

The Future of the Victoria Hall.

Cabinet 14 November 2012

Two cheers!

Cllr Dr Eleanor Jackson.

There are many reasons to applaud this report which addresses issues which Colin Darracott should have done when he got the Symonds Report in 2005 and shelved it, and Cllr Haerberling ought to have done when the late Cllr Hall and I persuaded her to apply a £40,000 sticking plaster. It lays to rest the arguments in the 1999/2000 review that the Victoria Hall should be demolished, and more recent proposals to sell it. I doubt if Frances, Lady Waldegrave anticipated such problems when she endowed the original hall in 1866 and laid down strict conditions concerning its educational and recreational uses. Since the 1905 rescue package and subsequent extension to house the town council and magistrates' court, it has been the jewel in the crown of the 'best-preserved mining town in England' and once refurbished will remain so. I am very pleased that there is such a substantial financial commitment, and if B&NES Council officers are prepared to consult *properly* with the groups and individuals who want to get involved, I am sure it can be made to pay its way long term. It riles Cllr Bellotti when we speak of 'saving the Victoria Hall' but I think that with a bit more substance and by working together with the Museum, potential purchasers of the Library, the youth hub users and the NRR, this building at the heart of the community can be saved. As it says, 'He that endureth to the end shall be saved.' I have been campaigning since 2005, having decided to live in Radstock because I was enchanted by the Victoria Hall. Many others feel equally strongly.

However I would like to propose a minor amendment:

2:7 When practicable, to continue to allow Radstock Youth Hub members and Radstock in Bloom the use of the garden and garages.

There is a certain air of unreality in the report. Attempts were made in 2004-5 to sell the caretaker's house. It is now in a dreadful state. Apart from that, it is hard to see who would live next to the Susan Hill School of Dance practices. The figures are not consistent in the report and the house will surely have a use as changing rooms for the hall performances or for the young people.

Secondly, in the Site 2 planning NRR permission there is a 'community hall'. I suggest that this is removed in the re-submission, and a sum paid to the council for the Victoria Hall, or it is integrated into the hall use.

Thirdly, the young people are interesting in extending their cookery classes to practical experience. A community café is a brilliant idea – but it is very close to St. Nicholas Church tearooms.

I am sure local people will be happy to help officers with the 'business plan' and I would urge you all to get a move on. We cannot afford to have a three year delay like that the Clandown Residents Association experienced with their Orchard Project.

Two Cheers then.