

WCBC Executive Board Meeting - March 8th 2016

Members Questions – (Declaration of interest from Councillor David Kelly, who left the chamber).

Councillor Malcom King OBE (MK) at 02:11 on the webcast.

Thank you Chair. So. The Grove Park Girls Save Our Heritage Group still holds out hope that the building can be retained and refurbished, thereby continuing to make a valued contribution to our town's built environment. But, more importantly, as an educational establishment fit for purpose in the 21st Century.

They are therefore pleased to learn of the Education Department's intention for one, possibly two, primary schools in the spirit of the Covenants. They are hopeful that the Lead Member for Education and the Head of Education will reconsider the decision to request the Executive Board for demolition of the former Grove Park Girls' School.

As an alternative solution, would they consider the appointment of an external architect to carry out a feasibility report so as to ascertain the possibility of converting the former Grove Park Girls School for use as a primary school which will meet the conditions laid down by the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools programme – and if this is the case, that it can be delivered at an acceptable cost. It is their understanding that a feasibility report could be carried out within a relatively short period of time.

They would like to stress that their request should not be interpreted as a stalling tactic but one of evidence to be placed on record that Councillor's decision-making is based on evidence and critical analysis. If detailed work has previously been carried out to this end they would like to ask why this information was not shared with all elected members as part of the report that went before the Executive Board in January 2016.

(MK) at 00:4:40

Finally, if a third party representing a faith-based school has been consulted can you confirm that they have been given the option of conversion of Grove Park Girls School that would meet the conditions of the 21st Century school programme. Thank you.

Cllr Mark Pritchard (MP) introduces Lead Member for Education, **Cllr Michael Williams (MW)** to respond to the question.

MW at 05:00

Thank you very much. My answer will be somewhat shorter than the question.

Can I first say how puzzled I am at the form of the question. I get the impression here that you've had a conversation with the Save Our Heritage Group and either prompted them with some ideas or taken down their ideas and now are acting on their behalf. I find it odd that they haven't presented their own case today and are relying on you, a rather recent convert to the old Groves site. And I refer here to your failure to attend any of the corporate land meetings where issues of this nature are discussed over the last 18 months - and in particular, 2 meetings which were held specifically to look at the Groves and possible options for its future.

But I will now go on to the question.

(MW) at 06:00

I refer you first of all to comments that David Jones made in a conversation he had with a reporter from the Wrexham Leader some weeks back about capital investment in college buildings that were going to be made over the next 10 years. And, in that report, he made it absolutely clear that their plans for renovation did not include any refurbishment other than to incorporate the front of the Groves, the façade + it was in effect a new build – a design presumably from the architects as the most cost effective option.

(MW) at 06:58

You and I were present at the turf-cutting ceremony to replace the new school to replace Hafod-y-Wern I your ward. It is a very impressive design and will serve generations of children over the next 35 years and is fully supported by the community – and I'm pleased to know that.

But if you follow the suggestion from the Save Our Heritage Group we could have decided to refurbish the old school and not build a new one but know from experience that this would be a poor substitute for a purpose-built school designed specifically to meet our vision for a school for the 21st Century.

(MW) at 07:32

In relation to our discussions with representatives of the Catholic Diocese we have held initial discussions with the Bishop and some other members of the Trustees group to provide land on the Groves site for a new school building to replace the existing St Mary's Catholic Primary school which is very urgently needed since there is very little space at St Mary's to be able to carry out any extensions; the number of children from the Catholic faith are increasing in numbers and the danger is they will not be able to accommodate Catholic children in the future because there will be no room.

(MW) at 08:20

No discussion has taken place about refurbishing the Groves for that purpose because of the uncertainty of costs of remodelling a building that has been empty for 15 years. The Diocese is required to meet 15% of the costs of any new build. Trustees need very accurate information about these costs because at the end of the day it is members of the Catholic Church who have to dip their hands in their pockets to meet 15% of the costs which they invariably have to put towards any remodelling or any projects relating to the Catholic Church.

(MW) at 08:56

We couldn't provide those costs - which they couldn't be provided for any attempt to remodel The Groves - and we have experience of this from attempts to refurbish schools in the past which have resulted in huge cost overruns and I'm sure you'll know what I'm talking about.

Thank you.

(MP thanks him then asks for someone to ask David Kelly to come back in).