

May I welcome you(again) to Radstock. Radstock is looking particularly ravishing at present because yesterday we had a visit from the SW in Bloom judges who were, I believe, suitably impressed with our efforts.

Even in its present dilapidated state, they were impressed with the Victoria Hall and (what ticks boxes with them) the community campaign since 2005 to keep it open for community use. It is the 'jewel in the crown' of 'the best preserved former mining town in England'. It therefore falls under the purview of the NPPF policy 12.126 which stresses the importance of 'a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats.' (councils should)'recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance.'

This building was 'state of the art' when it replaced the earlier building funded by Frances Lady Waldegrave in 1866 as a working men's institute, to provide education and wholesome recreation for the miners and their families. I am not at all convinced that the officer's report acknowledges its importance in this respect even today, or the way it encapsulates the history of the 19th/20th century with Keir Hardie electioneering there, the Miners' Welfare providing relief in the 1920s and 1930s, training courses for mining engineering held there in the fifties and sixties, Billy Graham's campaign relayed there in 1967. Our understanding of community has changed over the years but this is an iconic building that can be at the heart of Radstock's future development. Church buildings often get marooned in the wrong places as the population shifts, but the Victoria Hall is ideally located for all the community and tourists.

When I was in the process of adopting a child, it struck me from the paperwork how difficult it would be. I know who I am and where my family comes from, and am proud to carry on the work of Cllr James Jackson, who served on Kenilworth Urban District Council and became its chair in 1922. But children up for adoption often have great gaps in what is known of their family. The Victoria Hall is essential for our identity as a community, and I beg you to re-open it as soon as possible.

Dr Eleanor Jackson, B&NES ward councillor, Radstock.