

# Houghton Hall Park

## March 2022 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.

As we enter March spring is definitely in the air, we are now waking up to light rather than darkness, green shoots are starting to appear on the trees and spring flowers are starting to bloom, the overall feeling is one of change and hope, seeing recent events in Ukraine you can really appreciate what we have on our doorstep and know never to take it for granted. Life continues in the park with lots of preparations for the year ahead, our activity and events programme is underway and this month we have our Mother's Day floral workshops, these are all sold out but if you would like expert tuition on how to create a floral masterpiece, using fresh foliage and flowers, we are running a number of Easter workshops which include evenings (and a hot cross bun!), more information can be found in our 'What's On' pages, along with everything you need to know about our new event in May, 'Bark Run'.



By Rita Egan

Storm Eunice hit the park a couple of weeks ago, find out in Eleanor's update what damage she did and what she got up to in half term. There have been some visitors to the kitchen garden who are leaving behind some unusual items, Mark our volunteer gives us the lowdown in his nature article. Jenny, the Community Gardener, may be leaving us but the garden updates will continue, this month Mark tells us what Jenny has achieved (and there's a lot!) during her time at the Park. Our plant of the month is the Crocus, Irene Copperwheat tells us all there is to know about it.

Have a wonderful March in the park!

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

# What's On

## Easter Floral Workshops

**When:** 7<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> April

**Time:** 10.30am, 2.30pm & 7pm

**Cost:** From £22.50

Enjoy an Easter Floral Workshop at Houghton Hall Park this April, we have three on offer which include evening sessions!

All workshops use fresh foliage and are led by our Jenny who has years of experience as a trained florist.

### Woodland Table Centre



Not necessarily aimed at children but think of Alice in Wonderland meets Charlie and the Chocolate Factory! Colourful creations to produce a talking point Easter table centre. This will be a long design with an Easter tree as part of the focal. Spring flowers, eggs, an array of fresh foliage, nests and so much more will keep you busy the whole morning through!

This session will be child friendly but you can book if you are an adult too!

### Easter Table Centre

This isn't just any table centre, this includes a hurricane vase and candle at its centre to produce a truly unique Dutch styled centre piece. Individually crafted to utilise nature's best materials such as moss, bark, hazel, bulbs plus other wonderful textures. This circular design will be a talking point this Easter with no two sections being the same.

We guarantee you'll love this workshop, make for a friend for Easter or keep it yourself...we won't tell!

Complimentary tea/coffee and hot cross bun included. This work shop is for adults only.

### Easter Wreath – Evening sessions!

Seasonal wreaths are so in vogue at the moment, after many of you have practiced Christmas ones we are sure you will enjoy this twist. Natural bark, feathers, hazel, dried seed heads, nests, eggs, daffodils, raffia to name a few of the beautiful textures we will be using.

Bring your friends and come and design a spring delight to adorn your door.

Complimentary tea/coffee and hot cross bun included. This work shop is for adults only.

Spaces are limited, so book now on our website:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/easter-workshops>

## Easter Egg Trail

**When:** 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> April

**Time:** 10am to 3pm

**Cost:** £4

Join us for an eggciting Easter egg hunt this April, help mama chicken find her eggs that the mischievous animals from the park have hidden, have a wander around the park and discover which prankster has hidden each egg, solve all the clues and come back to the Visitors Centre to collect some treats from our Easter bunnies! Your prize will include something to grow, something you can make at home, things to discover and a yummy sweet treat.

Tickets cost £4 each, you can also take part in the trail for FREE but this will not include the prize. Please bring a pen, something to lean on and a bag to take home your prize.

Refunds will only be given if we cancel the event.

We will also have a selection of craft stalls at the event on Sunday 10th April, there will be lots of Easter treats on offer.



## Pop-Up Tasty Creative Stalls



**When:** Every weekend in the Visitors Centre Foyer

**Cost:** £10 per day

We offer the foyer space in the Visitors Centre every weekend to local crafters as an opportunity to showcase their work with a pop-up stall, stalls cost £10 per day and can be booked on our website:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/pop-up-tasty-creative>

We also have stall pitches available at our upcoming events, these are outside and cost £15, the stall holder is

required to bring their own gazebo, tables & chairs, for more information and to book visit our website:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/event-stalls>





## Bark Run

**When:** Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> May

**Time:** 10am to 3pm

**Cost:** £12 per person

On Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> May we will be holding our very first Bark Run! This will be a 2km run or walk you can do with your dog, it will take place in our magnificent park which is a firm favourite of our four-legged friends! There will be five different times throughout the day you can take part, the fun course will include a few obstacles for you and your dog to enjoy. When you have finished you will be rewarded with a fantastic medal which also has a special tag you can attach to your dog's collar.



Spectators are welcome and there will be some doggy themed stalls for you to enjoy.

Entry costs £12 per person, under 16s must be accompanied by an adult, both adult and child will require a ticket, one dog per entry i.e. one person cannot run with more than one dog. Book on our website <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/bark-run>

## Natural Mindfulness Walks



**When:** 1<sup>st</sup> April, 6<sup>th</sup> May, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1<sup>st</sup> July

**Time:** 10am to 11.15am

**Cost:** £7

What's a natural mindfulness walk, you ask? (Don't worry, no swim suit required!) The walk is based on shinrin yoku, a practice from Japan that translates as 'forest bathing' - immersing our senses in the atmosphere of the forest. During the walk, your guide Nicola will invite you to slow down and guide you in some simple exercises to help you tune into the surroundings and mindfully connect to nature.

There are impressive benefits to our wellbeing from shinrin yoku. These can include reduced stress levels and anxiety, improved creativity and energy levels and even a boost to our immune system.

To book go to:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/nature-immersion-walks>

## 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

**Art & Culture Event**

**great lifestyles**

**March'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 March
- 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 31st March
- 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.

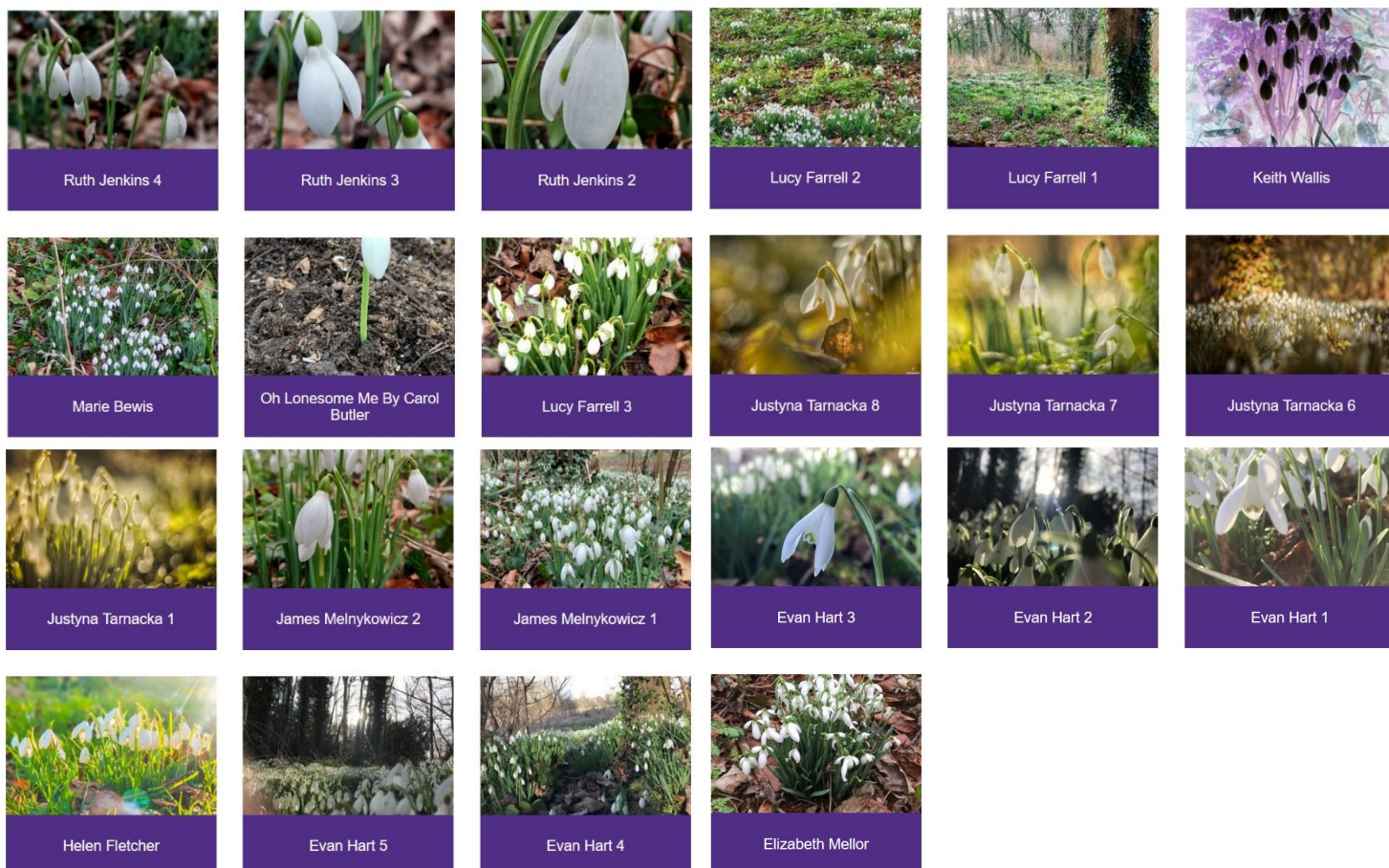
March's theme is: 'Black & White in Houghton Hall Park' we would love to see what you capture, this is completely open to interpretation! Please send your submissions to [hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk).

The images must be taken between 1<sup>st</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> March 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, in our monthly newsletter and our new calendar.

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

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

February's theme was 'Snowdrops' in Houghton Hall Park, thank you to everyone who sent in photos, they seem to get better each year!



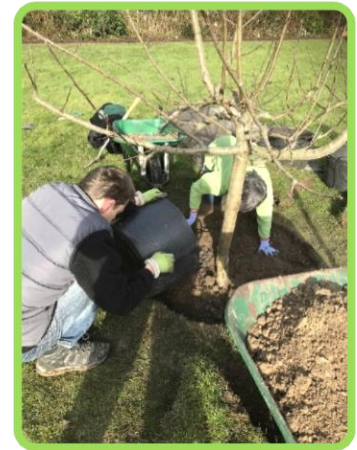


## Community Park Ranger Update

Words and photographs by Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger.

This month has been very busy with activities for half term, to the storms, to moving apple trees, we have had a real mixture of work going on.

We started off the month by moving two large apple trees from next to the kitchen garden to the cedar lawn. The trees had outgrown the space and were encroaching on the wall and on a raised bed. The volunteers did a fantastic job of digging the most perfect hole which made moving the tree a lot easier! Hopefully over the next few years we will be able to plant or move more fruit trees creating an orchard area for peace and reflection.



During half term I ran some events, the first was a willow bird feeder workshop which had participants weaving their own feeder and then filling it with lard and bird seed, this should help the birds through the rest of winter and look nice in your garden too!



The second event I ran during half term was a bird mobile event. This consisted of walking around the woods collecting bits and bobs such as pine cones, leaves, twigs and everything in between. We then headed back to the visitor centre and with some extra bits such as paper birds and string made mobiles out of everything we had collected by attaching them to a stick. The end results were really great!



Storm Eunice made herself known this month with very high winds, the park didn't fair too badly, one large horse chestnut uprooted leaving a bit of a mess and some other trees dropped some fairly sizeable branches but apart from that the park got off lightly. We managed to get Forest Wood Services in the sort out the safety issues such as the hole from the uprooted tree, they also managed to make the path walkable again, and remove some hanging branches which were hanging over the paths, there is still work to be done and we will get them back later in the year to deal with some of the branches on the floor.

Due to the yellow weather warnings we had February's Sunday volunteer session was cancelled.



If you would like to get involved and volunteer in the park on the third Sunday of the month or during the week on a Thursday please email me at the address below for more information:  
[eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Have a great month and stay safe!

Many thanks

Eleanor



## Nature Notes

*Words by Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer.*

The month of March brings with it the start of spring. The vernal equinox, when the days and nights are of equal length, occurs this year on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> although for simplicity, weather forecaster's work to 1<sup>st</sup> March. It heralds new life when fresh buds appear on trees and shrubs and birds and animals start raising their next generations. If you don't know the year is divided into quarters, with two equinox, the vernal and autumnal, this is when the sun is directly above the equator. Then there are two solstices the summer and winter, this is when the sun is at its furthest from the equator. Our winter solstice and our shortest day, happens when the sun is in the southern hemisphere above the tropic of Capricorn. During our summer the sun is in the northern hemisphere above the tropic of cancer giving us our longest day.

All very interesting you might say, but although these facts have remained unchanged for thousands of years, in relation to how we divide the year into spring, summer, autumn and winter, seasons may not be so clearly defined in a hundred years' time. Climate change is having a dramatic effect on our seasons. Winter this year was another mild one compared to the past. Yes, I know we've had some bitterly cold days, but we have had a lot of rain and apart from a few flurries, no proper snow to speak of.

One consequence of a mild winter is aphid numbers are likely to be much higher and the government has given farmers the go ahead for emergency use of neonicotinoids, a range of chemicals, banned for the last couple of years and known to be harmful to bees. As I've mentioned before, it puts nature out of sync. And the natural harmony of the natural world can't adapt fast enough to cope with the changing pace of the climate.

Now on a completely different subject. If you walk around the gardens of the park, have you ever wondered why there are egg shells on the beds? Sometimes it appears there are whole eggs and only when you take a closer look you notice a small hole in them. Well rest assured despite it being Easter next month, we are not growing chickens!! The eggs are in fact put there by foxes caching food. From talking to park visitors, I think there have been a family of six foxes who visit the gardens regularly. Next time you come into the kitchen garden, just inside the gate on your right, you will see a track of flattened grass they have made.

We follow a no dig philosophy, only mulching the beds to revive the soil and suppress weeds. The foxes find this layer of compost easy to bury food items into. They also scratch in it for worms and we often when we arrive in the morning, have to rake over any freshly mulched areas after their enthusiastic nocturnal activities. We have no idea where they getting their eggs from, but it's not



unusual for us to find six or more in a day. Just before Christmas I was loading a barrow from the pile of compost and unearthed a large pork pie along with an egg they had buried and both were still within the best before date.

The success of foxes is largely down to their ability to adapt and regular sighting in urban areas, even in the daytime is not unusual. In this environment they can live up to eighteen years, although ten to twelve is more usual. This is far longer than their country living cousins who may



only live for three years. I have seen them in north London streets and had one walk past within two feet of me. In fact, it was so close I was tempted to stroke it, not something I would recommend.

**Fox fact:-** Unlike dogs, foxes don't have facial muscles that enable them to bare their teeth.



*Fox track in the grass*

The mating season is December to February and the kits are born after a

gestation period of around fifty-two days. They are born blind their eyes not opening for roughly two weeks. During this time the vixen will stay in the den with them, being fed by her mate. Usually at five weeks the kits will take tentative exploratory steps out of the den. By the tenth week they will be fully weaned, but will stay with mum until autumn, when from eight months old they will start to search for their own territory. Foxes reach sexual maturity at ten months, so may mate soon after leaving. The foxes in the park seem to be

crepuscular only venturing out late evening, so it is very unlikely you will see them during the day. But it's nice to know there's a diversity of wildlife in the park.

Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park and Gardens.





## What's the latest in the Gardens?

*By Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer*

In last month's newsletter, Jenny our Community Gardener gave us the sad news she is leaving to pursue a new venture. So, this month it seems an opportune moment to go over the incredible work and difference Jenny has made in the four brief years she has been working at the park.

When Jenny arrived the kitchen garden beds were overgrown and had little in the way of organised structure. To start Jenny drew up a plan and started the daunting task of creating the beautiful and well organised kitchen garden we enjoy today. As you walk around the kitchen garden you might think the vegetables and fruit you see on that visit will be constant. This is far from the case, as not only are crops rotated from year to year to avoid pests and diseases and get the best from the soil, cache crops will be grown to come up and be harvested as main crops in the same bed develop, therefore, a plan needs to cover a three to four year period and with eight raised beds in the kitchen garden would have taken a considerable amount of time and thought. Undeterred, Jenny, along with a few hardy and enthusiastic volunteers, set about the formidable challenge of clearing all eight beds and planting crops. All done despite for the first two years, there were no onsite facilities or somewhere to take shelter from the weather. Jenny has a gift for encouraging people and making things happen, so slowly the numbers of volunteers increased to the current level of thirty, each bringing different skills and abilities which Jenny put to good use. You may not know, but a lot of the events at the park are supported by the volunteers and associated props are designed, created and made onsite. Her powers of persuasion have also brought about considerable improvements to the infrastructure of the site. Many of these have been built by the volunteers, sometimes with materials that have been donated.



*A couple of the early volunteers planting in newly prepared beds.*



*An early view across the kitchen garden after a lot of hard preparation work.*



*Bed 3 being prepared for this season's crop.*



*Bed 7 ready for this year's Easter display.*

The park area covers around forty-two acres and at the time of her arrival, had no water available for wildlife, Jenny was keen to remedy this and pushed for permission to have a wildlife pond within the kitchen garden. Once given the go ahead, a pond was constructed and filled solely with collected rainwater. A deck which overhangs the water to allow pond dipping was built and installed. Jenny tracked down second-hand railings and gates which are being put in at the moment. As an ongoing project a children's area will be built next to the pond area. Facilities will allow children to examine items from pond dipping and express their creative side with craft events. Work has also started on the construction of a produce hut by the gates to the yard. This will provide a permanent place where produce, grown in the garden, can be sold.



*This area has changed considerably.*



*The pond proving much needed water for wildlife.*

We cannot forget the amount of work done in the formal garden either. As a heritage garden the layout and planting cannot be changed, but when Jenny arrived it needed a substantial amount of TLC. Again, starting with those early volunteers, a lot of invasive weeds have been either eradicated or greatly reduced, all done without the use of chemicals. Although the layout can't be altered, additions have been made. The Houghton Hall sign near the cedar tree has been installed at the entrance to the park from the gardens and new borders created with thousands of bulbs planted. Daffodils are currently appearing around the cedar tree and along the hedge at the side of the cedar lawn. In a month or so tulips and alliums will pop up along the hedge opposite the kitchen garden. The raised bed at the end of this area is also a Jenny addition. There have also been numerous improvements Jenny has instigated to behind the scene areas. Sowing seeds, potting up and preparing produce for sale along with other activities, can now be done more productively and in a bit more comfort than in those early days.



*The Park sign bed ready to be planted up.*



*Bulbs appearing in the border opposite the kitchen garden*



*Daffodils around the cedar tree.*





*A recent view of the formal garden*

Jenny brought with her the philosophy of permaculture, where soil structure and its improvement are maintained as a natural process. To this end we follow a no dig policy, instead each year beds are heavily mulched, which helps to suppress weeds and feed the soil. This also maintains the natural ecosystem of the soil. To avoid walking on and compressing the soil, bark pathways are put between the growing areas and are replenished annually. This improves drainage and as it slowly decomposes adds nutrients to the soil.

It cannot be understated the incredible difference Jenny has made to the gardens. During her tenure, her wealth of knowledge, talents and generosity has helped numerous volunteers and visitors to the gardens alike. I know from the numerous well-wishers that have come

to the gardens in recent weeks, her effervescent and ever enthusiastic presence will be greatly missed by many. We all wish her the very best with her new venture and the future.

Mark Bolan

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

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## Plant of the Month – Crocus

Crocuses are native to the Alps, southern Europe, and the Mediterranean area and are widely grown for their cuplike blooms in early spring. Crocus “bulbs” are technically corms. They are solid inside like a potato if you cut them open and they have a papery outer covering which is called a tunic. The crocus corm that you plant in autumn gets completely used in the process of growing and flowering the following spring; it will simply dissolve and fade away. Right before the crocus plant goes dormant, it will make a new corm. In fact, each crocus usually makes many corms. Crocus flowers do not have stems. The buds emerge from the soil at the same time as the foliage. Each bulb typically produces several blossoms in quick succession and the flowers close at night and in dull weather.



Crocus provide an early and important source of food for bees. On sunny days you'll see them eagerly gathering the rich, golden-yellow pollen.

Irene Copperwheat  
Houghton Hall Park Volunteer



## 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

Mon – Sun 9am to 4pm



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



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