

Statement to the Cabinet 5 September 2007 re the Victoria Hall.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Happy birthday! Almost exactly two years ago today the Report of the Victoria Hall Working Party was delivered to the previous B&NES administration with a request for a speedy decision to save the jewel in Radstock's crown of heritage buildings. This magnificent late Victorian building was opened in 1897 to celebrate Queen Victoria's jubilee as a result of an endowment of land and money made by Frances, Lady Waldegrave for the benefit of the people of Radstock. It was a state of the art building because then it was thought that nothing was too good for the working people of Radstock. Their descendents also deserve the best. Unlike your constituents in Bath, there are few other facilities for them locally for recreation. The building has been thoroughly surveyed and is still structurally sound. It deserves your help. It could so easily become the centre of community life again.

The Victoria Hall Working Party which was set up by Norton Radstock Town Council has included with the report a draft business plan. Amongst proposals for which I am campaigning are

- Proper disabled access and a lift
- Conversion of the old caretakers' house into offices for the Town Council
- Facilities for theatre and music groups
- Removal of the old partition walls to restore its splendour
- New multi-functional meeting rooms, with space for art exhibitions and craft workshops
- A tourist information office there

Full architectural drawings have been made and a planning application could be made tomorrow. Most of the Working Party, who include current town councillors and B&NES councillors as well as community representatives, are prepared to act as trustees if necessary. There are charitable bodies which could be approached if you will resolve the question of ownership between yourselves and the Town Council but the £ 300,000 needed is peanuts compared with your projects in Bath. So we held an open all party meeting on 8 February 2007 and called for action, and we are bitterly disappointed at the continued delays. To hold the NRR/Bellway development responsible for this situation is simply to prevaricate. Lord Waldegrave, collateral heir to Frances Lady Waldegrave, has a legal claim on the building and one can be sure that if the Council fails in its duty to maintain the building, he will assert that, just as he has done to gain possession of the former St Nicholas' Primary School.

2008 marks the centenary of it coming into public ownership. Please mark it with a full restoration and modernization programme.

Historical note

In 1866 Frances, Lady Waldegrave, was persuaded by the Revd Horatio Nelson Ward (Grandson of Admiral Nelson) to donate £300 to provide education and leisure facilities for the miners of Radstock. This was the origins of the Working Men's Club, now removed across the road, but in 1897 to celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee the present community building was opened to replace the original building. Radstock Industrial and Co-operative Society Board needed space for meetings, and 1,000 books in the community library were re-housed there. It quickly became the centre of social and political life in Radstock. Today people recall dancing the night away there, the bands, the concerts – and the magistrates court dealing out justice if they misbehaved! The glorious Victorian building is structurally sound but has suffered wear and tear and the consequences of neglect since 1974, when local government was re-organised.

Now it suffers a much greater threat because of the NRR/Bellway plan to direct the Frome Road traffic into Victoria Square and down the Street. That is, 560 vehicles per hour in peak periods, many of them eight axle juggernauts. A similar number currently go up the Frome Hill. The vibration will seriously damage its foundations and the traffic pollution will destroy the character of the square, while the magnificent architecture is concealed behind modern buildings. If the General Development Committee deemed the 1914 rear facade of the Holburne Museum to be worth saving, how much more should this beloved community building be saved, and protected from inappropriate encroachments?

Cllr Eleanor Jackson. 4 Meadow View, Radstock BA3 3QT