

# Houghton Hall Park

## June 2021 Newsletter

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

It's been a very busy month for the park with lots of changes and activity, we are pleased to say



that the Visitors Centre reopened on the 1<sup>st</sup> June, you are now able to use the toilets and 'Really Awesome Coffee' are running the café, we wish them every success! Please remember to wear a mask when inside the Visitors Centre and adhere to the one-way system.

We were lucky to get some good weather in half term and it was great to see lots of children enjoying the activities that took place. Everyone had a ROARsome time at our dinosaur trail, the giant poo and the dancing T-Rex were a particular hit!



Accolade Hounds were extremely pleased with how the 'Doggy Market' went, they raised vital funds for the charity but more importantly they had lots of interest in the dogs that need a new home. Our friends from Full House Theatre were in the park running free workshops including beatboxing, they also had a SEND specific day (funded by CBC) which there will be more of in the summer holidays. The 'Have a Grow Day' in the kitchen garden proved very popular, Jenny has some fabulous pictures and a write up of how Silsoe Horticultural College helped us in her update.



Make the most of the recent hot weather and we hope to see you in the park soon!

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

## What's On

### Stickman Trail

**When:** Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> June

**Time:** 11.am to 2.30pm

**Cost:** FREE!

As well as Arbor we have another popular tree character in the park on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> June, come down and visit our FREE fun-filled activity trail featuring popular picture book character Stick Man. The self-guided trail is aimed at encouraging children aged 3-7 to get outdoors and explore the natural world and find out how things grow. If you want to 'twig' how much fun the trails can be, then visit us 11am to 2.30pm.



We are one of a very select group of city farms, community gardens and care farms in the UK that have been chosen to host a Stick Man trail, which have been created by Social Farms and Gardens, the UK wide charity supporting communities farm, garden and grow together. Find out more about Social Farms & Gardens via [www.farmgarden.org.uk](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk).

The Stick Man trail (installed thanks to the support of Magic Light Pictures) is based on the much-loved Stick Man picture book written by Julia Donaldson and illustrated by Axel Scheffler.

## Tasty Creative Market

**When:** Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July

**Cost:** £12.50 per pitch

We would love to hold a 'Tasty Creative' market outside in the park on Sunday 18th July, tasty creative is a cross between a craft fair and farmers market, so if you are a crafter or create lovely goodies to eat/drink this is for you!

This event will only go ahead if we have enough interest in pitches. Stall holders would be responsible for bringing their own gazebo, tables & chairs.

Pitches are £12.50 and can now be booked on our website.

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





## Buggy Exercise

**When:** Every Wednesday 10am

**Cost:** £2 payable in cash on the day

**Where:** Meet outside the Visitors Centre

A fun fitness session where we enjoy a warmup around the park and then a circuit session, a great way to meet other local parents/carers and get fit along the way! Social distancing regulations apply. Book on our website [www.houghtonhallpark.org](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org)



## Junior Parkrun

**When:** Every Sunday

**Time:** 9am

**Cost:** FREE!

Junior Parkrun is a free, weekly, timed 2km parkrun for 4-10 year olds every Sunday at 9am. Open to all, safe and easy to take part in, for more information go to:

<http://www.parkrun.org.uk/houghtonhall-juniors/>



# Monthly Photography Themes

**Art & Culture Event**

**great lifestyles**

**June's Photography Theme**

**'Flowers' at Houghton Hall Park**

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in June
- Some images will be featured on our website, social media platforms, notice boards around the visitor centre and in our monthly newsletter
- Send them to us at: [hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)
- Deadline 30th June
- 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. June's theme is: 'Flowers at Houghton Hall Park'. There is an abundance of the flowers in the park at the moment, the formal gardens are looking spectacular and not forgetting the wildflowers in the meadow.

**IMPORTANT:** Please remember to practice social distancing when coming to the park. Please send your submissions to [hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk).

The images must be taken between 1<sup>st</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 and each person can submit up to 5 entries. We will not accept any overly photoshopped images that do not represent the reality of the subject in the photo. Some images will be featured on our website, social media platforms, notice boards around the visitor centre and in our monthly newsletter.

Please see our website for the full terms & conditions before you submit your work: [www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography)

We received some amazing photographs for this month's photography theme 'Connect with Nature', thank you to Lee Doyle and Rita Egan, totally different perspectives of the park but equally stunning! They are also available to view on our website.



Lee Doyle 5



Lee Doyle 4



Lee Doyle 3



Rita Egan 1



Rita Egan 3



Rita Egan 4



Lee Doyle 2



Lee Doyle 1



Rita Egan 5



Rita Egan 2



## Community Ranger Update

*Words and photographs by Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger.*

Where has May gone! The months seem to be flying by.

During May I spent quite a bit of time preparing and creating the Dinosaur trail that ran in the Half term. This included making a giant dinosaur egg, a dinosaur poo, some footprints and a plant. The idea being that the people taking part on the trail would be able to figure out which dinosaur visited the park by process of elimination using a crib sheet with a few dinosaurs on.

In this month's Sunday volunteer session we did some comfrey management. Comfrey also known as knitbone is a herbaceous perennial (which means it has no persistent woody stem and comes back each year.)



It has many benefits such as being a good fertiliser, great for bees and in the past has been used as compresses for things such as sprains and strains (modern science advises against using it).

Although Comfrey is great it is rather invasive and tends to take over quite quickly. Walking around the woods you will see that we have absolutely loads of comfrey and it is taking over so in order to give other plants a chance to grow we cut some of it back. With the help of the fantastic volunteers we managed to clear a section which also allowed us to check up on some whips that had been planted a few years ago.

In the afternoon we checked up on some other trees that had been planted in 2017 by some of the current volunteer group. How they have changed! From the small thin almost twig like whips that were planted they have truly grown, we even managed to take the guards off some of the trees as they've grown so well!

2017



2021





After the great dent that the Sunday volunteers made in the comfrey with the help of a few weekday volunteers: Andrew, Katie, Bill and Zabe we managed to clear some more comfrey and really give the trees some space! This will help them grow as they won't have to compete with the comfrey (which can grow really tall.) Katie, Bill and Zabe also did bramble clearance and on a particularly windy day helped with bits for the trail.



This little caterpillar was found by our volunteer Katie, and with a little bit of research we figured out it was a Scarlet Tiger moth caterpillar, one of its food sources is comfrey so no surprises where we found it!



If you would like to get involved and volunteer in the park please feel free to email me on:  
[Eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

It's finally starting to feel like summer so have a fantastic month and enjoy the lovely weather and don't forget to wear sun cream and keep hydrated!

Stay safe,  
Many thanks,  
Eleanor



## Nature Notes

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

Believe it or not, Sunday June 20<sup>th</sup> is the longest day and June 21<sup>st</sup> is the official start of summer and we are almost halfway through the year. It seems at long last the warm weather has arrived and life is gradually getting nearer to what might be deemed normal. Great tits have been nesting in my garden again this year and the butterflies have been making a welcome appearance. On the feeders I've had great spotted woodpeckers, long tailed and blue tits, green and gold finches. The robin and black birds are regulars, as are the squirrels, pigeons, crows and gulls. In fact recently my garden has been filled with a cacophony of birdsong. By the way if you have been feeding the birds, don't stop because it has warmed up, the birds will still appreciate the addition to their diet. The unseasonal weather in May has made it very tough for birds as they try to feed their chicks. Also don't forget to provide fresh water and placing a piece of terracotta pot in the water so that it comes above the surface, gives great access for insects to get a drink.



*A blackbird takes a bath in my pond*

I've managed to capture some different pictures recently. I spotted the elusive black squirrel one evening, managing to get a quick shot before it scurried away. Then a peregrine falcon chose my patio to eat a pigeon for lunch. I also managed to be about when a hedgehog ambled through the garden.



*The elusive black squirrel*



*A peregrine falcon tucks into a pigeon on my patio*



*Unfortunately, a rare sight these days.*

This month sees the start of 30 Days Wild, which is run by The Wildlife Trusts. The idea is you do something every day of the month involving nature. It doesn't have to be anything major, something like putting water out for the birds or planting a sunflower. For my first day I will be following their suggestion and eat my breakfast in the garden listening to the birds. I will also see what insects, birds and wild flowers I spot, ticking them off the list I've downloaded from their website. If you want a bit of fun and take part, go to their website and sign up, there is an info pack you can download.



*A ladybird convention*



*Planting has started around the kitchen garden pond*

The planting around the pond at the back of the kitchen garden is taking shape. A wide range of plants from low growing sedums which will harbour insects such as beetles to taller grasses and flowering plants such as lobelia. To add to the diversity of habitats, at one end of the pond we are creating a small boggy area for moisture loving plants like astilbe and ligularia. There is a perforated liner under the soil, which will be kept moist from sinks, where the produce, grown in the kitchen garden, is washed, a great idea for water reuse. The pond itself has been filled using rainwater and will be kept topped up from rainwater collected specifically for the purpose. To add

interest and create additional exit points from the water, a large log has been placed across one corner. This will also provide a perch for birds to land on. Although not finished, birds have been taking advantage of the water, drinking and bathing. Footprints in the soil and on the liner also indicate it has been visited on more than one occasion by several foxes. We are regularly asked by visitors to the gardens if there will be fish in the pond. The answer is no, because it is specifically a wildlife pond and fish would soon eat any eggs or tadpoles, so we would never attract frogs or newts.



*A bee is quickly finds the flowers around kitchen garden pond*

Next month is the annual Big Butterfly count, at the time of writing this, the actual date is still to be announced, but it is usually the middle of the month. Sadly, last year's count showed the biggest fall in butterfly numbers, in the eleven years the project has been running. If you fancy taking part, I did hear that Dobbie's were going to be one of this year's sponsors so keep an eye out for information if you are at one of their garden centres. I should have more details in time for the next newsletter.

Before I finish- Did you hear about the battle of the caterpillars? Well Colin versus Cuthbert caterpillar cakes to be more accurate! It was recently reported that M&S threatened Aldi with legal action over their Cuthbert caterpillar cakes and warned other supermarkets who have similar versions of the cakes, to stop copying Colin. This was picked up by Chris Packham Vice president of Butterfly Conservation who tweeted that there was a world crisis over falling butterfly numbers and they would be better off donating some of the cake profits to butterfly conservation, rather than squabbling over cake versions of caterpillars. He even offered to design a new version of the cake to any supermarket that took up the challenge. In the end it was Iceland that took up his idea and they are bringing out Bonny the butterfly cake with 100% profits from sales going to Butterfly Conservation. Shortly afterwards Cuthbert tweeted Colin suggesting they could be besties for a while and donate profits to cancer charities including MacMillan Cancer Support, sponsored by M&S and Teenage Cancer Trust, sponsored by Aldi. So it seems, for a while at least, there is a quiet truce in the caterpillar cake world!

Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park



# What's the latest in the Gardens?

By Jenny Osborne, Community Gardener

*It's all happening at Houghton Hall Park!*

The pleasure of harvesting is a full-time occupation now as each week another crop is ready to fill volunteers trugs and trays. With harvesting there is always an element balancing time with the heat of the sun. Picking or planting vegetables should not be done in the heat of the sun and getting them washed and chilled is imperative for keeping them fresh.

It has been really nice to start harvesting a few more crops. Our baskets are now full of

Rhubarb, spring onions, cabbages, asparagus, beetroot, lettuce, herbs, chard, kale, mange tout, radish, and turnips.

In the next few weeks, I imagine we will begin harvesting new potatoes, broccoli and fennel. This time of year is what we have all been waiting for!

To have had days of relentless hot weather has not been easy for sensitive vegetable crops and we have seen spinach, radish, swede and lettuce bolt as a result.

*What do we mean by bolting?*

## Annual crops

Annual crops sensitive to photoperiod (how many hours of daylight received) include lettuce, some radish cultivars and spinach. They are long-day plants, which initiate flowers when day length increases. It is a natural progression for spring-sown annuals to run to seed as summer progresses, but this can happen prematurely under the influence of stress or day-length.

## Biennial crops

Some biennial crops (which grow in the first year, flower in the second) such as onions, leeks, carrot and beetroot can initiate flowers in the first year. This is due to unsettled weather conditions early in the season and usually occurs after a prolonged cold spell, often during the propagation phase. Cold nights, hot days and late frosts may also contribute to premature initiation of flowering.

The beginning of month saw our first garden event of the year 'Have a grow day' It provided us with an opportunity to showcase our kitchen garden, sell produce and plants and engage with our local community. The weather couldn't have been kinder, and people turned out in incredibly high numbers. Although some of the volunteers were not able to attend on the day, they helped out by



potting up plants, making signs and labels and generally helping prepare for the day.

Have a Grow Day was also supported by our friends and colleagues from Silsoe Horticultural centre. Charlie represented the centre by selling herbs which was a project he himself initiated. Here is an extract of that journey from their newsletter:

### This is Charlie's story...

Step one was to choose and order the herbs that he wanted to grow, Charlie picked some unusual ones too!



When the seeds arrived, Charlie had to work out when they needed to be sown and he sorted them into each month so he knew when to sow them.

Look at that concentration on Charlie's face sowing the seeds



Charlie made some labels so that he knew where his herbs were in the greenhouse. The labels made it easy to find the herbs in the greenhouse. When the seedlings are small it is difficult to tell which ones are which.



*Can you tell the difference between celeriac and coriander?*



Potting on, once the seedlings were big enough. Lots of people have helped – this is a mammoth task – from modules into small pots and now into bigger pots.





The herbs grew well in the heat of the big greenhouse.

Charlie chatting to CBC's Chief Executive about his project on a recent visit. Charlie chose which herbs went into Marcel's veg box along with fruit and veggies that were ready to harvest: spinach, rhubarb, asparagus and beetroot! Marcel was also given some rhubarb chutney and strawberry and rosepetal jam!

### *Houghton Hall Park Have a Grow Day*

Staff helped to take crates and crates of herbs, tomatoes, sweet peas, rhubarb plants down to Houghton Hall Park. We had so much stuff that we had to make two trips in the white van.



Charlie labelling the pots ready for sale.



Antonia Ryan CBC Councillor for Parkside jogged past and stopped for a chat and to buy some herbs



The Elves and the shoemaker bed now has a hut and we will soon be adding the props to bring this bed to life! The planting is well underway and is beginning to burst into colour with the warmer days.







The wildlife pond is moving forward with the addition of a hefty log! We are already seeing birds and dragonflies regularly visit the pond which is absolutely brilliant at this very early stage of the installation.

Attracting wildlife and living with nature is a fundamental ethos to the gardens. This year more than ever we have included pollinating strips and sections within our edible beds to provide a food source and encourage the beneficial insects onto the crops as a natural defence against some of the more destructive pests. Eventually the harmony is restored without having to reach for chemicals and sprays.

The successional planting of flowers means there is a continual supply of nectar from the early tulips, alliums and to the late flowering dahlias.



The phacelia shown here in the photo is one most alluring plants to bees and probably one of the prettiest!

By the end of this week the majority of plants to fill the beds will be in the ground and successional seed sowing will begin in earnest to be able to harvest a crop and literally replace it on the same day, essentially by having timed the sowing 4 - 6 weeks prior. If we were to direct sow it would mean seedlings are more susceptible from pigeon attack, and would take longer to reach the size of the transplant. Therefore, we will be able to crop more from an area. Some plots in the kitchen garden have as many as 5 crops planned for them!

Replacing the winter lettuces has been a big job this week, unfortunately the extreme heat has meant some have needed replacing. Our lettuces are harvested by picking the outer leaves leaving 4-5, this can be done around 6 times the length of harvest is increased. Our salad bags are mixed with herbs and edible flowers and will contain mixed salad leaves, rocket, parsley, mint, coriander, oregano, salad burnett, chervil and dill.





The good thing about having such a good mix of volunteers is the vast range of skills we acquire. Sewing 3 pieces of netting 8m wide on the grass in the sun....no problem for some! This was to cover our strawberries as the birds are taking them green so we need to net them sooner rather than later it would seem. I reckon some will be more deserving of the first pick after this episode. It definitely wasn't one of my ten minute jobs!



The runner beans and French beans are all planted now and seem to be finding their way up the canes nicely. Thanks Sam!



The cut flower patch has been given some additional support to ensure the stems grow straighter and the wind doesn't break them like last year. These are the cornflowers, full of bud but only one flower so far. It won't be long before we can't keep on top of the cutting!



Back in the spring we planted a native hedge so we could establish a windbreak along the perimeter fence. We gave it a little weed this week a good water and replaced some of the whips that hadn't taken. Overtime this will be a wonderful habitat and food source for wildlife.

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And the kitchen garden is absolutely blooming! Take a stroll through if you get a chance to see for yourself.



And finally, team work!



We have been lucky enough to have been shortlisted for CPRE awards and will have a short film made about volunteering in the kitchen garden, We will let you know how we get on.

In the meantime enjoy your garden and our beautiful park

*Happy Gardening, stay safe*

*Jenny*

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## 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 – Sat 9am to 5pm

## 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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