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The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum (WNF) seeks to represent the views, in relation to planning matters, of residents in the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan area, located just 1 km south of The Triangle. The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) was approved overwhelmingly by our residents in a referendum in May 2021 and was subsequently 'made' by Oxford City Council.

### **WNF response to OUFC plans to meet the OCC seven priorities for The Triangle**

The WNF Steering Committee (excluding councillors, who are non-voting members) has considered the proposals put forward by Oxford United Football Club for The Triangle at Kidlington, to meet the seven OCC strategic priorities. The following is our response.

***Priority 1: Maintaining a green barrier between Oxford and Kidlington, and protecting and enhancing the surrounding environment including biodiversity, connecting habitats and supporting nature recovery***

**Comment:** It is impossible for the club to address this priority, because the site is so small. Because of revisions in recent years to the Cherwell District Council Local Plan, most of the original Green Belt between Oxford and Kidlington is now allocated for housing, and therefore the green barrier between these two settlements will be greatly diminished as the housing comes to fruition. In fact, The Triangle site IS the only remaining green barrier planned to remain along the Oxford Road corridor. Therefore it will perform a vital role in defining the separate identities of Oxford and Kidlington in the future. But this green barrier will disappear if OUFC acquire the site. When the club's requirements have been met, adding a large stadium, associated access road, 150 parking spaces, and enough hard standing to accommodate 10,000 arriving and departing spectators, there will be no significant green space left. The small triangular patch of about 1 acre (the size of a large back garden) at the northern end of the site cannot reasonably be described as a 'green barrier' between a city the size of Oxford and the large village of Kidlington. The reality is that the development would cause Kidlington to merge with Oxford: precisely what the original Green Belt was intended to prevent.

***Priority 2: Improving public access to high-quality nature and green spaces***

**Comment:** See the previous comment. It is impossible for the site to make any significant contribution to 'improving public access to high quality nature and green spaces', because it is so small, and meeting the club's basic needs will consume such a high proportion of it. Even if the public are given access to the small triangle at the northern tip of the site, it will be too small to be a significant public amenity.

***Priority 3: Enhancing inclusive facilities for local sports groups and on-going financial support***

**Comment:** The club outlines some laudable objectives in terms of supporting local sports groups. But they are expressed in imprecise terms and are thus less than convincing. To fully address this priority, the club needs to provide detailed plans and to quantify the 'financial support' it plans to provide.

***Priority 4: Significantly improving the infrastructure connectivity in this location, improving public transport to reduce the need for car travel in so far as possible, and to improve sustainable transport through increased walking, cycling, bus and rail use.***

**Comment:** It is impossible for the club to address this priority, within the confines of the Triangle. Instead of 'significantly improving infrastructure connectivity in this location', the presence of the stadium will be hugely damaging to local connectivity. The site itself will contain only 150 car park spaces, which different club representatives have told us will be 'all disabled spaces' or 'for directors only'. The intention of the club is to provide **no vehicle parking for spectators**. Instead it plans to encourage spectators, and coach operators bringing spectators from further afield, to exploit the nearby Park and Ride (P&R) sites, provided at public expense for an entirely different purpose. From the typical spectator numbers provided by the club (10,000), it is clear this would swamp the Water Eaton and Peartree P&R sites, and there would be overflow parking in nearby residential roads, Sainsbury's car park, Stratfield Brake car parks etc. This would be hugely disruptive in the vicinity, and would severely impair the functioning of these two Park and Ride sites serving Oxford city. In addition, again using the numbers provided by the club, road congestion in the area would be severe, as thousands of vehicles arrive and depart on match days. Moreover, all spectators parking at Water Eaton P&R or arriving by train at Oxford Parkway would need to cross Oxford Road as pedestrians. To avoid blocking this main road and to cope with the many thousands of spectators, a substantial footbridge would be essential. But no guarantee of this is provided: there is only mention of the 'potential' for such a bridge. Some acknowledgement of Priority 4 could be achieved by the club providing extensive match day bus services from directions other than those served by the railway. But the proposals contain no firm commitment to this, referring only to a 'vision' of 'enhanced bus services along Oxford Road'. The proposals provide for only 7% of spectators arriving by bicycle: accommodation for 700 bicycles. In all these respects, the OUFC proposals currently fail to address OCC Priority 4.

***Priority 5: Developing local employment opportunities in Oxfordshire***

**Comment:** The club claims to address this priority by predicting the new stadium will generate 340 new full-time jobs at the site, in addition to the jobs replacing those at the existing stadium. The justification for such a prediction is not made clear in the club's proposals. To fully address this priority there needs to be a clear explanation of what all these new jobs will be, and how the numbers add up to 340.

**Priority 6:** *Increasing education and innovation through provision of an accessible sports centre of excellence and facilities linked to elite sport, community sport, health and wellbeing*

**Comment:** The club supports local sports education already. But its references to how this will 'increase' with the arrival of the new stadium are thin. To fully address this priority it needs to provide much more clarity of the new provisions planned.

**Priority 7:** *Supporting the council's net zero emissions pledge through highly sustainable development*

**Comment:** By far the most effective way the club can support the OCC zero emissions pledge is for the existing Kassam stadium to be retained, and made more sustainable, instead of demolishing it and building a new one on a green field site. The depth and extent of soil and water table disturbance necessary for the building processes, and the after-effects of development based on fluctuating populations of people, vehicles, and built services will never replace the ecosystem services of the existing habitat. If retention of the existing stadium is genuinely impossible, then OCC policy requires that the environmental damage of building a new stadium must be ameliorated as much as possible. The current proposal contains ambitions consistent with this. But at present they are unconvincing. There is reference to possible use of PV panels, of diverting 95% waste from landfill (already normal practice in Oxfordshire) and of 'sustainable water management', but with no commitment to detail. There is no indication of how the requirement to increase biodiversity by 10% will be achieved. It is clear that, for OUFC to fully address this priority, there must be a great deal more clarity and detailed commitment to the sorts of sustainable features alluded to in their proposals.

**Other Comments:** We fully support the aim of finding a good home for OUFC's new stadium, close enough to Oxford city for the club to retain its identity and close association with the city. The club's 'Alternative Sites Report' makes clear that the minimum area required is 15 acres. Although that report considers 64 potential sites, it does not include any site consisting solely of the Triangle. Of those 64 sites, **all** 8 sites of less than 15 acres are rejected as not meeting the area requirement. Of the remaining sites, 6 are considered promising and flagged green, as meeting all EFL requirements and OUFC's search criteria. The rational approach to finding the optimum site would be to pursue each of these 6, to identify that which meets the club's needs best. For example, a good candidate appears to be the site at South Hinksey. It is said to meet the needs, and has the benefits of being adjacent to other sports clubs and the A34. By contrast, the Triangle does not even meet the minimum area criterion, providing only about 10 acres. Its only advantage over other sites is its proximity to Oxford Parkway railway station. In all other respects, it is unsuitable.

**Conclusions:** It is clear from above that the Triangle site is totally inadequate for a new OUFC stadium. Its area is only about 70% of what the club declared was their minimum requirement. For spectator parking it relies entirely on exploiting public assets in the form of existing Park and Ride sites. That would overwhelm them on match days, threatening a key element of the Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council policy of encouraging use of P&Rs by the public for access to Oxford City centre. There are also many other respects

where the OUFC proposals either fail to address, or only weakly address, the OCC seven priorities. We urge the County Council not to release the land at the Triangle for the new OUFC stadium, and instead to encourage the club to pursue the other promising sites that it has identified.

From Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum Steering Committee, 22 July 2023

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