

## **PRESS RELEASE**

31 January 2008

### **WEARDALE PREPARES TO MEET JOB DEMANDS AT EASTGATE RENEWABLE ENERGY VILLAGE**

Eastgate Renewable Energy Village will provide a huge economic boost for Weardale and a study has just been completed to ensure the area is well prepared for the job opportunities it will bring.

Commissioned by Wear Valley District Council and the North East Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the Eastgate Skills and Employability Plan research was undertaken earlier this year and supported by West Durham Rural Pathfinder.

Bob Hope, strategic director for Environment and Regeneration at Wear Valley District Council says: “The Eastgate Skills and Employability Plan highlights the overwhelming support from our local colleges and training providers to contribute to the success of this initiative. Their backing will ensure local people are best placed to take advantage of the opportunities Eastgate Renewable Energy Village will bring.

“This research was commissioned to ensure we’re ready to maximise the job opportunities for local people in the construction, short and medium and long term phases of development by identifying any potential skills gaps and putting plans in place now to help meet them.

“The ‘green’ appeal of relocating a business into a renewable energy showpiece will be strong and even at this relatively early stage in development we are receiving strong commercial interest.”

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Local schools, colleges, universities and training and employment providers were consulted during the Eastgate Skills and Employability research, which identifies potential barriers to employment such as transport and childcare, as well as the skills which would be required to meet job opportunities at the development. It also highlights the ample labour pool of 845 active job seekers in a 15 mile radius of Eastgate.

Wolsingham School and Community College is just one of the local institutions that will be taking part in the local training and education network.

John Maddison, assistant headteacher says: “Eastgate is ideally placed to prepare the future workforce of the area. Our vision as an organisation is to use Eastgate as a catalyst for development, allowing us to work together to ensure that local people are best placed to take advantage of the job opportunities it will bring.

“We plan to deliver the skills and qualifications needed for students to support the Eastgate project, focusing on the environment, sustainable energy, geology and science. Ideally, we would like to deliver these relevant courses from our very own eco-centre at the site, which will be a classroom made of sustainable material.

“As a specialist school in Travel and Tourism the project is particularly relevant, and we hope Eastgate will act as a living case study of how regeneration can benefit a rural area.”

The proposals for a vibrant living and working community at Eastgate are designed to generate sustainable jobs for local people and create a draw for investment from outside this area.

Information produced through planning activity estimates that, subject to planning approval, the Renewable Energy Village will create around 150 jobs from business investment. A further 200 jobs will be generated in the visitor and hospitality sector

whilst a wealth of other opportunities are anticipated in the surrounding area as a result of the new economic activity at Eastgate.

Bryan Rees, chair of the West Durham Rural Pathfinder, says: “We worked with existing businesses within a 15 mile radius from Eastgate, allowing them to understand what is actually proposed for the site and what opportunities it may present. We were particularly keen to encourage businesses to work in a more joined-up way.”

Eastgate Renewable Energy Village will utilise the 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

Visitor Centre and education facilities

A range of leisure activities including extensive mountain bike trails.

For a range of information on the project, go to [www.weardale-works.com](http://www.weardale-works.com), call 01388 761571 or email [regeneration@wearvalley.gov.uk](mailto:regeneration@wearvalley.gov.uk).

The Eastgate Skills and Employability Plan (ES&EP) research was funded by the Learning & Skills Council (LSC) and West Durham Rural Pathfinder. Funding has been secured from the Learning & Skills Council, WVDC and Natural England through Defra’s Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF) to take forward elements of the ES&EP

**ENDS**

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**Notes to editor:**

The following local agencies were consulted in the creation of the Eastgate Skills and Employability Plan - Derwentside College, Durham Education and Business Partnership, Durham University, Bishop Auckland College, New College Durham, Wolsingham School and Community College, Job Centre Plus, East Durham and Houghall College, Harehope Quarry, Natural England, LSC (North East), Wear Valley District Council

**Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund:**

The Aggregates Levy is a tax on the production of primary aggregates (sand, gravel and crushed rock used, for example, in the construction industry). Introduced in April 2002 part of the money raised is to fund the Sustainability Fund.

This fund, the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund or ALSF, aims to address the environmental and social cost aggregate extraction by delivering environmental improvements, minimising the demand for primary aggregates, promoting environmentally friendly extraction and transport, encouraging the use of recycled and alternative materials, and reducing the local effects of aggregate extraction. Natural England is one of a number of organisations selected by Defra to award sustainability Fund grants for projects which reduce the effects of aggregate extraction. Natural England's ALSF Grant Scheme aims to support projects that reduce or research the effects of aggregate extraction on nature conservation, landscapes, access, informal recreation and communities.

**About Natural England:**

Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity that it brings.

Further information about Natural England's Aggregate Levy Sustainability Fund Grants Scheme can be found on [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk). The ALSF grants team can be contacted on 01476 584 821

**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.

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

(01388) 761571

[economic.regeneration@wearvalley.co.uk](mailto:economic.regeneration@wearvalley.co.uk)

**About West Durham Rural Pathfinder:**

West Durham Rural Pathfinder is part of a larger national initiative aimed at improving the delivery of rural services locally by connecting and influencing those involved in rural strategy, policy, funding and delivery, to help them identify better and more innovative ways of working. The Pathfinder area covers the whole of the Teesdale and Wear Valley districts. For more information, please contact the chair of the West Durham Rural Pathfinder, Bryan Rees, on (0191) 202 3669 or email [bryan.rees@gone.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:bryan.rees@gone.gsi.gov.uk) or visit [www.westdurhampathfinder.com](http://www.westdurhampathfinder.com).

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Supported through Defra's  
Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund