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New experts appointed for Weardale eco-friendly development

Renewable energy village moves a step closer

A ground-breaking eco-friendly development in Eastgate has moved a step closer with the news that a team of experts has been appointed to prepare a planning application.

The plans, which are expected to be ready for submission this autumn, cover proposals for the creation of the Eastgate Renewable Energy Village (www.weardale-works.co.uk) on the site of the old Blue Circle cement works in Weardale, County Durham, which closed in 2002.

It is anticipated that the scheme, which has the backing of many local people, will create at least 350 sustainable jobs, including opportunities for new and existing businesses.

The appointment of the various experts is an important step forward for the scheme, which is hoping to get the green light next year from the Government.

The Weardale Task Force - made up of representatives from Wear Valley District Council, Durham County Council, One NorthEast and Lafarge Cement UK - is the driving force behind the scheme.

It has confirmed that the four strong team of specialists - three of which are from the North East - will work over the coming months on drawing together the final planning application, which is based on the recently updated master plan. Each specialist will lead their own team of experts.

Jim Urwin of David Lock Associates, which provides master planning services and has been engaged on the project since the beginning, has been re-appointed as lead consultant during this crucial next phase.

Planning consultancy services will be provided by Llewelyn Davies Yeang, with the team being led by Matt Verlander based at the firm's Newcastle office. Llewelyn Davies Yeang is one of the world's leading planning and architecture practices with a particular strength in regeneration and development planning.



Matt Verlander will take the lead in the preparation of the planning application with work from the others supporting this. He will report directly to Jim Urwin and One NorthEast's John Topliss.

Renewable energy consultant Daniel Dufton from leading global power services consultancy PB Power will design the renewable energy components for the development in-line with its eco-friendly theme.

Environmental assessment consultant Paul Salmon joins the team from environmental and engineering consultancy Entec UK Ltd to co-ordinate the vital Environmental Assessment required for the planning application.

John Topliss, on behalf of the Weardale Task Force, said: "The appointment of the team of specialist consultants is crucial in bringing the whole project a step closer.

"It ensures we will be able to meet the stringent requirements of producing a planning application package, expected this autumn.

"We have set out to create something special - a living, working, learning and leisure environment to provide much needed economic regeneration and sustainable jobs.

"The Task Force is committed to achieving this and the next phase is vital in gaining approval for the proposed mixed uses of the scheme."

The overall concept for the regeneration project 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.



Photo caption

New expertise: (L-r) Entec's Paul Salmon, PB Power's Daniel Dufton, David Lock Associates' Jim Urwin and Llewelyn Davies Yeang's Matt Verlander will be preparing Eastgate Renewable Energy Village's planning application.

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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 in October 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:

Media Enquiries

Robson Brown PR

Andy Bruce / Liz Luff

(0191) 244 6651 / (0191) 2446659

07725 603579 / 0797 4698759

andyb@robson-brown.co.uk / lizl@robson-brown.co.uk

Weardale Task Force

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

(01388) 761571

economic.regeneration@wearvalley.co.uk