

Hydrocitizenship – Lee Valley Case Study - Interviews

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DB – I am an account manager which looks after several different stakeholder relations. ... Lead for cross rail and HS2 in the Hertfordshire and Nth London area. ... Also including in biodiversity & water space projects in Lee Valley including WW. ... WW was one of the projects identified as part of the wider Upper Lee Valley Landscape Strategy. They identified a tranche of projects could be delivered in short, medium and long term with the overall objective of linking up green space in the Lea Valley from the Tidal Thames in the South up to and beyond the fringe London in the north. WW which is one of the projects which was almost good to go and they needed to develop the concept a little but the multi-partner will was there to bring that forward without major works to set that up. Some of the projects in the Upper Lee Valley Landscape Strategy will need to wait for major development overhaul but the obviously the space in WW is already there. It is a matter of agreement, private land to be overcome.

R – What was your view of that Upper Lee Valley Landscape Strategy from an EA perspective?

DB – Our fundamental regulatory role is around flood risk and surface water drainage. Our role has changed and some of these responsibilities have been handed over to the local authorities, but we still have an interest in surface water flood risk and so on and biodiversity, contaminated land remediation and water quality and importantly the improvements for the Water Framework Directive, so inherently green infrastructure strategy is something we actively promote to deliver multi-functional benefits that green space delivers. So things like if there are opportunities for reed beds to improve water quality, promote habitat enhancement and improve quality of surface water run off and fundamentally improve the environment for people and wildlife would be our corporate strap line. So we see the potential and we are in an environment now where projects are delivered in partnership on the whole. We are used to delivering projects in partnership and are happy to do that so provided the project delivers some of our corporate objectives like the WFD, surface water, flood risk etc. we are able to find some funding to support that. And while we will rarely be the lead partner we will happily sit on a steering group with other orgs to deliver those environmental benefits.

R ...

There is a central theme to those sorts of projects which almost everyone signs up to but each partner has really quite different interests in it and sometimes that poses some operational challenges for some of those partner orgs depending on what their responsibilities are and some of those orgs will not have land owner responsibilities or regulatory responsibilities might find themselves slightly constrained by some of the more statutory or private constraints but fundamentally there is a core vision to deliver an increase in green space, how that is done will vary and there has been a lot of discussion about that over the years of these projects in terms of what that should look like. If I am honest some of the time we have been quite peripheral to some of the landscape type discussions, we may have views but that doesn't have fundamental bearing, as we don't have a view on what things should look like, or what level of access people should have, it sounds a bit boring but we need to just ensure it doesn't restrict our ability to carry out our statutory role. Some it is about the complexity of our own organisation on the one hand we have depts. Who are about deliver improvements to wildlife and habitats but they have to balance that with hard infrastructure that helps manage flood risk in urban environments like central London, so you have situations where maybe you wouldn't want hard concrete canalised channel to convey

flood water where it would be much nicer to have soft banks but it just isn't practical in those locations either for budget reasons or from a water engineering purposes. Sometimes it comes across as if we are constraining slightly, I am aware of that, but equally we are an important partner to have round the table.

R – barriers to overcome to partners

DB – It might be more appropriate for TW to comment on this, but there have been some challenges for TW I am sure in opening up their private land to the public, but equally they have done admirably in overcoming those and they have provided lots of in kind and lots of financial funding for this project which has been really quite impressive, but at times they have had to stand firm on certain things, so you mentioned health and safety being able to maintain their operational activity that kind of thing and we have been similar if I am honest and we have had quite challenging discussions about leasing our assets to the project. To give you a specific examples there are a couple bridges that belong to us & access to land that we have leased to the project and these things are complicated, you don't think they will be and there is a path we want to lease to the project which involves many different departments, legal teams, estates, surveyors and are difficult to project plan for and take longer than you think and from our perspective that was one of the challenges. I am conscious that they are quite concrete examples but these are the sorts of things that can slow a project down.

R – partnership model common now in green infrastructure planning?

DB - Yes I think so – London has always been very good, there are wide range of stakeholders from my experience of working inside and outside London you get the biggest and most interesting mix of stakeholders in London and they go right across the board from engineering, commercial right up to NGOs and community groups and representatives.

R – role of EA in enabling community engagement resource management?

DB – We are not major landowners ... but we are pretty good at the community engagement side of things, especially with our own projects, like flood alleviation schemes ... at the Samsbrook flood alleviation scheme [up river from WW]... that had lots of community participation, lots of consultation with some resistance in some parts, but overwhelmingly because it delivered on reduced flood risk a lot of people fairly supportive and it delivered associated green space routes so as part of that there was a on-going dialogue with the local community to help shape the design, we would have had a view on what level of flood risk improvement/benefit was required from the project but several rounds of consultation & engaging with local community would have shaped the design as well.

R – Why would private companies like TW get involved in these projects – what is their motivation?

DB – I am conscious I don't want to speak out of turn but I think TW lead on the project, the heavy weight work was done by their head of CSR, that probably goes some to answer your question, it is probably about engaging customers and communities really.

R – What are the community benefits of the site opening?

DB – you know, infinite – I wish I had bought a house round there before I knew it was going ahead! – Connectivity is a big one East-West connectivity, North-South connectivity – The Lee Valley was quite badly severed by hard infrastructure utilities and things like that still is ... a lot of the fences are coming down as part of this project and that is fantastic and it is becoming more and more of an issue for communities getting access to green space and lots of those communities can be classed as deprived communities with deficiency of access to green space so all of a sudden have that resource

on your doorstep is fantastic – lucky home owners of Walthamstow I say! I should probably mention fishing!

R – role of these projects in the regeneration story of the area?

DB – Yes – I guess this links to the role of green space in regeneration overall and the economic, something eNGOS and green statutory authorities have been trying to make for while between green space and the economy, a message we have been trying to sell for a few years to local economic partnerships, the value of green space in growth, something that is quite often missed – I would be very surprised if WW doesn't have just such an effect locally in the area – for better or for worse it will increase land values and aid regeneration – whether that is a good thing? – whether it is those deprived communities that get access to those increase in land values or benefit from those increase in land values but it supports the wider regeneration of the area. The value of the property that looks on green space is so much more than one that doesn't.

R – What about the property that looks onto blue infrastructure?

DB – I am using terms interchangeably – I see WW is a green and blue space blue space with green margins and all that is being enhanced as part of the project – there is an increase in biodiversity, hard-standing will be replaced with green surface area and so there will be a net increase in green surface area as part of the project – I think we are funding 3.5 Ha of reed bed as part of our contribution amongst other things – which is part of the biodiversity benefits.

R – Anything unique or special about it being blue space/ infrastructure?

DB – Yes – just on a personal level you only have to look at a map of London to see what role the lee valley plays – there is nothing quite like it in London – there is the Thames and then this blue ribbon that runs straight up the middle of London – so it is pretty unique in that sense – there are parts of London that would lay claim to their canals and such but there is nothing quite on that scale. And there is something quite special when you walk across - I can't remember which one it is know – I think it is as you walk to TW Coppermill treatment works and you look left and you see the city and you look right and you see the island – it is impressive.

R – Is there anything particular about ecosystem services that this blue-green infrastructure offers?

DB – I think certainly there is – I am not sure I can put my finger on it exactly – I think people value the opportunity to find themselves in a space that is a little less busy when they live in a very crowded urban environment – the interesting thing about that area in particular is the contrast – it is not like Notting Hill or Kensington & Chelsea where the urban landscape is quite attractive as well – the urban landscape is quite harsh in the Lee Valley in most cases – within in a number of steps you are in this tranquil place. The health benefits are quite measurable – or tangible if not measurable.

R – Are there likely tensions and conflict with the introduction of new uses and users?

DB – Yes – are the fishermen happy?! I think it comes down to management. There are things you can do – this is where I am slightly out of touch with the project and there may things in the management plan that the rangers will implement – that you might open the gates to anglers an hour or two before the rest of the public or something like that. Or have closed days – because if you are increasing footfall to that extent there are going to be competing uses and there is a risk that that some of tranquillity ... it is a green and blue space of regional significance and you are talking about bringing quite large numbers of people in potentially ... then you may lose some of that tranquillity that you were able to offer in the first place. That may be the case it may not it is definitely a consideration. ... there will be people who like it just the way it was – but

overwhelmingly more people will benefit it will be a nicer resource. I know from the little land we have round there that no public were allowed to walk around there and now they will be able to we are going to manage it a little but differently but overwhelmingly the benefits outweigh the risks for us.

R – What are the risks of opening the site?

DB – We have a few minor concerns – maybe anti social behaviour will be considered a risk we are considering – we are quite good at gating off our assets because security is key is someone dumps a moped or worse a car in one of our flood risk channels it creates a flood risk or they could damage our assets like bridges things we need to maintain our assets and I would imagine the same applies to TW more so – critical infrastructure water supply for London – these are headline risks I suppose – they are quite hard concrete risks and maybe there are others around uses – like making sure the right communities have access, use it, know about it. But with good publicity, good management and good engagement most those can be overcome. Security might be an issue – from a public safety some parts of the site are pretty edgy - the north part of the park there are quite scary spaces actually, but that said the area to the north there is a riparian path that has always been open and used as a cycle path and considered quite risky that is part of the area we are opening up and so if you increase footfall to the area you are probably reducing the personal safety risk.

R – Will they affect the identity of the area?

DB – I am sure it will – I can't see how it can be anything but good – I am not an expert on that part of London – I am a Londoner so I am just trying to think as a Londoner ... – I can't see any negatives, but I am sure some will find reason to pick at it, but surely it must be overwhelmingly good – it is a free public resource. ... The area is changing in other ways to the east of the wetlands ... we know what has happened to Walthamstow its been gentrified, its becoming an attractive place and people want to live there now and that hasn't always been the case – and this can only help and will help it spread West to Tottenham which is a more deprived, less appealing part of town at the moment. There will be some people that still don't know it is there and will pass them by, but largely it will bring a lot more people into it.

R – Is there something about it being a nature reserve not a public park in terms of how it is valued or understood?

DB – This is just me - Not an official view - there is a risk fewer people will use it because it is a nature reserve as not everybody gets it – why do you go to a nature reserve if you are not into birds – that is a possibility – so there might be something there around trying to understand what people will sue it for – you are not going to go there to kick a football around or fly a kite so that could limit and a slightly negative aspect in terms of attracting people but I think there are example of large wetlands in London - some charge that are quite successful so there is no question it will be used.

R – And that no charge point ...

DB – That has been fundamental throughout as I understand it and that is really important and if anything it is educational – it has huge potential in helping people understand the role of water in urban environments and the interaction between nature and infrastructure - that fact that nature is there and yet also supplying the taps of London and valuing the free aspects - those people that will discover that are probably not the people that would have paid to go to Barnes Wetland Centre – the hefty £15 to get in!

R – Does it have an opportunity to change our relationship with nature and water?

DB – Yes – It can certainly help us on the water quality side of things understand that – ultimately it is an important water resource that is there for the city to use & if it helps people understand that that can only be a good thing- what makes it slightly different from what we would usually be working on – we normally engage of public water courses – rivers that we have control over or ownership over. A lot of our work is around misconnection and how people treat the water around them and that will not be an issue in the wetlands as they remain reservoirs. I am not sure about the level of public education around how much explanation there will be about what the reservoirs are used for.

R – Is there something about this opening in London rather than is a rural location?

DB – There is something different about how Londoners experience nature – you see that just working in an organisation that is quite rurally focussed – the education aspect of it will be very important. ... One of the attributes of the space It is like the only big sky in London – a different feel to it.

R – How does WW fit into your Lee Valley planning?

DB – We have had it as a priority for a long time ... we are always going to be very involved in it is where a majority of our flood risk is and it still has loads of opportunity to deliver these projects with multi-functional benefits. Our focus has moved away slightly since the Olympics - We always saw the Olympics as likely to be a catalyst for further improvement in green and blue spaces to the North and we invested a lot in the Olympics with a dedicated team. The Lee Valley will always be important for that reason as it has some of our main assets in it but there are competing priorities now. Like growth in London is a big thing now which the Lee Valley will feature in. [For example, the housing growth areas.] ... House building is also quite big on our agenda so we have an interest in rivers, contaminated land, waste and water supply ... so a few years backs it was always about the Lee and now it is broader – the Olympics was a single biggest opportunity and if you look at what it delivered we restored wetlands and remediated umpteen hectares of contaminated land wit others of course - and we are still working with LLDC but some of the Olympic inertia has gone elsewhere. But there is no doubt it will continue to be an important place for us just going back to my description of the blue ribbon running through London at the beginning.

R – What responsibility do citizens have for their green space?

DB – I think probably the answer is yes- I don't know how we go about that – I don't necessarily think that is a job for the EA. Probably there is an element of behaviour change required.

R – Where you involved in the consultation?

DB – We were a consultee more than shaping the consultation. Our key funding contributions were in kind and also small financial contribution to fund the co-ordinators post and reed bed delivery which we would have consulted in.

R – How does the EA work with eNGOS?

DB – We have an environment programme and catchment co-ordinators and they co-ordinate and oversee the catchment partnership. They are funded by Defra to set up these catchment partnerships – not necessarily to lead it but be involved in the setting up, facilitating and co-ordinate of the partnerships and they are ideally chaired by an eNGO. We have had a bit of trouble in the Lee – maybe trouble isn't the right word – but I don't think there is a catchment partnership for the Lower Lea – partly because there are quite a range of stakeholders already functioning there – so there might be a feeling of why repackage something that is already there & we do have a catchment co-ordinator for the Lower Lea who engages with the likes of T21, Ground Works &

other stakeholders. From our perspective it is about delivering the river basin management plan objectives and achieving WFD actions and objectives.

R – Challenge how to deliver IWRM with more community involvement in an austerity funding context?

DB – Yes it is quite a challenge – and I suppose we probably come up for some criticism sometimes we can't operate in all the areas we would like to or allowed to. We are quite a different organisation than we were 3, 4, 5 years ago. A lot of our responsibilities ... well we used to write policy, ... we are still quite proactive as an organisation but comment on a much narrower range of areas ... we are dialled back to our fundamental regulatory areas like WFD, like managing flood risk on main rivers, tidal flood risk, we have handed over some of our responsibilities on surface water, our consenting approach has changed and tightened lots of changes have made it more difficult and obviously funding – ultimately you can get involved in more more projects if there is funding for more partnership projects, if that decreases there is less you can do with the money ... our priorities are quite heavily steered by government. We do operate slightly differently to how we did and I am not sure all the partners we work with have necessarily caught up with that change. So sometimes their expectations of us that we cant really follow through on. I have noticed - especially on projects like this when in the life of a project our remit has shrunk.

R – Who do you feel have been the dominant stakeholders in shaping this project?

DB – The core are TW, LBWF have been instrumental with hosting it and LWT- I think those three are the key. Then there is an outer core – including us, the GLA – they have probably funded more but are the same status – what they have provided in extra cash we have provided in extra land I suppose, and the HLF – the key funding body. They are the main ones driving if forward and some of the neighbouring boroughs.

R – Do you feel there are stakeholders or communities missing who should have had more of a voice?

DB – This is where it gets quite political – the LVRPA dipped in and out throughout – I suppose because it is not on their land, and so less relevant and they have greater weight where they have more land holdings throughout the Lee Valley, they have been involved but not at every meeting – I don't there are any glaring omissions. ... Credit to Rose, she is good at doing the stakeholder thing and bringing the right people to the table and keeping things moving forward - I do think it is a good broad stakeholder group. Also Natural England - Sometimes we attend on behalf of each other - we are both arms length Defra organisations, we have different remits but especially for NE for resources reasons who are smaller than us we sometimes speak to them beforehand and represent their views - they have been quite instrumental. Things have changed there were other GLA organisations involved in the beginning that no longer exist, Design for London, LLDC - and that made it quite an interesting and chaotic space for a while and they have been slashed and cut, and remerged, reshaped so they are all represented by the GLA.

R – What are your thoughts on it be a volunteer reliant site?

DB – I think it is a fantastic thing – that it can be run by volunteer organisations – are they resilient I don't know? What happens if someone is ill and can't come to work? It has to be opened every day and closed every day and that is a really important thing for us in terms of our statutory type and TW, ... there are security issues of leaving those gates open over night so it is really important that it is managed according to the management plan. There are risks there but I am sure the appropriate measures can be put in place but yes it has to be resourced.