

From: Councillor Sean Woodcock
Sent: 16 April 2024 10:25
To: Planning; liz.leffman@oxfordshire.gov.uk
Cc: Liz Brighouse (liz.brighouse@oxfordshire.gov.uk)
Subject: Application 24/00539/F - Land to the East of Stratfield Brake And West of Oxford Parkway Railway Station, Oxford Road, Kidlington

Dear Councillor Leffman and Cherwell District Council Planning,

As a Reserve Member of the Planning Committee at Cherwell District Council for the past year, I have refrained from commenting on the issue of Oxford United's stadium and the Triangle. It is right and proper that members of the committee are able to make decisions without suspicion of pre-determination.

However, having had many conversations with anxious fans on the doorstep and taken the time to read the application & most of the comments, both for and against, and with the municipal year now at an end, I think the time is right to let people know where I stand.

My view is that the Triangle is an excellent site for a new stadium to go and that the County Council should take a supportive approach to it.

I have visited the current one several times over the years to watch Oxford United and London Welsh (who were based there for a short time).

It is a real pain to get to and very much relies on use of a car.

The possibility of having a stadium within walking distance of a bus station with direct links to the city centre as well as the train station at Oxford Parkway, is very exciting and should be a massive tick in terms of sustainability.

It would also take cars off the road from around the city which is something that all parties agree is a good thing.

There will clearly be a need to manage increasing footfall in the local area with potential for increased litter and other issues that inevitably come from having crowds of people in one place. These are all problems that can be appropriately mitigated though and are not reasons to block the stadium.

It should be emphasised that alongside potential downsides there are many upsides to having regular crowds in the Kidlington area. The benefits to local hospitality venues are obvious as well as the knock on effects to the Cherwell economy.

Much has been made of the closure of local roads on a matchday. This is a legitimate concern and will clearly need to be properly managed given that this is a busy road.

Nevertheless, I believe a way forward is possible if it is considered as a problem to be solved rather than just as a problem.

While potential loss of Green Belt land is a material concern, I take the increasingly prevalent view that 'Green Belt' land is not all the same bar the legal planning status.

It is not all beauty spots with important wildlife to be preserved. Some land allocated as Green Belt is in fact best described as grey; abandoned car parks or dirt tracks.

With a housing crisis well-established, Labour has already committed to review of the rules around the release of Green Belt land for development if we are elected to form the next government after the next General Election.

This does not mean concreting the countryside; just ensuring that the right areas are protected, while other areas where development is needed for housing or other needs, can be released.

With regards to the stadium it is increasingly unclear that the land at the Triangle serves any continued use as Green Belt land particularly with the development that has already taken place and is still taking place around it.

As the county's only fully professional football team and a historic club in its own right, Oxford United rightly commands the loyalty, affection and love of many here and beyond the boundaries covered by Oxfordshire County Council.

The work of Oxford United in the Community also stretches well outside the ring road with support for local initiatives such as summer camps for girls football at Easington Sports FC in my town of Banbury.

The club is faced with the imminent loss of its home. For Oxfordshire to lose Oxford United would not only be a tragedy but I would argue also represent a significant failure on the part of local politicians.

Sitting on the fence while this takes place is simply not an option, and it is no good for those of us in public office to ignore realities by pretending that the club can stay where it is when that has repeatedly been shown not to be the case.

So while I acknowledge that there are issues in need of resolution with regards to traffic management, I nevertheless repeat my call for the County Council to take a supportive stance on the issue of the stadium moving to the Triangle.

I also ask that councillors and officers at Cherwell District Council approach the planning application, with an open, but constructive, mindset.

Ahead of us is the opportunity to give Oxford United a stable future, while simultaneously bringing south Cherwell a much-loved local institution with benefits to the local economy.

In the interests of transparency, I will be making this letter public.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this letter and take it into your consideration,

Councillor Sean Woodcock

Labour Party Candidate for Banbury Constituency

Labour & Co-operative Party Councillor for Banbury Grimsbury & Hightown on Cherwell District Council

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