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Newsletter New Year 2016

Dear Friends

Let me first send my warmest thanks to all who have supported Botton and my very best wishes for the New Year. We are now well into the second year of our campaign and I find it is easier to be optimistic than it was this time last year.

Let's look first at what CVT is saying. Whilst we cannot quote directly for reasons connected with the mediation process, we can glean from various sources that they are 'considering' a 'Shared Lives solution' at several communities. They say they accept that this, at Botton at least, will be on the basis of independence for the Camphill volunteers. It is of concern that they have ignored the other two communities engaged with the legal process, which would be the obvious choice for a Shared Lives trial especially The Grange where former Co-workers, still capable of re-establishing the Camphill ethos, could run shared lives households.

We have learnt that actions speak louder than words and, whilst some of what the senior management is doing is clearly right and welcome, on the ground Co-workers are still being made to feel as employees on the lowest rung. Havoc is being caused as the guest volunteers (the young co-workers) leave at the end of their time at Botton and CVT is not replacing them and is preventing those few left from doing any caring for Villagers. There is still no proper sharing and consultation before new edicts are announced, such as the recent much-criticised 'Visitor Policy', which demands that visitors sign in for badges in a manner alien to Camphill. On the ground, we struggle to see actions that foster the independence and good relationships.

On the other hand, it is clear that Caroline Tomlinson, who is jointly instructed by Botton Claimants and CVT, is really engaging with the issues and looking realistically for ways forward.

We, however, have to accept that we do have a problem here. The trouble with acting in a way that destroys trust and with taking decisions that have a catastrophic impact on lives, including those of the most vulnerable, without any discussion or consultation is that now that all trust is gone it is

hugely difficult to rebuild. There is then a danger that even genuine actions are inevitably viewed through spectacles coloured by past actions.

So, you may well wonder, why am I feeling more optimistic? The reason is simple and relates to the quality of the Co-workers who have stood firm and united for over a year and a half since the bombshell letter of the 13th May 2014, with its destructive payload requiring Co-workers to become employees and to cease shared living, was delivered. A true anecdote may help explain. I was at the Christmas Eve Celebration at Botton sitting next to a Villager who joined in all the singing (which I could not do). At one stage he clearly became upset and stood up. I had no idea how to help or what the trigger had been but a Co-worker quietly appeared at his side, obviously understood the problem and was able in moments to return him to his seat and his involvement in what was happening. I happen to know this particular Co-worker has suffered hugely from what has been happening at Botton, being at times close to despair and exhaustion. Yet that Co-worker was not only alert and caring but had the understanding and knowledge of the Villager to enable a quiet caring intervention. I was left amazed at the strength that could do this. It is that very strength that will be there long after CVT is forgotten.



Botton in the snow

Action for Botton had a meeting with Co-workers just before Christmas and I can report that they remain rocks of calm determination. I cannot overstate my admiration for them. Not only have they stood firm but have organised themselves as a separate association, moving from a phase of protection and survival to creation and building. Botton Village Camphill Community (BVCC) is the future, which we are working towards. It will be the independent body with which CVT, if it is as good as its word, will come to a suitable agreement about the houses where "independent" Camphill life-sharing will continue. CVT will still offer its employee-based non-shared lives care to anyone who prefers and chooses that approach.

Despite cautious but growing optimism there remain major issues. Camphill is a three-legged stool, the legs being shared lives, shared culture and shared work. The first can be achieved through the Camphill Shared Lives scheme being developed with the help of Caroline Tomlinson and the independence promised by CVT. The cultural framework we can rely upon the Co-workers to deliver. The stool however needs three legs to stand firm and CVT have yet to commit to ceding control of even a minimum of requested work-places and at least one farm – all built and developed by the Co-workers I might add – to the BVCC Association. There is no logic to this reluctance, especially as those very few workshops the Association asked for have been shut down anyway and the farm deteriorating under the charity's new system.

In the meantime, Action for Botton has been far from idle. In the light of the progress so far we lifted the deadline we had imposed for 1st January this year. If there had been no progress we would have re-launched our campaign aimed at ensuring that the public understood what was being done to the wonderful idea and place called Botton. AfB wants to see things move on from the former entrenched position and has been and remains clear in welcoming what appears to be a less aggressive and more communicative stance CVT seems to be adopting.

We continue to be busy and instructed a leading forensic accountant to attend the recent AGM to ask searching questions on the published accounts, which show that the current direction is unsustainable in the longer term. Simple arithmetic shows that abandoning a cost-effective and co-operating group of experienced and committed volunteers providing 24 hour life-sharing, and replacing them with shifts of far more expensive employees and even more expensive agency staff has already more than tripled staff costs (compared with the Co-worker system), and this at a time of reducing social care funding. We have made the full report available to the Board of Trustees.

It will become clear, with the next round of the mediation meetings early this year, whether CVT are really prepared to grant autonomy to BVCC to run a Shared Lives scheme without interference by the charity. We all know that good fences make good neighbours: in the case of Botton this does of course not mean fences literally, quite the opposite. It means that only if the Association's right to exist as a separate legal entity is respected, can they feel safe and view CVT as partners in future; without legal separation there will always remain a threat of having to defend their way of life against CVT again. There is now a clear and powerful vision of peace and stability in Botton where two equal partners, whilst offering two different options of care and support, will co-operate in the interest of the whole village. At last will people be able to use their energy and talents for creative projects and rebuilding instead of self-defense. Will CVT truly agree to let the Association rent the necessary properties at realistic rates and with security of tenure, and agree appropriate terms for BVCC also to use a few workshops and land, in order to make this peaceful future possible? Or will it be all smoke and mirrors that fade when CVT is finally faced with respecting the autonomy of BVCC?

Despite greater optimism than this time last year, we still need your help please in three respects:

1. Action for Botton and the families of Botton Villagers have been active in other areas. The plight of Botton is receiving attention at Parliament and an *Early Day Motion*, which can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2015-16/249>, has been tabled saying:

"This house is concerned about reports from families of residents at Botton Village that the loss of the residents' chosen lifestyle, of their home and family life as they know it, and the removal of very

dear friends, is causing distress to learning-disabled residents; and therefore urges CVT to work with the authorities to revert to a volunteer co-worker model at Botton Village ..."

Support for this Motion has come from all political parties and impressive as it is, it requires more MP signatures. We therefore ask you to please write to your MP asking that he or she support this EDM. This is really urgent and important. Even if your MP has signed the motion, a letter thanking them would be good. This really is positive campaigning!

2. The Camphill Movement has seen an important development with the formation of a new body known as the *Alliance for Camphill*. The Alliance is independent of Action for Botton, which is a campaigning group concentrating on Botton, and offers an opportunity for individuals who value the fundamental principles of Camphill to work together to further the Camphill principles and practice throughout England and Wales. Please do consider joining, as it is really important to ensure that the erosion of the Camphill way of life, so evident at Botton, is reversed on a national scale. To join (for which at present there is no membership fee) [please consider the principles and aims of the Alliance](#) and e-mail the Association's secretary at emmelinerj@hotmail.com.

3. We still need funds to ensure there is no let up to the legal and mediation process. The mediation process is going in the right direction but not complete, yet even mediation is expensive, requiring the expertise of our excellent lawyers. After this, funds will also be needed to support the BVCC as it becomes self-financing. Please continue to support this work with your donation, together for the future of Botton. Please see below how to make a donation.

So let me end as I started with wishing you all a very happy New Year, and expressing the hope that this time next year we will see Botton Village Camphill Community in operation as the memory of legal proceedings fades as a historic event which has, after all the turmoil, left a Botton stronger and irrepressibly and gloriously Camphill.

Yours sincerely,

Neil Davidson, Chairman, Action for Botton

To make a donation

- 1) Online through PayPal by clicking the yellow donate button on <http://www.actionforbotton.org>
- 2) Pay directly into our account:
 - Action for Botton, Nat West Bank, Sort Code 53-50-15, Account No 50702254
 - SWIFT: NWBKGB2L, IBAN number: GB86NWBK53501550702254
- 3) Send a cheque made payable to 'Action for Botton' to our postal address above.