The Chepstow Society

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Mr Paul Matthews
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County Hall,
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From John W Burrows
Chairman, The Chepstow Society
cc.
Cadw – Director – Gwilym Hughes
MHA – CEO – Gwyndaf Tobias
CTC – Mayor, Town Clerk;
MCC & CTC Ward Member
Residents Group St Ann Street

8 March 2026

Dear Paul Matthews,

13 St Ann Street, Chepstow – Concern about a proposal to demolish the most prominent Georgian building (the former Sailors Tavern) in a Georgian Conservation Area, and the handling of this issue by MCC including the 'de-listing' of this historic building by MCC in 2024 on the basis of inaccurate information and without appropriate public consultation.

There is much alarm locally about the potential loss of a 250 year-old prominent building on Chepstow's riverside and the manner in which Monmouthshire County Council has handled the matter, which is why we are writing to you.

You will have received a detailed letter from residents about the process surrounding this proposal for the demolition of 13 St Ann Street, Chepstow. The Chepstow Society which was founded 78 years ago in 1948 with objects which include protecting the historical heritage of Chepstow, is similarly concerned about this planning application and about how **MCC** and **Cadw** came to 'de-list' the building without consulting locally, and without consulting the Chepstow Society. We are here to help, and MCC, Cadw, and MHA officials could, and should, have consulted us on this matter to get accurate information on the building.

1. **The historic building - 13 St Ann Street, Chepstow should not be demolished**

1.1 I enclose photographs and information which show the importance of this historic building to Chepstow and its prominence in Chepstow's Conservation Area and riverside, and in the Town's history as the former Sailors Tavern and for its former industrial use.

1.2 Please look at the pictures at the end of this letter and the history **(Appendices 1-7)** which show ships being built directly in front of 13 St Ann Street in the C19th. The building has links with Nelson, and has considerable connections with Chepstow's maritime heritage.

1.3 The applicant for demolition, Monmouthshire Housing Association, (**MHA**) tried to persuade residents, MCC planners, and the 'de-listing' process, that the building wasn't the original Georgian building and so demolition was alright. They were wrong. However, MCC officers and Cadw officials still pursued the applicant's request for 'delisting' even though the basis of the original listing had not been compromised. It is a very disturbing situation.

1.4 The frontage of 13 St Ann Street is substantially the same frontage as was listed in 1975 and as built in 1777, and is a major part of the Town's heritage. Over 60 objections to the Planning Application for Demolition have been logged with MCC by the closing date of 27 January 2026, including an objection by the Chepstow Society. We hope that the objections will result in a rejection of the application to demolish this historic building.

2. De-listing 13 St Ann Street, Chepstow was wrong and should be reversed

2.1 The **'de-listing'** decision taken by the Council in 2024 is fundamental to this current demolition application. The application makes much of the 'de-listing' of the former Listed Building as if the building no longer had historic significance and was suitable for demolition. The 'de-listing' must be considered alongside this application to demolish because the 'de-listing' is being used as grounds for demolishing this prominent historic building.

2.2 The **de-listing** was clearly an attempt to 'get round' Listed Building and Conservation Area legislation which **MCC** and **Cadw** have a duty to uphold, and do uphold against other applicants for even small changes to Listed Buildings here and across the County. MCC officers and Cadw were complicit in this de-listing action and were wrong. The building was listed primarily **for its Georgian façade, which still exists, and not for its interior** and yet the poor condition of the interior was used by MCC and Cadw officers for justifying de-listing the whole building and thereby inviting demolition of the previously listed historic frontage.

2.3 '**Delisting'** is a very unusual process and is not necessary for anything other than a potential demolition because major alterations can be made to Listed Buildings provided that the Listed characteristics are not destroyed. **In the case of 13 St Ann Street, the original façade and its contribution to the street scene and grouping of Georgian buildings and to the history of the town was a key part of the original listing**! All the adjacent Listed buildings in St Ann Street (6-12 and 14-15) share the same reason for Listing, namely '*Group value with adjacent Listed Buildings*'. This was the reason for the Listing of 13 St Ann Street.

2.4 **The frontage of 13 St Ann's street is distinctive**. The streetscape and appearance of this collection of Georgian type buildings was regarded as sufficiently important to warrant Listing. The unusual and distinctive fenestration of the frontage - that is, the three windows on the top floor above the four windows on the middle floor - make the building both readily identifiable in earlier pictures, and contribute significantly to the streetscape. It is not clear why MCC's Listed Buildings Officer was not able to distinguish between the historical frontage of the building and what the owners had carried out internally – presumably with Listed building consent at the time or ignored by Council officers who should have been enforcing compliance. The distinctive façade is clearly identifiable. It has not changed substantially in 250 years and was protected by the 1975 Listing until **MHA** persuaded **MCC** officers and **Cadw** officials to '**de-list'** it in order to open the way for its demolition.

2.5 **The façade of 13 St Ann Street and its contribution to the group value of the Listed Buildings, and to the Conservation Area, is still the case today** and there was no reason for the Council to 'de-list' the building especially knowing that it would encourage an application to demolish the whole building which would involve demolishing the façade of this prominent Georgian building. *Was 'de-listing' ever put to Committee or to any form of public or Member consultation?*

2.6 MCC was wrong to be party to a 'de-listing'. It weakens an authority's ability to fairly determine a planning application and appears to put the planning authority in concert with the applicant to an outcome which hasn't yet been put to Member or public consultation. It is very unusual for a local planning authority to support a 'de-listing', and somewhat suspicious as the Council is giving away powers which they hold on behalf of the community to protect the integrity of the heritage area. The Chepstow Society would be very worried indeed if the County Council, as guardians of Listing and Conservation powers, were to be giving them away to developers, as happened in this delisting – which should be reversed. Not only is **MHA'**s latest demolition proposal outrageous, **were it to be agreed by the Council**, but the **process** used by **MCC** and **Cadw** involving a 'secretive' **de-listing'** of a Listed Building flies in the face of Conservation Area practice and Listed Building legislation intent, and proper consultation practice, and proper administration of the planning process.

3. De-listing 13 St Ann Street, Chepstow was wrong on facts

3.1 **MCC, surprisingly, agreed to 'de-list' 13 St Ann Street, Chepstow even though it is the largest and most prominent Georgian building in this street in this Georgian Conservation area - and which is directly opposite the former port area and shipbuilding area related to the Conservation Area and town's history, and opposite the Bandstand and riverside park.** MCC agreed to 'de-list' on grounds that were inappropriate, unresearched, inaccurate, misleading, and, furthermore, allowed previous negligence by an owner of a Listed Building to be grounds for 'de-listing' which would encourage any owner of an unwanted Listed Building in the County to let their property fall in to decay in the hope of a future 'de-listing'.

3.2 **Cadw** and **MHA** have not acted properly on this matter either, but principal responsibility for it lies with MCC as the Local Planning Authority who failed to conduct due diligence on this building and its history but relied upon inaccurate information from **MHA,** and their consultants, seeking demolition! **Cadw** also failed to do their due diligence on this matter and appeared not to know or care about the frontage of 13 St Ann Street and didn't visit the site or seek further information about the building before agreeing a 'de-listing'.

3.3 MCC officers seemed to have believed the applicants (**MHA**) without checking on the information that was important to this case. Nor do they seem to have had regard to the Council's own current Conservation Area guidance set out in the MCC 2016 Conservation Area Appraisal. Character Area 2 states that the 2, 2.5, and 3 storey buildings in St Ann Street **……'form a cohesive group with a strong building line on the south side of the street. The varied architectural styles of the buildings and harmonious palette of materials contribute to their significance and define them as buildings making a positive contribution towards the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.'**

3.4 Indeed, the proposed demolition and rebuild would not only destroy the original frontage of the largest Georgian building in this street but would impact negatively on the group value of the adjacent Listed Buildings and devalue the status of the Conservation area.

4. *'De-listing'* involved no public consultation

4.1 The damage of the de-listing process, and its inaccuracy in information on the building and its local significance, was exacerbated by **MCC, Cadw,** and **MHA** all failing to consult openly and properly on the matter locally when accurate information on this proposal would have come to light and the public would have had the opportunity to have their say.

4.2 The Chepstow Society has existed for 78 years and its objectives include the preservation of the historic heritage of Chepstow and yet we were **not informed nor consulted** by MCC or Cadw about this remarkably unusual process to 'de-list' the most prominent Georgian building in the Conservation Area. **Had there been proper public consultation and scrutiny of the de-listing proposal locally, and had the Chepstow Society been consulted, we would have provided accurate information on the building and its importance to the Conservation Area and to Chepstow and we would have advised MCC and Cadw against 'de-listing,' and would have provided the information needed to retain its Listed Status.**

5. Council investigation and reflection

5.1 The whole matter, and process that was followed by MCC officers and Cadw, and the absence of appropriate public consultation, and its wider implications for conservation in Chepstow and the County, needs looking into by the Council. *What advice was given by Council officers in the pre-application process? What encouragement was given by Council officers to the approach taken by MHA? Who led MHA to believe that they could demolish such an historic building, and that the Council would give consent to the demolition of one of the most important and prominent Georgian buildings in the Conservation Area?*
The 'de-listing' should not have happened. The grounds for delisting were wrong, and there was no adequate or appropriate consultation on such a major issue. Furthermore, as noted earlier, allowing previous negligence by an owner of a Listed Building to be grounds for 'de-listing' cannot be right as it would encourage any owner of an unwanted or difficult Listed Building in the County to let their property fall in to decay in the hope of securing a future 'delisting' and demolition. It sets an awful precedent, and undermines the Council's position in enforcing Conservation and Listing legislation. Furthermore, the Council was a former owner which makes this semi-secret 'de-listing' action all the more inappropriate.

6. Importance of social housing

6.1 The Council may have been motivated by a policy desire to see more social housing which is commendable, and we would support that, but it has to be within the law and within the protection those laws provide for vulnerable and important historic buildings and Conservation Areas – laws which the Council and Cadw is charged with enforcing.
Multi service Local Authorities wear many hats but it is important to carry out each function properly and not to compromise the appropriate process for one function in order to favour another. If that were ever appropriate, the Council should put that issue to full consultation with the public. 'De-listing' in private is not acceptable. It undermines the whole process.

6.2 Monmouthshire Housing Association should work with the planning consent they already have for 6 social housing units behind the Georgian façade of 13 St Ann Street. That application was properly dealt with at the time and consulted on. There was local public consultation and residents accepted that approach which retains the front of one of the most historic buildings in Chepstow – whilst providing 6 social housing units.

Demolition of this prominent 1777 building and its historic frontage would be catastrophic for the Conservation Area and for Chepstow's heritage, and must not be allowed.

7. Way forward

In view of the unusual circumstances surrounding this application and delisting, and the age and importance to Chepstow of 13 St Ann Street, Chepstow, we hope that:

1. **Monmouthshire Housing Association would be persuaded to withdraw** the application to demolish 13 St Ann Street Chepstow in favour of coming forward with a better proposal for social housing units here, more in keeping with the historic setting of the Conservation Area and preserving the historic frontage; **or, that -**
2. **Council officers will recommend rejection of this application to demolish** 13 St Ann Street, Chepstow and that Council Members will agree to reject the current application to demolish 13 St Ann Street, Chepstow in favour of a better proposal for social housing units at this location, more in keeping with the historic setting of the Conservation Area and involving the preservation of the historic frontage of no.13;
3. **Council planning officers will discuss with MHA and their architects** (or new architects) a way forward to provide 6 social housing units (or an appropriate number for 13 St Ann Street, Chepstow) **and retain the original frontage**, in line with an earlier planning application which was consulted on, and approved by MCC;
4. **the historic and prominent Georgian frontage of 13 St Ann Street, Chepstow should be preserved and protected** as an important, and unique and integral part of the Conservation Area and Chepstow's maritime, industrial and social history, and **should be re-listed** - even though its preservation should still be ensured by officials having proper regard to the building's contribution to the whole Conservation Area setting;
5. **Council officers (Planning, Building Control, Lawyers) should ensure the preservation of the historic frontage of 13 St Ann Street** and ensure that no action, or inaction, by the owners contributes in any way to destabilising the frontage of 13 St Ann's Street or its support to the neighbouring properties, and this must be monitored from now on and throughout any refurbishment work on the building which is eventually permitted by the County Council;
6. **in future the Monmouthshire County Council and Cadw will not try to 'de-list' or undermine the current protection of any Listed Building or part of the Conservation Areas without <u>full public consultation</u>** in an open manner with the public, the Town Council and, we hope, with the Chepstow Society, and
7. **MCC/Cadw will not accept an owner's previous negligence** as a reason for de-listing;
8. **MCC, Cadw, and MHA will look into how this situation of de-listing 13 St Ann Street and the proposal for demolition was allowed to get as far as it did,** with inaccurate information about the building, and without appropriate public consultation with the residents and with appropriate interested organisations like the Chepstow Society.

Yours sincerely,

John W Burrows
Chairman of the Chepstow Society
(founded in 1948 to preserve features of historic interest and stimulate
public interest in, and care for, the beauty, history, and character of the area).

See Appendices 1-7 (photographs of 13 St Ann Street, its location and history) attached.