

## **A statement by Amanda Leon, member of Radstock Action Group, to B&NES Cabinet 8 February 2012**

*'It is a complicated knot of roads that have been tied here over the centuries. It was proving difficult today to find anyone who had confidence the council's plan would untangle that knot'. David Woodland for ITV West Country Tonight on Tuesday 7 February 2012.*

My intention had been solely to ask Cabinet to listen to our responsible request to discuss the possibility of being allowed, as a group of highly qualified and responsible individual volunteers, to keep the Victoria Hall open for current users.

However, such is the scale of devastation and the lack of responsible planning and communication relating to the council's latest incursions into the town, I feel that I have no option but to allude to the bigger picture – a picture of which Victoria Hall forms a significant part; a picture in which the Victoria Hall will be put beyond the reach of the community as Radstock is converted into an isolated, marooned patch at the centre of a traffic system designed to speed through traffic on its way.

Today, two members of B&NES Property Services were in Radstock measuring up some undisclosed aspects of the Victoria Hall. It would have been inappropriate to interrogate them on what exactly was going on and why. Given the fact that members of the community have already volunteered to keep the hall open, would it not have been a good idea to invite us all to a meeting to explore how this could become a reality?

Being under siege is an unspeakable experience. Physical siege provoked by muddy roads; the destruction of swathes of trees in the centre of the 'best preserved mining town centre' in the country; unannounced closure of well-used footpaths; the taking out of service of light-controlled pedestrian crossings; huge trucks and endless noise from wanton corporate vandalism as B&NES flattens the natural features of the railway land. And emotional and intellectual siege provoked by a constant stream of misinformation and absence of information; remarks about what outsiders (in this case B&NES) are going to do to our town; a complete disregard for normal procedures<sup>1</sup>; total silence from the council when we ask even the most reasonable questions<sup>2</sup>; broken undertakings<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On whose authority and under what agreement from elected members following which procedures, were all the trees felled? Where is the Safety Audit for the current road proposals?

<sup>2</sup> Very early on Monday 6 February, we emailed the leader of the Council asking what was happening – we didn't even receive an acknowledgement. B&NES issued a press Release at 17.22 after irreversible damage had been done. They did not copy us in, but we received it all the same from a sympathetic councillor (and, for the record, it was not Cllr Jackson).

<sup>3</sup> Assurances that unless houses were built there would be no road

The well-being of those who live and/or work in the town is at stake. At the very least, given the situation I have outlined above, I would ask that B&NES works with people to ensure that the facilities offered by the Victoria Hall are maintained.

We understand precisely that no long-term commitment is possible immediately, but we would like to see that when a group of volunteers steps up with a reasonable offer of community involvement, approaches our 'listening' council, that their offer is welcomed and processed so that at least some semblance of continuity can be maintained in Radstock.

Please allow us to keep the Victoria Hall open. We will act responsibly. We want to work with B&NES as the owner of the building.