



PRESS RELEASE - 12 October 2006

Fishy Business to Provide Sustainable Jobs in Weardale

Farming in Weardale could receive a boost thanks to an innovative new plan to take advantage of the geothermal hot water source recently confirmed at the proposed Renewable Energy Village in Eastgate.

A forward-thinking fish farming business based in Kent hopes to utilise the renewable energy source to cultivate an increasingly popular breed of warm-water fish. So keen it is to be part of the development, it was established as Weardale Fish Farms a year ago, despite currently being based in East Malling near Maidstone.

Specialising in the cultivation of tilapia, a mild tasting white fish, Weardale Fish Farms plans to expand its operation into purpose-built premises at Eastgate creating new jobs for local people, as part of the eco-village development.

Major supermarkets including Tesco are already selling tilapia as a substitute to diminishing cod stocks. With around 120,000 tonnes of cod currently sold in Britain each year, the aquaculture business has huge potential for economic growth.

Utilising the geothermal resources at Eastgate to heat water to the required 30 degrees centigrade is crucial to the 'green' approach to tilapia production being pioneered by Weardale Fish Farms. Managing director, Phil Jinks, believes the development offers everything his company needs to succeed.

Phil says: "We were immediately interested when we heard about the proposed Renewable Energy Village at Eastgate as we knew it would be ideal for our needs.

"We're currently in the process of establishing an organic method of tilapia cultivation with low density fish stocks, but as it's a warm water fish, it must be bred indoors in the UK.

"Previously, we've harnessed the heat generated as a by-product of freezing ice at skating rinks, but the potential to use geothermally heated water fits perfectly with our eco-friendly ethos and gives us the potential to significantly expand our operations with a sustainable energy source."



Eastgate Renewable Energy Village is on the site of a former cement works and will provide an eco-friendly, working, living and learning environment and visitor attraction for the benefit of the Weardale community. It is expected that in excess of 350 jobs will be generated across the entire site.

It will uniquely utilise all five available forms of renewable energy: biomass; geothermal hot water; wind; hydro and solar.

The planning application for the development, for which outline plans received overwhelming support on completion of a public consultation last October, is due to be submitted in July 2007 once essential environmental, geological, and social studies are complete.

John Hamilton, Chairman of Weardale Task Force says: "Weardale Fish Farm's planned expansion into Weardale will enhance the existing proposals for the Renewable Energy Village and provide sustainable employment for local people.

"It will also utilise the geothermal energy of the dale in an innovative way, adding aquaculture to this area's long and proud farming tradition."

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Issued by Robson Brown PR on behalf of Weardale Task Force

About Eastgate Renewable Energy Village

Eastgate Renewable Energy Village is a regeneration project on the site of the former Lafarge Blue Circle cement works. It will maximise the potential of the site to provide an eco-friendly living, working and learning environment and visitor attraction for the benefit of people of Weardale.

It will demonstrate best practice in sustainability by utilising all five forms of land-based renewable energy available in the UK, which are wind, solar, hydro, biomass and geothermal – a unique concept in this country.

The project will enhance the lives and prosperity of the existing population of the Dale by creating sustainable jobs, homes and recreational facilities for local people within a development that is at the forefront of eco-friendly living. It will also provide opportunities for links with other businesses and leisure facilities in the Dale.

The new eco-community will provide one of only two public hot springs in the UK utilising geothermal hot water, and a centre for education for residents and visitors to learn about renewable energy, sustainable living, life in the Dale and the surrounding North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



It is estimated at this stage that a planning application will be submitted in July 2007*, with planning permission hoped for by 2008.

Regeneration projects on this scale can take more than a decade to complete due to their complexity. As an example, Bluewater shopping and leisure development in Kent, also on the site of a former Lafarge works, took over 11 years from concept to completion.

*Previous reported timings of a planning application submission have been superseded due to ongoing viability studies, essential to meeting planning requirements. An environmental study into the affect on local birds will continue until the end of winter 2006/07 so that seasonal observations can be made.

About Weardale Task Force

Weardale Task Force is the body responsible for overseeing the formulation of a 'masterplan' for the proposed Renewable Energy Village and is made up of members from One NorthEast, Wear Valley District Council, Durham County Council and Lafarge Cement UK.

For further information please contact:

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Weardale Task Force

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