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22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020

Dear Members of the Petitions Committee,

**RE: Petition P-05-949. Save Cowbridge Old Girls' School from Demolition**

Thank you for considering our petition which calls on the Welsh Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to protect the former Intermediate School for Girls, Cowbridge, from demolition. The school was the first intermediate school throughout Wales and England to be built specifically for the education of girls as a result of the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889. It stands as an attractive testament to a pivotal moment in Welsh history about which we should be quite rightly proud. The building is under threat of demolition and the petition calls on the Welsh Government to protect it through either listing or the provision of additional social housing grant to allow the developers (Hafod Housing Association) to convert the building.

As outlined in the Minister's response of 6<sup>th</sup> March 2020, our campaign group has previously requested that Cadw consider the former Cowbridge Girls' School for listing. In order to provide new information in support of listing, we commissioned Robert Scourfield MA IHBC FSA to undertake a detailed historical and architectural appraisal of the school in June 2019. Mr Scourfield is a full member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation and has served as a local authority buildings conservation officer for over 24 years. He also worked on the Cadw Resurvey of Wales from 1993-1995 and was a Cadw Inspector of historic buildings from 1999-2000. His full report, which was submitted to Cadw in July 2019, is enclosed for your information so that it can be considered alongside the petition and Ms Alfrey's response of the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019.

Whilst it is respected that the Minister is obliged to concur with the opinion of Ms Alfrey, we would like to respectfully point out that her conclusion is very much based on her own highly subjective opinion rather than the clearly laid out guidelines for assessing suitability for listing. Enclosed is the rebuttal to Ms Alfrey's report which was sent to Cadw in August 2019. Cadw declined to respond to this rebuttal stating that it did not include any additional new information in support of listing, however, since it provided evidence to counter Ms Alfrey's view not to list, we feel this deserves consideration and an appropriate response.

More specifically, one of the reasons put forward for not listing the school buildings is that it would have been considered and rejected for listing in 1999 when Cadw undertook a community resurvey to identify historic buildings. No evidence has been presented to demonstrate that this was the case and there is the possibility that it was simply 'missed' due to the high density of listed buildings within Cowbridge. Furthermore, in the twenty years since the resurvey, knowledge surrounding Victorian buildings has increased substantially along with our appreciation of such buildings.

Another concern, as highlighted in Mr Scourfield's rebuttal, is that Ms Alfrey's report does not consider the merits of the architects. Mr Scourfield's report has led to the unearthing of a significant amount of information regarding the importance of Robert Williams, the architect of the original school buildings. As a result, Professor Dafydd Johnston has recognised that Robert Williams has provided a significant contribution to Welsh culture and an entry is currently being written for inclusion in the Dictionary of Welsh Biography and will be published shortly. This development in itself warrants further consideration by Cadw.

Following Cadw's response to Mr Scourfield's report and the widely differing views of Ms Alfrey and Mr Scourfield, a request for a peer review of the listing decision was made via Jane Hutt AM. We enclose both the letter sent to Jane Hutt AM (including a table detailing instances where historic buildings have been converted into social housing) and also the response received from the Minister on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2019 declining a peer review.

In September 2019 the Victorian Society listed the school buildings in their 'Top 10 Endangered Buildings List' – the only building in Wales included in the listing. Christopher Costelloe, Director of the Victorian Society, said *'Cowbridge School is a beautifully crafted building, solid, handsome and capable of being reused. Its thoughtless demolition would be a huge blow to the town. Many other Victorian school buildings are in a similar position – these buildings can and should be reused.'*

As a result of the listing decision by Cadw, the recognition of the importance of the building by the Victorian Society and the continuing feeling within the heritage profession that the building should be protected, in November 2019 we met with the developers (Hafod Housing Association) at a meeting chaired by Jane Hutt AM. During the meeting we discussed options for retention of the building for social housing and that it was felt it would be a fitting tribute to the architect who was an early pioneer for social reform. Due to the reasons cited for demolition being purely financial, we discussed options for community funding raising schemes to bridge the gap and also opportunities for heritage funding. Hafod Housing Association's recent conversion of Aberdare Intermediate School for Girls was discussed and how this demonstrated that historic buildings could be repurposed for social housing in line with current building standards (article enclosed). Unfortunately, all options for retention of the building were declined, and the building once again is subject to a planning application for demolition (due before the Vale of Glamorgan Planning Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2020). The sale of the site to Hafod Housing Association by the Sir Thomas Mansel Franklen Trust is subject to planning permission for the scheme being approved.

As a result of the real threat of loss of this important historic asset, the petition was launched on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020. Due to the imminent planning decision, there has been only a short time in which to collect signatures, however, the number collected demonstrates the overwhelming objection to loss of this building and that this resonates further afield that the immediate locality. Therefore, given the national level of support to save the building, the communal value (which forms part of the listing criteria) should be considered as high.

In order to demonstrate that Cadw's decision is widely disputed, we enclose a letter to the Deputy Minister for Culture Sport and Tourism which has been signed by a number of highly esteemed experts across the heritage profession. Also included with this letter is a report from Dr Sian Williams, former senior lecturer in educational history at Cardiff Metropolitan University, who states that the school 'was a building of note in both Wales and England'. The signatories of the group letter include several Fellows of the Learned Society of Wales, British Academy Fellows, the Director of the Victorian Society, the President of the Post-medieval Archaeological Society, the President of the Royal Historical Society, the President of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, the former President of the British Academy and former member of Cadw's Historic Building Council. Given the aforementioned subjective nature of Cadw's rejection to list the building by a single specialist in comparison with the number of highly respected specialists and academics who oppose this decision, we feel that this calls into question Cadw's assessment of the building and calls for greater scrutiny of their decision not to list.

In summary, we ask that you consider all of the concerns raised in this letter and enclosed documents regarding the decision not to list this important building. We feel that the extreme views of Cadw and the Minister in comparison to those who have signed the group letter demonstrates that at the very least a peer review is warranted, if not their decision overruled and the building protected through listing.

During our research we came across a quote from Maud Gunter, one of the first pupils who attended the school and later returned as headmistress. In 1971 when the girls' school was about to close and amalgamate with the local boys' school, she gave this message to the pupils:

*'You can be proud of the history of your school. See to it that you uphold its record in your own day and generation.'*

We now call on the custodians of our heritage to ensure that this building is preserved for generations to come and that it is protected so that it can continue to stand proudly as a reminder to the role that it played in ensuring equal opportunities in the education of women and that Wales, as a nation, was pivotal in creating these opportunities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara Pedersen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sara Pedersen  
SAVE Cowbridge Girls' School Campaign Group