

# Houghton Hall Park

## April 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.



April is here and the park is looking very spring like, we started our events and activities programme with the Birds of Prey Day which was rescheduled from last year when it was cancelled due to the heat wave. The weather was yet again unpredictable and we had a very soggy day, that didn't stop us though! Herrings Green Activity Farm provided the Birds of Prey for the day which included an eagle, hawk and owls. Even though it rained all day we were pleased to see an impressive crowd at 1pm for the flying display, there was a slight change of plan with this as



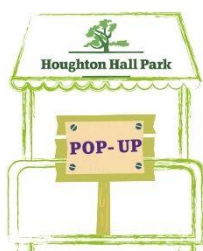
there were a number of dogs in the park and the handler didn't trust the eagle who has a particular liking for Jack Russell's therefore the birds were kept on a line rather than flying free, we think that this was best for all concerned! Along with the birds we also had a number of craft stalls and owl pellet workshops which after a little trepidation the participants found extremely interesting, lots of bones were found including this mouse skull.



It's also been a busy month in the gardens and the wider park, catch up on the latest updates from the rest of the team later in the newsletter. We hope you had a Happy Easter and will be back with another update in May!

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

## What's On



### WEEKEND POP-UP CRAFT/PRODUCE STALLS IN THE FOYER

Date	Pop-Up
8th April	Leah Mistry- Handmade jewellery & resin ornaments
9th April	Leah Mistry- Handmade jewellery & resin ornaments
15th April	Handmade By Rosie - Sewn items
16th April	Belicious Cakes - Cakes & Deserts
23rd April	Murrays Makes - Embroidery items
29th April	Doggy Dawdlers - Doggy crafts & Treats

Stalls cost £10 per day, if you are interested in having a stall please visit [www.houghtonhallpark.org/events](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events)

## 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>



# Monthly Photography Themes

**Art & Culture Event**

**great lifestyles** Central Bedfordshire

**April's Photography Theme**

**'Blossom' at Houghton Hall Park**

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in April
- Some images will be shown 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 30th April
- Full terms & conditions at our website

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

LOTTERY FUNDED

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

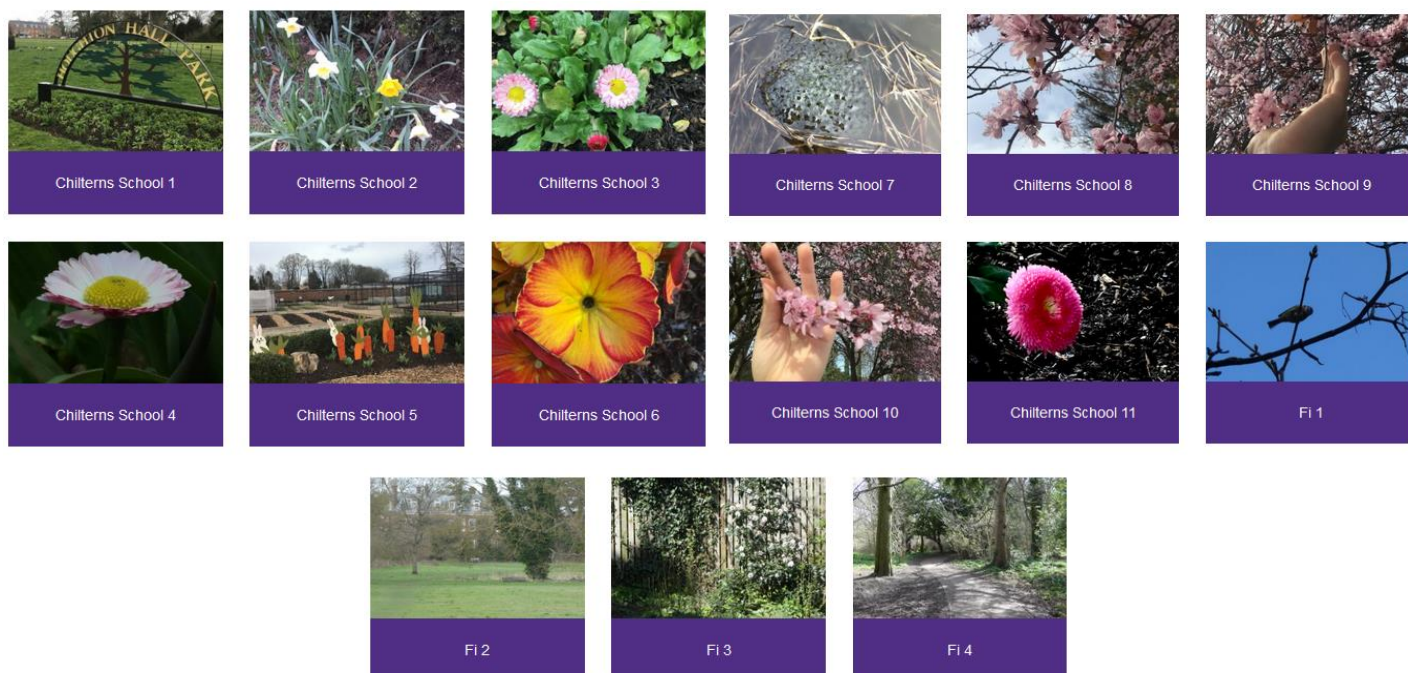
April's theme is: 'Blossom at Houghton Hall Park', we can't wait to see what you capture for this one, please send your submissions to [hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk).

The images must be taken between 1<sup>st</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> April 2023 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)

Last month's theme was 'Spring' this is always a very popular theme as you can see from the photos below, to see the full images go to our website.

Thank you for the beautiful photos of Spring in the park sent in by the Chilterns School and Fi age 11, we can't wait to see what you submit next!



# Community Park Ranger Update

*By Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger*

Hello, well March flew by, I can't believe we are well and truly into April now!



Clearly the cowslips can feel it but Spring has truly sprung this month with everything starting to grow again. Out in the park you'll be able to hear the birds tweeting, the meadow is starting to team with life and the trees are starting to bloom too!

This month a lovely group from U3A came along to have a go at some willow weaving. They

managed to make these incredible willow flowers and had a great laugh whilst doing it!



March's monthly volunteer session was a litter pick. We did a shorter session as it was Mother's day but the amount of litter we managed to collect was crazy! We found old coats, lots of regular litter, a shopping trolley and much more.



In the gardens we've been making sure the place is looking spick and span ahead of the upcoming growing season! That includes clearing leaves, edging and creating structures that we will need to grow things up. You can see community Gardener Sue moving some coppiced hazel ready to make obelisks!

The Birds of prey event took place on 26<sup>th</sup> March, as part of this we ran an owl pellet workshop. This meant getting to take a closer look at what the owls have been eating. Using a pair of tweezers and a gloved

hand you can start to pick the pellet apart and see what's inside. All sorts of animals were found the most popular being mice skulls, various other bones and a few people even found Shrew skulls!

In other news I will be leaving the park at the end of April. I have been offered a promotion near my family so will be heading back to the midlands. It has been fantastic working in the park over the last two and half years. It has been really great getting to know lots of you and work with some truly fantastic people!

Have a great month and I will see you for my last update at the end of April!

Many thanks

Eleanor





## Nature Notes

Words by Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer.



*Moss collected to line the nest*



*A squirrel by the nesting site*

The last couple of weeks have been very busy for the birds that visit my garden. I've watched as finches, tits, blackbirds, robins and magpies have been gathering material for nest building. A pair of great tits started working on two nests, one they abandoned last year in the soffits of the house and another in a hollow of an apple tree close to the house. Even though the apple tree is a refuge for lots of birds who visit the nearby feeders and one of the routes the squirrels use to come into the garden, this was the site of their chosen nest. As a result, they spend a lot of time defending their space. I just hope they are successful in raising a brood. The squirrels will be their biggest threat, so I've moved one feeder further down the garden to tempt them away from the tree. I've also replaced the other feeders for squirrel proof ones.



*Checking the nest site*

The blackbirds, magpies and crows have built nests nearby and I've witnessed several aerial combats between them as they defend their respective nest sites. At times it seems as if they deliberately go out of their way to annoy one another. Like a dog fight in a star wars movie, their dexterity in the air is quite spectacular to watch. Particularly as the magpies chase the crows, matching their every change of direction with split second timing.

The sunny weather over the Easter break, prompted the frogspawn in both my own pond and the one in the kitchen garden to hatch. The process starts with lots of bubbles forming on the jelly mass as if it's fermenting. Then the little black specks start wriggling out of their protective cells, escaping to face the challenges in the wider water of the pond. Apart from birds eating them, many will fall prey to dragonfly larvae, which are ferocious feeders.

So apart from being a busy time, this time of year can be both challenging and exhausting as nature tries to raise the next generation.



Until next time.

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park and Gardens

# What's the latest in the Gardens?

By Sue Beard, Community Gardener

*March days when the sun shines hot, and the wind blows cold.*

*When its summer in the light and winter in the shade!*

Despite the ever-changing weather this month we have been super busy in the gardens getting ready for the year ahead. In the greenhouse and poly tunnel is an array of early seedlings growing, including, beetroot, tomatoes, herbs, herbaceous perennials, and early flowers. Some have already been dibbed out and are busy growing on with the help of the sunny warm days we have had. With the few days of light frost last week, it has been necessary to wrap them in fleece during the night, but they have survived well and are busy growing into strong plants.

This year's potatoes are chitting in the greenhouse and are just about ready to plant out hopefully the weather will stay dry, and we should start to plant them out this week.



All the beds in the Kitchen Garden have now received the second mulch and have newly woodchipped paths, so look lovely tidy and prepared for the planting ahead. We remain constantly vigilant though to any weed that dares to grow!!

Planting in the new herb garden bed at the front of the kitchen garden has started and it is now starting to take shape. A range of herbs and flowers will fill the bed with a beautiful bay and lavender as the centre piece. Additional herbs are busy growing in the greenhouse and we can add them to the bed once they have reached maturity.

As Spring has arrived so have the beautiful Tulips and daffodils

providing a much-needed burst of colour and a promise of the sunny summer days ahead. The tulips burst into flower just in time to compliment the wonderfully colourful and fun Easter display on the story telling bed. In the Kitchen Garden yard we have been spending time having a good spring clean and general tidy up! Everything is now looking lovely and tidy and more spacious. We just have to remember where we have put everything!

In last month's newsletter I mentioned how we had been assessing the damage caused to the shrubs in the formal garden last year when the temperatures plummeted to minus 13. Luckily the damage caused was very limited and only requires a limited number of replacements. This month we have been giving some of the shrubs a much-needed hard prune. The shrubs around one of the main beds in the formal garden have been reduced in size, this is not only so that the shrubs can re shoot and grow greener and stronger but also means that formal garden will be much more open and will enable a clear view across at the main park.

Hopefully Spring will continue with lots of sunshine and warm sun helping us to get on with sowing, growing and planting in the gardens ready for all the visitors to the park this summer.

Until next time. Happy Gardening!





## 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



LOTTERY FUNDED