

£84m convention centre on track to deliver UK Space Agency conference

The last struts of steel will be slotted into place this week to complete the 4,600-ton steelwork frame as the ICC Wales venue takes shape ahead of its opening next summer. The UK Space Agency Conference from July 9-11 will be the first major event to be staged at the new centre.

ICC Wales will accommodate up to 5,000 delegates within a 26,000 square metre footprint, making it the largest centre of its kind in Wales and south west England.

On a visit to see the progress at the site, Economy Secretary Mr Skates said:

“The work done to date really emphasises what an impressive project this is. The International Convention Centre Wales will be an iconic, major asset for Wales, enabling us to compete with any venue in the UK and beyond to attract and host key events that will make a huge contribution to our economy.

“It’s already providing opportunities for local businesses throughout the construction phase, but the economic benefits of the new convention centre will stretch far beyond the new building itself. Business tourism brings with it wide ranging benefits and the new centre will allow us to build on our international reputation as hosts of some of the world’s biggest events.

“This is a project that will make a huge statement along the M4 corridor about the shared ambitions of Welsh Government and the Celtic Manor Resort and I am delighted that everything is on track to deliver major events, starting with the highly anticipated UK Space Agency Conference in 2019.”

ICC Wales will house a 1,500 auditorium and a 4,000 square metre exhibition hall which will be Europe’s largest pillar-free ballroom.

The venue represents a step change in capacity for both Wales and the Celtic Manor Resort to accommodate globally significant corporate events and association conferences, and build on the reputation established by hosting the Ryder Cup and the NATO Summit in the last decade. The Welsh Government and Celtic Manor are 50:50 joint venture partners in the project.

Celtic Manor Resort and ICC Wales Chief Executive Ian Edwards said:

“ICC Wales will be a real game-changer for Wales and is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the whole country to benefit from business tourism.

“The events industry is worth about £42 billion to the UK economy. That is a huge sum and Wales’ share of that right now is only about 1.5% purely because we don’t have the facility or the infrastructure. ICC Wales will change that.

“We are delighted by the progress made on construction and it was a pleasure to show the Cabinet Secretary around what is going to be an inspiring venue as it begins to really take shape.”

Transport Secretary puts forward Welsh stations for UK Government improvements

AfA is a UK Government funded programme, used to create an obstacle free, accessible route from station entrance to platform. This generally includes providing lifts or ramps, along with associated works to improve accessibility for rail passengers.

The stations, which cover Mid and West Wales, North Wales and South East Wales, were recommended by a Wales and Borders railway industry group and are in addition to four previously committed-to schemes which were deferred by the UK government.

Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Improving accessibility for passengers is a key priority for me. An unacceptable number of our stations are wholly or partly inaccessible and this provides an opportunity to address some of those issues in Wales.

Although rail infrastructure is non-devolved and the responsibility of the UK Government, our Wales and Border rail service contract includes a £15m investment by Transport for Wales (TfW) towards station accessibility improvements.

We have worked with TfW to allocate £10m of this to match fund the Wales and Borders station nominations to the UK Government’s Access for All funding, extending the benefits passengers can experience across Wales by increasing what we can achieve by combining investments.”

A list of fifteen stations have been nominated for a share of the Department for Transport’s £300 million station improvement programme, planned to run

from 2019 to 2024.

If those applications are successful they will be given step free station access, and will build on the 11 stations already benefitting from previous investment, including Radyr, Wrexham, Bridgend and Prestatyn.

Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

“My ambition is to improve accessibility at all stations, based on an assessment of need, and to ensure a fair distribution of investment in step free access across each region of Wales.”

Organ donation consent rates in Wales highest in the UK

The donation after circulatory death (DCD) consent rate in Wales has also improved and is now 68% compared to England 59.8%.

Wales now has the highest combined DBD and DCD consent rate in the UK at 80.5%, when compared to England (66.2%), Scotland (63.6%) and Northern Ireland (66.7).

On 1 December 2015, Wales became the first country in the UK to move to a soft opt-out system of consent to organ donation. This means that if a person has not registered a decision to become an organ donor (opted in) or a decision not to become an organ donor (opted out), they will be considered as having no objection to being an organ donor – this is known as deemed consent.

NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) have been undertaking an analysis of the effect of Welsh Legislation on consent/authorisation rates since 1 January 2016. They have collected cumulative data on consent rates in Wales compared to England.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“Every organ donation is an invaluable, potentially life-giving gift. These new figures are a real cause for optimism and another indicator our pioneering legislation is having the effect we hoped it would and is helping deliver real improvements for Wales.

“None of what we have achieved would have been possible without the support of the Welsh population and the healthcare professionals involved in making this a success. I thank them all for getting

behind this and am keen to see if these increases are sustained.”

Chief Medical Officer Dr Frank Atherton said:

“These are encouraging figures but we must continue the good work to further increase organ donation here in Wales.

“We must always be mindful that the numbers in Wales are small and we have to wait to see if these increases are sustained. We cannot definitely say this is solely down to our organ donation legislation but I think it is reasonable to believe that it must have contributed to it, together with better public awareness and good clinical practice.

“We know awareness and understanding is increasing, but it is really important we continue to reach the Welsh public on this issue. It’s really important that we keep the momentum going and I urge everyone to take a moment and have a conversation with their loved ones about their organ donation decision.

“If you know you want to be an organ donor, then simply tell your loved ones. Your family will be involved in any discussions about organ donation if you are in a position to donate your organs when you die. Never having discussed organ donation could make an already difficult time more stressful for families.”

New buzz around Welsh Government offices

Nine new hives have been installed on the roof of the Cathays Park offices. The hives are part of Pharmabees, Cardiff University’s award-winning project which aims to host a community of bees on buildings in the city centre. There are other hives on the roofs of the National Museum of Wales, the St David’s Shopping Centre, Cardiff University buildings and in Bute Park.

Each hive will be home to up to 50,000 bees during the summer and will be managed by local bee keepers. The Welsh Government also has apiaries at its offices in Merthyr Tydfil, Llandudno Junction and Aberystwyth, along with other biodiversity projects on its estate.

The initiative is part of a number of Welsh Government biodiversity projects as part of its Action Plan for Pollinators. Pollination is also vital for crop production and worth more than £690 million to agriculture in the UK each year. Many wild flowering plants also rely on insect pollination for

reproduction.

The Environment Minister, Hannah Blythyn, said:

“Bees are a crucial component of the food chain, acting as pollinators for a huge variety of plants and helping them flourish. But we’ve seen a decline in bee populations in recent years and we must take steps to reverse these trends.

“Our Action Plan for Pollinators in Wales sets out how we will provide diverse and connected flower-rich habitats for pollinators and raise awareness of their importance.

“Installing bee hives on public buildings is one way to highlight the importance of pollinators, with the added bonus of producing amazing honey at the same time!”

[Children in care in Wales are happy and settled – new survey shows](#)

The “Our Lives, Our Care” pilot survey on the experiences of looked after children was conducted by the charity Coram Voice and the University of Bristol in six Welsh local authority areas earlier this year.

Commissioned by the Welsh Government and supported by the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, it was completed by 686 children and young people – approximately 28% of all looked after children in Wales aged between 4 and 18 years old.

The survey was conducted as part of the Bright Spots Programme to help local authorities, as corporate parents, to better understand what matters most to the children they are looking after and their thoughts and feelings about the care they receive.

The survey found:

- 96% of children (4-10yrs) trusted their carer and only 4% did not, while 71% of young people (11-18yrs) trusted their carer ‘all or some of the time’ and only 7% did not trust at all
- The vast majority of children and young people did feel safe in their placements. In fact, a larger proportion of looked after children ‘always’ felt safe in comparison with children in the general population
- 94% of children and young people (8-18yrs) thought that their carers showed an interest in their education

Later today, the Minister will attend a national event in Llandrindod Wells to celebrate the work being done across Wales to improve the outcomes for looked after children.

Welcoming the results of the survey, Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“Improving outcomes and life chances for care experienced children is a priority for me as Children’s Minister and of the Welsh Government as a whole.

“Recognising and listening to children and young people, and being responsive to their views and experiences is fundamental. So I want to thank all the children and young people who have given their time to participate in this survey.

“There are areas where we are doing well but also others where we can do better. We must now learn from what children and young people are saying matters to them most – in their relationships with their carers, families and friends, how they are supported and the opportunities they are given to flourish.

“I want local authorities to use the information wisely so it can influence how services are developed and delivered to meet children and young people’s needs and expectations.”

“My message to the children in care in Wales is – we will listen to you, and we will act to ensure your concerns are addressed.”

The Children’s Commissioner for Wales, Sally Holland said:

“Speaking to children and young people face to face is very important, but a survey does something different. It gives them the chance to give anonymous, honest feedback on their experiences, and provides the opportunity for those in charge of their care to pinpoint areas they may need to work on to improve experiences.

“The questions in this survey focused on children’s rights and well-being, and it is the first time such a survey has been conducted in Wales. I championed this survey being undertaken here in Wales to make sure that ‘bright spots’ of practice can be highlighted and celebrated, and that the concerns of care experienced children here in Wales can be heard and, more importantly, addressed.

“I look forward to seeing the concrete changes and actions that come from this important piece of work, reflecting what each local authority as the corporate parent will take forward for their own children in their care.”

Brigid Robinson, Managing Director of Coram Voice, said:

“We are pleased to work in partnership with the Welsh Government so that the views and experiences of more children in care can be heard, and its commitment to act on these findings is very encouraging.

“We hope that further local authorities will get involved in the programme so that we can build a wider picture of how children and young people feel about their care, address any variation in support, and most importantly act upon what they tell us.”

The co-author of the report, Professor Julie Selwyn CBE, Director of the University of Bristol’s Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies, said:

“I am delighted that the Welsh government has today published the views of over 600 looked after children and young people in Wales on how they feel their lives are going.

“Most children felt that their lives were improving, felt safe in their placements and trusted their carers but about one in six young people (11-18yrs) had concerning low levels of wellbeing. Girls were twice as likely as boys to have low wellbeing as were those who had experienced many changes of placement. Children who had an adult in their life who they trusted, had at least one good friend, understood why they were in care, and liked their appearance were more likely to have good wellbeing.

“We are pleased that the local authorities who took part in the study have already begun to make changes in response to the findings.”