

I **object** to this application for the following reasons:

### 1. Inappropriate development on Green Belt

A. The applicant has not demonstrated 'very special circumstances' required for the proposed development. It is a matter of public record<sup>1</sup> that the owner of the applicant's current home has indicated that the club is not being made homeless. This was also recently confirmed in the local press<sup>2</sup>. Tim Williams, the CEO of Oxford United, stated in a public video<sup>3</sup> in April 2023 that *'the club is now in a Race Against Time to open the new stadium by the summer of 2026. The end of our site licence and the lifting of the restrictive covenant of the use of land will force us out of the Kassam Stadium in June 2026. If we can't open a new stadium by the start of the 2026 season we will be homeless. We have no choice.'* The absence of an automatic right to renew a lease/licence should not be equated with eviction – particularly when your landlord has publicly stated he is willing to extend it. Moreover, it does not seem credible that this is the applicant's only option, particularly at this point, with June 2026 now only around 2 years away. There has been a real lack of transparency surrounding this proposal since it was first announced. Far more due diligence is required on these points to assure the public that this application for development on Green Belt satisfies the high bar of 'very special circumstances', and is not simply preferred for commercial and financial reasons.

B. Even if a stadium is deemed to qualify as 'very special circumstances', the commercial uses, including a 180 bed hotel, on this site cannot be justified – the area is already well-served by hotels such as those on Langford Lane in Kidlington and in Summertown. As stated in the application *'These [commercial] spaces, comprising a mix of uses as above, help to ... drive additional income to help fund the development'*. Financial sustainability of a private company is an irrelevant consideration. It is also concerning that the development will need to be funded by commercial revenue which is by no means guaranteed.

C. The applicant's alternative site search does not appear to be robust. It underestimates the biodiversity and value of the proposed Green Belt site. It is also unclear why other sites have been disregarded.

D. The applicant states (4.36) that the stadium will be used *'for a wide range of activities including conferences, meetings, trade shows, corporate events and dinners. Over the course of a year, it is anticipated that around 580 events will be hosted'*. Commercial use of this Green Belt site in this way is unacceptable. Use of the stadium should be restricted to sports events only, if this is the primary purpose of the applicant's proposal, with a restrictive covenant included should planning permission be granted.

### 2. Traffic and site access

According to figure 4.13, the applicant proposes three additional Toucan crossings, and two temporary pedestrian crossings over the Oxford Road and Freize Way. This will significantly disrupt traffic flows on these key routes in and out of Kidlington, even on non-match days. The diversions – or road closures – proposed (4.73) would represent a significant loss of amenity for residents and risks creating traffic chaos on a frequent basis. The fragile road network in this area will come under increasing pressure anyway over the next few years with existing planned development in this area.

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<sup>1</sup> According to information released under the Freedom of Information Act, Firoka wrote to the leader of Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet in January 2023.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24056192.oxford-united-stadium-owner-open-club-staying-kassam/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iggOk-vzDo&list=PPSV>

Diverting traffic along Frieze Way increases emissions in the vicinity of Stratfield Brake Sports Ground, predominantly impacting young people participating in sport in this location.

The applicant's CEO, Tim Williams, stated recently that a footbridge would be constructed to enable safe access into the site. This must be required as part of this application.

### **3. Parking**

A. I am very concerned that the lack of parking provision at the proposed stadium will result in local municipal car parks being repurposed as car parks for the proposed stadium, hotel and trade show/conference visitors. As a parent, I frequently use the car park at Stratfield Brake Sports Ground to take child/ren to participate in sport. It is often at capacity. How will the applicant stop stadium/hotel visitors using this as a free car park? The pedestrian crossing the applicant proposes over Frieze Way makes this increasingly likely. The Park & Ride across the road from the site will also be dominated by stadium/hotel visitors, depriving council taxpayers from using this community facility to shop in Oxford.

B. Residents have not been consulted about Controlled Parking Zone provision nor residents' parking permit schemes. Who will pay for these? Where are they proposed? Where is the evidence that these measures will be effective? Much more detail is required on this before this application proceeds any further.

C. A number of approved planning applications by Cherwell District Council in Kidlington in recent times has already led to antisocial parking in Kidlington, with cars blocking pavements and parked on grass verges. This will become completely out of control if this application is approved.

### **4. Detrimental visual impact to surrounding area**

At almost 25 metres in height (4.27), the stadium will dominate the local area, where residential development is generally low (2 storey) housing, and have a significant detrimental visual impact. The current site was acquired to prevent the coalescence of Kidlington with Oxford. The poplar trees on the north of the site and on Kidlington roundabout form a natural and prominent feature at the entrance to the village. This landscape will be entirely lost. The nature and scale of development would be entirely incongruous with its surroundings and appears to be overdevelopment of the site with the structures virtually touching the site boundaries. It is out of keeping with the permitted development on Stratfield Brake Sports Ground where the club house is situated centrally, with adequate surrounding green space. Due to the small and awkward shape of the site, the stadium will overshadow the highway and ancient woodland to the south and overly dominate its surroundings. The proposed images also depict a blue colour scheme which is completely out of keeping with this Green Belt location – a more natural colour palette with more appropriate building materials could have been used.

### **5. Ecological impact**

A. I strongly object to the removal of mature oak trees protected by tree preservation orders in order to accommodate a stadium, hotel and commercial development on this Green Belt site. The applicant's comments about the trees' status/value are at odds with the opinion of the arboricultural officer who only recently granted TPO protection.

B. The applicant states that the site will be used 24 hours a day (4.38). This continuous activity will detrimentally impact wildlife present on the site, as well as on adjacent sites such as the nature

reserve and Ancient Woodland. The proposed structure also virtually touches the Ancient Woodland to the South of the site. This is an inadequate buffer zone to enable this area to survive.

C. The applicant states (4.80) that *'The Proposed Development is looking to achieve at least BREEAM 'Very Good'*. This is very disappointing, particularly given that if the club's leaves its current location, this risks the destruction of a stadium which is only around 25 years old and would destroy a Green Belt site.

D. It is also disappointing to see the applicant has chosen synthetic polycarbonate, composite and precast building materials. More natural, and sustainable options would have provided a more sympathetic look and feel, in keeping with the Green Belt location next to a local sports ground and nature reserve. The applicant could have taken inspiration from Forest Green Rovers' new eco stadium which plans to use predominantly timber as a renewable and sustainable building option. In addition, the applicant is only proposing to provide EV charging to 25% of its car parking spaces – why not 100% on day 1 to support and encourage EV car use? Food outlets on the site should be plant-based as a way to reduce the site's carbon footprint. I urge the Planning Committee to require that the applicant revisits the proposals, if permission is granted, to achieve far more ambitious environmental objectives.