Kevin Palmer's notes for Planning Inquiry, Derby Council House Tuesday, April 15

Thank-you for the opportunity to let me speak. I must start by saying that I am not a councillor and am not, nor have ever been a member of a political party. I am simply an independent person who lives in close to the in inquiry site and I like to feel I am representing the ordinary man in the street.

I want to stress residents are not NIMBYs, but any housing in Spondon or elsewhere has to be the right homes in the right place as far as development plans go – and this plan does not meet that.

I refer to the Spondon Local Plan of 1989. It says that the land between Chaddesden and Spondon is shown on the 1958 Development Plan - nine years before Derby's boundaries were extended to take in Spondon and Chaddesden among other places - as white land on which the existing uses were to remain predominantly unchanged

"The City Council has maintained a consistent policy of retaining the separate identity of those settlements which were originally separate from the historic urban core and this policy of retaining an open wedge of land where uses are of an open character has accordingly been applied in this area."

"There has been a long history of refusals of planning permission for development in the 'wedge' area stretching back to 1957 when an application for residential development was refused partially on the grounds that the area was required for the creation of an effective open wedge between Spondon and Chaddesden ."

And so it has gone on – all applications have been refused by the city council, as have appeals against those rejections. The green wedge is only 500 metres across so building on it will make this green corridor even more narrow, defeating the object.

Effectively, it was decided that any application for housing in Spondon should be infill development within the built-up area. And so it has been. This has included on green sites such as orchards, the cricket club, and a garden nursery and brownfield sites – at least two factories, a scrap and waste area, a caravan centre bank and convenience store, a former bus and car park for Celanese workers, demolished blocks of flats. . The last development, by Wheeldon Bros, even involved building on land beneath pylons which people said would never be built on, but they are no longer operational. We have had our fill – there is no space left apart from these fields and green belt to the east of Spondon.

I quote from the council's green wedge review of 2012 which says this land provides a vital break in the urban landscape helping to reduce the feeling of urban sprawl, providing residents with access to the countryside and space for recreational activities. It also provides a haven for wildlife.
It is a green lung within the city, helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change (and I would personally add air pollution which can be poor given the nature of the A52, rail and industry) It provides space for agriculture and is one of the most actively farmed areas of the city. It contributes towards the mental and physical well-being of residents.

But sir, I think I hold a unique place in this inquiry as I believe I am the only person here who, as senior local government correspondent of the Derby Evening Telegraph, was present at the meeting in the 1980s when this green wedge was formally adopted by the city council planning committee as policy as either the first or one of the first in the city. It was not for six months, five, 10 or even as now, for 40 years. It was intended to be for ever – unless and until councillors decide otherwise. This acknowledgement and respect for open green spaces in the industrial city of Derby was momentous, particularly as south of the railway line there was one of the largest industrial

complexes in north-west Europe, plus other industries and an incinerator nearby.

And that is the crux of the mater – who governs Derby? The decision on this and other green wedges were taken by democratically-elected councillors with the city's interests at heart. They are responsible and accountable to the electorate, the ordinary hard-working men and women of the city who like to enjoy such spaces. In our democracy it is councillors who make policies and with the help of officers guide development, which says where housing and other land uses, bearing in mind infrastructure, including roads, should go.

It is not for house-builders, developers, or landowners to decide or dictate where planning permission should be given for homes or to ride-roughshod over democratically-decided policies, in a cavalier manner creating a higgledy-piggledy effect just so that they can make a profit.

Companies are not responsible to local taxpayers but to shareholders, and in this case Miller Homes is owned by US asset management firm Apollo Global Management.

A man in his 30s spoke to me this morning and when I referenced the inquiry he said it was important to keep the green wedge between Spondon and Chaddesden to stop the two communities coallescing and becoming an urban sprawl. This is not a case of people from Spondon against the people of Chaddesden; it is a question of keeping the buildings and two communities apart.

While the policy of the green wedge is paramount a major concern of residents, not just on Royal Hill Road but also on Locko Road and further afield is traffic. As someone who has had the pleasure of living in Spondon all my life I have seen how the village has grown and with all the various developments so has the amount of traffic. We are not just talking about cars but buses and heavy vehicles such as juggernauts, bulk carriers and car trailers making their way through the narrow streets and past even more narrow pavements in Sitwell Street and Moor Street to a warehousing site at West Hallam. There is a lack of car parking in the village made worse by some drivers from other villages coming to Spondon and getting on buses to Derby City Centre because the buses can avoid some of the many hold-ups and problems of finding car park spaces. At morning rush hours there are traffic queues on Dale Road, Moor Street, Sitwell Street and Willowcroft Road, which is effectively the main exit to Derby city centre and other places.

Royal Hill Road is narrow and has people parking cars and larger vehicles on both sides of the road and even on pavements and grass verges so that often a motorist has to drive along the middle, give way to oncoming traffic and then drive in a slalom manner.

Royal Hill Road itself has 73 homes. Six houses do not have gardens or driveways to park cars and there are 13 properties which have white lines on the road because occupants have disabilities or other access issues. Ninety homes is almost as many as the 101 homes in the three cul-de-sacs, Windmill Meadow(built on the former Spondon Cricket Club site), Marina Drive, and Charles Avenue which have to access and egress via Royal Hill Road, the only way to the main Locko Road.

If residents of 90 planned homes have just two cars this alone would be around 200 or more vehicles making journeys along Royal Hill Road, which is unsustainable. That does not include visitors, delivery vehicles, refuse lorries, emergency vehicles...

But traffic issues are not just confined to Royal Hill Road. Locko Road, is a busy spine road There are seven homes on Mill Row about 100 yards from Royal Hill Road, whose occupants have to park on Locko Road. Next door is the Vernon Arms pub. It does not have a car park so again customers, including those attending wakes and other functions, have to park on Locko Road. On Saturday I

found 18 cars parked here with another 13 opposite, half-parked on the pavement.

A few yards further away is a busy light-controlled pedestrian crossing close to the staggered junction of Locko Road, Chapel Street (which leads into the village centre),Church Street and West Road. This junction is in the village conservation area.

Within 200 yards there are three schools, the highest concentration of such in all Derby. These are a senior and two primary schools accommodating 2,100 pupils and staff. West Park secondary has has 1,460 pupils aged 11-16 and 200 staff, most of whom travel to and from work by car along West Road, as do some pupils in parents' cars. Springfield Primary School, almost opposite has 40 staff, again most of whom travel by car. West Road, itself a dead-end, is one of the most narrow in Spondon. At its most narrow point it is just 122 inches across and so can only take one vehicle.

In addition, there is a relatively new footpath from Springfield School that comes out at the bottom of Royal Hill Road near Marina Drive before the road bends round to the right, where parents park to drop off and pick up children, doing three-point turns in the process . I was shocked when I visited the site before 8.30 am on January 17 and saw the number of vehicles involved, parking right around the bottom length of Royal Hill Road (including reversing into the drive of the landowner), but also in Marina Drive and Charles Avenue.

In addition St Werburgh's CoE primary school has an access for staff on Church Street to park. . There is also pedestrian access on Chapel Street and some parents park in the grounds of the old school opposite to drop off and collect their children.

All this means that at times there is gridlock with traffic in and around this staggered junction and the roads leading to it at a standstill which can last for some considerable time as the different schools stagger their morning arrival and afternoon departure times. Depending on other factors such as road works gridlock can turn into chaos, causing particular problems for emergency vehicles trying to fight their way through when seconds can be vital in saving property and lives. Two weeks ago I witness a massive juggernaut turn from Church Street into Chapel Street where there were contractors vehicles blocking the road. It the tried to back out just as kids were coming out of St Werburgh's primary. One parent guided the juggernaut on to Locko Road while I tried to discourage people from crossing in case the vehicle jumped. This took several minutes and caused more gridlock, especially as the juggernaut then tried to go down Church Street, which has double yellow lines on one side and no pavement the other.

So there is a heavy mix of a large tnumber of pupils, particularly younger ones with accompanying adults trying to cross these busy roads in addition to all the vehicles.

The thought of another 200 cars trying to get up and down Royal Hill Road and on and off Locko Road, particularly at peak times is horrifying, impractical, and unsustainable and will make a bad situation far worse.

Sir, I have provided photos showing traffic issues and I would urge when visiting the site to actually do so at a time of a school run so that you can see the issues for yourself. I live near there and know on a daily basis what happens. This is important because I am given to understand by locals that the traffic consultants for Miller Homes in their original report attended the site during school holidays. I do not know if this is true but if it is then it is against the guidelines and will give a very distorted picture. I spoke to someone this morning who queried when you would be visiting the site. He uses a walking frame and sometimes has difficulty crossing between parked vehicles. I think you also have a petition signed by those who drop/[pick up children at the footpath leading to Springfield School telling of the problems and how these would be worsened if the scheme went ahead.

I should also add that para 8.4 of the summary and conclusions of BWB transport report is totally inaccurate. It says the site is accessible by public transport via the S2 Shuttle bus. That was a trial which ended last year after a short period, so no longer applies. The nearest bus stop currently is in Sitwell Street, well over double the 500 metres suggested in the report. Walking from the farthest point in a development would take the best part of 15 minutes and I would not like to carry shopping bags and walk in the rain back up Chapel Street to reach that starting point.

There is the added question of air quality – yesterday it was listed in Spondon as Poor "The air has reached a high level of pollution and is unhealthy for sensitive groups. "This can only be made worse by building on fields in a green lung and putting extra vehicles on Royal Hill Road, particularly heavy construction lorries if permission is granted.

The applicants say that approval would help meet the council's target. Actually, there are around 5,000 homes which have planning permission but no work commenced. The council and developers should consider other sites, both greenfield and brownfield, in the city and not pressurise an already built-up suburb and intrude into the vital green wedge.

I quote a statement from Miller Homes in the Derby Telegraph: "Land off Royal Hill Road, Spondon, will be a highly desirable place to live, reflecting the desirable elements of the local vernacular" This last phrase is the most meaningless marketing gobbledegook I have ever heard. Importantly, it will not be desirable to live there if people cannot get up and down the road because of traffic congestion or not be able to use the already hard-pressed facilities.

This continues:: "The proposals respect the local character but also move the community towards a more sustainable future, though a significant increase in housing choice." Again, more utter rubbish which does not stand up to reality. There is no respect for the local character, it does not say which community will have a more sustainable future, and the increased housing choice is not much when you consider that until the other week there were 90 homes for sale in Spondon on Rightmove. Even on Friday there were 76 – six of which were on the market at more than £400,000. There is enough choice already. This is being extended by what may be the start of an exodus. One couple in Marina dRIVE have sold up and left. They said the situation there was bad with people parking and they feared it would be unbearable with homes built on the green wedge so they were getting out.

People are worried that if this plan is approved it will only be a short time before Miller Homes or another developer comes forward with an equally absurd argument to nibble away at another stretch of the green wedge.. There could be a domino effect which could also send ripples against the other 12 green wedges in the city and beyond.

To sum up; This controversial application, opposed by many people, is neither needed or wanted in Spondon. It goes against all previous decisions and principles over decades. It will erode the important green wedge, increase traffic problems and put pressure on local services. These outweigh the so-called benefits which local people think are both invisible and risible. I would urge you to dismiss this appeal..

I would just say this is nothing against Miller Homes themselves – I would similarly oppose plans by any other company. I am keen to save the heart and soul of the village where I have lived all my life.