

Powys County Council grant planning permission for £150m Global Centre for Rail Excellence

July 30, 2021



A planning application for the construction of a world class rail testing facility on the Powys and Neath Port Talbot boundary has been conditionally approved by Powys County Council 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 Powys and Neath Port Talbot 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 Leader, Councillor Rosemarie Harris, said: "This marks a vital step forward in this fantastic opportunity for jobs and technology in Powys and South-West Wales. The centre has the potential to boost investment and the economic well-being of the area. It supports our need to move to a low carbon

society and bring more environmentally friendly industries to the area.”

Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Cllr Iain McIntosh added: “The planning decision paves the way for a possible £150 million investment in the region creating high quality jobs for the region with potential for a real jobs boost during the construction phase and beyond.

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 the Council’s planning committee which granted conditional approval of the GCRE today (Thursday July 29th) were told in a report the proposal had the full support of the council’s Economic Development Service and was pleased to note the financial support that has been committed by both the UK and Welsh Government.

Neath Port Talbot Council granted conditional approval to the application to the planning application, submitted by the Welsh Ministers, earlier this week.

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).”

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