

## **Son slams council for demolishing care home.**

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This article did not appear on the Aldershot News website.

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The son of Joan and Sidney Christmas, after whom Christmas Lodge was named, has slammed Hampshire county Council for demolishing the home. Alistair Christmas said he felt the council conspired to close the facility, which was designed specifically to cater for the needs of elderly people, almost as soon as his mother died.

The site was put up for sale earlier this year and the closing date for bids is June 20<sup>th</sup>.

Councillors expect developers will probably want to tear down the remains of the former care home, which is already partly demolished following an arson attack last year, and build housing.

There have been concerns about parking problems if new houses are built and many have said the site should be used for retirement homes. But Mr. Christmas said his county councillor mother would be devastated to learn the site is being sold.

He said she would have opposed the plans to redevelop the land and had fought suggestions that it could be closed before her death in 2001. Mr Christmas said: I think what the council is doing stinks. My late mother gave years to Hampshire County Council and this is how they repay her”.

“She pushed very hard for an older people’s day centre in Aldershot while she was a councillor and in 1978 she was made a CBE and an honorary alderman of Hampshire for her efforts”.

“There was a time that she heard that they were going to close it and I remember her saying ‘over my dead body, while I’m alive they’ll never do that”. “After she died, the council clearly thought ‘well, here’s our chance’. As soon as she was out of the way they thought now that she’s dead we’ll close the place and tear it down”.

“The people of Aldershot, who are honest and hard working, deserve better – and this is what they get”.

“The sad thing is that Christmas Lodge was a purpose built building 25 or 30 years ago. It hasn’t been looked after, it’s been vandalised and now the council are going to sell the land off. They’ll probably make £1M or £2M from it, but that’s all. And that money will never come back to Aldershot – it will be lost in Hampshire’s coffers”.

Mr, Christmas a former pupil of Newport Junior School, contacted the News after spotting the story about the building in last week’s issue of the paper while having a haircut in the town centre. He said that whilst it would be nice if rumours about the building having been given to the people of Aldershot by the family were true, Hampshire County Council was the legal owner.

But the site's connection with the family go much further back than the building’s short history.

Mr Christmas said the land was part of a 500-acre estate owned by his ancestors, much of which was sold for development in the late 1930’s. The last of the land was sold four years ago, having previously been the site of the outbuildings of Park Farm House where Mr Christmas, the youngest of three boys was born.

He said the true story is basically that my great-grandfather bought Park Farm, which was a huge estate, in the 1850’s. He owned the land on which Christmas Lodge was built but he sold it all off in the 1930’s which is why all of the houses around there are 1930’s style terraces.

“My mother was a member of Hampshire County Council for 16 years and was chairman of social services for six years, and she was the one who pushed for the day centre. She was thrilled when it was opened. It’s just very sad and I think the older people of Aldershot deserve better”.