

Kidlington Parish Council

Chair's report: May 2023

Most readers will no doubt know the outcome of the Parish Poll that was held on 10 May on the question "Should Kidlington Parish Council support the building of a stadium for Oxford United Football Club in Kidlington?" Out of a total 10,022 Kidlington electors, 928 voted YES and 2073 voted NO. The turnout was 29.99%, compared with the average 37.06% turnout for the recent Kidlington East and West District Council elections. The result is more or less in line with that of the County Council's online survey more than a year ago, in which out of 822 local respondents 38% were in favour of negotiating with the Oxford United and 58% against.

Although the poll's status is only advisory and the Parish Council did not support it, we accept that the result is significant. Nevertheless we will continue for the time being to maintain our position of neutrality on the issue for two fundamental reasons. The first is on grounds of fairness: we now know that at least a substantial minority of residents are in favour of the stadium development, and we owe it to them to wait until we have considered the detailed plans before finally making up our minds. The second is to make our engagement in the consultation process as effective as possible--bearing in mind that we are only consultees and have no decisive say in the matter. Whatever view we eventually take, it will carry more weight if it is based on consideration of the detailed plans than if it is not.

At all events, at the time of writing, the detailed plans have just been published by the Club, and the next stage of the County Council's consultation process has begun. Details and access to the on-line survey can be found at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/thetriangle: the survey closes on 23 July. We urge all residents to look at the plans and respond to the survey. Email and letter submissions will also be accepted. Documents with the details are available at <https://oufcstadium.co.uk/relevant-documents/>. As the best introduction to them, residents are encouraged to start with the *Overview and Summary*.

We are also obviously concerned that the survey should be as fair, sound and effective as possible, and are pressing the County Council for more information on this score. There are plans at present for a breakdown by area, and for an associated leaflet drop to local households, as well as for a series of public exhibitions put on locally by both the County Council and the Club. When we receive full information, the Parish Council will decide whether we need to hold a separate consultation of Kidlington residents, or whether the County Council survey will be sufficient. If yet another survey is added, there is an obvious risk of consultation fatigue on the part of residents.

The current timetable is tight for the Parish Council to make up its mind. The results of the survey will be published on 11 September in time for the County Council Cabinet meeting on 19 September, which is expected to take a firm decision whether the stadium proposal goes forward. This may create problems for the Parish Council, since we would obviously want to see the results of the survey as regards local residents before taking our final position on the issue and submitting it to the County Council.

DAVID ROBEY