

Press release: Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns' New Year message for 2018.

Each New Year provides us with the opportunity to reflect on our achievements over the 12 months, and look forward to the year that stretches before us.

2017 was the year that Wales once again shone in the global spotlight and underlined its credentials as a first class host of major sporting events when Cardiff hosted the UEFA Champions League final. The biggest sporting event in the world that year was beamed to 200 countries and up to 170,000 fans from all over the world flocked to the city and left with a clear and positive message about everything Wales has to offer.

There is little doubt that 2017 was also the year that launched the UK into a seminal moment in our political and constitutional history.

We began the year by writing a new chapter in Welsh devolution as the Wales Bill received Royal Assent. In March we triggered Article 50, putting the decision taken by the British people to leave the European Union into action. And we ended the year by reaching an agreement on the first phase of negotiations which will take us through to discussions on trade and security in 2018.

It was the year that the UK Government also underpinned its ambition to re-balance the Welsh economy and grow the private sector with major investment in infrastructure.

The decision to reduce the Severn Tolls before abolishing them altogether, the introduction of state of the art trains on the Great Western Mainline and funding for superfast broadband, are all essential steps towards delivering long-term, balanced economic growth.

We have also continued to demonstrate that this Government is firmly on the side of business. The Government's modern Industrial Strategy has been designed to build on Wales' strengths in fields such as aerospace, technology and life sciences and I want to ensure that we are putting our best foot forward to maximise the benefits for Wales from the initiatives and grand challenges it presents.

And of course, the UK Government has set out the way forward for a comprehensive and ambitious series of City Deals for Cardiff and Swansea, is progressing with a growth deal for North Wales and is opening discussions on a growth deal for the Mid Wales region.

These deals are about creating a network of regional economic powerhouses capable of forging mutually beneficial connections and linkages.

This is why our announcement to abolish the Severn tolls is so important – my number one aim when I became Secretary of State – sending a direct message to businesses, commuters and tourists alike that we are committed to

strengthening the links between England and Wales.

And in order to build on this, one of my first tasks in the New Year will be to host a Summit on 22nd January at the Celtic Manor to bring together local partners from across the South West of England and the South Wales to explore how we can further strengthen the links between the two economies.

So if 2017 was the year of progress for Wales and the United Kingdom, 2018 will be the year where we must have the vision and the courage to seize the opportunities these moment present.

This is also the challenge that we lay down to the Welsh Government when firmer foundations for devolution in Wales come into force on 1 April next year. The new reserved powers model of devolution in Wales will make clear what is devolved, and the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales, and what is reserved – and the responsibility of Parliament. This will put more decisions into the hands of Welsh Ministers, giving them important new levers to grow the Welsh economy and to deliver better public services across Wales.

As the voice of the UK Government in Wales, and the voice of Wales in Westminster my department will continue to closely with departments across Whitehall to ensure companies and investors see Wales as an outward-looking, ambitious trading partner. That was the message I gave to business leaders on my recent trips to Japan and Qatar, where I spoke to a number of investors – both existing and potential – about what Wales has to offer post EU exit. And it will be the message we will carry forward into 2018.

The UK Government will not be found wanting in energy, enterprise or enthusiasm when it comes to delivering for Wales. In 2018, we will continue to manage our economy carefully, to build a country that works for everyone and an economy that is fit for the future.

This is how we will preserve, protect and progress our prosperity.

On behalf of my ministerial colleagues, I wish you all a very healthy, happy and prosperous 2018.