

# The Botton Declaration

## Botton Village: A Beacon

For sixty years, Botton Village has shone as a beacon to the world. It has united the learning disabled, vocational volunteers and their families as equals in one community-building endeavour. It has inspired a worldwide movement, and touched the lives of tens of thousands.

In a world of deepening loneliness and alienation, Botton is living proof that modern mankind can recreate the human bonds of community that make us truly human.

And what is the magic that has captivated so many?

It is the faces of Botton Village. The portraits of those the world labels 'learning disabled', 'beneficiary' or 'service user'. Yet here, they are colleagues and co-creators in a remarkable venture. And their faces have purpose, dignity, and self respect.

## This is what we stand for

In a fast changing world, we must all run to keep up. But we lose our ideals at our peril.

- We live together. We share our homes and our lives. The elderly, the busy youngster and the small child each has their place, and we are all enriched by our daily interactions. We believe everyone has a right to choose real community.
- We work together. Everyone has a contribution to make. Meaningful work, being relied on – this is true empowerment. Disability has no meaning where there is inter-dependence.
- We aspire together. We uphold the better part of the other person, and they ours. Only with each other's help do we rise above our prejudices and the disabilities we *all* suffer, to become a little more human. We look to the things that are bigger than we are, and try to weave together a culture that allows us to grow, like buds to the light.

We do not claim to have always lived up to these ideals, but we have never ceased to strive for them.

## **A Declaration of Intent**

### **A parting of the ways**

We stand at a cross roads. Those currently controlling our charity (the CVT) have chosen to make a radical departure from its founding philosophy.

Everything we stand for, and everything we have created is now under threat:

- The vocational volunteers are to be replaced by employees.
- Life-sharing is to be replaced by conventional shift-working on strict 'Care Hours'.
- Community decision-making is to be replaced with top-down management.

The managers tell us the community will continue to flourish, but we know community. Disempowerment will bring disengagement. Loneliness and loss will follow. It is a sad decline already well documented in other CVT centres.

### **Reclaiming Botton**

The most shocking aspect of the proposed changes is that they are being imposed against the wishes of the overwhelming majority of all key stakeholders!

- The residents and their families have consistently cited the volunteer-based 'life sharing' model as the key feature of the Botton they treasure.
- Most co-workers will not accept employment
- The charity has not even informed its members and donors of this watershed moment.
- The local community around Botton is rallying to its defence. A campaign group has formed ('Action For Botton'), comprising concerned local professionals.

If we speak in one voice, we can reclaim and re-make the Botton we all value so highly.

## **Declaration**

We, the undersigned co-workers of Botton Village, have no confidence in those now in control of CVT, or the direction in which they are taking our community.

We believe CVT's actions are:

- **Not** justified by any legal imperative
- **Not** in the best interests of the people we support
- **Not** in the spirit of the charity's own charter
- **Not** wished for by the majority of residents, families or co-workers
- **Not** financially viable

CVT has rejected or ignored every appeal by every stakeholder calling on them to engage constructively to find an acceptable alternative solution. Consequently, we have no choice but to make this public declaration:

While our commitment to the wellbeing of our people, and our legal obligations remains paramount,

**We will not co-operate with CVT in pursuing their disastrous re-structuring strategy.**

### **We must plan now:**

We are planning for an independent Botton. This will need:

- The recruitment of professional, managerial and accounting expertise
- The creation of a fully-costed business plan
- The formation of an independent company
- Consultation with stakeholders, regulators and commissioners
- Recruitment of local professionals willing to serve on a new Board
- Lobbying CVT to begin negotiations on a de-merger
- Fundraising for the above purposes

We call on all sympathetic parties to assist us in this considerable task as care, support and companionship must remain our principal focus.

We hope the trustees themselves will have the wisdom to see that letting Botton go may be in the best interests of the wider charity. A house divided cannot stand.

**23 July 2014**