



Isle of Anglesey

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The Isle of Anglesey has so much Potential from an Economic Regeneration Perspective.

Council Leader Councillor Gareth Winston Roberts OBE

As County Council Leader and Executive Corporate Regeneration portfolio holder, I'm glad to say that I have great cause for optimism for the future. We are working hard as an Authority to enhance the economy and it is developing rapidly on several important fronts - from transportation to tourism.

Unemployment is falling locally and the infrastructure needed to attract new employers to the Island is currently being created.

The construction of Parc Cybi, on the outskirts of Holyhead, will go a long way towards helping address a shortage of sites and premises for industrial and business use, and provide opportunities for local business to expand.

We've also had a number of significant economic success stories of late, most notably Anglesey Airport and Holyhead Celtic Gateway Bridge. The Airport, with its twice daily service to the Welsh capital, is operating at close to 90% capacity. We could not have dreamt for a better start to a project which has seen us working together with the Welsh Assembly Government and RAF Valley.

Celtic Gateway Bridge



Councillor Gareth Winston Roberts OBE

The £7.5m Celtic Gateway, which is seen as a symbol of Holyhead's regeneration, has created a dramatic new landmark linking the town centre, railway station, and ferry terminal. Many other exciting projects are under development in and around our largest town, including ambitious plans recently unveiled by port operator Stena Line. This has seen the company create a strategic partnership with London-based Conygar Investment Company to develop surplus land along

the Holyhead waterfront. The County Council looks forward to working with our partners to ensure that we achieve our common goal - the regeneration of Holyhead.

Further partnership working, especially with colleagues in the private sector, is vital if we are to succeed in developing new and innovative projects and attract further inward investment.

Our partnership ethos is further reflected in the creation of the new economic delivery plan for the Môn/Menai area. Co-operation at the highest level between Anglesey, Gwynedd Council and Welsh Assembly Government will ensure the development of a robust economic plan for the region. This plan recognises the important role of the Menai hub in stimulating growth, and will develop initiatives to encourage economic growth.

The Anglesey Economic Regeneration Partnership (AERP) will continue to play a prominent role in strengthening links with the private, public, voluntary and community sectors.

As the main body responsible for economic and rural regeneration on Anglesey, the AERP will also concentrate on ensuring lobbying and influencing on both a national and international level so that our current and future economic



Anglesey Airport



needs are met. It will also, all importantly, lead the co-ordination of the activities to capitalise fully on the new EU Convergence Programme.

Convergence funding from the European Union will, of course, play a prominent role in securing a prosperous future for Ynys Môn – The Mother of Wales. We have already achieved so much locally through millions in Objective One funding, and Convergence now provides us with a golden opportunity to continue investing in projects which will boost economic growth and employment.

Interreg 4 funding, which bolsters links between Ireland and Wales, is also on the horizon. Here on Anglesey, we've already begun the process of producing proposals for funding for a number of projects, varying from help for businesses to supporting the development of the marine sector and maritime heritage.

Capitalising on these various funding streams is all-important if we are to create a prosperous future for Anglesey through sustainable economic regeneration.

The Nuclear Decommissioning Agency (NDA) is exploring the possibility of giving Wylfa power station a nine month extension which would see the site remain operational until the end of 2010.

High level talks on the possibility of a new nuclear power station for Anglesey are still ongoing. The County Council has already given a clear indication of its support for nuclear power. I am quietly confident that we will be successful in securing a new nuclear power plant on Anglesey, which will go a long way towards safeguarding our economy, and ensure a bright and prosperous economy for generations to come.



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Embracing Change

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Politicians from all parties and from practically every country in the world have long argued that to put all of a region's economic eggs into one brittle basket is a recipe for disaster.

In many ways, that's exactly what Anglesey has avoided – in recent years, at least. Once a predominantly rural economy, where farming fed most families, for well nigh half a century the economy has been expanding to include most facets of a modern society.

While the rural economy remains vitally important, supporting businesses involved in food processing, for instance, the island is also home to some heavy industry through smaller scale manufacturing to service industries. It's becoming an ever more important transport hub and tourism, already a major part of the economy, is growing rapidly with new attractions attempting to pull in higher-

spending visitors. The fact Anglesey has also secured EU Convergence Funding until 2013 will boost economic regeneration considerably. By the end of 2007, some £37m had been drawn in from Europe, supporting 48 projects. With associate match funding, that figure rises to close on £100m invested in Anglesey's economy.

Yet tourism remains a key element in Anglesey's plans for future prosperity. "We're involved in raising the quality of what we offer and we're working closely with public and private partners to say, worldwide, we're top location in which to holiday," said Sasha Davies, Head of Service: Economic Development. "A key development is the 125-mile coastal footpath right round the island. It links closely with the internal network of footpaths so we are beginning a big promotion on walking holidays."

Other attractions in Anglesey include developments such as Copper Kingdom at Parys Mountain near Amlwch, Trac Môn –

Amlwch Port



Anglesey Circuit at Bodorgan - and a substantial redevelopment and upgrading of the Plas Coch complex in the south of the island. New and enlarged marina facilities at places such as Beaumaris and Holyhead go hand in hand with Holyhead Waterfront project, which is looking at regenerating key parts of the town including the port, beaches and other areas of marine recreation, the coastline itself and established leisure areas. Elsewhere, new developments complement established tourist attractions such as Beaumaris Castle, National Trust property at Plas Newydd, the Sea Zoo, and some of the most spectacular, unspoilt beaches anywhere in Europe.

"Our watersports are first-class with opportunities to sail around the coast and there are adrenalin sports, such as kite-surfing or surf-boarding, especially on the west side of the island," said Sasha Davies.

Late last year, the council also launched the long-awaited Môn-Menai Coastal Action Plan, the result of a two-year partnership between North Wales Watersports, the Isle of Anglesey and Gwynedd county councils, the Welsh Assembly Government, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment Agency Wales.

"Given the current fragility of Anglesey's economy, the council and its partners are anxious to ensure the economic potential of the coastline is fully utilised," said council leader Gareth Winston Roberts, OBE. "The new plan outlines a number of project proposals that can utilise and enhance our spectacular coastline, both in terms of onshore and offshore facilities."

Golf is also high on the agenda for further development, especially as international eyes of the golfing world focus on Newport as host venue for the Ryder Cup.

"We're saying that if you're in south Wales for the Ryder Cup, consider coming to Anglesey to spend some days golfing on one of our excellent courses," said Sasha Davies.

The island is also gearing up to attract even more passengers off the increasing number of cruise ships making Holyhead

a port of call. It's already handling 2.5 million passengers annually who take one of the conventional, super or fast ferries to Ireland but the advent of cruise ships is something of a new development.

"By 2009, there will be a side-berthing facility which will unlock the huge potential Holyhead has," said Sasha Davies. In 2007, 12 cruise ships visited Holyhead but expectations are up to 50 ships will visit annually, right from small vessels serving a niche market to ships carrying 2,000-plus passengers.

"We estimate every passenger who comes on shore spends between £40 and £60," said Davies. "For instance, when The Century from Royal Caribbean Line called into Holyhead, there were 1,800 people on board and 1,500 got off. They went to places such as Llynnon Mill, South Stack, Beaumaris and further afield - to Caernarfon Castle, Bodnant Gardens or for a drive over Llanberis Pass. As a result, Holyhead's expansion is proving beneficial to the whole of North Wales."

Holyhead is also growing significantly in terms of freight and, while Stena and Irish Ferries have seen passenger levels rise robustly, freight follows closely, despite severe competition from ports such as Liverpool. Close on two million tonnes passed through the port in the last year. The considerable investment made in Holyhead in terms of road access and improved dock facilities, plus the completion of dualling of the A55 across Anglesey in the last decade, has done much to improve freight flow. The town centre has also been improved and the new Celtic Gateway bridge forms a stunning welcome sign.

"In recent years, we have seen Holyhead Port grow in importance to freight customers who now see it as the main gateway for transport to and from Ireland," said Vic Goodwin, Stena Line Route Manager for the Central Corridor. "This is due to the opening of the A55 dual carriageway in 2001 which has reduced journey time to the port and enabled freight traffic to grow by 50 per cent through Holyhead since the turn of the decade." Indeed, so important does Stena consider its business out of North Wales that it has transferred a ship

Holyhead Harbour



deployed on the North Sea to serve Irish routes.

However, with travel to Ireland becoming relatively carefree, travelling from South to North Wales, once the bane of any traveller's life, is now also much easier. The Welsh Assembly Government is to invest additional cash into improving roads such as the A470, a major route from north to south and an upgraded railway timetable will be introduced by December 2008 with more and quicker trains.

Ieuan Wyn Jones, deputy First Minister and Minister for Economy and Transport, is to probe the feasibility of faster rail services with business-class facilities.

"Improving transport links throughout Wales will make our economy more competitive and will bring our nation closer together," said Jones, who is also the Assembly Member for Anglesey.

Additional future improvements will see strategic capacity enhancements on the Trans-European corridors - which includes the A55 - across North Wales to provide high-speed road links to vast markets in mainland Europe.

Perhaps most significant has been the provision of an air link between Cardiff and Valley, where the present RAF facility had been opened up for civil operations. Long talked about, the new service has

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Menai Suspension Bridge, visitors crossing the Celtic Gateway



proved hugely successful with most flights operating at around 80 per cent capacity.

“Many small, rural economies have prospered on the back of small, rural airports, especially in locations such as Ireland or Brittany,” noted Sasha Davies. “We’re very fortunate to have that link and there are opportunities, over the next couple of years, to look at other routes, particularly Dublin and London Stansted.”

Much store is being put on the potential boost the service will have for the economy.

“I believe this service will make us more competitive in terms of attracting new investment to the island,” said Gareth Winston Roberts, leader of the Council.

Electronic communication also remains vital to any community in the 21st century and Anglesey has pioneered a European-funded project to improve broadband access and take-up. Anglesey Connected was the first wireless broadband project anywhere in the UK and interest, nationwide, has been intense.

While Anglesey’s transport networks continue to develop what about the island’s business community?

There’s little doubt that challenges persist over the decommissioning of Wylfa nuclear power station in 2010 and the knock-on effects on Anglesey Aluminium, although there are highly encouraging signs that several economic corners have

been turned. At one time the Welsh constituency with the highest unemployment in Wales, Anglesey’s percentage rate has tumbled from twelve to around five per cent, a fraction above the average for Wales.

However, those who are economically inactive in Anglesey make up around a quarter of the workforce which, says Sasha Davies, is “a challenge”. Another challenge, though one being faced up to with considerable determination, is to spread the number of jobs available to the workforce. At present, two per cent of companies on the island employ forty per cent of the workforce and four-fifths of companies employ fewer than five people, clearly something which the council is keen to change.

In order to confront the issues of economic inactivity and to attempt to provide answers as to why Anglesey’s gross value added (GVA) lags well behind the UK and the Welsh average and, indeed, is considerably lower than neighbouring economies, last summer the County Council’s economic inactivity working group set up a ‘work and well being’ event to improve understanding and awareness of issues and look at ways of tackling it.

“Raising activity rates is considered central to reducing poverty, social inclusion and improving people’s mental and physical health,” according to Gareth

Winston Roberts. “This new working group’s objective will be to work in partnership to develop projects and initiatives.”

It’s that clear vision which adds to the positive aspects of business life in Anglesey. The new Welsh Assembly Government business centre at Parc Cybi at Holyhead will provide 1,200 new jobs when all units are filled and complements the Penrhos Business Park. That park will include not only industrial units, but also offices, leisure facilities, including a hotel and associated food outlets. At Amlwch, further development of the business park is under way and at Bryn Cefni in Llangefni, the business park is being extended and is seeing increased development of office space. There’s also been considerable private sector development in both Llangefni and Holyhead and the regeneration of those two towns is being complemented by similar activities in Menai Bridge, Beaumaris and Amlwch.

“With all the jobs we expect to see created in Anglesey, we do have some concerns over whether we have necessary skills to support businesses,” said Sasha Davies, “so we’re looking carefully at skills we will need in future. We’re working closely with schools and, with the new Welsh Baccalaureate coming in soon, pupils will be much more vocationally focussed as well as academically trained. That means they will have business and entrepreneurial skills as well as vocational skills sought by new businesses.”

Anglesey, just across the water from Bangor, benefits from close links with the city’s university while Coleg Menai – based on the island – along with Menter Môn and Hyfforddiant Môn Training work with business to provide courses which will reflect the needs of that community.

“And the Economic Regeneration Strategy, which we launched a couple of years ago, is still fit for purpose and well in line for any decision on a stay of execution for Wylfa or development in Anglesey Aluminium’s thinking for the future. We are confident a resolution can – and will – happen. We’re certainly still lobbying.”

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Nevertheless, the skills base on the island is far from negligible. Apart from transport operations and food processing – where companies such as cheese and dairy products producer Glanbia joins the internationally-recognised Halen Môn company which processes sea salt or Menai Oysters which supplies the likes of Harrods and Selfridges from its beds on the Menai Straits: indeed, Anglesey is looking to its Roman and Tudor past to start wine production near Cemaes Bay – other manufacturers give the island a number of manufacturing jobs higher than the Welsh average. Eastman Kodak has long been established on Anglesey and Faun, leading manufacturer of refuse collection vehicles has a major base in Llangefni. Rehau, a major polymer processing company supplying the construction, automotive and industry sectors, is also Anglesey-based.

In recent years, Anglesey has benefited from European Objective One funding, now rebranded Convergence Funding. That, in turn, has attracted in considerable private finance for projects and a wide range of support schemes will continue to be available to encourage new business ventures.

“As a result of European funding, we have seen increased interest from the private sector and we are also working closely with the Welsh Assembly Government and other funding sources such as the commercial banking sector,” said Sasha Davies. “We are seeing some of the big accountants taking more notice of what we are doing and people don’t necessarily have to travel for the best commercial advice as, increasingly, it’s here. There’s also much more interest in commercial property.”

“Post devolution, we took time to find our feet. We’re maturing in Anglesey and I think it’s fair to say we are becoming ‘the Island of Choice’, for business ... and quality of life.”

Menai Straits

