

Bolton Council approves demolition of Victorian School

The Executive Committee of Bolton Council has voted unanimously to demolish the former Clarence Street Community College. The fate of this handsome (but sadly unlisted) council-owned 1880s Board School, designed by the prominent local architect Jonathan Simpson, became a national story when SAVE successfully issued an injunction to halt demolition work in October last year. The council had started pulling-down the building after unlawfully granting itself consent under delegated powers. This came just months after the same council had produced a report which praised the building – identifying it as a key local landmark ‘worthy of retention’. The building was to be replaced by a temporary car park.



Since halting demolition SAVE has been looking at ways to encourage the council to retain and refurbish the building – soliciting advice and support from the Churches Conservation Trust and the Princes Regeneration Trust. SAVE was also able to correct inflated figures given in a council report which stated the cost of scaffolding the building at £350,000. Following a visit from SAVE’s specialist contractor this figure was revised to £80,000. However, this was not enough to sway the council which seemed determined to finish a bad job.

In a sad reflection of how Bolton’s elected officials value the heritage of their town, of the 60 councillors contacted by SAVE prior to the latest planning meeting, only three replied. Demolition was justified purely on economic grounds – the part-destruction of the building raising costs of repair considerably.



William Palin, Secretary of SAVE, says 'We are deeply disappointed by this news. The council has sanctioned the destruction of a fine and important landmark building which could easily have been repaired and reused – as has been demonstrated by numerous successful Board School conversions all over the country. By using the part destruction of the building as a reason for its total demolition we believe the council has taken advantage of its own unlawful behaviour – the grossly inflated scaffolding costs providing further evidence of a dismissive attitude to historic buildings in its care. This is a short sighted decision which will deprive an already degraded area of the town of one of its best buildings.'

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SAVE Britain's Heritage has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, journalists and planners. It is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic built environment.

In 1995 SAVE published the report, *Beacons of Learning; Breathing New Life into Old Schools, SAVE Britain's Heritage*, which lists 128 schools built between 1870 and 1900 which have now been converted. The report focuses on the plight of urban schools in England and Wales and contains essays and illustrated case studies of demolished, converted and empty and threatened school buildings (£11.50 / £9.20 incl. p&p).

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SAVE Britain's Heritage is an independent Charity formed in 1975 which campaigns publicly to protect threatened historic buildings and to inform national conservation policy. Registered Charity 269129

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