

# Houghton Hall Park

## January 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.

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2021, not the start we would have liked or wanted but we can hope that like the seasons our days will start to get a bit lighter soon. This picture was sent in by Zoe Wright for last month's photography theme, she's called it 'A Glimpse of Sunlight' which feels apt in these times, there's still much darkness but with the launch of the COVID vaccine there's a glimmer of light on the horizon.

Even in lockdown we can still enjoy the park, remember to stick to current social distancing regulations and to keep the park looking great please dispose of your litter responsibly.

In the newsletter this month we have lots to take your mind off current events, meet some of our volunteers in Jenny's gardening blog, see what Eleanor our Community Ranger has been up to and find out about the RSPB's Big Bird Count in Mark, our volunteers, nature notes. We also have a new nature challenge the children can take part in each month.



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

## What's On

### RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch

**When:** 29<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> January

**Cost:** Free

Join thousands of people taking part to see the drama unfold on your doorstep. We might not be able to get together with loved ones at the moment, but you can make plans with friends and family to take part in the world's largest wildlife survey, all from the comfort of your own home.



You can choose any hour between 29 and 31 January. So whether you're an early bird or a night owl, you can still take part.

Count the birds you see in your garden or from your balcony. Ignore any birds that are still in flight. To avoid double-counting, just record the highest number of each bird species you see at any one time – not a running total.

You can submit your results and find out more at [rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](https://rspb.org.uk/birdwatch)

### Children's Nature Challenge

The poster is purple and green. It features the text 'Nature Event' in a white circle, 'great lifestyles' logo, and 'Children's Nature Challenge' in large white letters. Below this, it says 'Get crafty &amp; make a bird, anyway you like, and send us your pictures!' and 'Find out some facts on birds and take our bird quiz.' There is a photo of a child's handprint bird craft. At the bottom, it says 'When taking exercise in the park take part in our winter scavenger hunt.' and 'Everything can be found and downloaded on our website! https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/childrens-nature-challenge'. The footer includes 'Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org' and 'LOTTERY FUNDED' with a logo.

**When:** 14<sup>th</sup> January to 14<sup>th</sup> February

**Cost:** Free

Each month during lockdown we are going to give you some activities you can enjoy with the kids at home or in the park when taking exercise. As our photography theme is birds this month we would like you to try and make your own bird at home, out of anything you like, and to send us a picture. On our website we have put together some facts on birds and there is a quiz you can take part in, there is also a winter scavenger hunt which could keep the kids occupied when taking your daily exercise in the park or any other local walk. Have fun, we can't wait to see your photos!

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/childrens-nature-challenge>

# Monthly Photography Themes

**Art & Culture Event**

**great lifestyles**

**January's Photography Theme**

'Birds' at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture for 'Birds' at Houghton Hall Park

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in January
- 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](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)
- Deadline 30th January
- Full terms & conditions at our website

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

LOTTERY FUNDED

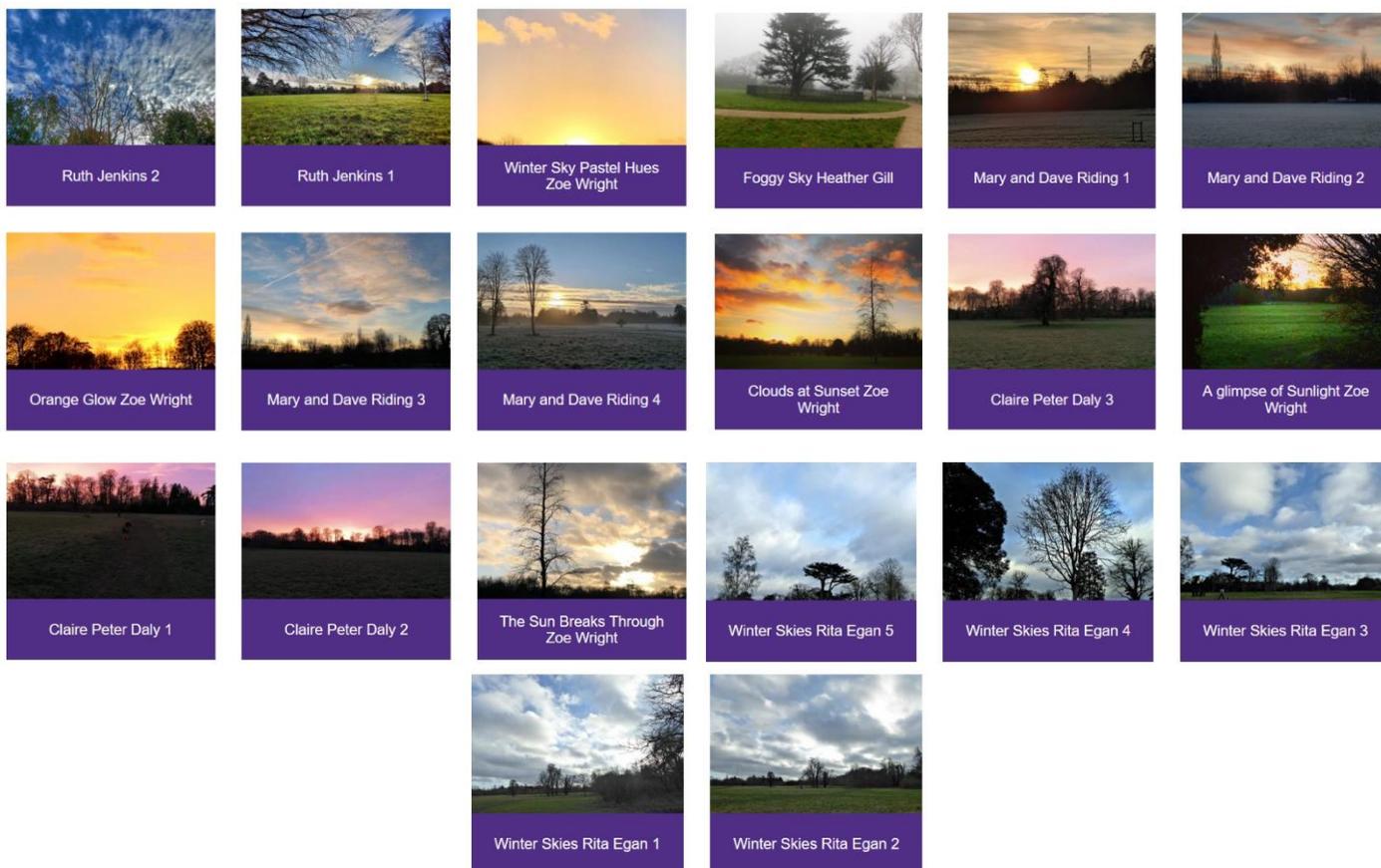
We welcome photographers of all abilities from the age of 16 to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly theme. January's theme is: 'Birds' at Houghton Hall Park', we've seen a few cheeky robins recently it would be wonderful if you could capture them!

**IMPORTANT:** Please remember to practice social distancing when coming to the park.

Please send your submissions to [hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk). The images must be taken between 1<sup>st</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020 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)

We received some marvellous entries for last month's theme which was 'Winter Skies'.



## Community Ranger Update



Before



After

The monthly volunteer group met in December and with the help of Jamie from the Green Sands Trust we began some coppicing along the south side of the park. Three volunteers attended the session and they made a great start with the coppicing and managed to coppice 7 stools by hand.

Jamie who is a trained chainsaw operator used his chainsaw to get the bottom of the stumps really low which will encourage regrowth. Due to the stools being neglected they were rather large and were relatively difficult to cut. Now that they have been coppiced they will be easier to manage and will provide usable material in the future.

To protect the stumps and any regrowth from animals such as rabbits and deer who tend to eat the new shoots, we covered the stumps with brash (left over twiggy bits) for coppicing.

### Tree Rescuing!

We have continued with last month's bramble clearance and have been clearing between the trees that we found under all the bramble! With the help of some fantastic volunteers

we have made great moves in clearing the brambles which has allowed us to check the trees and gives them a better chance of survival as they have more light and less competition. Now all we have to do is finish cutting back the last bits of bramble and then move the pile.

Did you know that there are over 330 species of brambles in the UK?

Did you know brambles are part of the rose family!



The finished coppice stool



## Nature Notes

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

Well here we are at the beginning of 2021 let us hope it brings a better and safer world for all of us.



*Just few feet from my window*

Last month I spoke about Citizen Science as a form of taking part and its importance by giving scientists more information that they would otherwise have access to. This has prompted me to remind you of a national event taking place over the last weekend of January 29th-31st. It is of course The RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch, which is a form of Citizen Science. To date there has been over forty years of data collected giving an accurate insight into the changing fortunes of our garden birds. This year's event will be of great importance as it will show the impact Covid 19 has had on the avian populations. This in itself will be an indicator of any benefits there has been to the environment during the pandemic. So, if you can, please take part, it involves just one hour of watching at any time over the weekend. If you don't have access to a garden then, restrictions permitting, it can be done at a local park. The great news is you don't need to be a member of the RSPB to take part. To register go to their website [rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](https://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch) for more information and to download the guides and recording forms. If you do take part don't forget to take lots of photographs.

Normally my grandchildren come over and we do it together, but I suspect, under the current restrictions, it won't be possible this year. Even so we will have a 'Whats App' call and at least compare notes. This is a great activity to engage children, who will enjoy spotting and identifying the different species with the help of the coloured guides you can download.

### And now for something completely different...

I don't watch a lot of television, but recently I was persuaded to watch Gogglebox. During this particular episode the participants were watching a programme about elephants. At a crucial point a baby becomes separated from the herd, as the elephants are being stalked by lions, and is in mortal danger. The viewers are gripped holding their breath. They hope the lions will fail and the baby saved. In the end to their relief the baby elephant makes it back to the safety of its mother. But their relief is short lived as it becomes apparent that the stress has proved too much for the matriarch of the herd and as the camera turns to her, it is clear she is dead, moving some of the viewers we are watching to tears. I mention this because it seems automatically we are moved to support the underdog. Then it got me thinking, what if it had been a film about the lions? What if the programme had told us the lions hadn't eaten in over a week and if their hunt failed their cub would most certainly die? So, this month rather than do the usual round up of the past year I thought it would be fun to get you thinking about how you tend to view the natural world around you.

### Food for thought

So many children stories humanise the animal world, giving them human traits and voices. For adults, George Orwell used animals to make a point, on how behaviour can stoop to tyrannical lows, in his satirical book Animal Farm. Beatrix Potter brought animals to life in her famous tales. Rabbits, squirrels, mice and the like have lots adventures. Likewise Walt Disney and Pixar films

depict insects, fish and animals, evoking all sorts of emotions in us, they make us laugh, cry, root for the little guy and boo the bad ones but when it comes to reality we hate a lot of these creatures and kill them.

We love to watch animals being born on programmes like Country file and Spring Watch. Seeing baby lambs frolic in the fields. We go 'ahh' at little pink piglets and see fluffy yellow baby chicks as cute but how many of us consider they will soon enter the food chain and none of these will make it to their first birthday.



*This sinister looking caterpillar of the beautiful Cinnabar moth.*

Don't we take delight in seeing a blackbird or thrush take a snail and smash it against a hard surface to get at the juicy meat inside? Do we ever take the side of Brian the snail? Or do we feel concerned for the very hungry caterpillar tightly clamped in a blue tits beak? But what sentiments do we feel, when the blue tit becomes a meal for a sparrow hawk, or we see a pigeon being torn apart by a peregrine falcon and fed to its chicks?

It seems our emotions are influenced by the way these creatures are presented to us. Some people love spiders and keep them as pets, others run a mile at the sight of just a small one, trapped in a bath.

Irrespective of the way these

things make you feel, the bottom line is at some point, they all become food for something else. From the smallest insect up to the largest animal, each of these creatures is dependent on another, either by creating the environment for something else to exist or it becomes a meal. Before being a food source for humans, farm animals manure supports a host of micro-organisms, flies and beetles. The number of worms present are a great indicator of soil conditions and support a great number of animals. We all know they are a favourite of blackbirds, but worms are a staple diet for badgers, foxes also love them. Slugs and snails have their place in the eco system too. Some are carnivores some vegetarian, some only eat decomposing material, were you aware slugs also eat dog poo?!



*Love in the grass, Slugs will never rank high in the popularity stakes.*

My point in mentioning all this is, maybe we should be careful about being selective, nature can be fickle and is finely balanced, so if we favour one thing over another we could inadvertently disrupt its stability.



*Squirrels have easy access to the feeders*

Let me give you a couple of examples. I'm a keen gardener and get upset when squirrels dig up and eat the flower bulbs in the garden. I also hate the slugs for nibbling my newly planted seedlings. If I don't keep a wary eye, Lilly beetles will strip a whole plant overnight killing it before it flowers. I could call in a licensed pest controller to get rid of the squirrels. Put down pellets to kill the slugs and spray the lilies with chemicals. In doing so I could upset the equilibrium of the garden by eliminating any one of these creatures. I could be depriving a fox of a squirrel for its breakfast or kill something that eats a poisoned slug or insect, by eradicating one problem I could also end up creating a new one that I doesn't exist at the moment.



*A bee covered in pollen*

In order to control beetles damaging their crops, growers sprayed them with neonicotinoid pesticides. At the time it was seen as a panacea to a very serious and costly problem. Since being introduced, it has since been discovered these chemicals are fatal to bees, moths and hoverflies plus a whole host of other invertebrates and aquatic life. This then had a knock on effect on other wildlife that fed on these insects. So, by solving one problem a multitude of other issues arose, including killing off the life crucial for pollination. Currently there is a ban on the use of these chemicals and I've no doubt alternative solutions will be found.

What is the solution to my problem? Firstly, I treat all these issues as my fault after all the squirrels, slugs and beetles are only doing what comes naturally in order to survive. All I have to do is protect my plants and grow a few more than I need to make up for some inevitable losses. I give squirrels alternative sources of food with easy access to some of the bird feeders and I grow lots of sunflowers in the summer and enjoy watching them take the odd head off a plant. Which by doing so also exposes food for other things. I provide suitable places for slugs to spend the day, which I later uncover, allowing birds and frogs to feast on them. By providing a varied range of food in feeders, I encourage as



*A rat enters the food chain, a wasp and a fly start the process.*



*A corner of my wildlife pond providing a diverse habitat, with lots of nooks and crannies.*

many birds as I can to come to my garden. By creating the right environment, I get both a natural solution and the pleasure of seeing a diverse range of creatures that make my garden home. If you want to enjoy the pretty and cute creatures in your garden then diversity is the key, the good, the bad and the ugly, after all doesn't seeing ugly then make seeing beauty all the more pleasurable? The pictures in this article were all taken in my garden, which by the way has only been created over the last year and is far from finished, yes even the picture of the dead rat, killed by a neighbour's cat. Because water is so important in a garden, the wildlife pond was one of the first things I put in last May. Proving that it doesn't take long for wildlife to move in once the right conditions are created.

So perhaps reading this has given you some 'food for thought' and just maybe got you thinking about the way you see and react to the natural world around you.

Happy New Year and best wishes for the year ahead.

Until the next time.

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park.

## What's the latest in the Gardens?

### Kitchen garden

We have continued to harvest crops such as swede, carrots, brussel sprouts, leeks and beetroot this month. There is still a lot of mulching of beds but that will give us plenty to do when we return in the New year.



The volunteers have been busy selling off the stickmen to raise money for local food bank distributions. We also collaborated with Silsoe Horticultural centre who were kind enough to harvest some of their excess produce which we combined with our own. Despite the rainy day we managed to raise £350 for the local food bank at Tithe Farm Primary School.



### Formal Garden



Mulching, raking, weeding and cutting back in-between the rain showers! The piles are going down at last.

We have even started to make a flower bed under the new Houghton hall park sign!

So, we come closer to the end of the year and I am busy collating our harvest charts, making planting guides for the year ahead and so much more.

I thought it would be really nice for you to meet some of the regular volunteers who give up their valuable time to maintain the park and gardens every week. It

is testament to their incredible efforts and ideas that the park has achieved so much this past year. Our first five volunteers are introduced in the following pages and we'll have some more next month!

Another year of ups and downs but I wouldn't have wanted to have been working anywhere else.

I raise a cuppa tea to you all:

*'Thank you for all you have done and all we are going to do in 2021!!'*

Happy Gardening, stay safe

Jenny



## Meet the volunteers



### Sandra

**How long have you been volunteering at HHP?** Since 2018, I started with the previous gardener – Jane

**What profession/ job do you do or did you do?** I was a social worker. For the last 10 years of my career I was a specialist social worker for family carers which was the best job in the world. It was very humbling working with such amazing people who spent their lives supporting family or friends to remain living safely in the community. This was often at a great cost to themselves in terms of their health, time and finance. Although they never fully appreciated what an amazing job they were doing.

**What are the most enjoyable jobs in the garden?** I mostly enjoy working in the formal garden and having the time to finish the job I started is the most enjoyable!! But this doesn't happen very often.

**What is your favourite season and why?** I love all the seasons but summer is probably my favourite as it's the time when most pollinator plants are in flower which attracts the most bees and butterflies.

**What have you enjoyed or found the most rewarding thing about volunteering?** I love the team and we are a happy bunch. Jenny is great at making us all feel special. But I really feel proud of my efforts when members of the public tell me what a great job I am doing. I have also seen the gardens open up to so many different sections of the community. It makes me smile when mums are showing their little ones the pretty flowers, ladybirds and the bees and if we are lucky sometimes the butterflies.

**What has been the funniest thing that you've been asked to do or has happened?** Clearing weeds that were higher than me was hilarious. Standing on a chair to stuff the bride & groom for the Scarecrows Wedding as they were also taller than me!

**What has been the most inspirational garden that you have visited?** I wouldn't like to choose but I was always inspired by the volunteers who were deadheading in the herbaceous borders. That's when I knew I would like to do that when I retired.

**Who is your gardening hero?** Jenny Osborne, to take on the garden in the state it was and to transform it the way she has is one amazing person, I call her Wonder Woman.

**What is your favourite vegetable and recipe using it?** Aubergine and we had an amazing crop this year in the kitchen garden, my recipe is an Aubergine stew - a bit like a Tagine.

**Is there anything else you would like to say?** A big thank you to Jenny for her imagination, energy and kindness. Also thank you to my team mates for all the fun we have and for the opportunity to put on my sun hat and pretend that I am the 'Lady of the manor' when working in the beautiful formal gardens.

## Marjatta



**How long have you been volunteering at HHP?** Since the gardens opened

**What profession/job do you or did you do?** Happily retired

**What are your most enjoyable jobs in the garden?** I like all the jobs, honestly, the variety of tasks is great!

**What is your favourite season and why?** All the seasons, do not like cold and rain though.

**What have you enjoyed or found the most rewarding thing about volunteering?** Spending time in beautiful surroundings and meeting other volunteers and park visitors, learning new skills.

**What has been the funniest thing that you've been asked to do or has happened?** Never imagined making accessories for Stick Men!

**What has been the most inspirational garden that you have visited?** Chenies Manor at tulip time.

**Who is your gardening hero?** Our Community Gardener Jenny

**What is your favourite vegetable and recipe using it?** I do not have a favourite, like them all and always willing to try new and any unusual ones

**Is there anything else you would like to say?** HHP volunteering has improved my life immeasurably and being able to volunteer during COVID restrictions has been a real sanctuary for me. Jenny, the gardener, is a brilliant team leader and takes everyone's abilities and preferences into account when allocating tasks. She has made our community a much better place to live



## Lucy

**How long have you been volunteering at HHP?** Since 2008

**What profession/job do you or did you do?** Recruitment and HR Administrator

**What are your most enjoyable jobs in the garden?** Interacting with the other volunteers and park users. Watering and picking the produce. Eating cake made by other volunteers!

**What is your favourite season and why?** I like all the seasons because you get lovely Spring and Summer flowers like Snowdrops, Daffodils and wild flowers, wonderful Autumn colours in the trees and hedgerows and in the winter months preparing for the coming seasons.

**What have you enjoyed or found the most rewarding thing about volunteering?** Positive feedback from park users.

**What has been the funniest thing that you've been asked to do or has happened?** The funniest thing I have seen is a squirrel running off with a corn on the cob in its mouth

**Who is your gardening hero?** Monty Don, Adam Frost and Jenny

**Is there anything else you would like to say?** I love being in the park, especially when you can hear the birds singing. It is really nice to see the park being used by so many people.

## Linda



**How long have you been volunteering at HHP?** About a year or so

**What profession/job do you or did you do?** I was a Supported Housing Officer for Central Beds.

**What are your most enjoyable jobs in the garden?** All of it really, but especially growing plants from seed to maturity as I'm always amazed at what can grow from the tiniest seeds.

**What is your favourite season and why?** I don't have a favourite; they are all appealing in different ways. Winter is when I have time to plan my veg beds for the year ahead, Spring brings new life to the garden and planting out, Summer is full of colour and life and Autumn is the final

harvest, full of unique colours and busy refuelling beds for next year.

**What have you enjoyed or found the most rewarding thing about volunteering?** Being with like-minded people, learning and both seeing and hearing how people enjoy our efforts.

**What has been the funniest thing that you've been asked to do or has happened?** Actually, learning that I can't plant in straight lines without a guide line of some sort.

**What has been the most inspirational garden that you have visited?** The RHS Gardens at Wisley are amazing - something for everyone - and most recently the Savill Gardens at Windsor.

**Who is your gardening hero?** Not really a hero but I admire Diarmuid Gavin's garden design. (And Jenny of course.)



## Building Dave

**How long have you been volunteering at HHP?** Since June 2019

**What profession/job do you or did you do?** Factory Manager /Business unit head. SKF U.K. Ltd Sundon Park, Luton

**What are your most enjoyable jobs in the garden?** Pruning! (Ok I'll settle for making "things")

**What is your favourite season and why?**

Spring. Lighter days and plants are all starting to bud up ready to burst into their full glory, daffodils are showing their sunny faces!

**What have you enjoyed or found the most rewarding thing about volunteering?** Turning some of Jenny's ideas into reality and helping to develop the gardens for the community to enjoy.

**What has been the funniest thing that you've been asked to do or has happened?** Use the spare green shed panels to close in the sides of the canopy.

**What has been the most inspirational garden that you have visited?** Compton Acres

**Who is your gardening hero?** Percy Thrower as he was the first gardener I used to watch on TV.

**What is your favourite vegetable and recipe using it?** Onions as I use them nearly every day when I'm cooking, probably a Goan fish curry.

**Is there anything else you would like to say?** Never under estimate how a cake or biscuit can help get your own way.



## Keep in touch

### Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

### Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

### Twitter

@BedsCountryside

### Website

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

### Email

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

## Current Opening Times

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

## Become a friend of Houghton Hall Park

Thinking of joining the Friends of Houghton Hall Park? 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 Friends of Houghton Hall Park, please email [hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)



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