

**“No Evidence Building Was Donated to People” - 6/6/2008 The Aldershot News – published from a letter by HCC Councillor Eric Neal . *“Original article”*, this reply by C.L.E.C.T was not published by The Aldershot News – Why ?**

***“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.”***

“Urban Myths” at some point must have originally had a grain of truth to start that myth, and indeed if you go back far enough, the Christmas name IS mentioned in this regard in a transfer document, but you do have to go back to the late 1800’s. Perhaps the fact that before Christmas Lodge was built, the land had a Scout Hut on it (site plan in the HCC archives and mentioned in the very same Aldershot News issue), may have lent credence to this particular myth, but in the end it may turn out to be just that, a myth, more research could be done but in the end where would it get you?, HCC own this land and come hell or high water they are going to sell it.

***“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”.***

What would Mrs Christmas make of this situation today?, honoured by her peers in naming the home she helped to set up, Mrs Christmas was chair of Social Services, the very group that later summarily closed Christmas Lodge on “economic” grounds.

***“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”.***

The deeds are available if you make an appointment and are prepared go to Winchester to inspect them. Rushmoor bought the land from Dorland Properties, owners of this portion of the original Aldershot Brick & Tile Works, one of whose previous owners included George Kemp, a great benefactor to a then fledgling Aldershot; we wonder what he would make of this situation.

The 1974 transfer document from RBC to HCC in fact does not correctly outline the land bought by HCC. The boundary description only mentions the Western, Southern and Eastern boundaries, no mention is made of the Northern Boundary, Croft Lane. Does this constitute a problem for the pending sale? Documents prior to the purchase by RBC of the land from Dorland Properties, I.e. how the land got from the Aldershot Brick and Tile Works to Dorland have never come to light, we know what the documents are but HCC do not have them in their archive.

***“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”.***

This is incorrect, the rumour that we continually hear is not that the Christmas family bought the nursing home, clearly this is not the case, but **“that the land was to be used for the benefit of the children of Aldershot”**. As mentioned above there is a plan in the HCC archive that clearly shows a Scout hut, from where the Scouts moved to their present premises in Manor Park. Was this an early use of this site by the “Children of Aldershot”?

***“He added that the council was not 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”.***

We have always put forward the case **that HCC will sell part of Brickfields Country Park**, now confirmed by our local County Councillor. The statement that Brickfields Country Park have **“unofficially adopted”** the land is wholly incorrect, they are using it with the full knowledge of Hampshire County Council and Rushmoor Borough Council who have HCC documents allowing such use. HCC erected the current boundary when Christmas Lodge was built, allowing the land to become part of Brickfields Park; the original larger boundary can still be seen in some places.

***“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”.***

In his recent letter to the Star, Cllr Neal claims - ***“This is no small piece of land and is over a quarter of the original site”***, now it is 15% - so which is it; over 25% or 15%?. The Christmas Lodge plot is 1.45 acres, the land already in Brickfields Park is 0.17 of an acre, not over a quarter, not 15% but less than 12%. If you want to check it for yourself we can point you to the HCC survey pins in Croft Lane and Brickfields Park.

Section 106 contributions were originally intended to increase overall open space provision or to provide for the improvement of existing space or facilities. Forcing a developer to **hand back** land that is **already existing open space** is not what most people would regard as above board or even fair, especially on the users of that open space, even if it might be within the rules. Whilst it makes money for HCC it does not benefit the local community, it does not increase open space provision and does not provide funds for improving existing open space.

We ALREADY have use of this land Cllr Neal, have you not noticed? Brickfields Park Volunteers have maintained under licence it for years. Rushmoor Council have had it under licence from HCC since the mid 1980's when the park was set up. Do you think this situation is fair on volunteers who have in all good faith spent their time and effort to maintain your facilities for the community?

*“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”.*

Your own words Cllr Neal – *“you often have to provide mitigation land”* - not **hand back** what the community already has.

Adds to its value for HCC maybe, HCC make their books look good, and also transfer a problem that they could have dealt with many years ago to somebody else. A prospective developer could argue that in the light of failing market conditions, returning the land already in Brickfields Park to Rushmoor is unfair, being effectively a 12% premium for being allowed to build a few houses, it may even put some developers off in the current climate.

*“I would loved to have been able to hand the whole of the site over to Brickfields it was never possible to do so”.*

No? we beg to differ. This stance by HCC totally ignores Government provisions for the disposal of unwanted Council property to the community. Government legislation said they could do it, HCC chose not to, many other councils in the country have.

*“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”.*

According to HCC Property Services the figure was £5m and came directly from the Health Service budget. Sold, yes and now at a loss if this published £1M cost is to be believed. At a meeting last August with HCC Property Services, CLECT were told that we could buy the site for £3M, HCC stating “we do not care who we sell to”. Since then the property market has gone into a steep decline so HCC may not even make that £1M.

What of that £40m that HCC managed to find to virtually rebuild their offices in Winchester, would not that money have been better spent on the Adult Social Care budget? Is a supposed £3m to £1m reduction in the potential sale price of Christmas Lodge possibly due to HCC delays, value for money ?, does it really take nearly three years to sell 1.45 acres of prime building land?. We think Aldershot has not gained, yet again.

*“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”.*

A tacit admission that the sale of Christmas Lodge might not make that £1m. Statutory requirements for affordable housing are set out in PPS3, the Hampshire County Structure Plan 1996-2011, policy H8 and the Rushmoor Local Plan Review. HCC are not the planning authority for this site, RBC are, and Rushmoor Affordable Housing Policy H6 states: *“The Council will seek an appropriate portion of affordable housing on any additional sites of 1 Hectare or more, or 25 or more dwellings”.* Reductions can be sought by developers experiencing higher than normal development costs.

As the Christmas Lodge site is well below the 1 Hectare requirement and 25 dwellings would be over development of that site, it is quite unlikely that any social housing would result from development here. However should a developer put in blocks of flats, then the 25 limit could be readily exceeded, a situation Cllr Neal opposes in his recent letter to the Star - *“I will oppose any flat development”.* There would seem to be a conflict here in Cllr Neal's desires, he wants affordable housing but opposes flats, Christmas Lodge will not support affordable housing without there being flats.

The original proposals for Christmas Lodge put forward by CLECT would have provided affordable housing immediately, plus many other valuable resources for the community, fitted with the latest environmental systems it would have been environmentally sustainable and could have been a flagship environmental development for the Borough and Hampshire. This opportunity has now been lost, and yet again Aldershot has lost out.