

Landscape lessons from Europe for Taskforce team

One of the priorities contained within 'Our Valleys, Our Future', the Valleys Taskforce's delivery plan, is to explore the concept of a Valleys Landscape Park, to help local communities build on their many natural assets, including the potential for community energy generation and tourism.

Neckar Park, Stuttgart, Germany, and Hoge Kempen National Park, Genk, Belgium are two global-leading examples of landscape parks, and Alun Davies, as chair of the Taskforce, was keen to learn more about how both celebrate their heritage while supporting local economies.

Alun Davies said:

"I have said all along that the taskforce must make a positive difference to the lives of people working and living in the Valleys.

"We all agree the Valleys should be a place people are proud to call home; a place where businesses choose to invest and operate; where communities are empowered and show pride in their environment, and the environment itself is an integral part of people's lifestyles.

"The areas we visited this week are excellent examples of what could be achieved in the South Wales Valleys. Both parks were developed in former industrial areas, where the heritage was celebrated, rather than left to rot. These inspiring public spaces have enhanced the environmental quality and recreational value of their region for the benefit of their communities and tourists alike."

The Cabinet Secretary pledged to meet with community partners from across the Valleys to discuss his visit and proposals to establish a similar scheme here in the future. Stakeholders will be asked to consider how the concept could work in their community and for contributions to the name and branding.

He said it was essential the people of the Valleys were involved in developing these proposals and building on the distinctive and breath-taking natural and cultural landscapes and fantastic recreation opportunities that already exist there.

M4 Project Public Inquiry Concluding

Opened in February 2017, views have been heard from those for and against the proposal to build a new 14 mile (23km) six-lane section of motorway south of Newport, including a bridge across the River Usk and major remodelling of junctions 23 and 29 of the M4.

The current M4 route, running north of Newport, is regularly congested particularly where it narrows to two lanes at the Brynglas tunnels.

The inquiry received 319 unique objections out of a total of 6189 and 216 letters of support.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

I have been clear that this inquiry should robustly and openly scrutinise the proposed scheme, the embedded environmental mitigation measures, the Business Case and all objectors' suggested alternatives including the Blue Route.

I want to thank all individuals and groups for their involvement in the inquiry. We will now await the independent inspectors report and we expect to be able to make a decision later this year on whether to proceed with construction.

The Inquiry inspectors will now report on their findings to inform Welsh Government's decision on whether to proceed with construction. Their report will make recommendations to the Welsh Government.

After the Welsh Government has had the opportunity to scrutinise the recommendations, the government has confirmed it will bring forward a debate in the National Assembly for Wales on the scheme.

If the decision is made to go ahead with the project, construction could start around the end of this year and the new section of motorway could be open by the end of 2023.

Progress on improving services for neurological conditions welcomed

Commenting on the neurological conditions annual statement of progress for 2016-17, Mr Gething said:

“People with neurological conditions need timely access to high-quality care, wherever they live. Our plan, supported by additional funding, aims to deliver that.

“I am pleased the annual statement has shown progress in improving the services for people who have a neurological condition. There are excellent examples of multi-disciplinary team improvements throughout Wales despite dealing with increasing and more complex demands for services.

“In particular, there has been a reduction in the number of emergency admissions and the average time patients spend in hospital following an admission. This is a key focus of our plan and demonstrates that patients and the NHS are getting far better at managing people’s conditions.

“Progress is also being made on the establishment of a responsive and efficient neuro-rehabilitation service to ensure patients get the care they need as locally as possible.”

Around 100,000 people are living with a long-term neurological condition in Wales. Of those, over 41,000 people in Wales are estimated to suffer from Parkinson’s disease, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, motor neurone disease or cerebral palsy. In addition, a further 10,000 people each year were admitted to hospital for an acquired brain injury.

Only a few days left to have your say on plans to end the physical punishment of children in Wales

The plans are part of a much wider package of measures the Welsh Government is taking to support children to have the best start in life, and to support their parents to do the best job they can.

It is already against the law for a parent or carer to physically punish their child, except where this amounts to ‘reasonable punishment’

The proposed legislation would not involve the creation of a new offence. It would instead remove the defence of ‘reasonable punishment’ to the existing offences of assault and battery.

It would mean any adult looking after a child would no longer be able to use physical or corporal punishment against them.

Ministers want to accelerate existing trends in the way parents in Wales discipline their children and to support them in feeling confident to choose positive and more effective methods of discipline.

Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“The Welsh Government has a long standing record of working to ensure children have the best start in life and of promoting children’s rights. This is why we intend to bring forward legislation to make it clear that physically punishing a child is no longer acceptable in Wales.

“Children need discipline to understand what is right and wrong and how to behave. Removing the defence makes it clear that physically punishing children isn’t acceptable in Wales.

“I am aware there are differing views on this; so the consultation provides an opportunity for everyone to have their say to help us try to address concerns as the legislation develops.

“The consultation closes on Monday 2nd April – so I’m encouraging as many people as possible to take part.”

[We are no clearer on what kind of Brexit the UK government wants – First Minister](#)

The First Minister has outlined his concerns that Theresa May has yet to adequately explain the kind of new relationship with Brussels she would like after the transition period more than 20 months after the referendum.

In contrast the Welsh Government has published evidence, analysis and detailed proposals for a Brexit that would protect jobs and the Welsh economy.

The First Minister said:

“We are only 12 months away from formally leaving the EU and the people of Wales still have no idea about the post-Brexit deal the Prime Minister wants with Brussels. The transition deal was welcome, but we shouldn’t lose sight of the bigger picture. The reality is we still do not know what we are ‘transitioning’ to. Long-term uncertainty has not disappeared, the shape of our trade

relationship remains unclear and this is bad for business and investment.

“As the Prime Minister recently said herself we all need to face up to some hard facts. This is sound advice for the UK government itself. There still seems to be no agreement at the heart of Whitehall on the kind of post-Brexit relationship with the EU they want.

“The UK faces prolonged negotiations where tough issues will need to be resolved. If the government does not budge from its ‘red lines’, we face the prospect of a future relationship with the EU-27 which will do serious damage to our economy. We need clear decisions, transparency and the ability to legitimately scrutinise choices that will have an impact for generations to come.

“The clock is ticking. Businesses and the public sector need to be able to plan for this huge change but the lack of clarity from the UK government is making this all but impossible. I am not questioning Brexit – the UK is leaving the EU. But we deserve to know what the plan is.

“By contrast, we have based our priorities on evidence and on putting the needs of the economy first. We will continue to fight for a sensible Brexit that protects Wales’ economy and jobs. Pragmatism and common sense needs to prevail to deliver a successful Brexit.”