

'Urban myth' about Lodge - Aldershot News 6/6/2008

Cllr. Eric Neal, HCC Aldershot East

"In a recent article in the local press Cllr 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." (See note 1)

The "homework" for this particular "Urban Myths" takes quite some research, have you done any Eric?, the documents for Christmas Lodge are spread between Hampshire County and Rushmoor Borough Councils and go back to the 1800's. Researching Christmas Lodge fully has taken a lot of time and could take much, much more.

"Urban Myths" at some point must have originally had a grain of truth to start the 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 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 recently mentioned in the Aldershot News) 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
- regardless of the communities wishes.**

"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."

A point to note - the 1974 transfer document in fact does not correctly outline the land bought by HCC (<http://www.best-report.org/downloads/1974deed.zip> - page 1). The boundary description only mentions the Western, Southern and Eastern boundaries, no mention is made of the Northern Boundary, which is delineated by Croft Lane, is this because Croft Lane as a public highway is controlled / (owned ?) by Hampshire county Council. Does this constitute a problem for any future sale ? Documents prior to the purchase of the land by RBC from Dorland Properties, that is how the land got from The Aldershot Brick and Tile Works to Dorland have never come to light, HCC do not have them in their archive, where are they ?

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

Mrs Joan Christmas was so much more than that Eric, you do her a dis-service. (See note 2)

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 has now summarily closed Christmas Lodge on "economic" grounds, what an honour !.

*"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."

£5m which apparently came from a Health Service budget, what of that £40m that HCC managed to "find" to virtually rebuild their offices in Winchester ?, would that money not have been better spent on the Adult Social Care budget.

“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.”

24 hour security was not placed on the Christmas lodge site for nearly **five weeks AFTER** the fire, and had that fire not happened it is very unlikely that any security would have been employed at all. HCC’s “Health and Safety” excuses about vandals injuring themselves applied equally well before, as after the fire.

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“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?”

A community Centre that is still not built (in 2010), and not likely to be in the near future. Christmas Lodge would have provided such a facility for the local community immediately and at relatively little cost from existing facilities. Aldershot Scouts have spent time and funds on being part of that Manor Park centre, and this week (2008) we hear in the Aldershot News that Cllrs. Neal and Kimber have found funding for the Scouts to improve their current facilities, so it does not look like they are to move anytime soon.

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“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.”

Sold, possibly but now at a loss if the £1M cost is to be believed (below).
At a meeting last August with HCC Property Services, CLECT were told that we could buy the site for £3M, HCC “did not care who we sell to”, a stance that totally ignored Government provisions for the disposal of unwanted Council property to the community. Since then the property market has gone into freefall so HCC may not even make that £1M figure.

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“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.”

Is refusing a Community Centre from existing facilities - value for money ?
Is a supposed £3m to £1m reduction in the potential sale price of Christmas Lodge due to HCC delays - value for money ?,
Does it really take nearly 5 years to sell 1.25 acres of prime building land ?,

Eric – you have not fulfilled your pledges, you have not delivered in this case, we think Aldershot has missed out – again.

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“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.”

Easy for you to say Eric, you may not have a seat if this situation ever pans out, and it’s a point already covered by the RBC planning brief.

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“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. “

Eric, you need to get your facts right, in this weeks Aldershot News you seem to say that this **“no small piece of land”** is only 15% of the site, not **“over a quarter”**.

So which is it ? – Fact - the Christmas Lodge plot is 1.25 acres, we’ve had it surveyed using the HCC survey pins,

The land in Brickfields Park is 0.25 of an acre, not “over a quarter”, not “15%”, but one fifth. If you want to check it for yourself we can point you to those HCC survey pins in Croft Lane and Brickfields Park, the very same ones we used.

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“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.”

Financial sense to HCC maybe, repeat your own statement often enough it becomes the “truth” does it not?, remember that so often repeated phrase - **“maximise contributions to the Adult Social Care budget”**.

HCC make their books look good, and 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 current market conditions returning the land already in Brickfields Park to Rushmoor is unfair, it being effectively a 20% premium for being allowed to build a few houses - It may even put some developers off.

Section 106 contributions were intended to **increase** the overall open space provision or to provide for the improvement of existing space. Forcing a developer to - **hand back an open space that is already incorporated in an existing open space** - is not what most people would regard as above board or even fair especially on the user of that open space, it is just “fudging the figures”, “cooking the books”, maybe even a “scam”, even if it might be within the rules.

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“In contrast I came out of the recent borough elections amazed by the uncosted 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.”

At least they have promised something !.
Free parking for Aldershot Town would be the shot in the arm it so sorely needs, removing short term free parking and putting more meters is not, whatever the Council. North Camp has a vibrant* shopping centre, currently free but threatened with meters. * Well it was then – have you noticed the empty parking spaces now that meters are in place !.

An A331 link would help to remove the severe transport problems that the residents of North Town experience and are only set to get worse if the recycling / incinerator plans come to fruition, not to mention the project Connaught residents who will use North town as a southbound cut through to the A331.

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“..... Aldershot residents gained, the figures clearly indicate we have. Nearly £5 million invested into Ticehurst.....”

Paid for by the NHS.....

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“.....plus a considerably plot of land from the Christmas site to Brickfields.”

Land we **ALREADY** have use of Cllr Neal !!!!!, have you not noticed !!!!!, have you ever been to the site ??????.
How can you give back to someone, something he already has ?.

Brickfields Park Volunteers have been maintaining it for you for years .!
What is a - *considerably plot of land*

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“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.”

I sincerely hope they do benefit Eric, but lets just wait an see.

Coun Eric Neal, HCC Aldershot East

Notes.

1) - In a recent communication from Alastair Christmas – 13/6/2008

“There was an article on the front page of the Aldershot News last Friday, speculating as to whether the land upon which Christmas Lodge was built was donated to the people of Aldershot by my parents. Sadly the story was false.”

“The irony is that Christmas Lodge was built on land that was once owned by the Christmas family. My great grandfather bought Park Farm and Park Farm House in the 1850,s, which consisted of 500 acres of agricultural land in Aldershot. The farm was sold in the 1930's for development.”

2) Re - Joan Christmas

“She represented Aldershot on the Hampshire County Council for an uninterrupted period of 16 years until her retirement in 1978, the last 6 years of which she was the Chairman of the Hampshire County Council Social Services Committee. In 1977, the then Chairman of the Hampshire County Council, the late Lord Porchester contacted Jim Callaghan, the Prime Minister of the day, proposing that my mother should be given an award.

In the 1977 New Years Honours List, she was made a CBE and I attended her investiture at Buckingham Palace. She was also a Hampshire magistrate for thirty years. She died in July 2001 at the age of 87. Only a few years before her death, she was made an Honorary Alderman of the County of Hampshire and both the Chairman and the Chief Executive of the Hampshire County Council made a big fuss over her.”