

WCBC Executive Board Meeting - Tuesday 12th April 2016

Agenda Item 3: CHAIR Cllr Mark Pritchard (MP) to CLLR David Kelly (DK)

MP: Items of personal interests, declaration of personal interest if any, are there any? David, David Kelly?

DK: Chair, item number 5, Notice of Motion, personal and prejudicial, as before I will leave the meeting.

MP: Thank you David, any others? OK thank you.

We will now move onto Agenda number 5 Notice of Motion, thank you David, to consider the Notice of Motion referred by the Council to come back to the Executive Board this morning. It has been moved and seconded Dana, I did have your email and I did confirm back to you that it was moved and seconded so there's no need to do that today, so I'm happy to allow any elected member what wants to come to the table this morning to ask questions or discuss the motion which is in front of me here today.

Does any of you want to come, your more than welcome to. Dana?

Morning Dana.

CLLR Dana Davies (DD)

DD: Thank you Chair,

Yes, we brought this Motion in front of Council to debate the demolition of the Groves site. We had a number of questions and the change in policy from the original document that the Executive Board made in December 2012, to form a partnership with Coleg Cambria in moving that building and that site for redevelopment into further education?

We then were party to some information which showed that there was a change in policy in July 15 on your direction Cllr Pritchard, regarding looking at options of the council retaining the Groves site for use as a primary school site?

You believed that the college did not intend to deliver on the whole of the proposed development, the three phases: phase 1 being redeveloping the actual former girls school building, then phase 2 was sports facilities for the site and phase 3 was for the classrooms for the site, and all this was happening during the period that Coleg Cambria were doing their options appraisals and their costings because their board were not making the decision until November 2015, so while that was happening they were looking for more information as to why there was a change in policy when the board, when Coleg Cambria's board, still hadn't done their full options appraisal and costings.

We also believe that the redevelopment of that site for further education would also have an economic benefit to the town with all the students, you know, coming into town and also the additional courses and everything that could be available to our young people in Wrexham, so they could study in Wrexham.

We also had concerns around the Covenants, going through all the Covenants, the three Covenants on the site, there's an area stipulated for school buildings, there's a small area off Chester Road that's stipulated for access and the rest of the site is stipulated in the Covenants for recreation for the school, so we were concerned to come across the full Council reports in 2010 where areas pertaining to the Penymaes Avenue end were actually in the local development plan for housing and we wondered how that could be put forward by the council when all the land has Covenants on it?

We also had concerns around if this recent quick decision really had anything to do with the budget for asset and economic development as their 1.5 million pound reserves had obviously been earmarked now for the Arts hub, and we wondered whether it was that lack of financing that could see the building through to redevelopment and whether that was why there was a rush to demolish.

We've obviously had representations from numerous members of the public in my ward, further afield as well, and this appears to be because of the rush to demolish the building, there appears to be an element of distrust? Like the council are hiding something, they're not telling us everything, so the primary concern really is that the decision, whilst its being considered for listing, at the moment the decision is still with the Executive Board to demolish, so there are concerns out there with the public and with elected members that potentially the day after that decisions been made, the council could instruct the decision to demolish because the decisions been made.

So the purpose of the motion really is to reconsider the demolition of that building, and whilst we're waiting for the listing, the whole decision to demolish could be taken off the table which would then renew confidence in members, in the eyes of the public and we could then, once that decisions been made, we could restart the process with proper consultation on all the options for that building and the site. OK.

MP: Thank you Dana, I'll go through it one at a time and if I miss any please come back, I'll give you that opportunity.

With regards to the Covenants, the Covenants is for education purpose only, I think your fully aware of that, our office has instructed you that. You know that so this is for the benefit of, and I'm sure all the elected members knew that, but this is for the benefit of the people of Wrexham.

There are Covenants on it for education and we will not move away from that, we are committed to that and me as an individual, I can't speak for the other Executive Board members, but they haven't come to me and said anything different. We will not support putting houses on that, the people who put these Covenants on years ago for me, were visionaries, who wanted to cater for education within the town, so myself and other elected members wouldn't support putting houses on there at all, so we can stop that myth this morning, and I think your fully aware of that and all elected members have known that for years, that I wouldn't support putting housing.

With regards to the speed, its been empty for, some people say twelve, some people say fourteen years, but I don't think we've rushed this at all Dana, and we've had political debates and discussions on this for years, but what I would like to remind you all here this morning which I'm sure your fully aware of, up to now Wrexham council have spent £900,000 on that property which you're fully aware of, and your group, and the Lead Member for Finance was, and he's

here this morning, Malcolm King, is fully aware of them costings, so we all know the amount of money which will be spent on it.

Then with regards to the issue of health and safety. We all know there's an issue with health and safety on that site. We have individuals that are breaking in there regularly and we're stopping them, and the police were called over the last weekend. We had three individuals breaking in again and the police are dealing with that . We have people running across the roof, we have people getting in there, Stihl saws, crow bars, they're gaining access, so that's why we feel we need to deal with the issue, we can't ignore it now, in the past, and I can't speak for them individuals, it was ignored and just left to stand there. We can't, we have to deal with it, and on top of that there's pressure for education provision within the town and I know you've challenged that and I think that we are all comfortable now that there be need and demand for education within the town centre.

With regard to open this in transparency, this is the one that I'm disappointed with because if anybody needs to have any information on The Groves they can have it. I've instructed Officers, and I don't have to instruct Officers but I have, to furnish any elected member, any member of the public to have what you want, and I know with regards to Coleg Cambria, that Malcolm's been in to speak to Officers through the freedom of speech and we've had all the emails so that's been covered very well.

Finally Coleg Cambria,

I think that's been very well documented in the local press. They made it clear that they weren't in the position to progress with that site. They made it clear, Malcolms had the emails. Its there in black and white, anybody can have them. I mean it was minuted that they could not progress with that site, they made it clear. We offered it them when they told us they couldn't progress with phase 2 and 3, we went back to them. Steve Bayley, the Officer, had meetings with them and said you could have The Groves, can you continue with phase 1? we will take phase 2 away and we'll put education provision on the other side. They said they couldn't do it, that's documented and its in emails and Malcolm's had a copy of them, so that's covered too.

Is there anything else you wish to know?

DD: Just going back to the Coleg Cambria site and I just want to touch on education provision as well, whilst they were doing, I've seen the emails back and to, and whilst they were doing their options appraisal and coming back to us so they could put options forward, obviously one of the options is always do nothing when you're in a decision making process, and reading the emails, they were very much telling us that they were looking at all the options and putting the costings together and they could not come back to us with an overall decision until it had gone to the Board in November.

Now that board meeting was after the Executive Board meeting we had, so from reading the information it didn't look within the emails that they were actually pulling out of the deal. There was some issue over when phase 2 and when Phase 3 would commence but reading emails, there was a commitment to phase 1 which was redeveloping The Groves site and that's the information I've looked at and I've read and feel very much that they were putting their options appraisal forward. So it does look, in all honesty, reading all the emails between the Officer of the council, and Coleg Cambria, that potentially we could have jumped the gun whilst they were doing their options appraisal, and from our point of view, from a council point of view, and a

Wrexham town point of view, that was the best option for that site, that would have preserved the building. It would have given us huge economic benefit into the town and we haven't pushed that, I don't believe, as much as what we should have pushed it.

We had, in July you know, information from yourself, asking if we could look at pulling the site back into the council because of education demand, and I think that then has changed the policy and the direction of future talks with Coleg Cambria, regarding securing that building and securing that site for further education use.

With regards to education provision and demand in the town. Yes I agree. We've been saying it for ages. The strategy for primary education in Wrexham would be to increase the size of the current primary schools where we can. Its the other side of town where we've got issues with land-locked schools, where we've got you know, Victoria school, St Marys School, St Giles, its the other end of town.

So you know, looking at this as well, we haven't even formulated the school strategy, the school planning strategy yet. Thats not coming to the Executive Board until July. That's been delayed, it was due to come next month. So, and then we've got the LDP as well. Within the LDP there's a recognition that we need two primary schools but they're not on that site. They're on Ruthin Road and they're on Cefn Road, the Bryn Estyn site so I can, I can recognise that we've got an issue with primary school place planning in Wrexham, but also within the Covenants isn't this site earmarked for secondary school education not primary?

MP: Thank you Dana.

With regards to Coleg Cambria, totally disagree with what you've taken from their email, I will furnish any member of the public, anybody in Wrexham can see them because they're a public document.

Our officers offered The Groves to Coleg Cambria, and they said it was not, they didn't want it, that's the brunt of it. Malcolm had copies of it, You know, I can't, I just, everybody here today, no elected member was involved in those discussions. It was Officer to Officer. No steer was given by us, and ideally if Coleg Cambria would have progressed with phase 1, wonderful, fantastic, but they said they didn't want the school. I cannot go away from that. Its the, its fact. So I don't know what you take from that, but you obviously see it different from me, but the emails are out there for everybody to see.

With regards to education provision. I'm delighted, and I'm really pleased that you're sitting here this morning accepting that there's a need for education provision within Wrexham, and the reason why your sitting here today, and we're having this discussion, is because there's a Covenant on that site, that that site has to be used for education. So that's why we have to use it for education, and with regards to, and I sometimes struggle with this really, that I think its just become political Dana, and its a political platform and I don't like that because I think we all want to do the best for education and our children within Wrexham, and we have to put education provision on that site because we can't continue to waste money on it and as I said earlier, £900,000. We've issues with security, we are going to have to revisit it, you know, because we are considering at this moment in time putting security on 24/7 on the site. That will cost this authority another £100,000 per annum, and we're gonna have to do that because the issues with our insurance policy because we have to protect the building. We also have to protect the general public, um, and that money will come out of education, so money which

should be spent on education, on children, is going to mothball the school. Is that right? We personally, I'll answer that. No it isn't. We should not spend public money, £900,000, and probably another £100,000 on securing the site, when the money should be spent on catering for the children's requirements and needs in education in this town.

We could have left it and some people have said to me, you should have left it Mark, you shouldn't have taken this issue on. Let sleeping dogs lie, leave the Groves alone, but we can't and we shouldn't .

The easiest thing for this Executive Board, like previous administrators, was to leave it alone. We can't, because we have a building there which is costing money, and we have issues with the Health and Safety. That's why we've dealt with it, and that's why we're having this discussion and I wish, you know, and I hope going into the future, that we had the right discussion for the right reasons and not a political platform.

Do you want to come back?

DD: I do yeah, I'm gonna ignore your comments about political platforms if you don't mind, because I'm trying to make the informed argument and I find that quite offensive.

With regards to the money and funding it out of education money. Its an asset. Really that should be funded out of the asset budget. You shouldn't be touching our education money, and I'm delighted that your, that you gave me the comment regarding the education and recognising. We've been recognising in Scrutiny for quite some time, that theres been issues over school place planning. You can refer to the Minutes on that prior I believe, to the Executive Board making a comment on it. And with regards to there being "no steer to officers", the emails which are out in the public domain following an FOI request, refer to the steer that you gave the officer on the 17th of July.

MP: Thank you. Does anybody else? Malcolm?

MP: Morning Malcolm.

Cllr Malcolm King (OBE) (MK)

MK: Well thank you for the opportunity to speak to this issue. First of all, just as a matter of record, you know that I was part of the Labour group in 2008 that persuaded the council to preserve The Groves all those years ago now, eight years ago.

I was also as you know, the Lead Member in 2013-14 that put the case together to form a partnership with Coleg Cambria, which seemed the perfect strategy for the site, and for Wrexham, and I don't know if you'd call that a part of previous administration, but that certainly, I would say, contradicts what you were just saying. That previous administrations didn't have a plan for the site. That was quite clearly the plan for the site that the whole council supported at that time, and it made huge sense but I'll come back to that if I may in a couple of minutes.

Several questions on fact at the moment. You made the, you said very clearly, the Covenant was for education purposes. I read the Covenant and that's not how I read it. It actually specifies

Secondary to Further Education. Its not, it seems to rule out primary education, so I wonder if we have, could have, a comment from the Legal Officer on that, as to whether or not that specific reading of the Covenant does create a problem for primary schools. Because certainly as a lay person, my reading of it says that it does have a problem for primary education and I wonder, given the wording of the Covenant whether there's been any legal advice taken by the council as to whether we could simply put a primary school there, or two, as some people have speculated on.

That's also very important for two reasons. First of all the Lead Member kindly let us know there are discussions going on with the Catholic Church about the possibility of moving St Marys there, and as we all know, this is pretty cramped into the site they are now. But I wonder whether the Catholic Church knows, or the Governors know, whether or not the Covenant may not allow for a primary school to be there, and also whether politically they would want the site where the only way of getting it, was to knock down a very special part of Wrexham's heritage. Whether that's formed part of the discussion with the Catholic community of Wrexham?

I would have thought there would be quite a number who perhaps, wouldn't want that as a starting point for a new school, and, well, the first part of my questions, that I just wanted to know if CADW do not list the Groves, what would be the timescale to demolishing the buildings? I imagine you want to rush to do it as quickly as possible, but I wondered if you have obviously given that some thought, and the slight concern that there's been a hold up in it, in the desire to get it knocked down as quickly as possible, and whether or not you've got plans in place to get it done say within a fortnight of CADW's decision, if its not to list it?

So there's a series of questions there, but I think the key one is the issue about why we pulled out the arrangement with Coleg Cambria. Because of course, you're aware that your reply to the Principle, the Chief Executive sorry, of Coleg Cambria, you're aware obviously of the Principle of Coleg Cambria saying that, about the reasons for the breakdown and in the arrangement and the reply to him.

I understand he hasn't replied to you on that but I'm slightly perplexed by some of the replies around that, because my reading of those emails of which I've been able to see a copy, doesn't support your interpretation of it. It doesn't support interpretation as they're saying that they're not quite sure about their finances. None of any public body is I guess at this stage, and they can't, couldn't be, absolutely certain about subsequent phases of the plan. Neither could we, neither could probably any other public body be certain about subsequent phases of plans to do with major finance. And it does seem to me that we're, we or you, or, well you're the Lead Member aren't you? Made the decision, that well, let's use it for something else, somewhat prematurely rather than continuing with the, with the, strategic plan of having that partnership.

I'm perplexed because you characterised on saying that they didn't want it. They didn't want the site, and I don't recall anywhere in those emails where they actually say they don't want it, but they made it clear they weren't in a position to progress the site, if you mean by that the later phases, that's probably true, but in terms of the earlier phases, it doesn't seem to be clear to me from those emails that that's what they meant.

I am particularly perplexed by the statement you made just earlier to Cllr Davies, that the report to, that there had been no steer by us, by members, in regard to those communications with Cambria. Presumably the steer would have come from you, as the Lead Member and Leader of the Council.

Are you actually saying that the reports of Land and Property, where it was proposing to do something quite different, that you weren't consulted about that report? And that you were, because I was your predecessor as Chair around the Property, and predecessor as to the Member for these matters. And the idea that there would be such a major change in policy mooted as a committee of the Council, without asking me as Chair, or saying should we take it to this one, what should the content be and so on, the idea that there be no steer by me, would have been extraordinary to the point of being unique.

So I don't really understand your statement with regard to that. So they were getting cold feet, but it does seem to be, from the correspondence, that it was, I would have assumed, that they actually pulled out probably after consultation with colleagues, and its that, for me, kind of breaks my heart. Not that I was the architect of that arrangement, but that it was the perfect strategic plan for Wrexham.

We like every other town centre in Britain practically I guess, are struggling with the future of the town centre in terms of its commercial viability and so on.

That's well documented and there's all sorts of people who say, you know, in twenty years time high streets won't look anything like they are now. So the idea that we would miss all those students coming into Wrexham to spend their money, to provide more commercial opportunity for the town centre in Wrexham, that we do away with that, and replace it with primary school if that's possible.

Are we picturing that primary school children will go out in their lunchtime and go round town, or after school and spend their money in town? That's clearly preposterous, so we've lost a huge opportunity to help the town centre. We've lost a huge opportunity to keep those, that concentration of students together in the town centre, and for what?

We have no planning for primary schools at the moment, no plans to start it until July, so I just don't understand why you've taken a decision which on the face of it appears to be a terrible mistake for Wrexham which we will suffer from for many years to come. Besides the idea that you seem desperate to knock down such a hugely important part of Wrexhams heritage, so I do plead with you to change your mind. This is a mistake of huge proportions.

MP: Thank you Malcolm. I'm going to bring in Trevor Coxon for legal advice on the Covenants. The advice that I've been given, and not just by Trevor but by other Officers as well, that we can put a primary school on it and the Covenants does not stop us from doing any of that, but Trevor Coxon will comment on the Covenants before I bring the other members in.

Trevor Coxon (Statutory Monitoring Officer (TC):

TC: Well this is the first time Cllr King has raised this with me this morning so no, I haven't had the opportunity to read the document myself. I have a legal staff which looks into it, so you say you've had advice from other members of my legal staff, then I'm quite happy to go along with that. Thank you.

MP: Thank you. But what I will ask Trevor to do is just to confirm that, if you could do that after the meeting, to come back to yourself and all elected members confirming the Covenants on the site so we can put a line through that.

MK: Can we have the exact wording?

TC: No problem at all.

MP: You will have the appropriate wording and Trevor has just confirmed he will do that. OK thank you. Regards to the education, Michael would you like to come in on the education?

Cllr Michael Williams (MW):

MW: I would just like to go into this problem over the Covenants. As far as I've been made aware by Officers, the Covenant refers to the site for the presence of a County school. Now we have County primary and County secondary schools, so there appears to be no conflict between the wording of the Covenants and education departments decision to use the site for primary education at the end of the day.

MP: Thank you. Cllr Hugh Jones?

Cllr Hugh Jones (HJ):

HJ: Thanks. I'm just going to make reference to the fact that Cllr King twice said and personalised it, by saying to you as Leader, you made the decision because you are the Lead Member, and it breaks his heart, and he also referred to the Corporate Land and Buildings, of which Cllr King was Chairman.

Interestingly, Cllr Kings attendance record as a corporate member of buildings is as follows:

The 7th October 2014 absent with an apology.

The 14th November 2014 absent no apology

2nd December 14 absent no apology

3rd February 15 absent no apology

2nd June absent no apology

1st July absent no apology

7th October 15, when this item of The Groves was on the agenda, absent no apology.

4th November 2015, when this item of The Groves was on the agenda, absent no apology.

So I would suggest that if the decision breaks his heart, perhaps he should have attended the meetings where decisions were made. Thank you.

MP: Malcolm, your more than welcome to come back.

MK: Yes, I realise that one of the main tactics for the Executive Board is to attack, make the person take on the speaker. But if I can just explain that the time for the meetings have changed to 2 o'clock on a Wednesday, which is when I have my staff meeting at work, so its almost impossible to get to it. The only times that actually I could have got to it has been when the meetings have been cancelled themselves.

So yes, I have been considering for some time resigning from it, because its so difficult to get to it, because it clashes with my main meeting of the week. So yes its, its perhaps wrong of me not to resign before now, but I like my involvement with Land and Property. I have a long standing experience in the issue going back twenty five years or so, and I don't really want to give it up but it's an impossible clash, but to characterise that as being though I have no particularly strong feelings about this issue, is pretty tawdry really. Thank you.

MP: Thank you Malcolm, Malcolm can I just discuss the issue, that you said I made the decisions and this is what I'd like to clarify here today? Because you, you made reference to personalising things. I think in the past it has been personalised and everybody seems to be pointing the finger at me and the consequences of that, my family have had harassment. Me self personally, I've had threats made against me and I take exception to that and I just want to clarify this here today, I haven't made the decision, the decision was made by the Executive Board and I still believe that was a right decision.

It was called in through the political process on the Scrutiny on the calling and they supported that the right decision was made. So I think its a little bit unfair when you keep on pointing the finger at me and your colleagues continue to do the same, because you're incorrect and you're wrong and I'd please like you to stop that, because the consequences of that, people target me and my family and I don't like that either.

So coming back to it, in the future, I'm going back to the past, could we all stop personalising it for individuals, because there's consequences of people doing that and I hope today we can have a sensible debate and we can cover it, and we can exhaust it and I'm quite happy to sit here all morning and further if you want to So we can get these issues resolved and move on. But we can't keep on having personalities and personal attacks, it doesn't work and it isn't fair and its wrong.

Now coming back to when we said in the past with regard to, that you were Lead Member and you had this vision of a college, wonderful. Whether it was you personally, I don't believe that as a fact Malcolm, I think that was an exaggeration on your behalf, but I think what you said was right.

The vision was right but the bluntness of that, there was no contract with Coleg Cambria to deliver phase1, phase 2 or phase 3 and they could walk away at any moment in time and that's what they did. So if there is a problem here, the problem probably would have been in the past, or why there wasn't a contractual agreement done between ourselves and Coleg Cambria. There wasn't, that's the way it is and we have to move forward on it.

Coming back to Coleg Cambria, and I know that you've spoken to Steve Bayley, the Officer, and I'm sure you've probably spoken to Coleg Cambria, but you will have to get that information off them what was said in that meeting, because I wasn't there, I wasn't party to it, but what come back from the officers, that I know the officer has furnished you and told you this, through emails and verbally, that they weren't interested in taking on The Groves and I do believe I'm correct in that issue.

Thank you Malcolm. Malcolm, if you want to come back you can, but I have allowed you thirteen minutes and I don't mind, you can continue as long as there's a question. Thank you Malcolm.

MK: Yes sorry. First of all can I say I regret that your family might have been targeted for any of these issues. At any time its disgraceful. However, that's the point of being a Lead Member or Leader of the Council, is that you, the point of being, that is, that you do, you take responsibility for certain things and that's in the job description. And that's the point I was raising, was that the idea that you would, there would be a preparation of such a large change in policy with such potentially huge consequences, without, without being involved in that and the preparation of reports to do that.

I find that impossible to understand and even to believe. But two questions, first of all the issue about the primary school and the Covenant, because Steve Bayleys email of 15th September 2015 to John Davies the Head of Education, says that even using the site for a primary school will require some work on the Covenant, which is in favour of secondary schools.

So it does appear that Steve must be under some false illusion in talking to Head of Education here, that there's something in the Covenant that doesn't just allow education to go on the site. That its, its rather more narrow than that. But perhaps Mr Coxons reply will clear that matter up, and yes, so I don't really understand why we're pushing on with this.

You also didn't say anything about, in your reply about how quickly the place would be demolished if CADW fails to list it.

MP: Thank you Malcolm. With regards to the Covenants. I do believe that the Officer has said that he will come back to you and I'm sure that he will cover all the issues that you have raised this morning with regards to the covenants, so I think we've covered that.

With regards to the demolition, we are in the process of tendering on, I do believe that a preferred tender has been chosen. I think where we are with regards to timescale, we're waiting for CADW to see if they list it and if they list it well, obviously we will have another discussion. But I have got something I will read out here at the end explaining the process and that, and I'll do that later when I've allowed you all to have your discussions.

But we are where we are with it, I do believe that the issue, and I keep on coming back to it for me, has always been the issue surrounding the asbestos and the health and safety and *<pauses as someone in public gallery remarks>*.

I do believe the issue has always been for me is the health and safety, safety of the general public and the safety to anybody who enters that site, I've moved away from that and I don't apologise for that.

As I said, you know, its evidence based, not me making it up which a lot of people go out to say that and verbally say that into the public which is untrue. Its evidence based, we've had a company in, they've identified to finding asbestos, there is asbestos in there and it isn't me making it up. That there are children running along the roof, and there's children breaking in and adults breaking in stealing the copper, the flooring, and damaging it, and I'm sure if you look at Wrexham.com, the evidence was there on what damage has been done.

So there is a serious issue here on the health and safety of the general public and that we have a statutory and a legal obligation to cater for them and that's what we will do, so is there, Malcolm are you OK with that?

MK: Sorry just to record you saying about, there is some doubt about why we hadn't got an arrangement, a legal arrangement, a contract with Coleg Cambria. You recall that we got legal advice saying that we weren't able to do that, which is why we wasn't, so, that the, kind of in the sense that it wasn't done very well. We examined that at great length and took legal advice and we weren't able to have a contract with Cambria much to our regret. Just to put the record straight.

MP: Thank you Malcolm, thank you for that. Anybody else? Brian and then Carol.

Morning Brian.

Cllr Brian Cameron (BC):

BC: Morning Chair thank you for allowing me to speak. I'm not going to touch on anything that, well I don't think I'm going to touch on anything that any of my colleagues have raised, but you did make reference in relation to keeping all the members, being informed about the process that's been going on throughout the issue and in relation to The Groves. However, in the past I think I'm right in saying, every single Executive Board member have said how the importance of consulting with the public is vitally important to whatever the authority does.

The question I'd like to ask the Lead Member is, why, in the first place, before the decision was made, didn't you go out to consult with the people of Wrexham? Was it because it was too controversial and you didn't know what was going to come back, or for some other means?

I call on this Executive Board to reverse their decision to demolish The Groves until a proper consultation process has been carried out with the people of Wrexham, that includes the needs for ALL education needs in the County Borough, including the needs of the future LDP, before any decision is made, because at the moment to me it looks like your just saying we need this, we need that. The Covenant will take care of itself. We don't know, I don't understand the Covenants, whether it says it needs a new primary, whether it needs for secondary. What I do need to understand is if there's a need for primary school, more primary schools, then there's obviously gonna be a need for more secondary schools.

So there should be a proper strategy for what the Borough of, the County Borough of Wrexham needs, so I would call on the Executive Board to carry a proper consultation. We're gonna be talking about something a little bit later in the meeting where it has consulted with the people,

and we've spoken many times of how many people have been consulted on other issues, but on this, there is no numbers at all on the amount of people that's been consulted in the County Borough of Wrexham. Knowing how much the feelings of the people are, so I do, at this late stage, even while we're waiting for the CADW decision, ask this Executive Board to carry out a proper full, open and frank consultation process. Thank you.

MP: Thank you Brian.

With regards to the consultation and with regards to the demolition of any building I think what we need really to do, and I'll just cover this because I did cover it at the call in, but we have followed exactly the same process on the consultation as we would do with any demolition of any other school and we've done this in the past and will continue to do it in the future, so we haven't treated The Groves, and we need to remember, if you take the emotion out of this, The Groves is not listed, it might be *<pause - remarks from public gallery>*, The Groves is not listed, so it hasn't got a listing on it so we treat it exactly the same as any other school.

Now, when we went to the call in, and I was scrutinised on the decision making then, we covered this at length so I'm sure you're aware, but I'll just cover it quickly, that we have done the same process on the procedure of the consultation of this school as we would do with any other school with reference to the demolition order, the planning process and everything else. So we've done nothing different in the past or we won't certainly do anything different in the future, and I'd ask you this question, Why would you treat The Groves any differently because its a school and we're looking to *<remarks from public gallery>*, what we're looking to do is to re-develop the site.

So with regards to the consultation, when we go out for consultation, when we go out for the consultation in the future, if, IF it isn't listed, we will then have a full consultation, of course we will, but we do that anyway, so that's where we are on that Brian, and I know Brian your fully aware of this but you did leave the table but yes your more than welcome to come back Brian.

BC: Thank you Chair I didn't intend to come back but I feel that I must.

Feelings that your seeing from the public gallery this morning is no different to what the feelings are across the County Borough of Wrexham. That is why I call on this Executive Board to have an open and full and frank discussion. I don't know about any other planning applications, I have been involved in one or two, but where I have been involved those issues are formerly to myself, but with this particular thing because of the nature and the controversial manner in which it has been brought about, that's why I'm asking for the Executive Board to have a proper, frank and open consultation that takes in the needs of the future of all educational needs. Whether that be primary, secondary, grammar school, whatever it means, all I'm saying is we need to know what our needs are.

Thank you and that's all I'm going to say.

MP: Thank you Brian. Brian can I just come back with regards to the issue how controversial this is, and I will speak honestly here today which I have to, because as Malcolm said when your the Leader of the Council, it is what it is.

I've had representation made by me from lots of people to stop wasting public money on a school which is like a sponge, and that money should be spent on education. So for every individual that comes to me and says save The Groves, I have a lot more saying why are you wasting public money, my money, on a school which has been mothballed for fourteen years and your looking to spend more money again which should be spent on education, and on the back of that I have people, parents, making representation to me, saying my children follow a certain faith and will want to go to a faith school in Wrexham, and they can't because it was built for 200 and now its taking on 400. So when your the Leader of the Council and Executive Board and elected members, because I know you're all fully aware of this, we have to take everything into consideration and what's been done in the past on this site is just a certain amount of people are challenging us, and rightly so, but we have to cater for the bigger picture.

Now, where we are at this moment in time and I will say it again, The Groves is no different from any other school in Wrexham and it isn't listed at this moment in time.

Michael would you like to come in on the education?

MW: Sorry, just a comment initially about the suggestion about its architectural significance. I'd just like to read this statement following a visit by a CADW inspector. 'It is pleasantly designed but architecturally it is not especially remarkable. As mentioned already we can only list the best examples of their type of buildings that were built after about 1840 and we don't think that this school, most of which dates from the 1930s, is of sufficient architectural quality to meet the criteria.

Those aren't my words, they're the words of CADW.

MP: Thank you Michael.

MW: In response to Brian's comments about secondary and primary education in the local authority area. We do have sufficient capacity within our school system to meet demand for the foreseeable future. As far as our pupils are concerned, our problem lies particularly with the increase in the population and because of the desirability of living within the town centre, and this is having a big impact on school placement within the areas surrounding Alexandra School, Borrass and so on, but schools are very over subscribed. We have judged there is going to be a population increase, we certainly know that there is going to be an increase in primary school population over the next five years, and if we don't address the issue during this period, we're going to have situations where children in the town centre may not be able to get a place within the school thats nearest to where they live.

That is a major fact and this is a problem we're going to have to put, to address. Now there are solutions available, but my solution is, and the education departments solution is, is that we use education land that we have in Wrexham, and I would remind you that it is the only piece of education land that we have.

We recently had to make a compulsory purchase of some land to extend a primary school in Penycae and I tell you now, its not cheap. It costs a lot of money, and if we have to pay out

money for compulsory purchase of land then that is at the expense of the quality of the build that we put onto, in that place.

We know that we need to replace St Marys Catholic School. This has been going on since 2008 when the inadequacies of the building and the place where it is, needed to be addressed, and this is something we're desperate to make sure we address. There's no justification for providing a school for Roman Catholic children which is substandard in relation to what we need.

What is being suggested we provide in terms of a 21st Century school. We know that by 2019 we will need another primary school within the town centre. If we don't build one within the town centre, it'll be outside the town centre, and that'll be of great inconvenience to parents themselves. Thank you.

MP: Thank you Michael.

Can I just touch on this as well, that education have made it clear from day one, and this is the education officers, that they don't want the school, they want to re-develop that site, and put 2 or 3 schools on it. So education department are saying that they don't want the school and also that the Chair of Governors has sent an email saying that they don't want the school either. That if they were to be fortunate enough to be able to put a new school on that site, they would want a brand new school. So, you know, when you say that the decisions are being made by others, we are looking at all options and considering everything on the table.

So you've got an education department who don't want it, the Lead Member is quite right they want to re-develop the site because of the requirements of the numbers, and the Chair of Governors at St Marys have said that they don't want the school either. They want a brand new school which they can be proud of, which is a 21st Century school, which is fit for purpose to cater for their education needs within the, within Wrexham, and that's where we are with that.

Carole would you like to come to the table? Thank you Carole, and thank you for your patience.

Cllr Carole O'Toole (MBE) (COT):

COT: Morning and thank you for calling me to the table.

I will be very brief. I would like to return to a suggestion that was made more than once, and by more than one member of Land and Buildings and was raised again by me in the call in, concerning the Exec Board, the Council, organising a half day event, notwithstanding what happens with the CADW listing, so that there can be an exchange of information on the both sides, of everyone who is and has been involved in this debate.

The kind of event I'm imagining, as I say, it could last half a day perhaps or a day, be housed in the Memorial Hall and Officers and the Lead Members and all who've been involved would be able to address the many issues that appear to still be unresolved concerning future plans for The Groves.

I think that if the Executive Board were prepared to consider such an event, it would go some way to perhaps restoring faith and trust in terms of how we operate. So my question is are you prepared to reconsider this suggestion? Thank you Chair.

MP: Thank you Carole for your question and you are consistent Carole because you, you have asked for that in the past. I think where we are with regards to this suggestion, proposal is that if we do it for The Groves we would have to do it for every other school building that we look to demolish going into the future, and I think that's my issue.

Because we have to be consistent in our decision making and in our process, and I think that the discussion that we had with officers is that why would you want consultation on the school? Because that's what a debate would be.

Once a decision is made on The Groves, whether its listed or whether we demolish it, then the discussions will start then, in earnest with regards to the consultation of education, so I understand your dilemma Carole and I really do.

As an elected member you want to have as much discussion and debate on it. The difficulty that I have and it is difficult for me, is if I allow this in The Groves, I would be treating The Groves differently from any other school, and at this moment in time, because it isn't listed it isn't different from any other school and as I said in scrutiny, which I know your aware of Carole, that we've done exactly the same process through the consultation, through Executive Board and through the call in.

We've treated this exactly the same and we were mindful to do that because we didn't want anybody to come back to us on two reasons really. One, showing favour of preference to The Groves and secondly that we treat them differently, so at this moment in time no, I wouldn't, but I mean, you know, if, if there is a surge of you know, want from this I would look at it again but I don't believe, because I've discussed this with officers at length, and again, you know, they can't see a reason for it so I would see no reason to do that Carole and I know we've spoken on this.

Thank you Carole.

COT: Thank you. Thank you for that response and to some extent I agree with the comments you've made and I do understand because I've checked fairly early on with the Legal Officer, that in terms of following a process with regards to demolition of a council owned building, we were following the process, I understand that.

However I think that one has to point out that the building in question does mean that maybe decision making should have taken into considerable account that The Groves building was perhaps viewed slightly differently by the poplice of Wrexham, from other school buildings, and yes I would ask you to give consideration to my request if possible for this reason and this reason only.

I think we are embarking on a process here which is looking at damage limitation to this council and I think that for that reason alone, I think it would be worth the administration considering a half day event in order to limit the damage this issue is causing to this council and this administrations reputation, and I don't need to remind you I'm not part of this administration, but I think the issue has damaged the reputation of this council. Thank you Chair.

<applause from public gallery>

MP: Thank you Carole. I don't agree with you on that. I think what would damage the reputation of this Council if we didn't cater for our education needs within the town centre, and we had children that couldn't go to a preferred school to follow their faith and that's why we've progressed this and will continue to do so.

John would you like to come to the table?

Good morning John.

Cllr John Pritchard (JP):

JP: Thanks very much, I'm not here to criticise or argue today but I have concerns when £900,000 was mentioned been spent up to now. I know the support that has gathered recently to save The Groves, Bromfield Comprehensive school building. Some of this support has been political and also public support from ex pupils and their families which is understandable.

If the campaign is successful to retain the building will the expense come from the educational budget to retain the building for the coming years? If this is the case I understand this may affect some schools budgets within our wards for the future years, that is approximately 70 schools in total.

Some of the schools have experienced a budget this financial year, can we as Councillors be assured that the council will notify schools and governors that may be affected in advance of how this may affect their budgets for the future years. Thank you.

MP: Thank you John, I'll just touch on it then I'll bring in the Lead Member with regards to the implication of the costings. Yes the money will come from the educational budget, it has done in the past it will continue to do in the future.

Yes we have spent £900,000. We are considering to put security on it 24/7 because of, you know, the issues I've raised earlier on so that will have an impact, and it, and if, as you say, if it is listed we will have to do something with it and if we do decide, if its listed, to put education provision within the building, because we'd want to use it, we wouldn't want it sitting idle, and we said that.

It would have an impact on on the 21st Century school program, yes it would for obvious reasons. Michael?

MW: Thanks very much Chair.

There is no doubt that the recent past history demonstrates to us over the last two years, the Life and Learning Department had taken a huge cut in its budget, well over 33% and it has no funding that it can put into mothballing anything at all. The likelihood is that any money that has to be spent on preserving The Groves site will have to come from other sources, and the only other source we have is that money that's been put aside for our 50% contribution towards the costs of new schools, and if that has to come out of, if the funding that we're talking about has to come out of that budget, it does mean that the kind of quality build that we want for the 21st Century schools which all the children are entitled to have, will not be as good as it could be.

JP: <Reply off microphone>

MP: Thank you John. Colin you indicated? Morning Colin.

Cllr Colin Powell (CP):

CP: First time sitting in the hot seat so it reminds me of my education in Bromfield and so I'm sitting here as one of the ex pupils I think, where it was very often said to me that empty vessels make the most noise which is why I haven't been here before.

We've spent a lot of time talking about the history, and the history of how this has got to be here, and there was discussions around consultation and the processes behind that. We've had a little bit of history repeated from different members on about how we got to be here and, you know, the building being empty for twelve to fourteen years without any vision for it.

Well, actually up until the middle of last year there was a vision for it, it was going to be a secondary education of sixth form provision, so there was a vision, a strategy in place, and its only been over recent times its in limbo.

The arguments behind that, I think there's different points within all of that. However, prior to it going to Coleg Cambria there was a proposal tabled, I can't remember the exact date of it but, its got it here that, um, I've lost it. 4.9 in this report and I'll find out what it is in a second: The former Groves school site has a high profile and proposals for the future use for the former Grove Park County School for Girls building and site will be keenly scrutinised. It is proposed a further report on proposals for the future use of the cleared site and the former Grove Park County School for girls buildings, err building, is brought back to the Executive Board in the spring of 2013.

Now that was a report prior to, I think, the discussions with Coleg Cambria, and it recognised then the historical and local support for the building. I have to say, walking into that building as a fresh faced bushy tailed 12 year old, um, it was a bit of a daunting building and one you faced with a bit of aspiration and a bit of dread all mixed into one as you do. I drove here today past the building and again, you know, we've had discussions around CADW listing. My understanding of where this currently is, is not necessarily the CADW listing, but its the guidance from Welsh Government that buildings of a local or cultural nature of importance should be retained for future use.

That's separate to the CADW stuff, and I think with regards to the building itself, it strikes you as being different to the other buildings around Wrexham.

We're slowly being turned in my view, into a warehouse town almost no different to the industrial estate, and I would expect any town to be looking at some of its historical context and its nature to retain as much as possible.

I think The Groves building or Bromfield building as I like to call it, fits that bill in as much that its got a historical context. It is of such a nature that it should be retained and I think where there's a will there is a way. We spent a lot of time arguing about it costing money and so on, its better to demolish and so on, I actually think its better to be retained personally and would like to sort of record that here.

The alternative is that we end up with a situation, and I'm not sure whether the questions been asked, that is currently being undertaken in Edinburgh where all the schools are currently closed because they are of a relatively new design model and the walls fall off, but despite being empty for fourteen years the walls are still there and the roof is still there.

The damage that has been done to the building is yes, vandalism and scrap, but the integrity of the building is still there despite being left sitting idle for quite a while.

So I think there is a rationale for retaining the building and doing something with it and I personally would, would welcome that use for secondary education or educational purpose.

I was fortunate enough to go to Glyndwr University when it was a tech college and I went back when it was a university and so on, there's something striking about the building, there is something that could be done with it and it can be used and so on and I think that needs to happen with The Groves.

So, I wanted to record my, my views with regards to the retention of the building. I recognise some of the arguments that go both ways with that, with this. I really do think that there is enough vocal support in this town to warrant that their views be taken into account for this, and the retention of some of our historical buildings, and I, I have concerns about the structure of future provision within this town and its history being lost forever, so we only get one shot at this and I think we need to retain it. Thank you Chair.

MP: Thank you Colin for your comments, and I do note them, but what I would say is that with regards to the characteristics of the building, I think it does split opinions, you know, for every individual says to me its a nice building I have other people says to me its an horrible looking building.

I'm only saying what people are saying. With regards to the building itself I will remind you all it isn't listed, it might be listed going into the future, and if that's done well that tells us all that there's enough character within the building to list it, but they have looked at it twice in the past and they've come back that they wouldn't support it.

But going into the future, and I think, you know, all of us need to remind that we all keep on moving forward into the future, education have made it clear that there's a demand for places in the town. They have made it clear that they don't want the building, they want the site.

That's where we are with it, they have aspirations and I will fully support em on this I really will because I've supported them in the past and I'm not gonna make a u turn on it. We need to cater for education provision within the town, we have a proposal on the on the table that we will look to put two stroke three schools on that site, and um, that's where we are with it at this moment in time, unless things change with reference to CADW.

Malcolm, err Michael would you like to comment on that?

<off mike : Cllr Michael Williams says he's getting quite exasperated>

MP: I know

MW: Sorry, I'm getting quite exasperated with the direction that the debate is taking at the moment, and I wonder whether in fact the Labour group is interested more in preserving the building which as CADW have pointed out, is of no architectural or historical significance, ahead of providing the best possible facilities for our children and for future generations of children in the town centre.

This is the impression I'm gaining from the conversation as its gone so far. But to go back to what Colin has just stated. With Gwenfro, his ward, Gwenfro School is being demolished and we're putting a new school on site, the option *<pauses, comments from the public gallery>* exactly the same is happening at Hafod Y Wern and exactly the same is happening with most of the buildings, because we want buildings that are fit for the 21st Century.

And examining both of those schools, a decision was taken quite early on that just re-modeling those would not fit in with the concepts that we have, and you, neither of you objected to that at the end of the day. You were quite happy to see that happen.

In fact you were there at the time of the turf cutting ceremony for the new schools that are going to appear on that site, and quite rightly so as well, because there's no difference in Caia than anybody else. They deserve the best possible facilities, they're two excellent schools and why should we try and do a fudge based on the school as it is at the moment.

It is the policy to remove, demolish, schools when we replace the school with something which is better and this is what I am passionate about in Wrexham. I don't want children in Wrexham to suffer as a result of a decision that might be taken to preserve The Groves. I would find that entirely against all my philosophy about education in Wrexham. *<slams pen down>*, Thank you Chair.

MP: Thank you Michael. Can I just come back to it. Can I just come back to the Motion. What I wanted to do this morning was to give everybody an opportunity to come to the table to raise concerns and discuss the motion.

I am conscious of the time but I do want to continue on that route because I, because you know, we're damned if we do we're damned if we don't, if I don't allow you to speak you say that we're suppressing democracy. I'm not giving you the freedom to speak, so I want you to continue to come to the table if you have anything new to add, obviously the previous speakers have come and gone.

I hope we can still get through this and everybody, just, let's have some patience, I know its difficult and I am conscious of the time and we have got a full agenda in front of us, but that's where we are. Cllr Dutton.

Cllr Robert Dutton (OBE) (RD):

RD: Chair, that was going to be my point, um I think you've been extremely fair. I have not heard anything today which is any different to what we've heard time and time again in terms of the representations over this particular school. I think you've been, bent over backwards. We've been on this particular matter well over an hour now, and I think quite frankly its time that the question was actually put, because we have got a large agenda important matters members have raised and I will ask that the question be now put.

MP: Thank you Cllr Dutton I will allow some more speakers and then we will have closure on it but thank you Cllr Dutton.

Cllr Joan Lowe.

Cllr Joan Lowe (JL):

JL: Thanks chair. I wasn't going to speak but following the question put by Cllr Pritchard to the Lead Member of Education about where the money would come to sustain mothballing The Groves, I feel I've got to.

I am so annoyed and distressed to feel that if that was mothballed further, that the money for 21st Century schools would be in jeopardy. My village school amalgamated eight years ago. We are still waiting for a new school and it is, we are earmarked for next year, if that was put in jeopardy, well I, I'm so distressed. I cannot understand Cllr King and Cllr Powell. You have new schools going up, and you think that its more important to keep The Groves and put my school, and there's Cllr Griffith's is the one afterwards, at jeopardy. Don't our children deserve the benefits of having a decent school and our teachers, going into the 21st Century? I think this is absolutely disgusting.

MP: Thank you Joan for them comments. Does, Colin I will allow you to come back briefly and if you could just keep, keep to the motion. Thank you Colin.

CP: Well it was to respond to the point that was made by Mike and I'll get to Joan in a second, but actually Gwenfro School is not in my ward, OK. Large numbers of my children in my ward go to the school, but its not actually in my ward. And for reference purposes I made significant comments about the quality and the design of the building. I think given some of the schools that have been built in Wrexham, there was better designs and I made those observations at the time.

I very much welcome a new school like other members would when other existing schools are falling apart. We have the opportunity here to make the best of a historical building and turn it into a new school, from the plans that were submitted by Coleg Cambria, it wouldn't cost an awful lot more, and the integrity of the building would last substantially longer So that's my observation on that.

With regards to jeopardising future provision in other areas. We're planning to do this anyway, so how can we be jeopardising other areas of school provision? It is very much a case of there is looking to be a plan going forward with regards to the provision of education on that site, so its about using what's currently there and making the best of it, and enhancing the historical context of the building. What's wrong with that? I can't see anything wrong with it but there we go. So thank you Chair.

MP: No, thank you Colin for your comments. Is there any other elected member wants to speak? David.

Good morning David.

Cllr David Griffiths (DG):

DG: Morning Chair, I for one have no problem with what opposition do because that's what opposition is. I don't have no problem with the people in the gallery, because that's what free speech is and we fought two world wars to make sure we maintain free speech.

What I am going to say though, is to follow on what Cllr Joan Lowe has said. I have waited patiently for a new school in my ward. The school itself educated my mother, my aunties, uncles, all my brothers and it tried very hard to educate me, but whats happening is, it is not fit for 21st Century.

The modern teaching today is not apt to that school and although it will break my heart for that school to be demolished, where I take joy from, is that that school will be better than what it was before, and my whole stance is if its good enough for somewhere else its good enough for me.

And if there's new schools going up and I don't have my school in my ward, and I'm being personal about it now because I'm very, thing with this 21st Century school, I want them children of my ward to have the best education and the best place that we can afford, and I don't want to see anything that's watered down because we've gotta keep somewhere open.

Let the formalities go, let CADW come back and if they say it is we've got to find it, but I am saying to the people who are protesting now, you won't get my support with that if it means that the education of the children and future children in my ward are going to be compromised. Thank you Chair.

MP: Thank you David and thank you for your comments. Lloyd Kenyon.

Good morning Lloyd.

Cllr Lloyd Kenyon (LK):

LK: Good morning Chair, I wasn't going to speak but ,um, I have to echo what David said and what Joan said, and as the Chairman of a Local Authority school, faced with making staff redundant as a result of the lack of money in the budget now, I have to say I think that any saving that you can make is absolutely the right way to go forward.

With regard to the school itself, as you mentioned the CADW inspector has turned it down twice because it is an unremarkable building. Now if you would like some advice I can give you, as Cllr Dutton will remind you, I demolished a listed building with permission, over thirty years ago. It can be done but in this case the building is not worth listing in the first place.

MP: Thank you Lloyd for them comments. I think we have exhausted, Dana? I'm not gonna allow it, no, I mean its two, no, Dana, OK, Bob, I have allowed everybody who's indicated to come.

If I allow you to come back I'm gonna have to allow other people, so I think, you know, we've had a good discussion on this and a good debate, is there any other of you members want to speak on it? OK thank you, thank you for that.

What I'm going to do now, I have prepared something here that I'm going to read out and I will furnish you all with a copy of it after this meeting today.

First of all I would like to thank you, to the speakers for putting the case for the Executive Board to consider, reconsider, its original decision taken in January.

Much has occurred since then, not at least the application to CADW to consider listing the former school building. This we understand is currently under review and the Welsh Government will issue its decision in due course, so I'm proposing to the Board today that we note the Motion and the observations of all members here this morning.

If the Welsh Government do decide to list the building we will have to reconsider and consider the implications of that course of action but in the interim, it is my intention only to seek to remove the asbestos from the building in the interest of public safety here today.

Any demolition will await the decision on the listing, but if the decision is not, is not to list, then my recommendations is that the decision of the Executive Board in January to demolish, will still stand.

I am happy to move that. Could I ask a member of the executive board to second that?

<off mic> I'll second that.

MP: OK. Could I have a show of hands all in favour of that. OK. Thank you all, thank you for that.