

PRESS RELEASE

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PLANS FOR EASTGATE RENEWABLE ENERGY VILLAGE TAKE A HUGE LEAP FORWARD

Bold plans to secure the long-term economic future of County Durham's beautiful Weardale have been submitted to Wear Valley District Council and are now available for the public to view locally and online.

The proposals for Eastgate Renewable Energy Village cover 350 hectares deep within the Dale on the site of the former Lafarge Cement works and quarry and bordering the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Thanks to the accessibility of geothermal power on the site, it will be unique in featuring all five forms of land-based renewable energy available in the UK – hydro, solar, wind, biomass and geothermal – and will generate enough 'clean' electricity to offset the energy consumption of the whole of the Weardale.

As well as demonstrating the huge potential of renewable energy and providing much needed local business accommodation and homes, the plans also include exciting visitor attractions. These include the geothermally heated public spa, which will be only the second in the country after the Thermae Spa in Bath, and extensive mountain biking facilities proposed by leading trail designer Dafydd Davis MBE that could potentially host international competitions.

On the valley floor, where the cement works and its 122 metre high chimney previously stood, 8,300 square metres of business accommodation, 65 homes (including a percentage of affordable homes), sports fields, allotments, a hotel, education and visitor centre and biomass plant are all planned.

A fish farming company currently operating in Kent, but already named the Weardale Fish Company, will relocate to the development to take advantage of the geothermally heated water available.

Elsewhere on the site, which covers an area greater than 800 football pitches, features include international-standard downhill mountain biking and a variety of other biking, hiking and nature trails for visitors to enjoy. The dramatic quarry area will be accessible to the public and a dry toboggan run will weave intriguingly downhill through the woods.

It is estimated that Eastgate Renewable Energy Village will create 150 jobs from business investment and a further 200 jobs in the visitor and hospitality sector, while a wealth of other opportunities are expected to be created in the surrounding area.

Having been through Wear Valley District Council's validation process, the outline planning application submitted in March is now available to view in Crook Civic Centre, Durham Dales Centre, Wolsingham Library and on line shortly at www.weardale-works.co.uk.

In addition, information boards and posters showing plans contained in the application can be viewed will be visible at a number of other locations throughout the Dale and at the Weardale Hub in Stanhope.

MORE

One NorthEast's John Topliss, Eastgate project manager says: "We are setting out to create something very special at Eastgate which will help secure the long-term economic future of Weardale. As well as bringing much needed employment opportunities, the positive knock-on effects will be felt throughout the Dale.

"We have submitted an outline planning application to agree the new uses of the site and the 'footprint' of the buildings and we're now hoping for a positive planning decision by the autumn.

"This is a very exciting time for everyone involved in the Eastgate project as it has necessarily been a lengthy process to get us to this stage. Now, after a great deal of environmental and economic testing and four rounds of community consultation we have a proposal that we're confident will deliver a positive future for the people of Weardale."

The proposals for Eastgate Renewable Energy Village are being driven by Weardale Task Force – which is made up of members from One NorthEast, Wear Valley District Council, Durham County Council and Lafarge Cement UK. David Lock Associates, which provides master planning services and has been engaged on the project from the outset, is the lead consultant.

Subject to a positive planning decision on the outline planning application, the Task Force will then begin to apply for detailed planning approval on the various elements of the proposals. For a range of information on the project, go to www.weardale-works.co.uk, call **01388 761571** or email regeneration@wearvalley.gov.uk

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About Eastgate Renewable Energy Village:

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

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-village 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.

About Weardale Task Force:

Weardale Task Force is the body responsible for overseeing the formulation of a master plan 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.

Local residents are requested to contact the Task Force with any queries or concerns on:

(01388) 761571
economic.regeneration@wearvalley.co.uk