

## **Objection to Planning Application 24/00539/F**

Proposed Stadium and Hotel at 'the Triangle', Kidlington.

### **From: Kidlington Development Watch**

Contact details: Name and address supplied in covering e-mail.

Kidlington Development Watch (KDW) was established in 2014 because of concerns about proposals for excessive development and their damaging consequences in and around Kidlington. It aims to provide information to residents about planning proposals affecting Kidlington and has been a very active participant in the Local Plan Process. It has a large mailing list and can reasonably claim to represent the views of a large number of residents.

### **Kidlington Development Watch OBJECTS to this application.**

1. This proposed development is strongly opposed by a large majority of Kidlington residents. Surveys have consistently shown that around two-thirds of residents are against the proposal. A parish poll, undertaken in conditions not conducive to a high turnout, attracted a turnout comparable to local elections and showed that 69.1% of voters rejected the proposed stadium.
2. A stadium would result in substantial adverse consequences and disruption for Kidlington residents when football matches and other events take place because of increased traffic, on street parking, difficulties in travelling, and potential anti-social behaviour.

### **Travel, Traffic and Parking**

3. The application does not provide sufficient information to properly assess the impact on traffic flow, travel time, public transport capacity or crowd control measures. It should not be decided until these are submitted and have been consulted on.
4. Claims by the applicant that 90% of travel would not be by private transport are clearly nonsense. This is the opposite of the situation at the current stadium where over 80% travel by car or van.
5. Closeness to the Railway Station is not relevant as travel by train would not be suitable for the overwhelming majority of home or away supporters.
6. Parking provision for the stadium is therefore clearly inadequate.
7. Existing Park and Ride car parking is intended to allow visitors to Oxford to travel into the city by bus, whether their journey is for work, shopping or visiting theatres, museums and other attractions. Use for the proposed stadium would inevitably disrupt this and be damaging to Oxford City Centre.
8. Parking would inevitably occur extensively on residential streets and any accessible vacant space in Kidlington.
9. Proposed parking restrictions would not be capable of being enforced.
10. Proposed closure of the Oxford Road would result in huge inconvenience for Kidlington residents as it is the main route into Oxford by public transport (many buses per hour), cycling and motor vehicles. Although Oxford Road is

the main route from Kidlington it is a relatively narrow road with narrow pavements shared between pedestrians and cyclists.

11. Whether or not the road is closed, large numbers of spectators would spill out onto a very constrained space and this would be both disruptive and dangerous.
12. The Triangle site is at the Kidlington roundabout, a known traffic pinch point. Traffic in both directions, including that 'diverted' down Frieze Way will have to negotiate the roundabout. Crowds walking from Kidlington (either residents or visitors having parked there) to the stadium will have to cross the roundabout. This is likely to lead to gridlock impacting the local and national road network north of Oxford.

### **Green Belt**

13. The development would remove the last remaining piece of Green Belt between Oxford and Kidlington – the sensitive Kidlington Gap - at its narrowest point.
14. This would not just harm the Green Belt but destroy four of its five key purposes as set out in the NPPF and reflected in Policy ESD 14 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2015, which states that the Green Belt will be maintained to:
  - a. Maintain separation between settlements;
  - b. Preserve the special character and landscape setting of Oxford;
  - c. Check the growth of Oxford and prevent ribbon development and urban sprawl; and
  - d. Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.The proposed development would also destroy the essential characteristics of Green Belt highlighted in the NPPF namely openness and permanence.
15. Green Belt boundaries in the area have recently been reviewed and extensively changed. The new boundaries have been described by the Planning Inspector (into the Local Plan Partial Review) as 'defensible'. Government policy is that Green Belt is permanent. This development would be wholly contrary to local and national policy.
16. The possibility of building a stadium at Stratfield Brake or Water Eaton was discussed in 2017 at a meeting of council leaders, planners and OUFC. The then head of strategic planning and the economy for Cherwell District Council (Adrian Colwell), explained that the sites were 'not viable'. He is reported by the Oxford Mail as saying that: "Green Belt, buffer zone and planning constraints mean no development of a stadium was possible on either site." These constraints apply equally to the triangle and are even more relevant today.
17. The land was taken into public ownership specifically to protect the gap between Kidlington and Oxford. The need to protect the gap is now even greater because of other proposed development. To hand over land protected by public ownership to private bodies for massive development for commercial gain seems to be an abrogation of public duty. This should be taken into account in assessing this application.

18. The 180 bed hotel would generate significant extra activity 7 days a week adding to congestion and pressure on local infrastructure and services. The different usage characteristics of the hotel and some of the other proposed uses should be assessed separately from the stadium.
19. A 180 bed hotel represents a major development in its own right and is not a necessary part of a stadium. It would never be permitted at this location in the Green Belt and should be considered separately for this reason also. The legal precedent cited by the applicants concerning 'mixed-use development' (para 9.25, Planning Statement) should be closely checked to see whether it is truly comparable. In any event, as the hotel comprises a major part of the development it makes the Very Special Circumstances test even more difficult to surmount.

### **Unsuitability of Site and Location (regardless of Green Belt designation)**

20. The site is too small and an awkward shape for the development proposed. It is closely hemmed-in by busy major roads one of which has no pedestrian provision and the other (Oxford Road) only has narrow pavements. This would lead to dangerous situations when events take place.
21. The public and 'green' areas are much too small to cope with a potential 16,000 visitors.
22. The statement that the proposed 'green' area at the very north of the site would maintain a sense of openness is disingenuous in the extreme. It is very small and is intended to be a functional part of the fan zone. There is no guarantee it would be maintained.
23. The stadium is sited too close to the protected woodland habitat to the south of the site which would inevitably suffer damage possibly to the point of effective destruction.
24. The development would be completely out of character with the surrounding area which is either low rise residential or undeveloped green fields, golf course, nature reserve and playing fields. Much of this is planned to be replaced by new low rise residential development. However, the proposed hotel and stadium will be 25m tall, equivalent to a 7 or 8 storey block of flats, and have an approximately 180m x 140m (over 2.5ha or 6 acres) footprint. This would dwarf and dominate everything in the surrounding area.
25. Most modern stadia are, in fact, situated near retail parks, light industrial sites and/or business areas (for example at Brentford, York, Reading, Swansea and Wimbledon) rather than next to residential areas or protected habitats.
26. The site is in the middle of an area already being developed (Oxford North) and to be subject to major housing and science park development in the coming years. This will create huge pressure on infrastructure and services to which the Stadium would add significantly. As part of these plans it is considered that the Oxford Road is a major transportation corridor into the city which as described above would be disrupted by the stadium.
27. The unsuitability of the site (as described above) for this development would be the case regardless of Green Belt designation.

## **Very Special Circumstances cited are disingenuous**

28. OUFC says that it has to find a new place to play after 2026. However it is now clear that the club made itself homeless and hasn't tried to negotiate to stay at the Kassam Stadium. This is a modern facility comparable with or better than many similar clubs. The owner of the Kassam Stadium has publicly stated that the club can continue to play at the ground. This position should be confirmed by the Council and OUFC's claim not accepted.
29. The importance of the Kassam Stadium as a football stadium was recognised by its designation by the City Council as an Asset of Community Value. This was inexplicably allowed to lapse in 2023. Nevertheless the City Council's recent submission Local Plan says that "The football stadium should remain (unless it has been replaced elsewhere in Oxford or in proximity to Oxford)" (Policy SPS2). Oxford's Local Plan Policy is therefore that "The football stadium should remain".
30. Recently OUFC, rather than stressing its claimed 'homelessness' from 2026, has focused on claimed benefits, including increased revenue, arising from owning its own stadium. However this is not guaranteed nor is ownership of the hotel and other commercial uses. According to its own accounts the club's liabilities exceed its assets by over £20m. Funding for the stadium – probably well in excess of £150million - would therefore have to be forthcoming from external investors who will only do so if there is a financial return. So 'increased revenue' is likely to go to investors rather than the club. There is also absolutely no guarantee that the club would continue to own the stadium. Football clubs are regularly bought and sold and different owners may have very different plans.
31. There are no 'very special circumstances' to justify the construction of a 180 bed hotel.
32. The club claims there will be environmental benefits to a new stadium. However demolishing an existing stadium to replace it with a new one (including an unnecessary hotel) does not represent sustainable development, especially given the huge amount of carbon generated simply through the building process. It would surely be less expensive and much more sustainable to improve the existing stadium.
33. The club also claims economic benefits such as new jobs. However, Kidlington has almost full employment. Jobs would presumably be lost in the south of the City, an area which, arguably, is in more need of employment opportunities.
34. Claims that the site will increase biodiversity and access to the Green Belt defy common sense. The development would be likely to diminish biodiversity both on and around the site and will effectively destroy the Green Belt.
35. Claimed environmental, economic, biodiversity and access 'benefits', even if they were real, would not represent very special circumstances.