

## **Information Further to Ministerial Answers**

### **Information further to discussions held in Plenary regarding listing the Custom House and Royal Buildings in Port Talbot as buildings of special architectural or historic interest, issued by Alun Ffred Jones, the Minister for Heritage during March 2011**

To Bethan:

During Heritage Questions on 16<sup>th</sup> March you asked about the Custom House and Royal Buildings, Port Talbot. I am now writing to let you know that Cadw has completed its assessment of the additional information submitted by Mr Shakeshaft in support of his request to have the buildings listed on account of their special architectural or historic interest.

After careful consideration of the criteria for listing as set out in paragraphs 53-55 of and Annex C to Circular 61/96 '*Planning and the Historic Environment : Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas*' and Appendix F to Circular 1/98 '*Planning and the Historic Environment : Directions by the Secretary of State*' Cadw remains of the opinion that the buildings do not satisfy the listing criteria and so cannot be listed. I am enclosing a copy of Cadw's assessment.

### **Information further to discussions held in Plenary regarding listing the Custom House and Royal Buildings in Port Talbot as buildings of special architectural or historic interest, issued by Alun Ffred Jones, the Minister for Heritage during March 2011**

To Peter:

In my letter to you of 8 March, I undertook to inform you of the outcome of Cadw's consideration of the further information submitted by Mr Shakeshaft in support of his request to list the Custom House and Royal Buildings in Port Talbot as buildings of special architectural or historic interest.

After careful consideration of the guidance on listing as set out in paragraphs 53-55 of and Annex C to Circular 61/96 '*Planning and the Historic Environment : Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas*' and Appendix F to Circular 1/98 '*Planning and the Historic Environment : Directions by the Secretary of State*' Cadw remains of the opinion that the buildings do not satisfy the listing criteria and so cannot be listed. I am enclosing a copy of Cadw's assessment.

### **Assessment for Listing as a Building of Special Architectural or Historic Interest Customs House and the Royal Buildings, Port Talbot**

#### Background

Port Talbot was surveyed to identify historic buildings of the standard suitable for listing in 1999 and the Customs House and the Royal Buildings were assessed but not recommended for listing at that time. The buildings and their proposed redevelopment were brought to the attention of Cadw late in 2009 and a further assessment of their eligibility for listing was undertaken. Cadw confirmed the earlier survey judgement not to list. More recently, further information was supplied and, following an informal site inspection, Cadw confirmed in

February 2011 that the earlier assessment was correct and that the buildings did not meet the criteria for listing. Following that decision, Cadw has received further information supporting the case for listing, culminating in e-mails of 28 March 2011.

### Architectural Interest

The buildings in question comprise a pair of 2 and 3 storey buildings on Talbot Street and bordered by Eagle Street to the west and Beverley Street to the east.

To the left (or west) is the combined Customs House and 12 Talbot Road. It is a 3 storey mildly baroque dressed stone building facing onto Talbot Street with a similar lower 2 storey building attached to the left along Eagle Street. They are a well designed pair and have matching doorcases with substantial corbelled canopies and share some other detailing in the quoins and window surrounds, ground floor gabled pilaster strips, eaves brackets, projecting chimney stack and continuous banding across the ground and first floor. Additionally the elevation to Talbot Road has two shaped gables with inscription panels, one with the date of '1897' which is presumably the date of the building, and the other 'PTRDC°', relating to its original use.

To the right is the Royal Buildings, a neo-classical brick building with stone dressings of 3 storeys and 10 bays to Talbot Road. There has been some design and composition in its layout with the façade wrapping around into the road to its right and centred on two pedimented central bays with sculptured figures to the tympanum. The left hand of the elevation is terminated by a further single pedimented bay, matched by a pediment on the angled corner bay. There is a parapet and each window bay is linked vertically with moulded canopies below the upper windows. The entire ground floor is taken up by a run of shop fronts with an arcade entrance under the central bay.

Guidance on selection of buildings for listing states that in the post-1840 period greater selection is necessary to identify the best examples of particular building types, and only buildings of definite quality and character can be listed.

With regard to the Customs House (& 12 Talbot Road) the general architectural character is not exceptional as an example of late C19 baroque revival as there is little in the way of the movement and decoration that characterises architecture of this type. Cadw has compared the building against other similar buildings that have been listed (for example, Exchange Buildings, Llanelli) and the Customs House does not compare favourably on visual and design terms with these examples. Furthermore, there has been replacement of the windows with poor modern types, replacement of rainwater goods, rebuilding of a chimney stack and the building can not therefore be classified as a particularly good and unaltered example of its type.

With the Royal Buildings there has been some alteration to the windows, a number of the small pane upper sashes have been replaced and, although the ground floor shop fronts retain a continuous cornice and a curved shop entrance to the Beverley Street corner, there have been some alterations to the shopfronts themselves. Again the building cannot be assessed as a particularly good example of its type and following a comparative exercise against similar buildings that have been listed, better examples have been identified elsewhere (High Street, Barry).

### Historic Interest / Historical Association / Group Value

Cadw has been supplied with extensive information by a local resident; some of it relates to the architectural merits of the buildings but most of it relates to the historical background to the construction of the Customs House and the foundation and development of Port Talbot.

It is clear that the Customs House was constructed in 1897 as the headquarters of the Port Talbot Railway and Dock Company. The information supplied has linked this building to the foundation and growth of Port Talbot under the benevolence of Miss Emily Charlotte Talbot. It claims that the Customs House has a well-documented association with Miss Talbot and this is of direct importance to the history of the town and Wales. It is also claimed that 'the enduring Talbot legacy to the whole of Wales is embodied and symbolised in the very fabric of the Custom House itself.'

The importance of historic interest and association is rightly highlighted but it is important to note the dependence on some recognisable architectural merit within the listing criteria. Appendix F to Circular 1/98 states that well documented historic associations will increase the case for a building's inclusion in the statutory list but there should normally be some quality or interest in the physical fabric of the building, either in terms of architectural merit or in the preservation of features which directly illustrate and confirm its historical associations.

On this there is no direct physical and visible link of the role of Miss Talbot, the function of the Customs House and the importance of the building and Miss Talbot to the nation of Wales. The importance of Miss Talbot as a historical figure is not in question but her role in the foundation of Port Talbot and the PTRDC is not recognised by any features within the building itself – there is no dedication stone or commemorative plaque for example. The datestone and other panel relate merely to the function and age of the building and do not directly relate or connect with the wider story of Miss Talbot and Port Talbot.

Without this, and since it is not possible to identify this building as one of the best examples of its type, it has to be concluded that this building does not meet the criteria for either architectural interest or historic association.

It is also suggested that these buildings are important for their role in the socio-economic history of Wales and for their group value. They do form a group, not necessarily cohesive but the styles of architecture used and the relative ambition inherent in the two buildings does suggest something of the social and economic growth of the town and south Wales in the later c19.

Again however listing would depend on some quality or interest in the fabric of the buildings themselves and by virtue of their size, style and composition they would need sufficient merit in their own right for listing and not be dependent on just group value alone. They also lack what could be classified as a strong combined group value - part of a planned street layout, an integral part of a wider landscape (dock, port complex etc.). Their function tells us something about the socio-economic history of the town but this is not exceptional in terms of national history and altogether it must be decided that these buildings do not meet either of these criteria.

Cadw  
29 March 2011