

**DECISION OF THE CABINET SECRETARY FOR FINANCE AND LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
FORMER GROVE PARK SCHOOL, WREXHAM**

"I am grateful to my policy officials and to those persons beyond the Welsh Government who have made considerable contributions to the information before me. I regret that the gulf between honest opinion in this matter means that my decision will inevitably deliver disappointment to some. All may be assured, however, that everything which has been written has been read and has provided welcome assistance to me.

In deciding whether or not to list the former Grove Park school (which I'll refer to as "the Building") I must first reach a decision on whether or not it has special architectural or historic interest and then assess those merits against the key examples of its type which broadly define the standard to be met if a building is to be listed. I have read the Ministerial Advice before me which includes section 1 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the Welsh Office circulars 61/96 and 1/98. I understand that I am bound by section 1 and must have due regard to the circulars.

First, the architectural or historic interest of the Building. Much of the opinion before me supports what my lay eyes tell me, that the Building has architectural merit. It is simple yet elegant and while I note the opinion that it is plain, it's still plainly a beautiful old building. Perusing the photographs of its decorative detail including a double sweep stair, Deco inspired balustrades, terrazzo treads, herringbone brickwork and parquet flooring has been an unexpected pleasure. It is clear to me that the Building was brought into being by craftspeople whose skill remains evident. The suggestions of historic interest in the Building are engaging rather than authoritative, but not to be set aside entirely. I understand that the building of new secondary schools in Wales slowed down during the inter-war years. The Building is clearly not alone in being constructed during this period, but neither are examples plentiful. The history of women's education in Wales – as in women's experience more generally – is under-represented. The Building is not alone in being constructed as a girls-only school at this time, but once again examples are relatively rare. The impact of the 1937 Air-Raid Precautions Act seems to me to strike a minor note, but I have seen the significance attached to it by a number of those who have provided written evidence. My conclusion is that while historical significance, of itself, would not be sufficient to lead to listing in this case, these are factors which deserve to be taken into consideration in reaching a decision in the round.

I turn next to the assessment of architectural merit against the best examples of its type. I neither dismiss the opinions nor expertise of Messrs George and Jones, the Twentieth Century Society, Save Britain's Heritage or the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales - all of whom support the listing of the Building. However, the balance of expert opinion before me counsels against listing the Building on the ground that its architectural interest is insufficient to render it worthy of the company of the listed schools of its type. I can see why the balance of expert opinion

concludes that the schools designed by Pugh Jones are outstanding but I do not agree that the difference between them and the example I am asked to consider is so great that the Building should not be allowed to sit among them. The quality and character of the buildings is not dissimilar; they may not share the same flair but they all have flair. I see the broad rather than the perfect equivalence that Annex C of circular 61/96 guides me to seek.

Finally, I understand the value of expert opinion and that this decision is entrusted to me, a lay referee who must have due regard to, rather than relinquish responsibility to, that opinion. I appreciate that our architectural judgements are, to a degree, subjective and hope that there is both room for my opinion and for reasonable disagreement.

My decision is to list the Building, with its historical dimension, on the ground of its special architectural interest due to its aesthetic visual quality, craftsmanship and decorative detail."