

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party
for the South East of England

John Rainford
Site Manager
RWE nPower - Didcot A Power Station
Didcot
Oxon OX11 7HA

March 28th 2008

Dear John,

I was pleased to receive your letter of February 18th announcing nPower's deferral of plans to use Thrupp Lake to infill pulverised fuel ash (PFA) from Didcot Power Station. I particularly welcome the news that this has in part been made possible because of recycling and reuse options for the ash. My priority at this stage is to encourage nPower to actively put in place measures that will guarantee the protection of Thrupp Lake in future.

Ash re-use/recycling

I understand that it might be difficult to predict market demand for ash by the construction industry, for example, over the next several years. However, in Germany, PFA from nPower plants is separated into constituent parts to maximise the environmental and financial benefits of reuse and recycling. I would be interested to learn whether this model is being followed at Didcot to ensure that the full potential for reuse and recycling is exploited? I also understand that, in the past, DEFRA have expressed an interest in technology known as Rocktron for recycling ash and am interested in the extent to which nPower is engaged in the research and development of such technologies? I have been led to believe that 23 years ago, when the original planning consent was given to use Radley's gravel pits for ash disposal, the forerunner of nPower promised to build a recycling plant for PFA at Didcot. Whilst I am far from certain that this is the most sustainable option, I wonder has any further thought ever been given to such a proposal?

Energy demand

I also appreciate that nPower is not able to predict energy needs over the coming winters, particularly given the increasing impacts of our changing climate. However, again, there are strategies that nPower could pursue in order to manage energy demand, such as large scale support for energy efficiency programmes in the community, that would help stabilise and reduce heating and other energy demands.

A different business model

In your correspondence of March 19th 2007 you mention that nPower is investing heavily in the development of renewable technologies, which I would applaud. In the self same letter you imply that it would be virtually impossible to significantly reduce or even halt generation at Didcot A ahead of 2015 without impacting upon the local economy and the security of the nation's electricity supply.

Yet in the kind of zero-carbon economy increasingly espoused by progressive think tanks, as well as the environmental movement and Green Party, it is only by moving away from polluting, centralised, fossil fuel reliant energy generation that local economies can develop and energy security can be guaranteed. I agree that a diverse mix of energy generation is desirable and argue that the first steps towards achieving such diversity must be a reduction in generation of the Didcot A kind and a replacement of capacity with generation from renewable technologies.

Please can you advise to what extent nPower's renewable energy programmes are part of a larger strategy to move permanently to this kind of generation and end operations that are environmentally unsustainable?

The environmental impact of PFA infilling

The planning process for Thrupp Lake highlighted significant environmental risks posed by infilling at other lakes in the area, for example, the leaking of contaminated water through the inadequately engineered protective clay bund around a recently lost lake. There is a potential pollution threat with respect to the local ground water and the wildlife dependent on clean water. I am advised by people living locally that there have been a number of pollution incidents associated with current PFA dumping activity and it has also already been blamed for increased flooding in the locality. I am certain that nPower will be as concerned as I am to ensure that these risks are addressed as a matter of urgency and look forward to learning what new measures will be put in place to guarantee that activity around Didcot is meeting the very highest environmental standards.

Finally, I would appreciate information about plans and the timescales involved to restore Thrupp Lake to its pre-development state. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Lucas', written in a cursive style.

Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.