

# **MINES RESCUE STATION MAESGWYN ROAD, WREXHAM CONSERVATION STATEMENT**



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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The former Wrexham Mines Rescue Station was built between 1913 and 1918, and served as a base for equipping and training colliery rescue teams in the Wrexham area. The station closed in the 1980s and was acquired by the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service as a headquarters and training centre. The Fire Service vacated the premises around 2003, and following a change of ownership, planning consent was granted in 2004 for demolition and residential development of the site. This consent was renewed in 2007. In 2010 the property was purchased for redevelopment by Neville Dickens, the owner of adjoining land. Following commencement of demolition works in August 2010, in accordance with the consent, the building was listed Grade II.
- 1.2 Demolition and alterations need listed building consent. The Welsh Assembly Government's guidance on planning and the historic environment in Planning Policy Wales (2010) and Circular 61/96 requires that proposed changes are based on a clear understanding of significance of the heritage asset affected and its setting, and provide full information so that the likely impact of the proposals can be assessed.
- 1.3 This report carried out by Peter de Figueiredo provides an assessment of the building and site within its historic context, and an understanding of its development based on historical research and building recording. A statement of significance and a set of policies set out in the document were used as guidelines for an options appraisal. This led to the development proposals, which are assessed in terms of impact on the significance of the listed building in line with national and local planning policy.

## **2 HISTORY OF THE MINES RESCUE SERVICE IN NORTH WALES**

- 2.1 The first safety standards in the coal mining industry were laid down in the 1855 Coal Mines Act. In spite of these, between 1850 and 1908, Mines Inspectors' Reports indicate that 70,700 miners died or suffered injury<sup>1</sup>. It was not until 1907 that a Royal Commission recommended the establishment of a Rescue Service, resulting in the Coal Mines Act of 1911. This Act had 127 sections dealing with management, safety, accidents and employment, and more than 400 regulations were subsequently issued under powers conferred<sup>2</sup>. The Rescue Regulations of 1928 required adequate provision to be made for safe conduct of rescue and other necessary work in mines after an explosion or fire. For example every mine employing more than 100 people on a single shift had to have a suitable first aid room adequately equipped at the surface in constant charge of a competent person, and a sufficient number of persons employed below ground had to hold certificates of proficiency in first aid.

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<sup>1</sup> Winstanley, I, *Mining deaths in Great Britain*, 1995

<sup>2</sup> Statham, IFC, *Coalmining*, 1951

2.2 The Regulations also required that properly equipped Central Rescue Stations be provided under the control of a fully trained and competent superintendant within 10 miles of the mines served (shortly afterwards increased to 15 miles), and each mine should be in constant telephone communication with the station. The Rescue Stations were of two types:

- those that maintain a permanent rescue corps, similar to a fire station, ready for immediate action as required; and
- those which train rescue brigades from the collieries served by the station.

In the latter type, of which the Wrexham Rescue Station is an example, when a disaster occurred, the superintendant and staff from the station would proceed to the colliery taking necessary rescue apparatus. They organised rescue teams from the trained men at the colliery and attended to the testing and servicing of the rescue apparatus. In both cases a specified number of trained men, depending on the number employed below ground, had to be available at each colliery.

2.3 The Regulations specified methods to be adopted in the selection and training of rescue workers, the equipment to be provided and the general organisation of rescue operations. Rescue brigades also dealt with recovery and with mine fires and explosions, often in circumstances of extreme danger.

2.4 The Mines and Quarries Act 1954 introduced more stringent safety regulations than the 1911 Act that it replaced<sup>3</sup>. Whilst the Colliery Manager remained responsible for safety, the Act required that regular Workmen's Inspection Reports be submitted, and all collieries were to have their own safety officer with a Safety Committee and representation from management and the Trade Union.

2.5 The Wrexham Rescue Station was erected for the North Wales Coal Owners Association, which represented mine owners in the counties of Denbighshire, Flintshire and Shropshire. Before nationalisation of the coal industry in 1947, the coalfield was mined by a number of private companies, including Brynkinalt Colliery Company, Llay Main Collieries Limited, Broughton and Plas Power Coal Company, and Ruabon Coal and Coke Company<sup>4</sup>. The collieries served by the Wrexham Rescue Station included Gresford, Llay Hall, Llay Main, Black Park and Bersham. The Gresford and Llay Main were deep pits that were sunk in the area following the closure of many of the old pits.

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<sup>3</sup> National Union of Mineworkers (North Wales Area) MSS, *D/NM/1316*, NUM Memoranda etc 1967-81, Flintshire Record Office

<sup>4</sup> National Coal Board Records, *GB 0208 CB*, Flintshire Record Office

- 2.6 In 1934, the Gresford Colliery was the scene of one of the most severe disasters in Welsh mining history, leading to the loss of 266 lives. Rescue teams struggled to extinguish the fire which had been caused by a large explosion, and to rescue possible survivors. The inter-war period saw many pit closures, and between 1945 and 1968 the number of collieries in North Wales reduced to three, Point of Air, Gresford and Bersham<sup>5</sup>. The Gresford colliery was closed in 1973 (the head gear wheel is preserved as part of the Gresford Disaster Memorial). No pits are operational in North Wales today.

### 3 HISTORY OF THE WREXHAM MINES RESCUE STATION

- 3.1 An account in a local paper of August 1912 headed *Life-Saving Station for Wrexham* records a decision by the group of collieries in the district to establish a central rescue station in Wrexham<sup>6</sup>. This was to be equipped with a motor-driven vehicle in constant readiness and the crew would be formed from men from the various collieries. A telephone service would connect the central station with each mine so that in the event of accident, trained help could be obtained in short term. Air helmets, to be used by rescuers, as well as other apparatus for use in colliery explosions and other emergencies was to be kept in readiness, and the men were to be properly trained in their use. It was reported that a new building was to be erected near the Great Western Railway Station.
- 3.2 It can be assumed that this article referred to the Rescue Station subsequently built in Maesgwyn Road. Maesgwyn Road was laid out at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the 1899 OS map showing development of houses along its western edge. At this time the eastern side was in use as an open air sports ground. The OS map of 1912 shows no development on the site, but according to mines records, the Wrexham Rescue Station opened between 1911 and 1918<sup>7</sup>. 46 Rescue Stations were erected during this period across the UK, with one other in North Wales, at Mold. A photograph of 1914 shows a rescue team outside what is said to be the Wrexham Rescue Station<sup>8</sup>.



*Rescue team possibly at Wrexham Station 1914*



*Llay mine rescue team 1934*

<sup>5</sup> Morag Rees, D, *Industrial Archaeology of Wales*, 1975

<sup>6</sup> Wrexham Advertiser, 10 August, 1912

<sup>7</sup> [www.romar.org.uk](http://www.romar.org.uk)

<sup>8</sup> Ithel Kelly, *The North Wales Coalfield: A Collection of Pictures*, 1990

- 3.3 The earliest map evidence for the building is the 1937 OS, which shows the footprint largely as at present, though it is clear from analysis of the structure (as described in Section 4 below), that it has been substantially adapted since it was built. The 1964 OS map shows an identical footprint for the building.



OS Map 1937 showing Wrexham Rescue Station bottom left

- 3.4 The way in which the building was used can be understood from an account given by Malcolm Williams, a miner who worked at the Llay and Gresford Collieries between 1966 and 1974, and is now a Wrexham councillor<sup>9</sup>. He has described how conditions such as poisonous gas, heat and cramped conditions were simulated. The floor was filled up with coal and shale, irregular in shape and at differing heights with a tram line incorporated. Rescuers would practice techniques such as propping up beams, bricking up damaged parts of the mine to ensure that the shafts were safe in potentially dangerous conditions. Williams also quotes from a local newspaper account of 1950 that refers to the drills that the rescue teams went through on Sundays to ensure that they were fully prepared:

*Instruction is given in conditions as near the real thing as possible. Donning their self-contained breathing apparatus, students have to enter a specially constructed chamber which is almost an exact replica of a pit face where an explosion has occurred...electric heaters and a fire that belches smoke from a hole in the floor keep the temperature at a high level...As part of the test, perspiring rescue workers must fight their way past all manner of obstructions to reach their wounded 'victim' – a model filled with lead weighing 15 stone...Their task is to bring their patient down 90 yards of gallery while instructors stand by watching for faults and keeping a check on the times.*

<sup>9</sup> Daily Post North Wales, 29 September 2010

One room was used for keeping canaries (which can detect carbon monoxide in gas). In another were stored medical supplies, oxygen cylinders and telephone outfits. Councillor Williams also appears in a video made for the North Wales Miners Association Trust in which he explains some of the equipment used by the rescue teams<sup>10</sup>.

- 3.5 After the Gresford pit disaster in September 1934, 30 men were selected from the local area to be specially trained at the Rescue Station to re-open the pit. Three rescue teams were also trained at Wrexham to man the Dinorwic site when the hydro-electricity plant was being built. It is probable that the training galleries were built at this time.
- 3.6 Following the closure of the local pits, the property became redundant and was purchased by the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service in the mid 1980s as a head quarters and training centre. Planning consent for this change of use was granted in April 1987, and the building was extensively adapted.
- 3.7 The Fire Service vacated the building around 2003, when Wrexham Council sold the site to Gordon Mytton Developments. Outline planning permission was granted for demolition of the existing building and construction of eight apartments with parking in April 2004. The permission was renewed in December 2007. The property was purchased in 2010 by Neville Dickens. The site was acquired with a view to development, and in response to a request from a local resident, the two inscribed terracotta panels from the front elevation were removed for safe-keeping in July 2010 before listing.
- 3.8 On 18 August 2010 the building was listed. This action was precipitated by the commencement of demolition works on that day. The works involved the removal of the southern gallery and the side wall of the drill hall, together with a small rear section of the workshop building.

#### **4 ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE WREXHAM MINES RESCUE STATION**

- 4.1 Maesgwyn Road was built up from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The west side of the street, which was developed first, is largely residential. The northern end of the west side was at first occupied by a sports ground, but this was developed after 1912 for an omnibus depot and the Mines Rescue Station. Both of these buildings remain. To the south the road is entirely residential.
- 4.2 The Rescue Station today consists of the former superintendant's house and attached workshop building, which together form the road frontage, together with a drill hall and training galleries to the rear. The site is bounded to the rear by railway land. The two-storey house is to the right, and is symmetrical in composition, and the lower workshop range is to the left. To the rear is a single storey drill hall with narrow training galleries to each side.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.northwalesminers.com](http://www.northwalesminers.com)



- 4.3 The frontage buildings are faced in red Ruabon brick, with panels of buff brick at upper level. Special moulded bricks are used for lintels, sill band courses and chimney copings. Roofs of the frontage buildings are red tile, whilst the drill hall is roofed in slate.



*Frontage looking from south*



*Frontage looking from north*

- 4.4 Originally, the house and workshop were connected by a vehicle opening which led through to the drill hall, as shown in the undated photographs below<sup>11</sup>. This was surmounted by a semi-circular gable with a terracotta inscription *North Wales Coal Owners Association* in raised letters. The opening was later infilled with matching brickwork and window, probably in the immediate post-war period, and the gable (although included in the list description) was removed in July 2010 before listing as described above.



*Frontage before infilling of main entrance*

<sup>11</sup> D/NM/1648, NCB Records, Flintshire Record Office



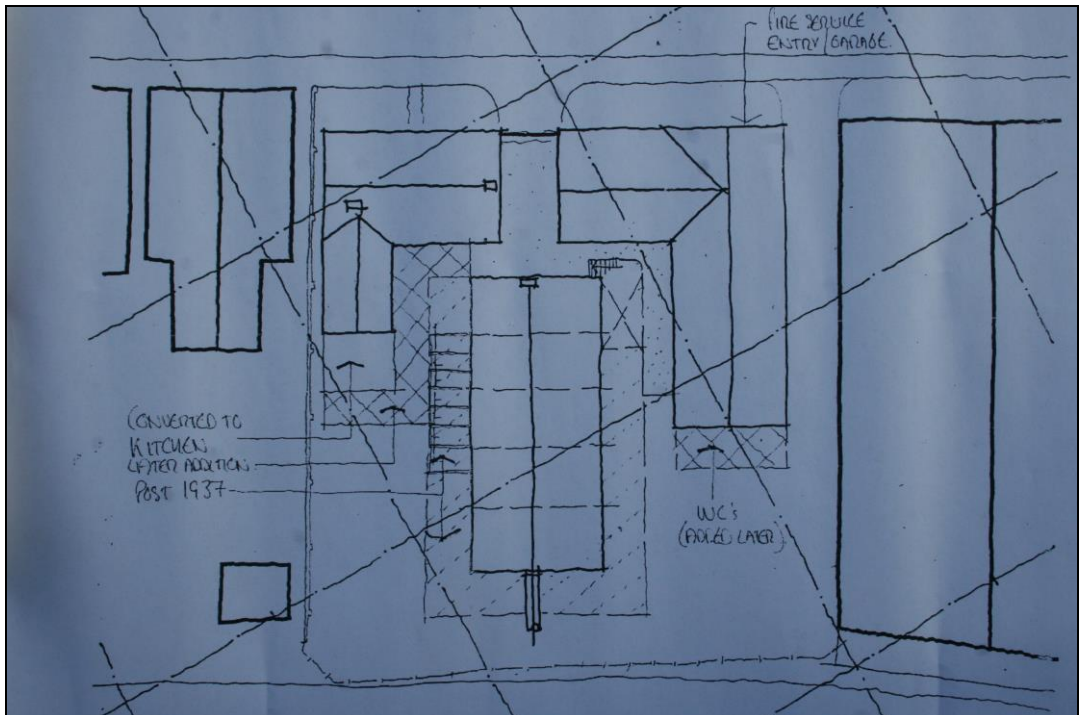


Frontage showing doors at main entrance, and alteration to workshop



Frontage showing gable with inscription prior to removal

- 4.5 The original front elevation of the workshop was probably symmetrical, with two windows flanking a central feature containing the inscription *Rescue Station*. This was subsequently altered by the intervention of a large doorway, resetting of part of the string course, and the replacement of the inscription to the side. The door was later changed again.



Plan of premises showing superintendent's house and workshop fronting Maesgwyn Road, with drill hall to rear and gallery extensions to north, east and south. Later extensions to rear of house and workshop.

- 4.6 It is uncertain whether the drill hall to the rear was part of the original building. Whilst simpler in design, it has similar decorative features, including a chimneystack with moulded brick coping, and is shown on the 1937 OS map. It has patent glazed top lighting, and is separated from the house and workshop by a roofed walkway, which was probably open originally. The training galleries to either side of the drill hall have flat concrete roofs and are later, probably added after the Gresford disaster in 1934 when activities at the premises were expanded. The rear bay of the drill hall was extended to create a connecting limb between the two galleries, with the original gable wall still in place. Flat roofed extensions were added later by the Fire Service to the rear of the superintendant's house.



*Gallery extensions to south and north sides of drill hall*



*Staircase and landing to house*

*Typical room with external window*

- 4.7 The interior of the property has been extensively altered in recent years. The superintendant's house was converted to offices by the Fire Service. Whilst it retains its original layout of domestic-scaled rooms, no original fittings and fixtures remain apart from the staircase, which is of a standard design of the period. The workshop building has been subdivided by partitions into a series of small office stores and changing rooms, with no special character. The drill hall too has been subdivided to create a lecture room, maintenance rooms and stores.

- 4.8 The galleries contain one feature of interest, which is a humidity gallery fitted with humidity and hot air inlets, and vaulted in the form of a mine shaft. From the 1950 newspaper description quoted in paragraph 3.4 above, it can be deduced that the training sessions involved the rescue workers making their way along the three-sided run of galleries which were filled with obstructions until they reached the humidity gallery where the 'victim' was

placed. Access to the humidity gallery was through a small hatch in the end wall at floor level (which still exists). The task was then to bring the ‘patient’ back through the galleries, the total journey equating to the 90 yards mentioned in the newspaper article. No trace remains of the floor level smoke vents, but the humidity gallery retains inlets through which hot, humid air was admitted, and in the adjoining control room, the mechanical and electrical equipment, probably dating from the 1950s, survives.



*Humidity gallery with smoke inlets*

- 4.9 Apart from the humidity gallery and control room (seen in the photos above and below), the other galleries contain no features of interest. A section close to the humidity gallery was fitted with softwood ‘fences’ by the Fire Service, which used the galleries for training in the 1990s.



*Section of gallery adapted by Fire Service    Ductwork to smoke inlet system*

## **5 SUMMARY OF CONDITION OF THE MINES RESCUE STATION**

- 5.1 A structural has been undertaken by Bell Monroe Consulting, and the safeguarding and stability of the partially demolished section of the building has been ensured by temporary propping and tarpaulin covers as agreed with the Council. Extensive refurbishment and upgrading is required if the building is to have a long term sustainable future. No major repairs have been carried out in recent years, and there has been no investment in refurbishment, new services or energy efficiency.

## **6 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **6.1 Statutory Designation**

6.1.1 The Wrexham Rescue Station is a Grade II listed building. The listing notice states that it is included for its interest as a Mines Rescue Building, purpose built to serve the mines within the North Wales coalfields and important for retaining its original form and layout, in particular the training gallery. It is considered to be a rare example within Wales surviving in a relatively unaltered state and displaying good architectural detailing and construction.

### **6.2 Identification of Cultural Significance**

6.2.1 Following the methodology for assessment of cultural significance set out in the English Heritage *Conservation Principles*, the following conclusions are reached:

#### Evidential Value:

6.2.2 The core of the present building on the site dates from between 1913 and 1918, and was built as a response to government legislation for the safety of mine workers at the nearby collieries. Substantial alterations were carried out in the 1930s and the post war period. From map evidence we know there was nothing previously on the site, which consisted of an open sports ground, and prior to this agricultural land.

#### Historic Value:

6.2.3 The building is of primary interest for its connection with mining history in the locality, and the role that it played in the management, training and equipping of rescue teams engaged in mining disasters, and essential health and safety operations. The teams were involved in the rescue operations after the Gresford mine disaster of 1934, which was one of the most serious incidents in the history of mining in the UK, and in other critical emergencies. Many local men risked their own lives in the cause of rescue missions, and developed their skills through training carried out at the premises.

#### Architectural Value:

6.2.4 The architectural value of the building is modest. It dates from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a period of prolific construction activity in Wales, and has no special technological or engineering interest. The building is faced in Ruabon brick, which is common in North Wales and the North West of England, and whilst it incorporates elements of decorative interest, these are standard manufactured products, which are used in an unexceptional manner. The overall design of the building is chiefly of interest for its layout as a specialised Rescue Station, although the combination of a superintendant's house, a drill hall and a workshop is repeated in other service buildings, for example fire stations and drill halls. What makes the building different is the incorporation of training galleries, although these are not original to the



building, and were added later, probably in the 1930s, following the Gresford disaster. The training galleries themselves are of very basic construction, consisting of plain brick walls with a flat concrete roof, and are built against the sides of the drill hall. One gallery has been largely demolished. Inside the galleries, the only element of interest is the humidity gallery, with its hot and humid air inlets and post-war machinery.

#### Aesthetic Value:

- 6.2.5 The front elevation of the superintendent's house remains largely unchanged, but is of modest aesthetic value. Perhaps the most interesting external features are the two inscribed panels that were removed from the frontage for safe-keeping a month before it was listed. Whilst these survive on site, and could be reinstated, they were not a fixed part of the building at the time of listing. The aesthetic value of the exterior has been compromised in other ways. The alterations to the frontage by the infilling the main entrance way, and the remodelling of the workshop have had a detrimental effect, and the 1980s flat roofed extensions to the rear are of poor quality. Internally, the building contains no features of special aesthetic interest.

#### Communal Value:

- 6.2.6 The site has particular value for the local community, especially those whose families were involved in the mining industry. The men who risked their lives in mining disasters are a source of local pride, and the building is a tangible link with the area's industrial past.

### **6.3 Comparative Analysis**

- 6.3.1 Little research has been done on other surviving Mines Rescue Stations, but the list description states that the building is a rare example in Wales. In 1918, there were 46 stations, of which seven were in Wales<sup>12</sup>. By 1950, these had dwindled to 35, with seven in Wales. Today there are six operational stations, four in England, one in Scotland and one (Dinas) in Wales. Three of these are modern buildings, and only one, Houghton in Tyne and Wear, is listed (Grade II)<sup>13</sup>. Examples of other early stations are illustrated below (though only the one at Houghton is in use as a Rescue Station today):



*Mansfield 1909*



*Ilkeston c.1920*



*Houghton 2010*

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<sup>12</sup> [www.romar.org.uk](http://www.romar.org.uk)

<sup>13</sup> [www.minesrescue.co.uk](http://www.minesrescue.co.uk)

## 6.4 Criteria for Listing

- 6.4.1 Welsh Office Circular 61/96 sets out the Secretary of State's policy for listing buildings of special architectural or historic interest. The main criteria for inclusion in the statutory lists are set out at Annex C of the Circular. The emphasis in these criteria is on national significance, though it is stated that this cannot be defined precisely. For instance, the best examples of vernacular building types will normally be listed, but many buildings that are valued for their contribution to the local scene, or for local historical associations, will not merit listing. Such buildings may be suitable for inclusion on local, non-statutory lists.
- 6.4.2 The main criteria applied in deciding which buildings to include in the statutory lists, and set out in Annex C, are:
- architectural interest: the lists are meant to include all buildings which are of importance to the nation for the interest of their architectural design, decoration and craftsmanship; also important examples of particular building types and techniques (eg. buildings displaying technological innovation or virtuosity) and significant plan forms;
  - historic interest: this includes buildings which illustrate important aspects of the nation's social, economic, cultural or military history;
  - close historical associations with people or events of importance to Wales;
  - group value: especially where buildings contribute an important architectural or historic unity or are fine examples of planning.
- 6.4.3 Particularly where buildings are proposed for listing on the strength of their historic interest, the older a building is, and the fewer the surviving examples of its kind, the more likely it is to have historical importance. After 1840, it is stated, because of the greatly increased number of buildings erected and the much larger numbers that have survived, greater selection is needed to identify the best examples of particular building types, and only buildings of definite quality and character are listed. The process adopted for 20th century listing is to identify key examples for each of a range of building types – industrial, educational, hospitals etc – and treat these examples as broadly defining a standard against which to judge proposals for additions to the list.
- 6.4.4 The external appearance of a building – both its intrinsic architectural merit and any group value – is a key consideration in judging listing proposals, but the special interest of a building, for example those that are important for their technological innovation or as illustrating particular aspects of social or economic history, will not always be reflected in obvious visual quality.
- 6.4.5 Well documented historical associations of a building's importance to Wales will increase the case for its inclusion in the statutory lists. They may justify a higher grading than would otherwise be appropriate, and may occasionally be the deciding factor. There should normally, however, be quality or interest



in the physical fabric of the building itself to justify the statutory protection afforded by listing. Either the building should be of some architectural merit in itself, or it should be well preserved in a form which directly illustrates and confirms its historical associations (eg. because of the survival of internal features). Where otherwise unremarkable buildings have historical associations, they would normally be best commemorated by other means (eg. by a plaque), and listing will be appropriate only in exceptional cases.

6.4.6 The criteria set out above explain the Secretary of State's view on special interest as it relates to listing, and help to define significance. In the context of the Wrexham Rescue Station, however, the decision to list the building poses some questions. Firstly, since the building is 20th century, it must be regarded as a key example of a building type and, it is stated, must be a building of definite quality and character. Yet it seems doubtful that mines rescue stations can be regarded as a specific building type for the purpose of listing, and would have to be considered along with other educational or training facilities. Since the building has limited quality and character, the case for listing must therefore be marginal.

6.4.7 Equally, although the decision to list the building is made primarily because of its association with mining history, it is a requirement that there should be quality or interest in the physical fabric of the building, either through intrinsic architectural merit, or through preservation of features that illustrate and confirm its historical associations. Since the building has been extensively altered, and there is virtually no evidence of its former function, the building retains little authenticity. Without the terracotta plaques which were removed for safe keeping before the building was listed, there is almost nothing to illustrate or confirm its use as a mines rescue station.

## **6.5 Principal Aspects of Significance**

6.5.1 Thus, considering the building holistically, and taking into account the historical background, the architectural description, the listing notice and the Assembly Government's policy guidance as set out above, it may be concluded that the principal aspects of significance are:

- A surviving example of a former Miners Rescue Station, erected in response to the requirements of the Coal Mines Act 1911.
- Historical associations with the local coal mining industry, and in particular with health and safety operations.
- The role played by the rescue service in the Gresford Pit Disaster of 1934 and other emergencies.
- The later-built humidity gallery inserted within the south training gallery, together with its equipment.
- The frontage of the superintendant's house.
- The terracotta plaques (which are included in the list description, but had been removed before the building was listed).

Lesser significance:

- The original plan form of the complex, consisting of superintendant's house, workshop and drill hall and later training galleries.
- The former entranceway.
- The drill hall.
- The altered workshop.

Neutral:

- The interior of the house and workshop.

Negative:

- The alterations to the main frontage and other extensions.
- The internal changes made to all other elements of the property.

## **7 HERITAGE PLANNING CONTEXT**

### **7.1 National Planning Policy and Guidance on the Historic Environment**

7.1.1 The Assembly Government's objectives for the historic environment are to:

- preserve or enhance the historic environment, recognising its contribution to economic vitality and culture, civic pride and the quality of life, and its importance as a resource for future generations; and specifically to
- protect archaeological remains, which are a finite and non-renewable resource, part of the historical and cultural identity of Wales, and valuable both for their own sake and for their role in education, leisure and the economy, particularly tourism;
- ensure that the character of historic buildings is safeguarded from alterations, extensions or demolition that would compromise a building's special architectural and historic interest; and to
- ensure that conservation areas are protected or enhanced, while at the same time remaining alive and prosperous, avoiding unnecessarily detailed controls over businesses and householders.

7.1.2 Where a development proposal affects a **listed building** or its setting, the primary material consideration is the statutory requirement to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

7.1.3 Applicants for **listed building consent** must be able to justify their proposals, show why alteration or demolition of a listed building is desirable or necessary. It is generally preferable for both the applicant and the planning authority if related applications for planning permission and listed building consent are considered concurrently. Consideration of proposals for a listed building should be made on the basis of a full, rather than an outline planning consent. Planning permission alone is insufficient to authorise works to a listed building.

7.1.4 While it is an objective of Assembly Government policy to secure the conservation and sustainable use of historic buildings, there will very occasionally be cases where demolition is unavoidable. Listed building controls ensure that proposals for demolition are fully scrutinised and justified before any decision is reached. The demolition of any Grade I or Grade II\* listed building should be wholly exceptional and require the strongest justification. In determining applications for total or substantial demolition of listed buildings, authorities should take into account the condition of the building, the cost of repairing and maintaining it in relation to its importance and to the value derived from its continued use, the adequacy of efforts made to retain the building in use and the merits of alternative proposals for the site. The Assembly Government would not expect consent to be given without convincing evidence that all reasonable efforts have been made to sustain existing uses, or to find viable new uses, and that these efforts have failed; that preservation in some form of charitable or community ownership is not possible or suitable; or that redevelopment would produce substantial benefits for the community which would decisively outweigh the loss resulting from demolition. Authorities should not authorise demolition of an historic building to make way for new development, unless it is certain that the new development will proceed. This requirement can be secured by condition. Conditions may also be used to require the preservation of particular features and/or to require works to be carried out in a certain way.

## **7.2 Welsh Office Circular 61/96**

### *Demolition of Listed Buildings*

7.2.1 There are outstanding buildings for which it is in practice almost inconceivable that consent for demolition would ever be granted. The demolition of any Grade I or Grade II\* building should be wholly exceptional and require the strongest justification. The Secretary of State would not expect consent to be given for the total or substantial demolition of any listed building without convincing evidence that all reasonable efforts have been made to sustain existing uses or find viable new uses, and these efforts have failed; that preservation in some form of charitable or community ownership is not possible or suitable; or that redevelopment would produce substantial benefits for the community which would decisively outweigh the loss resulting from demolition.

7.2.2 The Secretary of State would not expect consent for demolition to be given simply because redevelopment is economically more attractive than repair and re-use of a historic building, or because the developer acquired the building at a price that reflected the potential for redevelopment rather than the condition and constraints of the historic building.

7.2.3 The Secretary of State would expect authorities to address the following considerations in determining applications where the proposed works would

result in the total or substantial demolition of the listed building, or any significant part of it:

(i) the condition of the building, the cost of repairing and maintaining it in relation to its importance and to the value derived from its continued use. Less favourable levels of rents and yields cannot automatically be assumed. Any assessment should also take account of the possibility of tax allowances and exemptions and of grants from public or charitable sources. In those cases where it is clear that a building has been deliberately neglected, less weight should be given to the costs of repair;

(ii) the adequacy of efforts made to retain the building in use. This should include the offer of the unrestricted freehold of the building on the open market at a price reflecting the building's condition (the offer of a lease would normally reduce the chances of finding a new use for the building); and

(iii) the merits of alternative proposals for the site. Whilst these are a material consideration, the Secretary of State takes the view that subjective claims for the architectural merits of proposed replacement buildings should not in themselves be held to justify the demolition of any listed building. Even where it is thought that the proposed works would bring substantial benefits for the community, it will often be feasible to incorporate listed buildings within the new development, and this option should be carefully considered: the challenge presented by retaining listed buildings can be a stimulus to imaginative new design.

#### *Alterations and Extensions to Listed Buildings*

7.2.4 The listing of a building confers protection not only on the building but also on any object or structure fixed to the building and which is ancillary to it and, if built before 1 July 1948, within its curtilage.

7.2.5 Many listed buildings are already in well-established uses, and any changes need be considered only in this context. But where new uses are proposed, it is important to balance the effect of any changes on the special interest of the listed building against the viability of any proposed use and of alternative, and possibly less damaging, uses. In judging the effect of any alteration or extension it is essential to have assessed the elements that make up the special interest of the building in question. They may comprise obvious visual features such as a decorative facade or, internally, staircases or decorated plaster ceilings, and the spaces and layout of the building and the archaeological or technological interest of the surviving structure and surfaces. These elements are often just as important in simple vernacular and functional buildings as in grander architecture.

7.2.6 Many listed buildings can sustain a degree of sensitive alteration or extension to accommodate continuing or new uses. Indeed, cumulative changes reflecting the history of use and ownership are themselves an aspect of the special interest of some buildings, and the merit of new alterations or additions, especially where they are generated within a secure and

committed long-term ownership, should not be discounted. Nevertheless, listed buildings do vary greatly in the extent to which they can accommodate change without loss of special interest. Some may be sensitive even to slight alterations; this is especially true of buildings with important interiors and fittings - not just great houses, but also, for example, chapels with historic fittings or industrial structures with surviving machinery. Some listed buildings are the subject of successive applications for alteration or extension: in such cases it needs to be borne in mind that minor works of indifferent quality, which may seem individually of little importance, can cumulatively be very destructive of a building's special interest.

- 7.2.7 The listing grade is a material consideration, but is not in itself a reliable guide to the sensitivity of a building to alteration or extension. For example, many Grade I1 buildings are humble, once common building types which have been listed precisely because they are relatively unaltered examples of their sort. They can have their special interest ruined by unsuitable alteration or extension as readily as can Grade I or II\* structures.
- 7.2.8 Achieving a proper balance between the special interest of a listed building and proposals for alterations or extensions is demanding and should always be based on specialist expertise; but it is rarely impossible, if reasonable flexibility and imagination are shown by all parties involved. Thus, a better solution may be possible if a local authority is prepared to apply normal development control policies flexibly; or if an applicant is willing to exploit unorthodox spaces rather than set a standardised requirement; or if an architect can respect the structural limitations of a building and abandon conventional design solutions in favour of a more imaginative approach. For example, standard commercial office floor-loadings are rarely needed in all parts of a building, and any unusually heavy loads can often be accommodated in stronger areas such as basements.
- 7.2.9 The preservation of facades alone, and the gutting and reconstruction of interiors, is not normally an acceptable approach to the reuse of listed buildings: it can destroy much of a building's special interest and create problems for the long term stability of the structure.
- 7.2.10 Local authorities are reminded that they have the power to relax certain requirements of the Building Regulations where their strict application would be unreasonable in a particular case and sympathetic consideration should be given to applications for relaxation in respect of work to listed buildings. Often, it will be possible to meet the requirements of the Building Regulations in a way which does little or no damage to the appearance of the building. Authorities should seek expert advice in endeavouring to strike a balance.

### **7.3 Wrexham Unitary Development Plan**

#### **7.3.1 *Policy EC9: Alterations or additions to, and development or redevelopment within the curtilage of, buildings or structures of special architectural or historic interest must respect the setting and character of the listed building or structures.***

The supporting statement encourages sensitive repair and improvement, using traditional materials and techniques, and in establishing appropriate new uses for listed buildings to guarantee their future survival. Demolition will not normally be allowed. Alterations/additions to listed buildings require the greatest skill and care in order to avoid damage to the intrinsic character of the buildings themselves (including interiors and fixtures) and to their setting. Similarly new development affecting a listed building must be sympathetic so as not to harm the listed building's historic integrity and identity.

### **8 PRINCIPLES FOR CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE**

#### **8.1** Following the recent listing of the building, and taking full account of the Statement of Significance set out in Section 6 above and the heritage planning context set out in Section 7, an options appraisal was carried out to inform development of the site in a way that would respect its primary heritage values. This was focused on four separate options:

- Demolition and redevelopment in accordance with the existing approved layout.
- Demolition and alternative redevelopment.
- Retention and refurbishment of the existing building, including rebuilding the demolished sections.
- Selective demolition and redevelopment.

#### **8.2** The key considerations are as follows:

##### Option 1: Demolition and redevelopment in accordance with the existing approved layout

The outline planning approval had previously been found acceptable in planning terms. The situation, however, has changed following listing. Any application for demolition will now need to satisfy the Government Assembly policy criteria set out in 7.2.3 above. It will also be necessary to submit a full rather than outline application. Whilst a robust justification could be presented in support of this option, it must be accepted that there would be strong local opposition to the principle of total demolition, and reluctance on the part of the local authority to grant approval.

##### Option 2: Demolition and alternative redevelopment

The historic environment issues in this option were felt to be broadly similar to Option 2, though amalgamation of the Rescue Station and the former Bus



Depot sites may provide greater opportunities for comprehensive development, which could bring substantial public benefits and would be less hampered were the listed building to be replaced. Amalgamation, however, may not be practical due to operational constraints.

#### Option 3: Retention and refurbishment of the existing building, including rebuilding the demolished sections

Full retention and refurbishment of the existing building, including rebuilding the rear sections that have been demolished was assessed as being impractical, bearing in mind the specialised use of the building and its inflexible layout. This option is economically unviable.

#### Option 4: Selective demolition and redevelopment

It is generally accepted that not all aspects of a heritage asset have equal value, and that features that make a limited contribution to significance might be amenable to change<sup>14</sup>. Indeed, where the level of significance is neutral or negative, there may be opportunities for positive enhancement of the heritage asset through beneficial change.

The Statement of Significance has categorised the primary values of the listed building as its historical associations, the frontage of the superintendent's house, the terracotta plaques that were previously built into the frontage and the humidity gallery. Lesser values are attached to the surviving elements of the original plan form, the former drill hall, the workshop and the entranceway. This analysis was used to develop an option based on retention and refurbishment of the significant elements, namely the whole of the original superintendent's house, reinstating the plaques and connecting entranceway, with dismantling and reassembly of the humidity gallery in a museum environment where it would be fully accessible to the public.

## **9 THE PROPOSAL**

- 9.1 Following the initial options appraisal, it was decided to develop Option 4. The draft scheme involves the retention of the superintendent's house, the reinstatement of the entrance gateway, and the dismantling of the humidity gallery for museum display. The remainder of the site is developed for housing with parking and open space.

## **10 HERITAGE IMPACT APPRAISAL**

### **10.1 Use**

- 10.1.1 The form and layout of the property makes it difficult to find an alternative use. Outline planning consent has been granted for residential use of the site,

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<sup>14</sup> See Communities and Local Government Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment

but this would not be possible within the existing building envelope. Hence the development of a scheme involving conversion and partial demolition.

10.1.2 The proposal involves returning the superintendent's house to residential use. Since the property was occupied by the Fire Service, the house has been used for offices, and the reversal of use will allow for the domestic character to be restored.

10.1.3 The use of the remainder land for housing is compatible with the general character of the area.

## **10.2 Impact on Historic Fabric**

10.2.1 The proposal involves substantial demolition, with loss of the workshop building, drill hall and galleries. Discussions have been commenced with the local authority for the humidity gallery to be removed for museum display and interpretation within the Wrexham area.

10.2.2 The superintendent's house, which is to remain, is the most intact element of the property, and its most prominent feature as seen from the public realm. The workshop has suffered from radical alterations both externally and internally, and the (possibly later) drill hall and galleries contribute little of architectural significance.

10.2.3 The superintendent's house will be carefully conserved, with the removal of later rear extensions, and the reinstatement of the interior. The original entranceway will be reinstated as the main site entrance, incorporating the original terracotta plaque.

10.2.4 Discussions have been held with the Wrexham Museum authority to secure a suitable location for the humidity gallery, where it can be publicly displayed. This will allow the story of the Mines Rescue Service to be explained and interpreted for local people and visitors.

## **10.3 Impact on Character and Appearance**

10.3.1 The chief design principle of the scheme is to complement the retained superintendent's house with sympathetic new residential development. This involves reinforcing the street frontage and providing new housing at the rear that roughly follows the L-shaped plan form of the existing building.

10.3.2 The new development is two storeys high, and will be subservient to the superintendent's house in height, scale and massing. It will be built in complementary materials, designed and detailed in a contemporary manner.

10.3.3 The development layout creates a semi-public courtyard to the rear, which combines parking and open space. Private garden areas adjoin the neighbouring depot site.

#### **10.4 Balance of Public Benefits and Disbenefits**

10.4.1 Justification of the scheme rests ultimately on weighing the public benefit against any harm that would be caused by partial demolition.

10.4.2 The tests required by the Secretary of State in the case of total or substantial demolition are:

(i) the condition of the building, the cost of repairing and maintaining it in relation to its importance and to the value derived from its continued use.

(ii) the adequacy of efforts made to retain the building in use.

(iii) the merits of alternative proposals for the site.

10.4.3 The circumstances of the present case are unusual, since the present owner bought the property with the benefit of an outline consent and with a view to carrying out the existing planning permission, and was only prevented from doing so by spot listing after demolition works had commenced. Its condition was poor before purchase of the site, but has been made worse by the demolition.

10.4.4 The cost of repair and maintenance could only be justified if a viable use could be found for the premises, but this is unlikely bearing in mind its location, the constraints of the site and the inflexible and particular layout of the premises. It cannot be converted into housing because of the constraints of the plan form and the proximity to adjoining properties. No other uses are viable or suitable.

10.4.5 The building has not been in use for several years, and was purchased in 2010 for demolition and redevelopment. Any requirement that the owner keep the building in use is therefore not applicable.

10.4.6 Alternative options for the site have been considered, but have not been pursued, either because they would lead to greater loss of significance or because they are not practically or economically viable.

#### **10.5 Heritage Impact Conclusion and Justification**

10.5.1 In assessing the impact of development on heritage assets, it is generally accepted that features of lesser significance offer opportunities for the creation of heritage values of tomorrow, which can be achieved if the quality of the new work is of a high standard of design, materials, detailing and

execution. National and local policies on planning and the historic environment do not preclude demolition and redevelopment, provided that the proposals can be seen to preserve and enhance the significance of the heritage asset.

- 10.5.2 It is unusual for a building to be listed almost wholly for its historic interest. This assessment had found that the building has only very modest architectural and aesthetic interest, and this is principally related to the superintendent's house, which remains largely intact, the terracotta plaques (which are not part of the building as listed) and the humidity gallery. Welsh Office Circular 61/96 states that there should normally be some quality or interest in the physical fabric of a building to justify listing. Either the building should be of some architectural merit in itself, or it should be well preserved in a form which directly illustrates and confirms its historical associations. Where otherwise unremarkable buildings have historical associations, they would normally be best commemorated by other means (eg. by a plaque), and listing will be appropriate only in exceptional cases.
- 10.5.3 It must therefore be concluded that the historical associations would not be substantially weakened by partial loss of fabric, since it is not the fabric itself that provides the significance. Understanding of the history of the building could indeed be enhanced and promoted by a combination of on-site interpretation and a museum display centred on the humidity gallery (which is an interior that was created within a very uninteresting brick and concrete roofed lean to, and could therefore be relocated to a more suitable setting where it would be seen by the public).
- 10.5.4 Whilst the scheme will clearly involve compromise in terms of the integrity of the building, it is necessary to weigh the balance of public benefits against disbenefits. A viable use for the building is required. This is unlikely to be achieved without a substantial degree of alteration, and in my view it is preferable to secure a good scheme that allows for the historic interest associated with the building as a mines rescue station to be better expressed and understood by the public than to be over concerned with the complete fabric of the building itself.
- 10.5.5 Thus, whilst the proposal will lead to considerable demolition, sufficient will be conserved, both on-site and off-site in a museum setting to maintain the key significance of the property, which is its place in local mining history. The scheme will allow for the story of the Mines Rescue Service to be explained and commemorated, whilst achieving a beneficial use of the existing site. The alternative is likely to be further slow decay of the building, leading to its ultimate loss.

## **11 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

- 11.1 The former Wrexham Mines Rescue Station was built between 1913 and 1918 and served as a base for equipping and training colliery rescue teams in the Wrexham area.
- 11.2 The Rescue Station closed in the 1980s and following brief use as a Fire Service headquarters, it has been vacant for many years. Planning consent

was granted in 2003 for demolition and redevelopment, and the permission was renewed in 2007. Following commencement of demolition in August 2010, the building was listed at Grade II. Listed building consent is therefore now required for demolition or alterations.

11.3 The building is principally of historic value for its associations with the local coal mining industry and the role it played in the management, equipping and training of rescue teams. Its architectural value relates to the superintendants house and elements of the frontage, together with the humidity training gallery. Its aesthetic value is slight, and the building has suffered a number of changes that have affected its significance.

11.4 Assessed against the criteria for listing set out in the Welsh Office Circular 61/96, the grounds for listing appear very marginal, for notwithstanding its historic interest, the building has very limited quality and character.

11.5 Following the recent listing of the building, and taking account of the Statement of Significance and the heritage context as set out in this report, an options appraisal was carried out to inform development of the site. This focused on four separate options:

- Demolition and redevelopment in accordance with the existing approved layout.
- Demolition and alternative redevelopment.
- Retention and refurbishment of the existing building, including rebuilding the demolished sections.
- Selective demolition and redevelopment.

A scheme involving partial demolition and redevelopment was selected, and a detailed justification is set out in Section 10.5.

11.6 The heritage impact of the draft scheme, which is intended to be submitted for planning consent, is assessed in accordance with national and local planning policy. Notwithstanding the degree of demolition proposed, it is concluded that the benefits of the scheme will outweigh the disbenefits, provided that a suitable venue is found for the public display of the humidity gallery.