

Sustainable drainage systems key to reducing flood risk – Hannah Blythyn

The Welsh Government's [Water Strategy for Wales](#) sets out our aspiration for sewerage and drainage infrastructure for both waste water and surface water to be well managed and maintained in an integrated way.

To help achieve this, the Welsh Government wants all new developments to incorporate effective sustainable drainage systems (SuDS). The SuDS approach aims to deal with rainwater using techniques such as infiltration and retention that mimic runoff from a site in its natural state.

SuDS schemes slow down the flow of water and remove pollution, typically using combinations of installations such as permeable paving, soakaways, green roofs, swales and ponds.

The Welsh Government has recently [consulted](#) on how its aim of seeing the SuDS approach used to deliver multiple benefits for society in all new developments should be implemented.

Between 2010 and 2015, the Welsh Government supported Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water in developing a series of SuDS projects, known collectively as 'Rainscape'. One of the largest of these is at Stebonheath Primary School, Llanelli, which uses a range of SuDS methods to divert or reduce the flow of rainwater to the sewerage network. These include permeable paving, water butts, planters, increased numbers of trees, grass and plant, and a large swale.

Stebonheath Primary is the first school in Wales to have a surface water removal scheme retrofitted into its grounds. The scheme has been used as an educational opportunity to enable pupils to understand more about water resource management.

Speaking during a visit to Stebonheath Primary, Hannah Blythyn said:

"Surface water flooding is a serious problem and a major cause of flooding. The Rainscape project, which I have seen today is an innovative and sustainable approach to dealing with rainwater, which reduces the risk of flooding and water pollution, while also providing a wide range of community benefits.

"It was great to hear how the pupils get involved in the design and ongoing maintenance of the Rainscape features. I was particularly interested to hear how they have been educating their parents on the benefits of the project. This, in turn, has led to a better understanding in the community about the subject of drainage, which, I think it's fair to say, is not usually a conversation starter."

"Sustainable drainage schemes help to reduce surface water flood

risk, protect water quality and improve the local environment. We want to make them a requirement across Wales for all new developments and I am grateful to everybody that responded to our recent consultations.”

100% rates relief for community hydro projects

The business rates relief will enable eligible projects to retain the maximum possible benefit for their local area, enabling them to re-invest into their local community.

The grant scheme will also provide support to cap the increase in business rates for other small-scale developments to 10% or £1,000 where there was no previous liability.

The new grant scheme, which will start in April, will provide greater support to hydropower developers in Wales than elsewhere in the UK. Work is under way with community developers and others to ensure it is easy to access.

It will be application based and hydro projects will be able to apply for a grant towards both their 2018-19 rates liability and retrospectively for 2017-18.

The Environment Minister Hannah Blythyn yesterday officially opened the ‘Welcome to Our Woods’ community hydro project in Treherbert, which is creating a low carbon outdoor space and facilities to generate income for the local community. It is an example of a project which will benefit from the new 100% rate relief.

Lesley Griffiths said:

“I am very pleased to announce a new generous grant scheme of support for hydro power projects.

“Our new scheme will provide 100% rate relief for community schemes and provide support for other small-scale projects towards their non-domestic rates. Crucially, it will provide greater support to hydro-power developers in Wales than is available elsewhere in the UK.

“Electricity generation from renewables in Wales has trebled since 2010 and community developments have played an important part in this success.

“Yesterday the Environment Minister officially opened the ‘Welcome to our Woods’ community hydro project which will be providing income to the local area. This project is a great example of a community working together on its energy future and will benefit from the new scheme I am announcing today.”

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford added:

“I am pleased that through this grant scheme we have been able to provide 100% rate relief to help ensure hydro-projects are able to retain the maximum possible benefit for their local areas.”

The 100% non-domestic rate relief scheme for community hydro projects is part of the 2018-19 Budget agreement with Plaid Cymru.

Ian Thomas, Company Director Welcome to our Woods Ltd said:

“The ongoing support we have received from the Welsh Government has been absolutely vital to the development of our scheme and has enabled us to re-invest in the local community. We welcome the additional support announced today – it will help us continue to deliver our clean energy project.”

Economy Secretary sets out changes to governance arrangements for Wales’ Enterprise Zones

During his appearance at the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Ken Skates announced the conclusions of his review of the governance of Wales’ Enterprise Zones while stressing his commitment to the continuation of all eight of the zones.

Speaking after Committee, Ken Skates said:

I am very proud of the achievements and success of our Enterprise Zones and grateful for the hard work and commitment of the Chairs and Advisory Boards in driving their success.

Collectively our Enterprise Zones supported over 10,700 jobs to the end of the last financial year at a cost per job of less than £6k

per job, and whilst the pace of delivery has varied between the Zones, this very much reflects each Zone's economic context and starting position.

All eight Enterprise Zones have made significant progress, and are continuing to deliver value for money by laying the foundation for future prosperity and creating the right environment to support the development of sustainable job opportunities in communities right across Wales, both in the short and longer term.

And this is something that is very much in line with the focus of my recently launched Economic Action Plan, which seeks to empower all our regions in Wales to become more productive.

Projects such as the Advanced Manufacturing Research Institute on Deeside, which will deliver game changing skills and innovation support to business – and Tech Valleys, which will lead the development and delivery of emerging technologies in Ebbw Vale, very much support that commitment to regional empowerment and have emerged from the work of the Boards. They will only add to the Zones' reputation for delivery.

The changes I have outlined today are about streamlining bureaucracy and utilising other governance structures where I believe that represents the most sensible way forward. They have also been made as part of a wider review of advisory architecture across my portfolio.

The views of the Chairs of the Enterprise Zones have been invaluable in shaping my decisions and I am pleased to have their broad support for the changes.

Minister celebrates 5,000 opportunities created by Lift

The Minister attended a special event at Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan in Ebbw Vale, where she met some of those helped by the programme and their mentors. Aneurin Bevan University Health Board has been a major collaborator on the project in the Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly areas and, across its various sites, has provided around 100 opportunities to people on the programme.

Delivered across nine areas in Wales, Lift provided dedicated one-to-one support to people from households where nobody has worked for at least six months who face employment barriers. Mentors worked with people to identify reasons why they are not in work and to provide support to help overcome

those issues. Mentors remain in contact with participants for up to twelve months after they start in their new job or training placement to offer ongoing support.

The programme met its target two months early and by the end of the scheme in December 2017 had provided 5,174 training and employment opportunities, including helping 1,099 into work.

While the programme has come to an end, the learning from it will be taken forward in to Communities for Work Plus, a £12m per annum programme which will provide intensive mentoring and support to those furthest from the jobs market from April 2018.

The Minister said:

“It has been a pleasure to celebrate the success of Lift and to meet some of the people supported by the programme. It is particularly pleasing that some have moved on into employment with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and that others are about to do the same.

“I am delighted that Lift has exceeded its target of supporting 5,000 people into job and training opportunities. As I have seen today, the programme has had an incredibly positive impact on people’s lives, giving them the confidence, skills, experience and information they need to succeed.

“This is an excellent example of how we are working across Welsh Government departments and with many partner organisations to support people to gain skills, training and employment. I want to thank our partners in the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board for their vital contribution.”

[Welsh Castles lit up to celebrate LGBT History Month](#)

LGBT History month aims to increase the visibility of LGBT people, their history, lives and experiences in our communities. This year’s theme is Geography: Mapping the World.

The National Assembly for Wales has also organised for the Senedd in Cardiff Bay to be lit up with the rainbow flag colours.

Leader of the House, Julie James, said:

“As well as celebrating the contribution LGBT people have made to our communities, LGBT History Month provides an opportunity to reflect on the history of discrimination and prejudice LGBT people have faced, and for us to show our commitment to tackle these inequalities.

As this year’s theme is Geography: Mapping the World, I’d like to recognise and celebrate with those countries around the world who are advancing equality for LGBT people, like Australia who have recently passed a bill allowing same-sex marriage. But there are also countries where LGBT citizens are not afforded the same rights as the UK and our thoughts are with those communities.”