

KIDLINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

Exeter Hall, Oxford Road, Kidlington, Oxfordshire, OX5 1AB



Parish Council: 01865 372143
E-Mail - clerk@kidlington-pc.gov.uk
www.kidlington-pc.gov.uk
Clerk: Rachel Faulkner

Susannah Wintersgill
Director: Communications, Strategy and Insight
Oxfordshire County Council

8 September 2023

Dear Susannah,

OUFC's plans for stadium development.

Until the Club's detailed plans were published in June, the Parish Council remained neutral on this subject. When the plans finally appeared, we raised a number of major questions and concerns with the Club and the County Council. The Club has recently informed us that the information we requested is not available at this stage. We did not hear back from OCC.

The Parish Council therefore objects to the stadium proposal as it stands. Our main concerns are as follows.

1. **Traffic congestion.** Specifically what plans have been made for the provision of public transport to matches? Who will provide it? Where will passengers be dropped off? Where will coaches park? How much will this add, together with additional car traffic, to congestion in the area? Detailed modelling is urgently needed. More specifically:
 - a) The footbridge across the Oxford Road is described as "potential". In our view it would be indispensable, in order to avoid unmanageable congestion on crossings and the foot-/cycle-path.
 - b) The *Stand United* document (but not the *Overview and Summary*) refers to the need to close the Oxford Road for part of match days. This is a totally unacceptable solution as far as Kidlington is concerned. Getting into Oxford is difficult enough already.

Congestion is already a major problem in the Village. It will become far worse in the next few years. 4,400 new houses in Kidlington and the three adjacent parishes will increase their joint population from 20,000 to 30,000, not including major new developments in North Oxford. The current draft Cherwell 2040 Local Plan includes another 750 dwellings in the immediate area. Yet only minimal improvements are planned to the road network. The stadium development would add very significantly to the construction traffic generated by these new houses, and to the general traffic congestion thereafter. The resulting prospect is alarming.

2. **Parking.** In the long term the Club may meet its aim of 90% match attendance by sustainable means, but that will not happen immediately. We need to know what additional measures will be implemented in the short-to-medium term. Specifically what will be done to prevent match-day crowds from parking in Kidlington? Detailed modelling is needed to demonstrate capacity at the park-and-rides.

Commuter and other parking is already a serious problem in the Village. Use of the park-and-rides will only increase with the new housing developments

3. **Frequency of matches** and other major events. We need to know precise numbers of these, and how they can be scheduled to avoid excessive disruption to traffic.
4. **Pledged benefits to residents.** These are currently expressed for the most part in general and quite vague terms. What exactly will be available to residents, what will be free and what will be charged for, and for how long?
5. **Guarantees** of OUFC commitments. We understand that in the absence of a lease these will take the form of covenants. We need to know exactly in what form, if we are to be confident of these commitments in the longer term.
6. **The Green Belt Gap.** Building the stadium on the Triangle site, together with the extensive new housing developments along the Oxford Road, would effectively remove the Green Belt gap between Oxford and Kidlington. This would be a major loss to a Village that values its identity and does not want to coalesce with Oxford. The loss is not compensated for by the mitigations and benefits proposed in the plans as they stand.

We are also concerned at the scale of development currently proposed on the site, and believe that it should be further reduced in order to minimize the environmental impact and the loss of biodiversity. We believe it is essential for an Environmental Impact Assessment to be included in the plans.

Consultations. In the first OCC online consultation, out of 822 Kidlington and Gosford & Water Eaton respondents 38% were in favour of taking the stadium proposal forward and 58% were against. In the Parish Poll held in May of this year 928 Kidlington electors supported the proposal and 2073 voted no, a turnout of 29.99%. The analysis of the County Council's recent engagement exercise substantially supports these results: residents living within a 2-mile radius do not believe that OUFC's plans wholly or mostly meet 6 out of 7 of OCC's stated priorities.

The OCC Officer report on the issue gives insufficient weight to the fact that local opinion is so clearly opposed to the proposal; it relies far too much on the survey data for Oxfordshire as a whole. But the Oxfordshire data is skewed by the disproportionate response from Club supporters outside the 2-mile radius. Within the 2-mile radius, supporters responding are a minority of 1 to 2; in the County outside the radius they are a majority of 3 to 1. All that the Oxfordshire results really show is that club supporters in the County favour the proposal.

For the all reasons stated above we do not believe that the priorities have been sufficiently met for OCC to agree to the disposal or lease of the land at this stage. (We note that Sport England takes much the same view.) But meeting these concerns will require commitments by OCC as well as by the Club. As custodian of this key Green Belt site, OCC has a responsibility for its future use. It will be abdicating its responsibility if it leaves the resolution of concerns to the statutory planning process, which after all may well be concluded not in Cherwell but in Westminster.

We recognize, finally, that Cabinet may decide that the serious concerns we have expressed can be dealt with through the Collateral Agreement that the report proposes. However, at this stage it is unclear what details would be included in the agreement and whether it really would meet our concerns. We ask OCC to consult major stakeholders on these details, and also to recognize that the details should entail commitments by OCC, notably on transport, as well as by the Club.

Yours sincerely



DAVID ROBESY
Chair
Kidlington Parish Council