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HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR:
COMMUNITY HUB (FORMER SCHOOL)
HIGH STREET
PONTARDAWE
NEATH PORT TALBOT
SA8 4JN

July 2026



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1. Introduction & Background

1.1 Introduction

This Heritage Impact Assessment is written by Nathan Goss, Director of Nathan Goss Conservation on behalf of Evans Bank Planning LTD. It was commissioned on 26th May 2026 to inform proposals for the alterations to the former school building.

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1.2 Location

The Community Hub (former school building) is situated on High Street, and it occupies a predominant corner position with a medium sized frontage within this historic area of Pontardawe in Swansea. The Community Hub faces Brynawel Road which leads onto High Street.

1.3 Purpose of the Heritage Assessment

The purpose of this Heritage Assessment is to fully understand the heritage asset and its vulnerabilities and then assess the likely impact on the heritage of the proposed alteration to the Former School Building.

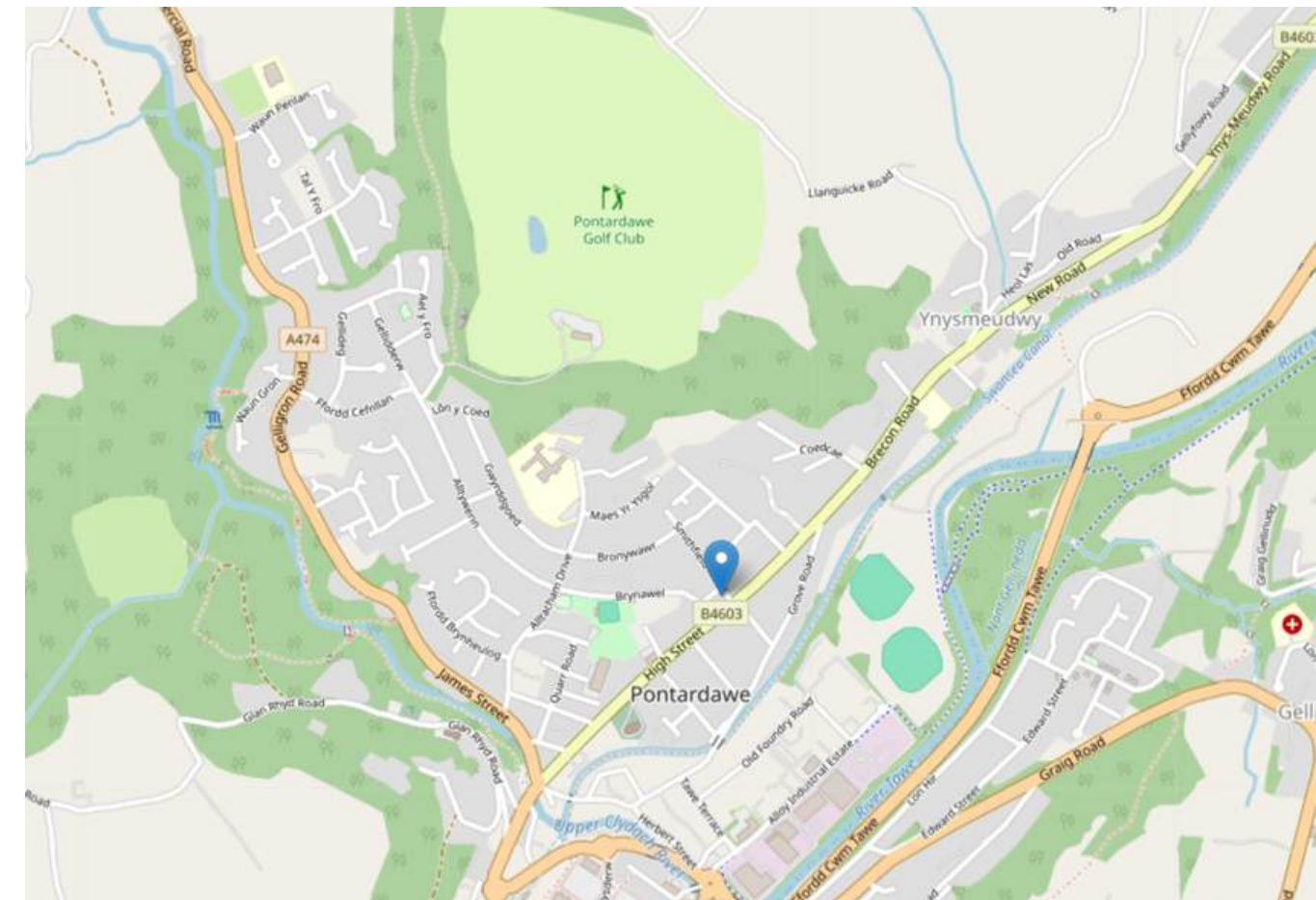


Figure 1 - Aerial view marking location of Community Hub (former school)
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The process for writing a heritage report is in line with the philosophy first set out in the Burra Charter in 1979 and last updated in 2013 (The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance 2013.) It sets out a methodology that is adopted by ICOMOS and used throughout the world. The objective is to identify the place and its associations, then assess its significance, identify obligations arising from

this significance, gather information about other factors affecting the future of the place and develop a policy for its future. The assessment also follows the approach set out in Cadw's Conservation Principles document (Conservation Principles for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Wales, March 2011) as well as that set out in the more recent Annex 1 of the Consultation on best-practice guidance documents associated with the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Annex 1 is entitled Heritage Impact Assessment in Wales and sets out the general principles to consider when planning changes to historic assets.

This report is based primarily upon a detailed site survey on the 10th June 2026 and subsequent desk-based research.

1.4 Designations

The Former School building was designated a Grade II listed building on the 13th March 2003. The property lies within the Pontardawe community which has approximately twenty listed buildings, nineteen of which are Grade II and one Grade II*.

Statutory protection, under the terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that works that affect the special character or appearance of a listed building require listed building consent.

2. Understanding the Community Hub (Former School)

2.1 Origins and uses of the Community Hub (Former School) (as per Cadw listing 80988)

The Former National School (historically known as St Peter's Schoolhouse) on Brecon Road had a deeply intertwined history of elementary education and religious worship, evolving alongside the growth of the Swansea Valley.

The Origins (1856) Industrial Population Boom: The school was conceived in the mid-1850s to provide basic elementary education to the children of the poor and the rapidly expanding working-class population. This boom was driven by Pontardawe's local tinplate works, coal mines, and the nearby Ynysderw Ironworks.

Community and Industrial Funding: The land was gifted by Harriet Williams of Brecon. The grand Gothic building cost exactly £1,276, 18s, 8d. It was funded through a combination of financial contributions from local working class families and a committee of regional industrial pioneers, including William Parsons.

The National Society System: The school was founded under the umbrella of the National Society for Promoting Religious Education. Its core foundational mandate was to teach the principles and faith of the Church of England alongside basic literacy and numeracy.

- **1856–1885: Elementary Day School:** The building's primary function was an elementary schoolhouse. In 1863, it was formally restructured into a "mixed" school, separating older children from infants. It taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and religious scripture.
- **1858–1860s: Local Church & Worship Space:** Because the parish church (St Peter's Church) was not completed until 1862, the school's right-wing classroom was officially licensed for church services in 1858. It functioned as the primary place of Anglican worship for the town during this time.
- **1885–Mid-20th Century: Sunday School & Church Hall:** Once secular elementary education shifted to newer council facilities, the day school closed in 1885. The parish church took full control of the property, utilising it as a Sunday school and church hall.
- **1952: Modern Restoration:** A commemorative stone plaque on the building notes a massive community renovation project in 1952 to keep the facility viable for local parish and community assemblies.
- **Present Day: Architectural Preservation:** Today, the building no longer operates as an active educational facility. It is preserved as a Grade II listed building, safeguarded primarily because it features the largest surviving collection of historic yellow terracotta window dressings made by the famous local Ynysmeudwy Pottery.

Exterior

Former National Schools, now church halls, coursed rock-faced sandstone with yellow terracotta dressings and slate roofs. Teacher's house to left with gable projecting to front, two parallel schoolrooms to centre, and large gabled porch and third schoolroom projecting to right, the Bath stone traceried window indicating that third schoolroom was used as a church. Centre range has roof carried down low over mullioned windows, two 3-light, one 5-light with projecting base of truncated chimney between first two. Windows have triangular heads to lights. Schoolroom wing to right has steeped coped gable with cross finial, the left slope interrupted for base of a missing bellcote and then descending at steeper pitch below. Ashlar pointed traceried 3-light window with quatrefoils in head. Terracotta quoins to right, walling continuous to left with large gabled parallel roofed porch with coped gables and cross finials both ends, cambered-headed door with rusticated terracotta flush surround, diagonal low buttress at corner. SW side wall has small window.

Classroom SW wall has three 3-light windows, NE wall has 2 similar, each flanked by buttresses with terracotta offsets. NW end of front classroom has coped gabled porch with cambered-headed doorway. Parallel classroom to right extends further with bargeboards to NW gable, brick-framed pointed window and NE lean-to NW end small chimney. Rear SE 3-light, 5-light and 3-light windows.

Teacher's house has right side-wall chimney, front gable with quoins coping and cross finial, and 2-light terracotta mullioned window each floor, shouldered heads to each light, the windows recessed under blank arch with quatrefoil and stone voussoirs. SW side has two similar windows flanking door in gabled timber porch. No coping on SE end gable which has similar window each floor and quoins.

Interior

Not mentioned.

Reasons for Listing

Included as large Gothic school group of the mid C19, unusual for the locally made terracotta details.



Figure 2 - Extract from the Swansea NLS 1888/1913 map showing the footprint of the former school © Ilgc.org.uk

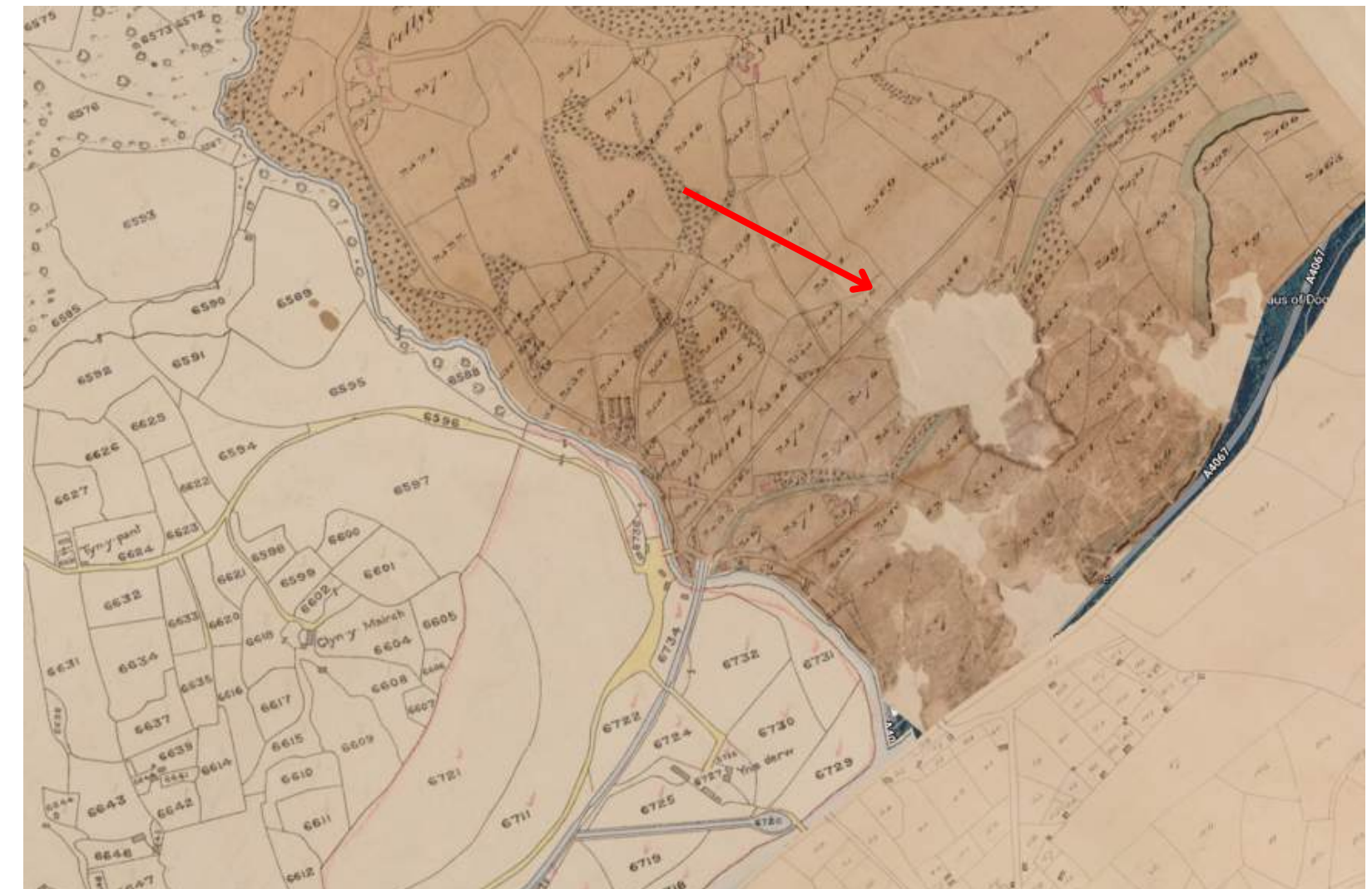


Figure 3 - No sign of the school on the 1842 Tithe map of the parish of Llanguicke in the County of Glamorgan © Ilgc.org.uk

2.2 Exterior of the Community Hub (Former school)



Figure 4 - North West Elevation



Figure 5 - North east elevation and north west gable



Figure 6 - South west elevation and gable



Figure 7 - South east elevation

2.3 Interior of the Community Hub (Former School)



Figure 8 - Main Hall



Figure 9 - Main Hall



Figure 10 - Rear Room



Figure 11 - Doorway to porchway



Figure 12 - Workshop roof

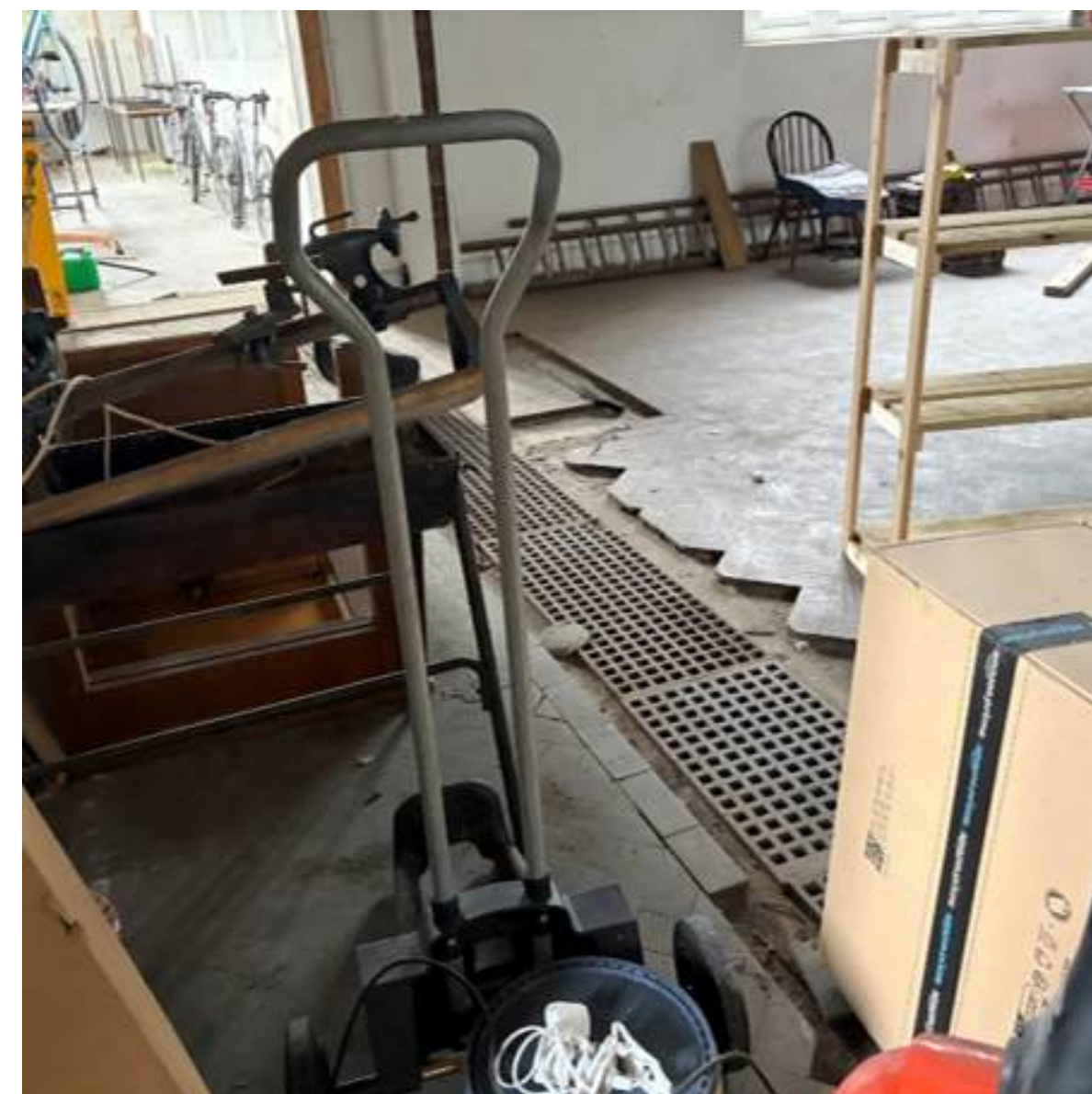


Figure 13 - Main Hall floor

3.0 Understanding the setting of the Community Hub (Former school)

The Community Hub occupies a prominent position on High Street, one of the principal historic routes through Pontardawe. Its immediate setting is defined by a traditional linear street pattern, established plot boundaries, and a mix of 19th-century residential, commercial, and civic buildings that collectively form the historic core of the town. The building's frontage, scale, and architectural detailing remain consistent with this context, allowing it to be understood as a former educational building of local importance.

The surrounding townscape retains a coherent historic character despite later infill and modern interventions. Buildings along High Street generally share traditional materials, modest scale, and simple vernacular forms, which provide an appropriate backdrop for the Community Hub. The listed building continues to read as part of this established historic frontage, and its architectural qualities—particularly its stone construction, roof form, and fenestration—contribute positively to the visual continuity of the street.

The building's historic and functional associations are also reflected in its setting. Its position on High Street illustrates its former role as a school serving the local community, with its accessible and visible location reinforcing its civic and communal significance. These associative values remain appreciable within the current urban context.

Key views that contribute to the understanding of the building include direct approaches along High Street, where the principal elevation and roofscape are clearly visible, as well as oblique views that reveal its form, materials, and architectural detailing. These views help sustain the building's legibility and its contribution to the character and appearance of the wider townscape.

Overall, the setting of the community Hub makes a meaningful contribution to its special architectural and historic interest. The relationship between the building and High Street, the coherence of the surrounding historic townscape, and the continued visibility of the building within key public views all reinforce its significance. Any proposed works should therefore ensure that this relationship is preserved and that the building's contribution to the character of High Street is sustained.

4.0 Condition of the Community Hub (Former school)

The Community Hub is in fair but ageing condition, with its main historic structure still sound but much of its character diluted by later alterations and long periods of limited use. The external stonework and distinctive traceried window remain intact, but modern interventions such as softwood joinery, cementitious repairs and internal linings have obscured original finishes and reduced breathability. Internally, the space shows

general wear, outdated materials and functional obsolescence, with modern partitions interrupting the original volume of the schoolroom. Although there is no evidence of structural failure, the rooms clearly requires sensitive repair and conservation-led refurbishment to address accumulated minor defects and bring the space back into meaningful use.

External

- **Masonry:** Generally sound but weathered, with open joints, surface erosion and isolated cement repairs needing replacement with lime.
- **Roof:** Stable structure, but slate coverings and rainwater goods show age-related wear and require routine maintenance.
- **Joinery:** Mixed condition; later softwood windows/doors are weathered and unsympathetic, while the historic traceried window is intact but needs gentle conservation repair.

Internal

- **Floors:** Generally sound but largely modern, with concrete floors and later finishes that obscure original surfaces; some areas show wear and would benefit from renewal with breathable materials. One section of nice parquet flooring, needs repair
- **Walls:** Mix of original masonry and later linings; plasterboard and cementitious finishes have reduced breathability and show signs of age, minor cracking and general wear.
- **Ceilings:** Functional but plain; some areas are missing, failed or have defects and outdated materials, with no evidence of structural concern but clear scope for conservation-led improvement.



Figure 14 – Failed stonework



Figure 15 - Foliage growth



Figure 16 - Foliage growth and stone defects



Figure 17 - Cementitious pointing



Figure 18 - Missing lime pointing



Figure 19 - Rear Store



Figure 20 - Foliage growth, missing pointing



Figure 21 - Defective ceiling



Figure 22 - Missing ceiling



Figure 23 - Defective windows



Figure 24 - Water ingress



Figure 25 - Modern materials



Figure 26 - Missing parquet floor

5.0 Understanding Significance & Heritage Impact

5.1 Assessment Statement of Significance

The former school house holds significance as a mid-19th-century educational building that contributes meaningfully to the architectural, historic and communal character of Pontardawe. Its traditional stone construction, vernacular detailing and modest institutional form reflect the town's civic and educational development during this period, while its simple yet robust composition and characteristic roof form express the architectural language of local schooling in the Victorian era. Surviving elements of its original plan and fabric that include the masonry, roof structure and distinctive traceried windows provide evidential value, illustrating period construction methods and the functional design of small community schools. Despite later alterations, the building's historic character remains legible, allowing it to continue conveying its original purpose and longstanding role within the social life of the town.

The former school has evidential, aesthetic, communal and historical value.

With all this in mind it is best to assess the former school as an aesthetically pleasing example of 19thC architecture, with some retained features.

5.2 The proposed development to the community hub

Exterior

- Removal of derelict concrete shed
- Repointing areas of external masonry using traditional lime mortar
- Repair to stonework around doorway
- Installation of one bat box and one bird box
- Removal of foliage

Interior

- Demolition of a small part of wall in workshop area to facilitate disabled W/C
- New Kitchen and ventilation (ventilation through existing chimney)
- Demolition of internal wall (Workshop)
- Repair to parquet floor
- Repair plaster on walls
- Repair ceilings

Fabric retention

- Retention of all significant historic fabric, including original joinery, ceilings, walls, and roof structure.
- No changes to principal elevations.
- No changes to roof form.

5.4 Assessment of Heritage Values

Changes within the historic environment are inevitable and conservation is often more about the careful management of that change rather than the prevention of it. New work must respect the setting and significance of the historic assets affected and this report explains both the significance of the house and its heritage values and how this need not be adversely affected through its restoration.

Cadw, following the lead set by Historic England, published Conservation Principles 2 setting out how historic assets should be managed to sustain their values.

The preceding part of this Heritage Impact Appraisal has described the heritage asset and explained its significance. The next stage is to test this understanding against the conservation principles adopted by Cadw on behalf of Welsh Government.

These principles start from the point of view that changes within the historic environment are inevitable, and that conservation is often more about the careful management of that change rather than the prevention of it. The guidance set out by Cadw requires that:

“New work must respect the setting and significance of the historic assets affected. The quality of design and execution must add value to that site and its setting, both now and in the future.”

It sets out criteria for how significance can be evaluated, considering Evidential, Historical, Aesthetic and Communal values and says that:

“The significance of an historic asset embraces all of the cultural heritage values that people associate with it”.

5.3.1 Evidential Value

This derives from those elements of a historic asset that can provide evidence about past human activity.

Evidential value is retained in the surviving historic fabric, including masonry, joinery, and internal spatial arrangements that provide insight into the building's original use and construction methods. Although later alterations have occurred, the building's core form and character remain appreciable.

The evidence shown within this document proves that this building has medium heritage value.

5.3.2 Historical Value

This derives from how the historic asset might illustrate a particular aspect of past life or be associated with a notable family, person, event or movement. This can be less tangible than the evidential value but are nonetheless important.

The historic interest of the building lies in its association with the expansion of local education provision in Pontardawe, representing a period when small, community-based schools played a central role in social and civic life. Its position on High Street reinforces this historic function, illustrating the importance of accessibility and visibility in the siting of educational buildings of the era.

The former school has medium historical value.

The real value of the former school is derived from the contribution it makes to the history of and the development of Pontardawe and its suburbs.

5.3.3 Aesthetic Value

This derives from the way in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from an historic asset.

The former school has clear aesthetic value derived from its traditional stone construction, simple vernacular form, and well-proportioned elevation facing High Street. Its use of local materials and understated detailing contributes to the visual coherence of the historic streetscape.

5.3.4 Communal Value

This derives from the meanings that an historic asset has for people who relate to it or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

Communal significance derives from the building's longstanding presence within the town and its role in the collective memory of the local community. As a former place of learning, it contributes to the social history of Pontardawe and continues to hold resonance for residents familiar with its past function.

It has medium communal value.

5.4 Assessment of Heritage Impact

The proposed works to the former school house will have a predominantly positive heritage impact, addressing long-standing condition issues while reinstating aspects of its historic character. The building's significance lies in its mid-19th-century educational origins, traditional stone construction, vernacular detailing and surviving architectural features. The proposals

focus on conservation-led repair, removal of unsympathetic modern materials and the sensitive reconfiguration of internal spaces to support a viable community use. These interventions will enhance the legibility of the original schoolroom, improve the building's breathability and ensure its long-term sustainability.

Where change is proposed, it is confined to areas of lower significance, such as later partitions, modern finishes and non-historic joinery. No original structural walls, historic ceilings or key architectural features are lost.

External repairs including lime repointing, masonry consolidation and conservation of the traceried window will strengthen the building's fabric and preserve its architectural interest. The repair/replacement of modern softwood windows and doors with more appropriate joinery will further enhance its appearance and reinforce its historic character.

Overall, the proposals result in no harm to the building's special interest and deliver clear heritage benefits, securing the future of the former school house through sensitive repair, improved environmental performance and a sustainable new use that supports its continued contribution to the historic character of Pontardawe. This work will help sustain the property and preserve its use for future generations.

All new works are reversible where possible and have been designed to be clearly legible as contemporary interventions.

Overall, the proposals represent a sensitive, conservation-led approach that preserves the building's character, enhances aspects of its significance, and fully complies with the statutory duty under the 1990 Act and relevant national and local heritage policy.

6. Planning Policy and Guidance

6.1 Key legislation to Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2023

The statutory protection, under the terms of the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2023 and its supporting regulations -this means that any works that may affect the character of the listed building, or any of its ancillary buildings, as one of special architectural or historic interest need listed building consent. There is a presumption in the Act that Welsh Ministers will 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”.

Listed building consent is obtained from the local planning authority, and in this case has been applied for from Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

6.2 Local Planning Policy

In terms of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the adopted development plan for the area within which the application site is positioned is the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan (LDP).

“Safeguarding features of historic and cultural importance. This includes protection mechanisms for listed buildings, conservation areas, and scheduled ancient monuments.”

“Heritage assets play a pivotal role in increasing the regional appeal of the County Borough as a place to live, work, visit, and invest”.

6.3 National Planning Guidance

National Policy on the historic environment and the development in the setting of listed buildings is set out in Welsh Government’s Planning Policy Wales (Edition 8, January 2016) and in particular in Chapter 6, Conserving the Historic Environment.

It states at 6.2.1 that one of its objectives is to “safeguard the character of historic buildings and manage change so that their special architectural and historic interest is preserved” and another is to “preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas, while at the same time helping them remain vibrant and prosperous”.

6.4 Cadw guidance on Assessing Heritage Impact

In 2016 Cadw published draft guidance on Heritage Impact Assessment in Wales explaining how vital it is to understand the implications of any proposed change before development is consented. It describes heritage impact assessment as a “structured process” to be summarised in the Heritage Impact Report.

Accordingly, sections 2 and 3 of this report have set out the understanding of the former school’s character and significance and that of its surrounding heritage and section 5 sets out the assessment of the heritage impact.

6.5 TAN 24

These objectives are emphasised within Technical Advice Note 24 'The Historic Environment' (2017) which defines a historic asset as 'an identifiable component of the historic environment. It may consist or be a combination of an archaeological site, a historic building or area, historic park and garden or a parcel of historic landscape.' (TAN24 Para 1.7).

7.0 Access

Heritage impact assessments are required to consider, as part of the evaluation of potential mitigation, what increased access to the heritage can be offered.

Separate document attached - Planning Statement for the former school – Evans Banks Planning Ltd.

8.0 Summary

The former school is a grade II listed building it is included within Cadw's listing as being built in the mid-19th-century with Gothic-influenced architecture and a strong association with the development of education and parish life in Pontardawe.

The property as we know was built as a school and with this in mind consideration has been given to the sensitivity of the listed building and with specialist knowledge incorporated into the design of the project in order to sustain the special interest and significance of the listed building.

The former school retains a meaningful level of historic and architectural interest, but its significance is moderated by later alterations, partial loss of original features, and the modest, vernacular nature of the building. While it is a good example of a mid-19th-century National School, it is not an exceptional or rare example at a national level. Its value therefore sits comfortably in the medium range.

The proposals offer an opportunity to improve the environmental and sustainable nature of this heritage asset through the minor works illustrated within this document. The proposal offers site specific design which is informed by an understanding of the heritage asset.

The proposed works to the former school involve only a very small loss of historic fabric, limited to the removal of a short section of internal partitioning to enable the conversion of the w/c into an accessible bathroom. These elements are not original and do not contribute to the building's special architectural or historic interest. All primary historic fabric including external stone walls, terracotta dressings, roof structure, original joinery and the legible historic plan form remain intact. As such, the loss of fabric is minimal, affects only low-significance material, and does not harm the building's overall heritage value.

In summary the report has assessed the capacity for change and tested that against the proposed development and demonstrated how the heritage asset will be sufficiently protected.

9.0 Cadw Listing



Full Report for Listed Buildings



The list description is not intended to be a complete inventory of what is listed: it is principally intended to aid identification. By law, the definition of a listed building includes the entire building (i) and any structure or object that is fixed to the said building and ancillary to it and (ii) any other structure or object that forms part of the land and has done so since before 1 July 1948, and was within the curtilage of the building, and ancillary to it, on the date on which said building was first included in the list, or on 1 January 1969, whichever was later.

Summary Description

Reference Number	Building Number	Grade	Status	Date of Designation	Date of Amendment
80988		II	Designated	13/03/2003	
Name of Property		Address			
Former National Schools					

Location

Unitary Authority	Community	Town	Locality	Easting	Northing
Neath Port Talbot	Pontardawe	Swansea	Pontardawe	272454	204402

Street Side	Location
	On the NW side of Brecon Road some 300m NE of the Church of Saint Peter.

Description

Broad Class	Period

History

Extensive Gothic school group built of 1856 built as church schools for the rising industrial population principally financed by contributions of workpeople and a group of industrialists and landowners including William Parsons, W. Williams of Ynysmeudwy, J. Morgan of Gelligron, E. Jones of Garth and G. Lewis of Alltacham. The land was given by Harriet Williams of Brecon, the building cost £1,276/18/8d. The school was licensed for services in 1858. Unusual for the date is the use of terracotta for all the window dressings and quoins, the terracotta being made at Ynysmeudwy and being the largest surviving example of the product of that works. Closed 1885, used as Sunday schools, renovated, according to a plaque, in 1952. All chimneys removed.

Exterior

Former National Schools, now church halls, coursed rock-faced sandstone with yellow terracotta dressings and slate roofs. Teacher's house to left with gable projecting to front, two parallel schoolrooms to centre, and large gabled porch and third schoolroom projecting to right, the Bath stone traceried window indicating that third schoolroom was used as a church. Centre range has roof carried down low over mullioned windows, two 3-light, one 5-light with projecting base of truncated chimney between first two. Windows have triangular heads to lights. Schoolroom wing to right has steeped coped gable with cross finial, the left slope interrupted for base of a missing bellcote and then descending at steeper pitch below. Ashlar pointed traceried 3-light window with quatrefoils in head. Terracotta quoins to right, walling continuous to left with large gabled parallel roofed porch with coped gables and cross finials both ends, cambered-headed door with rusticated terracotta flush surround, diagonal low buttress at corner. SW side wall has small window. Classroom SW wall has three 3-light windows, NE wall has 2 similar, each flanked by buttresses with terracotta offsets. NW end of front classroom has coped gabled porch with cambered-headed doorway. Parallel classroom to right extends further with bargeboards to NW gable, brick-framed pointed window and NE lean-to NW end small chimney. Rear SE 3-light, 5-light and 3-light windows. Teacher's house has right side-wall chimney, front gable with quoins coping and cross finial, and 2-light terracotta mullioned window each floor, shouldered heads to each light, the windows recessed under blank arch with quatrefoil and stone voussoirs. SW side has two similar windows flanking door in gabled timber porch. No coping on SE end gable which has similar window each floor and quoins.

Interior

Reason for designation

Included as large Gothic school group of the mid C19, unusual for the locally-made terracotta details.



10.0 Existing and Proposed Plans

Attached separately

11.0 Appendix to HIA

Proposed Work	Your objective	Significance of affected fabric	Assessing beneficial impact	Assessing harmful impact	Proposed Solution
Removal of derelict store shed	To improve the aesthetics of the building	No significance	Improves the aesthetic impact of the building.	Damage to historic fabric on removal	Only use hand tools for demolition
Removal of foliage	To stop ivy, foliage growth damaging the building	The walls have significance	Stops water ingress and damage to historic fabric	Loss of historic fabric (minimum)	Carefully remove foliage by hand, dig out roots and treat. Cut ivy at base and allow to recede naturally, when dead remove by hand.
Removing defective lime pointing, re-pointing in lime	To provide a weather resistant wall	Lime pointing has significance but is beyond saving	Re pointing will ensure water penetration/ingress is eradicated.	Loss of historic fabric	Match the colour and consistency of the lime pointing – Send a sample to Ty Mawr for analysis – Method statement for removal and re-applying
New accessible bathroom	To provide accessible toilet facilities and meet inclusive design standards.	The walls have significance	Improves accessibility and supports inclusive use.	Loss of historic fabric (minimum)	Design the work to minimise damage to historic fabric



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Photographs illustrate a variety of projects I have recently worked on