

# Park plan opposition growing

## Anstey Residents Group protest meeting Sunday

By Moira Howells

AROUND 200 people turned out to protest against further development of Anstey Park on Saturday.

The Hands Off Anstey Park protest is supported by a Facebook petition which, by Wednesday, had more than 455 signed up, many of them young people.

Both reflect the strength of feeling over a proposal by Alton Town Council to release part of the park to make provision for junior football, needed to satisfy a condition of planning which would result from the proposed development of the Coors Sports Ground site in Anstey Road.

If the Molson Coors/Vale partnership gets permission to build a supermarket on the 2.27 hectare (5.61 acre) site it will have to provide alternative accommodation for the sporting facilities currently housed there.

While permission is already in place to build a new outdoor bowling facility and tennis courts on ATC-owned land in Chawton Park Road, the sticking point is over the future of Alton Town Football Club.

The Coors proposal envisages ATFC moving to an upgraded enclosure at Anstey Park, currently under licence to Alton United Youth Football Club whose 470-strong membership and 20 teams would be moved to new facilities on the Diggers Field side of Anstey Park.

Protesters are concerned over the resulting loss of open space, both from this development and due to increased pressure on open parkland for training pitches.

ATFC would need land over and above the enclosure space for training, and Alton Rugby Club would lose the land they currently use for training purposes to the junior football development.

Leading Saturday's protest against the controversial loss of open space were members of the Anstey Park Casual Users Group. While insisting that they are not against sport or against AUYFC having better facilities, they do not think this is the right plan.

They are opposed to the fencing and closing off of yet more public open land, and to the resulting access road, pointing out that the junior footballers already have good facilities, for which they have an 11-year lease.

They argue that Coors has already agreed good re-provision facilities for bowls and tennis and that the only club being disadvantaged by the proposed development of the Coors Sports Ground site would be ATFC.

Protesters believe that Coors should come up with an alternative solution for the town's football club that would not result in the loss of well used parkland.

The Users Group further point out that while people understand the need for change they have not been consulted over this proposed loss of public open space.

APCUG were joined on Saturday by members of the public and by members of the Anstey Residents Group who are equally opposed to the potential loss of this currently peaceful and unspoilt stretch of green open space.

ARG is totally opposed to the building of a supermarket on the Coors Sports Ground site - a proposal

which is said to have put neighbouring residents in "a stranglehold position", unable to sell their properties.

Commenting this week on the release of the Kinetic report, resulting from November's public consultation by the Molson Coors/Vale partnership, ARG says that while a High Street survey by Kinetic had shown 54 per cent of people polled would support the building of a new supermarket on the Coors site, the ARG straw poll of visitors leaving the consultation exhibition had shown 75 per cent of visitors opposed to the plan. The Kinetic report had shown that 67 per cent of visitors had stated their opposition to the supermarket plan - a close percentage to that forecast by ARG.

An ARG spokesman concluded: "Clearly then the public exhibition has backfired badly on Coors as a large majority of Alton residents have indicated in a very definite way that they do not want the Coors supermarket proposals to go ahead.

"ARG very much hopes that Alton Town Council and the East Hampshire planners will listen to the voice of the people of Alton."

ARG is to hold an open meeting at Holybourne Theatre, London Road, this Sunday (February 7) to bring supporters up to date on developments.

Starting at 7.30pm the meeting will present ARG's strategy to oppose the Coors supermarket application and the need to protect the public open space in Anstey Park. ATC will be discussing the issue at its full council meeting this Wednesday, February 10, 6.15pm at Alton Assembly Rooms.

