

Construction of International Convention Centre Wales begins

Once complete in 2019, ICC Wales will provide total floor space for meetings, conferences, exhibitions and events of 26,000sqm – the equivalent size to nearly 4 international rugby pitches.

An £83.7m joint venture between Celtic Manor and Welsh Government, ICC Wales will accommodate 5,000 delegates and includes a 4,000sqm pillar-free main hall, a 1,500 seated auditorium, 12 flexible meeting rooms, a double-height glass atrium and a 2,500sqm outdoor plaza.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“The International Convention Centre Wales is vital to fulfilling our ambition of making Wales a leading international destination for business. In order to compete in a highly competitive international market, Wales needs a convention centre of this quality and size. A world-class venue such as this will allow us to capitalise on Wales’ growing reputation as a destination for major events. The Celtic Manor has already demonstrated its ability to host global events and I’m confident our partnership with them on this project will deliver significant economic benefits for Wales.”

Sir Terry Matthews, Chairman of the Celtic Manor Resort, said:

“ICC Wales will be a game changer for the country on the international business events scene. For far too long, Wales has not had the share of this lucrative market that the country deserves. This is going to change. I’m positive that we have begun a new era in staging major events in Wales and our new state-of-the-art convention centre will continue that momentum for decades to come. It’s an incredibly proud moment for me to see this amazing project start to come to life and I pay tribute to the leadership of our partners in both public and private sectors who have helped to make this dream a reality.”

Mark Drakeford congratulates new WLGA

Leader Debbie Wilcox

Following the WLGA's Annual General Meeting in Cardiff earlier today, Mark Drakeford said:

"I'd like to send my warmest congratulations to Cllr Wilcox. I am sure she will lead the WLGA with the utmost professionalism and expertise in the years ahead.

"This is a very significant moment for the WLGA which today sees the election of its first female leader since the body was created in 1996.

"While it is clear we still have some way to go before our councils are fully reflective of the people they serve, it is encouraging to see women leading Anglesey, Ceredigion and Powys councils as well as Newport.

"We also now have a new generation of councillors in Wales – all of whom will bring new ideas, different ways of doing things and a fresh perspective.

"I hope to continue the constructive working relationship I've had with the WLGA since I took up this post last year.

"I have been encouraged by a willingness to engage on areas such as local government reform and have been pleased with the positive progress we've made.

"It is vital that we continue to make progress on reforming local government and I look forward to working with Cllr Wilcox and the leadership of the WLGA on the serious and credible set of proposals that the Welsh Government has put forwards."

Welsh food and drink companies embark on trade mission to Milan

As part of the Welsh Government's commitment to raise Wales' global profile as a first-class place to do business, it is supporting nine producers to visit Milan from the 24-28 June.

This follows Italian interest in some of these products during the recent TasteWales event organised by the Welsh Government, which showcased over 800

Welsh food and drink products to buyers from all over the world.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

“We are extremely proud of our high-quality food and drink and recognise the enormous value it brings to our economy. Food and drink is a priority sector for the Welsh Government and this is why we have set an ambitious target to grow the sector by 30% by 2020.

“In light of the UK’s decision to leave the EU, it is now more important than ever we promote the very best the food and drink industry has to offer and continue to make an impact in global markets. I am delighted we are supporting this group of producers to go to Milan and follow up on the exciting leads made with Italian buyers during our successful TasteWales event.”

The producers range from cereals, preserves and tea, to free-from foods and brewing companies.

Italy is one of the biggest markets for gluten-free products in Europe and craft beer producers; Evan-Evans and Samosa Co will be joining the trade mission to promote their gluten-free options.

The organic market is also growing significantly in Italy and Pembrokeshire based company, Daioni Organic, will be in Milan to take advantage of these growth opportunities.

During the four day visit the companies will have an opportunity to showcase products to selected buyers and develop new business through a series of market briefings, store visits, and meet the buyer/showcasing.

The producers attending the trade visit are:

Daioni Organic, Deeside Cereals, Evan-Evans Group, Sims Food – Samosa Co, Baa Brewing, Clarks, Lurville Delight, Radnor Preserves.

[Help us decide the future of Community Councils in Wales](#)

Local Government Secretary Mark Drakeford today announced that the Welsh Government was looking for two members to join a panel co-chaired by former Assembly Members, Gwenda Thomas and Rhodri Glyn-Thomas.

The co-chairs will be joined by another former Assembly Member, William Graham,

and Powys councillor, Kathryn Silk.

The Welsh Government is seeking expressions of interest from clerks of community councils and those working directly with communities – whether in the public, voluntary or private sectors.

The review is part of the Welsh Government's broader plans to reform local government and aims to ensure that the most local level of government works well and delivers results.

Panel members will be asked to look at the potential role of community councils; define the most appropriate model/structure of local government to effectively deliver this role; and consider how this model could be applied across Wales.

Announcing details of the review today, the Cabinet Secretary said:

“We should never underestimate the difference that good community councils can make. They are often the closest to the people they serve and, with that kind of insight, are well placed to deliver services for the local area.

“However, while there are some very good community councils across Wales, their size, responsibilities and community involvement can vary.

“That's why we need an honest debate about what the future role of Community Councils might look like and how we can put in place a consistent structure that serves all of our communities well.

“We have representation on the panel from all the main political parties in local government in Wales and there will also be extensive political engagement as part of the panel's work.

“We now need two extra members who can bring their own experience to bear on the work of the panel. We would encourage anyone with a strong community-based background to apply.”

The evidence-based and inclusive review of Community Councils is expected to start in July and take a year. All relevant stakeholders will be invited to contribute including, but not limited to, community and town councils, principal councils and community and third sector groups.

[Focus of Brexit negotiations must be](#)

on securing transitional deal – First Minister Carwyn Jones

“A year on from the EU referendum it is becoming increasingly clear that it will be impossible to both negotiate a withdrawal agreement and put in place the basis for a future relationship with the EU within 2 years,”

Mr Jones said.

“Therefore the priority in negotiations with the EU must now be on agreeing transitional arrangements to come into effect in April 2019. This will be vital in helping reduce the uncertainty around Brexit, which is damaging to the economy.”

Despite an eventful and often challenging year, the Welsh Government’s Brexit position has remained clear and consistent from the day immediately after the referendum; that the result must be respected and the economy must come first.

The First Minister said:

“Our 6 point plan was greeted with raised eyebrows when we proposed it the morning after the referendum, but it has stood the test of time and has formed the basis for our white paper, Securing Wales’ Future.

“Our balanced and coherent approach to leaving the EU, which puts economic interests at the heart of the agenda, is the closest thing the UK has to a realistic negotiating position, which meets the needs of all regions of the UK.”

Looking back at the past 12 months, the First Minister spoke about the Welsh Government’s achievements in their Brexit approach – from convening an exceptional meeting of the British Irish Council in July last year, launching our white paper – Securing Wales’ Future and the subsequent policy paper on Brexit and Devolution, establishing the European Advisory Group and the Agriculture and Environment Roundtable Group, developing the Business Confidence Plan, and also seeking assurances from the UK Government that our departure from the EU will not negatively impact on our NHS and universities.

The First Minister added:

“It is clear our white paper has influenced the UK government’s approach in important areas such as upholding existing employment rights and the crucial importance of transitional arrangements. We have also secured guarantees from the UK government that they will replace the EU funding Wales would have received up to 2020.

“The uncertainty and instability the UK government has allowed to develop over the past year is now being compounded by the ongoing chaos around the Prime Minister. With no mandate, no clear negotiating strategy and a cabinet riven with disagreement over how we should approach Brexit, the UK government must prioritise transitional arrangements to ensure that the Britain’s interests are best served.”