

## **National Tree Officer Conference 2017 – LTOA Chair John Parker's closing comments**

“It has fallen to me to deliver the closing address of the 2017 National Tree Officer Conference – and what a fantastic event it has been.

It isn't easy to put on a conference, and it is even less easy to put on a conference of this quality which is affordable for everyone. I'd therefore like to start by thanking the London Tree Officers Association, the Municipal Tree Officers Association and the Institute of Chartered Foresters for making this possible, and the Conference Steering Group who organised it all. Thank you to the event sponsors and all of our speakers. I'd also like to give special thanks to Al Smith. Al has been at the heart of the LTOA since the beginning, he sits on the Conference Steering Group and he is the instigator and driving force of the national tree officer group conference calls. Al has been instrumental in bringing us all together today.

I firmly believe that public sector tree officers are the best people to manage public trees. I believe that being a tree officer is a great job, despite the challenges. But we are under attack, like so much of the public sector is under attack. I hear a lot about the problems faced by nurses, prison officers, firefighters and the like – but never anything about tree officers. The public doesn't lament the plight of the tree officer. Trees are now widely seen as being important, but the people who manage them – not so much. I've therefore come to the conclusion that if we are to be saved, we are going to have to save ourselves. Nobody else is going to come riding to the rescue.

So how do we save ourselves? I think the answer is a combination of collaboration, justification and promotion. Collaboration between tree officers, with other parts of the industry and those outside the industry. Justification of the importance of trees and the people who manage them. Promotion of the fantastic work which we are doing.

This conference has done all three. We have shown what can be achieved when we work together; tree officers and tree officer groups, with support from our partners. We have shared experiences and knowledge and the tools that we need to justify the value of trees and tree officers. We have promoted some of the work which is being done all over the country; we have heard about pests and diseases, innovations, i-Tree projects, management models and so much more. There is some incredible work going on.

The conference has been superb and I feel proud to be a part of it. I encourage you all to contribute something next time - you will have something to offer. But, collaboration should not be an annual event. I know you are busy, but I urge you to get involved. Join your local tree officer group. Feed into the wider national tree officer discussion. Join or form working parties; attend events.

You do an amazing job. You are multi-skilled professionals managing multi-functional infrastructure. Promote yourselves! Sell yourselves! Go back to your local authority and tell them what you have learned today. Go back to your local authority and tell them that tree officers are doing and sharing incredible work and that you are a part of it. We will always be stronger when we stick together - we need to make sure that we continue to do so.

Thank you all very much for coming, and have a safe trip home.”