

Meadow View Residents' Action Group

<i>Chair</i> Gary Dando	<i>Secretary</i> Eleanor Jackson	<i>Treasurer</i> Esther Parker
17, Meadow View	4 Meadow View	12 Meadow
Radstock	Radstock	View
Bath BA3 3QT	Bath BA3 3QT	Radstock
Tel. 01761 -432739	Tel: -436277	Tel: -434600

Members of the Cabinet, Councillors, Ladies and Gentlemen

My name is Gary Dando, and I have spoken to Council several times about the Local Plan and the diabolical NRR/Bellway planning application. The Victoria Hall is the most important secular building in Radstock as it now is, and should be preserved as a community building for future generations to enjoy. It is a priceless part of our mining heritage but it is not just an outstanding landmark from the hilltops around Radstock. It is also a symbol of the soul of Radstock as it was once the hub of social life in the whole area, and so many important events took place there. It belongs to all of us, and so it should not be sold off for flats or a pub or whatever.

It seems very ironic that just as Cllr Jackson and Bath Tourism Plus are investigating ways to attract tourists to it, I should be standing here warning you that urgent action is necessary to prevent the building falling down. I am a builder, I know what I am talking about, and I am shocked that in two years since the Victoria Hall Working Party commissioned a survey of the building, there has been so much deterioration, as the present report you have before you indicates.

The Meadow View Residents Action Group have been talking directly to Ms Sue Bridge, Director of Bellway Homes. She said two weeks ago that they could not afford to renovate the building as part of the 106 Agreement though they might be able to help with the costs of improving disabled access. Therefore the Council should stop procrastinating, as the previous administration did, and take action now, either to work with the NRTC to restore the Victoria Hall, or to set up a community trust as per the Quirk Report, with an appropriate financial dowry and input from our elected representatives.

Please save the Victoria Hall now.

(Attached is our letter to English Heritage, explaining the hall's history)

21 April 2007

Heritage Protection Operations Department
English Heritage
1 Waterhouse Square
138-142 Hoburn
London EC1N 2ST

Att. Ms Cowan
Dear Sirs

The Victoria Hall, Victoria Square, Radstock, Bath. BA3 3ST

As I have already discussed with you on the telephone, there is great concern in Radstock about the future of the Victoria Hall, which, as you will see from the enclosed *History of the Victoria Hall* has played a central role in the history of our community. In fact one could reasonably claim that the history of the building is the history of the community in the twentieth century, though the Hall has also hosted national events, such as the future leader of the Labour Party, Hugh Gaitskell's meeting to explain coal nationalization in 1947, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Campaign. It is of great sentimental importance to generations of Radstock people who have attended both ordinary recreational events, doing their courting at the dances in the fifties and sixties, for example, or participated in jubilee celebrations. In accordance with the original covenant which Frances, Lady Waldegrave attached to her donation, (*History* p4) recreational facilities are still provided for working people, though currently it is unemployed or semi-employed youth who use the facilities during the daytime most. There is still a small reading area, but the former magistrates' court is now the Town Clerk's office. The main hall which has an excellent dance floor, is still in use, but it is on the first floor, and until there is more than a chairlift to provide disabled access, it cannot be fully used. Its decline reflects the general decline of Radstock since the mines were closed, the railway removed, and larger employers such as the print works at Purnell's in nearby Paulton, and Alcan Metals in Norton relocated. Revitalising the Victoria Hall by restoring the original building and providing modern facilities such as a lift, would regenerate the community, and provide a springboard for the development of tourism.

The present crisis is caused partly by the issue of disabled access. Norton Radstock Town Council refused to find £100,000 for disabled access in 2000. When the Council proposed closing it, there was uproar and packed public meetings, while a plan in 2004 by Bath and North East Somerset Council, who now take responsibility for the building, to convert it to luxury apartments or a public house, met with further protests. In consequence of this the Town Council set up the Victoria Hall Working Party which drew up detailed plans, but these have been shelved since October 2006, and an attempt by the Labour Group to get a grant from the Budget on 20 February 2007, was voted down by the Liberal Democrats and their Independent allies. The sum required is £380,000 is a paltry amount compared with the £38 millions lavished on the Bath Spa,

but unfortunately the majority of B & NES councillors represent Bath wards, and do not want money spent on low revenue yielding *mofussil* areas. Legal ownership of the building is in fact disputed, as it is doubtful whether the Town Council has the right to alienate it, but there is no doubt that if it ceases to fulfil the terms of the covenant, Lord Waldegrave will reclaim it, as he is trying to do with the nearby old St Nicholas' Infants School, built in 1857, also at the instigation of Lady Waldegrave and the Rector of Radstock. I will be emailing you pictures of the dilapidation of the property. Water pours into the main downstairs office because of cracked lintels, windows and drains need replacing, and the stonework needs attention. However, structurally the building is sound, our surveys show, and there is a new roof and boiler. The Victoria Hall Working Party (cross party), the Meadow View Residents' Action Group (28 local households) and individual members of Radstock Churches Together, are very keen not to allow this situation to continue, and a local trust could easily be formed if the Council continues to refuse to act.

Apart from neglect, and lack of investment for modernization, the building is in grave danger because of the Norton Radstock Regeneration Company /Bellway Homes planning application for development of the former railway lands and Foxhills/.Meadow View which was granted by the General Development Committee of Bath and North East Somerset Council on 19 March 2007. This will involve the removal of the railway heritage in central Radstock (see enclosed leaflet) and the construction of a large retail building or community building on the Victoria Hall car park. Loss of parking will also affect usage of the building, but the main danger comes from the fact that the Frome Road, which currently acts as a mini-bypass, will be brought through where the war memorial used to be, and the subway (under the trees in the *Town Centre Walk*) This means an estimated 7,000 vehicles, many of them large juggernauts will pass within 18 inches of the building, because the pavement is very narrow. The Victoria Hall currently dominates Victoria Square, where it faces Fortescue House, which is a listed building. It will be instead at a busy crossroads with two way traffic (traffic is currently one way, which is how Radstock people want it to stay) All this traffic rattling past will shake the foundations, but also will make it impossible for passersby to stop and admire the building. It is currently on the much used National Cycletrack, (Highway 24) but this will be moved, and cyclists will hardly see it. The re-configuration will shift the heart of Radstock to the other side of the Methodist Church, and the other side of the river, although that was previously only a cattle market at the back of the station. Other listed buildings in the area are St Nicholas' Church, the Radstock Working Men's Club and Institute (a Regency merchant's house) Hope House Surgery, and the historic buildings in Fortescue Road, for which English Heritage provided support when they were renovated. I have already mentioned Fortescue House. Except for the Church and the Working Men's Club, all are built in the distinctive local white lias stone, as are the majority of buildings in Radstock conservation area.

Members of the Working Party and the Residents' Action Group want listed status to protect the building from further neglect, and to ensure that it is not submerged and damaged by the NRR scheme (now before the Secretary of State and likely to be subject to judicial review) The Independent Councillors, one of whom is also a director of the

NRR, persuaded the Radstock Residents' Association (about 15 active members) to 'monitor' the situation. They say action will be taken after the NRR scheme is resolved, but that would mean waiting five years, if the Bellway schedule runs without hitches, and in the meantime irreparable damage may have been done.

It is a building of great architectural beauty similar to the nearby Methodist Church, and at the heart of 'the best preserved former mining village in England', so please help us save it for future generations to enjoy, and to help increase our tourist industry.

Reports and pictures will be emailed to you. Thank you again for all your help and advice.

Yours faithfully,

Dr E.M. Jackson
Secretary: Meadow View Residents' Action Group.
Member of the Victoria Hall Working Party.