

**P-04-365 Protect buildings of note on the Mid Wales Hospital site –
Correspondence from Members of the Public to the Committee**

William Powell AM
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales

Dear Mr Powell,

The petition P-04-365, lead petitioner John Tushingam, *“We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to list or otherwise protect buildings of note on the former Mid Wales Hospital site. Unlisted but in the Conservation Area they are an invaluable part of the architectural and social heritage of Talgarth.”* is still under consideration.

The committee has been extremely helpful in this matter for which I am most grateful. The Mid Wales Hospital is within the Talgarth Conservation Area and on the local list but I am wondering, in light of the renewed threat to the buildings, if it could be possible to ask Cadw to reconsider listing?

A statement written by Judith Alfrey of Cadw 16 July 2012, in response to a request from SAVE, gives a brief assessment of the historic and architectural interest of the former Mid Wales Hospital, Talgarth, explaining the basis of the decision not to list, but setting out the understanding of where its interest lies. Three years have passed since this statement was made and Cadw’s website tells me:

A key element of Cadw’s heritage regeneration activity is action related to heritage assets in a deteriorating condition. We have been working to identify the number and type of listed buildings at risk in Wales.

Between 1840 and 1914, only buildings of a definite quality and character qualify (especially those which are the significant works of principal architects).

The focus for Cadw's future grant giving will be on historic building repair schemes which will help stimulate regeneration opportunities and/or which will help save listed buildings that are at risk.

A commitment to sustainability means making the most of all our resources, including our heritage, for the benefit of present and future generations. As part of this commitment, we want to make sure that regeneration is informed by heritage and a sense of place so that historic buildings can have a sustainable future.

The original buildings of the Mid Wales Hospital are a heritage asset in a deteriorating condition. The architects Giles Gough and Trollope are principal architects in the history of asylum design. Listing might open the door for grants and demolition would hardly fit with 'making the most of all our resources'.

Yours sincerely,

Virginia Brown

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Second response

Mid-Wales Hospital, Talgarth

The buildings at the former Mid-Wales Hospital have been assessed on two occasions, but were felt to fall short of the high standard necessary for listing. They were assessed as part of a thematic survey of NHS hospital buildings which was undertaken to provide certainty about the listability of buildings on the NHS estate, and again when the community of Talgarth was surveyed. As part of the thematic exercise, some 230 structures on 35 sites were assessed for listing, and 42 structures on 11 sites met the listing criteria and were listed. These sites now set the bench-mark for listing.

Amongst the mental hospitals which have been listed, the earliest and most architecturally distinguished is the North Wales County Asylum at Denbigh (1846–8 by Thomas Fulljames), which is listed at grade II* in recognition of its importance as a pioneering example of early Victorian asylum architecture. Also from the first generation of asylum buildings, Penyfal Hospital Abergavenny is listed grade II as one of the best C19 hospital buildings in Wales. The surviving original sections of 1851 are also by Fulljames, though with some remodelling by Giles, Gough and Trollope in the 1880s. By the early twentieth century, new thinking on hospital planning is best reflected in Wales at Whitchurch Hospital which is a close contemporary of the Mid Wales hospital, being built between 1902–1908. Like the Mid Wales hospital, Whitchurch uses the principle of echelon planning. It is considered to be the best example in Wales using this plan form, and is of exceptional architectural quality and character. When built, it was amongst the most modern of its period, offering provision for the latest treatment methods, and including facilities such as a large recreation hall.

Listing requires selectivity, particularly for buildings after about 1840, where it is necessary to identify the best examples of particular building types, selecting only buildings of definite quality and character. For twentieth century buildings, key examples are identified. As far as hospitals are concerned, Whitchurch Hospital has been selected as defining the standard for early twentieth century buildings.

Although the Mid Wales hospital does not meet the exacting standard required for listing, this should not be taken as meaning that it is of no value or interest, and its inclusion within the Talgarth Conservation Area would seem to be an acknowledgement of its local importance. Although when compared with Whitchurch Hospital, the buildings at Talgarth are stylistically conservative, they constitute a near-complete group in a harmonious style with good quality detailing (particularly in the use of materials), and a coherent plan: retention of its original echelon plan-form is probably the principal historic interest of this complex of buildings and although we have judged Whitchurch to be the key exemplar of this significant plan type, the buildings at Talgarth represent a good demonstration of similar principles. The relatively complete survival of the complex at Talgarth also enabling the

buildings to demonstrate approaches to mental health care in the early twentieth century.

Judith Alfrey
16th July 2012

Third response

Mid Wales Hospital, Expert Opinion.

Dr Jeremy Taylor who has written the most important history of the architecture of mental hospitals points to important innovative features in the layout of the hospital buildings.

Simon Bradley, the general editor of Pevnsner series of county volumes covering England and Wales has described the Mid Wales Hospital as a complex of high architectural quality and social interest.

Robert Scourfield the author of the revised Powys volume of Pevsner described the hospital as 'an incredibly complete site'.

Cadw acknowledges that the Hospital buildings are of value and interest and 'constitute a near-complete group in a harmonious style with good quality detailing (particularly in the use of materials), and a coherent plan: retention of its original echelon plan-form is probably the principal historic interest of this complex of buildings and although we have judged Whitchurch to be the key exemplar of this significant plan type, the buildings at Talgarth represent a good demonstration of similar principles. The relatively complete survival of the complex at Talgarth also enabling the buildings to demonstrate approaches to mental health care in the early twentieth century.'

Clem Cecil of SAVE Britain's Heritage

A model Edwardian hospital of 1900 designed by London architects Giles Gough and Trollope, with an unusual echelon plan set in rolling green fields on the lower slopes of the Brecon Beacons National Park, was saved from demolition in October last year by the unanimous vote of members of the

planning committee of the National Park Authority.

The hospital buildings have lain empty for over ten years and their treatment should be seen as a national scandal. They are not listed but last year the conservation area was extended to include it as an acknowledgement of its significance

What struck me on visiting the Hospital again is the beauty and potential of the site, but also the lack of responsibility of the present owner who has neglected to maintain the buildings since he acquired them. Despite this, much of the site is bearing up well. The buildings are in a conservation area and therefore constitute an important part of local and national heritage.

SAVE believes that the Mid-Wales Hospital site offers the opportunity to retain an important group of historic buildings in their original setting, whilst creating new homes and new jobs through the restoration and conversion of the site buildings.

SAVE has successfully worked in many sites all over the country bringing them back into use, often in desperate situations. Architect Graham Frecknall, who has substantial experience of working with mental asylums, including Pen-y-Fal in Abergavenny, is of the view that this site is eminently capable of reuse.

We beg to differ with Collins' comments that "the main ward buildings are well beyond a state of economic repair". A thorough structural survey is needed to come to such conclusions, and one has not been undertaken.

Mr Frecknall and SAVE both consider a successful scheme can be undertaken at Talgarth. He has prepared plans showing how the principal old buildings can be maintained. The scheme as shown contains 57 residential units created on the site, the majority in the old buildings, with a number of workspace units.

Some of the residential units can also make excellent holiday lets for National Park visitors. This will allow the old hospital to play a significant local role in tourism and local employment.

SAVE will continue to support local residents campaigning to get the best solution for this site.