

# Houghton Hall Park

## July 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.

July is here and it's the month the schools break up and we look forward to holidays and relaxation, the summer won't be quite the same this year, we will probably be staying closer to home and there won't be the normal events we enjoy over the summer period, let's keep positive though! The social distancing regulations have eased and whilst we still can't hold large scale activities in the park, we are excited to inform you that we do have a children's activity in the park planned for July and we'd also like you to take part in the Big Butterfly count, more information on these activities is on the 'What's On' pages. The photography theme in June was 'Trees in Houghton Hall Park', we had some stunning images sent in and particularly loved this one of the Cedar Tree by Gemma Bunting, the flowers in the formal garden frame it perfectly. Mark Bolan, one of our volunteers has written a piece for the newsletter this month on garden birds and how you can look after them, finally Jenny our Community Gardener has more news of what's happening in the formal and kitchen gardens, it's been a very productive month produce wise.



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

# What's On

## Stickman Trail

**When:** Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July to Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July

**Time:** 10am to 3pm

**Cost:** Free!

We're branching out! Come down and visit our fun-filled activity trail featuring popular picture book character Stick Man, which will be open on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July. The self-guided trail is open until Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July and 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 10am to 3pm.

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.

Due to social distancing measures still being in place all trail activity sheets and certificates will be uploaded on to our website ([www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/stick-man-trail](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/stick-man-trail)) which you will be able to download from home. We would ask that when you are taking part in the trail you abide by the current social distancing restrictions and refrain from touching the trail boards.







## The Big Butterfly Count

**When:** Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July to Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August

**Cost:** Free

The Big Butterfly Count is a UK-wide survey aimed at helping us assess the health of our environment simply by counting the amount and type of butterflies (and some day-flying moths) we see.

To join in all you need to do is download the butterfly id chart from

[www.bigbutterflycount.butterfly-](http://www.bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org)

[conservation.org](http://www.bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org) you can also download the

Big Butterfly Count app for free on your phone.

Between Friday 17 July and Sunday 9 August come to the park and choose a place to spot butterflies and moths. Watch for 15 minutes then record which species you saw via the website or the app. If you can't get to the park do the count in your garden or near your home.

It would be great to see how many different species of butterfly there are in the park, the pollinator bed in the kitchen garden may be a good place to start your count!

## Fitness in the Park

**When:** Every Tuesday & Thursday

**Time:** 6.30pm

**Cost:** £2

Fitness in the Park has been a great success being fully booked every week therefore we will be continuing these sessions into August.

This is a fun body weight class for all fitness levels, due to social distancing regulations there is a maximum number of five attendees per class. We have received very positive feedback from attendees of this class saying it is great for the mind as well as the body.



Classes cost £2 and you must book your place at [www.bookwhen.com/clearfitness](http://www.bookwhen.com/clearfitness)

Meet outside the Visitors Centre.

For further information contact [hayleyclear@gmail.com](mailto:hayleyclear@gmail.com)



## Buggy Exercise at Home

**When:** Every Wednesday

**Time:** 10am

**Cost:** Free

Buggy Exercise cannot take place in the park but fear not you can still take part at home! The class is being offered via Microsoft Teams. If you would like to take part please contact Hayley at [hayleyclear@gmail.com](mailto:hayleyclear@gmail.com), you don't need to have a baby, the class is open to everyone.

## 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, **July's theme is:** 'Sunlight at Houghton Hall Park', with summer now here we thought this would be the perfect theme for this month, let's hope we get some sun!

**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> – 31<sup>st</sup> July 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.

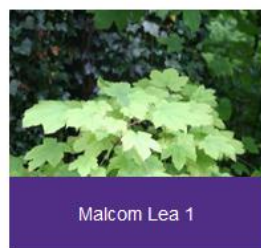
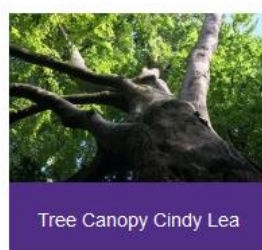
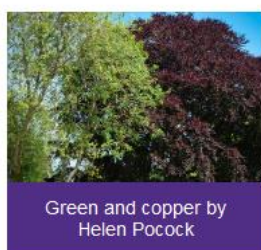
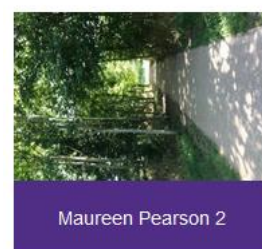
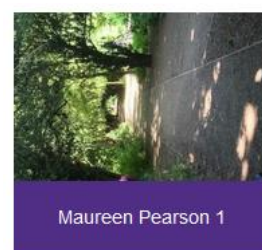
Please see our website for the full terms & conditions before you submit your work:

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





Below are the entries from June's theme: 'Trees', what a great selection of trees they really show the diversity of the park, thank you to everyone who submitted a photograph.



# Nature Blog – Feed the Birds!

*By Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer*



No doubt many of you have tried building bird tables and putting up feeders to encourage birds into your garden over the lockdown period. It seems lots of children have been doing this as part of home schooling projects and hopefully were quickly rewarded with a great variety of birds visiting their efforts. If you didn't get quite the variety you were expecting, it could be the food wasn't to their liking. Bird's diet vary and they also have their favourites, to get over this I put out a variety of feed.

To give you a rough idea:- Finches and tits seem to stick to sunflower hearts. Tits tend to grab a seed

and take it to a nearby shrub to nibble, whilst finches stay perched at the feeder. Dunnocks and sparrows go for mixed seed. Blackbirds and robins love meal worms and suet pellets. The greater spotted wood peckers go for suet balls and kibbled peanut. Pigeon's will eat anything including your lettuce plants! Starlings go for any fat based food. I make my own mixing a variety of seed with lard and sometimes grated cheese, which I put in old butter tubs and keep in the freezer until needed. Most birds will add fat to their diet in winter. Avoid putting out too much bread, although it isn't harmful, its nutritional value is low and it doesn't have the protein or fats birds need in their diet.

In addition don't forget clean water, apart from a drink, birds love to splash about in it to get rid of bugs in their feathers. Which is a good reason to change the water daily. Smaller birds in particular like to have somewhere close by they can escape to if they are spooked, a tree or shrub close to a feeder can provide a safe haven for them.

Now that the lockdown is beginning to ease. If you have started feeding the birds, can I encourage you not to stop. Garden birds get to rely on it and if they have a known source, it can save them a lot of energy not having to find an alternative. This is a great benefit to them, particularly in the cold of winter and in spring when they are raising young. They can have as many as three broods a year so use up lots of energy. Another point to remember is to keep your feeders clean. Different species of birds come into close contact with each other, that they wouldn't normally do and can pass parasites and viruses between them. By the way don't forget, always wash your hands after filling your feeders. A useful tip, I keep my bird feed in plastic milk bottles, it keeps the food dry and it's easy for topping up the feeders.



And finally, love them or hate them, pigeons might be annoying and dominate your bird tables, but they are quite clever. They can find their way home from over a thousand miles away, average sixty miles an hour over a distance of six hundred miles in a single day and they can take off vertically. Like humans they can see in colour, but they can also see ultraviolet, they mate for life and can breed from the age of six months. But did you know pigeons along with doves can drink by sucking (Take note if you are into pub quizzes!) other common bird species have to dip their beaks into water then tip their heads back to drink.

Until the next time, enjoy your bird watching.

*Mark*



## What's the latest in the Gardens?

Welcome to July's newsletter, and as I often remark, well where did that month go....?

It has been non-stop here in the gardens as produce is being harvested on a regular basis, weeds are still growing with a vengeance and plants are awaiting their allocated plot in the plan.

There is so many things to share with you this month, but I am mighty glad the temperature has cooled and allowed the plants a little recovery time. Days and days of scorching heat is not conducive to effective growing. Or indeed to us!!

One of our nicest splashes of colour at the moment has to come from the formal garden on the corner where you are greeted with a splash of purple and mauve hues.

During this duller spell we have been taking advantage of the weather and trimming back the box edging that forms an edge around many of the beds.

Thanks to the endless enthusiasm of the volunteers this job is very nearly completed. It is important that hedging is not cut in extreme sunny conditions otherwise the leaves will become scorched. By trimming them it will eventually make for thicker and more definite edge.

Colour is very much on offer with the pollinator bed in the kitchen garden with the next wave of flowers coming through weekly. I the wind is blowing the right way you can smell the sweetpeas from the path!



**Left** *Campanula pritchards* variety **back middle**  
*Veronicastrum* **front** *veronica royal candles*





## Produce and Harvesting

We have picked so many strawberries this month and many of you have been able to enjoy the spare produce. Some of these have been taken up to our CBC site for distribution into the community with the food parcels.

However, what do you do with all these extra ones. Well you bake a cake of course!!!



This week we began the exciting job of lifting and drying the autumn planted onions and garlic. Some of them have been an impressive size... check this monster out!

They are not all quite as large as this prize winning one!

We regularly harvest salad leaves, and this week the cucumbers, tomatoes and potatoes have become part of the mix.





## Tomato, aubergine, chillies and peppers

Bed 3 has had a revamp and the beginning of the month saw the first wave of planting out 12 varieties of tomatoes. With over 40 different varieties to choose from it was hard to narrow it down but we are looking forward to seeing how they compare in taste and vigour. I must say I am looking forward to tasting Jens tangerine! There are some more unusual varieties: green zebra, snowberry, orange fizz and blue bayou to name but a few.

Between the tomatoes we have planted basil but the pigeons have taken quite a liking to this so that may not be as successful as I had hoped.

We also have a good range of aubergine and chilli plants between the rows. In another week we will be adding the pepper plants which are patiently waiting at the back.



As soon as the new potatoes have been harvested then the leeks will be planted in the last area next to the sweetcorn completing the last cycle before we begin the autumn planting of onions and garlic and it all begins again!

With the extreme weather conditions that we have been experiencing we have put measures in place to help sustain moisture levels on the beds where the plants need it most. This week the cut flower patch had drip line irrigation laid alongside some sturdy support structures to prevent the wind snapping the stems. The cut flower patch adds another layer of interest to the kitchen garden from a visual aspect and a pollinators paradise but also so volunteers can enjoy cutting the flowers for home.





We have a wide selection such as: Panicum, dahlias, phlox, Alchemilla, delphinium, liatris, asters, antirrhinums, sedum, zinnias, cosmos, sweet peas and gypsophyllia.



Some areas are having a bit of a revamp and some colour added. This is an area of fenceline which we moved some pyracantha into last year as the bed was a little congested with them. There is now some foxgloves and verbena to add colour as you exit this area of the formal garden. So just take a look at the crops we have coming up, some of them doubled in size since last month:





Once a crop is removed, we are always looking to the next thing to plant out, meaning that the spaces are as productive as possible for as long as possible. Here are the peppers waiting patiently alongside some lettuce that were sown 4 weeks ago. I am also experimenting with some courgettes sown 3<sup>rd</sup> week of June. As the earlier plants run out of steam at the beginning of September, I am hoping that these will bridge the gap giving us a later and bountiful harvest.



And behind the scenes.....

Work continues to improve and tweak our presentation and so Carol has been busy preparing a variety of things for us. As well as pricking out and potting up. It will be jam jar decorating later this week!

Litter picking throughout the park, weeding, watering and deadheading continues on a daily basis.

Bigger projects will be on the move later this month as wood will be arriving to make more potting benches and cold frames, it simply doesn't stop here!

I have included a lot more pictures than normal in this update as I feel this month really illustrates the progress and changes that have occurred in the past month.

So halfway through the year, more volunteers are back with social distancing measures in place. Things are certainly beginning to feel a little more 'normal'

One thing we have all commented on in these times, is just how appreciative the community is of the gardens we tend. The positivity and engagement levels have been off the scale this month and we are so pleased that your enjoyment of the park is so important to you.

*Happy Gardening, stay safe*

*Jenny*



## 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

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



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