**File: WATERNGO1-30thNov.WMA  
Duration: 01:03:32  
Date: 17/03/2016  
Typist: 805**

START AUDIO

Interviewer: Right there in front of you, because it’s your voice, not mine, that we need. John, could you please start with you explaining your history in and around the Wetlands, and what your role was at \_\_\_[00:00:16].

John: Okay. My name’s John [Brighton], I’m currently the Senior Program Manager at Thames 21, who are a member of the Rivers Trust, and are particularly focused on urban areas and … Well, urban rivers, really. I used to work for the environment agency, where I was at there for seven or eight years, and I was Biodiversity Officer and Technical Specialist in Biodiversity for the Environment Agency, where I mainly looked at the River Lea and all of is tributaries in London.

With regard to Walthamstow Wetlands, I worked on that project from its inception, really, its inception at its current phase, and there were phases before looking at how the site could be used; but this is the phase which almost investigated and has delivered it to where it is now. So, I started working on that probably six or seven years ago, and that included all … That was after the So Near But So Far document which LWT did, and then following that, we commissioned a feasibility study type of document; what type of site it would be, in terms of business plans and so forth. That’s how it sort of ended up coming out as a nature reserve sort of target to it, which largely has informed its way through there, so that’s then helped fill out the … Or helped produce the [H-Lep 00:02:04] application … Well, then following that, the appointment of LWT as the nature reserve owner, and the consultants who developed it, and took them through that stage until … Well, I left EA about a year ago when it was actually going to implementation phase, so [implementating] all the designs and that. So, yes.

Interviewer: That’s brilliant. I wonder what your thoughts were, particularly given your recent experience at Thames 21, in terms of what the aspirations for the project were from the different people that were sat around that table. If we could start with what your thoughts were in terms of EA’s view, because that’s who you were, and reflect on the … It’s quite an interesting partnership, of civic and government agencies, and presumably they came with a range of different aspirations for the project?

John: Yes, I suppose from EA’s point of view, EA didn’t really have a view on the project; it was more that I, as an officer, thought it was a good and needed project, and it should be taken forward. Very much, I pushed for that to be done, and whether that be through permissions, or whether that be through getting money. It wasn’t actually an environment agencies’ need, want, care to do; so, from the EA’s point of view, it was only really myself who pushed that with little to no support from the rest of the EA.

Interviewer: Is that because it doesn’t really fall in … There are statute requirements in terms of permissions, but that’s it in terms of the EA remit?

John: Well, the EA remit, they were also WFD water bodies, as in reservoirs, and the SPA designation \_\_\_[00:04:24], designation. That’s where the statute organisation came from; but there was little to no support with regard to those implementations, and that’s really how the EA is, sort of functionally. Unless it hits their core areas, or flood risk, or some elements which are flagged up to them at a very high level, then it’s very much up to officers to design their own workload. There’s very little functional steer from management. So, yes, I suppose with regard to those projects, there was very little push from the management area within the Hertfordshire and north London section.

Interviewer: Does that also mean very little resistance, as well?

John: Probably, yes, yes, it does. So, there was only one occasion where we had to repair our workload, and as such, one of the managers said “Oh, I think you should stop doing that.” I said “No.”, and that was it, really. As long as you did a good job, or seen to do as a good job, you could do what you like, really. There was probably relatively poor buy-in from senior managers to the project.

Interviewer: Which is interesting, I think, given the scale of it.

John: I think it was very short-sighted on their behalf. Of course they went along to some of the handshaking things, and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Photo-ops.

John: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes.

John: But there was actually very little other input, and particularly very little response from necessary support here and there.

Interviewer: I can guess, but why were you so passionate about it? Why were you so singularly driving … determined about it?

John: Because I thought it was a good thing to do. It does an awful lot for the reservoirs. It hopefully will enhance them ecologically. I think it does a lot for the communities which surround them, as well as access to green space, but also hopefully there is a feedback mechanism there to learn about water, understand about water, and in that way it improves the drainage, or improves the water quality in the river; reduces people’s consumption of water. I think the only way to understand the landscape in which you live in is to have access to it, and I think that’s a key point within that project.

Interviewer: Yes. In terms of, you must have sat through numerous numbers of those partnership meetings, did you get a sense of what the civic … The people around the table that were responsible for the sort of more civic agendas, what they felt or had aspirations for the site, for?

John: It’s an interesting one that, because … Well, from a civic point of view, Rose [Jay G 00:07:58] very much drove the project, which she’s done amazingly to get the council on board, and then she was obviously employed by the council; but it was really her drive which made that project happen, along with Thames Waters’ drive. Kirsty [Halfrey 00:08:23], who’s unfortunately on maternity love, but if-

Interviewer: I caught her.

John: Did you? That’s excellent. She was massively keen, too, as well as Helen Newman, who’s retired … Well, not retired, but she’s no longer with Thames Water, I’m not sure where she’s ended up, but definitely have a chat to those two. They were really big drivers within Thames Water, those two, as well as Rose Jay G from just a Lea perspective; I think she grew up in the Lea area, and therefore she had a driver behind it, locally. Then, she was able to corral the necessary support from a variety of organisations to deliver it. Or a variety of individuals in organisations.

I think it’s very interesting, because you look at it from the side of the council’s, or the people with more civic responsibilities; so by that, I mean the surrounding boroughs. You obviously have Waltham Forest hosting it, which they did, and then Harringay, Hackney, and I suppose, slightly, Enfield. Harringay, Hackney, Enfield, probably never particularly felt a big commitment to the project, although they perhaps wanted it to deliver more for their areas than it did, but that got sort of discounted over financial feasibility, so on and so forth.

To be honest, I don’t think, between you and I, that Kirsty and Rose, and Rose and Helen got on well in the end at all, because they had driven it all to such an extent, they all had slightly different views, and they wanted slightly different things from them. There was probably like a big wedge there; but undoubtedly, without those three individuals, that project would never have happened. No way.

Interviewer: It’s interesting to know that such a major project is reliant on just a key individual-

John: Oh, absolutely, yes.

Interviewer: Whereas you just assume that \_\_\_[00:10:50], bit more strategic in terms of [health], well-being, nature and sustainability.

John: Never. Yes, so it was those three, yes, and you had other people there, like Pete [Massigni], who was first at Natural England, helped push the project through, and then at the GLA where he helped fund the project, and do a variety of \_\_\_[00:11:13]. He was a key individual in some respects.

Interviewer: And their aspirations for it, was it around..? I mean, you said from a \_\_\_, perspective it was around … Maybe around identity of the area, it was about valuing the area, wanting something, an asset for the area?

John: Yes, I think so. I think Rose’s background was she came from a landscape perspective on the Thames, and then looked at the Lea and did this landscape character assessment, which is how I first came across the project, sort of at that stage. Then we focused in on the Walthamstow area. So, yes.

Interviewer: What do you think it brings to the area?

John: What, the Wetlands?

Interviewer: Yes, the opening up of the Wetlands.

John: It’s interesting, you look at the surrounding areas, and they are, in effect, they’re disconnected completely at the moment because they don’t have access; but even when access is opened up, they still don’t have good access to the sites. In effect, what it’s doing, is driving a massive regeneration program around the area. You look at Tottenham Hale, you look at Blackhorse Lane. Meridian Water has its own drives as well. What it probably will lead to, and definitely with the Lea Valley now, you’re seeing is being completely gentrified. Your existing communities are getting prized out. That’s the same with the Olympic Park in Hackney Wick.

Although, Hackney Wick has gone through two phases, so it’s gone through the original community, and then it’s the artist community, and now the artist community are getting phased out.

Interviewer: Yes. So, in terms of … So, what that brings in terms of … It brings increased access where they have disconnected access at the moment, but it’s acting as a catalyst as well for that economic regeneration?

John: Yes, I mean, you look at a lot of studies, I’m sure you know that as soon as you’ve got access to high quality green space, that significantly improves property prices, desirability to live, and then blue-green spaces is even more valuable. I think that’s a massive driver for the area.

Interviewer: Why is that, that green-blue space is that much more valuable? What is it that.. ?

John: I think there’s something ingrained in human nature, that obviously, we are completely dependent upon water, and we have been, whether that be for food, drink, irrigation, and I think there is very much a feeling within somebody, looking out … I grew up by the sea, and to look out over the sea, or to look out over water brings a significant calmness, clarity of thought, potentially taking yourself away from your immediate circumstances in life, and allows you reflect on where you are, what you want to do in future, so on so forth. I think that, particularly in urban living, that disconnect, because often we’re surrounded by large buildings, we’re surrounded by that, and that, I think, leads to almost closed thought processes.

I think you can get very much stuck in your own mind, associated with that, and that leads to a variety of health … Solely \_\_\_[00:15:48], about wealth as a key driver to life, as opposed to wider reflection, which I think … And I think water’s sort of integral to that. Well, I can definitely say that is to me, but I think that’s what I see in others as well.

Interviewer: Yes, and that’s been your experience both at the EA, and here?

John: Yes.

Interviewer: It is interesting, isn’t it, how it is that much more[transportive 00:16:18], thatexperience and interaction with water. I wonder if we could take a step back, and just think about some wider trends in terms of why some of these areas are now being made available to the public; and you’ll come across that, presumably, also in your existing role, because you’ve got a range of people involved in Thames, and then all along the Lea, that we have an increasing encounter of private within this \_\_\_[00:16:55], of governance, and I wonder what your thoughts were on that more generally, and why you think someone like Thames Water would open up this space?

John: Well, I sort of know why, and that’s because the legislation around where you buy your water from has changed, and so in future the government’s introduced something that instead of having to buy from your direct water supply, you can choose who to buy your water from; so, even though we live in London, and all our water comes from Thames Water, we can buy it from … In future, we will be able to buy it from Utilities Water, \_\_\_[00:17:40], with north-east England, or something like that, because they might have better sustainability policies. There is a big driver in Thames Water to make their customers feel valued and give something back to their customers. Undoubtedly, that project would have never have happened without that change in legislation, because that had to come down from the chief exec having a much wider thought process about this legislation, and it was very much what I call a JFDI, that this has to happen, otherwise we’re going to lose all our money and not be profitable.

That’s the major driver in why that project’s been … It’s why that project didn’t happen for 50 years from the Abercrombie Fitch vision, to why it happened, or started to happen about 7 or 8 years ago.

Interviewer: What do you think will be the fallout of this? They are major land-holders, up and down the country, are water companies. What do you think, in terms of if you’re looking at that landscape, and you’re looking at different people to approach in terms of supporting increased water sustainability, or integration of water activities, are they more receptive now?

John: Certainly Thames water are. Certainly in my current position I’ve got a very good working relationship with them, although it’s quite strange for me, Thames 21 are very much an organisation about pollution. Arguably, Thames Water are most certainly the biggest pollution of our water courses – not to be mentioned in public. But, we do have a very good relationship with them now, where on a number of projects we work jointly to restore water quality, improve community engagement, so on and so forth.

I think we’ve got broadly three/four projects funded totally by Thames Water, so that’s major.

Interviewer: It is a real commitment, isn’t it, to community engagement?

John: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think the private ownership affects the way that people will experience these spaces, if there is this element of, either just whether it’s integration or not?

John: I think often that people still don’t think of Thames Water as being privately owned.

Interviewer: Interesting, okay.

John: And it’s not a private sector organisation; the majority of their staff are still leftovers from …

Interviewer: \_\_\_[00:20:40].

John: Yes, yes, and it’s got definitely a slightly different ethos to a private company.

Interviewer: That’s interesting.

John: So, private ownership, I think, say, a loose concept in the case of Thames Water. I mean, it’s interesting, because you also look at current government organisations, and they don’t allow access to large areas of land, for a whole range of reasons, so I still see it as that sort of government, quango, private-sector organisation, with a whole load of issues.

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

John: How that sort of structure will affect behaviour is interesting, because essentially, I think people very soon will start to see it as their place, and that will, I think, create significant tensions, because … Well, and I think it will create tensions with the various user groups as well. You know, when cyclists who want to bomb through, you’re going to have walkers, you’re going to have children, families, fisherman; there is going to be some horrible times and clashes between the various communities there, and I think it will be quite difficult to manage in future.

Interviewer: Why is that, that that sort of clash of communities will happen there, where it doesn’t in … or is maybe not such a great concern in other green spaces?

John: It certainly is, from the fisherman/birders perspective, it’s almost been a private area, and they probably act, and there’s already clashes between fisherman and birders already; but I think that will be further enhanced in future years. Yes.

I suppose when I say ‘communities’, it’s almost thematic communities, as opposed to geographical communities.

Interviewer: What do you think about who is being targeted to use the space?

John: I don’t think anyone’s being targeted.

Interviewer: Okay.

John: I mean, I have to admit, I’ve not been involved in the last year and a half, probably, maybe two years, so I haven’t been involved with that community engagement; but this project was started, and like a lot of … In actual fact, I’d say every London Green Group project, it has not been targeted at a group, it’s been developed by people doing their jobs to improve X, Y, and Z. So, there’s never been, and I know they’re looking at doing this now, which I think is actually a very good thing, within London there’s never been a structured look at our green infrastructure, or our blue-green infrastructure, and saying, “Where should we develop it?”

All the projects which have been delivered, and Walthamstow is one such one, and it’s, “We should do something here, there’s massive opportunity.” It’s been officer-level people like Rose Jay G who have identified them and driven them.

Interviewer: Yes, and so it isn’t a case of … Do you think the sort of justice agenda comes after the event? Do you think that they look at the scale of the site, clearly there’s a legislative and a bottom-line driver for Thames Water, and Rose has her own particular agendas there in terms of what she’d identified; but the idea that this is in one of the most deprived, densely populated areas of London, that comes after the event?

John: I’d say it adds further support to it, yes, as opposed to … What there isn’t at the moment, and I know that the GLA are beginning to look at it, there is a deprived area here, how do we renew, or how do we regenerate, or gentrify the area? How do we improve that quality of life? There’s never been that look at it. I think there is a foot to start considering that, and that sort of comes within the green infrastructure taskforce, who have started to push London, and that comes through the London infrastructure plan.

Interviewer: Okay, and that will be … They hope will be more targeted in terms of identifying areas that are in desperate needs of green and blue space, and how they might experience it?

John: Yes.

Interviewer: Leading on from that, I guess, I really welcome your views on how, obviously, it was identified as a nature reserve, and there were different motivations for that; not least of all, I’m sure, the designations around the site, but the imagining of it, so some of the imagery that’s gone up on the website, in terms of some of the promotional material, it doesn’t necessarily hold up to a mirror to the local area. I wondered if or how people might use, these different communities might use green space? I wondered what you thought was … Your experiences up and down?

John: I suppose the first bit is, I haven’t actually seen the materials which are being released, sort of certainly in the last two years; but I suppose it’s an interesting one, it’s being a branded a nature reserve, and there’s been materials which have gone out as such. Whether … And I think this slightly relates to your question, in that whether it will actually be a nature reserve to people is something very different. People value it for what it is, and whether people value what the material, what is going out as being a nature reserve, is something that’s completely different as well. I think there’ll be an interesting mix there, as well.

So, yes, I mean, I suppose I don’t particularly have answers, thoughts, I suppose I just question it … Well, I definitely think that some people will use it more. I think, as with Walthamstow already, it’s becoming very white and very middle-class. I think you’ll get a lot of white, a lot of very middle-class people using it. It wasn’t that area, and it wasn’t like that five or six years ago when we originally … Was it seven or eight years ago when we originally started? It was still a very deprived area, but this is rapidly changing. So, by the time it’s actually opened, or by the time it’s established, it probably won’t be the existing communities, they will have largely moved out; but, nowadays, I don’t see it being a particularly diverse area, and certainly I think that will change with its lifespan, as well.

Interviewer: From that perspective, there are dis-benefits to it turning into a nature reserve.

John: I suppose whatever you put there … I suppose in some way, there will be some drive around there which would have affected the gentrification; but I think the gentrification of the Lea is already long happening, and that’s happening external to the Walthamstow Wetlands project. The Walthamstow Wetlands project is another cog in the mechanism, but there are vastly more, and I think the major cog in the mechanism is the Olympic Park, and that’s what’s really driven the change, and I’d say definitely the Walthamstow Wetlands project, particularly up in Blackhorse Lane, is definitely driven by the … Well, the gentrification of Blackhorse Lane and Walthamstow is definitely driven by the Olympic Park; potentially slightly less so in Tottenham, because it’s obviously not … Still pretty well connected.

Interviewer: You spoke about the different tensions and conflicts already, but I wondered if you thought … When you were developing it, and the ideas were evolving, was there a sense of an expectation of what people should do and shouldn’t do in the site?

John: Certainly from the partners, yes. I mean, obviously when London Wildlife Trust won the bid to … And it was always going to be LWT or RSPB who were going to win it; it was always going to be a nature reserve, but with that there is certain expectations. I think if it were an RSPB nature reserve, that would have made it much worse, because RSPB would have come and brought in their national sort of birdy-view, while LWT, obviously are able to be a bit more reflective of the local area. I do think we’ve probably made quite a wise choice there, choosing LWT.

Interviewer: Yes, that’s interesting. Then, did they also have experience of [slightly inflexible engagement 00:31:51], LWT, and vis-à-vis, RSPB?

John: I’d say that officers working on that project do, yes.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. Yes, yes, okay.

John: David’s brilliant.

Interviewer: Yes.

John: He’s quite reflective of that area, and prepared to do detailed engagement. I have seen other stuff from LWT which is very difficult, because they’re largely driven by their members who come from a very specific viewpoint, and can mean that makes it quite difficult for them to reflect the local community, because they want wildlife to be at the forefront, and I know that has loads of big clashes within LWT’s networks and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Because members want protection of wildlife, whereas in reality, local communities want access to …

John: Yes, access to nature, yes, yes.

Interviewer: … new space, which is very accessible, meaningful to them, rather than something a bit more wild. Okay. You’ve spoken about the benefits to the community, particularly in terms of well-being and education. Perhaps we could talk about how them opening up affects … The people that will visit it, how it will affect their connection with water. One of the reasons, I guess, around Thames 21, is that it’s trying to affect people’s relationship with water, so when you look at your experience on the Wetlands project, and now your experience now, what are your thoughts in terms of what opening up that space will mean for people’s connection with water?

John: Well, I hope it enables them to engage in a more positive manner. I think what you see a lot from, say, national water charities, very much is, ‘XXX’ statistics, or emotive comment, and the message broadly is, “You should value water, take care of it, don’t pollute it, make sure children have access to clean water, sanitation.” So on and so forth.

I hope, and I would like the project to enable people to value their local water, and I think … How can you not visit that site and not value it? It’s stunning. It doesn’t feel like you’re in London, it’s just incredible. I hope what that means is people actually … And through that education material on-site, and through the various programs run there, I hope that that will mean that people look at it, use it, begin to understand it, and then take that understanding back into their own homes, their own environments, their own local park, and start caring for their local assets, or their local water assets, by that, I mean.

Whether that’s what you put down your sink, your misconnected houses, your local park, whether you drop litter into your stream, or whether you almost recycle more. Your whole process, that valuing your local environment gives; but that’s just my desire for what I would like it to achieve.

Interviewer: I guess I sort of have two questions after that, then. The first is, how would they best do that? And then I would like to reflect on what the barriers are to achieving that very positive aspirational behaviour change.

John: I suppose the, how do they go about doing that, well, I suppose that’s partly self-driven by the individual, because that … I think it partly does have to … Yes, you’re not going to be able to do it without it being partially self-driven, I.E. this looks amazing, taking it back; but then it’s up to, your first port of call is your contact with people at the centre. The interpretation material which is either at the centre, or around the area. Those key pieces of information which might stimulate thought to, “This is beautiful.” To, “Oh, that connects to that.”

I suppose what we do here, now, with our interpretation of our SUDS schemes, and so on and so forth, is, last thing you need is a big board with lots of information on. You almost need a little snippet of information, stimulate thought, and then take that away … Well, enable that to be linked to elsewhere, so that if people want to, they can go away, read a little bit, read a little bit more, and that’s how you enable people to understand, increase value, so on and so forth.

Interviewer: And what do you think will be the barriers to people taking that journey, or going through that process in valuing?

John: I suppose my worry for the site is, from a people engagement, and what I want the site to achieve, is, it might actually become extremely hectic. I think that will prevent \_\_\_[00:38:55], people to prevent getting involved. It might, I don’t know, the quality of the interpretation, the actual clashes in community groups; that could be a huge off-put, again, the thematic community groups. Then, I suppose a lot of it is that first interaction, that people-side point of view. Quality of material, so on and so forth.

Interviewer: Okay. Education …. \_\_\_[00:39:41 – 00:39:48]. I guess one of my questions has been around the public consultation, which LWT did twice, and I wondered what your thoughts were in terms of the experience of that?

John: I haven’t been involved in it, really, so.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay, well, that’s easy. \_\_\_[00:40:22]. We spoke about the unique nature of the site. The water base, we’ve spoken about that. Yes, some of the questions, we have \_\_\_, actually, what responsibilities do you think people, local people, anybody visiting it, should adopt, or what the partnership envisaged people adopting in terms of responsibilities on-site, and maybe away from the site in terms of \_\_\_[00:41:09]?

John: On-site it’s relatively easy, as in, they hope people will not throw litter about, act in a responsible behaviour towards the site; and that’s not disturbing the birds overly, not going off the path, and then your general green-space ones, so anti-social behaviour, so on and so forth. From Thames Waters’ point of view, there was definitely a desire for the site to reduce people’s consumption, and that message. That’s a really big driver for them, along with all water companies, construction issues and so forth.

I suppose my desire was really from a local Lea catchment perspective, which was that they would then be able to use the site as a message for not misconnecting your house, not pouring fats down the sink. Things like that, which would then help … The site is actually completely disconnected, really, from the local quality, the local river perspective, in terms of a functioning asset; but I suppose my desires for that site were to enable people to improve the local river assets, as well, from community learning. Now, I don’t know if that will ever actually be in there or not.

Interviewer: So, to take some of the learning that they do around water management, and in turn, sustainable use of water in the reservoirs, take that a way to understanding that within a Lea catchment perspective.

What are your thoughts, I guess, in terms of how people could get involved, or going forward in the management of the space? So, you said they were particularly at risk that people will, I think you used the phrase that they will “begin to see the place as their own”, and a number of different stakeholders have spoken about the importance of ownership, and I guess my question, or my concern is, how does that ownership manifest in terms of influence?

John: Yes, I think that’s going to be a real challenge for the site, I really do, because there’s obviously a lot of cultural … Whether it’s Hindi, or other religions and their view of water, and how it should be used. There’s obviously a high Jewish population, particularly in Stanford Hill area, near the reservoirs, and how they use and see water. I see them often, cycling home, lined up by the canal, praying. There’ll be use issues around that. There’ll be use issues around birders, and birders in particular, but wildlife enthusiasts in general, and then more amenity user groups. I can see that café being your latest coffee and cake morning for mothers, and stuff like that. There’ll be obviously noise associated with that, and then you’re going to get the grumpy birders, or the grumpy fisherman saying “You’ve disturbed my peace!”

I hope that the site will have loads of kids on, and get kids actually actively interested in nature. But-

Interviewer: Sorry, go on.

John: What was the question?

Interviewer: In terms of whether or not they’ll have roots to have their voice heard in that space, to somehow shape the space as it evolves.

John: That’s where I take my hat off to Dave Mooney, and say “Good luck, mate.”

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter).

John: But, I think it’s going to be a tough task, whoever does it, and obviously Dave’s going to \_\_\_, in some format, so.

Interviewer: Yes, especially with such diverse voices.

John: Mm-hmm, there’s going to be huge conflicts there.

Interviewer: Interesting. Right, where are we? So, management, those that have been able to influence … Do you think, in your experience of the project, that actually there have been stakeholders missing, that you rather wish their voice had been heard either earlier on in the process, or just heard at all, that really weren’t present at the table?

John: Well, I suppose there was never a local community stakeholder which really shaped the project. I’ve criticised many a EA project, flood alleviation scheme before, for not engaging local community. It’s almost designed, consult, build, which is not what you’re meant to do, obviously. It’s consult, design, consult, build, or something, whatever it is. That was never done on the project … Well, I suppose it was done, in actual fact. You did have the So Near So Far document.

Interviewer: Yes.

John: But that was so long ago at first, that it didn’t … Whether it actually consulted the real local community, or whether there was an increased weightage to user groups, which there probably was; but that’s not necessarily a bad thing, is another aspect. But, certainly when we were looking at it from a business-plan, structural feasibility sort of point of view, from the inception, from the … What’s it called? Landscape character assessment. From then, until HLF phase two, there was no consultation with the public. No real consultation with the public which I can remember, so that element was probably missed. It certainly had all the statutory organisations, and some. It was very statutory-heavy.

Interviewer: Okay.

John: I think from a Waltham Forest perspective … \_\_\_[00:48:34], slightly aside, there’s a very interesting comparison, because the Leyton Jubilee Park, which is only just down the road, that park has had millions of pounds put into it from Waltham Forest, partly from the Olympics money, millions put into it, and that was all driven by the council leader, Chris Robbins, who made the council … Just caused up a whole fuss. That park has had everything done to it; it still is, but it never had … I don’t think the Walthamstow project ever had that support, that impetus from the leader, so I always find that … It sort of comes back to my point with myself and the EA, Rose in her role, and Kirsty and Helen Newman in their … It’s individuals who drive these projects. It’s not necessarily-

Interviewer: It almost happens despite …

John: It can do, it can do, yes. Yes. It’s rarely an ethos-driven thing.

Interviewer: Yes, which as you said at the beginning, is incredibly short-sighted; and also, I think in terms of the consultation, as good as So Near But So Far is, as you very rightly pointed out, the population is changing so quickly, that even if that was the local community then, it more than likely isn’t-

John: Yes, I mean, that was probably 10 years ago.

Interviewer: Isn’t the local community now. But that, I guess, is the challenge with a project of this scale, isn’t it?

We’ve spoken about the dis-benefits, we’ve spoken about … I guess one of my final things is around how you hope people might get involved in the stewardship.

John: Yes. Well, yes. I think in reality it will be very difficult for communities to get involved in the stewardship, just because of its … You know, working site, and they will always have to be managed by a third-sector organisation, and LWT, you know?

Interviewer: Yes.

John: Well, yes, yes, yes, like specific managed volunteers.

Interviewer: Yes.

John: Yes, and even that is a limited amount, because there’s not loads of trees, it’s not like a woodland where you could get loads of volunteer management; it’s mainly going to be the once a year, grass and rake cut, trim hedges, maybe once in a while trim the reed bed, if they can ever get access to it, because I don’t know how they’ve built it, but it’s likely that you probably couldn’t take a volunteer out onto it.

Interviewer: Yes, the risk is too great.

John: Far too dangerous, yes. So, there will be a habitat management aspect which they can do. I think where volunteers may be more of a benefit, or community stewardship, is promoting it to surrounding communities, manning the gift shop, manning the education stores, giving guided tours. Then there’s the stewardship of behaviour, and I think that’s a really important one for the site. If people see something which others are not meant to do on the site, then people tell them; whether that be dropping litter, whether it will be dogs running into the reservoirs, or something like that. I think that’s a key stewardship element.

Interviewer: Yes, no, I think you’re absolutely right.

John: I think the interesting bit of the stewardship is where that may lead outside of the boundaries of the reserve. Whether that’s further down the Lea Valley, or further up the Lea Valley, or backs into people’s homes, I think that’s the unknown within it, and what I hope it would deliver \_\_\_[00:53:35].

Interviewer: And presumably, from … Yes, from your perspective in your current role, that would be your interest in the project, that it would have overflow in terms of a heavy change \_\_\_.

John: Yes, yes, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. I’m pretty sure I have exhausted and drawn out way too much of your time, but let me just double check. \_\_\_[00:54:05 – 00:54:19]. We did identity, you spoke about regeneration, didn’t you? Yes. \_\_\_, challenges. Yes, I think we … Oh, I suppose one last thing, I guess, is around connectivity between the different communities. Because you’ve got the green way opening up the cycle route between Woodberry and Walthamstow, do you see that as something that will offer increased connectivity between different geographies, and therefore in some way connected through, and by water? Or actually, that is sort of a bit abstract for people?

John: I think there’s increasing connectivity regardless of those routes, massively increase in connectivity between Walthamstow and Hackney, associated with the gentrification of Walthamstow, and the increasing expense of Hackney. You’re getting a lot of Hackney people moving out to Walthamstow, and then of course they’re coming to see their mates and that back in Hackney, so that’s already becoming a well-trodden path. The links will further enhance that; the actual physical links will further enhance that.

Yes, you’ve got that link, and you’re going to have the enhanced links sort of around Blackhorse Lane; in actual fact, outside of those, there’s going to be no increase in linkage between communities in the Wetlands, and that’s where particularly Hackney, previously Hackney, Harringay and Enfield felt very isolated from the project.

Interviewer: Because of the gates that aren’t there.

John: Yes, yes. There’s very valid reasons for why they aren’t there. They’re hugely expensive, because of the physical connections. Railways all down the Lea Valleys, motorways, and so forth. So, yes.

Interviewer: Yes, and that’s where those different … The previous master-planning is interacting with this as a project, in what it can and can’t do, isn’t it?

John: Yes.

Interviewer: Brilliant. Thank you so much. Is there anything else you want to say about the project at all?

John: No. I’ve probably said quite a lot of negative stuff, but I will say, it is one of the best projects out there. It is fantastic, absolutely brilliant.

Interviewer: Do you think it will get the, sort of … It’s billed as the biggest European nature reserve. Do you think it will live up to that headline?

John: I think it’s coming at a very interesting time. Whether it will get European recognition or not is, almost, I don’t really give two hoots. I don’t care. What matters is its recognition within London, and I think it comes at a very interesting time with the next mayoral candidates coming, and they’re both a bit more left than … Sadiq Khan, and what’s-his-name? Conservative bloke. Yes. They’re both green infrastructure, they’ve talked about … So, I think there it has an interesting political element, certainly for how London will develop in the next 5 to 10 years.

Interviewer: That’s interesting. Goldsmith.

John: Goldsmith, that’s it. Zac Goldsmith.

Interviewer: Zac.

John: Yes.

Interviewer: Right, okay. Those sort of projects start having political capital?

John: Yes, yes. Yes, and you know, there’s big opportunities for them in these sorts of projects. I mean, you look at Boris’ legacy, they’re all fecking red Ken’s projects. That’s what a lot of people don’t get.

Interviewer: The master of PR.

John: The bloke’s an asshole, but he’s brilliant because people love him, because he’s a buffoon, but he gets attention to things. I think it’ll be interesting. You look at the London National City Park. Again, that’s … It’s almost like … I think it’s very good in many ways; I’m not sure if I support it or not, partly from personal interests with Thames 21, and I think various people in other charities have said the same, or indicated the same, that what it could do is actually take all the money away from existing charities; that means that a lot of us go bust.

Interviewer: It replaces all the small charities with a monolith, doesn’t it?

John: Yes, and then-

Interviewer: That may not have the sensitivity to deal with the complexity of London.

John: Yes, yes, and also you look at what it’s actually saying; it’s not actually saying a lot. It’s a great PR thing, in a way. But, I think it’s important in the fact that it’s influencing politics, and no matter how well Thames 21, London Wildlife Trust work, we can do nothing without influencing politics. I think that’s critical, and that’s what Walthamstow Wetlands coming in the first two years of … Or the first year or so of the [mayoral’s 01:00:45] term, can really start to be a big player. That’s all the big projects going on at the moment, the big green infrastructure projects. How can they show that this is a success and should be done in other areas?

Interviewer: Yes, and that they were in some way behind it, therefore they should take some of the \_\_\_, from it.

John: Yes.

Interviewer: How do you think that plays out in terms of the plans for the new green bridge?

John: That thing’s a fucking disgrace. That’s basically some toss wanting something nice in their area, and I hate it. That’s a very blunt view. No, I think that does green infrastructure a bad name, and it sort of goes back to what I almost … What I sort of indicated with … Or London green grid, which is a great thing; but it’s where its fallen down, is it’s not structured. It’s basically people’s projects. What they’ve done is, they’ve produced some great designs, they’ve produced some great PR; but in actual fact, it’s a badly thought-through project which isn’t needed, and is a waste of money.

To the people who don’t know, or who are potentially badly advised, they see it as a great opportunity, and they will put money into it. We had some really big companies approach us to ask for comments on it, so we’ve put a very pragmatic view across. But, yes, so that’s where, these things where … I suppose it’s what I’ve learnt; you need that sort of wider structure if you’re going to invest in green infrastructure.