

Press release: Fuelling the momentum for a North Wales Growth Deal

The time has come for North Wales to become an economic powerhouse, UK Government Minister Guto Bebb will say as he embarks on a two-day visit to fire up discussions on a growth deal for the region.

Mr Bebb will meet with business leaders and representatives of local authorities and higher education to discuss their vision for a North Wales Growth Deal and to underline the UK Government's support for the area's economy.

The UK Government has already delivered the £1.2 billion Cardiff Capital Region City Deal and, earlier this year, the Prime Minister signed the Swansea Bay City Region Deal.

The Government is now turning its attentions to delivering a growth deal for North Wales, working with local partners and the Welsh Government to identify the best way to strengthen the region's economy and make the most of its connections to the Northern Powerhouse.

UK Government in Wales Minister Guto Bebb said:

City and Growth Deals are about revolutionising the way our towns and cities govern themselves, shifting powers down from Whitehall and Cardiff Bay to local leaders who are better placed to take decisions that affect their communities.

This is North Wales' opportunity to benefit from this movement. I want to see what progress is being made on developing the vision for the region's economic future.

We want to work closely with the Welsh Government, local economic ambition board, education institutions and local authorities to agree a new deal that will successfully drive growth across the region.

I have no doubt about the ambition of local leaders in North Wales to get this right, and I am determined that powers and tools are handed down to them to grow their economy.

Mr Bebb will use the meetings to reinforce the message that North Wales has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to capitalise on the benefits the Northern Powerhouse will bring.

He added:

The Northern Powerhouse, coupled with a growth deal represents our best chance to bring transformational change to North Wales. The region is perfectly positioned to benefit from the Northern Powerhouse. Its export base and reputation for big energy projects makes it a perfect partner for closer collaboration to expand the economy of North.

It is these expertise and links that the North Wales Growth Deal visionaries must build on. They are now in the driving seat to deliver.

The Minister's visit to North Wales will also see him visit two companies leading the way in groundbreaking design and research in support of the Wales Festival of Innovation.

He will see a fusion of academia and industry during a visit to the Optic Technology Centre at Wrexham Glyndwr University in St Asaph – a research hub and business incubator that has created dozens of hi-tech companies and hundreds of high quality science-based jobs over the past 12 years.

Professor Maria Hinfelaar, Vice-Chancellor of Wrexham Glyndwr University, said:

The OpTIC Centre places Wrexham Glyndwr University at the heart of science and technology industry in North Wales.

It's fantastic to be involved with world-leading research and innovation and the centre's role as a hub for incubation is integral to the university's drive to support entrepreneurship. OpTIC Glyndwr is already playing a critical role in the triple helix of academia-industry-government which will help to create jobs and grow the economy of the region.

Mr Bebb will then visit Qioptiq in St Asaph which was recently awarded a £82m Ministry of Defence contract to maintain surveillance and targeting equipment for the UK's Armed Forces.

Managing Director at Qioptiq, Peter White said:

St. Asaph in North Wales is home to one of the UKs largest clusters of high technology optical and optronic innovators and Qioptiq has been the catalyst for many of them. Winning a major contract such as this provides security and allows us to invest in the infrastructure and in our people and this in turn helps the local economy and our supply chain. We are recognised worldwide for our technology, capability and innovation and this reflects on the UK in a very positive manner.

ENDS

Notes to Editors: On 6 September 2016, the six local authorities of North Wales and the region's leading higher and further education institutions published A Growth Vision for the Economy of North Wales.

The vision centres on developing the energy, advanced manufacturing and digital economic clusters in the North Wales region as a means of driving economic growth and raising productivity. The vision focuses on improving transport and digital infrastructure, developing the region's skill base and promoting business growth. You can view the vision [here](#).

News story: David Davis' opening statement from the Queen's Speech Debate 'Brexit and Foreign Affairs'

The negotiations over our exit from the European Union are fundamental to our future.

It is no exaggeration to say that they will shape everything we want to achieve as a country over the coming years and decades.

We are doing nothing less than refashioning Britain's place in the world.

Our success or failure will determine and shape all our futures so it's obviously a great responsibility but also a great opportunity.

It falls on all of us in this place – every one of us in this Parliament – to make a success of it.

If we work together, and we succeed, we can ensure a strong and growing economy which spreads prosperity and opportunity around our country, which underpins well-funded public services and gives a better future for us and our children.

I have always been clear that after Brexit, the United Kingdom will continue to be the outward looking and global nation it has always been.

Indeed, we should be more engaged with the world than ever before.

For I firmly believe that last year's vote to leave the EU was not a call for retrenchment, a call to look in on ourselves.

The UK has the means, the ambition and now the freedom to play a more positive role in the world.

That is demonstrated in our commitments on defence and international aid.

The UK is the only country in the world that meets both its NATO pledge to spend 2% of GDP on defence, and the UN target to spend 0.7% of our Gross National Income on development spending.

That ensures that we both defend our values, work to tackle poverty and conflict and help to protect the most vulnerable in our world.

After exiting the European Union, Britain will be a country that still steps up to its role as a world leader.

That means continuing to help to protect and secure our wider European continent.

We want to deepen cooperation with other European states and bring the European Union policy into a wider, global framework.

Seeking a new deep and special partnership with the EU

As we have said, we will seek a deep and special partnership with the European Union. One that reflects our shared values and histories.

One that works for all parts of the United Kingdom, our Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. And one that delivers for the special circumstances around the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, because no-one wants to see a return to a hard border.

It should be a partnership like no other.

It should be underpinned by ambitious agreements on free trade and customs, covering goods and services and seeking the greatest possible tariff and barrier-free trade.

It should also include a broad security agreement covering all aspects of our current collaboration – including defence and foreign policy, justice and home affairs, law enforcement and counter-terrorism.

And it should be supported by continued cooperation and open access in highly regulated areas like aviation, financial services, data, transport and nuclear.

We recognise that such a wide ranging partnership will require fair and uniform implementation. It must also be long lasting.

That is why we must ensure mechanisms exist to manage the evolution of our regulatory frameworks to maintain a fair and open trading environment and minimise non-tariff barriers.

That is also why we have been clear that this new partnership must be overseen by a new independent, impartial dispute resolution mechanism.

This cannot and will not be the European Court of Justice. No nation outside

the European Union submits to direct jurisdiction of the ECJ – neither will the UK.

We will start towards this new partnership by securing the rights of citizens on both sides.

I know everyone in this House will agree with me that European Union citizens make a huge contribution to our society.

You've heard from the Prime Minister about what the approach will entail – but the overarching principle is that European citizens living in the United Kingdom will continue to live their lives in exactly the same way as British citizens, with the same rights and responsibilities.

We intend to reach agreement on this issue as quickly as possible.

But not everything in these negotiations will be easy. They will be complex and, I have no doubt, at times even confrontational.

But I am convinced that both sides want to secure close cooperation and a deep, new partnership.

Leaving the single market and customs union

Last year in the referendum we received a national instruction.

One which we will undertake in a way that serves the national interest.

The instruction from the British people was to take back control of our borders, our money and our laws.

So failing to deliver on this instruction is not an option for those of us that count ourselves as democrats.

Ending the free movement of people means leaving the single market – as the EU has made abundantly clear to those that have cared to listen.

We all accept the need to protect existing UK business in the EU. Leaving the single market does not mean losing access to that market. Which is why we're proposing a new ambitious free trade agreement.

But this is not just about protecting existing markets.

To deliver in the national interest we must seize on our new freedoms in terms of trade to create jobs and lift living standards. Britain must get out into the world, forge its own path, and be a true beacon for free trade.

That means leaving the customs union, so that Britain for the first time in over 40 years will be able to take full advantage of growing markets across the world and determine a trade policy fashioned – not around 28 country's interests – but about one country's interest. So we get a trade policy that suits this country, and this country alone.

The European Commission itself says that 90% of future growth in world trade

will come from outside the European Union.

This has already been reflected by the long term decline in the share of British goods that go to the European Union as our global trade has increased dramatically.

That 90% growth outside has meant that our relative share of trade has gone down.

In services for example, we're now 60% outside the EU and 40% inside. Now, all of this is without preferential trade agreements for much of our trade.

Just so the House understands, the best academic data I can find shows that creating a new trade agreement increases the amount of trade by about 28%.

If the House wants an individual parable, NAFTA, in its first seven years of operation, increased trade by 40%. So these are really significant items of policy which we can exercise.

So if this House wants a Brexit deal that drives prosperity and living standards.

If it really wants a Brexit for jobs. Then it must put its faith in free trade and ensure an exit that means we can embrace its opportunities to the full.

Let us move beyond the platitudinous propaganda of "hard and soft Brexit". Let us discuss how we fashion our new place in the world. And start acting together, truly in the national interest.

Repeal Bill

There is an extensive legislative agenda which is necessary to prepare the UK for its new place in the world.

Working together, in the national interest, will be crucial as we go through the process in this House – and the other place – of putting necessary legislation in position to make sure our laws work effectively on the day we leave the European Union.

For my part, I am willing to work with anyone to this end.

The sheer importance of this issue makes that essential.

The eyes of the country will be on us all. We will all be judged on our willingness to work pragmatically and effectively together to deliver the verdict of the people in last year's referendum.

Nothing is more central to this than the Repeal Bill.

The principle is straightforward: to repeal the 1972 Act, and to transfer existing European Union law into UK law. And, to answer a question which my opposite number has raised, these rights and freedoms will be brought into UK

law without qualification, without limitation and without any sunset clauses. Any material changes will be dealt with by subsequent primary legislation.

I cannot stress enough to the House, and the nation, the importance of this Bill in ensuring that we can have a smooth and orderly exit from the European Union.

Every part of the United Kingdom needs to prepare its statute book and ensure that it functions after we leave the European Union. The Repeal Bill will give the Devolved Administrations the power to do just that and ensure a smooth and orderly exit for all.

As we have also said repeatedly, we expect there will be a significant increase in the decision-making power of each Devolved Administration once we exit the EU.

That is why – given that this Bill affects the powers of the devolved institutions and legislates in devolved areas – we will seek the consent of the devolved legislatures for the Bill. We would like everyone to come together in support of this legislation, which is crucial to delivering the outcome of the referendum.

When we designed our approach to the Repeal Bill we endeavoured to strike the right balance between getting our statute book in order for the day we exit but also ensuring full parliamentary involvement and scrutiny.

Indeed, it is the only viable plan that has been put forward in this House. While I have heard some concerns raised by those on the opposite benches, I have heard no alternatives put forward nor any detailed proposals for how they would approach this crucial matter.

As I said to my opposite number when I presented our white paper on the Repeal Bill: “If, in the next two years, we find something that we have missed, we will put it right.”

That offer still stands, and not just to the opposition but to the entire House.

We must get this right.

We must be able to deliver a functioning UK statute book by the day we exit the European Union.

When the Lords Constitution Committee examined this issue, they found few alternatives. Their recommended approach aligns closely with that which we have set out.

It is vital for businesses, workers and consumers across the United Kingdom that this House undertakes the difficult but eminently achievable task of working together, responsibly in the national interest, to provide certainty and stability.

Other EU exit related legislation

While the Repeal Bill is the centrepiece of our approach, it is far from the only piece of exit related legislation we will be putting through.

The Government is bringing forward a first tranche of Bills on areas affected by our exit from the European Union. These include legislation on trade, customs, immigration, international sanctions, nuclear safeguards, agriculture, and fisheries.

I have told this House a number of times, we are not going to make significant policy changes without first passing primary legislation that will be thoroughly debated and voted on in both Houses. These Bills will deliver on that promise.

This initial tranche of Bills also has a further purpose. As I am sure many across the House would agree, it is the job of a responsible government to prepare for all eventualities.

I have made clear yet again today that we want a close new partnership with the EU that works for everyone. However, we must also ensure we have a functioning statute book and functioning national systems no matter what – in other words for all outcomes. These bills will help to provide that. Not doing so would, as the then Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee put it, would be a ‘dereliction of duty’.

We must and will be prepared for any outcome. However, I remain confident that we can get the right deal from these negotiations.

Doing so is fundamentally in the interests of both the UK and the EU.

A strong and prosperous EU, capable of projecting its values and continuing to play a leading role in the world, is in the United Kingdom’s best interests.

Just as a strong and prosperous UK is in the European Union’s interests.

Conclusion

The task ahead will no doubt be challenging.

But it was a task set to us by the British people in last year’s referendum – a national instruction.

So, it is our duty in this House to pull together and deliver on that instruction in the national interest.

For if we do, we can deliver a better and brighter future for the entire United Kingdom.

A future where we step onto the world stage, as a champion for free trade, a firm advocate of the rule of law and a true beacon for democracy.

Press release: £1 million for local charities responding to Grenfell Tower disaster

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid today (26 June 2017) announced that the government is providing £1 million to support the charitable response to the Grenfell Tower disaster.

This recognises the extraordinary efforts made by many smaller charities and not-for-profit organisations following this tragic event.

The money is a significant contribution to the locally-led recovery effort. It will be administered by a consortium of independent trusts and charities, and be co-ordinated by [London Funders](#).

The first payments are in the process of being made to reimburse charities for their immediate response to the disaster, as well as supporting on-going efforts.

The government is providing a further £48,000 to give organisational support for the assistance centre, located at the [Westway Centre](#), and the community groups working most closely with the people affected. This will be administered by voluntary organisation [Locality](#).

The funding announced today is in addition to the £5 million [Grenfell Tower Residents' Discretionary Fund](#).

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The residents of Grenfell Tower have been through some of the most harrowing experiences imaginable and the response from local charities and volunteers has been remarkable.

This funding will mean that smaller charities and community organisations can continue to make a huge difference.

The first payments are in the process of being made and the government will continue to do everything we can as fast as we can to support those affected by this terrible tragedy.

David Warner, CEO of London Funders, said:

We are delighted that the DCLG has responded with vital funds to provide immediate support to community groups in Kensington and

Chelsea who are supporting those directly affected by the Grenfell Fire.

London Funders, along with a consortium of Trusts and Foundations, is making sure the money gets to those groups who can best use it as quickly as possible. We have now put in place the processes to make that happen.

Tony Armstrong, CEO of Locality, said:

Local community organisations have been at the heart of the response to the devastating Grenfell Tower fire, providing relief, shelter and support to the hundreds of individuals and families.

Local people, groups and organisations need to be heard and have more power over what happens in their local area. This funding will help make sure people affected by the disaster continue to receive valuable services, and have access to the local facilities and buildings that have been so crucial in the response to the fire.

Statement to Parliament: Government response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy

With permission Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the Government's response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and our safety inspections of cladding in other buildings.

Introduction

I know I speak for the whole House when I express my heartfelt grief at the Grenfell Tower catastrophe.

Almost a fortnight has passed but the shock has not subsided.

I have visited Kensington and witnessed the terrible anguish of those who have lost so much.

In some cases people will have lost literally everything.

I am sure that, like me, many members have returned from their constituencies this morning with the anger and the fears of residents still ringing in their ears.

Anger that a tragedy on this scale was ever allowed to happen in 21st century

Britain, and fear that it could happen again.

It is this fear I want to address first today Mr Speaker.

Cladding checking process

I know the entire country is anxious to hear what we are doing to reassure residents about fire safety in similar blocks around the country.

My department has contacted all councils and housing associations asking them to identify all tall residential buildings in England that they're responsible for, which have potentially similar cladding.

We estimate this number to be around 600.

On [18 June we wrote to them and asked them to start sending samples](#), and on 21 June our combustibility testing programme for Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding started, run by the Building Research Establishment (BRE).

On [22 June the government provided advice to all these landlords about interim safety measures](#) where a building has ACM cladding that is unlikely to be compliant with Building Regulations.

This advice was recommended by an independent panel of experts and includes advice based on the emerging findings from the Metropolitan Police investigation into Grenfell Tower.

I can inform the House that as of midday today, the cladding from 75 high-rise buildings, in 26 local authority areas, has failed the combustibility test.

I know members will rightly want to know if their local residents are affected, and my department will publish regular updates on [GOV.UK](#).

The combustibility test has 3 categories rated 1 to 3, and it is judged that cladding material in category 2 or 3 does not meet the requirements for limited combustibility in Building Regulations.

I can also confirm to the House that so far, on that basis, all samples of cladding tested have failed.

The fact that all samples so far have failed underlines the value of the testing programme and the vital importance of submitting samples urgently.

The testing facility can analyse 100 samples a day and runs around the clock.

I am concerned about the speed at which samples are being submitted. I would urge all landlords to submit their samples immediately.

In every case of failed tests landlords and local fire and rescue services are alerted, and we are supporting and monitoring all follow-up action, including by a dedicated caseworker in my department.

Landlords for all affected buildings have informed or are informing tenants and implementing the interim safety measures needed, working with fire and rescue services.

At this time the safety of people living in these buildings is our paramount concern.

I am determined residents have as much peace of mind as possible in such worrying times.

Landlords must keep residential buildings safe for their tenants.

Where they cannot satisfy that obligation with appropriate mitigating measures, we expect alternative accommodation to be provided while the remedial work is carried out.

That is exactly what has happened in Camden and I'd like to pay tribute to the residents for their brave response in such a distressing situation.

Other residential buildings and public buildings

Mr Speaker, it is obvious the problem of unsafe cladding may not be a problem unique to social housing, or residential buildings.

We have asked other owners, landlords and managers of private sector residential blocks to consider their own buildings and we have made the testing facility freely available to them.

My department is also working with the [Government Property Unit](#) to oversee checks on wider public sector buildings.

Hospitals are well prepared – each one has a tailored fire safety plan.

But nothing is more important than the safety of patients and staff, so on a precautionary basis we have asked all hospitals to conduct additional checks.

The government will continue to work closely with fire and rescue colleagues to prioritise and conduct checks based on local circumstances.

The [Education and Skills Funding Agency](#) are contacting all bodies responsible for safety in schools instructing them to carry out immediate checks to identify any buildings which require further investigation. We will have more information this week.

Across the wider government estate 15 buildings have been identified as requiring further investigation.

Victims and survivors

Now while that work continues it is vital we offer every assistance to the victims of the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

As of this morning, 79 people have been confirmed dead or listed as missing

presumed dead. Sadly, it is believed that this number will increase.

Mr Speaker, as the Prime Minister told the House last week, the initial response of the emergency services was exemplary, but the immediate support on the ground was simply not good enough.

A remarkable community effort sprung up overnight, while official support was found wanting.

That failure was inexcusable, and it is right that a new team and approach is now in operation.

We have activated the Bellwin Scheme and sent significant central government resource including:

- a single point of access into government provided by the Grenfell Tower Victims Unit, operating from my department
- staff from 6 government departments offering support at the Westway Assistance Centre
- and a family bereavement centre in Holborn

The government has set aside a [£5 million Grenfell Tower Residents' Discretionary Fund](#) and more than £1 million has been distributed.

Each household affected is receiving £5,500 to provide immediate assistance, and so far 111 households have received payments.

The British Red Cross are operating an advice line for anyone affected or in need of support.

They are just one of many charities, faith organisations, and businesses that have provided invaluable assistance to victims.

Mr Speaker, I can announce to the House today that the government will contribute £1 million to support their efforts.

This money will be new money; it will be distributed by the local consortium of charities, trusts and foundations who are working together to respond to this tragic event.

Update on re-housing

Our other priority has been to find survivors a safe and secure place to live.

The Prime Minister made a clear commitment that a good quality temporary home would be offered for every family whose home was destroyed in the fire, within 3 weeks.

Every one of those families will also be offered a permanent social home in the local area.

This work is underway, and the first families moved into their homes over the weekend.

Last week I also [announced](#) that the government had secured 68 homes in a new development in Kensington to rehouse local residents.

We will do everything we can to support the victims of the Grenfell fire now and in the future, and I will regularly update the House on our progress.

Building Regulations / Expert Panel/ Public Inquiry

Mr Speaker, as the Prime Minister said in her statement to the House last week, the disaster at Grenfell Tower should never have happened.

There is an ongoing police investigation, and there will be an independent judge-led, public inquiry, to get to the truth about what happened and who was responsible.

Building Regulations and the system for ensuring fire safety in buildings have been developed over many decades.

Until the Grenfell Fire many experts would have claimed that system has served us well.

But now we have witnessed a catastrophic failure, on a scale many thought impossible in 21st century Britain.

It is clear that this failure must be understood; it must be rectified without delay, and the government is determined to ensure that happens.

As an initial step I can inform the House today that I am establishing an independent expert advisory panel who will advise the government on any steps that should immediately be taken on fire safety.

Further details of the panel including its members will be released shortly.

Mr Speaker, this tragedy must never be forgotten, and it should weigh heavily on the consciousness of every person tasked with making the decisions that ensure it can never, ever happen again.

[News story: UK government publishes proposals on rights of EU citizens](#)

[Speaking in the House of Commons](#), the Prime Minister said that EU citizens

make an invaluable contribution to the UK and the government wants to provide them with certainty about the future of their lives.

Theresa May said a [policy paper](#) published by the government would make clear the UK's 'fair and serious offer' to maintain EU citizens' rights, which will be enshrined in UK law.

The Prime Minister once again made it clear these proposals should be part of a reciprocal agreement for EU citizens in the UK and UK nationals in Europe, which the government wants to agree as quickly as possible.

The Prime Minister said:

EU citizens are an integral part of the economic, cultural and social fabric of our country and I have always been clear that I want to protect their rights.

That is why I initially sought an agreement on this before we triggered Article 50. And it is why I am making it an immediate priority at the beginning of the negotiations.

That agreement must be reciprocal because we must protect the rights of UK citizens living in the EU too.

Our offer will give those 3 million EU citizens in the UK certainty about the future of their lives. And a reciprocal agreement will provide the same certainty for the more than 1 million UK citizens who are living in the European Union.

In its policy paper, [Safeguarding the position of EU citizens in the UK and UK nationals living in the EU](#), the government makes clear how EU citizens looking to remain in the UK can do so.

The paper confirms the creation of a new 'settled status' for EU citizens who arrive before a cut-off date, which is yet to be specified and will be agreed as part of the negotiations with the EU.

Applicants who already have 5 years' continuous residence in the UK will be immediately eligible for settled status. Those who arrived before the specified date but do not yet meet the 5 year threshold by exit day will be allowed to stay until they reach that milestone and can also secure settled status.

Those EU citizens who are granted settled status will be treated like a comparable UK national, entitled to broadly the same rights and benefits.

And a grace period of up to 2 years will be in place for all EU citizens, including those who arrive after the cut-off date, allowing them to regularise their status to remain in the country.

All those applying to remain in the UK will undergo full criminality checks.

The paper also confirms:

- family dependants who join a qualifying EU citizen in the UK before the UK's exit will be able to apply for settled status after 5 years
- EU citizens looking to remain in the UK will be asked to apply for documentation under a new streamlined, user friendly scheme
- protection for the existing healthcare arrangements for both EU citizens in the UK and UK nationals in the EU. This includes seeking continued participation in the European Health Insurance Card scheme for all UK nationals and EU citizens, including for temporary visits
- the UK intends to provide certainty by continuing to export and uprate the UK State Pension within the EU, as well as offering reassurance that those exporting a benefit at the specified date will be able to do so, subject to ongoing entitlement
- EU citizens who arrived before the specified date should be able to continue to be eligible for Higher Education (HE) and Further Education (FE) student loans and 'home fee' status.
- the UK intends to continue to recognise professional qualifications obtained in the Member States prior to the UK's withdrawal from the EU. This would be part of a reciprocal deal which ensures professional qualifications obtained in the UK and EU Member States continue to be mutually recognised.

Notes for editors

In addition to the publication of the policy paper, the government has updated its [advice for EU citizens living in the UK](#).