

Kidlington Parish Council

Chair's report: August 2023

The Parish Council has decided, at its last meeting, to oppose Oxford United's proposals for a stadium as they currently stand. Why has it taken us so long to make the decision? Readers will appreciate, I hope, that since the proposals were first sprung on us almost two years ago we have acted consistently and tried, as far as possible, to be fair to residents as a whole: recognizing there are arguments on both sides, we remained neutral until detailed plans were made available. These were published by the Club in June, but did not contain enough detail on a number of points to meet the major concerns that we had. We therefore notified the County Council and the Club that we would object unless we could be satisfied on matters concerning traffic congestion, parking, the number of major events, and the future reliability of any commitments that the Club might make.

In the interim between June and OCC's decision date of 19 September we asked the Club and the County for answers to the questions that we had, but were eventually told that further details were not available at this stage. We have therefore written to OCC to object on the issues above, and also because we remain concerned at the scale of the proposed development, and do not believe that the significant loss of the Green Belt gap between Kidlington and Oxford would be sufficiently compensated for by the mitigations and benefits as currently put forward.

The officer report that will go to the OCC cabinet for a decision on 19 September makes interesting but discouraging reading: see p.157 onwards of the [agenda reports pack](#) of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 13 September. Although local turnout was disappointing, with only 1034 Kidlington respondents out of a total of 5441 from Oxfordshire and beyond, the results of the OCC public engagement exercise confirm those of the earlier parish poll and the first OCC online survey about Stratfield Brake: a clear majority of respondents within 2 miles of the Triangle do not believe that the stadium plans wholly or mostly satisfy 6 of the 7 strategic priorities that the County Council has set.

The results for Oxfordshire as a whole are however quite different: the majority of respondents believe that the 7 priorities have been wholly or mostly satisfied. 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, versus non-supporters, 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 the club supporters in the County, in reality a minority of the population, favour the proposal.

Regrettably, the officer report relies heavily on the Oxfordshire data, and concludes that all of the priorities have mostly been met. The recommendation, which the Cabinet are no doubt likely to follow, is that resolution of the remaining concerns should be largely left to the planning process. We believe this to be an abdication of responsibility, because we all know that the planning process does not always protect the interests of local residents, especially if, as may well happen in this case, the final decision is taken in Westminster.

The officer report also proposes selling the land to the Club rather than leasing it, subject to covenants concerning its future use. It is difficult to decide on the balance of legal arguments here, but selling rather than leasing would seem to protect the County Council's future position better. Whether or not it would protect the future interests of residents is not yet clear.

Our position is that the remaining concerns about the priorities all need to be addressed before the planning process begins. The officer report does go some way towards this position by the additional proposal of a collateral agreement in which the Club will be required to satisfy the remaining concerns over and above and alongside, rather than before, the planning process. Whether this proposal is acceptable to residents will depend on the rigour of the requirement: that is, whether all

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the specific concerns that we have expressed will have to be satisfied in detail, and whether OCC will really be willing to stop the Club's plans if they are not. We are raising this crucial point with the County Council

DAVID ROBEY