

**Christmas Lodge
Environmental Community Trust**

CLECT



Christmas Lodge Care Home, Evelyn Avenue

PROPOSAL

FOR ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITY USES

INTRODUCTION

In January 2006, when the Hampshire County Council first announced the intention to sell the Christmas Lodge site for residential development, the local community, still bruised from other attempts to save such facilities, resigned itself to losing yet another local asset.

Nevertheless, the Aldershot Civic Society did publish a Report "Alternative Uses for the Christmas Lodge Site" (BEST Report, Appendix 1), in which it outlined the potential harm to the adjoining Brickfields Park and local biodiversity, and the benefits for the community that could be achieved by a continued community use of the site.

In response, Hampshire County Council stated that it was going ahead as planned to obtain outline planning permissions for the site in order to "achieve the maximum capital receipts from the sale for development" and that the local community would be consulted as part of the planning process.

In May 2007, the Communities Secretary, Ruth Kelly, announced an initiative (Quirk Report) that allowed local communities to buy disused schools etc. for very little money, with the aim to create "a new era of civic pride" by giving local people more say in how local assets are used. (BBC Website).

Since the mid 1800's Aldershot town has been inextricably linked with the army and as a Garrison Town, Aldershot has always had the reputation of being a "rough" place. In more recent years, it has also gained the reputation of being cheap, cheap housing, cheap shops, with a gradual decline in well being and civic pride. One only has to read the local press and talk to our residents to find that Civic Pride in Aldershot is rapidly declining and most residents would argue that there is now very little to be proud of in the town. In the recent local elections, the average turnout in Aldershot was well below that of Farnborough.

Civic Pride and the willingness to get involved in the democratic process are at an all time low and respect for the Council and elected representatives alike is exceedingly difficult to find.

It is self-evident that these attitudes are harming the community and that they need to change. For the community this means that we all have to work together.

However, with a population that has grown suspicious and cynical, this is not an easy task. Experience elsewhere has shown that people need an appropriate vehicle that caters for involvement in an attractive and popular activity that produces visible results with a visible ‘feel good’ factor, that creates conditions in which the community can regain confidence in itself and in the authorities.

We propose that a body such as the

Christmas Lodge Environmental Community Trust

could just be such a vehicle.

These facts have been identified in the Civic Society’s Report - The BEST Report and much of the following proposal aims to use the growing interest in nature conservation and green issues highly prominent in both local and government thinking to bring the community together, to re-create local confidence in their community, to deal successfully with the many new challenges that lay ahead not only with global warming and urban nature conservation, but also with the massive additional development of the Aldershot Urban Extension.

HISTORY

The Army came to Aldershot 150 years ago, and since then, life and conditions in the town have been determined mainly by the needs of the military, through the use of surrounding land with its limited availability for ‘normal’ growth and economic development of the town.

Although, the civilian population of Aldershot has always risen to the challenges that came with life in a garrison town, the merger with Farnborough in the 1970’s and the consequent steady decline of the town have left the people disillusioned and disheartened – with good reason:

EXAMPLE: Open Space

Much of Aldershot’s Open Space, listed in the Local Plan, is owned and controlled by the military.

- Most of the publicly owned commercial buildings and schools, Adult Education facilities and other civic infrastructure buildings together with the surrounding land and public playing fields have been sold, regardless of wide opposition from local residents.
- Aldershot is already identified as an area with a very significant shortfall of Open Space (approx. 50%). Moreover, in the Rushmoor Plan, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Sustainability Appraisal (page 36, Any Gaps or problems?) the Council states that **“It is difficult to improve on targets for Open Space as there is only a limited amount available within the Borough”**.
- Proposed community facilities, including a Community Centre and an Athletic Academy each with associated parking, will have to be built in our public parks, regardless of the loss of green space and the damage to the feel of these Parks, because there is no other publicly owned land left. **This can only exacerbate our loss of open space.**
- Almost the entire amount of developers open space contribution money generated by the West Gate development in Aldershot (£1M with 485 new flats on the site) will be spent on new community woodland in Farnborough – regardless of the far greater shortfall in open space in Aldershot.

- In 2004/05, almost 90% of community project funds (£114,000) went to six projects in Farnborough, whilst only one single “community project” in Aldershot – a CCTV system in a street near the train and bus stations received funding of £19,000.

The new Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) creates an additional demand for Open Space away from the SPA in order to alleviate pressure on the SPA from people and their animals bringing increased recreational activity from the cumulative impact of residential development in the surrounding towns.

Natural England has developed a delivery plan identifying measures of mitigation that would reduce pressure arising from new development on the SPA, which are:

The creation of new publicly accessible natural green space, or

Existing publicly accessible natural green space must be improved.

The Christmas Lodge Environmental Community Trust’s proposal of a merger of the Christmas Lodge site with the adjoining Brickfields Country Park would tick all the boxes; it would satisfy Natural England’s requirements -

- (i) by creating new green space and
- (ii) by adding facilities to the existing Brickfields Park open space by operating the Christmas Lodge site by community for the community.

The Christmas Lodge Environmental Community Trust should be set up primarily as a working base to promote community involvement and enhance civic pride through activities that maximise beneficial gains for the community.

THE PROPOSAL

The aim is to create a community enterprise that allows for a practical involvement of local residents in the decision making process, in the practical application of these decisions and in the running of those services that have a direct impact upon the local, physical environment and quality of life.

We propose that a body, **Christmas Lodge Environmental Community Trust** is to be formed.

A Management Committee to be set up to steer the proposal through the initial setting up of the Trust and to control the long-term running of the Trust.

The Committee should be formed from a volunteer cross section of the local population.

That a proper Constitution and a Cost Analyses and Business Plan be written.

Following our public meeting on the 5th of June, where we presented our aims and suggestions for Christmas Lodge, the following uses have been identified and agreed (further uses not withstanding) -

1. **Crèche, playgroup, small children's activities centre** for residents within walking distance. Meeting centre for mothers and toddlers. Centrally located within the ancient Boxalls Farm area, the Lodge is well connected via a network of paths and roads, affording easy pedestrian access.
2. **Toilet facilities for visitors to the park.** It is surprising how often this is requested from visitors to the park and would provide a valuable facility leading to better and greater use of the park.
3. **Public wildlife demonstration garden,** water tolerant planting schemes. The area of the existing Lodge gardens and amenity land is of a sufficient size and with a variety of growing conditions that are very suitable for such an activity. A Rushmoor Borough Council policy, this could be linked to Rushmoor in Bloom further enhancing the Boroughs prestige.

4. **Environmental education centre.** Many schools use Brickfields Park for nature study but would benefit from onsite teaching facilities, education aids and services for environmental and botanical subjects. Older students could use their time with the Friends of Brickfields Country Park volunteers for course work. There are 3 schools within walking distance of the Lodge.
5. **Environmental sustainability demonstrator,** with solar panels, solar hot water, ground source heat pumps, wind generators as demonstrators to the public and linked to a website showing the costs, benefits and drawbacks of such systems. Open to the public, sponsored by manufacturers, another benefit to the community and more via the web. Another Government policy, but where do the public get unbiased advice as to what is the best system for their investment and what return will it give. Just how much *will* that energy saving light save you? this can be shown in real time.

With the Southern aspect to the Lodge we envisage this one item could make Christmas Lodge independent (or very nearly so) of mainstream power services and even generate further income from the sale of power. Linked to a website for the Lodge it will demonstrate the benefits to be had and be in-line with key Government policy.

6. **Key worker housing** in the upper floors, or in the Northern building. This is another key Government policy which would have multiple benefits for the Trust, be an income stream, and provide some security for the enterprise at the same time providing benefits in affordable housing for key workers. The site is local to main rail connections and bus services.
7. **An Aldershot Museum.** Aldershot has no museum of its own, it does however have a military museum with some Aldershot information, but it is primarily for the militarily minded, and when project Connaught is finished it will be firmly back in the military part of the borough. An Aldershot museum, run in concert with the Aldershot Historical Society, Museums service and other groups, would serve to group various separated local exhibits within the town itself. This could become a central repository of things Aldershot, bringing together dispersed historical resources and knowledge into a cohesive exhibit.

8. **Mobile Library location.** Libraries should be an integral part of society but are undergoing heavy financial and staffing reorganisation. As a stopping point for the Mobile Library, Christmas Lodge could provide a valuable service for the community. Christmas Lodge could perform the task of a “drop in” miniature or “outpost” library where the community can order, pick up and drop off books without travelling larger distances to their main library.
9. **Meeting rooms for local groups,** W.I. Cubs, Scouts, Brownies Etc. etc. There are also many other local groups who currently operate from the generosity of their members, but who would benefit from a base where they could operate from, store materials, conduct meetings and lectures.
10. **Silver surfer demonstrator,** trainer etc, as above, the government want us all to be computer literate, but older generations can find this a difficult and daunting task. With on-site assistance, and if required training in this technology for those who find it daunting. Webcams, web phones, a place for the non technical to meet and contact relatives abroad via video and cheap web phone links, in a world where families are spread far and wide.
11. **Bird watching** is already one of the nations favourite past times and still growing, why not adapt the existing balcony for bird watching?. Unfortunately not favourably received by the meeting, this could still provide a useful valuable facility for parts of the community and further a field via webcams.
12. **Small wildlife hospital.** This has been seriously looked at in the past, but failed as the organisation requiring space, failed. There is no such facility locally and with the resurgence of wildlife and global issues this could be another centralised facility in the area.
13. **Cyber café.** I.T. systems used for some of these suggestions would have duality, not only providing a web presence for the Lodge, they could also be used for training purposes. A place for people to meet, chat, a centre point for the local community.
14. **Tool storage,** meeting and lecture facilities for The Friends of Brickfields Country Park.

15. **Small enterprise offices**, low rental, with supplied services. Many business start-ups require space and operating from home is not always convenient or even legal. We could provide small offices with all services at low rental, a further income stream for the Trust.

This is a small list of uses for the Lodge, more will undoubtedly become evident with time and we feel sure that you, the reader, could add a few more of your own. Please feel free to do so.

THE IMMEDIATE EFFECTS of adopting this proposal would be:

The continued community use of the Christmas Lodge buildings for the community.

Although the former residential care home has been empty for more than 18 months and has very recently sustained damage in an arson attack, the South wing is not beyond reasonable economic repair. The existing buildings are fit for purpose and should be retained in their entirety.

The prevention of loss of a section of the adjoining Brickfields Country Park (BfP).

The Christmas Lodge site contains a small but vitally important section of the Brickfields Country Park. This is currently leased from the owners of the Christmas Lodge site (Hampshire County Council). Retention of this area is essential for continued future public access to the park and to **prevent** it from becoming a haven for drinkers and drug users, should this land go for development by isolating the Northern boundary.

The protection of urban natural habitat for protected species.

Brickfields Country Park is vital to the conservation of Biodiversity in Rushmoor. The fact that 4 species of insects, the Long-winged Conehead, (notable A), Roesel's Bush Cricket, (notable B), the Wasp Spider and Bombus Hypnorum, are relatively new arrivals in the UK and have been found breeding in the BfP underlines its importance as an urban "Stepping Stone" site. Two other such sites in the Borough have recently been lost to development.

In the Park, more than 400 species of plants, birds, mammals and insects are already recorded.

So far, nine species have been identified as UKBAP Priority species, a further five UKBAP species are identified, but still need to be verified with two of these species having a Hampshire BAP. Eight bird species have a Status Amber and a further six other insect species are listed as Nationally Notable. (Appendix 2)

The essential stabilisation of the slope and remedial works that would be required for the proposed development of the Christmas Lodge site could destroy this habitat forever, with possible loss of existing and new species such as -



The Beautiful Demoiselle Damselfly
New to Brickfields in 2006, **Not** previously recorded in Aldershot.



Long-winged Cone head, Notable A, recent arrival in the UK.



Roessel's Bush cricket, Notable B, a recent arrival in the UK



B. Hypnorum, Female, the Tree Bumblebee, first recorded in the UK in 2000

Long term benefits for the community

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE WE FACE TODAY IS CLIMATE CHANGE, and the some of the important tasks the Christmas Lodge Centre would be involved in are -

- Promote awareness of Global Warming and how simple actions can reduce the damaging impact of human activity, i.e. record the changes that have been brought about by the centre, such as locally grown plants – no transport mileage; more permeable surfaces – less run-off, less flooding etc.
Demonstrating the effects of Global Warming, Cost Savings.
- Demonstrate the use of permeable surfaces (flowerbeds, gravel and grass) rather than hard standing to prevent/reduce flooding around properties and, during severe weather events, reduce run-off into the public drainage system. Perhaps establish a network of ‘Gully Watchers’.
Global Warming, Self Help, Civic involvement, Cost Savings.
- Demonstrate and record the surface temperatures of differing surfaces and their effects on the environment.
Global Warming education.
- Demonstrate water saving measures for gardeners and homes, water permeable surfaces, rainwater collection, grey water reuse Etc.
Recycling, Conservation of Natural Resources.
- Demonstrate alternative energy systems, solar power, energy saving measures and devices heat sinks within buildings and gardens.
Recycling, Conservation of Natural Resources, Cost Savings.
- Maintain an “Innovation Ideas Bank” for the re-use of materials, products, energy and natural resources.
Waste Reduction, Landfill reduction, Recycling benefits.

The Christmas Lodge Centre could be a very powerful educational tool to promote and maintain biodiversity in the Borough by -

- Demonstrating how a habitat works, the interdependence between plants and animals, plant and plant, or animal and animal. Demonstrating our own dependence upon a healthy eco-system. Examples should be provided and could include such exhibits as a Perspex fronted compost heap. **Biodiversity, Waste Reduction.**

- Setting up recording and monitoring schemes for species in Brickfields Park and other sites elsewhere in the Borough as part of a wider scheme helping establish and maintain local Biodiversity records, assisting the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre.
Community Involvement, Civic Pride, Cost Savings.

- Creating a wildlife garden to demonstrate the compatibility of wildlife gardening with modern ideas and fashions in garden design. This could include a “bee wall or cairn”, constructed from building rubble, an “environmental” sculpture made from wood leftovers promoting recycling and uses for invertebrate life such as Stag Beetles Etc. Stag Beetles are known to exist in some numbers in the vicinity of Christmas Lodge.
Biodiversity, Waste Reduction, Community Involvement.

- Road verges are regarded as an essential wildlife habitat, many of them are cared for by the Hampshire Wildlife Trust. The centre could work with such organisations to provide local knowledge, records and practical assistance.
Biodiversity, Sustainability, Civic Pride, Community Involvement, Cost Savings.

- Provide an attractive opportunity for healthy outdoor activity for all generations.
Public Health.

The Christmas Lodge Environmental Community Trust, with our proposals for a Christmas Lodge Centre, would be a practical way to spread the agenda of community involvement and civic pride throughout the wider community, leading by example and showing the world at large that they can identify their “own patch”, improve it, look after it and be -

Proud of their achievements and the changes for the better.

Christmas Lodge Environmental Community Trust firmly believe this is the way forward and ask the involvement of all concerned, Hampshire County Council, Rushmoor Borough Council, Christmas Lodge Environmental Community Trust,

And last but by no means least, the community.

Appendix 1.

The report entitled -

“ALTERNATIVE USES FOR THE CHRISMAS LODGE SITE”

Can be downloaded from -

www.best-report.org/downloads/alternativeuseschl.pdf

Appendix 2.

UKBAP Species found in Brickfields Park-

Pipistrelle - *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*,
Bern 2\Bonn\Habitats & Species Directive, UKBAP, Schedule 5, HBAP

Loddon Lily - *Leucojum aestivum*,
JNCC Nationally Scarce, HBAP

Brilliant Emerald Dragonfly - *Somatochlora metallica*,
HBAP

Pearl Bordered Fritillary - *Boloria euphrosyne*,
UKBAP, Schedule 5, HBAP

Stag Beetle - *Lucanus cervus*,
Habitats & Species Directive, Nationally Notable B, UKBAP, Schedule 5,
\HBAP

Tree Sparrow - *Passer montanus*,
Bird Population Status: red, UKBAP, HBAP

Song Thrush - *Turdus philomelos*
Birds Directive 2, Bird Population Status: red, UKBAP, HBAP

Carder Bee – *Bombus humilis* –
UKBAP, HBAP

Carder Bee – *Bombus ruderarius* –
UKBAP, HBAP

Bird species in Brickfields Park of status amber or worse -

Kingfisher - *Alcedo atthis*
Bern 2, Birds Directive 1, Bird Population Status: amber, Schedule 1

Redpoll - *Carduelis flammea*
Bern 2, Bird Population Status: amber

Cuckoo - *Cuculus canorus*
Bird Population Status: amber

Mute Swan - *Cygnus olor*
Bonn, Birds Directive 2, Bird Population Status: amber

Grey Wagtail - *Motacilla cinerea*
Bern 2, Bird Population Status: amber

Yellow Wagtail - *Motacilla flava*
Bern 2, Bird Population Status: amber, HBAP

Green woodpecker - *Picus viridis*
Bern 2, Bird Population Status: amber

House sparrow - *Passer domesticus*
Bird Population Status: red

Starling - *Sturnus vulgaris*
Birds Directive 2, Bird Population Status: red

Notable species found in Brickfields Park -

European tortoise Bug - <i>Eurygaster maura</i>	Notable B
Long-winged Conehead – <i>Conocephalus discolor</i>	Notable A
Roesel's Bush-cricket – <i>Metrioptera roeselii</i>	Notable B
Hoverfly – <i>Megasyrphus annulipes</i>	Nationally Notable
False scorpion – <i>dendrocernes cyrneus</i>	Nationally rare
Bee – <i>Dasygaster altercator</i>	Nationally Notable B