



An Audacious Idea for River Restoration in the Lower Reaches of the River Rhee

Friends of the Rhee

February 2026

Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

Who are Friends of the Rhee? 1 of 3

Friends of the Rhee are an informal group of volunteers from the local community of Haslingfield, Harlton and nearby villages. It is part of, and supported by, the Haslingfield and Harlton Eco Group

It all started in 2020 with water vole surveys, visual surveys, participating in programs such as the UK wide WaterBlitz and 'naming the river' with a new sign post.



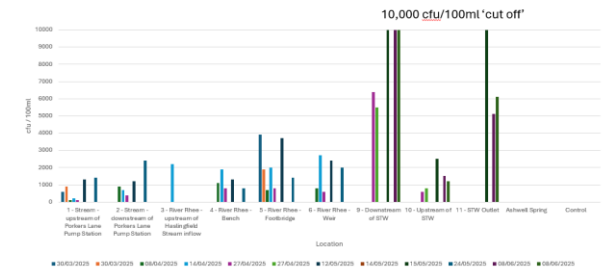
Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

Who are Friends of the Rhee? 2 of 3

In 2024, Friends of the Rhee attended a site visit at the Haslingfield Water Recycling Facility (Sewage Treatment Works, STW). In partnership with Cam Valley Forum and funded by Haslingfield Parish Council, that led to establishing a citizen science lab and a program of river monitoring for Ecoli during 2025.



Results – March to June 2025



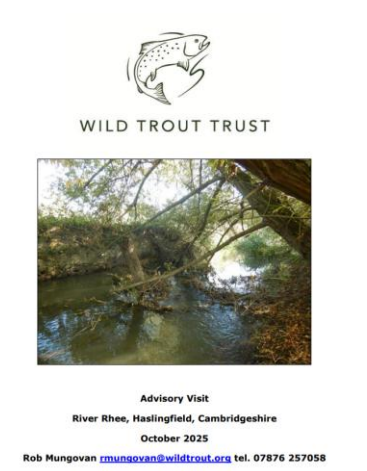
Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

Who are Friends of the Rhee? 3 of 3

In 2025, a volunteer with Friends of the Rhee discovered that the Haslingfield stretch of the Rhee is inundated with American Signal Crayfish (ASC), trapping, under permit, more than a 1000 ASC in less than a couple of weeks. This led to more questions about the wider ecological condition of the river. In October 2025, Rob Mungovan of the Wild Trout Trust, completed a survey and issued an advisory report.

During 2025 Friends of the Rhee completed a tree survey, attended community events and participated in sediment monitoring.

They have met with local farmers and other community groups and Catchment partnerships.



Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

Partners and Supporters



Haslingfield & Harlton Eco Group



Haslingfield Parish Council



Harston Parish Council



Cam Valley Forum

Protecting and enhancing the environment of the river Cam and its tributaries



**Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Northamptonshire**

Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

Friends of the Rhee – values and ethos

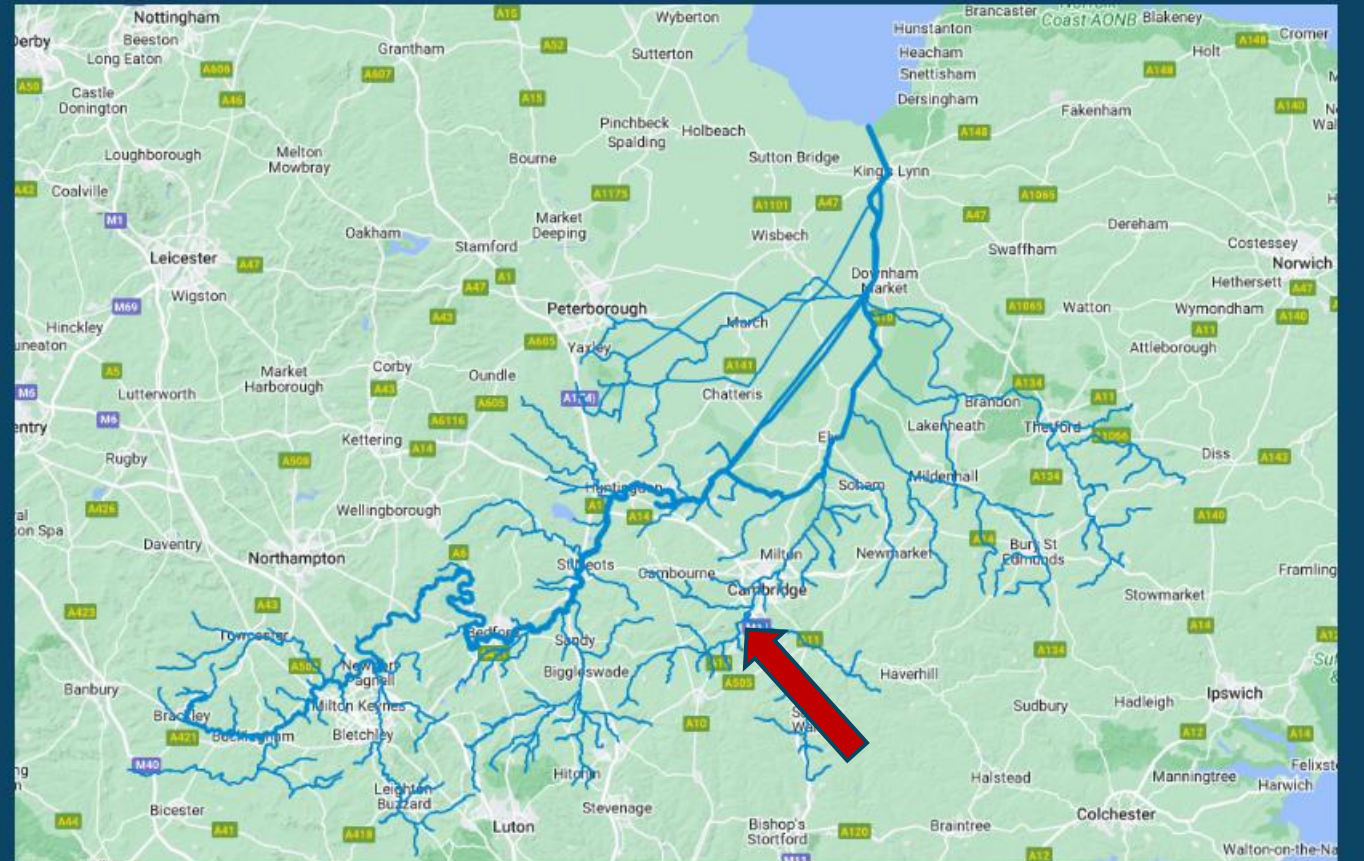
- **Respect** – Fostering a courteous, compassionate environment for diverse views. Kindness. Assume that everyone is doing their best.
- **Teamwork** – Collaborating to achieve shared goals and creative unity.
- **Integrity** – Committing to honest, transparent communication at all times.
- **Inclusivity** – Celebrating diverse voices, backgrounds, and experiences.
- **Learning** – Building knowledge and understanding through open-mindedness.

Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

The Rhee is part of the Great Ouse Catchment

The Great Ouse, the fifth longest river in the UK, together with its tributaries sustains people and nature across a catchment of 8,500 km² stretching from Northamptonshire to the Wash.

While it is mainly rural, it's one of the fastest growing areas in the country with approximately 1.7 million people living in the catchment already. Its significant tributaries include the rivers Tove, Ouzel, Cam, Ivel, Lark, Little Ouse, Wissey and Nar.



Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

Why restoration of the River Rhee?

A healthy river has (1) enough water, (2) good water quality, and (3) good physical shape including floodplain connection. These 3 are interrelated (eg less flow means less dilution of any pollution and so worse water quality). The River Rhee is suffering from the following ...

- **Water scarcity.** Low base flows due to depleted aquifer caused by historic and current over abstraction (WRE workshop)
- **Lack of diversity of nature habitats, decline of key species and Invasive species** (e.g. ASC), Biodiversity and key species loss
- **'Historic' river realignment** – indicated by the Parish Boundary not aligning with the river channel in one area
- **Impoundment**** – e.g. at Burnt Mill weir
- **Historic dredging** causing level of river base to be lowered and levees along the river to build up
- **Climate change** e.g. more intense rainfall leading to inundation of water infrastructure
- **Loss of amenity** for communities – polluted rivers, low flows
- **Development** e.g. new development, inadequate grey water infrastructure, East West Rail (will pass just to the South of this area)
- **Pollution**
 - Point source from Haslingfield STW and from upstream STWs
 - Diffuse pollution e.g. road run-off, agricultural pollution
 - High level of sediment in the water – maybe due to ASC burrows and/or agricultural practice upstream

** an impounded river moves slowly, which means it deposits lots of fine sediment, which tends to blanket the river bed because the water doesn't have the energy to move it around. This means it will lack habitat diversity within the channel. It is also more vulnerable to algal blooms, which means less dissolved oxygen, more turbidity, and generally less good water quality.

Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

Possible Benefits of River Restoration for the Rhee

- **Holding water on the land**
 - For nature
 - For agriculture – topping up at time of drought
 - For longer term sustainability of the region by recharging the aquifer through infiltration
- **Improved water quality**
 - reduce sediment transport
 - provide an environment for pollution degradation e.g. Ecoli
- **Biodiversity improvement / areas for nature**
- **Resilience to climate change**
 - Reduce risk of flooding downstream
 - Diversity of habitats to support nature resilience
 - Supporting agriculture
- **Improved amenity for local communities**

Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

Key Features

Haslingfield Sewage Treatment Wks

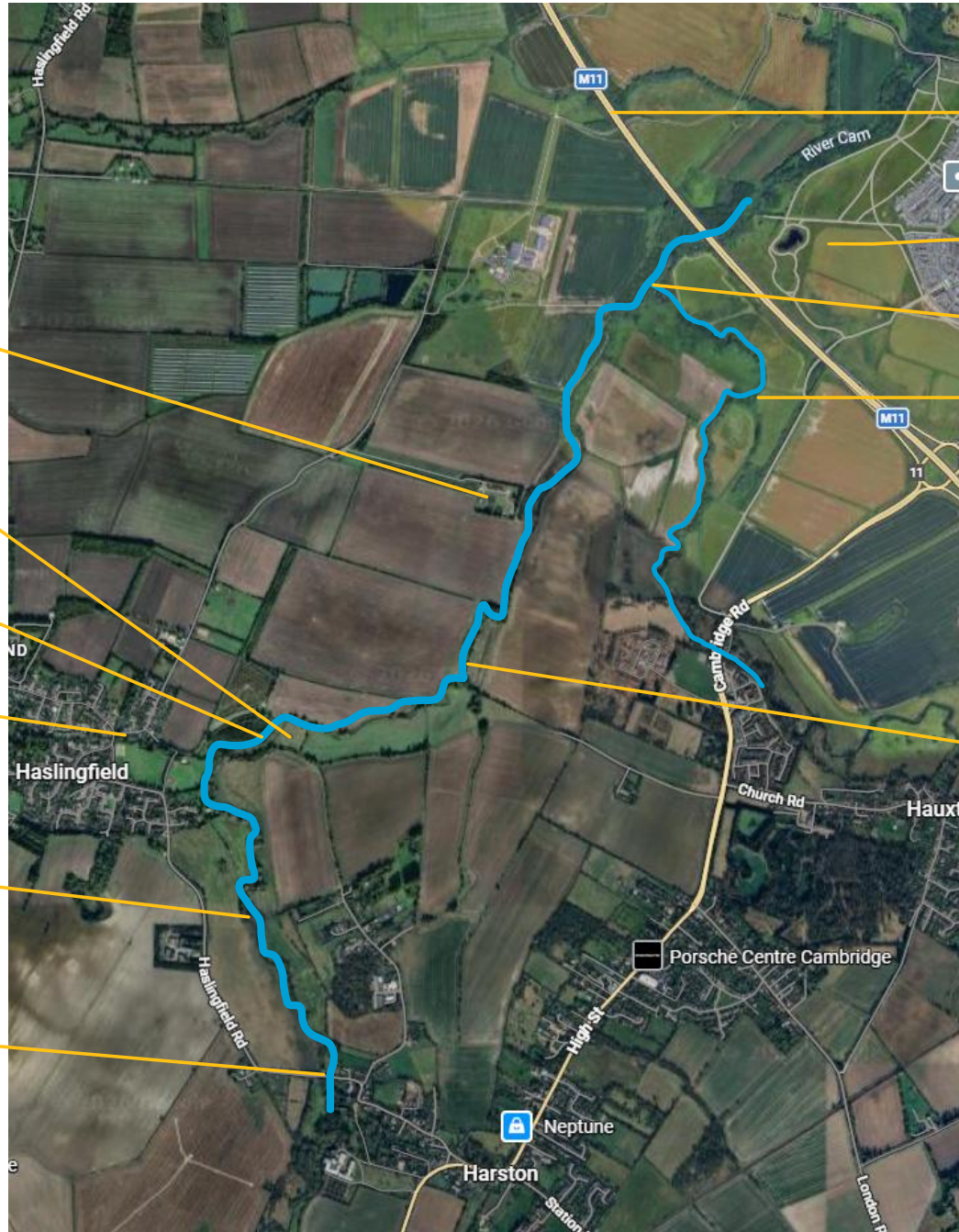
Not JC owned

Footbridge and weir

Porkers lane / River Lane Pumping Station

Clock Holt, not JC owned

Harston Bridge



M11 Motorway

Trumpington Meadows

Hauxton Junction

River Granta

River Rhee
4.6km from the Harston Bridge to Hauxton Junction

Restoration areas

Area B

The river is impounded with slow flows and sits to the north of its floodplain. Floodplain gets very wet in the winter (30-50cm). Opportunity to bring the river back onto the flood plain, create ponds/reservoir(s) for nature and agriculture, plant trees and improve amenity.

Area A

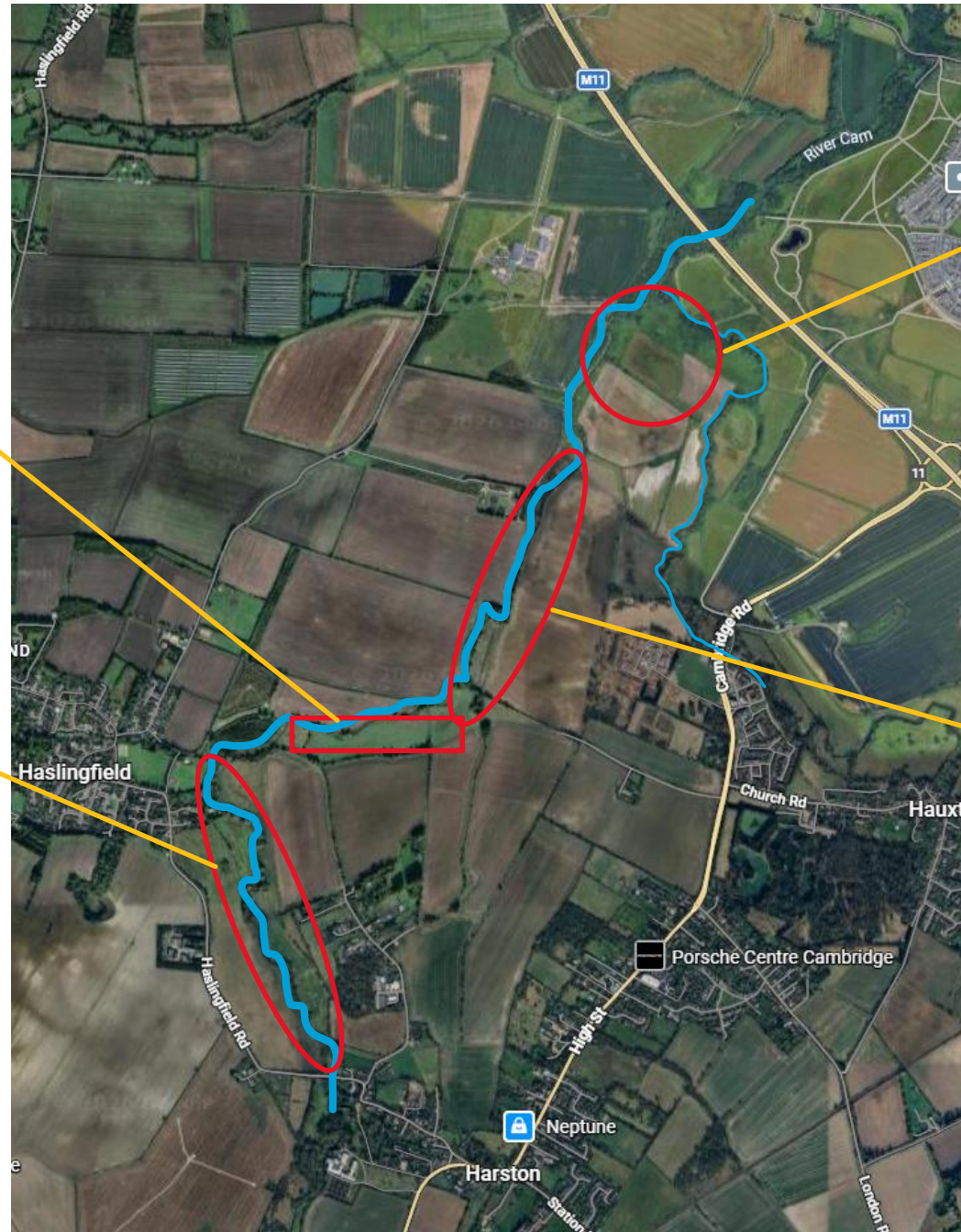
Hartson Bridge to the Burnt Mill Footbridge. The South end of this area was the focus for the advisory report by Rob Mungovan of the Wild Trout Trust. Farmed by Burwash Farms on the west and Newton Farms on the East. Many old willows, wet areas in the low lying areas either side of the river. Opportunity to create scrapes / backwaters and to remove the levees.

Area D

An area identified for improvement opportunity by the Wildlife Trust and subject of an EA study in 2022.

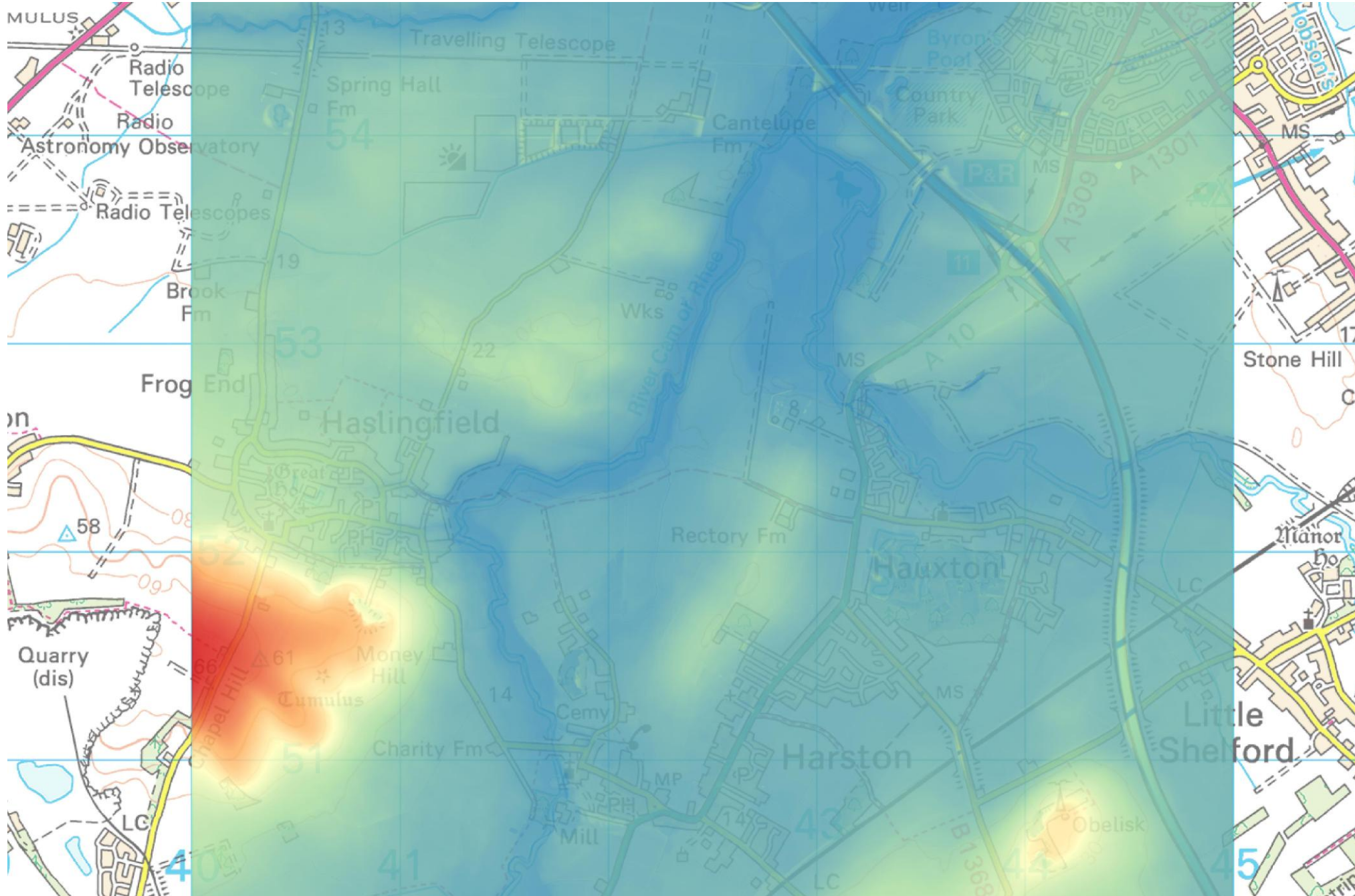
Area C

Access in this area is restricted and is relatively unknown to Friends of the Rhee. Ecoli testing from the STW regularly shows high levels. Opportunity for reed beds and raising the river bed. Maybe wetting the flood plain to the east of the river channel.



Lidar Data

Lidar data shows the topography. Orange is higher ground (Barrington Hill chalk outcrop), Darker blue is the low lying ground showing the flood plain along the river from Harston Bridge to Hauxton Junction



Area A – Harston Road Bridge to Burnt Mill Footbridge



Old Parish Boundary indicating change in course of the river. Opportunity to bring the river onto the floodplain.

Many springs along the length of the field, opportunity to create ponds, scrapes or backwaters

Plant other tree species around the river and along the riparian strip

Remove or cut through the levees (banks along the river) to allow the river to flood into its flood plain more regularly

Wet areas in the field – opportunity to create scrapes or backwaters

Opportunity to improve the longevity of old willows, use willow branches for river management and to create channel features



Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

Area B – The Footbridge to the ‘Corner’



Opportunity to bring the river onto the floodplain and create a wetland / reservoir / scrape / room for nature.

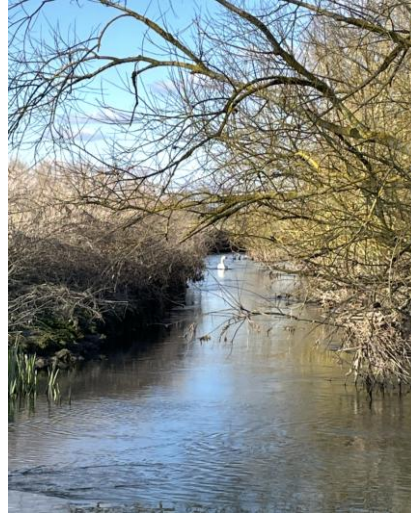
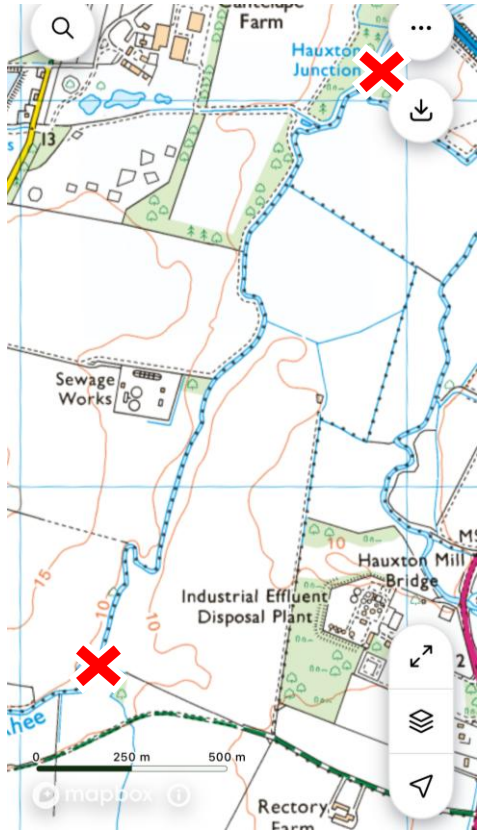
Planting trees to create a new woodland area

Diversify the grassland



Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

Area C – The ‘Corner’, past the STW to Hauxton Junction

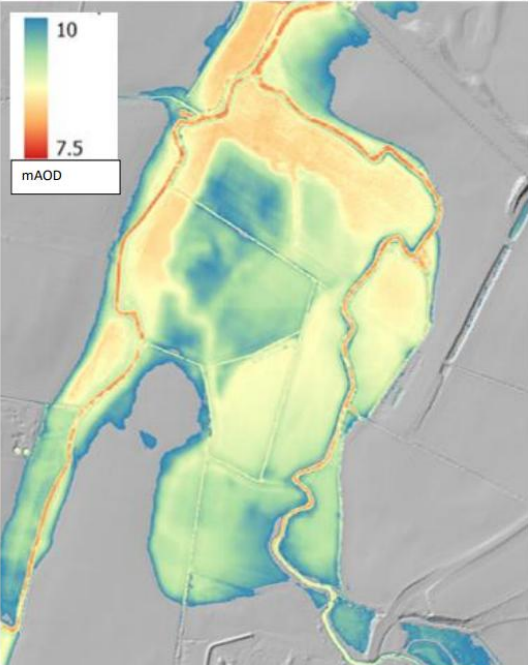


Opportunity to diversify the flow, bring the river onto the floodplain, create more plant and tree diversity on the riparian strip and mitigate the pollution from the STW using a reed bed



Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

Area D – Hauxton Junction



Lidar topographical data. Blue is high, orange low.

Opportunity to create a wetland nature area connected to Trumpington meadows.

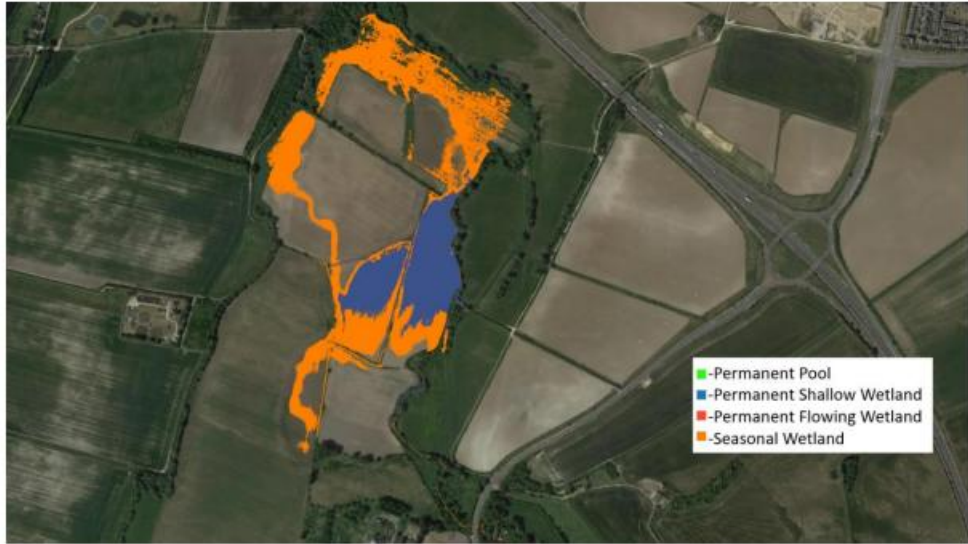
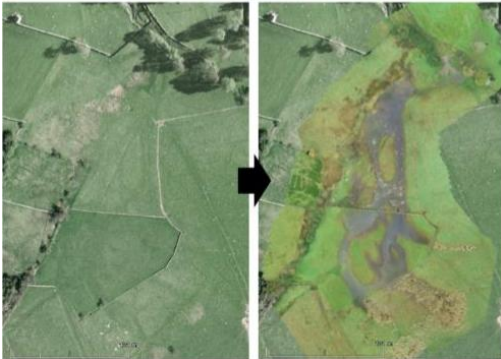


Figure 4.2. Potential created wetland types and extents for River Cam study reach at Hauxton Junction.

Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

Case Studies - Inspiration for River Restoration for the Rhee



Mikeld Sike on the Lowther Estate



The River Nar.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH1d9ybcNU&t=82s>



The River Witham in Lincolnshire

<https://www.wildtrout.org/news/river-witham-floodplain-reconnection>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/river-reset-for-the-first-time-in-2500-years-to-help-climate-change>

Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

Exploring feasibility for Restoration of the Lower Reaches of the Rhee during 2026

In 2026 Friends of the Rhee plan to

- Engage with local ecology and water stakeholders and regulators e.g. Environment Agency, Wild Trout Trust, Wildlife Trust BCN, Cam Catchment Partnership
- Engage with land owners, land managers and farmers
- Identify partners and advisors
- Find funding and deliver a feasibility study e.g. JBA Consultants or River Restoration Centre, Cranfield
- Engage with key funders e.g. Anglian Water A-WINEP
- Continue to deliver river quality monitoring and small scale, volunteer-led, in-channel works

Working together to Improve the River for Nature and the Community

A moment of reflection

Dear broken rivers ...

Alexis Wright (2019)

from,

Is a River Alive,
Robert MacFarlane
2025



Invocation to the Rhee, 2025

I stop on the path as I approach Rhee. I speak my intention to visit. The sun is dancing on the surface of the water. Welcoming me.

Blackbird robin blackcap chiffchaff. A cluster of insects dance in the sunshine above Rhee. Gentle river. Calm river. She is silent. The birds fill the silence.

A willow catkin floats on the current. Floating towards the sea.

The surface of Rhee is like glass. There is an occasional ripple with the wind. The sun's reflection follows me as I walk along the riverside path

Happy to be here in this place, at this time. Knowing what it is to be alive. Full attention. Full Immersion in this inquiry.

I walk slowly around the large meadow next to Rhee. The earth is cracked on the path.

I assess the opportunity for immersion. Woodpeckers chuckle in the distance. Skylarks sing with encouragement. The banks are steep and muddy and the water low. Physical immersion, not even just my hands, is not for today.

I sit cross legged on a grass hummock. Close to the water edge. Close my eyes. Audiological immersion. I am taken by the rustling of the small clump of dried grasses next to me.

I pick a few grasses and create a small bed for the shells from my pocket. An offering to Rhee.

A shoal of tiny fish play close to the surface. In an eddy.

As I say goodbye to Rhee a lump in my throat.

On my way back along the field a flint heart-stone shows herself to me. Reflecting the sunshine.