

Kidlington Parish Council

Chair's report: March 2023

This is my last report as Chair of the current Council. I was thinking it might be best not to do one at all, but events of the last two weeks call for some commentary.

As many readers know, the Annual Parish Meeting was held on Thursday 30 March. The main business was a question-and-answer session on Oxford United's stadium proposals, with questions answered by Calum Miller, the County Council lead on the project, myself on behalf of the Parish Council, and Niall McWilliams on behalf of the Club. But so many questions were sent in advance—getting on for 100—that I had to collect them in a document so that each of the three respondents could answer them in groups. It was only possible to take a very few questions from the floor.

This part of the meeting seemed to go reasonably well, but things became more heated when a group of residents called for a Parish Poll on the question *Should Kidlington Parish Council oppose the building of a stadium for Oxford United Football Club in Kidlington*. As I have said many times in previous reports, the Parish Council's view was that residents should not be consulted before detailed plans of the project are available. Such plans are not yet available. Many residents will have already made up their minds for or against the project, but many will still be undecided and will want to see the details before deciding.

Nevertheless residents have a legal right to call a Parish Poll. If the call is supported at a Parish Meeting by 10 electors or one-third of those present, whichever is less, the Poll has to be held. The only voting allowed is on the wording of the call, not the substance. At the meeting, after a vote, the word *oppose* was changed to *support*. Not surprisingly, some of those present were rather confused by this piece of legislation.

The Poll has to be held within a fixed period, and as a result will take place on Wednesday 10 May, in the week after the local elections. The usual polling stations are used, but are only open between 4 pm and 9 pm. The Poll is conducted by the District Council, but the Parish Council has to pay for it. The Parish Council will be sending a circular with information about the Poll to all residents of Kidlington. More information is also on the Council website.

Although the Council's view is that this is not the time to hold a Poll, we nevertheless think it is important that as many electors as possible should know about it, so that the results reflect the current state of opinion in the Village as accurately as is possible in the circumstances. The results are however not binding on the Parish Council, just as the Parish Council's view is not binding on the County Council. It will be open to the Parish Council to hold another consultation once detailed plans for the stadium are available, in parallel with the County Council's consultation plans.

DAVID ROBEY