

# Comment for planning application 24/00539/F

<b>Application Number</b>	24/00539/F
<b>Location</b>	Land To The East Of Stratfield Brake And West Of Oxford Parkway Railway Station Oxford Road Kidlington
<b>Proposal</b>	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
<b>Case Officer</b>	Laura Bell
<b>Organisation Name</b>	
<b>Address</b>	28 Hayward Road,Oxford,OX2 8LW
<b>Type of Comment</b>	Objection
<b>Type</b>	neighbour
<b>Comments</b>	<p>I write to object to this application in the strongest terms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(a) as an inappropriate appropriation of Green Belt land</li><li>(b) as a massive overdevelopment of a tight site</li><li>(c) on the grounds that, if such a development were to be allowed, then it fails to make adequate provision for traffic management on the Banbury Road (A4165), whether vehicular for those not involved with access to the stadium during match times, or for proper management of those attending events at the stadium</li></ul> <p>while, further, if the Planning Authority is minded to take into account the many submissions made in support of the Proposal solely on the grounds of the "need" to find a home for the Football Club, then it is incumbent upon the Authority also to note the false premise on which such arguments are presented and on which I shall expound at the end of my submission.</p> <p>So let me take the points on which I formally object in turn. Please note that, while I do not live within the Cherwell District, I live within one mile of the proposed development and use the A4165 regularly.</p> <p>Inappropriate appropriation of designated Green Belt</p> <p>The land to the south of Kidlington was purchased by the County Council in 1937 specifically to ensure that there be a Gap between Kidlington and Oxford. This was brought out forcibly in the 1990s at the time of the development of the Stratfield Brake Recreation Ground. I was involved as Chairman of the Kidlington Running and Athletic Club from 1995-2020; it was permitted on the grounds of being a public recreation ground, not just for the benefit of the three founding clubs as a sporting facility funded by a Sport England (National Lottery) grant, but crucially having public access - commercial interest was not part - and the extent of permanent structure limited so that only a grass running track would have been permitted, and the cricket scoreboard had to be movable. At the formal opening, speaking on behalf of the three clubs, I described Stratfield Brake as "the finest sporting facility of any village in the country", and I emphasise that now to remind the Authority that Kidlington proudly maintains its status as a village, rather than be a mere suburb of an expanding Greater Oxford. This is already threatened by the "ribbon" housing developments proposed down either side of Banbury Road north of the City boundary as far as the railway line -</p> <p>The creation of a four-storey monster alongside Banbury Road to the north of the railway and the A34 would completely destroy the separation of Kidlington from an Oxford conurbation.</p>

Further, whilst the argument that there is an urgent need for more housing close to Oxford may be deemed an "exceptional" reason for the reassignment of Green Belt for development, the commercial interests associated with the provision of a home for Oxford United do not.

#### Overdevelopment of the site

I have referred to mass above. This will dominate the site and form a far more overpowering presence than the artist's impression indicates since it will be the pre-eminent "impression of Kidlington" as one approaches from the south and crosses the bridge across the railway and the A34. Unfortunately, the stadium is being compressed into a tight site and the overall development is for more than a stadium alone. Thus the road immediately around the proposed stadium is pressed against the boundaries of the site, with the only relief being the far north tip of the site into the roundabout.

I note that the plans suggest that the line of trees that continue the sequence that has been preserved within the roundabout as a result of objections to their removal will be removed - it should be a condition, if planning consent is given, that they be retained.

#### Traffic and crowd management should permission be granted

I fully support the condition proposed by the County Highway Authority that the A4165 remain open at all times, and not be subject to any road closure on match days. There are many reasons for this -

1 This is one of just two corridors to the City from the north. The combination of forcing all traffic to go via Frieze Way and the Woodstock Road together with the additional traffic that matches themselves will generate will surely cause all five roundabouts on that diversion route to seize up - indeed to the extent that makes issues at the Plain in the City Centre during rush hour seem minor by comparison.

2 If the road is closed, then the question as to how all match-related traffic reaches the Water Eaton Park and Ride must be answered. The only approach then is via the Banbury Road north of the Cutteslowe roundabout. A single route to the sole parking area is surely a nonsense, not least because all match related traffic from the north will be forced around the diversion discussed in (1), adding further to traffic chaos.

3 Next, if the Water Eaton Park and Ride is the designated parking and drop-off area, what provision will be made for those who use such a facility prior to continuing into Oxford? Has the impact on businesses in the City (e.g. Westgate, expecting shoppers to use the Park and Ride bus service) received adequate attention?

4 By the same token, it should be noted that the Sainsburys store at the Kidlington roundabout is the only full-sized supermarket serving the entirety of North Oxford and Kidlington. Has the impact on Saturday shoppers been considered?

5 Related to (4), no indication has been given as to how those attending matches will be prevented from using Sainsbury's car park - especially if the alternative is a three-mile detour in slow moving traffic.

6 The same applies to other apparent alternatives. Some drivers may try to park in Stratfield Brake; others in front of shops either side of Oxford Road. How are such intruders to be distinguished from genuine users of those facilities?

7 So far, I have addressed issues arising from Saturday afternoon matches. What about midweek, evening games? Given that the Park and Ride together with the station car park are used by commuters either travelling into Oxford by bus - as is encouraged - or taking the train elsewhere, where will those attending football matches park if the car parks are already full? Further, since such commuters will have driven in from the north, why should they then be forced to drive three miles just to get back to the Kidlington roundabout?

Having addressed the need to keep the A4165 open at all times, I now turn to crowd management between the Water Eaton Park and Ride and the proposed stadium.

First, it is essential that any footbridge across the road be built before the stadium opens. But I assert too that, whilst this is necessary, alone it is not sufficient.

No document has addressed the question as to how such spectators cross the bridge that crosses the railway and the A34. The pavements on either side are far too narrow to accommodate crowds, and there is no means to widen them without encroaching onto the current highway. Worse still, it must surely be dangerous to expect crowds to use just those pavements when there is a significant traffic on the road.

The Planning Authority should therefore demand that this issue be addressed before there is further consideration. Whether the solution is a new dedicated footbridge that crosses the railway and the A34, or a tunnel that goes under both of these and the A4165, is not my concern, although having written this it now becomes transparent that the tunnel also solves the road closure question.

#### The Football Case, OR NOT

Many submissions in favour of the proposed stadium come from those living far from Oxford and with no knowledge of the detailed issues involved, whether that of encroachment on the Green Belt or local traffic-related issues. One can see why, on general grounds of support for football, these have been submitted, whether at the urging of OUFC or completely independently. But if it is appropriate for the Planning Authority to be influenced by such submissions, then it is equally important that the Planning Authority look carefully at the history of OUFC.

I will not engage in aspects of the relationship between OUFC and Mr Kassam over the past five years that have seen OUFC running out of its licence since it would be dependent on the research conducted by others, and which no doubt they will present. I shall go further back to previous incarnations of attempts to "put OUFC on a sounder footing".

I start with the legendary Robert Maxwell. Was he not the saviour who would develop the club, with the added benefit of being "local"? For a while, maybe, but remember that he sold the club for 1 when the broader enterprise became insolvent.

Later there was Mr Kassam himself. But a search of Companies House records show that he was in fact a director for only seven years, from 1999-2006. I refer the Planning Authority to

<https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/00470509/officers>

for a complete record of the turnover of directors in order that it may form an impression of the stability behind such enterprises - no doubt, this will come as a shock to many of those who have written letters of support from a distance.

More difficult to dissect, however, is the proposed relationship between OUFC as a club, and what will essentially be a property company with substantial long-term liabilities arising from loans taken to build this stadium. If the model is in any sense like that established at the time either of Robert Maxwell's or Mr Kassam's acquisitions of the Club, then the Planning Authority needs to take note.

It may not be a planning matter, but since the grant of a lease by the County Council is dependent on the granting of planning permission, the ultimate responsibility of the Cherwell District Council becomes clear. Unless there is a very clear indication otherwise, then there is a risk that the grant of planning permission benefits only an underlying property company and not the Football Club. How that will play out may be hard to discern, but the current situation with the Kassam Stadium should act as a clear warning of easily an initially enthusiastic owner can discard that interest unless there is a built-in protection for the Club from the outset. And the relevant information is notable for its absence.

The Planning Authority must accept responsibility, not merely for the immediate needs of OUFC, but for the heritage that this development may leave.

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**Attachments**