

Kidlington Parish Council

Chair's report: January 2023

Since my last report, much has happened on the two issues I wrote about there.

Shortly before the County Council Cabinet on 24 January to decide how to take forward Oxford United's stadium plans, the officer report on the subject was published, at https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s64219/CA_JAN2423R06%20OUFC.pdf. This recommended that the Stratfield Brake proposal should no longer be considered a suitable or deliverable proposition, and that the Cabinet should proceed instead with the alternative scheme for a stadium in the triangle across the road, with no significant additional development except within the stadium footprint. The Cabinet agreed to enter into non-binding negotiations on this scheme, stipulating that before a firm decision is made a number of objectives would have to be met by the Club. These included maintaining a green barrier between Oxford and Kidlington, transport issues, benefits for the community, and green or net zero objectives. For a fuller press release on the decision, see <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/continued-stadium-discussions/>.

While the negotiations will be non-binding, and a decision will depend on whether the stated objectives are met, it has to be said that the stadium project is now somewhat more likely to happen. At all events, the Parish Council's status in the matter is quite different from the case of Stratfield Brake. While the Triangle site is (just) in Kidlington, we have no rights over it. We cannot decide whether or not the scheme goes ahead: we are only consultees.

Nevertheless, as with Stratfield Brake, we will for the time being take a neutral position on the Triangle project. We recognize that there are strong arguments for and against it, and that views in the Village are deeply divided. As discussions develop and full details emerge we will be able to reconsider our position. In the meantime we will consult with stakeholders and residents on their needs and concerns relating to the project, and hold a question-and-answer session at the Annual Parish Meeting on 30 March. We will also engage with Oxford United and the County Council in order to ensure, as far as we can, that Kidlington's needs and concerns are met as fully as possible. We will pay close attention to the issue of the green barrier between Oxford and Kidlington, and the cost of a further incursion into the Green Belt.

We also believe that residents should be properly consulted before a final decision is made. But since this is likely to happen in some months' time, it will be for the Council elected in the coming May to decide.

As for Cherwell's 2040 Local Plan, the draft that I wrote about last time was considered by their Executive on 19 January, who decided to defer a decision and refer it back to officers for further consideration, to include, among other things, the changes to the housing numbers proposed, and the point that more should be done to maintain the Green Ring around Kidlington. The housing numbers had been significantly increased in this version of the draft in order, once again, to satisfy Oxford City's supposed unmet housing need. A total of 6,087 houses was allocated for this purpose, including the 4,400 new homes already allocated around us. Is this what dictated, at least indirectly, the surprise inclusion of the two new Green Belt sites, North of the Moors and South-East of Woodstock, that I wrote about last time? We are very concerned at the resultant prospects of increased congestion and environmental damage, over and above the consequences of the 4,400 houses already in the pipeline. We will be watching this space carefully.

DAVID ROBEY