

PRESS RELEASE

May 2008

ENSURING A FUTURE FOR WEAR VALLEY

Former miner and council employee Stanley Bell is backing the proposed Eastgate Renewable Energy Village to reverse what he describes as 'worrying times' for Weardale.

Stanley, from St Johns Chapel has lived in the dale for over 70 years and has seen a significant decline in the area in recent years.

Stanley, 72, says: "Weardale has always been a working dale with the lead mining and quarries, but now it has ground to a halt.

"The loss of jobs means that the dale is no longer able to support itself and the declining numbers of people here are quickly removing the need of other businesses, trades and services. I never thought I would see the day when there was only a handful of shops between Stanhope and Killhope!

"Because the younger generation now have to move out of the dale to find work, the majority of the population is made up of elderly residents such as myself but when we are gone what will be left? Granted the dale is still a stunning region and prides itself on being an area of outstanding natural beauty, but if no-one is here to see it that means nothing!

"These are very worrying times for those people still living in the dale and without a project like Eastgate Renewable Energy Village things are only going to get worse. Eastgate will bring vital jobs back to the dale, allowing current residents to remain in the area and bring in new residents who will support our current struggling economy.

“It is about time Weardale stopped living in the past and moved forward to keep the dale alive.”

It is estimated that Eastgate Renewable Energy Village will create 150 jobs from business investment and a further 200 jobs in the visitor and hospitality sector. A wealth of other opportunities are anticipated in the surrounding area as a result of the new economic activity at Eastgate.

One NorthEast’s John Topliss, project manager for Eastgate Renewable Energy Village, said: “There are currently 6,500 people living in Weardale and the proposals for Eastgate are designed to ensure not only a better economic present for them, but also a sustainable long term future for their families.

“It is important that the dale is not too reliant on any one industry and we have therefore developed the Eastgate proposals to provide a variety of employment opportunities to suit a cross section of people.

”We have consulted widely when developing the plans to identify how Eastgate will complement existing businesses in the area and altered the proposals accordingly. For example, after consulting the Area Tourism Partnership we removed the 25 holiday lets that were in the original master plan to ensure increased opportunities for accommodation providers in the area.

“We have also included a crèche in the plans following a report commissioned by the Learning Skills Council which highlighted the importance of childcare facilities to allow local people to maximise the employment opportunities that will arise.”

The Renewable Energy Village will encompass a mix of homes, office and workshop accommodation, a hotel and a public geothermally heated spa – only the second in the UK. The entire site, including the actual Renewable Energy Village, Riverside Meadows, The Slopes (hillside) and The Tops (quarry areas) will cover a vast area, greater than 800 football pitches, and incorporate visitor attractions and fish-farming.

Unique in this country, Eastgate will be the only Renewable Energy Village to feature all five forms of land-based renewable energy available in the UK – hydro, solar, wind, biomass and geothermal. It will generate sufficient ‘clean’ electricity to offset the energy consumption of the whole of Weardale.

An outline planning application for the proposed Eastgate Renewable Energy Village in Weardale has now been submitted to Wear Valley District Council and is on display in Crook Civic Centre, Durham Dales Centre and Wolsingham Library.

In addition, information boards and posters showing plans contained in the application are visible at a number of locations throughout the Dale and at the Weardale Hub in Stanhope, and the plans are also available to view online at www.weardale-works.co.uk

For a range of information on the project, go to www.weardale-works.com, call 01388 761571 or email regeneration@wearvalley.gov.uk.

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Media Enquiries:

Robson Brown PR

Liz Luff / Michaela Crosthwaite

(0191) 2446659 / (0191) 244 6653

0797 4698759

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

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.

The outline planning application was submitted in late March 2008, with planning permission hoped for later this year.

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