

Cabinet Secretary announces a new Avian Influenza Prevention Zone

Lesley Griffiths has also confirmed there will be some important changes to the measures that will apply within the new all-Wales Prevention Zone.

The current Prevention Zone requires all keepers of poultry and other captive birds to keep their birds indoors or take all appropriate steps to keep them separate from wild birds, and to enhance biosecurity. This follows a number of confirmed cases of Avian Flu across the UK, including in a backyard flock of chicken and ducks near Pontyberem, Carmarthenshire.

Expert advice suggests it is unlikely the current level of risk will change before the current Prevention Zone is scheduled to end on 28 February. In view of this, and following consultation with industry and veterinary representatives, the Cabinet Secretary has decided to put in place a new Prevention Zone, that will take effect from midnight on 28 February.

The new Avian Influenza Prevention Zone requires all keepers to complete a self assessment of biosecurity measures on their premises. The objective being to keep domestic flocks totally separate from wild birds by continuing to keep birds housed or using other measures, which may include permitting controlled access to outside areas, subject to the introduction of additional risk mitigation measures.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“My decision to put in place a new Avian Influenza Prevention Zone until 30 April is based on sound expert and industry advice.

“The risk of infection from wild birds is unlikely to decrease in the coming weeks. The changes I am announcing today are proportionate and place the onus on the keeper to select the best option for their circumstances to protect their birds. They must, however, ensure compliance with the additional risk mitigation measures”.

The Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Christianne Glossop added:

“Keepers of poultry and other captive birds must remain vigilant for signs of disease. Avian Influenza is a notifiable disease, and any suspicion should be reported immediately to the Animal and Plant Health Agency. Keepers should practice the highest levels of biosecurity if they are to minimise the risk of infection.

“I continue to strongly encourage all poultry keepers, even those with fewer than 50 birds, to provide their details to the Poultry

Register. This will ensure they can be contacted immediately, via email or text update, in an avian disease outbreak enabling them to protect their flock at the earliest opportunity”.

Innovation and commitment to quality – making Bluestone a success

The final phase saw the addition of 64 new luxury holiday lodges, a development which was supported by funding from the Welsh Government and has created 115 jobs in the local area. The holiday village’s total number of 5* lodges, cottages and studio apartments is now more than 300 and the resort welcomes 140,000 staying guests per year plus a further 120,000 day visitors to Blue Lagoon Waterpark.

The development was supported by £1.5 million of Tourism Investment Support Scheme funding through Visit Wales, the ambitious expansion programme took 18 months to complete at a cost of £8.5 million.

Bluestone is now one of Wales top 10 biggest private sector employers, and employs 700 people.

The development comes against the backdrop of sustained growth for the 5* resort, which is set over 500 acres of national park near Narberth in Pembrokeshire. During a visit led by Chief Executive William McNamara, The Economy Secretary had a flavour of future plans which include the development of the nearby Black Pool Mill and a Skydome for the resort.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates, said:

“I’d like to congratulate the team at Bluestone for the excellent, high quality product which they’ve developed – and which is proving so popular with new and returning guests, this is clearly evident by their high occupancy rates. I’m delighted that the Welsh Government has been able to play a part in laying the foundations and supporting the growth of this business – which is such an important employer in rural Wales. I wish the team every success with their innovative ideas for future development of the resort.”

Bluestone Chief Executive, William McNamara, said:

“Pembrokeshire does tourism for a living and we’re incredibly proud of the way in which Bluestone has cemented itself as a unique jewel in the crown of the Welsh tourism offering.

“Clearly, with a thriving industry, there are huge opportunities for the sector and for us as a business. Our research shows that 50% of our guests have never previously visited Pembrokeshire so there’s a real opportunity here to demonstrate our unique offering to new audiences.

“I’m pleased to have the opportunity to showcase all that has been achieved at Bluestone to date and to share with the Cabinet Secretary our ambitious vision for the future.”

The 115 jobs at Bluestone are in addition to the 696 new and 787 safeguarded jobs that were announced by the Welsh Government last week following direct support.

[New National Endowment for Music announced](#)

The National Endowment for Music, a joint initiative between Kirsty Williams and Ken Skates, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure, is a new and innovative approach to supporting young people to develop their talents in music.

The initial contribution of £1m will be provided to the Arts Council of Wales to cover the set up costs of the Endowment with a further contribution to be made to the seed fund once it is in place. It is our ambition that the fund will eventually generate at least £1m per year, which will be used to fund additional music activities for young people across the country.

Kirsty Williams said,

“The National Endowment for Music will help ensure that all our young people, from whatever background, can develop their talents and skills through music.

“During my time as Cabinet Secretary visiting schools across the country, I continue to be impressed and inspired by the musical talent of our young people and the schools that promote such opportunities. I want to build on this success and extend these opportunities throughout Wales.

“Having experiences outside the classroom is a sure way to help children build confidence and discover what inspires them. In time, this Endowment will provide extra chances for young people to access important education experiences.”

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said,

“If you were to ask people around the world to name things they associate with Wales, their list would undoubtedly involve music. From our traditional choirs to musicians who perform across the globe, Wales punches well above its weight. We need to make sure the next generation can carry on this great tradition.

“Local authority music services have been badly affected by the austerity imposed by the Westminster Government. This £1 million contribution is intended as a catalyst, a demonstration to potential donors of our commitment to the arts and to our musical heritage.”

Phil George, Chair of Arts Council of Wales added,

“Challenging times call for determined action. It’s more important than ever that we provide opportunities for young people to enrich their lives through artistic expression. This new fund is an invitation to private and corporate donors to join the Welsh Government in nurturing young musical talents and helping them delight and amaze us all.”

Karl Napieralla who chaired the Music Services Task and Finish Group, which recommended establishing the fund said,

“I am delighted that one of the recommendations from the Task and Finish Group is coming to fruition. Hopefully the funding will help secure the future opportunities for young people in Wales from whatever background to enjoy and participate in music.”

The National Endowment for Music builds on the £20 million Creative Learning through the Arts Plan to support creative teaching and learning in schools.

The Endowment is our long term, sustainable approach to increasing musical opportunities for the young people of Wales.

“A better and fairer approach” to public access for outdoor recreation

The Welsh Government asked the public for its opinions in 2015. Many of the

5,800 who responded said the current system is too complex and burdensome with some strong, and sometimes polarised, views on how it might be improved.

The [consultation](#) revealed the wide range of outdoor activities taking place across Wales but also exposed challenges faced by land managers and flaws and inconsistencies in the current system.

After reviewing the responses, Lesley Griffiths has announced her intention to develop proposals on how current laws can be improved in order to:

- Achieve consistency in the opportunities available for participation and how activities are restricted and regulated;
- Simplify procedures for designating and recording public access;
- Improve existing advisory forums and better communicate access rights and responsibilities.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“Outdoor recreation makes a significant contribution to the economy and provides considerable health and social benefits. This is demonstrated by the huge success of the Wales Coast Path which has increased Wales’ profile at home and abroad. We now have the opportunity to build on this success.

“Wales needs an approach to public access for outdoor recreation that is less burdensome to administer, provides for a wide range of activities, but at the same time, respects the concerns of landowners.

“Whilst we can learn from other countries’ approaches, Wales requires laws which suit its cultural and physical landscape. We are very much aware of the concerns of landowners and the aspirations of access users. I will publish our proposals at the earliest opportunity so people can have their say, so we achieve a system that works in the best interest of all parties”.

[Preferred candidate for Welsh Revenue Authority chair confirmed](#)

Before the chair of the WRA is formally appointed, the National Assembly’s Finance Committee will hold a pre-appointment hearing on Thursday February 16 to take evidence from Ms Bishop as the preferred candidate.

Ms Bishop’s announcement as the preferred candidate follows a recommendation

by an independently-chaired appointments panel after a fair and open recruitment exercise regulated by the Commission for Public Appointments.

The Tax Collection and Management (Wales) Act, which was passed by the National Assembly in April 2016, established devolved tax arrangements in Wales, including the creation of the WRA to collect and manage devolved Welsh taxes.

The WRA will become operational from April 2018, when stamp duty land tax and landfill tax are devolved to Wales. The WRA will be a non-ministerial department of the Welsh Government, which is accountable to Welsh Ministers, the National Assembly and Welsh taxpayers.

Notes

- A pre-appointment hearing has been arranged for the chair of the WRA as this is the first non-ministerial department to be established by the Welsh Government. Pre-appointment hearings are used elsewhere in the UK to enable committees to take evidence from the government's preferred candidate for certain key public appointments prior to the final appointment decision.
- The National Assembly's Finance Committee will publish a report setting out its views about the preferred candidate's suitability for the post. A final decision about the appointment will be made by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government.

Kathryn Bishop

- Kathryn has more than 30 years' experience working with organisations undergoing major change – at Accenture, Allied Dunbar, Eagle Star, Zurich and the University of the West of England. Her background includes IT and HR.
- She has a portfolio of commitments and is an associate fellow of Saïd Business School (University of Oxford), where she directs and teaches on leadership programmes for professional service firms and other multinational corporations.
- Kathryn was appointed a civil service commissioner in April 2012 and acted as the interim First Civil Service Commissioner from April to September 2016.
- She is a director of a consulting business, managing projects for clients, including assistance with strategic planning for private sector organisations, executive agencies and NHS trusts.
- She has held a number of non-executive directorships within government, including the UK Border Agency, the UK Intellectual Property Office and the Welsh Government.

The Welsh Revenue Authority (WRA)

The WRA will have comparable powers to other UK tax authorities so its functions can be undertaken consistently and comprehensively.

As well as collecting tax, the WRA will:

- Provide information, advice and help about taxes to taxpayers
- Resolve complaints and disputes
- Promote tax compliance
- Reduce tax evasion and tax avoidance
- Support the development of Welsh Government tax policy