



FRIENDS OF VICTORIA HALL

B&NES Cabinet Meeting: 6.30 pm 11 July 2012. Radstock Methodist Church

Statement by Rupert Bevan to be read by Mr Oliver Bevan.

Subject: Radstock Victoria Hall

There are few people who are not aware of the pivotal role that Radstock played during the era of the Somerset Coalfield.

The town became the commercial focus for the many mines in the area and its two railway stations, marshalling yards and carriage works were kept busy for nearly one hundred and fifty years, providing distribution services for the coal industry. The town that grew up to service the industry was busy and prosperous and endowed with some fine buildings; not least of all being Victoria Hall.

This elegant edifice, along with a school and training college were the gift of Countess Waldegrave, whose family owned a considerable portion of the local mines. Victoria Hall played an important part in the life of the town from the 1840s, so much so that in 1897 it was largely rebuilt to accommodate increasing leisure demands of the townsfolk. Such was its importance that the social reformer Keir Hardie visited it at the turn of the 20th Century.

In more recent times Radstock has taken a severe beating with the closure of the mines and railways and now the very heart of the town is threatened by the possibility of an ill-conceived relief road that will destroy for ever the relative tranquillity of the town centre. Victoria Hall will become a casualty of this scheme, marooned in a sea of noisy motor cars and accessible only to those prepared to risk their lives crossing the street! The important point now emerging is that if Radstock is to survive as a prosperous town centre, the hall should continue to play a central role.

This year the Friends of Radstock Victoria Hall were founded to defend the building from any threat of sale or closure. Although recognising that much work will have to be done to save it for future generations, they believe that this would be well worth doing since the townsfolk will continue to require leisure facilities.

We believe that ultimately the hall will be self-financing but will need some capital injection, perhaps from B&NES, to enable that to happen. We believe further that an eclectic range of activities could be centred at the Hall and that a wide range of age groups could be accommodated.

In this Jubilee year we have a special reason for looking back with appreciation of the generosity and vision of Countess Waldegrave. This is our opportunity to continue her work by refurbishing Victoria Hall so that for the next hundred years Radstock people can enjoy its facilities.

Rupert Bevan, Chairman, Friends of Radstock Victoria Hall