



The Radley Lakes

An environmental cause célèbre?

August 2006

RWE npower, the German-owned power Company that runs the ageing Didcot 'A' coal-fired power station is adamantly determined to destroy a beautiful lake in the Oxford Green Belt by turning it into a waste dump for pulverised fuel ash (PFA) despite the existence of better alternatives.

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County Wildlife Site under threat

The lake under threat is Thrupp Lake at Radley, which, together with its smaller companion lake, form the centrepiece of Oxfordshire's newest County Wildlife Site. This recently acquired status represents a long-awaited official acknowledgement of the ecological value of the site, *as it is now*, to wildlife, and is a vindication of the efforts of many ecologists and naturalists, who include some of the top names in the County, if not in the country, and who have, over the past several months, been painstakingly surveying and cataloguing its wildlife. The results are impressive, with the species list over 1,400, of which 46 are nationally rare, scarce or vulnerable (Red data and notable species). A further 134 are locally rare and 15 UKBAP priority species have been identified. The lakes themselves are hard-water low-nutrient (oligo-mesotrophic) waters supporting a variety of unusual plant species known as stoneworts. This makes them UKBAP priority habitats, which means that they are rare and should be preserved wherever possible. The area is frequented by a number of legally protected species, including otter, water voles, bats, kingfishers, and many other birds, all of which would be harmed by the proposals. Whilst the new wildlife site encompasses some 2 square kilometres, and contains a wide range of different habitat types (including some that are far less species-rich, such as restored and unrestored areas of PFA) all of this interest is concentrated within the relatively small area, of about half a square kilometre, around the lakes themselves. This site is regarded, by some experts, on account of its exceptional biodiversity, as meriting national status.

With over 1,400 species identified within an area of just half a square kilometre, the site is regarded by some experts, on account of its exceptional biodiversity, as meriting national status.

Public Opinion Disregarded

The lakes and their surroundings are also a cherished local amenity. They are used for recreation by local people, the vast majority of whom are strongly opposed to the plan.

After kicking an earlier planning application into abeyance in 2005, opponents of Npower's plans, under the banner of **Save Radley Lakes**, have mounted a vigorous campaign against the current planning application to try to persuade the Power Station to adopt alternative, less harmful and more sustainable ways of disposing of its surplus ash.

11,500 people signed a petition and over 3,000 sent written objections to Oxfordshire County Council. The issue has received much coverage in local media, and has recently obtained coverage in the National Press and on National Radio. In the face of all this, RWE npower remains intent on destroying the Lake and, through the application of corporate and political pressures that only a major utility company can wield, has persuaded the Conservative-led Oxfordshire County Council to ignore the express wishes of its electorate, and grant the power station permission to proceed with its vandalistic practices. However the proposal goes against the Local Development Plan on one or more policies and therefore has been referred to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Ruth Kelly, for a decision on its determination.

What are the opinions of 11,500 petitioners and 3600 objectors worth?

Waste of a Valuable Resource

RWE npower appear confident that they will get all the permissions they require, despite not having demonstrated the overriding nature of their need, and despite a restoration plan that offers little by way of mitigation, except that they will refrain from destroying even more of the site.

This issue is of great importance, not only for the Radley Lakes and for the people who cherish them, but because it exposes deficiencies in our national policies for waste management and protection of the natural environment from avoidable harm. The proposed disposal of the ash in Thrupp Lake will destroy a rare and valuable wildlife habitat.



*A rare and valuable habitat.
UK distribution of hard oligo-mesotrophic
water habitats with Chara (stoneworts).*

[From the JNCC website,
www.jncc.gov.uk]

The PFA that the Power Station wishes to dispose of so recklessly is a valuable resource. It can be converted, in its entirety, into a range of useful and valuable products, mainly of use to the building industry.

Government Encourages Waste and Pollution

Looking at just the construction industry, and this is important, the use of these materials, in place of traditional Portland-cement-based materials derived from quarried limestone, saves the production of considerable amounts of CO₂ - that which would otherwise be produced by the limestone kilning used in traditional cement manufacture.



Didcot Power Station, August 2005.

Indeed the potential savings are a significant fraction of the total carbon emissions from the Power Station itself.

Unfortunately, some Power Companies are not interested in exploiting these potential advantages because the income they would generate is tiny compared with that from electricity sales, and any operation which poses the slightest perceived risk to their principal money generating operation is anathema to them.

“The production of considerable amounts of CO₂ could be saved...”

Anyway, they have persuaded government to let them dump the ash into holes in the ground at very little cost. (PFA attracts a landfill tax of just £2 per tonne, which is a fraction of what the rest of us have to pay to dump our rubbish.)

Government is encouraging this wasteful and destructive practice at every turn. Many countries are actively striving for 100% beneficial reuse of PFA. The UK barely manages 50% (though detailed figures have not been published since 2002).

No-one to stand up for Wildlife & The Environment

An important consideration is the question of how much value should we put on the environment. English Nature are the guardians of the natural environment, and their stated policy is only to object to development of sites of major national importance, such as already-designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Special areas of Conservation (SACs) and have little time or resources to expend on defending “lesser sites”.

“English Nature are the guardians of the natural environment....”

This might be reasonable if such lesser ranking sites had some sort of lower-level protection commensurate with their value, but this is not so. The laudable aims of the Government’s Planning Policy Statement (PPS9) on protecting the natural environment and maintaining a mosaic of habitats and wildlife corridors across the countryside are defeated at the first hurdle by the mantra that “English Nature has not objected”.

A non-objection by English Nature leaves a site defenceless and is taken as a green light to wilfully destroy wildlife on any site that is not considered, or yet considered, to be of national importance.

The inability, or reluctance, of English Nature to act against such proposals is becoming a major factor in the destruction of much of our cherished countryside.

The attitude that SSSIs and SACs need only represent the best examples of their habitat types or species content, and that everything else can be concreted over, is quite wrong. Besides, even SSSIs have to bear the impact of major projects of overriding national importance. Other sites go into decline because of poor management or because of the natural successional progression that such management is supposed to, but often unable to, check. Many sites are now under threat from climate change. English Nature should therefore be on the lookout for new sites to mitigate these losses.

Local Wildlife Trusts are non-statutory consultees, so any objection by them carries much less weight, that is assuming that they are inclined to object at all. Wildlife Trusts may receive support, directly or indirectly, from big business and thus may find themselves with a perceived, if not real, conflict of interests. In this instance, the local wildlife trust, BBOWT, has not objected. BBOWT has financial connections with RWE npower.

An Unnecessary Act of Destruction!

The proposed destruction of the last remaining Radley Lakes is totally unnecessary. That is what is making people so angry.

It is *not* a choice between wildlife and the natural environment, and some essential or important piece of development. This is nothing more than waste disposal, and it should be universal policy that this will not be carried out at sensitive natural sites.

More environmentally-friendly and sustainable solutions *have* been identified. Moreover the power station will *not* stop generating, causing the lights to go out, if this lake is not filled with PFA. Why? Because there *are* good, if not better, alternatives and, besides, the lake's capacity is inadequate to meet the Power Station's projected needs until 2015, when it is due to close, especially now that coal enjoys such a favourable position in the energy market.

Power generation is much too important and too lucrative to allow such a small thing to stand in its way. If alternatives *have* to be found, they will be.



*Orchids at Radley Lakes,
just one of the 1,400
species so far identifi*

Corporate Power prevails OK!

The Radley Lakes have become a bone of contention between the Power Station and the Local Community. The power station operators wish to destroy Thrupp Lake because they bought it for £3.2M before they had planning permission to fill it with PFA. Whatever the internal ramifications of this, it appears to have become a matter of corporate pride that a Big Company like RWE npower should not be deflected in its intent by what it perceives to be a few locals and a motley selection of wildlife.

The dreadful reality is that the Power Station is threatening to destroy a beautiful site boasting a spectacular collection of rare and legally protected species against the wishes of thousands of local people.



*PFA slurry discharging into a lake.
This is the fate that awaits Thrupp Lake*

Why this must not be allowed to happen

The Radley Lakes Affair is *not* a minor local issue.

In fact, it should be a *cause célèbre* for the whole nation because of what it says about how much we care for our environment and because it encapsulates virtually all of the current environmental issues, such as waste reduction, sustainability, reducing carbon emissions and protection of the natural environment; and because it exposes grave deficiencies in the implementation of our policies for dealing with these matters, and the inability, in such cases, of local democracy to prevail over corporate power.

If we cannot lift a finger to save the Radley Lakes, then God help the rest of the planet!



Autumn sunset at Thrupp Lake. Will this sight ever be seen again?

Remember that the animals and plants have no Member of Parliament they can write to; they can't perform sit-down strikes...they have nobody to speak for them except us, the human beings who share the world with them, but do not own it."

Quoted from Gerald Durrell - "Catch Me a Colobus"



“A cause célèbre for the whole nation....”



www.saveradleylakes.org.uk
