

What is B&NES up to?

B&NES has long known that Radstock Action Group, amongst many others, wishes to see the Victoria Hall put to positive use for the community. You will find a note of our attempts to promote a dialogue with them at the end of this document.

We were as surprised as everyone else to read in the press at the beginning of this year, that B&NES had plans for the Victoria Hall. Despite their knowing that we had organised an event for 21 January on **Saving the Victoria Hall** B&NES planners who appear to be behind this latest development have not communicated with us at all, though we are pleased to say that Ian Lund has accepted our invitation to speak – an invitation issued before B&NES issued its press releases about its plans for the Victoria Hall.

Do we know anything?

- Radstock Town Council is giving up its tenancy at the end of February 2012
- It appears that a consultant has been engaged to write a business plan which excludes community use. He presented his plan at the Somer Valley Partnership on 4 January. Attendees were urged not to bother making notes as the whole presentation would be made available via email. So far, repeated requests to see the presentation have been ignored.
- At the meeting, when the matter was discussed, it emerged that the consultant had been engaged by B&NES Major Projects (head of section is John Betty)
- It appears that the proposal is to use planning gain money (Section 106) from the Alcan site in Westfield to install business units in the Victoria Hall.
- Unsubstantiated rumours are circulating that the building may be boarded up – we don't know where this idea started.
- RAG is in regular contact with Policies and Partnerships. On 19 January we were told that the business hub option was the best for the building – we made it clear that we disagreed.
- Yet again, the people of Radstock are being ignored and it looks as if B&NES wishes to impose a solution on the town.

Saving the Victoria Hall

The Victoria Hall was given to Radstock by the Waldegraves in the 19th Century. It is the key civic building in the town and we believe that it can have a sparkling future with community involvement. We hope that the event will address alternative visions for **our** town hall.

A History of RAG communications with B&NES about the Victoria Hall.

Last year we wrote to B&NES' Vernon Hitchman, the B&NES solicitor as follows:

14 April 2011; RAG to B&NES Solicitor Vernon Hitchman

[Dear Vernon Hitchman](#)

Radstock Action Group would like clarification on the situation in relation to the Victoria Hall, Radstock.

We want to look into the possibility of putting together a Business Plan to redevelop and protect the building whilst ensuring that it is of use to Radstock residents, businesses and visitors.

Please could we have:

1. Clarification of the exact status of the building as from the abolition of NRTC
2. BANES' view on our tentative enquiries/proposals.

We would also appreciate any support, professional advice and ideas to advance our proposals. Clearly our most pressing concern is to know that if we embark on some investigations they will be regarded positively, or at the very least not opposed by BANES.

We would be happy to meet and discuss these technicalities further.

We then received the following reply:

20 April 2011 B&NES Solicitor Vernon Hitchman to RAG

Dear Ms Leon

Thank you for your email.

The Council's lead officer on property matters (sic) is Tom McBain and by copy of this email; I would ask him to respond to you direct.

Yours sincerely

Vernon Hitchman

We then received an email, out of the blue, from Graham Russell, Independent Local Government Adviser.

26 April 2011

I am picking up emails for Vernon Hitchman during the election period relating to the community governance review. I was the independent adviser appointed to lead the review process.

I am addressing your email about a business plan for Victoria Hall.

The status of Victoria Hall is that it has transferred to Radstock Town Council on a tenancy at will. It remains a Bath and North East Somerset owned building. This transfer was enabled through the Reorganisation Order which brought about the abolition of Norton Radstock Town Council and the creation of the three new parish level councils. In this context you might value a discussion with councillors on the new Radstock Town Council once they are elected on 5th May.

I have spoken at length to David Dixon, Policy and Partnerships Team at B&NES and he is happy to discuss your initiative and to show you similar business plan initiatives for other buildings in the area, not least Midsomer Norton Town Hall. Ultimately you and your partners in this initiative will need to convince B&NES Property Services that you can produce and deliver a viable plan for this building's future.

We heard nothing from Tom McBain so we wrote again.

2 August 2011

Dear Tom McBain

We do not appear to have received any reply from you about the query we sent to Vernon Hitchman, although we did receive some comments from Graham Russell but their status is not clear to us.

Perhaps you could clarify?

Since which time we have heard nothing.