

Right to Buy suspended in Flintshire

The move comes ahead of the Welsh Government introducing legislation to abolish the Right to Buy across the whole of Wales.

The Right to Buy allows eligible social housing tenants across the UK to buy their council or housing association property at a discount. The proposed legislation will end these rights, protecting social housing stock from further reduction.

Over the past 30 years, the Right to Buy has resulted in a significant reduction in social housing stock. Between 1981 and 2014, 138,709 council homes were sold – this is a 45% reduction in the social housing available since the policy was first introduced.

Research also indicates that many of these homes end up in the private rented sector and, as a result, cost local people more to rent and, in some cases, the public purse more in housing benefit.

The First Minister said:

“I have agreed to Flintshire council’s application to suspend the Right to Buy to help them deal with the pressure their social housing is facing and to ensure that homes are available to those who need them.

“While this will help one area for a short period of time, we also need to address this issue for the long term. This is why we will be introducing legislation to abolish the Right to Buy in Wales.

“The Right to Buy is depleting our social housing stock. This damaging policy is further increasing the pressure on our social housing supply and is forcing many vulnerable people to wait longer for a home.

“Legislating to end the Right to Buy is the only sure way to prevent this and give social landlords the confidence to invest in building more of the affordable homes Wales needs.”

Chinese entrepreneur to open two new stores in Wales

The news announced today (Wednesday 22 Feb) in China follows a meeting in

Shanghai between Economy Secretary Ken Skates and Bobby Zhou, CEO Anbo Holdings, a wholesale and retail business specialising in engineered and solid wood flooring products.

In the UK the company operates under the retail brand Flooring REPUBLIC which already has six stores in South Wales employing twenty people. The new stores will be in Bridgend and the other potentially in North Wales.

Ken Skates, who is leading a trade mission to China to further strengthen trade and export links between the two countries, said:

“Anbo, which was set up in the UK ten years ago by entrepreneur Bobby Zhou, is a great success story. Since its inception the business has flourished and seen an average 15% annual increase in turnover, with a projected £16m turnover this year.

“The Welsh Government has worked closely with Anbo Holdings in both in China and in Wales and this support has helped the business to expand and increase its footprint in Wales. I was particularly pleased to hear that its stores in Wales are amongst its most successful in the UK which has been attributed to the strong work ethic and enthusiasm of its staff.

“The news, confirmed today, that it is to open a further two stores in Wales is excellent while discussions are also underway on the potential of Flooring REPUBLIC opening a new manufacturing and training facility in Wales.”

Bobby Zhou said:

“Our Welsh stores are amongst our most successful across the country and our sales performance in Wales exceeded our forecasts .

“We chose to expand in Wales because of the fantastic infrastructure, hardworking people and the warm acceptance that we received. We are impressed with the business environment, the ease which you can get things done, and most of all because our people in Wales have a fantastic work ethic and understand our passion for great customer service – which is core value of Flooring Republic brand!

“The Welsh Government has assisted greatly by helping us find new suitable properties and has advised on expansion areas. One of our main development areas is the introduction of an apprenticeship scheme which we are currently discussing with the Welsh Government.”

Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone expands to include three new sites

The new sites – Tafarnaubach Industrial Estate, Waun y Pound Industrial Estate and Victoria/Festival Park – are already home to a large employment cluster with private and publicly owned developable land and ready to occupy units available.

They now join five other strategic sites within the Zone that include Bryn Serth, Rassau Industrial Estate, The Works, Tredegar Business Park and Rhyd-y-Blew which has the additional benefit of Enhanced Capital Allowances.

These five sites have 83.5 acres of privately and publicly owned developable land available as well as ready-to-let industrial units.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Elevating the status of these sites to be included in the Enterprise Zone will help raise their profile, make them a more attractive proposition for potential investors while also offering prime strategic locations for starts ups and businesses looking to expand.

“Ebbw Vale is already home to a number of world-leading manufacturing companies, some of which are based on these sites that have the space and capability to accommodate a wide range of manufacturing companies whether they are looking for new development sites or units that are ready for immediate occupation.”

Key companies already located on these new sites range from PCI Pharma Services, a Welsh Government Anchor Company to Tenneco Walker.

Chinese health and nutraceutical group to open European HQ, R&D and manufacturing centre in Wales

The news was announced today by Economy Secretary Ken Skates who is in China

on a trade mission and meeting Acerchem International Chairman Frank Chen, Strategic Director Ms Nancy Wu and Global Vice President Ken Li at a business reception in Shanghai this evening.

Mr Skates said:

“It’s great news that Acerchem International has chosen to set up its European Headquarters in Wales and is to open a manufacturing and Research and Development centre here, creating a significant number of skilled jobs.

“The company has a long standing Research collaboration with Swansea University which clearly illustrates the importance of building international academic links with business and industry.

“This investment, which is supported by the Welsh Government, can only serve to strengthen the ties between our two countries. China is an extremely important market for Wales and our trade mission this week builds on the strong economic and cultural links that have been developed over a number of years.”

The investment by Acerchem International is backed by £600,000 from the Welsh Government and will create 38 highly skilled, well paid jobs, primarily working in R&D. The company plans to establish its R&D facility in the Institute of Life Science at Swansea University.

Acerchem International Chairman Frank Chen said:

“We very much look forward to building up the business in Wales and developing even closer links with Swansea University.

“Support from the Welsh Government helped fast track this project and was vital in bringing it to Wales and we value the support we have had from Welsh Government officials in Shanghai and in Cardiff.

“Opening this new HQ and R&D centre in Wales marks an exciting new development for the group and a great opportunity to develop and grow the business.”

CEO Jeff Jiang founded Acerchem International in Shanghai in 2007 which has grown into a multi million pound business and a leading group in the health and nutraceutical sectors. The company exports to over 40 countries with sales offices in Wales – at the Institute of Life Science, Swansea University – in Japan, the Netherlands and Spain.

Its product range includes nutritional supplements, functional foods and beverages, beauty care and animal nutrition supplements.

The company provides a diversified portfolio of fermented ingredients and has developed a sophisticated extraction and purification business unit using natural ingredients, giving products better absorption and stability.

With an R&D centre in Shanghai, and working alongside Swansea University, it has developed its own formulations which include premix, blends, tablets, soft-gels, and others. It plans to invest significantly in R&D working with Welsh Universities and increase its business with existing customers in Wales that could also lead to additional jobs being created.

[New EU project to help grow the fisheries industry in Wales and Ireland](#)

The funding will enable Bangor University and Ireland's seafood development agency, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, to pilot a research and development programme aimed at improving the productivity and growth of shellfish businesses in both nations.

The Irish Sea Portal Pilot will investigate patterns of movement of shellfish in the Irish Sea to help reduce the costs of locating shellfish seed and help increase the volume of mussels and shellfish available to the industry.

The project is being funded through the EU's Ireland-Wales co-operation programme, which aims to strengthen economic links and stimulate cross-border collaboration in areas including innovation, climate change, cultural and natural resources, heritage and tourism.

Shellfish seed is a resource shared across the Irish Sea, crossing national boundaries. and provides significant economic benefits. The industry is worth around €250m between Wales and Ireland.

The two-year pilot will be developed in partnership with small and medium sized businesses and will also help the industry to tap into resources and expertise at Bangor University and Bord Iascaigh Mhara to support wider opportunities to expand the industry and create new jobs.

Welsh Government Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“We've been clear about the benefits of EU cross-border programmes to Wales and this is a very good example of how countries can work together to maximise shared economic opportunities.

“This is a valuable industry to both nations that has the potential

to grow further. I'm delighted that over €1m of EU funds is being invested to support that ambition."

Irish Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Paschal Donohoe, T.D. said:

"The Irish Sea is not only our shared border but also our shared resource. This project is an excellent example of how EU funding can assist the two regions in working together to develop that resource."

Prof David Thomas, Head of the School of Ocean Sciences and Director of Sêr Cymru National Research Network for Low Carbon, Energy and Environment, commented:

"This project builds on years of expertise in both sustainable fisheries and in shellfish biology at our School of Ocean Sciences. We're keen to work with partners to support sustainable fisheries which benefit coastal economies, and are delighted to work with our Irish counterparts to increase the important shellfish industry in both countries."