

PRESS RELEASE

25 October 2007

FINISHING TOUCHES UNDERWAY FOR EASTGATE PLANNING APPLICATION

Changes to the proposed master plan for Eastgate Renewable Energy Village in Weardale will be the subject of a fourth round of community consultation as the submission of the planning application nears.

In November, homes and businesses in Wear Valley will receive a newsletter giving a full update on progress at the site. It will also offer the opportunity to comment on the amendments made since the master plan for the redevelopment of the former Lafarge cement works site was endorsed by the Weardale Task Force as the basis for pre-planning work in November 2006.

One NorthEast's John Topliss, Eastgate project manager says: "In preparing plans for the Eastgate site there have been three previous rounds of formal public consultation, as well as long term liaison with residents and businesses.

"This fourth opportunity gives everyone in the District a chance to see the changes proposed to the layout and comment on them before we submit the planning application early next year."

Proposals for Eastgate Renewable Energy Village will utilise all five forms of land-based renewable energy available in the UK - wind, solar, hydro, biomass and geothermal – a unique concept in this country.

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Amendments to the master plan for the site now include a larger biomass plant than previously envisaged, and this is expected to generate levels of electricity equivalent to that needed to power every property in the dale.

This follows a detailed assessment of the visual impact the originally proposed commercial wind turbines would make on the surrounding Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and their removal from the proposals. Three smaller state-of-the-art vertical wind turbines are however now proposed on the valley floor close to the geothermal borehole.

John adds: “The changes to the master plan have come about through ongoing liaison with the local community, and the receipt of additional comments from various agencies and government departments, as well as interest from commercial organisations.

“Our consultancy team continues to work on the environmental impact and traffic assessments that are an integral part of the planning application process. Additional findings from these, and any further comments received from the public in response to our updated plans, will be incorporated in the outline planning application.”

If planning permission is granted for the Renewable Energy Village, a not-for-profit organisation, initially including members of the Weardale Task Force and with community representation, is intended to be set up to progress the development of the site and then oversee its management. Lafarge Cement UK will hand over the site, free-of-charge, to the new organisation once planning permission is granted.

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. 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 early 2008*, with planning permission hoped for during that year.

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 quarry, took over 11 years from concept to completion.

*Previous reported timings of a planning application submission have been superseded due to an additional, fourth 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.

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

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