

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	Steve
Address	Balliol Farm,Rousham Road,Tackley
Type of Comment	Objection
Type	neighbour
Comments	<p>I am writing to object to the proposed stadium development. I am a parish councillor in Tackley, but I am responding in a personal capacity only.</p> <p>1. Green Belt</p> <p>OUFC ("the club") has not met the test of "very special circumstances" to justify development on the last remaining green belt site between Oxford and Kidlington. That test is a high bar, intentionally so.</p> <p>The club chose in 2021 to give up its 2006 lease of Kassam stadium, where they had security of tenure until 2046. They claim that the lease was terminated on force majeure grounds, specifically the Covid pandemic. However, even elementary legal advice at the time would have informed them (and their landlord, Firoz Kassam/Firoka) that there were no such grounds in place. Under the terms of that lease the government would have had to declare a national emergency and invoke the Emergency Powers Act. This never happened.</p> <p>Therefore it suited the club (and possibly also its landlord?) to engineer a termination of the lease, the club having by then held a number of meetings with Oxfordshire County Council about possibly acquiring a new site. The club "needed" to be "homeless" to justify acquiring publicly owned land.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the "termination", the lease was promptly renewed, twice. Firstly for a short period to allow one play-off match, and then, in June 2021, for five years up to 2026.</p> <p>Firoz Kassam has confirmed publicly that neither the club nor the county council (or any council) has approached him to discuss a further renewal in 2026. He would be very happy to hold such discussions.</p> <p>It is absolutely normal, when commercial leases expire, for landlords and tenants to discuss renewal terms. It happens every day of the week.</p> <p>OUFC is not homeless. It is in no danger of becoming homeless.</p> <p>2. Traffic and public safety</p> <p>The site is bounded by two A-roads, one a fast dual carriageway, the other the main road between Oxford and Banbury, serving all of north Oxfordshire. Access to the stadium has to come from one or both of these roads. Both roads are potentially dangerous to pedestrians.</p> <p>During public consultations, and up to and including the OCC meeting on 19 September 2023 when a decision in principle was taken to grant a lease to the club, the club maintained that they would provide a bridge linking the stadium site to the Water Eaton Park and Ride, and the Oxford Parkway Stadium.</p> <p>Days later, at the launch of the stadium project on 9 October 2023, the bridge had disappeared. Information displays instead said roads would be closed for two hours and one hour bracketing match times, and traffic would be diverted. This effectively closes north Oxfordshire's access to the park and ride, and the railway station. And will almost certainly bring Kidlington and the diversionary route (including the A40 Oxford ring road) to a standstill.</p> <p>The 9 October launch was clearly the result of a lot of planning by the club. The club chose not to inform OCC on 19 September of what was, by then, clearly a settled intention to abandon the bridge proposal.</p> <p>The club said at the time of submitting this application that there would be a separate planning application in relation to a bridge at a later date. No such application has yet been made.</p> <p>The proposed road closures are now down to 30 minutes and not the three hours the club considered necessary on 9 October. This is not credible.</p> <p>Some 500 buses per day use the Oxford road.</p> <p>The Council should refuse to grant the current application without a credible additional proposal giving suitable assurances that stadium access is safe for all visitors, and that no traffic disruption will be necessary.</p> <p>3. Non-football activities</p> <p>The club envisages a 180 bedroom hotel, bars, restaurants and commercial and conference facilities: the site will be in use 24 hours a day, every day.</p>

This is in addition to whatever needs arise in relation to match days. This is 365 days a year.

The club's financial objectives, and the funding of this project, depend absolutely on them squeezing every last drop out of such activities.

There is inadequate parking on the Triangle site itself for such activities, plus all staff required to service them. There will clearly be huge additional pressure on the park and ride car park, every single day, and also on other parking nearby such as the Stratfield Brake community sports field, Sainsbury's, and of course all nearby residential streets. There is currently unrestricted parking on all of these streets.

The club has provided no coherent plan for a residential parking scheme covering much of Kidlington and also the proposed housing developments very near to the Triangle site.

There is no evidence that there is actually any demand for a large hotel in addition to the existing ones at Langford Land, Peartree and North Oxford/Summertown. Additionally, as Oxford is home to a world-class university, it has no shortage at all of excellent conference facilities. It is hard to see why events planners would actually choose to hold a conference at the proposed stadium in preference to much of what is already on offer in far more attractive locations.

4. Finance

In 2007 leading Spanish football club Valencia started work on a flagship new stadium. 17 years later, it is half-built, no work is continuing, it is an eyesore. It may never be finished.

<https://footballgroundguide.com/nou-mestalla-how-is-the-new-valencia-stadium-progressing#:~:text=The%20Nou%20Mestalla%2C%20the%20potential,construction%20projects%20in%20world%20football.>

The council needs some assurance that the same thing is not going to happen to the last remaining bit of green belt between Oxford and Kidlington.

OUFC lost over 6 million last year, and is 24 million in the red. It survives only thanks to the goodwill of its principal shareholders who, for the time being, are willing to underwrite these losses. The club has not been lucky with its "choice" of owners over the years. Shareholders can and do choose to cut their losses and walk away, across all levels of professional football.

If the proposed stadium is owned by an entity other than the club, then the club could be left abandoned by its owners with an unaffordable millstone around its neck, either during construction or at any time thereafter.

5. Environmental impact

It is hard to see how this development will meet OCC's condition for granting a lease that there be net zero carbon impact. Any such calculation should also factor in the embedded carbon in the existing Kassam stadium, which has decades of useful life left in it. But if the club vacates Kassam, that is a white elephant, facing certain demolition of a perfectly functional building.

The Council will have seen expert evidence of the loss of biodiversity and of protected trees. I will not elaborate on that, save to say the club's pretence that they will increase biodiversity seems to be beyond credible. There is a lot of biodiversity on the site, because there is currently minimal human impact there. Several rare/protected species have been observed. The only way to sustain this biodiversity is to leave the Green Belt alone.

**Received
Date**

22/04/2024 17:59:34

Attachments