

Comment for planning application 24/00539/F

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Application Number | 24/00539/F |
| Location | Land To The East Of Stratfield Brake And West Of Oxford Parkway Railway Station Oxford Road Kidlington |
| Proposal | Erection of a stadium (Use Class F2) with flexible commercial and community facilities and uses including for conferences, exhibitions, education, and other events, club shop, public restaurant, bar, health and wellbeing facility/clinic, and gym (Use Class E/Sui Generis), hotel (Use Class C1), external concourse/fan-zone, car and cycle parking, access and highway works, utilities, public realm, landscaping and all associated and ancillary works and structures |
| Case Officer | Laura Bell |
| Organisation Name | |
| Address | |
| Type of Comment | Objection |
| Type | neighbour |
| Comments | <p>I strongly oppose the proposal by Oxford United Football Club (OUFC) to build a football stadium on protected green belt land to the east of Stratfield Brake and west of Oxford Parkway Railway Station. The proposal would cause significant harm to the lives of local people, irreparable environmental damage, and is inconsistent with planning policy and the Cherwell Local Plan.</p> <p>1 - Protection of the green belt</p> <p>With significant ongoing development in Oxford and the surrounding area, maintaining the green belt and separation between the Oxford city limits and surrounding urban areas is essential. The proposed development would be on one of the last strips of land that separate the urban areas of North Oxford and Kidlington, leading to a near continuous urban area from the centre of Oxford to the northern extent of Kidlington and Woodstock. The Applicant's suggestions that the green belt is maintained by the small, planted area in the centre of Kidlington roundabout is clearly laughable.</p> <p>To grant permission for development on green belt land, the Applicant must meet the criteria set out in the National Planning Framework. They have failed to do this in a number of essential areas:</p> <p>A - Paragraph 145 states that the green belt boundaries can be set by neighbourhood plans. The Cherwell Local Plan does not include this proposed football stadium and maintains the land in question as green belt - a point noted by the Planning Inspector. If this area of land is to be developed, a new neighbourhood plan should be developed, which would require the democratic mandate of the local electorate. As such, Cherwell District Council would be in contravention of the National Planning Framework to permit development on this land without subjecting a new neighbourhood plan to a vote.</p> <p>B - Paragraph 146 states that exceptional circumstances must exist for green belt land to be developed on, and that "all other reasonable options" must be examined. OUFC falsely claim that they have no other possible site for a future stadium, but as demonstrated in the attached letter, gained through a freedom of information request to Oxfordshire County Council, OUFC chose to enter into a short term lease of their current stadium, and they have not attempted to arrange a new lease with the stadium owners even when the owners are openly prepared to negotiate. As such, they have not demonstrated that all other reasonable options have been explored, and as such their application does not meet the necessary tests for development of the green belt.</p> <p>C - Paragraph 154 states that construction of new buildings on green belt land are "inappropriate" unless in a set of circumstances that paragraph 152 refers to as "very special". The application in question meets none of the proposed special circumstances in paragraph 154. This includes failing to meet the conditions of the text on "facilities for outdoor sport", as the proposed stadium will not meet the subsequent condition of "preserv[ing] the openness of the Green Belt". In addition, it is reasonable to understand</p> |

this paragraph to be referring to the provision of outdoor sport facilities for public use, and not a stadium for a private business. Although OUFC claim that they would open the stadium for some limited public use, they also state that they aim for regular non-sporting events to also take place within it, meaning that any actual community use would be extremely limited and would not meet the bar necessary for this development to offer any realistic community sporting benefit. This proposal must be seen as what it is: a business facility, NOT a community sports ground.

Based on the above, granting permission for this development would be a gross contravention of both national and local planning policy, and must not be allowed.

2 - Environmental damage

The proposed development is on an area of managed woodland that is home to a huge variety of wildlife according to an in-depth ecology report by Dr Judith Webb. OUFC commissioned a sub-standard ecology report that took place in a single summer month to underestimate the ecological significance of the site. This makes their application both inaccurate and dishonest. Cherwell District Council's own Ecology Officer made statements that the development would require protected areas for ecology that have been ignored in the Applicant's submission. The proposed development also fails to meet the biodiversity net gain stated in the Cherwell Local Plan, which once again makes the application inconsistent with local planning policy.

In addition, the site is home to many trees that will be lost to the development, including two under tree protection orders. It is also a vital site for accumulation of flood waters, recently being submerged during winter heavy rains. The proposed development, with very limited drainage plans and little-to-no evidence of independent review of flood risk, will cause run off of the rainwater currently captured on the site into the surround areas. This will subject local homes and businesses to a new risk of surface water flooding, and as the site is surrounded by the strategic road and rail network, will cause transport chaos when major roads and railway lines are submerged by the site's water runoff.

Finally, the proposed development is 25 metres high, and will have a significant and lasting impact on the surrounding area, including land far beyond that currently under consideration. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for this application demonstrates "significant adverse effects" that are present at year one and "are considered to remain" at year 15. The local population should not be subjected to this visual assault, especially when the people of Kidlington overwhelmingly opposed the development in the 2023 Kidlington Parish poll.

3 - Harm to the lives of local people

The Applicant's proposed development will have a devastating impact on the people of Kidlington, surrounding towns and villages, and the lower Cherwell Valley. Kidlington is our local town centre, including where we shop and socialise, as well as being key to local transport.

The Applicant's plans include almost no car parking and rely solely on football fans using Oxford Parkway as the stadium car park. This will render the site unusable on match days for its intended purpose: as a railway station and park and ride. This will mean that local people (as well as those visiting Oxford from further away, who would use the park and ride due to its proximity to the M40) will be unable to use these key services. Commuters and visitors who use Oxford Parkway railway station will find the car park overrun with football fans' cars and will no longer be able to use this key service. This will force them to either drive to their final destination (i.e. London) or drive into Oxford to use the main railway station. Those wishing to travel into Oxford will be forced to divert to a different park and ride, or drive the entire way into Oxford, as the park and ride site will be full and local buses will be sent on a long and circuitous diversion for the sake of the football club. This is an unacceptable outcome, as both the park and ride and railway station are critical pieces of local infrastructure that will be completely unusable to local people on match days. OUFC have presented no credible plans on how they will discourage fans from driving to the proposed stadium, parking in the railway station car park, or parking on residential roads. Note that most of OUFC's fan base is from East Oxford, with no public transport links to Kidlington. In addition, there is already a known problem with football fans parking on residential roads and grass verges when attending games at the Kassam Stadium, which has huge amounts of onsite parking; we can safely assume that the same problem would occur if OUFC is allowed to build a stadium in Kidlington, with far less parking in comparison to their current site.

The Applicant has failed to include plans for a footbridge from the park and ride site to the

proposed stadium, which is against their previously stated intentions. Instead, they have proposed to close the Oxford Road during matches to allow football fans to cross the road, which is against the terms of their lease as agreed with Oxfordshire County Council. This will have a huge impact on local people, for whom the Oxford Road is a key artery into the city of Oxford. As well as causing severe congestion in Kidlington, with a significant knock-on impact for local business and residents, traffic will be diverted along Frieze Way to the A44 and Peartree Roundabout- an already overcrowded and congested route, causing further misery for people living on the A44 corridor. As well as causing significant inconvenience to local people, this will add considerable extra miles onto each individual car journey, causing a dangerous increase in emissions that is incompatible with local and national policy. Furthermore, the road closure will prevent the movement of emergency vehicles; Thames Valley Police, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, and South Central Ambulance Service all have significant bases of operation in Kidlington, and will be prevented from effectively reaching emergencies during football matches due to both severe congestion and the road closures themselves. Although OUFC claim they would reopen the road to emergency services, the practicality of doing so would make it impossible to do safely in the presence of hundreds of football fans on foot in the road. Finally, the diversion route proposed by OUFC would send huge amounts of traffic from the A44 and Peartree Roundabout onto Sunderland Avenue and back up the A4165 - both already congested roads that are residential in nature, causing worsened congestion and suffering to motorists and homeowners.

As such, the Applicant's proposal to close key roads and take over local travel facilities are unacceptable, and entirely at odds with the interests of the people of Cherwell Valley. The damage caused to local and regional travel, emergency service provision, and residents' day-to-day lives by this development would be sufficiently severe that it must not be allowed to go ahead.

In summary, the application fails to meet the necessary tests that would allow green belt development, would cause significant and irreparable environmental harm, and would have a profound negative impact on the lives of local people. The Applicant has been dishonest in their application regarding the potential to stay in their current stadium, has been disingenuous regarding the environmental impact of their proposal, and has stated their intention to close roads against the agreement they made with Oxfordshire County Council. Their plans go against the will of the local people, as shown by the 2023 Kidlington Parish poll, and must not be given planning permission. I implore Cherwell District Council to refuse this application, protecting not only green belt land, but the wellbeing of the people of the Cherwell Valley and beyond, and upholding local and national planning policy.

Received Date

20/04/2024 17:42:09

Attachments

The following files have been uploaded:

- OCC - email from Firoz Kassam REDACTED.pdf