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START AUDIO

Interviewer: Okay, so it's your voice we hear. Can you start by explaining your role?

Respondent: My role? Yes.

Interviewer: Connected to the site.

Respondent: I'm the Conservation Volunteering Officer for Woodberry Wetlands. I started volunteering here about four and a half years ago and then eventually started doing an internship. This place is mainly education so no one was really doing the practical conservation side of it. I started doing that and then opened up the volunteering base and started running the volunteering base here.

In the beginning I was mostly doing community outreach in a project called Community Space Challenge. I did that for a year. Then the second year, I don't really know what I was doing for the second year. Basically I started working for Woodberry Wetlands only since April this year, April 2015, yes.

Interviewer: Can you talk to me a little bit about the community outreach part then and what that involved?

Respondent: Yes. I basically had to engage with residents. I had to improve 12 green spaces, engaging residents of different ages because the idea was to get young people working side by side with older people. Yes, I did the project and ended up doing 14 or 15 sites rather than 12. We had loads of volunteers, it was really good.

Interviewer: Cool. How does that work? How do you go about getting people that aren't usually involved in these spaces to become involved in them?

Respondent: Well TRAs and then also I had a colleague that already had a project in some of these housing estates so I already had some contacts.

Interviewer: What, in your experience, is people's reaction to particularly this space?

Respondent: This? They are just amazed by it I guess. Yes, that's the first reaction I get.

Interviewer: In terms of the type of volunteers that you get now, do you get local residents volunteering?

Respondent: We do have people from all over the place but yes, mainly from Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Haringey.

Interviewer: Okay. How about recruiting people off the estate, Woodberry Down Estate, has that been possible?

Respondent: When I did the Community Space Challenge, I did some work with people from Woodberry Down Estate but actually, I don't have many volunteers currently from Woodberry Down Estate. I don't know why that is, I don't know. I do have a couple that live just in this block for example. I have actually Tim now that lives in that place. Yes, I guess I have about three or four people that live in Woodberry Down.

Interviewer: Okay. If you can talk to me a little bit about-

Respondent: [They're drilling holes 0:03:25].

Interviewer: Oh fine, okay. What you think people, in opening up the site, what benefits do you hope local communities will get from it?

Respondent: Just having an open space and being able to look at the horizon, that's pretty good. What else, just being in touch with a wild place because it's a bit more than just a park. Then the amount of events and activities we're going to have here as well and training that we already give to people.

Interviewer: Okay. In terms of then perhaps the challenges of people getting involved here, are there barriers that you've come across that you're aware of why people wouldn't necessarily either use the space or choose to volunteer?

Respondent: Well until now it has been closed so that was the main barrier. After that, I don't see any barrier. On my activities, practical conservation, definitely if you have any physical disability, something like that, obviously the kind of activities I do are not really suitable. In terms of using the space, I think there are no barriers for people because it's free, we have a good path all the way round the reservoir. Yes, I think it's open to everyone.

Interviewer: When you were doing the outreach stuff, what sort of barriers were coming up then? Why hadn't people been getting involved in their green spaces?

Respondent: Because many times it was housing estates and people were thinking, "Why should I be doing this work if it's probably Hackney Homes or the council's task to do this?"

Interviewer: Okay, so they just didn't feel it was their responsibility?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Then our role was to try to explain to them, "If you expect Hackney Homes or Hackney Council to do everything then it will be pretty boring. If you have \_\_\_[0:05:48] green space then maybe it can be tailored to your necessities."

Interviewer: Okay. Is that what you hope for here?

Respondent: How can I say? It's totally different working in a housing estate or working in a space like this because people just come to you. Whilst on the housing estates, I was pushing hard to get people involved. In here, I just do nothing and people just turn up.

Interviewer: Why is that? What is it about this space?

Respondent: Well I think just the space itself is beautiful. Then just the group of volunteers we have are pretty welcoming to everyone that arrives as well. Yes, there's a pretty good sense of, I wouldn't say family but yes, it is a nice group. It's a friendly group. They get together every Saturday and they just do some work together and then maybe at the end of the day have a couple of beers. There's a feeling of doing something good for nature and then there's also the social side of it which is quite important.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think there will be any disadvantages of this space opening up as a nature reserve?

Respondent: Well we'll have to wait and see but there might be some, yes.

Interviewer: What potential risks or challenges are on the horizon lately?

Respondent: Personally, I don't know, maybe having too many people.

Interviewer: Okay. Then that is in terms of disturbance for the wildlife?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. How do you manage that?

Respondent: Well we've created a sensitive area on the North Bank that people have access to so that was one of the ways of mitigating that possible situation. For example, now that we're cutting the reeds on the East Bank, we're leaving a fringe between the path and the rest of the reed bed so people are not tempted to walk into the reed beds, they're like natural barriers.

Interviewer: Yes. Wildlife disturbance is the main challenge or potential disadvantage that you can see? There aren't any others?

Respondent: I don't see any others.

Interviewer: Are there any risks of there being any tensions between different user groups?

Respondent: I don't really know. For me that's really hard to answer because we've always been close to the public. The only people who come in are volunteers so yes, I'm not really sure how that's going to develop.

Interviewer: As you say, wait and see.

Respondent: Yes, exactly.

Interviewer: Okay. You spoke a little bit before about questions about people not having a sense of responsibility for their green space and feeling like someone else should be responsible, there is to be [municipal 0:09:19] responsibility for it. What sort of responsibilities do you aspire for people to have here in terms of how they protect or conserve this space?

Respondent: Well I hope people keep coming and doing the practical management of the site, which it would be impossible to do without this amount of volunteers we've been having. I also hope there will be people, it's hard to say, well just - can you ask that again sorry.

Interviewer: Yes, their sense of responsibility for the site so when they come here or even if they just live locally, do you think they should have any form of responsibility for the site?

Respondent: I'm not sure about formal responsibility because even with our volunteers, I don't like to keep it too formal otherwise that scares people away. When they come, they come because they want to do some work and they want to chat with the other volunteers. Sometimes giving them too much responsibility, that might put them off.

Although then you have a different volunteer which is the younger volunteer who wants to pursue a career in conservation and then that person is looking for being a lead volunteer, doing an internship but most of the people just want to come here, do a bit of outdoor work and then go home.

Interviewer: Yes. If you were going to talk about the site, you were down the pub and you're talking to people about why this is important to you, what it is about this environment that you value?

Respondent: What do I value about this place? Well the people. I always come back to the same thing, that's what I work with, my volunteers. My volunteers definitely and just the reeds around the reservoir is a pretty amazing feature. What else? The team we have trying to do a lot with not much so that's pretty good as well.

What else? Then yes, just having - you were talking about the local people and the responsibility in this place and in this project, the guy who did the staircase in the visitor's centre, he was just walking by and got in touch with me because these [planks from the new river 0:12:17] were being ripped apart. He was like, "Maybe you can use them." Then after that we went to collect all this timber.

Gary, who lives in the tower block, came for an event, "Oh yes, I used to be a brick layer." "Oh cool, maybe you can do the brick laying on the roundhouse," so everything comes together. Now this guy, the maps we have are absolutely shit, really outdated, really old school. This guy got in touch with me a couple of weeks ago, "Yes, I'm actually \_\_\_[0:12:47] maps," "Okay, cool." I don't know, I just think this place has a good vibe that brings people towards it.

Interviewer: Yes, okay. I terms of this being dominated by water, is there anything special about this being a water site?

Respondent: Yes. I think that's a pretty good point. Personally, in Portugal, I'll go to the sea quite often. I miss that. Then when I came here and see the reservoir, it's not the same thing but it's pretty good.

Interviewer: Is there an aspiration that people coming here are experiencing the space, understanding the wildlife here and seeing the green beds and the reservoir and understanding the wetlands. Is there a hope that that might affect our relationship with water?

Respondent: Well I hope so, not just with water but with the wildlife as well, yes. I think that's our main role here because it's quite a small nature reserve to be honest. For London, it's fairly big but nationwide it's quite a small site but our main role here is basically to get people that live in the city who don't have contact with nature to experience it in here without having to travel too far so they come here every weekend.

Also, by doing education to young children then basically we're looking after the future if you teach people how to respect and look after nature.

Interviewer: In terms of the sort of behaviours that will be encouraged on site, so when it does open soon...

Respondent: Yes, May.

Interviewer: What sort of behaviours and activities will be encouraged on the site?

Respondent: Well I can only talk from my end which is basically practical conservation, which is cutting down reeds, planting trees, looking after the trees we've planted, keeping the site clean, organised. Then there will be lots of other stuff happening which is just all kicking off now which is going to be yoga and life drawing, nature drawing.

Interviewer: What about the way people behave on site because this isn't a public park.

Respondent: No. Yes, well that's one of the main issues is going to be make people understand that they cannot walk dogs around for example. I think that's going to create some...

Interviewer: Interesting conversations.

Respondent: Yes, not being able to make barbecues and stuff like that. This is all something they're going to need to be on top of and just respecting for example the sensitive area so just people can't jump over the fence and just go and have a wander round.

Interviewer: Will it be the responsibility of the volunteers to communicate that?

Respondent: Well not really, we'll have a ranger and then we have me and possibly if there are volunteers that want to get involved in a more serious way then, yes, they can take up the lead volunteer role and do a bit of ranging work as well.

Interviewer: Okay. Now it's a privately owned site, does that affect how people are going to experience it? Does it affect the nature of the site?

Respondent: I don't think it will affect, no, only because it's closed at night but that's the only - other than that, being an open space or being a closed space I think is pretty much the same. I wouldn't see any - especially because you don't really feel very fenced off because we have natural barriers which is the canal, then we have the houses and on the other hand, yes, you have Lordship Road but then you have those buildings.

Interviewer: It doesn't feel like a private space?

Respondent: No. Well I don't think so once you're in the reservoir. Maybe here at the entrance, yes, but once you're out there it doesn't feel private.

Interviewer: Okay. If you were going to describe London Wildlife Trust's aspirations for this site, sum it up and say, "This is why we're here, this is what we're trying to do here. This is what we want this site to be," what would you say?

Respondent: Well we want to improve the habitats. We've done a bit of that by creating the islands, helped to create more than that by planting around 400m of hedgerow. That's preparing for the future. Aspirations, I guess it's just having people engage with nature, that's basically it and making people respect it as well and training people as well, that's going to be a very important thing for us.

Interviewer: There will be a real focus on education?

Respondent: Yes, education and training for adults as well.

Interviewer: Out of all ages?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think there are a risk that there are communities that won't feel comfortable in this space?

Respondent: That might happen, yes. I'm not sure why but it might happen but it's hard to say. When we're open, see what happens. See \_\_\_[0:18:58] have here, see if there really is a space, which I think there will because I keep getting people asking me when it's open.

They want to come inside and they want to see so I don't think that will be a barrier because before, even when we were open and we only had this small garden, we used to have a weekly class for people from the Jewish community. We had a main garden which was Turkish so I don't think that will be that-

Interviewer: \_\_\_[0:19:26], okay. I wanted to ask you about identity, whether or not you think this, when open and this being a nature reserve, will affect the identity of the local area?

Respondent: Oh definitely, yes.

Interviewer: In what way? Can you talk to me a little bit about that?

Respondent: In what way?

Interviewer: About how people perceive the area or value the area.

Respondent: Well I think it's like having a park on your doorstep, I think it's just - I think it will encourage people to move in knowing that they can go for a walk around the reservoir and go to a cafe with a nice view over two reservoirs, which can either be good or bad because they basically bring the prices up.

Interviewer: Okay, that was my next question I guess was its role in the regeneration story. We walk round the Barclay Homes and it's all over the boarding and that's a real focus clearly there. I wonder what role you think the nature reserve plays in the regeneration story, its part?

Respondent: Well I think the benefit big time is from the location they're at, definitely. On the other hand I don't think it will benefit much from the redevelopment as they do from the nature reserve but that's a personal thing.

Interviewer: Yes, okay. We've spoken about risks, we've spoken about benefits, activities encouraged and activities not encouraged, \_\_\_[0:21:22], benefits to the local community, challenges. I did have a question about whether or not you think a place like this affects connectivity between different citizens or are there different areas or whether it will bring different communities together, whether it has that capacity really or in that role?

Respondent: Being perfectly honest, I don't think it will bring communities together.

Interviewer: Because they will come and they will use it independently?

Respondent: Independently in their group, yes, I think so.

Interviewer: Okay. Responsibilities we've covered, benefits. Yes, I suppose were you involved in doing the consultation with-?

Respondent: Not really, no.

Interviewer: Okay, so I don't need to ask you about that, okay. Routes to get involved once it's opened and shape it and have a voice in it, what pathways to get involved are there or will there be?

Respondent: I think the main and only pathway will basically be, no, not the only path but I mean the main way to get involved and to have a say in it will be to be a volunteer since we are a volunteer organisation so we do value their views. That way is being the user of the courses and of the stuff, the events that are going to be running in here. I think that's a different way so that will be more as a client. A volunteer is someone that I think is more connected to the site.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think, and just reflecting on the comments from the volunteers of the focus group, whether or not those volunteers develop some sort of sense of ownership.

Respondent: Yes, they do, definitely.

Interviewer: Okay. One of the only other questions was whether or not you think there's a role for - the impact on wellbeing at the site. The site being situated where it is in this part of London, quite densely urban in this part, whether or not you think there is a role for the site in terms of-?

Respondent: Oh definitely, especially with the new bike - sorry, did I not write this - the new bike lane running from here to Walthamstow Wetlands.

Interviewer: Yes, the green one.

Respondent: Yes. I think that's definitely going to be playing a part in peoples wellbeing and being maybe a bit more active and doing a bit more exercise.

Interviewer: Okay. One last question; what if you had one memory or one experience here that you treasure and you would say most memorable, what would that be?

Respondent: The first day I came here.

Interviewer: Why's that?

Respondent: Because I saw the reservoirs, I thought, "I could work here." Then it actually came true.

Interviewer: That's brilliant, lovely.

Respondent: Cool.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for your time.

Respondent: Thank you.

END AUDIO

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