


15, The Moors,
Kidlington,
Oxfordshire
OX5 2AH



Dear Sirs

**Land To The East Of Stratfield Brake And West Of Oxford Parkway Railway Station
Oxford Road Kidlington**

Reference Number: 24/00539/F

I am writing reference the application by Oxford United for planning consent to build a new stadium at the Triangle site, in Kidlington, Planning Application

I am a resident of Kidlington and have been for just over 4 years.

I am **objecting** to the proposal. My Grounds for doing so are as follows:

Biodiversity

The Triangle site is agricultural land, used at the moment for growing willows to support a local industry; this is a very low intervention form of agriculture and as per Dr Webb's report, the land has fantastic biodiversity/. As an enthusiastic but amateur naturalist, with consent, I have undertaken a bat walk on the site and found Pipistrelles, both Common and Soprano, to be present, as well as Common Noctules. This is mentioned in the FOSB Biodiversity reports, which are incredibly thorough and well researched – I understand the surveys are continuing.

The Triangle site boundaries with the Oxford Road and Frieze Way are glorious scrubby hedgerows, which give a continuous "green corridor" joining the similar hedgerows of the Golf Course to the South and the agricultural land to the South.

Although agricultural land, the current use is very sustainable, and there is no intensive farming, treatments, or regular ploughing. The site is not accessible to the public, so for instance dogs will not be being walked there causing disturbance and eutrophication. Both will have greatly aided biodiversity, and the Willows will have provided a relatively undisturbed and stable habitat since planting (2006), allowing a community of species to grow together there.

To the north of the site there is a substantial area unmanaged, and the hedges and boundaries are also unmanaged, creating woodland edges which are important for wildlife.

The whole area is incredibly, and diverse OU's claims that

“ The Site will also be subject to new native tree planting, and new attenuation features and wildlife pond created, which will provide enhanced foraging opportunities for bats”

are fallacious! The “new” features will no substitute whatsoever for the enormous loss of rich habitat which will arise should this project progress.

I am advised that a Harvest Mouse Nest has recently been found on the site; this is another priority protected species. Further surveys will be undertaken to determine if there are other nests.

I anticipate that the response to this discovery – and others of protected species, will be “translocation”; here are Dave Goulston’s comments on Translocation in his book “Bee Quest”

Such translocations are amongst the most spectacularly pointless of gestures, a sop to keep conservationists happy and allow developers to say that they have mitigated the damage of their latest project. You may wonder why I say this - surely it is a good thing to save newts from being buried under concrete - so let me explain why in a small digression.

It is generally the case that organisms live at somewhere near the 'carrying capacity' of their environment. Imagine a hypothetical population of deer living on an island. The island is big enough to grow enough grass to support one hundred deer. If there are fewer than one hundred deer, the animals will have a surplus of food, life will be good, mothers will tend to have healthy calves which will tend to survive and so the population will tend to grow. If there are more than a hundred deer, food will tend to be in short supply, the animals will become underweight, weak and susceptible to disease, and few calves will be born. In these circumstances, the population will tend to fall.

Population biologists talk about

'density-dependence', by which they mean changes in birth and death rates that tend to push a population towards carrying capacity.

To use another Scientific term, the population is in “stable equilibrium”. ...

In translocation, one has to find somewhere to move the animals to. Generally the answer is the nearest place that already has (them). it does not take a genius to work out what will happen next – the overcrowded population will fall. ... until the population is reduced to what the environment can support.

I understand that there is also a proposal to raise the level of the ground by 0.6m at least from the existing level, by the importation of spoil; this may well have considerable impact on the adjoining land and woodland, as there will be changes in the drainage and also likely that there will be chemicals leeching from the dumped spoil into the ground and the ground water.

Traffic

At the moment there is no proposal for the promised bridge over the Oxford Road, but reliance is placed on the road being closed before and after matches.

The effects of this will be very considerable; there will be impact on emergency services, the Kidlington Ambulance Station is off Langridge Lane, and ambulance access to the JR

and to attend calls in the Cutteslow, North Oxford areas will be impacted, as will their ability to take casualties to the JR and other Oxford hospitals.

The Kidlington Fire Station is Sterling Road Approach and their ability to attend call outs to the South will also be impacted.

The Police HQ is off the Oxford Road and access to this will also be impacted.

Traffic will be impacted by drivers “dropping off “supporters at the Kidlington Roundabout and on the Oxford Road (if it is not closed) or if it is closed driving up it from the South to the closure point, then dropping off and turning round to return. It will be chaotic.

In these days of Satnavs and AI, the road closure will be noted and vehicles diverted, very possibly through Islip, and Cassington or Bladon and Yarnton to the West. I can not see that these are considered in the Traffic and Transport report.

Parking

The Company have employed consultants and assert that 90% of supporters will travel using green or active travel. They are leaving a site with 2000 parking spaces for a 12500 seater stadium, to one with 120 parking spaces for a 16000 seater.

There will be reliance on the Parkway across the road (815 car parking spaces, plus 31 Accessible and 30 Motorcycle¹) but this of course is used by others, in particular those visiting Oxford and others using the railway. Vehicles entering the Parkway, driving round to find spaces, failing to do so once it is full, leaving and then driving round searching for alternatives will increase congestion and impact air quality.

Recently an incident was reported where there was an event at the Bicester Road Cemetery²; the cemetery car park was full, and as a consequence vehicles parked on the verges in the Bicester Road, causing rutting and damage to the planting there. It is conceivable that parking will occur on the Kidlington Roundabout itself, and the verges etc. privately owned off road car parks will be impacted – the Bicester Road Cemetery car park, the verges along the Bicester Road, the Stratfield Brake car park and the Woodlands Trust Car Parks will all be used. Quickly the local area will become clogged with parked cars – The “Garden City” and the area in the Civil Parish of Gosford and Water Eaton around Hampden Drive, Cromwell Way and the like will all be used. Similarly the 5 Mile Drive area and Cutteslow Park areas will be impacted by parking. Recently on the OU Facebook page there was an image of cars parked and ticketed close to the Kassam³, with a request that matchgoers respect the neighbours.

Size and Capacity

According to Wikipedi⁴a, the largest ever crowd at the Kassam was less than capacity at 12,243, in 2005; one wonders why there will be a need for 16000 seating – surely overcapacity.

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxford_Parkway_railway_station

2 <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=7212012315543283&set=pcb.6700445940059545>

3 <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=910656854394969&set=pb.100063519879005.-2207520000&type=3>

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kassam_Stadium#Construction

The Triangle site is too small for the proposed Stadium; it is “shoe horned” on with many proposed compromises; originally they were looking at using both Stratfield Brake, and the Triangle⁵, however the Kidlington Parish Council were not willing to release the Stratfield Brake site, and so the club are now forced to squeeze the stadium onto the Triangle site, about 1/3 of the original proposed footprint. For ease, the Triangle site is approximately 4.9 Hectares, the Original proposal was for both the Stratfield Brake area (approximately 18⁶Hectares) so the original proposal was for a combined site of about 22.9 Hectares⁷)

Green Belt

The Triangle site is Green Belt land, and as such its status is to be cherished and protected. The proposal is for a huge, visually obtrusive 5 storey steel and glass structure, of negligible architectural merit, with a completely unnecessary and obtrusive concrete gateway.

Arriving in Kidlington from the South, there is, at the moment a clear demarcation with the Greenbelt land on the East and the West, then the Kidlington Roundabout with the wonderful “Rosie” Elephant sculpture announcing Kidlington’s splendid identity, vision and history. The Stadium would give a rather different impression.

Public Transport

Additionally, bus services will be impacted and although the Applicants assert that this will be for a limited time, in fact the road is a major route into and out of Oxford to and from the North; many communities will will be impacted

Local Opinion

Of course in a Poll, the residents of Kidlington expressed their disagreement to the proposal ⁸“3,006 ballot papers, 928 local residents voted yes, 2,073 voted no”. Sadly that Poll did not allow either Proxy or Postal votes, and was for very limited hours – I was disenfranchised as a consequence.

Background to the application

The Company have more or less engineered the situation where they are dependent on others to give consent and sell land and to build a new stadium, to enable the club to continue – by failing to pay rent, the Company were forced to the edge of bankruptcy with a petition submitted by their present landlords⁹. This followed an earlier petition by the tax authorities¹⁰ due to unpaid tax. It seems reasonable to assume that this parlous financial position was what triggered and justified Firoka Ltd to implement the early termination clause of the lease, creating the “burning platform” that the Company emphasises threatens the continued existence of the Club.

5 There is an “illustrative masterplan” here showing both areas in use: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-63285679>

6 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-64386216>

7 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/59936961> and https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/news/976/cpsprodpb/E62A/production/_127222985_d02c28f1-12dd-4c7b-8410-4d941f67102b.jpg.webp

8 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-65555010>

9 <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/sport/17551669.oxford-united-respond-firoka-winding-up-petition/>

10 <https://m.thegazette.co.uk/notice/3161873>

It is noted that Firoka Ltd are apparently prepared to negotiate with the Applicant for the continued use of the Kassam Stadium¹¹, and have always been prepared to do so, and that the Applicants themselves rule out alternatives such as “Ground Sharing Agreements”¹²

The Bankruptcy Petitions were pre-pandemic so the pandemic can not be cited as a cause or justification; the Club’s finances were, and are in a parlous state! Their 2022 accounts showed they were supported by a £4.2 million subsidy from their wealthy directors. Those accounts, and latest for the Club¹³ indicate that the Accounts are prepared on a “Going Concern” basis, which is considered appropriate due to “expected continuing financial support of the ultimate controlling body”.

This is a company who want to enter into a £130 to £150 million project.¹⁴, but failed to pay Minimum Wage to their employees¹⁵ and have a documented history of problems constructing the present “Kassam” stadium back in the 2000’s, resulting in the original contractors leaving site,

the freehold of the site being sold with the Club occupying it on a lease rather than Freehold¹⁶, which was the original intention, and contributing to the cause of their present insecurity.

There was an opportunity to purchase the freehold in 2008, for £13Million; however this opportunity was not taken¹⁷.

Some of the present directors are known to be “property developers” and had interests too in Reading Football Club. An article in Kidlington News speculated that the real objective is for these individuals to increase their ownership of land for development and furthering their business interests rather than the welfare of the Club, with the Club’s vulnerable state being exploited to enable this.

The club has, of course a considerable supporter base (the “Oxford United Official” Facebook Group has 1200 followers¹⁸, and it is noted that many of the “support” entries in response to the Consultation are from afar – I noted France and Argyll, Scotland, and these supporters describe themselves as "neighbours".

I've not reviewed them in detail, but noted one comment (Harris - from Buckinghamshire) seeking to dismiss the objections in the following terms

11 <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24056192.oxford-united-stadium-owner-open-club-staying-kassam/>

12 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/68510881>

13 <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/00470509/filing-history/MzQxNjQyODk3NWFkaXF6a2N4/document?format=pdf&download=0>

14 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/68510881>

15 <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/23603027.oxford-united-failed-pay-minimum-wage-staff-members/>

16 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kassam_Stadium#Construction

17 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kassam_Stadium#Construction

18 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/248741060049305>

"few locals are concerned about the impact of large crowds coming to the area but the times this will happen are "relatively few" (5-6 hours for no more than 30 days of the year) "

- its interesting that he does not dispute the impact, but seeks to dismiss it as inconsequential. It may be inconsequential in High Wycombe, but it will be consequential to local communities – being in High Wycombe, he may not be the best authority here!

Many others cite non planning grounds –

- the survival/ viability of the Club,
- the benefits for the health and wellbeing of members, and
- importance to their family relationships.

One states

"Kidlington has nothing to do and no incentive for people to stay or travel there.¹⁹ "

which is clearly not the case, Kidlington is a thriving community, with much going on, including amateur football, bowls, Concerts, gardening society; pubs, restaurants, and of course the richness of the local cultural life is enhanced by easy access (cycling, or public transport) to Oxford itself, with access to Museums, Theatres, Restaurants, Cinemas, and the like. There will be an impact on these should road closures occur. Of course museums rely on volunteers, and many will travel in on the Oxford Road from the North, their ability to contribute to the cultural life of Oxford will be reduced.

Sincerely

Andy Pedley

19 <https://oxfordclarion.uk/oufcs-new-stadium-what-do-the-consultation-responses-say/>