

Wrexham Council decides against legal action to de-list school.

The news that Wrexham Council will not be taking legal action in order to de-list the former Grove Park School was met with cautious optimism by members of Save Our Heritage today.

The building was listed by Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government Mark Drakeford AM in November last year. At a meeting in December, Wrexham Council Executive Board voted to give authority to their Leader, Councillor Mark Pritchard, along with Council officers, to evaluate whether they had any grounds to challenge this latest listing decision.

We would like to address Council Leader Mark Pritchards latest statement as follows.

Councillor Pritchard has repeatedly stated that the costs of maintaining the building are £1 million, but our detailed breakdown of these costs show the real figure to be closer to £0.25 million. This constant manipulation of the truth does nothing but show how little regard the Councillor has for the people of Wrexham. They deserve the truth, and fabricating figures like this is no longer acceptable by someone in public office.

The Councillor goes on to say that the building is ill suited for modern 21st Century primary school education, but has failed to back up this statement with hard facts. Our exhaustive research has found similar buildings throughout the country that have been refurbished to meet current standards, and are delivering high quality education today. The restrictive covenants are irrelevant, as they apply to the land, and not the building. Councillor Pritchard is naïve in his understanding of these matters.

The statement also mentions that the Council were planning to build two primary schools on the site. This directly contradicts their plans a year ago, which was to use the site as a staff car park for the foreseeable future. To date, they have not applied for funding, or even completed the Draft School Organisation Strategy review which covers education requirements until 2025.

Save Our Heritage group member Sarah Roberts said “We are pleased that the Council have finally agreed to undertake a feasibility study. At a meeting of the full Council on March 8th 2016, we asked for just such a study to be carried out,

but our request was met with silence. If the Council had listened to our request, they could have saved themselves a great deal of time and money.”

Lynne Williams added “In my opinion, by stating that the building will cost huge sums of money to maintain, Councillor Pritchard is once again dealing in fiction, and not fact. He has no evidence to support these claims. Throwing vague phrases like this into the public domain is highly unprofessional.”

Group chairperson Elaine Guntrip-Thomas said “Nothing has changed for us. Our vision for the building has always been to see it used for education once again. We firmly believe that with proper refurbishment, the school can be made fit for purpose. Whether this is for one or two primary schools, or any other form of education is immaterial. What's important is that an iconic piece of Wrexham's built environment is retained, and brought back to life.”

Our investigations have shown that there are so many benefits to refurbishing older buildings for educational purposes, both from a cost and environmental perspective. Unfortunately, Wrexham Council seem “hell bent” on clearing the site in order to build yet another “metal box” school that will have a much shorter lifespan than a refurbished brick building.

The First Minister Carwyn Jones has already stated that Welsh Government funding under the 21st Century Schools program can be for refurbishment projects, and not just new build schools.

Web Links:

Save Our Heritage Wrexham website - www.soh.wales

Fact or fiction? : <http://soh.wales/index.php/fact-or-fiction>

Wrexham County Borough Council - <http://wrexham.gov.uk>

About Save Our Heritage

The Save Our Heritage Group are non-political volunteers opposed to the destruction of older buildings which give the market town of Wrexham its character. Since forming in January 2016, they have concentrated their efforts on saving the former Grove Park School for Girls. Their website is at www.soh.wales .