



The countryside charity
Oxfordshire

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Dear Sir,

Re : The Triangle, Oxford Road, Kidlington

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) Oxfordshire works to improve, protect and preserve the landscape of Oxfordshire and its city, towns and villages for the benefit of everyone. We would wish to respond to the Consultation relating to the site below.

<https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stadium-land-use-negotiations>

CPRE Oxfordshire do not consider this site suitable for the sort of development proposed and we would urge OCC to take OUFC's plans no further. We outline our arguments below:

Actions taken to date by Oxfordshire County Council ("OCC")

CPRE Oxfordshire are concerned that this site was offered by OCC to OUFC without any prior consultation. The fact that this has already happened shows that OCC has already decided behind closed doors to proceed. This consultation is thus too late and, in any case, only allows comments on OUFC plans, not on the general principles involved as to whether this is a suitable place for the sort of development proposed, which it clearly is not. The consultation concerns OUFC's proposals to alleviate some of the problems which the Council foresee with this site, despite the fact that the Council has already offered it to the OUFC. In other words, this is not really a proper consultation about the proposed development and seems to be just a tick box exercise to mask over what is clearly a deficit in the decision-making process. Our comments relate to the suitability of this site for the sort of development currently proposed by OUFC.

The Triangle

This site is in the Oxford Green Belt and is used as for willow coppicing. It is neither derelict nor unsightly and it forms part of the last "Green Barrier" separating Oxford from Kidlington. It performs two of the main purposes of land in the Green Belt which is to prevent urban sprawl and prevent settlements coalescing. The land was originally acquired by OCC specifically for that purpose, so a need for this barrier is already well established. The area of land concerned was included and redesignated in the recent Cherwell Local Plan Partial Review as "Green Belt" although the long-term plans of OUFC to move to a new site were already well known at the time the Plan was being compiled. The Vision statement in the Plan states:



“In 2031, Kidlington is a distinctive and sustainable community with a strong sense of identity”.

In Section 5, it also describes the Green Belt as important in the context of the overall Plan.

The site is adjacent to an area of ancient woodland and forms part of the same wood as is protected by the Woodland Trust on the opposite side of Frieze Way. It is a small site for such a large development and there must be fears that if the development was allowed here that the neighbouring Stratfield Brake area of sports fields would as of necessity need to be built on to provide the necessary facilities such as the bars/ restaurants and car parking. It is noteworthy that OUFC have not given up on using at least part of the Stratfield Brake area in the future. It is probable in CPRE Oxfordshire’s view that any development on the Triangle site is only a preliminary step before development will be proposed by the owners of OUFC of the Stratfield Brake area, as well, which is of course owned by the Council. OCC will no doubt come under huge pressure to allow development there as well to ensure that the stadium does get built having parted with the Triangle at will apparently be less than advantageous financial terms. The Stratfield Brake site which is also in the Green Belt is a valuable green open space recreational area which should be retained at all costs.

Nature of development

Although the provision of a new stadium forms part of the development, the part which apparently will fund the stadium is a new hotel. This is thus a proposal to build a new hotel which will include the benefit of a new stadium for OUFC. The fact is that Oxford already has plenty of hotels, many of which are new and more which are proposed or are being built. There is no “*exceptional need*” to build new hotels in Oxford. The idea that a site in the Green Belt is being proposed to build a new hotel indicates that despite Government pronouncement that the Green Belt is sacrosanct that those policies are not being followed through at a local level.

Status of development

There are many unanswered questions about why OUFC needs to move from their existing stadium. Apparently, for reasons that are again are unclear, the amount of rent/ licence fee that the Club will pay to use the new proposed stadium will be substantially less than at present. How those providing the funds for the new stadium, the owners, will achieve a commercial return on that basis is entirely unclear.

The existing Kassam stadium is about 20 years old and is in an area which is convenient for many of those fans who support the Club and has plenty of reserved car parking and has other facilities such as restaurants and a hotel. The stadium is thus quite suitable for OUFC’s current needs. It has been announced that those funding the proposed development are looking to spend over £100 million on the proposed stadium which leaves unanswered the question as to why they do not purchase the Kassam stadium.

All the Councils in Oxfordshire are aware of the climate emergency and the fact that this proposed development will involve the demolition of one suitable facility so that it can be replaced with a similar structure 5 miles away will be a huge waste of natural resources at a time when we should be conserving these. The fact also is that the Triangle site is located “out of town” and those visiting the proposed new site will for the most part need to travel further either by car or use additional public transport all of which will further increase the carbon footprint of the proposed stadium. Many who formerly would have been able to walk to the Kassam stadium would have to travel to the proposed new stadium by either car or bus. It should also form part of the decision-making process that the stadium if built will be primarily for a professional football club and the number of times it will be used fully for its intended purpose will only be in region of 100 hours a year.



In terms of setting any sort of example of providing guidance as to minimising global warming allowing development here would show that the Councils declarations of a climate emergency are only really cosmetic and have no firm basis to them at all. The sorts of proposals made by OUFC to compensate for the impact of their development do not begin to address these problems and again could be described as entirely superficial and cosmetic. The environmental impact needs to be properly considered.

The traffic plans produced by OUFC to date are wildly optimistic as to those who will use public transport to visit the Triangle and, for example, do not take into account the lack of any buses that run directly to the site from the more populous parts of Oxford, such as Blackbird Leys near where the Kassam stadium, is located. The likely travel plans of away supporters coming from other parts of the country who for the most part travel by either coach or bus has not really been considered as OUFC have no control over how these fans travel. The build-up of traffic at peak times for matches, frequently played on Saturdays, will coincide with those times when the existing parking facilities, currently used for park and ride and as station parking, are already heavily used. The future of the park and ride scheme itself could well be threatened if users consistently find it is unavailable on Saturdays just when they need it.

In addition, the inevitable consequences of traffic congestion adjacent to the Triangle also poses a real threat to the hard-pressed shop and stores in the City centre as it is located on the main thoroughfares into Oxford from both Banbury and Bicester. The proposals made by OUFC indicates that the Oxford Road would need to be closed at match times to allow people access to the stadium. This might have been acceptable at Grenoble Road but not on the main Banbury Road which is the main route of most buses and traffic coming from the North side of the city.

Brownfield sites within the City

In their attempts to acquire the Triangle (which will be sold to them at what will be a reduced price) the owners of OUFC have commissioned a report from Savills which attempts to rule out any other sites within the Oxford area as being suitable. One of the main criteria Savills has used in their review is that any alternative site must be within walking distance of a railway station. This is not a requirement of the EFL and ignores the fact that travel to the proposed stadium for almost all home fans will not be undertaken by rail as Oxford only has two railway stations and Oxford Central station which connects to Parkway is not located anywhere near any of the more populated areas of Oxford such as Headington, Cowley and Blackbird Leys. However, Savills on that basis has ruled out the Unipart site (30.63 HA) which is a much larger Brownfield site. This site has been empty/ underused for at least the past 30 years and is ripe for redevelopment and the Councils should be much more forceful in fulfilling their professed aim of using Brownfield sites instead of allowing more development in the Green Belt.

For the vast majority of travelling fans the cost of rail travel to away matches is a major consideration. For example, a single off-peak rail ticket from Barnsley (whose team is in same Division) to Oxford Parkway costs in the region of £80 which is why most of the away fans organise coaches or share car rides. The actual impact of rail travel on reducing the number of car and coach movements on match days should be properly analysed by OCC. Some independent expert assessment by OCC of OUFC's claims in this and other regards is urgently needed. **It is most unsatisfactory that as yet the Council appear to have not conducted any independent scrutiny of OUFC's plans except to raise certain "priorities" which have to be met and then asked residents to comment on whether they have indeed been met without doing so itself.**



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Campaigning to protect our rural county

In summary, the Triangle is not a site which is suitable for the sort of development proposed and we would urge OCC to take OUFC's plans no further.

Yours faithfully,

Lynda Moore
Planning co-ordinator CPRE Oxfordshire