

Friends of the Rhee, Update for Haslingfield PC, Aug 2025

In 2024, Haslingfield PC provided a grant to Friends of the Rhee to initiate some work around the river and to conduct a period of monitoring and testing for *E.coli*. Friends of the Rhee are a local group established in Haslingfield in 2020 and are part of the [Haslingfield & Harlton Eco Group \(hheco.co.uk\)](http://hheco.co.uk). The objectives of the project are to

- i. Assess water quality: Conduct regular monitoring of local stretch of river Rhee for *E.coli*
- ii. Promote stewardship of local environment: Engage the community in monitoring
- 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

Cambridgeshire's rivers are under pressure from pollution, sedimentation, low flows, and habitat loss. The impact of these pressures on economic growth has been widely reported. Various funding initiatives are emerging to mitigate these issues. They take a science-led, data-driven approach to guide restoration efforts. Community involvement is encouraged.

The River Rhee flows between the Parishes of Harston and Haslingfield. It flows from Ashwell Springs in Ashwell and meets the River Granta at Cantelupe Farm before becoming the River Cam. The river and the river environment are used regularly by farmers, dog walkers, fishermen, horse riders, runners, walkers, families, teenagers, cyclists, canoeists and others. The Rhee has been described as humble, neglected, wild, polluted, degraded, canalised, beautiful, peaceful, dredged, important, spiritual, abstracted, resource, amenity, turbid, muddy and an important ecosystem.

In 2023 and 2024, Cam Valley Forum (CVF) <https://camvalleyforum.uk/> conducted River Sampling and Testing for *E.coli* at ten locations in and around the River Rhee between Harston and the Haslingfield Sewage Treatment Works (STW). Results suggested that, if The Rhee were designated as a Bathing Water, it would receive a “Poor” rating, with advice not to swim. There are a number of potential sources of *E.coli* in the Rhee including sewage treatment works, septic tanks and agriculture.

Between February and August 2025, ten volunteers have been trained, and regular river and stream monitoring is being done around Haslingfield for *E.coli*. A ‘lab’ is established in the shed of a Haslingfield resident.

Data has been collected for several months and has been shared with Cam Valley Forum who invited representatives of Friends of the Rhee to present their project in a meeting with Anglian Water on 17th July 2025.

It can be observed from the data collected between March and June 2025 that:

- There has been little rain during the period of sampling.
- The River Rhee, as it flows past Haslingfield and upstream of Haslingfield STW, (locations 3, 4, 5 and 6 and 10) is generally of poor, occasionally good, water quality in respect to E-coli.
- Samples have been collected from the stream both upstream and downstream of the Porkers Lane Pumping station on five occasions (locations 1 and 2). On all but one occasion, the E-coli levels were higher in the sample taken downstream than that taken upstream of the Porkers Lane pumping station.

- Samples have been collected from the River Rhee upstream and downstream of the Haslingfield STW (locations 9, and 10), and from the outflow (location 11) on three occasions. All the outflow and downstream samples showed concentration of E-coli significantly higher than the upstream samples. Four samples from the outlet and from downstream of the WWRC were greater than the 10,000 cfu/100ml cut off.
- Ashwell Springs was sampled on one occasion. There was no E-coli detected.

The sampling and testing protocol has been under development during this phase. The project is at an early stage and the data may not yet be statistically significant.

Friends of the Rhee are part of the Haslingfield and Harlton Eco Group who provide an umbrella for managing funds and for insurance. The two groups worked together to make sure that the insurance cover was suitable for purpose.

The initial Parish Council grant was for the sum of £460.08 and covered establishment of the project and the lab and three months of testing, which is now complete. At that time, the PC suggested that if other sources of funding were not available, that Friends of the Rhee could approach the Parish Council again for a further nine months. A further nine months sampling would cost £438.25.

Friends of the Rhee have reached out to Harston Parish Council and to Anglian Water. Both have declined to provide funding for this project at this stage.

Dr Lara Hawkins,
Haslingfield resident, Convener of Friends of the Rhee & Trustee of Great Ouse Rivers Trust