

Minister praises work of Wales' environmental groups

The Minister was speaking before Keep Wales Tidy's annual Tidy Wales Awards, in Cardiff Bay's Pierhead Building, where she will present awards and thank volunteers for the work they carry out to improve the quality of their local environment.

Welsh Government funding has enabled Keep Wales Tidy to work collaboratively with Local Authorities, community groups and the public to engage in a wide range of projects to improve the local environment.

Hannah Blythyn said:

"I am extremely honoured to have been given the opportunity by the First Minister to lead work that affects every corner of Wales, from improving the quality of the air we breathe, to enhancing access and recreation opportunities.

"I am grateful to Keep Wales Tidy for inviting me to this event today – my first as Minister. They are a great example of an organisation that is carrying out important work to improve local environment quality in communities across Wales. Their activities help keep our public spaces free from litter and fly-tipping so people can take pride in and make good use of the places where they live.

"I look forward to working closely with Keep Wales Tidy and the many other organisations represented by my portfolio. Together, we can help achieve a cleaner, greener Wales that benefits communities and future generations in Wales and beyond."

Further calls for devolution of Air Passenger Duty to Wales

According to new, independent analysis, devolving and then reducing APD in Wales would directly result in a significant boost for the economies of both South Wales and the South West of England.

And a meeting with influential business leaders earlier this month showed that support for this move from prominent figures in the aviation, tourism

and business sectors in Wales is unanimous.

The UK Government has previously said that devolving APD to Wales would cause “unjustifiable disadvantages to Bristol [airport]” and would not be in the interests of passengers in those areas.

However, APD is already devolved to Northern Ireland and UK Minister’s have also given the same commitment to Scotland.

The Welsh Government argues that the UK Government’s reluctance to devolve APD continues to place unjustifiable constraints on Wales’ ability to promote itself abroad and is hindering growth in its aviation sector and wider economy.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“With APD already devolved to Northern Ireland and the commitment given to devolve APD to Scotland, the UK Government’s refusal to move on this issue is undermining our economic position compared to our colleagues in other devolved administrations.

“Following publication of independent analysis on the devolution of APD to Wales, we recently held a meeting with prominent figures in the aviation, tourism and business sectors in Wales to discuss this new evidence. That meeting showed that support for the devolution of APD is unanimous, with it being broadly viewed as a move that will help ensure Wales is open for business across international borders.

“The meeting also showed that there is a widely held view that APD is negatively affecting businesses within our economy and its reduction or removal would be a stimulus to enable competition and increase growth.

“I have made clear that if APD was devolved I would reduce it in Wales, a move that I am confident would better connect Wales with transport and business hubs and act as a huge stimulus for business and investment.

“The UK Government gave a clear commitment to review any new evidence – I call on them again to act in the interests of Wales on this important matter.”

[Devolution of air passenger duty to Wales.](#)

Minister champions Welsh skills talent at national Skills Shows 2017

Held annually in Birmingham's NEC, the Skills Show – which runs from 16-18 November this year – is the largest skills and careers event in the UK. It also hosts the WorldSkills UK Finals, where Wales has secured the highest number of entrants of all UK regions into this year's competition.

The Finals are used to benchmark excellence across a range of vocational skills areas. They are also used as part of the selection process for the international competitions EuroSkills Budapest 2018 and WorldSkills Kazan 2019.

Around 500 competitors are taking part in the WorldSkills UK Finals, which consists of up to 60 national competitions where entrants battle it out for Gold, Silver and Bronze medals and recognition as the best in the UK. Of that figure, 71 competitors are Welsh, accounting for approximately 14% of the UK total making it the highest regional representation.

In addition, nine talented students have been invited back to compete for a place in Squad UK for the WorldSkills Budapest / Kazan cycle. Sixteen entrants are also taking part in the 'Inclusive Skills' competitions, which have been specifically designed for those with disabilities.

WorldSkills UK will also announce the overall winner of its Local Heroes 2017 award at the Show.

Local Heroes are supporters of WorldSkills UK who drive their organisation's involvement in competitions. In addition to promoting benefits of WorldSkills to students, apprentices and senior managers, they give their time to support competitors, putting on additional training competitors and offering pastoral and moral support.

Six people have made WorldSkills UK's Highly Commended shortlist for the Local Heroes 2017 award and two are from Wales – Darren Collins from Airbus UK (Broughton) and Rona Griffiths from Coleg Cambria.

Speaking at the event, Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning Minister, Eluned Morgan said:

"That Wales has almost 100 competitors taking part in this year's Skills Show is a fantastic achievement and testament of our national skills excellence and talent.

"Supporting skills growth and talent development is a key priority for the Welsh Government. Through our various employment and vocational skills programmes – including our new Apprenticeship Policy which places a greater emphasis on higher level skills – we are committed to helping individuals achieve their goals and become

valued members of the Welsh workforce.

“By taking part in Skills Competitions like this we are creating a highly skilled nation that will support our economy, safeguard our industries and improve the prospects of Wales.

“I wish everyone taking part in this week’s competitions the very best of luck and extend my thanks to those who have supported them on their journey for all their hard work and dedication to help make this happen.”

Further £4.5m funding boost for Ebbw Vale

The funding will support the construction of a new business hub on The Works site, which will be designed for emerging businesses in sectors including research and development, high-tech engineering and pharmaceuticals.

Around two acres of land on Lime Avenue will be redeveloped to create more than 20,000 sq ft of business floor-space by 2019. The project is also being funded with £2m from Blaenau Gwent Council.

The £6.5m development follows other EU and Welsh Government investments in The Works site, including the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone, which is providing state-of-the-art educational facilities for Blaenau Gwent and the Heads of the Valleys.

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“We are committed to maximising EU funding while it is available and investing in projects that will create long-term benefits for local economies, people and communities in every part of Wales.

“This development in Ebbw Vale will help attract young, ambitious businesses to the area with great potential to expand and create good-quality jobs locally.”

The Lime Avenue development supports the ambition of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys’ Our Valleys, Our Future plan to help improve prosperity across the South Wales valleys.

It also follows last month’s announcement of funding for a new 50,000 sq ft industrial building in Ebbw Vale, which is the first stage in the creation of the Welsh Government’s £100m Technology Park, which will create up to

1,500 new jobs in the area.

Councillor Dai Davies, Blaenau Gwent Council's executive member for regeneration, said:

"We welcome today's announcement from the Finance Secretary to fund high-quality hybrid-style business units on The Works site, which we hope will create new enterprise and jobs in Blaenau Gwent.

"Once completed, we will be looking to market the units to attract entrepreneurs who want to take forward high-value businesses in sectors such as research and development, high-tech engineering, pharmaceuticals, digital technology and creative industries."

[Packaging company creates 250 jobs in Wrexham](#)

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates has announced that Hotpack Ltd has completed on the purchase of property and land at the Llay Industrial Estate in Wrexham with a view to creating 250 manufacturing and warehouse jobs on the site over the next 3 to 5 years.

After 22 years of expansion in the middle east, the Hotpack management team had been looking for a suitable location to manufacture in Europe. The company's decision to locate to North Wales follows months of support and advice from the Welsh Government as well as a £1.5m loan provided through the Development Bank. The loan is the first in North Wales to come from the Welsh Government's £100 million Wales Flexible Investment Fund.

The company has praised the support it received from Welsh Government and the Development Bank which helped it to select Wales as a base ahead of stiff competition from Slovakia and other European countries.

Hotpack's location in North Wales is expected to bring £50m of inward investment to the region.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

"I am delighted that following a period of close working between Welsh Government and Hotpack Ltd, and £1.5m of support through the Development Bank, the company has made the decision to move to Wrexham.

"With a business plan that expects to deliver 250 jobs over the

next 3 years, I am confident that Hotpack's move here will bring genuine benefits to the local economy and community, and I look forward to visiting when the new facility is up and running.

"This is an example of exactly what can be achieved when businesses are given access to the right advice support. Last month I was pleased to launch the Development Bank of Wales, which will provide us with a competitive edge over the rest of the UK. I am confident this will ensure we enjoy even more success in boosting job opportunities in communities right across Wales."

Hotpack Packaging Global Managing Director, Mr Abdul Jebbar said:

"From our very first visit to region, the people of Wales and in particular Wrexham, offered us an exceptional levels of support, both personally and commercially.

"We were particularly impressed to by the assistance of Economy Secretary, Ken Skates and Rural Affairs Secretary, Lesley Griffiths, other local politicians and Wrexham Council. The Welsh Government's business support team have worked closely with us throughout our fact finding visits. Having now completed on the site purchase, we have already commenced the site factory & development and we took forward to a long and mutually prosperous relationship with the people and businesses of Wales.

North Wales Regional Manager, Rhodri Evans of the Development Bank of Wales said:

"It is great news the first company in North Wales to benefit from the Wales Flexible Investment Fund is one with the potential of major job growth in the area. Working with Welsh Government, we have been able to provide the finance to help attract an expanding business to Wales and choose Wrexham as the location for its first UK base."

Hotpack will be sharing the site with Sharp who are already located there.