

Save Cowbridge Old Girls' School from demolition

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 12 Mai 2020
Petitions Committee | 12 May 2020

Reference: RS20/11947

Petition Number P-05-949

Petition title: SAVE COWBRIDGE OLD GIRLS' SCHOOL FROM DEMOLITION

Text of petition: We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to protect the former Intermediate School for Girls' in Cowbridge, Vale of Glamorgan. This was the first intermediate school to be built specifically for the education of girls in Wales (and England) and is the subject of a planning application for demolition. Failure to protect it will lead to the loss of a nationally important historic asset.

Opened in 1896, Cowbridge was the first girls' intermediate school to be built in Wales (and England) as a result of the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889, a pivotal moment in Welsh History. Amid its contemporaries, Cowbridge was highly unusual in including accommodation for boarders from the outset and largely funded by a local philanthropist.

The original character of the school survives to a very high degree, both internally and externally, including the original hall and staircase. Only 5 comparable (of 95) schools are listed across Wales. A survey of them all confirms that Cowbridge survives to an equivalent degree to some and a better degree than others.

The architect, Robert Williams, was a pioneer of his time and renowned for being a radical, prominent advocate of building



conservation, national pioneer of social housing, promoter of the Welsh School of Architecture and proponent for the publication of building literature in the Welsh language. He later went on to work in London and then Egypt for the Davies Bryan family, where many of his buildings still stand and are nationally protected.

In summary, the former Cowbridge Intermediate School for Girls' survives as a prominent and attractive testimony to a pivotal moment in Welsh history and the equal opportunities afforded to underprivileged girls of the time. We urge the Welsh Government, as custodians of our heritage, to protect this building either through listing or the provision of additional social housing funding to allow its conversion.

1. Background

The petition calls on the Welsh Government to use the listing system to protect this building. Listing is the way that a building or structure of special architectural or historic interest is recognised by law. Changes to listed buildings are managed through listed building consent, which is part of the planning system. Listing is intended to help manage change and protect the building, its setting and its features from unsympathetic works that could damage its special interest.

Many buildings are of interest architecturally or historically, but for buildings to be listed, this interest must be special. The Welsh Government uses Technical Advice Note 24: the historic environment, which provides the criteria used for listing. In summary, the main criteria are:

- Architectural interest.
- Historic interest
- Close historical associations
- Group value
- Age and rarity.

Anyone can request that the Welsh Government considers a building for listing. As the response from the Welsh Government to the petitioner points out, however, there is no right of appeal against a decision not to list a building, though an individual could look to pursue a judicial review if they felt the Welsh Government had not followed the correct process.

The Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016 modernised the legislation that underpins the listed building regime. The Act introduced a right of review a decision by the Welsh Government to list a building, but not an equivalent right to review a decision **not** to list a building. You can

Title:

read more about legislation relating to listed buildings - including changes introduced by the Historic Environment Act - [here](#).

In addition to the national list, local listing can be a way of protecting historic buildings of special local interest which do not meet national criteria for listing but have a vital role in maintaining local character and a sense of place. Local planning authorities are able to draw up lists of historic assets of special local interest. Cadw has published [Managing lists of historic assets of special local interest](#).

This document sets out general principles and good practice for preparing and managing lists of local historic assets and provides guidance on their use in the planning system. This guidance is aimed primarily at local planning authorities, but also at third sector organisations and the owners of historic assets. Compiling a list of historic assets of special local interest is voluntary, but where a local planning authority chooses to identify these assets, it must include policies for their conservation and enhancement in its development plan.

2. National Assembly for Wales action

In 2017 the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee conducted an inquiry into the [historic environment](#). It did not recommend any changes to the listing system.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.