

Kidlington Parish Council Chair's report March 2022

As expected, on 15 March the County Council cabinet passed the motion to enter into discussions with Oxford United on the stadium proposals at Stratfield Brake. The motion was slightly amended from the previous occasion with a view to “protecting and enhancing the surrounding environment including biodiversity, connecting habitats and supporting nature recovery”.

The plan is for discussions (not negotiations) to begin now between the Club, the County Council and the current council leaseholders of the site: Cherwell, Kidlington, and Gosford and Water Eaton. The aim of the discussions is to develop the proposals in detail, taking into account the councils' concerns, mainly about environmental impact, noise, transport, traffic and parking, and the long-term dependability of any commitments that the Club may make. We shall also be seeking firm evidence that no acceptable alternative site, including the present stadium, can be found.

Let me emphasize, the Parish Council is in no way committed to agreeing to the proposals in whatever form they eventually take. Our position remains as it has been: we are keeping an open mind on the subject for the time being, and when the proposals have been developed as far as they feasibly can be, we shall make our decision. However attractive the proposals may or may not be, they will still have to be weighed against the absolute environmental cost of a major encroachment on the Green Belt around the Village.

The Council is taking this position because we know that opinion in the Village is deeply divided. Of the 818 local respondents to the County Council survey, 58% voted against, but the respondents are a tiny proportion of a population of some 15,000, and we cannot know how representative they are. We believe it would be irresponsible, and unfair to the number already in favour of the proposals, to take a decision before we know exactly what form they are going to take.

Given the importance of the issue and the division of public opinion, we have also decided to consult residents before our final decision is taken. For the reasons above, this consultation will not take place before we have a set of detailed, firm, concrete and reliable plans. The best form for consultation will need further thought: the two main alternatives currently being considered are a residents survey by leaflet and post, or a Parish Poll—like a mini local election.

Such consultations will have to be advisory only. The Council has been elected to take decisions on behalf of residents, and final responsibility for the decision in this case is ours. But the results of consultation, unless they are inconclusive, will clearly weigh very heavily in the decision that we take.

In tandem with the consultation, we plan to mount an exhibition in Exeter Hall where the proposals will be presented and illustrated. The purpose of this will be to help residents make up their minds one way or the other before responding to the consultation. Details remain to be worked out, but the intention is that the exhibition should be neutral, taken as a whole, and include the case for the proposals and the case against.

DAVID ROBEY