



THE FRIENDS of PRIORSLEE LAKE

Interim Report No.2 on Priorslee Lake

Reponse to: “Lakeside – Draft Development Guidelines”

Report by Borough of Telford and Wrekin Council

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The “Friends of Priorslee Lake” is a group of people interested in the wildlife, and particularly the birds, to be found on and around Priorslee Lake, Telford.
- 1.2 The aims of the Group are to study the wildlife on and around the Lake, to encourage the watching and recording of birds on the Lake, to try and protect the site from damage from any cause and to enhance the natural qualities of the site.
- 1.3 This report is our response to the Borough of Telford and Wrekin Council “Lakeside – Draft Development Guidelines”, dated 18th. July, 2006, **Rev. H.**

2. About the Lake

- 2.1 Readers of this report should first read The Friends of Priorslee Lake (FoPL) Interim Report No. 1, dated 8th August, 2006, which gives a general outline of the Lake and its surrounding area and its importance to wildlife – especially to birds.
- 2.2 It has to be understood that Priorslee Lake is undoubtedly the most important site for birds in Telford. It has the largest overall list of bird species (153) and has had visits by more rare birds (22) than any other site in Telford. It also has a good number of breeding species (41) and winter visiting species (98). These figures relate to the period 2000-2006.
- 2.3 Priorslee Lake must not be seen in isolation. Priorslee Flash to the north-west is also a good birding spot, though no where near as good as Priorslee Lake, and Wesley Brook running between the two is an important “wildlife corridor” allowing birds to pass between the two in search of food and breeding site.
- 2.4 Priorslee Lake is therefore the jewel in the crown as a wildlife and birding site within the boundary of Telford and the Wrekin. It not only attracts local birdwatchers but regularly appears in national reports on sightings of rare birds (eg. In the national Birdwatching magazine) and in pager and e-mail reports.
- 2.5 These reports are good publicity for Telford and keep it in the “wildlife limelight”. Birdwatching is an important pastime with the RSPB having more than one million members.

2.6 It is therefore very important that any development around and/or adjacent to Priorslee Lake does not destroy its wildlife value. This also applies to Wesley Brook.

3. Telford Council's Lakeside Guidelines

3.1 The Priorslee area has been identified for mixed use development under Policy MU02 for housing (600 units), employment, a learning campus, limited retail facilities, sports and leisure (involving the Lake), a hotel and open space.

3.2 The Borough of Telford and Wrekin Council has produced draft development guidelines for the area - which has been named "Lakeside". The guidelines are dated 18th July, 2006, **Rev. H**, which suggests a number of earlier versions which we have not seen and the distinct possibility that more will follow.

3.3 It is quite likely that representatives of the existing Priorslee inhabitants will also want to put forward their views on development around the Lake and it is to be hoped that active steps will be taken to ensure their views are taken into account.

3.4 The term "Lakeside" used in the title of the guideline itself arouses suspicion as it suggests much of the development will be around the Lake with an inevitable loss of wildlife value.

3.5 The south shore of the Lake is bordered by the M54 and the east side by the B5060, leaving only the north and the west shores where any development could take place. Of these, the north shore and the west shore around the entry point of Wesley Brook are the most important areas for birds. This only leaves the remaining open area on the west shore between the Lake and Ricoh and this adds to the diversity of the site so development on it would be a loss to the environmental value of the site as a whole. It would also drastically impact on the visual aspect of the Lake.

3.6 Priorslee Lake and its shores are shown as part of the Green Network of Telford and it to be hoped that the Green Network will be protected and not turned over for development. Surely enough other land can be found?

3.7 The Shropshire Ornithological Society has proposed that Priorslee Lake be designated a "County Wildlife Site" by the Shropshire Wildlife Trust and this is actively under consideration at the moment. Although such a designation would not bring with it legal protection, the Council would need to ensure the site was protected from development if it wishes to maintain its "green credentials" and not open itself to criticism.

4. Comment on the Draft Guidelines

4.1 This section comments directly on the draft guidelines giving the same paragraph numbers as in the version detailed in paragraph 1.4 of this report. Each comment begins with the Guidelines paragraph number underlined.

4.2 Guidelines Para. 1.1. The Council's vision statement makes no mention of wildlife. It should include a further sentence. Viz: **The Lake is an important wildlife area and steps will be taken to protect its value to Priorslee and Telford.**

4.3 Guidelines Section 2. No mention is made of the Lake area being part of the Green network of Telford. This should be included and mention should be included of the need to maintain the Green Network if Telford is not to become a concrete and brick jungle where only work places, homes and necessary infrastructure are provided.

4.4 Guidelines Para. 3.4. Mention is made of a "safe and healthy local environment with well designed public and green space". (Bullet point 4.) The green space should be mainly based on the Lake area and Wesley Brook (except for playing fields, etc.) and this should be mentioned.

- 4.5 Guidelines Para. 3.16. The need to protect and enhance the environment (bullet point 5) is rightly mentioned and it is hoped this will be followed.
- 4.6 Guidelines Para. 3.30. Bullet point 2 includes “.... natural environment with protected and enhanced natural and historic assets”. It is hoped that this will be followed.
- 4.7 Guidelines Para. 4.2. This outlines what Bovale (a development company) has in mind. Bovale owns the land adjacent to the north shore – presently occupied by the Celestica building. The Bovale plans are for an enormous development of offices, factories, houses and a hotel with a promenade along the north shore. The Bovale plans are totally unacceptable and would entirely destroy the wildlife value of the Lake. It appears that Bovale wants to squeeze in as much development in as possible.
- 4.8 Guidelines Para. 4.11. It is rightly pointed out that Severn Trent (ST) own the Lake and all the shores around it. Any shore-based development within the ST ownership area must be with their approval. Again, the valuable ornithological and ecological habitat is recognised and it is hoped that ST will appreciate this too.
- 4.9 Guidelines Para. 4.13 – 4.19. No mention is made of Wesley Brook and the small ponds along it as it flows from Priorslee Flash to Priorslee Lake. It is an important wildlife corridor and presumably it or its banks belong to Telford Council. Mention should be made of Wesley Brook with a commitment not to damage its wildlife corridor value by building too close, piping it, or putting paths or cycle ways on its banks. It should not be opened up too much by the removal of vegetation
- 4.10 Guidelines Para. 4.22. Shropshire Ornithological Society is not mentioned as an “interest group”. It has made representations on the area and should be included.
- 4.11 Guidelines Para. 5.10 – 5.14. This section mentions briefly the wildlife value of the Lake but mostly in a local context (see para. 5.12). Mention should be made of the rare birds recorded at the site and the importance of these nationally since they are reported at national level and become part of the British national bird records maintained by the British Ornithological Union. The wildlife value of Wesley Brook should be mentioned in para. 5.11.
- 4.12 Guidelines Para. 8.3. “Figure 1 – Mix and Quantum Uses” under Sports, Leisure and Recreation mentions “Facilities for the continued/improved and enlarged recreational use of Priorslee Lake. To this should be added: **with protection for the wildlife of the site built in.**
- 4.13 Guidelines Para. 9.1. Bullet point 7 specifically mentions wildlife habitat and it is hoped this will be maintained.
- 4.14 Guidelines Para. 10.6. This paragraph suggests a hotel on the south-west shore of the Lake and the positioning of a hotel at this point has to be questioned. Hotels by their very nature are large building with large car parks meaning large areas of concrete and tarmac. Not very good for wildlife. Vehicular access to a hotel at this point would also cause problems. One wonders if a hotel is needed at this point and perhaps a site nearer to Telford Centre and closer to rail and bus links would be better.
- 4.15 Guidelines Para. 10.7. This states there is pressure to protect and preserve the ecological (wildlife) areas around the Lake and we confirm this.
- 4.16 Guidelines Para. 11.6. This states there is ecological (wildlife) value in the bordering habitats and vegetation of both Priorslee Lake and Wesley Brook – the first time Wesley Brook is mentioned! It is pointed out that under the terms of the PPS9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (adopted in 2005) any proposals should not only **PREVENT** harm but **ACTIVELY MAXIMISE** wildlife opportunities.

- 4.17 Guidelines Para. 11.11 and 11.20. This states that account should be taken of the lake and watercourses in the overall design of routes and spaces and areas where painting can take place. It is important that routes (paths, cycleways and roads) do not themselves destroy or lead to the destruction of habitat associated with these watercourses and that any planting is in keeping with wildlife and not cosmetic. This is particularly true for Wesley Brook.
- 4.18 Guidelines Para. 11.12 and 11.13. These state that surveys need to be carried out for both the wildlife and the habitat. These need to be done over an extended period (usually several years) if a “snapshot” result is to be avoided. FoPL recommends such surveys be implemented as soon as possible. (Note. Bird surveys have been done for some years and the bird wildlife value is well known.)
- 4.19 Guidelines Para. 11.17. This states a management arrangement will be required for the area. An action plan will be required to ensure the proper development of wildlife habitats as well as a management arrangement to protect the area. The council already has wardens who may be able to take on this role with little additional cost. FoPL suggests such plans are developed alongside the building development plans.
- 4.20 Guidelines Para. 12 and 13. This refers to planning applications and FoPL recommends that bullet point 9 in paragraph 13.1 should read: **Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment – Including Wildlife Protection.** This will emphasise the wildlife side as opposed to just simply the natural vegetation and existing tree of the site.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 The whole of Section 4 contains comments on the Guidelines and it is hoped these will be taken on board and become part of the overall philosophy of a future revision of the Guidelines and part of the planners in-house philosophy when making or reviewing future plans for Priorslee Lake area.
- 5.2 Paragraphs 4.2 - 4.3 - 4.4 - 4.9 - 4.10 - 4.11 - 4.12 - 4.14 and 4.20 all contain specific recommendations to changed wording in the report as it currently stands.
- 5.3 In paragraph 4.18 FoPL recommends steps are taken to carry out a full long term survey of the site for all forms of wildlife other than for birds – existing birds surveys are continuing. Wildlife surveys need to be done over a period of time because of changes due to the seasons (some creatures hibernate and many plants die off over the winter period) and to prevent a “snapshot” result being obtained. As development might be in the not too distant future, surveying should start sooner than later.
- 5.4 In paragraph 4.19 FoPL recommends that both an action plan for the enhancement of the wildlife habitat and a management plan for the continued protection of the site should be developed – although this is not so immediately important.
- 5.5 In view of the possible designation of the Lake and its shores as a County Wildlife Site, serious consideration has to be given not to develop the shore areas for commercial development or housing but to keep the Lake area as a wildlife and leisure area. Of course, the leisure activities have to be compatible with the wildlife.

Whilst it is understood that putting certain buildings on the shores of the Lake appears attractive to planners, and would appeal to the purchasers and users of such buildings, having an attractive wildlife site nearby where people can walk and relax would also be an attractive asset to nearby developments – not least being that further development could not take place where the wildlife site is.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 There is much in the Guidelines to be complimented and it is not the intention of this report or of FoPL to be too critical of the work on possible development in the Priorslee Lake area. FoPL recognises that development in the area will take place – it is really just a question of how much and **WHERE**.
- 5.2 The wildlife value of the area was probably not too well known to the powers **that be** before news of the Lakeside developments caused it to be publicised. Now that it is highlighted it is hoped that plans will be amended accordingly. Whilst other lakes in Telford could stand close development without undue damage to the wildlife – **PRIORSLEE LAKE CANNOT**.

15th. September, 2006.

Richard Camp,
Co-ordinator.