

# £6m St Asaph flood protection scheme officially opened by Environment Minister

On 27 November 2012, the River Elwy overtopped the existing defences affecting 320 properties, tragically claiming the life of Mrs Margaret Hughes, who lived in a retirement home near Mill Street.

Following the flooding, Natural Resources Wales commissioned an extensive study to fully investigate the flood risk and designed a scheme to reduce future risk.

The new flood scheme will reduce the risk of flooding from the River Elwy to 293 homes and 121 businesses including schools, retirement homes, sheltered accommodation, the local library, doctor's surgery and fire station. The scheme will protect St Asaph from an event equivalent to the floods in 2012.

Infrastructure and recreational benefits will include new and wider footpaths, improvements to the ancient City Bridge and the installation of an "i beacon" Bluetooth transmitter.

The project also includes the installation of bird and bat boxes and the replacement of trees and hedges. Natural Resources Wales are planting more trees than were removed to build the scheme.

After officially opening the new scheme and unveiling a plaque, the Minister for Environment said:

"We all remember the serious flooding here in 2012, so this is an important scheme for St Asaph. Those events remind us of the real threat we face from flooding, which is likely to increase as our climate changes.

"I would like to thank Natural Resources Wales and their contractors for delivering this important scheme which is reducing the flood risk to 414 properties, including 293 homes.

"The scheme has been supported with £6 million from the Welsh Government. Earlier this year I also announced a £56m programme to strengthen Wales' flood and coastal defences, helping build resilience in communities across Wales which face similar risks."

Tim Jones, Natural Resources Wales' Executive Director of Operations for North Wales, said:

“This scheme will make a real difference to people living and working in St Asaph who suffered such devastating flooding in November 2012 and have lived with the threat of flooding for many years.

“While we can’t always prevent flooding from happening, we have built a robust scheme for St Asaph that will significantly reduce the risk and provide effective, long-term peace of mind for people in the city.

“And the scheme’s environmental improvements and new recreation opportunities are a boost to everyone’s day-to-day life in the city as well.”

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## £5m Welsh Government funding for Pantycelyn

The funding, which was previously agreed in principle, was confirmed by the Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, Eluned Morgan, as she visited the halls of residence and viewed plans for the project.

Neuadd Pantycelyn has been a dedicated Welsh medium residence since 1974 and is a symbol of Welsh speaking culture within Higher Education. The refurbishment of the building will ensure its historical and cultural significance will live on and will provide opportunities for students to live their everyday lives through the medium of Welsh.

Part of the building will also be used as a centre for Welsh Speakers and Learners and will be open to the community.

Eluned Morgan said:

“The importance of Pantycelyn to the Welsh speaking world cannot be overestimated. It is an iconic building to so many people throughout Wales and beyond so I am delighted to confirm this funding of £5 million to ensure many more Welsh speaking students will be able to call it home and experience its unique linguistic and cultural atmosphere.

“We have set an ambitious target of reaching a million Welsh speakers by 2050. I have said many times that education is key to achieving this target and this is as true for higher education as it is for primary schools. The students who will be living here will be the teachers, lawyers, scientists and politicians of

tomorrow so ensuring they have the opportunities to learn and live through the medium of Welsh and to carry that forward to their professional lives is a vital part of the Cymraeg 2050 strategy.”

Professor Elizabeth Treasure, Vice-Chancellor of Aberystwyth University, said:

“We are very grateful to Welsh Government for their support for our exciting plans to reopen Pantycelyn as a first-class hall of residence for Welsh-speaking students. Aberystwyth offers an unrivalled experience to students who want to learn and live through the medium of Welsh, and the refurbishment of this historic building will further enhance the breadth and depth of our Welsh-medium academic provision.”

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## **Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Scottish Brexit Minister raise concerns with UK government over their Brexit White Paper**

In the letter, the 2 Cabinet Secretaries point out that the full draft White Paper on EU Negotiations has still not been shared with the Scottish and Welsh Governments ahead of today’s Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations) – despite previous assurances from the UK government that the devolved administrations would have a meaningful opportunity in shaping negotiating positions as they are developed.

Mark Drakeford said:

“We have not had the opportunity to read the UK government’s White Paper on its negotiating position with the EU ahead of today’s Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations), so it will be impossible for us to make the sort of considered contribution, based on evidence, which we think is essential. This is a clear breach of the JMC (EN)’s terms of reference, which require the Committee to try to seek agreement on the negotiation position of the UK government. It means that the UK government’s position will not be as informed about devolved responsibilities as it needs to be, as negotiations move into their vital next phase.”

The full text of the letter is below:

Dear David

JMC (EN) and the White Paper

We are writing further to the unsatisfactory discussion of certain sections of the White Paper on the EU Negotiations at the Ministerial Forum on Wednesday.

This was clearly not the fault of your Ministerial colleagues who attended the meeting but of decisions taken elsewhere in Government about what can and cannot be shared with us.

We were not permitted to see a single word of the draft White Paper in advance of the meeting and could only make our contributions on the basis of a brief, oral summary of the relevant chapters. It is particularly bizarre that at least one chapter was sent to our Permanent Secretaries – who are not members of the Forum – while the meeting was underway.

This in no sense lives up to the assurance that we would have a meaningful opportunity to shape negotiating positions as they are developed.

Moreover, the discussion of specific elements was further undermined by a lack of insight into the broader narrative: discussing cross-border transport is difficult without the context of proposals on customs arrangements, and the proposed mobility framework covering migration is clearly crucial for the science and research chapter, civil judicial cooperation and many other aspects of the White Paper.

We therefore wish to make it absolutely clear that we will not regard any discussion of the White Paper at next Thursday's JMC (EN) as meaningful, unless we have been given prior access to the text of the draft White Paper as it currently stands.

If we do not have this opportunity, we will have to make it very clear that we have been given no real possibility to consider, let alone influence the content of a document which will purport to speak on behalf of the whole of the United Kingdom, about matters, many of which are devolved, and on a subject which is of the greatest possible importance to the people of Scotland and Wales.

We are copying this letter to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, the First Minister of Scotland, the First Minister of Wales, and to David Sterling as Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Yours sincerely

Mark Drakeford AM/AC  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyllid  
Government  
Cabinet Secretary for Finance  
Constitutional Relations

Michael Russell MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for  
Business and

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## Discussions on UK-wide principles for recycling drinks containers

Welsh Government Minister for Environment, Hannah Blythyn, and the Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, met their UK and devolved government counterparts to discuss potential UK-wide schemes.

The summit brought the four nations together to coordinate work at a UK level and set principles for the design of potential schemes across the UK. The Ministers agreed to work together on a scheme's design and operation.

A Deposit Return Scheme would see people pay a small deposit when they buy a drink in a single-use container and get that money back when it is returned empty.

Following the summit, Hannah Blythyn said:

“We know about the impact single-use drinks containers are having on our environment, often blighting our countryside or ending up in our seas.

“I welcome working with the other UK nations on a UK-wide Deposit Return Scheme. There appears to be a collective appetite for a scheme from all UK nations, so this would be the most practical and effective way to implement a scheme.

“We are considering a number of solutions to reducing the impact of single-use plastics on our environment in Wales. Any scheme we introduce must be the best for Wales and work alongside our existing policies, which have made us first in the UK and third in the World for household recycling.”

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## Pay rise offer for NHS Wales' staff on 70th anniversary

The Welsh Government will be investing extra funding in addition to the consequential funding they will receive from the decision by the UK Government to raise pay for NHS staff in England.

The offer, which will provide a pay increase for staff across the NHS, has been negotiated with employers and unions. It will now need to be approved through a ballot of union members. It means all NHS staff in Wales will have pay parity with their counterparts in England, following the recently announced new pay deal there.

The Health Secretary said:

“I am pleased to announce, following negotiations with unions and employers, that we are now able to offer a much deserved pay rise to our hardworking and dedicated NHS staff.

“As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the NHS in Wales, it is appropriate we recognise those who have made the service what is today and continue to deliver the best possible care for all in their time of need. Our NHS in Wales simply could not function without the skill, dedication and hard work of its staff.

After 8 hard years of austerity, imposed by the UK Government, we have committed extra funding beyond the consequential funding that we received following the pay rise in England, to offer a deal which is not only fair to staff and taxpayers but will also lead to a better NHS for Wales.”

The deal matches the offer made in England and goes beyond it in some areas which are important to our NHS in Wales.

These include a continuing commitment to look at the annual Living Wage Foundation recommendations so that NHS pay scales remain fair in the future. In addition, recognising the specific commitments to improve the health, wellbeing and attendance of NHS staff in Wales, the offer provides better payments during sickness absence than in England. Trade unions and employers will also work together to support individuals if they face a diagnosis of a terminal illness including support for the TUC “Dying to Work” campaign.

The pay offer includes:

- Going beyond our commitment to the Living Wage Foundation recommendations, with a new rate of £17,460 introduced from 1 April 2018 as the minimum basic pay rate in the NHS and the lowest starting NHS salary increases to £18,005 in 20/21.
- Investing in higher starting salaries for staff in every pay band by reforming the pay system to remove overlapping pay points.
- Guaranteeing fair basic pay awards for the next three years to the staff who are at the top of pay bands;
- Guaranteeing fair basic pay awards and faster progression pay for the next three years to those staff who are not yet on the top of their pay band.