



OXFORD UNITED SUPPORTERS' PANEL 2023-24 REVIEW

Throughout my time on the Panel we have aimed to work closely with club - praising where praise is due and challenging where needed - and always with supporters at the heart of what we do. Our bread and butter activity is liaising between fans and club to ensure that fans' views are listened to on the basics of ticketing, matchday conditions and events, as well as in wider discussions with the FSA. On top of that we have been closely involved in developing plans for a new stadium, representing fans views on BBC Radio Oxford and writing regular columns for the Oxford Mail. We have established good relationships and intend to build on this as we face different challenges this coming season in the Championship.

Come on You Yellows!

Paul, Chair of OUSP 2023-24



FAN ENGAGEMENT

One of OUSP's key aims is to improve dialogue between fans and club, by ensuring there is a range of channels of communication available for all fans. We publish minutes of our meetings with the club to keep supporters informed of our discussions, which focus on matchday and club heritage matters.



One of those channels is the traditional, informal "Open Training Day". OUSP has persistently worked for the return of these days, and in August 2023 the club held the first one since Covid at the Training Ground (image left). With numbers limited, tickets were soon snapped up, and hundreds of season ticket holders of all ages watched training, met players and staff, enjoyed food and drink stalls and looked forward with other fans to the season ahead. It was a first step for the event, and a lot was learned. Due to essential work at the stadium and Training Ground over the summer the 2024 event is likely to take place in October half term.

From the 2024-25 season the EFL will require clubs to publish and to review a Fan Engagement Plan. OUSP began drafting its first Fan Engagement Plan in 2023, and held discussions on its contents with the supporter groups. We referred to FSA guidance and asked the club to commit to improving strategic-level engagement where no formal agreement was in place (matchday and operational issues are covered by OUSP's Memorandum of Understanding with the club). The Plan now provides for quarterly updates and a commitment for the club's Chair and/or CEO to meet three times a year with the board of OxVox (the Independent Supporters' Trust). We have made further suggestions, including providing for engagement with supporters of our women's team, and ensuring that all existing channels of communication are retained and highlighted as part of the plan.

The Plan commits the club to attending at least two fan forums a season, which the fan groups will arrange and run. In March OUSP supported OxVox with the forum attended by Grant Ferguson and members of senior management. Nathan Cooper did a fantastic job of asking the questions and managing the discussion. We believe these events should be accessible to as many fans as possible, regardless of whether they can get to the venue, so we set up an OUSP YouTube channel to stream the event. We overcame a few technical glitches to enable over 300 fans to watch the stream live, and over 1700 to view recordings.



As part of the Plan, the club proposes setting up a Fan Advisory Board to give supporter input on its vision and strategic direction, off-field performance as well as more significant operational issues. Supporter groups, the FSA and the club are exploring the best way for this to work for our fans.

We are aware that there is more that can be done to improve fan engagement and general communications, and will continue to work hard in this area.

STADIUM TALK

Whilst our eyes are firmly looking to our future at the Triangle, we must make the best of the Kassam stadium for now. There are many things which we would like to improve, but we recognise that there has to be a very good case for spending capital on a building that is not ours, and is only likely to be used for the short-term. We have had to prioritise areas in our discussions with the club and StadCo.

The **pot holes** in the car parks were one of these areas, and it was good to see them repaired last August. We continue to push for the blue badge parking spaces to be re-marked so that drivers can easily identify them. This has been agreed in principle but there are other priorities to address first. Lighting was repaired/bulbs replaced around the main car parks and reflective strips added to the posts outside the South stand.



As an outdoor venue, the stadium suffers the impact of **pigeons**. OUSP has spent many hours reviewing seat cleaning and collating feedback from supporters. This was an issue that needed a more robust ongoing action plan. The club agreed a revised cleaning programme with StadCo, putting more emphasis on matchday cleaning. We asked for matchday facilities reporting to be added to the “Report It” line enabling cleaners to be sent to affected areas quickly. A new pigeon management action plan has been introduced, including bringing in a hawk as a deterrent. The stadium can never completely eliminate the problem, so we advise fans who find an area that needs attention to either report it to their nearest steward or text 60075 with details of the location and the problem.

We had constructive discussions with Farris catering, which have led to an additional unit outside the ground in the south-west corner for most matches, as well as vegan choices at the concourse outlets. The sweet van is often available at the south west corner. Logistics prevent the addition of more food outlets in the concourses.

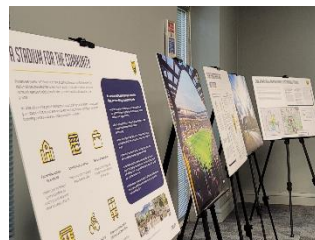


OUSP'S WORK FOR THE TRIANGLE:

- Spoke at the County Council meeting on 19th September at which the decision was taken to lease the land to OUFC
- Attended parliamentary reception with club, FSA and MPs as a case study for the importance of the Football Governance Bill and raising awareness in Westminster of our stadium situation
- Supported OxVox initiatives:
 - handing out QR codes to fans at the stadium and at the Open Training Day to encourage writing to Councillors
 - getting fans to sign up to their three-point pledge on matchdays
 - Delivered leaflets in Kidlington with local supporters
- Held fortnightly online meetings (September - November) to keep planning team updated on issues of importance for fans
- Submitted a written response in support of the planning application as a stakeholder
- Shared information on planning application through our newsletter/social media

The project to build a state-of-the-art stadium at **The Triangle** has been a key focus of fans, club, councils and community. As it is such a crucial project for the future of the club, OUSP has been closely involved, particularly in respect of looking at the future matchday experience.

With the plans taking shape in 2023, members of OUSP took part in a lengthy workshop with the architect, landscape designer and project manager to review the concepts to date and to contribute ideas.



OUSP then ensured a separate meeting was set up online with our disabled fans. This led to design suggestions that go beyond statutory accessibility requirements. For example by ensuring wheelchair users can sit with their family group, and by providing a sensory space with different levels of sensory stimulation. The submitted plans include most of our suggestions.

AWAY DAYS

Whilst most of our matchday work focuses on home games, we want our fans to have a good experience at away matches too. Much of that is out of our hands, but nonetheless there has been some progress in areas we can influence. Where possible the club now enables fans to chose their seat location for away games. This helps resolve the conflict of random allocation which places fans who want to sit with fans who want to stand.

Early in the season a number of fans raised with us the inconsistency in away match information. We have since agreed a template with OUFC, that includes key details such as whether there are on the day sales and where tickets can be collected, which has helped fans plan their trip.

We collected ratings and feedback from travelling fans and shared relevant points with the host club. The FA Cup tie at **Coventry** generated a lot of comments: we had a comprehensive reply from them addressing our concerns—and yes you can take balloons! We are very aware of the problems many fans had when trying to purchase tickets for the Play-Off matches. We have collated your feedback and details of your experiences and are working with the club to address the issues that were experienced.



In January, ahead of the **Bristol Rovers** match, OUSP became aware that home fans were being offered heavily discounted tickets in their new stand. EFL rules state that away fans can only be charged more than home fans located in the same class of seating with the visiting club's agreement. We queried this with our club, and whilst OUFC had agreed to an offer, Bristol went beyond what had been agreed. We felt that this was clearly unfair to our fans. Whilst OUFC raise the matter with Bristol, OUSP took the matter to the FSA and ultimately it was referred to the EFL. The EFL found that Bristol Rovers had breached the agreement, and should make a partial refund. We are pleased that Oxford United is contributing the balance in order to give all of our supporters who were in the South Stand seats a credit to their ticketing account of the full difference between the price they paid and the £10 paid by the home fans

NATIONAL GROUPS

To be effective on behalf of our supporters OUSP believes it's important for us to understand developments nationally and ensure issues that affect Oxford United supporters are fed into national discourse. OUSP is therefore an active associate member of the **Football Supporters' Association (FSA)**, the national representative body for football supporters. One of our representatives attends the FSA's regular EFL network meetings. OUSP rep, Grace, participates in their women's network meetings. Matthew has joined in a smaller focus group sharing ideas and good practice on atmosphere groups. This all helps us be better informed when dealing with local issues. For example, we learned from other clubs how they were implementing Fan Advisory Boards.

Like OUSP, the FSA believes football is for all. The FSA work closely with organisations such as Kick It Out and Level Playing Field to ensure that this core belief is happening in the real world. OUSP already works closely with **#HerGameToo** and **Level Playing Field**, we provided advice and support for the establishment of LGBTQ+ group **Proud Yellows**. We are eager to work with other organisations and our own supporters to promote diversity and inclusion, so if this is something you have any suggestions for please get in touch with us.

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**BY THE FANS
FOR THE FANS**

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