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START AUDIO

Interviewer: Can we start with you introducing yourself and your links to both of the Wetlands sites.

Nathaniel Legall: Okay, my name is Nathaniel Legall, I am 22 years old. I am a Wild Talent Trainee for the London Wildlife Trust. It’s primarily a one year course, based on the Level 2 Wildlife Conservation or \_\_\_ of Conservation.

It’s an NVQ and it’s a fulltime work based traineeship, giving me more experience in terms of the trust reserve management and based in the East.

So I spend a lot of my time in Walthamstow Wetlands and Woodberry Wetlands and I’m currently learning about how they manage those sites.

Interviewer: Okay.

Nathaniel Legall: For wildlife and for people.

Interviewer: Okay. So could we start perhaps with you describing what it is in particular about both of those sites that you value from an environmental perspective? Or from any perspective, actually.

Nathaniel Legall: The first answer that pops into my head is the urbanisation that’s surrounding those sites, it’ quite unusual to find such a dense amount of houses and businesses and buildings around a nature reserve.

But Walthamstow, Woodberry, hopefully are going to be good examples of how you can make a home for nature, alongside homes for people and hopefully they’ll provide good opportunities for people to connect with nature.

More so that places like Barnes, where in a sense you have to pay to enter. Whereas these are going to be free sites, so they’re taking away that economic barrier to wildlife. Sorry what was the question?

Interviewer: What you value about the sites, what it is in particular that strikes you?

Nathaniel Legall: I guess it’s the openness as well. When you walk along Seven Sisters Road, for example. Or Ferry Lane next to Walthamstow Wetlands. You don’t really expect to see so much happening, but when you walk into it or someone takes you round, it’s striking to see the diversity of wildlife. So that’s what I value most.

Interviewer: Okay, well you’ve already started talking there a little bit about the benefits, or perhaps the reasons why people would come. Because it is free at the point of entry.

I wonder if you could talk to me a little bit more, about what you perceive as the benefits for the wider community, with both sites being opened up?

Nathaniel Legall: The tip of my tongue says ‘jobs’ but it isn’t about work, it’s not about money. It’s just about connecting to wildlife, such an important thing to do. Just having enough opportunity. We already have [one set of marshes 00:03:22].

Interviewer: Yes.

Nathaniel Legall: And they’re managed by \_\_\_. It just adds another dimension to the area. It’s another opportunity, it’s another natural site, a different set of faces. The more opportunities to connect with wildlife, the better.

Benefits to the local community did you say?

Interviewer: What is the benefit of having that access and that connection?

Nathaniel Legall: So you can understand where your water comes from. Because when we do the walks around these sites, people say “What is the reservoir used for?” and if you live anywhere north of the Thames, this is for your water.

Most of the time you get a surprised reaction. So it’s educational and hopefully people will think twice, at least for a second about how they use their water.

Interviewer: Okay.

Nathaniel Legall: Benefits of volunteering- people who are looking for work, volunteering’s a fantastic way of getting experience. Even if you don’t want to go into conservation, volunteering will help your community, it’s fantastic.

You’ll get more skills, get to meet new people, get the social benefits of volunteering, making new friends. Benefits of the site for the local community…

Interviewer: Do you think the local community are going to use them?

Nathaniel Legall: When we say local, what’s our..?

Interviewer: Maybe immediate vicinity. So here for example, will the people in Woodberry \_\_\_ Estate use this?

Nathaniel Legall: Absolutely, I have no doubt. The people who use Woodberry Wetlands, every time I come into the site, there’s always someone at the gate trying to push their way in.

Interviewer: Really?

Nathaniel Legall: I have to say, “It’s not quite open yet, come back at Easter” but I’ve been doing that for six months now. So every other day at least, I had to do it today, so I have no doubt the local community will see the site.

Also at Walthamstow Wetlands, the same thing. A lot of people use Lee Valley Park as their kind of walking routes during Saturdays and Sundays. Walks with their families, with their dogs.

So I imagine people will use Walthamstow Wetlands as an extension to those leisure walks or maybe even, once a month, change their route a bit and take the bridge today, just to vary it.

But in terms of Walthamstow as an area, I’m not sure that people on the north side of the area will travel all that way, just to go, unless they were already connected to nature in some way.

People from the Blackhorse Road area; Walthamstow’s virtually on their doorstep and they have several entrances, so…

Interviewer: Are there barriers to people taking part, or feeling comfortable in those sites?

Nathaniel Legall: A major barrier for Walthamstow, because it’s not open yet, so I don’t know but it’s that long road; \_\_\_ Lane between Black Horse Road Station and Tottenham Hale because of the reservoirs because they’re so long. And it runs alongside, it’s kind of like a barren wasteland.

You’ve got the industrial estate and then there’s nothing but the road until you come to the canal.

Interviewer: Yes.

Nathaniel Legall: So if you don’t cycle often or you’re not confident walking, there might be a barrier or if you don’t want to get on the bus. It’s only on a bus route.

Because I’ve walked that quite a few times, and it’s not a nice walk.

Interviewer: Yes, it’s a hectic road isn’t it?

Nathaniel Legall: It’s very busy. Other barriers…Still public perceptions, local people might think of it as just the fisheries, even if you have LWT plastered all over it. ‘Come inside for a cup of tea’

Unless you know someone who’s been there, or you know someone who’s gone there, you still might think it’s just for fishermen, which has been the perception for decades really.

Someone who’s lived here their whole life, I think that’s been quite difficult to overcome, unless major publicity and time goes into getting people to understand what it is and what \_\_\_[ 00:08:22].

People might not be interested in wildlife or interested in conservation or understand what we’re doing, what the point of the site is. So that’s part of a broader barrier isn’t it?

Interviewer: And is that also in fact, because the identity of both sites, they’re very much nature reserves, not public parks.

Nathaniel Legall: Yes.

Interviewer: So do you think that’s what feeds into some of those perceptions about how we use it and who should use it?

Nathaniel Legall: Yes, I guess so, because if you’re not interested in wildlife, why would you go to a nature reserve. It’s kind of almost like that.

But we have the events manager, who is starting to make headway with that. We had the yoga stuff and maybe those audiences will come for something else other than nature and see “Oh there’s nature there too”

Interviewer: Yes, so you almost need a hook first to get them in on something that they do know and then..?

Nathaniel Legall: So, yes that’s probably…

Interviewer: Okay. We spoke about benefits. Possible risks of the site?

Nathaniel Legall: I don’t know if there’ve been drownings in the past but you know, kids will be kids and people have accidents, so make sure safety is on point. Having staff around who are trained as well is going to be really important.

Interviewer: Yes.

Nathaniel Legall: They’re quite large water bodies and whilst it’s deeper in the middle, drowning is still possible even in a very shallow bit of water.

Risks, oh disturbing the wildlife is massive. The idea of opening up Walthamstow Wetlands and having that central path and the hub, people will be focused around certain parts of the reserve. But there is still the potential for people to go off the path more regularly.

You know, leisure lines where you have in parts, people tend to go off the beaten path and set their own route. It might be a risk to wildlife in those more sensitive parts of the reserve where they nest.

Noise and footpath erosion and stuff like that. That’s a good point to keep an eye on. That’s all that comes to mind.

Interviewer: Particularly given that you grew up in the area, I’m interested as to whether you think the opening of the site will affect people’s perceptions of the area or your sense of identity of it?

Nathaniel Legall: I think it probably won’t affect the identity of Walthamstow or my identity. Just today, people were saying “Oh have you been to Walthamstow, it’s really dingy isn’t it. People walk around in tracksuits and multi-coloured laces and it’s a bit of a shithole really”

Interviewer: Who was saying this to you?

Nathaniel Legall: Some of the volunteers. Not saying it to me, but I was listening and it’s the same old story really isn’t it, we’ve had the riots and Walthamstow was a name that came up quite regularly in the news.

I don’t really think a nature reserve is going to change that. That’s my perception of our people’s perception, I don’t take that as part of my identity.

Interviewer: What’s your sense of identity for it?

Nathaniel Legall: I think Walthamstow’s a multicultural hub. I think it might be one of the most multicultural places in the world, not London, and not the UK I think the world.

There different languages and the backgrounds, it’s difficult to come across places with that. It’s not just saying it, people actually talk to each other when they come, even though they come from different places and have different skin colours.

I mean my best friends are a Roman Catholic Indian, an atheist Algerian and a Sri Lankan Canadian. Try and get your head around that.

So yes, and they’re supposed to be helping me at The Mill this evening. They’re not just fake friends, they’re actually people I know and understand.

Interviewer: As a function of being where you are and being part of Walthamstow?

Nathaniel Legall: I think so, yes. I can’t imagine getting that kind of friendship group…

Interviewer: Anywhere else.

Nathaniel Legall: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes, it’s great.

Nathaniel Legall: And they’re school mates basically, so from school.

Interviewer: Okay.

Nathaniel Legall: So yes, will the Wetlands change my identity?

Interviewer: Yes, your sense of belonging or your perception of where you come from and your home town effectively?

Nathaniel Legall: I don’t know, not really.

Interviewer: Do you perceive it as an asset for Walthamstow.

Nathaniel Legall: Absolutely, we are only improving what we have already. So only good can come from that. Having the Marine Engine House opened up, we’ve got offices there and a volunteer area and café. And it’s just another place for people to go.

Interviewer: It’s interesting that you’re 22, you’re very engaged with it, this is a passion for you. Do you think many of your peer group will be interested?

Nathaniel Legall: Yes, I’ve got a couple of my friends interested already and they came down to volunteer and they came down. Definitely, so it’s not impossible and if I can do that, if people put up posters up on notice boards in cafes and shops and talk about it and visit the site. Then yes, that should hopefully at least get a few more people around interested that weren’t before.

Interviewer: In terms of the sort of activities that are going to be encouraged on site, what sort of things will you hope that people will get involved in on both sides?

Nathaniel Legall: I hope people will get involved in the management of the site, hopefully and you’ll be able to see the benefit. I hate the phrase ‘Giving back’ because it sounds like you’ve taken something doesn’t it, but yes contributing basically, hopefully people will see the benefits of volunteering.

I hope people get involved with the nature walks, bat walks and bird walks and surveys and hopefully will help their understanding.

Interviewer: Do you think there’s anything in particular about both sites, being water dominated. So is there anything in particular about the value or the quality of the space that it brings, that there’s so much water?

Nathaniel Legall: Well I suppose, at Woodlands it’s open, and you can see quite a long way which is strange to see in London and that’s really valuable for people, a lot of people tell me that.

Even myself, to stand there and stare at the vastness of it and you know, spot up landmarks in the distance. In Walthamstow you can spot Ali Pali, Canary Wharf, and Woodberry Wetlands, all from one spot. So that’s really good.

You don’t really get that in woodlands or heathland or any other habitat, like reservoirs.

Interviewer: So there is something quite particular about the reservoir qualities then.

Nathaniel Legall: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think it will affect people’s interactions with water. So if they come to places like this. For a lot of people, this is a remarkable water body, for them to interact with that they don’t encounter on a usual basis.

Do you think it will affect their connection or their relation to water?

Nathaniel Legall: Yes, absolutely, I suppose you get that key sense in that “You get your drinking water from here. This goes to Cotton Mill Treatment Works then comes to your tap” Absolutely will affect your relationship with water.

Interviewer: Activities that will be discouraged and how that will be achieved? What sort of things will you encourage people not to do?

Nathaniel Legall: Running probably isn’t great unfortunately. Or running too close to the reservoirs.

People use running as a leisure activity to keep fit, but if you’re running along the bank of the reservoir, you might fall in.

Smoking…It’s part of the policy I understand, that dog walking won’t be allowed which is going to be a stakeholder challenge to say the least.

Yes, I feel a bit bad about saying the smoking, I mean, I don’t smoke, but lots of people do.

Interviewer: You mentioned there a sort of stakeholder challenge. Do you think there are likely to be any user flashpoints? Are there likely to be any tensions or conflicts or conflicts between different types of users?

Nathaniel Legall: (Laughter) Well, you know the fishermen are going to be first off. Fishermen versus everyone, basically, versus the world. (Laughter) It’s going to be across Walthamstow, not at all in Woodberry because we don’t have fish.

So that’s been their kind of haven forever and now, only in a short period of time, it was 2012 I think don’t quote me on that, the plans for Walthamstow Wetlands to be opened up and now we’re in 2016 and it’s only 4 years and when you’ve had it for like 50-60 years…We’ll see how it goes.

Stake holder conflicts. Like I was saying dog walking is really popular on the neighbouring walks and marshes, really, really popular, like one in every two people have a dog with them on Saturday or Sunday.

So having that bridge connecting those two sites, making it clear, is going to be a real problem, that one thing is good on one site and not on another and the reasons for that as well.

Because \_\_\_[Lee Valley 00:20:52] has given priority to the [London Wildlife Trust, while they do the same thing more or less, it’s going to be interesting how that works out.

Some people might say “Well I can walk my dog into the marshes, what’s the difference, \_\_\_, what’s the difference? I can do it one place but not another”

Interviewer: So that’s a potential challenge?

Nathaniel Legall: I think so. The question’s come up a few times on the walks.

Interviewer: Do you think users and local people, do you think they should have any sense of responsibility for the management and conservation of the site?

Nathaniel Legall: Are we talking about the local community or just users of the site?

Interviewer: Either. Let’s start with local community. Do you think they should have a voice in the management of the site or could they?

Nathaniel Legall: Yes absolutely, it’s probably really important that they do have a voice. The site won’t get used and people’s opinions will become negative, so having a vehicle for that and making sure that they have that say. So our policies on how the site’s managed are really important.

Otherwise, as we’ve seen in Lee Valley Park in the \_\_\_[marsh 00:22:24] behind [say Lee Marshes-] we were trying to construct a temporary structure for \_\_\_ training.

You have a massive uproar and stay-ins, it didn’t end very well. Everyone has their own opinion, but I think that’s a good example of how we probably could have done more to listen before making the decisions.

Interviewer: Yes.

Nathaniel Legall: Also users hopefully will see that it takes effort and time and you can’t afford to hire people to manage the site, so volunteers are a fantastic way of contributing.

Interviewer: It’s a privately owned site and there’s lots of them popping up around London, privately owned public spaces. Are there any benefits or challenges of that?

Nathaniel Legall: Yes, having one site owned by one organisation and another owned by another can be difficult because they might have different management practices and policies.

For example, one site might use herbicide, the other might not but the wind might carry that onto their site and might affect that fringe.

I guess that’s the challenge in terms of communication between organisations. I don’t know how good that has been in the past but hopefully it will improve for Woodberry and Walthamstow reservoir. What was the question, challenges?

Interviewer: Yes, does it limit, or does it affect the way people are going to experience the site?

Nathaniel Legall: That it’s privately owned and not run by the same…

Interviewer: Well it’s not a public park, it’s not a public site. It’s private, therefore how you experience it, there might be sort of rules and regulations, that maybe there wouldn’t be, if it was a public park.

Nathaniel Legall: Aren’t most spaces owned by someone or the other?

Interviewer: Well if it’s owned by the council that it’s effectively owned by me and you because the council is there to serve us.

Nathaniel Legall: Okay.

Interviewer: So these are both Thames Water sites and Walthamstow is operational and so there might be particular rules in terms of how we experience and use it maybe.

Or will it affect how you manage it, so that the interaction between LWT and Thames Water might shape that interaction?

Nathaniel Legall: Do you mean, are there challenges right now or will three be more?

Interviewer: Might there be, or if you don’t think…

Nathaniel Legall: I don’t think there are going to be any more than there is already, I mean you can’t really swim.

Interviewer: No, true, same as it was before.

Nathaniel Legall: Same as that.

Interviewer: Were you involved in the consultation at all?

Nathaniel Legall: No. I just watched it from afar basically.

Interviewer: Do you have any comments on that or we can skip that?

Nathaniel Legall: Well I think I would have liked to have had a say, but I was busy studying and didn’t have the time and then by the time the window was closed and I wasn’t busy…

Interviewer: What sort of roles do you hope local people will take on, on the site?

Nathaniel Legall: Volunteering hopefully, hoping us manage the site. Maybe even running events themselves. They’re going to be really important in getting the word out about the site, sort of mouth is the most effective.

Interviewer: So they effectively become ambassadors hopefully?

Nathaniel Legall: Hopefully. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Is there are ole for these wetlands in the regeneration story of this part of town?

Have they played or will they play a role in the regeneration of the area, do you think or have they been part of that story?

Nathaniel Legall: Yes, I mean, they’re a good by product of it, absolutely. A lot of the money that’s gone into developing it, has come from that.

That’s important to acknowledge and I guess they probably acknowledge that in their sales rates, people that buy up flats.

Are we talking about both sites?

Interviewer: Yes.

Nathaniel Legall: Yes, I’m seeing Walthamstow Wetlands coming up a lot in the media and publicity and Walthamstow is kind of like an up and coming place as well. \_\_\_[00:28:55] the council like to talk about it a lot. So yes.

Interviewer: Okay, final question; in terms of your experience, you’ve been on both sides and experienced both sides, but I wondered if there was anything particularly memorable or powerful in your experiences of either that you wanted to share that sort of sums up how you feel about them?

Nathaniel Legall: Powerful experiences…

Interviewer: Or fun or funny? (Laughter)

Nathaniel Legall: I think a really powerful experience for me, was on a walk in January there were just loads of people from Walthamstow on the walk and they were all from different backgrounds and different ages and just talking to people and saying “Where about’s do you live?” and they say “Walthamstow”

And I say “Where about’s in Walthamstow, what road?” and they’ll say “Livingstone Road” and I’ll say “Oh fantastic, I used to go up there. I went to the school just round the corner” and then they can see “I understand where they’ve come from, at least a little bit”

It kind of hit me after that, this is actually happening on my doorstep, it’s a really big project and it’s a really massive change to the local area. Somewhere that I’ve walked around for a long time”

So it just kind of hit me that day “Yes this is happening now” so it’s great. “Be ready” because I don’t want to make a bad impression, I don’t want it to be a crappy site, I want it to be good, I want people to come and enjoy it and talk about it.

Interviewer: Do you think your family will enjoy it?

Nathaniel Legall: Yes I think so, definitely.

Interviewer: And have you been telling them all about it?

Nathaniel Legall: Yes of course. (Laughter) We used to go to the marshes quite a lot, so yes they never went into the reservoirs at all.

Interviewer: So it’s a new patch for everybody to go on. It’s magic isn’t it, it’s lovely. Thank you so much for your time.

Nathaniel Legall: That’s alright, yes.

Interviewer: Great.

END AUDIO

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