**22.06.21**

**So, if I was standing outside your outside your house and looking up and down your street, what would I see?**

Three story town houses, many in multiple occupation, many in either council or Housing Association ownership. Probably half of them I guess, and then the other half. Privately owned, split into one or two flats. Aspen, our neighbors on one side of their whole houses and some of the road or other splints, or one or two flats. Few trees on the road.But yeah, fairly consistent to three story what Edwardian late Victorian housing stock? Yeah, probably various states of repair in disrepair really mean it's we've had the front of our house painted this year. So there's always works going on, but it's a bit of a bit of a mixed bag really.

**Yeah, yeah, sounds very much like where I am. How long have you been there?**

We've lived here for six years. 6 and a half years I think. Which is unbelievable, but we've lived in N16 for 20 odd years. I’m originally from Bedfordshire, I grew up in the countryside. My wife is originally from Nottinghamshire, grew up on a farm and we moved to London. About 1998 after awhile, we met working in Swindon. And then we did the traveling and then we, my wife got a job at the British Museum and we moved to initially to Harringay briefly and then we bought a flat in Cazenove Rd. Upper Clapton kind way. I think that was about 1999 and so and then we bought there that had a small garden and then we bought a two bedroom flat with the garden and then we we bought here about six years ago.

So we've all we've lived in N16 for 21 years.

**What do you think has kept you in the area? I mean, it sounds like you’re pretty well rooted there.**

It's probably a common thing to say in a bit of a cliche, but the vibe of the place when you know the area and it's always been quite cosmopolitan, it's been challenging over the last 18 months to kind of sometimes justify why you live in what is still a fairly polluted fairly Litter strewn, over-crowded area when the main justification for it is that while there's a gig venue down the road, there's brilliant pub serving fantastic craft ales. There's the ice rink that my daughter goes to the gym club that my son goes to or within walking distance. That's all shut up or you end up with is the the urbanization and you don't even have the benefit of the hustle and bustle and I've always quite liked both in the same month. Both my wife and I grew up in the countryside and we know we know how it is to have to rely on your parents to take you anywhere. And they're not really be anywhere to go anyway.

I used to cycle a lot 'cause cycling around the countryside with a friend was about as much as you could. You could do, you know this is before long before the Internet and mobile phones and stuff like that you know? So I guess that's why we've always been attracted to the city and sort of. Put up with it and most of the time it gives us payback. But as we've. Not being able to do the things that we wanted or that we would normally expect to be the quid pro quo of living in an urban environment.

It's or sometimes has made me question for the first time about, well, actually. Is this the right place? And of course we've now got a teenage daughter and a nearly teenage son and I son loves skateboarding and he you know he's working on that. But my daughter is very much more sort of environmentally aware and I think it was kind of much like I did when my parents moved from Bristol. When I was a teenager thinking why did you move from Bristol, 'cause it's such a cool place and I'm stuck in Bedfordshire. She's kind of a bit. Why do we live in London? We could live in Northumberland, you know? So you begin to question that kind of kind of thing, really, but that's that's probably why.

**Yeah, yeah, that's interesting.**

You say you've also got my son like my father in law has that he lives up in Northumberland and so him. He and my mother in law who lives in Nottinghamshire. They sort of split their time between these two houses and often we can go up there so the only place we've been in the last couple 18 months into the holidays and stuff is this place in the north Pennines and absolutely the middle of the amazing countryside. So that's where we go from a bit of relief and that's been a that's been great over the over the lockdown.

**I mean obviously, that kind of countryside with that kind of landscape is is really different to what we're living in here, but I kind of want to draw in from that just for a minute. So you said that you've got, you've got a garden.**

Yes, your house yeah yeah. So it's kind of we've got. We haven't got the side return done, so we've got a bit down the side of our kitchen. And then we've got a patio, probably a meter and a half in depth. And then then we've got pretty much a square lawn that's about 5 meters by 5 meters. So I think sort of from the full length of the garden. Would be about. I think it's 13 meters OK, but actually a large part of the house end of that is taken up by the kitchen, but you know, from our dining room window, we've got a view of 13 meters to the to the back wall and then a square of law and let's just up a couple of steps.

**Cool, do you have anything at the front as well?**

Little yard at the front, you know, just outside the Bay window and an inner and an enormous pyracantha hedge that I have to keep cutting back as the Council send a letter every six months or so. I have to. I tried to time it so I cut it back just before I get a letter from the Council. Not to, I'm not trying to be inconvenient to people, but you know the thing. The thing grows. I cut it back and then it grows again. Yeah, there's a docking point for bikes. It's a place outside our house, people put their bikes there and the hedges grow and you can't really get over to it.

I like I like our little our little hedge 'cause it looks magnificent when it flowers and it's got lots of berries on it for the birds and the bees. I'm trying to keep it under control, but I'm not prepared to cut it down.

**Yeah, brilliant so you know as you know this research is about what people perceive nature to be and what nature looks like in in the borough? So if we start at the fundamentals, what does that word nature mean for you? Or what are the associations of that word?**

In in London today, or just in general?

**I think in general, but then how that? I guess I'm interested in how that relates to London as well.**

This thing first we spent among the big trees. British forests. When you talk about nature or not, I don't. I don't think of the Great Barrier Reef or Serengeti or something like that. I think something much more much more domestic. Yeah, you know, places like Epping Forest and Hackney Marshes and then in the woods down by the River Lea or Abney Park, those tose kind of places is I, I guess when you talk about nature so sort of a a mixture of. Flora and fauna, not necessarily adesigned landscape. Let me just plug my iPad in…It's telling me yeah, so you can. Yeah, sort of. Yeah, I'd like to visit lots of gardens and things like that and designed landscapes, but I don't necessarily think of that as nature.

**That kind of yeah, Capability Brown style of garden?**

yeah, I really enjoy that and the plantsman ship involved involved in that. But that's something a bit different I think.

**That's interesting. 'cause I mean you mentioned a few places there. You know with the Marshes, the woods by the Lea, Abney Park and Epping Forest. So I mean I guess in themselves those are fairly different. And what I mean for example, we take Abney Park, 'cause I suppose that's you know a man made thing in a way. What makes that to be or so natural, so close to being nature?**

I think it's because of the way it's overgrown, so yes, it is a. It is a man made landscape like like a country part like a country house garden, but it's clearly not. You know nature's clearly got the upper hand there and and also the way that it's set out. I can kind of find my way around it now, but I've lived here for 20 years and I still get. You know, I couldn't give anyone directions in in Abney Park. I can probably find my way. Around it and out of it, but one of the things that makes it. Not man made even, even though you're following the past, is it? You don't really know where you're going 'cause you're completely going round it.

Yeah, came to intuitively in terms of direction and stuff like that. And you know, I haven't been in their masses of times. Again, been in there more during last 18 months and then previously but. And I think the fact that you know it is overgrown and there's so much greenery in there and the canopy, you know that you you can see daylight through there but not not hugely, and that's something that you know is similarly experiencing in Epping when you in amongst the big beechwoods that it's completely dark. If you go in in the summer, you know it's so shady and dark, and I suppose. Yeah, that's that's kind of why I think of that as both of those things as nature rather than one being man-made landscape in any other.

I don't know if you know the Hatfield forest up by sort of Saffron Walden, near Stanstead and again. So normally it's plagued by aircraft noise. I imagine it's I mean I went to visit it about a year ago and there were no planes. Or maybe there was two planes gonna think took off and all the time and so having a friend and I went, it went for a walk around the the fields and and and into the park. And although that, yeah, it's it's it's natural, it's quite open and I'm so I'm just wondering whether the sort of the. The nature element is some kind of enclosure or proximity to to stuff.

**Right, what's that about? Is that a sense of it being more wild or less?**

Not completely unmanaged, maybe more enveloping you know. So when we got to the North Pennines. We walk up on the on the hills. You are, you know you are. You have among nature, but there's something there that's a bit because of the views and stuff. It's more. You're in a landscape you're in a. Even a natural environment, but it's more of a sort of an environment, whereas if you're. In Wick Woodlands down by the Lea, Or in Abney Park? Is more. Proximity kind of thing. It seems that all of that that that stuff here, the trees, the bugs, that the Cow parsley is all quite close to you.

Where was when you're walking on the on the hills or, you know, in the Lake District? 'cause like yes, you're surrounded by nature, but in a way you also surrounded by the sky and farm houses and caves and sheep and and and all of which is his nature, obviously, but it's. I think maybe. Something about that you know I'm not going back. Thinking of nature as being sort of, you know, the fox is and the weasels and the. Images in the stuff like that. You know? That's kind of perhaps what I think of is is nature rather than environment or landscape anything.

**OK, that's interesting. And then. I mean it. It say if you were walking back from Abney Park to your place. What about that kind of environment or landscape? How? 'cause I mean is there kind of? You know, like a scale of naturalness or kind of continuum, you know if those places you mentioned quite high up on that and then. Or is it devoid of nature?**

I mean if he's somewhere. Well, you've got big plane trees on the on the street, so. Even you're going up up Stamford Hill up to Stamford Hill Crossroads, where some enormous plane trees. In an otherwise fairly UN inspirational landscape to me, there's more nature there than there is on on my Rd. For example, where there's a couple of fairly young Rowan trees and and the Cherry Tree, that's not quite the right shape and stuff, yeah? So I wouldn't say it's devoid, but I think there's there's different elements of scale. And I think I'm more aware than he spit things like weeds and and stuff like that. You know things growing, so there's the little park and the basketball court down the end of our road. And there's lots of things going there.

And my daughters got an interest in botanicals and foraging and sort of plants that. So I think like with many people are more interested in or more aware of things that are growing that perhaps. I wouldn't have really considered in in the past kind of thing and my wife is such a fantastic cook so we're always on the lookout. Things like wild garlic or anything else that we can. We can cook and I think again, that's the kind of the nature you kind of thing. It's on, it's it's tangible. It's it's touchable, is currently quite quite close by, yeah. The. Yeah, so I'm kind of.

I wouldn't say no. There's that. There's nothing natural sort of on the streets, but it's it's those bigger trees. I guess that I would. Think about. Because you can. There's more of an experience there, or there's something that. That tangibility of. Thing this, I don't know how to put it.

Yeah, you know, if you're just looking at a dandelion growing through the pavement, well you have to get. You can't have to switch yourself onto appreciating that. I think a bit more than. But I mean yesterday I was I was delivering some postcards to today's on a couple of streets right here. And on the way back I just went to Butterfield Green and stood sort of just inside the gate under the trees where you just get an arch of trees and there's the the grass there, you know. And that's it's not a fantastic landscape at all, but that was quite nice. I just stood there for a minute or so. I've got my greenery kind of thing and I guess green might come into it as well. You know it's got it. That doesn't apply in the winter time, you know, just standing in somewhere like Butterfield Green. Particularly if you sit under the trees and all you can see is the trees.

which kind of makes me think I I work as a volunteer at a Vineyard. So I I volunteer up there once or twice a month on a on a Sunday and I run the guided tours. How much great that mean? And that's that's a very managed environment, but all around it are our trees, and you can sort of stand there when you can in One Direction. You can see that the orbit slide, and then the Shard, but much of the rest of it is just trees, and you know you've blocked out the city from being from being there, and it's that sort of thing that Butterfield green or Wick Woodlands, or the track along the side of the river, Lee by Hackney Marshes. 'cause I can't. I'm not into football, so Hackney marshes to me. Hold no passion or anything like that. It's just a big empty space that people kick a ball around for some unbeknown reason. But that bit the other side of the football pitches where that where the river is, which I only really discovered quite recently.

That’s superb and I go running along there or cycling along there. So I go down there. Yeah, once maybe twice a week or or the other direction and up around both Wednesday marches and landed back there in Springfield part, you know the view from Springfield part will just go in there, and Walthamstow marshes is fantastic.

**There's the fitness thing, obviously, but what makes that place good?**

I could run, you know, I used to run home from work when I was going into the office, who's on Pentonville Rd, so I do that five less about 5K and do that two or three times a week, but that’s just a way of getting home, not going on the bus, but it doesn't give you quite the satisfaction. Sometimes I go out and then go for a run and just really enjoy. See what I say or go?

Yeah, it's again that that that bit down the river Lee where you see the the bare trees and you see the buds and you see the blossom then you see the leaves in this and the other and that sort of process is is really nice. Yes, but maybe a bit with the vineyard. You know where you see the the stuff starts to grow and go mad, and then it produces the fruit and then all leaves fall off and then you got loads of sticks in the field for another three months to come.

I quite like that that's that continuity isn't it? It's not just the the change, yeah? And in a way, I find that more we went to to the Suffolk coast, the other the other week with some friends who we've been going there for years and years. And yeah, lots of people are very much about. Got to be by the sea and I wanna live by the sea and stuff and I don't really really have that. I prefer to see the change in in nature.

You know, that to me is more is more interested in watching the the the waves on the pebbles kind of thing which some people like, the same old same old. Just some days it's sunny. Some days it’s windy but it's just the tide going in and out. Where with that slower seasonality, you don't get it at the seaside, maybe you do but I do know I think that's I like that element of what we would talk about is being nature. I guess that comes back to the degree in as well and that. Yeah, that's all stuff and the surrounding. This randomness of it. Yeah, and so you know when we go to Epping Forest we look for the deepest parts of the would come from where you mean you can never really escaped the traffic noise but you can avoid it a little bit and what actually I don't wear things of interest to you or whether it's too far right. But what I really enjoy when we've been going there and we went. We went on the wind to know we yeah, we went in the winter solstice just before Christmas and it was raining and what I found really interesting was, and I'm a geographer by training, so that's fine. That's my degree. Is anything anything to do with nature and stuff is good, but as it rained you could see exactly how the the the water was finding its own route through the through the landscape. And then it these these channels kind of teamed up and they they became bigger channels. And then it became streams and then eventually somewhere they they became a river but. That really struck me that you never see that in in an urban environment.

Yeah, it rains here the drain out the front floods, then the water goes over the pavement and then then then then another drain. So when that happens every time. But I've never really been anywhere where you could watch the water make its own, make its own way and that you know found that really quite interesting and quite. Revealing is almost like a secret that been sort of exposed. Had a hydrology element kind of kind of works, you know. And yeah, but good to see that in action really.

**Yeah, it's really nice. That kind of relief of the land.**

And then yeah, yeah, you know someone like her being where it's quite. It's quite hilly and would have been quite. You can see why it would have been quite frightening for people. I mean you can't get lost in Epping Forest 'cause you might temporarily get disoriented and not be able to find your car straight away. But you ain't gonna get no ones ever starve to death and then falling off a number of years. Yeah, so just just being somewhere where you've got that. The relief you know that you can workout. The shape of things that you you miss in London.

You know we get walking. Up to Stamford Hill, you going up the hill going if I cycle or run to the to the river and coming back from Chattsworth Rd up to the A10 over Clapton. Well mainly that bit from there up to Clapton Pond, yeah, but then even sort of from Amherst Rd up to up to the A10. You know you're coming up here and it's quite a lot of hills but you don't. You don't appreciate any of them 'cause they're all built upon or you're driving on. It's not really trying to get up there on a bike kind of thing that it becomes a bit more noticeable.

**Yeah. I can attest to that.**

There’s a very steep hill by Springfield Park, which are quite actually quite like going up 'cause I. I've only had a bike again for a year or so. I used to cycle a lot as a kid and at university and then when we moved to London and just didn't have a bike. So it's been quite nice exploring different places on a bike and you know, you get to realize what's up and down.

Well, there's this Spring Hill which is the one next to the park. But then behind the pub there's a steep hill. I haven't tried cycling up that.

**Yeah, it’s very steep. People still walk up and down it, even after going to the pub there.**

Yeah, that's right. Yeah, I'd love to have seen the landscape before. It was all urbanized. You know, that would. Yeah, trying to try and imagine where we are now without all all of that would be interesting.

**I mean there's loads of stuff there that's really, really interesting to me. But then what I might do now is just kind of explain this kind of next bit and then do something. (explaining task)**

My perception of the spatially of things has changed, and it's changed to become more local. One of the things I did at university was a tutorial in my first, possibly my first week or something and the tutor said, I want you to draw a map or describe your locality, and so I drew my little village where I grew up and Bedford where we go shopping on a Saturday, Saturday and hit him where my mum would go shopping every week, and a couple of places where my mum and dad were. My friends, lived and then sort of the A1 because I was very familiar with that, but other places outside of that weren't really in my locale. And the last 18 months, that's really changed, and it's become a lot less focused to the South West of where we are down to Kings Cross, the West End, etc. And a lot more out to the East. I mean, I've I've been to London fields for the first time ever. Yeah, and I know how to get there.

I still don't know how to get to Victoria Park from our house. It made me look at different areas. I spent more time at need. And Hackney Marshes on the river. Then I would have done going into. I would in the past I suppose. But Oxford, St, Regent Street, Covent Garden, all of those places that you go back to the things that's been my local, and that's a bit more. Actually, I'm not quite sure where I am around here anymore, you know. And so it's been a lot more sort of nature based and spatially change kind of thing, so that's interesting. An interesting one to explore. So yeah, OK. Alright, well, I think we could chat all night…