

## Annex 2

---

# Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford United Football Club land negotiations: updated engagement and communications strategy

## Introduction

This strategy sets out how Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) will inform and engage a wide range of stakeholders and members of the public as it continues with negotiations with Oxford United Football Club (OUFC) about the potential use of the land at 'the triangle' for a new stadium.

Council-led engagement activity will focus on the extent to which stakeholders are satisfied that OUFC's proposals meet the council's strategic priorities for the use of the land so as to bring benefit to our communities in Oxfordshire.

On 19 September 2023 Cabinet is due to decide whether or not to lease or sell the land to OUFC for the development of a stadium. Feedback from the stakeholder and public engagement activity will be considered, alongside other supporting information, as part of the decision-making process.

OUFC's proposal for the stadium would then need to go through a full democratic planning process by the local planning authority Cherwell District Council. This would include a statutory public consultation process.

## Background

Following a decision by Cabinet on 24 January 2023, Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford United Football Club have entered into negotiations on outline legal and commercial terms for council-owned land, which could be used for the development of a new football stadium. The land in question is located east of Frieze Way and south of Kidlington roundabout and is known as 'the triangle'. It is situated in the green belt.

For OUFC to receive agreement from the council to lease or buy the triangle site, their proposal must address the seven strategic priorities set out by the council for the use of the land, which are listed below. It must also meet objectives around managing financial risk and obtaining best value for the taxpayer from any transaction.

The seven strategic priorities are:

- Maintain a green barrier between Oxford and Kidlington
- Improve access to nature and green spaces
- Enhance facilities for local sports groups and on-going financial support
- Significantly improve 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 and rail use
- Develop local employment opportunities in Oxfordshire

- Increase education and innovation through the provision of a sports centre of excellence and facilities linked to elite sport, community sport, health and wellbeing
- Support the county council's net zero carbon emissions pledge through highly sustainable development.

During the negotiation period, Cabinet has asked officers to identify opportunities to meaningfully engage with stakeholders as OUFC's proposals are developed and impacts clearly identified. This engagement will focus on the extent to which stakeholders are satisfied that OUFC's proposals meet the council's strategic priorities set out above.

The county council is aware that OUFC, as the scheme promotor, has been undertaking pre-application engagement work with community stakeholders and the planning authority. This activity is entirely separate to the council's engagement activity.

## **Objectives of stakeholder engagement**

We aim to be as open and transparent in our communications and engagement activity as possible so that stakeholders feel they have been given the opportunity to share their views. We also need to shape the engagement activity carefully so that it does not risk prejudicing any future planning process.

The objectives of this plan are to:

1. Keep stakeholders, residents and fans informed about key milestones and the latest developments in this process.
2. Inform stakeholders, residents and fans of the distinct and separate roles of the three organisations in this process (Oxford United Football Club, Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council) to enable engagement with each organisation in the right context.
3. Provide meaningful and visible opportunities for a wide range of stakeholders, including local residents, Oxfordshire residents and OUFC fans, to provide structured feedback on OUFC's proposals, within the parameters set out by the county council as the landowner.

## **Audiences**

The main audiences for the county council's engagement and/or communications activity include:

- Local communities, in close proximity to the triangle including Cutteslowe, Kidlington, Sunnymead and Wolvercote
- Local democratic representatives, including parish councils, district councillors, county councillors, and local MPs
- Local residents' associations and local residents' forums
- Chief executive officers of Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council and West Oxfordshire District Council
- Current leaseholder of the Triangle and adjacent leaseholders
- Local sports clubs including Kidlington Youth Football Club, Gosford All Blacks Rugby Club, Kidlington Cricket Club and Kidlington Running Club
- Friends of Stratfield Brake and the Triangle

- OUFC supporters including Oxford United Supporters Panel and OXVOX - an independent supporters' group for OUFC
- Other local community organisations and groups and local interest groups including, accessibility, equality, and diversity, environmental, religious, schools and voluntary and community and youth groups
- Local and strategic representatives of the Oxfordshire's business community, including Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Experience Oxfordshire
- Wider Oxfordshire residents, commuters from outside of the county and visitors

This list is not exclusive, and we are continuing to welcome approaches from other organisations that would like to be involved and recommendations from groups and organisations we are meeting. During the first phase of stakeholder engagement in April and May 2023, the council was provided with a suggested list of additional stakeholders. We will review this list and engage with groups and organisations as part of the second phase of stakeholder engagement.

## **Activity**

### **Communications**

We will provide stakeholders, residents and fans with access to timely, easily accessible, and factual information using council-owned and other digital channels (website, social media), issuing media releases, sending letters and emails to key stakeholders.

To support phase 2 of our engagement plan (described below), we will also add a letter drop, supplying packaged content for editors of community-led printed and digital media, targeted social media advertising, digital and radio advertising and a poster campaign to our communications mix.

Key to our communications approach is a dedicated page on the county council website ([www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stadium](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/stadium)). This page includes definitions, timeline, repository/links to cabinet papers and other documentation, contact information, and signposting to other sites. It aims to provide a one-stop shop for stadium-related information.

### **Stakeholder engagement**

Opportunities for stakeholders to share their views has been divided into two phases, which are set out below. Each phase has a different focus.

#### **Phase 1 (April and May): Targeted stakeholder engagement**

- Designed to provide a listening platform for targeted groups of stakeholders to share early formative views on opportunities and concerns with regards to the principle of the stadium on 'the triangle' site.
- Engagement has taken the form of face-to-face meetings or virtual meetings, led by an independent chair, attended in listening capacity by a senior officer and Cabinet member. All meetings are formally noted.
- We have reviewed and expanded our stakeholder list, which includes individuals and organisations that we have kept informed throughout this process.

- Up until 3 May, we have held seven meetings, with a further five meetings scheduled.
- A briefing meeting for local district councillors is also being planned, which was delayed due to the recent district council elections.
- A briefing meeting and question and answer session for county councillors with OUFC has also been held.

## **Phase 2 (5 June to 23 July): Wider stakeholder and public engagement**

- Designed to enable members of public and stakeholders to assess the extent to which information released by the club (their proposals) address the seven priorities set out by the council for the use of its land and to capture structured feedback.
- The activity will take two forms:
  - primary engagement through a small number of roadshow-styled ‘listening’ events (public exhibitions) that are open to everyone.
  - an open engagement where anyone can share feedback using an online response form; email and letters will also be accepted.
- We will also hold a small number of targeted stakeholder meetings to include any stakeholders we were unable to meet in phase one.
- To support phase two of engagement, we have asked OUFC to provide visual and written material setting out how they believe their proposals address the council’s strategic priorities. This is designed to provide context to which people can respond.
- For phase two, we will commission an external provider to design, deliver and report on both the listening events and the open engagement exercise to provide independence.

## **Provisional timetable for phase 2**

5 June 2023 (10am)	Public engagement starts
From week commencing 19 June	Stakeholder meetings
Weeks commencing: 19 June 26 June 3 July 10 July	Roadshow style listening events (Kidlington, Cutteslowe, Wolvercote, Oxford city centre). Venues and dates are to be confirmed.
23 July 2023 (midnight)	Public engagement exercise closes
19 September 2023	Cabinet meeting at which a decision is due to be taken on the use of the land. A report on the engagement undertaken in phase 1 and phase 2 will be included in the cabinet papers.