

## **PRESS RELEASE**

July 2008

### **KEEPING THE DALE WE LOVE ALIVE**

Former head teacher Les Clarke is showing his support for the proposed Eastgate Renewable Energy Village to bring back the working heart of the community before it is too late.

Les, originally from Dartford, re-located to Weardale eleven years ago after falling in love with the area. He said: "When we first arrived in the Dale it was very much a self-sufficient community with its own supporting shops and services – Wearhead alone had two shops and a post office, but these are now all gone.

"The loss of jobs in the area means that this once strong community is now diminishing and the area needs employment to prevent Weardale from becoming even more of a commuter area.

"If something is not done the families in the area will suffer as schools die out and services fade away. Worryingly, this effect has already begun to take place and we are currently campaigning to prevent the loss of the ambulance service in the Dale. I would hate to see vital services like this and the surgery at St John's chapel be closed down when something can be done to revive the area.

"The Eastgate site is ideal for the purpose of regenerating Weardale – it is a large area that, as a previously used site, is already well-equipped to cater for the Dale's needs. Its existing power and railway links are both positives, making the site a perfect location for small businesses.

"I think it is important we act now - in ten to twenty years time it will be too late to save the Dale and we will regret not supporting this opportunity. Something needs to be done now while we still have the chance."

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: "The proposals for the project have been specifically designed to revive the local economy and ensure a sustainable long term future for people living in the Dale.

"We have recognised the need to bring money back into the area to support existing services and businesses and the estimated 350 jobs the project will prevent people from moving out of the area, spending much needed money in the dale.

"The plans will also bring visitors to the area and there will be an economic knock-on from business development on site to benefit the whole community."

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 500 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 'green' 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](http://www.weardale-works.co.uk)

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

## **ENDS**

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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.

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

[regeneration@wearvalley.gov.uk](mailto:regeneration@wearvalley.gov.uk).