

Magna Parka – 2015?

Rod Williamson

I've lit the tallow candle and rolled out the parchment, so pour yourself some mead in yon pewter goblet and join me back in the mists of time.

Within two years in 2015, it will be the 800th anniversary of the historically important Magna Carta (the Great Charter), which led the process to the rule of constitutional law in the English speaking world. The document was forced upon King John by the feudal barons at Runnymede in 1215; it had the king proclaim certain liberties, and accept that his will was not arbitrary. Four of the original 1215 documents survive, two at the British Library, one in Salisbury and one in my home city of Lincoln.

Magna Carta was followed by many extensions and refinements, and there are three clauses from the 1297 version of Magna Carta that are still on the statute books:

- The freedom of the English Church.
- The 'ancient liberties' of the City of London.
- A right to due process.

Very brief history lesson over, but like most things, our past shapes our future, and the world of parking is no different to that. I would like to suggest that perhaps we need to agree and define a Magna Parka for 2015, one that can define solid foundations and build clear and acceptable relationships between all the parties involved in the management of parking. From these foundations and clarity of relationships a new era of progress in parking can be made, benefitting all the parties involved.

In an attempt to tease out the current tangled web of oft fractious relationships, I have distilled them down to the three P's.

Public

Firstly, at the heart of Magna Parka there must be the general public. Parking management is here to serve the public at the individual level, and also on a wider basis, for the good of a twenty-first century developed economy. It should ensure road safety, an efficient use of the transport network, whilst facilitating business and social cohesion, making cities and towns work and, indeed letting them flourish.

It often needs re-iterating that the vast majority of the public dutifully comply with the parking restrictions and controls that are in place on and off-street and understand why they are there. However, their views do not either surface into the debate or are drowned out in the media, who sometimes seek to highlight the fringe Don Quixote obsessive's tilting their lance at parking windmills. Also some of the aggressive responses parking staff receive are clearly at an unacceptable level in a decent society, and there are a vocal minority who would like nothing more but to see us pilloried in the stocks on the village green, or worse, our heads prominently placed on a pikestaff.

Parking urban myths are quickly proclaimed and trumpeted around the four corners of this sceptred isle, before the parking industry version of the story has got its foot in the stirrup before setting off to put its side of the story, and their usually is another side to the saga. Parking operators and enforcers are, too often, portrayed as little more than a highly organised band of grubby-handed, money-fleecing knaves, lying in wait to extort treasure from the unwary innocent traveller.

However, the minority who do contravene parking controls and face penalties have a '*right to due process.*' The system, whether public and now private, contains the basic right of hearing of an appeal by an independent third party. In local government this is heard within the cockpit of Caroline Sheppard's famed Star Chamber. This is fairness in action. Although, as parking professionals we should ensure that only cases of true merit find themselves being weighed in the balance at the last chance inn.

Power

The King John of today is the UK government, who control the legal transport framework of the nation, including parking matters, through their Department of Transport. Now whilst I wouldn't suggest that the Dft, just like King John, used lengthy and wearying negotiations to avoid any change occurring, or then again! And maybe you and I, in our darker moments, would relish the opportunity to hold the British political leader to account, at sword-point located in a field just with within the M25 orbital.

We have the legislation that directly governs the parking world, the Road Traffic Acts 1984 and 1991, the Traffic Management Act 2004 and now the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012. Plus there are those areas that can quickly become veritable quicksand to the unprepared, the Data Protection Act, The Freedom of Information Act, Blue Badge legislation, CCTV enforcement rules and legal strictures for bailiffs collecting parking debts.

And talking of the '*ancient liberties of the City of London*,' perhaps London should not have separate rules on parking but for consistency and public-understanding it should be joined up with the rest of England and Wales. Within which it would then allow Councils outside of London access to a mechanism to review and alter PCN charge levels.

Parking Management

Whatever our role within the parking world we must fruitfully operate with the said laws of the land, and seek to constructively work with those powers to progressively amend and introduce even fairer and efficient means of managing parking. Our watchword should be excellence, and that needs to be demonstrated tangibly for the public, whom we serve, and to gain respect and influence from government. Excellence can be our sword and shield. Examples of excellence should be the norm and not the exception, trained and qualified staff, PARKMARK awards, crisp and clear administrative processes, infrastructure that is well-designed, well maintained, and accessible, whilst also exploiting the best and emerging technologies for things such as ticket machine design, paying by phone, ANPR, permit and contravention processing etc.

We need to be honest with ourselves and know we can do better and we must do better, thus to win the arguments of the day with the public and the powers that be.

We also hear the plaintive calls for us to ride out to rescue famed Lady Portas, the High Street damsel in distress.

The Quest

The BPA, as the trade body for the world of British parking, needs to structure the terms of this debate and use its combined knowledge and expertise to commence writing the Magna Parka for 2015.

So when Saint Patrick of Troy has returned from ridding the EPA Congress in Dublin of its snakes, he'll take wise advice and counsel from his round table. It will also come from Count Kelvin of Kent, who has distilled the competing voices from his meetings from royal courtiers, the brokers of powers, local trade guilds and the various good and the great. Lady Jane will wield the BPA organisational battle sword to hack through the obstacles to achieving parking excellence. All of them knowing that the esteemed Parking President, the princess Patel of Sandwell, has tired of seeing her knights,

wearing BPA colours, waste their energy in empty jousting. But she wishes to give them her accredited standard and coat of arms and see them seize the shining crown of parking glory.

And once we have drafted our clauses for the 2015 Parking Magna, we are on a parking knight's quest to bring understanding where there is mistrust, respect where there is none and honour for work that deserves recognition. It won't be enough to win by just believing our cause is just, as parking professionals we will need to marshal all our resources and be *Practical, Persistent* and *Persuasive*. Or else our aspirations will fail like the royal remains buried beneath a Leicester car park.

Adieu and farewell

Well dear friend, my quill is now quite scratched out; however I'll think I'll carry on wearing ye olde chainmail for just a bit longer, because, as we all know, it's a tough old world in parking. Yea verily.