

By email only

To: Planning@Cherwell-DC.gov.uk

CC: Mr David Peckford, Cllr Ian Middleton

4th March 2024

Dear Sir / Madam

Oxford United Football Club Planning Application for Land to the east of Stratfield Brake and west of Oxford Parkway Station, known as The Triangle

1.1 We are writing to express concern regarding this planning application which we understand is currently being validated by Cherwell District Council (CDC). Our concern relates to the Environmental Impact Assessment and in particular to the length of time over which bat surveys have been conducted.

1.2 As you are aware, in response to the Scoping Request consultation, concerns around biodiversity, including bats, were raised by a number of organisations. We also understand that the records held by TVERC have now been updated to include some bat recordings for the Triangle.

1.3 CDC's decision was issued at the end of September 2023. This decision referred specifically to our comments as follows:

8.15. Your attention is drawn to the comprehensive comments provided by FoSB. In particular, the comments in relation to the ecological survey work they have undertaken should be noted and addressed. [Our ecological survey work contained many references to bats which are known to use the site].


8.16. Your attention is drawn to the comments of Councillor Middleton and FoSB, and in particular, the evidence that data gathered from the survey work undertaken by your ecologists may be incomplete due to monitoring equipment being disturbed/removed by the current tenant before the study was complete.


1.5 The Scoping Request from OUFC included the following statement which indicates that the ecologists were not aware that the automated bat detectors (and other monitoring equipment) were removed very shortly after they were installed (for reasons previously disclosed).

6.17. Bat activity and automated detector surveys were conducted in August, September and October 2022. A specific survey to assess the trees onsite for the potential of roosting bats was undertaken in October 2022. Further bat activity and automated detector surveys are ongoing between June and July 2023.

1.6 In Annex 1 we have referenced and reproduced Section 2.4, Survey Timing, from the Bat Conservation Trust's "Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines 4th edition (2023)". This guidance states that it is often appropriate to collect data, at least for a year, if not longer. As the ecologist's survey work from 2022 did not actually take place it seems implausible that best practice has been followed in respect of bat surveys.

 = optimal period  = sub-optimal period

 = weather or location dependent (i.e. may not be suitable due to spring and autumn conditions in any one year or in more northerly latitudes). Note that October emergence surveys are not acceptable in Scotland.

 = it is not acceptable to trap bats when they are heavily pregnant and have dependent pups. Mothers need to optimise foraging due to the physiological demands of pregnancy and lactation, and pups need to be regularly fed. Interrupting these activities could potentially have an impact on breeding success in the year in question. The timing of birth can vary between years – it may be as early as the end of May or as late as the start of August, therefore caution should be exercised and local information gained on birth dates before trapping activities are carried out during the summer months. Any information gained and decisions made should be kept as a record.

a Not including trees.

b Please see Chapter 7 for recommended timings for surveys to give confidence in a negative result. For sites assessed as having low suitability, a survey should be carried out between May and August. For sites with moderate and high suitability, a proportion of the surveys should be carried out between May and August (to detect maternity roosts if present) but some of the surveys may be carried out later in the year in order to detect transitional and mating roosts. The survey season for presence/likely absence surveys is defined as May to September. Roost characterisation surveys may be appropriate in April and/or October depending on the need to characterise transitional/occasional roosts at these times.

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Considerations for bat surveys

- c The time that bats return to their roosts is very variable and therefore re-entry surveys are no longer recommended as a standard approach. If they are carried out the constraints should be recognised.
- d GLTAs can be sub-optimal in the spring, summer and autumn due to foliage obscuring parts of the tree. If all parts of the tree are visible then the survey can be carried out at any time. If parts of the tree are obscured by foliage then it is not possible to carry out a thorough survey and this limitation should be recognised and the impact on the results acknowledged. Please refer to Chapter 6 for more information.
- e Different species show a peak in swarming activity at different times, e.g. Daubenton's bat activity tends to peak in August whilst Natterer's bat activity tends to peak in September (Tomlinson, 2020) and therefore surveying across the swarming season is likely to be important.
- f Trapping and tagging in cooler conditions can make release of bats difficult, which should be a consideration if trapping is carried out in spring and autumn. Tagging of bats in April and sometimes early May should be avoided following a poor spring, if bats are in poor condition. Tagging of newly volant pups should be avoided. Tagging of bats should be avoided in October due to the risk that bats will enter hibernation with the tag still attached (bats will groom less often as they enter torpor more frequently). If a tag falls off during hibernation this could leave a bald patch if the fur has been clipped, which could have negative impacts for the hibernating bat. Please refer to Chapter 9 for more information.