



Ein cyf/Our ref MA-P-LG-0934-17

All Assembly Members

9 March 2017

Dear Colleague

***Visit to Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), February/March 2017***

A key commitment in *Taking Wales Forward* is to drive improvement in our economy and raise Wales' profile globally as a first-class place to do business, invest, visit, study and live.

Last week I visited Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), to demonstrate this commitment. I undertook a series of activities to promote overseas trade, investment, creative and educational collaboration in this strategically important region as part of Welsh Government's St David's Day 2017 celebrations.

Wales is a trading nation and we are actively supporting our exporters. I visited the Gulfood trade exhibition to join a record 25 of Wales' finest food and drink producers participating in this event, one of the world's largest annual food and beverage exhibitions.

Attendance at trade exhibitions and visits is an opportunity to promote Wales' food and drink sector on the international stage and help Welsh producers' efforts to establish new business relationships and expand their sales into potentially lucrative new markets. During my visit, I was delighted to announce Welsh Government is investing £2.4m to ensure Wales remains well-represented at high profile food and drink trade events and visits around the world over the next two years. This significant investment will further support our drive to meet our ambitious target of 30% growth in the sector by 2020 set out in *Towards Sustainable Growth*, which we are already more than half way towards achieving.

Dubai is gearing up for its own showcase as it will be hosting the next World Expo in 2020, bringing together more than 180 nations and an international audience of 25 million visitors. Alongside a multi-sector trade delegation from Wales, I visited the site and was briefed on plans for the developments taking place for the Expo and the multitude of opportunities for business. Our office in Dubai has well developed links with the key contacts involved in Expo 2020 and will continue to work to promote and maximise opportunities for Welsh businesses from this significant project.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The plans for Expo 2020 form part of the wider project to develop a huge new area called Dubai South. I met with the Senior Leadership Team on their plans for this flagship urban project to deliver a 145sq.km master planned city which is projected to sustain a population of one million people, create 500,000 jobs and include the world's largest airport (Al Maktoum International Airport).

I was accompanied on the visit by the Chairman, Vice Chancellor and others from the University of South Wales (USW) who have made great progress in working with the Dubai Government in developing plans to set up a new Centre of Excellence/Aviation Academy and operate its world class aircraft maintenance training programme at the proposed new airport. I was proud to see a Welsh University at the forefront of this project and witness this progressing to the next step with signing of Memoranda of Understanding between USW, the Gulf Aviation Academy (GAA) and Falcon Aviation. This project is an excellent example of Welsh Government's commitment to drive forward the internationalisation of the Welsh economy, recognising our exceptional higher education institutions play an integral role in this. The aviation hub in Dubai South is on course to welcome its first students in 2018.

In the last three years, Wales has attracted record levels of inward investment. During my visit, I was pleased to meet with the owners of Dubai based Hotpack Packaging Industries which is considering setting up a UK manufacturing plant in North Wales. Welsh Government officials are currently working with the company in their planning and preparations for the site.

St David's Day presents us with an ideal opportunity to celebrate our people, history, language, culture, food and drink and innovative businesses. I was, therefore, very pleased to host a 'Welsh Business and Culture Reception' attended by over 250 guests on the Royal Lawn at the British Embassy in Dubai, alongside Her Majesty's Ambassador to the UAE, Philip Parham. The reception included a showcase of Welsh food and drink produce including cooking demonstrations using Welsh produce by renowned chef Gary Rhodes, an exhibition of Welsh based companies with business interests in the UAE; a showcase of Aston Martin vehicles to highlight their major investment into Wales, demonstrating Wales as an excellent investment destination and performances from the world-renowned Welsh National Opera (WNO).

The WNO are currently performing at the new Dubai Opera House and during my visit I attended their outreach activities with local schoolchildren. I also attended their opening night performance of Madam Butterfly at the Dubai Opera House. The WNO worked tirelessly to fly the flag for Wales in the UAE and demonstrated they are truly a world class arts organisation and an excellent cultural ambassador for Wales. Their performances in Dubai is one of the highest profile elements of the 2017 UK/UAE Year of Creative Collaboration.

On the final day, I addressed the Dubai Welsh Social Club's annual St David's Day Ball which was attended by over 200 guests. I highlighted the importance of the Club, alongside other Welsh societies across the globe, in continuing to represent and raise the profile of Wales' strengths as a strategic partner in terms of trade, investment, cultural and educational links.

Over the years, the UAE has grown into a key partner for Wales and the spectacular growth and development that has occurred there has presented many opportunities for Wales. It was clear from my visit, Welsh businesses, educational and cultural institutions, alongside Government, are at the forefront of building alliances with partners in this region and it is important Wales continues to build on this and remain an outward and welcoming nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish under the 'y'.

**Lesley Griffiths AC/AM**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig  
Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs