

Houghton Hall Park

August 2020 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.

Summer is truly here now and what gorgeous, if a little hot, weather we are having! It has been great to see so many people making the most of the park, when visiting ensure you are abiding by current social distancing regulations and if our bins are full please take your litter home with you. Thank you to everyone who attended our Stick Man trail in July we couldn't believe how many of you came to enjoy it, the Stick men and bumble bee in the pictures were made by park user Philip Martin and his children, we are sure you'll agree they have done a great job! Buggy Exercise has also returned to the park with many of the attendees new parents who had their babies just before or during lockdown, with the majority of the usual baby groups not taking place



they have really enjoyed these sessions especially in regards to mental wellbeing and just having the chance to socialise with other new parents.

We have some new events taking place in the park for August, a free Fairy Folk Trail and creative workshops being hosted by Houghton Regis Art Town. Houghton Hall Park's team is also going to increase, we are looking for a



Community Ranger, keep reading for further details!

A great place to live and work.

What's On

Fairy Folk Trail

When: 25th to 31st August

Time: 10am to 3pm

Cost: Free!

The Fairy Folk in Houghton Hall Park want to reward all the children who have behaved so well this year so they are going to sprinkle some magic over the park and reveal their tiny homes. Come to the park between 25th to 31st August and find out about ten folk who live here, you'll see the homes of Willow the Wildlife Fairy, Marley the Meadow Pixie and Parker the Poo Pixie plus many more!



This is a self-guided trail and an accompanying activity booklet and map will magically appear on our website for you to print/download on Monday 24th August .

www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/fairy-folk-trail

Art Town Summer Creative Blast

When: 11th, 18th and 25th August

Time: Four sessions throughout the day

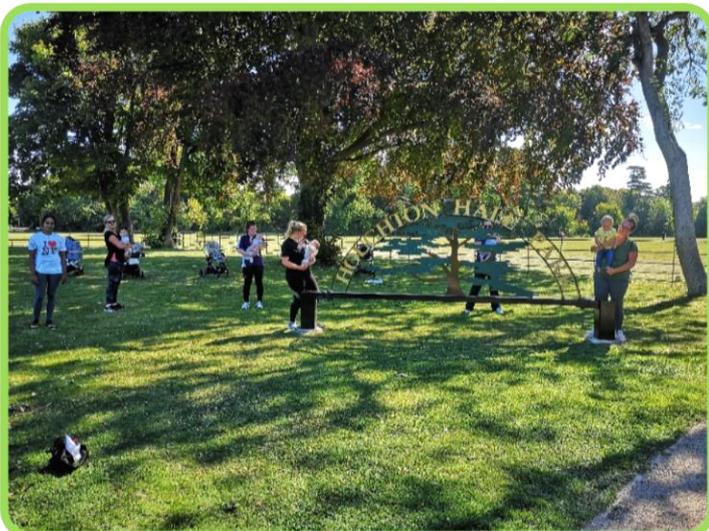
Cost: Free!

Houghton Regis Art Town we are going to be running free outdoor creative sessions at the park this August, thanks to support from the Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation.

There's lots to choose from, head to their website to book now: <https://fullhouse.org.uk>

Spaces are strictly limited so don't delay!

A colorful poster for the Art Town Summer Creative Blast. The background is orange and red. It features a cartoon hippo character in a green shirt and overalls. Text includes 'ART TOWN SUMMER CREATIVE BLAST', 'TAKE PART IN CREATIVE SESSIONS THIS AUGUST AT HOUGHTON HALL PARK', '11th, 18th and 25th August', 'ALL AGES', 'TRY ACRO-YOGA!', 'PIRATE COSTUME MAKING!', 'LEARN TO JUGGLE!', 'AND MORE.', 'ALL FREE!', and contact information for Full House. There are also small circular photos of people participating in activities.



Buggy Exercise

When: Every Wednesday

Time: 10am

Cost: £2

Buggy Exercise is now back in the park! We've had lots of new parent's attend the first session whose babies were born in lockdown and haven't had the chance to go to the usual baby groups, they've said it's been great to get out and meet other new mums not only physically but for their mental wellbeing.

Fitness in the Park

When: Every Tuesday & Thursday

Time: 6.30pm

Cost: £2

Fitness in the Park has been a great success and now the restrictions on numbers to classes has been lifted we have increased the class size from five to ten so more of you can enjoy them.

This is a fun class for all fitness levels, social distancing regulations are in place throughout the class.



Both Fitness in the Park and Buggy Exercise cost £2 and you must book your place at www.bookwhen.com/clearfitness

Meet outside the Visitors Centre.

For further information contact hayleyclear@gmail.com

Monthly Photography Themes

We welcome photographers of all abilities from the age of 16 to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly themes, **August's theme is:** 'Picture Perfect at Houghton Hall Park', take photos of your local park and make a photo album of your favourites (max 5) that we can share to help promote the park', let's see what you can do with this one!

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

Please send your submissions to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk. The images must be taken between 1st – 31st August 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

We had some stunning entries for last month's theme, Sunlight in Houghton Hall Park, a selection are below and all entries can be found on our website www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography-theme

Art & Culture Event

Central Bedfordshire
great lifestyles

August's Photography Theme
Picture Perfect at Houghton Hall Park

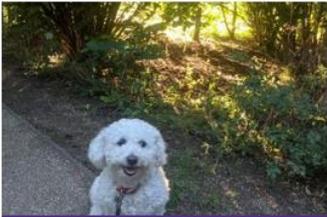
We hope you have fun capturing some pictures we can use to promote Houghton Hall Park

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in August
- 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 31st August
- Full terms & conditions at our website

PICTURE PERFECT
Take photos of your local park and make a photo album of your favourites. These can then be shared with the local Friends Group and on social media to help promote the park.

30+60
HERITAGE FUND
LOTTERY FUNDED

Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org



Louise Harris 4



Louise Harris 1



Karen Carey 3



Gemma Bunting 3



Louise Harris 2



Karen Carey 5



Karen Carey 2



Gemma Bunting 4



Louise Harris 3



Karen Carey 4



Houghton Hall Park in the Morning Marek



Diana Campean 5



Gemma Bunting 1



Diana Campean 4



Diana Campean 2



Cindy Lea Light through the trees



Gemma Bunting 2



Diana Campean 3



Diana Campean 1



Cindy Lea Lighting up the leaves



Job Opportunity – Community Park Ranger

Salary: £21,589 - £23,836 per annum pro rata

Hours: 37 hours per week

Closing date Sunday 23rd August 2020

More about the role:

Houghton Hall Park is a 17 hectare publicly accessible park located centrally within the town of Houghton Regis. It's a vital asset for our community – and it is getting even better. Thanks to an exciting project, the park has benefitted from large-scale restoration and investment. By improving this fantastic place, we're making Central Bedfordshire a great place to work and live. As Community Ranger, you will hold an integral role within the park team.

Central Bedfordshire Council and Houghton Regis Town Council have teamed up for this Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery 'Parks for People' funded project. Extensive landscape restoration work took place in 2016, including the recreation of the original formal and kitchen garden. Work has continued, with the construction of a visitor centre and installation of play features around the park alongside the introduction of a thriving events and activity programme.

We are now looking for an experienced Community Ranger to lead a variety of outdoor activities with park visitors, families, organised groups and a growing base of talented volunteers. This hands-on role will require a love of the outdoors as well as a practical knowledge of habitat management. A high level of ability in public engagement is essential and you'll be working alongside the community spanning a wide range of ages, demographics and abilities.

As a skilled professional, you will:

- Thrive to engage the community in a range of practical tasks.
- Recognise the priorities in maintaining different landscapes within the park including woodlands and grassland meadows.
- Bring a considerable level of experience of working in ranger roles within country parks or similar sites.
- Demonstrate experience of coordinating and supervising volunteers as well as engaging with members of the public and stakeholders.
- Have strong communication and interpersonal skills to help you inspire your volunteer team and interact with a diverse range of people.
- Ensure the site is safe at all times, undertake inspections of play equipment (training provided) within the park and nearby locations and pro-actively manage any possible risks or issues.
- Have experience in planning and delivering activities in publicly accessible spaces including conducting risk assessments and evaluations.
- Integrate seamlessly into the existing team and work alongside the Park Manager, Community Gardener and Activity Officer to achieve joint outcomes.
- Work flexibly to undertake some weekend work (recovered as Time Off in Lieu)

Join us, and you will enjoy excellent benefits plus training opportunities. Even better, you will find your greatness by developing this special place which is already so valued by those who live, visit, or work in Houghton Regis.

Houghton Hall Park Restoration and Renewal is a Parks for People Project supported by the National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund and Heritage Lottery Fund.

For more information or an informal discussion please contact: Rachel O'Leary, Houghton Hall Park Park Manager rachel.oleary@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk or Paul Burgess, Countryside Manager paul.burgess@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



Nature Blog – Butterflies

Words and photographs by Mark Bolan Houghton, Hall Park Volunteer

As July was the month of the butterfly count, I thought a few facts about the second largest group of insects, known as Lepidoptera, would be appropriate. Referring to the tiny plates covering their wings, the word Lepidoptera comes from the Greek meaning scaly winged and comprises of butterflies, moths and skippers. Skippers forming an intermediate group between butterflies and moths, having some similar characteristics of both. Butterflies account for approximately twelve percent of the estimated 180,000 Lepidopteran species globally, with all adult butterflies having two pairs of wings.



A Peacock warming in the afternoon sunshine



A gatekeeper resting on a blackberry flower

Despite their delicate appearance, butterflies are remarkably tough, some migrating hundreds of miles. In fact the most widely distributed butterfly in the world, the Painted Lady, has been known to fly 2,500 miles, the longest ever recorded continuous migration.

There are four stages that make up their lifecycle. Timing for each stage varies between species, as will the number of eggs that are laid. Some will lay eggs singly, whilst others, like the Large White can lay as many as a hundred in a batch. Hatching varies between a few days to several weeks.

The second stage is spent as a caterpillar, referred to as the larval stage. The sole purpose of the caterpillar is to eat and grow. For young caterpillars eating is usually a daytime activity, but as they grow they often switch to eating at night. As caterpillars get larger they grow a new skin underneath the existing one, before shedding the outer one. This moult, known as the instar, will happen as many as five times before the chrysalis forms. The time spent as a caterpillar also varies from a few weeks to nearly a year for those species that hibernate their first winter. Those that hibernate a second winter can live up to twenty months as a caterpillar, that's if they don't get eaten by a hungry bird!



A large white, a gardener's enemy

Although caterpillars have twelve eyes, with six arranged in a semi-circle on either side of their head; they can only distinguish between light and dark and do not see images as we do.

Appearing to have lots, they only have three pairs of true legs, which eventually transform to become the legs of the butterfly. The others are not true legs and are known as prolegs. The number of these will vary between different types.



A Red Admiral

The third part of their life cycle occurs when the caterpillar attaches itself to a twig, leaf or wall using silk produced through their spinneret, which is usually located on their lower lip. Once secure it wriggles out of its skin revealing the chrysalis which will gradually harden over a couple of hours. Again this third stage will last anything from weeks to months depending on the type of butterfly, some hibernating in this form.

The butterfly emerges from the chrysalis for the fourth and final part of their life cycle. Once free of the casing, the butterfly will hang upside down until its wings are fully pumped up. This can take up to two hours

depending on the ambient temperature. They cannot fly if they are cold, needing a body temperature around 30c to do so efficiently.

With no way of increasing their body temperature themselves, they will bask in the sun with their wings spread out to warm themselves up.

Butterfly facts.

Butterflies do not have mouth parts so cannot eat. Instead they drink through a tube known as the proboscis, which they keep rolled up under their head. When they first emerge from the chrysalis, this tube is in two parts which fuse together during the period they are getting ready for their first flight. As well as drinking nectar from flowers, they drink the juice from fruit and sometimes dead animal carcasses. They also drink from mud puddles, from which they get the mineral salts they need.

Butterflies taste with their front pair of feet! In some butterflies, only the female will choose to taste, they do this to make sure the plant they have chosen to lay their eggs on, isn't poisonous to the caterpillar. Because they don't have a nose,

they use their antennae to smell. There is strong evidence to suggest butterflies remember experiences they learned as a caterpillar. This doesn't mean they remember absolutely everything, rather memories such as which type of food plant they lived on. Unlike the caterpillar they once were, butterflies have vision and see ultra violet, blue and green. As many flowers have ultra violet patterns, which humans can't see, butterflies, able to see this extra detail, are directed to the nectar, their sweet reward for pollinating the flower.



Red Admirals finding nectar



Peacock butterflies on a buddleja bush

If you are fascinated by butterflies and would like to attract them into your garden, grow plants with flowers that give them easy access to nectar. Plants like Scabious, Verbena or Sedum are a good choice. But known as the butterfly bush, because it never fails to attract lots of butterflies is *Buddleja davidii*. There are lots of named varieties within this plant group and are available in a range of different colours from white, to the deepest purple. They also have a wonderful scent that you will enjoy too. Each flower consists of lots of individual flowers, so you can expect several butterflies searching out the nectar on each flower head.

An alternative way to attract them is by leaving pieces of fruit for them to drink from. Over ripe fruit is best as it has more juice and easier for them to take a drink. Slices of orange, banana, strawberries or watermelon are perfect. Remember to change your fruit daily, butterflies aren't attracted to mouldy fruit! To stop ants getting to the fruit, place the pieces on a flat stone in the centre of a dish of water. Unfortunately though, you will attract bees and wasps, so place the dish where pets and children can't reach it.

If you enjoy watching butterflies, don't forget to take some photographs. Apart from a wonderful record of your sightings, having a photo can help you identify a butterfly later, especially between two similar looking butterflies. Like the Meadow Brown and the Gatekeeper for example, both frequenting similar habitats. In the wild they can look the same, but there are a couple of very subtle differences you can confirm later, comparing your picture with an online or book reference.

Until next month

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

What's the latest in the Gardens?

Falling headfirst into August, a month where colours are vibrant and bold, produce is coming thick and fast and insects are in abundance.

As I have remarked before gardening is guided by nature and weather conditions and having my own fair share of pests this season: especially blackfly I was heartened to hear Monty Don reported back similar findings.

We have discovered an increase of wire worm in the soil just lately, which feasts on plant roots. Initially we opened up the soil to allow the birds to feast but have since discovered another natural solution. This is to insert half a potato on a stick below soil level to encourage them to it and then discard the potato. Fingers crossed!



Clearing soil



Potatoes cut in half



Inserting beneath soil level

The birds have been pecking at ripened fruits which is disheartening as we keep finding half eaten tomatoes and pecked at aubergines. Initially I thought they were wanting a source of water/moisture so have been looking at ways we can increase this within the garden by providing some additional water points. Yet pests of all sizes must be accepted as part and parcel of living with nature in a balance and I would much rather do this than reach for a chemical solution.

Painting of the old sign.....

It has been lovely to see the old Houghton hall park sign refreshed, and it will soon be back to its former glory. We will then be underplanting this in keeping with the rest of the garden to add another splash of colour.



Harvesting

The cucumbers and courgettes are in full production now and when we miss harvesting the odd one we get the odd surprise of a marrow!! The aubergines, chillies and peppers are coming along well. Kale is harvested two or three times a week. We have two varieties 'black magic' and dwarf curly kale. Both are an excellent source of vitamins.

I am pleased to see that we have finally got some runner beans developing, but they have taken some time to get going this year;



Harvesting potatoes

pigeons, slugs, hail, sun scorch to name a few setbacks. Three sowings later I feel we may have cracked it!!

Beetroot, lettuce, tomatoes and spring onion are other crops providing us with bountiful produce. There have also been some very odd shaped potatoes!!!



Mmmmm!!



Chillies



Picking beans

Jobs

- Continual feeding of the tomatoes ensure good plant health. I alternate between our own home-made comfrey liquid feed and liquid seaweed.
- Regular harvesting of beans and courgettes to encourage the plant to keep producing. It is still important to remove inedible ones, or you will reduce your harvest. Pick beans before you can feel the seeds in the pods as this is when they are at their tastiest.
- Keep sowing spring onions and radish every few weeks to ensure a non-stop harvest, look at sowing spring cabbages later this month for harvesting next April/May. It is essential that emerging seedlings are protected from Cabbage white butterfly who manage to appear the moment you have a strong healthy brassica plant in your hand!! I use a very strong and reusable netting called enviromesh. This provides considerable protection against wind, hail and heavy rain. The Crops tend to be earlier and suffer less from physical damage they also tend to need less water under drought conditions. The crop may be watered (or fed with liquid fertiliser) through the mesh.
The mesh will also give some frost protection. It is particularly effective in protecting mature vegetables (e.g. cauliflower and calabrese) from autumn frosts.
- Check staking on heavy crops such as brussels sprouts as they can become very heavy as the brussels begin to form.
- As perennial flowering plants begin to lose their colour cutting them back may well encourage a later flowering if conditions are favourable. We will begin to cut back *Alchemilla mollis*, *campanula*, *veronica* and *lychnis* in earnest this week.
- Look at ordering autumn sown onion and garlic bulbs before variety choices are limited
- Summer prune espalier trained fruit to allow the light into the ripening fruits
- And keep weeding... don't allow the pests to have a hiding place!!



Summer pruning espalier apple trees

Always learning....

With access to the internet so readily available, there are youtube videos and tips for growing and problem solving and every now and again you can pick up on other ways of doing things that you may not have considered.

With this in mind I am trying a couple of things this month. Firstly, removing excess leaves from courgettes that are oversized, mature and crossing to encourage new upright growth and new fruit production. This is a technique commonly used in America to extend the season.

The second experiment has been suggested to me by a colleague who has sown 3 runner bean seeds in a 7cm and planted them out to grow up a single cane. For me this goes against the grain

of one seed per module as the teaching has always been to encourage good air flow. So will the demand for nutrients be too great, will the harvesting become one tangled mess.....??

Not one to shirk a challenge I have decided to plant 2 seeds per module and with my volunteers we will record the plant health and monitor the yield that we harvest against single grown plants in the same bed. It will be interesting to report the findings with you. Sharing ideas and thoughts is what makes gardening so enjoyable and keeps us on our tipsy toesys!!!

Looking Good....



The planter situated opposite the kitchen garden is well and truly filling out and is looking absolutely delightful as blooms emerge in a kaleidoscope of colour. Verbena bonariensis, cleome, antirrhinums, asters, lobelia, lupins, cosmos, and ammi majus are packed in cheek to jowl. It may very well be one of my favourite areas of the garden.

This is an area we will be focussing in the autumn to ensure a stunning park entrance for you to enjoy.

These have to be one of my favourite flowers in the garden; perennial sweet peas, grown from seed and now well and truly established against the kitchen garden wall. Being perennial these will be cut back down in the autumn and will then regrow next spring.

Due to social distancing measures we have kept the kitchen garden opening hours to a minimum these past few months. Since the start of the school holidays we have relaxed these rules and this has meant more of you can enjoy and share with us this very special space. It has been heartwarming to see so many of you picnicing and walking through the parks with your families, it certainly makes my job all the more rewarding.

Until next month.....

Happy Gardening, stay safe

Jenny





Keep in touch

Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

Instagram

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Twitter

@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

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



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LOTTERY FUNDED