

**P-05-949 SAVE COWBRIDGE OLD GIRLS' SCHOOL FROM DEMOLITION,  
Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 22.02.21**

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22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021

Dear Members of the Petitions Committee,

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

We wish to update you on recent developments regarding the proposed demolition of the former Cowbridge High School for Girls. By way of a brief overview, the site of the former school is currently owned by the Sir Thomas Mansel Franklen Trust who have entered into a 'sold subject to planning' agreement with a developer who is seeking to demolish the school buildings in their entirety.

Whilst the community has welcomed the opportunity that this planning application brings to provide more social housing within the town (specifically rental accommodation) it strongly objects to the demolition of this significant historic asset. Through the course of the campaign to preserve the school, substantial new information has come to light regarding the heritage value of this building both at a local and national level. Built in 1895 it was the first school specifically built for the intermediate education of girls following the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889, which in itself was a pivotal moment in Welsh history. The school was also unusual in that it provided accommodation for boarders to allow less privileged girls to be able to attend the school from further afield. The building itself has many unique architectural features and was designed by Robert Williams, an architect who was an early proponent of the Welsh School of Architecture and seen as a pioneer of his time. He was also a proponent of the Welsh language in building literature and later worked for the Davies Bryan family (of Aberystwyth University) in Egypt where he was central to the Welsh community. These are just some of the many reasons why we are campaigning to ensure that this building is protected for years to come so that it can continue to stand proud as a reminder of a pivotal moment in Welsh history and the work of a prominent Welsh architect.

Whilst further information was being gathered for the planning application last year, we took the opportunity to work with SAVE Britain's Heritage to develop an alternative proposal that would provide social housing on the site whilst retaining the existing school buildings. A scheme was developed that would not only provide an increased number of units but also larger units with more residential amenity space and an increased number of units with their own external front doors, all of which would positively impact on the mental health of future residents. This would also realise a higher return on the sale of the site for the current owners, the Sir Thomas Mansel Franklen Trust. It was our aim to work as a community with the current developers to bring this scheme to fruition and thus provide a more beneficial outcome for all parties concerned. Further details of the plans can be found here: [PRESS RELEASE: SAVE unveils alternative plans to retain historic Welsh school \(savebritainsheritage.org\)](https://www.savebritainsheritage.org/press-releases/save-unveils-alternative-plans-to-retain-historic-welsh-school)

Unfortunately, our request to work with the existing developer was declined earlier this year and we learnt last week that the planning application for demolition has been progressed and that it is expected to go before the Vale of Glamorgan Planning Committee in late spring. With this in mind, and the fact that this is a complex case with a significant volume of evidence to be considered, we ask that you consider taking the petition forward as a detailed inquiry rather than being debated by the Senedd in Plenary.

We would also like to raise further concerns regarding the decision-making process by Cadw and the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism which have come to light following a Freedom of Information request submitted last July (ref ATISN 14039). This has revealed the following:

- On 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020, in an email to Gwilym Hughes (Deputy Director and Head of Cadw) the Deputy Minister stated:

“We have not been offered any potential future for the building, have we? You will remember our agreed mantra that historic buildings are not for us to stare at. They are for use as cultural markers of tomorrow! I am not persuaded to give any further consideration to this site.”

We feel that this dismisses the possibility of listing even prior to obtaining professional opinion on the merits of the case and the most recently submitted information regarding the school. Furthermore, the current/future use of a building or the site on which it stands does not come into the listing criteria as detailed in Technical Advice Note (TAN) 24: The historic environment.

- In a memo (ref DET/00488/20) from Matthew Coward of Cadw to the Deputy Minister on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020, it refers to report written by Cadw in response to further evidence in support of listing submitted by Dr Davies and Mr Scourfield. Matthew Coward writes:

“We feel that sharing the analysis with Dr Davies would have the effect of inviting further unnecessary debate.”

We feel this demonstrates a lack of transparency and willingness to engage in academic discussion and a lack of accountability in their decision making.

- Email correspondence reveals that the selection of Dr Richard Hayman as an independent consultant to review the decision was made by Cadw rather than the Deputy Minister himself. As raised previously, due to Dr Hayman’s employment by Cadw, whilst we do not question his professionalism, we do not feel that he can be considered independent and unbiased in this case. In addition, he reported his findings to Cadw who in turn passed them on to the Deputy Minister with their own interpretation of his report, rather than Dr Hayman reporting directly to the Deputy Minister. This is again at odds with the assertion that this was an independent review.

In addition to the above concerns, we would also like to highlight again that no substantial explanation has been provided as to why an independent peer review will not be granted in this case. Established procedures with Historic England and Historic Scotland exist to peer review decisions where there are contrasting opinions. In this instance we have extreme differences in opinion between Cadw (and a consultant employed by Cadw) and more than 20 highly regarded experts in the fields of history, architecture, heritage and archaeology. Within this group are the President of the Royal Historical Society, Director of the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, former members of Cadw's Historic Building Council, a former President of the British Academy and several Founding Fellows of the Learned Society of Wales. Given their collective expertise and experience their views, as outlined in their letter to the Deputy Minister ([22.03.20 Correspondence - Petitioner to Committee Additional information - Group letter of support .pdf \(senedd.wales\)](#)), should be respectfully taken into consideration.

We ask that you now consider putting the petition forward for a detailed inquiry to scrutinise all of the evidence provided in this case and press for an independent peer review through the established channels so that we can ensure that this important part of Welsh history is not lost.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara Pedersen". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light grey rectangular box.

Sara Pedersen  
SAVE Cowbridge Girls' School Campaign Group