

Houghton Hall Park

February 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.



The first signs of the change of season are on display in the park with the snowdrops in full bloom on Yew avenue, a beautiful, natural display as always. Change is also afoot in the park team, it is with much sadness that Jenny our Community Gardener is leaving us next month to pastures and gardens new. We are going to miss her so much but she leaves her legacy in the kitchen and formal gardens, without her hard work they would not be what they are today and don't worry the volunteers she has trained so well will continue her work until a replacement is found. If you are interested in applying for the role, more details can be found [here](#). Jenny will also be back to run our floral workshops this year!

With half term coming up next week we have some events taking place in the park, the first on Tuesday 15th is the 'Houghton Regis Community Action Day' organised by Central Bedfordshire Council to promote the services they offer along with other agencies, to compliment this we will also be running an Xplorer event for the kids. On Thursday 17th February Eleanor, our Community Park Ranger, will be running two children's workshops to make a willow birdfeeder and bird nature mobile, to find out more please read our 'What's On' pages.

Mark, our volunteer, has written a very interesting nature article on frogs this month and Eleanor, has been clearing the East Woodland with her band of volunteers, you can also find out all about our plant of the month, the primrose, from our volunteer Irene Copperwheat.

A great place to live and work.

What's On

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. Following this there will be a councillors surgery from 12pm to 4pm.

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.



Xplorer

When: Tuesday 15th February

Time: 11am – 1pm, last entry 12.30pm

Cost: Free!

Along with the Community Action Day in the park on the 15th February the kids can enjoy a FREE orienteering outdoor adventure at our Xplorer event - the perfect activity for primary and pre-school children.

Xplorer is a fun FREE family friendly navigation challenge that gives children a sense of adventure as they explore the park to find the markers. It involves a healthy mix of physical activity and decision making that the whole family can enjoy together. Using a simple map, the aim is to find a number of markers that are located around the park. At each marker children need to identify what is pictured and enjoy learning a fun fact to tell their friends. Come back to the Visitors Centre to collect your certificate and sticker!

Pick up your map from the Visitors Centre foyer.

Half Term Workshops

Willow Birdfeeder Workshop

When: Thursday 17th February

Time: 10am – 11am

Cost: £4

Have you got birds in your garden? Do they seem to be hungry and not able to get food? You want to help? Why not come along to Houghton Hall Park's willow bird feeder workshop run by our Community Park Ranger Eleanor. Learn how to weave your very own bird feeder and then stuff it with food that the birds will love!



This event is for children aged 7* and over (due to the dexterity needed to be able to bend and weave the willow. Younger children are welcome but will need a lot of help from a grownup.) Please let us know if you have any nut allergies as we will be using a variety of seeds and nuts to stuff the feeders. (We can make adjustments we just need to know!)

To book please visit our website:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/willow-bird-feeder-workshop>

* Children will need help and must be accompanied by an adult

Tickets are non-refundable unless we cancel the event.



Make a Bird Mobile

When: Thursday 17th February

Time: 1pm – 2.30pm

Cost: £4

Come along to the park and join Eleanor the Community Park Ranger on a walk around the woodland looking for birds and natural decorations to decorate your birds with. Then head into the visitor centre and create your very own hanging bird decoration!

Aimed at children aged 4 and over who must be accompanied by an adult.

Refunds are not permitted unless we cancel the event.

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/make-a-bird-mobile>

Nature Immersion Walks



When: 11th March, 1st April, 6th May, 10th June, 1st July

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>



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

Monthly Photography Themes



Art & Culture Event

great lifestyles

February's Photography Theme

'Snowdrops' at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in February
- 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
- Deadline 28th February
- Full terms & conditions at our website

Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED

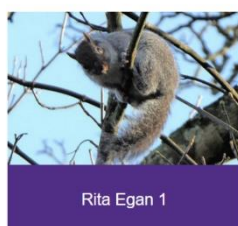
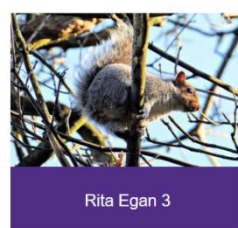
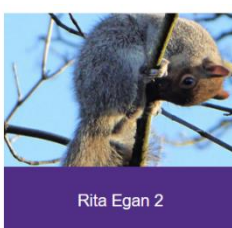
We welcome photographers of all abilities to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly theme.

February's theme is: 'Snowdrops in Houghton Hall Park' we would love to see what you capture, there is a magnificent display along Yew Avenue at the moment, go and take a look as they won't last long! Please send your submissions to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

The images must be taken between 1st – 28th February 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

January's theme was 'Wildlife' in Houghton Hall Park, thank you to everyone who sent in photos, we certainly have lots of cheeky squirrels in the park!



Community Park Ranger Update

Words and photographs by Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger.

What a month January has been! I hope you all had a good Christmas and New year and have settled well into 2022.

In the park we've been continuing our work in the East woodland ready for the trees that are coming in the next couple of months. The volunteers have been doing an amazing job of clearing space and cutting back the ivy and scrub that would otherwise be in the way for tree planting.

Some excellent teamwork here from a fantastic mother daughter duo!



There is an opportunity to volunteer during the week as well. This terrific trio of volunteers come along on a Thursday and do a fantastic job of helping to maintain the site and keep on top of things. Here you can see they doing some fantastic work in the east woodland making sure it's nice and clear.



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This month I also did my chainsaw course of crosscutting and maintenance. So hopefully when my new chainsaw gets here I'll be able to make swift work of some of the bigger bits that are just too big to do by hand!

If you would like to get involved please email me at:
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!

I'll also be leading some children's workshops for half term next week, check out our 'What's on' pages for more information on the 'Willow Birdfeeder Workshop' and 'Make your own Bird Mobile'.

Until next month,

Eleanor



Nature Notes

Words by Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer.

Looking in my pond the other day I saw a large frog. February is when they start coming out of hibernation with one thing on their mind, mating. So, this month I thought the life cycle of the common frog would be a good topic to cover. There are somewhere in the region of 6,000 species of frog and no doubt a few more to discover. A lot of people believe frogs live in water, they don't and have adapted some pretty strange characteristics enabling them to live in a variety of environments. Apart from hibernation frogs spend the majority of their time on land, which is why you often find them in the garden, despite not having a pond. Although they are amphibians frogs only need water to spawn.



In the water the male positions himself on the back of the female gripping tightly. To aid his grip male frogs develop spiny nuptial pads on their thumbs and forearms. As the female lays her eggs, as many as 4,000, the male fertilises them. These eggs float on the surface of the water encased in a slippery jelly like substance which protects them from predators. It can be anything from one to three weeks, depending on the ambient temperature, for these eggs to hatch into tadpoles.



Newly hatched tadpoles haven't got the strength to swim, so aren't very active during their first week. They spend these days slowly absorbing the remains of the egg yolk. Gradually building their strength and becoming more active they start to go in search of food. Their diet consists of algae and plant material. Breathing through primitive gills they will congregate in groups as a defence of predators.

At around six weeks their mouths start to widen and the head elongates, it's from now their back legs start to grow and their lungs begin to develop. With their back legs they can leap and leave the pond for the first time.



These froglets aren't able to eat at this point of development, instead they slowly absorb their tadpole tail for nutrition. Their front legs form and the gills they relied upon as tadpoles, are absorbed and have fully gone by the twelfth week. Around week ten their eyes begin to bulge and they take on the look of an adult frog.

Frogs breathe and drink through their skin which has to be kept moist. To stop them drying out they produce a mucus, a bit like having a built in moisture cream. They can absorb moisture from dew and condensation so aren't reliant on ponds. Their eating habits are a bit strange too. They don't

swallow in the conventional sense, instead they blink. With each blink they gradually push their food down.

Now a few strange frog facts:-

A frog can jump around twenty times its own body length.

Frogs hibernate during winter in soil or under logs. They can also hibernate in the mud at the bottom of ponds breathing oxygen in the water through their skin.

It is believed that frogs were the first land animal to develop vocal cords.

The largest frog in the world is the Goliath Bullfrog weighing in at a little over 7lbs. Despite their large size, their eggs and tadpoles are similar in size to other frogs.

At only 7mm long the recently discovered *Paedophryne amanuensis* is the smallest known frog and possibly the smallest known vertebrate. They were discovered living in thick leaf litter in the eastern forests of Papua New Guinea.

Tadpoles of the horned frog let out a scream underwater when threatened.

So, when you are out and about now is the time to look out for mating frogs.



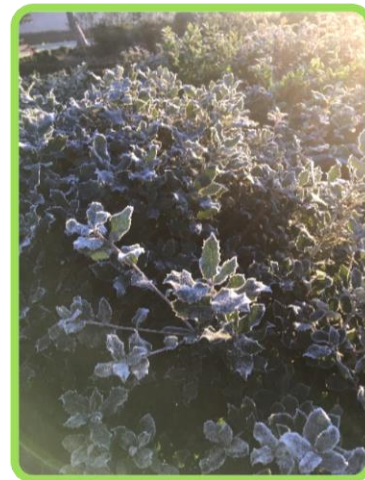
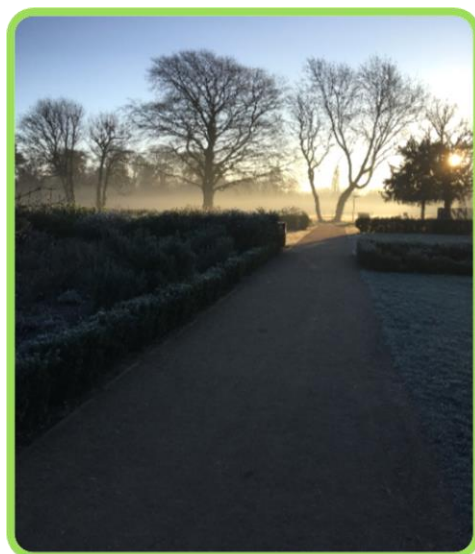
Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park and Gardens.

What's the latest in the Gardens?

By Jenny Osborne, Community Gardener



Houghton Hall Park at its very best on a wintry morning

Some cold mornings here at the park, with many a dog walker wondering why I am holding tight onto a padlock to defrost it! You forget how cold fingers can get! However, with the cold mornings, some incredible glimmers of winter sun which have been a joy to work in. We may have taken a break over Christmas, but we have well and truly made up for it since we have been back.

I decided we would have some more mulch delivered; well, it keeps us warm moving it!

We have mulched around the yew trees,

The bulbs around the cedar tree,

Finished the beds in the formal garden,

Topped up the salad planters,

And then made a start increasing the planting area around the pond.



We have tackled this the same way as all the other no dig beds, suppressed the ground with cardboard and then added a thick layer of compost. It is always necessary to have a supervisor overseeing these tasks!



Our recycled railings are beginning to get a coat of paint at every opportunity but some days are just too cold or painting so roll on the spring. These will eventually match the estate fencing in the very dark green shading.



The bean canes are being positioned to row a wonderful array of produce; some edible and some purely decorative, gherkins, sweetpeas to name just a few.



This is a great time to lift and divide some perennial plants and we have been busy doing this to provide 'free' additional plants for around the pond.



Although it is considered too late for planting Allium bulbs I January we thought we would see how we got on with this freebie packet we were sent. Alliums are exceptional pollinators, stunning cut flowers and incredibly decorative seed heads when dried. The flower that just keeps on giving!



Elsewhere in the gardens we continue to weed, prune, care and tidy ready for the start of spring. It is a great time to take stock of the year ahead and make plans for new ideas.

One of these ideas that we are developing is a children's corner in the kitchen garden under the shade of the tree. The volunteers have been busy moving hedging to accommodate this new space. Watch and see it develop....





Under the hazel structure volunteers have been 'busy' sowing early carrots. We have covered them up to increase germination rates and stop the foxes and squirrels digging the soil. These will be harvested before we need the ground for the beans later in the year.



And finally...

It is with mixed feelings that I bring you news that I will be moving on in my role as your gardener at Houghton Hall park. To have worked in this incredible town has been one of the most enjoyable experiences. I have had the pleasure of speaking with many of you daily, getting to know your children and your dogs!

I arrived nearly 4 years ago to weeds 6ft tall, strangled in bindweed, asparagus and rhubarb hidden under nettles, nowhere to work on a rainy day and one enthusiastic and dedicated volunteer. We had some tough days early on and were faced with many challenges, but we got through it! Well, roll a few years and admire the transformation as I simply couldn't be prouder of with what I am leaving behind.

30 incredible volunteers (and a waiting list!) with knowledge and a rhythm of the gardens, an organised plot with a no dig concept, a children's bed, salad planters, a wildlife pond, regular produce sales days, events, sheltered working areas, a produce hut on the horizon and a friend's group to help develop Houghton Hall Park to the next level. We have learnt skills from each other, had workshops and some very satisfying cakes and bakes. Everyone can now plant in a straight-line, so I believe my work here is done!

My volunteers have become close friends and I have been incredibly lucky to have developed so many wonderful relationships. Their support, care and enthusiasm are off the scale, and I know that my replacement will be lucky to have them by their side.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my team who have put so much energy into their roles and who continue looking out for the people of Houghton Regis; Rachel, Hayley and Eleanor, thank you for being some of the best colleagues I have ever worked with, it has been an absolute pleasure. As in any organisation there is a level of management that many of you will never have encountered but for me Paul, Caroline and Howard you too have been unwavering in your support and encouragement throughout my time with CBC.

There are so many people who I would like to thank but I must mention my gratitude to Robert, Ben, and Tara from Houghton Regis Town Council, who have always gone the extra mile to help me, nothing has ever been too much trouble and that was always reassuring that you had my back and looked out for me.

I will miss seeing you all, but I'll be back to visit and check in on you. As a town you should be incredibly proud of who you are, as you have restored my faith in community spirit. Houghton hall park is a hidden gem and I have loved being part of your lives.

As ever I wish you all some productive and enjoyable days in your garden, take some time to enjoy just being in the moment.

Happy gardening always

Jenny and all the volunteers



Plant of the Month - Primrose



A hardy little plant, the Primrose can flower from as early as December all the way through the spring until May. It favours woodland clearings, hedgerows and grassland habitats. Primroses are low-growing plants with rough, tongue-like leaves that grow in a rosette. Their flowers are large and creamy, with deep yellow centres, and often appear clustered together. The Primrose's common name comes from the Latin 'prima rosa', meaning 'first rose' and describing its early spring flowering.

Since Victorian times, April 19th has been known as 'Primrose Day' it marks the anniversary of the death of British statesman and prime minister Benjamin Disraeli

who died in 1881. The primrose was his favourite flower and Queen Victoria would often send him bunches of them from Windsor and Osborne House.

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

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



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