

Multi-million pound investment to develop Urdd residential centres

The £5.5 million will enable Glan-llyn to develop a brand new Educational Centre and upgrade the Water Sports Training Centre, and Llangrannog will be able to implement the plans to transform key infrastructure.

Today 56% of all Welsh schools attend Urdd centres on residential courses, and of those who visited over the past 3 years, 26% came from the 20% most deprived communities in Wales.

More second language Welsh schools visit the centres than first language Welsh schools, which demonstrates their value as an access point to the Welsh language, and that it is alive and relevant.

Confirming Welsh Government's investment in the scheme, the Education Secretary said:

"It's my pleasure to announce this funding, under the 21st Century Schools Programme, for the development of Urdd facilities in Glan-llyn and Llangrannog. Modernising education infrastructure plays a key part in raising standards and delivering on our National Mission. The Urdd plays a vital role in providing yearlong learning opportunities for young people in Wales. They also make a vital contribution to creating children who are social and healthy, and use the Welsh language outside of school. I look forward to seeing these developments and how they will help to improve the Urdd experience for future children."

Siân Lewis, Urdd Chief Executive said:

"I would like to thank the Education Secretary for supporting our vision for developing Glan-llyn and Llangrannog to be pioneering, modern centres which support 'learning outside the classroom'. This concept enables children and young people to learn, develop personally and socially, and through Urdd centres this will all be achieved whilst at the same time increasing their confidence in their use of the Welsh language. Thanks to this substantial matching investment from Welsh Government, the Urdd will be able to improve facilities and resources, create new jobs in rural Wales, upgrade infrastructure and create a fantastic environment in which to encourage effective learning throughout the year for future generations of Welsh children and young people."

The £2.75m capital investment is part of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools and Education Programme and has been agreed as part of the two-year

Budget agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru.

Urdd research shows that schools and educational establishments across Wales have already seen a significant increase in the wellbeing of children and young people as a result of visiting the centres, as well as having a positive effect on their use and preception of the Welsh language.

With 47,000 annual visitors and a turnover of £5.2 million, Llangrannog and Glan-llyn currently employ 160 staff between them. This funding will ensure new employment opportunities to include 12 new apprenticeships. It is anticipated that the increase in visitors at the centres will result in an additional £1.3m in turnover for Urdd Gobaith Cymru.

Electric charging points on strategic road links in Wales given £2million funding boost

The £2million funding, secured as part of the two-year Budget agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, will be used to help create a publicly accessible national network of rapid charging points by 2020.

The funding will be focused on locations on or near strategic Welsh road networks, with a particular emphasis on North-South and East-West journeys.

The Transport Secretary Ken Skates said he had also tasked officials to explore the feasibility of funding charging points at park and ride facilities and at taxi ranks.

He confirmed he was looking at a national concession model to deliver and run the network, whereby a contractor would have the exclusive right to operate, maintain and carry out investment in the network. He envisaged the contract would be procured and overseen by Transport for Wales (TfW).

Ken Skates said:

“We are committed to promoting the use of electric and hybrid vehicles in the transition from petrol and diesel.

“This funding for electric charging points will be a massive boost to the network and will help motorists who want to use electric vehicles for longer journeys.

“This could prove to be a catalyst for change in our efforts to support the use of electric vehicles. We have chosen to focus on the North/South and East/West routes as we realise their importance

for travelling around Wales.

“In these challenging times it is more important than ever that we work to improve sustainable transport links, to increase our low carbon transport options and to make Wales as accessible as we can.

“This funding is a clear demonstration of our commitment towards mitigating the impacts of climate change alongside reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality.”

There are currently 500 publicly accessible charging points in Wales and 2,500 plug in vehicles.

With the number of new electric and hybrid car registrations in Wales having increased by 35% in 2017 the Welsh Government hopes that this latest investment will help to meet the rising demand and encourage more people in Wales to invest in electric vehicles.

[Purple Option for Third Menai Crossing](#)

The Purple option would see a new bridge constructed to the east of the existing Britannia Bridge. Additional facilities for pedestrians and cyclists will be included as part of the scheme.

An appraisal of the options revealed the Purple option provides the highest economic benefits, offers ‘high’ value for money and is the best performing in terms of highway alignment. It was also the most popular option of the public consultation with 25 per cent of respondents selecting it as their first choice.

As part of the next stages, a procurement exercise will take place to appoint Technical Advisors to develop the preliminary design and prepare for publication of draft Orders and an Environmental Statement.

Further analysis is also required as part of the next stage of development to determine which form of bridge is most suitable. The cost of the structure is dependent on this analysis.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“The A55 is important locally, nationally and internationally. It provides the main economic artery for North Wales and connects the region with the rest of Wales, the UK and Europe.

“The Britannia Bridge is the only section of the route which is single carriageway and we know this reduction in lanes leads to

congestion at peak times and during the tourist seasons. There is very strong case for increasing capacity across the Menai and I am delighted the Welsh Government is taking action to address the issue.

“Based on the appraisal undertaken on the options, the Purple Option performs best and would be vital in improving journey times, strengthening the A55’s resilience, and ensuring safer travel across the Menai Strait.

“It will also provide economic benefits and ensure the route is fit for purpose as traffic volume is expected to increase over the years to come.”

Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates said:

“We have made it known for a long time our intention to build a third Menai crossing and today’s announcement is a significant step forward in delivering exactly that.

“The Purple option provides us with an opportunity to develop a crossing which would allow people to seamlessly cross the Menai Strait and support future projects such as Wylfa Newydd.

“We fully understand the sensitivity of placing a new crossing over the Menai Strait and further visualisation assessment and analysis work will now take place before the bridge type is selected and taken forward to the next stage of scheme development.

“The Welsh Government is investing hundreds of millions of pounds in North Wales and the announcement of the Purple Option as the preferred route for the third Menai crossing is yet another great example of our commitment to the region.”

Migration top of the agenda as Finance Secretary meets with UK and Scottish Brexit Ministers at latest meeting of European Joint Ministerial Committee

Besides a discussion of the state of negotiations with the EU27, there will be a strong focus on migration issues following the Prime Minister’s recently announced plan to reduce low-skilled immigration from the EU. Home Office

Minister, Caroline Nokes will also attend along with the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, Dominic Raab and Scottish Government Ministers.

Speaking in advance of the meeting, Professor Drakeford said:

“It is simply wrong, as the Prime Minister did at the Conservative Party Conference, to pretend that migration policy can be discussed in a vacuum, when the rights of British citizens to live and work elsewhere in Europe and vice-versa will be a critical part of the negotiations on a future relationship with the EU. The Migration Advisory Committee’s recent report has shown that we will continue to need – and benefit from – migration into the future. It would be foolish in the extreme to put at risk our access to the single market by insisting on ending freedom of movement only to have to increase inward migration from other parts of the world.

“More generally, we need a migration policy that allows us to attract workers into the right areas; both in terms of the type of work and the locations. We need a migration policy that works for the whole of the UK, not just for South East of England.

“For Wales, access to lower skilled labour is crucial, and should not be inhibited by an arbitrary salary threshold.

“Given the importance to our economic prosperity, and the interconnectivity between migration and our devolved responsibilities for public services such as education, health and local government, we are seeking assurance from the UK Government that we will be given the opportunity to share our views with them and that they will be taken on board, before the UK government sets out its future immigration policy later in the year.”

The meeting comes a week ahead of a crucial meeting of the European Council on the 17 October and 6 months ahead of the UK leaving the European Union in March 2019.

The Finance Secretary continued:

“A sensible deal is within reach but we want the Welsh Government to be fully engaged on the content of the political declaration on the future relationship before it is agreed with the EU. Chequers was a step in the right direction, but the government will have to move more decisively in the direction set out in our White Paper Securing Wales Future, if a satisfactory outcome to the negotiations is to be achieved.”

Funding announced for Pembrokeshire Library during Libraries Week

The funding comes from The Transformation Capital Grant Programme which supports museums, archives and libraries to transform services for users, and ensure their future sustainability.

The project will see the creation of a new build extension as part of a wider development project which will transform the Neyland Athletics Club into a community hub. This would transform the library into a multi-use facility, making it more financially sustainable and improving performance; it will also help the library to engage with the community, and assist it to deliver a professional library service.

Lord Elis-Thomas, said:

“I’m delighted to be able to announce this funding during Libraries Week – and I’ve been able to see first-hand the improvements this fund has already made in creating bright, modern and welcoming spaces for everyone.

“While Libraries Week is a great chance to discover the range of things you can do at your library, from play and learning for children, to managing your health, to accessing free wifi and games, to finding a job, the focus this year on wellbeing allows us to consider the wider role libraries can play to strengthen our communities. And this new development at Neyland will be a great asset for the whole community. Many libraries are at the centre of people’s lives and they have the potential to transform those lives by allowing a space for experiences to be shared and for promoting learning opportunities.”

Paul Miller, Pembrokeshire County Council’s Cabinet Member for Economy, Tourism, Leisure and Culture – who is also the Councillor for Neyland West – said:

“Two years ago our community was faced with the prospect of all but losing its library service with proposals under consideration to reduce opening hours to a maximum of two days a week.

“Now, thanks to this partnership between Neyland Community Interest Company, Pembrokeshire County Council and Welsh Government the community can look forward to a brand new, purpose-built library incorporating the latest technology and open seven days a week.

“It’s a great outcome for everyone and the new Community Hub remains on track to open its doors before the end of 2019.”