

I'm going to make a statement now about Radstock's Victoria Hall, its emerging new identity and the outcomes for its community.

To a relative newcomer like myself, Victoria Hall could have been the name of a local resident rather than a building. At first, it didn't mean much. Through enquiries I learnt that it has had many previous functions, and, until closed last year, had been a generic civic facility. Looking more closely, I read a small brown sign above the door which says 'licensed in pursuance of act of parliament for music and dancing'. Clearly, historically, this was a primary intention for this building. I'm so glad that Radstock will have that as its new core function again with Victoria Hall re-opening, this time as an Arts Centre.

I believe this will grant many commonly expressed wishes for our town:

It will create a public, easily accessible destination venue for community and arts events. A vibrant destination venue helps publicise events more easily, and Radstock will have a central go-to place for visitors and newcomers. With the vastly increased opportunity for public footfall, more people will be welcomed into the building than perhaps ever before to admire its features and enjoy the facilities.

An arts centre will address not only a local community deficit, but also a North East Somerset deficit. As part of Radstock's economic regeneration, Victoria Hall Arts Centre will attract more people to the town. The principal arts leaseholder, Bath Dance College's Performing Arts course, will be the heartbeat of the place. It will create financial resilience and partnership working with a local secondary school, as well as vital administrative infrastructure, consistent supervision of the facilities and its overall identity. The Arts Industry is worth billions to the UK and its leisure, culture and tourism industries. For our local young people who aim to work in the arts sector, the performing arts course will offer a firm foundation of qualifications and experience to increase their opportunities in the national and international arts world. The college has prioritised social inclusion by holding open events and supporting students' funding bids. This will be an excellent facility, not just for our young people, but for mixed community use by providing a locally-led steady stream of arts-based activities and events for all ages and abilities. It will authentically reflect local interests and emerging skills, and provide new experiences.

The arts, like sport, brings people together, it inspires and entertains. It can help combat social isolation, build positive cross-generational links and boost community cohesion, pride and identity.

Victoria Hall's latest incarnation is an inspiring sign of all that has been discussed for so long - Radstock's regeneration - in action.