

Save Our Heritage, a community interest company based in Wrexham, wish to submit an Expression of Interest for the building and land as described in the Invitation document issued by Wrexham County Borough Council.

About the company

The company was formed in 2017 after a successful campaign to list the former Grove Park School building. At the time, our group members were asked whether they wished to continue to safeguard other heritage buildings in the Wrexham area, and over 90% agreed. After taking advice from several sources, it was decided that a community interest company was the correct vehicle for any future operations. The company directors are highly experienced, motivated professionals with wide ranging skill sets and diverse business backgrounds.

Our idea

In preparing this proposal we considered the building form, and how the listing affects any development or alterations. We believe our idea presents a highly viable option that would be looked upon favourably by CADW, as it has minimal impact on the building whilst restoring much of the interior to original condition. Externally, very little would change, respecting the specifics detailed in the original listing decision.

Save Our Heritage cic would be interested in renovating the building for use as a Community Enterprise Centre. Our vision is for each classroom to become a rentable unit for new and established Wrexham businesses. However, unlike most commercial space, the rooms at Grove Park will be offered on an “easy in, easy out” basis, with no long term leasing agreements, unless specifically requested by the tenant. This form of ‘relaxed’ business space rental is often found in less traditional incubator models

Presently, there is at least 2300m² (24756 sq feet) of occupiable space spread across two floors. This excludes the main hall and some other areas which we were unable to measure during our site visit.

At a typical un-serviced commercial rental rate of £96.88/m² (£9 per sq. foot) - based on prices in the Wrexham area), there is a potential for an income of just under £225K per annum. However, as it's unlikely that individual metering for each unit will be practical, a higher rate per square metre would be charged, as the workspace offered would be fully serviced.

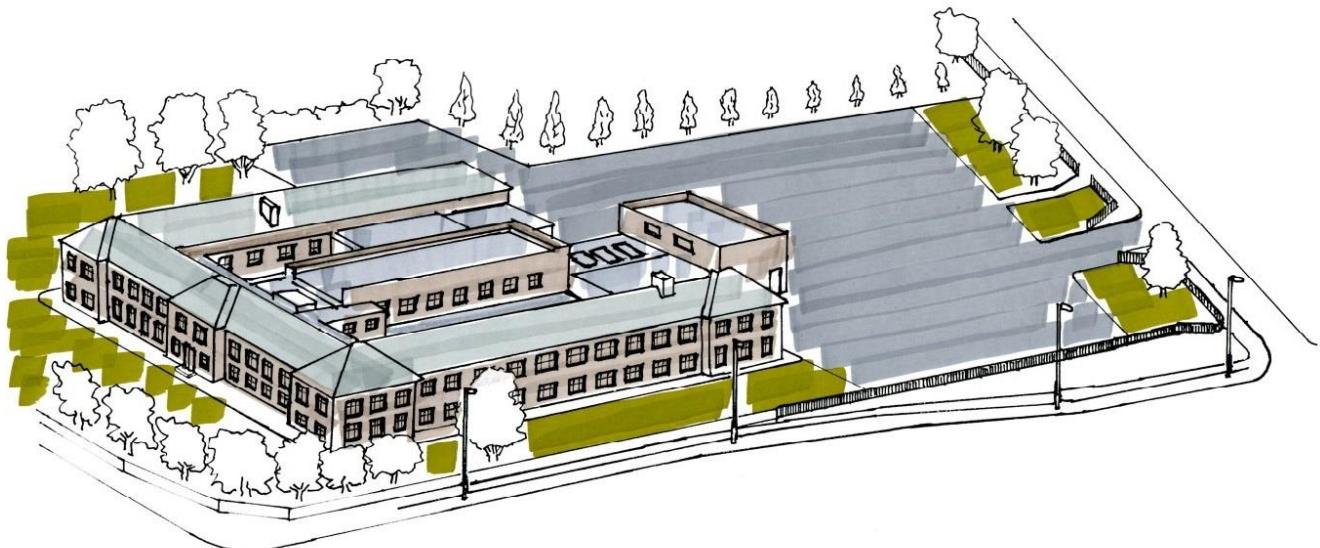
We also anticipate utilising the refurbished main hall for events to generate additional revenue. Currently, Wrexham lacks a medium sized concert venue. The William Aston Hall at Glyndwr University has notoriously poor acoustics, and other venues are undersized. The main hall at Grove Park would fill the need for a mid-sized auditorium with good acoustics. Whether the hall is used for live music and drama, film screenings, or seminars and conferences, the potential for income generation is obvious.

One ground floor classroom would be converted into a café, which along with providing food and drinks, would act as an informal meeting space for the tenants. At least one additional room will be made available for training purposes or meeting hire.

Some rooms are currently divided by stud partition walls, which are easily removed. Decisions regarding room sizes, and whether to restore them would be subject to a more detailed survey and viability study to be undertaken at a later date should this EOI be accepted. Some of the smaller rooms would ideally suit single person entities, whilst the larger classrooms would be best occupied by businesses with a greater number of staff, or those requiring extra space.

In line with our community theme, we would ensure that a room was always available for local user groups, charities and societies to hold regular meetings at reduced or zero cost.

We anticipate that the Community Enterprise Centre would create at least 5 FTE jobs.



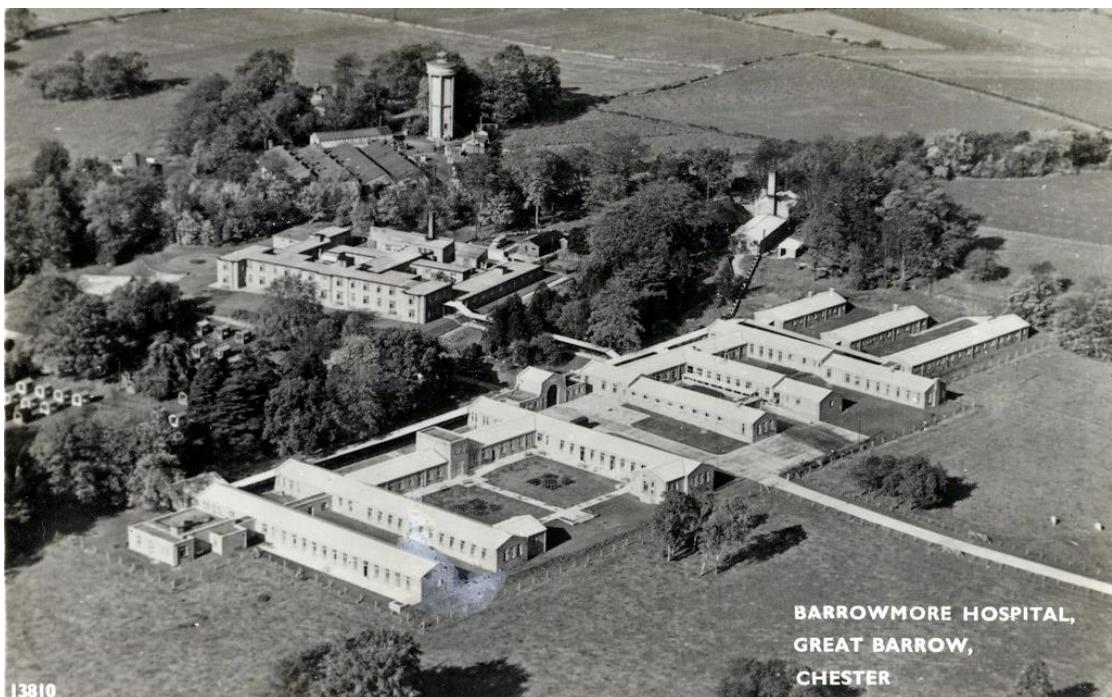
Groves Enterprise Centre visualisation

As part of our evaluation process, we carried out two case studies of similar building renovations.

Case Study Synopsis: Barrowmore Enterprise Estate, Chester

This was a former TB sanatorium, later becoming a hospital, before being abandoned by the NHS in 1984.

Whilst not a listed building, the wards are pretty much as they were back in the 1930's. They are now available for local businesses to rent. Currently the place has 100% occupancy, with a further 15 companies on the waiting list. The place is a hive of activity, with the companies sharing centralised resources such as a canteen etc. It has been operational for many years, and is very successful according to the charity running it.



Barrowmore Hospital in the 1940s. The building layout hasn't changed much since then. The main hospital block is currently used for residential care, and the wards in the foreground are used by local businesses.

Case Study Synopsis: Templemore Avenue School, Belfast

The building is very similar to Grove Park School, having a two storey layout around a central main hall. It was opened in 1926 and educated the children of the city for 50 years, before closing in 1976. It fell into disrepair, losing most of the slates from its roof and all its windows and doors. It was essentially nothing more than a derelict shell.

Despite being B1 Listed, its future looked doubtful, until the Princes Regeneration Trust stepped in to co-ordinate its refurbishment into the East Belfast Network Centre. The works cost £3.7m in 2014, with funding from several sources.

It now provides office accommodation for several community organisations, along with a café, outdoor soft play area, an auditorium and room hire etc. The building is controlled by a charitable trust, operating as a limited company.

The building is fully occupied, and as some tenants leave, other long term tenants have expanded into the vacated space.



Templemore Avenue School, now the East Belfast Network Centre

Purchase or Asset transfer

Ideally, we would prefer to purchase the building and land outright, but fully understand if Wrexham Council has reservations about this because of the nature of our proposal. However, potential funding partners would insist on a minimum of 10 years remaining on any lease, so if an offer to purchase was refused, then a long term community asset transfer lease would be considered favourably.

Listed Building considerations

As stated previously, our aim would be to restore the building to pretty much “as new” condition. We understand that CADW have identified several specific internal features that they would like to keep intact. We feel able to comply with these requirements. However, there is mention in the Councils own feasibility study (undertaken by TACP), of retaining an “example of original pupil toilets” but to our knowledge, there are no such toilets left in the building. All have been upgraded or replaced since the building was constructed. Our proposal would require more in-depth discussion with CADW before plans were finalised.



Groves Enterprise Centre corridor visualisation

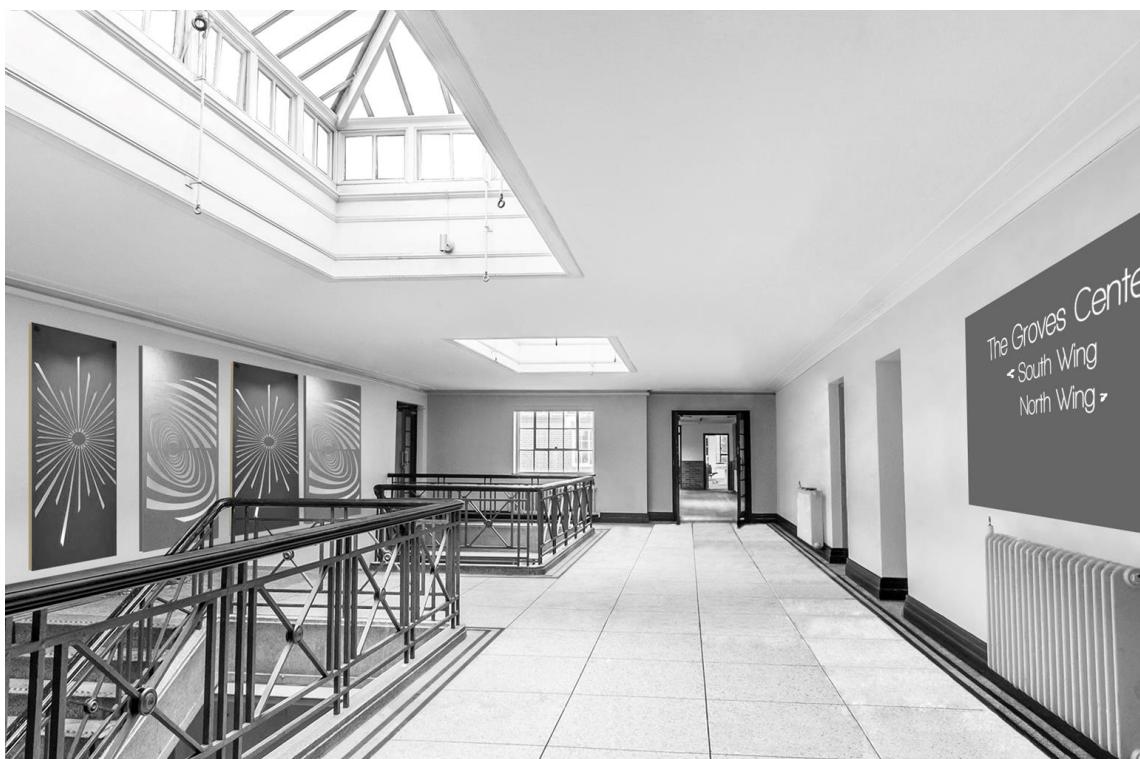
Covenants

The only covenant that affects the building was drawn up in 1906, restricting the use of the land to that of a county school. Variation or removal of this covenant though the Lands Tribunal could present a considerable challenge and financial risk. However, the potential funding source indicates that they have sufficient legal experience to undertake such work if it becomes necessary.

Approximately half of the land to the east of the school building is affected by the 1913 covenant. This prevents construction of any sort, except for that of a sports pavilion. Denbighshire County Council (predecessor to Wrexham CBC) conveniently ignored this covenant when they constructed the science block and other ancillary buildings in the early sixties. Presumably the construction of these buildings was never challenged, as they remained in place until demolition in 2014.

Our plan for the land to the east of the school is to use it for road access and car parking – which we believe would comply with the 1913 covenant, as no building is being constructed. However, as it has already been announced that Wrexham Association Football Club are to lease some land that is covered by the same covenant, there is a good chance that WAFC will have to remove that covenant depending on what plans they have for any buildings on the remainder of the site.

If removal of the covenant becomes problematic, then it may be possible to obtain indemnity insurance against any actions taken by a third party. This might be a lower cost option that is worthy of further investigation.



Groves Enterprise Centre landing visualisation

Funding

If this EOI is considered by Wrexham Council to have merits, then our next step would be to apply for a Project Viability Grant from the Architectural Heritage Fund. This would allow us to commission a more detailed feasibility study of our proposal.

Funding from the AHF would be used to produce a definitive report into the benefits and risks of refurbishing the former Grove Park School into a Community Enterprise Centre. In turn, this work would form the basis of the next stage of our funding journey.

We would then apply for a Heritage Enterprise Grant (up to £5m) to carry out the work required on the building. This would be a two stage process; with the first being a development phase grant which would cover detailed planning (up to RIBA work stage 1), surveys, consultations, legal matters etc. This would be followed by the delivery phase, which would include capital works and building fit out to Category A level.

Because the building has listed status, it will be given priority by all funding bodies operating within the heritage asset field.

Some initial fundraising would be required by the company to meet the grant criteria. Save Our Heritage were supported by close to 2000 members of the public during the campaign to save the building in 2015 – 2016 and we anticipate that many of those people would be willing to contribute financially to any future crowd funding efforts.

Timeline

Architectural Heritage Fund Project Viability Grants applications are made monthly, with a response expected within 8 weeks. If our EOI was accepted, we would strive to submit our application to the AHF before the end of July. We would expect to learn whether our application was successful at their next meeting scheduled for 24th September 2019. If we miss that deadline, then the next decision meeting of 2019 is on 11th December.

Heritage Enterprise Grants take longer to be considered. It takes up to a month before an invite to apply is made by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and after that, anything up to 6 months before a decision is made by the Trustees of the fund.

We anticipate that from project viability application to completion of fit out could take up to three years, but like all major building projects, external factors can influence the timeline greatly.

Outcomes

- ⑩ The building is renovated and becomes self-financing going forward.
- ⑩ Affordable, flexible business space becomes available to entrepreneurs looking to move away from the “work at home” model.
- ⑩ Business growth as a result of working alongside other enterprises, results in employment opportunities for the local workforce.
- ⑩ Jobs are created to manage and operate the Enterprise Centre.
- ⑩ Wrexham gains an additional high quality venue for music, theatre etc.
- ⑩ The people of the Maesydre ward would effectively have a community space replacing the one lost when it became the Ty Nos Night Shelter on Holt Road.
- ⑩ A greater number of people become aware of heritage matters in the Wrexham area, when a very visible heritage asset is re-purposed into a productive building for use by future generations.

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