

**Norton Radstock Town Council: Planning and Environment Committee  
20 July 2009**

**Statement by Radstock Action Group**

Radstock Action Group understands that the Planning and Environment Committee this evening will discuss a proposal to remove, albeit on a trial basis, the benches from the War Memorial in Radstock in response to anti-social behaviour which includes unreasonable noise levels in and around the war memorial, disruption which causes distress to some local residents.

Radstock Action Group does not condone anti-social behaviour but we believe that this suggestion is a hasty response to a much bigger issue and that it will not have the desired effect of stopping unacceptable behaviour.

The Memorial Gardens, including the war memorial itself, have rapidly achieved an important role in the life of the community of Radstock. The benches are there as a community facility and provide a resting and meeting point for people who have come into town to do their shopping; they provide a place to relax and talk to friends; they are a stopping place for cyclists and walkers who come into Radstock and pause to admire the town and to have some much needed refreshment, and they enable everyone to enjoy the beautiful park which is growing up around them.

The fact that young people go there reflects the fact that this is one of the few places they can gather and that they, according to their own reports, feel it is a safe place for them. The current problem highlights yet again that there is very little for young people to do in town, despite some excellent initiatives. Indeed it is not clear that the people who are causing offence are actually from Radstock, since the young people who most often congregate in the area are generally well-behaved and friendly.

Before we reach a point where we remove the benches - something that would only lead to all the young people going somewhere else - we would suggest that Norton Radstock Town Council opens a dialogue with all residents about what can be done to improve the situation without removing some of the very few facilities on offer for residents and visitors alike.

The idea that there are other benches available in the nearby park is simply to shunt the problems along without addressing them. For most of the time, and for most people, the benches provide a quiet social space and a place to refresh and reflect; the inevitable result of the removal of the benches would be another

proposal to remove more benches in other places.

There are plenty of means at the disposal of the police and other local agencies, to ensure that the noise can be stopped and we would like them to be used. Current legislation should be enforced and provides adequate support for the police in maintaining an acceptable environment for everyone in the town.

Much of the debate around the future of Radstock centres on providing housing, jobs and facilities for young people who might otherwise have to move away. The young people of Radstock are the future of the town and we want to encourage them to stay and be active partners in developing a first class environment for everyone.

So how can we begin this dialogue? We suggest that the Town Council takes steps to establish regular contact with the young people of the town so that they feel that they have a stake in developments and that they are valued and their voice is being heard.

We are putting forward the following but would be very happy to see any other mechanisms for involving young people:

1. The Town Council should identify from its members, one person who has responsibility for youth matters, or possibly a small group of councillors who represent the geographical spread of the area, for example one each from Radstock, Westfield, Clandown and Midsomer Norton
2. The role of this person/group would be to consult with young people wherever they congregate either formally or informally, and to identify how the Town Council can advance their requests and suggestions
3. A Youth Report, presented by the above individual or group, should be a fixed agenda on every full council meeting and representatives of the young people of the area should be encouraged to attend for this item to voice their views and answer questions
4. The Town Council should renew approaches to BANES and other relevant local agencies to attempt to identify funding which could be used for one-off youth events, the employment of a worker, better facilities for young people or other interventions.

Finally, we want to avoid doing anything which will drive a wedge between different sections of the community. Radstock has a positive future and it should be somewhere where everyone feels that their needs and aspirations are being met and in which they have a stake. To decrease the facilities available to us all will not get rid of anti-social behaviour.