

The Park Manager – Last of a dying breed?

- Is the role virtually extinct?
- Or has the leopard had to change its spots?
- The 21st century park manager and beyond

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Its always good to start on a positive n

The context of where we are

“When I started it was all about horticulture. I can't even remember the last time we specified what type of tree we needed”

“Now it's very much about what goes on in the park. It's about activity, it's about negotiating leases, it's very much around engagement rather than maintenance. We're always having to evolve”

Some naïve Head of Parks from Watford Borough Council Sept 2016

The context of where we are

11th February 2017 – *The Guardian* - an Anonymous Park Manager

“Park managers like me are a dying breed, an endangered species. During the formative years of my training I would write detailed plans about how to landscape and manage the park. Today I am set the unenviable challenge of having to stop doing things like planning and designing new flowerbeds for the public to enjoy. I have to cut back on the maintenance and litter-picking that ensured the park always looked its finest. I question what my role as a manager really means anymore.”

The context of where we are

3rd February 2012 *Horticulture Week*

"Park-specific jobs have gone and posts have gone upwards to directors of leisure, sport or even waste - or they've gone downwards to people in acting-head posts. Park managers are an endangered species."

The context of where we are

Dr Stewart Harding, The Parks Agency

"Several senior parks managers have left the service through redundancy, retirement or disillusionment. These kinds of losses are widespread and the outcome will be a decline in maintenance standards"

The context of where we are

Tony Leach, Chair, London Parks & Green Spaces Forum

"Over the past 18 months, 25 per cent (of London Parks Managers) have either left or their jobs have been deleted. We are losing people with park-specific skills who are often being replaced by staff responsible for leisure or sport or those lower down the food chain with less knowledge".



Perceptions of the Park Manager



History tells us?

The Victorians

- Borough Engineers
- Borough Surveyors
- Park Superintendents
 - J.J. Sexby (LCC)
 - James McHattie (Edinburgh)
 - William Wallace Pettigrew (Cardiff & Manchester)
 - Captain Sandys Winsch (Norwich)



History tells us?

Twentieth Century

- Britain in Bloom – driven by Horticulture
- **Parks Departments**
- Amalgamation into **Leisure Services Departments** as part of CCT – change is in the air

BUT

- The advent of **Streetscene Services** – ruled by Binmen, highwaymen and Engineers

History tells us?

Twentieth Century

- The revival – 1996 and the Heritage Lottery Fund
- £800 million invested
- A new “role” - Parks Development Officers / Managers
- Staff in parks again?

History tells us?

Twentieth Century

Professional representation

- ILAM
 - Urban Parks Forum
 - GreenSpace
 - CABE Space
 - ISPAL
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- Green Flag / Tidy Britain Group
 - The Parks Alliance and CIMSPA

Tipping point?

“As local authorities close or merge departments and lose dedicated green space managers, their capacity to compile applications diminishes. Even in the period before austerity, the nature of funding competition meant that when applying for external funding, local authorities had to be selective in the sites they took forward”. Dr Katy Layton Jones – University of Leicester

Crisis?

“The current status quo is unsustainable and the undoing of all that has been achieved in the past twenty years should be unthinkable. Yet parks are already entering a spiral of decline and this time there will be no miraculous multi-million pound bail-out by the Lottery” - Dr Katy Layton Jones – University of Leicester

So what are we now?

- Environmental Services Client Managers
- **Parks**, Healthy Spaces, and Events Team Leader
- Service Manager Grounds
- **Parks** Development Coordinator
- **Parks** Development Manager
- Public Realm Policy and Projects Manager
- Contract Manager Street Cleansing, **Parks** and Open Spaces
- Contract Management Officer
- **Parks** Service Development Officer
- Horticultural Development Manager

So what are we now?



So what did we do?



So what did we do?

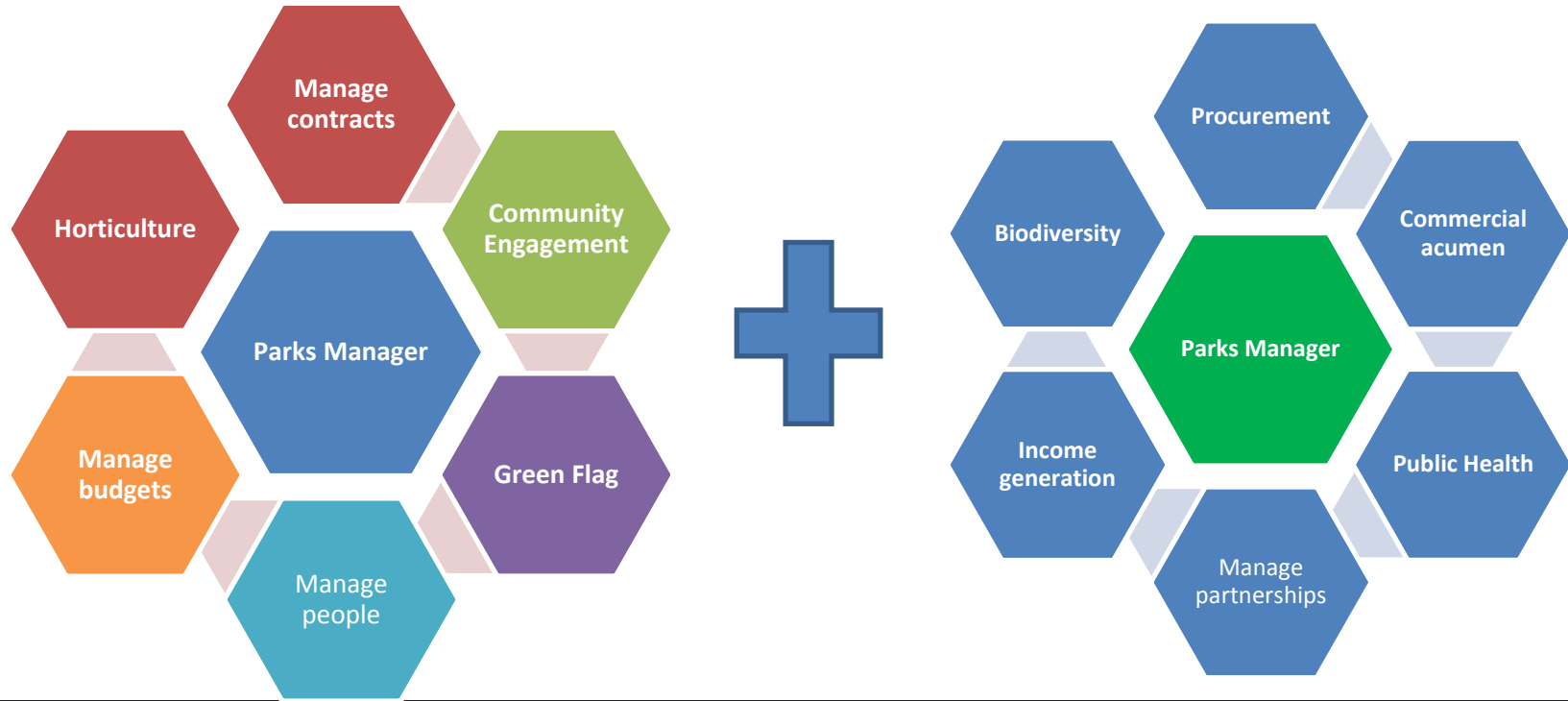
What skills do we need to have?

Legal,
Business acumen,
Financial management,
Enforcement,
Leisure management,
Property and facilities management,
Grounds maintenance,
Commercial events,
Community and partnership development,
Volunteering,
Conservation; and
Horticulture?

What skills do we need to have?



So what do we need to do today?



So what do we need to do now?

So is the role virtually extinct?

NO!!!!

So is the role virtually extinct?



What spots do we need to change?

10 points to consider

1. We are parks people – ensure we have parks in our job title – its what we do
2. We need a career pathway – the old traditional route is defunct - we should be targetting schools of landscape architecture, ecology, environmental science – its not just about horticulture
3. We need to identify the ‘stars’ –Who are they? And where are they?
4. Government champion – not necessarily a politician but an inside champion
5. A body that champions our cause – a new **ILAM** is vital to ensure the survival of the profession. Paid subscriptions perhaps?

What spots do we need to change?

10 points to consider

6. We must be **VISIBLE and BE HEARD** – enter Green Flag – be seen to be being seen and if you aren't heard, no one will know you are there and you will continue to be ignored
7. Be **STRATEGIC** – maximum impact
8. Embrace the **Health Agenda** – find out who is responsible for public health in your area / authority – they could be the key to your survival
9. Spend what we have wisely – maximum impact
10. Take risks – we outsourced in Watford – a brave decision for a Lib Dem Council

What spots do we need to change?



What makes a 21st century Park Manager?

Sue's View

“Be prepared to learn from other sectors – look outside the sector for inspiration”

“Internal networks are important – get involved, don't wait to be asked”

“Good people skills – crucial to the future parks manager”

“Working with people, taking the time to think and plan properly and think strategically”

Sue's view?



What makes a 21st century Park Manager?

A mis-guided Guardian readers view

“Parks should be managed by voluntary organisations plenty of people out there who want to do a bit of Gardening and grass cutting. I would quite like a go on a sit on lawn mower. Sack the council gardeners and get people do it for nothing. A bit of gardening is also great form of exercise and it makes you happy, so could save the NHS a bob or 2.”



And good to finish off on a positive note