



Press Release 20 February 2007

Hundreds demonstrate against RWE AG plans to destroy English lake

Two hundred and fifty local people in Oxfordshire have staged a demonstration against plans by RWE npower – a subsidiary of RWE AG - to destroy Thrupp Lake, a rich wildlife site close to the River Thames near Oxford, by dumping 500,000 tonnes of power station ash in it. People from the village of Radley, the town of Abingdon and further afield marched to the site, where they heard speeches condemning RWE for its actions.

Thrupp Lake is a 12 hectare lake close to the River Thames, Oxford and the town of Abingdon. It is extremely rich in wildlife, including legally protected species. The lake – a former gravel quarry - has been used extensively by local people for informal recreation for over forty years.

Inhabitants of the nearby village of Radley and town of Abingdon are outraged that the giant corporation started work before a legal dispute about the community's rights over the area had been resolved. Last year, a petition signed by 11,500 people, asking for the site to be preserved, was handed to RWE npower.

Anger was increased on 14 February when RWE npower obtained a wide-ranging and draconian High Court injunction which prevents many forms of peaceful protest against the development. The injunction also prohibits the taking and publication of photographs showing staff working at the site. One press photographer has already been prevented from recording the destruction of trees by RWE npower's contractors.

The local Member of Parliament, Dr Evan Harris, has written to the Chief Executive of RWE npower, expressing disappointment and concern about the company's behaviour. Further protests are planned, including a possible visit to RWE AG's headquarters in Essen.

The group Save Radley Lakes has been campaigning against the development for two years. Last year, they applied for the area to be registered as a Town (or Village) Green, which would prevent development and allow local to keep on using it for recreation. The application is due to be decided later this year.

Roger Thomas, a spokesperson for Save Radley Lakes, said:

“This whole affair is a disgrace. RWE npower has tried to give the impression that they have nowhere else to put their ash. That’s untrue. There’s an eight million cubic metre landfill site right by the power station. The ash could go there. Better still, they could recycle it into construction products like brick and cement. That would save raw materials, and also save 250,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions a year.

“But they simply can’t be bothered. Dumping the ash in a lake is their cheapest and easiest option – the one that produces most profit for RWE. The environment and the community are left to pay the real price. I’m told that it wouldn’t be allowed in Germany. Why should we have to put up with it here?

“RWE say that they will ‘restore the site to nature conservation’. It doesn’t need to be restored – nature has done that herself already. The site has a fantastic ecology, which will be entirely destroyed by RWE. Whatever is done, the lake will be gone for ever. You can’t restore a lake by putting half a million tonnes of ash in it.

“RWE were asked not to start work before the community’s legal rights over the area had been decided. They started anyway, and have now felled dozens of mature trees.

“They lost the moral argument for this destructive scheme a long time ago. All they have left now is bullying and intimidation of local people. They want to prevent us protesting peacefully or reporting what they are doing. A small group of non-violent campaigners occupied an empty house on the site. They were evicted quite violently a few weeks ago. Since then, the public roads around the lake have been patrolled by masked guards who refuse to show you any identification, film you without your permission and record your car registration number. It’s very frightening.

“The High Court injunction is really scary. It covers anyone who knows about it, and is extremely broad. It’s the kind of thing that is used against violent animal rights protestors. The Save Radley Lakes campaign has been entirely peaceful and lawful. RWE say they’re not trying to prevent lawful protest. In that case, why was one of their lawyers standing in the lane last week handing the injunction to middle-aged men and women who were passing by – not to mention a press photographer? This is a major assault on civil liberties in England - and it’s being perpetrated by a German corporation.

“RWE is doing great harm to the image of the whole German nation. The old English stereotype of Germans as harsh, brutal and uncaring had – thankfully – largely gone. Now, RWE is behaving in exactly that way in the English countryside. The board of RWE AG should be thoroughly ashamed of itself.”

Support for the campaign to save Thrupp Lake is growing. The UK Green Party has already urged all its members to tear up their energy contracts with Npower and switch to another supplier. Further protests are planned for the coming weeks

Note

Ash from Didcot Power Station (a 2000 MW coal-fired power station opened in the 1960s) has been being dumped in former gravel quarries at Radley since about 1982. Planning permission to fill the Thrupp Lake – the oldest lake, with the most mature ecology – was granted by Oxfordshire County Council in January 2007. Over 3000 people objected to the planning application for this.

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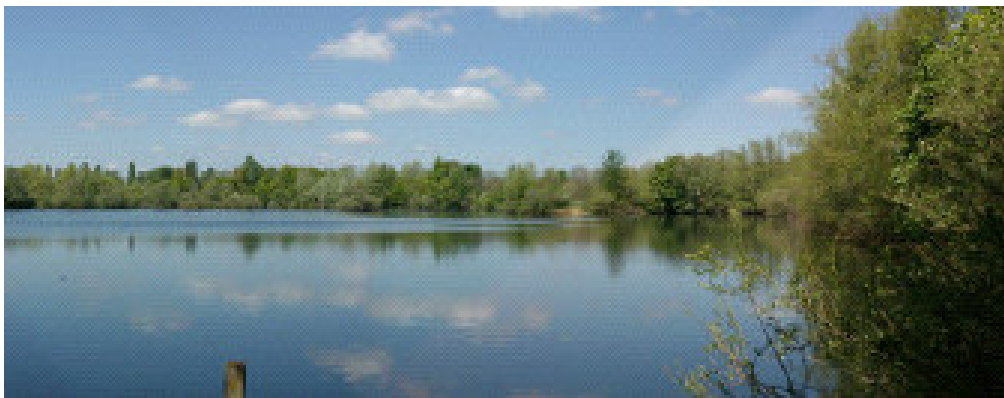
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Thrupp Lake, Oxfordshire – to be destroyed by RWE AG