



PRESS RELEASE - 8th December 2006

Updated Plans for Weardale's Eco-Friendly Community Receive Stamp of Approval
- Master Plan for Eastgate Renewable Energy Village Released to Public -

Newly updated plans for a proposed Renewable Energy Village in Weardale, County Durham, have been endorsed by the Weardale Task Force. The regeneration project is expected to create at least 350 jobs at the former Lafarge Blue Circle cement works, Eastgate.

A model and illustrations of the scheme are now available for public viewing in the Durham Dales Centre Tourist Information Office, Stanhope, until Monday 18th December.

This is the next significant step forward in the planning application process, and follows confirmation of support for the project from the vast majority of local residents consulted between 2003 and 2005.

The newly released 'master plan' will form the basis of the planning application submission, expected in autumn 2007, subject to further testing as part of the environmental assessment process.

The overall concept for the regeneration project is to create a sustainable 'mixed-use' living, working, education and tourism environment for the benefit of the people of Weardale and at the forefront of energy-efficiency. The site will utilise five forms of renewable energy: geothermal, hydro, wind, solar and biomass.

The updated master plan incorporates new interest from developers, design enhancements, and responds to comments from the local community. Plans for a hot springs spa - the 'Bath of the North' - remain a key feature of the project, following confirmation of the site's geothermal properties in July this year.

John Topliss of One NorthEast and spokesperson on behalf of the Weardale Task Force says: "All members of the Task Force have now given their stamp of approval to the updated master plan, which is an exciting leap forward for us in terms of preparing for the planning application submission.

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“This latest version of the plan is a result of a great deal of environmental, social and economic research and also reflects the growing interest we have had from businesses wishing to relocate to Eastgate. We’re thrilled that the site has the potential to create many sustainable all-year-round jobs for local people.”

Updates to the original master plan include (a full report is enclosed from David Lock Associates):

- A larger hot springs to accommodate a pool for general public use.
- Permanent residential accommodation separated from holiday lets, with many of the houses overlooking or close to the river Wear. In response to public consultation the overall number of houses has been reduced from 179 to 99, which includes 25 holiday lets and nine live/work units. This is the minimum considered necessary to create a living community.
- In addition to the renewable energy visitors’ centre, a separate education centre with classrooms and display areas has been introduced to increase the overall education element of the development.
- A new hostel, in addition to a planned hotel, will offer a wider choice of accommodation.
- A larger area for the railway station with more platforms to accommodate the rejuvenated Weardale Railway, a commuter service and excursion trains.
- Outdoor allotments for use by local residents, as requested during public consultation.
- A new ‘living machine’ sewage treatment system using an accelerated reed bed process.
- The surrounding Riverside Meadows will include a proposed outdoor education centre and geothermally heated koi carp fish ponds. An extensive network of mountain bike trails will snake through the hills and the tops.

Commenting on the next steps, Topliss continues: “We are in the process of appointing a team of specialist planning consultants who will prepare the planning application. The timing of the application submission is dependent on satisfactory completion of rigorous testing, but we predict that it will be early next autumn.”

A not-for-profit organisation will be set up to take the planning application forward, further details of which will be released shortly.



Topliss adds: "We're committed to keeping the community informed and encourage local residents to come and see the model at the Durham Dales Centre, which demonstrates a design at the cutting edge of eco-friendly living. We truly believe - and the latest updated master plan confirms - that this project will benefit the people of Weardale by creating jobs, boosting the economy and acting as a catalyst for the future regeneration of the district."

The Weardale Task Force is the body responsible for overseeing the formulation of the 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, with the specialist advice of town planning and urban design consultancy, David Lock Associates.

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Issued by Robson Brown PR on behalf of the Weardale Task Force

Notes to editors:

Images of the updated master plan and an artist's impression are on the enclosed CD. An image of the previous version of the master plan is available for comparison purposes. For further images please contact nicolag@robson-brown.co.uk, or lizl@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. 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-community 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 autumn 2007*, with planning permission hoped for by 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 Lafarge works, 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. An environmental study into the effect on local birds will continue until the end of winter 2006/07 so that seasonal observations can be made.

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Weardale Task Force

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