



21 August 2007

INCREASED COMMUNITY INFORMATION NOW AVAILABLE FOR EASTGATE RENEWABLE ENERGY VILLAGE

With four sets of specialist consultants working hard to prepare the planning application for Eastgate Renewable Energy Village in Weardale, local residents are set to benefit from an increased flow of updates regarding the project.

Residents in and around Eastgate this week [Wednesday 22 August] received the first in a series of Information Update news sheets, which will also be available in libraries, the Dales Centre and on the Eastgate website www.weardale-works.co.uk, giving the latest news on the proposals and pre-planning process.

The first Information Update explains how specialist 'testing' of the various elements of the master plan for Eastgate is likely to result in a number of amendments to the proposals announced in December, reflecting discussions with stakeholders, comments from local residents and new commercial interest.

One NorthEast's John Topliss, who is Eastgate project manager, says: "The Task Force is working with a number of specialist consultants to ensure each element of the project is appropriate and achievable.

"Work is ongoing and a revised master plan will be the subject of a fourth round of community consultation around October 2007. This continues our commitment to keeping local people informed and involved in the pre-planning application process."

Among a range of detail, the Information Update provides statistics on expected visitor numbers to Eastgate. Current estimates suggest that approximately 227,000 visitors would come each year, around 180,000 'day trippers' and 47,000 staying overnight on site in the hotel, hostel, holiday lets and outdoor education centre.

Of these, approximately 65,000 are predicted to come by rail – a relatively high figure which reflects the emphasis being given to public transport at the development. Once finalised, these figures will be used in the Transport Assessment, which will look at the impact of increased traffic in the Dale and whether this can be accommodated in an acceptable way.

The Information Update also records that small scale aggregates production in the eastern quarry is no longer to proceed. Alternative uses for the quarry are therefore being considered, in particular its possible use for additional mountain bike trails.

Also reported are the further investigations into the mountain biking element of the scheme, which could make Eastgate a premier UK biking destination. These have revealed that more visitors than originally anticipated will require repeated access to the 'tops'. Therefore, the funicular railway originally proposed in conjunction



with the aggregates extraction process may not be the most appropriate and efficient way of getting visitors, including the mountain bikers and their bikes, up to the tops of the slopes and the quarry areas beyond. Different up-lift systems are now being considered, including a cable car system.

Wind turbines also feature in the Information Update with the news that cutting edge, vertical axis turbines are being considered for inclusion in the scheme. Locations on the old works site or elsewhere in the valley floor are being considered. The vertical axis turbines would have less visual impact in relation to the surrounding Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty than conventional turbines.

The overall concept for Eastgate Renewable Energy Village is to benefit the people of Weardale and be a national exemplar project at the forefront of energy-efficiency.

The site will utilise five forms of land-based renewable energy available in the UK: geothermal, hydro, wind, solar and biomass. Some of the other features of the proposed development include:

- A geo-thermally heated public hot springs spa (one of only two in the UK alongside Bath)
- Residential and business space accommodation
- Hotel, Hostel and Holiday lets
- Visitor Centre and education facilities
- A range of leisure activities including extensive mountain bike trails.

Anyone wishing to view the current (December 2006) master plan and for a range of other information on the project, should go to www.weardale-works.co.uk, call 01388 761571 or email regeneration@wearvalley.gov.uk for a copy of the plan, to be put on the mailing list for this news sheet and for all other enquiries.

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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. 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-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.

It is estimated at this stage that a planning application will be submitted towards the end of 2007*, with planning permission hoped for during 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 cement works and quarry, 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 and an additional round of community consultation.

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.

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Weardale Task Force

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

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Issue No.1: August 2007

Weardale Task Force

EASTGATE RENEWABLE ENERGY VILLAGE

INFORMATION UPDATE

Work is progressing well on the preparation of a planning application for Eastgate Renewable Energy Village and its related educational and recreational activities.

The specialist planning consultant team, appointed in February, is currently looking into the master plan endorsed by Weardale Task Force and further researching and testing its components - new enquiries are also being received from potential developers and operators interested in becoming part of the development.

This news sheet is the first of a series to help keep local residents and businesses up to date with this process, and includes the changes to the master plan proposals reflecting discussions with stakeholders, comments from local residents and new commercial interest. A further round of community consultation on the amended proposals will take place around October this year and, while there's still a great deal of work to be done, there is now a real sense of momentum building towards the planning submission itself.

John Hamilton
Chairman Weardale Task Force

Visitor numbers

Work is ongoing but current estimates suggest that approximately 227,000 visitors would come to Eastgate each year (by way of comparison, there were 150,000 visitors to the Dales Centre in 2004/5). Of these, around 180,000 would be 'day trippers' and 47,000 would stay overnight on site in the hotel, hostel, holiday lets and outdoor education centre (an average of 128 people per night). About 65,000 are predicted to come by rail – a relatively high figure, which reflects the emphasis being given to public transport. Once finalised, these figures will be used in the Transport Assessment, which will look at the impact of increased traffic in the Dale and whether this can be accommodated in an acceptable way.

Mountain biking

Experts in the field believe Eastgate could become England's premier mountain biking venue, as well as offering international standard cross-country cycling routes. It may therefore be that the funicular railway proposed in the current master plan is no longer the most appropriate and most efficient way of getting visitors, including the mountain bikers and their bikes, up to the tops of the slopes and the quarry areas beyond. Alternative uplift systems are therefore being investigated, including a cable car system.

Aggregates extraction

The proposal to continue to use the eastern quarry, which was active until the closure of the cement works in 2002, for a small scale aggregates operation is no longer to proceed. Possible alternative uses for the eastern quarry are now being looked at, in particular its suitability for more cycle trails.



Wind turbines

The impact of wind turbines on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is currently being considered in detail. This includes investigations of different locations and alternatives such as vertical axis wind turbines on the works site or elsewhere in the valley floor instead.



Electricity from biomass

The current master plan includes a biomass plant that would produce heat for the proposed district heating system, which would heat most, if not all, of the buildings in the Renewable Energy Village. Recently, the Task Force has been approached by a Scottish company pioneering the production of electricity from biomass using forestry waste.

Hydro-electric scheme

Positive discussions have been held with the Environment Agency on how best to demonstrate the potential for electricity generation from water power at Eastgate. The Wear is a gravel river and any potential scheme must ensure there is no blockage to the free-flow of water and gravel. The concept now being considered is for a small proportion of the river's flow to be extracted at the western end of the site and then transported via an underground pipeline to a turbine which will generate electricity. The turbine would be located at the far eastern end of the site, close to the point at which the water would be returned to the river. Incorporation of a traditional waterwheel into the scheme is also being considered.

Flood Risk Assessment

Preliminary findings from a flood risk assessment currently being carried out is that flooding is not an issue in relation to the uses proposed in the master plan and where they are located on the site. A major part of this particular assessment is to test whether any parts of the site are likely to flood at least once in a hundred years. Early indications are that only a very small part of the site in the very east might flood. In the master plan this area is proposed as open space.

Railway Station

Now that an estimate has been made of the possible number of visitors to Eastgate, Weardale Railway is reviewing the size of station required for its operations. It is possible that the station may be reduced in size from that shown on the current master plan.

Communication

Weardale Task Force continues to engage with local people. One-to-one meetings with local residents in and about Eastgate are currently taking place and this news sheet was suggested by a group of Upper Weardale residents.

Costing the scheme

Specialist financial consultants have recently been appointed to provide preliminary costings in respect of the proposals and to identify which elements may require funding from the public sector. This information will then be used to prepare an outline business plan in support of the planning application.

Timings

The master plan will need to be amended to reflect, as appropriate, some of the matters described in this news sheet. A further round of public consultation on the amended master plan proposals is expected to be held during October prior to submission of the full planning application towards the end of the year.



To view the current (November 2006) master plan and for a range of other information on the project, go to www.weardale-works.co.uk. Alternatively, call 01388 761571 or email regeneration@wearvalley.gov.uk for a copy of the plan, to be put on the mailing list for this news sheet and for all other enquiries. If you require this Eastgate Information Update to be summarised in another language or format, such as Braille or talking tape, please ring Wear Valley District Council on 01388 761958.

Information Update prepared by Weardale Task Force, comprising One NorthEast, Durham County Council, Wear Valley District Council and Lafarge Cement UK. Printed on recycled paper