**File: ENVNGO2.2.12.15.WMA  
Duration: 1:08:12  
Date: 28/03/2016  
Typist: 694**

START AUDIO

Interviewer: Rachel – that's my Dictaphone – could you start for me by describing your role on the project?

Rachel Smith: Okay, yes. I'm Rachel Smith. I'm the Community Engagement Officer. I'm actually employed by the London Wildlife Trust, but actually, I'm part of the whole partnership that is the Walthamstow Wetlands. I was employed in April of this year, and I will be employed until the actual opening of Walthamstow Wetlands, which will be around April 2017. So it's actually a two-year contract.  
  
At the moment, I'm the only person employed on the ground of the Walthamstow Wetlands project. My role is to actually engage with the local people, inform them about what is happening on this site, about this amazing transformation, and also to get them really enthused at this stage. So we're doing that in a various number of ways. The first one is marketing and publicity, getting a really good website down, Twitter, Facebook.   
  
We're starting, now, to do media alerts. We actually did one on Monday, where me and Councillor Coghill sat in a boat – I'll show you the pictures of that – on reservoirs one, two and three, where the new reed beds are going to be planted. The reason that happened on Monday is because that contract has now gone out to a company called Salix, who are a bio engineering company, who also did the reed bed work here, at Woodberry.   
  
So we've worked with them before, and we know that they can actually deliver. They're very good at what they do. It was very exciting. We went out on our boat, and there was all of the Walthamstow press there, taking photographs of us, in my hard hat. Also, it was a very, very cold day, and I had about 15 layers on, so I looked like some sort of weevil that might have fallen out of the boat at any moment. But that was really good.  
  
So we're starting that media side of stuff. Certainly, this is going out to the Walthamstow Guardian and the local authorised paper, which has a huge readership. Once something goes into there, people know about it.  
  
So that's the first approach we're doing to engage the community. The second one is by having a whole range of walks down on the site. So local people can actually get onto the site, and actually experience the wonder of it. Because it is such an amazing asset to have in such a heavily densely populated area, to have such a huge space of green space. It's amazing how many even local residents have not actually been on that site.  
  
Most of them know that there's something there, that there's some sort of reservoir system there, but they've never actually been onto the site themselves and actually experienced it. It's really lovely to take local people who live on the next road down onto the site, and just see their expressions and their amazement, and this amazing response that this is there, right on their doorstep.  
  
The third thing is more targeted. At the moment, and historically, the site has been mainly used by fishermen and bird watchers. So it's mainly been middle-aged men who have used the site. Part of my role is actually to get involved with more isolated communities, and maybe communities who don't feel so comfortable being part of that kind of community, and actually getting them onto the site now, so that when it opens, they feel like they have some sort of ownership, and they feel comfortable being in the space.  
  
So I went down to The Mill on Monday, which is the local community centre. Absolutely fantastic response from them. They were so excited. They're going to rent out the whole of their place for a big exhibition before it opens, free of charge. They're so into it. So that's really nice. They've also got loads of local artists and things there that we can tap into, and loads and loads of community groups, particularly women's groups.  
  
They've got an Asian women's group, a Turkish women's group, a Bulgarian women's group, a Turkish men's group. So all sorts of faith groups and groups that we would like to try to get feeling comfortable with the space now, before it's opened. So they are a really good facility.  
  
The other way of engaging with the community is by actually using local people who are really excited about the project to volunteer with the project. We've been really lucky with that so far. We've got some fantastic volunteers who are helping me enormously. It's lovely that we're now part of a team with specific roles.  
  
As I mentioned, Steve did this video on Monday, where he interviewed Salix and Councillor Coghill. I'll show you that. It's brilliant. That's going to go on the website. [Ella's 0:05:55] helping with all the admin, and we've got photographers, we've got people doing the newsletter. So it means that we can roll out a much more intensive and a much better programming, because we're in a fixed timescale, to engage with as many people as we possibly can in that time.  
  
The other thing is, we've just finished all our publicity now, so we'll be rolling out the schools and the community group programme, the outreach programme, after Christmas. We're very excited about that. Walthamstow Wetlands is very much about the whole potential as an outdoor educational facility, maybe in a different way to other wetland nature reserves, in that it is in such a heavily populated area. So it's basically on people's doorsteps.  
  
Again, we want kids to get so used to being there that they feel that they kind of own it, and they feel really comfortable with it.  
  
It's interesting; I showed some architect students round yesterday, and obviously, they're in their early 20s and late teens; they're at university. Some of the questions they were asking, it's amazing that- Often, people haven't been into these kinds of open spaces, and their knowledge of nature and how the natural environment works is really limited.   
  
For example, I was talking to them about tufted ducks, and they were saying, "Would you find them if you went to London Zoo?" I was trying to explain that they were British wildlife, and they don't need to be in the zoo; they're quite happy on the reservoirs. But it's quite interesting, and it does show the importance of having such an amazing educational facility as part of the project.

Interviewer: Yes, if their only experience of nature is via these particular animals in the zoo behind bars, then…

Rachel Smith: Yes, I thought that was really interesting. Sad, but interesting.

Interviewer: Yes, it's very telling, isn't it? That's brilliant. I think what I'd like to start with then, I guess, is to turn some of my questions upside-down a little bit, and ask you about – you've already hinted at them in terms of the \_\_\_[0:08:38] role – what you feel are the real benefits to the communities of opening up the site.

Rachel Smith: Okay. One of the reasons that this is coming into fruition is because it was felt that this area, Waltham Forest, does not have access to enough open green space. Obviously, the benefits of that for local communities are fresh air, exercise, benefits to physical health and also to mental health, particularly in our very busy, stressful and hectic existences. It's nice to actually be able to have that space where it's quiet and tranquil, and you can actually think about things and have the time and headspace to sort things out.  
  
Obviously, in terms of physical health, it's a big space, so it's good. We'll be leading lots of guided walks, and we are now, so people can get out and about and a bit of exercise. There's also going to be a huge cycle path going through the middle of it, which will run from here, from Woodberry, down to the far end, the Billet Lane end of Walthamstow Wetlands. That's about a three kilometre cycle ride. So if you did that there and back, that's a good amount of exercise.  
  
For me, I think that there is something really special about being in the natural environment. For me, whenever things get very stressful or you have hard times, it's always helped me to actually be in the natural environment. It kind of centres you and puts things in perspective. I think that's really useful in our current, busy lives.  
  
I also think there's a spiritual element, whether that's related to a belief in God or not, how you define your spirituality. I think, maybe, that's what I'm trying to say, really, is what I said beforehand, but just actually being able to bring yourself back to who you are and just think things through. I think it's really important. There's something very centring about being in nature.   
  
I think particularly with the Wetlands site, because it is so huge, that whole thing about being actually quite a small part of a big world, it actually puts your own issues into some sort of perspective, which can be very helpful.

Interviewer: So that's the health and wellbeing, I guess, bit, but you also spoke about the education value that the site brings. Could you talk to me a little bit about the aspirations for education benefits that the site will bring?

Rachel Smith: Yes. I think the London Wildlife Trust are very much about protecting environments for people to enjoy. So it's not just about having natural worlds that are heavily protected, and people can't really make use of that; it's like one or the other. It's very much about integrating people into the natural environment, which I think is really, really important, particularly in urban conservation. That's what it's all about, and that's why this area has been opened up, and particularly for children.  
  
Because I think, often, the schools in this area don't have a huge amount of outside space, and they don't have access to parks and hills and mountains. They don't have that kind of environment on their doorsteps. So the hope is that we will have a huge indoor learning centre, but we'll also have a big outdoor learning centre, and that kids will actually be able to go and experience the living environment and learn about the wildlife on the site.   
  
But also how important it is that we conserve some of these wild species, and actually, how important it is for their lives, that actually, we wouldn't survive without a lot of these wild species. So it's really important that we learn to live in harmony with them, because without any trees, we wouldn't be able to breathe, so we'd all be dead.  
  
So I think those kinds of messages are really important, particularly in this day and age. The site is very much about London's water supply, where our water comes. It's also important for children to know that, because I think it's quite an esoteric concept, really. Water comes out of your tap, and unless you've been to a reservoir or been to a filter bed, that process is very technical, and exactly how that happens is really interesting for kids to learn.  
  
And within that, learn how to conserve water; how it's important that we don't leave the tap running or whatever. Just small ways that they can actually take on looking after the environment, and making small changes in their own lives that will make a huge difference.   
  
I suppose in that way, it's relating the wider environmental picture and some of the wider concepts, like climate change and species becoming endangered. All of those things that you think are more of a worldwide phenomenon, kind of linking it and bringing it onto a very local level, where kids, hopefully, can relate to it much easier.   
  
There are just small examples, like kids may know that pandas are an endangered species, but they may not know that pochards are now on the list of endangered species. We have our equivalent of the panda on Walthamstow reservoirs. We have them in quite large numbers, actually. Then through that, we can explain to kids that they are actually as important as the panda, and how important it is to conserve all of these kinds of species.

Interviewer: Again, you've described some of the things that you will be enabling to do; I wonder if you could talk about the sorts of activities and behaviours that will be formally encouraged on the site. Then maybe also reflect on the sorts of things that will be less encouraged, or people will be encouraged, certainly, not to do.

Rachel Smith: Yes. I think when I grew up, it was very much about the Country Codes, and when we went walking in Yorkshire, the Country Code was on all the gates and everything. So you were kind of brought up knowing what was acceptable behaviour in the countryside and what wasn't. I think that's maybe less so for kids who have grown up in very urban environments and don't have so much access to that.  
  
So I think part of my role is very much about teaching children and adults how to preserve the natural environment, and treat it in a way so that it will continue to flourish, and continue to be there for future generations. So we'll be leading guided walks, and as part of that, there will be some sort of education about not dropping litter, not climbing over gates, not going into the water, and explaining to kids why these things are important.  
  
We'll have areas that are blocked off at certain times, if there's a particularly sensitive breeding area, or a particularly sensitive plant that's growing there. That will be a really good way of talking to the children and adults about some of these things that I've been mentioning: how important it is to enable species to have the right environments for them to flourish, and how we can actually help to do that.  
  
Then, hopefully, people will learn some of these lessons from this site, and when they're going for a walk in the woods or whatever, they're not going to be running after the deer or running after the ducks. So they've actually been able to learn from this. In a way, it's a kind of microcosm environment; how to look after our natural world.

Interviewer: And the sorts of behaviours that would be encouraged on the site. So what do you anticipate people using the site for, and what way will they be on the site?

Rachel Smith: Well, I think there are going to be lots of ways that people can use the site. In the Marine Engine House, there's going to be a whole load of interpretation. Kids will have access to little sheets about the birds and stuff, so that they can go out and learn about the birds and tick them off when they see them, and also flowers and plants and mammals.   
  
Sorry, what was the question again?

Interviewer: How they will use and be on the site.

Rachel Smith: Yes. I think, at the moment, lots of people use the site for fishing; that will continue. Bird watching, it's a really recognised site, because of its importance for overwintering wildfowl. I think that's really good, because people will be able to go down onto the site, and they'll always see something. I think that's a real selling point to it, particularly because it's so important for bird life over winter. So it makes it a bit of an all-year-round site.  
  
So people will be cycling. There will be designated picnic areas; people can come and have their lunch, walking round. I think we will continue to have lots of guided walks of various facilities. Also, there's going to be a whole programme of events, like toddlers' events, pram-pushes – what are they called? Anyway, all those kinds of things. So hopefully, people from all backgrounds and from all experiences will be able to enjoy something on the site.  
  
I think the main thing that is different from now will be the Marine Engine House, the visitors' centre. We envisage that that will be a little bit of a hub; it's very near the car park. I was talking at The Mill yesterday, for people with physical mobility issues, because they will actually be able to get the Marine Engine House. It's not very far from the car park.   
  
So that, actually, might be quite a nice day out for them. They can actually walk that small distance, but still be in this wonderful environment, and get to the Marine Engine House and, say, have a cup of coffee, look at the exhibitions, look at some of the webcams or something. That can be a really nice experience for people. So they don't have to walk all the way around this huge site to actually benefit from it.  
  
The dining terrace and the viewing terrace at the other side looks out onto the reservoir, so people will have the experience of being in the open, quiet, expansive, wild nature. If they can't actually walk out there, they can still experience it.

Interviewer: Yes. You've spoken about a wide range of uses there – which is really exciting – that opening it up brings. I wondered if you could talk to me a little bit about potential tensions in use, where these either new and pre-existing uses may come into contact. Where are you anticipating any tensions?

Rachel Smith: I think there's potential for tensions just with so many people using the site for different uses. You've got, say, young families with buggies, and you've also got fly fishermen. So backcasting of the fishermen, I think, is going to be something that is going to have to be quite managed for it to be safe, once you start getting quite a lot of people on the site. I think that that can be managed, because I think you can have specific areas.  
  
I suspect the north side will be more fishermen. The fishermen will go more that way, and I think families and buggies and things, maybe, will stay more around the Marine Engine House, where there are some facilities, like toilets and drinks. But that's obviously a potential for conflict, as is the cycle/pedestrian way.   
  
We're envisaging that that will be used for cyclists and pedestrians and, say wheelchairs. Obviously, it's not a huge motorway going through the site, so I think that that could be a potential area of conflict.  
  
What was the question again?

Interviewer: In terms of potential tensions of conflicts, because of the range of uses, or even just the site being open.

Rachel Smith: Yes. What has come out of the walks is people would like it to be open longer than 5:00, in the summer particularly. It's going to start by being open 9:00 to 5:00. I think that may be reviewed as things go on. But that's different to how it is now, because there are much wider opening times at the moment, despite it being-

[Interruption 0:24:51 - 0:25:37]

Interviewer: So they're the particular tensions that you anticipate in terms of the spatial tensions.

Rachel Smith: And I think general antisocial behaviour is going to be an issue: people climbing over fences, people accessing the site at night. There's a big problem on Hackney Marshes with illegal raves and stuff. A big issue is the no dogs policy, so people are trying to bring dogs onto the site, and there's conflict inherent in that.   
  
The other big conflict is the conflict between having an increased footfall and the impact on the natural environment. We'll have to see how that pans out. We have got ecologists doing regular visitor monitoring and the effect it's having on the wildlife. Currently, there's no major issue, but we're not having level of numbers. That will have to be monitored very closely; they will do that when it opens, and if there are areas that are particularly sensitive, they will be shut off.

Interviewer: Could you talk to me a little bit about the implications for this being a privately owned operational site being opened to the public in this way?

Rachel Smith: Yes. For Thames Water this remains an operational site. In a way, it's a bit of a challenge for them opening this up. In terms of their operational work, it would be easier for them to keep it as it is now. I think that's something really positive that we need to embrace, that they have actually taken this decision to open it up so people can have access to this amazing, idyllic oasis in the heart of London. So I think they need to be commended for that.  
  
I think that the flip side of that is that what they need to do to maintain the water supply will be the uppermost condition. So if they decide that the site needs to be shut or something, I guess it will be, because they will have the final word. If they've got problems, like potentially, we can envisage a problem with Lockwood entrance, because at the moment, lots of people come in there with their dogs, they will shut it. Because they are very clear that they don't have dogs on the site.  
  
I think that's fair enough. I think they have to do what they have to do.

Interviewer: Are there implications for, do you think, the way that people can get involved in the management of the site as a function of it being a privately owned site? So how people would get involved in the governance or the stewardship of it.

Rachel Smith: It is an interesting dilemma, because they're the landlords, but the London Wildlife Trust will be delivering the project. So I think our volunteers and our staff will have the amount of governance that they need to deliver that project. Thames Water and LWT have a good relationship. I don't see there will be a major problem with that. At the moment, Thames Water are really happy just for us to do what we need to do, and I suspect that will continue.  
  
They are aware of what they're signed up to, but I think if there were any major concerns that were putting the water safety at risk, then they would have to step in. But I think it would be at a fairly extreme level.

Interviewer: Are there any routes for local people to get involved in the shaping of how it evolves and how it continues to be run?

Rachel Smith: Yes, they can become a volunteer with me, and they can join the Friends' Group. Local people have been involved for a long time with this. There was an initial consultation many years ago – I can't remember quite how many. I think it was about eight or something – the So Near, So Far. That was a long time ago.

[Interruption 0:30:31 - 0:32:05]

Interviewer: So initial consultation, 2008, 2009, so [Crosstalk].

Rachel Smith: I don't know when that was, really. Then, when the whole project was being developed, there was a lot of consultation at that point with various areas of the community, particularly schools, community groups, and just general local residents. So people have been involved throughout.

Interviewer: You mentioned that, going forward, in order to be involved and to participate in any way to shape it, the routes are through volunteering and through the Friends' Group.

Rachel Smith: Yes. It's so difficult, because I forget that we're part of a partnership. But they're not really doing anything, at the moment, on the site. They're doing all the construction stuff, but- So at the moment, yes, and certainly, come next August, there will be a proper educational worker and a conservation volunteer officer. At that point, the volunteering will really step up. Because basically, LWT are delivering the whole of this project through the use of volunteers, so there will need to be many people involved.

Interviewer: How would you say, really, in terms of who have been the dominant voices in terms of bringing the Walthamstow Wetlands, as a concept, to the table? Who would be the stakeholders that have been most influential in bringing this to the table, would you think?

Rachel Smith: I think that's a very interesting question, and it depends who you ask. I would say Thames Water, London Borough of Waltham Forest and LWT, because they're the big players. There are other people involved, but not anywhere near on that level.

Interviewer: You spoke about the activities that should have happened on the site, and you've spoken about the tensions and, I guess, the risks, particularly in terms of operationally, what it means in terms of opening to the public. I wondered what your thoughts are in terms of how opening it up, and indeed the opening up of here. What impact does that have on the identity of the area, do you feel? Or does it not change the identity of the area, the opening up of the site?

Rachel Smith: I think it does change the identity, because I think it somehow makes it more green, and a little bit softer, in a way. That's a bit of a weird term to use. Both of them are slap, bang in the middle of very high density areas that are classes as quite economically deprived, with social problems. I think it just takes away some of the kind of urbanness of it, and makes it a little bit softer; a bit more picturesque and a kind of contrasting environment.  
  
So it kind of adds something to the bigger picture. The whole pot of this area has now got a lovely nature reserve.

Interviewer: Do you think there will be a change about how local citizens view it; how they view their local area?

Rachel Smith: Yes. I really hope so. I hope that they will see this as something that's really positive, that's actually adding something to the area, and something, therefore, that's bringing value and worth to the area. Therefore, something that should be respected. Hopefully, people see it as an improvement to the area; that it's another facility, something else to offer.

[Background noise 0:37:24 - 0:37:37]

Interviewer: So you've spoken in quite positive terms there in terms of the benefits to the local area and the local identity. Do you think there are any risks of disbenefits of them being opened? Are there any consequences or knock-on effects of these nature reserves existing and being open to the public?

Rachel Smith: What did David say to this one?

Interviewer: He said that he-

Rachel Smith: I think Walthamstow has more of an issue. I think because Walthamstow is a water supply site, I think there are two major risks. One is somebody falling in, and the other one is some kind of terrorist act, which they're extremely worried about at the moment, and extremely cagey. They won't speak at all to me about how the water is moved round the reservoirs for security issues, which I can completely understand.   
  
I think that's more of a risk at Walthamstow, because it's so huge. Here, I think it's not so big, and you can see across the reservoir. You could almost see somebody in trouble. But I think at Walthamstow, much less so. It's going to be much harder, hence the need for so many volunteers. That's going to be one of their major roles, I think, is just going to be watching people around each reservoir, so they're not damaging any habitats, but also for their own safety as well.

Interviewer: Do you think there are consequences in terms of an economic change of the area? Certainly, here, the reservoirs are presented as part of the package in terms of the regeneration of the area.

Rachel Smith: Yes, and I think in Walthamstow, as well, it's being presented in that way by the local developers around the site, and as an excuse to build very close density housing, because they have all this wonderful outdoor space. I think so. I just think that if you're going to have an urban area that is well and healthy and thriving, then I think it's really important to have access to green space, and to have access to these kinds of facilities.   
  
So I think it can only be good in terms of regeneration, in terms of bringing people into this area.

Interviewer: Is there a risk that the communities that were intended to benefit from it aren't the ones that benefit from it?

Rachel Smith: Yes, I think very much so. I think that that's where we need to come in. Like my role, the community engagement role, about targeting people who are a bit more isolated, or communities that maybe wouldn't necessarily gravitate to this, I think that needs to carry on when it's opened. I don't think that's something that we can just stand back on. I think it's really important that local communities benefit from these resources.   
  
It may be that we need to have particularly targeted activities, or – I don't know – social events, and just flyers around the local residents or something. So it's actually getting the people who've been here many years, and probably have seen this site through many different guises, that they're actually now benefitting from it. Many of the local residents have used this site and put something into this site for many years. It's really important that they benefit from this regeneration.   
  
So all those community engagement strategies really need to be thought out, and they need to be continued after my role has gone.

[Background noise 0:42:34 - 0:42:48]

Interviewer: You spoke about Thames Water, and the implications of it being a prime site for education is for how people experience it. It's a big risk for Thames Water; it's a huge site, a big, operational, health and safety, etc.- those are the risks. What are its motivations for opening a site like this?

Rachel Smith: I think it's their social responsibility, isn't it? All big companies, and particularly something like Thames Water, with all the controversy about raising energy prices, they need to be seen to be giving something back to the community. It's part of their whole marketing strategy, and this is part of that strategy, I think, to be seen to be giving something back to the community.  
  
I think they genuinely, at a higher level, also, are keen to open it up for greater public access.

Interviewer: \_\_\_[0:44:08] whether there's anything special about this being a blue/green site, so specifically the blue \_\_\_. Is there anything particular about it being a water site that makes it distinct or brings particular values?

Rachel Smith: Yes, I think so. I think there is something wonderful about watery landscapes and being near water. I live near a river, and it's lovely to look out over the river. There's something quite relaxing and psychologically positive about the consistency of moving water. I think, also, particularly with Walthamstow, just to be able to look out over those huge expanses is really good for your soul.  
  
Again, it does make you realise that you're a small thing in a big plan. But yes, I think it's relaxing, and it's rejuvenating, water. The other thing is, this whole landscape is about the water. It's about the ducks and the wildfowl that are living on the water. It's about the water voles, it's about the kingfishers and the herons, and all these birds that are there because of the water.   
  
That makes it a unique site, as opposed to people going for a walk in their local park. They won't necessarily be seeing pochards and gadwalls and tufted ducks. Well, maybe a little, but not on the same scale.

Interviewer: Is there an aspiration for, and do you think there will be an impact for the way that visitors are connected to water; how we know it, how we use it, how we value it? Do you think the Wetlands can bring any sort of shift in terms of our connection with water?

Rachel Smith: Yes. Hopefully, people will feel, maybe, a bit safer around water, from actually being able to be there in a safe way.

Interviewer: Because they don't currently, because they may not currently feel safe around large bodies of water.

Rachel Smith: No. Well, I don't know. It's difficult. That's maybe not true. But people may have experience of kind of a bit wilder water, like the sea and stuff, and flooding and all those kinds of… So it might be nice to be around water where it's quite calm and quite…   
  
It's interesting, because it's not an actual landscape; it's a manmade landscape. I think that changes the whole identity of the water, in a way, and how people view it. It's much softer than, like I say, something like the sea, which people may or may not like. They may prefer it; they may not prefer it. They may think that there's something missing without having that wildness. But they also may feel that it's more tranquil and an easier to gauge landscape.

Interviewer: That's interesting.

Rachel Smith: I think it is interesting, because you can also see to the end of here. I think there is something different about these kinds of bodies of water than something like the sea, which is wild. It's just like, "Hey, it's going on forever." Whereas this, you can make more sense of it in your own head. Maybe it's more understandable.

Interviewer: Yes. Do you think it will enable us to have a more sustainable relationship with water?

Rachel Smith: I really hope so. I think that's one of the major things. That is one of the reasons that Thames Water have opened it. I'd just forgotten about that. Yes, they want people to have a better understanding of where their water supply comes from, and also a better understanding of the importance of conserving and rationalising our water use. Particularly, it's going to be one of our major issues over the next 50 or 100 years or whatever.   
  
So I think that that is important to Thames Water, because it's going to make such a difference to them in terms of their whole finance. If people can start conserving water, it makes business sense for them, but also, in terms of the effect on the climate and the environment.

[Background noise 0:50:22 - 0:50:33]

Interviewer: \_\_\_.

Rachel Smith: I'm probably missing the point on most of these questions.

Interviewer: Not at all, no, because your experience is quite unique, particularly given your role. I think that's really valuable.   
  
So I've done those. You've spoken about the consultation, but you weren't involved in the [local] consultation.

[Background noise 0:51:07 - 0:51:27]

Yes, there is one question around responsibilities. So citizen responsibilities in and around the site that will be encouraged, either in terms of the way they are, or proactive things that they could actually do.

Rachel Smith: Visitors?

Interviewer: Visitors, yes, and then if they go on to take on different roles on the site. So the expectation of how people will interact with the site in terms of obligations, in terms of duties, in terms of responsibilities.

Rachel Smith: Yes. This is all very interesting. At the moment, we're trying to write something to get the people in the way of thinking. So I guess it's an environmental responsibility to the environment to leave it in the state that you found it. So not dropping litter, not picking things, not throwing stones at the ducks, not taking eggs, all that kind of stuff that will come with the education programme.  
  
But I think there's also a social responsibility towards other people using the site. The hope is that we can foster some mutual respect within all the site users, and that it is a site where people can be at one with the environment, but at one with each other as well. It may be that through the work of the volunteers, and maybe even the waterside residents, those can be messages that continue to be got across in a nice way.   
  
The hope is that eventually, they will become part of the whole philosophy and the whole way of being on site. That sounds really fanciful, but that is certainly our hope.

Interviewer: Aspiration.

Rachel Smith: Our aspiration, yes. I think that will be done by continually reinforcing what my mum calls socially acceptable behaviour, and not reinforcing socially unacceptable behaviour in a nice way. I think it will be a slightly different philosophy having volunteers doing that than at the moment, where you have the Thames Rangers doing that, because they have to deal with some horrific stuff. The hope is that we won't have that level of social problems, because of just the fact that there are so many more people on site.  
  
So at the moment, a lot of their problems are in the very isolated areas of the site that they're having to deal with. We're hoping that the increased footfall, in a way, will knock some of that out of the way. But they are pretty heavy-handed when they need to be, because (A), they need to be, and (B), they have specific roles that they need to uphold.   
  
Hopefully, there will be a change in the whole feeling of the site when there's a greater input from local communities through volunteering. And just the whole change from having families and kids and prams, and old people and women and older Jewish women. A much more spectrum of communities actually engaging and using the site.

Interviewer: And the hope is that change in demographic will affect behaviour by an isolated few that are currently-

Rachel Smith: Yes. You could actually broaden that, and say, in terms of the whole philosophy of actually being immersed in other people actually makes you much more tolerant to other people's differences. Hopefully, that can be one of our aspirational- It is, definitely, one of our aspirational aims of the site. Because people are coming from such a diverse area, and it's interesting whether that will happen, or how long it will take. It's very interesting.  
  
When I first moved into my house, there wasn't any of the Jewish community in Stamford Hill. You'd never see anyone on the marshes. Now, you're cycling, walking, pushing- totally feel comfortable in that space now, and that's really wonderful. That's maybe taken five years or something for that to happen. We're talking about, really, the same communities; we're right next to the marshes. So hopefully, they will naturally progress through that Coppermill Lane entrance, and actually feel comfortable being on this site, as they now clearly do on the marshes.

Interviewer: What do you think enabled them to feel comfortable and allowed them to occupy and populate that space?

Rachel Smith: It's really interesting, because I don't see why there wasn't anyone, and then, suddenly... I think it's just that whole thing where once a few people start doing it, then everybody follows. They must feel much more comfortable and able to stop and chat to people that they clearly know. It's a nice, social day out.

Interviewer: Yes. In terms of any occasions that \_\_\_[0:58:27] [a threat], underlining some of the things that you were talking about there is, perhaps, I hope, that different communities can co-exist and even interact through the site. The site might act as a catalyst-

Rachel Smith: As a catalyst for that to happen, yes. I think that's very, very much our aim, because it's in an interesting position in terms of the kinds of populations around it. So there's a big Muslim community in Walthamstow, then there's the Jewish community in Stamford Hill. Then the Hackney side is more Afro-Caribbean. That's very generalist. But in a way, this is the kind of centre point-

Interviewer: Yes, \_\_\_[0:59:23].

Rachel Smith: -which has always been a kind of block, in a way. So opening it up, hopefully, will mean that there will be many more people mixing and cohabiting quite happily together on the site. It happens on the marshes; I don't see why it won't happen there.

Interviewer: What do you think might be the barriers to people using the site?

Rachel Smith: I think access, transport, car parking charges for people who maybe can't use public transport. So for elderly people, I think. Or not necessarily elderly, but for people with mobility issues, there will be an issue. I think there's an issue with Coppermill Lane. They were talking a lot at The Mill about this, that actually, it's a huge walk to get from, say, The Mill to the entrance.   
  
They were talking, again, about having a little bus, which I know has been consider, and hopefully, will happen. Because for older people in that area, or people with mobility issues, it could be really hard for them to get to the site.

Interviewer: Yes. So like a little shuttle.

Rachel Smith: Yes, a shuttle bus, which I think is a really great idea.

Interviewer: \_\_\_[1:01:07].

Rachel Smith: Yes.

Interviewer: Because it's another \_\_\_ for people to get to know each other as well.

Rachel Smith: Yes, I think it would be absolutely fantastic. It can run right from outside The Mill, and I think that would be a really lovely thing to do.

Interviewer: It reinforces both spaces [could be] for everybody.

Rachel Smith: Yes. I think The Mill, they do that really well. I think they've really got that. That's another way that maybe we can take a little bit of that by busing people from there down onto the site; some of that wonderful, complete involvement and – what's the word? – acceptance of everybody.

Interviewer: \_\_\_[1:01:58] watch the time. [So we've got] identity and responsibilities. \_\_\_. I think you have covered all of them, Rachel.

Rachel Smith: I suppose, because of my background in social work and stuff, and particularly mental health, I'm very into that whole social inclusion thing. I would really like there to be – I won't be around then – whole, like I say, conservation groups for people with mental health problems, really tackling into some of the… And people who are very isolated and lonely somehow getting into that, and actually, somewhere where people can meet with each other and be outside in a really positive environment.  
  
I think LWT are very good in terms of their volunteer programmes. I think there's lots to offer; lots of training, and get your little T-shirts so that you feel part of a little team. At Walthamstow, certainly, there will be a little space for volunteers. There will be lots of volunteering events. So I think I can really see the positives of that, and actually making sure that those volunteer programmes are really inclusive.

Interviewer: Okay. Because there is a risk that…

Rachel Smith: Yes, which means not just advertising in the local paper, because then you'll get your usual-

Interviewer: [Crosstalk 1:03:57].

Rachel Smith: -what I get on the walks: the middle-classes of Walthamstow coming. So I think that, again, some of that really needs to be thought about and targeted properly. If I was to stay around, I would do something, maybe, with people with mental health problems, because that's my experience. That's where I'm-

Rachel Smith: Yes, and I can really see the benefit.

Interviewer: Do you think..?

Rachel Smith: Because I always used to refer people to OrganicLea. Have you heard of Organic-? It's amazing. I think they're fantastic. I think that there's no reason why we can't become like that for this end of the borough in a totally different space. But that's a whole new world.

Interviewer: But potentially, it would require staff and training and volunteers that were skilled, and had experience of working with people with mental health issues.

Rachel Smith: Yes.

Interviewer: Given that throughout the conversation, the focus on volunteers and the range of different types of expertise and skills, it may be that, potentially, there are opportunities for that to develop.

Rachel Smith: Yes, absolutely. That's the wonderful thing about volunteers. You don't know what kinds of skills and experience they're going to be offering. People really can see the benefit of both of these projects, Woodberry and Walthamstow. I think when it is such an amazing project like Walthamstow, with so many possible benefits, I think, already, people are really interested in it.   
  
Then you do get people with lots of skills that are really, really wanting to give something back. Because it is a bit of a flagship, people can kind of focus on it, and I think that's a good thing. I hope it will get like that. I think it will, with word of mouth and things.  
  
Once you start developing your volunteers, they'll tell their friends, and you'll get that whole-

Interviewer: You build that network through it.

Rachel Smith: Build that network, yes.

Interviewer: Certainly, already, in the conversation with your volunteers, their feeling of being part of a team is already explicit, and they're only a small group at the moment.

Rachel Smith: And that's really nice, because there's a whole thing with volunteers; it can be challenging, and it can take up quite a lot of your time. For me, who hasn't got any time, it's quite… And there are issues – I'm not saying there aren't – but it's so positive. The good things so outweigh the bad things. Yes, just absolutely brilliant, and really good, I think, at this stage, for local people to see that.   
  
Because there was quite a lot of feedback from the walk, saying, "Oh, they're doing that. Maybe I could do that." It's just like, "They're normal people. I could do that." So yes, I think it's all very positive. Anyway, I'm just waffling now [Crosstalk 1:07:17].

Interviewer: No, I think that knock-on effect in terms of volunteers, and them being, as you say, normal people, that's really accessible. And understanding that, actually, they've lived in the area for donkeys, so actually, they've got quite a bit of information they could share, and people might [Crosstalk]. I think that's very self-affirming. You feel that you've got something to give where maybe \_\_\_[1:07:43] or \_\_\_.

Rachel Smith: Absolutely. I think that's one of the benefits of getting people who know the site really well, and have used the site all these years, isn't it? They're really important, because they're the people who know the site really well, and they've got something to offer. I think that's really important.

END AUDIO

[www.uktranscription.com](http://www.uktranscription.com)