

Statement on behalf of Norton Radstock Town Council to the Bath and North East Somerset Council Cabinet meeting on the Future of the Victoria Hall

INTRODUCTION

The issue of the future of the Victoria Hall has been discussed many times by B&NES Council. The Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 22 September 2004 proposed the following:

1. That the Council's property and legal officers expedite the process of arranging a new lease for Norton Radstock Town Council at the Victoria Hall.
2. They requested that the Council Executive review the function of the Victoria Hall and consider making significant provision within the 2005 budget to bring the building up to the required standards in consultation with the Norton Radstock Town Council.

The relevant Executive member, Councillor Darracott, confirmed to Council on 18 November 2004 that: "The Executive Member acknowledges the O&S Panel views, and, in consequence, is in discussion about the situation with officers and Members in order to produce a list of options for consideration."

Despite this, no such lease was entered into with the Town Council and no financial provision has ever been made within the B&NES budget.

CURRENT ISSUES

The hall does not comply with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act. Adaptations necessary to comply with the Act will cost at least £110,000.

A number of major maintenance issues have been identified by our surveyors, costed at £151,000. Consideration of these issues has been deferred whilst the future of the Hall is under debate, but cannot be postponed indefinitely.

The development plan submitted to B&NES costed the proposals at some £300,000 (June 2005 prices), although the proposals were capable of being phased.

B&NES proposals would all see the Town Council pay full market value for the hall, whilst leaving us responsible for all repairs, maintenance and adaptation. Costs of between £0.5 and £1M (or one to two times our current precept) are simply unaffordable and the impact on Norton Radstock Council Tax payers would be significant and long lasting.

A WAY FORWARD

We believe that this report does not take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Quirk proposals; rather it seeks to maximise returns and minimise liabilities to B&NES Council. This runs the risk of leaving the Victoria Hall in its current underutilised and undeveloped state.

The Town Council, at its meeting on 5 November 2007, agreed the following recommendation in respect of the future of the Victoria Hall:

"That the Town Council asks Bath and North East Somerset Council to work jointly on a proposal to redevelop the Victoria Hall along the lines originally proposed by the Town Council's Victoria Hall Working Party.

This proposal to be in compliance with the principles of the Quirk Review, to maximise benefits to the community through redeveloping an underused community asset and to represent value for money for the Council Tax Payers of Norton Radstock."

We therefore call upon the Cabinet to work with the Town Council and other stakeholders to develop an alternative proposal to secure the long term future of the Victoria Hall.