

WCBC EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING 12th January 2016

Cllr David Kelly (DK) declared a personal interest so will leave when school is discussed. Close family member lives adjacent to the school, personal and prejudicial interest.

Cllr Mark Pritchard (MP) - At the Executive Board Meeting on 10th Nov 2015 members agreed to withdraw from the negotiations with Coleg Cambria to sell the former Groves site and to retain it for its own use for education purpose provision in Wxm town centre. The council now retains possession of the former Groves School for girls buildings which continues to deteriorate following vandalism and despite enhanced physical security and frequent mobile patrol. The current cost of security and maintenance repairs and maint of the building and domestic rates is £25K pa 2015-6. The choice facing the council is simple : should it continue to retain the building and invest in it prior to it being refurbished at a future date, or should it demolish the building and make the savings on the security + maint costs into the future.

If members decide to retain the building an estimated investment sum of at least £375K is required to mothball it into the future. The building for future use is including asbestos removal £375K

I do apologise, chair (disjointed presentation of the above two sentences).

This is because the roof continues to deteriorate and recommendations are to keep the building watertight. If members decide to demolish part of the building but retain the Chester/Powell road façade it is estimated that this would cost £418K plus an additional £150K pa to protect and retain the façade pending further redevelopment, which could be years away given current funding pressures within the council. If members decide to demolish the building it is estimated that this would cost £246K including the asbestos removal. The most recent cost estimating to refurbish the building for educational use was completed by Coleg Cambria in 2015 and this shows the cost in the amount of £5.5million.

When the additional requirements for the primary school I believe that the costs are likely to be higher. Given this I believe it is better for the Council to demolish the building and to provide a clear site for the development of a new Primary School on the site. Chair, I'm quite happy to move the recommendations within the report ? 3.1. and it's 1 and 2.

Chair, Cllr I Roberts (IR) – Thank You (TY) Mark, have I got a seconder?

Cllr Hugh Roberts (HR)– Can I second those recommendations and reserve the right to comment.

IR – Any comments from the Board?

Cllr Ronnie Prince (RP) – Chair, as a former pupil of the school on that site I have some very sentimental memories of attending that school. In the report it mentions it was an all girl's school, I didn't attend that for obvious reasons; in 1939 the school was built on that site and it was called Grove Park G S for Girls. In the 1970s it changed to a mix-sex comprehensive and was named Bromfield and I attended in 1973-8. Corporal punishment was the norm and boy I had my fair share. In relation to the building it was a 2 story building; very very high ceilings; very long corridors and as I say I've got some really sentimental memories of that building but in that report we are talking about building a modern primary school fit for the 21st century that will best serve the children of Wrexham with a facility to give the best opportunity for the best education. So I've got to weigh that up against my sentimental values on that building and I'm sure that many people who've attended that school feel the same way. On reflection I've got to weigh that up and I've come to the conclusion that that building, the way it's built, will not fit the criteria for a 21stC primary school. And for that reason I will support the recommendation today.

IR – Any other comments from any other members? Ok, I'm going to start with Carole first. TY Carole.

Cllr Carole O'Toole, MBE (COT) – TY Chair. In this debate I'm speaking as local member for the ward in which the Groves site is situated and I am representing the views of those members of my ward who live in the square which makes up the immediate boundary of the site. Except this is a small sample but I didn't have time to canvas further afield in person. I delivered a street letter to approx 82 houses last Wednesday and have spent the last few days canvassing opinion in the ward. I have spoken to about half of the residents in this area.

As a result of those conversations I am not in a position to support recomm 3.12 for demolition of the building. Of the people spoken to, the initial reaction from the majority was opposition to the demolition of the building. I went through the same features of the report, listing the extremely difficult financial position which to save the building present to the administration but in the main there was still strong resistance to agreeing to the demolition of the building.

I presented the proposals for 1 or 2 fit for purpose primary schools to replace the building, and although some people could understand this viewpoint. **IT WAS NOT WHAT PEOPLE HAD UNDERSTOOD WOULD BE THE PLAN.**

People anticipated from recent decision-making about the building taken in the Autumn of 2015 that the present building would be preserved as a school. In stating their position people quoted the historic and iconic importance of the school in Wrexham, and cited the architectural features which they felt deserved preservation. Frequently references were made to a beautiful brick building that is a critical landmark in the Maesydre area and town centre. People were very keen to keep what is regarded as a part of the heritage of Wxm and I was asked more once "why does Wrexham council destroy buildings which represent our heritage?"

Not all were opposed to demolition. 8 favoured it and cited approval of modern, purpose-built schools. Interestingly, 2 of those were younger people, 1 the mother of a small child who said she would not want to send her child, as a 4 yr old, to the Groves school as it was but would to a purpose-built modern school.

A very small minority expressed no interest in the debate at all. I am very aware of the damage to the inside of the building; aware of the huge ongoing problems regarding the security of it and the attendant fire risk posed by leaving the building as it is for much longer. But pointing out these problems did not dissuade any from their initial chosen response. 2 people in acknowledging the diffic decision facing the Exec Board described it as a "Head or Heart" decision.

If more time had been made available by the admin to present their case, reactions may have been different. The public has had less than a week to digest the proposals. Some members will be aware that I was concerned about the speed with which this proposal has come to the Exec Board and I have lobbied for more info to be share and to be in the public domain. Since becoming a councillor for the ward I've always campaigned for the retention of the building and for the whole site to be retained for education purposes. The latter is the unanimous desire of all the ward members I engaged with. Also nearly every person I spoke to referred to the covenant on the land. So, there is support for a school to be built but not necessarily a new school.

By way of conclusion, I can only restate that there is a huge reluctance to accept that the building has to be demolished. Given the look of the building now, and the antisocial behaviour that some residents have to live with, I was taken aback at the strength of feelings expressed. I ask now if the strength of this submission is strong enough for the Exexecutive Board to reconsider their position. Chair, I have one other question re. para 4.23 which refers to the temporary use of the site as a staff car park. I have no prior knowledge of this, and now are seeking confirmation of the lead member of the assurance I have been given by email that if this proposal is considered in the future there will be prior consultation. TY Chair.

MP – Carole, you're right, it is a difficult decision for all of us. I've had emails and phone calls and discussions with a lot of elected members and the members of the public, but we are where we are with it and a lot of what's gone on. I haven't been party to but I'm here this morning with this report.

With regard to the parking I can give you that guarantee, yes, there will be consultation done on it, and I haven't had a response from the officer yet confirming how many places would be required and if there would be a need for a temporary car park but on that matter I will keep you in the loop and I will get back to you. I will give you that assurance. With regard to information, you can have as much info as you want. I can give you that as well, that isn't a problem. With regard to the time scale, I don't think we've rushed it. I think if I'm right it's been empty for close to 14 years; we haven't dealt with it and it's here this morning so we can deal with it and move on. And I'll tell you the dilemma we have in Wrexham, and I'll give you the stats and figures and %'s increase and explosion of demand for education provision within Wrexham and I'll read them out to you and I've asked the Officers to double-check these and I have, I'll bring them out to you this morning, and I've sent these off to an MP this morning who asked the same question. I can confirm that the education department requests that the Groves site are to be retained for education provision, so the education department are saying that they want it. The issue around Wrexham is the Primary School places. And I'll just read this out to you – there's a lot here but I'll just read out the % to you –

“The level of growth in the primary population across the whole county averages over 5 yrs is over 1.7% between 2010 and 2014. The Primary School population has increased by over 7.27%. The average across Wales for the same period is 4.65%. The only local authority with a higher level of primary growth and level of demand is Cardiff. So Cardiff and us have the highest demand for primary school places. Applying the same rate of 1.7% annual growth up to 2014 we require up to 2,317 primary school places within Wxm. (I'm guessing the directly quoted text ends here)

So that's where we are. And we know what the demand is. We cannot sit still and not make a decision on sites that we own to put Education provision on the sites. Because, if you think we'll be criticised for demolishing this building, we'll be criticised even more heavily if we know the demand and we don't cater for it going into the future. And what I don't want Wrexham to become, is to put portacabins in our schools like we've done in the past. We can't do that. It isn't fit and proper that pupils are taught out of portacabins. We should build 21st Century schools, fit for purpose for education provision within this authority. And that's why I'm here this morning, because I believe that the demolition of this school will make way for a fit for purpose school and possibly there could be 2 primary schools on that site.

So, we're looking for the future. We know the demand is there and we know the need, so we have to make that decision, and that's where I am with it, for me. I'm further apart from it than yourself, and I understand. But I must say Carole I appreciate the time and effort you've put into this and I know we've had meetings and discussed it and I'm not going to sit on this but I'm making a judgement call here to cater for education provision going into the future. The demands are there, the stats are there, ourselves and Cardiff have more demand for places than any other authority in Wales so we can't sit on our hands and wait for it to happen.

So I'm hoping what rises from the ashes is we demolish the building and we put 1 or possibly 2 21st Century primary schools on that site. For me, I can't ??? with it, I think it's the right way forward for Education provision within the authority. What we have to be careful of this morning we get into a discussion and a debate to keep it at all costs and not about the education needs, within this council. We have to have a balanced approach when we make a decision. What I would challenge anyone here this morning I've said it to elected members and other members of the public – if this was your money, would you waste it every year by putting thousands of £s to mothball a building? I'll give you the answer from me as an individual – no I wouldn't. So why should we as taxpayers. Times are tight, we have a demand, a request for primary places, we need to move forward. I do apologise if members think I'm a bit brutal here, but I'm just stating the facts. And for too long we've sat on our hands I this council and not dealt with that site, because of political reasons. That's the bluntness of it here this morning; I'll say it again, we haven't dealt with it because of political reasons cos it's been too difficult. I can't dodge this and I don't. I think as the leader of the council and as Executive Board members we take the leadership, we run the council, we have that responsibility, we have to make unpleasant

difficult decision at times and this is one of them. I don't apologise for this report being in front of you this morning; I'm pleased, because I'm looking from when that site will come 1 or 2 Primary schools, brand new, 21st Century and I'm delighted and pleased. And I hope that the Executive Board supports the recommendation here this morning so we can move forward and we can cater for the educational needs within Wrexham. TY Carole.

COT – TY. People understand the demand. The problem is how we meet it. I have an intimate knowledge of the length of time we've been dealing with that building as I suspect people in the chamber are aware. *(Smiles)* The time issue I refer to is the information we are debating this morning went into the public domain 5.15pm last Wednesday, less than a week ago. I understand what you mean by money, how we use it/waste it – but I can only repeat what residents said to me – preservation of our heritage is not a waste of money.

Cllr Dana Davies (DD) – I was going to ask what educational purpose the site was earmarked for so I'm pleased you've cleared that up – for Primary education.

You mention a balanced approach – so I'd like to discuss the location of this primary school. We have the report coming to scrutiny potentially March or April "The Strategic Plan for Schools Provision in Wrexham." Work is still being done on it.

So I'm concerned that the site is earmarked before we've seen the strategic plan. I appreciate we've got schools close to the site where we're having to increase capacity to meet demand. My concern – is yes, we need primary capacity but we need the location to be at the Ruthin road end. Schools there are landlocked, we can't increase capacity in either Victoria or St Giles. So there'll be a knock-on effect from a school transport point of view. Will put pressure on that budget too.

We need to review the Strategic Plan before we decide what's a good site. I'm asking within this report – what's the rush??? Why NOW when we haven't even got the strategic plan yet? You say we need 2500 primary school places in the future. A lot of that is going to be met by the increase in capacity in primary schools we've got now, not by building new schools. We're doing that with Alexander and Plas Coch. So, the location, we need the report first, and what's the rush?

MP – I don't think there's a rush. It's been dormant for a long time. Re the stats – I'll send all elected members a copy of the stats later. I think you've forgot there's a covenant on that site for education provision. Previous leaders have tried to remove that covenant without success so we're stuck with it. I think it's a good thing. Our forebears wanted to cater for education provision within the town. Whether we decide now or not we've still got to use it for education provision. I'm disappointed that elected members who've contacted me forgot to mention that, even though they knew there was a covenant on it. That's the dilemma – we have got to use it for education provision. If there wasn't a covenant on it, I would have thought previous administrations would have sold it for housing because of the value of the land. People who put the covenant on the site prob will be laughing down at us because there will be education provision again on that site because we're stuck with it. I say again – we've dodged it for political reasons and it hasn't been dealt with. I can see this political cloud all over us this morning and I've seen it since last week when this report was published.

DD – I understand there's a covenant on it but education provision isn't just primary schools. It's a number of things. My number one concern is when we're looking at education provision in Wrexham we shouldn't do it in isolation. Why can't we wait a few months to see the detail in that strategic plan. Why have such a big piece of work if we're not going to consider it in the bigger picture?

Cllr Michael Williams (MW) – We do have a strategic planning policy and that's been in effect for a number of years; it was changed in 2012 and there were objections to it which resulted in the decision to take the policy to scrutiny to let them have a look at it again to see if it can be improved. If you read the report carefully we're only identifying the Groves site as a *potential* site for town centre provision in the future. We're not saying it's going to happen immediately. Even if we had everything in place to build a new school on the Groves site it'd take at least 3 years before we could implement it simply because the department is tied up with Hafod y Wern new school, Gwenfro, Alexander and the extensions that are taking place, and extensions to Plas Coch itself.

What's going to happen in the future, and it's going to be 10/12 years before this plan is fully implemented because of the timescale that we're looking at. We're not just looking at the Groves site, we're looking at a number of sites in the area where we recognise there's a number of areas where there's a likely need for schools to be built.

DD – And that response is very reassuring. TY. The report says it's an education facility and lead member has said it's earmarked for primary provision. We've got to look at the bigger picture. What you've clarified is very helpful.

Cllr Andy Williams (AW) – Firstly, I'm not against a school being built on this site and I do understand there's a covenant. But I am against the building being demolished. It's a beautiful building and it has a potential site for 2 primary schools. This situation could have been avoided years ago when the building was in better condition. We've known for many years the figures and shortfalls in primary school places and we should have acted on them many years ago. It has been empty for approximately 12 years, various elected leaders of political council have sat back and let it fester until we're in the situation we're in today.

We've tried to pass this building onto Coleg Cambria for them to adapt it. Our proposals to Coleg Cambria were to keep the building in its former entirety and for them to adapt it to their situations. They lost appetite and pulled out of the project leaving it in our portfolio.

I also understand that the building has leaks, and the costs incurred securing it in its current condition. But I strongly believe that we should be keeping the 2 facades that are in the corner of the site. It's in an ideal position to continue the development of the land, for us to carry out our multifunction educational site.

I've been told it's not possible, and we need to knock the building down. Well, I don't think this is right. You've only got to look around the corner at the War Memorial Hospital; that façade is not listed at all but it's been built into a multipurpose, fit for the year College. I'm also told a modern 21st Century school is a single storey construction; but the plans are afoot at the moment for the Gwenfro school that appears to be a 2-storey school.

I've also been told that CADW have looked at it and they don't think any part of the building worthy of saving. For me, they're merely saying no part of the building warrants being listed as a Grade 2 Listed Building. What they haven't said to us is that this is a beautiful building of character that you could incorporate into a modern new fresh design to meet the needs of a 21st Century school. Their only interest is to list buildings. I've also sat on many planning committee meetings where you've insisted that every effort is made to protect and keep facades. Some of the projects around Wxm are still ongoing with facades that we've told people to keep. Yet here we are today looking at a Council building that we're going to demolish and not keep any of its facades.

As Carole said, the majority of people in Wrexham do want to keep the building although I know the potential is unworkable due to current layout and condition of the building. But we should make a compromise and keep these 2 facades. It would be quite easy to bolt on a modern well insulated open spaced school that is fit for the future. We should have gone down the line many months ago like we did with Eagles Meadow where various architects submit their design for incorporating old and new in a 20th Century school. I'm convinced the Welsh Assembly Government would support this. We're not going to end up with any iconic buildings in its place but a modern structure that's been replicated in and around Wrexham many times that we see today. Why can't we be

different and incorporate this into something old and new to form this 20th Century school. This is something other authorities may replicate.

I do not therefore support the decision to totally demolish this building, but one to keep 2 facades as this is the largest character building in Wxm that we have and it should be part of our heritage that we keep for others to see.

Cllr Andrew Bailey (AB) – Paragraph 2.1 of this report says that “members agreed to withdraw from Coleg Cambria” – just to clarify to members of the public that it’s is the Executive Board members who agreed to withdraw. A number of us, I don’t think I’m alone, felt this was premature, this would have achieved something that would have fulfilled the covenant, within a shorter timetable. Now, nothing’s going to happen until 2019 at the very earliest as the Lead Member said; it could be quite a number of years before anything happens here. The report says the building’s been secured and then admits it’s been prone to trespass and vandalism; I’m not sure how those words tie in together; to add to this I’ve been approached by a number of people and they’ve used the term ‘municipal vandalism’ for what you are proposing today. From the start of this saga it was always tacitly agreed that the façade on Chester/Powell road should be preserved. The rationale for the acts you are proposing today is in the 2 or 3 paragraphs from 4.3 onwards – the Local Development Plan to 2028. You’d be looking at this on your forward work programme next month, planning looked at it last Monday. Yes; we’re going to need 10,000+ houses; yes, we’re going to need the infrastructure; but one of the basic fault lines – we’re going to be the in-between council in between one?(can’t tell what was said) that’s going to be rejected and one that’s going to be accepted. And a lot of us have been working hard on the Planning Policy Panel to do that. But one basic tenant of the Local Development Plan is that the infrastructure should match the building; the fault line we’ve had in planning reports had a suggestion for a new building but unless you can tell me that there is going to be new building within this precise area you’re going to be putting a primary school where you don’t necessarily need one. There are going to be more houses in Wrexham but you’re going to need those schools and infrastructure where those houses are, not necessarily here. Another of the basic tenants you’re going to be looking at next month is the reducing of strain on our local highways network; reducing school miles, if I can put it like that; extra journeys that are not needed. You’re going to need new schools, I accept totally your rationale but not here. You’re going to need them closer to where the new houses are. So, I’d ask you to defer this, and have some joined-up thinking with the local development plan all together. I think you’re rushing into it. What’s the rush, as other Councillors have said, let’s have some joined-up thinking with the local development plan, lets have a 21st Century school where the 21st Century houses are. Unless you’re going to tell me the Police Station is going to be high-rise flats what’s going to be the need in this specific area so please defer this decision.

Cllr Brian Cameron (BC)– Can I first say that I think The Groves School plays a big part in the heritage of our town, Wrexham. That’s why there is a covenant on the site, Leader. The people of Wrexham deserve much more than an idea that has been rushed through without any thought to consultation – an issue that appears to be a problem for this administration. Why do I say this – as the Leader, you have an obligation to consult with our local MPs and AMs. And although you’ve mentioned that you’ve written to the local MP recently – this isn’t happening. I would like with our local MPs support to read the recent email that was sent, incidentally, on the 11th of January and only answered on the 12th of January. With your permission (looks ?possibly towards M Pritchard?)

<Reads E-mail>

Dear Mark,

The Groves is one of Wxm’s best known sites and its future has been a problem for many years. Closure of the school on site 12 years ago was part of a largely unsuccessful council-led Secondary School reorganisation. Long-term issues remain within the Secondary sector in the town – excess places within the town centre schools.

In this context, the bombshell suggests on four days notice without any public consultation whatsoever for the Executive Board to consider the motion is bizarre. For a start, there is no clear proposal as to what is to happen to the site; is it to be used for a primary school or a secondary school. (we've heard this morning from other members). Who will pay for the future development of the site; what discussion has taken place with other major education providers in the town; Coleg Cambria and Glyndwr etc etc. The decision to demolish the building without a clear proposal for the site is irrational.

Why must this decision be made now rather than carrying out a proper public consultation on this issue first? What is the hurry? It seems that the council does not envisage work beginning on this site until 2019. Wrexham council must start recognising that it is not the only body in the town with the town's future at heart and start engaging with everyone else in the town before it makes irreversible decisions. I wrote to you last week urging more consultation on the controversial arts hub. I then hear of this, like everyone else – completely out of the blue. Can I urge this Executive Board to stop and reconsider this proposal for demolition only as a proper part of a plan for education in the town and to consult all interested parties when there is a properly formulated plan?

I must say, if this Executive Board passes this motion tomorrow I think it may open itself up to legal action such as the irrationality of the proposal. I would ask that you defer this item until a proper consultation has taken place and a plan for either a Secondary or Primary school in the town.

IR and Dr Helen Paterson in conversation off-mike.

Cllr Anne Evans (AE)– There are 2 issues. The issue of the school has been discussed very eloquently at length and although the condition of the building and the retention of the building has been discussed I just have a plea to the Executive Board.

This building is an iconic building. It points to the fact that Wrexham was in the forefront of women's education at a time when it wasn't universal. I think that should be celebrated and if we remove or demolish the building and the façade we can't go back. And, as Councillor Jones tells us, culture and heritage comes at a price. And I think the extra cost - we've kept this going for years - I think the cost of retaining it for future generations to see what we have achieved in Wrexham is a price worth paying. Thank you.

MP – I'll answer some of the member's questions with regards to consultation and emails between myself and an MP. I'm very disappointed that they've been read out here this morning; when I exchange emails with MPs or AMs or elected members I don't expect them to be publically broadcasted in a public meeting. I really don't. But since you've mentioned it, I'll touch on it. I think confidentiality has been broken and that's where we are. With regard to AMs and MPs when labour ran this authority they would come in and have discussions because I was deputy leader. Since the Independent group have taken over I haven't seen them; I haven't spoken to them; they haven't come to see me; I have openly invited them to come in on any occasions that they want to. Now, if they've got an interest in Wrexham – a true interest in Wrexham they would come and see the leading group of this authority. Absolutely. And why wouldn't you. Because if I was an MP or an AM I would come for discussions but they haven't, I haven't seen them. Now whether that's because labour isn't running this authority I don't know but I can assure you I haven't seen them. But the invitation is still there, and I'll say it now, on the webcam, any AM or MP or any elected member is very welcome to come and see me; the door is open. Ok, so I've covered that one.

With regard to the discussions and exchange of emails, I didn't reply to Ian Lucas, I asked an officer to, and he did last night – Dafydd Ivans – and I've got it here in front of me – and it was sent at 16:59 stating the use and the proposals for that site going into the future and I've touched on it this morning it will be primary use – and I also sent the stats to him with regards to the percentages and the demands. So he's fully aware of that. When I was listening to you reading out it was the same email as I had from him so I thought well that's strange, he's either exchanged emails with you or he's given you a copy of it – that's entirely up to the MP. We have replied to him, the Council, and I'm waiting for a reply from him.

But I do go back to it – we haven't rushed this. It's been empty for close to 13½ years and we have to make a decision. The other councillor mentioned the façade, and he's quite right we can keep the façade but the cost is over £400K and £105K a year to support it in scaffolding or, we leave it empty and we don't touch it again – leave it for another 12/14 years – it costs us a lot of money to retain it in its present form. And that's why the report is here this morning so that we can make a decision on the site and fortunately enough for me I'm far enough away from it for it not to have a personal interest in it politically or emotionally. What I'm asking members to do this morning is make a judgement on what's right for this council going into the future and education provision.

But I will touch on this – and it hasn't been mentioned by any other member but I'll mention it – the security and the cost and the vandalism. There is evidence in the report of what damage there is in there. And constantly it's vandalised. Gangs of youths go over there with poles and smash the security fencing up. It's the best security fencing we can get. You can't get any better, it's first class. They go there with saws and cut holes in it. They go inside and they've absolutely trashed the place. And on top of that there's asbestos in there. Now when you ask why am I rushing it – as soon as I was told there was asbestos in there, and we all have a duty of care and we have to deal with it. So that's why we, and myself as the leader, have pushed this report through because we have to make a decision we can't leave it empty. God forbid that any youngster goes in there and gets a contamination from asbestos or anything – hazardous waste, anything – there is evidence of asbestos in there and that's been confirmed. So that's why we have to deal with it this morning, not leave it, and rightly so. Really, taking the compassion away from this debate it's a straightforward judgement – we keep it, we retain it, we keep paying money, taxpayers money to mothball it – and do you know where that money's coming from? – it's coming from the Education Budget. That money comes to us from Welsh Assembly Government to cater for the educational needs of Welsh children, not to mothball buildings. It's coming out of our budget. Every year. And that means there's less money going for the education of children in this authority and I don't support that either.

So, coming back to it, if you take the emotion out of it I think it's a straight forward decision here this morning & I hope that the Executive Board members are bold and brave enough to stick with the recommendations, I really do. We have to cater for education provision going into the future. We know the demands. There's schools in this town that were built for 200 pupils and they've got over 400 now; they're bursting at the seams. The demand is there, now, as we speak; we have to make a decision on it. So I'm pretty relaxed on this, this morning; I think we should make a decision and move forward.

Cllr Alun Jenkins (AJ) – Can I get back to the 2 recommendations that are here before you today. The first one is to do with the removal of asbestos. I think the report speaks for itself; there is asbestos problem in the building that needs to be tackled. I have no problem with that – that needs to be dealt with as quickly as possible. The second recommendation is the demolition of the building. It's that that I have concern about. We're not talking about the future of schools and education; that's already taken place if you look at the 1st paragraph 2.1 the Executive Board on the 10th November withdrew from negotiations with Coleg Cambria and decided that it was going to allocate the land for future school use. That decision's already been taken. I don't disagree with any of the statistics that Mark has given there is a need for the school and you've already taken that decision that this site is going to be allocated for school use. You look at paragraph 4.6 – now we're waiting for a report from the department of Education on how the site can be used – maybe 1 or 2 primary schools – that is to come into the future. The aspects of the impact on school transport and everything will be taken at that time. Is the school in the right place, does it serve the right needs, that comes later. But that's not what today's debate is about. It's about the state of the building at the moment and whether it needs to be demolished immediately. Now, as has been said already, the Grove Park Girls building has been very contentious for very many years. When it was 12 years ago that we actually moved from there having put 3 different schools in there while their schools were being refurbished and there is a problem with the building at each stage the public of Wrexham, many ex-pupils many other people who have got no connection with the former school have a feeling of sentimentality (that you talked about) towards that building, the school. Many of these ex-pupils have got fond memories of the entrance façade, the staircase leading up to the balcony, the big school hall, parquet floors throughout the building; the area outside which was referred to as the cloisters – these

are things that they hold very dearly and would like, if possible, to see them retained. And because of that, 3 years ago when we were looking at the future of the site, we deliberately decided that the buildings were surplus to requirements but in order to keep our options open the former girls school building would be retained. So the rest of the site have gone, and that one is still in place.

The public of Wrexham, those who feel very strongly about this heaved a great big sigh of relief and thought, “now this building is safeguarded.” It’s still there, and its prospects for the future can still be considered. 18 months ago we entered into negotiations with Coleg Cambria. Coleg Cambria were required, then, to refurbish that building and about 18 months ago they held a big consultation event. They had drawn up the plans of how they were going to develop that site – phase one was going to refurbish the building and put it back into use and so on. A lot of the public of Wrexham attended that meeting and left that meeting thinking at last, there is a proposal for the retention of that building and bring it back into long-term use. Again, a huge sigh of relief that that problem had been tackled. Then we came to the meeting 2 months ago when we were told that we were withdrawing from negotiations with Coleg Cambria but at that time there was no mention and we took that decision that I’ve just referred to that the site would then be allocated for school use, 1 or 2 schools, whatever they were going to do with it subject to the report to come back to us. But there was no mention at that time of the future of the building and what bugs me now is come to last Wednesday when all of a sudden into the public realm comes the report recommending that the building needs to be demolished with the decision being taken – you’ve got the right to do it, ten of you, the delegated right, to take the decision on behalf of the 52 of us. And that is going to be done within less than a week without any publicity to the fact that the building needs to come down.

Now, as a result of this, people have acted very quickly; Carole has worked her socks off to try and inform the people who live around the site and to seek their views. The petition – the strength of feeling is high. The majority of the members of this council, if we had the means to retain it, we wanted to see that building retained in some form. And to do this at a week’s notice; you take the decision; and that’s final. Nobody has a right of appeal, nobody can put their two pennyworth in as to couldn’t it have been done differently.

All I’m going to ask today is that maybe you delay that part two. There is a need to do what Coleg Cambria did – to hold a public event where the public of Wrexham can be invited to see the details, to know what happened with the Coleg Cambria application, why that was terminated, how those proposals are no longer available, to go through the state of the building, to go through all the arguments. The need for demolition, the asbestos because I think we need to treat that whatever decision is being taken. I think there is a need now for that meeting to take place to be available to the ppl of Wxm to come in to be able to see the details. They’ve only had less than a week to see those details and I think there’s a great deal of information that can be shared with people. I’m quite sure that many of those people are going to be adamantly against the demolition of the building but at least by delaying today there is the opportunity for those people to have their say listen to the facts and to be able to accept why we’re having to do what we’re having to do, if that is going to be the final decision.

The only discussion that this has had within the council was within the Land and Buildings Committee back in November. I moved at that time that this consultation event, we could have done that before Christmas, it would have been back on the agenda today but at least the public of Wrexham would have had the opportunity to know what was in the plans and to have their say. The public of Wrexham are in the position of hearing of this probably on Thursday at the earliest and the decision has been taken today, Tuesday less than a week later. Transparency, tact, diplomacy come into this if we want to carry the people of Wrexham with us then please try to involve them. Can I suggest that you need to accept no.1 so that you go ahead, remove the asbestos from the building then delay; we take some time now to have this public event where the people of Wrexham can share information with us, have the opportunity to have their say and you come back in a month or twos time when that event has taken place. I’m quite confident now about what Dana and other people have said about the future use of this site; the report that John Davies is expected to bring back to us sometime will deal with those issues. That is not what is being talked about today. The issue today is does this building need to be demolished immediately.

Even if we had the go-ahead to put a new school/new schools on that site money will not be available until 2019 so you could demolish it tomorrow, you still wouldn't have new schools on there until 2020 at the very earliest. Why are you rushing. Please give the public of Wrexham the time to at least understand what the position is, be consulted on this, and come back with a report fairly quickly in the Spring.

Cllr Phil Wynn (PW) – Members of the Executive Board, I'm sure you're picking up on the sensitivity of this issue, particularly from ward members who represent the town itself, rather than the rural wards. As has been eloquently said, the general public have been denied an opportunity to be consulted on this decision we're discussing today and as the lead member has said (Hugh Jones) we're proud of our record on consulting. That doesn't mean to say that we are unable to take tough decisions, unpopular decisions, but me as an elected member I always wish to engage with the people of Wrexham and give them the opportunity.

We know since 2012 we've always had an issue of budgeting the number of primary school pupils within the county – it's on record, we all know that. In 2014 we made a political decision to save this building in recognition of the contribution it makes to the built heritage of our town, allowing it to be sold at a discounted price to Coleg Cambria who at that time had the capital monies to convert it into a 21st Century educational establishment. You only have to look at the planning application that was approved at the beginning of December to see that it's a very nice building. I don't know the details but it does look a nice building from the drawing but let's not fool ourselves into thinking that the building is about to fall over and has no usefulness going forward. It has, if we have the ambition to do so. I would say, listening to the debate from this side of the floor, we did commit politically to saving that building and then in December decided not to for the reasons explained. However, for the matter of £2000 per month to keep the building mothballed I would say that an extra few months in the scheme of 12 years is nothing, to allow the people of Wrexham to speak and engage with their elected member. My head says that possibly the building will have to be demolished but I think we should allow the people to speak and engage with us, as Coleg Cambria did when they were trying to sell the idea.

So. I agree that we should go in immediately and decontaminate the building of asbestos. My understanding is that work would have to be done even if the building is to be demolished so that money would not be wasted. And if we're going to spend a few thousand, let's wait for our education officers to come back in a few month's time, tell us what is the strategic need for primary schools within the town centre – because it's an area that might end up with 2000 extra houses being built. I would prefer a primary school to be built nearer to those houses than in the Acton area which has no need for additional housing to be built and therefore there is no need for additional English medium schools to be built. We're increasing the extension of Alexander to cater for that need.

Please, please Executive Board, I plead with you, take on board the sensitivity of the issue, the views that have been expressed today and just delay your decision for a few months to allow people to engage. Because the other thing is, as has been mentioned, we are spending over 5 million pounds on a new primary school at Gwenfro – but that's a 2 storey building. If it's good enough for Gwenfro, please allow us a few months to discuss whether that concept could be utilised at the Groves. I don't know, at the end of it it may be not suitable, and that's fine, we can accept that. But please, let's delay the decision until all 52 elected members have had time to engage with members of the public. TY

IR – Thank you. Geoff ...

Cllr Geoff Lowe (GL) – Can I just start by thanking the speakers who have sat here before me addressing this important matter for the people of Wxm. And going back to something Phil Wynn's just said, and Hugh Jones highlighted it earlier this morning, consultation. And when you look at this and where we are, I believe we have failed to consult with people. And I consider that to be unfair. The people of Wxm, and some of them will have high value and regard for this building, deserve as much. So, one of my questions is, "*Are you going to consult, as you so often claim you do, with the people of Wrexham?*"

I understand what the council leader was talking about earlier in terms of finance, I fully understand, it's very difficult times for all of us. And some people may understand the position the council is in and the problems we may have if we continue to invest in this site. And no, Mark, I don't consider your remarks to be brutal, I consider them to be the facts. But during some of these discussions we've had about this building, the old Grove Park Girls school, I've heard such descriptions as being an 'iconic' building. Are we going to replace this iconic building, and I've heard we are, I'm not quite sure of the number either, I've heard 1 building, 1 school, I've heard 2, I've heard 3, I've also heard word of Faith Schools being put on there – which I would personally welcome- but whether I will see that happen is another thing. I've heard discussion that the buildings going on there – whether it's being 1, 2 or 3 – will be iconic buildings of high quality. One of my questions is, “*will you commit this council to that promise, that there will be buildings of iconic status, not the usual buildings, tin-roof things that make it difficult for people to study in?*” We all know how difficult they are.

Another question I have is about educational places, and I do appreciate the pressures we are under as are many other authorities throughout the UK. “*Are we going to be able to provide the homes for these families and children to live in, in Wxm?*” Some of you may be able to answer that for me because I know as a councillor how much pressure our housing department is under when it comes to providing public housing.

My last question is, Mr Chairman, “*Have you considered the management of traffic around the sites, be it 1, 2 or 3 schools?*” Because you're local people, just as I am, and you know the roads you're talking about, Chester Road, major artery into the town; and Park Avenue is also another major artery into the town because it feeds in from Rhosnesni, Borras, Maesydre, and when I say Borras I include the Goulbourne Estate; Little Acton and even the Fairways. So, you've got a huge problem of managing traffic at different parts of the day, in the morning and in the afternoons. And you all know, we all know, Chairman, the problems around our schools regarding traffic management. It is a nightmare. It is a RISK to every child. Community Councils have had to fund Traffic Wardens to control that because this council decided it was not necessary to have them so it passed that responsibility on to Community Councils. So I'd like some observations and some commitment from this council on what it's going to do on the questions I've raised. Thank you.

MP –Yes, I'll answer that question about the number of primary schools on that site. It could be 1, it could be 2, because that's where we are at this moment in time. Education have said, subject to the land area on that site they can put 2 schools on that site. With regard to the traffic, we'll go through the planning process if this is supported here this morning. The planning application is put in on behalf of Wxm CBC to build primary education and traffic will be dealt with as part of the planning process. Ill say that here because the Lead Member for planning isn't here so we've covered that.

With regard to the homes, the local development plan, one was thrown out because we weren't proposing to build enough properties within Wrexham and around the town centre and while the Welsh Assembly Government have made it clear that they will expect this authority to build over and above 11,000 so the minimum they'll accept is 11,000. So that process is still going through the planning policy panel and I do believe they have recommendations more or less completed now to bring to the Executive Board for proposals.

With regard to iconic, yes, and it's a thing Alun Jenkins touched on earlier on, it did come up in the Land and Buildings meeting in November and it was fully supported ... the meeting to demolish the ... er.....er.....
(pause)

I'll just continue – it was supported at that meeting to demolish it but subject to the wording of 'iconic' building put in. So we put in and committed ourselves at that meeting that we would have an iconic building, a school building, on that site, and that's what And the reason why we did it was because we felt that that site deserved it, because of the history and the heritage which has been said this morning. We didn't just want to put a box there and let's be blunt about it because it's been said earlier this morning it's a gateway into Wrexham and it's a prominent corner site we would want a 21st Century iconic school building on that site. And that's what we've committed to subject to the funding from the Welsh Government. So you are right, Geoff, it does deserve it, we are committed to delivering that, and that's where we are, and that's why we changed the recommendations to put in the wording 'iconic' on that site. Thank you, Geoff.

IR – Thank you. Can I bring Mike in now?

MW – Alun spoke passionately about public consultation. Can I remind him of a period in 2008 when the administration, of which you were part, took a report to full council to demolish the school. I wasn't aware at the time that they'd had any previous consultation over it either - before - it was overturned as a result of independents voting with labour at the time and it was labour who took the credit for preserving the school as it is. In terms of the site itself, I accept some of the arguments that have been put forward, that yes, it might be a sort of testament to women's suffrage and that Anne Evans said but what I'd put my hand up of course I wouldn't tend to celebrate that – I would celebrate the fact that the school eventually became a comprehensive school, which was a decision in 1965 of the labour government at the time to do away with the selection process which was invidious, inaccurate, and at the end of the day caused rifts within communities and friends to separate from each other.

In terms of the area of land and the suggestions that have been made that we keep the façade, we have to take a more pragmatic view of building within this local authority area. And if we don't, our partners will. Because we are working with a partner at the moment looking at the possibility of a Faith School on the site. Now, I've had a chat with John Davies about the potential cost to retain the façade of the building and the impact that would have on the increasing the cost of the build itself. I don't think the partner will accept that, they will withdraw from the deal at the end of the day. Additionally, Welsh Assembly Government are anxious to ensure that they get more bang for their buck, to quote the Americans phrase, and what they want to see is a reduction in the cost of the per-metre-squared floor area of 21st Century schools buildings. This has happened in the case of Gwenfro and Hafod y Wern. The buildings are still going to be good, they're going to be excellent quality, what they've managed to do is to look at design principles that reduces the total cost of the building itself. It cost 10 million but it would have cost considerably more had we gone via the old route. Now that money has been used we wouldn't have been able to do it if we hadn't had that extra money over and above that. And I'll be moving this report presently to extend Alexander School which is DESPARATE for accommodation because of the increasing numbers going into the school and Plas Coch, where significant numbers of pupils for the past few years have been accommodated in mobile accommodation which should be and is unnecessary. This is all that I wish to state just to review most of the points that have been said.

IR – Leader, are you content with the recommendation as it stands?

MP – Yes. Thank you Chair. Can I just thank all elected members who have come to the table this morning and put their case forward but I believe that this is the right way forward for this site. I haven't rushed it, I've looked at it, it was discussed, being going on for a long time in this council. I believe the recommendations are right within the report and I'm quite happy to move them, Chair, and I think it's the way forward, I really do, or I wouldn't be sitting here this morning taking all the criticism and flak that I've taken personally, and I have had a lot of emails and sharp emails – I'll put it in that context - but I do believe that we as elected members - the leader, the deputy leader, the executive board members have a role and a duty to play in this council and I believe it's our duty here this morning to move this site forward to cater for education, primary education on this site. I do believe it and I have said a couple of times this morning I'm far enough away from it without the emotion to make a balanced decision here this morning (or this afternoon) to move this site forward for clearance, and to put educ provision on the site. So yes, I'm happy with it but I would like to thank members for their questions and discussions this morning. Thank you Chair.

IR - Thank you. I'm going to take this proposition to the vote, I have a seconder for it, it was Hugh, all those in favour That's unanimous again and carried.

COT – given the way the vote is going, could I ask to make one more comment, now that I know the way the vote has gone.

IR in discussion with someone, off mike.

Then he moves on to Agenda 8.