

Comment for planning application 24/00539/F

Application Number	<input type="text" value="24/00539/F"/>
Location	<input type="text" value="Land To The East Of Stratfield Brake And West Of Oxford Parkway Railway Station Oxford Road Kidlington"/>
Proposal	<input type="text" value="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	<input type="text" value="Laura Bell"/>
Organisation Name	<input type="text" value="Scott Walkinshaw"/>
Address	<input type="text" value="3 Highfield,Long Crendon,Buckinghamshire,HP18 9DR"/>
Type of Comment	<input type="text" value="Support"/>
Type	<input type="text" value="neighbour"/>
Comments	<p>I strongly support the development of the new stadium for Oxford United at The Triangle in Kidlington.</p> <p>All football clubs at every level are a vehicle for social cohesion with a reach across social groups and generations and it is essential that we support them to maximise their potential. Few institutions are such a powerful force for social change, whether it's encouraging women and girls to play sport, promoting healthy living to children in schools, providing walking football for the elderly, supporting LGBTQ fan groups, The Manor Club for retired people, disabled football or simply a sense of camaraderie that comes from attending games and committing to the same simple cause of winning games whether you are eight or eighty. One only has to look at the story of 8-year-old Kyle Andrews to see what kind of impact a club can have - please watch the video on YouTube to understand that this is not a decision about football.</p> <p>It is critical that a city like Oxford has a successful, sustainable football club. At the heart of this is a permanent home. It has been proven time and again that the Kassam Stadium is neither fit for purpose, nor is there a drive or desire from its owner to maintain or modernise it. It is frankly an embarrassment that this facility represents the best the city can offer when towns like Rotherham, Shrewsbury, Doncaster, Bolton and many others can boast a facility for their local club which is modern and fit for purpose.</p> <p>Several owners, and prospective owners, over more than 20 years have sought to purchase the stadium complex from Firoz Kassam for the benefit of the club. Mr Kassam has never shown any desire to sell and it is clear The Kassam Stadium offers no future for the club.</p> <p>The result has been growing debts as a series of generous investors have supported the club through many difficult years. Successes have been in spite of its environment, there is now an opportunity for Oxford United to be successful because of it.</p> <p>The club has shown through its visits to Wembley in 1986, 2010, 2016 and 2017 that it retains the support of a significant number of people within the city, the county and beyond - each time the club has sold its full allocation of 30,000 tickets. Compare this, for example, to the recent EFL Trophy Final at Wembley between Peterborough and Wycombe - both League 1 peers of Oxford and both with stadiums smaller than the proposed development - who attracted a total crowd of just 42,000 between them. This is just one small demonstration of the potential the club has.</p> <p>Despite this, the club has been put in jeopardy for a generation by a decision taken over twenty years ago. As an alternative to imminent extinction, it was the best available option when leaving the old Manor Ground in Headington. But it has only served to put the club at constant risk and continues to do so. To allow a club that represents the city and county to fail would bring shame at a national and international level. By contrast, to support a club and see it succeed can only enhance the perceptions of Oxford as a modern, vibrant city.</p>

It is time to correct the mistakes of twenty years ago and to take a modern and progressive view of Oxford as it develops. We need to embrace the opportunity to address the challenge of finding a new home for the club once and for all.

The club's current owners have shown a commitment to the club over an extended period of time through the development of the training ground, investment in players, and through their efforts to progress the stadium application to this stage.

The application itself is comprehensive, well presented and clearly shows a careful consideration to local residents, the physical environmental and the surrounding transport infrastructure. The expectations of football clubs and their responsibility to their community far exceeds the expectations of a most commercial organisations, but the club accept this, moreover the fans demand it, and as a result, this application shows a clear commitment to the local community, environment and economy.

The location, adjacent to Oxford Parkway train station, provides access from both the north and the south of the county. Personally, for the first time, I'll be delighted to attend games by train direct from Haddenham and Thame Parkway allowing me to leave my car at home, reducing congestion and emissions.

The decision to approve the planning application is a positive decision to support social cohesion, to promote healthy living, to boost the local economy, enhance the local community and include those who are vulnerable or marginalised across Oxfordshire society. To achieve this via another means would require huge financial investment direct from the council. We have an investor willing to achieve these goals without that burden on the taxpayer. This is a once in a generation opportunity; a positive decision to maintain a 130 year old sporting institution which people across the city, county and wider country believe in for much more than just football.

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Attachments