

PRESS RELEASE
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WOLSINGHAM BUSINESSWOMAN BACKS EASTGATE ECO-VILLAGE OFFICE FACILITIES

A successful Weardale businesswoman is backing the creation of new office accommodation at the proposed Eastgate Renewable Energy Village after being forced to relocate her company out of the dale.

Maureen Stanton, owner of Wolsingham-based multimedia call centre On Net Communications, will reluctantly be moving her 70-strong operation to rented offices in Crook when Wolsingham Steelworks, where her present office is based closes.



And having been unable to find suitable premises within Weardale into which the company could have moved, Maureen is now calling on local planners to support the Eastgate scheme and provide facilities from which sustainable employment opportunities for local young people might be offered.

Founded by Maureen in the year 2000, On Net Communications moved to its Wolsingham offices in 2003 and provides frontline call answering services for regional small businesses that don't have the time or resources to do this themselves.

It also carries out a range of outbound information-gathering and research projects for a raft of major national companies and organization in a range of industry sectors.

The company recently opened a small call centre in Coundon, and is now looking at the feasibility of opening further premises in Willington, Tow Law and Bishop Auckland.

Maureen, who has lived in Weardale for 20 years, decided to base the company in Wolsingham for both business and personal reasons, and believes that providing new employment opportunities for young people is the key to ensuring the community's long-term health and viability.

She says: "A lot of major employers have left Weardale over recent years, and a consequence of this has been that many of our talented young people have chosen to leave the area to further their careers, which has in turn a detrimental effect on the general well-being of the whole community.



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“We chose to base the company in Weardale to create new local employment opportunities, and now employ more 70 people from across the area, but having now been unable to find anywhere suitable to move to, we are, very reluctantly and hopefully only temporarily, having to leave the dale.”

Maureen believes that the Eastgate Renewable Energy Village’s proposed office facilities would offer the area a new lease of life, and the chance to look forward to new commercial opportunities.

She continues: “The technological and commercial aspects of the Eastgate proposition fit perfectly with companies such as On Net, and would help create new sustainable employment opportunities, thus giving young people the chance to stay and build careers in Weardale.

“Eastgate would be the perfect place to which to relocate our business, and we would look to use services provided by and offer services to other tenants, thus helping to keep more of the money generated locally within the area.

“Weardale has to look forward to its future, and the infrastructure offered by the Eastgate scheme would make it somewhere that we, and many other local businesses, would want to be.”

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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.

It is estimated at this stage that a planning application will be submitted in early 2008*, with planning permission hoped for later in the year.

*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.

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

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