

**Kidlington Parish Council**

**Chair's report: March 2024**

More on the two items I reported on last month.

We have now agreed on a 60% rent reduction with the Cherwell Collective for its use of Exeter Hall, expressed in the form of a grant in order to make the subsidy as transparent as possible. For reasons of its own, the Collective has reduced the use it makes of the Hall, and some misinformation has appeared blaming this on excessive rent increases. But even with the normal inflation added in, 60% represents only a modest increase over our previous two-thirds subsidy. We also continue to provide the Collective with free and exclusive use of very substantial storage facilities as well as three allotments.

Only 1500 of the Collective's 5000+ members/users are Kidlington residents. Important though its work is, the Parish Council has to balance the support it gives the Collective against the other needs of Kidlington residents, whose interests we are elected to serve.

As for the Stadium proposal, our Planning Committee is currently doing a great deal of work scrutinizing the vast swathe of documents submitted by OUFC in support of its planning application to Cherwell District Council. We shall be looking hard at all aspects of the proposal, but probably hardest of all at the plans for transport, traffic and parking, given all the issues there will be with traffic in the forthcoming years even without a stadium. We expect to finalize our response to this stage of the District Council's consultation at an Extraordinary Council Meeting at 6 pm on April 25<sup>th</sup> in Exeter Hall.

This will certainly not be the end of the consultation. We have not yet seen the plans for a footbridge for fans across the Oxford Road from the park-and-ride. We also understand that a further transport modelling study is expected, because of the inadequacy of the model that the present plans include. We had hoped that we could comment on the whole proposal including these parts, but the District Council insists on our commenting piecemeal, as the different parts come in. This is obviously far from satisfactory, but we will do our best to comply.

I must add that throughout the whole confusing and difficult process of the stadium scheme, and despite all the objections that we have expressed to it, we have made a point of maintaining good relations with OUFC and in particular its former Managing Director Niall McWilliams. I have had informal meetings with Niall, and councillors have met with him and other OUFC representatives. None of this has removed any force from our objections, but it recognizes the reality that the stadium could still go ahead however strongly we object to it.

If it does go ahead, residents of Kidlington will undoubtedly pay a significant price. We are duty bound to try as far as we can to ensure that, if this happens, the negative effects on the Village are minimized and the compensatory benefits are as great as possible. To this end, meeting with representatives of OUFC is a useful part of the process.

Finally, for similar reasons, we have had informal meetings with the developers of the proposed site at the back of the Moors. Our strong objections to this proposal remain as expressed in our response to the District Council's draft Local Plan, but since it could nevertheless go ahead, we need to do what we can to maximize the benefits and minimize the negative consequences. However the planning landscape may change after the local elections in May, and for the time being we are suspending engagement with the developers.

DAVID ROBEY