

Key vote on sail academy scheme

£7.8m bid to boost region's economy

By HYWEL TREWYN

PLANS for an ambitious £7.8m sailing academy are set to move forward if councillors give their blessing today.

It's predicted the Welsh National Sailing Academy and Events Centre at Hafan Pwllheli marina would generate £1.6m income annually for the Llyn peninsula economy.

Gwynedd council board would need to apply for over £4m of capital funds for the facility, as well as up to £3.5m of European funds with the council fronting up the remaining £250,000.

The plans would mean building 150 extra berths for visitors, as well as improving links between the town and the waterfront.

Pwllheli, which has 400 berths at present, is recognised as one of Britain's top sailing venues, along with Weymouth and Largs in Scotland but it lacks facilities for sailing events.

Today, Gwynedd Council's Development Scrutiny Committee will assess the project so far, including two reports on the socio-economic and linguistic impact and separate language impact which are both favourable.

The next step is to present a report to the Council's board to seek support to progress to the detailed planning stage.

In a report for the scrutiny committee today, economic and community department head Sioned Williams said Pwllheli had hosted a significant number of successful sailing competitions over the past few years raising the area's "international profile" and was the only sailing training centre in Wales for the 2012 London Olympics.

However, Mrs Williams said: "Investments in other important UK sailing centres makes it increasingly difficult to continue to hold and attract major, additional competitions."

A report by engineering consultants



Pwllheli marina (top) is the base for a proposed £7.8 million sailing academy (artists' impressions above)

showed that sand, gravel and some clay would have to be dredged from the harbour. It was estimated that 9,700 visitors are attracted annually to the Hafan and Pwllheli Sailing club presently which equates to 31,150 day visits every year. This amounts to an annual income of around £500,000 for Pwllheli.

The scheme would create 225 new jobs and support an additional nine. It's estimated it would create 11,500

additional day visits to Pwllheli, increasing to 26,500 if an annual regatta was held.

Mrs Williams concludes: "A real opportunity exists to foster economic activity by utilising the area's outstanding natural resources, and by doing so responding to local needs."

Although the cash-strapped council owns the site, it will only be able to contribute a small amount of money.

The next stages include establishing a "not-for-profit" organisation, setting up a steering group and confirming a design brief.

Surveys, discussions and public consultations would follow before submission of consent applications and the drawing up of tender documents followed by tendering for contracts.

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