

P-04-365 Protect buildings of note on the Mid Wales Hospital site – Correspondence from the site owner of the Mid Wales Hospital to the Committee, 18.11.2013

Dear Caryl,

I thought the visit was conducted in a friendly and constructive way. I hope the Members of the Committee benefited from the process and that they could see at first hand the conditions of the buildings at the site.

What I cannot judge, of course, is the views of those present and the way it will go from here on. I therefore have some questions at the end which I would be grateful if you could address.

Generally though, I think that the Petition process for seeking the Listing of buildings is potentially dangerous and incomplete. This is because the petition is being driven by a small group of people working together and who prepare a petition simply because they do not want something to happen. The petition is highly simplistic as it only offers one option, one view point, and is simply presented, with no back ground information, knowledge of the site, or other options presented. Indeed site discussions with petitioners suggested perhaps there to be a level of misunderstanding of how problematic buildings like this truly are. I saw the list of names on the petition some time ago and it was obvious that many had been simply persuaded to sign it by the petitioners but were unlikely to have any particularly strong feelings about it or much knowledge of the subject as they were from all over the place. The petition therefore cannot be said to represent the local community. A petition in this instance is a deeply flawed basis on which to garner the local community views on the future for the site. With this in mind we ask you to consider that in spite of all that has been said by this group it remains a fact that when we held a public meeting in Talgarth Town Hall, we offered those present a form on which to express their views. Out of 64 forms that were handed in on the day or posted to us a few days after, 62 were broadly supportive of our proposals, which included the demolition of the buildings in question. Those forms are still in our possession and this statistic should not be ignored.

We understand that it is the Welsh Government's Listing Group who decide whether specific buildings are worthy of 'Listing' or not. They have been through the thought process several times before and the latest attempt was quite some time ago, when the buildings were in much better condition, yet they decided they did not merit it even then. This situation has also been confirmed by the Historic Buildings Advisory Council of Wales (representing CADW - (now part of Natural Resources Wales), as the buildings have previously been considered for listing and have been judged to fall short of the criteria of being of "outstanding interest".

Additionally, Brecon Beacons National Park have not sought to list the buildings given that they do not represent the standard required by the Listed Buildings and Conservation Area Act. The National Park, however, has included the site and buildings within the Talgarth Conservation area. The Conservation Area designation provides suitable controls over the future redevelopment of the site, in accordance with the Local Development Plan and the findings of the Planning Inspector's Report. Then there is the National Park's Planning Committee and the statutory planning process which ensure that the wider views of the local community and those of the National Park officers are represented and fully considered.

Now the buildings have desperately deteriorated further. Our proposals will preserve the Chapel for a community use and small business centre, along with the main administration buildings. We have reviewed the main ward buildings and these are well beyond a state of economic repair causing us to show this area to be redeveloped for housing. Our proposals have been supported in the recent Inspector's report on the Brecon Beacon's Local Development Plan. Seeking to List the Buildings now would fulfil little other than to cause substantial delays and almost certainly assure their eventual collapse. This would deny the people of Talgarth the regeneration of the site for housing, employment/medical uses, and community facilities which are envisioned within the Local Development Plan.

I would be grateful if you could keep me fully informed of the process.

Please can you confirm the following:

- When will the Petitions Committee make their final decision;
- How and when can I provide any information to aid their decision making process;
- Can I speak and appear before the Petitions Committee;
- Will the petitioners be afforded the ability for further lobbying and speaking at the Committee?
- What are my rights of potential appeal, if the Petitions Committee are able to influence a review of the buildings being re-considered for listing?

With regard to the future of this process it is very difficult for me to comment as I guess every situation is different, requiring a whole range of skill sets and experience. Whilst it is always interesting to see the democratic process at work it is also very easy to see its flaws – especially when dealing with something like this which has to be decided upon, in the end, by people with the skills and experience. Showing concern and expressing opinion is one thing but making final decisions is something that must be done only via the proper process.

I hope these few comments, made with careful thought and the benefit of over 3 years working with this site are considered by your office to be constructive and helpful? We await the answers to the above in due course.

Best Regards

Phil Collins