

Wrecking ball to be taken to iconic school building

By Jennie Mulcahey

jennie.mulcahey@nwn.co.uk

A FORMER town centre school will be demolished after lying empty for more than a decade.

Wrexham Council's executive board met yesterday to decide the future of the former Groves High School site on Powell Road.

Councillors voted unanimously in favour of proposals seeking the demolition of the building, which costs the authority £25,000-a-year on security and maintenance as well as non-domestic rates.

Other options had been discussed, such as demolishing part of the building but retaining the facade at a cost of £418,000, as well as an extra £155,000 per year to protect it while waiting for development to go ahead, and retaining and mothballing the site at a cost of £375,000.

But council leader Cllr Mark Pritchard said demolition in order to build a "modern 21st century school" was the more viable option.

Demolishing the whole building is expected to cost about £246,000 including asbestos removal from the site.

Cllr Ronnie Prince said that while the building had sentimental value to him, having attended the school, he recognised the need for a modern 21st century school to "best serve the children of Wrexham".

He said: "Weighed up, it does not fit the criteria of a 21st century school."

Cllr Anne Evans said the building



■ Plans to remove asbestos from the former Groves School building before demolition are due to go before Wrexham councillors.

is "iconic" and "was at the forefront of women's education in Wrexham when there wasn't any".

She spoke against the proposals and said it should be kept for future generations.

Cllr Carole O'Toole also spoke against the proposals and said the council had rushed in to its decision. She said she had spent time speaking to residents in the area, and that while most felt that something needed to be done to the site, "people anticipated the present building would be preserved."

She added: "People were keen to keep part of the heritage of Wrexham. If more time was available the reaction would have been different. The public has only had a week to deal with it."

"There is support for a school but

there is a huge reluctance to accept the building has to be demolished."

In November last year, the council, which had been in negotiations with Coleg Cambria to sell the site, decided to retain the land with a view to opening a new school.

It had been thought the current buildings could be renovated.

But Cllr Pritchard said extensive damage to the interior and exterior of the building means demolition is the best option.

Coleg Cambria, which agreed a deal in principle to buy the site from the council in June 2014, announced it was withdrawing from negotiations with the council following a board meeting in November.

The college had planned to use

the site as a sports centre and teaching area for 16 to 19-year-olds.

Cllr Pritchard asked councillors to put their emotions aside and look at the proposals with a balanced view.

He said: "It's a difficult decision for all of us but I don't think we've rushed it. It has been empty for 14 years – we just haven't done anything about it."

"We can't sit still and not make a decision, we will be criticised more heavily for not meeting the demand."

"Demolishing the building will make way for possibly two schools on the site."

"We're hoping it rises from the ashes. It's the right way forward."

"We have to make unpleasant decisions sometimes."

'Hurried nature of decision is strange' – AM Lesley

FOLLOWING the meeting, Wrexham's AM Lesley Griffiths said: "I've always argued Wrexham Council needs to start planning for future



■ Lesley Griffiths.

education provision, but the ad hoc and hurried nature of this decision is strange.

"Up until a couple of months ago, the council seemingly had no plans for the Groves site yet in a short space of time they've completely changed their viewpoint and have rushed key decisions."

"There has been no consultation or effective communication, either with the public or local stakeholders. With other recent controversies surrounding the Arts Hub and Nant Silyn, Wrexham Council should have realised this is a sensitive subject as the building holds many cherished memories for Wrexham residents."

"I am concerned by Wrexham Council's actions. A proposal this significant should not be forced through without consultation or proper planning and I will be writing to the council leader in search of an explanation."