

Had the Council meeting tomorrow not been cancelled, I was going to ask the Chair if I might raise the question of the future of the Victoria Hall as an urgent matter. The circumstances surrounding the impending closure of the hall on 1 March do make this an urgent matter, and I am very pleased that Cllr Bellotti has agreed to visit Radstock to assess the situation for himself. I bought a house in Radstock in 2003 because when I got off the 'bus when house-hunting, it 'spoke' to me, and told me of a community where I would be at home. Two years later, I had an epiphany, 'If I can't save the world (as the Class of '68 thought they could), I'll save the Victoria Hall.' I joined the Victoria Hall working party which produced a report, a survey and a plan for the future, which, however, was conveniently shelved by Cllr Darricott and not progressed. Presented with it in 2007, Cllr Hanney said that the future of the Victoria Hall must be treated as part of the 'holistic re-development of the centre of Radstock' but at least under pressure from the late Cllr Hall and myself, he authorised £40,000 of essential repairs and another survey.

Although the Victoria Hall has limped along since 2000 in limbo between B&NES and NRTC, it has flourished as the heart of community life and is well used by community groups, the silver band, a Pentecostal church and businesses every night of the week and at weekends. It is the only large community space capable of holding big meetings and with a proper kitchen could host many more parties and celebrations than it does at present. To board it up now would mean the dispersal, or even the end of some of these groups because there are no alternatives nearby. It needs LTC, proper management and committed volunteers, but Radstock Museum, Meadow View Residents Action Group and Radstock in Bloom members are by no means the only people committed to its future. It may well prove that there is a reverter on the site, as with other central Radstock buildings, or a covenant mirroring the one laid on Lady Waldegrave's first community hall on the site, built in 1866, which will constrain future use, but what is needed now is action.

I request cabinet, on behalf of the people of Radstock, first, to make a commitment not to sell it for offices or some other private purpose. Secondly, to instruct officers to work with the community to ensure a viable future perhaps on the model of the Old Town Hall in MSN, perhaps co-run by the Museum but in all cases to ensure that the vibrancy of night life in Radstock remains, and it provides for recreation and education as originally intended.

Finally, please arrange for a temporary management committee to run the building after 29 February.

Dr Eleanor Jackson, B&NES Councillor for Radstock.