

## **Kidlington Parish Council**

### **Chair's report: September 2023**

Readers will no doubt know by now that the County Council agreed at its meeting on 19 September "in principle" to proceed with leasing the Triangle site to Oxford United for their new stadium. This was subject to four conditions: (1) obtaining planning permission ; (2) producing a net-zero plan for the construction and operation of the stadium; (3) providing details of how it will meet the commitments made to the county council; (4) agreeing a restrictive covenant that will reserve use of the land for football/community sports and leisure/sports stadia, with limited commercial activities permitted only within the stadium footprint.

(3) may be the most contentious of these conditions. The commitments that the Club has to substantiate concern the ways in which it will meet the County Council's 7 strategic priorities for the development of the site. The officer report on which the Cabinet decision was based concluded that these had "mostly" been met, following, somewhat uncritically, the view of the majority of Oxfordshire respondents to the recent consultation survey. But as I pointed out in my last report, this result was skewed by the disproportionate response-rate of Club supporters in the County as a whole. In the area within a two-mile radius of the Triangle site, Club supporters were in a one-to-two minority of respondents, and the majority view was that the strategic priorities had not, except in one case, been mostly or wholly met.

As I said in my last report, the Parish Council's view was in line with that of the residents in the two-mile radius. We argued in particular that insufficient detail had been provided by the Club to alleviate major concerns about transport and parking, benefits to residents, and green and ecological issues.

I made these points at the Cabinet meeting as one of the many speakers against the proposed development. But while Cabinet members expressed some recognition of the validity of the objections, it was clear that the result was a foregone conclusion. All Cabinet members that spoke made a point of expressing their support for the Club, and it was clear that this weighed much more heavily with them than the views of local residents. They evidently feel that the votes of Club supporters and sympathisers count for more.

Nevertheless the requirement described under (3) above could be a significant way of meeting local residents' concerns, at least in part. It recognizes that, as the Parish Council had argued, these concerns cannot simply be left to the planning process, especially if the outcome of the planning process may ultimately be decided not in Cherwell but in Westminster. Yet everything depends on how rigorously the Club's detailed plans are judged. The letter requiring the detailed submission from the Club has been made public, and can be viewed at the Parish Council's web pages on the stadium. The requirements seem generally correct and reasonable. But deciding whether or not they have been met has been delegated to the new Cabinet Member for Finance, Dan Levy.

We are arguing that the process leading up to this final decision must be transparent. The Club's detailed plans must be made public, and stakeholders given the opportunity to comment on them before the Cabinet Member for Finance decides whether or not they have met the requirements. The officer report to the Cabinet meeting was rather too easily satisfied by the Club's plans as they were stated at that stage. We will expect the Cabinet Member for Finance to be far more rigorous before making the final decision.

DAVID ROBEY