



PRESS RELEASE - 08 May 2006

**Weardale Farmers Have Their Say about Unique Renewable Energy Village  
Plans for Eastgate  
Biomass Fuel Opportunities for Local Agricultural Businesses**

Thirty agricultural businesses in Weardale will be consulted on how they could benefit from new opportunities, including supplying biomass fuel, created by the proposed Eastgate Renewable Energy Village.

The study, commencing in June for three months, will be conducted by local academic, Mike Dunn, as part of his post graduate qualification in Rural Development & Resource Management at Newcastle University. His report, due in September, will provide recommendations to the Weardale Task Force about how the local agricultural sector can benefit from business opportunities created at Eastgate.

The regeneration project on the former cement works site will provide an eco-friendly living, working and learning environment and visitor attraction for the benefit of people and businesses in Weardale. The new eco-community will uniquely utilise all five available forms of renewable energy, including biomass, which involves using plant material or agricultural waste as fuel. Other power sources will be geothermal hot water, wind, hydro and solar.

It is hoped that local agricultural businesses, as well as nearby forestry and woodlands, will supply biomass fuel, mainly from Willow and Poplar crop rotation, to heat water for the district heating system.

Other opportunities for agricultural businesses could include contract and maintenance work, jobs within a training and skills centre promoting traditional crafts and sustainable agricultural practices, plus bed & breakfast accommodation and farm shops for tourists.

Mike Dunn will be visiting 30 farmers individually to determine the viability of providing local biomass fuel, explore further business opportunities in-depth, and to report on the degree of support for the venture from the local farming community.

Dunn says: "The proposed Renewable Energy Village is for the benefit of people of the Dale and could have a positive impact on farming businesses looking for opportunities to diversify their skills.



"I'm looking forward to speaking to local farmers and discussing with them how their business could be given a new lease of life by the opportunities offered at the Eastgate development."

John Hamilton, Chairman of Weardale Task Force says: "This is one of several viability studies currently ongoing into how the Renewable Energy Village could benefit local businesses and the environment.

"We're looking forward to learning how we may best help local farmers maximise the new opportunities in the Dale, and we're also pleased to be supporting the work of a local academic, whose passion is to use his resulting Masters qualification to work on future regeneration projects in our region."

**ENDS**

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

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**Weardale Task Force**

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

(01388) 761571

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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. 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 May 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 affect on local birds will continue until the end of winter 2006/07 so that seasonal observations can be made.

#### **About Weardale Task Force**

Weardale Task Force is the body responsible for overseeing the formulation of a 'masterplan' 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.