**Old King Edwards School letter to B&NES November 2020**

BPT has been in touch with Officers at B&NES Council at regular intervals over the years regarding the Old King Edward’s School on Broad Street. Given the impact of COVID on the decline of the high street it is even more timely than ever for local action on this ‘at risk’ site.

King Edward’s School moved from the Grade II\* building in Broad Street in 1986. It is shameful that the subsequent owner has let this fine building moulder for over 30 years. Lack of occupation is very bad for historic buildings and it is a very poor advertisement in the heart of the World Heritage Site. Questions arise about the building with regularity at BPT’s AGMs and it is a matter of frustration that we never have any better news to share.

It is a shame that at no point in the last 30 years, since the advent of the National Lottery made resources available, was any collaborative scheme put forward which could have allowed for compulsory purchase, restoration, and a new life for this building appropriate to its status and prominence. However, we are where we are and Bath Preservation Trust is extremely keen to see something happen which gets this site back on track.

In our view The Council should be doing everything within its power to CPO the site, and once in public ownership opportunities for funding will follow.

Times are now harder and resources more stretched.  But perhaps also the attraction and profitability of the ‘super-pub’ (for which permission exists) will have diminished post-COVID and will make alternative approaches a more attractive proposition to the owner.

On our fantasy wish-list’ might be the consideration of the relocation of the City Archives out of the basement of the Guildhall into a local history centre, as long as the challenges of appropriate environmental control could be met.

As we understand it the current Guildhall accommodation for the Record Office and its archive & local studies collections does not meet DDA compliance and unless it is re-located to ground-floor space in the Guildhall never can achieve this. In recent years we have been involved in some discussions about new uses for the Guildhall generally but a new public space in the Guildhall for Record Office users was never raised as a possibility.

The 2017 refurbishment of the Guildhall basement for the Record Office to create a better public interface and to take in Local Studies material from the Central Library, as we understand, was only ever viewed as an interim measure and the search for a new-build site, or refurbishment of an existing premises, has been going on for 20 years and remains a goal of Heritage Services and of some Councillors. However, potential premises that were considered always formed part of the Council's commercial property portfolio and were ultimately rejected either as fundamentally unsuitable or (more likely) because they could produce more income from letting than from Record Office occupation.

King Edward's school was often suggested by members of the public to the Council, but not being Council-owned it was never seriously considered.

It is clear that Lottery funders favour Record Office building projects which incorporate re-use/restoration of historic buildings as part of their new premises, e.g. The Molyneux at Wolverhampton, Kresen Kernow at Redruth. The complex requirements of modern storage standards are achieved through high-spec. new storage rooms adjacent and connected to the historic premises.

What is required for this is a Listed building in Bath which both in need of saving, and which the Council could afford to purchase – and it seems we have one.

The Broad Street school is seriously worth considering for cultural use; if part of the car-park behind the school can be allocated for a new-build add-on to accommodate state-of-the-art storage for the document collections, and also give DDA-compliant level access to the historic part of the premises, the re-purposing of this significant Listed building would be a worthy recognition of the high status of the Archive collections.

Thinking of Designated collections, of which B&NES Council has three, the fate of the Fashion Museum is uncertain as soon as the NT lease expires. The Fashion Museum has always struggled with being too far away from the Roman Baths. Broad Street could be a much more achievable destination to visitors on a combined ticket.

It would of course need the new-build behind the school, as would Record Office use of the site, to give sufficient floor-space to make a workable venue.

In summary, both the Fashion Museum and Record Office need city centre premises. The likelihood of either (separately or combined) getting a new-build is remote in Bath, given the high value of sites and the high income-earning potential of such sites by any other use than cultural. Re-use of an existing building is the best hope for either.

The site in part or whole, becoming a centre for archives and local history studies is a future use BPT would be fully behind.

Historic England say that ‘their [local Heritage at Risk teams](http://historicengland.org.uk/about/contact-us/local-offices/) strive to find solutions for sites at risk’ and we would urge them to demonstrate that they are working actively to remedy the situation.

Notes:

2018 press statement:

*Bath Preservation Trust continues to be very concerned about the state of the old King Edward’s School building. The recent break-in, as well as causing damage to the historic structure, shows how vulnerable a property like this can be when its owner leaves it unused and increasingly derelict. The building is Grade II\*, a high level of national designation, and is on the national ‘at risk’ register.  It is a poor advertisement both for a World Heritage City and for one of the South West’s leading independent schools, who sold the building in good faith over 20 years ago. Historic England say that ‘their*[*local Heritage at Risk teams*](http://historicengland.org.uk/about/contact-us/local-offices/)*strive to find solutions for sites at risk’ and we would urge them to demonstrate that they are working actively with the owner and the Council to address this long overdue eyesore.*

<https://www.bathchronicle.co.uk/news/state-former-king-edwards-school-1147127>

<https://www.bathchronicle.co.uk/news/bath-news/trust-very-concerned-over-state-440436>