

Thematic Mapping and Three Short Stories for Film for Superflux



Andy Barrett
October 2024

Introduction



This document has emerged from a long period of deep listening, conversation, walking, research, mapping, and recorded interviews. The initial brief was to explore three ‘contested’ landscapes and from this initial work to focus in on one site for more detailed analysis. The initial sites (with introductory notes on my research) were:

Colwick Woods / Colwick Lakes (Country Park)

Colwick Woods is a 50-hectare site consisting of grasslands and ancient woodland (1600’s, possibly earlier), situated within the Nottingham city boundary. It is located in Sneinton, an area largely made up of terraced housing that has managed to avoid gentrification, and which is home to a diverse community. It has been designated as a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest since 1995 and listed as a Local Nature Reserve since 2004.

Colwick Lakes (or, more accurately, Colwick Country Park) is a larger site, that can be reached through the woods (although then needing to cross a railway track and a busy road). Running along the western side of the Trent (there being no bridge to cross over to the more affluent area of West Bridgford), are the 24-acre West Lake and 65-acre Main

Lake, as well as a Marina. The site has been increasingly well managed and has a playground, an educational outdoors facility, and now the second largest fish pass in Europe which will regenerate 60 kilometres of the river and has the potential to initiate a genuine trophic cascade.

My engagement with the woods has been through walking, listening and observing, and joining in on litter picks, wellness walks, and tree planting events. I have been talking to those who use the woods, mainly as walkers, and those who engage with it on a more direct level, including talking to those who are active in the Friends of Colwick Woods. This group are moving away from a previous focus on seeing the woods as a community resource, to focussing on encouraging a more diverse foliage and fauna to re-establish itself.

My engagement with the lakes has similarly been through walking, listening and observing, with my interviews focussing on the fish pass and the river (those who live on it and fish it), partly during a period of flooding. I will now be talking to those who have turned the West Lake into an outdoor swimming facility, as well as those who understand 'wild swimming' as something you don't have to pay for. (The University of Nottingham have recently run a research project exploring the increase in outdoor swimming: [Wild Swimming & Blue Spaces \(horizon.ac.uk\)](http://horizon.ac.uk))

In my brief and informal interactions with people across both sites (the majority of which are dog walkers) most have talked about ideas of exercise, of well-being, of a space to get away from it all, of a delight in seeing the (limited) wildlife that is available. There are some who are very impressed by the way that the Lakes site have been managed; there are those who prefer the 'wildness' of the woods. There have been very few myths or stories shared. Many comments are replicated and in asking questions around hopes and fears, the responses are usually around ideas of the sites not being built on, of a desire for them to be maintained, of changes in the weather not being overly detrimental, rather than stimulating more complex thoughts and considerations around the changing environment and our future relationship with the natural world. It is telling that Kat Batelle, the PR officer for Jackson Civil Engineering, who built the fish pass, found there was little interest in the work that has been taking place for many months, even when travelling around the site to ask questions.

It is really in the interviews with people, when I have been able to spend an hour talking to them and to dig deeper, that a more nuanced set of understandings around the question of ecologies has been revealed; offering the potential to investigate further into some of these debates and visions around 'wilder' landscapes, to develop a set of questions that may lean in on a more focussed topic.

Beer

Having been to Beer, a small fishing village in Lyme Bay, East Devon, three times now, it is clear that there is a real suspicion amongst the community towards those from outside wanting to explore questions of fishing and the relationship between this and the identity of the village. It is also clear that centuries of fishing are coming to an end, with only three working boats now on the beach. I was able to carry out an enlightening hour-long interview with Kim Aplin, one of the last fishermen on the beach, whose great-great grandfathers were fishermen and whose daughter now makes art from reclaimed plastic found on Brighton beach.

In many ways the story of Beer is the story of many villages; of holiday homes and depopulation, and of once coherent communities becoming fragmented as a result. Given this those I have tried to speak to understandably want to know what is in it for them. This is a question that, in being unable to answer, I have some concerns about. The fishing community, in particular, is exhausted by constant consultation and in being asked to tell their story; largely through the [Lyme Bay Fisherman's CIC](#) which is trying to give the (very small amount of) fisherman a voice in wider conversations with DEFRA. The excellent thirty-minute film which has recently been made - [The Last Custodians - Lyme Bay Fisherman's CIC \(lbfcc.com\)](#) - is a clear summation of their current experiences; and information on the health of the bay and the reef can be gathered from the [Blue Marine Foundation | Marine Conservation Charity](#)

Given my inability to offer the community a direct response to the purpose of my research at the moment, and in how the material they give me will be used, alongside the work that has already been done, I feel as though we need to reconsider my engagement with this site.

Mansfield (and ex-mining sites)

At this stage I have only carried out basic exploratory work in connection with these sites (largely in an effort to identify those that will be of most interest to explore further). In visiting several 'natural' sites in the town, to listen, observe, and initiate some informal conversations, the responses I received were very similar to those mentioned previously at Colwick. In my initial conversations with the [Maun Conservation Group - Mansfield](#) it is clear that the focus of their work is on upkeep, and that they are less interested in ideas of rewilding and developing new relationships with the natural world than the Colwick Woods group. As a result, I have focussed my work, up to this point, on the Colwick sites.

There are two potential areas of interest that we may wish to explore. One is around the reparation work at the former Rufford colliery site. Unlike many sites this is one that is still in the development phase, with arguments over future use of the land (how much should be given to housing, how much should revert to natural landscape) very much at play. However, tensions and emotions are, apparently high, and there is an element of suspicion towards those wishing to involve themselves in this process. As a result, I imagine that (as with Beer) there will be a demand to know more about the purpose of my research as I try to talk to those embroiled in this situation; and that without clarity those with the most interesting things to say may be unwilling to give me their time.

The second is very different and is connected to work I am doing at Mansfield Cultural Services. As mentioned before the Museum has received Arts Council funding for a new gallery showcasing a Victorian collection of birds - [Museum awarded £76,700 for restorations to its natural history collection – Mansfield Museum](#). It will open in April and over the first six months or so a variety of interventions and art works created in response to the collection will be shown. I wonder therefore if I could use this as a space to develop some conversations through one-to-one conversations, or with small groups. This would move the approach in this location away from field research based on a specific site, into gathering material based on a set of questions (which might be less place-based) activated through a potentially more provocative (and creative?) process.

We decided to focus on Colwick

Thematic mapping document



The site is slashed through by steel tracks and wooden sleepers, first laid out by the Midland Rail Company in the mid-nineteenth century. To the north the exposed two-million-year-old Keuper Marl, left by a hypersaline shallow sea, a time of marine transgressions, reveals slices of time layered one upon the other. To the south the Trent Valley basin, the river rushing past the Colwick racecourse, another nineteenth century arrival here.

The northern side is where the grasslands and ancient woodland sit, reaching back to at least the 1600's, a hidden green space that sits within a landscape of terraced housing, Sneinton, a traditional working-class area that has journeyed from village to slum to a many-cultured community that has resisted the campus-ification of much of the city it has become a part of.

Once home to a Prisoner of War camp, and a pitch and putt golfing course, the top part of the woodland site looks out over the city, the Trent Valley and way off into the distance. The woods that sit on either side are largely wild, with unlaidd paths swerving

through ash, elm, oak, field maple and beech; dog's mercury and ivy dominating the ground.

The southern side is more carefully managed, with Colwick Country Park sitting between the river and racecourse. Carved out of gravel workings, the residue of the re-routing of the river as part of flood protection work in the 1960's, a colossal endeavour, the park is dominated by two lakes where fishing, swimming, canoeing and sailing take place, watched by the many species of birds that have established themselves here. Park benches, often with flowers laid beside them, look out onto joggers, dog walkers, families teaching their young children to ride their new bicycles, and large groups of people – often those who have arrived in the city more recently, from other lands – cooking food on smoking barbecues.

The river is wide (around 250 foot) and the current is strong. On the south bank lies Lady Bay and West Bridgford, a more affluent area than here, and one which cannot be reached by bridge, as though the residents want to keep their distance from those who occupy the northern banks. A marina provides mooring for boats, and the giant sluice gates which, in stopping fish reaching their spawning grounds, have spawned a new, meandering concrete feature, the second largest fish pass in Europe.

This document comes from a period of deep listening, a series of walks, desk-based research, short snatches of conversation with people on the site, and longer interviews with fourteen people, the majority of which have a deep connection to the site. The aim is to convey the kind of thinking that this work has initiated, and to provoke potential questions that may lead to other ways of thinking about how investigation into the site may be of value in your wider work. Why are we looking here and what has been seen that may be worth developing a response to?

Adrian is an angler and a Buddhist, who has been fishing the Trent for many of his sixty plus years. A keen social historian of the river he lives 'off the grid' as much as possible, having no computer, mobile phone or TV.

Annie and Peter live on a boat on the Trent, opposite the park and the new fish pass. They've been there for around eighteen months, having previously lived on a boat in Northampton for some years. In their early thirties, both work in the arts and the choice of living on a boat has been partly informed by their financial situation.

Glynda and Sam are members of the Friends of Colwick Woods. Both in their early seventies they are regular walkers through the site and throw themselves into the litter picking and tree planting work that is taking place. We met in Glynda's house, where she has lived all of her life, close to the woods. Sam lives closer still, having moved here twenty years ago and choosing her house precisely because of its proximity to the site.

J.D. is an eager, puppyish man in his early thirties, his enthusiasm and optimism visibly buzzing around him. Chair of the Friends of Colwick Woods, and part owner of a local cider company that is becoming increasingly popular in Nottingham, he is driven by a belief that anyone can make things happen to change things for the better.

Jim and Yvonne are a local couple in their seventies who have been coming to the woods since they were children and have lived in the area throughout their lives. Jim's uncle lived in the woods, after coming back from the Second World War.

Kat is the public liaison officer for Jackson Civil Engineering, the construction company employed by the Environment Agency to construct the Colwick Fish Pass. In her early thirties most of the work she is engaged in is around flood protection, and she is passionate about her role in this and the fact that 'possibly our help here has realistically changed the life of the river in its entirety'.

Linda is a woman in her sixties who has been walking the Trent for as long as she can remember. A religious woman, who lives on her own, she sees the river as being a vital part of her spiritual connection to God.

Marcus, in his mid-fifties, lives close to, and regularly walks through the woods. As an architect he is fascinated by the use of natural materials, and of the potential lessons that can be learnt from the ecological processes he observes.

Neil is a pest controller (who lives in Devon, outside of this site, but who has interesting perspectives on our relationship with the natural world). In his early fifties he has been a keen hunter all of his life, and spends most of his time engaging with animals.

Peter Olko, a man in his seventies, has been successfully campaigning for many years to stop building on an ancient woodland site in nearby Annesley. Having come from a family who farmed in Poland for many generations, he spent his working life as an engineer.

Stefan is a retired model-maker, now in his seventies, who lives with his wife on a riverside home he designed and built. When we met the river had flooded (as it often does) and could only be reached by boat.

Usha is a visual artist and arts educational worker in her early sixties who lives near to the woods and who walks through them regularly. Being told by her doctor to move from Sneinton which, being in the Trent Vallet basin, finds itself one of the most heavily polluted areas in the region, she has found it difficult to escape from the 'pull' of the woods.

With these conversations generating many thoughts, and touching on many themes, I have decided to break them down through thematising the site in a variety of ways (some of which build on each other and some of which overlap). This allows me to explore one or two key themes within each thematization, and to use quotes from the interviews to illustrate these. These quotes are also colour coded with **red referring to issues of loss or challenge**, **green to re-emergence and possibility**, **yellow to social and cultural understandings (past and present)**, **including ideas of stewardship and purpose**, **blue to those understandings that are based on an affective understanding, including human/non-human contact, or fear of and alienation towards the natural environment** and **purple to those that deal directly with personal attitudes towards the changing climate and potential actions in response to this.**

I have also identified key sections within the interview transcripts where issues raised can be more fully explored and have colour coded these within the interview documents.

The original document included page references to a series of transcribed interviews which have not been included here.

THE SITE AS INTERSECTING SOCIAL SPACE / RESOURCE



Through my visits I have encountered a wide range of people and communities, all of whom have the space to co-exist, all of whom have differing understandings, histories and interpretations of the site. Predominantly both locations of the site are used by local people, many of whom are dog walkers, and many of which use the site regularly and have a relationship with it going back many years.

The park side, with its two lakes and riverside banks, has also become an important site for families and friends to gather (many of those who live in the area are in flats or small terraced houses with little gardens) especially from the newly emerging communities that are settling in the area. Yet it is clearly becoming busier, and reaching out to people from other areas of the city, with cafes, the marina, and the escalating outdoor activities leading to a much higher footfall at weekends. These various constituents tend to inter-act without any real conflict, even when very different worlds collide; large parties of people barbequing food and playing music close to anglers who sit quietly by their pitches; families walking along the paths moving to the side as joggers or cyclists rush past. The commercialisation of the lakes is generally welcomed, although some are conscious of the trend towards turning the site

into an activity park, with its newly laid and wider paths, partly paid for by the hosting of the Detonate music festival.

Water also means money; whilst the river levels rise so does the value of property that stands along the banks, with unfettered access to views of the Trent. You can tell the strength of the economy by the speed in which the old factory warehouses are turned into expensive apartment blocks with their small balconies (whatever you do, make sure there's a balcony) facing the water.

If the park site is used by an increasingly varied community the woodlands are hidden away in what is still largely a working-class area, although the importance that this landscape once played in the social and cultural life of that community has changed as fewer people use it (having alternative sources of leisure activities that were unavailable to previous generations, particularly of younger people). This question of site as resource also throws light on how engagement with the natural world as a place to gather food (largely through poaching) has faded away (although there are still some examples of this), and understandings of resource are now more likely to be framed around concepts of health and well-being.

The change in those who use the site is connected to wider social and economic changes, and in the breakdown of previous collective identities and cultural traditions that flowed from these. An increase in people living in the woods (presumably having nowhere else to go) is a sign of increased economic precarity, and has created some tension because of the litter that has been left around their informal dwellings.

A lot of the guys down the river were factory men, working men. But that seems to have gone now, there's been the destruction of what we used to call industrial working-class life. Remember that someone said 'we're all middle class now' and that has a bearing on what happens on the riverbanks in the countryside. Adrian

My uncle lived in the woods for many, many years. He slept on the floor, on the leaf mould. He collected sphagnum moss, which is used for wreaths and people down at Sneinton used to buy it off him. And mistletoe at Christmas. Sometimes it would be for a bit of bartering when he went in the pub, mistletoe for a pint of mild. Jim

Now it's all about forest bathing and tree hugging. And it's been made something conscious whereas in the past you might have just gone in and felt it. But I think with this digital era and business, it's needed to be framed for people to go, 'oh, I actually need a bit of that'. Usha

Lots of people want to live on a boat, it's becoming more trendy recently. Annie

You've got to bear in mind we didn't have Walkmans and anything; we had what was called outdoors. We'd go up to woods egging, put a string up to swing on the trees; there must have been 20-30 swings up on these trees. Jim

There used to be quite a lot of poaching, people coming down at night with night lines. You can't blame them coming from a country where food was cheaper, and when they see the price of cod in Morrisons thinking, 'well, we're going to have to go and catch some'. But it was a problem. Adrian

People are losing their rituals and traditions, like harvest suppers and Maypole dancing, which connect them to the rhythms of the seasons and to nature. Peter Olko

A lot of people consider anything that's in their house that isn't them or their children or a pet to be a pest and they want it removed. And it isn't always, you know; having a house mouse or a field mouse in your house isn't necessarily a great issue. Neil

As soon as it was turned over to your Berghaus Anorak brigade with the bloody dogs and fancy walking boots and everything else, the wildlife died down. Adrian

So, it was council owned and if you got rabbits here you would be poaching because they would belong to council. Even taking the pigeon eggs, you're stealing. But nobody bothered. In them days, it was, you know, someone's got to eat to live. Jim

It's a really difficult balance. I think we're always going to have your Sunday picnic people ones and your walkers, as we are, that go in and out of the bushes. Sam

They can have the middle-class cottage by the river and their fucking river comes up and there's nothing you can do about that. It's in your back door; it will have you. They think they can control everything but it will do for them. Adrian

Emerging questions / provocations

How has the breakdown in collective forms of ritual impacted on our relationship with seasonal calendars and the natural world?

THE SITE AS INDICATOR OF MANAGEMENT ETHOS / MYTHOS



There are various pressures interacting on the site based around monetisation, government and council policies and approaches, and local activism. Each drives the creation of the site. Monetisation – specifically in this instance in the creation of an outdoor swimming area – creates a more managed space, in which physical structures are put into place to make the area look more appealing, using bright colours and flags.

Alongside this the desire to see the park site as an exemplar in terms of getting people out and about to exercise, (becoming a resource for physical and mental health, with subsequent financial savings down the line) mean that pathways have been widened and tarmacked so that they are wheelchair and pushchair friendly. Government and local policies have been (although I haven't investigated these widely as yet) more connected to ecological dynamism which have, in this instance, led to the ethos of less intervention in the woodland site, alongside the creation of the second largest fish pass in Europe in the park area, at a cost of nearly ten million pounds.

What makes the site so interesting is the way in which one half of it (the park/lakes) has become increasingly managed and shaped and curated, whilst the other (the woods) has become an example of what happens when intervention begins to fade away, and nature is given the space to reassert itself. The majority of those I have met and walked with have embraced this, the developing 'wildness', the increase in foliage and fauna, that they experience.

If the park site is used by a varied community the woodlands are hidden away in what is still largely a working-class area. The changes in working class uses of the site over the years, particularly in connection with poaching and angling, tells another story of how these sites are understood and of how – and for who – they might be managed.

We don't want it a park, so it's just mown everywhere with picnic areas and things. We want it to be enhanced, to keep what we have, the old oaks and the old chestnuts. We've got a couple of really, really old crab apple trees and when the mother tree breaks a piece off the daughters are already there to go. The path changes and you think I'm sure I used to go down there but it's changed because they're coming up. Glynda

There's more of awareness now that you don't clear stuff away. They're leaving it for the beetles and the fungus and the invisibles. I think we're realising more and more what sustains us is invisible; it's what's beneath the ground, in the earth, in the air, which we're polluting and this whole thing of plastics being everywhere. We're waking up now. Usha

It's a bit sterile, the park, but there is wildlife in there. There's muntjacs and things at night; where they're all up in the day I've no idea, probably at the back of the factories or something. There's always someone faffing about down there, and animals don't like it; they don't want it. They'd rather be down the back of the factories in a thick bush. Adrian

We did get quite a lot of people saying there are people starving and you're spending money on fish. Kat

There's an idea that the woods should be a community space, an educational space; a bush working space, a meditative space. Some people will look at a massive bramble thicket with trees, and it's all overgrown, and there's a bit of a grubby stream running through it and they'll go 'what a state!' rather than thinking it's perfect. It's full of blackberries for birds; it's got animals nesting in there; it's got water going through it; the trees are good there. That is perfect. J.D.

It's a managed landscape we live in; it isn't fairy land. It isn't. If everything stops, if all the factories go away, it doesn't mean that everything's wonderful, and there's bunny rabbits hopping around, and you've got wonderful dragonflies. It's a managed landscape, all of it, there isn't a scrap of this country that's natural. Even the moorlands used to be wooded, years ago, before my time, and we've lost the woodlands. Adrian

Emerging questions / provocations

What happens if natural landscapes become viewed / repackaged as a resource connected to ideas of health and well-being?

What is it that appeals to us about 'wildness'? Does it activate some kind of inner desire that may be difficult to name, but which can be keenly sensed?

How will people respond to the environmental changes that the fish pass activates? How will this alter their perception of its value and cost?

How do policies promoting engagement with the natural world, through making it more accessible, create an ongoing sense of nature as ordered and other?

THE SITE AS HARBINGER OF CLIMATE / ECOLOGICAL CHANGE



The sites are ways in which people can identify and measure ecological and climate change. River levels and flooding, with the Trent bursting its banks at the beginning of the year as part of what seems a more common occurrence, are the most obvious examples of this.

I don't think we can continue to live on this boat in this place if we're to get floods like that 6, 7, 8 times a year in the winter or something. But it definitely feels like it's going to keep getting worse and worse and worse. Sometimes you talk to people and they say 'oh you'll be alright with climate change, living on a boat'. And it's not quite as simple as that. We need a bit of land to tie it to. Peter

I remember being really stunned when I was talking in the village hall to someone and I was saying, 'oh, how high does the river come up?' He says, 'oh, it's come up to the flood bank.' And I was 'what! Up to the flood bank? Really?' And now it's up to the flood bank, every bloody flood. Stefan

The flooding caused problems (with the fish pass) as the stop logs either side became stuck inside, which meant the fish were also stuck inside because they'd come in with the floodwaters. So, we then had to have the ecologists out. We carried out a fish rescue with nets and buckets and took more than a thousand fish out of the pass. Kat

Since it came up in October it's just been relentless. You do the clearing up and then it happened again. six times on the trot. And who knows if this is the end of it; it could carry on. We've had floods smack in the middle of summer. Stefan

During the floods one of the most noticeable things was the disorientation that was caused as routes and pathways vanished. People who had walked through the park for many years realised that they needed to orientate themselves in others ways than the paths that had been laid down and which had created a particular kind of narrative, a particular set of positions from which to be in the site, and to observe the landscape around these.

For those who take a more active engagement in the woods, specifically in trying to foster a more dynamic environment for wildlife, changes in the temperature and seasonal patterns have produced a closer human / non-human relationship as volunteers have intervened to try and alleviate some of the challenges faced by animals.

That heatwave was one of the worst experiences of my life. We were walking up almost every day with five litre bottles of water and just filling up trays and the birds were immediately coming. If you're a robin, that's never gone more than one hundred metres in any direction you don't know there's a massive lake another one hundred metres away so we needed to keep taking water up. There are yew trees up there that are suffering. It's just too hot for them. J.D.

The two last summers we had about six weeks of really hot weather and the voles and smaller creatures that can't go very far just die. We were carrying water but you just couldn't keep up with it. It was just so hot it was drying everything up. The little creatures just couldn't get water, and you were finding them on the little paths; tiny little things. The birds didn't seem to want them, so, they couldn't have been much good for food either. Sam

Changes in climate can also be seen through a **breakdown of ritual**, where certain activities connected to times of the year, have become less frequent; or in the sense of a temporal fracture, of rhythms breaking down, accelerating, throwing things off kilter:

People used to sledge on the woods for weeks. This year we had one day of snow. And I rushed out with my dogs and wanted to make a snow angel before it went and by next morning it had gone. Glynda

Blossoming time seems to have crept forward into the year, that's the most notable thing. just the earth throwing its hands up in the air. It's the extremes, I think, that you witness in the land and the surface of the land and the rhythms of the land. It's all very extreme. Usha

Many of the changes that are identified appear difficult to put into words; people have a sense that things are different, perhaps more fragile, but the way in which this is experienced may be sensorially, in small clues in the landscape, as much as through a body of evidence that can allow a clear picture of change to be created.

The woods are damper than they used to be. I don't remember that amount of moss and dampness when I was a kid ... it was crunchy under foot. Wherever you seem to walk now... (it's) a bit spongy, a bit damp. Whether that means anything or not, I don't know. Jim

I think you see it more on the trees than anything; you'll see them struggling later in the season. During the earlier part of the season whatever's happening, it feels right. It's the end of the season where if we haven't had much rain the big trees start to show signs in the way they drop their leaves early. Marcus

The one thing I miss is when I first came up here, I heard the cuckoo the first few years. I don't hear it now; I don't hear it at all and that's a sad thing, isn't it? Sam

Riding your bike as a kid, you'd be swallowing flies and they'd be getting in your eyes most of the time. I drive through country lanes for miles and miles every day in my job and I very rarely get an insect spattered on my windscreen. Neil

Every downpour you'd have ten frogs in the back. You don't see that at all now, even though we've dug a little pond, you don't see any frogs. There used to be a manure pile in the field behind this house which brought a lot of grass snakes, but I can't say that I've seen a grass snake in the last two years. Peter Olko

Change is not all about loss however. With the woods becoming a less managed site, and with ecological processes being allowed to re-establish themselves, growth and abundance is apparent, and with this the emergence of animal life.

There are more mammals; there's the muntjac deer that appeared around 2004 – 2007, and we've got some roe deer as well. There are buzzards and kestrels nesting now. We've got more insects because we've got the blackberries and the brambles, and people don't tread all over them. I've noticed where they used to mow down the bottom there, it's now the great big plants. It's as though you are walking through a tropical forest in the summer. Glynda

Predatory fish couldn't see their quarry so there wasn't a deal of big pike, big perch. But with the water clarity changing they could see and you started to have predation. The small fish get eaten off and leave room for bigger fish to grow on. The river started to change. Instead of being a dirty old industrial river with lots of little roach, it became more of normal river with larger fish; in balance. Adrian

Emerging questions

How might experiencing the speed of ecological recovery impact people's feelings of agency around the challenges of environmental degradation?

What happens to us psychically when the pathways we use to navigate landscapes become erased through climate change?

THE SITE AS LANDSCAPE FOR ACTIVISM



The sites, in their different management ethos, can be seen to have encouraged different types of activism. The park and lakes have created space for a kind of **lifestyle activism** that uses nature as a palette on which to project alternative ways of living, described using words such as 'wilder' and 'connected'. In this configuration the landscape is very much a resource, one that offers 'experiences' that can become central to a sense of identity.

The woodlands offer a space for perhaps a different kind of activism, again as a resource through which to practice a worldview, and through The Friends of Colwick Woods to express this in a semi-formalised management ethos that has been able to shift grassroots intervention policies on the site. Alongside the key figures of this group there is also a sizeable number of local people who engage with caretaking activities on the site, picking litter and planting trees, developing a form of custodial connection to the landscape.

People's reasons for engaging with this work are rarely connected to a wider interest in climate activism and are much more connected to ideas of place, of seeing the site as something that is of value to them (in offering refuge, a 'breathing space', a place to walk, etc) that they wish to protect from those who fly-tip or litter the site, or of the threat of encroachment from property developers (although this does not appear to be imminent). Yet this involvement also develops a deeper engagement with ecological awareness, and of the individual's potential role within these processes, that in turn can lead to greater engagement with the woods; creating a kind of feedback loop which has the potential to widen out into a more developed climate awareness and activism.

In talking to Peter Olko, it's clear that knowledge and definition is key to local activism, that how local knowledge is pooled, constructed and presented when defending spaces from the threat of intrusion (development) is vital. How such knowledge is retained and passed on therefore becomes highly important, and there is a concern that much of this is being lost.

It's a constant battle around here to preserve natural landscapes. Big developers have their pet consultants who see things with darkened spectacles and locals, because they're not trained botanists, find their statements are not given the same weight in consultations with local councils. I've become a repository of knowledge for the woods but there aren't people out there willing to take it on. Peter Olko

I do think sometimes people are worried about the wrong stuff; you know, 'What can we do!'. You can't fix everything, but if you fix a really small thing, it matters to that Robin, that Blackbird. J.D.

We need to understand our place in the whole system, that has to resonate. It's not just about what we want, it's about that understanding. That is fundamental. It's about being connected to a feeling, a sense, and a knowledge that is inherent within us, that we're a part of it even though we've been separated from it, a lot. Marcus

Although it was nice to see them paths, I want them paths all to disappear now. And I know that sounds bad, that I've seen it and you're not allowing others to see it, but just let nature look after it. Jim

You cannot convince anyone to do anything that will last out of shame. You haven't done this; the governments have done this; corporations have done this. So don't ask me to do my bit because this is your problem to solve. When I get people involved with cider making, or with woodland stuff that has much better results than saying to people, 'well, this place is a tip and we're all responsible for it'. J.D.

My children aren't activists, they're not going to rallies; but whenever we walk in here you just see what it means to them. That's all you can hope for really, that they can feel that and if a moment comes, they'll act on it. Marcus

Emerging questions

How can networks be created between smaller place-based projects and what benefits might such structures create?

What are the local experiences that trigger wider climate activism?

How can local knowledge be gathered and re-presented in ways that allow it to be given the same weight as more scientific interpretations when there are arguments over the uses of environmental sites?

THE SITE AS TESTING GROUND FOR FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE



One of the ways of understanding the site is through seeing it as a space where different forms of knowledge are activated, garnered and tested. These forms of knowledge have changed over the years, revealing different social relationships and uses between the site and surrounding communities. Childhood involvement in the woods from those who lived in the area, when alternative resources for play were much less available, meant that the woods became 'our playground', which needed to be coded and mapped out to allow for meetings to take place. Activities such as making camps, damming streams and the now outlawed pastime of 'egging', the taking of eggs from birds' nests often for carefully curated collections, meant that a grounded knowledge of the woods was established.

The more a site is managed the more that information tends to be provided, telling you of the different birds, plants, insects and animals that may be present on the site. The less a site is managed the more that the art of naming has to be learnt and practised. The monthly walks that the Friends group carry out are partly an exercise in this naming, in developing woodland knowledge.

Foraging has become more common, connected to ideas of health and alternative lifestyles, turning the site into a place of provision which has resulted in understandings of different plants and of the best times to gather them. The woods are also a provocation for some, in terms of providing challenges and ideas, as can be seen in Marcus's thoughts below.

For those who live on the river there is a sense that a symbiosis needs to be developed, that the moods and whims of the river have to be understood, that the water that supports them needs to be viewed as a living thing that gives out clues to its behaviour and caprices. Similarly, engagement with nature, of immersing yourself in sites where you feel as though you are co-existing with other species, can lead to the kind of knowledge that Neil talks about; of a deep relationship between himself and the animals that he hunts.

It is also interesting to note how technology can be used – and is by people of all ages – to engage with the woods and to garner knowledge of the landscape they are passing through. Whilst the technology can initially be thought of as another distancing mechanism, converting the physical presence into digital information, this then has the potential to re-animate this presence over future visits.

Finally, in attempting to discover myths and stories about the site which may throw light on conceptualisations of these landscapes and their place within local experience, there has been no evidence that this form of language and narrative has been part of the way the site has been understood.

You see a nest and you put your hand in and you go 'it's a starling's nest', or 'it's a thrush's nest', or 'it's a blackbird's nest'. That's without even looking in the nest, that's by putting your hand in and just feeling the shape of the nest. If it's a blackbird's nest, it's a nest with some fluff in. If it's a starling or a thrush's nest it's like baked mud inside. You learn that as a ten-year-old. We had forty-eight different species of eggs from these woods. Jim

They didn't know what was underneath the feet. They didn't know the Greater Stitchwort; they didn't know the Marsh Marigolds. They were just yellow flowers and white flowers and bluebells. They didn't know the difference between Spanish bluebells and English bluebells.

Peter Olko

Nettles and sticky weed's really good for us at this time of the year. It's a great time for dandelion leaves, they're young, really good for the liver. It's like the spring energy coming in, you know. Usha

A lot of people can't deal with the idea of the process that revolves around them getting the meat that they want to eat. We have to take away this sanitised approach. A lot of hunting groups have tried to sanitise the approach as well, just to pamper to some of those needs. And I think we have to be honest; we are killing an animal. You can call it harvesting, you can call it culling, but at the end of the day you are taking something's life and I think you have to take ownership of that. Neil

I sometimes go and stand in the middle of the woods and put the app on and it tells you which birds are singing and sometimes I can spot them, but not very often. Linda

I can go to a Pooja night at the Buddhist centre and three days later be fishing for roach on the Trent. To me it's all part of one great thing. Adrian

I went on a speculative materials workshop in Birmingham which was starting from the idea that humans are dead, we're all gone ... we're designing for nature, not for humans to interact with nature. What materials can we use to create those environments and those spaces to enable nature to flourish? We were considering the idea of how you create structure, not for a human being to find shelter, but for nature's shelter. It's great having a bank of seeds, but if we don't have a place for them to germinate? We were exploring the idea of injecting the earth with seeds and creating forms that would erode over time and release nature back into nature. I think this whole notion of regenerative materials is fascinating. Marcus

We would say I'll meet you at the Lightning Tree or I'll meet at the Woodpecker Tree, I'll see you at the Blue Tit Tree. It could have been an oak tree, it could have been an ash tree, it could have been anything. Didn't matter; it had a woodpecker's nest in years ago or it had an owl's nest in and that's how it got its name. Jim

Picking something, walking through the woods, having that experience of just being out in nature; of coming back, shoving food down your gob and going back out into it again. I don't think the younger generation are doing that. I think they're doing it in an experiential way, which is how everything's being sold nowadays. I think the freedom to be able to come and get this experience for free, I don't think they have that in their system as much. That's not me being patronising, I just don't think it's in their molecular structure. Marcus

I see the river like a benevolent God. It's on your side; it can be dangerous or annoying, but it's ultimately there. We live on it; it lets us live on it. You can hear it moving all the time; the mood of something else is dictating my mood. The river's unsettled, so I feel unsettled.

Annie

Emerging questions

How might technology be used to enhance the immersive nature of a natural landscape site rather than creating another level of interpretation / distancing?

THE SITE AS METAPHOR FOR RESILIENCE



When talking to people about what they 'learn' from engagement with the site the conversation often shifts to language around ideas of health. There is a sense that the site is one of replenishment, a breathing space, that has been exacerbated since COVID where these locations were sanctuaries. There is also an awareness from campaigners and activists that the trend for social prescribing and the focus on mental health and well-being offers ways to protect these spaces.

To leave rubbish in these sites seems to create a visceral response, as though it is literally some form of poison. And, in tune with different management principles, there is clearly more of an understanding that the debris of nature – the rotting tree trunk lying across a path, the rusting hulk of a decaying car colonised by moss – is, through its unmanaged state, more akin to ideas of health than the previously more carefully manicured space.

The sites – particularly the river – also offer temporal perspectives which some appear to find useful in framing their life experiences, and in finding solace in ideas of balance, transition and resilience; of an unbreakable spirit that will not be bowed whatever we throw

at it. Nature is there to be learned from as much to take solace from, to inspire a sense of inner power and agency.

I quite like being at the whim of the river. That sounds weird because we've just been saying how difficult it is ... but it's like the chores of living in the world. The river's moving, we need to move with the river. Annie

Because you see everything and it breathes, it goes up and down. You get a bit of an excitement when the flood comes up ... it's like the first snows of winter, and you think right, here we go. Stefan

I love the opportunism of nature, mushrooms breaking through the concrete. I love that resilience. When I was recovering from illness I'd sit by a giant oak for hours, not feeling well, but just feeling rested and held and nurtured. If ever injured myself as a child I would plant something and as it grew, I knew my injury would be mending. There's something about a process outside of myself that's also reminding me about myself. Usha

I was engaged to be married and it all fell apart. I went down to the river regularly because it gave me that sense of I'm not the only person with a broken heart. This river was here before I was born, and it will still be there after I've gone. This too will pass. And I remember I really felt that I needed to forgive him. I chose a big stone and I threw it into the river. I've done that a few times over the many years I've been going down there with people that I've needed to forgive. And as I've thrown them into the river, it gives that sense of purpose, that sense of letting go. The river has swallowed the stone, and it's enabled me to forgive. Linda

Mother Nature will win no matter what, because Mother Nature will live a lot longer than you and I are going to live, a lot longer than our relatives are going to live. Jim

(Having asked if his knowledge of the woods has made them more alive to him). 'Yes; you realise what it's gone through to get where it's got to'. Peter Olko

Emerging questions

To what extent does framing the natural environment as a 'breathing space', connected to ideas of well-being, lock us into the insider/outsider position?

In seeing sites as this kind of resource what kind of narratives around 'wildness' does it create?

How might ideas of the resilience of nature, and the processes that inform this, be used to generate new ways of thinking about social and economic structures?

THE SITE AS PARALLEL / LIMINAL SPACE AND MEETING POINT BETWEEN HUMANS AND NON-HUMANS



The woods and the park offer clearly identified spaces in which engagement with other species is framed. The wide expanses of the park and the lakes, traversed through wide tarmacked paths, position you as observer, the **landscape becoming a spectacle**, in which the many birds that are present become exoticized through this relationship.

The woods create a more democratic environment in which the human presence is pushed in upon by often dense foliage, where paths do not look out onto clear vistas but into what appear impenetrable spaces. Here there is an expectation that other species are present, co-existing in a parallel and conjoined world where paths intersect, where small and narrow paths are signs of non-human design that has been carried out, a work of navigating and mapping that draws us into other understandings of these woods, that creates an awareness of our inter-relationship with other species.

The presence of these species is often announced through sound, as they move from the branches of trees, from the undergrowth and understorey, causing an instinctive reaction in the passer by as they look to see where the sound is coming from, (in these split seconds

our stories are momentarily connected). Sometimes a creature will cross a path, or come close. Sometimes people come to visit at certain times of the day or night to try and encounter these animals. Sometimes there are events organised where the promise of witnessing certain species causes interest and excitement. Sometimes people leave seeds for animals to gather once they have left.

The woods are also a place where there are signs of human existence that have been merged into the natural landscape, as foliage wraps itself between and around these alien objects to find a way to make sense of them.

The links between global events and the non-human presence on the site, has also been made evident, with the war in Ukraine impacting the supply of steel and delaying the construction of the fish pass, and subsequently the life cycle of several fish species.

When I see that butterfly resting right there, I can feel the sun on me in the way that the sun is being soaked into those delicate wings. They're sunbathing, aren't they and sometimes they suck the moisture, but they like the heat and when I see that all I want to do is just lie on the floor. Usha

When we did the bat walk, we had ten times more people than we expected. We looked up and bats were everywhere ... a tawny owl buzzed us and there was a cry of terror as this thing came swooping out. J.D.

I've often met badgers here. If you stand really still at twilight you can hear them eating the worms, crunching away. They just creep out and go back. Usha

There's mice in my jacket, there's mice in my paniers; whatever I leave out there, the mice move into. The flood brings all the bloody rats and mice up. Stefan

When my father was growing up it was so cold in the winter, they used to drive the cattle into the lower part of the house and live above it, so the heat from the cattle would keep them warm. Peter Olko

The twenty-minute rule is incredible. You sit there very, very quietly. Animals will come out to you, and that comes with time and experience. But just the ability to sit and wait ... people are so busy in their lives that to sit down and not move for twenty minutes, not talk, not go on the mobile phone, for a lot of people it's quite challenging. Neil

The reason we like to try and keep the paths clear, and encourage people to stick the paths, and grow things along the sides of the paths, is that it gives us more space to hide stuff. J.D.

During COVID, you could just feel there was space for nature to enter, everything was quieter. It was so hushed and it was like snowfall in a way because nature would come through and you didn't necessarily need to track it. It was just there because we had stepped back from our busy, over expansive lives of modern society and, in the tide going out it gave space for nature to come forward really and just be in the land where we would normally occupy it and frighten them off or threaten them. Usha

I've twice seen this big deer. You get a presence behind you and you look and there's this big brown deer looking at you. It quietly walked out of the bracken and brush and but when the dog came, it just disappeared. They don't run or panic, they just disappear. And that was beautiful. Sam

It's got trees growing through it, but the car is there, the last skeleton of it. How it got there no one really knows. It's grubby and it's rusty and sharp but you know it's not going to bother a mouse. J.D.

It's the idea of reaching into another world. When I was young, I used to look over from a cattle bridge into the weeds and deep waters ... and I said to my (Buddhist) mentor that it used to captivate me. It wasn't just to look at, I also wanted to be down there, amongst it. And even now when I'm fishing, if I look into a pond, it's like a whole world of forests and things. Adrian

Emerging questions

What is the affective impact of a landscape that surrounds and encloses, that presses in on the body, as opposed to one that opens out before you?

How do human and non-human paths intersect? What happens at these junctions?

What might we learn if we trace the impact of global events through to the life cycle of our foliage and fauna? Would this create any kind of cognitive shift in our understanding of the local landscape?

THE SITE AS EXAMPLE OF POTENTIAL



In my conversations there has been little sense of an engagement with the site informing wider perspectives of ecological degradation, and I have had to push at this to unlock observations about the potential of nature to revitalise at pace if given the space and conditions to do so. Some of those I have interviewed who have a deep engagement with the natural world (Adrian, Neil) in no way see the current situation as a ‘climate emergency’ but as part of an ongoing and dynamic process in which the tenor of the conversation is unhelpful.

What is evident is how those who use the less managed wood site can clearly see the speed with which nature reclaims spaces and how this has also had an impact on regenerating species inhabitancy. The Fish Pass project, and responses to the impact of this, will be telling. With little interest being shown during the many months of construction, the Pass itself is unlikely to offer any views of the fish using it as it currently stands; and with many of the projected changes occurring further along the river, it will be interesting to see how this structure is discussed over the following years.

Those who are engaged with questions of ecology do also see that there is a tension between encouraging more people to enter into a relationship with the site, and the potential impact of this. There seems to be a dilemma here. To encourage people to become more aware of the environment they should directly engage with the natural world and gain the kind of grounded knowledge and experience that really shifts perspectives. But in doing so this also creates challenges around giving nature space to reassert itself.

Things change almost within the next two seasons, I'd say. In fact, there was a bloody great tree in Bingham's Pond they took that out, they built a peg next to it, the reed bed was left, but the bankside vegetation was stripped out and within two seasons you've got lovely reed bed coming up, meadow thingy-me-bobs, and mustards, they're all growing. Adrian

(On a scheme that has re-introduced beavers). I think you have to understand the impact it has at different levels of society. We love the beavers being around, but they're designed to slow down water flow by creating dams. And this has been causing flooding in the valleys where we are. They were reintroduced to help with flooding in the cities and towns, but why are people in the rural communities having to pay for the people further down in bigger cities? Neil

The first pond we put in we didn't know if it was going to take. We thought this is going to get damaged or discovered. We went back three months later and did an analysis on tracks and found that whatever you can imagine is in those woods was visiting that pond. It was one pond twice the size of this (bar) table off the beaten path. And we had Muntjac tracks, birds of prey feathers were there, everything you could think of in the in the mud around it, certainly 20 plus species. J.D.

I didn't realise my hearing was going for a long time and eventually I got some hearing aids and the first time I went in the woods with those it, it was incredible. It was beautiful. I could have sat there all day just listening, recognising the sounds. It was beautiful. Sam

In the early seventies the river was not only devoid of a lot of bankside vegetation, but also the water was quite murky, partly due to the power stations bringing warm water in. So, you had a whole different level of microorganisms living in it. It used to steam on us on a winter's morning if we went down to the Trent. Then, in the eighties, some of the power stations closed. The Water Authorities finally got their act again and started cleaning things up. The river changed. It was starting to run clear, chub were appearing that were larger. It was noticeable that willow trees, where there had been just sprigs and bushes on the other bank, were starting to grow. Adrian

Opening this barrier will open 60 kilometres of spawning grounds for 11 different species of coarse fish, including the endangered European Eel. Economists who know these things say you will have a knock-on effect throughout the entire food chain ... if we get the fish upstream, then the things that prey on the fish will come there and it knocks on the whole way. It will completely change the life cycle of this stretch of river. We believe one fish spawning season will be enough to have a significant upstream effect if they can get through and successfully spawn. Kat

I think the lack of understanding of how quickly nature can take root contributes to climate anxiety. There are wonderful, wonderful studies where areas have been left alone, concrete areas that have just had a big fence put around them. And within ten years you've got trees, you've got grass, you've got butterflies and birds and all sorts of things. Because the default state is still nature at the end of the day. You can concrete it, you can do what you like to it, but unless you irradiate it or poison it beyond recovery, something will come back. J.D.

Nature will recover very, very quickly given the chance. I think people think it will take generations before recovery happens. I think you're talking maybe three to four years and you'll see massive amounts of change. It's stuff that's quantifiable. Just by changing the ecosystem slightly, we'll have a massive effect and a very rapid one. Neil

It would be phenomenal to actually see the world, not just when David Attenborough puts it on your TV, but to actually be able to see it yourself would just be a fantastic goal to aim for. I think people would appreciate it if they could see it. Kat

Emerging questions

How far along an ecological chain are we able to judge the impact of 're-wilding' projects?

What does abundance feel like? How might the sensory impact of abundance restructure our considerations about the environment?

Might nature's examples of adapting / thriving in precarity be useful in re-conceptualising our own life narratives?

Three Story Scripts for Film



The following three stories draw on my research across all three of the sites that I have engaged with to posit ideas and possibilities for a renewed future engagement with the natural world. They are written as the starting point for short film scripts, with suggested visual information.

THE BUTTERFLIES

A sunlit field of many butterflies comes into focus. Nina, a woman in her forties, is walking slowly through this field. Her narration is from another moment; we see the field and the butterflies both from her eyes, and also from outside of herself, looking in.

It's always such a treat to come here; to see these. It never disappoints. How could it?

I'd almost forgotten what it was like; walking with my grandmother in the fields nearby, her telling me the names of every one that we saw and us drawing them together when we got back to her house.

We see butterflies being drawn in a sketchbook, by young hands and old.

It helps to be able to name them. To know which fritillary is which; whether that clouded yellow is a male or female; it brings them more into focus somehow.

We are back in the field and begin to notice, in the distance, other figures.

And it's not difficult to do, to be able to identify things, to acquire knowledge. Once they decided that we couldn't bring our mobiles in with us there was more of an effort, I think. Rather than relying on the apps.

We hear a couple of beeps, like those of a supermarket scanner.

Sometimes you hear arguments; people querying whether the scanners have been working properly, swearing that they never saw some of the butterflies that were listed on their receipt. That this is why they had their phone taken from them; that they don't believe it's got anything to do with the signals or creating a more mindful environment.

We see, indistinctly, two people, one of whom is gesticulating at the hand-held scanner that the other, who is wearing a luminous jacket with a company logo of a butterfly, is holding.

We now see Nina, talking directly to the camera.

I realise that I'm lucky. That not everyone is in a position to do this. I understand why some of these places are getting so much criticism, and the security that some of the sites have had to employ isn't helping with the way people think about them. But some of what's going on is crazy.

We see a small group of people, their faces covered, running through the paraphernalia of an outdoor swimming 'centre' and up to a lake where they start to empty flasks into the water.

It all started with the swimming; people sniping from the sidelines, as they always do, but after the first attack when the algal blooms appeared in a dozen or so ponds and lakes it was clear that some people were prepared to do more than just complain about it. That they were ready to sabotage nature itself to make their point.

We return to Nina, talking to the camera.

I know there are some lovely places that have changed a lot because of all this interest; and maybe if I had been one of those that had been swimming there for years I'd be frustrated as well. But if you're going to keep posting pictures of yourself in some lake or river and boast about how invigorating it is, how much more you feel 'in touch with nature', then you can't really complain if others start to take notice and want to try it for themselves.

We see a sign for the 'Wild at Heart Swimming Experience', with outdoor changing rooms, showers, coffee and food vans, tables and outdoor saunas. As some are swimming others are taking part in an outdoor Tai Chi class.

There's nothing wrong with making something a little easier to do, and once things become popular of course people will seize the opportunity to make something of it. But every single wilderness experience I've been to has had great facilities, and it's obvious that everyone there is having a great time.

We return to the butterfly site; now approaching it from the outside: 'The Purple Emperor Butterfly Experience'. As Nina's voice over continues we see small groups of people being given clothes to wear, and handed a sensor which they are shown how to clip on to the front of their jackets. They sign forms and are given promotional material to read.

Of course, there's bound to be some who are just in it for the money, who've seen the tax breaks the government has been offering, the growing popularity of these wild immersion experiences, with their beavers and otters, their storks and wolves and elks, and have jumped on the bandwagon. But it's not as easy as that. You can't just take over a piece of farmland one year and start running safaris there the next. It takes time, commitment and money; and nobody can guarantee that it's going to work out. There have been all sorts of stories about places where the wildlife they tried to introduce just didn't get on with the environment, or seemed to thrive but hid themselves away so well that no-one ever saw them and customers wanted their money back.

But there are also those that have made it, that have worked through all the regulations and the challenges so that whole areas are alive with species that weren't there before.

We now see a montage of wildlife from various 'experiences': white storks from Knepp; bison from Wilder Blean; otters, beavers, ponies, cattle, salmon.

And it's only when you really, truly experience something that you understand it. The utter beauty of it; the visceral thrill of seeing what nature is, what it can be, as it prowls and flies and crawls around you. And it's only when you truly understand something that you start to make changes in the way you are; in the way you behave. A way that means you are more in tune with the natural rhythms of the world, of the needs and moods of nature. As we must be; all of us.

We see a group of people protesting outside 'Wolfworld Glamping Experience'; with signs saying 'End the Wilderness Divide' as others walk out in 'Wolfworld' hoodies and caps.

Any new technology is always expensive when it's first introduced, everyone knows that. It needs people who can afford it to spend their money on these things, whatever they are, so that they can become established. There's no reason why in the future these green bathing centres, woodland safaris, fauna saunas, and forest clinics won't be affordable to more people.

We see another group of people at another 'experience' centre, being welcomed as though they are entering a health resort.

And I've begun to notice more and more people turning up who tell me they've been prescribed a visit from their doctor and are paying a tenth of the rest of us.

We return to Nina, talking to the camera.

Surely as more and more species are reintroduced by all these companies that are springing up to take advantage of the farmland that's becoming available, it won't take too long before they start to spread.

We see 'experience' workers tagging animals, erecting electric fences, flying drones over their land, setting off in jeeps with rifles slung over their shoulders.

I know there are strict rules, and that these businesses are doing what they can to try and make sure these creatures stay within their boundaries having invested so much in them, and who knows what kind of lengths they might go to; but you can't really control nature like that can you? Surely it will get to the point where whatever these experiences are offering, whatever kind of premium species they promise you will be able to get close to, I'll be able to go to a field without worrying about the sensors, and the butterfly itemization, and the billing at the end of it all and just sit there and watch the butterflies as I did with my Gran.

We return to the butterflies being drawn in a sketchbook, by young hands and old.

But until that happens ~~does~~, I'm choosing to spend my money the way I want to, by being out in the wilderness with nature. And nobody's going to make me feel guilty about it.

We see Nina in the butterfly field once again, as a group of butterflies comes towards her. We hear a sequence of beeps as each is registered.

THE HEARING

The camera moves around an old pit site that has, over the last years, become a rewilded area – with saplings and more established trees, bird feeders and information panels, lagoons and coots – before revealing wind turbines that stand dominantly against the landscape. Darren, a man in his sixties, begins to talk.

It all sounds softer now, that's for certain. It's a quieter way of gathering energy, but I can still hear it.

We see Darren sitting on a bench, looking across the lagoons.

And they ask me sometimes, when I'm sitting on this bench, looking for the plovers and the pipits, the crossbills and warblers. How's she sounding down there Bill?

In the distance we see a miner from the 1890's heading towards Darren.

It was my great grandfather who first heard it. He came from the North East; a sinker, when every landowner here, for miles around, wanted to find a way to haul the coal up out of the earth; whatever the challenges. And there were plenty of those. His brother was killed by an inrush of water with thirty-seven others. Just because you can't see a river, doesn't mean it's not there. He stopped here after meeting a farmer's daughter who weaved baskets from willow that were second to none. And the day after he married her it happened.

We are inside a dark mining shaft, a number of men working the face with picks. A very low and deep rumbling, which is almost imperceptible, begins.

It went right through him apparently, a kind of vibration that he understood, that no-one else felt. He always said that it was like a voice; the earth telling him to leave, that it was angry, that it had had enough.

From inside the darkness, we hear a cry of 'Get out! Clear out! Come on'

He managed to get everyone out, telling them a collapse was on its way and sure enough it happened, only moments after the cage had brought the last of the men to the surface. There would have been a few dead that's for sure. They said he went down on his hands and knees ...

We see the miner kneeling, lowering his face to the earth ...

... and whispered something, right up close to the earth.

Darren now talks to the camera, still sitting on the bench.

Everyone knows miners are superstitious. When you're clambering into the dark guts of the earth, you cling onto anything that gives you a little more confidence that you'll be let out again. And from that day on there wasn't a miner who didn't hope to see him on their shift. But everyone soon understood that it wasn't a question a luck. That he could talk to it, the earth, or rather it could talk to him. And it did, they say; all the time.

Darren is joined on the bench by miners either side of him; one from the 1950s and one from the 1980s.

And it passed on. To my grandfather, my father and then me. The earth being able to talk to us; to tell us when it was angry; when it was ready to lash out in pain. And no man who ever worked alongside any of us ever came to any serious harm. We don't know why it chose us but I'm glad it did. My dad thought it a curse, and he turned to drink in the end; but not me. And the thing is that everyone accepted it, that such a thing might be possible. It didn't seem strange; it's just how it was.

We now see a montage of activity related to mining culture: of allotments, flower shows, anglers and caged bird clubs, as Darren continues.

Because we all had some kind of connection, that was the thing. You just look at these communities, the way that they literally grew out of the earth, were connected to the earth, and then – when the cord was cut – how they withered away. If you weren't down inside her, you were tending to her up here, growing plants and vegetables, fishing the rivers, keeping birds to watch their colours emerge or to take to the air. Letting her provide for you; throwing yourself into everything she had to offer. We may have been poisoning the air, causing her damage, but she wasn't separate from us, outside of us, do you understand?

We now see a close up of a large lump of coal, the camera slowly moving around it.

There's this lump of coal as large as the body of a cow in All Saints Church at Clipstone. They had to lay a railway track to get it in; into the Miners Chapel. And every Harvest Sunday you'd see it all in front of you ...

As the camera pans out we see baskets full of fruit and vegetables piled up in the church.

... the offerings that nature had provided from above and below; and how it was all tied together. How a tree rotting thousands of years ago had drawn a family – sometimes from places across the seas, like the Polish man who lived next door – to a hole in the ground. And feeling that; understanding that; how everything we do is pushed and pulled by the landscape and the pressures that time works upon it, made the hairs on my arms lift.

We return to the bench, where Darren is now sitting alone.

Of course, the pit has been closed for a long time now, and I thought when I left, when it was all over, that would be it; that our conversations, between the earth and me, would come to an end. But as anyone who lives round here will tell you the earth is still letting us all know what she thinks as she settles back into place a little; making adjustments for our absence within her.

We see a row of terraced housing, the camera moving through the door of one of the houses, up the stairs and into a room that has a large crack across one of the walls.

She sends cracks out across our kitchens and bedrooms; speaks through the creaks in our houses at night, and in the shifting of door frames; sometimes in ways that can only be felt as you pull on the handle a little longer than before.

We return to the rewilded site, as at the beginning, seeing people walking and talking.

Most are happy with the way things are changing; and I can hear she's in a rush; perhaps to make up for lost time, who knows? Shrubs are growing in soil that has pushed out its poison, bringing the insects that bring the birds and there's fish in the ponds as well. It's lovely, it is; I walk round here most days, many do. 'Who would have thought', that's what you hear; from those who remember what this land was before; the industry that sat here; the noise and the toil and the muck and the strain.

But I'm not so certain. There's something a little bit wrong, I can feel it; I can hear it.

We see Darren kneeling down, his ear pressed upon the ground.

The towns and the villages round here were born out of our partnership with the earth and I can sense that she's missing us. That even though we sometimes caused her pain, we were more a part of her by being up to our necks in her. Not like now when we're just looking on.

We hear the sound of waves building.

Look; there's a fisherman I know, where I go on holiday, down south. He's running the last boat out of his village.

And now we are on a small Devonshire beach, full of small fishing boats.

They still have boats on the beach but that's just for the tourists, to make them think it's still a fishing village. It's a selling point; like here the old industry has gone.

The camera focuses in on the sea.

The reef is recovering, he says, but at the same time the links between the villagers and the sea, the way that they lived and breathed together, are vanishing. And it's not just the sea, he tells me; back when he was young everyone was alert to the wind and the weather, the moisture in the air, and the smell of the spray.

We see a fisherman, out on his boat.

Because it was important; it might keep you alive, that knowledge; that way of talking with the world. And something needs to replace that doesn't it? Otherwise, what are we left with? How do we really know the world around us if we forget how to communicate with it by immersing ourselves in it? Do we just leave it to scientists to give us facts and figures that don't mean anything?

We now see the wind turbines again.

Look at those turbines. Where are the people working them? And it's the same with the solar panels.

We see a field full of solar panels.

Fields and fields of the things and not a person in sight. How does that help us be in contact with the world? Real, true contact that allows you to understand it, to feel it, to hear it.

And again, we return to the rewilded site.

All of this is beautiful, don't get me wrong; what they've done to the place, how we've left nature reclaim it. But it can't just be scenery; it can't just be something we walk around and admire because we're letting it do what it wants. We're meant to work it; be with it; let it provide for us.

In amongst the walkers we see miners and fisherman.

That's what its expecting; I can hear her telling me that. I can hear her saying that we can't just walk away. That we need to come back, all of us, like before. And if we did then maybe this time there'd be a lot more of us who could hear what she was saying. Who could find a way to open themselves up to her.

Everyone stops and kneels and places their ear to the ground. There is a moment of silence before the camera closes in on Darren, his face filling the screen.

I never had kids. I couldn't. My family's not got a lot of hearing left to do. And no, I can't tell you what it's like. It's just something I hope that one day you find out for yourself.

THE RAIN

Helen, a middle-aged woman is looking out of at her kitchen window as the sound of rain quickly builds.

I'd been watching these things being built on the street and thinking that at last some money was being spent round here. And when they were finished, I went out to have a proper look, and there was a notice, saying there was going to be a meeting. That they were hoping that people would get involved. That they were putting them all across the town. Bioswales.

A group of people are sat on plastic chairs looking towards a young woman who is showing a PowerPoint presentation about various forms of blue-green technology. We see close ups of various design ideas intercut with the audience response to what is being shown.

The community centre was packed: I was surprised how many people had come along. But it had been growing; the sense that the weather was something to worry about; that the rain had become more than just ... depressing. It had been getting beyond a joke, how often the water was coming up into the street, finding its way into the houses.

I think people were expecting to find out what was going to be done about it and then go home. So, there was some surprise when they asked for volunteers to mind the bioswales. To plant them; to clear the rubbish out of them; to make sure they could take as much rainwater as possible to keep it out of the system, splashing onto the roads, going into the sewers. Some started to get annoyed. That they'd come here expecting to hear some serious ideas, some proper plans for action, not glorified flower planters. But I thought why not? Maybe it will be a way of getting to know my neighbours a little better.

Helen is with a small group of people, of all ages, gathered around a bioswale. They are planting shrubs, sweeping up rubbish, talking and laughing.

I became part of a team, just five or six of us to start with. To be honest there wasn't really much to do, they're not that big. But we decided that we wanted it to look as good as it could, you know; to plant a real mix of flowers so there was lots of colour in the street. And within a few weeks it did look really lovely, and we'd take it in turns to come out and make sure all the rubbish was cleared away.

We see the group looking at other bioswales; taking photographs, making notes.

And, of course, we'd go and look at what other people were doing with theirs, because every street had at least one of them. And there were all sorts of things planted and that got us thinking about what we'd done, that we hadn't thought about which plants absorbed the most water.

We see earnest conversations taking place next to the bioswales; and people in the library looking through books.

So, we started to research that, and talk to the other volunteer teams, and took out a lot of what we'd planted and replaced it with ferns because of their foliage and thick root systems. And it became kind of competitive; because there were these sensors that we'd been given that could tell you how much water your bioswale had absorbed ...

Helen and another woman are taking readings; they appear somewhat disappointed.

... and we'd always be checking and judging against the readings on other bioswales and wondering what we could do to make them more effective at their job, whilst also making them look as good as they could, with their lilies and irises.

The camera moves in through the fauna of the biosphere and back out to Helen who is standing next to it, looking at the sky.

I became kind of obsessed about the rain. Not obsessed exactly, but connected to it in a way I hadn't felt before; or at least that I couldn't remember. But you see toddlers jumping in puddles, as though there's some kind of innate power drawing them towards it, that a puddle of rainwater is something they need to engage with more than anything else in the world, and you think 'that is utter joy'. And we must have all been like that once.

A montage of storm announcements; of black skies; of terrible flooding in other countries.

For the last few years the storms seemed to just constantly be hovering, always ready to pounce as they rattled through the alphabet and threw their rain onto the ground with greater and greater force. But even though the weather was all we talked about it still somehow didn't really feel as though it was a part of us, something we were fundamentally connected to. Maybe if it was like in those countries where you saw the absolute power of rain to turn lives upside down in an instant, it would be different. Maybe then we would all be sensitive to

the smallest change in the atmosphere; alert to it in a way that makes the hairs stand up on the backs of your neck.

Helen arrives at the bioswale to find the plants have been torn out and thrown onto the ground. She carefully picks them up.

Of course we had to put up with vandalism, and a lot of people thought we were being ridiculous, you know, 'pissing in the ocean' and all that even as we tried to explain. That the pipes below were at breaking point ...

Helen places her ear to the ground.

... that if you listened carefully you could hear them groaning and cracking under the pressure of it all. And every few weeks another street would find water pushing up into it from down below.

We needed to do more. The bioswales were just the start.

We see the work that is being spoken about taking place.

The roofs were next; making sure that every possible surface that could be greened was; even the smallest garden shed. Then we started digging drainage ponds, and in some areas there were reports of lots being drawn to decide which houses would be demolished to make the space needed. Then the wetlands started to be dug, and again decisions had to be made to identify where we wanted them.

We return to the community centre, which is packed with people, this time talking to each other, making plans, holding discussions.

By now the different groups of volunteers had joined forces and found that the action meetings were drawing more and more people in because something was happening.

We see Helen and a larger group now, walking around drainage ponds that are ablaze with insects and birds.

There were a lot more insects and birds around, and slowly the flooding was easing off. Maybe a lot of people didn't notice the difference, but we did. It had been a huge amount of effort for what was really just a miniscule difference, but the rain was sinking back into the

earth, more and more of it. And the rain sounds different as well; I've really noticed that. Not the way it falls but the way it lands; what it lands on.

We return to Helen looking out of at her kitchen window, the sound of the rain heavier now than at the beginning. She turns and speaks directly to the camera.

I know that maybe we are just fiddling while Rome burns; that what we're all doing here, and in all the other villages and towns and cities across the country, isn't going to make any difference if the storms become more violent, if the rain gets heavier still; which some say it will.

Some ask if I worry about it. That all this work may be for nothing. But it's not.

We see two young girls and their father digging a moat around a sand castle on a beach.

When I was a child I used to spend hours on the beach every summer with my sister and dad, trying to channel the sea into moats around our sand castles, and then watching the moment when the tide started to come in and everything collapsed. And if you looked around there would be lots of other children too, digging away, engineering in the sand.

The camera pans out and the beach is full of children digging channels and moats around sand castles.

I've been thinking about that a lot lately.

The camera pans out to reveal more and more children digging on the beach as the sound of rain begins to build. As the image fades the sound of rain becomes louder and louder, increasing even when the screen has gone to black; before stopping abruptly.

Postscript – Windblown



I'm walking through a small ancient woodland that is owned by Taylor-Wimpey, with a man called Peter Olko. He's pointing out the many different shrubs and flowers that we pass, some of which he has planted himself, strategically, to help his cause.

Spurreck, Woodland, Horse-chestnut, Wood Anemone, Wood Anemone, Wood Anemone, Cow Parsley, Lesser Burdock, Lords-and-ladies, Silver Birch, Wavy Bitter-cress, Pendulous Sedge

Peter comes from a family of farmers, although his career was in civil engineering. His father worked under the Nazis as a labourer and got out of the country as soon as he could. His elder brother was taken to be shot, along with twenty-two Jews in the village, until the Priest informed the executioners that this was not Stanislaw Bolko, that they had got the name wrong. Peter's father managed to move to France and after the D-Day landings joined the Polish Free Army. Having no wish to return to a Communist Poland he moved to the U.K., with his French wife and no money. He worked hard and managed to buy an old farm house and an acre of land in Grassthorpe in Sutton on Trent, joining in the family tradition of subsistence farming that all of his uncles and aunties were engaged in, 'like going back to the 1920s; thirty or forty years behind us'.

Peter's father made wicker baskets, fishing baskets, clothes baskets, bicycle baskets. He even made a basket for the Queen; the basket that was used to bring her mail in, in the morning. He never met her. It's probably falling to bits now. A Mrs Savage, from Nottingham, used to come every fortnight to buy his baskets and one day she brought Peter a fishing reel, and took him to the local beck, gave him a rod, and showed him how to fish. Which is how he became a fisherman.

It's fishing that has connected me to Peter, but it's not what I'm here to talk about. I'm here to find out about this wood, and how Peter has been fighting for a quarter of a century to protect it from water. Not the excessive rain that has been falling and which the wood can easily deal with, even if the paths are very sludgy, but the planned (and extremely large) soak-away to deal with the top surface water connected to the planned building of housing.

Peter moved here in 1983 to take up the post of Senior Engineer for Works at Kingsmill Hospital. In 1999 Taylor Wimpey applied to build ninety-nine houses in the field behind his house that sits close to the wood. They said the field was nothing special, just a pony paddock; that their survey had identified seventeen plants within in, so there was no reason not to build on it from an environmental point of view. The wood, too, Little Oak Plantation, was 'very poor ... nothing of significance', and had only been present since 1949.

Peter wasn't so sure about either claim. He went to the Nottinghamshire Biological and Geographical Records Centre and they came out to survey the field. Seventy-seven different species were identified and it was labelled as a local wildlife site, a 'neutral grassland, which semi-preserved it for three years.'

Then there was the wood. Peter and his friend Anne started to walk through it, every two to three weeks, along a series of pathways and intersections, surveying five yards either side of these walkways. They took photos, noted down everything they could see as they tried to understand it, to catalogue it, to listen to it. They created a map detailing the wood in ten areas, 'blocks', to give precision to their work. They saw that 'the wood is bounded by native deciduous trees to all sides', and that although there was a good deal of pine it was in the areas where oak, sycamore, silver birch, rowan, elm and yew were standing that ground flora was more abundant and diverse.

Jane Carruthers from the Biological and Geological Records Centre came out to validate the list of plants they had forwarded to them, being able to give many of them a name. She was particularly excited to see the plant that Peter is looking for now, *Adoxa moschatellina*, the Town Hall Clock plant, as it is known, with its five faces. Four of these point out in different

directions at right angles and one points up 'looking for God to come back to Earth' Peter tells me. (I look this plant up later and wonder if he has confused this description by merging it with another of its nicknames, the 'five-faced bishop'. Apparently during the war, it was said that the fifth flower was for Spitfire pilots to know when it was teatime.)

Wood-ridge, Common mouse-ear, Rowley Willowherb, Dickcissel's Nightshade, Hazel, Cotoneaster, Hawthorn, Cuck's-foot, Tubeflorous-grass

It was clear that this wasn't a wood that had been planted in 1949, as Taylor Wimpey declared. It may have been replanted then, there was evidence of a lot of oaks being cut down, of pines being planted. When Peter and Anne went to the university to study maps, they found that as the maps got older the wood was still there. All the way to 1600. ('Look at the maps', he tells me; 'you get a sense of history from those, they're important documents.) Information is out there, 'but you've got to dig, you know ... people will help you if you tell them what you are facing'. He found a Tree Officer employed by Notts County council who came to look round the site and identified 'a bit of an ancient ditch' and showed him how 'that hedge was relayed about one hundred years ago'.

This was an ancient wood.

Peter and Anne started to organise walks so people could see what they had in their ex-mining village. It was clear that 'they didn't know what was underneath the feet. They didn't know the Greater Stitchwort; they didn't know the Marsh Marigolds. They were just yellow flowers and white flowers and bluebells. They didn't know the difference between Spanish bluebells and English bluebells.' The response was positive but when he asked them 'to go tree hugging, or measuring trees, we perhaps got one response'. He doesn't think the village has much of a collective spirit, much of a sense of community. He thinks it might run back to the divisions of the strike, the two unions – the N.U.M. and the U.D.M. – fighting it out. 'Unless you lead people here by their nose when it comes to community and the environment around this area, they're not really interested.

Most in Annesley thought that they wouldn't be able to fight Taylor Wimpey. But Peter is a determined man and they dug into their report, which claimed that the soak-away would empty fifty per cent of its capacity within a day after a major rainfall, as is required by law. They proved that it would actually take around thirty days (because of the way the clay lies underneath the soil). That therefore there was a real danger that the wood could be flooded, that 'an influx of water could destroy what's took centuries to build. In two years you could lose it'.

Fragaria, Broad Buckler-fern, Common Milk Fern, Red Fescue, Wild Strawberry, Ash, Snowdrop, Chives, Woodruff, Herb-robot, Herb Bonnet, Ground Ivy, Hogweed, Daisy's Maid

Taylor Wimpey have come back with two further applications over the last twenty years, for underground trees and pipework. Peter, and his small band of trouble makers showed on both occasions that these would cause the loss of many trees and upset the ecological and biological balance which had existed over centuries.

He points out some wild garlic. 'We introduced that', one of several guerilla plantings that were useful in showing diversity. 'You have to be savvy.' But it's come at a cost; there's been 'a lot of stress'. 'It's a continual fight', he tells me. Developers are always trying to hide their intentions. The reason the field became available to build on in the first place was because the council had moved the green belt by a matter of metres and nobody had noticed. Except the developers, who pounced as developers do; always on the lookout for spaces to take over. He thinks it's time to hand it over to a younger generation, although he's not hopeful.

We pass some trees lying on the ground, freshly cut presumably by those whose gardens back onto them and who wanted extra light. The bluebells are out. There are a handful of camps, presumably made by kids.

When I ask him if he has seen a change in the woods, in the climate, he pauses before saying the winters are not as harsh as they once were. That the first ten years he was here, 'every downpour you'd have ten frogs in the back. You don't see that at all now, even though we've dug a little pond, you don't see any frogs'. There used to be a manure pile in the field behind his house which brought a lot of grass snakes, 'but I can't say that I've seen the grass snake in the last two years. And that's a bit of a failure because the field was also a local wildlife site for grass snakes which gave it another further level of protection, you know'. The pines grow higher, as they do. There are fewer species of birds. They used to have woodpeckers, but he's not seen one this year. There's been a few jays. The starlings have disappeared.

Creeping Soft-grass, Bluestem, Holly, Soft Rush, Yellow Archangel, Nettlewort, Honeyuckle, Dog's Mercury, Three-nerved Sandwort, Dandelion, Wood-sorrel, Scots pine

Since Taylor Wimpey bought the woods, they have carried out no maintenance there at all, even leaving the bags of rubbish from their testing. There are advantages to this, but disadvantages too. 'That one should go, that one should go, that one should go', he indicates, pointing at trees that are shading out light, stopping the growth below.

We talk about the rituals and traditions of village life, that still happen in some places with their harvest suppers and Maypole dancing. Of how important they are in creating a connection between community life and the rhythms of the seasons, of a connection to the past and to nature. A connection that he thinks has all but vanished. When his father was

growing up, he told me, because it was so cold in the winter, they used to drive the cattle into the lower part of the house and live above it, so the heat from the cattle would keep them warm.

Since getting that rod from Mrs. Savage, Peter has fished all his life. He fishes with seed bait; wheat, tares, hemp, seeds rather than using maggots. It's an old-fashioned method that's all but disappeared. There were breweries around where he started fishing, with a lot of malted barley available. Anglers would take some, when it was soft and starting to sprout. You throw some onto the river and you attach a bit to the hook; it looks like a little snail. Certain fish like certain grains. Roach like hemp, which has a little white shoot and looks like a water baby water mussel. Tares look like a bigger mussel, but you can't make them shoot very well.

He's going off the fishing now; it's partly to do with the otters. After they were re-introduced, they found a comfortable dinner in commercial and trout fisheries. There are gates across many of these now, so the otters can't get in, closing them off from the natural world and becoming semi-artificial. But it's difficult getting the balance right. He talks about the white-clawed crayfish, native to the UK, struggling against the American crayfish which were introduced as a form of table food, a kind of baby scampi, and which started burrowing into and undermining the river banks. It's pennywort that has taken hold of the canals, blocking the light all the way down. They've put some 'American type beetles in to eat it', but he hasn't read the reports on that recently. The location of badger setts is kept quiet, he says, 'because humans want to do that much damage to them'.

Rough Meadow-Grass, Aspen, Wild Cherry, Blackthorn, Bracken, Sessile Oak, Pedunculate Oak, Lesser Celandine, Creeping Buttercup, Gooseberry, Dog Rose, Bramble, Raspberry

We talk about the old pit sites round here, the way they are merging back into nature. He tells me about the crack willow, an inferior type of willow which suppresses the other growths. If you go round the ponds on these ex-pit sites you will see many smaller willow trees with their pussy willow buds; and once they have finished flowering and been pollinated, they'll be pushed or blown out. 'Once it's set it will soon take over, and if you see a site with weeping willows and marginal plants then you know that's a site that's been managed, where working parties have pulled out all the crack willows before they take hold'.

Peter doesn't know of any myths about these woods, although it was a place of fraternisation between the Italian prisoners of war and the local prostitutes. The only other people we see are those walking their dogs.

'It's a constant battle around here to preserve natural landscapes', he tells me as he points out wood avens and anemones, 'people take it for granted'. He doesn't forage here, though I'm sure he could. 'Who knows how to make nettle soup these days?', he asks me. 'The old country values of catching a rabbit, gutting a rabbit, cooking a rabbit are gone. My next-door neighbour won't even touch chicken. These are essential skills. If it's not in a packet, people don't know what to do with it.'

'It seems to me', he says, and I wasn't expecting this, 'that we're killing the planet. We're killing ourselves and we're killing the planet. People used to band together to do things, to enjoy things, you know, to help each other out. They're not interested now'. Surely there's hope somewhere? I ask him. If there is he doesn't think it'll come from the government, 'it'll be a people thing, if it comes'. Whatever that means.

Broad-leaved Dock, Elder, Common Ragwort, Red Campion, Rowan, Hedge Woadwort, Greater Stitchwort, Common Chickweed, Dandelion, Yew, Wych Elm, Elm, Common Nettle

His concern is this. That you have the big developers with their 'pet consultants who see things with darkened spectacles' facing locals with their local knowledge which, because they're not trained botanists, find that their statements are not given the same weight in consultations with local councils. So, the way that this knowledge is pooled and constructed and presented is vital. But how is that knowledge shared and passed on? Peter is aware that he has become 'a repository of knowledge' for this space, this environment. He feels guilty at times that he holds it, 'but there aren't people out there willing to take it on'.

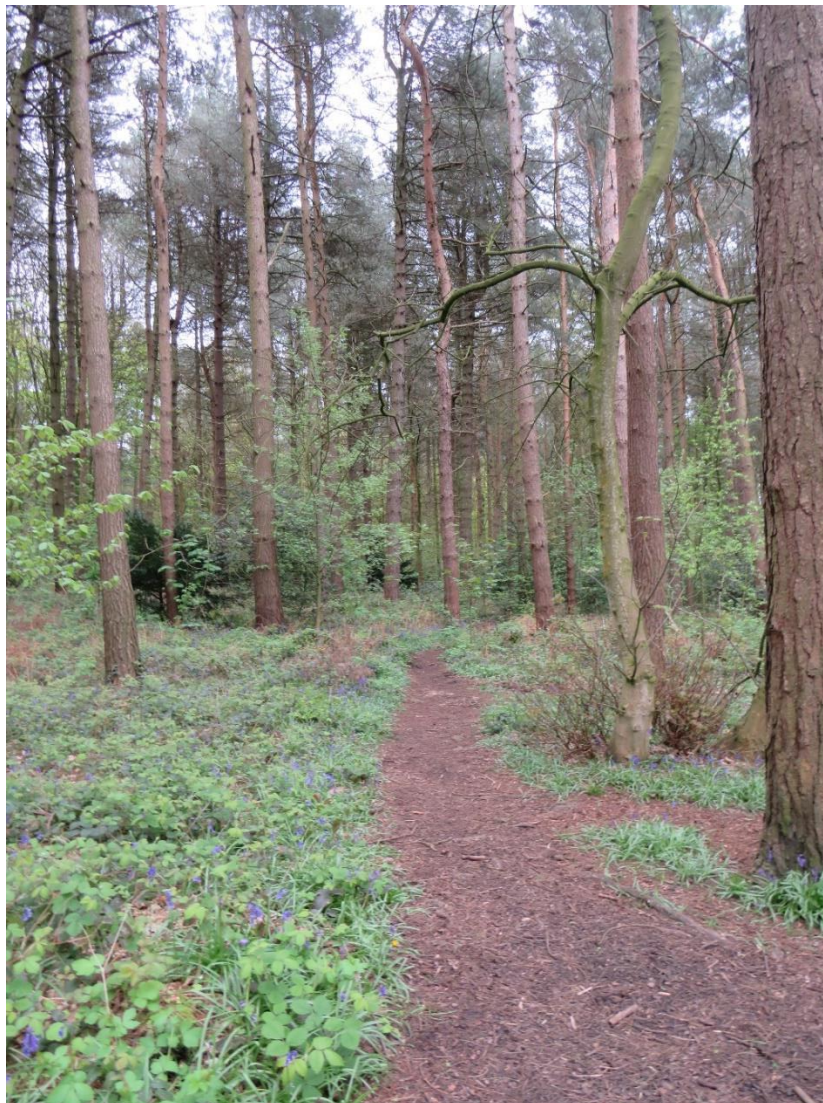
And it hasn't come easy. He could tell you the names of hundreds of different species of fish, but when it came to botany, he 'wasn't so hot'. It took him two or three years of research 'to bring me up a level, to be able to name things, to say "that's a century plant, that's angelica". But none of the other locals wanted to devote that time to it'. And I wonder how we can retain local knowledge if we don't use it.

He shows me a path in the wood, another battle he has fought. It was mentioned in a council planning application, and somewhere hidden away at the back of the document was a reference to building materials they wanted to introduce into the wood, to make the path a weather proof one, so that people could walk through it without getting their shoes dirty. Again, the issue was water, and the fact that the run-off would affect the roots of the trees to the sides of the path.

'It's all about windthrow', he explains; the way that trees are uprooted by the wind. Those that surround the wood, that are on the perimeter, have stronger roots because they are on the frontline when the wind approaches. Those inside do not need to worry so much because they are protected. The water that seeps into the soil and damages or loosens those roots means they are more vulnerable. They start to fall, and the more gaps there are the more the wind is a threat.

We make our way back onto the road. There is some chutney waiting for me if I want to come back to his house to collect it. I asked him if the gaining of this knowledge of the woods has made the woods more interesting to him, more alive, more dynamic. 'Yes', he says, 'you realise what it's gone through to get where it's got to'.

Tufted Vetch, Common Vetch, Sweet Violet, Wildst. Linn. Polst. Schimper's 1867



Fin