



Press Release 9 December 2007

Call for Joint Talks to save Thrupp Lake

At a meeting of the full Vale of White Horse District Council, on Tuesday evening, Dr Peter Harbour of Save Radley Lakes asked the Leader of the Council to request the Chief Executive to instigate discussions with interested parties to find an alternative disposal site to Thrupp Lake for Didcot Power Station's PFA (waste ash) and to explore how the necessary permissions could be rapidly granted.

Dr Harbour suggested that the best disposal route was dry storage¹ above ground as the PFA could then be recycled rather than wasted. Wet disposal² to landfill at Radley has risks including flooding and environmental pollution. It results in the permanent loss of a valuable material with many uses in the construction industry, uses which can result in potential significant savings of CO₂ production (eg in the manufacture of cement and concrete). There would also be damage to the ecology of the newly created County Wildlife Site and a loss of a much treasured local amenity. Dry storage above ground would avoid all these problems; and the option has not really been explored by RWE npower.

Such a joint approach could result in a win-win situation for all concerned:

- Oxfordshire County Council would avoid the embarrassment of having granted planning permission, which many councillors regret.
- Waste Recycling Group (WRG) at Sutton Courtenay, which takes London's household waste, would receive cover material for the remainder of the life of the Sutton site. Currently it uses 100,000 tonnes a year but when Didcot A closes in 2012, 100 lorries a week will be needed to bring similar material in by road from outside the area.
- The Environment Agency would avoid blame for increasing the flood risk to Abingdon.
- Npower would save the bulk of the cost of construction and subsequent restoration at Thrupp Lake. Much PFA could be sold, not dumped. They would avoid a lot of opprobrium and could rightly claim to be a responsible and flexible company which responds to public concerns. They would also avoid the consequences of being unable to carry out their current plans should the area be declared a Town Green.
- The Vale Council would gain credit for taking the lead in facilitating planning permission.

It is hoped that MP, Dr Evan Harris, who worked extensively with various agencies associated with the flooding, will be able to use his powers to bring the agencies and companies together, in order to come up with a viable disposal option for npower's PFA that also meets the approval of local people.

Councillor Jerry Patterson, leader of the council, delivered a strong hint to RWE npower, that the ball is in their court if they wish to do the right thing and save the lakes, but the Vale Council will be helpful. "The Vale's position on the Lakes is well-known. There are representatives of RWE npower here tonight. It must be for RWE npower to initiate discussions. Should they do so, I will ask the officers to exercise their powers in the matter."

For further information contact: Marjorie White on 01235 216428 or 01235 530174, or visit www.saveradleylakes.org.uk.

Notes for Editors

¹ In "dry storage", the pulverised fuel ash (PFA) is stabilised by mixing with enough water to dampen it to allow the ash to be safely deposited on an above-ground mound without causing dust emissions. The addition of water also causes the ash partially to solidify through pozzolanic reaction. This means that the surface, when suitably tamped down, remains stable even after the ash dries out. During subsequent exposure to rainfall, water penetration is minimal, so very little of the soluble material in the ash, which includes toxic heavy metals, leaches out, or does so over a sufficiently long period so as not to present a hazard to the local environment or to groundwater. A sealing layer is placed between the mound and the ground below to prevent leaching through the wicking effect.

Dry storage has been successfully used at other power stations, such as Drax, and operational techniques have been developed that allow the deposition and removal (for recycling) of ash without risk of causing dust emissions.

Dry storage was also used at Didcot A, prior to the construction of Didcot 'B' which took away the space. The lack of a dry storage facility for stockpiling ash at Didcot has been a major contributory factor in the destruction of so many of the lakes at Radley, through wet disposal, in the current decade.

² In "wet disposal" the ash is mixed with copious amounts of water to make a fluid slurry, which is then pumped into "lagoons", which are lakes, such as those at Radley, where the ash is allowed to settle out. This method dissolves some of the soluble material contained in the ash. Even though this soluble component is only a small proportion of the ash material, the resulting cocktail is potentially very harmful to groundwater and the environment. For this reason, since about 2000, such ash lagoons have had to be sealed to prevent contamination of groundwater and underground aquifers. Even so, much of the polluted water created in the disposal process is decanted into local water courses and into river systems, such as the Thames at Radley, where any toxic effects are (it is hoped) mitigated by dilution. However the sealed lakes remain a potential threat to the local environments in perpetuity (or until such time as the containment fails and the soluble material leaches away). Experience of managing sealed PFA lagoons is limited to the past decade or so and the method is not without problems: the construction of bunds required to seal the edges of the lake is destructive of the surrounding landscape; the PFA does not compact or stabilise as readily as in unsealed lagoons; and the permanent retention of soluble toxic substances means that there are on-going problems returning the land to any sort of agriculture.