

Fears that park may be lost

by Andrew Milford

CONCERNS have been raised that a popular park in Aldershot could be lost if a chunk of it is sold for development. A portion of Brickfields Country Park is part of the former Christmas Lodge site, owned by Hampshire County Council. As the land on which the residential home stood until last December is now up for redevelopment, there are fears that the parkland could be taken along with it — with potentially disastrous consequences.

Mike Hatch, of the Friends of Brickfields Country Park, told the News: “It is going to restrict access to quite a large area for the people who use the park and I can foresee a lot of them jumping in their cars and driving around rather than taking a walk. “There are some people in the immediate area who will not go and use the park so it will restrict usage of the park. “This could be the thin end of the wedge, with people then saying we may as well get rid of the park for development.”

There are also concerns that drink and drug related antisocial behaviour will increase. “We get a certain amount of antisocial behaviour here, which we have worked on to try to reduce,” said Mr Hatch. “One of the things we had to do was to remove one of the park benches because people were congregating around it. “There has been drinking and drug taking and we have had ducks and geese shot with airguns. “Moving the bench has alleviated some of the problems because people haven’t got an area to focus on. “However, I can see that if the access at the back of the park was removed, the back corner would then become a fairly isolated area. “People are going to congregate up there even more because it is a quiet spot and they can get on with what they want up there. Drinking and drug taking will get worse.”

This is not the first time that the closure of Christmas Lodge has caused consternation among members of the community.

Heron Wood councillor Peter Sandy has already collected more than 2,500 signatures on a petition campaigning for the home to be reopened. He has garnered support from around Aldershot, Farnborough and Farnham and is hoping to reach 4,000 names before he presents the petition to Hampshire County Council.

Aldershot Civic Society, which encourages people to take pride in the town, has also hit out at plans to sell off the land. The chairman of the society’s environmental group, Johanna Lance, said: “I have been aware of this issue ever since the possible sale was announced. We have been looking into it and, basically, the position of the civic society is that if Christmas Lodge can no longer be used for residential care, the site should be included in the park. “Because the site is not that big, the only way to make it profitable is blocks of flats and the impact of such a development would be unthinkable.”

The campaign to retain the area of parkland has been handed a boost by Rushmoor Borough Council, which is working with the county council to come up with a solution. Peter Amies, head of community at the borough authority, said: “It is not a very large area of the park but it is obviously important to the Friends of Brickfields Country Park. “We are now liaising with the county council — who we have a good relationship with — and we are looking to get an easement for it or to purchase it. “All of our efforts are going into protecting the area and I am hopeful that the county council will pass it over to us.” He added: “The area of land is not substantial and it does not have good development potential. I would anticipate that we will be able to secure it.”

No Hampshire County Council spokesman was available to comment as the News went to press.