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START AUDIO

Interviewer: Okay. Can we start with you both introducing yourself and your respective roles and connections to the area?

Geoff Bell: I’m Geoff Bell, B E L L and Geoff, G E O F F. I’m the chairperson of [Rigby Down 0:00:19] Community Organisation. I’ve lived here for nearly 40 years.

Interviewer: Okay.

Simon Slater: I’m [Simon Slater 0:00:28]. I’m the independent tenant and the leasehold advisor working on the estate. I’ve been working on the estate for seven years and I live in Stoke Newington, in Stoke Newington 25 to 30 years. So I’m also a resident in that I know of the reservoirs.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you. If I could ask you both the same question actually; if we could start with a very general one about how you feel the reservoirs, the role they’ve played in the regeneration story of the area?

Geoff Bell: The interesting thing is, when it was the anniversary of the first [solar been dog 0:01:15] – I think it was last year or the year before – [Bartley] Homes did this thing, and I made this little speech about save the reservoirs, a campaign, saying that nobody would be here today if it wasn’t for the \_\_\_[0:01:28].

Among the people there was [Fetchley] who saved Bartley Homes. He came up to me afterwards, after the speech, and said, “This is absolutely true. We wouldn’t be here if those reservoirs weren’t there.” He says, “And indeed, we were offered this space when they were looking at levelling over the reservoirs and building houses and we were offered houses.” I said I didn’t want to know about it. Which is true.

So Bartley Homes I think at the time were the only developer who was interested in building here. The only reason they were interested in it was because of the reservoirs. I mean, that’s what he basically told me. So in a sense – and whether this is a good thing or this is a bad thing – you can see how right from the start it’s been absolutely central. The existence of these reservoirs has been absolutely central in Bartley Homes. That’s why they built their houses first overlooking the reservoirs, they were the homes built. If you look at all the marketing they’ve done, that’s what they’ve stressed throughout.

As I say, regardless of one’s view on the whole process of regeneration, whether it should be managed differently or… You know, it shouldn’t have been overseen by Bartley Homes. What actually did happen, the reservoir \_\_\_[0:03:14]. I think that’s fairly obvious, as I say. That’s how they market it; you just have to look at the marketing stuff to see that. So from their point of view the reservoirs were actually central.

I think from the point of the people who live here, I think in many ways the reservoirs have only- often a lot of them have only come to prominence really since the regeneration started and the pathways were made and all this sort of stuff. They have actually sort of opened up the east and west reservoirs, and certainly they’re much more used now than they were 15, 20 years ago, which is a really good thing.

During the summer, I walk there every evening. It’s just a wonderful walk, after dinner and all this sort of stuff. You see lots of people there now. Whereas a few years back, you’d see the occasional person and their dog and that was it. So I think they’ve been good, and I think they’ve been good for cause, for [shopping 0:04:26] to bring about the regeneration. But also they way they’ve \_\_\_ is not bad has actually been a gain for the local people.

Interviewer: So that combination of it acting as a catalyst for the regeneration, but in and of itself resulting in greater amenity for local people has been quite central?

Geoff Bell: Yes, I would have thoughts so. That’s what I think, I think it has been. I think it’s been absolutely key. I mean, as you say, you just have to look at the list of \_\_\_[0:05:01] they’ve actually put out about it, and the fact as I say, they certainly wouldn’t be here if it hadn’t been for them.

Because they sell, especially those towers with beautiful views of the reservoirs, that’s how they’re sold. If you look at lots of Bartley’s, stuff they do, it’s often very near water.

Simon Slater: They do a lot of waterfront stuff.

Geoff Bell: They’re quite central to their whole development strategy, water, because you can sell water. Which again is why they have water features as well. You know what I been? It’s so all the… It seems to work. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes, okay, so if we were to hazard a guess what their motivation is for that?

Geoff Bell: Well, it helps-

Simon Slater: It maximises profit.

Geoff Bell: Yes, it helps their homes.

Simon Slater: I mean, if you look at the Bartley development there is down Vauxhall, which is a particularly ugly one, were all along the water around the Thames down towards Chelsea and Fulham, there’s loads [in Fulham there 0:06:11]. But they also did a development by Woolwich, on the Woolwich Arsenal. So for them I guess it’s a way of marketing.

What they have done here, and I think this is true, as Geoff was saying, is that is has- now, this isn’t down to Bartley’s necessarily; this will be part of the Council as well. But it’s opened up the Metropolitan Open Land. It was Metropolitan Open Land, but the way that they have invested in the landscape has made it attractive. Again, that’s one of their selling points.

As Geoff says, it has attracted community in the way that the old reservoirs didn’t, because they were locked off by Thames Water. The estate had its back turned to the reservoirs. The only time people would see it is if they were in the higher blocks or the higher floors.

Certainly [Woodbury Down 0:07:24] during the recession, I think probably the regeneration kept going a bit because of the fact that they were building beside water; it seems to add a premium. But it has had a negative view in that the original master plan for Woodbury Down had the development of the worst housing first, so the worst housing is going to go down first, which was north of Seven Sisters Road. What’s happened is, partly for feasibility reasons, viability reasons, in effect what’s been developed is the waterfront. That’s caused problems both for individuals and the community and for Woodbury Down Community Organisation.

So they changed the phasing, put phase two in before phase one. That’s because of the water.

Interviewer: Because, as you said, the presence of the water and the views of the water and the access to the water adds a premium.

Simon Slater: Yes, it makes it easier for them to market as well.

Interviewer: Okay.

Simon Slater: So I would imagine, if you’re trying to market somewhere like the Elephant and Castle, you’re trying to market Woodbury Down. Two very different ways of doing it.

Interviewer: So you said that’s generated problems, the shifting of the phasing of the houses. Could you talk to me a little bit more about what that has meant for local people?

Simon Slater: Well, as I said, the first master plan was based on dealing with the worst first. This was before any developer was on board. But they’re known as the seven blocks that run up from Manor House tube station. They’re beside Seven Sisters Road. If you were purely just regeneration the estate using public money, then you would probably do that. You’d clear those out, build with grant, put in shared ownership or social rented homes.

Here, because it’s self-funding regeneration, and Bartley’s have to sell their properties to help fund it, then they obviously weren’t very interested at all. So when they did come on- the first site was always going to be the old school site now, which is right by the reservoir. Because it was a cleared site and on a regeneration you’d have what they call a rolling [decant 0:09:55], so you’d build new homes on an empty site, you move people into it, you knock down those people’s homes, build new homes. So the idea is that people only move once. That’s not happened here, of course, but they’re not reasons necessarily due to the water.

Geoff Bell: They went through it at one stage before the phasing, and said what is viable and what isn’t viable. You know, whether each phase was viable. They said, for instance, on the second block, that phasing wasn’t viable. So therefore they would have to make profits from their previous phase to make that viable now.

Whether that’s true or not, who knows? It also, of course, raises for us the question, “Well, after three or four phases, are these guys going to actually pull out?” (Laughter) I’m sure their contract means they can’t do it, but you never know. So we’re always on the watch. Once they’ve built these flats over the reservoirs, over New River - which is always a part of this of course. It’s not just the reservoirs, it’s New River as well.

Once they’ve built all of this, sold the best views, will later sneak off and say, “Sorry…”

Simon Slater: So there’s been a review of the master plan recently. The master plan has been updated, upgraded, and one of the big fights that [Wood Co 0:11:26] had in particular was around the equal sharing of the views. Because Bartley’s definitely wanted all of the views of the water to be private. We’ve got somewhere kicking around a PowerPoint presentation which pretty much shows that. What Wood Co said was that it had to be a fair sharing of the best and the worst sites. You couldn’t just have all the privately owned looking at water, and all the social rented looking at Seven Sisters Road.

By and large, that was a win for Wood Co. There is a fair sharing in phase five, which is over East Reservoir. There will be a social rented block which is directly overlooking the water. There currently is a social rented block – or two social rented blocks – overlooking the waterfront, overlooking the reservoirs in phase one.

Interviewer: Which is a considerable win in terms of the value that water brings, for the greatest benefit for those that need it the most.

Simon Slater: But the community will have to be watchful all the time on the detail. Because when they were looking to design phase three, which they’ve just done and got planning permission for, social renting didn’t have a very good site anyway. That’s accepted. But what happened was this shared ownership was meant to be overlooking green space and also the water suddenly found itself shunted round the back. There was a row about that.

Interviewer: In terms of the stakeholders who are responsible for keeping an eye on that, is that largely or universally yourselves?

Geoff Bell: It really is. (Laughter) You see the thing is, like this thing about views, because the people who are involved in this at the time to making that pledge and being there, a lot of them have moved on. We’re the only ones with a memory \_\_\_[0:13:41], and we brought this up with the fellow running- not running Bartley’s, but the man who’s responsible for the regeneration now, overseeing [the waterfront] site. He said, “Oh, right, I \_\_\_ know this,” that we’d made this promise for the shared views. So we helped to produce when the promise was made and all this stuff.

The Council, although if you point it out to them, they \_\_\_[0:14:14] on this. Again, because the lead councillor has moved on, officers have moved on and so on and so on. So whether by accident or by conscious choice, we’re the ones who have ended up overseeing that these promises are actually kept and are not just about the best views, but a mixture of other things as well. That’s the role we tend to play and have played.

Simon Slater: Yes, the residents, the institutional memory of the regeneration, the Council will and do stand up for these issues. But as Geoff says, officers come and go.

Interviewer: Yes. That is a common story in regeneration that takes this long. It’s that institutional memory, isn’t it? And with it, things will drop through the net if people and organisations like yourself aren’t in place to secure that.

I think that aspect of protecting the views and access to it is very interesting to me in terms of what people get out of being, not only overlooking the reservoirs, but near the New River. I wondered, could you both talk to me, both maybe from a personal perspective, but also from what you hear from local residents in terms of why they might benefit and value that space and access to it?

Geoff Bell: I’ll tell you one think which I think is very interesting, and I haven’t got any answer for why this should be, but one of the greatest users of the New River path are the Orthodox Jewish. Now, I don’t know why that is the case; I’m sure you’ve talked and you’ve probably found that out. They’re quite a closed a community, but it’s incredibly well used by them. Incredibly well used, all of the time. I have to say, I walk up it quite a lot and you see this all the time. It’s very interesting, that you’ve got this group of people who are obviously dying to have this [route 0:16:44], if you like, sort of interchange with the [world].

I don’t know, and as I say, I haven’t the faintest idea what’s in their culture or why this would be the case, but I think that is very interesting. I think it’s only really since… Because I did used to walk there prior to the path and all this, but certainly it’s only being used really since the regeneration has started, by lots of people. Lots of the people who walk there now and the newer residents. Right? People who have moved in, it’s well used by them as well.

You see, you always have this thing here are Seven Sisters Road, and this again, all the work that has been done on this, is that people this side of Seven Sisters Road tend to see themselves as vulnerable people and are reluctant to cross the road.

Interviewer: Okay. So it acts as a barrier?

Geoff Bell: So it does act as a barrier to the reservoirs. Because it’s a dangerous road, and one that serves- and it is. So to an extent, things like that have always mitigated against the reservoirs being fully used. You’ve got the reservoir centre there, which was again a result of a Save The Reservoirs Campaign, but again, that’s been underused by local people. Basically because the services they provide, the facilities that they provide, things like sailing and all this, are quite high priced. This is a working class area and you can’t afford to spend £60 an hour hiring out a yacht. You know what I mean? Things like that.

These are issues that we’re trying to address and come to terms with. But I think it’s taking a long time for both the Council and the community to realise the potential for this, but at the same time, make sure that it doesn’t become an overused tourist trap. It’s just balance really, isn’t it? If what is happening now with the Wetlands project, they’re going to open that up and it’s only going to be two or three days a week, which is fine I think, which is the right way to do things. But it’s just balance that you’ve got this wonderful site here, you want it used by local people, but you don’t want to spoil it. So it’s that balance, I think. I don’t think people have thought about that enough really, to tell you the truth.

Simon Slater: On a personal view, there’s times when I’m cycling to or from the Redmond Centre, or I’m walking up there, and it takes your breath away at times.

Geoff Bell: It does, it does.

Simon Slater: I think that’s partly because it’s the breadth of open space; we’re so used to London being surrounded by open buildings that when you’re not- especially when you come round the corner and it’s suddenly there… It’s quite uplifting.

Ironically, I don’t actually use that walk at all much, because for me, I’m here for work. So if I, on a personal level, want to go for a walk, I’ll go down to the River Lee and the Walthamstow Marshes, and I get the same benefit that way.

Interviewer: Okay.

Simon Slater: But I would imagine when this reservoir is open it could well be something where I’ll just decide to go for a walk, and if I ever- or when this job ends, then I think it’ll then be a place I’d use more. For social.

Geoff Bell: Again, people’s sort of views, something quite interesting happened a couple of months back when the Council of the West Reservoir were people who were not quite clear, drained or partially drained New River. They did this for various technical reasons, which they explained as \_\_\_[0:21:27] do this.

As a result, or some of the fish and swans had problems. There were fish that died, all this sort of stuff, and there was this one swan which properly lost its young. So there was this discussion at our board, and people were really angry about this. I don’t think that would have happened, that sort of feeling would have been expressed four or five years ago. To an extent that the knowledge of the state of the reservoirs in all this, but also because it’s opened up. People now feel ownership of it. There’s a, “Why have they done this? Why have they put these swans through change?” and all this. People were really quite angry about it.

Me as well, because it was a totally thoughtless thing to have done. They could have done it in a different way. I thought that was really irresponsible. [Cross talk 0:22:28]. So we demanded it, and indeed, they’re coming back, the West Reservoir Centre I think at our next board, to explain this to them. To tell people why have they done this and what are they going to use the West Reservoir Centre for as well. All of this stuff has come up and people really feel an ownership of it now, which they haven’t done in the past really.

Simon Slater: That’s because it was closed off, wasn’t it? I mean, the reservoir path was seen, as you say, for dog walkers or as a potential place to go and get mugged. Now they’ve opened it up, there was a discussion early on – and it still raises its head every so often about is the New River dangerous? Could the kids fall in? Should there be some sort of fence put up? Which to date all the partners, Bartley’s, the Council and Wood Co have said, “No, we’ll keep it as it is.” Which I think is beneficial.

People now I think recognise more the community benefit. Because what it does do is it does enable people to mix in a way that green open space does and walks do that other things don’t. So even if you go shopping in the same shop, you’re not mixing necessarily… That’s helpful.

There have been some concerns about lighting of it because they’re not going to light the walk in the future because of putting off the bats. But I’m pretty sure it won’t be a problem.

Geoff Bell: You know, people have been shooting up there as well. You can see the [string 0:24:20]… You see these things, but…

Simon Slater: You have, you have the odd [wino] going there.

Geoff Bell: I mean, it isn’t a huge problem. It’s not a huge problem.

Interviewer: No, okay.

Geoff Bell: It’s an issue now and again. People smoking dope there. You quite often smell it. Certainly \_\_\_[0:24:34]. Some people get angry about these things but…

Interviewer: But by and large, people don’t feel unsafe?

Geoff Bell: No, I definitely don’t think so.

Simon Slater: [Elaine 0:24:46], hi.

Jo: Hello. Hi, I’m [Jo].

Female: Pleased to meet you.

Jo: Lovely to meet you. I’m a researcher at the University of Brighton.

Female: Yes, I’ve just read \_\_\_.

Jo: Thank you.

END AUDIO

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START AUDIO

Interviewer: Carry on then. As you’ve just joined us, [Elaine 0:00:06] could you just start for me and talk to me a little bit about you connection with this area and specifically, the reservoirs.

Elaine: My name is Elaine [Goznow]. I’ve lived in this locality all of my life. I’m a fourth generation – there are four generations of my family that have lived in this locality. I was very much involved in Save the Reservoirs, Filter Beds and New River Campaign.  
  
And I suppose I’ve got a passion for London, for history. I think I was inspired, apart from those two reasons, by the injustice and the threat to the reservoirs and New River in the 1980s. So yes, my family have been in the vicinity for over 60 years, living on Woodberry Down Estate.  
  
I live in social housing. The Reservoirs Campaign, or Save the New River Reservoirs Campaign - well its correct title is Save the Reservoirs, New River and Filter Beds Campaign and it was established, I think it was in 1986 and the first we heard of it being under threat was at a Woodberry Down Tenants Association meeting, just across the road here.  
  
And it was in a very quick sentence when, I think Hackney Council, it may have been from Thames Water, that Hackney have been. I was there with my- it was just in a flat across the road with the office, I was there with my parents and I was flabbergasted, just astonished that the New River, which is an aqueduct built in 1630, should be threatened. And the open space, of course, provided by the reservoirs.  
  
It was after that, that we really… Well, we initiated meetings, so the initial meetings were in my parents’ flat in \_\_\_[0:02:27] Gardens. I remember one of the officers from Hackney Planning Department being there. We were set up with £1,000 and we had-

Interviewer: Sorry, was that from the Council, paid?

Jeff: Do you remember who it was, the council officer?

Elaine: The council officer?

Jeff: Yes.

Elaine: My dad might remember, I can’t remember the name, no.

Jeff: Reason being is I have the details of the old hill planning. I might know who did the negotiation with Thames Water.

Elaine: This would have been a conservation officer, I think. It was a woman, I can’t remember her name. I don’t know if the Woodberry Down Tenants Association minutes and stuff are available. I’ve never-

Jeff: I doubt it.

Elaine: I grabbed them, ran into the loo and then I found- I grabbed this off the fridge. No, that’s one of the early things, but that’s from Jeremy Corbyn but that’s (Laughter).

Interviewer: And because of course, he was in support of the campaign?

Elaine: Yes, after he met my dad and I at Finsbury Park. So, yes, we had Michael \_\_\_[0:03:46], QC recorder, also in my parents’ flat. [David Pracy], a librarian. He worked in Stoke Newington and lived in Broxbourne on one end of the river and on the other end of the river.  
  
I had studied geography and I’d also done a bit more \_\_\_[0:04:07] studies. We had an artist- it could have been a hand-picked group that established the campaign, I mean in very short time. So we had [Hilly Janes] that was a journalist also a librarian. My dad had just retired from the department of the environment. My background \_\_\_[0:04:35] geography – historical geography.

Interviewer: Okay.

Elaine: Oh, an artist. And we quickly hired the Woodberry Down School hall for a public meeting. It was a very difficult campaign to run, really, because the Lea River went through several different local authorities. Broxbourne, Enfield, Haringey and there did come a point where I was meeting representatives from all the boroughs and as a wildlife interest, I remember, I used to go to \_\_\_[0:05:23].  
  
The old town hall building at Crouch End. But that’s how I’m involved. I also went to those local schools and the Woodberry Down Comprehensive was one of the very first comprehensive schools in the country and we used to think it was the first in London, but I think-

Jeff: Yes, it was \_\_\_[0:05:53].

Elaine: The first in London, or there’s one just south, but also that has this, I noticed, \_\_\_ attached to a regeneration area. There’s another, around the same time, but it was very notable. And having attended that, I thought it was \_\_\_ to say, but the main teaching block overlooked the reservoirs. Overlooked the west reservoir with the castle pumping station.

Interviewer: That brings us on to roughly where we were, actually, in terms of we were all talking about the values and the benefits that the river and the reservoirs bring to local people and the community. So presumably, the benefits there are that it was central, as an asset, for little school children to see and have access to.  
  
Could you talk a little bit more about how you perceive personally – but also more broadly – what sort of benefits the campaign brought to attention?

Elaine: Well, from my perspective, my parents moved into their flat when it was built in 1961 and it has a stunning view of Finsbury Park and the New River winding through it. There was a 1930s sort of clubhouse, sort of mock-timber building in the cricket pitch and it could have been anywhere in the country but the view was from Hackney.  
  
And I suppose, well, my father’s curiosity was raised in. He wrote an article in Country Life about it. He was previously- so I always sort of knew it was historically interesting.  
  
In fact, the flat we lived in before – which I left when I was \_\_\_[0:08:00], because \_\_\_ House, was also the site of the New River. And I remember, even now, I can remember seeing this interesting bird – it was obviously a heron – so I was under the age of four, I remember being struck by this- this was interesting \_\_\_ around here. It was striking.  
  
And then, yes, attending both schools and I think it was important that at both schools, the [due influx of 0:08:31] juniors still exists, but having attended there, the presence of the New River has a wonderful open aspect – provides a wonderful open aspect for the school – both playgrounds are juniors and the infants.  
  
It’s also pleasant to walk down. Because it’s a post-war building, which is now listed, but I do remember visiting other schools from there, you know, various, I don’t know, choir thing. And even with Brownies, visiting other schools, I couldn’t believe that, I couldn’t believe you can have a playground on a roof some Victorian building.  
  
So I think it’s a very different aspect from many inner-city primary schools. It’s very, very open for what’s considered a densely built-up area. I think that’s a considerable asset.  
  
Secondary school comprehensive, again, some of them are absolutely spectacular facilities, including a theatre, a separate language rooms, separate gyms, all purpose-built, purpose-built geography rooms, purpose-built \_\_\_[0:10:08] maintenance. Domestic-whatever it was – science. But the main teaching block had a view over the reservoirs.   
  
So again, I would say, the greatest advantage was the open aspect, the calmness of the view across the west reservoir. I mean, the two-star, listen old pumping station, Castle building, is still very attractive. I mean, it’s a pretty weird building to look out from when you’re, you know, drifting off in whatever subject you either taught.

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter).

Elaine: There was this sort of castle across the water.  
  
I remember, the head-teacher, [Michael Marland 0:10:56]. Because it was a redundant building then, once the – I can’t remember now what date the pumping equipment was taken out – but he did try to, at that time, doing two squash courts, I think. So I don’t think it was under threat then. I’m not sure. I’m not sure. Some other [really nice assets 0:11:25]…

Interviewer: What was the argument made with Save the Reservoirs? What was the sort of underlying threat of these being covered up, levelled up or turned into housing? What would you lose?

Elaine: I think my father and I, in the first instance, I think we’re mostly sensitive about the New River, really, that you could have something originally built in 1613. It’s not easy to list.   
  
If it was a building, it would be listed easily, but as a piece of industrial archaeology, it isn’t easy to protect it. It’s possible, but protecting it, it could be scheduled as an [ancient monument 0:12:11] but once it was scheduled, then you can do hardly anything to it, you couldn’t even put in a signpost.  
  
So the prospect that something that had been around for so long was under threat, you know, it could just have been a clay ditch, seemed just dreadful. And it was all in the climate of privatisation where I would say it was very significant. We felt everything was under threat, you know, from the local parks’ management changing to the housing management changing.  
  
And of course, we did go on to learn that Thames are pretty ruthless. They’ve got a very, very powerful… With the reservoirs, there was no public access. So some people were very keen on public access and others who lived along the route of the New River were worried about public access.  
  
I don’t think I was that motivated by that factor. I think with the reservoirs, we went on to learn – we worked with London Wildlife Trust, I also worked for \_\_\_[0:13:46] – that thought the reservoirs were very valuable for wildlife and the fact that they stayed open, they didn’t freeze over, was very significant in this part of London.  
  
Where some of the reservoirs in Walthamstow would, the flow of the New River was quite fast and it kept the east and west reservoirs \_\_\_[0:14:11] open. I did used to know, off by heart the \_\_\_, various types of wildlife that \_\_\_.

Interviewer: [Were elderlies here involved in the campaign?]

Jeff: They were involved, yes.

Elaine: Yes. John Newton was there.

Jeff: I mean, one of the best summing up of the campaign was actually written by Elaine’s father and it was for a speech which [Diane Abbott] made in the House of Commons. I think that speech was written by your dad, basically, wasn’t it? Most of it-

Respondent: Martin, we visited Diane Abbott who was also very supportive of Jeremy Corbyn. Diane Abbott, in the first instance of course.

Jeff: And actually, towards \_\_\_[0:15:03] look up that speech, just google \_\_\_ Stoke Newington Reservoirs and I’m sure it comes up. I mean, we’ve certainly quoted it in the exhibition and Jeremy spoke as well, so the two of them spoke. But Abbott summed up the argument quite well in the House of Commons and was a big thing.

Respondent 3: I think it’s interesting that, I would say the reservoirs, the New River but not the filter beds, which, at that time, so my memory was they were dry by then, they weren’t being used, they were dry. Although there was a campaign about it, particularly around the types of bird that would be found in the filter bed.  
  
Certainly when I was aware of it in Hackney, at that point, what’s happening is the council tried to do a deal with Thames Water. So in effect, it’s not as crude as this, but in effect what they did was they kept west reservoir open. It was gifted to the council along with £1m to stop it from being obtained.  
  
Then the weakest link – yes as you say – was the filter beds. And their main concern, at that time, was that they got affordable housing. Which to give them their due, they did. Most of that housing over there, if not all of it, I think is southern housing, so housing association.

Elaine: So I think with Diane Abbott. We just saw Diane Abbott Thursday night and she had the speech on a Friday. It was an adjournment debate, I think, where things move very quickly.   
  
So we were all down in her office, down south, Michael, there may have been three of us. And she is very clear thinking. She was very focused at picking up everything we said but, I mean, it was a dream. The next day we sat in public gathering, she said what we said. But it felt wonderful. And we met them afterwards a little bit.

Interviewer: I think that- oh, sorry, go on.

Elaine: Sorry, I was going to say, the outcome. You know there’s different things to talk about. We could talk about the type of group, the people that are concerned around the filter beds. So lots of houses backed on to the filter beds.  
  
So you have homeowners who had a vested interest – and we had quite a few people from there who were more active than many others. And there was \_\_\_[0:17:53] for quite a while and there are some nice pictures. So when the system was still in use, you needed the filter beds.  
  
It was sand filtration and then it was chemical filtration once it was in the \_\_\_. So there were some beautiful photos \_\_\_[0:18:15] I’ve got, it’s a Christmas card with a beautiful snowy view taken by \_\_\_, someone who backed on to the reservoir, the filter beds.  
  
Now the filter beds. The pumping station was built a long time before- I think it came with two filter beds and then the filter beds were extended and I still think there was a very strong case for keeping the original two filter beds. Whether they’re made into a garden or they kept a pond.  
  
But I think there was a case in conservation terms, for keeping an example. As in, in \_\_\_[0:18:57] of the pumping station.

Interviewer: So it was effectively collateral damage – the filter beds – in terms of the ongoing negotiation between the various stakeholders?

Jeff: You can put it that way, yes. That was lost. I mean there was actually \_\_\_[0:19:17] quite a strong sort of \_\_\_. This was a \_\_\_, you know?

Interviewer: How long did it go on for?

Jeff: The campaign?

Interviewer: Yes.

Jeff: Went five or six years, seven or eight. No it was longer than that.

Interviewer: Really?

Jeff: Have you see the \_\_\_[0:19:36] in our book?

Interviewer: Yes I have.

Jeff: Yes, so that the dates, that’s the date that started in-

Elaine: ’86. Began in ’86.

Interviewer: Yes.

Jeff: So it’s more than ten years because this is the Save the Reservoirs. This was the \_\_\_, that’s the filter beds thing, so that was 1995. So that was when the filter beds were decided with \_\_\_[0:20:02].

Interviewer: What sort of numbers of people would you say were active or in any way involved in the campaign?

Elaine: Well I would say it altered over the years. So I’ve worked at London Wildlife Trust and I remember people talked to me about it and people will say “The campaign. The environmental campaign. 18 months. Shall I give it 18 months?”  
  
God. It started in ’86, my daughter was both in 1990 and I think I was still going with a baby and a swing, it was, say up to ’91 then, I mean, my dad and I just took a backseat. It was the occasional things we’d go on about.  
  
But by then, we’d won the very significant things. Certainly, Thames were absolutely pass masters at dissipating. There would be lots of media interested. My dad told me as well we would be interviewed. At length, this stuff that would go on for days in the media and then it came to nothing because Thames wouldn’t say that there was a threat.  
  
They would somehow dissipate it and there were no decisions made. We were still thinking “There’s time to work on it”. It was always dealt with like that. At meetings, they would field some technician, you know, no-one with policy interest, no-one with-

Interviewer: Or the power to make this [Crosstalk 0:21:27]

Elaine: Substantive to doing this. But I think the adjournment debate was very significant and Michael \_\_\_, I think it was before then, had turned up the act- an active parliament that- it’s something to do with maintaining the on-going maintenance of the New River, like perpetuity, I mean it’s incredible.  
  
I mean, it looks amazing and carried huge weight, but in fact, it could have been \_\_\_[0:22:10], it could have been got round, but of course it would have been dreadful publicity for Thames and it put it on a different footing. They’d got to find a different use.

Interviewer: I think that takes us to identity. I wanted to talk about identity of what’s clearly the passions and time and energy and money invested in supporting and protecting them and now they – as we started talking about – are central to the ongoing story of the regeneration of the area.  
  
I wondered whether you could talk, each of you, about how you feel about how access to those reservoirs affects the identity of the local area.

Respondent 3: In some ways, those reservoirs before acted as a barrier to Woodberry Down and the rest of Hackney. I mean, certainly, when I was working for the council advising the Chair of Housing in the early ‘90s, it was seen as on the edge of the borough and it was a hard to let estate.  
  
We had to do some internal marketing with people on the housing register at Woodberry Down – we call it Woodberry Down, how, because I remember I had all the facilities that anyone would need – to try and get people, to get the squatters off and try and get people living in the estate.  
  
And as someone who lived in Stoke Newington, it’s not an area you came up to. I briefly rented a room at Turnham Court Park, which was overlooking the reservoir. But again, you wouldn’t know – that was in a house – you wouldn’t know that the reservoir was already there.  
  
I think what has happened now, partly because of the Castle Climbing Centre I think has opened it up a bit, you’ve got more people coming and it’s very well used, the Climbing Centre. And certainly the regeneration by opening up the walkways. It’s opened it up much more to the communities that [Jeff 0:24:31] was talking about, the \_\_\_ community coming down.  
  
I think the big thing that hasn’t been done and it needs to be pushed on is that asset the council have got which is the West Reservoir Centre that isn’t having issues by anybody, no issues brought by the schools, \_\_\_ is by the sort of wealthier middle-class community in and around Stoke Newington and it’s certainly not used by the residents up at Woodberry Down.  
  
And if you talk to the council officers themselves, they will pretty much shrug their shoulders and accept that something needs to be done. It’s just one of those things that’s been kicked to the bottom of the pile, I think, until recently.  
  
But with the opening of the east reservoir, I think that has then added an impetus again. So with regeneration and close opening the east reservoir, that’s added as an impetus to try and get the council to do something about the West Reservoir Centre.  
  
I think it – just as an asset to North London – is brilliant. It’s right by a Tube, it’s in the middle of a built up area, it’s a fantastic facility and it’s been under [utilised 0:25:51]. But as Jeff said, that then could potentially lead to pressures upon it if loads and loads of people come down.  
  
So there have been suggestions about opening a walk around the west reservoir. But I think some of the people in Queen Elizabeth Walk that back on to it, don’t particularly want that. So you’re always going to have that-

Jeff: Yes. \_\_\_[0:26:23] yes.

Respondent 3: That pressure attention.

Elaine: I’m reminded now. The Reservoirs campaign, it was seeing limited access. The east reservoir enhanced sort of wildlife and some public use of the west reservoir and conservation of the New River.

Interviewer: And in terms of, identity, Jeff, what does that mean to you?

Jeff: You see, I think certainly me, certainly have become much more conscious and I think this is probably true of lots of people, of green issues, than we were 20, 30 years ago. There was a campaign there, right about the same time as the Reservoirs campaign, or maybe a little bit later, there was a campaign to save the library \_\_\_[0:27:25] shut down.  
  
And I was involved in that, in the occupation of the library in order to try and save it and I wasn’t involved in the Save the Reservoirs at all. And I think the way general consciousness has moved over the last 20 years. People are much more conscious these days of certain things like that.  
  
You sort of realise that what you have here is something pretty unique, you know, and if you’re privileged to live here, you’ll be privileged to walk along there. As I said, during this time I walk there every Saturday evening. It just blows your mind really, I don’t know if you know it, and it’s just such a fantastic thing.  
  
You see the wildlife and the views and sunsets and the rainbows and all of this. And this is inner-city London, you know? This is just fantastic.  
  
I do think people value these things much more. Certainly I do anyway. I certainly value these things much more now than I did, you know, when you were 20 or 30.  
  
Because you sort of realise what a mess we’re making of the bloody planet. It is and you think “Well this is just something which is so worth holding on to”. The people around here, I think, and Billy said and I’ve said it, we owe such a huge amount to the people who come here and keep these things -we really do.  
  
It’s just fantastic, really. That is there and now, we’re sort of talking about the nature reserve and all this with the buildings and you know, the problems. Well maybe what about access? You know, too much access might spoil it.  
  
But these are problems of success rather than anything else though, aren’t they? And this is the thing, I just think it just makes it. You see, when you first moved in here, I don’t know, you know, took me years to actually figure out I was here almost, you know?

Interviewer: And that’s because it was closed off?

Jeff: Yes, it was closed off because it wasn’t \_\_\_[0:29:45] to people’s \_\_\_. Consciousness is funny really. It was never really, you know as Elaine says, she was looking over the New River, so the New River was a thing for them and somehow the ideas of the reservoirs, it was only people who were living – a lot of the people who this sort of campaign – were actually overlooking it or lived next to it.   
  
Rather than people saying “This side of the Seven Sisters Road” or even sort of near it. It was never part of your conscious really, but it is now. Partly that’s because it’s been sort of opened up and partly it’s because people now feel about green issues and have realised the importance of these things much more than they have done in the past.

Interviewer: Yes.

Elaine: But also a lot of work done on raising awareness in all sorts of groups that we contacted.

Interviewer: As part of the campaign?

Elaine: Yes. Yes, at the beginning we had all manner of environmental, historical interest groups.

Interviewer: And what does it mean for you, Elaine? What does it mean for the identity of the area?

Elaine: Well, I say I’ve lived beside the New River. It’s a beautiful view of the New River in both flats. Even the first flat overlooked the school and the river beside it, so again it was very open and I valued it at the school I was attending – the comprehensive school.  
  
I hear now, sometimes, people saying “Oh, yes \_\_\_[0:31:28]” people have sort of discovered it. It’s like “Oh, you know, no-one knew it was here” and \_\_\_ here \_\_\_. You ask all those people in the flats like \_\_\_ Dale, [Emma Dale] actually who’s block is aimed on to that. I think regular folk in council housing, they valued that. We had a different part of this development but, you know, they \_\_\_[0:31:52] river. I think they still value it.  
  
What I understand, in the first tranche of development on the east reservoir, there’s no social housing in that tranche. Apparently in the next tranche – whatever one that will be – the development that was proposed, one of the developments by Thames, Diane Abbott describe as a “Yuppie stockade” and that phrase comes back to me.  
  
We haven’t got a yuppie stockade where the reservoirs are, but I think the pains, I suppose, are to ensure that what’s being built is integrated. I think it’s important to say that throughout the Reservoirs campaign, there was the interest of people who lived backing on to the filter beds, those very active.   
  
There were probably two or three others. Someone living in Lincoln Court who was very, very good, but very, proportionately, extremely few people in Woodberry Down council tenants who participated and I’ve thought about this many time over the years.  
  
At the time, I suppose, I think people can become feeling like they are ineffective, that they have no power, that things are done to them, that they aren’t confident in feeling they can change anything or they can rally together to make something happen. It was frustrating.  
  
Obviously, my dad had recently retired when he \_\_\_[0:33:56] this week \_\_\_ to a lot of effort and time and that’s another factor. You’ve got to have the time to apply yourself to do it. But even turning up at monthly meetings was…   
  
People would say in the street “Oh, yes, more power to your \_\_\_” but there was very little… I think it is confidence. Not that they didn’t value it, but to actually feel the power was with you to do something about it.  
  
Yes, we had a meeting at the \_\_\_[0:34:28] my dad spoke to someone from London Wildlife Trust about [joining]. From my perspective now, I raise this a lot, there’s been a “Hydro found sound” to our project, aimed to 13 to 19 year olds.   
  
It’s alright for my son who is aged 15. There were two dates put forward. Well he couldn’t go to the first one because he’s at music school every Saturday, but the one that was available, first day \_\_\_[0:35:06] music school hit with that. “Yes, up for it” and then I thought, my experience around here, there’s not much take-up of stuff like \_\_\_.   
  
I wonder if he could go with a friend who lives across the borough boundary, \_\_\_ choice of friends, so I asked. Straight away “Yes, delighted \_\_\_”. So they were the only two that turned up.  
  
Now apparently the school were informed, the youth club were involved. So you found sounds around the reservoir, with underwater recording sort of stuff, and then you went back and you manipulated the sounds on IT equipment at the youth club to produce a soundscape or something musical.  
  
But I feel frustrated on behalf of the community in that, you know, I still think if you put this on in Guildford and you charged for it, it would be would be over-subscribed. But around here, you put that on, you give them lunch, you still get no-one.

Interviewer: Why is that? We’d spoke at the beginning about some of the things we were going to talk about and one of those were the barriers to people taking part in valuing of the New River and reservoirs and that’s an example of people being given the opportunity to experience and benefit from that asset and yet not taking it up.  
  
There’s presumably good reasons for them not taking that up?

Respondent 3: I mean, they talk in jargon, consultation for \_\_\_[0:36:48] regeneration. And people are talked to so many times and it takes so long that in the end, they’ve just done nothing and their life’s gone.  
  
I think it’s the same as some of these things, to be honest, is that – no disrespect – how many academics did we see now and students wanting to write their dissertations?

Elaine: It’s a good case study.

Respondent 3: People have got their own minds to- I think some of the stuff that we have at the [Redmond 0:37:16] Centre, people- it’s almost like consultation for [tea]. Interestingly enough, the Edge is incredibly well used as a youth centre; probably the most well used for its size across Hackney. That’s because it’s well run and they are very open, but none of their regulars, presumably are interested in that project.  
  
A lot of the stuff, the Redmond Centre is a bit at the edge of the estate. This issue about Seven Sisters Road and other places acting as a barrier, I didn’t believe until I started this job and when we were decanting people into temporary accommodation and you say to someone “This isn’t Seven Sisters Road, do you fancy going over towards Springpark Drive” they say “Well, I’ve never been down there”.  
  
And you think, you know, they literally have never been to that part of the estate. The idea to cross the road was \_\_\_[0:38:19] to people. I’ve heard things about \_\_\_ Gardens. Some people are saying it’s a fantastic place and wouldn’t want to live anywhere else. Other people have said “You don’t want to live there, you’re going to get knife crime”.  
  
It is a very parochial area, in some ways. I mean it had seven tenants association at different times because each little block-

Jeff: \_\_\_[0:38:40] like a-

Respondent 3: Tenants association. I think it was also a failure to get some of the information out to the newer residents as well. I don’t know if that’s because they’re renting, moving on or they’re just \_\_\_ and living here and then going out in the city or what.   
  
I think it’s breaking down now, but there is still an element to that.

Elaine: But that must raise questions, what kind of sense of community there is if there’s an awful lot of short-term residents.

Jeff: [Crosstalk 0:39:18] I think they’re right, I think people do feel that they’ll- “Can I change it? Can I do it?” They don’t realise the power they’ve actually got, you know?  
  
This is why, again, you see it at reservoirs, you know, this is sort of a lesson which I keep going on about. They did, the campaign changed \_\_\_[0:39:44] and people can’t sort of do this.  
  
And there’s something, if you like, would go try and do and try and say “These are the things we’ve achieved. These are the things we’ve done. We can do this” you know? And it is possible.  
  
Again, people do have their own lives, their own concerns, they’re worried about this, that and the other. I know it’s very difficult to get people actively intervolved in this. At the moment, WoodCo, I mean we get 50, 60 people do every monthly meeting of our board, which is really, really good for the local organisation like yourselves.  
  
But at the same time, we’re very vulnerable. I mean three or four of us die, you know, we could actually die, you know what I mean? To be quite honest about it, you know what I mean?

Interviewer: It’s definitely reliant on key individuals.

Elaine: I’d say that is the same for any voluntary or any small interest group, environmental group. Even school groups, it’s almost the \_\_\_[0:41:00] for saying parents are. But there’s one way that \_\_\_. I think education also, perhaps is a key.

Jeff: And I mean you’re always told, aren’t you, by people, authority “Oh, that’s not your business. That’s not your concern. We’ll take care of that”. It’s like that sort of thing that happened in Paris, the group was their warming thing, you know what I mean?  
  
It is very predictable that people say “Right, solved that now. That’s solved”. You know what I mean? Things like that. The only way, and it’s the thing that [Sarah 0:41:50] and I were talking about earlier, the only way you can ensure that promises like that are made just to keep active, you know? And that’s the only way you can do it.  
  
Whether it’s here, or whether it’s on a global scale, you know what I mean? Because there are too many people who have got their own interests and not doing what they should do, you know? And those are the people you have to fight against and it isn’t an easy task lots of the time.  
  
Especially when people appear reasonable and \_\_\_[0:42:24] and all this sort of stuff.

Interviewer: Which links me to my questions about the mixed model of ownership that you’ve got down there on the reservoirs and how that’s playing out in terms of how much voice you feel you have as an organisation in how it’s going to be used, the fact that that’s being opened as an LWT nature reserve.   
  
You started the conversation about what you were going to try and push for, for the west reservoir. What route to governance or what route to influence governance do you think you have?

Respondent 3: I think potentially, Woodco could push an open door on some aspects. Because for all the fear that people have about the weakness as an organisation that Jeff’s just expressed, it’s actually immensely well regarded amongst the partner organisations because it’s an organisation that is represented and they can have conversations with.  
  
It’s been sustained over the years to that extent. But it’s not something that needs to be pushed, is it? I mean, we’ve not had any discussions about any sort of community influence over the east reservoir at all. West reservoir partly because it’s council-owned and run, people feel that they can influence that either through their politicians or access through officers and \_\_\_[0:44:06] Woodco pushing about the west reservoir, certainly.  
  
Community Land Trust is an idea that people have been kicking around for years, but it’s not something that we’ve had any discussions about and if I’m honest, you get caught up on the day-to-day regeneration. The biggest issue for people in our community organisation in the next six to nine months is to try and get some sort of transparency and community ownership over the heating and hot water system is going to be across this estate.  
  
Because it builds a wrong- they’re badly built, that it’s not being provided as well as it should be. They are the sorts of things that people- you know nitty gritty, rather than “Am I going to influence the London Wildlife Trust over the way they run the east reservoir?”

Interviewer: Yes. So there are more pressing and urgent priorities than [Crosstalk 0:45:05].

Respondent 3: But it’s something that we’d probably need to think about.

Jeff: I think, for instance, there is an exhibition and that is meant to go to the east reservoir \_\_\_. Now whether they’re going to do that or not, but I think it’s something we have to follow up because I think it’s important that the rule of local people are sort of kept down on a permanent basis. So I’m going to contact him again, because he said he’s going to put all those exhibitions up.

Interviewer: I’m sorry Jeff, do you mean at the LWT Centre?

Jeff: Yes. So something like that, something which said “This is about local people. What local people have done for this area” and of course the reason you do that is not simply to show how wonderful it is, it’s to build pride among the local people so that they understand “Well, my parents did this” or “My grandparents did this” you know “I can sort of do this as well”.  
  
So I think things like that actually. Again, making clear that you are sort of the campaign which achieved this and teaching lessons like that overcomes \_\_\_[0:46:16]. Helps \_\_\_ more, addresses the issue, you know \_\_\_.

Elaine: Of course. It is an absolutely prized asset to build positive developments more than anything else.

Interviewer: Yes.

Elaine: [Crosstalk 0:46:38] value of the real development here. It’s questionable whether it will be done there without such an asset.

Interviewer: And that’s where we started, wasn’t it? Talking about how central that is to-

Elaine: [Crosstalk] I’m not on the board. My daughter is on the board. How many members are on the board?

Jeff: I think 20.

Elaine: And I think there’s three who live in the old flats. One is my daughter, one is [Pat Harp 0:47:07], one is Jackie.

Jeff: Jackie. Oh and there’s [Valerie] as well.

Elaine: Four.

Interviewer: And so you’ve actually seen, presumably, quite a churn in terms of membership with new residents?

Jeff: That’s right. I mean, it is something we have made a conscious effort to try and get. It’s important that new residents, renters or owners or private tenants are involved and we’d be down community organisations because we do want to speak for everybody right? And we jump on to Billy’s answer in the sense that this is one sort of neighbourhood. It’s absolutely essential.  
  
But Elaine is right, at the same time, the people who live in- if so, do you live in some of the southern blocks? Where you’ve got damp and things like that, maybe you’re just ground down a bit, you know?  
  
Although we campaigned very, very \_\_\_ to address dampness issues and there were real rows against the council at our meetings about the damp and eventually the council changed and eventually we sort of won and the councillor says “Right, we will address these issues. We will go and do a \_\_\_[0:48:33] and we’ll offer people new flats,” and so on.  
  
But that took a lot of hard work and people came to the meeting and were shouting and the councillor and so on and so on. In the end, that sort of thing worked, you know? But that’s what I’m saying, we have to keep doing that, you know?  
  
I mean, the danger organisations like yourselves face, is that you almost become “Because we’re involved in the master plan” and, you know selling you to it, you almost become part of the establishment, there is always that danger, you know?

Elaine: I think that is very [significant 0:49:08].

Jeff: There’s always that danger, right? That, you know- you meet council leaders all the times “Oh, these are quite nice people” or you meet \_\_\_. On an individual level, they’re really nice guys and all this and to an extent, you’re always have to be wary in not being sucked into being them as opposed to us.  
  
But again, that’s something which the Trade Union Movement – to use an example – has always been suspect. You know, Trade Union leaders would go to the House of Lords and- do you know what I mean? They start on the factory floor and end up in the House of Lords.  
  
That’s always an issue you have to be really conscious of. That you don’t lose your focus.

Interviewer: And hat presumably affects the issues that are coming to the board. That, that’s composition of what members and what is concerning people and what people want raised. Well presumably that is affected by that composition.

Jeff: I think it is because people who are shared ownerships, say, right? To an extent they have got a material interest in the area now too. Not all people in the sense of council tenants, don’t, right? Maybe because they don’t own a property.  
  
Whereas if you’re a shared ownership or if you own these things, I mean you’ve got “Oh my God, if things go down I won’t get an offer, I won’t be able to sell this place on”. You know, I suppose things like that can play as well. But at the same time, I mean to be fair share play to them, when Barclays have tried to get off areas, you know? There are people who have lived in those areas, private tenants or shared ownerships who say “We don’t want gated areas”, right?  
  
So things like that, and so it is very important for us that these people are involved but at the same time, Elaine’s right- You know, it’s pretty difficult to maintain the interest of the people in the older blocks. One of the reasons, of course, is that they’re older people so they’re less inclined to come out and so on.  
  
But it’s always difficult to try and maintain that balance, if you like, in an organisation like yourself, they try and speak for everybody.

Elaine: So I \_\_\_[0:51:40] because I’m \_\_\_. But of course, these ideas we feel you’re on the fringe of things. Then, you know, your concerns about whatever it is, with housing as Jeff was saying those with a vested financial interest in the place, you would hope that their drive, just like the articulate in schools or those who live around the filter beds and the rest of us, you expect that their input will actually raise the game forward so that all of the benefits will be shared.  
  
But if the community that’s coming in has a fair proportion of those who are just, you say “Turning around at the weekend with their suitcases” because they’re all short term and that the landlord lives in Asia or Abu Dhabi aren’t here, it’s not the same vested interested.

Respondent 3: It’s interesting. It’s like the woman that just came in lives in [City View 0:52:57]. Not really sure where she’s from – Hong Kong.

Elaine: What’s that? She’s from Hong Kong?

Respondent 3: She’s only been here two months. I make sure that she – not sure exactly what she wants – but I make sure she gets what she wants so we can pull it in. Because what I’m seeing – again, I don’t live here – as an outsider looking in, what I’m seeing is that the people that are coming forward as potential community activists are the shared ownership residents that are brought in, that have got a commitment to the area and are beginning to get active.  
  
We’ve seen it about. There might be nimby issues, where there’s noise nuisance, various other bits and pieces. More positive one would be the Woodberry Down Family’s Group are trying to set up a community nursery. We’re beginning to see some of those people active. So Andrew is on the exec.  
  
What we’re not seeing as yes, are private owners. That may be because we don’t know how many of them actually live there and how many are being rented out.  
  
I think you will begin to and I think you’ll start beginning to see people that are renting privately, if they rent here over two or three years. If they’re here for six months, they never have time. But increasingly, as a tenure in London, you are going to have a lot of people that are having to rent privately because they can’t afford to buy and because of that, we may, in time, see more of those people.

Interviewer: So with that changing demographic and potentially the shift in ownership of the actual reservoirs themselves, how do you anticipate people will use, for example once it’s reopened in the spring, how do you anticipate people will use the area? Will there be a shift in use? Will there be- ?

Elaine: Is this is east reservoir?

Interviewer: Yes.

Elaine: Because it’s never been opened. It’s not reopened is it? It was [Crosstalk 0:54:59] very much.

Interviewer: It’s still owned by Thames Water isn’t it?

Elaine: I think so. I’m just not up to speed. The first time I visited it was the other Saturday when he went on his Found Sound project. Yes, I think they must have opened it. Yes.

Respondent 3: But it’s leased to?

Elaine: Leased to London Wildlife [Crosstalk 0:55:20]

Interviewer: LWT. Yes.

Respondent 3: I think a lot depends on that culture you know. If it is attractive to people to go to it, then they’ll go to it. If it’s got a decent café and they can [Crosstalk]

Jeff: It is a fantastic walk around there, if you’ve been there. And \_\_\_ a view you get from the other side, because you get the view of the flats. It isn’t as nice a view in some ways because the flats appear as if it’s all closed in almost. It’s a funny view, but at the same time it’s a beautiful walk up there and I think it will be used because there’s going to be a café there as well.  
  
It’s only going to be open a couple of days a week, isn’t it? Which is probably right, you know?

Elaine: Because it was the Easter, wasn’t it? Best for wildlife. [Crosstalk 0:56:13] and it’s going to be enhanced for wildlife. Obviously the absence of disturbance was good for wildlife, but I guess they know, it’s limited access.  
  
But the café on Lordship Road. I had a bet, I would say, you’d have people from Stoke Newington would come to Lordship Road so they will use it. Whether you will get \_\_\_[0:56:42] Gardens folk or Woodberry Down folk generally, I don’t know.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Elaine: I think it’s very complex as to why people don’t but why social-housing people of the original blocks at least don’t get involved. I think it’s much, much more complex.   
  
I was saying about the youngsters and this project as a current example. Now the schools were informed, the youth club was involved in it, but still, you could not train the kids and my son is at music school, 8:45 in the city, 8:45 to 5:45 so to get over to the reservoir on the day that he wasn’t at music school, to get there for 10:30 with a mate for a fun day, doing something inspiring was a treat.  
  
Now, others have said to me, well the gentleman who the manager of the youth club said “Well, they need ownership of the project. They needed to be involved from the outset, to be designing”. But if you only got to things that you know about, how can you widen horizons? You need to give things a chance, get out a bit.  
  
I don’t know. I have always lived here. I want to help the folk that I identify with. I was saying to \_\_\_[0:58:20] my kids, just get out there and just try it, you know, why not? It’s for you. I suppose that’s the other thing, these things, people don’t feel are for them. But [Crosstalk].

Jeff: I’ll tell you what would be really interesting. Something you can do some time. To just stand there one day and ask people where they live, what they \_\_\_[0:58:48]. That would be fascinating, to see, to do a poll and say “Where do you live?” and see where they come from.

Interviewer: I think they do plan to do some visitor surveys when they first open it.

Jeff: Something like that would be really fascinating because I think you’re right. I think you would find, as I say, my view is a lot of the people – and I work there – a lot of the people, people who have just moved in plus the orthodox Jewish people, those are the main users.

Interviewer: So new residents, people coming down from Stoke Newington you say?

Jeff: [Crosstalk 0:59:27] No, residents who’ve moved in here.

Elaine: [Crosstalk] When you open the café that will be on Lordship Road which is-

Respondent 3: Well they won’t get access from Lordship Road, they’d have to come all the way out of \_\_\_[0:59:36]. There’s so many cafés in Stoke Newington, Church Street, you’re not going to see those people come up.

Elaine: Well of course there’s already a café in the west one, I don’t know how well his-

Respondent 3: I think the west reservoir is going to be the key. If the council could come back – and they’re meant to be coming back January – with ideas of how they are going to open up west reservoir and properly market it. Then that might do something.

Interviewer: The barrier there at the moment is it’s not hugely well run or advertised and cost you mentioned, Jeff.

Jeff: It’s quite costly, yes, to actually use it, but there’s also people- I mean as Jackie knows - she lives in the southern block - she’s “Oh, I would never walk there” you know, because it’s too far to walk to, almost, you know. So there are barriers like that as well, the physical.  
  
But if it was me and it was something really vital and different and think about these thing and I think it is and this is what the council have to do and we have to do as well. Think about how you can use this because it is an amazing experience.

Respondent 3: As the development goes on, it will make it easier because the walk that you’ve got goes up to a certain point, becomes a shitty path, doesn’t it? Once that’s fully open, it will make it easier for people to physically go around there, once the park is open and it’s all part of it, it will make it easier for people to do that.  
  
Whether they ever take it up, I don’t know. But Hackney is very green and very beautiful in other ways. There are lots of ways people can go walking. If they open up that west reservoir so people can physically walk around it, jog around it, then you may get them there.  
  
That said, I don’t get the impression lots of residents from Woodberry Down go to Finsbury Park. It’s across the road for god’s sake.

Elaine: I think, and I keep saying, this is a very complex issue about ordinary local people in the original flats and accessing anything. I think – we were talking about it in respect to this project – that knowing the value of something and I don’t think people really can appreciate the value of things. I don’t mean it in a condescending way, I just think…  
  
That project for example. You could include that in your CV. You know, you’re writing to college or something. There are ways you can use that, whether it’s from IT, music, from science and wildlife, it’s eye-catching enough to art. It’s an art project. But people don’t see that.   
  
No-one else saw that. I mean, I could see it and of course my son went. Actually he’s at school on the River Thames. His school is on the Thames and it was a school friend he went with.

Interviewer: So is it translation? Is it translation Elaine? Is it a case of presenting these projects in a very different way to highlight the benefits?

Elaine: What the west reservoir? I mean, I’m sitting here thinking “Oh, great. Kids on the estate, young people, maybe even me – we can access the west reservoir if it’s made affordable, it’s made accessible to us, great”. But I suspect you’re right.   
  
It will be the Tube. You know, who is using the Castle Climbing Centre? I bet you could stand on that door and there’s no-one from Woodberry Down using it. They’ll be coming on the bus and the tube. We see them, you know.

Respondent 3: And it’s an issue with class. Let’s be honest. A lot of it is right, [Crosstalk 1:03:35] but it is about- I think in some ways it’s an issue with class because if you look at where people use and go to, where they feel comfortable.  
  
It’s about feeling comfortable and if you don’t have the confidence to go and try something new because you don’t know, you may be made to look stupid or whatever and that’s partly down to the fact that it is a working class estate. In effect, often they are being invited to what they, perhaps, see as middle-class activities.  
  
However, if you look at say, both the [fleeced] which is very well used by the existing residents and the fun day, which although we’ve had the problems of \_\_\_[1:04:20] down here when people cross the road, it’s again, very well used. If we were to have the fun day in a couple of years’ time, down at the west res centre, then where people are going to something that they know and are comfortable with, that then might start getting people going to the west reservoir centre.  
  
And that’s really what it’s about. It’s about a series of barriers that are either real or imagined. Even if they are imagined, they are still a barrier.

Jeff: It’s like the new gym, which has just opened up. There’s an interesting story in there. There was this sentence in the original master plan about a gym. And I grabbed \_\_\_[1:05:05] and said “Where’s the gym?” and they were “We never promised a gym” and I showed them the line in the middle of their master plan.

Interviewer: [Crosstalk] I lied to you.

Jeff: So one line, right? And so eventually they’ve got this low-cost gym here. They announced this, I thought to myself “Oh my God, nobody is going to use the damn thing” but actually, there’s what, about 5,000 people that have joined or something so far?

Respondent 3: Including a number of people that I wouldn’t necessarily have \_\_\_[1:05:37].

Jeff: That’s right. So that would be quite interesting. To see how that’s used. Again, whether there’s people on the estate or whether it’s people from Stoke Newington or wherever. That’s actually going to be the test, but so far there has been an amazingly successful campaign to get this low-cost gym here. Another thing I’ve used.

Elaine: You know, about \_\_\_[1:06:09] London and all the rest of it, a friend of my father’s visited and he was sent to a gym by his GP. Let’s see the clinic refer regular folk to the gym for free, you know, on prescription or however you want to do it. That would make it accessible.  
  
You could also get kids from Skinners. I see the kids from Skinners walking to Finsbury Park. I mean, when I went to Woodberry Down School, we’d be taken off, I’d go horse-riding in Epping-direction and Newbury Park. I mean, surely we can take kids from Skinners to the reservoirs \_\_\_[1:06:51] if they provide.  
  
But, it’s awfully hummed well hasn’t it? Where is the star- ?

Respondent 3: It’s also partly because [Crosstalk] professionals doing it and they don’t think- ours is nothing to do with this reservoir but, not today really, but I was working at Hackney Council when they were going to knock down Clissold [Park 1:07:14] within the new leisure centre.  
  
They won an award, allegedly, over the way they carried on the consultation. It took years and it was massively a bother to build the bloody thing, but anyway, they ran this award and I went to the launch of it.  
  
Then – I can’t remember, the estate is next door to it – but I said to them about that, so “What was the consultation?” and it’s like “Well, we didn’t talk to them. We just talked to the people that were using the centre” and that’s part of the problem, isn’t it?  
  
It’s that often things are done in isolation. So the primary school, when they did their consultation on extending the primary school, they did a bit of stuff with some of the parents and they contacted the Woodberry Down Families group but they didn’t talk to \_\_\_[1:08:08], they didn’t talk to Barclays, they didn’t talk to the council regeneration team.  
  
People do too much stuff in silence.

Elaine: Also, I didn’t add at the meeting the other night, but I attended the primary school, yes and I know that is a very nice looking building, it is. In recent years it’s been listed. There were things in there taken from the Festival of Britain, there’s the statue entirely.  
  
But in their wisdom, they just pained the front of the school white, although the building was listed, with complete disregard because once it’s done- I mean, they agreed with my objection that it should be painted like that, English Heritage or something, I got a letter saying it will be looked in to. It’s been painted.   
  
Now someone has got to maintain it for a start and it detracts from the original building and now they’re going ahead with – well, they’ve applied in planning to do things – without consulting people.

Interviewer: Is that true? You said you hadn’t yet pushed for any sort of involvement in the governance on the east reservoir. The consultation on that? Was the estate involved in that?

Respondent 3: Yes. Deborah Woodco, yes. [Crosstalk 1:09:29]. And they’ve done stuff with PACT Project, haven’t they? And Gloria has done a lot of stuff with PACT. She’s well interested in the estate she’s been pushing.  
  
So of all the stuff that the \_\_\_ said to do, I think the PACT project has been one of the most successful ones. But we haven’t talked about the \_\_\_[1:09:55].

Elaine: I think the London Wildlife Trust have got a very good record in wildlife conservation. I mean, \_\_\_, I would say in that respect. But I don’t know about managing cafés and funding. I mean, I don’t know. Or how accessible some of that is. It becomes a different sort of game \_\_\_[1:10:29]. I don’t know.

Jeff: Sorry if I have to pull out, we’ve got a meeting at one so I’ve got this- I don’t know if you want to look at any of this.

Interviewer: Yes I do, very much then, please.

Jeff: Which is the Save the Reservoir \_\_\_ are newsletters here. Well, these are newsletters produced by the New River Action Group and this is The Lea, you see.

Interviewer: Yes, of course, which is brilliant.

Jeff: Which is brilliant. So if you want to look at these-