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PRIVATE EYE

INCINERATORS

Fuel's gold

INCINERATOR schemes are demonstrating that, as well as damaging air quality, burning waste is an expensive, er, waste of money.

Two years since it started operation, the Splott incinerator in Cardiff (pictured) is causing problems for operator Viridor. The “energy from waste” plant is unable to generate enough power to deliver the constant, cheap hot water to 50,000 homes that was promised. Apparently it's the poor quality of Welsh rubbish that's to blame! When burned, it does not generate enough heat, even though the plant devours 350,000 tonnes a year.

Environmentalists and sceptical locals maintain that the blot on their landscape is too big for the amount of rubbish available. It's a headache for Viridor, because it needs to fulfil strict conditions attached to the £110m loan for the project from the European Investment Bank. If the plant fails to meet the EU's R1 efficiency threshold, it will be reclassified as a mere waste disposal facility and no carbon offset dosh will be claimable.

Viridor's proposed solution is to burn an extra 20 percent – around 75,000 tonnes a year – to increase efficiency. This means many more lorries trucking the rubbish to the incinerator and carrying away tens of thousands of tonnes of ash.

There's a problem with this proposal: Wales's high recycling rates, of around 55 percent. Waste paper and plastics, which Welsh councils recycle so well, are the “high calorific feedstock” which Viridor covets. So the firm is planning to bring rubbish from more than 100 miles away, and the Welsh Assembly is reported to be considering offering a subsidy to councils who pay Viridor to



burn their rubbish. It might be good for Viridor's shareholders, but it will do nothing for the environment or recycling rates.

Meanwhile there's mounting evidence that recycling rubbish is actually cheaper than burning waste. Contracts and PFI bid documents prepared by Derby city and county councils eight years ago, obtained by a whistleblower, admit as much. The city and county once had recycling rates at 50 percent. And then they signed an incineration contract under which they have to procure more than 150,000 tonnes a year of residual waste of a certain “calorific” value (mainly plastics, biowaste, paper and card).

As any fuel know, residual waste does not have such values, as it should comprise material left over *after* the recyclables and compostables have been removed. It dawned on the councils that they would not have enough burnable material to fulfil the contract. So they decided to force people to throw away previously recycled and composted materials!

Recycling collections have been removed from many streets. The brown bin for “organic” waste, which used to be emptied for free, now has to be paid for by householders. Derby's black bins now bulge with previously recycled and composted material, ready for the day – possibly in September 2017 – that the incinerator is lit.

Meanwhile Derby's recycling rates have already dropped to 34 percent – so residents can pay more to have their rubbish burned instead. Brilliant!