

'Urban myth' about lodge

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In a recent article in the local press Coun Adrian Collett Lib/Dem leader at Hampshire County Council stated that Conservative lead HCC "had ignored the wishes of the Christmas family who had donated the land for the Community's use".

Adrian, you must stop believing in urban myths and do some homework; this land was never donated by the Christmas family to Aldershot. I quote from an email sent to me from HCC properties services: "The Chief Executive has reappraised our legal position regarding the ownership of Christmas Lodge.

"He has reaffirmed that there are no restrictive covenants affecting the land, which would restrict our ability to sell the site for redevelopment. "Hampshire County Council acquired the site from Aldershot Borough Council in 1974, who in turn purchased the site from Dorland Properties Limited in 1957.

"Neither of these conveyances referred to a covenant preventing development of the site".

"There is also no mention of the land being bequeathed to the people of Aldershot".

"I can therefore confirm the site is owned by Hampshire County Council and that there are no restrictive covenants affecting the land, which would restrict our ability to sell the site for redevelopment."

My friend and colleague Coun David Welch also supplied me with the following information. It was given its name to honor Coun Joan Christmas who was a Conservative County Councillor for Aldershot who played a major role in the building and setting up of the lodge.

In August 2007 as the county councillor for Aldershot East, I sent the following letter to the local press: In your front page article headline 'Lodge will be razed in weeks' you seem to imply the £11 million overspend in the Adult Social Care budget was due to some mismanagement by the Conservative led Hampshire County Council. Far from it, the overspend was due entirely to an unexpected increase in demand by residents of Hampshire for services. What should the county council do turn the sick, old and vulnerable away?

With regards to Christmas Lodge Hampshire County Council has spent nearly £5 million on refurbishing and expanding Ticehurst Nursing home. Aldershot now has a state of the art nursing home less than a mile from Christmas lodge. It can accommodate nearly 70 people and now houses the staff and residents from the lodge, regrettably for many reasons the lodge is no longer required by the County Council.

Because of the fire, which was an act of arson a 24-hour security patrol has been put in place for Health and Safety reasons. This is costing you and I a lot of money therefore the building will be demolished ASAP by HCC.

With reference to turning the site into a community resource, RBC has already drawn up plans for a new Community Centre in Manor Park. Why would Rushmoor Borough Council fund another community facility within the immediate vicinity?

The Christmas Lodge site will be sold, the county council needs the money for further investment in its care and nursing homes which provide a total of 1,300 units of accommodation across the county.

With regard to the land still owned by HCC and incorporated into Brickfields Park, which includes the access path. I have argued for its legal transfer to Brickfields and I am confident this will happen when everything is finalised.

Whether we like it or not, we all know the site will in the end be developed for housing. The pressure by the Government for councils to provide new housing in the South East is overwhelming. The reasons for this are clear, a desire for more and more people to live on their own and the unprecedented levels over the last 10 years of uncontrolled immigration into this country.

In my literature when I was elected to represent Aldershot East I basically made two pledges, to see that council tax payers obtained value for money and Aldershot did not miss out. Unlike certain other people I do not promise things that cannot be delivered.

What I can promise is that I will argue as strongly as possible for the site to be developed in keeping with the existing type of housing in the area, and I will oppose any flat development.

As you know Hampshire County Council has agreed to my request to transfer the land mentioned above to Rushmoor Borough Council and therefore Brickfields. This is no small piece of land and is over a quarter of the original site.

Why not transfer the land now?

It is sound financial sense to sell the entire site with an obligation for the purchaser to transfer this area of land to Rushmoor Borough Council. The new owner would than be able is offset some of the open space provisions required under section 106 of the Town and County Planning Act. This provision will make the site more valuable and therefore HCC should obtain a higher price for the land.

This is how Hampshire County Council returns the lowest increase in council tax in South East England and in doing so obtained from the independent Audit Commission the status as a four-star authority, one I think of 12 in the UK.

In contrast I came out of the recent borough elections amazed by the uncostered promises made to the Aldershot electorate by the local Labour party. From free parking in the town centre for Aldershot residents to subsidised late night bus services for North Town, plus an odd £20 million for a road access from the A331 to North Town industries.

Regretfully we are never told who is going to pay for all of this? It certainly will not be this Government, it has run out of your money.

Have Aldershot residents gained, the figures clearly indicate we have. Nearly £5 million invested into Ticehurst plus a considerably plot of land from the Christmas site to Brickfields.

Hampshire County Council hopefully will realise about a £million from the sale which HCC will than spend for the benefit of all in the County and that includes the people of Aldershot.

Coun Eric Neal, HCC Aldershot East