

Statement by Radstock Action Group

BANES Full Council Meeting 27 March 2008

In 1926, Radstock was given a piece of land by the Great Western Railway, on which to erect a War Memorial. Since that time, the site, including the memorial itself, has been maintained, for over 80 years, on behalf of the people of the town, by Radstock Urban District Council and its successor, Norton Radstock Town Council.

In 2005, the memorial cross was moved to another site in the town, but the original site, between the Victoria Hall and the Post Office, retains special significance for the people of Radstock and continues to be maintained as a public, civic space.

Radstock Action Group is exceptionally concerned that BANES has, very recently and without prior warning, attempted to claim ownership of this site by making a Statutory Declaration of Ownership to the Land Registry. Such moves are anti-democratic and contrary to the best interests and wishes of the people who live and work in Radstock.

It demonstrates that BANES, yet again, is willing to act with total disregard for and, in opposition to the views of the people of Radstock, pursuing decisions and policies which show contempt for the democratic process and the expressed wishes of local people.

In contrast, there is plenty of evidence that the land has, since, 1926, been owned by the people of Radstock, through their elected body, Radstock Urban District Council and subsequently, Norton Radstock Town Council, who can, in this case be regarded as the custodians of the site for the electors.

We wish to highlight the following:

1. This land is traditionally associated with the people of Radstock and has been seen, over a long period, as a focal point for meeting and recognising the community in which we live and work
2. It is the responsibility of the Town Council to protect the open spaces and the continued ownership of such spaces for present and future generations. This responsibility has been effectively executed, but is now jeopardised by BANES
3. At no point has BANES presented any evidence to suggest, let alone prove, that they are the owners of this piece of land
4. The erosion of public and significant spaces in the community can only lead to a loss of identity for the town centre
5. The original site would have been consecrated, as was the new space that was allocated in the Miners Memorial Garden. The original site is listed as an official war memorial. Representatives of the British Legion have said that the site should, therefore, be accorded the same respect and status as a war grave.

In collecting the signatures on the petition which we are presenting to you today, (all collected in the space of about four hours), signatories (there were very few refusals) mentioned repeatedly that it is a matter of common knowledge that the space belongs to the people of Radstock, that it has always been a special site of historical and cultural significance to them, that it has served as a focal point for commemorating the contribution of local people to both world wars and has witnessed services, parades and social gatherings to this end.

Radstock Action Group therefore calls on BANES to relinquish any further moves to claim ownership of this important site and to respect the evidence and the continuing wishes of Radstock people to keep the site as a civic and memorial space for the town, in the ownership of the town.