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START AUDIO

Interviewer: So if we could start with you introducing yourself?

Elizabeth: My name’s Elizabeth and I live at Waterside in Walthamstow, at the side of the proposed wetland side. I think we’re probably only six houses, actually on the site. I don’t think there are any others.

Interviewer: Could you talk to me a little bit more, about your experience of living here, so close to the reservoirs?

Elizabeth: This is my first experience of living by water. I’m from Wales and we lived in a land locked valley in Wales, so this is new to me, that you find a space like this, in the middle of the city, London in this case and you’re right by the water. So it’s remarkable in every sense.

We’ve been here for about 18 years, and I guess what it’s done is connected me to the seasons and the weather. And people complain a lot about weather and wet and windy, but actually, here on the side of the reservoirs, that’s actually the better times because you’re exposed to the weather, it’s wet and windy but you’re inside.

And since we’ve had this glass bit put on the back of the house, it’s even better. So everyone who comes loves, without exception, this space, but also if they lived here, they’d spend all their time in this glass bit on the back.

Which is true, actually, it’s lovely just to sit and look. To look at the water, the wildlife, the changes of the seasons. But in the distance, you can also see traffic and trains.

Now I’m very connected to trains because my Dad worked on the railway in Wales and we were brought up virtually living on the platform, of a little country station in Abergavenny.

So, trains are a real comfort to me, and they’re my earliest memory, the steam trains coming into the station and leaning out of the window and almost being able to touch the train. I spent all my childhood there and to live by lines around us.

We’ve got lines into London, to Stanstead, to Cambridge, all around this house. It’s just amazing. So it’s the connection of the water, but with living in an urban area, it’s a double life really.

You’re living in the town, you’re near to the city. Last night I went up to town and I was there in 15 minutes and then coming home, I’m back by the water and in the country, in 15 minutes which is fantastic.

Often people ask “Do you feel it’s very isolated here?” well in some ways it is isolated, but we live opposite the treatment works and that’s an operational centre rather like the reservoirs and it’s 24 hours there.

So again, you’re never on your own here and over the years, it’s opening up, the marshes and with the wetlands I’m sure there’s going to be more people here.

But there’s lots of people walking and enjoying feeling like it’s in the country. It’s the country feel about it, in the city. It’s quite unique.

If we were living somewhere like Hampstead, you might feel you’re in the country but it might cost 10 times more. (Laughter) We couldn’t afford it, so this is great.

Interviewer: So that sort of brings me onto some other questions. You’ve spoken there about your experience of being here and some of the joys that that brings for you.

Could you talk to me a little bit about what you think would be the benefits to the wider community of extending its opening?

Elizabeth: It would be very nice to have it as a private secret, just for us, but obviously it can’t be, it’s not going to be. And why can’t people from not only Walthamstow but much wider areas around London, why can’t people come and enjoy the space.

I think there may be problems around it being an operational site and that’s really my concern. In that, it’s where our drinking water comes from, so it’s got to be sensitively treated in many ways.

People have got to be very mindful of this site, that it is an operational site and this is our drinking water and also the habitat of so much wildlife down here, some of it very precious and rare.

We just talked about the newts, that I didn’t know about actually. But there’s the wildlife and the birds particularly, there’s a level of not wanting to disturb their habitat, I think.

And the fishermen, I know, have some reservations and that’s because there will be lots more people walking about and they’re concerned about that.

But in terms of access for everybody, it’s a good thing, it should happen.

Interviewer: You spoke very passionately and eloquently there, about it being the countryside but in London. What do you think, for people actually in the immediate vicinity, this brings, maybe in terms of health or wellbeing? What this space has the potential to bring?

Elizabeth: I think, that can’t be underestimated actually. I know you’ve spoken to others about the effect on their health, and they particularly chose to live here because they were unwell and how that’s improved their health.

But for me, I’ve got multiple sclerosis, being peaceful and quiet sometimes is really important and valuing that space, just to sit quietly. But I don’t think it’s just for me, because I’m unwell, that I need that- I think it’s for everybody. Particularly in London, everybody ought to have that space where you can be quiet.

This is one of the reasons I go to church and this isn’t going to be part of your study. But my husband is completely against religion and church or organised religion of any sort. But I think, for me, I went last night and to be able to sit quietly in a beautiful space. You just cannot underestimate the value of that and I think this is a similar thing.

Just sitting here now, I know that just 15 minutes up the road there’s the busy market. I know there’s Hackney over there, there’s blocks of flats all around us, but we have this capacity to be able to sit here.

And you’ll notice my neighbour has got a hermitage next door, and if you have the chance to speak to her, she meditates and for her and that’s really important and it’s the most beautiful space.

Sitting in that hermitage and looking at the water and being able to really connect with her meditation and you don’t need a hermitage to do that. I mean, I can just sit here and we’ve got chairs around the garden and when it’s nice weather we just sit outside and being outside is lovely.

Interviewer: The way you’re talking about it there, it’s almost spiritual.

Elizabeth: Yes, I think there is. Some people might argue that that’s just a bit wacky, but for me, and quite a few other people, and even if it’s not expressed, there may be something spiritual about living so close to nature, particularly, stressing this, in the city.

You know, I’m from the country, but I’ve never felt like this in the country, which is a bit strange.

You know, I lived in a little market town, surrounded by mountains. My playground were the mountains around my town, but it’s still not like this.

I mean, I was a child then, so I took everything for granted anyway. It was rather like the railway station, it was just where we were.

But this is very precious.

Interviewer: Could you talk to me a little bit about what is particularly valuable about it for you, being a water based landscape?

Elizabeth: There is something about water, quite right. When I sit at the end of the garden, there’s a lapping sound, and a wave sound and it’s just the water breaking against the side of the reservoir. But actually it feels like the movement of the water, I guess, that it’s a living thing and it’s inhabited by other living things.

The fish jump and leap and I always think, they do it mostly in the centre of the lake and they’re leaping for joy that they’re not caught by the fishermen who are round the edge and I always think they’re saying “Look at me, I’m jumping about, you can’t get me” (Laughter) It’s that feeling.

There’s the swans, the elegance and the beauty of the swans on the reservoir and I think there’s six at the moment, on that little island there. Although it’s not tidal of course, it’s a reservoir.

They take the water up and down, so sometimes there’s a little beach there and we have the birds around on the beach and sometimes, now it’s filled up at the moment, so there’s no beach, so they’re back up[ on the island.

So there’s a feeling of – it’s not a beast, but it’s a living thing.

Interviewer: Do you think in extending the opening and increasing the access to the space, that it will affect our relationship with water? Do you think there is a chance that the wider communities that interact with it..?

Elizabeth: It’ll be an enjoyable experience to walk in a lovely place, but whether or not it’s the same as living by the water is a different thing.

I think living by the water, is well in London it’s quite unique I guess. Unless you’re living by the busy Thames or somewhere along there.

But this sort of water, there’s not many places you can live somewhere like this in London, and I think it’s that combination of urban and rural that we’ve got.

And you would experience a little bit of that obviously, when you’re walking round and looking at the wildlife, but then you’re going to go home. But I’m sure it will have a positive effect.

And for children, to have access to this and learn about nature and wildlife and how we must respect it and how things through the seasons evolve, I think that’s fantastic. It’ll be a great opportunity and school parties will be able to come.

They’ll be a massive educational sort of drive, I’m sure to this project. That’s part of the purpose.

Interviewer: You’ve talked there in terms of learning to respect it, and I wonder what sort of behaviours and activities you hope will be encouraged on this site and those that you hope will be discouraged?

Elizabeth: Well, what I mean, by respect is, it’s partly to do with the seasons I guess.

There are times that you have to be very quiet, because birds are nesting. You need to be quiet around various areas. It’s a place to be peaceful and it’s not a place to be playing loud music.

You know, you heard me talking before about the litter. That’s one of my concerns, that people, without any regard for road, field, reservoir, will just be dropping litter.

Maybe that would be a thrust, in educating people about “Don’t spoil this lovely land” because at the moment, it’s virtually litter free.

I don’t think fishermen are particularly litter bugs, but there isn’t much litter on that site I guess, the bit that people are going to walk around.

It would be such a shame, and how dangerous that can be as well, to wildlife.

Interviewer: Which brings me on, I guess to whether or not you feel that people that use the site, and local communities. Now that it’s been brought into their consciousness. Whether or not you feel that they will have, or should have any sort of sense of responsibility?

Elizabeth: Well, we can always hope, let’s hope. I can’t answer that, I don’t know who’s going to walk around. I’m guessing you may be talking to the converted, in terms of people who are going to access the site. People who are interested.

Because there’s not going to be anything whizzy to do here, except walk around and look at wildlife and enjoy being peaceful and quiet.

So it’s not going to hopefully not attract people who want to have loud music and picnics lounging around and jumping in the reservoir.

But who knows who’s going to come? If it’s open we’ll have to see. But again, that’s about plenty of volunteers around, which Rachel assures me, there are going to be and education. So it’s getting the balance right.

On odd occasions, we’ve had groups of young people coming over and antagonising wildlife. Trying to get hold of geese and so they obviously haven’t had access to this area before, so they’re treating it as they would a housing estate or a street anywhere and it’s not quite that.

Interviewer: Obviously, it features largely in your sense of identity, in terms of where you live and the area for you. But do you think opening up and extending will open up and affect the identity of the area more generally, the perception of the area?

Elizabeth: Yes, I do. Again, I’m hopeful that it’s going to be positive, that it’s going to be a really positive shift and for this area and particularly the impact on this area.

It can only go good, in that lots more people will come, hopefully and it will put us on the map I suppose. We’ve got William Morris and Walthamstow is really very upbeat now.

It’s had a great change, a cultural change. Talking of William Morris, it’s sort of come back around, in terms of craft and art, there’s a lot going on. New restaurants and cafes, cinemas.

So this, as an addition, as something different, which is going to bring another layer and another perspective to the area. Which I think again that’s for the good. Yes, very good.

Interviewer: We’ve spoken about some of the risks there, in terms of extending the opening. I wondered if you could reflect for me on some of the barriers to people enjoying the site or feeling like it’s theirs to enjoy.

Maybe they won’t feel comfortable for whatever reason. Did you have any thoughts on why they wouldn’t feel like it was theirs or for them?

Elizabeth: Well, no I can’t think why people wouldn’t. It’s open, it’s free, and so it’s an attractive proposition. Because we talked earlier about this sort of quick fix thing, there’s not going to be very much ‘to do’ in terms of activities.

Like museums now all want activities, hands on stuff. My understanding, there isn’t going to be much of that. Really, it’s going to be a place to walk quietly, look, observe, enjoy and again going back to the weather, it’s going to be sometimes wet and windy, sometimes cold, sometimes fine.

There isn’t going to be anything other than that to do, just walking about in the weather and look and learn. But whether that’s enough to attract people, I don’t know.

There are certain people who find that very attractive but maybe that’s not for everybody.

Interviewer: Do you think, given the location of the site and where the different entrances are, do you think it plays into the regeneration story of the area?

Elizabeth: Well as far as I know, there are going to be two entrances. There’s one here and there’s one over at forest road. Blackhorse Tube is close by and there are buses and so on.

Here, my fear is they’re going to drive in front of our entrance at Coppermill. And that’s going to be a real issue because there’s no parking. It’s already heavily overspill.

Any nice day, there’s a tiny car park and they’re parking all the way up the road. So I’m expecting a lot more traffic actually.

I know the idea is that people travel by public transport, but whether or not that’s going to happen.

There’s a new station opening on Lea Bridge Road, which is going to run from Tottenham to Stratford. It’s an old station they’re re-opening, and that’s due to open this year. Now that might help.

But if you get off there, then you’re going to have a good half hour to this entrance, in Coppermill. But we’ll have to see. I mean, one of my big concerns is the litter, which we’ve talked about, but it’s the traffic.

Although the idea is that people will cycle, because we’re now part of the Quietway, they’re going to walk, bus, tube and train. People are going to drive, they are going to drive here and that’s a bit of a worry. There’s not much parking places.

Interviewer: Which sort of brings me on, I guess, to possible tensions or possible user conflicts.

So different users and how they interact. So at the moment, it’s a bit of a monoculture in terms of the use. It’s used predominantly by fishermen and birders and the occasional walker.

So with extending that use, do you think there are any possible tensions?

Elizabeth: Very likely.

Interviewer: In terms of?

Elizabeth: My understanding is that the fishermen have had this site for many years, almost unchallenged, with the odd bird walker. A very silent group of people walking round, you know, usually on their own or in pairs, very quiet. That’s the nature of bird watching, you don’t make a lot of noise.

And there are going to be, as there have been recently, large groups of people walking round, which is what’s happening. I can’t really say.

I feel that they probably don’t like it very much, but I don’t know if that’s true or not, so don’t quote me on that, but I feel that they think it’s their space.

And the other element of course, is Thames Water, who manage the site and constitute to do so because it’s drinking water. There’s lots of things they have to do and that might sometimes conflict with people walking about.

They need to use their vehicles, their vans, their trucks, they need to do maintenance. And we’ve had massive maintenance here.

This last year, all across the back here, that went on for months and that was heavy machinery that ran all day for weeks and weeks.

So there are things that have to happen, in a reservoir that’s serving London for its drinking water.

Interviewer: Which brings me on actually, to the fact that it’s an example, not one of the biggest examples of its kind, but it’s an ex ample of privately owned land, being opened to the public.

And I wondered if you could reflect for me, on how you think that will affect people’s experience of that land and the sort of public space it is?

Elizabeth: I can’t say, because our relationship with Thames Water, over the years ranges from non-existent to just a little bit existent. Really, if something goes wrong…

It was the fencing at the back and we had a long sort of back and fore about that, but otherwise, they don’t impact on us at all. But they do own that site.

And I know they’ve changed hands over the years, so there’s maybe a different feeling now, about who’s running it. I don’t even know whose running git.

Interviewer: It’s still owned by Thames Water.

Elizabeth: Yes, but it’s a different company that runs it.

Interviewer: Yes.

Elizabeth: Because my neighbour, who you may talk to, he worked for Thames Water.

Interviewer: At the Water Board.

Elizabeth: Yes, the Water Board and another neighbour worked for the Water Board, but that’s not the case now. And it’s contractors, so there’s a different relationship between different contractors.

So when we were having building works at the back here, you know, with the fencing, it wasn’t actually Thames Water, it was the contractors that we were talking to mostly about it and the fencing was done by somebody else.

So they don’t have their own teams of people now. But it’ll be interesting to see. I have no idea how this is going to work, in terms of Thames Water and what their feeling it about it.

But they must be up for it because-

Interviewer: They’ve invested so heavily in it.

Elizabeth: They have, yes. But I don’t know how unique it is. Is it unique? Barnes I know it’s not an operational site is it?

Interviewer: No, that’s right.

Elizabeth: But is there anywhere else?

Interviewer: Not on this scale and not in terms of it being operational. Most of the reservoirs that they have, that are used as an amenity, the operational bit is sort of sectioned off.

Elizabeth: And this isn’t going to be sectioned off is it?

Interviewer: Whereas, users will be interacting with the operational site and there will be bits that will be zoned off, when work needs to be done.

Elizabeth: Yes.

Interviewer: But you’re effectively trying to retro-fit people into a space that is almost universally operational. So a very real challenge for them.

Elizabeth: If it didn’t work, for whatever reason, could they pull the plug on it? Could they say “No”.

Interviewer: If it doesn’t work for operational reasons?

Elizabeth: Yes, and they could just say “You’re not having access anymore” have they got that written in somewhere?

Interviewer: Yes. Everybody I’ve spoken to has said, “The operational…

Elizabeth: That’s the priority.

Interviewer: Yes, must be prioritised. It’s prioritised over conservation, it’s prioritised over people.

Elizabeth: You know, that’s an awful scenario. That’s the worst scenario ever and hopefully even if things go wobbly, which they may do and go a bit…

Interviewer: Uncomfortable. (Laughter)

Elizabeth: Yes. Then hopefully, it can be worked out, there will be a way of working it out, hopefully. But Thames Water, as far as we’ve been concerned, we’ve had little to do with them. But they haven’t been particularly cooperative in things that we’ve done.

We’ve always sort of had to take a deep breath, when we’ve had to do anything. You know, if there’s something about the road up there or anything. It’s always a bit of a challenge.

So I’ll be interested to see how this is going to work now.

Interviewer: Yes.

Elizabeth: Hopefully, it sounds like they’ve had a complete change of heart. Something’s happened, you know, they’re different people now.

Because if it had been the old Thames Water, I don’t think this would be happening now, for sure.

Interviewer: No, I mean, I think there are legislative reasons for doing it.

Elizabeth: I’m sure there’s much more to this that meets the eye. They’ll be political reasons, they’ll be 101 other reasons why now is okay to do it.

Interviewer: A lot of people have said, the change of management at Thames Water, has been quite integral, in terms of …

Elizabeth: Yes.

Interviewer: Because this has been on the cards for over a decade and has always been “No, no, no” and I think the change in senior management, has been quite instrumental.

Elizabeth: I think it was quite amazing and shocking to some people that it was going to happen in the end.

They couldn’t believe it. I think Alex, who is not here to see it, would have been very surprised.

Interviewer: Really?

Elizabeth: Yes, very surprised. Because he’s really old school Thames Water. You know, when they had lovely gardeners and they had a clubhouse there and they had dinners, canteens and dinners on Saturday night and their own football ground. Things are not like that anymore.

Interviewer: So the shift, from it being a public utility to being a private company.

Elizabeth: Yes, it’s very marked.

Interviewer: this sort of takes us onto the consultation.

Elizabeth: Yes.

Interviewer: And your experiences of the consultation and what it involved. I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about that story and the timings of that and how you interacted with that?

Elizabeth: We did, very much interact with it. It’s been better, since Rachel is in post, I have to say and we have someone to talk to now. But previously, it’s been a difficult and another challenge for us.

Because we feel, in a way, very vulnerable, because we’re the only residents. We’re not a massive residents’ association. We can’t gather lots of people and go and march about things, because there’s only six houses.

But saying that, originally Clare Coghill was very helpful, and Ellis and I spoke at planning.

Interviewer: When was that sorry?

Elizabeth: You’d have to check back, it was two, three more. It was when it finally went to planning and you know, the go ahead for the planning but you‘ll have to check with somebody about the date, but it was a long time ago.

And you know, you get your two minutes, and Ellis spoke and I spoke and somebody else spoke, who has since sadly died. A woman who was very involved in this, she was a member of the Walthamstow Marshes, Katy Andrews, you might have heard of her. But she very suddenly and sadly died, last year.

But before you talk at these planning meetings you have to announce whether you’re for it or against it.

Interviewer: Yes.

Elizabeth: “Are you speaking for this or against?” and of course we spoke for it, both of us and we had our two minutes. Ellis spoke, but he’s a member of RADA, so he spoke really fantastically. I didn’t speak so fantastically but I did my best and it seemed to go alright.

Interviewer: Well done.

Elizabeth: The planning went through then as a result of that. But they did take into consideration, all that we’d said and the councillors that were there were very mindful of us living here and that we were already acting as guardians in a way, of this site. They were talking about the care of the site, and because we’re so knowledgeable there’s no one else like us.

It’s not like saying “Look at us, we’re fantastic” we’re the only people who live here year in year out and know the site from this side, looking out. Nobody else does that, nobody else can do that.

So we feel that we do have a right to say something. We are supportive, we’ve continued to be supportive. Now Rachel’s in post, it’s much better. She’s great, sometimes you can sound off to Rachel and she seems to take it all on board and carry it away with her and then come back and talk to us again.

That’s been fantastic. And as the volunteer programme launches- she’s asked me to go, and I am going to go in a couple of weeks’ time. That will be great. And I think that might be the change as well.

Because if I am part of that group and others along here are going to be part of the group, then at least we’ll try to work it that somebody is always at the meetings, one of us.

So there’s a few people here now who are very keen to join. So yes, I think we felt often that we weren’t’ informed and then we find meetings that happened, but we really had to keep our eye on the ball.

There’s a responsibility for us to do it as well, not always being sort of spoon fed and not always been personally invited.

But if there’s anything at The Mill, for example, which is the community centre, we make sure that somebody goes to that. Rachel comes here, we’ve been to the walks.

Another neighbour goes to the bird walks, so there’s plenty. We feel we are more involved now. But I think, like all consultations, that’s the purpose of the consultation isn’t it?

Interviewer: Yes.

Elizabeth: You know, to address all the problems and they can get a bit tricky and if you don’t like confrontation, I know there’s a way of doing it, but people get very heated. So we’re stuck with it, and hopefully Rachel’s sticking with it as well so that’s good.

Interviewer: So you spoke there about having the right to have a say but also one of the reasons why you wanted to be involved in the consultation was that you felt particularly vulnerable in terms of your position here?

Elizabeth: Yes, of course. In terms of “It’s our right to say” it’s everybody’s right to say, that’s what consultation is, it’s a public consultation, that’s what it’s about.

But for us, we are particularly vulnerable here and we’ve recently had a break in. we were concerned that people would be wandering across the back, as they do occasionally now, and staring in because we’re very exposed here.

And the groups that may be using the site, we don’t know, there are going to be some groups who’d make us feel more vulnerable than other groups, shall I say.

They’ve talked a lot about using offenders, ex-offenders in terms of education, which is fantastic, but we’re very conscious that these are houses that are easily accessible.

Interviewer: Yes.

Elizabeth: Hence. We’ve talk about how we can make it more secure by the gating, which is what we’re talking about. Not that we want to be that private and shut off from everybody, but it just feels that we could be too accessible in a way, because there’s only that little fence.

But we don’t want a big wooden wall. That was one of the suggestions, but we don’t want bricks ad wood and things built, we like it as it is now.

I mean, it is a new fence, but the trouble with gates is that Thames Water need to come up and down all the time here. So that will have to be managed, I guess and they’ll have the final say on that.

Interviewer: We’ve spoken about risks, we’ve spoken about benefits, about challenges opening and the operational side of things. We’ve spoken about it being privately owned.

Yes, I mean, we could speak a little bit about whether or not you feel the opening of the site would affect the connectivity between different communities.

Because historically, it hasn’t been any sort of through way, whereas now, that infrastructure is coming into play and the increased gait.

Do you feel that there will be an increased connection between the different communities?

Elizabeth: Do you mean, in terms of the fishermen and the bird watchers and the walkers, sort of connecting up together? Or do you mean different cultural groups, what do you mean?

Interviewer: So I suppose it’s a bit of a multi-layered question.

Elizabeth: How is that going to work?

Interviewer: Physically, in terms of this side, that side and also there’s the potential for increased interaction of course between the communities.

Elizabeth: Well one of the obvious difficulties is going to be the cyclists. Because there are going to be cycles allowed.

I don’t think around these bits, but there’s a cycle path and there’s always problems with cycling and pedestrians.

That’s always been a bit of an old chestnut there. People were concerned it was going to be used as a bit of a rat run because of very fast cyclists going to work.

But I don’t think that is going to happen, because I don’t think it’s open enough for them to be using it as a way to work. Which they’re probably a bit disappointed about.

So it’s probably going to be more social cycling and family cycling, I think. I don’t know much about that, but I think that’s what’s going to happen.

Again, with the fishermen, I don’t know, I can’t say. We talked with Rachel about hard to reach groups, on this site. That would include young people, perhaps young offenders.

It might include some disabled people or old people. All those groups who could use the site, how they’re going to interact, I really can’t say.

I mean, how do they interact currently in Walthamstow or in other areas, I don’t know. It’s about education and it’s about people meeting up and not feeling so challenged about seeing a group of disabled adults around.

Not worrying that this is a group of ‘old people’ or ‘young people’. What you really want is all those groups to be mixed. But how that works, I don’t know. That’s a sort of thing for society really isn’t it, how we all get on?

Very much, talking about The Mill, which I’m very much part of. That’s where groups interact there, very much so. We have a knitting group and that’s all ages. Young people, children, very elderly, some people with mental health issues.

Because one of the personal concerns, I guess, is that mental health support now is very limited and in Walthamstow, some of the day centres are closed.

So people are accessing groups that they may not have joined in the past. So that’s why you may get volunteers who may join and come along to the wetlands, and how they will integrate into working as volunteers.

We have people at The Mill, who join now because their day centres are closed, so they come to us. So we have to make some accommodation and some allowances sometimes and we have to change the way we think about how people interact and joining groups and their capacity to join.

Quite often, it’s absolutely fine and great. Occasionally there are problems, but usually you can work it out, sensitivity.

Interviewer: Yes.

Elizabeth: Yes

Interviewer: And maybe this will be a canvas for that same wonderful, working across the barriers, that’s going on at The Mill.

Elizabeth: Yes, it’s going to be a great big, outside community centre. (Laughter) A bit like The Mill, but outside.

Interviewer: Let me just make sure I’m covering all my…I get so caught up in what we’re saying, I lose where I am.

So maybe where we were from consultation, the natural segway there would have been to ask about, how going forward, the general public, including the \_\_[00:40:18] residents, will have pathways to shape, influence the site. Be involved in the stewardship of the site.

Elizabeth: Well, some people will want to be, because they are people who just want to be involved. But there are other people who will just want to enjoy the site, visit it, and go home and that’s fine as well.

But how you go about influencing…I don’t know enough about the structure and how it will work. I will know a bit more, once I start volunteering, I guess, with Rachel.

I don’t know how we can influence how its’ run. Are you talking about eh sorts of groups that..?

Interviewer: Well, any sort of influence. To be in a position to be able to say “Well actually, this isn’t working and I think we need more of this” To have a voice.

Elizabeth: That’s through discussion, I guess and you need to have access. You need to know how to do that. It’s no good having a little suggestion box at the gate, it’s not going to work like hat.

It’s got to be a more sophisticated way of finding out what people want and that’ll be through volunteers talking to people or groups of interested groups of people saying “Why don’t you”

Rather like the meeting we had here a few weeks ago. There were suggestions about, Teresa particularly had suggestions for the knitting and the Terns and the terns arrived actually. (Laughter)

So that’s how things spark off. Calling meetings, not calling it ‘a brain storm’ but having a meeting. And people who are interested makes suggestions and maybe challenge the management or whoever’s going to be running the place about “Well this isn’t’ working, why don’t you try this?”

But how that’s going to happen, I don’t know yet but I guess through the volunteers.

There’s always going to be a group of people who won’t go to any meetings and complain and moan and write letters and emails and whatever, and “Oh this is useless and hopeless2 but that’s life. (Laughter) Yes exactly, they’ll probably have lots to say.

The issue of the dogs. We had one walk round here, and somebody had a dog and they were quite offended that their dog couldn’t walk round. A sensible person that I know quite well, thought it was outrageous that dogs weren’t allowed but “Okay, but that’s the rule, no dog”

Interviewer: Going back to some of our tensions, dog walkers will because it won’t be allowed on site.

Elizabeth: Yes, well responsible dog owners would have their dogs on leads obviously, but some people won’t do that.

Interviewer: Yes.

Elizabeth: Not everybody’s responsible. It’s like cleaning up dog poo. Your common sense and everybody thinks it, but there are people who don’t because you see it everywhere. It’s like litter, it’s the same thing.

Let me let my cat in a second.

Interviewer: Right, we spoke about water, we spoke about connection to water.

You’ve been involved in the process and the consultation. Do you feel that throughout the process, have there been stakeholders missing from this story, that actually should have been involved? That should have had their voice heard, that you’re aware of?

Elizabeth: I’m sure they’re all involved. I’m always amazed that I never see anybody from Thames Water, ever. I know they are involved, very involved but they’ve never come to anything that I’ve been around.

But I know they’re there, but they must be talking at a higher level. They don’t actually come and talk to us as residents and to my knowledge they didn’t come to any of the consultations. They didn’t come to planning and they didn’t’ come to The Mill.

I’ve never seen anyone from Thames Water. I know a few people from other things, from living here. But I think, we’ve actually asked Rachel that, and she said “Oh they do come, they are very closely involved”

Obviously, because it’s their site, but we haven’t seen them. But other than that, I think they’re trying their best to make this consultation and this process accessible to everybody. I don’t think they could do anymore.

Rachel is trying really hard to include every group that she ever can hear about and think about and she’s up for it and she’s fairly new in post but she’s making loads of contacts and she seems to know lots of people now.

They have consultation at The Mill which is a great place. There are lots of things going on; the walks, this little group of volunteers that she’s got already.

It’s quite often the way that people say “Oh we weren’t asked” or “We didn’t know”

“Well possibly, it’s because you haven’t tried to find out” and I think it’s pretty public, it’s been in the papers and quite rightly the council are so keen on this now and they’re banging on about it.

You’d think it was just them doing it. Those picture of Chris Robbins, perched on the end of the pier over there somewhere thinking “Oh look at me” (Laughter)

So I think everybody knows about it, but they’re all a bit vague. “What’s happening, when’s it opening?” But that’s how it is.

Interviewer: So there is a bit of a thirst for more knowledge, for maybe some of the detail?

Elizabeth: Possibly. I mean there are some people who don’t know an absolute thing about it, but they probably don’t know anything about the building on Selborne Walk. They don’t know anything about Mini Holland. They’re going to be people who are just not interested in the bigger picture.

Interviewer: Not plugged in.

Elizabeth: Exactly and then will be amazed when it opens.

Interviewer: Hopefully \_\_\_[ 00:47:02]. Yes, so you’ve spoken about a range of the values that we get from this space. I wondered if you could talk maybe more specifically about what it is about this particular environment that you value or think users will value?

Elizabeth: I think I’m going to repeat myself, but it’s going to be about the connection with wildlife and nature, the capacity to have a little bit of peace and quiet in the midst of a very busy urban setting.

Very close to the centre of London but being able to sit quietly, walk quietly in the country side, although not really but as close as you can get to the country. And the value of living and being in a place like that health wise, emotional, spiritual, all those things.

It’s just going to be, for some people it’s going to be the only space that they’ll experience, they may never go out of London. They may not go to the countryside. This might be the closest they’ll ever get to living or being in a quiet space.

Interviewer: Okay, one final question. In all your interactions with this space, with the environment here, if you reflect on that and think back over the years. What has been a real charged memory, a fun memory or some particularly memorable interaction that you feel is powerful in terms of this space.

Elizabeth: It’s not one particular memory but it’s the feeling I get when I come back from holidays. Now I have quite a lot of holidays and they’re in very nice places, but when I get back here, there is nowhere that quite matches this for me.

When I get back here, and I’m able just to come and look and sit here, then I know I’m home and this is the best place. I know it’s the best place.

And in terms of retiring and moving out of London, it’s becoming less and less likely now.

Though probably the place we’d go to would be the seaside, but we still wouldn’t find anywhere like this.

Interviewer: That’s the last one. Thank you so much for your time.

Elizabeth: Thank you too for listening to me. (Laughter)

END AUDIO

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