

## **Do your homework**

26/ 6/2008

Adrian Collett's letter in the Star (June 12) clearly indicates that I upset him – so much so that he threw his dolly out of the pram.

All I had said in a previous letter to the press was “Adrian you must stop believing in urban myths and do some homework: this land was never donated by the Christmas family to Aldershot.”

In fact, Hampshire County Council acquired the site from Aldershot Council in 1974 and they had previously bought it from Dorland Properties Ltd.

In attempting to make his point Adrian also raised other matters which require clarification, namely Ashburton Court in Winchester.

This is a huge crumbling 1960s building, energy inefficient and costing a fortune to maintain. The new building will allow officers of the county council to work in comfort and safety at a much reduced cost. Also with its open plan offices more staff can be relocated there, which than allows their empty offices in Winchester to be sold.

Money raised from these sales, together with sums our economically wise county council had already saved, will cover the expense of the new building. To quote Adrian's exact words: “they can find £40m to refurbish their Winchester Ivory Tower yet cannot find smaller sums to give our care homes a new lease of life”. I say: “Adrian, do your homework: the £40m only exists when the rebuild, office and land sales are complete.”

The county is giving a new lease of life to its care homes, of which Ticehurst Nursing Home in Aldershot, is an example. It has been expanded and upgraded, thus improving the quality of life of its residents, including those who formerly lived and/or worked in Christmas Lodge.

This has been a most successful cost-cutting exercise by the county council and yet, as I have observed over my last three years as a councillor, the Lib-Dems – led by Coun Collett – have opposed every one of these cost-cutting proposals by a Conservative administration – and we are talking millions of pounds here.

They seem to be living in some strange time warp harking back to the “good old days” before 1997 when a coalition of Lib-Dems and Labour ran the county council, spent nearly all the reserves, returned council tax increases well above inflation and even contemplated selling off all the county's care and nursing homes in order to balance the books.

What a contrast to today: we have had the lowest county council tax rise in the South East, are aiming for an even lower increase next year and we are rated a top performing council in the delivery of its services to the community.

In conclusion therefore I say to Adrian: “Please do not lecture me, start living in the real world” – a world, incidentally, which still contains a flourishing “Westy” thanks to the fact that the Conservative-run Hampshire County Council has spent some £70,000 in the last year on improving it!

*Coun Eric Neal, Aldershot East*