

In the heady days of the 1968 great Birmingham University 'sit-in', a student on the team negotiating with the university authorities solemnly declared: 'Every student should have a role in the Refectory', and was completely bewildered when the entire company, don and student alike, fell about laughing. But he was right. Students felt it was *their* university and they should have a say in how it was run, (for example with representatives on the Refectory management committee).

Similarly, Radstock residents have had a community building on the site of the Victoria Hall since 1866 and feel it is *theirs* as Frances, Lady Waldegrave intended. 254 of them told B&NES this in the consultation, as did the fully elected RTC, who also sent a series of letters going back to May 2012 which have been ignored. (Sadly officers did not see fit to analyse for public benefit the detailed suggestions made in section 4 of the questionnaire, 'any other ideas') You could of course argue that the present proposal is better than that of the officers who tried, in August 2011 to get it turned into a 'business centre' and commercial offices, but Cllr Crossley is suffering from a serious bout of amnesia –or heatstroke- to declare as he does in today's Journal, that letting it as a commercial enterprise with a few rooms available for community groups to hire, is the only option available. When cabinet previously considered the matter, it was on the basis of the library being the anchor tenant, the sale of the library building being essential to pay for the refurbishment. If the town council and the youth hub had also moved in, as per discussions I had with officers and cabinet members in December, it could have been viable, especially if administration had been by a trust, perhaps with a link to Radstock Museum.

Of course one is pleased that the building is being renovated, though at a terrible cost in terms of the loss of a unique Victorian heritage, with sheer vandalism in the destruction of the snooker hall, and of course it is good that the Saturday morning tenant, the Susan Hill School of Dance, is flourishing and able to take on the responsibility, but if Cllr Romero had not intervened in such a timely fashion, even the vegetable garden would have been lost to our young people. It is very easy for professional politicians to emulate Margaret Thatcher, in order to 'get things done', intoning the mantra 'There is no alternative', but ownership of the building belongs to the people of Radstock: B&NES administrators are only the stewards.

Far too many historic buildings have been lost to quick fix, quick buck 'modernisation' since the 1960s. (Susan Hill runs an excellent business, but to place on her shoulders, as Cllr Crossley does in his Journal letter, responsibility for the economic regeneration of Radstock is ridiculous.) I call up on the cabinet to refer the issue of community participation to the relevant scrutiny committee and to audit expenditure properly so that we all know exactly what is going on. Democratic accountability is what we wanted in 1968. We want it now!

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