

*Alternatives to Mass Burn Incinerator (MBI). - A reprint of the October 2009 Grapevine article.*

Last month Bucks County Council gave energy-from-waste company Covanta six months to get agreement to take our waste at a site in Bedfordshire. If that fails, as is quite likely as Bedford residents are naturally opposed to it, Bucks may reconsider using Edgcott or will have to come up with an alternative solution. [\[WRG resubmitted their plans for Edgcott on 4/10/10\]](#)

Several people have suggested we are against MBI on the grounds of NIBYism. This is probably because we haven't explained the pros and cons or the alternatives – or our view that existing local policies on the issue are out dated.

### **ESTABLISHED RECORD?**

The advantages of MBI are: a) it has an established (Questionable) track record. b) It avoids increasing landfill tax. c) It is a 'one stop' solution to a big problem. One planning application for a massive factory instead of several applications for several small sites. Note that these are not advantages for the public, but they are for the County Council. You may also hear that it produces electricity from waste, which is true but is much less than the alternatives and is comparable with recovering methane from land fill sites.

### **VERY BIG**

The disadvantages are: a) it needs to be very big to achieve economies of scale and this means centralisation, this has implications for the generation, transport and supply of waste. (ATTs on the other hand are generally smaller and thus avoid centralisation). b) Is only one level above landfill (sometimes referred to as "landfill in the sky") as a waste disposal technique – land-filling is viewed as the least suitable method of waste disposal. The Scottish Parliament amongst others has now banned MBI. c) It only reduces waste by 2/3rds – the technique does not eliminate waste. Under the present proposal for Edgcott 100,000 tonnes of base and fly ash will need to be disposed of in landfill or reprocessed as a construction aggregate. Glass, stone, minerals and similar wastes cannot be burned. Fly ash from mass burn techniques is unstable, highly toxic, and officially classified as hazardous. d) There are emission problems when any of the safety systems fail and during firing up and down when the temperature is too low. e) Sites have to be licensed for toxic waste and are likely to attract further toxic waste that would be transported by road. f) It is a very inefficient method of electricity generation, only 15% efficient, i.e. 85% of the waste's energy value is lost. g) It counters the UK council's directive of the 'proximity principle' (not carrying waste excessive distances from the point of generation to treatment/ disposal). 10% of all UK traffic movements are related to the waste industry. h) It will militate against recycling because of the contractual requirement for minimum volume. This will seriously reduce, perhaps even eliminate, the opportunity for the private sector to create recycling businesses within Buckinghamshire or the surrounding area. It reduces access to recycled products such as garden mulch, wood chip or stone aggregate which will have to be transported in from further afield; again, further increasing traffic movements. It may undermine existing recycling businesses. i) It will counter Europe's and the UK's directives to salvage value through recycling. j) It will close off the opportunity for clean and efficient generation of electricity for in excess of a generation – a very substantial lost opportunity considering the predicted shortfall in electricity production. k) It has hidden, increased and difficult to quantify health and transport costs. l) It is unsustainable in that input quantities, costs and social

costs are far greater than the benefits. In the case of Bucks CC it needed more than twice the currently reducing demand (because of increasing recycling) of waste, necessitating transporting in a huge amount of waste from outside the county, adding to local congestion. m) and finally it is generally considered to be old technology that is being phased out.

## **OUT DATED**

The real problem for people living in Buckinghamshire is that the county council waste policy was determined in 2005 and is now out dated.

So what are the alternatives to MBI? First continue to promote 'Reduce-Reuse-Recycle' which is steadily (slowly) reducing the amount sent to landfill. Next encourage treatment of bio waste (aprox 50% of what goes to landfill) by composting and Anaerobic digestion. The other 50% can have metals etc removed and the remainder can be processed in an ATT (Advanced Thermal Treatment) plant which are much smaller local plants that produce hydrogen and carbon monoxide which can either be used on site to produce electricity efficiently or sold off separately.

Our problem is that not much consideration has been given to better alternative solutions and Bucks County Council is under pressure to avoid increasing land fill taxes. So it is important to keep the pressure on Bucks to consider newer better alternatives. We can do this is by supporting SAVI.

[www.besavi.co.uk](http://www.besavi.co.uk)