

Maintaining high quality parks in a challenging economic climate

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Issues

In two sections

LTS Green Space Solutions – a trading vehicle, purpose and achievements

Second section

- Finishing 'top 3' within the Eastern region (Green Flag)
- Maximising external funding and mobilising the volunteer base

Background information –Luton

- London borough in green fields
- Labour controlled
- Densely populated
- Very developed - development for housing, leisure etc. is a threat to parks
- Areas of deprivation and health inequality



Background information

- Parks have seen large reductions in budgets over too many years I care to mention
- Over 40% of our budgets have been reduced - £1.3million in the last three years
- The revenue generating golf course was transferred to the sports trust (active Luton)
- Frequencies reduced to a minimum, bedding removed, tree planting and tree work to maintenance based on risk

Advertisement for Luton

- Luton has 7 Green Flag parks ranging from Grade II* Listed parks, to local parks and a woodland
- Achieved in 2014 with a background over 35% budget reductions
- Has a great airport – generates much needed revenue into the council



First section – survey

- **WOULD YOU ALL PLEASE STAND UP.**
- **WOULD THOSE PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT CONSIDERING TRADING PLEASE SIT DOWN.**
- **WOULD THOSE PEOPLE WHO ARE ONLY PLANNING TO TRADING PLEASE SIT DOWN.**
- **FINALLY, WOULD THOSE PEOPLE WHO ARE CURRENTLY TRADING PLEASE SIT DOWN.**

LTS Green Space Solutions

- Faced with losses, trading arm was set up offset to try and offset the councils' financial problems
- Department set up the framework for Luton Traded Services which embraces all the council services that can trade
- We trade as green space solution
- Set up in 2012

Achievements – contracts

- Busway maintenance 4 years annually £80k
- Completed the planting on the inner ring road and carrying out subsequent maintenance. £42k
- Awarded Harpenden floral work for 6 months. Now extended for 5 years with an increase of 5% income rising to £19k per year

Achievements – contracts

- Two school contracts
- Other works including active Luton and Luton cultural trusts/ Volker highways in the town
- Private individuals-usually tree work
- In total green space solutions –cost of service £284k with an income of £329k making a profit of £44k

Before you start

- Preparation of a business plan
- As part the business plan identify unique selling point – no large scale large contractor in our area so should have financial advantage (crowded market place)
- Have you the resources to put to trading
- Commitment from staff as you are going to need of cooperation and flexibility

Before you start

- Must know which land you maintain (difference between housing and highways)
- Must know your total costs (SSC etc.)
- Establish your cost per hour by taking the total of productive hours divided by total cost (result should be around £23 per hour)
- Test your efficiency by comparing yourself with other local authorities and private companies – identifies where to improve

The journey

- Growing business within existing resources is a problem in the first instance to get started
- Results in high quotes as you have to use existing employees on overtime or take them off and back fill with temporary employees
- Making sure when pricing that you can make a profit (essential)

Problems

- Introduced a minimum of £500 for small local tree works as seeking wrong markets – domestic work
- Uniform/livery an issue when we have two separate sections with different designs
- Tendering



Green Space Solutions Livery and uniforms

Plan for this year/next

- Increase income by being successful when bidding for local authority contracts and similar bodies based in or around Luton
- Increase profit from £44k to £54k
- Introduction for direct charging time recording system when working for green space solutions

Plans for this year/next

- Carry out target marketing to commercial sites within the borough in particular housing associations, academies and clinical commissioning group (doctors surgeries)
- Won the maintenance contract of new M1 Junction 10a junction for four years
- To become BALI registered

The challenge second section

- The challenge has been to try and maintain the quality of parks in this financial environment
- I am going cover some of the actions we have taking in these areas;

Community involvement

Capital schemes

Best use of existing resources

Community involvement

- Friends groups
- Sports clubs/strategy
- Businesses/schools
- Local Organisations
- Mind
- University
- Health initiatives
- Sponsorships

Gives some details of each



Community - Friends groups

- Friends of Luton parks and Greenspace which is an overarching body formed from representatives of local friends groups from – used in consultation of Council changes
- Local friends groups and other park interest groups



Community supporting improvements

Manor Park friends group applied for

- £50k from Community spaces to restore the park gardens
- Worked with Barclays to fund a basketball area, skatepark & coaching
- Bill Burton awarded the volunteer of the year in 2015 by the Keep Britain Tidy group



Community- Clubs

- Members approved a scheme of Capital asset transfers (CAT) to encourage clubs to take on responsibility for maintenance
- This is in readiness the community taking more of an active role in providing services



Community Sports clubs – capital asset transfers

- Take responsibility for the maintenance costs of the facility and be able to charge users
- Usually a 25 year duration to allow them to access external funding at peppercorn rent.
- The main difference is that they must become a separate entity – allotments have formed a co-operative society owned by its members who put a nominal £1 at the start
- Funding available from DCLG for training groups to take on CAT responsibilities

Community -Business/schools

- Local business with social responsibility programmes – Barclays, TUI (Thomson holidays) carried out woodland management, bulb planting, tidying
- Cheynes Infant School decided the play area next door was sad looking & worked with reception year classes to seek improvements.

Grampian Way Play Area

Grampian Way park receives a makeover

Pupils at Cheynes Infant School are enjoying a revamped local play facility thanks to generous volunteers from TUI UK & Ireland, home to the brands Thomson and First Choice.

Employees from the Luton-based holiday company braved the summer heat to give the play area in nearby Grampian Way park a much-needed makeover.

The project came about after year one pupils at the school wrote to the Council and a local MP expressing their concerns about the condition of the park.

They then liaised with the Council's parks service which contacted the authority's volunteering coordinator for assistance in finding an organisation to support the project.

The pupils were then given the opportunity to choose a colour scheme and make suggested improvements to the play area.

Thomson and First Choice volunteers were joined by the pupils on the day as the work was carried out.

Caroline Kitcher, human resources director for Thomson and First Choice, said: "We were delighted to be part of these projects in Luton as volunteering is close to the hearts of our employees.

"We believe volunteering brings people together, creates an opportunity to make a difference, and develops new skills or builds on existing experiences and knowledge. It is rewarding and can help to improve confidence and self-esteem."



All hands on deck: the team who helped revamp Grampian Way park

Darren Ruffett, head of year one at Cheynes Infant School, said: "The children were extremely passionate about making the park a nicer place to visit. They worked hard participating in purposeful learning by writing complaint letters, designing new play areas and liaising with the Council.

"It is fantastic that the children can now see the results of their hard work and enjoy using the play area."

Cllr Khtija Malik, Portfolio Holder for community development, said: "It is always great to see local businesses working with and supporting the local community like this. The fact that the children also got involved and helped secure the improvements makes this a wonderful community story."

The Council's volunteer scheme works with local businesses on a number of projects to benefit the community, with

Thomson and First Choice previously supporting a disability sports event at the Inspire Sports Village and painting play equipment at Stockwood Park.

● For details of how your business could get involved please call 01582 55 73 19 or email volunteering@luton.gov.uk. If you have a community project that you feel would benefit from the support of volunteers, please contact email karen.fletcher@luton.gov.uk

Community – Signpost TEAMSP

- Homeless charity that have high levels of support -80 people attended at Kidney wood
- Signpost cleaned the seats and tidied the parks ready for green flag judging

Community – Signpost TEAMSP



Community University –BESS

- Sheffield & Cranfield university Bio diversity & Eco System Services (BESS) project studying the effect of wildflower meadows on the insect population
- Luton interested in the publics' reaction



Meadow Trails



- Picture of the second area sown with annual mixture in Wardown park again to study the effect on the insect population
- Local school involved in an area not part of the scheme

Community – health voluntary organisations

- The local Mind charity ran a 12 wk course in Wardown park 2014 with nine people attending gaining a John Muir qualification
- Future plan next year unused allotment site (New Bedford road) –Penrose housing to train individuals in landscape /hort to obtain the CSCS card for building sites
- With funding in the future from Penrose making it sustainable

Community -Healthy Parks



- This year Mind Health and Wellbeing Project in Memorial park training students to level I City and Guilds in horticulture

Community Health initiatives



- Grant from public health of £20k to provide fitness equipment in three parks
- Awarded £20k for a six month post for promoting healthy parks activities

Maximise funding opportunities – capital schemes

- Member support for capital improvements
- Funding streams can be accessed by groups which are not available to councils
- With their help you can bid for external bids
- Offset savings

Capital schemes external investment



- Wardown park Rotary bandstand to be installed next year
- This is to part of programme of events

Capital schemes -Wardown Suspension Bridge



Capital schemes Wardown Lake silt removal



Capital schemes Community Friends group – example of schemes

- Bramingham friends group have completed two projects – providing a play area and a pond with funding from Area committee for prime funding
- This then allowed them to make a successful bid to community spaces and WREN for £105k and £8 from London Luton Airport Limited funding

Best use of existing resources

- Centralised all our operations as a small borough in area
- Created a two tier maintenance regime with a specialist group concentrating on green flag parks
- Sickness monitoring and action to reduce levels
- 40 hours a week from March to November and 32.2 the remainder

Lessons

- Victims of our own success and groups can go off and go off in tangents
- Very resource hungry especially if they are going to bid for external money
- Play area surfacing placed upside down around play area
- Looked at conservation areas but the cost of cut and clear at the end of the season is prohibitive
- Friends groups in BME areas very difficult

Way forward next year

- More challenges as the budgets are set to reduce further for all
- Reduce the stock for housing and improve quality of remaining facilities
- Commercialism i.e. costa coffee,
- More trading
- Community asset transfers