

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.

Small and rural schools set to benefit from £2.5m funding – Kirsty Williams

Local authorities have been applying for the funding after the Education Secretary Kirsty Williams revealed the support package in November last year to encourage innovation and support greater school to school working.

This includes using digital technology to combat the issue of professional isolation, providing administrative support in schools where the head teacher has significant teaching commitment, supporting collaboration and federation of schools, and where opportunities exist and there is local demand, using school facilities for community purposes.

Amongst the local authorities to receive funding are Anglesey, which will receive £138,000 to federate some of its schools, and Pembrokeshire, which has been awarded £158,000 to fund a Small School Innovation Project for a network of 15 small and rural schools.

Kirsty Williams said:

“Small and rural schools play an important role in our national mission to raise standards and extend opportunities for all our young people.

“We are taking action and providing new funding to help small and rural schools deal with the unique challenges they face, such as small pupil numbers and issues in recruiting head teachers and staff.

“This financial support will benefit pupils, teachers, and the wider community. I want to see rural schools working more formally together and across the country, forming federations and looking into the possibility of sharing buildings with other services to ensure school buildings remain viable.”

WLGA Spokesperson for Education, Councillor Debbie Wilcox (Newport) said:

“This funding is great news for small and rural schools. As a former teacher of many years myself, I know how having the best possible learning environment can enhance education and overall experiences. Local education authorities have been working hard to ensure schools are responding to modern challenges and are fully-equipped to provide the best education environment for teachers, pupils and staff, and this investment will help to continue that important work.”

WLGA Deputy Spokesperson for Education, Councillor Ellen ap Gwynn (Ceredigion) said:

“Small and rural schools face unique challenges, especially in terms of recruitment and smaller pupil numbers. But they’re more than just schools in the communities that they serve. They are important assets to the community as school buildings and resources are widely used for an array of community purposes. This funding will contribute to ensure that learners and communities alike can continue to reap the benefits of these schools, and also to strengthen the support for Welsh language education provision in our rural communities.”

The Education Secretary also announced plans to consult on strengthening the School Organisation Code in respect of a presumption against the closure of rural schools. For the first time ever there will be a designation of rural schools for that purpose. A 14 week consultation ended on 30 September and responses are currently being analysed.

European politicians in Wales to talk Brexit

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford will also attend the talks with more than 20 local and regional representatives from Scotland, France, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands at a conference titled 'European co-operation beyond Brexit'.

The Welsh Government is organising the event at City Hall with the Conference for Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), a European network which has members from 160 regions from across the EU and beyond.

At the event the First Minister and European regional leaders will formally sign the 'Cardiff Declaration' which calls for continued strong relationships and co-operation between the UK and nations and regions across Europe post-Brexit.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

"Bringing together representatives from across the regions of Europe and signing the 'Cardiff Declaration' demonstrates our intention to collaborate with our European partners. Wales remains open, outward facing and international in outlook and Brexit will not change that.

"While we have been consistently clear that we are not trying to undo Brexit, we have a range of shared interests, from trade to protecting the rights of UK and EU citizens, which must be prioritised in the negotiations.

"This event and our joint declaration demonstrate that while Brexit has an impact on all European countries and regions, it must not become a stumbling block to our established strong relations that benefit us all."

Rise in new affordable homes welcomed

Last year the Welsh Government announced a commitment to deliver an extra 20,000 affordable homes by 2021, including supporting the construction of more than 6,000 homes through the Help to Buy – Wales scheme.

In 2016-17, local authorities reported 2,547 additional affordable housing units had been delivered across Wales, an increase of 6 per cent on the

previous year. These figures exclude homes delivered via Help to Buy-Wales. 1,864 homes were delivered through Help to Buy during 2016-17 which, when added to the affordable homes stats released today, highlight the significant progress toward our 20,000 target in the first year.

Rebecca Evans said:

“Ensuring that people have a safe, warm and secure home is one of our key priorities. I am committed to increasing the housing supply in Wales and have an ambitious target of building 20,000 affordable homes during this term of government. I am therefore pleased to welcome today’s significant progress.”

Welsh Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) continued to make the largest contribution to additional affordable housing in Wales, delivering 93 per cent of all additional affordable housing provision over the past year (2,378 units).

The Minister added:

“I am grateful to social landlords for the important role they play. I am proud of the positive and constructive relationship we have with the RSL sector in Wales and our joint commitment to work together for the benefit of tenants.”

The number of affordable housing units delivered with capital grant funding increased by 3 per cent during 2016-17 to 1,810 units, whilst the number delivered without capital grant funding was up by 16 per cent to 737 units.