

Ten years ago I bought a house in Meadow View, the former entrance to the Marcroft's Wagon Works. My solicitor warned me that a heritage railway was planned there. 'Great!' I thought, and I was shocked when 70 houses were planned for the land instead. What is the point of depositing all these houses in such a beautiful spot when the infrastructure for commuters is so poor, and congestion in Radstock dire? Then I was a lecturer in Religious Studies – a merchant in faith and hope. Now I am a battle-scarred politician but I still hope people will wake up to rail's importance.

Much has happened in the past decade which demonstrates the popularity of rail travel, with the Bath/Bristol commuter trains being packed like sardine cans, and the lines to London and to Salisbury/Portsmouth being well-used. Bath's economy is dependent on the tourists who flood in by train, and the same could become true for Radstock, as it is proving to be with the recently opened Glasgow to Galashiels line. Two cheers, then to B&NES Council for investigating improving Freshford station and re-opening Saltford. Part of the same survey conducted by Halcrow is Radstock-Frome, but sadly, as the officers point out, there are mistakes and deficiencies. Used as recently as 2000, it only requires eight miles of track to be re-engineered and re-laid, and four new stations or halts. It is 14<sup>th</sup> on the ATOL list of suburban lines which should be re-opened, and I as a member of Radstock Action Group, have had serious discussions with railway engineers and transport bodies about this.

The estimated cost is £41.3 million which makes it much cheaper than any comparable road option, while it would become much easier to ship out goods from Westfield Industrial estate and other manufacturing areas in the Somer Valley, reduce congestion in Bath and carbon footprint generally and attract tourists. A 125 train currently parked in Westbury overnight for the daily commuter train to London could just as easily leave Radstock but if a steam locomotive were placed in the Brunel Shed, Meadow View, it could become an engineering project for Radstock College trainees and a boost for the construction course there. We could create a mini Ironbridge with rescued railway buildings around it. It sounds unbelievable now, but in 1977 I worked for the Managing Director of a Birmingham export company, F.S.Mayman, who almost as a hobby mounted a successful campaign to keep the Birmingham Moor Street –Stratford on Avon line open and make it a commercial success. Similar vision is needed now if we are to meet the demands of 2030.

I strongly support recommendations 2.3 and 2.4 – another two cheers! – but would suggest a time scale for a proper, up to date report from Halcrow, a proper business plan and also a pledge that the former lands from the Brunel Shed, Radstock, to Westbury will not be compromised by any housing development, so far as it lies in B&NES' sphere of influence to do this. In TV documentary after documentary we see how the railways were the drivers of the industrial revolution in Britain. If the cabinet are as committed to economic regeneration as you say you are, then surely you will take the necessary steps to bring back the trains to Radstock.

Cllr Eleanor Jackson (Lab. Radstock)