# Q&A session for County Councillors with Oxford United FC

The following questions and answers were from a meeting between county councillors and Oxford United FC on 17 April 2023.

The OUFC representatives responding to the questions were Chief Executive Tim Williams, Development Director Jon Clarke, and Head of Strategy Niall McWilliams.

Further written information on a number of topics – including the club’s community pledge and employment plan – will be provided shortly by the club as part of its wider submission of information to address the council’s seven strategic priorities for the use of the land.

## Diversity and Inclusion

1. Why is the inclusion of women in the club only becoming a priority now?

We have established women’s and girls’ teams, who have been in place at the club for many years, and the club puts in significant investment and effort into them. We’re currently at the top of the FA Women's National League and, over the past four years, we’ve had hundreds of players representing Oxford United. There’s a clear plan in place to grow the girls’ and the women's game.

However, we currently have a restrictive licence agreement at the Kassam, which limits the numbers of games we can put on at the stadium and this affects the girls’ and women's game. We’re therefore very excited that the women’s team will be able to play their home games at the new stadium.

We also see the new stadium as a further opportunity to provide opportunities that benefit diversity and inclusion across a wide range of groups.

## Biodiversity

1. How will the club ensure a holistic approach to biodiversity?

The club has engaged sustainability experts Bioregional to carry out a full assessment of the site, develop a robust plan, and ensure every aspect of biodiversity and sustainability standards are in line with the club’s ESG (environmental, social and governance) responsibilities. This includes looking at sustainability across the whole site.

1. Why is the club only aiming for BREEAM very good status, not excellent or outstanding?

The new stadium will be designed, built and operated sustainably to achieve at least BREEAM very good status. This independent environmental assessment method from the Building Research Establishment will put the stadium in the top 25 per cent of new buildings in terms of sustainable construction and sustainability during its life of use.

Very good status is our minimum requirement and we will put every effort into improving on that.

## Transport

1. You reference a footbridge being built. Where will it be located?

The footbridge will be sited between Oxford Parkway and the proposed site for the new stadium.

1. You state that 90% of fans currently attend matches by car and your proposal is that 90% of fans will use active travel or public transport to reach the new stadium. That’s a huge change. How realistic is it?

It is indeed an ambitious target, but we think it’s achievable and we’re determined to meet it. We need a challenging target to a) maintain our carbon neutral status, b) promote the sustainability that we want and c) ensure this is a stadium that is accessible for all.

We will have minimal car parking spaces on site. We will increase the number of cycle routes that are available - and we are already working with Sustrans to achieve that. And we will work with local bus companies to put additional bus services on.

A huge objective for us is to increase the overall accessibility of the stadium so that a much wider range of the local population can come. We’ve taken on board good practice from clubs such as Brighton and Newcastle, where the vast majority of fans travel by public transport.

1. What discussions have you had with public transport providers, including the railways and the two bus companies?

OUFC is in discussions with Chiltern Railways, Network Rail and the bus companies. One of the key items being discussed is the potential for a new circular route, with the new stadium acting as a central key destination.

## Employment opportunities

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1. What local employment opportunities will be available at the new stadium?

Employees currently employed at the Kassam Stadium will retain their jobs at the new stadium, and that will be facilitated by additional bus routes and transport links.

Currently at the Kassam, we only have 20 to 30 days of use of the stadium each year, which means that people employed on a match day are typically casual staff. The new stadium will be open all year, meaning we will be able to take on full-time employees.

As part of addressing the council’s seven strategic priorities, the club will produce an employment plan.

1. How will local cafés and pubs benefit given the new stadium will be a 1.5 mile walk away?

We are in no doubt there will be significant benefits for cafés and pubs in the surrounding area. We expect many fans will choose to walk the 1.5 miles to local facilities and back again – it’s very common for football fans to walk that kind of distance.

While we want to provide a quality bar, cafe and restaurant facilities onsite, we’re not intending to provide a huge number of onsite restaurants and bars. We won’t be in a position to serve everyone on a match day, so we want to work with the community and with existing local businesses to support them.

Most football fans arrive at the stadium with less than 30 minutes to go before kick-off, so there will be plenty of opportunities for fans to enjoy facilities in the local area before the game.

## Contingency plans

1. When does the current lease expire?

The current lease expires in 2026.

1. Are you in discussions with the FA and EFL (English Football League) about what happens if there is no agreement with the council?

We are providing monthly updates to both the FA and the EFL to provide progress reports.

The lease and the land covenant at the Kassam will expire in 2026 and there is no Plan B. We don't want to be in a situation where a well-funded club goes out of business simply because we've got nowhere to play.

Within their contingency planning, all clubs have an arrangement to play at another stadium should their existing stadium be out of action for a period of time. However, the EFL does not encourage this as a permanent arrangement - Oxford United needs to play in Oxford or Oxfordshire.

The recent White Paper, which sets out the government’s plan to introduce an independent regulator for professional clubs, also states very clearly that there is an expectation that clubs have a permanent home in their own stadium.

1. What is your back-up plan?

Over the last two or three years, we have conducted an extensive search for sites. Every other option has been reviewed and exhausted and so the Triangle is now our only viable option.

## Commercial considerations

1. Does your business model stack up without any additional commercial operations on the site apart from the football ground?

Within the footprint of the stadium, we intend to build a hotel and conferencing facilities. We have done a considerable amount of work with experts in this area and we have a business model in place which will achieve significant incremental revenues that will support the new stadium build.

## Community facilities and investment

1. Will you continue investing in existing community clubs, such as the girls and boys football clubs in Blackbird Leys?

Oxford United is very much in the heart of the community. Moving location will not change that and we will continue to support community clubs such as the ones in Blackbird Leys.

1. What will be the impact of having all the teams in a single location, particularly in terms of participation among young people?

We want people to look to Oxford as a model of how to run an incredibly successful sports club. We want to provide the facilities that allow other sports to really thrive - not just football. We will make the area around the stadium into an inclusive hub for everybody to enjoy any sporting activity.

The new stadium will encourage healthy lifestyles, increased wellbeing, and inspire participation.

This project is a community project at its heart. We want to provide international-class facilities and create something transformational for Oxfordshire, not just in terms of football but in other ways too, such as supporting creative spaces.

In terms of economic benefit, football clubs that do well benefit the reputation and economic status of a town. Having a famous stadium will increase visitors and tourism.

1. What is the club’s vision for community and education within the footprint of the stadium?

We want to establish multi-functional spaces in the stadium for all members of the community. They will not only enable us to host everything from single room meeting spaces to conferencing and exhibition spaces, but they will double up as classrooms and educational spaces, as well as a cinema space and drama space. We want this to be a community facility 365 days a year.

We are currently undertaking a mapping exercise to identify what Kidlington and Oxfordshire needs in terms of facilities so that we can respond to that need.

1. What will the saving be for Kidlington taxpayers from the club taking on the grounds’ maintenance at Stratfield Brake sports ground?

We believe it will be a minimum of £80,000.