**File: ENVNGO11stDec  
Duration: 1:05:17  
Date: 25/03/2016  
Typist: 719**

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Interviewer: David, could you introduce yourself for me and talk to me a little bit about your role in both respective projects?

David Mooney: My name’s David Mooney. I’m the Regional Development Manager for East London for London Wildlife Trust.

My role is to develop projects in accordance with London Wildlife Trust Strategic Plan which is to effectively protect and enhance London’s wild spaces, London’s green spaces with a significant ecological value.

By doing this we engage with local volunteer groups, engage schools in in formal and informal education, young people in volunteering in education projects.

We have an outreach programme where we spread messages of wildlife conservation and ecology to people who might not have access to good quality green spaces.

So we do quite a lot of work on housing estates where people who might not traditionally be classed as wildlife enthusiasts, so we tend to often target ethnic groups with ethnic diversity, BME groups.

The two main projects I’ve been working on for the past four yes are Walthamstow and Woodberry Wetlands.

So in my role of Development Manager, one thing I’ve pushed for is to work- Because London has so many business interests, local authority plans, it can be quite a disparate mix of goals and targets for wherever you are, the public, private or charity sector.

My role is to try and find as many sets of mutual objectives between public, private and charity sectors as possible, so working in partnership with Thames Water who own a lot of good quality open space.

They're keen on opening up their green spaces, opening up their land from a corporate social responsibility point of view. Recreation and leisure is a big thing for their corporate social responsibility team and wildlife conservation.

So working in partnership with London Wildlife Trust helps them achieve their aims.

They're a water company so their USP is providing good quality clean water, and they're not specialists in nature conservation or community engagement so that’s where we’re partnering with them.

We also bring in the local authority. For example, Woodberry and Wetlands is Waltham Forest Council and Hackney Council. They have a set of similar strategic objectives for wellbeing, health and nature conservation, so we’ll liaise and engage with the borough on behalf of Thames Water to say we’ve got a mutual set of objectives here, do you want to get involved in this project.

Invariably, they say yes, if everyone’s putting equal amount of enthusiasm and funding into the project they’ll be part of it too.

We will then go around and engage with external funders, trusts and foundations and private companies, in this case, Berkeley Homes is the obvious choice for the Woodberry Wetlands project.

My role will be to develop partnerships and generate income to achieve successes.

In this situation we’re leading the project, we are the project lead, we are the project coordinator, and the borough, Thames Water and Berkeley Homes, this is Woodberry, form part of the steering group.

At Walthamstow Wetlands, the lead organisation is Waltham Forest Council and we’ve been brought in as their partner for nature conservation and community engagement.

It’s a slightly different set of parameters but a very similar set of outcomes and objectives for the project. Thames Water again are involved in that as a land owner.

Interviewer: Could you tell me what the success looks like for LWT in each project?

David Mooney: A very difficult quite to answer because success should look exactly the same but because we’re not the lead on one project and the lead on another, we have to accept that success will be difficult.

Success will look like London Wildlife Trust have opened one of the most exciting nature wetlands sites in London for many years. You will not at any point misunderstand who’s running the project and whose project it is. It will be branded and thoroughly London Wildlife Trust from entry to exit.

People will be having a wonderful time in a very serene, tranquil environment, volunteering in the reed beds. There’ll be school children discovering beetles in the woodland trail. There’ll be families enjoying lunch on the roof terrace. There’ll be kingfishers breeding along the river, reed buntings and reed warblers chirping along a boardwalk.

It will be the flagship for 21st century urban nature conservation. How’s that for a quote?

Interviewer: Great.

David Mooney: Walthamstow Wetlands should be exactly the same except the catch is that London Wildlife Trust will not necessarily be at the forefront of the branding. You won’t really know it’s London Wildlife Trust, you’ll think it’s a wonderful Walthamstow Wetlands that just exists in its kind of serene independence which is more we suspect what local people will want it to be.

We’re pushing for it to be more locally led, more local ownership, not that local ownership and locally led here isn’t key, but Walthamstow Wetlands has a lot more local interest and local independence, so we want to try and enhance that and advance it to a point where local people do have a lot more ownership are much more in control of it.

The parameters, so all over the above but more of a sense of more...

The space lends itself to being vast – the space is vast. It’s open. You get the sense you could get lost very easily in the space and we don’t want to lose that, so we don’t want to over brand it, over interpret it, over direct people, we don’t want too much signage, we don’t want the sense that you're in a managed place as such. We want the sense of wildness to remain.

If we over brand it as any one thing or, “This is London Wildlife Trust’s, or this is Waltham Forest’s, or this is Thames Water’s nature reserve,” you kind of immediately take away the sense of local ownership.

Because if you brand it as owned by one organisation or something that you're not part of, then you lose that sense of it’s not mine any more.

We’re doing that because we aren’t the lead, but also because the space lends itself more to that kind of experience.

East London is more wild anywhere in London, it’s less manicured, it’s less directed. It’s quite difficult to explain what East London’s about for people at the moment but for me, I was born and bred in London and you go to West London or you go to Central London or you go to North London and they all their different set of characteristics.

In other parts of London it very much feels like you're experiencing something that is being done to you, something that’s being put on for you, been cleaned for you, been presented to you for you to enjoy but only for a certain period of time and also you purchase it.

Whereas East London is definitely a sense of a lot more independence, less about consumerism and more about wild organic growth.

I know it sounds a bit more romantic, Walthamstow Wetlands in my two descriptions, if you're more independently minded you might want to go to Walthamstow more than you would to Woodberry Wetlands, and that’s fine, that’s okay.

Woodberry Wetlands is much smaller and therefore is going to have to be more managed because it won’t be able to take the numbers of people behaving however they want to behave.

Woodberry Wetlands, you're going to have to come in and have a real sense of behaviour change, it’s not a local park.

I suppose both spaces we’re going to engender this sense of behaviour change, this sense that it’s not usual, it’s not normal. It is quite weird, quite a different experience and therefore something you should really respect for the land itself rather than the product that you're being shown.

It’s not, “This is something we’ve built for you, respect it,” it’s, “This has always been here, respect it.”

This nature ecology and wildlife and water, this particular Walthamstow have always been since the beginning of time, not the beginning of time, since the beginning of any map of London you’ll see the River and if you watch maps of London grow from the Romans through to the present day it is remarkable how the location of Walthamstow Wetlands never changes.

It never changes shape. Yes, the reservoirs might have been built but before the reservoirs it was wetland anyway. So it’s the one part of London, there are three or four spaces in London that have never ever been built on: Richmond Park, Hampstead Heath and Walthamstow Wetlands.

So it’s up there with some of the very rare magnificent spaces in London and it’s the one huge space in London that no one’s ever walked around.

I’m off on a tangent now.

Interviewer: No, we like tangents. You spoke about the different models there of ownership and the role of LWT and your specific role in terms of trying to make these mutual objectives come together between a private, public, charity sector.

I wondered what your thoughts were in terms of Walthamstow being in particular privately owned and the implication of the experience for people to visit.

David Mooney: We’re going to try and mask that as much as Thames Water, depending on who you talk to in Thames Water don’t want us to mask the fact that it’s a privately owned space.

I think certain senior figures at Thames Water understand and respect that we have to try and mask it in some way because it immediately takes away that sense of freedom and enjoyment of the wild space if you know that it’s privately owned.

You're walking across a country estate, you walk past a lovely big house, National Trust, you're always reminded that it’s actually private and they can ask you to leave at any point.

We kind of want to get away from that. Politically also it’s quite motivating for me to make publically accessibly free a privatised piece of land, particular a water utility.

It’s something that really irritates everyone, isn’t it, having to pay for water, air. Having those things privatised from us is an irritating situation for us to be in, so from my personal political motivations, renationalising private land is something very important for me, probably one of my key personal drivers.

Once we’ve opened this we’ll never charge, if London Wildlife Trust wants to start charging for the point of entry is the minute I’ll work for another organisation.

That’s a tangent if you ever want one.

Interviewer: No. What are the motivations then for Thames Water from it’s their CSR policy, it’s-

David Mooney: Yes.

Interviewer: -and recreation, but what is the motivation now for opening up this phenomenal space?

David Mooney: For Thames Water?

Interviewer: Yes.

David Mooney: Personnel. They've got a different set of personnel.

Interviewer: Because LWT have been making this story for a long time.

David Mooney: Yes, and now Thames Water have had the personnel to hear it. That’s all I’ve got to say about that.

Interviewer: Fine. What sort of activities do you think will be formally encouraged in the space? When we started the conversation in the office about the volunteering one, could you talk to me about the different ways that you want people to engage in this space?

David Mooney: Schools, it’d be a formal learning programme.

Interviewer: Right. Sorry, this is for both sites?

David Mooney: Yes. Informal after school clubs, a programme of coordinated informal learning as well, so run around and there's a bit of a lesson plan but not really attached to a curriculum.

Volunteering, the three or four forms of volunteering will be practical, will be learning volunteers so recruiting volunteers to help tell the messages and the stories through formal and informal learning, events and visitor experience volunteers, then back office administration support volunteers. That is also PR and advocacy.

Then there will just be informal visits, just come and enjoy the space, engage with the space however you want to. We want, particularly at both sites, to engage users who might not traditionally appreciate nature conservation or ecology through art programmes, whether that be sculptures on site or temporary exhibitions, photography, competitions.

Then there's the traditional, they're fourth in my list but the traditional birdwatchers, conservationists who want to come and monitor and help survey and identify species on the space.

We want to attract people that will hire the space, private hires use the space because it’s a wonderful setting for events, whatever events that might be.

We want it to be a space for adult learning, I mean like conferences, academic meetings, both around nature conservation but also beyond anything that may of interest to hydro citizenship or just citizenship or art, whatever, use the space.

They're very multifunctional flexible spaces, they should be anyway, because nature reserves are traditionally not that and we’re back to this 21st century urban nature conservation.

What that means is, I think the key words in that sentence are ‘urban’ and ‘21st century’. We’re different from other nature conservation organisations in the fact that we’re urban so there's a plethora of different interests, and it’s 21st century so we’re absolutely at the forefront of progressive thinking and activity.

Interviewer: How do those wide range of people or any of them really, get to inform or shape or involve in the governance of the site? What routes to participation in a...

David Mooney: Through volunteering in the first instance. We will be introducing friends of groups but we probably won’t be constituting them because we’re very careful about being the...

Constituted legally bound friends of groups can end up more often than not being private clubs, private societies, allotment holders.

They can by their very nature, because they have legal representation, not be that inclusive. Weirdly, we want to be gatekeepers of the inclusive to maintain inclusivity.

We’ve had our fingers burnt for many years about the friends of groups basically taking over and doing what they want on what they deem is their own private nature reserve. We want to get away from fortress conservation.

Interviewer: That leads very nicely on to my next question which is about the people taking part and having informal contact with the site.

David Mooney: Have you read our activity plans for these two projects?

Interviewer: Yes.

David Mooney: Okay, fine. Barriers for people taking part, loads, the traditional, I suppose, the class and cultural and ethnic background of nature conservation groups tends to male, pale and stale, and therefore you're not necessarily going to steam in with a spade if you're a young Muslim woman in North Hackney surrounded by middle class do-gooding, second home owning retirees.

That’s the key barrier. The second barrier is if you've never experienced mud, umska, as an early child, or if you've been brought up, socialised with a response to mud and umska being, “Ugh, get away, you've got dirty shoes, don’t touch that,” or scared of nature, why should you steam straight in with a pair of welly boots with a bunch of do-gooding middle classers who are covered in mud, and quite like the fact they're covered in mud?

Not experiencing it and then when you attempt to experience it being surrounded by people that you don’t recognise and don’t feel comfortable with, they're the two biggest barriers.

Then there are loads of other barriers.

Interviewer: How do you get around it, how do you resolve some of those barriers?

David Mooney: Get the kids early, get them off their parents and chuck them in a mud bath, like see who can hold a snail the longest, and then get them back when they're older and try and give them some training and give them a paid traineeship and then some employment, give them the opportunity, the chance to be employed with us or engage with us for a significant period of time.

As soon as you get one or two young people coming from ethnic background, it’s a ticket to accessing lots of other people.

Also outreach is a big thing, going directly people’s community centres, places of worship and showing them pictures of what it looks like and what’s on offer. And then through effectively a sale pitch marketing the space, invite them back when the weather’s nice, and then hopefully they’ll pick it up and carry on coming.

Start very, very locally.

Interviewer: I saw you last week at the wetland centre.

David Mooney: Yes. That’s the kind of thing.

Interviewer: That’s the thing you're talking about? They're-

David Mooney: They're already involved. I’m absolutely preaching to the converted with that lot. I was just there to provide them with an update, I do that once a quarter, therefore a lot more relaxed and very much more informal a bit more comedy.

But if we were going to go and do outreach, probably we would bring a projector, people would come and we provide tea and coffee and we talk about it and there’ll be lots of questions, and then invite them for a walk like we’re going to do once the effing builders are finished.

Interviewer: What has been the relationship, what is your motivation for sitting with and talking with Woodberry Down Community Organisation? What’s their investment?

David Mooney: They are the local residents. Many members of them saved the reservoirs from being built over, so the motivation is almost out of respect. If it wasn’t for them we wouldn't be here.

They've been looking at the reservoirs, obviously love them, never been able to walk around them properly so again it’s engendering this sense of ownership amongst them to say, “You've saved them, it’s you who we need to ensure we keep them going.”

Therefore they're like one of our big, I can't think of the word.

Interviewer: Stakeholders?

David Mooney: They're our main stakeholder. Not just the Woodberry Down Community but we’ve got a lot of contacts with Lincoln Court and Lordship North.

Interviewer: Do they volunteer?

David Mooney: No, that’s an interesting one. From a research point of view, it’s not been rocket science but how do you get working class people with socioeconomic disadvantage to volunteer in something and not have things done to them, how can they do it with themselves for us?

I don't know the bloody answer, but I can be sure as dammit the people who volunteer for us have les socioeconomic problems and therefore have time spatially, physically, financially, to offer their support for free.

Woodberry Down Community Organisation four years ago was very much we were representing the interests of working class people on a housing estate. WDCO in five years’ time will be very much representing the interests of a different socioeconomic group because that group is changing as we speak.

I suspect the answer to the question, “Do lots of people from WDCO volunteer?” in five years’ time will be pretty much everyone who volunteers is at WDCO. At the moment, no.

Interviewer: The role of the wetlands I guess in terms of the wider gentrification story.

David Mooney: The wetlands would have happened with gentrification or without.

Interviewer: Did they act as an additional catalyst for gentrification?

David Mooney: What, the wetlands act as a catalyst for gentrification?

Interviewer: Do they? I’m asking. The fact that Berkeley have chosen to development here and look out over those reservoirs.

David Mooney: Yes, absolutely. The reservoirs have been here since 1834. The Woodberry Wetlands as a project would have happened without gentrification.

Gentrification would have happened without Woodberry Wetlands. This goes back to the mutual set of objectives. We could have fund-raised for this project without Berkeley Homes.

Interviewer: What do people value in the site, what benefits do people get from coming and visiting the sites? You spoke a little bit about Walthamstow and the space and the values that you can get there.

What values do blue-green spaces like Woodberry and Walthamstow bring to people?

David Mooney: I’m sure you know about the whole plethora of research that’s been done in terms of wellbeing, people’s mental and physical wellbeing directly linked to a connection with nature and good quality green space.

You can go to many green spaces in London, and in fact you can go to another green space over the road called West Reservoir but you’ll have a very different experience.

When you first visit you can't quite tell what it is, but in my opinion it’s very clear the way the habitat is managed and the way that the wildlife is allowed to flourish at East Reservoir gives people a very different visceral experience,

Different sounds, different smells, sometimes in East Reservoir it’s much smellier. The different physicality, there's a lot more movement on East Reservoir. There's a lot more movement on nature reserves in general, and whether that be plants in the wind or insects in the air or birds in the trees, it’s much more of a physical visceral experience.

That, it may well be in the first instance quite unnerving, it’s certainly unconventional. There is something about that experience though that attracts people back time and time again.

It may scare some people off and they might not come back, but I don’t really believe that’s going to happen. I think people will want to come back for what in the first instance feels unusual but once you're here for five minutes feels very, very natural and very normal, and that’s reconnecting with our, some people may even say it’s a spiritual experience, reconnecting with earth, with a natural environment.

In certain people’s experience it can be quite life affirming. It can be very distracting in a positive sense, i.e. it takes you away from your day-to-day experiences, distracts you from your monotonous existence potentially.

The sound of quiet or the sound of rustling reeds can distract you away from the harm of traffic noise and car alarms and ambulances.

All of those are a kinaesthetic experiences, are hard to articulate but attract people back, hard to articulate for people experiencing them, not hard to articulate- Clearly I’m using long poncey words, but if you ask someone why they are enjoying it, I think it’s for those reasons, for those experiences.

Interviewer: Is there something special about this being water space, David?

David Mooney: Water is weird, isn't it? It’s life giving and therefore you feel like you need to be near it because you learn very quickly from a young age that you can be hungry for ages but if you're thirsty and then you are dehydrated you are dead. You've got what two days and you're done, whereas you can go for weeks without food.

That’s a very urgent feeling of wanting to be near water, and then everything that spins off from that is to do with all the reasons why you enjoy or love something or someone. Why are you in love with some reason, because of their smell, the way they move, the way they look, the way the sunlight reflects on their face.

It’s the same with water. I know I sound like complete romantic ponce here but it really is this physical need we have for water.

Kind of like Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and then it’s like water is at the bottom, the one thing, and then it’s food. Everyone talks about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, is it food first? It’s not, it’s water first, then food, then shelter. What are the reasons why everyone loves water?

Another thing about this place, and because of this water it’s like this oasis in this urban desert. We’re like wildebeest. I’m probably more like a giraffe because I’m six foot three but you're like a, what are you like some kind of hyena hungry for information.

Interviewer: Water hog.

David Mooney: You’d take water hog, really?

Interviewer: I think they're very powerful...

David Mooney: Yes, they get taken down.

Interviewer: Yes, hyenas are good scavengers, yes, okay, I’ll go hyena.

David Mooney: Great scavengers.

Interviewer: Yes, you're right, this is like-

David Mooney: Yes, survivalist taking information, you're hunting it down. You know, I wanted to end this conversation 40 minutes ago and you weren’t leaving, so you're a hyena.

Then there’ll be hippos and elephants turning up soon. Everyone’s attracted to this oasis.

Interviewer: What do the wetlands mean in terms of more sustainable relationship with water?

David Mooney: Rephrase that question.

Interviewer: Do the wetlands enable us, the visitors, the people that will enjoy it, does it enable them to build a more sustainable relationship with water? Does it mean that they understand how to manage water better? Does it mean that they value water more?

David Mooney: No, not really, because it’ll always be here. [Cross talk 0:40:45] No, they’ll enjoy it more, but I don't know, unless we engage in that message, doesn't it that will translate in we need to save it more necessarily. Value it in what sense?

Interviewer: In the sense that it needs to be protected, it needs to be kept clean, it’s a finite resource, that you shouldn't be having bottled water, you should have...

The message that also in particular where there’s going to be a fairly heavily curated education centre with Thames Water messages.

David Mooney: At Woodberry or Walthamstow? Yes, Walthamstow, yes, that message will be pushed through from Thames Water’s point of view, yes, at Walthamstow, not so much here.

Interviewer: Do you think there's a feedback I guess around people being here who haven't ordinarily been here, been to water spaces, recognising that actually it is better to keep it clean, not dump stuff in it, and therefore there is some sort of positive feedback to it in terms of respecting water as a resource rather than something that will always flow from your tap?

David Mooney: Yes, I suppose indirectly, yes.

Interviewer: But that’s not a prime driver for you?

David Mooney: No. Don't tell Thames Water that. That’s Thames Water’s messaging though, we respect their messaging, we respect their objectives, and it is important.

I just think saving water is a message that people have to respect and understand but the need to save water from Thames Water’s point of view is because it probably saves money whilst them still being allowed to charge the same amount of money, and if they don’t have to produce so much water they can still charge the same amount.

But the reason why we need to save water is neither Thames Water or l London Wildlife Trust’s reason for being, wait, before I completely contradict myself here...

The reason for saving water is a climate change issue so if we really want to be kicking the message about saving water, what we really should be saying is use less carbon, reduce your carbon footprint, then we won’t have to worry about saving water so much.

I don't believe that water scarcity is a consequence of overusing water. In fact, it’s not.

Interviewer: What about in terms of a more integrated-

David Mooney: Messaging?

Interviewer: Yes.

David Mooney: Yes, that would be more worthwhile. I think if Thames Water’s messages were, if water companies and government messages were about reducing carbon footprint and therefore reducing the impact of climate change and if we had less of a climate change issue, we could do whatever the hell we liked with water because it’s something that’d be, we won’t have affected global water cycle.

Unfortunately, that’s an environmental scientist point of view which is a really boring one but I did environmental science and climate change is a consequence of our water crisis, it’s not overuse of water.

Interviewer: No, but the linkage between pollution and climate change and how we value it as a resource generally, there are feedback loops in terms of respecting that water.

David Mooney: Yes. Look, I’m not suggesting we don’t tell people to not respect water. London Wildlife Trust, the message certainly isn’t, the wetlands projects aren’t respecting water more.

It’s look how wonderful the wildlife is in good quality wetlands which by its very nature needs good quality clean water.

So yes, in that sense, if you really enjoy wildlife, you should respect water more.

The main issue for wetlands on an individual level how people can help wetlands and wildlife is by insisting that their plumbers don’t plumb all their white goods into rain drains.

That’s the only thing that you're doing to the environment. If you go home and your dishwasher and your washing machine and your sink aren’t connected to the sewage pipe-

Interviewer: Rather than-

David Mooney: Yes, then you're affecting wildlife directly. If they are in sewage pipes, you're pretty much sorted for a while, you've helped wildlife. There's not much else.

Interviewer: Will those sort of messages come across at Walthamstow?

David Mooney: We discussed this, like how do you come to a wildlife nature conservation space, a nature reserve, and say, “When you go home, make sure you're plumbing’s right.”

Again, it’s a message that will be confused and get lost. I understand it and I’m sure it will be well curated and well messaged but the fear of dread in me is that you’ll go and it’s like a Thames Water messaging centre, which will go in one ear and out the other, people won’t listen to it anyway.

Improving water quality in this country needs to be from the central government, it needs to be illegal to plumb your- It’s not illegal to plumb your bloody water into, it’s just ridiculous. You should be fined.

Interviewer: Yes. A question around tensions on the site. You explained why there might be barriers for say a young Muslim woman not wanting to be in the, you called it white, pale and stale.

David Mooney: Male, pale and state.

Interviewer: But what tensions, or do you anticipate any tensions between different user groups or different either geographical or \_\_\_[0:48:31]?

David Mooney: Yes. There are people that want to come here and enjoy wildlife and not be disturbed by school groups, so that could be a tension. There's always a tension.

There’ll be families that want their kids to run and play. They will want to hire the space and the tension could be that the site’s closed in the evening for private hire, and there’ll be a tension that you can’t get it.

You’ve come for an evening walk around the nature reserve and it’s closed, not that it’s ever going to be open, but it could be, but it’s closed because someone’s hired it. So that could be a tension, but we have to do that because no one’s funding it otherwise.

Interviewer: Is that both sites?

David Mooney: Yes, well, the buildings on both sites. Walthamstow we can have it more open more regularly, people could be, not necessarily being able to get in, jump in the building and get a cup of coffee and relax because there's an event going on, so that’s a tension.

There’ll be tensions between the organisations, so London Wildlife Trust and Thames Water in the way we manage the space.

We’re going to always push boundaries about how we manage habitats, so the Thames Water are under regulations to manage reservoirs in a certain way and that means cutting them to within an inch of their life around the banks and stuff, which we respect but we’ll always push those boundaries and say, “Are you sure? Let’s grow a little bit more.”

There’ll be tensions also between members of the public about, “Have you been to Woodberry Wetlands or Walthamstow? It’s really overgrown, isn't it, and not very well managed?”

As soon as we hear that we’re like yes, you got it, you understand. But then the messaging that we need to get across is really key, it’s on purpose, but then that goes back to this thing from a very young age Londoners don’t experience long grass or nettles.

Interviewer: Yes, because of what Hyde Park looks like.

David Mooney: Yes. Nettles are like we can’t afford to manage it properly or brambles is there are no rangers here.

Interviewer: Yes, must be dodgy.

David Mooney: Yes, but getting that message through to our funders as well is really interesting. Like Heritage Lottery Fund are starting to get it, they're starting to approve more and more nature conservation people but Heritage Lottery Fund projects, they’ll go around and tell local authorities, well, local authorities by nature don’t understand nature conservation.

But Heritage Lottery Fund will say, “This is not very well managed, it’s a mess.”

Interviewer: What about somewhere like Walthamstow which has real pre-existing use of very established-

David Mooney: Yes, sorry, of course, the anglers, the existing users. The tensions there are going to be unbelievable. The council and Thames, their response to that is, “We’ll, just going to have to get on with it.” And ours is as well, but it’s difficult for us because we’re managing those tensions on a daily basis.

But the anglers will be disturbed so we’ve got to make sure there's space for them, physical space and lots of strong information flow, but it’s not going to be the same as it was.

When I was a kid I used to come here. All that’s going to change.

Interviewer: What input have they had in the-

David Mooney: Frustratingly we gave them lots and lots of space and we gave them evening events and put on discussion groups and stuff and no one turned up which is a shame.

The fly fishing group responded well, but the anglers who are going to complain in the classic way that people tend to engage in could have is not until it actually physically changes, then you start complaining and say, “We weren’t consulted.” Local authorities sufficient that all the time.

Interviewer: What was the consultation experience like?

David Mooney: We did it a few times on site and gave them an opportunity to come and learn about- Sorry?

Interviewer: Who did come?

David Mooney: From the angling community? Birdwatchers came. We had independent friends groups come. A few of them said, “It’s a bloody massive waste of money,” and some of them said, “Yes, it’s great, it’s interesting.”

Some of the birders have been freaked out by the possibility of too many people being on site, but it’s such a massive site that you could have 20 times the amount of people on the site and you wouldn't even know they were there.

You could have 500 times the amount of people on site and you would not notice them.

Interviewer: It’s like camps or that sort of [Cross talk 0:54:22]. Were there people that you feel, you've said already the anglers were missing from the consultation, not through lack of being invited to take part, but were there people that were missing that looking back on it you wish were part of this conversation?

David Mooney: Resources aside?

Interviewer: Yes.

David Mooney: For the sake of just raising the profile, members of cabinet, the local councillors, it would have been good to have them on site.

Interviewer: They weren’t really forthcoming?

David Mooney: If you don’t put it under their noses they don’t tend to know it’s there. The thing is about local councillors, the local residents with ‘Councillor’ in front of their name, they don’t get any formal training, you're reliant on them being fairly intelligent, well rounded individuals, and they tend not to be, and they're very scared of not representing properly.

So if they're deemed to not know about something or understand something they get worried very quickly.

Interviewer: Identity. Lisa was talking about it a little bit earlier when we were talking I the office, how these sites being open affects the identity of the area for the area for people.

How do you anticipate it?

David Mooney: Having a nature reserve in your area immediately springs a kind of... In my mind immediately the area becomes more healthy, more exciting.

I suppose having a wetlands is a bit unusual, isn't it, it’s different. I would want to be near it, I’d have a sense of pride amount it.

It’s like getting anything, it’s like receiving, this sense of civic pride, this sense of additional infrastructure. It’s like having a train station open. I think it’s that significant is this, it’s that important to have a new big nature reserve in your area.

Then it’s the whole we’re opening cafés that are going to be serving really good coffee. People love that...

Christmas and your mum’s coming to visit and there's an amazing new café and, “Oh, it’s nice around here, isn't it?” Up and coming and all this shit.

The downside of that is it only becomes more fucking expensive because everyone wants a piece of it, so identity changes.

Interviewer: So there are dis-benefits?

David Mooney: Capitalism is by its very nature unfair, and therefore if something becomes popular, demand goes up, therefore it becomes more- We monetise every experience, every benefit.

If a local area becomes improved for whatever reasons of the above, we will monetise that and therefore the dis-benefits are that it becomes more exclusive, unaffordable to live near it, and therefore the demographic changes and this sense of gentrification.

Gentrification is a shit word for it. I call it cultural imperialism this kind of middle class wash spreads across the area. You can’t move for Farrow & Ball and buggies with suspension better than the average car and everyone looks the same, it’s just kind of euch.

That’s my worry, that I’m responsible for just fucking yummy mummies and croissants, but you know what, I love croissants so why should people not enjoy croissants wherever they're from, whatever their social background.

I’m an un-deconstructed Marxist, and Marx for whatever his theories were what he was basically saying is everyone should be able to have a croissant whenever they want, everyone. Why can’t we all have croissants?

He said loads of other shit as well, but that’s one of the essences of what he was trying to say. Not everyone should stop eating croissants and we should all eat shit bread. He wasn’t kicking a gruel argument, he was kicking at raising everyone’s enjoyment of life through equal access to...

What he was basically saying is that everyone should be able to eat croissants and that robots should make croissants. I think that’s a really good idea, handmade by robots, croissant, so then no one has to sell their time to make croissants to someone that can afford them.

Interviewer: Despite the doom and gloom, there are risks, but overall you're more hopeful than not?

David Mooney: Yes. What’s the alternative is what I always say, put it in perspective. Certainly if it remains private or-

The alternatives are it’s privately owned and never opened, it’s opened at a cost.

Interviewer: Barnes.

David Mooney: Barnes fucking Wetland Centre, or you can’t come unless you're a member, RSPB, or it’s sold and built on as was proposed in the ‘90s.

So if we don’t sort it, we’re like a best option, and yes, we’re going to have to manage that gentrification, we’re going to have to make sure that our business plan has a Robin Hood ethos about it, if you can afford it you're going to be paying. If you can’t afford it we’re going to offer it to you for free.

We’re going to have to differentiate, we’re going to have to charge-

If it’s for like free events, if you can afford them you won’t know about them because you won’t be invited. If you can afford them they’ll be on the website and you could be charged.

That’s the kind of business model we’re going to run.

Interviewer: How do you get that out there, how do you-

David Mooney: Because we continue doing our outreach, we continue doing our communications to targeted groups, but everyone who’s on social media and they've got a website, we’re going to charge the shit out of everyone for events, and then we’re going to do loads of free stuff, we’re going to truly, properly subsidise it actively, rather than the occasional free one that’s on a website as well.

No, it doesn't work. So we’re from free at the point of access. We were built in the 1980s about outreach and free, so we know how to do that bit. What we don't know how to do is charge people so we’re learning how to professionalise our offer, but very much with this Robin Hood ethos. [Aside conversation 1:04:53].

We can arrange it again.

Interviewer: Yes, if I \_\_\_[1:05:09] I inevitably will just have to come here for 10 minutes and say-

David Mooney: “Can you just tell me about this one?” Yes-

Interviewer: That would be great.

END AUDIO

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