

Houghton Hall Park

January 2022 Newsletter

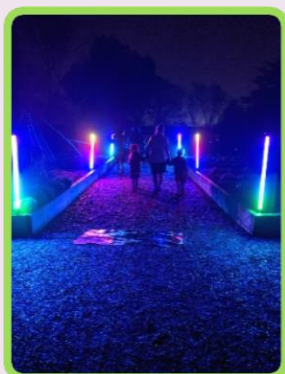
The Houghton Hall Park Renaissance and Renewal Project is being managed by Central Bedfordshire Council in partnership with Houghton Regis Town Council and is supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund.



Welcome to 2022, we are very excited for the year ahead in the park! It was a busy end to 2021, The Spirit of Christmas show took place which we were really looking forward to as it had to be postponed from 2020, it was all going so well, we had a fantastic night on the Friday and received lovely comments back such as this:

'I'm not one to comment/review things usually but I just wanted to say thank you to you all for such a wonderful night at the spirit of Christmas event. It was absolutely amazing from start to finish - myself and my daughter loved it! Thank you so much, I hope you do it again next year!'

Unfortunately, we were not able to do the whole show on the second night as three out of four actors due to perform tested positive for, you've guessed it, Covid-19. To say we were devastated was an understatement, however, we were determined to carry on so the lights were kept in place for the community to enjoy and enjoy them they did, some wonderful photos were captured for us from Lisa McGill Photography & Karen Meyer.



A great place to live and work.

What's On

Nature Immersion Walks

When: Friday 14th January, 4th February & 11th March

Time: 10am to 11.15am

Cost: £7

What's a nature immersion 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>

Houghton Regis Community Action Day

When: Tuesday 15th February

Time: 10am – 4pm

Central Bedfordshire Council are holding an Action Day in Houghton Hall Park on 15 February between 10am – 4pm. The aim of Action Days is to promote the services which we as well as our partner agencies offer

The event will include our Safer Communities team, Highways team and other council officers, as well as our partners including Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Bedfordshire Police.

There will be a Police Surgery held in The Lime Room in Houghton Hall Park Visitors Centre between 10am – 12pm, where residents are able to speak with a Police Officer in confidence regarding any issues they may have or to ask for advice.

Where possible our Highways Team be carrying out works across Houghton Regis this could be filling in a Pothole, fixing Street Lighting or responding to a number of different reported faults. There will also be high visibility joint patrols of our Uniformed Officers, Bedfordshire Police and other partners across Houghton Regis.

Our Safer Communities and Safer Communities Involvement Officers will be holding a number of drop-in sessions to promote the Action Day and to find out from residents their views of where they live and how Central Bedfordshire Council can help to make Houghton Regis a safer place to live.

The drop-in sessions will take place at the following Locations:

The Quadrant Shopping Centre, Dunstable – 24 January, 11am – 3pm

Morrisons, Houghton Regis – 3 February, 11am – 3pm



Houghton Regis Community Action Day
Tuesday 15 February 2022

"I wish someone would fix that street light"

"I just want some advice"

"People always park in the bus stop"

We will be carrying out home visits, providing crime prevention advice and street cleansing
Uniformed Officers will also be patrolling with Police.

We want to hear your views, let us know of any issues in your local area and how we can help to resolve them.
Call us on 0300 300 8301 or email community.safety@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

have your say...

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



Become a Friend of Houghton Hall Park



With the Heritage Lottery Funding ending in March 2022 a new group has been set up in order to promote and support various projects within the park and gardens. Last October an initial meeting of interested people was held and a committee of five volunteers elected plus a representative of the council, to form Friends of Houghton Hall Park (FoHHP). By having a formal group it will allow us to apply to various bodies for grants and other funding sources which we would not otherwise be able to claim. Additionally, we have the opportunity to approach companies to sponsor

ongoing projects or develop new ideas. The group has been given a notice board which is to be located between the formal and kitchen garden and should be installed in the next few weeks. The intention is to formally launch The Friends of Houghton Hall Park group in February and be ready to take applications for membership which will be £1.50 for 2022. If you would like to pre-register your interest and to be kept informed please send an email to the secretary at fohhp5@gmail.com putting 'Membership' in the subject line.



Monthly Photography Themes

Your chance for your photo to appear in the first Houghton Hall Park calendar!



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

January's theme is: 'Wildlife at Houghton Hall Park' we would love to see what you capture, there is an abundance of wildlife in the park if you look closely!

Please send your submissions to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

As an added incentive this year we would like to create a calendar depicting the park using your photos, this will be available for sale at the end of the year, so get snapping!

The images must be taken between 1st – 31st 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, 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

December's theme was 'Feeling Festive' in Houghton Hall Park, thank you to Rita Egan and James Melnykowicz (Age 12) for sending us your wonderful photos.



By Rita Egan



By James Melnykowicz

Community Park Ranger Update

Words and photographs by Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger.

What a whirlwind December was, from volunteering tasks, to Christmas crafts to willow weaving sessions and tree work it's all been going on in December.

The fantastic volunteers have been hard at work this month doing some clearance work in the East Woodland in preparation for tree planting in late winter/early spring. Both the Thursday group and the monthly volunteer group have done a fantastic job so far! There is still plenty to do so if you would like to get involved please feel free to email me on:

Eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk You don't need any experience or skills just a willingness to help and learn and to look after this fantastic park!



Volunteer's Sue and Angela really got into the spirit of clearance work on December's Sunday volunteer session channelling their inner lumberjills they managed to clear some of the dead elms (which have died due to Dutch Elm disease) and some other fallen branches that were in the way, it's really great to have such a fantastic team of volunteers to help support the park in such a fantastic way!



You may have noticed this month that we had the tree surgeons back on site again. This was to finish off the work that they started last winter which they had to stop due to nesting birds. This included felling a large horse chestnut that had a large ball of rot about a metre about the ground on the main trunk meaning it wasn't structurally sound, the felling of a beech which was showing signs of severe decline, some standing dead elms and also taking off some large limbs that were dead/dying.



Any tree work we do in the park is due to safety concerns. All the trees are surveyed and tested to ensure that they have to come down and only where they pose a significant risk to people (such as over paths.)



As you can see from the pictures the branch is completely rotten and the inside of the tree is dead.

In December we also managed to do some craft activities, the volunteers made Christmas wreaths which looked fantastic! They also got to have a go at willow angel weaving. After the fantastic success of the volunteers I decided to run some sessions for the public, I ran two sessions and everyone seemed to have a really great time and made some incredible angels! Hopefully I'll be putting on some more willow events in the future so keep your eyes peeled! Wreath making for volunteers was before the mask mandate was reintroduced.



I hope everyone had a safe and happy Christmas and I can't wait to

see what 2022 brings!

Have a safe and good January!

Many thanks

Eleanor



Nature Notes

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



Squirrels have been busy on my feeders

Well here we are at the beginning of 2022 let us hope it brings a better and safer world for all of us. This month I thought we could start the year with a quiz, but first there are two events happening soon that you might like to hear about. The first is the BBC Winter Watch programmes with Chris Packham, Megan McCubbin, Iolo Williams and Michaela Strachen. Gillian Burke has other commitments but she has pre-recorded a few items. As usual it will run four nights a week Tuesday to Friday for two weeks starting on the 18th January.

The second event which you can take part in is the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch

running from Friday 28-30th January. Signing up gets you your pack to help you take part and a code for 20% off at the RSPB shop with free p+p. 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 not only show the continuing impact Covid 19 has had, but the effects of the avian flu outbreak on the different bird species. This survey also gives an insight into the general state of the environment. 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 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. For full information and to sign up for your free pack go to

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/>



Birds at my feeders



A squirrel eats a sunflower heart watching for an opportunity to get back to the feeder

Due to the Christmas break there isn't much news to tell of the wildlife at the gardens, but it's been a busy time at the feeders in my own garden recently. It's not unusual to find three and sometimes four squirrels chasing each other for the rights to food. It seems they just don't like sharing. Squirrels don't hibernate during cold weather, instead they just come out less often. Who can blame them? I'm not sure I'd want to get up when there's a heavy frost around. But on milder days they come out in force to grab what they can. Apart from sunflower hearts they are very fond of apple so I scatter pieces around the garden for them to find. Peanuts, fat balls and fat cake are also popular this time of year with both birds and squirrels as it

provides a lot of protein for them. The few regular pigeons that frequent the garden take advantage of all that falls to the ground from the feeders. I think the success I have in attracting so many birds is because the feeders are close to an apple tree into which the birds can escape if disturbed. The tits will grab a seed and retreat into the branches to eat it holding it under a claw so they can peck away at it. The finches will stay at a feeder, constantly on the lookout. When one of them senses a threat they all instantly make for cover. Having a bird bath under the tree also helps. The shelter it gets means it doesn't freeze so quickly and the wildlife has all it needs in one

place. if you are thinking of putting feeders and bird baths out, consider what shelter you can provide to add some security for the birds. Feeders I have in more open areas of the garden only seem to attract squirrels, which is fine as their antics can be quite amusing. But the downside is they get through prestigious amounts of food eating it often when I'm not around to watch of photograph them.

Now for the quiz. It's about the collective nouns given to groups of animals and insects. See how many you know from the following forty. Some are known by several different names, answers are at the end of the newsletter!

Pigeons' _____ Peacocks _____ Nightingales _____ Magpies _____
 Bullfinches' _____ Buzzards _____ Eagles _____ Swallows _____
 Wrens _____ Swifts _____ Owls _____ Jays _____ Parrots _____
 Ravens _____ Crows _____ Woodpeckers _____ Doves _____
 Hedgehogs _____ Snails _____ Worms _____ Snakes _____
 Caterpillars _____ Butterflies _____ Bees _____
 Tigers _____ Sharks _____ Whales _____ Hamsters _____
 Toads _____ Frogs _____ Badgers _____ Moles _____
 Squirrels _____ Geese _____ Donkeys _____ Foxes _____
 Penguins _____ Rats _____ Hornets _____ Dragonflies _____

Have fun!

Happy New Year and best wishes for the year ahead.

Until the next time.

Mark

What's the latest in the Gardens?

By Jenny Osborne, Community Gardener

Happy new year!

A soggy but mild start to the year, but the daffodils know it's their time to start pushing their way through the soil. Last year's daffodil bulbs are making an appearance as more and more green shoots appear around the cedar tree.



The volunteers were busy planting a whole host of new tulips in various parts of the garden to hopefully provide you with a wonderful show in the next few months.

We took some time off in December and used the time to commit plans and ideas to paper which is always exciting.

As ever the volunteers and friends group have put forward some incredibly well thought out ideas and suggestions which ring the changes of the seasons.

I have just had confirmation that the potatoes and spring shallots will be dispatched soon, which in my mind marks the next prominent event in the growing calendar. The autumn sown cabbages garlic and onions have put on tremendous growth in the mild weather, but there is already a lot of slug damage, we are still susceptible to it, whatever people think. We did apply a nematode in autumn to help control slug numbers but it has been considerably worse this past year.



The momentous job of moving the strawberries to a whole new bed, replenishing the paths and increasing spacing has gone extremely well. They seem unperturbed by the upheaval and look right at home in their new bed. To help increase diversity we have included 3 pollinator strips to aid pollination and diversify beneficial insects visiting the garden.

So what other news have we to share? Gates and railings to the kitchen garden are halfway through being painted ready for the spring, a tedious job but one that is being shared by all the volunteers. It looks really smart and a job that has been on the job list a while.

The base for the produce hut has started. This is going to be located by the gates at the back of the garden and provide a sun, rain free environment to display surplus produce for the community. It means that we won't be moving parasols and tables around by the path in search of shade!



Thank goodness these aren't loose in the kitchen garden!!

New perennial plants have been arriving for bed 1, which is the cut flower, Papa, Sneak Preview, Alstroemerias, Astartia, Veronica, Alliums, Limonium, Roses to name a few!



Astartia



Limonium



Alstroemeria



Alliums

Last year's squash bed with the wonderful hazel structure is being utilised for beans which creates a marvelous back drop.

Plans are afoot for a newly allocated children's area so later next month I will reveal some of these ideas.

So, we continue the momentous task of mulching the beds and replenishing wood chip paths raking leaves and tidying away the yellow leaves on the plants. Plenty to keep us warm in these colder months.

We look forward to sharing with you the first opening of spring blooms

Enjoy the month as February is already winking at us

Happy gardening

Jenny and all the volunteers



Plant of the month – Winter Aconite



There is a little glimmer of hope at the beginning of January, a pool of buttery sunlight that shimmers on the floor as if to will the sun's rays to grow a little stronger. Happy to nestle among snowdrops or gather around the feet of shrubs - the Winter Aconite - *Eranthis hyemalis*.

It comes from the buttercup family, with yellow flowers surrounded by a collar of green leaves. Native to chalky woodlands in central Europe, it gets its name from its willingness to flower before everything else (hyemalis is Latin for winter-

flowering). It will happily do so from early January into February. Once flowering is over, they retreat back to their underground tubers until winter appears again. They require very little attention, though the addition of leaf mould in later spring to keep the tubers plump won't go amiss.

Irene Copperwheat
Houghton Hall Park Volunteer

Quiz Answers

Pigeons' *Flight – flock -Kit* Peacocks *Muster - Ostentation* Nightingales *Watch*
Magpies *Gulp - Murder - Tiding* Bullfinches' *Bellowing* Buzzards *Wake* Eagles *Convocation*
Swallows *Flight* Wrens *Herd* Swifts *Flock* Owls *A parliament* Jays *Band – Party – Scold*
Parrots *A pandemonium* Ravens *An unkindness* Crows *A murder* Woodpeckers *A descent*
Doves *A Dole* Hedgehogs *Array* Snails *A walk* Worms *A knot – Clew - Wriggle*
Snakes *A shiver* Caterpillars *An army* Butterflies *A flutter - Kaleidoscope* Bees *A swarm*
Tigers *An ambush - Streak* Sharks *A shiver* Whales *A pod – School - Gam* Hamsters *Horde*
Toads *A knot* Frogs *An army* Badgers *A cete* Moles *A labour* Squirrels *A dray – Scurry*
Geese *A gaggle - Skein* Donkeys *A drove* Foxes *Earth - Skulk – Leash*
Penguins *Rookery – Colony – Huddle* Rats *A colony* Hornets *Bike - Nest*
Dragonflies *Cluster - Flight*



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

Keep in touch

Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

Twitter

@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Current Opening Times

Mon – Sun 9am to 4pm



Central Bedfordshire Council



LOTTERY FUNDED