

Houghton Hall Park

October 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.

Houghton Hall Park flies the flag as one of the country's best parks

In a record-breaking year for the Green Flag Award, as the scheme marks its Silver Jubilee, Houghton Hall Park, is one of 2127 celebrating success today

The award is the international quality mark for parks and green spaces.

After 18 months that have seen our parks and green spaces play a vital role for people through lockdowns as a place to relax, exercise and meet friends and family safely, the news that Houghton Hall Park has achieved the Green Flag Award is testament to the hard work and dedication of the team that make the green space a great space that everyone can enjoy.

Houghton Hall Park joins parks and green spaces as diverse as the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, Woodhouse Park in Peterlee and Chiswick Old Cemetery in London.

Commenting on the news that Houghton Hall Park has achieved the Green Flag Award standard, Green Flag Award Scheme Manager Paul Todd said: "I would like to congratulate everyone involved in making Houghton Hall Park worthy of a Green Flag Award."

"To meet the requirements demanded by the scheme is testament to the hard work of the staff and volunteers who do so much to ensure that Houghton Hall Park has high standards of horticulture, safety and environmental management and is a place that supports people to live healthy lives."

The Green Flag Award scheme, managed by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy under licence from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, recognises and rewards well-managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of green spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world.



A great place to live and work.

What's On

Pop-Up Tasty Creative



When: Saturdays and Sundays from now until mid December

Over the next few weeks we will be having a pop-up craft/produce stall in the foyer of the Visitors Centre on a Saturday and Sunday, these will change each day and each week, so far we have card makers, wax melts, fans, jewellery and brownies to name a few booked on! We will announce on our facebook and instagram pages each week who will be there. Please do pop along and take a look, there will be some wonderful ideas for Christmas presents over the coming weeks!

Halloween Xplorer

When: 27th October

Time: 11am to 1pm (last entry 12.15pm)

Cost: Free!

Our Halloween Xplorer Trail is perfect for families with children 8 years or under. It provides an opportunity to take part in the Halloween festivities during the day and to explore the natural beauty of Houghton Hall Park safely through a fun outdoor challenge. It's FREE to take part in the challenge.



This activity will take place across Houghton Hall Park, with Halloween themed markers being located throughout its fantastic open spaces. On average people take around 30-45 minutes to complete the walk but you can always take advantage of the picnic benches or outdoor play area if your little ones need a break. Some markers are off the path and so depending on the weather, we would recommend wellies although they are not essential. The trail ends at 1pm so please be back before then to collect your certificate and sticker.

You can collect your maps and answer sheets from the Visitors Centre foyer. We ask that you please bring your own pen to note down the answers as you go along. Our Café will be open offering hot and cold drinks, waffles and snacks. Any four legged friends are welcome to join families on their quests.

This event is brought to you in association with the British Orienteering Association.

Willow Bird Feeder Workshop



When: 27th October

Time: 11am to 1pm (last entry 12.15pm)

Cost: £4.50 per person

Come along and try weaving your very own willow bird feeder. As we head into the autumn and winter months food sources for birds start to run low and they need an extra hand. Why not have a go and make your own refillable bird feeder using willow, lard and bird seed! This

event is open to those aged 8* and over as Ranger Eleanor teaches you how to weave your very own bird feeder. All tools, equipment and materials will be provided. If you wish to wear gloves please bring some along with you.

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

Tickets are £4.50 per person and can be purchased on our website:-

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

Halloween at Houghton Hall Park

When: 31st October

Time: 5pm to 7pm

Cost: £4 per child (children must be accompanied by an adult)

Experience Halloween like never before with an evening in Houghton Hall Park, the witch needs to remember her spell so all the children can have their treats, are you brave enough to help her do this by following a spooky trail in the park? Once you have solved the clues take the finished spell to the witch, she will give you your wand (to keep!), say the magic words and your treat will appear!



Enter our pumpkin competition, bring your carved pumpkins to the park on Friday 29th October, we will light them up on Halloween and display them around the event area to create a pumpkin spectacular! Vote for your favourite pumpkin, the one with the most votes will win a prize!

Do you dare to take part in our trick or treat games? Can you knock down all the ghost skittles? Find what's hidden in the slime tank? Get one of your hoops on the witch's hat? A safe environment to have some Halloween fun and maybe some treats!

The Visitors Centre café will also be open serving you some Halloween specials!

The event is aimed at under 10s, fancy dress is welcome, all children must be accompanied by an adult, the park will be dark so please bring a torch if you have one (or use your phone). Walk to the park if you can as our parking is limited.



Buggy Exercise

When: Every Wednesday (term time)

Time: 10am

Cost: £2 bookable at www.houghtonhallpark.org

Meet outside the Visitors Centre for a warmup around the park then an exercise circuit, a fun class, all fitness levels welcome!

Tots go Wild in Wellies

When: Every Tuesday (term time)

Time: 10am

Created for toddlers aged 1 to 4 years – and their grown-ups – the outdoor adventure will combine stories, singing and movement.

Find out more and book your space at:-

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/art-town-tots-go-wild-in-wellies-tickets-123186814077>



Christmas at Houghton Hall Park



When: Sunday 5th December

Time: 10am to 3pm

Cost: £4 per child for the reindeer trail and grotto – tickets on sale soon!

Yes you read it right, we are going to have real life reindeer in the park on Sunday 5th December! Come along to see them and sit in Santa's sleigh for a photo, all completely free!

We will also have a reindeer trail around the park for children to complete with a

visit to Santa in his grotto to claim their present! Tickets for this will be on sale soon.

To make the afternoon complete we will also have some festive outside stalls for those unique handcrafted Christmas purchases, stalls cost £15 to book and you can do this using the link below.

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/christmas-at-houghton-hall-park>

Monthly Photography Themes

Art & Culture
Event

Central Bedfordshire
great
lifestyles

October's Photography Theme

'Autumn' at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in October
- Some images will be featured on our website, social media platforms and in our monthly newsletter
- Send them to us at: hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
- Deadline 31st October
- 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. October's theme is: 'Autumn at Houghton Hall Park' and it certainly feels like autumn in the park at the moment. Please send your submissions to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

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

September's theme was 'Dogs in Houghton Hall Park' thank you to everyone who sent us in their photos, we love the number of dogs who visit our park.



'Bonnie' Priceless Princess
By Jade Siklodi



By Maja Pelczar



'Teddy' Waggiest Tail
By Kirsty Harris

Community Ranger Update

Words and photographs by Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger.

Well what a month, from beautiful sunshine to cold and rainy you can tell that Autumn is here!

It's been busy, from doing the paper work that I've ignored through the busy summer, to organising contactors, to the Sunday volunteer group who are fantastic.

This month's Sunday volunteer group really saw the start of the winter work programme begin. We did a pre-season litter pick which had us collect 8 big bags of rubbish from all over the site (a lot of it from the end of rabbit lane.) As you can see from the picture volunteers Alison and Catherine came up with an ingenious way to carry a heavy bin bag!



For the second half of the day we started cutting back self-seeded ash saplings. Ash trees can spread their seeds far and wide and they grow very easily and often in the wrong place.



Ash is a tree that suffers from ash die back which does what it sounds like and is a fungus that cause ash to die. The fungus was introduced to the UK about 30 years ago and since then has been slowly but surely spreading around the UK and young ash

trees/saplings tend to succumb to the fungus quicker than more mature trees. Due to this we cleared the ash samplings from the area which will allow sunlight in and encourage different flora and fauna to grow and thrive.



Whilst walking round the park I also found this little moth crossing the path. This is a knot grass moth caterpillar. Knot grass caterpillars feed off dock, knotgrass, as well as bramble and hawthorn, so plenty of food sources for them around the park.

If you would like to get involved with volunteering then please feel free to email me on:
Eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

As we head into October and the nights and mornings start to get darker stay safe and bundle up warm.

Eleanor

Nature Notes

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

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

Of all the flying insects, wasps are right up there at the top of our most hated pests. Above all they seemingly have no purpose other than to cause a nuisance and just the sight of their black and yellow bodies are enough to spoil any picnic. Of all the pests we encounter, we consider wasps as the most likely insect to sting us. So this month I'm going to try and change your opinion of *Vespula vulgaris*, the common social wasp and the one we are most familiar with. World wide there are in the region of 120,000 species of wasp of which in the UK there are around 9,000, but most are parasitic on other insects or plants and don't bother humans.



Wasps are very much misunderstood



A new generation is started

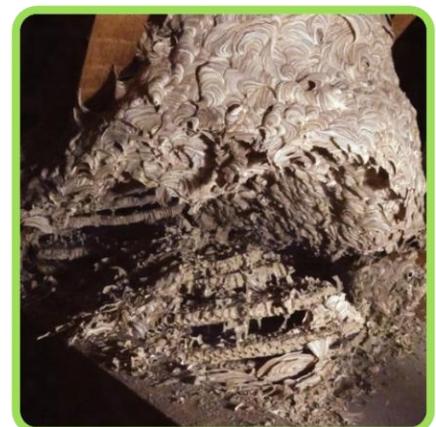


Perfectly formed egg cells

Living only two to three weeks the life span of a wasp is short, it's only the queen that will live the whole summer. Towards the end of summer the queen will lay eggs which are destined to become male drones and two or three new queens. The only purpose is for these drones is to mate with the new queens and start new colonies. Around April each queen will lay a dozen or so eggs which will become female workers. These then start to build a nest by chewing wood fibre and making the delicate papery structures we sometimes find in lofts or outbuildings. Throughout the summer the queen will continue to lay eggs and the nest will grow to contain 10,000 or more workers. The nest in the picture, taken in my loft, was huge and removing it filled three bin bags. As the weather cools at the end of summer the queen stops laying eggs and wasp numbers quickly decline. Soon after mating the male drones die and the original queen and workers will generally die of either starvation or are killed off by the cold. Only the new young queens will hibernate and survive the winter to start the next generation.

So what's so great about wasps? Firstly there is growing evidence that like bees, wasps are valuable pollinators, although with smooth legs not quite as good as bees. In fact bees are closely related and evolved from wasps. We are all aware how bee numbers are in serious decline, so losing another important pollinator species, isn't going to help the situation.

But probably one of their most useful assets, particularly from a farming and gardening perspective, is adult wasps prey on aphids and caterpillars helping to control their numbers. It is estimated that wasps in the UK account for 14 million kilos of insect prey during the summer, a far more natural form of pest



Inside a wasp nest showing layers of egg chambers



Wasps are very much misunderstood

control than spraying with chemicals. Bearing in mind chemicals are not a targeted control and don't discriminate between good and bad insects. They are also great scavengers using their powerful jaws to cut into dead carcasses, providing access to this valuable food source, for other insects. All this provides wasps with high protein food which they feed to their larvae. The larvae convert this protein and secrete a sweet nectar which the adults feed on. As long as there are larvae in a nest the wasps go in search of protein, their total nectar supply being provided by these larvae.

Towards the end of summer the queen stops laying eggs and the nest quickly becomes depleted of larvae, so food for the adult workers runs out and they then have to look for alternative sources. It's at this time wasps become more and more hungry and are enticed to the smell of anything sweet, which is why they are attracted to join us at a picnic. The problem is, as soon as we see them, we immediately go into defensive mode and start waving our arms about and try swatting them. Naturally this then puts the wasp into attack mode and it brings out its sting. This sting contains a pheromone which alerts other wasps to the threat and they all start to become aggressive. Like an army wasps rush to support each other in times of danger. So by swatting one wasp you're likely to attract a lot more. Remember it is only the short period when the nest is in decline, at the end of summer, that wasps are looking for sweet food stuffs. The simple answer is to put something sweet and sticky away from your picnic or BBQ. to keep them happy and therefore leave you to enjoy your picnic wasp free. So all in all wasps are really much maligned and misunderstood good guys (In reality it should be girls as most of the wasps you see are likely to be female workers!) By the way it's only female workers that can sting you as males don't have a stinger! Mind you apart from mating with the queen, males don't do any work either!

Latest news from the pond in the kitchen garden. We got very excited during the past week having spotted a couple of young frogs amongst the plants around the pond. Considering the pond was only started a little over five months ago, it's great to see wildlife moving in so quickly. The plant covered raised area at the beach end of the pond is a hibernaculum. Under the soil are lots of spaces created with wooden pallets, sticks, roof tiles and bricks for wildlife to hibernate in over winter. Fingers crossed our frogs will make use of it.

Dragonflies and damselflies appeared soon after planting in the pond started with various species regular visitors throughout the summer, darting up and down patrolling the water. It was during a warm afternoon on the last Wednesday of September I photographed a Southern Hawker laying her eggs in moss covering rocks at the side of the pond. As September is the last month you can expect to see these large dragonflies, it must have been the unseasonal warm spell that kept this one so active. These eggs will hatch next spring and the larvae will spend between one and three years in the water. Eventually around June-July time they will climb up reeds and emerge as a dragonflies. The eggs of Damselflies hatch within a few weeks and larvae of both Azure and Blue tailed have been spotted swimming around. So as we head towards winter I think we can consider the pond has been both a very worthwhile project and a major success for attracting wildlife.



Late September egg laying

Until next time

Mark – Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

What's the latest in the Gardens?

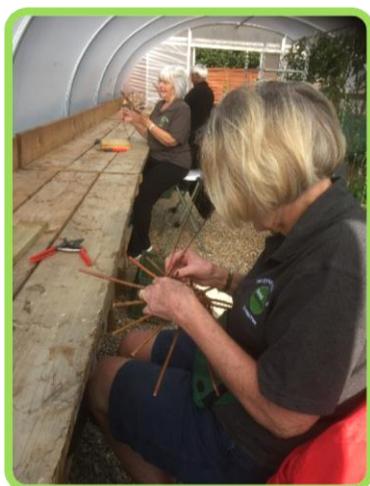
By Jenny Osborne, Community Gardener

A bit of Autumnal fun is to be found in the gardens this month!

Life isn't always about work so this month we have had some different things going for the volunteers to get involved with. With so many varied skills in the group it means that there are always a lot of ideas flying around!

One such activity was for basket weaving, an incredibly skilful heritage craft that was once the mainstay of cottage industry up and down the country.

Ed Burnett, a self-taught basket maker and local carver taught two fantastic sessions and we soon realised the complexity and dexterity needed to achieve a useable basket. I think we have all gone away from this realising the time and effort that goes into producing a hand-woven object.



We also had some spare straw bales from the dog show....so thought we'd make scarecrows!!
A bit of competition is always good for a team, and some hilarious moments were caught on camera as some rather creative scarecrows were made for the garden.



Every year it always surprises me how we go from Summer into Autumn and the change is almost overnight. The leaves are dropping, the conkers are scattering the path and suddenly you just need that extra layer on!

The garden is beginning to lose colour and vigour and plant debris is being removed daily whilst we begin to mulch the beds.

Behind the scenes we have so many different activities going on which support the parks events and engage with our community.

Here we are getting our soldiers ready for the remembrance bed, and a new addition is being added as we speak, I won't share more until next month!



The volunteers are busy making things for our Christmas stall on 5th December at the park, could you be interested in giving our individually prepared reindeers a good home?!

The festive wreath kits have been put on sale which is a big volunteer involvement as they will pick and package these for collection, the bunched sticks are under way ready for painting.



And what can I say about the giant gold nugget? Repurposed and transformed, have you guessed what on earth it can be? Next month all will be revealed, but I think it will make you smile!!



So, you can get a sense of the variety of jobs here at the park, definitely not all about having green fingers, which is why I am so thrilled that we have such a resilient core of volunteers who come week on week, many several times whatever the weather.

Despite all the frippery and distractions progress is being made in all areas of the garden. We are hanging on to the last few buds of colour but the dahlia stems are getting weaker and I feel the last few stems are on the last cut. We have had hundreds of bunches which have been put out for sale by the gates and enjoyed by many. The perennial plants like the scabious are establishing nicely and with any luck will be twice the size next year.





The wildlife pond is looking fantastic and we have had some really positive comments from visitors, and it adds a different area into the garden to care for. I came across a photo from January this year of the pond being shaped, what a difference 10 months makes. We recently uncovered some frogs under the vegetation which has thrilled me no end, natural slug catchers! I feel we are struggling with slug numbers this year so anything that can help will be a bonus. We have recently added some stones to cover, the pond liner and our railings will be with us soon so we can remove the temporary fencing. It already looks like it has been here for years, pond dipping here we come!



Produce is still coming thick and fast with a super crop of cabbages, some have a few slugs in but get past them and they have been delicious. Carrots and courgettes still cropping well and we recently tied up with the local Women's Institute to take some of our spare produce for their members. There have been regular stalls in the kitchen garden and so the produce has been truly shared by the locals. I get asked the question a lot about when we

have the produce stall, this is a difficult one to answer as generally a Monday and Thursday but if the weather is too wet, windy or sunny we have to forgo them. If there is an event on and volunteer numbers are low then it is almost impossible to do.

The harvesting, washing, bunching, and recording of the crops takes a while and the volunteers involved do a great job to ensure that there is a balance of produce for them to enjoy and surplus is shared, it may seem that there are a lot of crops in the garden but shared 30 ways it soon goes!



For next year we will have a purpose-built produce hut nearer the pond at the back of the garden which is in a more protected area in the garden, one of the many projects on the go!

For the next few weeks we will be working on getting August/Septembers sown plants in the ground ready to overwinter and mulching the beds. We have just had a load delivered and there appears to be one person really, really happy to be moving it!!!!!!!!!!!!

Until next month, enjoy this beautiful month of autumnal weather

Happy Gardening

Jenny and all the volunteers

Plant of the month – Aster



Asters are in the daisy family and flower mostly in late summer and autumn, which gives them their common name Michaelmas daisy. The Aster bridges the season from Summer to Autumn. The Aster has a long flowering period, with long, narrow green leaves and daisy like flowers which appear at the top of the stems. The Aster is a herbaceous plant native to the northern hemisphere. There are around 180 species in the wild, and more than 600 different varieties.

The flowers are even able to survive the first light night frosts, undamaged. Large numbers of insects therefore flock to the plant for a meal, since it is the only plant still flowering. This ensures ample pollination between plants. It is not unusual to see a hungry butterfly, a bumblebee and a couple of honeybees all circling a single aster looking for a final nip of nectar.

Irene Copperwheat
Houghton Hall Park Volunteer



Keep in touch

Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

Twitter

@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Current Opening Times

Mon – Sun 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



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