

# Houghton Hall Park

## January 2023 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.

It's January and the Houghton Hall Park team are busy preparing for the year ahead after a busy December.

The gas works are continuing on Park Rd North, however, you can still use the park and car park outside the Visitors Centre, drive past the road closure signs by The Chequers roundabout to access. We don't have an update on when the gas works on Park Rd North are due to finish, this is unplanned work due to a gas leak.

Buggy Exercise has restarted and is the perfect opportunity to get out in the fresh air and meet other parents, classes take place rain or shine and only cost £2 per session, find out more in our What's On pages.

Our volunteers worked hard in December in the gardens and the wider park, they also enjoyed a social event where wreaths were created and good food enjoyed, our Community Ranger Eleanor has written all about it in this month's update. Sue, our Community Gardener, has collated some lovely photos looking back on 2022 in her report.

Hedgehogs are the topic of Mark, our volunteer's, nature notes, discover how you can help these fascinating creatures in your own garden.

With the days getting colder hearty food is the way to go, volunteer Irene has come up with a lovely recipe for red cabbage this month, send us in your photos ([hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)) if you give this a go, we'd love to see them!



**A great place to live and work.**

## What's On

### Stick Man Trail

**When:** Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> February

**Time:** 11am to 2pm

**Cost:** Free!

We're branching out! Come down and visit our fun-filled activity trail featuring popular picture book character Stick Man. The self-guided trail is aimed at encouraging children aged 3-7 to get outdoors and explore the natural world and find out how things grow. If you want to 'twig' how much fun the trails can be, then visit us 11am to 2pm.



There will be a limited amount of free Stick Man Badges and Certificates in the Visitors Centre foyer, please come and find us once you have completed the trail. There will also be Stick Man Keyrings and soft toys for sale.

Please walk, scoot, or cycle to the park if you can, our parking is limited, overflow parking is available at Moore Crescent LU5 5GZ (five min walk to the park) just drive up to the barrier and it will open.

## Warm Space

**When:** Every Tuesday

**Time:** 9am to 4pm

**Cost:** Free!

The Lime Room at Houghton Hall Park Visitors Centre will be available each Tuesday 9am-4pm through the winter months as part of the network of Warm Spaces across Central Bedfordshire. Everyone is welcome. No need to book. Free Wi-fi, three hours free parking, and toilets are available (including accessible toilet and baby change) - and a selection of hot beverages will be available to anyone using the warm space with huge thanks to Really Awesome Coffee.



For more information on Warm Spaces and other locations near to you, please follow the link below.

<https://bit.ly/3XwGCNc>

## Buggy Exercise



**When:** Every Wednesday during term time

**Time:** 10am outside the Visitors Centre

**Cost:** £2

This is the perfect class if you have a baby, would like to meet other parents and get fit in the process! The park is a great sensory experience for your baby, just getting out in the fresh air and nature is proven to boost your mood and increase energy.

The class starts with a gentle jog/walk/stretch around the park followed by a circuit and sometimes boxing which is a great stress reliever!

To book on visit our website:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/buggy-exercise>

## Parkrun & Junior Parkrun

**When:** Parkrun every Saturday and Junior Parkrun every Sunday

**Time:** 9am

**Cost:** Free!

A free, weekly, timed 5k/2k walk/jog/run at 9am every Saturday & Sunday. Open to all ages and abilities. Organised entirely by volunteers. Friendly and fun.

If you would like to take part but have not run before you will need to register at [www.parkrun.org.uk](http://www.parkrun.org.uk)





# Monthly Photography Themes

We welcome photographers of all abilities to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly theme.

We are embracing the colours of January with our photography theme of 'Black & White', January can seem long and muted compared to the excitement of December, let's see if you can find some beauty in the park this month. Please send your submissions to [hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk).

The images must be taken between 1<sup>st</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022 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](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography)

Thank you to Sarah Rose for sending in her wonderful photographs of Rosie the dog and the stunning ice we had for December's theme of 'Feeling Festive'.

**Art & Culture Event**

**great lifestyles**

**January's Photography Theme**

**'Black & White' at Houghton Hall Park**

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in January
- Some images will be featured on our website, social media platforms and in our monthly newsletter
- Send them to us at: [hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)
- Deadline 31st January
- Full terms & conditions at our website

Find out more online at [www.houghtonhallpark.org](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org)

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# Community Park Ranger Update

*Words and photographs by Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger.*



Happy new year, I hope you are well and had a good Christmas and new year! December.... What a month. From extreme weather, events left right and centre and volunteers it was very busy.

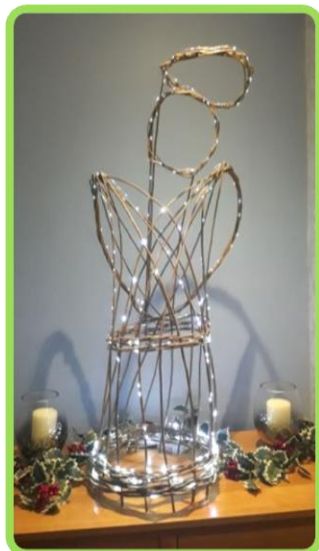
The snow came and coated the park in several inches of snow creating some lovely scenes.

Myself and Sue, the Community Gardener visited, Silsoe Horticultural College this month to do a willow wreath session with the students, they did a great job and we had a lovely day, I think

you'll agree the wreaths look fantastic!



I also ran some willow angel sessions that were really popular, everyone had a great time and all the angels looked incredible! I have more willow events planned for the coming year so keep an eye out on our website and Facebook.



December's Sunday volunteer session was a fun, there was girl power in abundance taking down a coppice stool in record time.





If you would like to join the Sunday volunteer session please feel free to email me at:  
[Eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

To round up the fantastic year of volunteering we had a shared super and willow wreath making session. The volunteers all looked fantastic in their Christmas get up as opposed to gardening clothes! The wreaths looked great and they did a really good job!



I hope you had a great Christmas and new year and I'll see you around the park in 2023!

Eleanor

Community Park Ranger

## Nature Notes

Words by Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer.

The dramatic decline in hedgehog numbers has been well documented in recent years. But were you aware that back in the 1950's there were an estimated 30 million hedgehogs in England. Unfortunately, due a range of factors, including loss of habitat, there are less than one million of these iconic creatures around today. Considering they have been around for, and have changed little in over 15 million years, it is a sad fact to think in just seventy years, we have lost over 29 million of them, the largest part of that loss occurring in the last twenty years. As around a quarter of their number are now found in urban areas, perhaps now is our chance to give them a helping hand. Although they are still hibernating, this month's nature notes give some insights about them, so you have time to consider how you might to be able to help this increasingly endangered species.



*Hedgehogs have poor eyesight but an excellent sense of smell and hearing.*

The hedgehog we see in Britain is the West European and is one of seventeen species worldwide and part of the Erinaceinae group. Apart from the mating season they lead a solitary life. Believe it or not they are distantly related to shrews. Growing to about a foot long and weighing two and a half pounds, they are the UK's only spiny animal. Not often visible, hidden under their spines, they have a short tail. Their six thousand or so spines are made of keratin, the same material as human hair and nails. These are shed and replaced in a similar way to our hair. With poor eyesight they rely heavily on a keen sense of smell and hearing.

For the first month following hibernation, hedgehogs need to put on weight lost over this period. Depending on weather conditions this is around April time. Hedgehogs reach sexual maturity at two years and known as a *Rut*, May sees the start of the breeding season. During this time a male can travel three kilometres a night in search of a female. They are not monogamous, both male and females often mating with several partners during this period. Pregnancy lasts four weeks, with hoglets being born in June. Females give birth to six or seven babies, although only half these are likely to make it to adult hood. If the nest is disturbed, a female may kill her offspring. Surviving hoglets leave the nest with their mother after three or four weeks on foraging trips. By August the young will be totally independent. Hibernation is generally November to April, and it can be detrimental to them if disturbed during this period.



*Hoglets are tiny.*



*Hedgehogs are very agile and can cover long distances during the night.*

One of the biggest challenges facing hedgehogs is man-made barriers, as they roam widely with territories covering as much as forty acres. Although they are not specifically territorial, usually only during the *Rut* is there any confrontation, generally amounting to no more than grunting at, headbutting and shoving a rival away. In the wider environment roads and drainage ditches are a big barrier and the cause of many deaths. The problem in urban areas is fenced off gardens, prohibiting their wandering habit. So, if you can, create a *hedgehog highway*, by making openings allowing them access in and out of your garden.





*Provide water to encourage hedgehogs into your garden*

You can also make your garden hedgehog friendly by providing food and water. Encourage slugs and snails into a cool place by providing cover for them during the daytime. These will emerge in the evening when hedgehogs start feeding. You don't need a large area; a small patch of undisturbed stones and damp logs is ideal. Slugs can't resist bran, so can be tempted to these areas by putting some flakes down. Or you could create a feeding station of your own by putting out a bowl of water and meat-based cat or dog food. If you do, please make sure it is changed

daily, otherwise it may cause them more harm than good. By the way, they are lactose intolerant, milk and bread are indigestible by hedgehogs and seriously upsets their stomachs. Check all areas before using mowers, strimmers or other garden machinery. Avoid chemicals and please don't use slug pellets. Finally, before next October why not install a hedgehog house in a quiet corner where it can be left undisturbed next winter.



*Hedgehogs forage for slugs, snails, worms and beetles*

## Plant of the Month – Winter Cyclamen



There are plenty of non-hardy cyclamen around at this time of year, however, they are one-season wonders. The hardy garden cyclamens, on the other hand once happy, will spread and colonise areas of the garden and, over a few years, will carpet tricky areas in shade, which is where they really look their best.

The seed is distributed by ants and wasps, which are attracted to the plant's starchy coating. This turns to a sugary substance that insects then take away from the parent plant. They live a life in reverse, dying back and lying dormant from spring into summer when things have warmed

up and then bursting into life when temperatures drop and the autumn rains start. Cyclamen like some shelter from strong winds and protection from strong sunshine. They can cope in north-facing aspects and are happy on acid or alkaline soils.

Irene Copperwheat  
Houghton Hall Park Volunteer



## What's the latest in the Gardens?

*By Sue Beard, Houghton Hall Park Community Gardener*

2022 was a challenging year weather wise in the kitchen garden.

From extremes of sweltering summer heat of 40 degrees Celsius, to freezing temperatures in December of minus 12, it has been a challenging time for all the plants but also our hardy volunteers who have braved the gardens whatever the weather.

December was such a busy month and brought a heavy layer of snow, which was so picturesque and gave the opportunity for some great photos but stalled us on preparing the beds for January and February. Luckily, we had managed to mulch all the beds in the formal garden so most of the plants were tucked up nicely once the snow arrived.

The wonderful 12 days of Christmas display kept us all busy. Our talented volunteers worked so hard creating each of the twelve days to ensure a display of such variety and interest! Wreath making workshops, creating items for the Christmas craft Fayre, and producing the 12 days of Christmas display and the tonnes of gardening tasks that are carried out each day kept us all busy throughout December and Christmas was here before we knew it

As we turn the corner into 2023 its time to take stock and see what plants have survived the strains of such changing and challenging weather conditions.

January is always a time of anticipation and excitement of the year ahead, and Spring starts to feel like it is within reach!

Getting ready for the growing season ahead, planting plans are being formulated and forever growing list of tasks is being collated so that weather permitting we can push on with bringing these plans to life.

Already bulbs are starting to push through the soil ready for bursting into colour when the spring arrives, and the gardens seems to be patiently waiting for the time to begin growing again and erupt into colour.

January is also a time to look back and consider what grew well last year, what didn't do so well and what we need to be mindful of this year. Hopefully the weather will be kind over the next couple of months so that we can forge ahead with preparation for this year's growing.

Until next time.

Happy Gardening!

## 2022 in the Gardens in pictures.....







# Houghton Hall Park

## *Kitchen Garden Recipe*

To use from - The Garden:  
Red Cabbage, Onion, Apple & Garlic



### Spiced Braised Red Cabbage

#### Ingredients:

1 star anise  
1 cinnamon stick  
5 cardamom pods  
1 small red cabbage (about 900g)  
1 garlic clove  
2 large onions , chopped  
1 Bramley apple , peeled, cored and finely chopped  
3 tbsp brown sugar  
3 tbsp red wine vinegar  
25g butter

#### Method:

1. Heat oven to 150C/130C fan/gas 2. Put the star anise, cinnamon stick and cardamom pods in the centre of a small square of muslin, and tie the ends together to make a bag. Put the spice bag in a medium flameproof casserole dish.
2. Remove any wilted or tough outer leaves from the cabbage. Cut it into quarters, then remove and discard the core. Shred the cabbage finely and layer up in the dish with the garlic, onions, apple and brown sugar.
3. Spoon over the vinegar and dot the top with the butter. Cover with a lid and cook for 2-3 hrs, stirring twice during cooking – the cabbage should be tender but not mushy. Remove the spice bag and serve.

Irene Copperwheat  
Houghton Hall Park Volunteer





## 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](mailto:hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

## Keep in touch

### Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

### Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

### Twitter

@BedsCountryside

### Website

[www.houghtonhallpark.org](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org)

### Email

[hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

## Current Opening Times

Mon – Sun 9am to 4pm



Central Bedfordshire Council



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