

Hop and a skip to make electricity

GREEN PIONEERS

Greg Blurton and Mandy Bridson are putting refuse to good use

GREG BLURTON and his sister Mandy Bridson were so shocked by the amount of rubbish their skip-hire business was sending to landfill sites that they decided to do something about it.

The two, who set up Rabbit Skips 19 years ago, started a second business, Enviropower — a small power station that turns household waste into electricity.

“The country was running out of space to put rubbish. When we discovered waste could be turned into power, we realised it was a win-win situation,” Blurton said.

Once the recyclable material is removed, an average skip has enough rubbish to power a regular-sized house for three

weeks, or 21 houses for a day.

With a £15m loan from Allied Irish Banks, the two entrepreneurs spent three years building a power station that transforms non-recyclable household and commercial waste into electricity. It opened 12 months ago, at Lancing, Sussex.

According to Eurostat, the EU data agency, the UK sends more waste to landfill than any other European country. Last year, 46.5m tonnes of rubbish were sent to landfill here and about 60% of household waste was buried in the ground.

However, landfill is falling out of favour. Rubbish dumps pollute the water table and surrounding soil. UK sites are nearing capacity. There are 614m cubic metres of landfill space left in England and Wales. At current rates, the UK will run out of sites by 2018.

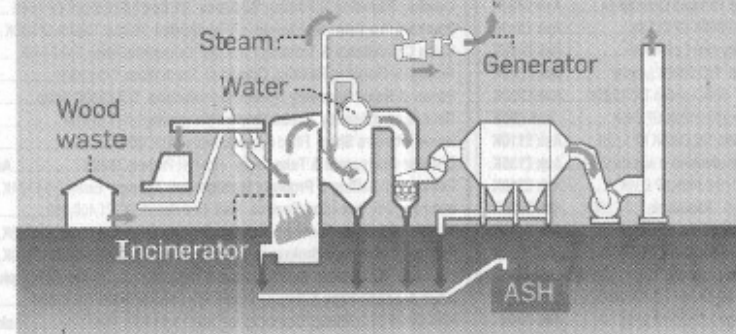
As a result, the EU is making dumping more costly. At the same time, generous subsidies mean converting rubbish to energy is more lucrative, a big incentive for Enviropower's founders.

“The laws on landfill are under scrutiny. We wanted to find a way of dealing with waste that was cost-efficient and sustainable,” Blurton said.

Rubbish power

Generator burns skip waste to make electricity

- 1** Household and commercial rubbish fed into incinerator
- 2** Hot gases heat up water to produce steam
- 3** Steam drives a generator that produces electricity



Even with modern recycling equipment, Rabbit Skips still sends several lorry loads of waste to landfill each day. Bulging landfill sites in Sussex are likely to close over the next two years, forcing firms in the area to transport waste to neighbouring counties — an environmentally unfriendly and expensive solution.

Blurton expects the plant, which also turns general rubbish into power, to divert 48,000 tonnes of local

unwanted materials from landfill each year — enough to power 8,000 homes.

First, the rubbish is sorted using powerful magnets, giant sieves and other picking machines — metal and stone cannot be broken down. The rest is broken up into pieces the size of oranges.

The rubbish is burnt to heat water and create steam that drives turbines to generate electricity. The exhaust gases are filtered and burnt again to

eliminate potentially noxious fumes. The residue is recycled and made into aggregate. “Nothing is wasted,” Blurton said.

The electricity is bought by Green Energy UK, an independent firm that supplies 100% renewable electricity to its customers, and is put into the National Grid.

Doug Stewart, Green Energy's founder, said: “Preventing waste from going to landfill and creating electricity with virtually no carbon emissions gives us two green benefits for the price of one.”

Enviropower has discovered that local people are enthusiastic and supportive of the fledgling company. Even the local cricket club has become a customer.

“The locals love the idea that almost all their waste is recycled, that it's done professionally, and that they are helping the environment too,” Bridson said.

Customers like the fact that only one skip is required, which Enviropower sorts out, whereas councils require households to separate their rubbish into several bins.

Ben Marlow