

## Material Recycling Facility (MRF)



In Suffolk, mixed recycling is collected by our council and is taken to the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) at Great Blakenham in Suffolk, for separation and baling. The Viridor facilities serves about 250,000 homes in the area.

### What happens at the MRF?

Freighters deliver the recyclable materials directly to the MRF from homes and after the consignment of material is weighed it's loaded into large bays. From here it is mechanically shovelled onto a series of conveyor belts to begin the separation process. The material passes through rotating drums (trommels) to remove cans and plastic bottles. Small pieces of paper and other combustible items are sent to a nearby incinerating plant to generate power for the national grid. Larger paper/cardboard is baled up and plastic is sent to Rochester for recycling at that facility.

We were told 100 per cent of the material that arrives at Great Blakenham Viridor is recycled in one form or another.

Line pickers have the unenviable job of removing larger unwanted items of waste (such as plastic bags, whole wheelie bins and dead animals!) by hand from the first conveyor belt. Further items of contaminating material (such as glass) are removed by hand from further conveyor belts by a team of up to 20 line pickers. Most of the pickers come from Eastern European countries and seem to stay for a few months work, return home for a while and then return again. The smell is not very nice and although the workers are provided with face masks few seemed to be wearing them. It's noisy and dirty work. Once unwanted items have been removed during the 'manual' stage the mixed materials are mechanically separated into different types. A high-speed conveyor belt separates lighter items such as paper from plastic containers and cans. Cans are pulled out and separated from the plastic items by magnets. Each of the separated material types are collected in different loading bays for compacting and baled for transportation to reprocessing companies to be made into new products.