

£110m town centre regeneration programme launches in Pontypridd

Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans announced £10m of funding for the town's Taff Vale development, the first project to get underway as part of the Welsh Government's Building for the Future programme.

Building for the Future will regenerate town centres and surrounding areas by refurbishing or redeveloping derelict or under-used land and buildings and bringing them back to life. The multi-million pound programme, supported by £38m from the European Regional Development Fund and £16m from the Welsh Government's own targeted match fund, will support business growth, create employment and increase footfall in town centres. This builds on the work of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys and the priorities highlighted in the Our Valleys, Our Future delivery plan, including a commitment to close the employment gap between the South Wales Valleys and the rest of Wales.

The investment from the Welsh Government includes £7m of EU funding and means that site of the former Taff Vale Shopping Centre site in Pontypridd town centre will be transformed to create three distinctive buildings. These will house office space as well as community facilities, including a library and gym. The site has been derelict for many years, and the development will create a vibrant new quarter in the centre of the town.

Rebecca Evans, who recently joined the Valleys Taskforce, visited the site to see how the development is progressing. She said:

"The Taff Vale project demonstrates how we are meeting our Valleys Taskforce ambitions to create jobs, boost the construction industry and revitalise town centres. Transport for Wales, the next rail franchise and South Wales Metro operator, will be based in the development. It will transform the centre of Pontypridd and is currently the largest single development project in the town. It's exciting to see these fantastic buildings start to take shape.

"Through Building for the Future we are supporting local authorities and private and third sector partners to acquire, refurbish or redevelop unused buildings and land close to town and city centres. They will identify how these buildings could be used, including for commercial, public sector and residential purposes. We will work with local authorities and building users to target and offer employment and training opportunities to people seeking work.

"Building for the Future will re-energise our town centres and create some bright opportunities for people and businesses up and down the country. It's great to see this work is already underway

in Pontypridd.”

In addition to Welsh Government and EU funding, schemes supported through the Building for Future programme will be match funded from a range of public, third and private sector sources.

“Let’s work together and seize the opportunity of devolved teachers’ pay and conditions” – Kirsty Williams

Powers over teachers’ pay and conditions are in the process of being devolved to the Welsh Government from Westminster under the Wales Act.

The Welsh Government will take responsibility for this area at the end of this September, with teachers’ pay and conditions being set by the Welsh Government from September 2019.

A [consultation](#) opens today on the mechanism for deciding teachers’ pay and conditions in Wales, with a model that would see unions, employers and the Welsh Government working together as part of a partnership forum.

This new Partnership Forum would be able to propose changes to a draft remit for pay and conditions and set the agenda for any other issues that needed to be considered.

Following consideration of the Forum’s views, Welsh Ministers would submit a ‘final’ remit for scrutiny and analysis by an independent expert body prior to taking any final decisions.

Running parallel to the consultation is a group set up to review teachers’ pay and conditions, chaired by Professor Mick Waters. The group will consider where and how the current system could be improved and will report to the Cabinet Secretary later this year.

Responsibility for teachers’ pay and conditions forms part of a broader set of measures to strengthen the profession in Wales. These include investment in business managers to reduce the administrative burden on headteachers, addressing classroom bureaucracy, reducing infant class sizes and the introduction of new professional standards.

Kirsty Williams said:

“I want to work closely with the profession to help teachers be the best they can be and that means looking at everything we can do to

support them – whether it be a fair and sensible structure for deciding pay and conditions, new ways to cut classroom bureaucracy or better professional development.

“As a government, we have been absolutely clear that there’s no question of teachers being paid less than teachers in England. The model we’re consulting on will ensure that unions, employers and Welsh Government can come together and agree a fair, sensible and sustainable way forward.

“We also have to look at this in the round; there has never been a better opportunity to develop a truly national model that enshrines a national approach to supporting and elevating the profession.

“I would urge everyone who shares our ambitions to take part in this consultation.”

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[Welsh exports up by £1.8 billion](#)

The statistics show that Welsh exports to EU countries increased by £1.1 billion (11.9 per cent), while exports to non EU countries increased by £743 million (12.9 per cent).

In 2017, Welsh exports to EU countries accounted for 60.3% of Wales' exports which was more than 10 percentage points above the UK figure of 49.6%.

Germany was the top destination for Welsh goods, with over 19% of total Welsh exports going there. Meanwhile 53.2% of exports were classified as "Machinery and Transport Equipment."

Welcoming the statistics, Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

"This £1.8 billion increase in Welsh exports really is excellent news. It is evidence of a great deal of hard work and tenacity by our exporting companies who are succeeding in their efforts to

increase their share of overseas markets.

“Exporting really does have the potential to transform a business and take it to next level, which is why increasing the value of exports and the number of exporters remains a key Welsh Government priority.

“This is more important than ever as we prepare to leave the EU, and the Welsh Government is working hard to provide exporting companies with the support they need at this challenging time.

“Our new Economic Action Plan is clear about our commitment to prioritising exports and trade, and to helping businesses retain their existing trading partners while supporting them to branch out into other global markets.

“In a few days I will be travelling to China with 25 Welsh companies who are working with Welsh Government to grow their share of the Chinese market.

“We know that Welsh exports to China have grown significantly from nearly £194m in 2012 to nearly £313m in 2017 but I want to see those figures grow further.

“My visit to Hong Kong and Shanghai, and the accompanying trade mission is all part of our work to further strengthen our trade links with a country that currently boasts one of the strongest economies in the world and providing our companies with the tailored support packages that they need to reach their exporting goals.”

Finance Secretary discusses EU withdrawal with UK and Scottish Brexit Ministers at latest meeting of European Joint Ministerial Committee

Professor Drakeford will meet with David Lidington, Minister for the Cabinet Office and Mike Russell, Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland’s Place in Europe to discuss the UK’s Brexit Bill which as currently drafted, would allow the UK government to take control of devolved policy areas.

The meeting follows this week’s vote by the National Assembly to press ahead with the Welsh Government’s Continuity Bill as a fall back option which would

provide legal certainty for businesses and individuals in Wales while safeguarding devolution.

Mark Drakeford said:

“Our concerns about the UK government’s EU Withdrawal Bill remain. As currently drafted, it allows Whitehall to take control of devolved policy areas, such as farming and fishing, once we have left the EU.

“We urgently need to reach an agreement that protects devolution and we believe this can be achieved through the right amendments and that is why we continue to talk to the UK government on this issue.

“However, the clock is ticking and the parliamentary timetable is against us. It is vital that an agreement on our devolution settlement post-Brexit is achieved as soon as possible.”