



PRESS RELEASE

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DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL BACKS ECO-VILLAGE

*Task Force Welcomes Council's Decision to Approve Renewable Energy Village -
major milestone*

Weardale Task Force, today, welcomed Durham County Council (DCC) Strategic Planning Committee's recommendation to approve its planning application for the redevelopment of the old cement works at Eastgate into a renewable energy village. The Chair of Weardale Task Force, John Hamilton, described the decision as "a major milestone" in this important development.

DCC's approval was based upon the transformational nature of the project: Namely the economic benefits the development will bring coupled with its sustainable ethos and the once in a generation opportunity to transform a major brownfield site. This will help to address the continuing economic decline of Weardale and provide future generations with real opportunities at the same time as creating a genuine 'green' legacy for the Dale.

In terms of the planning process, it is now up to the Government Office for the North East to decide whether it wants the application to be 'called in' for determination by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Rt Hon John Denham

MP. If the application is not 'called in', the Task Force will need to submit a detailed planning application, but is confident that building works can start on the site as early as 2011.

Given the significant benefits that the project will bring to the Dale and its use of the latest renewable energy technologies, the Task Force is hopeful that the Government Office for the North East will not 'call in' the application which would otherwise necessitate a public inquiry.

Welcoming the Council's decision, Task Force Chair, John Hamilton says: "This decision is a major milestone for the regeneration of Weardale. This is a landmark moment and we are delighted.

"The plans will see around 150 new jobs created from business investment and a further 200 jobs within the visitor and hospitality sector to replace those lost when the cement works, the major employer in the Dale, closed in 2002. They will also result in a new development at the forefront of the sustainability agenda.

"Currently Weardale is in a spiral of social and economic decline. The regeneration of the old cement works into a mixed use living, working and visitor development is the only 'show in town'. It is the only real opportunity to reverse the Dale's decline and presents a once-in-a-lifetime chance to provide for the next generation. Just allowing the site to remain idle and not grasping this opportunity would be a travesty. Weardale has always been a working dale. Our plans, drawn up over six

years and involving four rounds of extensive public consultation, balance the need for jobs with an awareness of the sensitive environment in which the site lies.”

Commenting on the decision Cllr Neil Foster, DCC Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration, says: “This project will create much needed jobs and vital investment in both business and housing in a rural area in great need of regeneration opportunities. It's very important that this is a sustainable project, offering long term and environmentally friendly gains to the local economy and the local workforce. It is an exciting and ambitious plan which will now be able to progress to the next stage, where –subject to detailed planning permission being obtained –we will see new jobs on the site.”

The Task Force is optimistic that the Government Office will not ‘call in’ the outline application and will be able to press ahead, without delay, in progressing detailed plans for the individual elements proposed within the site.

John Hamilton adds: “The redevelopment of the cement works at Eastgate is acknowledged in the Regional Spatial Strategy recently adopted by Government and it is one of just seven proposals in the County Durham Economic Strategy aimed at transforming the fortunes of the county. It is well-recognised that the benefits of our proposal will extend far beyond Weardale and that there is real strategic value in what we are doing at Eastgate. At the same time, our detailed Environmental Statement has shown that the proposal can be accommodated without unacceptable impact on the local environment. We are therefore hopeful that the Government

Office will see no need to 'call in' the application which would mean having a public inquiry and would put the whole project on hold for at least another year."

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Image: Artist's impression of Renewable Energy Village, David Lock Associates

Notes to editor:

- To view the master plan, prepared by David Lock Associates, and for a range of other information on the project, go to www.weardale-works.co.uk. Alternatively, call Durham County Council on 01388 761571 for a copy of the plan.

The Planning Process

- The Council announced this important decision at its Strategic Planning Committee meeting on 29 September 2009.
- The application was submitted to the local planning authority, DCC in April 2008.
- The application was put together, worked on, consulted upon and refined over 6 years prior to that.

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. The entire site, including the actual Renewable Energy Village, Riverside Meadows, The Slopes (hillside) and The Tops (quarry areas) will cover an area of 330 hectares (equivalent to 500 football pitches.)
- It will demonstrate best practice in sustainability by utilising – uniquely in the UK – 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 Renewable Energy 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.
- The public geothermally heated spa will only be the second such facility in the UK. It has been dubbed by the local MP, Rt Hon Hilary Armstrong MP, (Lab, North West Durham) the “Bath of the North.”