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Interviewer: Okay. \_\_\_[00:00:03], can we start with you introducing yourself, and your role here at the Wetlands.

Respondent: Okay, my name’s \_\_\_, I’m the … What’s my name now? I was a Team Leader; I’m a Performance Manager of the Ranger Team at Walthamstow Reservoirs.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit about what that job involves?

Respondent: It involves managing public access on the site, which currently is, although it’s not restricted to, but it’s mainly birdwatching and angling. We do allow non-birdwatchers to walk around the site as well, but, yes.

Interviewer: And how does that manifest on a day-to-day basis? What does it mean, interacting with the anglers and the birders, and other people?

Respondent: We’re just mainly a point of contact, or a presence on the site which is specifically to deal with the public, whereas a lot of the Thames Water employees are operational-based, and they’ve got their own jobs to do, so they don’t interact with members of the public on-site. So, yes, it’s just basically as the … We’re the sort of buffer between the company and the members of the public, so we pass across information about what’s happening where and when, and safety. We patrol the site to make sure people aren’t doing things that they shouldn’t be doing, and we also manage permit sales as well. Access at the moment is through a permit system, so visitor permits, and angling permits.

Interviewer: Okay. They can be daily?

Respondent: Daily, seasonal, yes. We do a birdwatching season ticket, and we do season tickets for the angling, as well; or you can just buy day tickets for both of those activities.

Interviewer: Okay, and how much are they?

Respondent: Birdwatching, currently, a birdwatching/visitor ticket is £1 for the day, and £10 for a season ticket, which lasts 12 months from the day you purchase.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: The fishing tickets vary because we offer different things on different reservoirs, but the fly fishing, we offer a six-fish ticket which is £30, a four-fish ticket which is £25, and a two-fish ticket which is £20. There’s also concession prices for those tickets, which are the same number of fish but £5 reduced across the board. That’s fly fishing. We do coarse fishing for the day, which is £15 for the day. A concession is £10, and a half-day evening ticket is £8, and then the season ticket prices vary for the coarse fishing depending on what reservoirs you need on your ticket. The whole complex is £385 for one year, and you can fish all the reservoirs, all the coarse fishing reservoirs. The fly fishing ticket is £350 for 75 fish, which lasts a year.

Interviewer: Can you talk to me a little bit about the people that use it at the moment? Who are the current users?

Respondent: Mainly anglers, and a … Yes, mainly anglers, fly fisherman, and coarse fisherman.

Interviewer: And what sort of numbers are we talking about?

Respondent: Over the course of a year we estimate we sell 10,000 permits, between 10 and 12,000 permits. Some of those permits will be season ticket holders, and they’ll have repeat visits, so it’s quite difficult to quantify that; but a conservative estimate, I’d say we have 20,000 visits a year, including repeat visits from season ticket holders.

Interviewer: And that’s solely on the angling … ?

Respondent: No, that will include birdwatching as well, yes.

Interviewer: Okay, and if you could describe the sort of users that you’ve got, so you said they’re very specific in terms of angling, or birdwatching, and a little bit of general visitors.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: If you had to describe the sort of people that use the sites, are there any trends?

Respondent: Well, yes. Okay, so coarse fisherman tend to be, if we’re looking at … They tend to be working-class males. That’s quite a generalisation, but in general they are all working-class, and sort of like tradesmen, a lot of them. The fly fisherman tend to be a little bit more middle-class, as you could expect; but not solely. There’s a good mix with the fly fisherman. The birdwatchers are quite a big mix, to be honest. Mainly middle class people. More often than not, male.

The recreational visitors are a broad section of people, mainly, also, on the weekends we’ll get most of our people coming in for a walk, that aren’t specifically birdwatching or fishing, and they can be families, couples just out for a walk that have heard about the site, yes. Again, mainly White British people use the site.

Interviewer: Okay. In your introduction, you were talking about making … You talked about your role in terms of safety and personal information, but you also spoke about preventing people from behaving in a way that they shouldn’t behave. What does that mean?

Respondent: Okay, so in the summer we get swimmers. People swimming in the reservoirs. We also get children, young people gaining access and vandalising Thames Water assets like life buoys around reservoirs, breaking windows, and that sort of stuff. Anti-social behaviour that you can get, particularly around the school holiday times and summer periods, where there’s long hours of daylight and it’s warm and pleasant outside. To be fair, because there’s someone on-site all the time, and it’s not obviously a park, it’s fenced all the way around, there’s very little crime we have on-site, I.E, thefts, and violence, and muggings and stuff. That’s never happened whilst I’ve been here, as yet.

Occasionally we have had to call the police in the past, where we’ve had people with mental health issues coming in off the street, and managing those sorts of incidents, yes.

Interviewer: How long have you worked on the site?

Respondent: I’ve been here 14 years.

Interviewer: So, they’re the sort of behaviours that you’re having to deal with if you’re trying to prevent people from doing that.

Respondent: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: I guess that leads us on to questions around how the site will be used once it’s opened up, and what sort of activities will be encouraged on the site, and then what sort of activities will be discouraged on the site; and I wonder if you can talk about that, in your perspective, as a … ?

Respondent: Yes, from my perspective, from my understanding, I think the activities are going to remain wholly the same; birdwatching, walking, angling, those activities are what we’re aiming towards. I think access is going to be made a lot easier, because there’s going to be two new entrances; one at the north end of the site, and one at the southern end of the site, which all of us, and particularly the rangers and also Thames Water staff, and our current users are quite nervous about, because currently there’s only one point of access, which is here, and there’s usually someone around this area so we can see and manage who’s coming on and off of site, so any sort of anti-social behaviour we can spot before they get on-site.

With the new entrances, I think a concern for everybody, including London Wildlife Trust, is these weak areas where people are now going to be encouraged to access the site; but there isn’t going to be necessarily members of staff there to oversee that and to make sure that it’s the right sort of people and activities that are going to be occurring. So, a bit worried about people coming in on scramblers, or quadbikes, or fly-tipping, those sort of behaviours, really, which up until now, the way it’s managed, it’s worked, because there’s this one point of access.

Interviewer: In terms of the way that the figures around the increased numbers are going from this approximately 20,000 to up to 100.

Respondent: A hundred, yes.

Interviewer: What behaviours are you hoping for on the site? You’re going to have a group of people that potentially, increasingly, are more of the recreational visitors that you’ve had a small amount of up until now. How are you hoping that people will use the site, and experience the site?

Respondent: I’m hoping that they’ll just go for walks, really. Maybe sit down and have a bit of lunch somewhere if they can, a picnic, and take their rubbish away with them. Like I say, there’s really not that much more that you could do with the site as far as activities … Or maybe there is, maybe I’m being narrow-minded, but I just imagine there’ll be an increase in the amount of visitors walking around the site, birdwatchers. I don’t think we’ll have an increase in anglers, because I don’t think the project is geared up for that. It’s more-so to promote access for walking and recreation, along those lines; but I can’t see there’s going to be … I’d be surprised if there’s going to be a massive increase in sporting activities on the site.

Potentially we might have some joggers using the site, to run through the site, which we don’t allow at the moment, and an increase in families with young children, because currently there’s an age-restriction on the site, which is no children under eight.

Interviewer: Yes, okay.

Respondent: But, yes, I just foresee the activities, particularly the birdwatching and the recreational visiting, just that number going up.

Interviewer: Do you anticipate, or are you concerned about any potential tensions between the different users?

Respondent: Yes, I am. It has happened in the past where we have people not understanding of angling practices, that get upset with fisherman because they’ve caught a fish and taken it out of the water, and are having their photo taken with it; and also, fisherman aren’t always the easiest people to get along with. Sometimes they’ve got right on their side, they’re perfectly in their rights to be grumpy because someone’s disturbed their angling; but other times they can be quite anti-social, the noise, and where they leave their fishing equipment laying around, that sort of stuff.

One of my concerns is how the angling and the existing users are going to interact with the new users, and any conflicts that may arise because of that, I.E. anti-social behaviour from both sides, and how that’s managed.

Interviewer: How do you think that might be managed? How might that potential hot flashpoint be overcome?

Respondent: In my mind, it would be good to have clearer areas for angling, areas for birdwatching, and then potentially dual-use areas where both of those things can go on. I think we’re going to have to manage it as problems arise in the first instance, and try and work around those issues with all the user groups, really, and try to make everybody happy, which would be impossible, but, yes. Certainly restrictions on areas where people can fish, where they can’t fish, and also restrictions on areas where people are encouraged to go walking, and not. That sort of stuff.

Interviewer: And is that planned?

Respondent: I don’t think, so not really.

Interviewer: Not to the degree that you would have hoped?

Respondent: Not really, no. I think, at the moment, it depends who you talk to, but the council have, or London Borough of Waltham Forest have a vision of opening the site up to everybody, no restrictions anywhere, go where you want, do what you want, whenever, because that fits their remit of opening up the borough. I’m guessing HLF probably feel quite the same, but they’ll be led whichever direction that they’re advised to go on.

The London Wildlife Trust, I think, probably wouldn’t mind a few restrictions, because it helps what they’re trying to achieve; at the same time, I don’t think they’d want too many, and similarly with the angling. The anglers wouldn’t want too many restrictions on their fishing, but they’d probably be quite happy to restrict other members of the public walking around, so I think it’s a tricky one. I think that’s going to be … I’m hoping that because the site is already open to the public, we already have visitors and families, and it’s not like we’re inviting a completely new user group in. These people already use the site, maybe in lower levels, smaller numbers; but I’m hoping that, I just think it will continue to work as it has done, but maybe the frequency of the incidents where we have conflict, that may rise a little bit. So, at the moment, we might get two or three conflicts in a year between a bird watcher and an angler. We don’t get very many, to be fair.

Interviewer: Approximately.

Respondent: Approximately, but that number may just slightly increase. We might notice it a bit more.

Interviewer: In terms of, you’ve brought me nicely onto, I guess the aims of the different parties. This is quite an interesting partnership of stakeholders involved in bringing this to, opening up an amazing space, to the general public in a more explicit way. What do you think their different objectives are in coming together to try and achieve that? You’ve already hinted at- [Crosstalk 00:16:31]

Respondent: Yes, like I say, the borough, London Borough of Waltham Forest, as I said, is interested in opening up the site to access with very few restrictions. They want it to be a good new story for the local borough, and to be seen to be adding open space to their borough, and I think that’s a good aspiration. Whether or not a reservoir, a working reservoir site is the right place to do that, is another debate; but it’s what they’ve got here, and there isn’t anywhere else. I think Thames Water … Thames Water’s reasons for doing it, I think the site needed some investment, and on its own Thames Water couldn’t supply that investment, and also wasn’t capable of obtaining the charitable funding that the project could get using the borough as a partner, but also politically I think it stands Thames Water in good stead. It’s a good new story. Reputationally, it’s good for the business.

London Wildlife Trust, I think this is the biggest project that’s ever landed on their doorstep, and they’re quite rightly excited and pleased to be part of the project. This is going to really get London Wildlife Trust known in this area, certainly.

Interviewer: That sort of takes us onto, I guess, questions around what you think the implications of this, being a privately owned site, are? Because it’s not like a public park, or isn’t a public park, so what is the implication, I guess in terms of management, but also people’s experiences of the park, as a function of it being privately owned?

Respondent: I think the tricky thing is the operational aspect of the site, it being still Thames Waters. So, potentially there could be areas or reservoirs that are drained, or bits of reservoirs that need repair, and so it’s going to be managing the operational side of Thames Waters business with the public access side of the project. It’s something, the fishery, we’ve had to deal with for as long as I’ve been here, and for a long time before, is that the operational processes take precedent over any of the … Certainly in the past, over the fishery’s requirements, and also, I’m guessing going forwards, over the Wetlands. Although, I think, obviously, whereas before the Fishery, there was three of us with quite a small voice; now the Wetlands is going to be a bigger organisation, more people, a bigger voice, and I think operations will have to work with the Wetlands a bit more than they have in the past with the fisheries, where we just get told “Sorry, can’t.” You’re draining a reservoir a day before we’re opening, on the opening day of the season. You could have done this in winter. “Oh, well it’s not our problem, it’s operations.” That’s what we’ve been told in the past. I think, going forwards, I think operations will have to take notes and listen to the Wetlands a little bit more. I’m not saying they will, and if there is an overriding business reason for doing work, that will always come first over the management of the site, the wildlife.

Interviewer: Do you think that will affect, also, the role for yourself and your team, as representatives of a particular way of using the site? Did you think that affects your voice and your impact on that?

Respondent: It’s difficult to say. At the moment, when it comes down to public access, the company usually asks our opinion on it. I think what potentially will happen is, we maybe bypass a little bit, and it would go to the Wetlands manager, who then might filter it down to us; but obviously, I think in the current scheme, the rangers are going to remain Thames Water employees, so it might remain very similar. We’ve got good working relationships with the other Thames Waters operational people that control the premises here, so it may well be that operations will still come through the rangers to pass messages on a little bit, to make sure things are being done how operations would like to see.

I think the actual site management, how it’s managed, is changing; particularly with the London Wildlife Trust being on board, they’re quite keen to take over the grounds’ maintenance in certain areas. I think in the past that’s been a problem where we’ve had areas which are particularly good habitats for wildlife, and then we’ll get massive flail come in on the side of the tractor, and clean it all off. But the reason for that is that they’re operational reservoirs, and they need to see the workings of the banks, and I think that will, I think the way they work together …

Interviewer: Do you anticipate that being a negotiation as it opens up, and the two different interests rub along?

Respondent: Yes, I think they’ve already gone through plans for the grounds work contractors, that they go through, and London Wildlife Trust has already looked through those and suggested areas that could be left to grow natural and wild, and other areas … I think, yes, you’re right. It’s a negotiation. I think there’ll be areas which, as far as the operations side of the business, are off limits, that need to be cut. There’ll be no compromise in those areas, whereas other areas they’ll be able to compromise and find a way to work together, hopefully.

Interviewer: Yes, okay. Do you think it affects the opening up of more general public access, and it becoming a managed LWT Wetlands, do you think it affects the identity of the site?

Respondent: I think it’s going through a rebranding. I think that’s potentially the biggest thing that’s going to happen, is the rebranding of the site, and it being advertised, and the new stories about the site, those sort of things. I think that will certainly bring more people to the site that otherwise would not have heard about it. So, yes, I think the identity is changing. Previously it was Walthamstow Fisheries, and it’s not going to be Walthamstow Wetlands, and that’s quite a big change as far as identity is concerned, and also alludes to different activity going on the site as well, so we’re changing use. Yes.

Interviewer: How do existing users feel about that shift in identity?

Respondent: Across the board, and it’s not just fisherman; none of them are happy. That’s including birdwatchers that have birded here for 20 or 30 years. I think one person’s comment was, “Oh, it’s going to be bloody like Thorpe Park.” And I think that’s a major concern for people that currently use the site, because the people that already use the site are happy with what they get from it, and no-one really likes change that much, and they just see doom and gloom ahead of them, and everything’s going to be different. I don’t think it’s quite as simple as that, but I can understand their feelings, particularly a birdwatcher. The birdwatchers we get here are like your more keen birdwatchers, and I think they’re worried that an addition 80,000 people a year is going to affect their birdwatching. Yes.

I think the fisherman are worried about things, for example, like an increase in crime, because there’s additional gates, and the fisherman come with quite a lot of expensive fishing gear, and also disturbances to where they’re fishing, and generally more restrictions on where they can and can’t fish.

Interviewer: And of course, these users, as you said there, have been using this site, some of them for all their life.

Respondent: Fifty, sixty years. Yes. Yes, so it can be quite … Yes, absolutely, I think a lot of it, they’re emotionally attached to the site. Their fathers may have brought them here forty, fifty years ago. Yes, so there is …

Interviewer: Do you think it has an impact more broadly … You’ve spoken about that shift in identity; do you think it has an impact more broadly for wider local communities in terms of their sense of identity about the borough, or about their community?

Respondent: Yes, I think … I’ve got family, I’ve got a young family, and the school my children go to is at the other end of the site, it’s \_\_\_[00:26:58], school, and \_\_\_, lane is the back entrance to the site, which is where one of the new entrances is going to be, and a lot of the parents, the school, everyone’s really very excited about the project, because from that road at the moment, you can see the reservoirs through a fence, but there’s no entry, so everyone kind of walks past it on their way to the marshes. I think the residents and families at that end of the site are very positive and excited about it being opened up. Some of those reasons might be to do with their property prices increasing, but, quite cynical.

I think, and certainly from this end, it’s a tricky one, because we’ve got Waltham Forest in that direction; to the east and west is [Harringay 00:27:51]. The type of people that live in Waltham Forest, at this end of Waltham Forest, are very different to the Harringay; Harringay, it’s very working class, and social housing, whereas on the Waltham Forest side you’ve got terraced houses, with three to five bedroom terraced houses with middle-class families, which are, at the moment, I think the project is reaching that group of people very well. It’s exciting them. They read the local newspapers, they follow the news, they see what’s happening. I think the people living in the social housing, more working class, maybe on benefits; I don’t think the message is getting to those people as much, and maybe that’s partly because they don’t read local newspapers, and maybe they’re not as interested in open space and wildlife as … Bit of a generalisation, I’m not saying they’re all like that, but I think as a whole, I think you notice that here.

Interviewer: Well, I guess there’s a couple of questions there. How do you overcome that failure to access that group?

Respondent: That’s a tricky one. That’s London Wildlife Trust’s job, I think. I’m guessing, get schools, because a school is a place where you don’t have those boundaries between class so much, middle, working class. You get all sorts of children in the same class, and I think you can get a message across to everybody. I think potentially, if you’re going to try and engage the people in Harringay a bit more, then I’m not sure, maybe some leaflets in the flats to let people know what’s going on. Maybe invite them to an open day.

It’s a tricky one, I’m not too sure. It’s not my field of expertise, but I think some thought needs to go into that, how to get those type of people on the site, because actually, I think those working classes and people in social housing, and stuff, I think they potentially have the most to gain from enjoying the site, and getting out and experiencing some open space; which otherwise they might not be able to do.

Certainly some of the parents that go to my kids’ school have got houses in Wales, and they go on holiday to. Actually, having this bit more extra open space isn’t going to make that much difference to them; whereas some of the kids that you see couldn’t tell you the difference between a Robin and a Blue-tit. I think they’re the people that we really need to be trying to get on site, and letting them know about it, really.

Interviewer: You’ve spoken very eloquently there about benefits that people get from the site. Can you talk a little bit more about what you think? You’ve been here for a long time, and you can see how people are using the space, so I’m thinking that you probably have some clear feelings on how people can benefit from the site?

Respondent: Well, I think benefits is just, it’s a tricky one. I think people obviously get enjoyment from being outdoors and doing an activity, so there’s health benefits. There’s also psychological benefits because you’re outdoors. You can get a new perspective on life, you can see species of wildlife you wouldn’t necessarily see in your back garden or down the main road here in London. You also get a perspective of London which you wouldn’t normally get, where you don’t have buildings surrounding you. You get to see a bit of a horizon, a sunrise and a sunset, which often, you may see the sun setting, but it will drop behind a building. Suddenly you get an expansive view, and that can be quite good psychologically, I think, sometimes, because it’s just a little bit of release and freedom.

My first year here it was very strange for me, because growing up in north London, and not really seeing a horizon very often; suddenly you’ve got this vista. I used to get, not a headache, but it used to hurt my head a little bit that we’ve got all this to look at, and, yes. I described this place to my colleague, who’s from Essex, as, “It’s a bit like the countryside.” And he burst out laughing, because it was like, “This is nothing like the countryside.”

Interviewer: (Laughter)

Respondent: I was like, “No, but it is for a Londoner.” Once you’re on the reservoirs, and you’re in the middle of it, and you can barely hear any road noise; maybe a siren or two. For a Londoner, it is very much like the countryside, and I think it’s from your perspective; but yes, he still laughs at me for saying that.

Interviewer: But it is a unique space in London.

Respondent: Yes, absolutely. I’m not sure how many of the other green spaces in London compare to this in size. I’m guessing only Hampstead Heath is close, and that’s in west London anyway; this is east London, an area where the demograph of the population could really do with something like this. Something that they’ve always had, but they’ve never utilised, possibly because the knowledge of access, how they gain access, and maybe also some of the restrictions that the company have placed on people using the site, so no bicycles, no children under eight. Discourage any sort of jogging. Yes, so public access has been allowed up until now, if you’re conforming to two or three different activities, and of course fishing, fly fishing or birdwatching.

It’s not solely that. We do sell permits to families on the weekends to go for a walk, and I think the moment you try to take some money off of someone for going into your site, it kind of changes the outing a little. I think some people resent that, and some people don’t mind paying £1 at all and think it’s a good idea; but I think that restricts, certainly, people with less income coming onto the site. Particularly if it’s a family, a large family; it’s going to cost them £10 for \_\_\_[00:35:09]. In the grand scheme of things, £10 isn’t much for a day out, but if you haven’t got anything, which a lot of the people in the area don’t, then it makes it too expensive to do.

Interviewer: Yes, and therefore \_\_\_[00:35:22], think of it as an option for them.

Respondent: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: Yes, okay. Are there any benefits … We started, and I was explaining that as a national project, we’re really interested particularly in how we, as people, as citizens, use water and experience water, and I wondered if you thought or if you have any feelings that there is something specific about this being a water-based site?

Respondent: Not really, I mean obviously, because it is a water-based site, it’s encouraged and facilitated angling in the past.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: And then obviously, because of the water-based, and the species, bird life, and fauna, plant life that we have on-site, it encourages various different species of birds. We’re nationally renowned for breeding populations of Pochards, and Tufties, and those sorts of things. Herons, and various other species. I think that takes us in a direction, really, that we’ve gone in, and which we’re going to, even with the Wetlands, going to continue to go. Yes, I can’t see … Unless you were going to turn it into a water-sports thing, I can’t really see anywhere else it would go. There’s not enough land amongst the reservoirs to do other activities, it’s quite restricted. Most of the land on this site is actually open water. Well, not land, but you know, open spaces, open water, with smaller strips of land around the edges joining the reservoirs.

Interviewer: Does that bring any particular values? Does that bring any particular appreciation of water, do you think?

Respondent: I don’t know, difficult to say. I think certainly … I think what it does is, when you’re on the site, it makes you think about why the reservoirs are there, what purpose do they serve, who benefits from the reservoir. Why do we have these big open bits of water? And then when you learn that they’re there to supply drinking water, then that’s something interesting, and a lot of people in London don’t realise where their water comes from, but I think that’s … Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think, because there will be the education … Indoor and outdoor education facilities, and some of that will be around this being an operational site, and about it being … Do you need to get that?

Respondent: Yes, let me just … Hello \_\_\_[00:38:18]. Yes, I’m in a meeting. Why? \_\_.

END AUDIO

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Interviewer: Yes so they’ll be indoor and outdoor education space and some of that will be around the role of Thames Water and how Thames Water use it, and how it results in drinking water.

Do you think that will affect, in any way, a more sustainable relationship with water, for visitors?

Respondent: Yes, I think they’ll think it’s a perfect opportunity for Thames Water to get those messages across and to get people to think about their water usage.

I think that’s one of Thames Water’s ambitions from the project, is to get that message across to people. I think that’s an important message. It’s a perfect opportunity to get that message across.

You know, how water works and the cycle and the processes that go into producing water and also the cost of producing water and the implications that that brings up from wasting water as well.

Also the benefits as well, of drinking tap water, the company will be quite keen to get across to people. With it being cost effective and the cleanliness of it, to get that message across to people, could actually help a lot of people on low incomes who continually buy bottled water. Because maybe culturally they’re used to doing that and from where they lived in the past, they believe that tap water is not good to drink.

The water that comes out of your tap, is a pharmaceutical grade product and yes, I think those sort of messages would be good to get across to people. That’s where the project will give them that form to do that.

Interviewer: So we’ve spoken about the benefits, and we have spoken about some of the tensions before, I know that, but do you think there is a risk of dis-benefits?

Respondent: Well the biggest one, is the impact that an increase in visitors, the project is discussing and aiming for really. And the impact that that’s going to have, on the wildlife that currently uses the site.

I think Natural England are going to be doing some studies along those lines, to see if the increase in number of visitors has had a detrimental effect on breeding birds and other wildlife that uses the site.

Interviewer: Any other social dis-benefits? Are there disadvantages?

Respondent: I wouldn’t say so, not really. Increase number of conflicts were between users on the site, I think that potentially and then also anti-social behaviour and managing that. I think that’s going to be the tricky thing.

And also, I guess the only other thing is risk of death. (Laughter) and I know it sounds a bit doom and gloom but we have had people fall in the reservoirs and die in the past.

Luckily not whilst I’ve been here and I think obviously encouraging the age restrictions, I think that potentially, is a huge risk and I think it’s been pushed to the side line, because to manage it, they can’t do that project, in my opinion.

You know, it wouldn’t’ be the same project, if you had to take that into proper consideration. So, I think that’s where we are at the moment.

The reason Thames has a restriction on children under 8 is because some young children died in the reservoirs, when they shouldn’t have been allowed on site.

Also the no bicycles or pushchairs or prams in case they accidently roll down the reservoir press into the reservoir.

I think the reason why we’ve got to this point, where we can be seen as restrictive to access, is because of this ultimate risk of people dying on site.

I think the projects wanted people to move away from those sort of restrictions and open the site up, but I think along with that comes increased risk of activities, around large bodies of deep, open water.

Interviewer: Obviously this sort of thing came up during the consultation?

Respondent: It did yes, particularly from us and Thames Water but it was paid lip service basically, it wasn’t really taken on board. They thought we were being harbingers of doom. (Laughter)

It’s difficult for us, because we’re seen as the people that don’t want change and we’ve had to fight that from the beginning.

Certainly myself, I’m accepting that there is going to be change but it’s getting it right and not just doing something because it looks good on a postcard or on the back of a newspaper.

That’s been a bit of a struggle to be fair.

Interviewer: Can we talk a little bit more about the consultation process and what that involved?

Respondent: Well they had public consultations for the anglers and the bird watchers. The bird watchers and the fly fishermen, they turned up to their consultations. The coarse anglers, which are by far and away our largest user group, didn’t turn up to the first one, not a single one.

Partly because the fly fishermen are organised into a club and have been for the last 20 or 30 years or even longer. So they‘ve got a structure there, they’ve got an organisation that they can go to, voice their concerns and then they’ve come back to us. So they had all that in place.

The course fishing here, they’ve never had a club, as such and the nature of coarse fishermen is they are a little bit more sort of selfish in their pursuit.

So they don’t like clubs as much, coarse fishermen will go and do their own thing, go fishing by themselves or with a friend.

You’re usually fishing against everybody else around you because you want to catch the biggest one that no one else has caught.

Whereas fly fishing, they’re more keen to help others. There’s not that much difference between the fish they’re catching, so it’s just a more open, it’s just a different type of fishing really.

Interviewer: And therefore attracts and encourages different behaviours?

Respondent: Yes and no. The fly fishing is quite an active activity, you’re out, and you’re moving around, you’re fishing always. The coarse fishing here tends to be, you set up where you’re fishing, you put a bed out and you lay down until your alarm makes a noise and you’ve got a fish.

Although they’re both fishing, they’re two very different styles of fishing. So yes, they attract different people. I know guys that do both and then I know people that used to coarse fish and started fly fishing and they’re like “Oh I could never go back and do that again”

And then other times, sometimes the fly fishermen get a bit older, they can’t move around as easily, then they go back to coarse fishing. It’s kind of a bit of a mix.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Respondent: So the coarse fishermen didn’t turn up at all, to the first one. Then between the first consultation and the second consultation, they opened up a Facebook page which has just got 3000 or 5000 members now and suddenly they started.

I wouldn’t call them an organised group, they’re more like a rabble of people on Facebook throwing opinions around. But suddenly there was a forum where you could get messages across to everybody and they had a second consultation. And even that wasn’t very well attended, but half a dozen people turned up to it.

But we’re still getting questions now, from coarse fishermen, saying “What’s all this work going on, on the Two and the Three?” because they’re out of the loop.

And also, let’s be honest, there’s not much signage up telling people what’s going on. Which I would have thought would be a minimum requirement, to a site that’s already open to the public.

I would have thought there would have been a notice board here by now explaining the project, what we’re going to be doing, when. But there’s none of that.

It’s almost like the project is seeing this as a blank canvas and there aren’t already users on the site. That’s the way I see it, and potentially that’s because that means they don’t have to engage with those users, which could be difficult.

But also, it’s been that struggle from the very beginning and when you hear the project being described as “Oh we’re opening up this area”

That kind of gets your back up a little bit, because we’ve been open always. We’ve always been open, you just had to find out how to get in. You could have saved all of that money and just put an advert in the local press and said “Look we’re open” then it would be done.

Obviously, we wouldn’t have the facilities and the additional habitats and stuff but I think the project- particularly the council, has seen it as, it’s better for the borough, to be seen as ‘Opening up an area that has never been open before’.

It’s a better headline, a better soundbite, to say “We’ve opened this up” when actually, you’re just investing in a site that’s already been opened and has already got quite a lot of history of people using the site for various activities.

Interviewer: And what about your involvement and your team’s involvement in the consultation. What has that been?

Respondent: I’ve been the working supervisor, I’ve been involved in decisions and consultation up to a certain level. So parts of the project will be that my managers see as affecting the fishery will be passed down to me, for a comment on and depending on that comment, some of it’s taken on board, other bits are sort of risk managed.

So they’ll look at it and go “Yes well, this is a big concern for the fishery but in the project, this is much more important that this happens”

They make compromises over the decision. I haven’t had any decisions to make, it’s just how well I’ve been able to put the fisheries’ point of view across, to build a case.

So then my managers and also the people leading the project and also the project managers can take that on board.

It’s not good enough to say “Oh we don’t like that” so you have to build a case and explain why we don’t like that, what impact it’s going to have to the business.

Certainly in key areas, when we’ve managed to financially show them that it wouldn’t be helpful to the fishery then they’ve taken on board, those suggestions as much as they can.

Not so much so, I’d say, when it’s been health and safety and that sort of stuff. Like I mentioned earlier, it’s been not skipped over, but kind of seen as we’re just being awkward.

But ultimately I think that’s decisions for people higher up, health and safety implications of allowing more people on and off the site.

The rangers will just work to rules that we’re kind of told and if something bad happens, then that’s someone else’s decision that’s taken that on board, to open the site up and allow children under 8 on site and bicycles and all the other activities.

Somebody else is going to be taking that decision and responsibility really.

Interviewer: Yes, what about things like, your knowledge of the site and the more sort of cultural and social things that you have, that you can share with people. Have you been asked to share any of that?

Respondent: Not so much at the moment, but I feel with the London Wildlife Trust and certainly the people that I know in the organisation at the present, I can see a good working relationship with them.

I supported London Wildlife Trust’s bid to be the partner…

Interviewer: [Crosstalk 00:14:29]

Respondent: Basically. So obviously, I’ve put as much pressure on my managers and decision makers that they were the right people, as much as I could and I think it wasn’t just down to me. Other people in the business wanted London Wildlife Trust.

I think for the fishery, having a partner like the RSPB wouldn’t have helped us at all and actually I’d worked with David at Woodberry Downs in the past and so I think we already had that working relationship.

And moving that forwards, we may not be on the same sheet, but I think we’re not too far from it and I think we can work together as a fishery and London Wildlife Trust.

They’ll be conflicts and they’ll be compromises, but I don’t think it will be a matter of “Well this is our wetlands, we’re going to do what we want” I think there will be that dialogue.

Male 1 (Aside): You’ll have to summarise that maybe in a quote.

Interviewer: That’s brilliant. Let me check, what the time is.

Respondent: We have got a bit more time, it’s half past and I’ve got until two.

Interviewer: Let me just double check.

Male 2: Would you like a biscuit? Hi guys.

Interviewer: Hi, how are you?

Respondent: It is that time of year, look. Where suddenly you need a…

Male 2: Yes it’s that time of year do you get little presents and stuff?

Respondent: Of course we do yes.

Male 2: Sorry to interrupt, are you going through the questions?

Interviewer: Yes. Dave has already been through them. We didn’t come to blows, we were alright.

[Crosstalk 00:16:13] (Laughter)

Interviewer: \_\_\_, you can’t get \_\_\_ of those quick enough. (Laughter)

Male 2: \_\_\_. Can I have a cup of tea as well, are you alright?

Respondent: I’ll have a black coffee, please.

Interviewer: I’m fine thank you.

Respondent: You need to pour that away Dave, I’ll give you that one.

Interviewer: Let’s just double check we’ve got everything.

We did speak about how you want people to behave on the site, but I wondered about people’s responsibilities on the site.

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: Whether you feel like they should have particular responsibilities, either to care for the site-

Respondent: Yes, absolutely. And that’s something that we tried to get across to the existing users as well. If they see something happening that shouldn’t be.

It might be anti-social behaviour or people with poor angling practice. There’s no point coming back at the end of the day or in some cases, three days later “Oh we saw this happening” and no one did anything about it.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: And I think taking responsibility for those actions and informing members of staff is very important because we don’t know these things are happening until you tell us often, so let us know and we can manage the site properly.

Similarly, yes I think people need to take responsibility for their own rubbish, in a way, other people’s rubbish as well. If a fisherman finds that’s there’s rubbish laying everywhere then just pick it up and if they don’t want to take it home with them, let us know, we’ll come and collect it. But yes, just general wellbeing of the site.

If they see water flowing from the side of a reservoir, where it shouldn’t be, then hopefully they’d let us know. You can never be sure, they’d probably sit on it and try to catch a fish. (Laughter)

Yes, so I think that’s something that we not struggle with, but is an issue now. As I said, you know, quite often we get people come in and they say “Last week there was this person doing this”

And it’s like “Well you need to let us know when it’s happening and then we can manage that properly”

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Yes, I think it’s just general caring for the site and what’s happening.

Interviewer: How do you encourage people to do that at the moment then, and how do you think that will be encouraged in the future?

Respondent: Usually, it’s verbally. So we have got a group of volunteers that walk around on the weekends occasionally or whenever they can get a bit of time.

So they’ll let you know if anything’s happening on site, but also as incidents occur, once that’s happened once, that they tell you that three days later. You say to them “Look do you not have our mobile number? Give us a call, let us know and we’ll come and manage it”

“Oh we didn’t know you’d do that” “Yes we will” so it’s just getting that message across to people that are on site and using it.

Also in some ways, I try to stay out of it, but Facebook as well. Because what will happen is, now they’ll see that someone’s left some rubbish and they won’t tell us, they’ll go and put it on Facebook.

And it’s like “Oh the site’s a disgrace, there’s rubbish everywhere” and actually they’ll just take a photograph of a small area where there’s a bit of rubbish and then that whole discussion comes up.

So in a way, it’s not ideal because a lot of the views are just ridiculous. But eventually someone with a bit of common sense, will put on there “Well let the rangers…” it gets across.

But as a Thames Water member of staff I try to stay away from the comments and stuff because you just get drawn into it, and because you feel emotional or passionate about the site, I might end up saying something I really don’t want to. (Laughter) So it’s nice to have.

There’s a few people on Facebook who we know are sort of ‘Friends of the Fishery’ and that would probably make more sense going forwards, as that gets bigger.

I think Dave is talking about having a ‘Friends of the Walthamstow Wetlands Group’

Maybe some of those people could be on the Walthamstow Reservoir’s Facebook page and when they see stuff like that, they can react to it and take the common sense approach to dealing with some of these issues

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But like I say, it’s very tricky sometimes, not to get dragged into it, because you see some ridiculous comments.

Interviewer: And this is Walthamstow Reservoir Facebook.

Respondent: It’s mainly coarse fishermen.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: They set it up, pretty much, I wouldn’t say it’s completely but the birders have their own sort of site, I think, I don’t think the birders use Twitter and that sort of stuff.

The fly fishermen don’t use it, that I know of, it’s just the coarse fishermen.

Interviewer: We’ve done responsibilities, we’ve done consultation. I mean, you’ve hinted at it a little bit, with going forward, making sure that the routes that people have to try and influence the site or make either yourselves or David and his team, aware of anything that was going on. How they might be involved in the governance.Do you see some obvious ways to help that happen?

Respondent: It’s a tricky one, it’s something which in the past, we’ve not encouraged, to have our anglers telling us how to manage the site.

But I think inevitably, that will happen a bit more, where we’re engaging with our customers more frequently and I can see that happening.

The other thing is about people getting their points of view across in a way that you can listen to them. Because often, our fishermen will kind of shout something at us, as we walk by.

And you can’t really use that for anything and it gets your back up, but I think that’s where the Walthamstow Fly Fishers Club… Because it’s all organised into a group and they’ve got that structure.

They’ve got people within that group who are capable of forming an argument without being offensive. (Laughter) and getting it across to you.

I mean, the bird watchers similarly, they can write letters and have that voice a little bit, although they’re not as prevalent as the Fly Fishing Club, partly because of their numbers here and they’re a little bit more individual in their pursuit.

The bird watchers often come in one or two, they don’t really want big groups of people. I think maybe the type of people that bird watching is popular for, are slight more loners.

People who kind of go out and do their own thing, whereas the fly fishermen are a bit more gregarious and like to go for a drink in the pub afterwards and they have annual events that they all join up and go to.

I think that’s the main difference between those two groups and then obviously the coarse fishermen, who just haven’t got themselves organised into a group to have their requests or their views heard as such.

Interviewer: Do you think there is a chance that they will respond and recognise that that absence of voice is partly a function of the absence of any sort of structure?

Respondent: I don’t know. They tried to get a group of them together, but I really don’t know. The silly thing is, there’s probably 10 times the amount of them as three are all the other groups, maybe even more than that.

They don’t have that will to do it. Like I explained earlier, the coarse fishing side of things, their motivations for doing it, are much more selfish than other pursuits.

Although they like the wildlife, the only thing they’re particularly interested in, is catching a particular fish and usually one of two species, generally here, that they’re after.

Whereas the bird watchers are obviously concerned about the habitat, and what’s the water quality and all those sorts of things because it affects the bird life.

And the fly fishermen, because they are already organised into a group have had a voice for a long time. So they don’t feel as though they need to.

I don’t know with the coarse fishing, it’s a tricky one. If they ever did, it would be the best thing they ever did, and also the worst- for us. (Laughter) I’ll be honest, so I’m not going to encourage it. If it happens naturally, it happens, but yes. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Pandora’s box. (Laughter)

Respondent: Yes, exactly.

Interviewer: Okay, I think my last questions, you’ve already slightly answered them, in terms of the current users and stake holders, because they’ve had a voice, have had the most influence over the process and this process has been going on for a long time.

But who would you see as having the strongest voice as in expressing…

Respondent: Of the current users?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: It would be the Walthamstow Fly Fishers’ Club, probably followed by the local birding community and then the coarse anglers.

Interviewer: Okay, I think…

[Background noise 00:27:35 - 00:27:49]

Interviewer: Oh my last one. So you’ve explained there why the coarse fishermen haven’t had the voice that they might have, given their numbers here.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Is there any other group that you feel have been missing, in terms of sharing their voice?

Respondent: I’d say local residents potentially, who aren’t anglers or bird watchers. But then again David might say “Oh no we consulted all the people in the local…”

I don’t know, that would have been outside of my knowledge of what’s happened. Obviously, I can only speak for the users that I know of on this site.

I have a sneaking suspicion London Wildlife Trust did consult residents and stuff. You’d have to ask them. (Laughter) “No we didn’t bother” (Laughter)

Interviewer: Okay.

Male 2: Are you recording that?

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter) I think that’s all my questions, thank you so much.

Respondent: No worries, yes.

END AUDIO

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