

“No Evidence Building Was Donated to People” - Aldershot News 6/6/2008

Christmas Lodge was never given to the people of Aldershot and the County Council has every right to sell it a county councillor has claimed.

Aldershot East member Eric Neal said claims the building belonged to the people of Aldershot and should not be sold were based on an urban myth.

He said the building was named after Cllr Joan Christmas, a Conservative county councillor for Aldershot at the time who was heavily involved in its development.

He added “There have been claims made in the local press that the county council is selling something that was given to the people of Aldershot and that isn’t the case. The deeds are available for everybody to see and they show quite clearly that the council bought the land from a company”.

“There is no secret about it. This is purely an urban myth”.

For several years there have been rumours that the nursing home was bought by the Christmas family and given to the town for its elderly people.

Aldershot Civic Society chairman Johanna Lance also heard this was the case and it was named after Cllr Christmas and her husband Sidney Christmas, one of the town’s aldermen at the time..

She hoped it would not be demolished as it was part of the town’s history and housed protected bat colonies.

But after doing some research she said there was nothing to back up claims that the family bought the lodge and donated it to the town.

She added: “Obviously we looked into that because it’s always the first thing you hear when you’re talking about Christmas Lodge”.

“But we went to the county council offices in Winchester and looked at the deeds, and it’s very clear that the council actually purchased the land from a company, so unfortunately these claims are not correct”.

“It would be nice if they were true but when you hear these claims and you follow them up you find that they can’t be substantiated”.

“With the Freedom of Information Act now it is very easy to check these things, and although the land may have been purchased for the provision of a care home for the elderly there isn’t any recorded covenant saying it can only be used for that”.

“I’ve absolutely where the story comes from and we can find absolutely no evidence to back it up”.

Former Rushmoor borough councillor Colin Balchin, who had a long association with the Christmas family, admitted that he had never heard that the family bought or donated the land.

He said “Unfortunately I don’t know what connection they had with that land”.

“Certainly I said at the time that if they knew that it was going to be demolished they would turn in their graves”.

But he said the connection between the family and the lodge was likely to be lost forever when the building is knocked down.

David Edgoose, who was also around at the time, said that although the home was named after Cllr Joan Christmas he doubted she ever owned the land.

Cllr Neal said the site was likely to fetch more than £1million when the council closed bids on June 20.

He added that the council was handing over a piece of land unofficially adopted by the Brickfield Reserve before selling the site, as it added to the value of the plot.

He said that while many people might think a developer would appeal against the clause requiring it to give the land to the reserve, it actually served as a strong mitigating factor.

Cllr Neal added: "That piece of land makes up 15% of the site and it will actually help the developer with their planning application because it can be used under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act".

"When you put in an application you often have to provide mitigation land, and the fact that is included in the plot adds to its value. It makes simple business sense to include it in the sale".

"I would love to have been able to hand the whole of the site over to Brickfields it was never possible to do so".

The council spent over £4m on Ticehurst and we are talking about getting £1m back from this site, so the people of Aldershot still have gained".

He said he would like the site to be used for affordable housing but the amount of money developers could offer for the site would have to be taken into consideration.