

Houghton Hall Park

May 2021 Newsletter

The Houghton Hall Park Renaissance and Renewal Project is being managed by Central Bedfordshire Council in partnership with Houghton Regis Town Council and is supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund.



We are now in May and it's the time of year that seems to fly by and we've certainly been busy in the park these last few weeks! If you've visited you will have noticed that we have had some tree works taking place, Eleanor our Community Ranger will explain why in her update this month. Bradley James Wynn spotted this spooky apparition in one of the trees that came down, can you make out the lady in the bonnet? Who could she be? One of the Brandreth family who used to live in Houghton Hall? Or as Bradley suggests a witch who was hung from the tree?! I guess we'll never know but why don't you try and find it when you're next here.

With half term coming up the first week of June we have some great activities planned including a Dinosaur Detective Trail, the Kitchen Garden will also be open on Saturday 5th June in conjunction with 'Have a Grow Day', our photography theme focuses on how nature is imperative to our mental health, find out more in 'What's On'.

There's been a hive of activity in the kitchen and formal gardens, learn what Jenny and the volunteers have been harvesting and growing in her update (there's a clue on the right!), Mark will also give us an update on how the wildlife pond is coming along and Irene provides us with a 'Plant of the Month' for May.



A great place to live and work.

What's On

Dinosaur Detective Trail

When: Tuesday 1st June & Sunday 6th June

Time: 11am until 3.30pm

Cost: £1.75 per child

A dinosaur has been spotted in the park, will you find him?! Turn detective, follow the map and clues to work out which dinosaur it is, once you have solved the mystery come back to the visitors centre to claim your prize!

The trail will cost £1.75 per child (adults free unless you want a prize!) and will need to be pre-booked at specific time slots on our website

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/dinosaur-detective-trail-1>

You will need to bring a pencil and may want something to lean on such as a clipboard or book.

Please adhere to current social distancing regulations when taking part in the trail.

Have a Grow Day

When: Saturday 5th June

Time: 10am to 1pm

In conjunction with Social Farms and Gardens your invited to "have a grow" in the Kitchen Garden as part of the first ever UK wide celebration of community growing.

We are inviting people to come and shake off their lockdown blues at a free and family friendly open day taking part on June 5th, as part of the national Have A Grow Day celebration launched by UK charity Social Farms & Gardens and sponsored by Nature's Path.

Visitors will be able to explore the kitchen garden, buy some plants at our first plant sale of the year and children will be able to take part in a free kitchen garden trail. All activities will be taking place outdoors and visitors should observe current Covid-19 social distancing guidelines.

The event is part of a national day of celebration and action that will see community growing spaces from all



over the UK throw open their gates to welcome the public in and showcase the amazing work they do.

Chris Blythe, Director at SF&G, said “it’s been a very tough 12 months for all of us, and our members have pulled out all the stops to support their local communities. We’re all even more aware now of how good for us spending time in nature is and Have a Grow Day is a brilliant way to get outdoors, visit somewhere new, and learn some new skills at the same time. We can’t wait to see all the different events happening around the country that celebrate and showcase just how amazing SF&G members really are”.

To find out where other events are taking place go to <http://ow.ly/9jcL50EFouC>

Buggy Exercise

When: Every Wednesday 10am

Cost: £2 payable in cash on the day

Where: Meet outside the Visitors Centre

A fun fitness session where we enjoy a warmup around the park and then a circuit session, a great way to meet other local parents/carers and get fit along the way! Social distancing regulations apply. Book on at www.bookwhen.com/clearfitness



Outdoor Bootcamp

Houghton Regis Outdoor Bootcamp

Where: Moore Crescent Recreation Ground, Houghton Regis, LU5 5GZ

When: Mondays
(Starting Monday 24th May)

Time: 7.15pm - 8.15pm

Cost: FREE

The Class is for all abilities

LIMITED SPACES AVAILABLE
SPACES MUST BE BOOKED VIA
www.bookwhen.com/activelifestyles

For more information contact:
active.lifestyles@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Active Lifestyles

A great place to live and work.

Find us online www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk [getactivewith](#) [@kentalkcentral](#)

When: Every Thursday 7.15pm

Cost: Free!

Where: Moore Crescent, Recreation Ground

A new outdoor bootcamp from Central Beds Active Lifestyles team.

Open to all levels, book on via - www.bookwhen.com/activelifestyles

Monthly Photography Themes

Art & Culture Event

great lifestyles

May's Photography Theme

'#ConnectWithNature' for Mental Health Awareness Week at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in May
- Some images will be featured on our website, social media platforms, notice boards around the visitor centre and in our monthly newsletter
- Send them to us at: hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
- Deadline 31st May
- Full terms & conditions at our website

Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED

We welcome photographers of all abilities to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly theme. May's theme is: '#ConnectWithNature' at Houghton Hall Park. One of the goals of mental health awareness week (10th – 16th May) is to Share nature: take a photo, video or sound recording and share the connections you've made during the week, to inspire others. We thought this would be a great photography theme, so come to the park, take a moment and see what you can capture, we'd also love to hear your stories on how the park helps your mental health.

IMPORTANT: Please remember to practice social distancing when coming to the park. Please send your submissions to hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

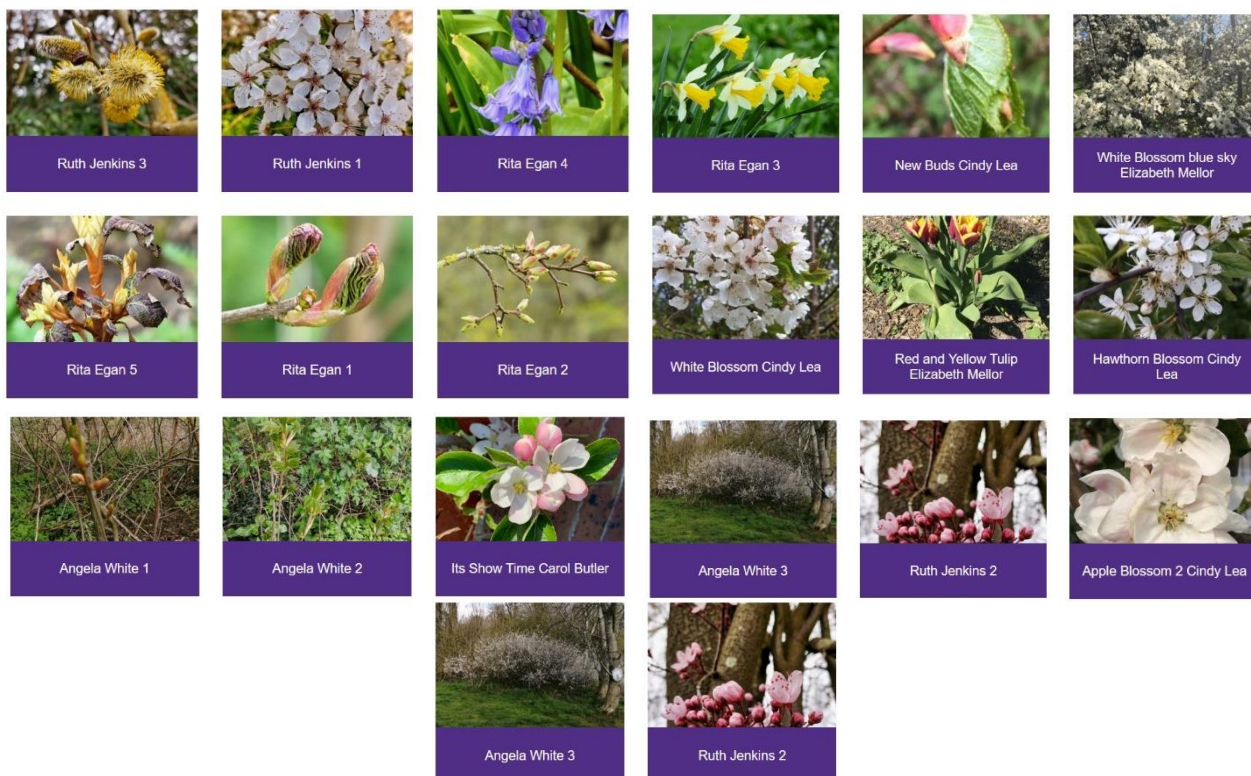
The images must be taken between 1st – 31st May 2021 and each person can submit up to 5 entries. We will not accept any overly photoshopped images that do not represent the reality of the subject in the photo. Some images will be featured on our website, social media platforms, notice

boards around the visitor centre and in our monthly newsletter.

Please see our website for the full terms & conditions before you submit your work:

www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography

Thank you to everyone for sending in their pictures of 'Buds & Blossom' in the park for last month's theme, they are all really beautiful, a selection of photos are below and you can find them all on our website.



Community Ranger Update

Words and photographs by Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger.

Wow, what a month April has been! It feels like it has been non stop and has absolutely flown by. The park over the last month has been very busy with lots of stuff going on.



The team admiring their hard work

At the start of the month we had some fantastic young people join us as part of the Future Proof Parks project coordinated by the charity Groundwork, they come along to improve the existing bug hotel and create a new one opposite to give the minibeasts even more places to hide. If you are or know a young person aged 13-24 who would like to get involved with projects in the park, please contact Emily at Groundwork: Emily.Clowry@groundwork.org.uk

After the Easter holidays we had tree surgeons on site for two weeks. Tree surveys had been done in the winter on trees over 300mm which identified any

trees that had problems such as structural defects, dead wood, or branches over paths. The team came in and checked every tree that had been identified for birds and bats before doing any work on the trees. Three trees have been left due to the birds moving in before we got to them. Some of the wood has been removed to leave space for planting next winter.

Between two sycamores that were cut down we found a concrete rabbit. It must have been there for quite a few years. Does anyone remember putting it there?

This tree looked perfectly fine from the outside, but as you can see was rotten the entire way through.



The revamped bug hotel and the new B&B 'Bug and beetle'



Can you see the rabbit?

Grass cutting has started this month. Sam the volunteer has been doing an absolutely smashing job on the mowing front.

I have been undertaking some elm clearance in the East woodland. These are old elms that have died due to Dutch Elm Disease. Ivy has grown over them and due to the

weight of the ivy and the diseased elm, they have started to fall down.

In April I took over the monthly volunteer session from the Green Sands Trust. With the amount of people visiting the park over the lockdown the amount of litter has increased around the park. There have been people litter picking by themselves around the park which has been really great and has kept the litter mostly at bay and for that we are thankful. For April's session 4 people from the original volunteer group and 4 people from groundwork came to the session. The weather was glorious with the sun shining.

We managed to get 8 big bin bags of rubbish and a trolley and we also identified a car bumper, a motorbike and some hazard fencing that all need to be removed.

If you would like to join the volunteer sessions in the park, please feel free to contact me on: eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



The trunk over the path



All cleared off the path



On the litter pick we stumbled across this fantastic den. It looks so cool, the decoration around the doorway is fantastic.

*Orange tip**Brimstone**Meadow Brown*

This month I saw my first butterfly of the year, and then another and another. So far I've seen a Brimstone, Holly Blue, Meadow brown and an Orange Tip. However no matter how much I tried I was not fast enough to get photos, so here are a few from google.

Have a fantastic month and if you see me running around looking slightly odd, I'm probably trying to get a picture of a butterfly.

Stay safe!

Eleanor

*Holly Blue*

Nature Notes

Words and photographs by Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer.

The issues of this past year have instigated many changes to all our lives and whilst it has been extremely challenging, hopefully over summer, life can gradually return to something we might regard as normal.

Although normal can't be said of the weather at the moment. Spring definitely seems all out of kilter, with April being the driest since records began and May starting with biting cold winds. The familiar proverb which was referenced in *'The Canterbury Tales.'* *'March winds and April showers bring forth May flowers'*, appears to be a long way from the truth at the moment. With the danger of frosts still very much a reality and putting flowers in the garden anytime soon, seems a doubtful prospect. We've had some lovely sunny days in the past couple of weeks, with cloudless skies making the nights very cold. This brings with it early morning frosts and I've had to scrape my windscreen, a couple of mornings this past month.

Butterflies love the warm days



This brings me to the subject of my Nature Notes this month. So many took up gardening and discovered nature on their own doorstep during lockdown. As soon as the sun came out, everyone headed for the garden centres to stock up on bedding plants, eagerly anticipating summer was on its way. Just as it was for us, the warmth woke nature up from dormancy and winter hibernation. Did you notice the numbers of butterflies, bees and other insects around on those warm days? But where are they now?

There is no doubt climate change is having a devastating effect on nature. Whereas we can adapt quite quickly to change, it takes more than a few generations for nature to evolve to cope with the vagaries of the weather patterns we seem to be getting. But we can certainly give it a helping hand.

We all have our favourites when it comes to animals and insects but can be very selective in which we feed or provide homes for. What we must be conscious of though, is your garden is the equivalent of a supermarket for all nature. Your flowers rely on all sorts of insects to pollinate them, insects eat other insects and so it goes on up the food chain. The



A wildlife paradise but not everyone's idea of beautiful

butterflies we love to see, rely on nectar provided by the flowers, the birds eat all manner of insects. My lawn recently has been awash with starlings, poking around for grubs and slugs lurking in the grass. Although not everyone's favourite, it is lovely to see them in such large numbers, if you can leave even a small area of your garden to grow wild. You will be providing a home for a host of insects, a small oasis of protection against the cold and rain. I know it's not always possible particularly if you grow vegetables but avoiding chemical pest controls will also reduce the imbalance of insect numbers and help maintain a complete eco system.



Bird feeders attract all kinds of birds



A larvae transitioning into a ladybird

have a pond with various water depths which is regularly frequented by birds who come to drink and bathe. The beauty for me and my reward, is



A squirrel enjoying breakfast

a rich diverse range of insects, lady birds and butterflies, birds of all kinds from a tiny wren, picking insects from the compost, to crows living high up in a tree. Gulls fly overhead until late evening, often upsetting the crows by drifting too close to their roost. More often than not one of the crows will take to the skies in an attempt to see off the intruders, who take no notice, squawking as if laughing at the futile eviction tactics. Eventually flying off in their own good time. Excitingly a Red Kite has recently been making low passes over a shed roof, where I often throw bits of left over bits of food, typically meat or fish. It has been flying over for a while, usually between mid-day and two pm, but has started to become more interested in what might be on offer.

If you want some inspiration on what you can do for nature, The Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust are holding '30 Days Wild', an annual event that began in 2015. The idea is, for each of the thirty days of June, you do a random act for nature. To help you there is a pack of goodies available, it includes a wall chart an activity passport and other things to inspire you. It's the perfect activity to do as a family and



A gift of sandstone put to good use

lots of fun for children. To register and for more information check out their website.



A snail laying eggs



A feral pigeon looks for easy pickings

At the back of the kitchen garden we have started creating the habitat around the pond edge. The idea is to create a natural looking environment that looks as if it has been there a long time, whilst also acting as a physical barrier preventing anyone falling in! Its construction includes plenty of nooks and crannies for bugs and insects to call home. The logs have come from the recent forestry work carried out around the park, giving old trees a new lease of life. We are also



The soil covered hibernaculum at the end of the pond

grateful for the gift of sandstone pieces, which you will see in the picture have been put to good use and also the donation of cobbles which will help form the beach area in front of the hibernaculum. The hibernaculum has been built with a couple of pallets, bricks and roof tiles topped off with twigs and finally covered with soil. This will provide a safe habitat for a wide range of wildlife to overwinter. Once the area is planted up it should blend in nicely with the plant roots helping to bind everything together.

Just as a side note, I have gardened for a long time and always kept a space for nature. My present garden I've only had for two years which shows it doesn't take long

for nature to move in. As usual all the pictures with this article were taken in my garden. Previously my garden was heavy clay, almost the opposite of the chalk just a foot below the surface, I garden on now. As a result I tend to check if a plant is suitable for the soil type. I grow a range of fruit and the majority of shrubs I grow, prefer an acid soil requiring ericaceous compost, so I have to keep them in pots and only water them with rain water.

Unfortunately when you buy shrubs the labels don't always indicate the soil type a particular plant needs. The acidity or alkalinity is shown on a scale of 1-14 along with the letters pH, which stands for potential of hydrogen. The lower the number the more acidic with 6.2 – 7 being neutral.

Rhododendrons and camellias for instance like a pH 5 - 5.5

Lilacs and clematis prefer 6.5 – 7.5 As a guide I've worked out that if the

instructions indicate adding lots of compost when planting, it's hint the shrub may well prefer a slightly acidic soil.

The reason this is important is because plants cannot take up nutrients properly, if you try growing them outside their preferred pH range. The first signs of a problem is usually yellowing of the leaves which then fall off. Now this symptom is also the result of other factors, such as over or under watering, but it is always worth a quick check on the internet if you have been seduced by those gorgeous blooms and made an impulse purchase at the garden centre. Something I am very guilty of!



A dragonfly takes a rest

Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

What's the latest in the Gardens?

By Jenny Osborne, Community Gardener

Blue skies, sunny days, warmer evenings and Frost!!!

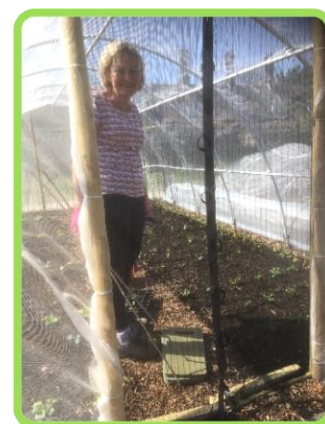
Spring has arrived...

What an interesting month we have had with temperature changes and weather conditions. The poor plants don't know what to make of it, especially the tomatoes. I have held back on sowing beans until this week as if the weather continues it really won't do them a lot of good. As I have often said things tend to catch up in the end and there is nothing worse than stressed 'leggy' plants. Plants that are stressed are more susceptible to pests and diseases. A delay in planting may mean we are harvesting a week or so later, but it will also mean that we are still cropping into October when everyone has put theirs in the compost bin!

The first signs of asparagus emerging, we have cropped around 12 bunches already. The first two years we left them to flower and resisted the urge to pick but now we can enjoy these tasty treats. Our other perennial crop is rhubarb and we have had the pleasure of 26kg this month already. Its replenishing nicely! This is the time of year that volunteers are rewarded for their time in abundance



In 4 weeks, we have gone from baby plug plants to some sizable plants, several crops of radish and the rows looking really full. Spinach has been equally plentiful alongside a variety of overwintered lettuce.





It is much easier to have a protected area that you can stand in and not crawl around on your hands and knees, so we are really looking forward to cropping from this airy space. The netting is a very fine mesh (*enviromesh*) which provides protection from cabbage white butterflies but also from flea beetle which make tiny holes in the brassica leaves.



Flea Beetle

The mangetout is establishing well and the first flowers have begun to appear so hopefully in the next few weeks we will be able to include these in our harvest. Around the edge we have planted spinach.

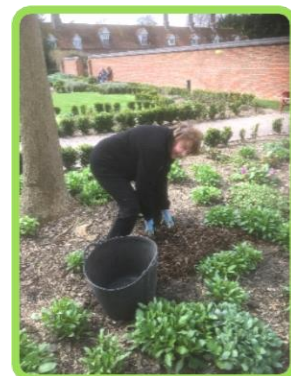
In the middle of March, we began our new potato planting of *maris bard* but covered them with a fleece to protect the leaves for catching a frost. It is just as well we did as we have had 10 nights in a row where temperatures have plummeted. Last year we were unlucky to catch a late frost and it put them a few weeks behind on harvest which put out our timings for the next crop. Fingers crossed it will work out just fine. In the last few days the leaves have pushed through the soil so we will dress them with a few inches of compost to encourage them to produce more tubers. This also prevents the potatoes from going green.





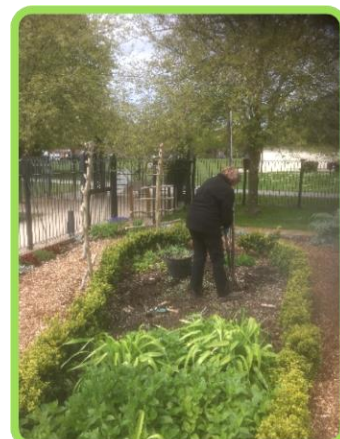
Our cut flower patch has a lot of very tender annuals grown so it will be a few weeks yet until we will be able to plant these out. One of them that we have moved onto the bed though is cornflowers. Striking, vivid shades of blues and lilacs these provide an abundance of flowers and are great for pollinators. They will need staking and I will show you how we are going about this next month. Cornflowers make excellent cut flowers and have an extremely long season.

The formal garden has been given a lot of care and attention this past month but we are still battling weeds from years of cultivation. We try to disturb as much as possible and where possible resort to hoeing for minimal soil disturbance. The bark chip mulch on the beds helps to suppress the weeds and keep in the moisture.



Work on bed 7 is at full speed ahead now as it begins to change its identity. The Easter chicks are happily packed away for another year. The volunteers have been busy putting in small wigwams for the children which will be overplanted with climbers such as sweet peas, cobeia, scandens, ipomea and golden hops.

Over the coming weeks we will begin to make more interesting structures for his bed as it develops into a themed 'Elves and the shoemaker'. Hidden amongst it will be lots of elf and fairy doors for the children to discover. We will continue to share its progress through our newsletter.



The wildlife pond is really making headway in the back of the kitchen garden. Water has been added and the edging stones and logs creating an interesting habitat for our wildlife. We were lucky enough to be given the opportunity to collect some sandstone from a nearby property which you can see we have started to incorporate along the edge. These different nooks and crannies provide wonderful texture and interest and by next month we hopefully will have completed designing the main edges.



Not a week goes by at the moment when potting up or pricking out isn't required as the month of April proves to be a crazy month. Our volunteers have been incredibly busy ensuring that our seedlings are well cared for.

We raise all our plants from seed and gradually harden them off in our cold frames before planting them out.



As we are inundated with trays of seedlings at the moment I was extremely grateful when a volunteer offered me her dad's old potting bench from a greenhouse that was being dismantled. Although years old it is extremely well made, and we have given it a new lease of life by treating it with a fence stain. It will be a godsend to have some additional benches in the green house.



Behind the scenes I am very grateful to have continuous improvements from our handy volunteers. Additional sink space and water points are making our life so much easier for washing tools, watering and cleaning our produce.



The value, humour and enthusiasm that Houghton hall park volunteers bring to the park is immeasurable. We have such a wonderful array of skills and diverse personalities and as a group create an incredible team which I'm so proud to co-ordinate. I extend my thanks to each and every one of you as this time of year we get swept away by the jobs and momentum of the season. It is only when I look back through the photos from when I arrived here that you can truly appreciate the journey we have shared.

Thank you for reaching out to support each other in these challenging times, for providing friendship and for keeping one another safe.

I look forward to supplying you with some tasty fruit and vegetables all year long!!

Happy Gardening, stay safe

Jenny

Plant of the Month – Bergenia



Commonly known as elephant's ears, because of their large, leathery, oval leaves. There are many new cultivars that have become widely available. Bergenias are low maintenance, evergreen, ground cover perennials which normally grow to a height of 50cm / 18in high. They spread to around 1m / 3ft round after a couple of years, will grow in sun or shade and tolerate a wide range of soils, including dry soils and clay. They make lovely edging plants with their huge leaves.

In spring most varieties produce pink or purple flowers although some are white. Extremely hardy, these are very tough plants!

Although Bergenias have a reputation for being good shade plants, if you choose a variety for good leaf colour, these do better in sun and poor soil.

Irene Copperwheat
Houghton Hall Park Volunteer



Keep in touch

Facebook

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Twitter

@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Current Opening Times

The Visitors Centre, café and toilets closed until further notice.

Become a volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

Thinking of giving something back to your local community? Then get in touch with us to see what you can do to get involved. Here are some ideas below:

- Observational Surveys
- Community engagement
- Weeding and clearing
- Cleaning
- Watering
- Growing food and encourage healthy eating
- Teach younger generations (if you have a skill or qualification, let us know!)
- Become a community leader
- Support other volunteers
- Contribute to the annual park events calendar
- Volunteering assistant at events running at the park
- Curate local history talks at visitor centre
- Habitat enhancement work in the woodland and meadow

There are many opportunities to take part. If you would like to volunteer and join the Volunteers of Houghton Hall Park, please email

hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



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LOTTERY FUNDED