

'Iron Ring' sculpture unveiled as part of £630k project at Flint Castle

The winning design was selected by a panel from the Welsh Government and sponsored body, Arts Council for Wales, following a nation-wide competition to obtain proposals for an artwork concept celebrating Wales' Year of Legends.

Begun in 1277, Flint was one of the first castles to be built in Wales by Edward I. The King later moved on to construct the north Wales castles of Beaumaris, Conwy, Caernarfon and Harlech, which today form a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The £395k monumental Iron Ring sculpture, plans for which have been unveiled today by Ken Skates, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure, could potentially measure up to seven metres high and 30 metres wide, and symbolises a giant rusted crown representing the relationship between the medieval monarchies of Europe and the castles they built.

The installation will be engraved with carefully chosen associated words and sayings to be developed with the local community.

When opened in 2018, visitors will be able to walk along the sculpture and enjoy elevated views across the estuary and of the castle.

Its location at Flint marks the event where the crown was famously transferred from one medieval dynasty to another, as described in Shakespeare's Richard II. Flint Castle was the setting as Richard II surrendered the crown to Henry IV – a momentous event impacting the history of Britain and Europe.

"The sculpture will take a balanced form, some buried beneath the ground, the remainder projecting into the air, to demonstrate the unstable nature of the crown,"

said George King, from George King Architects Ltd – the architects behind the ambitious design.

"The sculpture has been carefully designed to work at many scales. From afar its striking, iconic form resembles a giant ancient artefact, washed up on the shore of the Dee Estuary.

"Its scale and dynamic appearance means that it will become an instantly recognisable landmark for the area.

"However, as you approach the sculpture it becomes obvious that the piece is more than just a sculpture."

The engravings will celebrate local landmarks, historic towns and their links with Flint Castle, as well as content about the flora and fauna of the Dee estuary.

The sculpture is part of planned wider developments outlined in a newly-commissioned regeneration strategy for Flint foreshore, aimed at greatly enhancing the visitor experience at Flint Castle, strengthening and building on community relations within the town and helping with the regeneration of this unique area.

Ken Skates said:

“It gives me great pleasure to announce plans to help improve the visitor experience at this fascinating site steeped in history during Wales’ Year of Legends.

“Throughout 2017 we are celebrating the incredible people from our past, captivating places and stories that have shaped Wales’ rich heritage and culture.

“In its prime, Flint Castle played a pivotal role in not only shaping the future of Wales but that of the UK and Europe. The Iron Ring sculpture is a perfect way of marking this significance while attracting more people to visit the site, bringing positive economic benefits to the area.”

Further improvements to the castle include the installation of a stainless-steel spiral staircase within the north-east tower and a masterplan to consider the wider regeneration of the Flint Foreshore.

The £217k staircase has been fitted in the same position as the original masonry staircase, allowing visitors access to the tower and an opportunity to enjoy magnificent views from a new platform installed at the top of the stairs.

The regeneration approach is in its early stages, but will look at options for the improvement to the current facilities along the shore. This will include working with Flint’s RNLi, rugby club and football club to improve current facilities, and working with partners such as the Local Authority to develop visitor services at Flint Castle.

[£4.2m EU funds to construct new](#)

business units in Anglesey

The development at Bryn Cefni Business Park will provide over 1,300m² of office, light industrial and storage space for businesses on the former Môn Training site and over 750m² of office space at the Anglesey Business Centre.

The construction is part of wider plans to develop Anglesey's Enterprise Zone and Energy Island Programme. Work is expected to begin in early 2018 with the units being ready for businesses in early 2019.

Finance Secretary, Professor Mark Drakeford, said:

"I am delighted EU funds are being invested to construct high quality business premises to support the growing employment and supply chain opportunities stemming from the nuclear and energy sector in the region.

"This will help create a business-ready employment hub that will assist the region to attract inward investment and capitalise fully on the developments created by the Energy Island Programme."

The units will complement other EU backed business premises in the area, including the completion of seven business units on the Llangefni site and the construction of the nearby Menai Science Park currently underway.

Earlier this year, Economy Secretary, Ken Skates, opened the first two sections of the Llangefni link road which, when complete, will connect people to training and job opportunities in the area, facilitating further economic growth.

Anglesey's Head of Regulation and Economic Development, Dylan Williams, said:

"These new units will support the continued economic growth of Anglesey, the wider North Wales region and the ongoing development of our Energy Island Programme.

"Securing £4.2m EU funds is testament to the quality of our proposals and location of these schemes. This funding will enable us to create opportunities for growth, develop the success of the Enterprise Zone, and we hope to see other infrastructure investments taking place in the future."

Planning, Regulation and Economic Development portfolio holder Councillor Richard Dew:

"We are grateful for the EU funding and to the Welsh Government for

supporting our plans for much needed infrastructure improvements to enable the redevelopment of the Môn Training site and extending the Anglesey Business Centre. These developments will be very welcome to increase the availability of high-quality modern business premises to rent in the area.”

Key players gather to progress plans for £100m Automotive Technology Park

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates, chaired a meeting with industry figures from TVR, Ford, General Dynamics and IQE as well as representatives of Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone, Blaenau Gwent Council and Cardiff University, in order to develop more detailed proposals for the Automotive Technology Park at Ebbw Vale.

Last month the Economy Secretary announced that the Welsh Government would invest £100m over ten years in an Automotive Technology Park in Blaenau Gwent with the potential to create up to 1500 new full time jobs in one of Wales’ most deprived areas.

Today’ meeting focussed on opportunities that could create the most new jobs and maximum economic investment in the area.

Speaking after the meeting, Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Our plans to invest £100m in an Automotive Technology Park in Blaenau Gwent have the potential to transform the local economy and create up to 1500 jobs and I am keen to progress them as quickly as possible.

“Today’s meeting provided an ideal opportunity to bring key players from industry, local government, academia and the local Enterprise Zone together to agree our direction of travel and set key targets and milestones that will help drive this pivotal project forward.

“It was a very productive meeting that confirmed our collective ambition to shape and deliver a project that can genuinely regenerate the local economy.

“Delivered well the project can not only create r the high quality jobs the area needs but also play a key role in shaping the future of our automotive industry here in Wales.”

The Welsh Government will publish a full business case for the Automotive Technology Park later this year. This will draw upon the specialist advice already received from internal and external experts and reflect the views emerging from today's meeting and from other engagement work with key partners.

Our Valleys, Our Future

These are the three priorities for Our Valleys, Our Future – the high-level action plan by the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys, which will be launched today by Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language Minister Alun Davies.

The Minister will join Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure Ken Skates and other taskforce members to launch the plan at the opening of another exciting Valleys scheme, a newly refurbished play centre with the Fern Partnership, called FuZe.

Our Valleys, Our Future has been developed following feedback from people living and working in the Valleys.

It sets out a range of aims and actions in each of the three priority areas, including:

- closing the employment gap between the South Wales Valleys and the rest of Wales by getting an additional 7,000 people into work by 2021 and creating thousands of new, fair, secure and sustainable jobs
- launching three pathfinder projects to look at how services and local delivery can be better joined-up in Llanhilleth, Ferndale and in Glynneath and Banwen
- exploring the development of a Valleys Landscape Park, which has the potential to help local communities use their natural and environmental resources for tourism, energy generation and health and wellbeing purposes.

The Minister will say,

“Our Valleys, Our Future is not simply a plan for the Valleys. It is a plan from the Valleys.

“From the start, I have been clear this taskforce will not be another case of the government deciding what is right for the Valleys. If we are to succeed, local communities and local people must be at the heart of our work.

“FuZe is a fantastic example of this; a community-led project that

has changed the community it serves. One of the main aims of the taskforce is to empower communities and we must continue to listen and learn.”

The taskforce was set up a year ago to work with communities and local businesses across the South Wales Valleys to deliver lasting economic change in the region; to create good-quality jobs closer to people’s homes, improve skill levels and bring prosperity to all.

The taskforce will work to maximize job opportunities in the local economy – businesses such as retail, care and the food industry. It will also encourage and provide support for existing and potential entrepreneurs.

It will also 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.

Formal dispute resolution process underway over fair share of Barnett consequentialials from UK Government’s DUP deal

The Welsh and Scottish Governments have begun the formal dispute resolution process with the UK Government over their right to receive consequential funding as a result of the Prime Minister’s deal with the Democratic Unionist Party.

Both governments have made it clear any additional funding for Northern Ireland must respect the established funding principles and rules applied through the operation of the Barnett formula.

Applying the Barnett formula in the normal way, would result in Wales receiving an additional £1.67bn and Scotland receiving an additional £2.9bn.

The Welsh Government’s Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford and the Scottish Government’s Finance Secretary Derek Mackay have written to the Treasury to invoke the formal dispute resolution process through the Joint Ministerial Committee.

Professor Drakeford said:

“We have been clear with the UK Government that any additional funding for Northern Ireland must respect the established funding

principles and rules around the Barnett formula.

“The UK Government has abandoned these well-established arrangements to the detriment of Wales and other parts of the UK.

“The arrangements offered to Northern Ireland have direct read across to areas of devolved responsibility. For this reason, the benefits of the additional spending should be mirrored across all parts of the UK.

“By operating in this way, the UK Government has failed to provide Wales with the resources we need to invest in infrastructure, the NHS and the education system – depriving Wales of an additional £1.67bn.

“At a time when public services in Wales are under pressure as a result of the UK Government’s damaging and ongoing policy of austerity, it is only right that Wales gets its fair share of funding through the established rules of the Barnett formula.

“For all its faults the Barnett formula is supposed to be clear and rules based. It is simply inexcusable that the UK Government is willing to “bypass” those rules. That is why we have begun the formal dispute resolution with the Government so that Wales is treated fairly alongside all nations of the UK.”

Derek Mackay said:

“The Scottish Government fundamentally disagrees with the way in which this additional funding for Northern Ireland has been allocated. We have repeatedly made the point that all areas to which the £1 billion funding package has been allocated are devolved matters and therefore the Barnett Formula should apply.

“Despite this, the UK Government argues that there should be no Barnett consequential from this deal and refuses to acknowledge that Scotland, Wales and England will be short-changed by billions of pounds.

“That cannot be right – and the deal goes against the principles of the UK Treasury’s own statement of funding policy.

“Any suggestion that this funding arrangement is similar to previous funding for city deals in Scotland is wrong and not in any way comparable. City deal funding is conditional on match funding from the devolved administrations’ own budgets and also requires contributions from local authorities and other regional partners. In addition, the UK Government has promised city deals for Northern Ireland on top of this £1 billion of additional expenditure

“It remains my hope that we will be able to reach a satisfactory

resolution to this situation which results in a funding allocation across Scotland, Wales and England that is fair and reasonable for all – but in order to reach such a solution we now need to pursue the formal dispute resolution process.”