

Appointment of a Member to the Board of Natural Resources Wales announced

Geraint's appointment means the Board now has 13 members, including the Chief Executive. Geraint is a first language Welsh speaker, who will strengthen the Welsh language skills of the Board. He has been an upland farmer in North Wales for 20 years, and is an advocate for producing sustainable food whilst delivering environmental goods.

Minister Lesley Griffiths said:

“Following the recent scheme to recruit new members for NRW's Board, I asked the Advisory Panel to look again at those who applied and are able to converse fluently in Welsh.

“I attach great importance to NRW's role and the work of its Board and am pleased to announce Geraint appointment to the Board.”

Sir David Henshaw said:

“I am looking forward to working with Geraint and supporting NRW to deliver for Wales.”

Natural Resources Wales is the largest Welsh Government Sponsored Body – employing 1,900 staff across Wales with a budget of £180 million. It was formed in April 2013, largely taking over the functions of the Countryside Council for Wales, Forestry Commission Wales and the Environment Agency in Wales, as well as certain Welsh Government functions.

Geraint Davies has been farming for over 20 years in the Snowdonia National Park, North Wales.

He is an advocate for producing sustainable food whilst delivering environmental products.

His land management experience encompasses upland habitat management including upland water retention, ancient woodland, soil health and effective grassland management. He has a particular interest in creating and maintaining bird habitat on his farm.

Geraint is the former Wales Chair and Director of Nature Friendly Farming Network, Director of Partneriaeth Penllyn, Chair of the Farmers' Union of Wales Younger Voice Committee as well as being active in local committees in

Meirionnydd.

Geraint is a fluent Welsh speaker.

Welsh Government and Thales to work together on £20m cyber centre in Blaenau Gwent

The National Digital Exploitation Centre (NDEC) will be the first research and development facility of its kind in Wales, and will provide the perfect setting for SMEs and microbusinesses to test and develop their digital concepts.

It will also provide a research lab in which big multi nationals can develop major technology advances and will connect Wales to major tech centres across the UK and globally.

Not only will the cyber centre help Wales to exploit the global opportunities of digital transformation, it will also equip businesses with the skills and knowledge they need to win a greater share of large regional and national projects.

The NDEC, located in Blaenau Gwent, will be delivered by Thales in collaboration with the University of South Wales (USW).

The University will run an Advanced Cyber Institute at the Centre that will provide a base for major, multi million pound academic research and will also operate a Digital Education Centre that will enable SMEs, schools and individuals with the skills they need to protect themselves online.

As well as providing a vital facility for Welsh SMEs and academic research, the NDEC will also root technology giant Thales firmly in the South Wales valleys. The centre will be managed by a small team, some of whom have already been recruited from the local community.

Both the Welsh Government and Thales have committed £10m each to the project which is expected to generate significant income. All elements, apart from the educational aspects of the centre, are expected to be fully self-sufficient within five years.

Announcing the Welsh Government's partnership with Thales, Economy Minister Ken Skates said:

"I am delighted that the Welsh Government is working in partnership with global technology company Thales on a new £20m cyber centre

that will be located in Blaenau Gwent and right at the heart of our Tech Valleys project.

The centre will help ensure that Wales exploits the global opportunities of digital transformation, provide a base for ground breaking research and will equip businesses of all shapes and sizes with the skills and knowledge they need to win a greater share of large regional and national projects.

I am confident that through our partnership with Thales and the University of South Wales we will work to stimulate and create employment in high value technology businesses – an ambition that is right at the heart of our Tech Valleys project.”

Speaking of the announcement, Gareth Williams, Vice President, Secure Communications and Information Systems, Thales, said:

“We are very pleased to be working with the Welsh Government, University of South Wales and Blaenau Gwent Council to develop and deliver the NDEC. This will act as a cornerstone of our cyber security capabilities in the UK, providing a test bed for our technology, whilst also providing a catalyst for regeneration in the region.

This highly technical and accessible facility will be a centre of cyber and digital development and education, and a connection for South Wales to major technology centres across the United Kingdom.”

Professor Julie Lydon, University of South Wales (USW) Vice-Chancellor, said:

“USW is already a recognised expert in cyber security, with our Newport-based National Cyber Security Academy (NCSA) working closely with businesses to give students real-life experience in the sector.

This expertise in preparing students for a career in industry means we are ideally placed to support the NDEC’s aim of harnessing academic research and graduate education to develop market insight, enhance technological capability, and develop a skilled labour force in Ebbw Vale and the wider South Wales region through its educational outreach, CPD courses, and support for SMEs.

This project will be a significant step in building the region’s reputation in the ever-expanding global market for cyber graduates and research expertise.”

The Tech Valleys project is a key commitment of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys.

Up to £210m opens the door to more self-builders in Wales

Through Self-Build Wales:

- the Development Bank of Wales will offer loans on pre-agreed plots
- the loans will be repayment free until the new home is mortgaged allowing people to build their new home and cover living costs
- successful applicants can choose to use an approved builder or in certain circumstances do the work themselves
- local authorities and housing associations will make plots available with planning and site requirements complete
- every plot will have a 'Plot Passport' including approved designs, an estimated build cost and options for personalising the home
- approved applicants can reserve a plot by providing a 25% deposit on the plot cost. The Welsh Government through the Development Bank of Wales will provide the rest of the funding.

£210m is the projected investment over the term of the scheme as the initial £40m Welsh Government investment will be recycled.

Housing and Local Government Minister Julie James said:

"We want to make self-build available to many more people in Wales, not just the most privileged households. Finding the land, navigating planning consents and being able to afford to self-build while covering the cost of living can be real barriers.

"We have launched this scheme in partnership with local authorities to overcome all of these barriers. This offers a route into home ownership for people who want to stay in their local area but haven't previously been able to afford to buy there. It also offers older and disabled people the opportunity to build custom adaptive housing that meets their needs in the communities where they want to live.

"Figures suggest an average self-build house in the UK costs only 70-75% of its final value because no developer profits are involved. This puts that benefit into the pocket of the homeowner. At around 10% of new homes the UK has a much lower rate of self-building than other countries around the world.

"As we work to increase the amount of housing available, this scheme will help people who wouldn't normally think of self-build to consider it seriously.

“The scheme will launch in late spring this year, and in the coming months there will be more information available on the Your Home in Wales website.”

Finance Minister, Rebecca Evans said:

“I am pleased that we are using the capital funding in our Budget to support schemes such as Self-Build Wales, helping people to build their own homes whilst stimulating our housing and property market.”

Andrew Baddeley-Chappell, CEO of the National Custom and Self-Build Association said:

“Most of us aspire to build our own homes, yet despite the growth in the sector, too few currently achieve that dream. Putting the homeowner in charge leads to more homes of better quality and value. It helps bond the homeowner to the community where such homes are built. This package of measures sends a clear message that Wales welcomes and supports self-builders and we are excited to see the positive benefits that will flow from this announcement.”

Wrexham team helping the homeless praised by First Minister

The Community Care Hub, which has benefited from Welsh Government funding, provides health and social care services to rough sleepers, together with housing and welfare advice and a range of other services.

The hub was founded in 2016 by Wrexham GP Dr Karen Sankey, Dewi Richards, a mental health manager at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Tanya Jones from homeless charity The Wallich.

It holds weekly drop-in sessions with a number of organisations, including the health board, Department for Work and Pensions and Wrexham Council. The hub now supports more than 100 people who are homeless, sleeping rough or have mental health or substance misuse problems.

The First Minister joined one of the drop-in sessions at the Salvation Army building in Wrexham.

Mark Drakeford said:

“As the weather turns colder it is vital the right support is available for people who are homeless and sleeping rough.

“We’ve recently announced £1.34m to tackle rough sleeping in Wales this winter, including £54,000 for the Community Care Hub, in Wrexham.

“The multi-agency approach here, with everyone available in one place to provide vital advice and support is exemplary. There are a number of complex reasons why people find themselves homeless and it is important they have the opportunity to access the right support at the right time – as they do here.

“I would like to thank all those involved in this project for their hard work and dedication.”

Dr Sankey said:

“I am delighted with what the community care collaborative has achieved at the hub in partnership with AVOW and the Salvation Army, working with a wide range of voluntary and statutory sector partners.

“The hub is an innovative model of primary care offering an accessible, holistic, person-centred approach that meets the health and wellbeing needs of some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

“The success of the hub has attracted funding support from the Welsh Government, the Steve Morgan Foundation, the Waterloo Foundation and the Allen Lane Foundation, enabling the collaborative to employ care navigators – one of whom was a hub user in its early days.

“Working with the health board, we are exploring how the model could be replicated as an alternative model of primary care provision for the wider community.”

Major Roger Batt, Salvation Army Divisional Commander for NW England & North Wales:

“I am so pleased that First Minister, Mark Drakeford has come along today to Wrexham Salvation Army to see for himself what a vital service the care hub is providing to people experiencing homelessness in and around the town.

“The fact that visitors who may have primarily just dropped in to

the church to get a hot meal and a change of clothes can also get to see a GP, go to the harm reduction surgery or get advice on benefits while they're here is just brilliant.

"The care hub is really helping to reconnect people to the support they need to overcome homelessness and I am full of admiration for everyone involved in the partnership for making it such a success."

Minister for Environment urges fishers to prepare for no-deal Brexit

From 29 March 2019, in the event of a 'no deal', most fish and fish products will require a catch certificate for import or export between the UK and EU. This also applies to fishers who land fish directly into EU ports.

Catch certificates prove fish have been caught in line with established conservation and management measures. All non-EU countries are required to present catch certificates when trading with the EU.

The Welsh Government is holding a series of Brexit and Fisheries roadshow events over the coming week. The events are aimed at helping the industry prepare for Brexit, share information and provide support about what documents and certificates are needed in a post-Brexit world.

The Minister for the Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs said:

"Let me be clear, I believe the best outcome for the fishing industry is a deal. A no deal would have a devastating impact on the sector and must be avoided at all costs.

"However we need to plan ahead for all eventualities and our fishers need to be prepared for a no-deal Brexit. That is why they need to be aware of the processes they need to undertake to be able to transition smoothly to doing business outside of the EU.

"As a Government, we are doing all we can to support the sector prepare for Brexit and the challenges it brings. Our forthcoming roadshow events will help the fishing industry know what they need to do to prepare and help put them in a position to adapt to the changing markets. I urge all fishers to come along and find out more."

A new IT system to process and issue export catch certificates, and other supporting documentation, is being developed to help streamline the process. Exporters will receive full instructions on how to register and use the new system before the UK leave the EU. Import catch certificates will continue to be processed through the current paper-based system.

In addition to documents required under IUU regulations, fish importers and exporters will also need to follow additional steps to comply with health and customs regulations, in the event of a 'no deal' EU Exit.

Fishers and fishing businesses can stay up to date with the latest advice on EU Exit on GOV.UK

To inform fishers of the new processes and address any questions, the Welsh Government is running a series of consultation events throughout January. Dates and venues are below.

16th January – Caernarfon, Celtic Royal Hotel, LL55 1AY

17th January – Holyhead, Standing Stones Pub, LL65 2UQ

22nd January – Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire Yacht Club, SA73 3RS.

23rd January – New Quay, Black Lion Hotel, SA45 9PT.

24th January – Barmouth, Merioneth Yacht Club, LL42 1HB.

30th January – Saundersfoot, Saundersfoot Sailing Club, SA69 9HE.

31st January – Bury Port, Bury Port Yacht club, SA16 0ER.