

SAVING THE ENVIRONMENT ...REDUCING YOUR CLUB'S CARBON FOOTPRINT

By Melissa Jones

Robert Nutt and his brother John, are proprietors of The Oaks Golf Club and Spa in Aughton, near York. Nearly 12 years old, the club opened its doors to the golfing community in June 1996. Four years ago when they unveiled The Spa at The Oaks, this opened up another market for them – one that they wanted to run as environmentally friendly and cost effectively as they could.

Within two to three years the club hope to be fully self-sufficient, but in the meantime they're not far off the mark and their efforts are helping to reduce the clubs carbon footprint.

Electricity is generated at the club and spa during peak usage - from 8am until 9.15pm then automatically reverts back to mains electric during the evening. "A lot of golf and country clubs put in place energy saving measures but compromise the experience that they are giving their customers, for instance by reducing the hours the saunas and steam rooms operate. We took the decision to be as cost effective and environmentally friendly as we could without compromising



the members' experience which has come about by reducing energy costs," said Robert.

The partners also had to consider the amount of power cuts that the area suffers from. "Consequently we were going to have to look at setting up a back-up generation system anyway. We have people travelling from miles away for golf and pamper days and we couldn't have the power cutting out. In the past we have had to close the premises and give everyone their money back, hopefully this situation has now been overcome," explained Robert.

FUEL...

The brothers, who also farm in Aughton, took the decision just over year ago to generate electricity by using rapeseed oil derived from homegrown rapeseed and the heating on wood chips sourced locally.

"Because farming has been very depressed up until late last summer, we had around 300 acres of land available on the farm to produce rapeseed.



It seemed mad buying fuel for the golf club when we had our own potential source. We've always grown rape and that seed offered us the oil. The seed itself is about 40-45% oil and you are able to create electricity by running a diesel engine generator on the oil crushed out of rapeseed," enthused Robert.

The partners had planned to then burn the oil and use the meal that was created as their heat source for the bio-mass boiler. However, as the system was being set up and the necessary equipment being installed, the price of oil seed rape went through the roof. Prices had started to rise last August but by November their increase in cost proved for it to not be financially viable for club to burn the meal as it's still of a very high feed value for feeding livestock. It had out priced itself of burning.

Not one for giving up, Robert explained: "We then had a look around and actually sourced some reclaimed woodchip to feed into the boiler."

The Nutt's plan to plant Willow on their farm as soon as weather conditions allow: "It may take two to three years before we get a viable yield to start supplying our own wood. Once we are able to use the Willow, in effect we will be totally self-sufficient with fuel – oil for electric and wood for heat," gleamed Robert.

COST...

The system cost approximately £150,000 to set up and the club is looking at, and on target for, a three year payback - depending on how much fuel costs rise the payback could come around even sooner.

As The Oaks uses a generator consisting of a diesel engine converted to run on 100% rapeseed oil, the brothers are able to claim credits back from Ofgem, regulators of the electricity and gas markets in Great Britain, for producing carbon-free energy.

"It's quite a complex procedure. Carbon credits have a value of £50 per megawatt, which for us amounts to an extra £50 a day payback," explained Robert.

"On the heating side, last year our heating cost amounted to £32,000 for kerosine (32p a litre), this cost would have risen to in the region of £50,000

this year taking in to consideration the rise in the price of kerosine. In comparison to this the cost of the woodchip we have used to heat the club this year will have amounted to less than £10,000."

Of course once the one off cost has been repaid and the willow planted to generate wood chippings, the full benefit will be realised, "I think it will take around 10 hectares to become self-sufficient - costing £1000 a hectare. Because willows re-generate that is a one off cost. We just have to be patient for those couple of years getting going and maintain our current supply of woodchip from the open market," Robert explained.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES...

It's not just off the course that Robert and John have taken extra measures to enhance the clubs contribution to the saving the environment.

"We've planted a further 35 acres of trees on top of what was already on the land the course was built upon. With the variation in habitat from younger trees, to mature trees to gorse etc, we've actually improved and maintained various habitats' which was actually a major interest of ours anyway. There's a more diverse habitat and species down here than there ever was when it was farmed.

"You do actually read, and there's a lobby against golf clubs, that golf courses cause problems for habitats but that's not the case here and I'm sure that's not the case in many places – we've actually enhanced and diversified habitats," enthuse Robert.

The last piece of the puzzle for The Oaks is addressing their water issues. "We have a borehole for the spray irrigation on the greens and this is currently been looked at for its suitability for supplying the drinking and showering water," commented Robert.

A considerable amount of time was necessary to fully research the systems available and their viability, this now seems to be paying off. The philosophy of The Oaks is to provide first class facilities that are competitively priced for the members to enjoy. Leaving the members committees to plan and organise their golf competitions while the proprietors take responsibility for strategy and the day-to-day running which obviously include all environmental aspects.

