

ANTISOCIAL behaviour and drug-taking could thrive in an Aldershot nature reserve if land owned by Hampshire County Council is developed, it has been claimed. The land, which is currently part of the reserve but which legally belongs to the council, could be redeveloped under plans to demolish a former nursing home, Christmas Lodge, and replace it with flats. Advertisement your story continues below

At the moment, the land is used to access Brickfields Park, and if reclaimed by the council would leave walkers with just one way to get in and out. Mike Hatch, chairman of the Friends of Brickfields Park, said closing the entrance could mean that the northern part of the park is no longer visited.

The group says drug-related rubbish has been found in the park on a number of occasions. But it is working to combat any problems and scrub has been cut back to ensure that anyone in the park at night can be easily seen. During that work the group discovered part of the old Hampshire County Council boundary. Mr Hatch said the discovery suggested that more land than previously anticipated is owned by council.

If reclaimed, access to the north of the park would close and Mr Hatch says this would make it more secluded than ever before. He said: "They've made statements in the past to the effect that they hope to return the land which is currently part of the park, but if that's something that they want to do why haven't they done it? "They could have done it a year ago if they wanted to do it and the delay is just making people wonder whether they are going to sell it off with the rest of the land after all. "If they did, it would be disastrous for the park. It would lose an entrance altogether and the back end of the park would be completely cut off. That area would end up being even more appealing for people engaging in antisocial behaviour because they would know it was an area that was going to be deserted."

Mr Hatch said because rubbish associated with drug-taking had been found in the area in the past and the friends group was trying to open it up to make it less secluded. Mr Hatch said: "We're doing that so that these people don't feel the safety of being secluded by the trees anymore. "If Hampshire bring their boundary forward it's going to close off a large piece of land and it will stop a lot of people from using the park altogether. "They won't want to walk all of the way round to the other entrance so they won't come in at all."

Mr Hatch estimated that the council would only be handing over 0.3 of an acre if it allowed the park to have the land permanently. He is also concerned that bat boxes, required by Natural England so that bats previously living in the roof of the lodge have somewhere to go, have not been installed. Mr Hatch said: "We've been around the perimeter three or four times and we can't see anything in any of the trees, which is the logical place to put them. "There is one item that looks more like a bird box, but there should be five or six, and the one box we have seen wouldn't be suitable for bats.

A spokeswoman for Hampshire County Council said: "Regarding the boundary, our plans for the Christmas Lodge site have always been to secure capital receipts that we can reinvest back into the Adult Services and facilities for the older people and the vulnerable.

No development proposals have yet been submitted to the planning authority, but we anticipate being able to pursue options that will enable that part of the Christmas Lodge site that is included in the Brickfields Park site, to remain as part of the open space. "When formal planning procedures can be started there will be opportunities for consultation and comment."

Bat boxes had been installed in accordance with the Natural England requirements.