

Portfolio Holder Speech to Wood Build Wales Conference

Ladies and gentlemen. Imagine a project where you can take a seed and plant it. Watch it grow into a tree, nurture it, harvest it and use the wood to build a new family home - All within 150-mile radius.

Imagine then lots of trees with lots of people nurturing them, working for harvesting companies, new and existing companies making timber frame and modular housing resulting in the creation of many new homes and jobs using new skills.

Imagine the impact on the economy of rural Wales if the growth in the city regions surrounding rural mid and west wales is constructed using home and locally grown timber, which is processed and manufactured locally into modern, energy efficient homes.

That is the ambition of the Home Grown Homes project which is a long term supply chain project to change attitudes to the use of welsh softwoods and to ensure that they are more frequently used in residential development by volume housebuilders, local authorities and housing associations, benefitting the economy of the areas where the timber is grown, processed and homes manufactured.

I'm delighted to be here today, to officially launch the Home Grown Homes project on behalf of Powys CC, its key partners and a far wider group of stakeholders.

The project came from the simple idea. In 2015 Powys CC was freed from the shackles of the HRA subsidy regime and regained the ability to build homes. As a council we wanted to use our new housebuilding ability to:

- Have a long term positive impact on the local economy, not just by employing local contractors but by diversifying the rural economy and reducing the loss of economically active households from the area
- Deliver good quality, modern, energy efficient homes which had a minimal carbon footprint.

To deliver these objectives we recognised that we needed to develop our new homes using home grown and locally grown timber. We then considered the multiplier effect if we involved our partner housing associations. Thus the partnership was established.

The project commenced with our housing association partners and we recognised early on that the timber supply chain in Wales as it is currently established, is dysfunctional, and that the only way we would be able to meet the objectives of the project, was if we sought to transform the timber supply chain itself.

The Home Grown Homes project was initially funded by the partners and then by funding from ARWAIN. In 2017 the project obtained EU RDF supply chain and co-operation funding to the tune of £1.3 million and over recent months Powys CC has been involved in a procurement exercise to appoint a partner to manage the project on our behalf.

I'm delighted to say that in late March 2018, we appointed a consortium to manage the project. The consortium is led by Wood Knowledge Wales, and draws upon the expertise of TRADA, Cardiff Metropolitan University and Coed Cymru. My colleagues were extremely impressed with the quality of the submission by the consortium, which they felt brought the vision for the project to life.

So what will the project do? It has a number of strands:

1. To support the design, delivery and post completion performance measurement of advanced timber construction – by providing specialist advice and support for clients, ensuring they're using timber the right way and measuring how homes perform in real life
2. To develop the client case for procuring timber homes (focused mainly upon RSL and LA clients)
3. To develop the offer from Welsh timber product manufacturers to clients – this focuses specifically on developing the off site manufacturing capacity of locally based manufacturers, developing the work force of the future in the use of timber for construction

4. To develop and prove the economic case for land-owners to plant trees on marginal land in Wales – critical importance to see the forest cover in Wales increase from 14% at present to somewhere near the European average (37%)
5. To communicate the project outcomes and influence future procurement – website, workshops, conferences.

Inevitably the role of the partnership will need to change in the light of the appointment of the managing partner and we will shortly be publishing proposals on how the project governance will operate and our plans to broaden the range of stakeholders to include any social landlord in Wales and potentially any interested private developer.

The timing of the project is impeccable as it comes at a time when the Growth Deal for Mid Wales is currently being discussed with the UK and Welsh Government and Welsh Government recognises the need to transform the timber supply chain.

This project has could be a key part of the transformation of the rural economy of Wales. It provides an opportunity for farms to diversify their incomes, which will be critical in a post Brexit Britain. It will provide increase employment opportunities for rural areas in the growing of saplings, the planting and management of forestry, the processing of timber and the manufacture of timber framed homes. The Cabinet of Powys County Council recognised this is adopting a Wood Encouragement Policy, which commits us to maximising the use of locally grown and home grown timber in all new housing developments.

Powys County Council's Cabinet recognise that housing development has a critical role to play in the local economy and has ambitious plans to build 250 new homes over the next 4 years, but we also recognise that the Home Grown Homes project has the potential to have long beneficial impact on the economy of rural Wales – so we will do all we can to ensure its success.