

Green light for £150m Global Centre for Rail Excellence

July 28, 2021



A planning application for the construction of a world class rail testing facility at the head of the Dulais and Tawe Valleys has been conditionally approved by Neath Port Talbot Council's Planning Committee.

The train, rail infrastructure and technology testing facility known as the Global Centre for Rail Excellence (GCRE), will provide a unique capability in the UK and Europe to support innovation in the UK and international rail industry, including the testing of cutting-edge, green technologies.

The Welsh Government has been working in partnership with Neath Port Talbot and Powys councils to develop proposals for the GCRE, which will be located on the site of the Nant Helen open cast mine operated by Celtic Energy and the Onllwyn Washery Distribution Centre.

Powys County Council will consider the planning application, submitted by the Welsh Ministers, later this week.

The Leader of Neath Port Talbot Council, Cllr Ted Latham, said: "This is a fantastic investment in jobs and technology, not only for our valley areas but the County Borough and the South West Wales region as a whole.

“It will also showcase Neath Port Talbot on a national and global scale and has the strong potential to support wider investment and boost the economic regeneration of the area.”

Neath Port Talbot Council’s Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Sustainable Development, Cllr Annette Wingrave, added: “This will be a driver for the creation of high quality jobs in this area and it will also help to test and develop more environmentally friendly rail technologies helping us achieve our ambition of cleaner, stronger communities.”

The GCRE, to be based at the Nant Helen Open Cast site and the Onllwyn Washery Distribution Centre, will cover an area of around 475 hectares and will consist of two looped test tracks, one being an electrified high speed rolling stock track (6.9km long) and the other being a low speed infrastructure test track (4.5km).

There will also be a dual platform test environment, operations and control offices, staff accommodation, shunter cabins and facilities for research and development, education and training.

Members of Neath Port Talbot Council’s planning committee which granted conditional approval of the GCRE on Tuesday, July 27th, were told in a report the proposal had the full support of the council’s Economic Development Section.

The report said: “The GCRE Offers an opportunity for significant rail investment in Wales. This would benefit Neath Port Talbot and Powys and complement the Transport for Wales focus and commitment to revitalising the rail network by providing new services and rolling stock (trains and carriages), innovative solutions and a significant programme of station investment.

“It will also support recovery post COVID – the UK Government having emphasised the importance of infrastructure spending to help kick-start the economy and ensure long-term economic recovery. It will also provide further opportunities for sustainable technologies associated with the rail sector (electric, battery, links to sustainable generation etc).

“With key innovation assets such as the Hydrogen Research Centre, Flexible Integrated Energy Systems (FLEXIS) and other academic innovation centres in the Neath Port Talbot area, the GCRE will provide key strategic RDI (research, development and innovation) linked opportunities for this form of economic development.”

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