

Annex 1

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

Introduction

This strategy sets out how Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) will inform and engage a wide range of stakeholders as it moves forward with negotiations with Oxford United Football Club (OUFC) about the potential for land owned by the council to be utilised for the club's new home stadium.

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

In autumn 2023 Cabinet will decide whether or not to lease or sell the land to OUFC for the development of a stadium. Feedback from the 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.

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 them to engage 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 landowner.

Audiences

The main audiences for the county council's engagement activity include:

- Local communities, defined as being within walking distance of the triangle
- Local democratic representatives, including parish councils, district councillors, county councillors, and local MPs
- 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 interest groups including, accessibility, equality and diversity, environmental, residents and religious groups
- Local and strategic representatives of the Oxfordshire's business community, including tourism

- Transport providers serving the triangle area, including bus providers, rail providers, taxis and private hire vehicles
- Wider Oxfordshire residents, commuters from outside of the county and visitors.

This list is not exclusive and we welcome approaches from other organisations that would like to be involved.

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, and supplying packaged content for editors of community-led printed and digital media.

To support phase 2 of our engagement plan (described below), we will also add targeted social media advertising and a poster campaign to our communications mix.

Key to our communications approach is a dedicated page on the county council website. The page will include definitions, timeline, FAQs, repository/links to cabinet papers and other documentation, contact information, and signposting to other sites.

Stakeholder engagement

Opportunities for stakeholders to share their views will be divided into two phases, which are set out below. In both phases, engagement will focus on the extent to which stakeholders, residents and fans consider OUFC's proposals meet the council's strategic priorities for the use of county council owned land. The proposed dates for each phase are dependent on the receipt of information and plans from OUFC.

Phase 1 (March to early May): Targeted stakeholder engagement

- Designed to capture early views as to how OUFC's emerging plans meet the council's objectives, which can feed into our ongoing discussions with the club.
- Engagement will take the form of face-to-face meetings or virtual meetings, led by an independent chair and formally noted.
- We will review and expand our key stakeholder list, which includes individuals and organisations that we have kept informed throughout this process.

Phase 2 (early June to late July): Wider stakeholder engagement

- Designed to capture views as to how OUFC's developed plans for the stadium meet the council's seven objectives.
- The activity will take two forms:
 - deliberative engagement through a small number of 'listening' events with invited groups of stakeholders
 - an open engagement where anyone can share feedback using an online response form; email and letters will also be accepted.

- To support both approaches, we would ask OUFC to provide visual and written material setting out how they believe their proposal meets the council's strategic priorities to provide context to which people can respond to.
- We will commission an external provider to design, deliver and report on both the listening events and the open engagement exercise to provide independence.