

Kidlington Parish Council Chair's report January 2022

Planning developments have continued to loom on the Council's agenda. Late last year we had the draft Development Brief for 120 houses at Stratfield Farm, just North of Stratfield Brake, the one site within Kidlington proper in Cherwell's plan for 4,400 houses to satisfy Oxford's unmet need. Development Briefs specify in some detail how Cherwell expects new builds to be designed and laid out.

In this case our overall impression was positive. There was plenty of green provision, including protection of the existing orchard and the inclusion of play areas, allotments, cycling and walking routes. We proposed reducing the height of houses backing onto Garden City, and Cherwell agreed. But they reversed their original plan, which we had supported, for partial access to the site from Croxford Gardens as well as from the Sainsburys roundabout. Since this was strongly opposed by local residents, we were not too sorry to see it reversed.

We are now looking at the draft Development Brief for the land around the Bicester Road Cemetery, a much bigger scheme for 430 new dwellings along the North-South Bicester Road from the Sainsburys roundabout to the houses on Water Eaton Lane. As a whole, the development will have a major negative impact on Kidlington by removing much of the green gap between us and Oxford. But while we have yet to consider it in detail, some first impressions are quite favourable.

Again, there is plenty of green provision, including efforts to mitigate the reduction of the Kidlington gap. These include public green spaces, playgrounds, allotments and walking and cycling routes. There is a strong emphasis on variety of design and layout. Along the main road the sections above and below the existing cemetery are designated for a cemetery extension and allotments and there will also be a small park, breaking up the long line of houses with spaces of green. Houses will be set well back (with two points for vehicular access).

All that will remain of the Kidlington gap on the North side of the Oxford Road is a large triangle of land, currently an empty field, with one corner at the Sainsburys roundabout and another across the A34 from Parkway station. This is to be turned into a mix of playing fields and landscaped parkland.

Readers might wonder why we are willing to consider Oxford United's Stratfield Brake plans, given my emphasis on green matters in the paragraphs above—and the fact, I may add, that we firmly support Kidlington Development Watch's proposal (see the last issue) for Local Green Spaces West of the village. But as I said last month, we have to understand exactly what the plans are, and whether they can be limited, modified or developed to meet Kidlington residents' needs and concerns. At the time of writing, we are about to enter into discussions with Oxford United and the County Council, and for the moment are keeping an open mind.

The County Council will bring its Stratfield Brake proposal back to Cabinet on 15 March, I presume in much the same form as was deferred last month: to enter into negotiations, not yet to decide the matter one way or the other.

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