Date: 14/04/2022

Interviewer: Pat

Interviewee: Rowan

Rowan is a former Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park employee, was a Games Maker in 2012 and helped set up Our Parklife and the Park Champion Volunteer Programme in 2014.

Interviewer
How did you first encounter the Olympic Park or the area? What… how did that come about?

Interviewee
So, my first real kind of connection with the Park probably came about through volunteering at the Olympics as a Games Maker, but I guess before that I had, sort of, started to get an understanding of what was happening because I was studying Landscape Architecture in Sheffield, but under the sort of teaching of two of the main planting designers, James Hitchmough and Nigel Dunnett, so I do remember in my, I guess it was my undergraduate, you know, very early stages. So, I started my undergraduate in 2004, I can't remember how the timings went, but it was, sort of, studying up until about 2009 and in that time, you know, obviously, things that started to happen with the master planning, the site engineering, the… I remember conversations, or lectures where Nigel and James were talking about this Californian kind of poppy, the sort of ring of gold around the London Stadium, and the really tense decisions about, you know, when a cut needed to happen in order for these Californian Poppies to be flowering, for the opening ceremony. So I remember very early landscape planting design, kind of, master planning-based elements of the Park, because I was studying Landscape Architecture at the time. So that I guess, was in the, sort of, early 2000s and then, after I graduated as a, sort of, graduated Landscape Architect, I was working in London, you know, things were sort of well underway in terms of the Park and its design and its construction but I registered as a volunteer, as a Games Maker, and came back. I was living in Australia, and then cut that short in order to kind of come back and volunteer in 2012 for the sustainability team. It was one of those, like, once in a lifetime opportunities, really, so I came back and volunteered as, in the sustainability team and that had a kind of cross-cutting role across lots of different sites in London, mainly London or just outside of London and that did include the Park, you know, the Park was one of the sites we had in our remit so I remember being there during the Games as well and yeah, it kind of continued shortly after that.

Interviewer
The sustainability remit that was… that's presumably in the lead up to, it wasn't not exclusively during the actual Games?

Interviewee
It was yeah, no, well as a Games Maker, I think it was a relatively small team so there was a permanent, sort of, paid LOCOG [London Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games] team, that were focused on, sort of, sustainability for the Games, the Olympics and Paralympics, and I think it was, you know, there was this quite pivotal piece of, I guess, IOC [International Olympic Committee] policy that London was responsible for in terms of, kind of,

sustainability, credentials, processes, you know, ways of delivering the Games in a more sustainable way, and I think London was, pivotal in that in embedding that in the, kind of, decision making, but as a Games Maker I was only volunteering for the duration of the Games and the Olympics and Paralympics, but I guess there were others in my team in a paid capacity I think, who obviously had been slogging along on this for quite a long time before, but yeah, we were responsible for all, you know, noise and waste and lighting and the, sort of, environmental control I guess you could say at that point, checking that venues were doing everything that they were meant to be doing.

Interviewer
You sort of cruise around all the different venues?

Interviewee
It sounds glamorous, but the reality… and we, you know, in a way, we had these, sort of, we had patches I think it was like East, West and Central that the team was divvied up, and so I think I had the West which included like Lord's [Cricket Ground], Eton Dorney… Wembley, I think was in the West, Earl's Court… so I was focused there, but we did cover for each other, so we were kind of, we had an all-venues pass, which for Games Maker was quite, quite special, but we had our rota, and we had our venues to focus on, so we did… there were one or two… there were one or two times where we came into the Olympic Park, because there were, I don't know, things we had to cover for, but it does… that sounds glamorous, but actually the reality was, you'd be poking around back of house in bins and seeing if the way-streaming was happening, you know, it was a lot of back of house stuff as opposed to like, the glamour of being on the field of play or something, it was none of that but I do remember being at Eaton Dorney noise monitoring. You're, sort of, standing on the top of a stand as the rowers are, kind of, coming along and there's that like, wall of noise that comes with the rowers as they approach and we're there with our like seismometer [laughs] with the sort of decibels going through the roof, and thinking, you know, are they really going to listen to us?

Interviewer
I was going to say, what can you do at that point? Nothing!

Interviewee
But subtle things like I think early on, you know, they do ever so subtle adjustments to the angles of speakers in the way noise refracted off the lake and I don't know… but we were quite a small team, I guess, just providing that live data back to the central team, but it was sort of like the glamour of a back of house experience.

Interviewer
But that's always the most vital in the end, isn't it?

Interviewee
It was fun obviously. I think we obviously all had a blast and it's yeah, just a once in a lifetime opportunity. Very much focused… it was a volunteering experience that was, very much in my, on my radar as something that was sort of professionally relevant as well.

Interviewer
So how did that lead you into taking that position? What happened there?

Interviewee
So, I had come back from Australia, this was 2012, to volunteer and I had been practicing as a Landscape Architect and knew I didn't really want to go back into consultancy. I was… wanted to go to the, into the third sector, so I volunteered… started volunteering with Groundwork London, and they were an environmental charity I already knew and it was very much about, sort of, getting my foot in the door there, and I ended up getting a job, eventually volunteering led into a paid job in their Events and Marketing team and because it was 2012, there was a lot going on a lot of, kind of, LOCOG funded a lot of funding going into East London, particularly around kind of community growing. There was a particular programme, I think, called Transform, like a LOCOG funding… funded programme where community groups could apply for funding a so there was a big, funded programme that needed, sort of, additional resource, and a whole bunch of other things going on, so I actually got a job in their Events and Marketing team initially. That would have been 2012, I guess and then often is the case when you work in a charity, you end up wearing lots of different hats, so I continued to then support and then deliver, volunteering, corporate, lots of corporate volunteering, the charity was growing its corporate volunteering programme and, you know, obviously the Park was going to be kind of quite relevant in that offer and at the time Groundwork London were part of this, you know, this joint venture that was coming together to create Our Parklife, and they were one of the sorts of founding partners and by Autumn of 2013, the North Park was reopening and a big part of that was about identifying conservation volunteering opportunities locally in the North Park, and getting that volunteering programme off the ground, which was part of a small element of the kind of contractual commitments that had to be delivered by the facilities management contract, which was where Our Parklife sort of sat. So, I was, I initially got that conservation volunteering offer off the ground when I was working for Groundwork London, it was just a sort of project that I was leading on and then very quickly, the volunteer offer broadened, and the need for a sort of overarching volunteer manager to bring the whole kind of volunteering offer together, sort of soon evolved and then I was seconded from Groundwork London to the Park to do that, and so whilst I was a Volunteer Manager, it was yeah, trying to just pull together a comprehensive programme, obviously Active Newham had been delivering the, kind of, events offer kind of at the same time as I was doing the conservation offer, immediately post Games, and then yeah, so it's kind of about tying it all together, so for that point, I was seconded, and then when the General Manager posts came up for Our Parklife I, I moved, you know, I moved over entirely to be employed by well, it was Cofely at the time, then Engie… the FM [Facilities Management] providers, so one of the other partners of Our Parklife, basically, so it just sort of evolved like that.

Interviewer
So, when you were setting up the broader volunteer programme, what kind of things did you have to take into account and the main challenges that you've faced?

Interviewee
Yeah, so I think the main thing that we had to continue… so working was at the time, working very closely with Emma Frost at the LLDC, you know, the volunteer offer sort of sat in that Communities Team and the main focus was about, you know, what was the sort of, seeing how we could provide a

meaningful volunteer offer from the volunteer's perspective, so you're constantly kind of juggling, oh well, this is what we kind of feel like we need on the ground. But actually, is it a people going to want to do this? And is this a meaningful offer? And what are the different things that we can provide local people that connect them to the Park, it was about opportunities to connect people to the Olympic Park and trying to sort of start that vision of a lack of a sort of local offer, but also recognising that the Games Maker legacy was still so important, and so fresh, people would be coming from the other end of the country to volunteer on the Olympic Park. So, it was about providing a varied and meaningful offer, trying to sort of focus it on East London and East Londoners, but without excluding the 1000s of people that were so passionate and had such an amazing volunteering experience at the Games. So I think the challenge at that time was you had lots of different stakeholders still do, you know, on the Park, everyone kind of moving at 100 miles an hour trying to deliver things in a collective way, but also just so many kinds of so many people involve so many partners and then a Park that had just reopened, no one kind of knew how it was going to how it was going to go, how popular it would be. So, trying to navigate all of those new stakeholders. Challenges of such a unique site was quite tricky. But I think we kept coming, you have to keep coming back to what's the meaning for fun rewarding offer, across different opportunities that we could see sort of evolving, and, you know, the concept, my initial angle was that kind of conservation angle and, you know, but you've also got a Park that's maintained to such a high standard, it's difficult to identify, it's not like a lot of other Parks where you've got a list as long as your arm of things that you could get volunteers to do it. So, it's a very different sort of offer. And obviously, the mass participation events were happening and still happening. But we knew that that would get less and less and less as the site was built out. And obviously, this sort of the mobility side of things was, was really key. And it was a key part of my job, actually. And I remember my interview for the Volunteer Manager, you know, a big part of it was setting up a mobility service and get that kind of question and interview. Have you done this before? And I was like, no, I can't even bag this, because I absolutely haven't. But I'll give it a crack. And the time it was, yeah, Ian Mackinnon and Vicki Austin, who were the kind of access leading on that in access and inclusion, you know, angle and how the Park was designed to be, you know, incredibly accessible. So, it was with him and with that team that we sort of built up the mobility service, got the kit, trained volunteers up, got everything from driving tests to inductions on pieces of kit. I mean, you'll remember you were with us, right? So, remember, it was enough, you know, yeah, we were pitched up outside that info point for a couple of days a week, just sort of seeing what was needed, what was popular. And we went to remember, we learned a lot a so much from Kew from Kew Gardens, we went there because they had a very established service. And we basically sort of went there, they were incredibly generous with their time, and they're experienced, and we just, we mimicked a lot of what they delivered there for our service, because there's no point in reinventing the wheel really. And it worked very well.

Interviewer
One of the things that that I've always been in awe of any volunteer manager is actually managing the volunteers, because we're such a weird bunch. You know, it's not like managing a workforce with all the kinds of infrastructure that you have as reference points. And there's some, you know, characters, all sorts of different motivations. And, you know, it's hard, isn't it?

Interviewee

It is hard, it's really hard, because I think in because that was, it was a brand new programme, you don't really have the benefit of hindsight and knowing that people kind of come and go people, you know, fit, volunteering in and out of their lives on their terms, you know, it's like you say, it's not a job, it's absolutely and you know, you're get, you're bending over backwards, to try and make sure that you're providing an offer and experience that people want to be part of, because people will sort of vote with their feet. And you have to sort of, it's only through I think, experience and building that up over years and years and years where you can kind of say, well, you know, this will work for this person, but not for this person. That's okay. Like, I'm not it's not a sort of failure on our part when you know, when people you know, when it when it's perhaps not a good fit, you can build the confidence, say, well, that's okay, because it's this, and we know, it's this. And it won't work for everyone, and it will change. But, you know, such an amazing team, you know, and that team is so varied, like you say, and it's yeah, it's not going to be for everyone, and people sort of change. So, and the Park changes. And we had to be very clear very early on that this wasn't a sort of static offer. And that things would evolve, and your kind of saying be part of that and come on that journey with us, as opposed to other volunteer offers, which are quite rigid and don't really necessarily change much, particularly with organisations that have been doing it for decades. Whereas we were sort of starting something new, and we kind of just didn't know how it was going to go. But we also knew that the Park would be constantly evolving. So that was the only thing we could be sure of is that it would never stay static. You kind of had to be up for that. Otherwise, you know, it wouldn't necessarily be the programme for you otherwise.

Interviewer
So, I mean, that leads us on to the next bit handling because that sense of managing uncertainty and yeah quite know where you're going. How did that set you up for your wider role because the then became General Manager?

Interviewee
Yeah, and I think that, by that point, the volunteer offer and the programme, you know, was clearly becoming such an important part of the sort of life and soul of the Park. And so, you know, that the volunteers really had a, have a sort of, say, and an influence over, over what, not, not entirely, but you know, just such an experienced sounding board for a lot of the changes that were happening. And so, I think the volunteer programme was bigger, that had become bigger, perhaps, than we had initially anticipated, because we were like, oh, actually, you know, there's the customer service offer that can be part of this. There's, obviously events, obviously, conservation, but things like the tour guiding and stuff like that, like we kind of had this on our horizon. But so, I think when the General Manager role came my way, volunteering was a bigger part of that job, still of Our Parklife sort of reasons for being than perhaps the original. The original expectation, I think for our Parklife originally, volunteering was part of it, but there was a larger Employment Training and Skills angle when the kind of contract was being dreamt up, because the jobs market was very different. And so, we had to sort of just well just kind of move with it, training and employment was still a big part of what we were trying to achieve. But it wasn't necessarily about big numbers and large quantities, it was about trying to find appropriate matches for local people who were wanting to transition into work and, with the key sort of contractors on the Park, who'd signed up to those commitments. And actually, volunteering was a really good way for some people to access those opportunities. So, the numbers weren't huge. They weren't big, sort of employment programmes that generated loads and loads and loads of placements. But for the ones

that we did deliver, though they were sustained, they were already embedded in the Park. And I think what was interesting, and to the credit of those employers is that they had very little churn in their workforce. So particularly from the Engie and Idverde side, the workforce in those sectors, a lot of them had been there since day one and were happy and so and you actually had a shrinking workforce, once the Park had got up and running and established, the workforce sort of shrunk a bit because it got over that initial mobilisation. So yeah, you're having to tailor work and employment programmes to the end to the opportunity at the end of that, and actually, that wasn't as great as, as you know, because there wasn't a churn in the in the paid workforce, because everyone was happy. The good employment, you know, experience and their employment.

Interviewer
I was going to say, what do you think was the reason for that?

Interviewee
Yeah, there wasn't, you know, so the main sort of workforce teams that we were sort of focused on was that estates and facilities management, so that was security, cleaning, visitor experience. And grounds maintenance. And so particularly like it yeah, I think most of those teams, if I think back mean, when I was there, a lot of those faces didn't change. You know, they did, a lot of them had been there since even the games, they just came over because the contracts change. So, they've been there longer than a lot of people.

Interviewer
So, the challenge then is to keep the ideas fresh and moving. But that kind of consistency of approach and that teamwork.

Interviewee
Yeah. And I think you just have to acknowledge that things evolve as well. And the opposite. Yeah. We also kind of within our remit was this kind of educational offer as well. And it was about working with local schools and doing education visits on the Park. I'm using the Park as a sort of educational app or as an outdoor classroom, I guess you could say and what was great was that we had a lot to our fingertips, whether it was a kind of green conservation focused offer, or the energy centre or careers, you know, there were lots of different things that we could lever through our partners that were of real interest to sort of local schools and groups who were wanting to learn from the Park and learn about the Park. So that educational offer was also again, I wouldn't, not huge, huge numbers, but really impactful I think, and because you could really access the people behind the scenes as well are people that were kind of, you know, and the volunteers obviously supported us with that as well, massively.

Interviewer
But do you think that that schools project in particular education was the most impactful project that was in terms of a local community?

Interviewee
I think as a bit it depends on, it's very hard. It's hard to know, based on Yeah, what your kind of measure of impact is, I guess. Because you a lot of the time, I think it's only really through the

volunteers, you kind of get that direct feedback about the difference it's making with other things, particularly with the education visits, I mean, we had sort of sustained relationships with certain schools, but you're never going to know, you know, how what, whether that visit, registered on that child's brain and how that sort of, because it's just such a small piece of their wider kind of offer, but I'm sure that it would, that these things make a big difference, because it brings things to life experiences, particularly kind of getting out of the classroom. And Park Yeah, really does bring things to life. And we would get that feedback from teachers. And we knew it was yeah, really, really valued. But what was challenging, I guess that the schools that are immediately on or adjacent to the Park have been sort of getting constant stream of offers, I guess. But you, we were always trying to get that bit further into the East London boroughs, and did a few events, trying to sort of connect with teachers to sort of show them what we had on offer, but it's just really challenging for those teachers to carve out, the time to get their classes on to the Park, the logistics of the cost sometimes and, you know, that's why we had these sort of free offers. To, you know, where schools wouldn't have didn't, you know, didn't pay, we had targets that we, you know, we're aiming to achieve by offering the, the experience for free, but that was still just quite difficult for a lot of schools just physically get in.

Interviewer
I'm amazed at some of the groups that that I've done to, you know, community guiding, they've come from Cardiff, and the commitment. Especially after the lockdown and so on.

Interviewee
I think, to cut for schools to come from further afield, if it's wrapped up in something bigger, it's easier, whereas the schools almost right on the doorstep or on the doorstep of the doorstep, it's actually harder, because it's kind of part of your everyday environment, but also not as well. Whereas a bit obviously, sort of in terms of where our focus was, our focus was on those host borough schools. So, we didn't focus hugely on pitching an offer further afield. But those schools were coming to us because they were making plans as part of a bigger field trip or day out. And so, we're constantly sort of juggling an opportunity that we know is there versus we're actually our focus is trying to stay on East London. And so, juggling that that's quite difficult.

Interviewer
What you said before about not being able to measure impact very well, or to gauge it very precisely, I think is interesting, because it demonstrates a kind of cultural confidence that you know you're in the right direction. And there are some things you've just got to let go.

Interviewee
I think, it's interesting, sort of reflecting back, you've got a lot of that you'll all the time you've got these different sorts of sectors delivering social value, I guess. And it's you're trying to, you know, from a public sectors perspective, you're trying to come up with a transparent sort of measurable metric where you're trying to, you know, you're embedding, and I think the Park was one of the first contract, but maybe authorities, there was a piece of legislation that Public Services Act, I think, in 2011. And it was about, yeah, embedding social value measurement in the procurement of contracts of public contracts. And this was, I guess, one of the first times this was really embedded in the facilities management contract. And that's why our Parklife was kind of created, it was about going beyond just, oh, here are a

few performance metrics, it was like, no, we'll come, we'll set up a completely separate independent social enterprise that's going to deliver on this sort of social value, Social Impact mission. And that was quite unique, I think, at the time, but really sort of match the ambition that kind of came from the Games, really about how East London communities would benefit from the Games, employment skills, volunteering, etc. So that's where our Parklife came from. So that was very much that measuring impact and capturing it in a both quantitative and qualitative way was something sort of came out of those commitments, really those sorts of the commitments that were signed up to. But I think it's something as a sort of sector, everyone's still, different way of doing it. And depending on the commission over contract, it's, you know, it varies in terms of how much you're actually demonstrating your impact, how is that measured in a kind of transparent, fair way? What do you just intuitively know, or hear? Or see your own eyes? Because, you know, it's making a really big difference. But you still got to capture it somehow. And you're still down? So it was that was measuring kind of social impact is.

Interviewer
What about the Mobile Garden, because that was a particular project for you, wasn't it?

Interviewee
Yeah, it was something that, again, was led by Groundwork, as part of one of the projects that the LLDC kind of commissioned in terms of how it dealt with these sites, you know, activating development platforms for a number of years before, you know, the development took place. So again, when it was in it, sort of first home up at Chobham Manor that started very early on, I wasn't really involved as much because Groundwork took the lead, that's absolutely their bread and butter. And that was when Our Parklife was kind of quite young. And so, the whole point for Our Parklife was that partners who had expertise in a certain area took the lead like that was the point really, and that was the strength of the partnership. So, they took the lead on that and delivered a really successful programme up at Chobham. And then obviously, as we anticipated, that, you know, the garden needed to move and that I think that people are now living on that site. Now. It's crazy how quickly these things move around. So, then it was a case of Yeah, identifying an appropriate site that it could then move to whilst all of these are all these other forces that work on a site where developments and all the constraints and parameters of those developments are sort of at play. So yeah, again, working very closely with Groundwork but also with the other partners to like, you know, Idverde we're absolutely kind of mucking in in terms of how we could get the garden moved. Lots of legal support from Engie and their team about all the sort of leases and all of the obligations and things like that. But yeah, and LLDC had identified and embedded the garden to be at the Hackney Bridge site and it was just a case of trying to try to piece it all together. But yeah, it is I would have loved to have seen it move whilst I was whilst I was around.

Interviewer
So, you mentioned many partners that is that basically how it got funded through a sort of coalition of different organisations?

Interviewee
Yeah, the initial establishment was, again, based on the fact that different partners had sort of different resources and expertise to bring to the table. So, it was the private sector partners that stumped up and

initial sort of seed funding, really, that got those programmes off the ground, and it was the other partners, the third sector partners who were who had, you know, the expertise and the experience of working in East London communities particularly, so Groundwork, you know, incredibly strong in the sort of, yeah, working with local communities in that green sort of sector. And the jobs or skill side of things Renaisi as well were, one was that we're the fourth partner and interested primarily from a sort of employment and skills side of things. So, they obviously are different organisations with different priorities. They're not coughing up in the same way that the contributing in the same financial way that Engie and Idverde did. But that was the point really, it was that you had different partners with different think different things to kind of bring to the table. And that was across the sectors. And that was I still, I still think of it. Yeah, really interesting. You know, dynamic, because you've got four partners, each with an equal sort of stake in the, in the social enterprise, but with different priorities, drivers, but kind of coming together to try and make it you know, make it work. So yeah, interesting to try and navigate to steer that.

Interviewer
Yeah. So, I bet it was yes. All those hopefully not conflicting interests. So, when it was initially launched, was that very much your investigation? How it came about?

Interviewee
You mean, the garden? No, it preceded me. Well, I must have been working for Groundwork at the time, but in a different team. So, the team and colleagues sort of community gardening, were involved in the original, I guess, the initial, let's say, design and layout and construction. And Groundwork worked quite closely with Idverde, again, I think, you know, there was a kind of it, there was an employment and skills agenda as part of the original garden, because there was a green team, where, you know, there was an employment programme where people were learning sort of those on the tools type skills as part of the garden, but lots of engagement from the community gardening team at Groundwork and, and they really led on activating the garden. And I think for Our Parklife at the time, you know, the focus was very much on, on the volunteer programme and getting that really up and running and, and effective. And we were just such a tiny team, like I think and that was it, it was a sort of, it was a sort of fledgling organisation where these organisations were sort of seconding in staff, but we're talking it was just like me, the General Manager at the time, and then points of contact in those other organisations trying to sort of bring it all together. But yeah, the focus from I guess, for now, at that point was very much the volunteer programme took a lot of time to set up and to get everything in place.

Interviewer
What do you think is the main impact on the local community now that it's moved?

Interviewee
What the garden? Well, I think, to be honest, I don't know what's happened...

Interviewer
No, I know, you can't really tell what the aspiration was should…

Interviewee
I hope you know; it was really providing a space that was quite different to the rest of the Park. And, you know, a space where local people could come together and really get sort of stuck in and that kind of space doesn't really exist on the Park. Public spaces are used and managed differently, whereas with the garden there was always an ambition it happened in its previous location. Yeah, that that people had a, you know, a bit of space to themselves. It was about, you know a lot about food growing about skill sharing, about supporting communities and providing Yeah, providing a space for people to kind of come together learn and learn about food growing and learn about that specific outdoor kind of activity which you don't have anywhere else on the Park. You know, there are those allotments that are right, the way down tucked? There are new allotments that were built, but obviously they're sort of private still aren't community space such. So, and somewhere that's yeah, kind of quite visible and quite malleable. I guess, you know, where people can kind of shape, shape or space themselves.

Interviewer
So, a huge wealth of experience you had on the Park and leading up to it. And that led on to where you are now. Is that right?

Interviewee
Yeah, I'm sure. Quite a lot to do it for what I'm doing now.

Interviewer
Did you just come to a point where you thought, right, well, I've done everything I can really both for me and the Park and it's time or was it something else?

Interviewee
Combination of that sort of professional and personal need for a change? Really. I think. Yeah. Personally, I wanted to, I guess, sort of get out of London. Well, like, you know, just yeah, just couldn't, you know, couldn't afford the space that I wanted, So and I was always very fond of Sheffield, had a great time in Sheffield. And for my partner, you know, I knew it would be a good fit and a bit further north was a good thing. They're closer to family. And I guess, yeah, from a professional point of view, I felt like I yeah, just like I was still having a great time. I loved it. And I love the people. And I love the team. I love the dynamism. But I yeah, I just felt like my learning curve had plateaued, I guess. And I was ready, ready for a fresh challenge, and ready to ready for a change.

Interviewer
How's it been? Has it has it been a fresh challenge?

Interviewee
Yeah, that learning curve is now a vertical. Vertical line. I wouldn't even say it's the curve. But no, it's really good. It's, I think what my job now is. So, a Service Manager at Sheffield City Council for the countryside service, which sits in their Parks and countryside theme. And it's incredibly varied. And I think it Yeah, it suits me very well, because I'm spending a lot of different plates all at one time. So, you know, I the teams that I'm responsible for the cover, have a sort of city-wide remit and covers the ecology service, the Woodlands team, the tree team, the allotment team. Wow, the cut all the closed

and decommissioned landfill sites. There are a few venues in there. There are all of the friends of groups and the volunteers that work with those teams, particularly our rangers as a Ranger Team. So yeah, at any one time, I could be dealing with issues to do with any of those teams.

Interviewer
Gosh, that sounds a massive remit.

Interviewee
Yeah, that's a fantastic team. Again, up here is it's quite different. Lots I've never worked for a local authority before as well. So that's the only sector I've not worked in. Right, I've worked for consultancy and private and sort of third sector but not the public sector.

Interviewer
So, when you were going through the selection process for this role, I'm sure somewhere you will have been asked about the most challenging project or the most satisfying project or something that you'd experienced in in the Park.

Interviewee
Yeah, sure I had something. I think it's the ability Yeah, to be able to look back and you know, when you're in something at a time, particularly though, I think in any job there's a sort of perhaps a frustration, things that don't move as quickly as you'd like, so much all this red tape and all these blockers, but I think with the Park and I you know, I still see things on social media. And actually, things move at a monumental pace that is so different to perhaps a lot of other areas. But when you're in it, you're thinking, oh, God, this is taking forever for this to blah, blah, blah. But then you look back six months, a year, two years, three years, four years. And actually, some things are completely different. But you can kind of, you can sort of work back. And I think it's very, yeah, it's very satisfying to know that for sort of some of those things you were there, at the beginning, beginning, but quite early days, and that you sort of shaped that. And it's hugely satisfying to know that there are volunteers that were there before I was there now, probably 10 years later, like that you are part of something that has kept offering a rewarding and fun and interesting experience. And you're never doing it single handedly. There are loads of people that, you know, contribute to that experience. But it's nice to know that yeah, that you've played a part in that.

Interviewer
Yeah. And so have there been any, I'm not asking for names. But have there been any roles of people that have had a significant impact on your development?

Interviewee
I think I've, throughout, like each of the managers I've had have been very, very, very different. And so, I think I've just learned, all really nice, all really care. And although it might, although what we were sort of doing at that Our Parklife was quite a unique thing. And so, you know, a lot of the time, I just sort of trusted to just sort of get on with it really, because managers had a, again, a lot to manage. And this perhaps wasn't necessarily their area of expertise, but they were always incredibly passionate about it always very excited to be part of it and do what they could to try and enable things to happen. So, I

think I've learned, I've learned something different from each of those managers who have either come from different sectors, different stages in their career, right. Okay, some older than me some younger than me like that, regardless of that background, you know, every time there's been a lot of support, when, when I've needed it, and a lot of kind of like, well, let's try and work this through. I don't necessarily know the answer. But, you know, I'm with you on this, which is what you need to really. And then the rest of the time, you just sort of work it out with your team or your colleagues. Like, my team was very stable for the whole time I was there with Adele and Ian and Gabi came to us were obviously several other pools, several other managers. But broadly speaking, it wasn't a team that had again, like, you know, huge churn. So, so important to you're learning from your team all the time, you're learning collectively about what are we going to do about this? Or how should we approach this and, and learning from volunteers as well, because that you can be confident that you'll get an unfiltered opinion, which is, I'm sure is hugely valuable.

Interviewer
Well, what you were saying about learning different things on different people on how it all kind of coalesces. I guess that's the same for projects and trying to identify if you would have done anything differently, if you had the option. I suppose it's the same sort of answer, isn't it?

Interviewee
Yeah. I think and it comes with sort of, relatively early in my kind of career as well. So, a lot of that just comes with experience. I think the older that you get, the things that stress you out are different. Yeah. You know, there's an element of imposter syndrome, I think, as well. Like, you kind of think like, I get that with this job. I'm a little bit like, you know, I don't know about all these things, but you can't, you without realising you are building experience and confidence to manage situations in certain ways. And yeah, and I think just to have the perspective of like, it'll be all right. Yeah. It's the worst thing that you know, the worst thing that could happen is that you know, you upset a few people, and something doesn't quite go to plan but it isn't a job where like, you know, you're really in a sort of, you know, you're not dealing with the most critical thing. So, you gain that I think competence and perspective that, you know, we can work it out one way or another.

Interviewer
Yeah. And do you reflect? Sort of winding back to the early 2000s? Where you were a landscape gardener? Basically, do you do reflect on that journey, as they call it? Yeah, you're still rooted in that somehow.

Interviewee
Yeah. And I still describe myself as a landscape architect, if someone says, you know, oh, what do you do? You know, I would, probably nine times out of 10, say, oh, I'm a landscape architect, and I am now, blah, blah, blah. Like I would say, whatever my current role is that I continue through my chartership. Whilst I was, I guess, I would have started it at Groundwork, and was supported by mentored by a previous colleague, when I worked in private practice, who, yeah, we sort of mentored me through that chartership and exam. And I've continued to sort of be quite closely connected to the landscape institute, when I can and the Olympic Park was a big is a big part of that, because it's such a, it's such a sort of, you know, key, is a key scheme, it's a key project, it is constantly referenced, it was a landscape

led master plan, the whole of that area. And a lot of its successes are down to how down to the fact that it was a landscape led master plan. And, yeah, it's nice to come back to Sheffield, where those tutors are still around, and I would bump into them and on the Park, you know, they would come down and sort of walk around and do sort of kind of visits with the landscape team to check out the sort of how things were maturing and developing and being maintained. And so, I think that has been a kind of constant thread through all of these roles. And yeah, and it's interesting, I think, my current job, predecessors of mine have very much been based in the sort of woodland and tree and forestry sort of sectors, which I don't have that background. And as a landscape architect, you are trained to have a bit, you know, an understanding and knowledge of a bit of everything from planning, design, sociology, community engagement, ecology, engineering, construction, and, you know, that gives you a good skill set to be able to kind of juggle a lot of different areas, I guess. Yeah. So that original training is still a sort of pivotal, I think, to where I've got to, whereas some people look sort of describe it as a bit of a weird career path, but I don't know. Makes sense to me.

Interviewer
Just listening to you talking. It sounds absolutely, you know, consequential one thing like Yeah, listen, you sort of open to all the opportunities that it presented. What about the, have you been able to come back to the Park at all?

Interviewee
No, I have not the last two years.
I guess I saw I moved up here last June. And yeah, haven't. I pass through London when I go home to Brighton. But I haven't been able to sort of stop and pause yet. But I can't I still get the newsletters. Only last week I emailed Ian because I still get like emails for like buggy drivers and stuff like that. And I emailed Ian and I was like, right, I'm doing it please take me off this list. But I'm going to stay on the general mailing list, but I probably don't need to know when there's a buggy driving experience.

Interviewer
Have you retained any sort of favourite spots in the Park or is it will change so much?

Interviewee
I just, I, my, one of my favourites was always walking across its Knightsbridge. The bridge that takes you across that the Velodrome where you're going the North Park that view both up and down the river It's one of my favourites. And I remember because I spent so long in that in Park HQ [Park Head Quarters] in that porter cabin, that there would be days where you just so you've got so much work to do. And it’s so computer based, and it seems nuts that you've got this amazing Park on your doorstep. And there you are in this little porter cabin, with boarding all around you in a sort of fairly bleak car park, but you're also almost at the epicenter of the Park. So, to leave your desk to walk across the Park to get an earring. Yeah. But and it was great, and I you know, I like working as part of a team and the wider team even beyond that. But sort of volunteers and the duty managers and stuff like my other colleagues, from an Engie perspective, they were, you know, they were great and hugely supportive and very much focused on their own sort of service areas. But you were all part of a one kind of team really, and a lot of people just doing a lot of things to get to try and get things moving and get things done and get the best result. So, yeah, and very much sort of working closely with the LLDC in terms of

what's, what are we trying to achieve? And what's the level of funding that we've got available? Obviously, we were always sort of pushing to try and expand those commercial opportunities to bring more money in into, you know, into the social enterprise, but doing that in a way that fits with the bigger picture. But yeah, ultimately, it was Yeah, it did feel like everyone was always very, you know, very supportive of, particularly of the volunteer programme of getting that, getting that right, and making sure that people had a great experience and felt really connected and valued.

Interviewer
Well, that's very much your legacy.

Interviewee
When Adele took over, in gosh, I think it must have been 20.. 2015. Yeah, that long. You know, she's been doing it way longer than I did. I might have done that initial setup. But she's been driving it and managing it as a very type of slick operation for much longer than I did it. And I think so really, the volunteer, the success of the volunteer programme, really now is I think it's entirely down to her and the teams that, you know, the managers and the volunteers themselves, so I might have done the initial setup and stuff.

Interviewer
You lead that that collaborative culture that you've just referred to?

Interviewee
Yeah, we're quite different managers, I think, as well. And I think that kind of demented, you know, complimented each other, but to be a good volunteer manager. Yeah, you have to be firm and fair, I think.

Interviewer
And it sounds to me, from everything that you've said, which has been really rich is that you're very confident about the future of the Park. And you know, the different directions it's taking and the developments and how it's, it's kind of really fulfilling all the legacy aspirations from the outset.

Interviewee
Yeah, I think it's just such a unique play place that there. It's so there are so many. It's so rich, and there are so many things happening. You're always going to have kind of people that agree or disagree on what's right and what's not right for a place. But I was watching. I think it was inside the museum the other night. Yes. Yeah. And there was nothing in it. You know, the V&A. Were there and talking about V&A East and I was like, ah, it's just, that's just crazy, isn't it? And I think that's just to have the richness of those cultural arts, sports, tech, you know, media like to have that whole melting pot. I think it's just really exciting, you know, in all-in-one place that obviously, you've, you're always going to have the housing development. You're always that's always going to be contentious. You're always going to have you know, those debates, but ultimately, when you have all those other things laid in there and thrown in the mix, like it's just really yeah, really exciting. So yeah really, I will. I'll be as soon as I can. Yeah, can be back and make a diversion East. I will definitely come through a wonder. I'd love to see everyone and then in that new Info Point.

Interviewer
That's really good. You know, it's been incredibly rich, just listening to you talk like that and creating that real sense of story. Is there anything else you think you'd want to add at this point?

Interviewee
No, I, I just think really, yeah, just reinforced that point. have that teamwork you know you across, whether it's internally with Adele and Ian and Paul and Gabi or the vet and the various Neal and Alison and Simeon, and all that every member of my team that's had various levels of input over the years, that's been really special. And then that wider support. Behind the scenes, I think of a lot of members of staff that people often perhaps don't even really realise that it kind of exists necessarily. And I'd always kind of come back to the teams and the staff that are keeping this place ticking over the cleaners, the grounds maintenance staff, the security guards, like all of those roles that you kind of you it's that role of what they need, you only know that something's going wrong when sort of something's visible, but it's the importance of kind of recognising the fact that if you don't hear anything, then it's because people are working really hard to keep the place feeling safe and clean and tidy. And, and I think that those are often the kind of unsung heroes and the volunteers obviously huge part of the customer facing side of things, and are very visible and should be very visible, and particularly in our programme kind of want to be quite visible. That's not always the case. A lot of the time people just like to get on with things behind the scenes. But yeah, I think that can only happen when all of those other people are kind of getting on with their job day in day out. Yeah, you know, effectively. And yet, just all of the I think it just felt it did feel like you were going to all these kinds of stakeholder meetings and meeting with partners and new partners that were come on the scene, but everyone was sort of signed up to the same vision really, like really wanting to see things succeed. And that was yeah, that was really positive. Were really, really good, really nice to be part of and to sort of reflect and being part of it. And I'm sure yeah, like there's still loads more exciting stuff to come.

Interviewer
Yeah. You've just articulated a sort of blueprint for how to run an effective organisation. That's great.

Interviewee
Well, I hope Yeah. On the surface, everyone behind the scenes is sort of fragments.

Interviewer
Yes. And they're the ones that often get overlooked. But yeah, you're right. It's great. Well, that if there's nothing else you think pertinent. Thank you ever so much. It's been absolutely brilliant. Just listening to you. Very enriching me personally, apart from anything else.

Interviewee
That's really lovely to hear that.

Interviewer
The whole thing about setting a culture that you do intuitively, I know you said, you mentioned intuition only briefly, but that that's hard to kind of train and learn. That's that is something that you just know and knit in to all the things that you do learn.

Interviewee
Thank you. That's great. Well, that's very kind. Okay.