**File: WWVOLER27Jan.WMA  
Duration: 1:00:33  
Date: 22/03/2016  
Typist: 695**

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Respondent: Okay, cool.

Interviewer: Ella, If you could start with introducing yourself.

Respondent: So, hi, I’m Ella, Ella [Rotheroe 0:00:11] and I’m volunteering with [Rachel Smith] on the London Wildlife Trust Walthamstow Wetlands Project.

Interviewer: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about your role as a volunteer?

Respondent: Yes, it’s all been focused around community engagement, helping Rachel with doing the guided walks once a month or any extra walks that she might do during the week. Also helping collate all the sign in sheets, so I’ve been typing them up into Excel spread sheets, and then using that as a record of all the comments that people have said about the walks. Rachel can use those to make them more accessible and, I’ve also started to look at the postcodes, mapping those, which has been quite interesting. Helping to build a mailing list and starting volunteer recruitment and organising that a bit. So, yes, it’s been really varied. That’s what it started out as. Yes.

Interviewer: Can you talk to me about what your motivations are for getting involved in volunteering?

Respondent: Yes. I was working as a sound editor for four years and decided to a dramatic change in career and wanted to go back to studying nature conservation, but also wanted to actually get experience and see what it was like in the real world. I had started volunteering on Hampstead Heath with the RSPB project there doing community engagement. That was the first thing I did.

Then because my boyfriend lived in Walthamstow, I was spending a lot of time in Walthamstow. I wanted to do something a bit more local there, so I was just emailing around and came across the Walthamstow Wetlands Project accidentally. So I got involved with it there and was particularly interested in it because, although Hampstead Heath is an amazing site, it’s really wonderful, it’s kind of like a bubble because it’s got a very deep historic space that’s been protected for public use. Nothing much ever changes there and it is what it is; it’s great. But it stays as it is, whereas this is something much new, it’s not been done before, and certainly if it works, it would be a much more effective blueprint to apply across to all urban areas.

So I find it more exciting in that way. So, yes, that was particularly why I wanted to get involved in it.

Interviewer: That’s very interesting, that point there about it being a potential blueprint. When you say that, is it a blueprint for community engagement, or is it a blueprint for nature conservation? Or is the same?

Respondent: Yes, I suppose both of those things. I suppose more what I mean is for nature conservation. You have expanding human populations. I think this idea about trying to preserve spaces as they are isn’t always the best way about how can we create something new? And how can you, within a human-dominated space, find a balance and get everyone to benefit from having more natural spaces within an urban environment? I think that’s more probably- yes, \_\_\_[0:04:11].

Interviewer: That’s interesting. You started to hint there and talk a little bit about the benefits for people accessing the site. Can you talk to me a little bit more about that? Because you’ve watched people using the site now, you’ve talked to them a little bit. Have they given you some sort of insight into what they think would be the benefits of site opening up more?

Respondent: Yes, I think that just even that sense of discovering that space within such a densely populated area is something that opens your mind a bit. Just learning about the birds there and the bat walks, for example. You just don’t think you’re going to find those things in such an urban area. So it challenges your perceptions, I think.

It’s obviously a very calming space in that way to benefit people. It’s a big enough space that you can have a good walk, so in terms of getting exercise for people. Yes, I think mentally and physically it will be very beneficial for people.

Interviewer: Do you think there are any dis-benefits in the open [letters 0:05:32] to the public being extended?

Respondent: Yes, I guess you have increased footfall, so that’s possibly going to create more pressures and more conflicts maybe between different users. I guess mainly around the people doing the fishing and just going for walks and stuff, that’s definitely possible. That’s going to be the biggest- that and the issue with wildlife, how that might affect the birds nesting and stuff. I’m not sure. That might be an issue; we might see changes in the patterns of where they’re nesting and things like that. I guess in that sense there probably will be challenges for the site.

Interviewer: Do you think there are barriers for people not using the site? I was thinking particularly with \_\_\_[0:06:37] populations.

Respondent: Obviously you have to pay a pound each time you go, so I suppose some people might not want to do that. Or you can pay £10 for the year, can’t you, to get a permit.

What am I trying to say? Sorry.

Interviewer: That’s okay.

Respondent: On some level it’s not really inviting in a sense, but I sometimes feel like that’s more to do with people’s personal perception in a way than the reality. Because I’ve felt, when I’ve gone round the site and gone there, it’s like yes. I walk past some of the fishermen and it might be that they’re trying to have a bit of quiet, but I’ve never felt threatened or anything like that. I think it’s just people that maybe not used to that kind of site, because I grew up near Hampstead Heath and have always had that sense of just going out and exploring spaces that I’m not necessarily very comfortable in.

Me and my boyfriend will just go walking across London and stuff and you go to places where you’re not necessarily familiar with. But that’s part of the fun of it, I suppose. I guess it’s a human trend to want to do things that are familiar.

I always find it interesting in Hampstead Heath because you can go to some areas – with Hampstead Heath there are 300 hectares – so it’s big. I guess it’s similar in a sense to the Walthamstow site. You can go to sections and you won’t see anyone. The slightly wilder bit. But everybody will go- there’s Parliament Hill or this old park in Kenwood House where you’ve got the café and the amenities and where the paths are very clearly where you know where you can go. That’s where everybody goes to. I always find that interesting because there’s masses of space and people don’t want to go to areas that aren’t as- they don’t like that sense of going and getting lost and being in a space. I find that interesting.

In a way, that tendency might be something that they can exploit at the Walthamstow site; that mainly people will be focused around where the café area is and that bit. It’s like Lockwood Reservoir and that might stay pretty much the same and the fishermen can have that space. So it might naturally balance itself.

Interviewer: So what you’re saying in terms of the potential flash points, the potential conflicts might be resolved organically because of the reluctance of people to stray off?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Away from amenities and very clear paths and things like that.

Respondent: Yes, I think so. I think the main problem might be around reservoirs one, two and three, the not overgrown ones. They are really nice to walk around. You also get not as many fishermen probably that still want to be there, so that possibly might… Yes, I do think that you’ll probably get most of the - particularly people with young kids and stuff - focused around that end.

Interviewer: Yes. We’ve spoken about the benefits and possibly challenges and barriers there. Do you think there is anything - the project that we’re looking at is highly \_\_\_[0:10:32]. So all along that we’re intrigued to find out if there is anything particular about water spaces, any particularly unique qualities. I know you’ve spent a lot of time at the wetlands; do you feel that there is anything particular about it and why it could attract people to use it as a space?

Respondent: Yes. It’s definitely interesting having the different types of reservoirs. So you can go from the very overgrown, middle of the trees and everything to- it’s like the East and West of Warwick Reservoirs, which are so open and huge expanses, and then go round and see the Cormorant Island on the other side. So that variation is really special I think.

Also having the old buildings around the industrial of course, the pylons and all of that. That definitely gives it its own character. I feel it’s a very different site to Hampstead Heath, for example. I find it interesting, that mixture of the industrial with the natural.

Interviewer: Do you think the opportunity for people to experience [water 0:11:58] in a new way is… Do you think that will affect their relationship with water? A different way of knowing and understanding water?

Respondent: Yes. I think so. It’s difficult to understand things from… Because if you’ve grown up or you were brought up in a way where you’re just interested in that stuff anyway, it’s hard to appreciate somebody else’s perspective on it completely. But I think definitely; it is such a contrast from a built up urban environment, I do think it will open up people to interact with water in that way as being something else. Seeing big expanses of water I suppose as well is different from- yes, I do think it will.

Interviewer: It’s very different from the canals that they’re familiar with. Or even The Thames. That’s a very different water space.

Respondent: Definitely, yes. Absolutely. Certainly, maybe slightly different for me, learning a bit more about Thames water and that side of it really blew my mind a bit. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Really?

Respondent: “Okay, that’s how it all works.”

Interviewer: What is it about knowing or understanding that that was interesting or of value to you?

Respondent: I don’t know, I think I just love understanding how things work and that I was always the kind of person that wanted to know how the magic tricks worked. I always enjoyed them more once I’d… (Laughter) So I think it’s something about understanding those mechanisms and you appreciate it more as a system, and why this thing has been created. You just get more of a sense of the history of it. Just all those elements suddenly give it more meaning, I suppose.

Interviewer: That takes us on, I guess to does the opening of the space affect the identity of the area do you think?

Respondent: Possible. A lot of people are concerned about it becoming- yes, I do think that’s a tranquillity aspect. I guess there is that sense of when you go there now, it’s almost like this forgotten space and there’s something quite, whatever it is, alluring about that. There is that, and if it’s open you have more people moving through that space. It loses that character maybe. But it is such a huge site.

Hampstead Heath, again, is an example. You obviously have the area where you get millions of visitors a year, but there are still bits of it you keep discovering, new corners. So it’s possible it won’t.

Interviewer: In terms of how it plays into a wider debate around regeneration, do you think it has a role to play in that story?

Respondent: Yes. I think it definitely will raise the profile of the area and will make it more attractive to people from outside, in terms of both visiting and probably in living as well. I imagine, yes definitely. I think it connects all the different spaces up better once you open up that space more. The fact that you’ll be able to walk through from Copperhill, it will connect those spaces more I think.

I think definitely for Walthamstow it will. Because it will fit in with the whole William Morris gallery and Lloyd Park and it will become this space. And all the cafes; that’s changing so fast. I haven’t really explored Tottenham as much so I don’t really know the impact it’ll have there. It’s quite different, all that end of Tottenham. It’s a bit more desolate in a way.

Maybe Blackhorse Road, it might have an affect on that corner, because that hasn’t changed as much as Walthamstow High Street and that end. So maybe that will start to affect that area, like brining more money into it, I don’t know. Maybe.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay.

Respondent: I suppose it is still a 10-minute walk from the Forest Road entrance up to there. So I guess maybe it’s still a little bit of a distance for general people, but certainly for the school because they’ve got Willow – is it [Willow Field 0:17:32]?

Interviewer: Yes, that’s right.

Respondent: So I’m sure for them it’ll be really great.

[Background noise 0:17:36 – 0:17:50]

Interviewer: I wondered if you could talk a little bit more then about the roles of volunteers on the site, and what LWT anticipate to be the role for the [next year 0:18:02]?

Respondent: I think that’s still evolving a lot. I don’t think it’s set in stone, from the sense that I get. I think it’s going to have to rely a lot on volunteers probably to be able to function. It’s something that I guess is an area that I feel… Because I don’t have a problem at all, going down to Woodbury or whatever to help with reed cutting. You just go for a couple of hours and it’s something that’s social, and I don’t have a problem with that at all.

If it’s an expectation of the volunteers to have to deal more with crowd control or actual conflicts, that’s where I feel that’s not very fair. So I don’t know, because obviously they’ll want to have volunteers on the site helping people and guiding people and being at the entrances and stuff. I’m sure it will be fine most of the time, but I guess it’s those occasions where somebody insists on bringing their dogs in.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: When I was thinking about it, I envisaged that the volunteers would have Walkie-Talkies and they could report through to the rangers to actually deal with it, rather than having to confront people. I mean, it will be amazing. It will be a really great place for people to get experience and for the social and for people to connect with others. With that perspective I guess as volunteers, and being able to get involved and make their mark on the site.

I think there’ll be a really wide range of roles, with conservation and community engagement. Yes. There’ll be loads of opportunities for people to get involved. But yes, I think it still feels like they’re not sure exactly how practically that will be organised, or how many people you’ll need on the site at once.

Interviewer: At one time, yes. You started to talk about the benefits of being a volunteer. We’ve already talked about your motivation, but could you talk a little bit more about what you perceive as being the benefits of being either – and including - \_\_\_[0:20:35] volunteer, but being a volunteer in your particular role, and also being a volunteer on that site.

Respondent: Yes. What are the benefits? Lots and lots. Certainly, obviously, you’re getting to meet lots of different people you wouldn’t necessarily meet. For me, personally, it’s been such an amazing insight and to practically- this world of conservation and all the great and more complicated sides of it, it’s been really good. For me in that respect. With that particular site, you feel quite privileged being able to spend time on the site, getting to know the site.

I’ve really enjoyed the guided walks. The fact that Rachel gave that out to me and [Steve 0:21:35] to have our own segments, that was really nice. It allows you to take some kind of pride, I guess, in your knowledge and sharing that and making people excited about it. It’s that sense of, “Oh, come and see this thing.” (Laughter) To share that with people is a really nice opportunity, and that people want to listen to you as well is really nice. I think it’s a great way, if you haven’t had that experience before, of sharing things and people actually listening to you and asking you questions and stuff. It’s a really nice opportunity.

I mean, I guess in the role I’ve been doing, being able to build up my skills in Excel and things like that, it’s been a really good opportunity. I think LWT is really… I still haven’t learnt much about why the charity… I’m aware of their other sites, but I haven’t really visited that many of them. Only really Woodbury and Walthamstow Wetlands, so I guess I’ve got to explore the wider charity and the Wildlife Trust more generally.

Interviewer: You’ve been to both sites and you’ve volunteered on both sites. How would you compare or reflect on them as different sites?

Respondent: They are really different, aren’t they? Obviously the site is very different, but Woodbury is quite magical. I really love going there. Even though it is just the one reservoir, there’s something… The fact that it’s surrounded by all the blocks of flats, it is just this porthole almost into another world. Because when I go there to – because Rachel has her office there – they’ve opened up the walkway now. If you go down back from Manor Park, Manor House where they’re building up the new flats, you can basically walk from there to Woodbury, the offices along the canal, that bit there. It’s so nice in the mornings doing that; you can see everything. It’s really, really nice.

Yes, I really love going there, and I guess it’s better integrated I suppose as a space that you can just pass through. Whereas the Walthamstow Wetlands is more- because of the nature of it, and how big it is, the fact that it is a water supply space, it’s never going to be you’ll go there to walk around it. Whereas with Woodbury, it’s kind of like, “Oh, I’ll go to the shops via Woodbury Reservoir.” That’s quite different I suppose.

Interviewer: So Walthamstow is very purpose led; you have to go there with the intent of going to the wetlands, whereas Woodbury can be a part of your day-to-day life.

Respondent: Yes, I think so. I hadn’t thought about that before, but yes. I think that’s definitely… Yes.

Interviewer: That’s partly the geography, that’s also partly the scale and its purpose.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: That’s interesting. Okay. Activities, yes, yes; you’ve already started talking about that a little bit, and potentially some of the challenges that that places. But there’ll be activities that are encouraged, and there’ll be activities that are discouraged on the site. Could you talk to me a little bit more about those two categories of activities? You understand that-

Respondent: Yes. I suppose you’ve got activities like walking, will be greatly encouraged on the site. Attending the exhibitions and going to the café. Probably people will become more aware of the Angling Academy and getting more involved in the fishing maybe, so it might boost that and that activity.

Cycling would be encouraged, but only to the extent that you must stick to the cycle lane. (Laughter) So I imagine there might be some- I think most people will be fine, but maybe there’ll be a couple that stray. Bike explorers that might (Laughter) cause a few excitements. And dogs. That’s definitely one of the- there’s no dogs on the site.

Interviewer: So it discourages- no dogs.

Respondent: We did a little presentation last night at one of the Walthamstow Awards, [Claire Cocker 0:26:45] and local constituents. I don’t know, there are probably only about 15 people, so we presented a PowerPoint presentation and Rachel gave the talk. There were quite a few people saying that they weren’t happy with the fact that there weren’t any dogs allowed on the site and that side of it. I think that will continue to be a point of contention for people.

I think what’s not so clear maybe is, for instance, going picnicking, that side of things. I imagine it’s probably not going to be allowed anywhere on the site. I imagine, but that hasn’t been made clear to me and maybe people aren’t quite sure about that. So issues about littering and stuff might arise. People on the walks sometimes ask me, “Are we going to be allowed swimming or sailing in the reservoirs?” which obviously won’t be. But I think people are generally okay about that. It’s not too much of an issue.

Interviewer: You’ve talked about how that will happen. That’s partly by the volunteers encouraging them, advising them. Are there other ways that will affect or maybe policed?

Respondent: It’s tricky. Yes, you’ve got the rangers, but how do you make- signs, I suppose around the site. Presumably they’ll have to put up a few more signs. But yes, how you get people to understand the nature of a site without being really patronising. Giving everyone a leaflet? Maybe that is a good way, or do people feel like they’re being told off a bit? It’s really tricky. Having designated areas for things probably helps a bit.

Yes, so it’s tricky, and I guess there are people who’ll get used to the site and they’ll learn as they go. I’m trying to think of Hampstead Heath; I guess there aren’t so many rules. It is, again, a very different site. It’s again that sense of you can walk through there on your way home, it’s always open. It is quite a different site to most places. I guess Barnes, but then… So maybe it’ll take on more of that character. You don’t have to pay, it’s still a bit more visiting this place and it’s a wild space and…

Interviewer: And you’ll have to behave.

Respondent: You’ll have to behave in that way. But again, yes, it’s interesting, because with Barnes you go and you pay a ticket and that transaction somehow makes you aware about where you are. It’s interesting, it’s got a kind of mixed identity so it’ll be interesting to see how people see that.

Interviewer: Because as you say, that ticket works as a contract doesn’t it? You know, you walk in, you have to go through a certain entry point to get in. Therefore, you have to be given a leaflet that tells you what’s okay on site. Whereas that won’t necessarily be the case with Walthamstow. Certainly you won’t be paying for it, and they may not encounter a volunteer to give them some information.

Respondent: Absolutely. No, it’s really interesting, and a lot of people on the walks have said about how they’d love it to be a commuter route. I suppose before more of that functioned, Woodbury has that path and space, it’s a space you can enter into to connect up all the marshes and have that feel, that freedom. I think people are a bit uncomfortable with the constriction of it. The same with the dog walkers. It’s that same, “Well, surely…” It’s a bit constrictive somehow.

So yes, it’s really tricky.

Interviewer: Yes, the regulation of the site is clearly its biggest challenge?

Respondent: I guess the fact that it’s a water supply site, if that is made very prominent and people are made very aware of that, then that helps. As soon as you say that to people, they’re like, “Okay…” They’re begrudgingly sort of…

Interviewer: They’re more accepting of the rules are they?

Respondent: Accepting. I think so. I generally have found that when I’ve been talking to people. I’m like, “It’s your drinking water,” and they’re like, “Oh, yes?” They understand the complexity of it a bit more. Yes, that is really interesting.

Interviewer: So I’m just wondering about this identity, which is one of the most unique features. I was looking at the role of volunteers and what they get out of it, but I wonder if you feel like local people and volunteers more generally have a sense of responsibility for the site? Or if there is any sense that they have any sort of obligations to the site at all?

Respondent: Not generally. The bird watchers do. I think they want to preserve it for the birds and have that kind of relationship. Yes, it’s a really interesting question. I don’t think so.

Interviewer: They don’t have a sense or feeling that they should be protecting it or preserving it?

Respondent: Yes, in the sense that people are concerned that the wildlife will be disrupted. But more in the abstract rather than, “I should be there doing something physically.” For me to be absolutely honest, I suppose I don’t… I’m doing it because I like being in that space. I enjoy that sense of being in the actual space, I wouldn’t say it’s necessarily a sense of moral duty that I’m there. I don’t think so, if I’m being honest.

The same with Hampstead Heath; I don’t think I ever felt it was my moral obligation to be in that space, it was just I liked being in that space. It’s quite interesting, where I live – sorry, I’m probably going off track here. Tell me.

Interviewer: No, no, it’s fine.

Respondent: Where I live, I live in Temple Fortune so near Golders Green. We live in this quite old block of flats and it’s not maintained at all. It’s crumbling away, and when I was younger, we used to have people that we knew, there were quite a lot of older people who’d lived there for years and you used to go each other’s flats. Now it’s all rented out, so it’s mainly students or I guess quite a lot of Eastern European people. It’s all very transient. You have that disconnect now; nobody talks to each other, you don’t really know who’s living next door to you. I’ve grown up in this area, my whole life, but it does make you feel a little bit removed from it in that sense.

I imagine that’s also for other people. I’m not sure if that makes sense, but-

Interviewer: But are you saying that sense of disconnect and that transience of population means that people might not feel quite so duty-bound to Walthamstow?

Respondent: Yes, I think so. Definitely. Even me who’s lived in that place, I don’t feel necessarily duty-bound, because your life doesn’t… You’re living in a space but you’re also moving around a lot, coming into Central London, you’re not necessarily spending a lot of time in that space. It’s like you’re not completely connected with it even though I’ve lived there all my life. More and more now I’m not there so much, or you’re even transient within London.

So that sense of being part of a community and having a responsibility to each other, or being connected and caring about the space, I think for people of my generation at least it’s changed. It’s so much more focused on the individual and going out and achieving what you want. I find that interesting.

Whereas going to some of these things where people are still- community groups and stuff, older people who are still connected in that way, it’s quite interesting seeing the difference in the focus. Does that make sense?

Interviewer: Yes, sure. What I was asking about, I guess, if that people have a sense of responsibility to the site or if they feel bound to it. If they have a sense of stewardship, if they have a sense of protecting it or caring for it in any way. If you have a disconnect, and some people will and some people won’t, the reasons for that are important if you want the place to be looked after.

Very possibly not if people like yourself are very \_\_\_[0:37:39] with their time anyway.

Respondent: Yes, it could work out.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Yes, because I guess a lot of young people are trying- are doing- because you’re trying to get into that world, into that industry, so there’s that element driving you to do those things as well, because that’s just the way it is. You have to be it. Whether that’s a good or bad thing…

When I volunteer at London Zoo, it’s a really nice group of people. A lot of them are a lot older, like retired people, and they’ve been volunteering there for 25 years. They’re great, they’re really nice, but they feel very, not angry, but a bit frustrated with younger volunteers who come. Because obviously they’ll be there for a little bit and then move on.

It’s hard because in theory I’d love to be volunteering at London Zoo forever, but you can’t. You haven’t got jobs. It’s a different generation. For them, they got their job, they did their job or whatever, they were able to retire and do this. But for young people-

Interviewer: And retiring \_\_\_[0:38:58].

Respondent: Yes. It’s obviously just so different. So it’s very interesting those generational differences, I suppose.

I think Walthamstow is interesting though. There is a very strong community, lots of community stuff going on. So I do think it will find enough volunteers.

Interviewer: Local volunteers?

Respondent: Yes. It’s got that this unusual character to it. Yes, it definitely will. Despite all those things.

Interviewer: Right. We spoke about activities. Oh, yes; I suppose one of the things – well, we have hinted at it a little bit, partly talking about regulation, and the reason why it’s regulated is because it’s open Thames Water and it’s our water supply. Of course we are increasingly are seeing private ownership of big spaces, especially in London. Do you think that affects people’s experience? Do you think people acknowledge that it’s a Thames Water site? Does that affect their sense of experiencing it?

Respondent: It probably does in a way. I suppose we’re used to having public parks and you it’s just this public space. So yes, I guess it is, even for me. I haven’t really thought about that. But it is a different kind of space; it’s not just a public park. As you say, it’s got a different function, it’s owned by somebody else. That is always going to be balancing that and there is always a possibility that people have to change. (Laughter)

Whereas something like Hampstead Heath, to go back to that, is enshrined in law, that people have protested for over 100 years ago. It probably is better protected, but who knows?

Interviewer: As a public-

Respondent: As a public space.

Interviewer: As a public service?

Respondent: Yes. Definitely. I think it does a bit… Maybe that we don’t necessarily realise. Maybe I was always applying my understanding of public parks to it.

Interviewer: Yes, okay.

Respondent: So maybe we haven’t quite created our concept of what public spaces owned by private… Maybe that’s something we haven’t quite formalised properly.

Interviewer: Or maybe something that LWT don’t want to make explicit?

Respondent: Maybe, yes.

Interviewer: Because it might affect people’s sense of ownership or identity?

Respondent: Yes, I think there are also difficult questions. I overheard conversations about what happens if they’re suddenly to drain the reservoir, things like, which obviously would affect the birds.

The thing I would say about that is that nature does adjust and it often is built to deal with changes, so it’s not like that’s happening every week. But still they are difficult problems and those things can be magnified uncomfortably through the media or people can take it the wrong way. That’s difficult, yes.

Interviewer: But of course I suppose the interesting thing about Walthamstow is that is has been a functioning site for so long and almost has a function - \_\_\_[0:43:19] function site – that nature has grown in that space.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Allowed to grow in that space.

Respondent: Yes. I think that’s a concept that we need to… Just generally with the nature conservation that I have, in my studies, been looking at and thinking about a bit; you can’t always just preserve everything perfectly. You will see changes and fluctuations in populations and things will change and adapt all the time. Yes. That concept of this perfect space I think has to change.

Interviewer: It’s quite interesting isn’t it, because we have this sort of Victorian idea of a public park in the UK, which is very manicured and it has very set ways of being. Whereas the wetlands and the nature reserve, as well as them being a co-functioning site, is a very interesting departure from that. And it isn’t the Barnes model.

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: It’s trying to retrofit public space onto a public space, and a wild space. So it challenges a lot of our preconceptions around what we do.

Respondent: Definitely.

Interviewer: And how we behave in that space is interesting, isn’t it?

Respondent: Yes, it is. Definitely.

Interviewer: Which is why I think your point around, at the beginning, it being an interesting blueprint is really valuable. I’m sure a lot of planners and wildlife conservationists are looking on with interest to see if this works. (Laughter) Or not.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: We hope it will, we hope it will. You have spoken about the benefits to you for the site, and the benefits to volunteers. Have we really spoken about – oh, we did, I think maybe at the beginning – the benefits to the wider community. We spoke about the health and well-being benefits.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And actually yes, we addressed that in terms of the generation question as well. You spoke about the profile as well, so that’s fine. We spoke about the connection between water…

Respondent: Something to add to that is potentially, or hopefully, particularly in a place like Walthamstow where you have lots of – it’s obviously a very mixed culturally place –

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: - but it’s quite distinct, those different cultures. Problems around the meshing of all these different cultures and different perspectives. Even in the High Street, you see different barbershops dominated by different races, basically. Or different cafes which are dominated by different groups. So what would be nice is just people moving through a space like that and seeing different people and interacting in a space that’s not like being on a tube or going shopping. A different space to be around other people. Hopefully. I hope we’ll perform that function, if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yes, very much so. So real implications for integration, \_\_\_[0:47:20], mainly for questions around cohesion. You spoke interestingly about the importance of securing familiarity, and that’s why people go to the different bits that they go to, and maybe the same is true of people.

Respondent: Yes, definitely.

Interviewer: Just being familiar around different cultures. Okay, that’s a really interesting function.

I’m just making sure that I’ve covered everything… I don’t know actually if your experience so far would allow you to comment on this, so if you can’t, don’t worry. We spoke about barriers to the site, but I wondered if there are communities that you think will be missing from the site, that in your engagement work have been flagged up that there’s a risk that certain communities might not take part. Or feel comfortable in the site.

Respondent: Yes, no. One of the things Rachel talked about is we’ve got women and I think face groups and the focuses in terms of community engagement. I’d say probably on guided walks, the majority of people have been women I think. Or certainly 50-50, otherwise I’d say probably more women overall.

Interviewer: Has that been a purposeful target or has that been..?

Respondent: In terms of guided walks, that’s just who’s turned up. That’s nothing, that’s not been targeted at all. But I think with face groups, I think it’s just like a very middle class thing, and certainly within Walthamstow, the middle classes are mainly white overall probably. Also, even where my boyfriend lives, the neighbours are – he’s got black neighbours, Indian neighbours, whatever, but they’re still second generation British.

So I think their kids who have been born here and grown up here will be more inclined in that going out in nature and being in nature I think is quite middle class historically. I’m just comparing, my dad’s family are working class and my mum’s family are quite middle class, so being able to see the differences there in terms of how they used to spend their free time and what they did, and the places they used to go. So I would say personally that it’s quite a middle class thing, is that sense of having financial security and then being able to expand your world view to being, “Oh, nature!”

So yes, maybe that, more than being… It’s that class and the cultures that… I’m not sure if I’m making sense. It’s probably more of a class thing, and it’s just that within Walthamstow, racially I suppose –

Interviewer: That manifests racially?

Respondent: Just because of immigrant generations and that pattern. It generally happens. And probably culturally as well. For whatever reasons, going out and walking around in nature isn’t necessarily something that… Friends of mine, some of my best friends from Asian families, and their parents just didn’t really do stuff like that, didn’t take them to those sorts of spaces. We used to do it as kids, like after school or something, we’d go and explore and go and walk, but it wasn’t something they did with their own families.

Yes, I suppose potentially for those groups it might be more tricky to say –

Interviewer: To encourage them into that space.

Respondent: Yes, because it’s just not something that they’re used to doing. That’s maybe where the schools come in a bit more in giving kids access in that way.

Interviewer: Great.

Respondent: Although, this whole thing about water and faith and having different faith festivals around water and stuff could be a really interesting way of bringing people into that. Using that space in that way. I think there was even talk about having a prayer area on the site.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Respondent: That could be quite interesting. Sorry, I’m going off on horrible tangents here; sorry.

Interviewer: No, tangents; we love tangents.

Respondent: A friend of mine who’s Muslim goes to a mosque opposite the V&A. I can’t remember, the \_\_\_[0:53:26] Centre I think, and I went there for a dinner and they took us around the actual mosque. It’s a really interesting building, and I went into the prayer room there. My parents are atheists. I’d been to churches, but not- there was something really calming in that space.

It would be nice, in a more secular world, having those kind of spaces even. So the wetlands could potentially perform that sort of… I guess it is obviously going into a natural space and finding it calming, but making more of a point about that and trying to say- so yes, faith communities can use it, but also as a secular person coming into that space.

Interviewer: So its spiritual benefits?

Respondent: Yes, so not segregating it as, “This is for faith, people of faith…” Because I’m not a religious person, but there was definitely an effect on being in the prayer room, which was really… You didn’t realise you’re in Central London; it was so soothing. And in a way it would be quite nice integrating elements from more religious communities into the secular space. It’s probably a random. I’m rambling now.

Interviewer: No, I mean, everybody I’ve interviewed has spoken about the calmness and how serene it is. They haven’t necessarily used the world ‘spiritual’ but they’ve used terms that allude to a spiritual benefit, or a spiritual appreciation. I think that’s clear that nature can bring - and particularly a site so big, where you said yourself, you can get lost there and you can feel quite at one, which is brilliant.

Respondent: Yes, it would be nice if that could be a way of merging some of these very different communities together. Having a water festival and interpretations of that by different groups. That would be nice.

Interviewer: That’s great. Okay. Because I don’t follow specific questions, I have to make sure I’ve covered all the topics. The only question that we haven’t really covered is around what ways there are for the public – be that volunteers or just Joe Public – to engage in shaping the wetlands. Maybe even managing, or having a voice in the wetlands at all?

I wonder if you could talk about that, what ways you’re aware of or what ways there should be?

Respondent: Yes, the volunteering programme at the moment is very focused on community engagement. So it gives you a chance to become familiar with the site and build your connection with that, and then relate it to other people. Then there will be conservation, so actually managing the site in that way, physically connecting the nature and shaping it in that way. I imagine there’ll be more guided tour walks and all of those things.

At the moment, there’s the Friends of Walthamstow Wetlands Group, which I think will develop more into an advisory group. But yes, I guess it’s tricky, and it comes back to that thing about the fact it’s the Thames Water site and how much people can affect it, I suppose. But certainly in terms of understanding it and the industrial heritage, the social history, the archaeological aspects of it, which is really interesting, and the nature. I think there are already lots of ways to do that.

Interviewer: Yes. So there are pathways to participate, but the pathways to influence are limited. Would that be fair?

Respondent: I think so, yes. Maybe not around the café, and maybe there will be- obviously with the exhibitions, people might be able to have a say about what exhibitions will be put on, and the education aspect. What the schools need, and they can influence that in that way.

Yes, I think in terms of what the site can offer and how it’s used in that way. But I guess the bigger decisions, it will be more limited I suppose.

Interviewer: No, but that’s a good point in terms of the exhibition content and-

Respondent: Yes, I think that will be a really good way of…

Interviewer: There are clear stakeholders, aren’t there?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Like the schools, that can shape how people engage in it from an educative perspective. Yes. Right. Okay. Well, I think they were all my questions. Was there anything else generally that you wanted to say about your experience of the site, or you general thoughts of the site?

Respondent: No, just that I feel really lucky to be involved in it. Just working with Rachel has been such a great experience. She’s so understanding and nurturing so it’s been really good for me, helping me build my confidence a bit. And I’m just really, really excited to see how it evolves. So yes.

Interviewer: That’s great.

END AUDIO

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