Date: **10/02/2022**
Interviewer: **Di**
Interviewee: **Connor**

Connor works as a Park Ranger on Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. He walks us through his role as a Park Ranger and what he thinks of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

Interviewer
This is Di interviewing Connor at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park on 10th of February 2022. Hi, Connor. What's your job? What do you do on the Park?

Interviewee
My job role is Park Ranger, which mostly entails gardening, looking after the Park, and making sure the customers that walk through the Park have a good time and if any questions are needed, I will provide those.

Interviewer
Do you often get asked questions by members of the public in your role?

Interviewee
We get asked directions mainly. Some people ask what happens in the Park because there are a few occasions where there will be things happening like one of the major ones that happens very regularly would be the fun run [RunThrough] that goes through.

Interviewer
And do you get involved in preparing any of the fun runs?

Interviewee
We just clean up all the rubbish from the previous day. People that organise the fun runs mainly have their own people, but they are supposed to have a designated bottle collector from the fun run people, but we tend to have to sort that out afterwards [laughs].

Interviewer
I was thinking, are there any sort of gardening things that you have to do to prepare the route for the fun run or is it that you have to do anything or change anything?

Interviewee
I suppose the whole care throughout the year of keeping the foliage off the path is making sure the fun run is safe to run across, so just the constant maintaining of it helps them out.

Interviewer
So how long have you done this role?

Interviewee
I've been here about a year and a half now I think.

Interviewer
What did you do before that?

Interviewee
I was a publican, I've run quite a few bars and then before that I was a blacksmith.

Interviewer
A blacksmith? That's an interesting one! What made you think about being a blacksmith?

Interviewee
So I've always been interested in metal work. I lived in London my whole life and when I was in secondary school I went "right, I don't really want to stay here for too long" so I went and lived on a farm for two years to learn the trade.

Interviewer
Can you bring any of those skills into your work on the Park?

Interviewee
I know how to bend metal and know when it's breaking point is so if someone messes the tool around or something I can do a quick fix on it I suppose, but not exactly no.

Interviewer
What is your main role then in your, in your work on the Park?

Interviewee
My main role, the easiest way of describing it would be a gardener I would say.

Interviewer
Do you have a specific knowledge base or a specific plant, or…?

Interviewee
I'm training in Horticulture Level Two at the moment, I'm about halfway through that. It gives you a lot of plant knowledge. If you understand the basics on nature, you will have most of the information already but part of that course is also learning plants in Greek or Latin, which is quite difficult [laughs] I would say, until you get the sort of knack for it and then you kind of see the patterns but it is quite frustrating.

Interviewer
Which bit of the Park do you work in?

Interviewee
I mainly do the North Park, before that I was mostly doing extra works, which is very hands-on kind of work, a lot more on my type of how to work and then I've worked here and there on South which is lovely but it's definitely more of the touristy area is South, where North is definitely big trees, foliage and it is gorgeous over there.

Interviewer
So that's the bit you prefer?

Interviewee
I prefer to look at the North Park and garden through the North Park, than the South Park. I like doing the South Park but it's just not as I, as I said it's definitely more directed to the tourists than just a Park goer.

Interviewer
So, are you local?

Interviewee
So, on Newington Green, if you know where that is? So Islington, but it is literally if you go one road down, you're in Hackney, so I'm very close. It only takes me about well, depending on how fast and willing I am in the morning, I can do it from 20 minutes to half an hour.

Interviewer
So have you always known about the Park or…?

Interviewee
Well, it's the Olympic Games, it was pretty much plastered everywhere. I don't think there's a soul that doesn't know about it! [laughs]

Interviewer
I mean, from a local point of view, did you see it before it was built?

Interviewee
I'd never actually been! First time coming was when I got the job.

Interviewer
That was my next question, on the first time you came to the Park. What was your impression of it, and how do you feel about it when you first saw it?

Interviewee
Very nice, very grandiose, you kind of come here and it just seems open, more open than you would imagine a Park being, and there's a lot of key things, of when you walk through the Park that catch your eye, which is always an interesting thing to have, such as your big red slide! [laughs]

Interviewer
The ArcelorMittal Orbit! So do you ever come across volunteers in your work? Do you work with volunteers?

Interviewee
I've worked on a few projects with the volunteers, one of the main ones was the blossom project [The London Blossom Garden]. I helped get that started and cleaned up and planted all the stuff.

Interviewer
Can you, for the purposes of the recording, explain what the blossom project [The London Blossom Garden] is?

Interviewee
OK, so the blossom project [The London Blossom Garden] is a project that was... I know what I want to say, what I'm trying to say is that I'm, how we got the job. We got the job from the Government, but it was contracted. So, the job was contracted to us by the Government I believe, to remember the lives that were lost during the COVID epidemic. We managed to get it done in a very short time. It was a very planned out project and we managed to get it done, I would say, reasonably nicely. I always like blossoms in any setting really, it is a gorgeous, gorgeous tree.

Interviewer
What it, what was your role in creating that garden?

Interviewee
So I helped plant most of the plants there, and also over-see the volunteers planting the plants and making sure that they're doing the correct thing, and then in the beginning of it, I actually laid the turf as well and mowed it for the first couple of months I believe…yeah.

Interviewer
So what kind of maintenance was involved in keeping up?

Interviewee
Mowing it, litter picking it, getting all the leaves off of it, and then I believe this one person that might go around every now and again with a pressure washer just to make the pavement really nice down there.

Interviewer
So are you still involved in that, or are you…?

Interviewee
I still litter pick it every morning, but I don't tend to have much maintenance on the plant side of that.

Interviewer
So, where is your main area of working in the North Park?

Interviewee
So I'll do everywhere in the North of the Park. I do the blossom project [The London Blossom Garden], but it, when it's a bigger task that needs sorting out, we tend to get extra works to look after the blossom project [The London Blossom Garden] just to get it back up to standard.

Interviewer
Do you ever get involved in Wetland area or not particularly?

Interviewee
The Wetland is one of the main parts of the Park, so we will litter pick that every morning as well as, like, the Park in general and then some of them are then putting dead hedging there for bug life which is great. Always a great thing to try and push for is maintaining bug life, and I sometimes go with the boat team to sort out the banks when plants that are not supposed to be there.

Interviewer
So, which is your favorite part of the North Park, if you have one?

Interviewee
I don't really, it kind of just all melds together with North Park, you just go from bush to tree, from bush to tree, and it's all a very nice sight to take in to be honest. The North Park is just a nice, pleasant place to look at.

Interviewer
So you enjoy working there?

Interviewee
I enjoy the view, yeah.

Interviewer
How have you seen the Park evolve and what changes and improvements, or otherwise, have you seen in the time you've been? It's hard [to see] when you're working there, isn’t it?

Interviewee
I honestly, I couldn't answer that one!

Interviewer
That's fair enough! Do you have any funny, interesting or curious stories that you can talk about? About your feelings about Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in general, anything that's happened, that's been interesting that you could share.

Interviewee
I have to find lost dogs every now and again. There's an occasion where I find a dog and then rush around to find some assemblance of rope or something, to try and get it on a lead, and then yeah, walk

him around to try and get him back to yard [the works base] for them, them to ring the correct people to figure out what we do with the hound! I've had that about four to five times since I've been here, so yeah.

Interviewer
Do you think people just didn't notice their dogs gone, or has run off!?

Interviewee
I don't know. I'm a very dog person. One of my biggest things is you tend to find a lot of pet owners getting dogs, and being a pet owner and being a dog owner are completely different things. They just don't know how to do it, they really don't, and your dog's got to have a semblance of respect, and if it is just running off then it doesn't.

Interviewer
So for you that's something, you like dogs so that's a good thing that you can do to reunite…

Interviewee
Yeah, it's trying to figure out… and with that short time that I have them, I can see any problems see if there's some abuse going on with the hound or whatever right, I'm very observant when it comes to stuff like that.

Interviewer
I'm wondering what you think the Park is going to be like after 10 years, because we are now 10 years after the Games. In another 10 years' time, which would be 20 years after the Games, how do you think the Park is going to change and develop?

Interviewee
It's going to get smaller. We're just selling off land to build houses at the minute from what I understand, so it's going to get smaller and in 10 years they're probably going to want to try and take more land? I don't know.

Interviewer
When you say land, do you mean the land you work on?

Interviewee
Yeah, the North Park, the open section is all going to be houses now.

Interviewer
Do you think it's all going to be taken over or do you think any will remain?

Interviewee
The Park's still going to be here. I just think oh, the open parks are all getting rid. That's all been planned years ago.

Interviewer
Including Wetlands?

Interviewee
No, no, the Wetlands is completely separate. The Wetlands is on the other side of the Park.

Interviewer
Oh OK, so the other side of the river is what you're, you're talking about?

Interviewee
Yes, still North Park, but the other side of the river. The Wetlands is on that side and then where they're building is closer to Hackney estate, that area.

Interviewer
So you think the Wetland side of the river will remain, while the other side will become very built on, and how does that make you feel? Is it a good thing for the area, is it a bad thing for the area, is it a good thing for you, is it a bad thing for you…?
You can't answer that?

Interviewee
Nope! I don't like London in general. I think London is trying to branch its way out. It's also trying to take over more of the greenbelt. So, any, any, any places that are green and already being looked after and stuff, I don't think should be built on, in my opinion. I understand they're trying to say the housing crisis, but there is many, many different fixes they can do without wrecking places that already exist.

Interviewer
Do you think the Olympic Park will continue to be a resource for local people?

Interviewee
The Park will stay here, and the Park is the resource itself. It gives people a time to breathe, time to relax and time to join with friends and family. The Park will be here, and always will be here, so yes.

Interviewer
Do you see yourself as continuing to work in the Park, or do you think you will move on?

Interviewee
My problem at the moment is I'm working here and I'm working very hard, but with this job, it comes with having to do the [Horticulture Level Two] course, and if I don't pass the course, I will get fired.

Interviewer
So it's tied into the study, which is giving you a skill, brilliant! Is there anything else that you'd like to say about the Park, it's, how it's evolving your role? I find it interesting that you said litter picking is a big part of your role. Do you think the public appreciate the work that you do?

Interviewee
Oh no! Well, they wouldn't throw rubbish on the ground if they did [laughs], but one of my main things that I'm doing at the moment is the housing that's around that Park, they have to pay extra to be overlooking that Park, and one of my big things at the moment is trying to make sure all the rubbish in the fencing, and behind the fencing is all gone so when they're walking down their houses, or walking down their street near the houses, where they have to pay extra to live there just to be near the Park, don't just see a pile of rubbish. So I'm hoping a few of the residents have noticed that and gone “Oh, it's nice!” [laughs] you know, so hopefully, I've had three compliments with how my work’s going. It hasn't been about litter picking, it's been about me doing the gardening and they go “Oh, that looks nice! You prune that really, really well!” you know, even though as a customer, they might not know anything about horticulture, they can still see the presentation of it being nice.

Interviewer
Cool! Well, thank you very much for talking to us, it's been good talking to you.