

Amanda Leon, Radstock Action Group, to Cabinet 5 December 2012

Three important points to start with:

1. On 15 November, Jane Brewer, B&NES Senior Arboricultural Officer, stated, in an email to a Radstock Action Group supporter, that 'It should be noted that, unless the tree is removed to enable a full planning consent to progress, the tree is protected by the conservation area status'. The tree in question in this instance is the Jubilee Oak in Radstock.
2. On 28 November, B&NES issued a press release (Appendix 1) about Radstock regeneration which stated that, 'There will be an information event in Spring 2013 prior to the outline planning consent application being submitted'.
3. This, together with another reference in the press release to work commencing 'Subject to the outline planning consent being secured', mean only one thing, outline planning consent has not been applied for and it follows, therefore, that the 'full planning consent' referred to by Jane Brewer (my point 1), most certainly does not exist.

Notwithstanding all of this, B&NES is pursuing its original objective and digging up an oak tree over 100 years old, and half-heartedly pretending that it will survive.

Whilst we deeply regret the loss of this iconic feature from the town centre, we are most concerned with the fact that it is being engineered as a part of a scheme which will introduce main road traffic into the centre of the town and lead to the degradation of the built and natural environment, making the town centre less attractive to shoppers, tourists and businesses alike. And yet, Paul Crossley has repeatedly stated that if there is no housing there will be no road. Does Paul Crossley now know something the rest of us don't which makes him absolutely certain the housing will happen?

How has all this come about in the face of massive local opposition?

The situation has recently been compounded by Cllr Crossley joining the board of Norton Radstock Regeneration in the wake of the departure of Nathan Hartley. As Cllr Crossley has such entrenched views on the future of Radstock, it has to be asked whether there is a clash of interests for him, and how he justifies this move, given the fact that only one person on the NRR lives in Radstock.

Sadly, it is symptomatic of a profound democratic deficit in the workings of the Council, coupled with a complete disregard for due process.

Perhaps the Cabinet could start by encouraging Cllr Crossley to reply to Radstock Action Group's letter of 29 November (Appendix 2) – we have yet to receive so much as an acknowledgement.

I do not say this lightly – I am not alone in being angry at the lack of democracy and transparency and the total contemptuous, arrogant attitude shown for Radstock and its residents.

Appendix 1: Text of B&NES Press Release

For immediate release. 28 November 2012

Action plan to get Radstock's regeneration moving unveiled

The next steps of Bath & North East Somerset Council's plans to significantly upgrade Radstock's road network in order to tackle traffic congestion and support the regeneration of the local economy have been announced.

The town's road system needs upgrading first to help reduce traffic congestion and pave the way for the additional homes and shops.

Councillor Paul Crossley (Lib-Dem, Southdown), Leader of Council, said, "There are clear steps that Bath & North East Somerset Council will be taking with our partners to get the regeneration of Radstock moving. Starting with the relocation of the Oak tree, we will obtain the necessary planning consents to deliver the road network upgrade and new homes that the town urgently needs. We've listened closely to the local community every step of the way in both the development of the road plans and the relocation of the tree.

"The improvements are part of the Council's wider plan to breathe new life into one of our area's most historic market towns which also includes bringing Victoria Hall back into use and targeting the £500,000 regeneration pot earmarked by the Cabinet as effectively as possible."

Step 1: Relocating the Oak tree

The oak tree must be removed for the road upgrade to proceed. The Council respects the historical connection the community has with the tree, and especially the friends and family of Colin Latchem. Councillors have worked closely with the family to identify a suitable site for the tree to be relocated.

Starting Monday 3rd December, preparatory work to relocate the tree to Writhlington School will begin. It is anticipated that the relocation will be complete by Tuesday 11th December 2012. This is the best time to move the tree in order to give it the greatest possible chance of survival in a location where people are committed to looking after it. Cuttings and acorns from the existing tree are being cultivated at Writhlington School and Norton Radstock College

Karen Emery, sister of Colin Latchem, said, "The oak tree's survival and wellbeing has been my priority since the loss of my brother in 1997. The tree became a living tribute to Colin and is extremely precious to us all. We have worked closely with the Council and its tree specialists, Norton Radstock College, and Writhlington School to save the tree and give it the best possible chance of survival. If we want to give the tree the optimum chance of relocation and indeed a healthy future, we need to take action now, whilst dormant for the winter.

"Whatever the future holds for Radstock, seeing the oak tree survive and giving it the chance to grow into the magnificent tree that it was intended to become when planted, will always be something worth fighting for."

In addition, the Council has donated a new oak tree to Radstock which will be planted in the green open space near the Council car park on Waterloo Road at 12.30pm on 1st December 2012.

Step 2: Updating the planning permission

In response to local consultation, the Council made significant changes to design of the proposed road network. This has resulted in the need for the planning application to be updated to reflect the changes. The Council anticipates submitting an updated planning application in April 2013. This application for outline planning consent will include the detail of the road scheme and pave the way for reserved matters applications for the housing and town centre development.

Clive Wiltshire, Managing Director of Linden Homes South West, said, "Linden Homes welcomes being a part of the team delivering meaningful regeneration in the centre of Radstock. We have a proven track record of creating places that people want to live and work, and we are committed to delivering much needed new homes and jobs in the town. We will be looking to submit reserved matters consent for the first two phases of development once the outline planning consent is in place."

Subject to the outline planning consent being secured, work on the road network upgrade would begin in Autumn 2013.

Step 3: Working with our partners and residents

The Leader of Council will take a place on the NRR Board as a sign of the Cabinet's commitment to getting the regeneration of the town going.

Welcoming this development, Cate Le Grice-Mack, speaking for NRR said, "Our development is an important part of the total approach to the restoration of Radstock as busy and positive place for people to live and work. While the road scheme will help to move traffic more easily, we will make sure that the 48% of our site earmarked for green space, walking, cycling will enable people to move more easily within the town. And just to reassure people - the railway will not be disconnected, and light rail is still an option for those who wish to see it happen."

There will be an information event in Spring 2013 prior to the outline planning consent application being submitted.

Appendix 2: Letter from Radstock Action Group to Paul Crossley



www.radstockactiongroup.org.uk

8 Colliers Rise, Radstock BA3 3AU

Cllr Paul Crossley
B&NES
The Guildhall
Bath BA1 5AW

29 November 2012

Dear Paul Crossley

We have a number of questions for you and look forward to receiving your detailed responses promptly:

1. You have repeatedly and publicly stated that unless there are houses built on the railway land, there will be no road. Can you confirm that this remains your position?
2. If this does, in fact, remain your position, please would you explain why you propose removing the Jubilee Oak, given the fact that there is no current, live planning application for housing? Cabinet acknowledged this at their last meeting at which we were present. Your most recent press release about Radstock also acknowledges this.
3. The road, which at least 18 months ago was estimated to be going to cost £1.2m, is an irresponsible use of public funds, especially in a period of very severe cuts. Some professionals said, at the time of the original estimate, that it was not nearly enough and it will certainly cost more if you ever get round to building it at any point in the future. How can you justify this expense when you are cutting such vital services as those for children and young people? And when the local community has repeatedly voiced its strong opposition to it? And when all current thought on traffic management is quite clearly opposed to putting increased traffic through town centres?
4. In the event of the Jubilee Oak being removed, this will constitute additional major expenditure which will almost certainly be wasted as the tree will not be able to survive. As many people have pointed out, even if you persist with the road, what reason have you got for not leaving the Oak in its present position on the roundabout proposed in the (now defunct) plans?
5. You have been asked repeatedly why there has been no safety audit for the proposed new road. Perhaps you will now answer this question.
6. Given the revised flood assessments for Radstock and the most recent weather which resulted in the land near the river being heavily waterlogged and, in the

case of St Nicholas' School field, actually flooded, would you explain how B&NES can justify building on this area as it will clearly increase flood risk with all the accompanying problems for residents, including insurance possibilities and run-off complications?

7. We are very concerned about the lack of transparency in the composition, reporting lines and remit of the Radstock Economic Forum. Please could you let us know how the forum has been constituted and how the council guarantees that it is representative of the business community and residents? Exactly how does B&NES justify the giving of £100K to this forum from a fund which was trumpeted as new money for Radstock? What will the money be spent on?
8. B&NES recently 'consulted' on possible ways of using the £500K for Radstock. What is the final decision following from this consultation?
9. Given the vast disparity between regeneration sums being spent on Keynsham and Radstock, we would like to ask B&NES to ensure that the Victoria Hall retains snooker facilities whether by using the caretaker's house or building an extension to the Hall – this would not bring parity but it would certainly enhance the community facilities in the town. If you are not prepared to do this please would you explain why this is not an option?
10. What provision are you making for reinstatement of the Radstock to Frome rail link, including Radstock Station?

Yours sincerely

Amanda Leon, Secretary, Radstock Action Group