

# Uni village plan failing

by **Martin George**

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Kingston's University's nine-year dream of building a 1,000-bedroom student village has been declared a "dead duck" by a planning inspector.

The proposals for Thames Water land on the Berrylands sewage treatment works formed a key part of Kingston Council's 15-year vision for the borough.

But in a letter on September 9, the water company's chief executive said officers were told it would not release the land eight months ago.

Karol Smal, of the Spring Grove residents' association, said: "We question the apparent lack of integrity of council officers."

"If they did not lie to us, I think they have been incompetent."

The council denied Thames Water told it that it would not release the land for the student village over an eight-month period and said the two parties signed a statement in May.

The council said it acted in good faith and Thames Water did not provide evidence it could verify.

Planning inspector David Vickery rescheduled the last day of his public examination of the core strategy on September 13, to investigate the last-minute revelation.

He warned the council its strategy, which has been four years in the making, now had a "big hole" and could be "dead in the water"

when he decides whether to approve it in December.

Thames Water said it opposed development in areas suffering strong smells, and might need the land for future replacement sewage works.

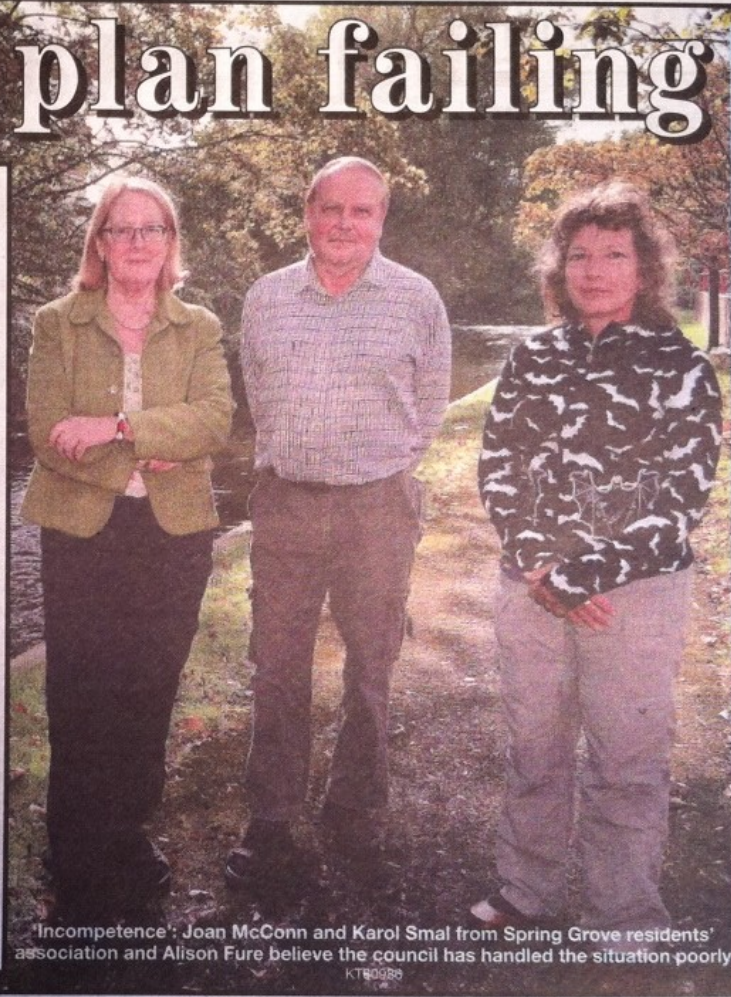
Chief executive Martin Baggs wrote: "It is disappointing the council presented evidence that disregards our clear position."

"It is somewhat paradoxical the council appears to have ignored our stated view that the proposals would lead to future problems relating to the level of odour, while raising concerns about odour levels."

Kingston University first unveiled plans for a village near the Clayhill halls of residence in July 2002, but councillors rejected them in April 2003 and in July 2004.

Councillor Liz Green said: "I am delighted it is not going to happen. There are issues every year with the new intake and the thought of having another 1,000 students there was horrific to residents."

Neil Latham, university Vice-Chancellor for corporate affairs, said it still needed additional student accommodation and would continue to work with the council.



'Incompetence': Joan McCann and Karol Smal from Spring Grove residents' association and Alison Fure believe the council has handled the situation poorly

## The need's still there

Kingston University said the borough needed 2,500 new managed student places, and providing them was a core council strategy.

A number of developers won permission to build the student accommodation, but the university objected to some they saw as "expensive and leading to a poor student experience".

The university is seeking blocks of at least 200 units that would allow students to live in shared cluster flats with support care for student welfare.

Councillor Barry O'Mahony accused the university of not doing enough to find sites other than Berrylands, leaving the borough with fewer family homes as they were being converted for student use.



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