerns about how the East West Rail route through the hill will interact with nature recovery;
- Marking the full extent of the Jubilee Wood and proposing the addition of the adjacent unnamed woodland and connecting path as a potential nature corridor to the River Rhee;
- Adding the village watercourse (from the manor moat through Wisbey's Yard Pond and the Millennium Pond to the Rhee) to the map;

- Correcting the proposed designation of Wellhouse Meadow (a covenant requires it to remain open grassland, not woodland) and noting the ongoing biodiversity work being carried out there;
- Expanding the All Saints churchyard designation to include the full extent of the site and Glebe Wood, following our June bioblitz which identified 110 species.

## **Watercourse Survey and Wisbey's Yard**

The most significant biodiversity achievement of the year was the completion of our Haslingfield Environmental Appraisal and Biodiversity Enhancement Report. eDNA testing was carried out on five ponds; ecologist Ann Sherwood surveyed the full watercourse from Wisbey's Yard to the river; and six water vole rafts were placed and monitored. Only one pond returned a positive result for Great Crested Newt, though two ponds (including one from the 2021 Gene Pools survey) have now had positive results recorded with CPERC. We have encouraged all residents to record wildlife sightings via iRecord ([www.cperc-record.org.uk](http://www.cperc-record.org.uk)).

The report was shared with relevant SCDC officers. A productive meeting with Geoff Clark in January 2026 resulted in agreements that contractors would lift the tree canopy over the Wisbey's Yard pond, begin initial dredging, and change the mowing schedule for the wildflower-rich verge at the corner of High Street – a verge that may have been undisturbed since medieval times and which we are exploring for Protected Verge status.

## **Wellhouse Meadow, Harlton Triangle, Scything and Wildflowers**

A third plant survey of the Wellhouse Meadow was carried out by Pippa and Michelle. While overall species numbers have not yet increased, specific wildflowers – meadow cranesbill and goatsbeard in particular – are showing higher numbers. Yellow rattle, ladies bedstraw and corn chamomile have all successfully colonised beyond the bonfire boundary, which is exactly what we hoped to see. The aspen clonal colony was identified and carefully managed.

The Cambs Scything Workgroup hosted multiple sessions through the year, from a spring maintenance day in March 2025 and an open pizza-and-scything evening in September 2025 to attract new volunteers, through to a scythe peening day in March 2026. The workgroup continues to grow its reach across Cambridgeshire.

In Harlton, the Cambridgeshire County Council has continued with the revised mowing schedule for the village triangle, which has resulted in spectacular spring and summer flower displays.

## **Church Bioblitz, All Saints Churchyard and Scouts Verge Seeding**

Our bioblitz in partnership with All Saints Church in June 2025 identified over 110 different species of plants and invertebrates in the churchyard, Vicarage garden and Glebe Wood – including pyramidal orchid and bitter stonecrop. The results were shared with our watercourse ecologist as part of the parish biodiversity mapping work. We have also agreed to help rewild a small section of the south side of the churchyard around its pyramidal orchids, and noted the connection of the churchyard to the Wellhouse Meadow via the vicarage grounds – a small wildlife corridor for our village.

In March 2026, Michelle organised a joint session with the Scouts to dig out nettle roots and seed wildflowers on the verge opposite the pumping station, following a recommendation in the environmental appraisal.

## **Community Orchard and Friends of the Rhee**

We continued our twice-yearly orchard pruning sessions, with specialist help from Charlotte Synge in March 2025 and a community pruning day in March 2026. The John Offord memorial tree, funded by Haslingfield United Charities, was planted in the orchard. Friends of the Rhee, which is affiliated with H&H Eco, continued its monitoring and advocacy work and has ambitious proposals for river habitat restoration which they hope to take forward in time. They are exploring the possibilities with local landowners, including Jesus College, and farmers.

## **Swift Boxes, Protected Verges and Neighbourhood Plan**

The six swift boxes on the Village Hall remain in place and we are hopeful of attracting swifts within the next year or two. We have shared information on the Protected Road Verge scheme with the Parish Council and are exploring whether the Wisbey's Yard verge and other locations might qualify. Four eco group members continue to work on the Neighbourhood Plan, ensuring that sustainability and biodiversity remain central to the plan's emerging policies.

## **Events and Community Engagement**

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### **April 2025 – Film: Pure Clean Water**

Co-hosted with Sustainable Shepreth and Friends of the River Shep, this screening of the award-winning chalk streams documentary at Haslingfield Village Hall launched the year's events programme on a watery theme.

### **June 2025 – Church Bioblitz, Repair Café and Orchid Walk**

June was our busiest month. The church bioblitz on June 7th uncovered 110 species in All Saints and its grounds. Our second Repair Café on June 14th was a resounding success: 10 volunteer repairers and 7 additional volunteers tackled 50 items, fixing 41 of them and preventing an estimated 470 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions and 95 kg of waste. Donations totalled £202 against costs of £100. Feedback was glowing. The orchid walk on June 15th, led by Clive Blower, drew 28 people from across the region to find five types of orchid at the Haslingfield Quarry, including the rare Man Orchid.

### **July 2025 – South Cambs Climate and Nature Forum**

The second forum with MP Pippa Heylings at Foxton Village Hall on July 5th drew 25 people from 14 villages, covering chalk streams, energy, the planning bill and more. A Westminster lobby day followed, with nine people meeting Heylings in person.

### **September 2025 – Pizza and Scything**

A fun and effective recruitment evening on September 14th offered free pizza to prospective new members of the Cambs Scything Workgroup, with a chance to try scything at the Wellhouse Meadow.

### **October 2025 – The Ants and the Grasshopper Film Screening**

We screened this film, which follows the journey to the USA of Malawian climate activist Anita Chitaya, in October 2025 at Haslingfield Village Hall – co-hosted with Sustainable Shepreth and supported by Aid Alliance. The film, which weaves together climate change, race and gender, prompted a rich post-screening discussion.

### **November 2025 – Thrutopia**

A small-group Thrutopia introduction evening explored ideas about navigating and shaping the future through environmental change, using the Thrutopia card set.

### **January 2026 – Nature Recovery From the Ground Up**

Lara Hawkins and Michelle presented at the From the Ground Up event at Gamlingay Eco Hub on January 31st, alongside representatives from Bassingbourn, Duxford, Gamlingay and the County Council. Fourteen parishes attended.

### **February 2026 – Retrofitting Event and Thrutopia**

'Retrofitting for Every Budget – or None!' at Haslingfield Village Hall on February 8th attracted a good audience. A second Thrutopia session took place in late February.

### **March 2026 – Orchard Pruning, Scouts Verge Seeding and Scythe Peening**

March was a month of practical action: community orchard pruning on March 7th, the eco group and Scouts wildflower seeding session on March 22nd, and the Scythe Peening Day on March 28th at Wellhouse Meadow.

### **Writing for the Community**

We continued to contribute regularly to Church and Village and the Haslingfield Parish Newsletter throughout the year. Articles included: a celebration of the From the Ground Up selection; a defence of brown lawns and unmown verges as vital insect habitat in the summer drought; a Let it Grow invitation to residents to join our wildflower patchwork project; and a warm reflection on the value – and the sadness – of jumble sales as the circular economy in action. We see this kind of writing as an important part of our work: keeping the village informed, inspired and connected to what we are doing.

### **Communications**

We continue to reach our community through multiple channels:

- Facebook Page: 345 followers
- WhatsApp Group: 46 members

- Newsletter: 170 subscribers
- Regular articles in Church and Village and the Haslingfield Parish Newsletter
- Monthly reports to Haslingfield Parish Council; annual reports to Harlton Parish Council

## Events Coming Up

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We have a full programme of events planned. All events are free unless otherwise stated; see <https://www.hheco.co.uk/whatson> for details and booking.

- **17th May 2026 – Haslingfield and Harlton Repair Café**, Harlton Village Hall, 1–5pm. Our third repair café, this time at Harlton. Free repairs of electronics, textiles, household items and jewellery. Book your item: [haslingfieldrepaircafe@gmail.com](mailto:haslingfieldrepaircafe@gmail.com)
- **6th June 2026 – Intermediate Scything Course**, Wellhouse Meadow, 10am–4pm. Full-day course for those who have scythed before and wish to develop their skills further.
- **14th June 2026 – Guided Rare Orchid Walk to Haslingfield Quarry**, 10am–12pm. Clive Blower leads our annual walk to the County Wildlife Site. Meet at the bottom of Quarry Lane.
- **14th June 2026 – Family Fun Day in Nature**, Wellhouse Meadow, 3–6pm. Pizza making, insect sweeping and ID, wildflower walks, art activities, and a ‘Rain Lab’ from Water Sensitive Cambridge. With the Wildlife Trust and local groups. Free, donations welcome.
- **28th June 2026 – Family Picnic and Pond Exploration Party**, 12.30–3pm. A local resident is opening her garden – home to rare Great Crested Newts – for a picnic and wildlife observation event. Write to [hheco@gmail.com](mailto:hheco@gmail.com) to register and receive the address.
- **5th July 2026 – Screening of The People’s Emergency Briefing**, Haslingfield Village Hall, 6.30–9pm. A 48-minute film featuring nine leading UK scientists on climate, nature, food security, health and economics, followed by discussion.

Monthly pub socials continue at the Harlton Hare and Hounds, 3rd Friday of each month at 8pm. All welcome!

*Report prepared by Chair, Michelle Golder, April 2026*