

PET(4)-13-12 : Tuesday 2 October 2012

Note of Petitions Committee visit to the North Wales Hospital, 1 July 2012

Related petition: P-04-381 Restoration for North Wales Hospital:

'We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to assess the architectural heritage of the North Wales Hospital and to ensure that the bat roosts located there are protected. We would like this truly unique building to be preserved and restored for the nation.'

Present:

William Powell AM (Chair)

Bethan Jenkins AM

Joyce Watson AM

Graham Boase, Head of Planning, Regeneration & Regulatory Services, Denbighshire County Council

Heather Cafearo, Principal Quantity Surveyor, Denbighshire County Council

Edward Holland, Senior Projects Adviser, Prince's Regeneration Trust

Abigail Phillips, Clerk

Sarita Marshall, Deputy Clerk

Annette Millett, Committee Support

1. The Chair thanked Graham Boase, Heather Cafearo and Edward Holland for meeting the Committee and expressed disappointment that it could not enter the hospital building for health and safety reasons.
2. The Chair explained that the purpose of the Committee's visit was to find out more about the building and the work that is being done to save it so that the Committee can give further consideration to petition P-04-381 Restoration of North Wales Hospital.
3. The Committee welcomed the opportunity to view the outside of the building and to find out more about the council's approach to the issue.
4. Graham Boase, Heather Cafearo and Edward Holland told the Committee:
 - a. The oldest part of the hospital was built in 1840. Other buildings had been added later and some were of a lower quality than the original building. The whole site was Grade 2 listed
 - b. The building was used as an asylum until the mid-1990s, when it was closed to patients and sold at auction. At its peak, 1500 patients were accommodated in the hospital.
 - c. The new owner of the buildings sold it on a few years later after carrying out asset stripping, and selling off some of the land on the estate.
 - d. The buildings are now owned by a company registered in the Virgin Islands.
 - e. The company put a planning application in four years ago which was agreed by the council. The company was to sell off some land for housing, which would provide the required funds to restore the listed building to a reasonable standard, the cost of which was estimated to be £4.8 million at that time. The council required a legal agreement

that the funds released by the sale of land for housing would be used to restore the listed buildings, and a bank Bond to underwrite the agreement.

- f. After nearly three years, the legality of the agreement and Bond were called into question and were cancelled.
 - g. An urgent works notice was served on the oldest buildings on the site, which make up around 25 per cent of the total buildings.
 - h. Following failed negotiations with the owners of the building, the council, in conjunction with the Prince's Regeneration Trust, entered the site a year ago to make the necessary urgent repairs. The council has spent £1 million on those repairs.
 - i. Dangerous structures notices have been served on some of the other buildings on site.
 - j. The council is committed to protecting the building and has a range of powers at its disposal that should enable it do so. The Prince's Regeneration Trust representative stated that the council's work on this issue was unparalleled.
 - k. It will be necessary to concentrate efforts on saving the oldest and most important 25 per cent of the site at first, with the hope that more of the buildings can be made safe for future regeneration.
 - l. The council fears that, once the current work is completed and the council and contractors leave the site, people will try to gain access to the building and could hurt themselves or cause further damage to the building. An average of 20 people a week try to get on site at the present time.
 - m. The council had consulted with the Countryside Council for Wales on the bat roosts, and the CCW are content with the council's actions in this respect.
5. The Committee thanked the council for their enthusiasm for the project and for taking the urgent action that was required.
 6. The Committee asked the council to meet with petitioners to discuss the issue and the council agreed that they would do so as soon as the situation allowed. The council also agreed to consider its wider communication strategy on this issue.
 7. The Chair thanked Graham Boase, Heather Cafearo and Edward Holland for their time.

Committee Service

July 2012