

## **Last ditch bid to stop new homes**

CAMPAIGNERS are fighting a last ditch battle to prevent homes being built on the site of a former care home for the elderly at Aldershot. They are seeking top-level talks with representatives of Hampshire and Rushmoor councils in a bid to save Christmas Lodge for use by the local community. The campaign is being led by the Friends of Brickfields Park – which adjoins the lodge site – who believe they face a race against time to stop homes being built on the land.

They have learned that developers are already trying to buy up homes in Evelyn Avenue which runs along the Christmas Lodge boundary. “About 10 home owners have been approached, and so far they have all said ‘no’ to the developers,” said Mike Hatch, chairman of the Friends. “But if the developers keep coming back and finally buy up the houses, then it would increase the size of the site to four acres.” He feared this latest news meant that the county council was paving the way to build homes on the site “by stealth”.

Mr Hatch added that the Friends were opposed to homes being built on the county council-owned site because of the impact it would have on wildlife in the nine-acre park. “We want to discuss the possibility of saving Christmas Lodge with Hampshire and Rushmoor councils and other interested parties,” he said. “In our view, the building should be made available for use by the community. We already know of groups who would be interested in using it.”

Mr Hatch appealed to members of the public to back the campaign by signing the Friends’ online petition at [www.best-report.org](http://www.best-report.org), and by writing to Aldershot MP Gerald Howarth and both councils.

Christmas Lodge, once a care home for 36 frail old folk, was closed by the county council in November 2005 because it did not meet present day requirements.

County council leader Ken Thornber said “all options” were being kept open for the disposal of Christmas Lodge with a view to reinvesting the proceeds in adult services. He added that, as the planning authority, Rushmoor Council would give residents the chance to have their say about the future of the site. “All angles will be fully considered as part of the development process,” added Coun Thornber.