

Statement to Cabinet 13th Feb 2013**Louise Bray**

I would like to seek Cabinet's assurance, that in the light of its intention to expand the primary schools of Peasedown St. John and Paulton, it will uphold the Education and Inspections Act of 2006 re-inforced in 2008 and still enacted, of the presumption in favour of keeping village schools open. Will the Council give full support to the highly inclusive village schools of Camerton, Shoscombe and Wellow as this expansion could make these schools more vulnerable to the fluctuations of birth rate experienced in rural communities. Historically our schools have a wide catchment from the villages and hamlets which surround them, communities without schools such as Combe Hay, Hinton Charterhouse and Carlingcott. Our schools are also supported by a catchment from Peasedown who have families in our villages but are unable to find affordable accommodation within them.

Whilst I fully understand the need of an expanding population, I would as Chair of Governors of Church Valley Federation, respectfully point out that we can provide two thirds of the spaces needed by Peasedown St. John this September. In times of financial constraint is this not a consideration against additional costs of expansion. St. Julian's Wellow was the first school in BANES to receive an outstanding Ofsted in May 2012 under tightened regulations, and our schools have been previously oversubscribed. This has worked against us as unfortunately, although regulations have changed, we have been told by a number of parents they have been nervous of putting us as first choice in case they did not get a place.

Returning to the Education and Inspections Act of 2006, it seems that there is a conflict of interest between the market forces dictated by Westminster, developers planning policy and what is actually enshrined in parliamentary law. I would like to see the council ensure that there is a future for our children in the heart of our rural communities. We struggle to maintain beautiful old buildings that are listed, but offer our children an education that on top of a full National Curriculum gives an innate understanding of the value of a sustainable rural heritage that is 'England's green and pleasant land'. Welly walks that mean real mud, growing vegetables, forest schools -dens and campfires, respect for our crops and farmers, hatching chickens and feeding lambs, the importance of our hedgerows and wildflowers... where to find Bath asparagus, how to weave willow. But also respect for the industrial landscape that this has in part replaced the mines and railways of Somerset that provided for the people of Bath. If you do not want separation of town and country, but a working countryside for the 21st century rather than a playground for the town, I ask the council to think carefully about how you protect our rural schools, and the very special place they have long held in our nation's hearts.