

# Rupert Burr – ten years on in Wiltshire

Rupert Burr was one of the first farmers to plant SRC willow on his farm near Swindon back in 1993. Initially his crop was intended to provide fuel to a local biomass power station in Cricklade, but this unfortunately failed to get planning permission. Left with 35 hectares of SRC on his hands, Mr Burr decided to try and get his own project up and running; an ambitious scheme for adding value to the crop – a co-operative power station that would be owned by the people who grow the crop. In 2003 he got a £1 million grant from the DTi for Roves Energy and

despite many setbacks Mr Burr is now hoping that the project is on the homeward stretch. He is about to apply for planning permission and is very optimistic that he has the backing from other local farmers to make it a success.

The project which will be sited on Mr Burr's farm in Highworth, Wiltshire is a combined heat and power (CHP) system producing 2 megawatt of electricity and 4 MW of heat energy. Mr Burr admits that the project stalled for a while because he could not find a use for the heat. "Without such an outlet, the

economics of electricity production alone for this size scheme do not stack up. In any case you shouldn't waste renewable heat. You should size the project according to the heat produced not according to electricity".

It was intended that the heat would be used to produce processed fuel for Didcot Power Station but despite initial interest RWE npower didn't fully commit to the project. Instead he is now looking to utilise the heat to process wood fuel into dry woodchips, pellets and briquettes for heating projects around Swindon. He points out that Swindon is one of the fastest growing towns in the UK with 50-60,000 homes planned by 2030 so there is a huge potential market.

The Roves Energy project could provide enough processed fuel to heat 10,000 homes and would require about 5000 hectares of energy crops. Mr Burr believes this approach to be complimentary to using biomass from other sources. He mentions that forest makes up only 3% of land use in Wiltshire so growing energy crops is essential for the project to go ahead.

He planted a further 20 hectares himself this spring and believes that others should get their applications in now for the Energy Crops Scheme as future funds might not be as lucrative. He believes that one of the main reasons the energy crops industry has been hindered is that while the Government sees their potential they also want to produce cheap electricity. He feels that all the other benefits of energy crops such as the biodiversity and rural regeneration should be given greater prominence.

In spite of all the ups and downs, Mr Burr is still confident that both his project and the industry as a whole will take off.



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