

Update

Newsletter of Wales' Oldest Organisation for Retired People Issue No. 37 August 2019

Thoughts from the Chair



75 and Fit to Work??

The latest idea from a UK Government “think tank” suggests that the State Pension age should be raised in stages to 75 years.



This obviously won't affect our members who are already receiving the State Pension. However, it will affect younger family members who will retire in the future. We know from our own experiences what older people are capable of contributing. There is no reason to believe that things will change in coming years.

We know from first-hand experience that many will not be fit or well enough to work until they are 75 years old. Many of us do part-time voluntary or paid work but how many could work full-time? A few might want to carry on in a job they can cope with but a small minority should not decide for a majority who want to retire and enjoy life while they can. If forced to work, many would not live long enough to collect their pension.

These days if older volunteers and part-time workers become unwell, tired or just bored, they can just stop. They know that they have their pensions to rely on as income. That won't happen if these plans go through. So where are all the older volunteers and part-time workers going to come from? Are we going to rely on the over-75s to run clubs, Credit Unions, RVS branches, Charity shops, provide free family childcare and so on? There might not be many over-75s around after a few years of this pension scheme.

Young people today already have problems finding proper jobs with prospects. There will be even fewer job vacancies if older people are not allowed to retire until they are 75. Does the “think tank” really believe that the money saved on pensions should be spent on supporting unemployed young people? This is just not crazy economics but damaging to the welfare of people at both ends of the age range. A government shouldn't be treating any of its citizens like this.

The UK already has one of the **lowest State Retirement Pensions** in the Western World. If this new suggestion gets taken up by the Government, we will have the **highest Retirement Age** in the whole world.

Any comments? Please send them in.

From John Griffiths AM



John Griffiths is the Assembly Member for Newport East and has held this position since the National Assembly for Wales was formed in 1999. John is currently the Chair of the Equality, Local Government and Community Committee and has served as a minister in the Welsh Government over successive Assembly terms. This includes being Minister for the Environment, Minister for Culture and Sport, Deputy Minister for Economic Development, Deputy Minister for Education, Deputy Minister for Health, Deputy Minister for Skills, Counsel General and Leader of the Legislative Programme.

I would like to take the opportunity to celebrate an area of environmental, scientific, cultural and historic significance partly within my constituency; the Gwent Levels.

The Gwent Levels is one of the largest areas of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh in the UK. The levels are made up of a rich patchwork of different habitats and landscapes running alongside the Severn Estuary coastline from Cardiff past the Second Severn Crossing and beyond. A large area of the levels falls within the boundaries of my constituency in Newport East; and is now a site of scientific interest and an area of natural beauty which we as Newportonians should be incredibly proud as part of this was once part of our industrial landscape .

It is vitally important we continue to preserve and protect eco-systems in Wales and the Gwent Levels are the perfect example of a special habitat with a rich biodiversity which is equivalent to the Amazon rainforest for sheer diversity of wildlife. The Levels are home to a number of endangered species including the Shriill Carder bee, water voles and European cranes as well as significant plant eco-systems. This month, I called on the Environment Minister, Lesley Griffiths, to consider further protecting this invaluable habitat by approving the application for the Gwent Levels to be awarded an Outstanding Area of Natural Beauty status to ensure it can be continue to be protected for future generations.



As well as being an area with a rich biodiversity and rare plant, animal and bird species, the Levels are also a landscape which has been hand-crafted by the communities that have lived here since the reclamation of the land from the estuary which started in Roman times. The Gwent Levels make up an area that has been utilized by man at least since the Mesolithic era - prehistoric ice and bronze age footprints and artefacts surviving in the Severn Estuary mud are still revealing clues about how this landscape has been used with the coming of every new tide.

Indeed the seascape is full of geological clues to its past to the era before human exploitation– the red cliffs rising out of the saltmarshes at Black Rock are rich with the fossils of the plesiosaurs and insects which populated the landscape when the area was transformed from a hot arid desert to a warm tropical sea approximately 200 million years ago. Archaeologically speaking, the intertidal mud flats of the levels have revealed the remains of Neolithic/Bronze Age settlement sites, as evidenced by human footprints, lithic finds, butchered animal bone, brushwood trackways and roundhouses.

Much of the Levels were hand drained using basic tools until as late as the 1960s. The character of local communities in the Levels reflects the ancient connection between people and the Severn Estuary.

A strong human dimension is needed to create a greater sense of understanding and appreciation for the Levels and that is where the Living Levels Project have stepped to the fore. The Living Levels Landscape Partnership has come together to deliver a programme of work which will promote and reconnect people to the heritage, wildlife and wild beauty of the historic landscape of the Gwent Levels. The Programme seeks to conserve and restore the important natural heritage features of the area, to develop a far greater appreciation of the value of the landscape and finally to inspire people to learn about and participate in the heritage of the Gwent Levels. The Living Levels want local people to engage and share their stories of this landscape to ensure its history and its future are shared and protected. The Living Levels are doing excellent work and there are chances for further development of an area whose heritage is all but absent in local visitor museums and destinations. From the reintroduction of apple orchards, connecting with local schools, collaborations with Newport City Council to combat fly-tipping and the popularity of cafes and eateries at Goldcliff and the RSPB Newport Wetlands centre, there is huge opportunity for development and utilizing the wonder of the Levels.

I want to encourage more people to visit and enjoy what this special area has to offer. Walking, cycling, exploring and experiencing the Levels will enable a better understanding of why this area should be cared for and preserved. The Levels are beautiful to explore whether on foot or by bike with flat, accessible footpaths, including some routes which are part of the Wales Coast Path which I introduced when serving as Environment Minister in the Welsh Government. There are great number of events and activities taking place over the summer months and into the autumn and I would encourage everyone to pay a visit to this wonderful landscape. For more information on the Living Levels and their current programme, please visit <https://www.livinglevels.org.uk/>

Whether it is seeing the wonder of a starling murmuration at Newport Wetlands, taking part in one of the many interesting workshops run by the Living Levels project or walking the full length of the sea wall at Goldcliff on the hunt for a pre-historic find, I hope many people will continue to go and explore the Gwent Levels. The best way to learn about this unique and wonderful habitat, an archaeological and historical resource for Wales of national importance, is to visit and enjoy it and in doing so, I hope, learn why the Levels deserve to be developed, sustained and preserved for future generations."

News from the Branches

Darren Valley 55 Club Amy Holifield - still going strong at 90 years old.

One of our founder members recently celebrated her 90th birthday with a party joined by family and friends at the Club. Earlier in the year she went on a cruise to the Low Countries.



In Rotterdam



In Bruges



At the 90th Birthday

As before, Branches are encouraged to send in news of their activities to share with others. Photographs are especially welcome. You will find a contribution from Darren Valley 55 Club in this newsletter.

Individual members can also send in their comments on articles in the newsletter or even their own views on topics of interest to older people. This will help us to make the newsletter a success.

Suggestions are always welcome

Help Wanted

As we have said in the past, we are always happy to welcome members to our Executive Meetings in Aberdare. We would particularly appreciate members who could offer help in carrying out the work of the Executive. Travel and other expenses are paid in these circumstances. Please get in touch if you are interested:

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More information about Active Wales

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Thanks to both for their continuing support