

EU boost for £9.4m project will use Caerau's mine-water to warm local homes

Water in the underground mine workings of the former Caerau colliery has been naturally heated by the earth, and as a geothermal source of energy, Bridgend County Borough Council is investigating how it could be extracted, using heat pump technology and a network of pipes, to warm around 150 nearby homes.

The scale of the scheme will be the first of its kind in the UK and would use existing radiators to heat homes without mine-water ever entering residents' properties. Among the global leaders in using this type of technology is Holland, which opened the world's first mine-water power station in 2008 in the town of Heerlen – a Dutch coal-mining area that closed its last mine in the 1970s.

Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, said:

“Our ambition is for our nation to be a world leader in pioneering low carbon energy. This is a cutting-edge model of generating a clean source of renewable energy, drawing on the legacy of our coal mining heritage. It will not only attract further investment to the area, but also address fuel poverty by cutting energy bills and has the potential to be rolled out to Wales and beyond.

“This EU-funded scheme will also create jobs both within the initial construction period and the ongoing supply chain, as well as offering training and educational opportunities in a very innovative area.”

The findings of a feasibility study to determine if the water is warm enough to heat homes are expected by the end of February. This follows test drilling into the mine workings under the Old Brewers site in Caerau which found that the mining void is full of water to a depth of 230m.

The British Geological Survey has since been testing the temperature, chemistry and volume of the mining-water, with the temperature expected to be around 20.6 degrees celsius – warm enough for the scheme to be a success.

Councillor Richard Young, the council's Cabinet Member for Communities, said:

“The volume of water and its temperature makes the scheme possible and now we have been awarded £6.5m of EU funds from the Welsh Government, the next phase is to work through the full scope of the scheme and put everything in place to deliver a trailblazing project for the Llynfi Valley. It will also act as a catalyst for other energy project investments, possibly through the City Deal and other investment.”

While the initial heat network will involve 150 properties, and the nearby school and church, there may be potential for the scheme to eventually warm up to a thousand local homes.

An exhibition is planned for spring 2018 when findings from the feasibility study will be shared with Caerau residents and any other parties who are interested in the project. Construction work will begin in 2020.

The scheme is a demonstrator project for the UK Government led Smart System and Heat Programme. The remaining funds for the £9.4m scheme will be made up by the UK Government, Energy Systems Catapult and Bridgend County Borough Council. Other partners include: BGS, Kensa, Egnida, SPECIFIC, Carreg Las, Natural Resources Wales and The Coal Authority.

[Take Time to Talk, Listen and Play](#)

A new campaign encouraging parents, carers and guardians to take time to talk, listen and play to help their child's language development and communication skills has been launched by the Welsh Government today (18th January).

The 'Take time' campaign is part of a wider Welsh Government approach to oracy which includes £700,000 of extra funding and support to schools in 2018-19 through regional consortia to help improve the language skills of learners. Funding of £700,000 is already in place for 2017-18.

The campaign will provide practical tips to parents/carers to help children aged 3 to 7 improve their language skills and prepare for school.

Research shows that children who receive this attention have a greater capacity for language, and later literacy, boosting their communication skills and chances of success in later life.

Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, launched the 'Take time' campaign at Llangattock Church in Wales School, Crickhowell, earlier today where the reception class took part in an workshop to mark National Storytelling Week.

Kirsty Williams said:

“We are prioritising children’s speech, language and communication skills because they are the building blocks for success, not only in school but later on in life as well.

“Oracy is essential for developing life skills and we are keen to support parents, carers and guardians as they pass these valuable skills on to their children.

“We know there are many different pressures when you’re raising children, sometimes just finding the time can be a challenge, but the message of this campaign is that every effort you make at this early stage will help and the benefits will last a lifetime.

“It’s important that we make this as fun and as rewarding a process as possible so the new campaign provides some helpful hints, tips and practical advice for parents, carers and guardians to support the development of their child’s bilingual speaking, listening and discussion skills.”

Alison Stroud, Head of Wales Office for the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists said:

“The ability to communicate effectively is an essential life skill for all children because it underpins a child’s social and emotional development. In particular, the first three years of a child’s life are crucial in developing all of a young child’s growing need to communicate. Poor speech, language and communication skills can impact their behaviour, mental health, ‘school readiness’ and even their employability as adults.

“Children should be exposed to as many words as possible in everyday experiences to help them develop their language and promote their communication. There are lots of different ways that parents, carers or guardians can support them, but the simplest way is to keep creating opportunities to listen and talk together with the telly, smart phones and other mobile devices turned off.”

From today, advertisements featuring writer and presenter Anni Llyn will run for two weeks on television, local radio stations and online, encouraging parents, carers and guardians of 3 to 7 year olds to take time to talk, listen and play.

The short animations will include top tips for them to help develop their child’s language and communication skills.

Booktrust Cymru’s Pori Drwy Stori programme supports key Foundation Phase areas of learning, including literacy and numeracy, as children start the

reception class at school.

The Welsh Government funded programme provides bilingual learning materials for use in the classroom, and at home, which will be an important resource for the oracy campaign.

Booktrust Cymru's Pori Drwy Stori programme materials are given to every child in the reception year of school. The termly resources supports parents and carers to engage in their child's learning when they start school and focus on the key Foundation Phase areas of learning, including literacy and numeracy.

Helen Wales from Booktrust Cymru added,

"Pori Drwy Stori allows your child to gain confidence with words in a fun way. Our challenges help children learn and recite rhymes or poetry in a fun way, whilst the magazine we produce encourages children to speak, listen and make decisions. We will be launching new materials and a pilot scheme for schools in Wales to help youngsters improve their oracy skills, and hope that parents and teachers will find these tools useful for promoting language development."

"Pori Drwy Stori aims to make learning fun and to give parents and carers ideas about ways they can support their children to talk and learn. The resources help children and families to have fun learning rhymes, to enjoy sharing books and stories and to play number games. The resources encourage children to speak, listen and make decisions building on our long-established Bookstart programme which encourages families to start talking and sharing books, stories and rhymes from a very young age."

Now in its fourth year, 'Education Begins at Home' aims to encourage parents, carers and guardians to do more of the little things at home that will make a big difference to their child's development and education.

For further information about the 'Education Begins at Home' campaign and the online resources available for parents, please visit www.facebook.com/beginsathome (facebook.com/dechraucartref) and follow us on Twitter @edubeginsathome (@dechraucartref)

[Statement by the Health Secretary on](#)

the latest NHS performance stats

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services, Vaughan Gething, said:

“Despite the busiest December on record for our A&E Departments and the busiest ever month for the Welsh Ambulance Service, our NHS has continued to perform under exceptional pressure in delivering emergency and scheduled care. The ambulance target was comfortably achieved in December. Although there was a slight drop in the proportion of patients admitted or discharged within four hours of arrival at A&E, A&E performance for the whole year has improved with 82.5% of patients seen in under four hours up from 81.2% last year.

I want to once again thank our NHS and social care staff for their commitment and hard work in delivering care during this extremely busy period.

“We have worked closely with health boards and partners since last winter to plan for this winter period and invested an additional £60m to help them deliver urgent and emergency care, and ensure planned care activity can continue during this time. During November, the number of patients waiting over 36 weeks stabilised, and while sadly some activity has to be postponed our investment has ensured operations and other procedures have continued through winter. We expect to see reductions in waiting times up to the end of March 2018.

Delayed transfers of care in December were lower than they were the same time last year and for the whole of 2017 the lowest they’ve been since records began. Therapy waiting times have again improved over the month and more people were treated within target times for cancer than in any previous November. Over 90% of urgent cancer patients were seen within the target times, the best performance since February 2014 and the target for non-urgent cancer patients was met.

“We still need to drive up performance in a number of areas but under severe pressure and record levels of demand our NHS has held up and continues to deliver high quality healthcare to patients.”

[Working parents in areas of Gwynedd and Anglesey urged to take up free childcare offer](#)

The Minister visited the Ty Cegin Community Centre in Maesgeirchen, Bangor earlier today, where he met staff working on the Welsh Government's childcare offer, as well as Children First, Flying Start and Families First – all of which support and meet the needs of children and their families in the local area.

The Welsh Government's childcare offer provides working parents of 3 and 4 years old children with 30 hours of free early education and childcare for 48 weeks of the year.

In September 2017, the Welsh Government began piloting the offer in areas across Wales, including in areas of Anglesey and Gwynedd, ready for full roll-out across Wales by September 2020.

Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“Providing free childcare is one of the Welsh Government's top commitments to the people of Wales.

“We are now in the process of rolling out our ground-breaking and ambitious childcare offer to areas across Wales – and I'm really pleased areas across Gwynedd and Anglesey are among the first to benefit.

“Working parents across Wales are already telling us it's making a real difference to their lives, reducing the strain on family income and helping ensure childcare is not a barrier to them taking up employment or increasing their hours.

“So I want to encourage more parents across Gwynedd and Anglesey to take up the offer. I also want to thank childcare providers for their enthusiasm and commitment to helping us deliver our ambitious offer.”

[A celebration of Wales at Cardiff](#)

Castle

The castle will host a celebration of Welsh culture, sport and heritage – from harpists and choirs to inspirational youngsters, award winning produce and cutting edge performers – providing the Royal couple with a snap shot of modern Wales.

The Culture, Tourism and Sport Minister will be part of the welcoming party, and was keen to give an insight into what the royal couple can expect:

Lord-Elis Thomas said:

“I’m delighted that Prince Harry and Meghan Markle have chosen to come to Wales as one of their first official visits since their recent engagement.

“We are very fortunate in Wales to have both a thriving cultural tradition and a vibrant, diverse offering. This is something we are all too keen to showcase, share and celebrate with rest the world and to do so in such prestigious company is a real privilege.

“The Welsh croeso is legendary, but our standing as a top class visitor destination, food producer, adventure hot spot, major events host and a lot more besides is also very much on the rise. I hope to see this visit provide a taste of the variety and quality of what’s on offer here in Wales.

“Indeed, our royal Welsh welcome extends well beyond this visit and we’d be only too pleased to highlight the magnificence of other parts of Wales in future.”