

£20m sawmill gears up for action



The completion of the new sawmill takes the total site investment at Lockerbie by James Jones to about £35m

Operations have started at a £20m sawmill site in southern Scotland.

Larbert-based James Jones and Sons will employ 85 people at its new Lockerbie plant once it is fully up and running.

Commissioning work is currently under way and the company hopes to reach its peak timber production levels some time later this year.

South of Scotland general manager Eddie Balfour said it was the "fruition of a long-term plan" which started when the site was bought more than 10 years ago.

The new sawmill takes the total site investment in Lockerbie by the firm to about £35m.

Mr Balfour said there were a number of reasons for the expansion of the Dumfries and Galloway facility.

"We had already got a good base of skilled labour in the area," he said.

"The other key factor is that we have got a forestry resource in the south of Scotland and we are bang in the middle.

"The timber is primarily going south into the main construction centres - Birmingham, Manchester and London - we go all over the UK from here."

Once it is fully operational, the plant will produce 240,000 cubic metres of sawn timber a year.

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Eddie Balfour
James Jones general manager

The proposals for the site were unveiled in November 2007.

'Short-term pain'

Mr Balfour admitted that the changing economic climate had caused the company some concerns.

"We probably would have delayed it if we had foreseen what had been coming," he said.

"It got to the stage that we felt that for the long term strategy of the company we had to keep going with that process.

"We knew there was going to be some short-term pain - I think it would have been a mistake to have stopped it."

He added that the new sawmill underlined the company's commitment to the area.

"We wouldn't have spent this money if we did not think there were 20 years of timber supplies in front of us," he said.

"It's the fruition of a long-term plan which started when we purchased the site more than 10 years ago."