

Council legal challenge de-lists Grove Park School

Narrow minded Council fails its citizens yet again

Wrexham Council's legal challenge has resulted in the quashing of the recent listing of the former school, members of the Save Our Heritage group were dismayed to learn earlier today.

“After so much hard work by so many people, to find out that the school is no longer safe from demolition is heartbreaking; and yet again shows that the Council refuses to listen to the wishes and views of the people of Wrexham” group member Sarah Roberts said.

The quashing of the listing by Judicial Review was made on the understanding that nothing must happen to the building prior to another decision on the listing status of the building being taken by CADW and the Ministers, which could be towards the end of November.

Despite Save Our Heritage being named as an “interested party” in the Review, they were unable to present their case, as the risk of incurring substantial legal costs was something that the group was unable to overcome.

The decision to withdraw from the sale of the building to Coleg Cambria last year was made by Wrexham Council, and in January this year, the Executive Board voted to demolish the building, citing several, as yet unsubstantiated reasons, for its actions.

The School Organisation Strategy (2017-2025) for the Wrexham area isn't complete, the effects of Brexit on immigration, and general economic outlook are all factors that were not considered prior to the vote. To date, the school building, nor the land it sits upon, have been included in the School Organisation Strategy, nor has funding for a new school been applied for. To further compound the matter, Wrexham Council are only now compiling their Heritage Strategy, which won't be ready until February 2017.

The preferred occupants of the site were St Marys RC School, however, there is no mention of this in the School Organisation Strategy document. In fact, studying the document shows that pupil numbers are rising more for Welsh medium, than faith based education. This raises more questions about the Council's real intentions. In the draft Local Development Plan, the site was marked up as “Residential”.

In June this year, the Full Council passed a motion requiring the Executive Board to re-visit the decision to demolish, regardless of the outcome of the listing. To date, this has not yet come to fruition.

According to Leader Cllr Mark Pritchard, the Council hopes to build one, two or possibly three schools on the site, but as documents obtained by a Freedom of Information request have shown, these statements were made long before the legal implications of the Covenants on the site were evaluated by the Head of Corporate Services, Trevor Coxon.

Lynne Williams from the campaign group added “We really hope that CADW and the Minister makes the right decision at the end of November, and re-list the building. It has so much potential, yet it's a shame that the Executive Board at Wrexham Council lack the vision and ambition to make use of this building. Re-utilising a building with such cultural and historical significance, makes so much sense from a financial and environmental perspective. It's constructed of high quality materials, and it will outlast any of the new build schools, such as the one at Hafod Y Wern, by many decades.”

Web Links:

Save Our Heritage Wrexham website - www.soh.wales

CADW - <http://cadw.gov.wales/?lang=en>

Wrexham County Borough Council - <http://wrexham.gov.uk/>

About Save Our Heritage

The Save Our Heritage Group are non-political volunteers opposed to the destruction of older buildings which give the market town of Wrexham its character. Since forming in January 2016, they have concentrated their efforts on saving the former Grove Park School for Girls. Their website is at www.soh.wales .