



Mared Rees
Wrexham County Borough Council
Guildhall
Wrexham, LL11 1AY

Sent via email: mared.rees@wrexham.gov.uk

11 September 2018

Our ref: 95 01 21

Dear Mared,

P/2018/0667 GLYNDŴR UNIVERSITY, MOLD ROAD

Thank you for alerting the Twentieth Century Society to the above application. The application seeks a range of changes as part of the University's Campus 2025 masterplan, including the demolition of a listed building. The Society wishes to **object** to the above application. The application was reviewed by the Society's Casework Advisory Committee at their September meeting, and the comments set out below are representative of members' views.

Glyndŵr University's Plas Coch campus incorporates the former Denbighshire Technical College, built to the designs of Saxon, Smith and Partners in 1950-53. The building is listed at Grade II, a rare designation for a post-war building in Wales. The scheme was awarded a RIBA bronze medal for the Liverpool area in 1956. The former College building is arranged in long low-rise blocks, laid out around a central courtyard. Particular attention was paid to the planning and distribution of functions, and it has been suggested that Sir Patrick Abercrombie was responsible for the internal planning. The College's plan separates the administration and academic spaces, and the music department and gymnasium are annexed to limit the spread of noise. The building is modest in style, with a ribbon glazing pattern running the length of the red brick exterior. The most significant external decorative features are located close to the main entrance facing Mold Road, and include a Portland stone planter and relief panels by Darsie Rawlins, depicting the crafts. The main entrance is marked by a curved projecting wall to the east displaying these relief panels, the contrasting horizontal brick pattern to the prominent entrance tower, and an entrance canopy. These elements are simple but work together to create a strong character typical of education and other institutional buildings dating from this period.

The Society considers the proposed Learning Gateway building to be harmful to the special character of the Grade II listed building, it will be detrimental to wide-ranging views of the building's entrance and will negatively impact the setting of the listed building. Members of the Casework Committee were of the view that the proposed pavilion gateway addition is unacceptable, owing to the disregard for the building's special architectural interest. We object to the principle of the proposed gateway building, and consider that any addition in this sensitive location will cause a major obstruction to views of the listed building. The applicants have failed to provide convincing justification for the necessity of this addition, as it has not been shown that the facilities housed in the new gateway building cannot be provided elsewhere on site, nor that the existing entrance fails in serving its purpose. The chosen scale, form and material finish of the proposed gateway

building are not sympathetic to the prominent front façade of the listed building, and we disagree with the applicant's claim that it would be a subservient addition.

Another aspect of the application is the demolition of the former Gymnasium, which now houses the Student Union. As previously stated, the former Gymnasium is located a short distance from the main former College building, and is connected via a covered walkway. The design of the Gymnasium is simple, and features including a pitched roof and rigid glazing pattern provide a clear visual link to the main College building. The Society considers the Gymnasium to be a key example of the former College's carefully planned distribution of functions, and its loss would cause harm to the significance of the listed building.

Welsh planning policy sets clear criteria for the demolition of a listed building. *Technical Advice Note 24 the Historic Environment* includes the following:

5.15 An application for the demolition of a listed building should be made in exceptional circumstances and only as an option of last resort. Consent for demolition should not be given simply because redevelopment is economically more attractive than the repair and re-use of a historic building.

The Society considers this application to be in direct conflict with this policy, as the applicants have failed to show that the demolition of the Gymnasium is a last resort, especially considering that its site is proposed to be left empty following demolition. The applicants have not shown the retention of the Gymnasium to be impossible, and the Society is of the view that the suggested benefits of improved landscaping and wayfinding can be achieved without demolition. The Society's opinion on the proposed second gateway extension, located in the footprint of the covered walkway, is similar to that of the main entrance gateway. Its design is unsympathetic to the austere aesthetic of the existing College building, and the applicants have again failed to provide convincing justification for the necessity of this harmful addition.

The former College's listing is defined to the main campus building and contemporaneous annexed buildings, including the Gymnasium. The Electrical Engineering building dating from 1967-68 is not included within the listing, however the Society considers it to be a positive contributor to the group of later additions to the wider campus and therefore objects to its demolition. The Society considers the ribbed concrete façade, ribbon clerestory glazing and concrete shell roof to be fine architectural qualities, which are representative of the building's use as an Engineering facility. We recommend that options for adaptation to suit evolving use are explored, with the demolition of the adjoining 1964-67 block allowing for a new extension to provide additional space as required.

The Society's final concern is with the ad hoc approach to the repair and maintenance of the Grade II listed building. The application states that some groups of windows have been replaced with UPVC units, and that this approach will be continued where deemed necessary. The original windows are a key contributor to the building's architectural significance, and the intricate pattern and lightweight frames must be preserved. We are strongly opposed to the replacement of original windows with UPVC units, especially where the original glazing pattern will be compromised. Window replacement will require a separate listed building consent application, including evidence that the replacement of windows is the only viable option. A clear plan identifying which windows are to be replaced will be necessary, along with a detailed specification for the design of the replacement windows.

Committee members were also disappointed to see that outstanding repairs and maintenance for the Grade II listed building have not been considered as part of this application, and it is our view that a more conservation-led approach should be adopted to secure the continuing viable use of the former College.

We support the continuing academic use of the former Denbighshire Technical College, and recognise that changing needs require alterations to the campus. There is a precedent for high-quality additions to the

campus, including the Electrical Engineering building, the Edward Llwyd Building and the Library, and we recommend that new facilities be developed to a similar standard, and these be located a clear distance away from the listed former College building. The modest decorative detail to the listed building demands a sensitive approach be taken to alterations, which has not been taken here. The Society objects to the addition of the new Learning Gateway building to the front entrance, the demolition of the former Gymnasium, the demolition of the Electrical Engineering building, and the piecemeal replacement of windows. We welcome a revised conservation-led scheme which retains the listed building, and takes a systematic approach to its preservation as the focal point of Glyndŵr University's Plas Coch campus.

I trust that these comments are of use to you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely,



Grace Etherington

Caseworker

Twentieth Century Society

Remit: The Twentieth Century Society was founded in 1979 and is the national amenity society concerned with the protection, appreciation, and study of post-1914 architecture, townscape and design. The Society is acknowledged in national planning guidance as the key organisation concerned with the modern period and is a constituent member of the Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies. Under the procedures set out in *ODPM Circular 09/2005*, all English local planning authorities must inform the Twentieth Century Society when an application for listed building consent involving partial or total demolition is received, and they must notify us of the decisions taken on these applications.