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START AUDIO

Interviewer: There’s no particular order to these and please feel free to come back to topics if you feel that you haven’t covered it, or something pops into your mind. Feel free to come back to that.

But one of the first things I wanted to concentrate on is your experience in volunteering. So I wondered if you could talk to me or describe to me your experience and motivations for volunteering here at Woodbury.

Male 1: I think I like it because it gets you closer to nature. I’ve always liked to be near water since I was a young boy. Since four I use to fish in the Lee Valley with my dad. And on a pit, at the time called the North Met Pit, I don’t know if you’ve heard of it; it used to be. And used to fish the river there at Kings Weir, all around those areas and then progressed and got the bus with some friends.

So I have always been near water. I find you tend to see nature, like Kingfishers, different types of birds and ducks. As you grow up, you get into that sort of thing and I think it’s good, places like this opening up for youngsters. They don’t seem to see anymore, these sorts of things going on. So I do think it’s a good thing that they are going to open this up for young people to walk around and actually observe nature.

Interviewer: Okay, lovely.

Female: I’m originally from Dorset, so I grew up in the countryside, fields and rivers outside my house, and [march 0:01:34] from the sea. And then I moved around since the age of 18 and just never really settled, city after city and finally settled in London. And just missed being able to be outdoors with nature and being able to do digging and being able to see things. And feel actually outside because you don’t always feel outside in the city.

So it was the loss of that and the want to actually have a home and part of home for me is being able to be outdoors.

Male 2: I can’t say that I really grew up around nature. I grew up in North London so a bit leafy but not a lot of nature there. But I wanted to get into conservation, basically. That was my main aim, looking for things where I can get some experience. And although this is not directly getting me there, it’s the same kind of things, being outside, being closer to nature, seeing lots of wildlife, like you said, around the water especially. There’s so much wildlife that I haven’t seen at all before I came here.

And helping some people who might be able to explain it as well, what it is. And doing, like you said, getting your hands dirty digging, being involved in that physical labour, is something I’m really looking forward to. And it’s also the only hangover cure I’ve found.

(Laughter)

Interviewer: That’s good honesty.

Male 3: So I have got the same reasons as well, but also for me, I find that I work a lot and so much time I feel like I spend a lot of time at work. And even though I live in a community I don’t really feel part of it. And coming here, in addition to the wildlife and the countryside and the hard labour, it is giving something back to the community that I feel is a problem for me.

Male 2: It builds the community.

Male 3: Yes.

Male 2: It’s a big part of it.

Interviewer: Do you come here every weekend?

Female: As much as I can, definitely.

Interviewer: Regularly, yes.

Female: Yes, nearly every weekend.

Male 3: I’d like to think I come every weekend, but the problem-

Male 2: It’s a fluid group of people.

Female: But you miss it when you don’t come, definitely. If you don’t come on a Saturday, you really feel it the next week-

Male 1: You feel guilty.

Female: It’s harder to get through when you haven’t had that day of being outside and doing the physical labour and seeing it. Yes, the community that we’ve got here, yes, the next week’s a lot harder.

Male 1: And even if it’s pouring with rain, you still seem to enjoy it, don’t you? It’s odd.

Interviewer: Roughly for how long have you been doing this volunteering here on this site?

Male 1: I’ve been her about eight months.

Male 4: Probably about three years.

Female: Just over a year.

Male 2: It will be about six months for me.

Interviewer: Okay.

Male 4: But I’ve always been interested in nature, birds especially, so that’s part of the appeal here. It’s also an extraordinary habitat for Central London. I’d heard about the place when I came to see it, I was actually blown away by that view across the water and the expanse of it. And the fact that, at the time, they had a bird viewing platform; there’s going to be a bird hide eventually, around the water. So that’s part of the appeal.

Also, the exercise aspect is much more enjoyable than going to the gym or swimming, which I also do, but that’s just up and down.

Male 1: You could do it here.

Male 4: I could, when it’s warmer.

Female: Yes, it’s a bit chilly at the moment.

Male 4: Yes. But, again, like Chris was saying, I work as an artist in a studio, so a lot of my week is spent in solitary. And it’s actually quite an enclosed studio space, so quite often I only hear people walking up and down the corridor outside my studio. Unless I have a chat with my next-door neighbour, I feel rather enclosed in there. And I really look forward to coming here on a Saturday. Yes, I would agree. It does have a sense of community to it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Female: I’m a teacher and I love my job, but it’s never done. You never finish the to-do list. You never complete it. You get home really late after a day at work and you think, “I still haven’t done anything. I’ve got so much to do.” Whereas, you come here, you plant a tree and you’ve planted it and it’s done. And you get so much more satisfaction. Or when I was scything the reeds and you can actually see what you’ve done with your day. Whereas with children, that progress, you see it but takes a lot of time and you don’t always know why you’re filling in paperwork but you always why you’re doing things.

Interviewer: Yes, okay. So a real sense of purpose that you take from being here and the work that you do here?

Male 4: And also, you mentioned time, but actually, for me, it expands time in an odd way. Today I’m only having a half-day because I’m in recovery, so it’s helped my hangover. But normally, a full day is a very long time from 11 o’clock in the morning but in a good way. So my perception of time is very different when I’m here than with any other day of the week.

Interviewer: That’s very interesting. And in terms of, if someone asked you in the pub and said, “Really, what is the one thing that you take away from being here, from doing what you do here?” Would there be one thing that you value above all else?

Male 1: I don’t know what it is. It’s just being close to nature on water, feeling the earth. I don’t know what it is.

Male 3: And it’s a beautiful place, as well.

Male 1: I’m unemployed but I was trying to get work at Walthamstow and I was directed down this route to do work here, which I’ve been doing and thoroughly enjoying. And maybe when we move on to Walthamstow, there’s a chance I can get part-time or permanent work.

Male 2: Yes, I think that connection to nature is quite important. For me, I work on Oxford Street, so it’s really, really intense, very busy all the time. I live in Whitechapel, so it’s very intense and busy all the time. So this is the one point where I get to feel a bit more grounded and gets you connected to living, almost, from these constant streams of people to a nice community and nature.

Female: It’s very rejuvenating. Whatever stresses you’ve had in your week, however busy it’s been, however horrible its gone, you come here and you feel rebuilt again, whether it’s for the day. And that’s part of the nature and that’s partly the people here.

Male 1: I only go home feeling refreshed.

Female: Yes, because it’s physically demanding but mentally it’s not.

Male 3: I would agree with that. My weeks can be pretty horrendous, then I get here and I forget for the four or five hours. But also, I think I also get a sense of achievement of, what else would I be doing on a Saturday? Probably lying around in my flat.

Male 1: \_\_\_[0:10:03].

(Laughter)

Female: But I do, I’d be so shattered on Saturday that I would have a lie-in until about 11:00am. And then you’d be tired and you’d potter around, and you wouldn’t achieve anything, so you come here, you still have a lie-in but you’re so productive. And you think, “Brilliant, I’ve done something with my weekend.” Being really productive, but you haven’t done anything stressful.

Male3: And you don’t need to plan your weekend as well. It’s Saturday and you wake up, it’s like, “I know what I’m doing,” and just go.

Female: Yes.

Interviewer: That’s great.

Male 4: I find it physically knackering. When I get home I fall asleep on the sofa but it’s still a good feeling, physically drained but you’ve been doing something constructive really. Whether it’s planting a tree, whatever it is, you’ve done a number of activities, which are quite pleasing in itself and leaving you with a good feeling.

Interviewer: No, that’s good. I want to move us on. You talk very passionately there, or you have, about why you’re here and what you get out of it. But I am sure there are times when you can’t come and I’m sure that there are people that would like to come and volunteer, or they wouldn’t even necessarily be aware of it. So I wondered if we could talk a little bit about the barriers to people coming and volunteering here. What might get in their way, both physical, mental or cultural?

Female: The weather possibly might put some people off, especially in the winter. You wake up and it’s raining and it’s cold, and you think, “I don’t think I want to spend my day outside.”

Male 4: Although the weather has a habit of improving on a Saturday, thankfully.

Female: Like today, a prime example.

Male 2: If it’s raining over water and I open the gates, and some-

(Laughter)

Female: Celestial.

Male 1: Perhaps sitting in the pub on Sunday lunchtime; I often go up on the Sunday lunchtime and I’ll I say, “I’m aching a bit from yesterday at work.” And they say, “But you do it for nothing, don’t you?” And I say, “Yes.” And they say, “How can you do that for nothing?” And I say, “You’ve got to come along to see what it’s like. It’s actually enjoyable.” Because it’s not all about money but people think that it is. \_\_\_[0:12:35] but it’s just fun.

Female: My colleagues don’t get it at all at work. They’re just, “It’s that what you want to do with your Saturday? Get muddy? But what about your free time?” And they see it as another job in the same way that you work, whereas it’s not like that at all. But I think there’s that conception that it is-

Male 1: Yes. I wouldn’t pay to come here but-

(Laughter)

Male 4: That’s going too far.

Male 1: Exactly.

Male 3: Yes, I think people might want to come but feel that they don’t have the time. It’s only when you come that you realise that actually, that’s not as bad actually.

Interviewer: Okay. So you almost need to experience it and reap the benefits before you’re convinced of giving up that time?

Male 3: Yes, I would say that would be true.

Interviewer: Okay. If we can talk really about the actual environment you’ve all mentioned, nature and being close to nature, and that’s one of the main benefits that you get from this space. I wondered if we could talk about what you value most about this wetland environment. What thrills you? What do you value most?

Male 4: I was just going to add something to the previous subject. Actually, there might be a knowledge barrier, that people think that they need to have lots of natural history knowledge or skills.

Male 1: And also, I think if they’re not interested in wildlife then they’re not interested in coming here. Everyone you meet here generally has an interest in wildlife and the environment.

Male 4: But that’s something that could develop. It doesn’t have to be a condition of coming here. It’s something-

Interviewer: So they might feel maybe a little bit intimated, that they might feel that there is an expectation to have that natural history knowledge?

Male 2: Yes. The website is pretty good though. I remember when I was looking at it, I’ve been doing some green gym stuff. That was all cutting hedges back, etc. This looked a bit more hands on but on the website I’m pretty sure it said, “You don’t need any skills, any abilities, any ages.”

Female: [Fran 0:14:58] always noticed there’s tea and biscuits as well.

Interviewer: I always bring biscuits.

Brilliant, so we spoke about benefits. We’ve spoken about your motivations. We’ve spoken about barriers, and if I can get you to talk about the nature and what you get out of it.

Female: The water for me and I think maybe that’s coming from being by the sea, but it’s the water and the light on the water, and how it constantly changes.

Male 1: I’d agree with that.

Female: Then just, when you’re standing by the edge of the reservoir and the way the sun sets over it, and just the way the wind blows over it, just the water is beautiful. And it never looks the same.

Male 1: It doesn’t. Every hour of the day if you look at it, it’s different. Different lights on it.

Female: Reflections on it, just, you could stare at it all day, really.

Male 1: You could.

Female: And you forget that the buildings are there. There will be a moment in the day when you look up and you’d go, “Yes, that’s right. I have completely forgotten.” Because you just come into this little bubble-

Male 1: And the leaves are rustling and you just take it all in.

Interviewer: Wonderful.

Male 4: Yes, I can see that. It’s an extraordinary habitat really and then in the distance you can see The Shard and it puts it into context really that you’re in Central London and here is this enormous expanse. And I think the water gives you more sense of space because it’s reflecting the light and it’s fluid.

Male 1: If it wasn’t for the water, I don’t think I’d be coming here, to be honest.

Interviewer: Is that right?

Male 1: Yes. Even if it’s just a field or whatever, I wouldn’t feel happy coming. It wouldn’t be the same, would it?

Male 2: Yes. I think one of the reasons I like it a lot is the nature, the different animals you see here. I’m definitely an animal lover but I feel like a suppressed animal lover growing up in North London. [Used to 0:16:51] see squirrels and ducks and that’s about it, constantly wanting to see more. And even since I’ve been coming here for the last six months, I think I’ve seen more different species I haven’t seen before, just here. Even things like crayfish or I saw some wood wasps larvae, which are horrible. They’re like massive grubs, different things I haven’t seen anywhere else and I get a lot of enjoyment out of that.

Male 3: I would agree. For me it’s the fauna. And there wouldn’t be as much wildlife if it wasn’t for the water. The majority of it is water-based.

Male 1: Exactly.

Male 4: Yes. But how it actually varies to an extent based on the water level because when it’s lower and you’ve got an exposed beach, you actually get different species of birds dropping in.

Male 1: I think it’s actually the water that’s probably saved the area as well as it would probably have ended up being built on.

Male 2: Yes.

Female: I think the other thing is, this movement away from the countryside is not seeing the seasons and coming back here being able to see the seasons again and really noticed, especially when we cut the reeds down and it’s all bare. And then that green spurt for four weeks where just everything here turns green and it just fills. And the daffodils and you actually feel like you know what time of year it is and you know where you are within that. And every single week it will look so different through spring. It’s wonderful.

And autumn, as well, when all the leaves - sorry, I get excited. But yes, it’s beautiful when you walk through. I’ve really miss that, miss seasons living in the city.

Interviewer: And that’s grounded you again, being back here and being able to see that and witnessing it again?

Male 4: Yes. For me it’s birds nesting. I can’t wait to see the first bird nest building here, which they’re doing as we speak really. I haven’t noticed any here but it’s happening very early this year because of the mild autumn/winter. It was on Winter Watch last week somebody had sent in a photo of a blue tit with nest material in its bill. I think birds now nest, every month of the year it’s been recorded, some species nesting, so it shouldn’t be too long around here before they’re starting.

Interviewer: And you’ve spoken already actually and moved on, extremely efficiently as a group, you already moved on to my next question, which was around, is there anything special about this being a water-based site? And you’ve already drawn that out considerable, but I wondered if, just before I move on to the next question, is there anything else you would like to add about this? If there is anything special about working on and being around a water-based site?

Male 1: Not really.

Interviewer: You feel you’ve covered that.

Male 4: I think we’ve said it all. I think it probably provides a raised diversity of jobs and tasks really.

Interviewer: That’s interesting, yes.

Male 4: Whether on the water, in the water or, yes, falling in.

Male 3: We haven’t talked about cleaning the new river. That’s horrible work but it’s an amazing thing. You get the satisfaction from cleaning out the river.

Interviewer: And what is it that makes you feel good about doing it?

Male 3: Because it’s clean afterwards and it looks nice.

Female: [It sounds actually nice 0:20:41].

Male 4: It’s horrible to think what people put in the water but then, every item that you take out is that bit better in getting it clearer and cleaner.

Female: It’s nice having the mixture of the two as well, having the new river and having the reservoir. I can’t even quite describe what’s nice about that but there is something very nice about it.

Male 1: I just hope when they open it up to the public, they don’t treat it like a dump. I’m sure it will be managed but that happens.

Interviewer: Yes, there are risks, aren’t there?

Male 1: Of course, yes.

Interviewer: You have started [goading 0:21:30] me there on that question around cleaning up. My next question was whether or not you think being in and around this site for yourselves volunteering but for people when it’s opened up, do you think it might generate a more sustainable relationship with water?

Female: Definitely and I think especially children. I do some work with Thames21 with getting children involved in running clean-ups in waterways. And I think for children to care about nature they need to understand it, they need to have a part in it and they need to enjoy it. And if they actually are seeing the effect that litter has on a waterway or the effect it has on the nature that’s using that habitat, it means something to them. And definitely, you can see it in their faces and you can see what they’re taking away from it and the language that they use at the end of that day to talk about it. It definitely will be children, I think. It makes a huge difference. I don’t know about adults because they’re more set in their ways.

Male 3: If anyone feels part of it, then they’ll respect it more. It would be good to try and generate some - rather than just showing people around, try and get them involved in something that they’re interested in.

Interviewer: So you would like that to be part of the experience here to be learning.

Male 3: I don’t know how that can be achieved, but yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Male 2: I wouldn’t want this to be a park, basically. Woodberry reservoir, I’d like it still to be something like a community project.

Male 4: But I think if you understand more about either the river or the reservoir as a habitat, as a system, then it might dissuade people from throwing supermarket trolleys in the water or whatever they do. It’s not a utility. It’s actually a resource.

Male 1: The only thing is, when they opened the new river up. When it was closed to the public it was beautiful and then it’s opened and it is full of rubbish, supermarket trolleys and plastic bags, anything you can name. There doesn’t seem to be any respect. I don’t know.

Female: Maybe that’s just because there hasn’t been that formation of a relationship.

Male 1: Yes, that’s a good point.

Female: Because they’re not involved in it. It’s just a patch of ground rather than realizing-

Male 1: So, they’ve left it up to \_\_\_[0:24:15] then it doesn’t work. It needs policing more, I think.

Interviewer: That’s interesting actually. My next question was around, you’ve had a remarkable experience and I’m very jealous of what you had here. And hearing you talk about it, you can see how important it is to you. When it opens up it potentially will be a different place and I wondered if you could talk about that? And how you think that will affect how you experience it, or indeed, whether you can choose to continue experiencing it?

Female: I think for me it there is definitely part of me that doesn’t want to let it go and want to keep it a secret and feels quite angry.

(Laughter)

It’s out of the World Cup. However, the better part of me wants it to be shared, for other people to get what I get out of it. And I certainly wouldn’t stop coming here just because I’ve lost that secrecy of it. I’d still want to be involved in it. I care about it and I wouldn’t stop caring about it just because I had to share it.

But there is definitely part of me that finds it quite difficult to let go, let everyone else in.

Male 1: Yes. If it all goes pear-shaped here, maybe we’ll all move or pull together towards each other.

Female: That’s always the option.

Interviewer: And the rest of you, how do you feel about it, being opened up?

Male 3: Certainly they’ve been \_\_\_[0:25:42 - 0:25:52].

Interviewer: Fair enough.

Male 4: But it has felt slightly like an underutilised resource. I used to volunteer at Camley Street Natural Park. It was opened the public and usually it was quite stimulating when people came in and asked about the place and you were the person explaining it on a casual basis. But although it’s only a 2 acre site, people couldn’t believe that it was there and alongside St Pancras Station.

But I think a lot of people would feel the same way about this place as I did when I first came, even though I knew about it. The scale of the site was, especially after Camley Street, a bit overwhelming. So hopefully we could feed off people’s excitement and enjoyment of the place.

Male 2: I still can’t say to my friends, “You can’t come see it, but if you can walk down this part of it,” so it would be nice for them to be able to…

Interviewer: To be able to share that?

Male 1: Yes, that’s a good point.

Interviewer: Could we talk about what you think are the benefits to the local community of this being reopened after such a long time and the hard work that you’ve done to change it?

Male 2: I would hope in a way it’s similar, to what I was saying before, there are lots of people in a city that is constantly on concrete, surrounded by people in unnatural environments all the time. I find it personally really hard to keep myself grounded, even mentally, trying to organise things. I think it’s really important to have that connection, even just for mental health. It think it’s about the tranquillity that’s out there, just stopping and looking at it, you can clear your head and relax yourself.

If I have two weeks in a row not coming here, I definitely feel less ordered mentally than I have if haven’t come here.

Female: I think, even for me, that perspective and open space for mental health, definitely.

Male 1: And I think people, even the people that live around the weir, have been so lucky in London to have to look over this reservoir, the breeze and just the water. And now to open it up, I suppose, it will be even better for the local people.

Male 4: Yes. I’d say they have a sense of possibly ownership or being given access to it as much as something that they can see but they could use and enjoy.

Male 2: I like the idea of children growing up, it’s a [site then 0:28:37]. You can’t change having \_\_\_ and think of the sustainable future. That I think children, getting them involved would be a massive benefit to the community, that \_\_\_[0:28:52].

(Laughter)

But yes, if you can get them in contact with nature when they’re young then they’re going to form it. I think once you get to the teenage years, you bring teenagers to a site they’ve never been to before, although it’s still possible as well, there’s still much more resistance because it’s, why should they care, almost.

Female: But also if the community projects still keeps going on, people needing two jobs, I think that’s very bonding to have a common goal, to get people together that maybe haven’t spoken to each other. Maybe they don’t know each other, so they’re from different sides of the reservoir and different backgrounds, but to come together and to work together, I think is quite [strengthening 0:29:36].

Male 4: Yes. To be part of an expansion and volunteering, and also, education sessions, I think. We used to do a lot of those at Camley Street. And Francisco was saying that they’re planning to do that here, so it would be good to get groups of young children coming and being enthused about nature.

Male 1: And to keep these sort of places going, I think, the way forward is, like Camley Street, these are the [policing 0:30:05] parties to open to the public. So it will avoid pollution and things like this. It would be looked after, in fact because it’s being used.

Male 2: Also, the community projects, also integration of the communities as well. A while ago I did a little bit of teaching with my group and if there was some place where they were allowed to go, some place where they could be outside and be in contact with people and getting out of the house, tends to be good mental health. I think that would be really, really good.

Male 1: Yes, mentally, I guess you’re right. It must be better for them. To get out and about, it’s somewhere to go on their doorstep, local communities could.

Male 4: And like anyone in London, there are really diverse groups of people who live on the periphery of this. And this could be the focus for trying to bring people together based on a common shared activity.

Interviewer: Again, coming back to questions around barriers and you might repeat some of the things that we said earlier on at the beginning. But do you think there are reasons why the local community wouldn’t necessarily feel that sense of ownership that you spoke about, or feel like they would or could take part in a shared experience that you spoke about. Are there things in the way that-?

Male 1: I think so. I think when it’s open to the public it would be word of mouth and they’ll tell friends, “We must go down there to walk around the lake. It’s so beautiful.” And I think more and more people will come just through that word of mouth.

Female: Yes, just lack of having done it before. People don’t naturally think about doing it on a day and realise they can do it. And then once you’ve started, I think then it becomes something you don’t doing. For a lot of people in this community or this area, they might never have gone for a walk around the reservoir to have a look at the birds, so it wouldn’t necessarily have crossed them to do that.

Interviewer: Yes. So just not on their agenda, or it’s not on the horizon-

Female: Not part of their life experience.

Male 4: I think on a simple level, people might not know how to get into the place.

Interviewer: No, okay. So actually getting in and access is a-?

Male 4: Signs and directions would be critical to the success of the place.

Male 1: I think once they bring their children, walk around it, they will \_\_\_[0:32:43] walks and stuff, the actually need to walk around, they can’t fail to like it.

Female: Yes.

Male 3: One think I might add, just \_\_\_[0:32:52 - 0:33:01] there might be some perception of it being associated with Woodberry Down.

Interviewer: Woodberry Down has tried to make it an extension of their campaign publicity.

Male 4: Yes. They’ve used it as a selling tool, haven’t they?

Male 3: Where, obviously, \_\_\_[0:33:21 - 0:33:27].

Male 2: For me that connection is more, so it could quite easily seem like a bit of grass, little zone again. I suppose the majority of volunteers here are white as well, so if you’ve got that connection to the middle class flats, and then a predominantly white group as well, it could almost seem like a barrier to people with ethnic backgrounds to them coming here.

Male 1: You could say that actually about Hampstead Heath. It’s a very, very rich, affluent area but you get all sorts of people there, don’t you?

Male 2: That’s true, yes.

Male 1: So I think people will just fit in. I don’t know, we’ll have to see, I suppose.

Female: Time will tell.

Male 1: Time will tell.

Interviewer: One of the things around my project that we’re trying to tease out a little bit is whether or not you think people have, or users of the site, have any sense of responsibility? Whether that’s sense of stewardship is something that they should have for areas like this and I wondered if you had any thoughts on it?

Male 1: What do you mean stewardship?

Interviewer: So whether or not you feel like you should be caring and being acting like a carer for the environment? So whether or not you have a sense that you have a responsibility to come and do that or whether you think the people that look on to the site or are close to the site should have any feelings of responsibility to keep it nice, to look after it, to-?

Female: That’s something that we need to encourage, actually.

Male 4: But to me, people visiting the site.

Interviewer: Visiting and also people that live locally to it?

Male 1: I think it would need looking after, rangers, whatever, permanently here because one, there’s a little pocket garden over the road, isn’t there? That we tidied up and there was a little gang there. We were talking to them and they were fine. And you go the next day and they just left rubbish all over the place because there’s nobody there to - like anywhere, any park, it needs to have wardens or something there.

Male 4: But it’s a large area, isn’t it, for-

Male 1: If this was left just open to the public, do what you like sort of thing, I think before long there would be bikes chucked in it and God knows what. I don’t know if you agree with that, but-

Male 2: It’s quite possible.

Male 1: Unfortunately, you get an element that won’t look after it.

Male 2: You’d have to push integration. You’d hoped that you can get people involved and if they are involved then there’s that connection that a lot of people won’t get.

Male 1: Of course.

Male 3: Yes, I agree. But on a realistic level I agree with Steve.

Male 1: You can’t leave them to their own devices, unfortunately. If you just get an element, a small amount of people that \_\_\_[0:36:28] and seem to disrespect anywhere they go. So I think that would happen.

Interviewer: Are there things that can be done to help get around that? Are there things, actions, can be taken by LWT or by yourselves as volunteers that can help change that risk?

Male 1: You can up notices I suppose, no litter, things like that might help. And I think they’re going to actually have wardens here anyway, talking to Francisco, who is the manager here. I think anywhere you go that’s just what has to happen now. All through the Lee Valley Park, it has to be.

Male 4: I think it will be two part-time rangers, so there will only ever be one person here. But there will be, I think there will be people passing through the week, as well as weekends. So I think just the presence of people, especially if you’ve got a LWT kit on, people will realise that it is a manged space and hopefully that will dissuade them from littering or trashing things.

Female: Coming here and seeing it should persuade people from trashing it. Maybe I’m more naïve but I think if people come here and see it, and they actually spend enough time here to take note of it. I just can’t think of anyone who spent more than an hour here willing to trash it on any level. I just can’t.

Male 1: I can.

Male 4: I think you hope that people would respect the place and you obviously work on that basis. And if you’re disappointed after the six months, then things have to be changed.

Male 3: Yes, but you can have a balance as well, try and get people there.

Female: Yes. I think events are a much better way forward, events that encourage people to come here and spend that time here. And meet people like us and talk and start getting involved themselves. I think things are going to change them.

Male 3: The people that come to the events aren’t then ones that are the problem, aren’t the ones that will disrespect the place.

Male 1: It’s the ones with antisocial behaviour, isn’t it? And those people are about.

Interviewer: Yes. So that for you is a risk for the site, that some people may not respect it?

Male 1: Some people won’t respect, not may, I think they won’t. But you get that anywhere.

Male 2: I think, \_\_\_[0:38:57] responsibility but I guess the dream would be that if you could get the local community involved and develop that kind of sense of stewardship, that that would almost allow it to police itself in a way.

Female: And I think we’re lower risk than some other sites because I think a lot of sites where there’s a lot of build-up of rubbish, including the new river itself. It’s where it’s been directly at the back of the garden or at the back of an estate’s garden. I think it’s been dumped over the fence. Whereas here, we’ve been lucky with actually who’s backing on to it.

We don’t seem to get rubbish over our fence, so I think there’s less of a risk of people walking all the way here with their rubbish and dumping it. There’s vehicle access, isn’t there?

Interviewer: No.

[Crosstalk 0:39:49 - 0:39:51].

Female: That’s a lower risk than a lot of sites for dumping.

Male 2: It’s got almost like a moat around it.

Female: Basically, yes. So I think that we’re not that high a risk of that. But, again, that’s maybe me being overly naïve.

Interviewer: The actual physicality of the site in it helps it being a little bit self-policing in that respect.

Male 4: Yes. I suppose the area directly around the reservoir is quite open and I think that would persuade people from doing something antisocial. But on the other hand, once you go down the embankment you’d be quite hidden there.

Interviewer: So there is a risk there.

Male 4: There are houses backing on to it, so maybe people would feel conscious of it being a-

[Crosstalk 0:40:38 - 0:40:42].

And that would control them a bit.

Interviewer: Yes, I see what you’re saying. Yes, very much so.

Male 1: And I think [Dom 0:40:48] had a good point, it is almost like there’s a moat around it with that river, isn’t it. It has stopped them coming in and, of course, you’ve got the [back stairs 0:41:01] at the back there. I think it’s a good point with the river going around it. It does stop them.

Interviewer: It’s almost like a boundary. It is a buffer zone.

Male 1: Yes, it has.

Male 3: The west reservoir has been open for some time but a lot of the time \_\_\_[0:41:19].

Female: No, it’s an estate and I think it’s well-liked and quite well looked after.

Interviewer: Okay.

Male 4: But I think that’s because it’s very activity-based. There’s the yachting club and other stuff, which takes place on the water. So people who go, they would go for that purpose.

Female: But then hopefully people who come here would come here for the nature and for the purpose of participating in activities such as bird watching rather than bringing their old bikes.

Male 4: Yes, less directive activities here than compared with West Reservoir but they’re a very different setup.

Female: Yes, they are.

Male 1: I think it’s a good idea opening it up. They’re going to have a café and that as well. It is interesting for the public. That’s what it’s all about, isn’t it.

Interviewer: Yes. Are there other risks? You might be worried about being polluted or you might be worried about litter. Are there other risks about this site?

Female: I think it’s losing its wilderness. I don’t want it to become [an area 0:42:24] where we end up with manicured paths. And obviously we’ve seen quite a lot of changes where gravel has been put down and carpark were made and things have been cut low. The grass has been cut low, things like that. So there’s the risk of it becoming a little bit too neat and it’s losing its roughness. I’m more worried about those things.

Male 1: I think it might lose its birdlife that you get here. There was a [bison 0:42:50] here on Tuesday. I didn’t see it. It is quite a rare bird and I don’t think you’ll get things like that with a pressure of the public. It’s being a bit selfish but it’s what happens.

Female: But we have the island now where there are very secluded, private parts to the park.

Male 1: Yes, I know, but it’s still not big enough that they can hide away.

Male 2: That’s my main anxiety, I think, with this place being opened up is, anywhere in London where it is lovely it’s overrun pretty quickly by people. You get so many people and I would worry about that, that you end up on the weekend with the place being full of people. It would lose its natural beauty and also a lot of wildlife.

Male 4: It would.

Male 3: Well, you’ve got to think, who is it for?

Male 2: Absolutely.

Male 3: It’s for the birds-

Male 1: Well, it is really. It’s theirs.

Male 3: Just close it all off and leave it.

Male 2: Yes, but it’s achieving that plateau; you want the birds and the people to appreciate the birds at the same time.

Male 1: The birds live here. We don’t.

Male 2: Yes, I’m including us.

(Laughter)

Interviewer: That’s great. The other thing I wanted to ask a little bit is around - I have two final questions. One of them was around this being a privately owned public space and these are literally just popping up around London quite a bit at the moment. And I wondered if you felt that that in any way would change your experience or a visitor experience, or if there are any benefits or risks that come with this being a privately owned public space?

Female: It changes the amount we can do sometimes. There are things that we’d like to do but haven’t been able to do.

Interviewer: In terms of conservation?

Male 4: Yes, habitat.

Female: So there were a couple of things where, because we don’t have the ownership of the site, we were prevented from doing some things, which isn’t always to the benefit of the habitat. So there are certain things we had to completely cut back to get rid of all the grass where that isn’t what we wanted to do to the site but had to. So there’s definitely tension sometimes if something is privately owned between the owner and-

Male 4: Because essentially Thames Water is thinking about the staff here at the reservoir, so ivy comes off the trees so that the trees don’t overbalance and potentially damage the wall of the reservoir. And also, they like the grass cut reasonably short.

Male 3: For a wall, we started building a wall but apparently you have to see the edge of the moat from different vantage points \_\_\_[0:45:52].

Male 4: Right. Where was the wall?

Male 3: It was wall made out of twigs.

Male 1: Yes, I remember.

Female: Yes.

Male 1: We had to stop doing it.

Male 3: It was not exactly encroaching really.

Interviewer: Okay, so there are some implications there in terms of your experience, of how it’s been managed that is affected by it being privately owned?

Male 1: They’re not too harsh. If you can put up with what’s going on. It could be worse.

Female: Yes, definitely. But it’s sometimes a problem.

Male 1: Yes.

Male 4: I don’t know whether there’s any link between it being used as a public space and Thames Water. I don’t know what their views are. Obviously, they’re agreeable to opening it up, but I don’t know if they’ve put any conditions on that.

Interviewer: Lots of what you’ve said has captured this last question or part of the question. Will the wetlands affect the identity of the area? Will being able to come here, walk around, do bird watching, getting involved in some of the events, experience the serenity and tranquillity that you spoke about, does that affect the identity of this part of London?

Male 4: Yes, but only positively I think.

Female: Yes.

Interviewer: In what respect?

Male 4: Just having this as a resource, I think, would increase a lot of local participation.

Female: Some say it already does for a lot of people. Quite a few volunteers that come here are people who overlook the reservoir and they mention all the time how much it’s affected them and why it is the reason the came here. So it’s already got quite an impact but once it opens, it will obviously be a lot greater.

Male 1: It’s a shame it has to open up to the public but that’s being a bit selfish. I think everyone should see it, really. That’s the case.

Male 3: Maybe it’s like if we’ve just opened up a big park, it will have a positive effect. And I think any \_\_\_[0:48:13] there, so, recreational, has a positive effect on that area.

Male 4: I suppose it comes down to the local people if they make use of it and begin to see it as an asset or if they don’t or, I suppose, we remain neutral about it.

Male 1: They’ll probably keep it, just the fact that it’s open to the public, otherwise I think they would end up building houses that float on it. I think that’s what we get going on.

Male 4: I think the fact that it’s London Wildlife Trust managed rather than local authority, it’s absolutely critical that people won’t say, “That’s money that should be going into housing.”

Male 1: Exactly.

Female: Yes.

Interviewer: I have one last question because I know you’ve all got to run. And I wondered if you could just give me one of your, maybe, happiest or one of your most interesting experiences here at Woodberry Down, volunteering.

Female: There’s a lot but probably learning to scythe.

Interviewer: Okay.

Male 4: Correctly.

Female: Yes, exactly. Because the first ever day I did here was scything. I did it terribly and I like to think that I’m quite good at it now. But definitely just doing something you never ever expected I’d ever learn to do. And the hilarity and brilliance of it all was good fun and is probably my lasting memory of Woodberry would always be learning to scythe.

Interviewer: Perfect.

Male 1: Mine was when I first was coming here with Helen, who works here. She’s one of the, what would you call her? She’s a manageress, so she’s goes and talks on global warming and stuff. The slide show showed us this and that and I didn’t realise so much about it them. I found it so interesting and it’s just opened it up for me. Great.

Interviewer: Lovely.

Male 4: Finding my first green warbler’s nest.

Male 1: Did you take it home?

Male 4: No. it was kept in here for a long time.

Interviewer: That’s lovely. Dom?

Male 2: I’m trying to think of one particular thing, scything down by the little walkway, what’s it called?

Female: Yes. I think it’s the walkway that gazes out over the reservoir. There’s a wooden walkway and we were scything underneath it.

Male 2: Yes. Again, similarly, I loved using the scythes. It’s so much fun. Something I didn’t mention actually, about one of the reasons that I like coming here, is getting to do things that I would never normally do. Even there we were using hatchets to hack away at things.

(Laughter)

Female: And the \_\_\_[0:51:25], learning to use the \_\_\_ because it’s a really-

[Crosstalk].

Yes, it’s basically a big pickaxe.

[Crosstalk].

And the day the horse came.

Male 4: Yes, that’s was-

Male 3: Yes, that would be the Shire horse.

Male 1: What about when we built the bird box. We had to make a bird box. That was interesting.

Male 3: I’ve not done it before.

[Crosstalk 0:51:50 - 0:51:54].

Interviewer: Lovely. Thank you all very much for your time this afternoon, especially when I know how much you get out of being out there. I really appreciate you coming in here and missing out on a bit of that and giving us your time.

Male 1: No, thank you. I enjoyed it.

Male 4: it was very good.

Male 1: It’s nice to sit down and have a chat.

END AUDIO

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