



Cabinet minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday 25 January 2021 in Via MS Teams Video Conference, available to the public at <https://buckinghamshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 11.03 am.

Members present

M Tett, A Macpherson, K Wood, S Bowles, B Chapple OBE, J Chilver, A Cranmer, I Darby, T Green, C Harriss, P Hogan, D Martin, N Naylor, M Shaw, W Whyte, G Williams and F Wilson

Agenda Item

1 Apologies

There were no apologies.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting, including the confidential minutes held on 5 January 2021 be agreed as an accurate record.

3 Declarations of interest

Angela Macpherson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, explained that she is a local member for the Grendon Underwood ward. John Chilver, Cabinet Member for Property and Assets, explained that he is also a local member for the Grendon Underwood ward. Furthermore, he has a daughter who works for the Ministry of Justice.

4 Hot Topics

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change reported on waste services and the adverse weather conditions. He reported that all waste services in former Chiltern area were suspended today but residents were to present their waste containers as normal and the Council would aim to reinstate the services as soon as they were able. In the former South Bucks area they hoped to undertake the collection today but it could be delayed. Residents were asked not to report them as missed bin collections. The bulky waste collection would also be delayed but again resident were asked to present their waste containers as normal. Garden waste in the former South Bucks area had been cancelled this week because of covid and in the Chiltern area would be delayed by one day. In Aylesbury Vale waste collections were suspended today but operators hoped to be working as normal tomorrow so most residents waste collection will be a day late. A service would be undertaken on

Saturday this week to keep up to date. Information was provided on social media.

5 Question Time

Question from Councillor Cameron Branston to the Leader

As a Councillor for the Grendon Underwood Ward, I am writing to put forward the views of residents in Edgcott and Grendon Underwood, the villages most affected by this proposed expansion.

Both villages are under significant strain managing traffic from HS2 and EWR projects, can the villages manage more traffic to the prison site? Once the prison is operational, traffic movements will continue. None of this is environmentally sustainable. As a Council, we have agreed to some significant targets in line with national carbon reduction targets by 2050. Daily movements from 500 - 600 coupled with visitors will only increase carbon footprint in Buckinghamshire. A brand-new bus stop will not encourage more people to use public transit.

The proposal will increase the prison population to 1,400, which is larger than both Grendon Underwood and Edgcott and several residents have argued that this development moves away from organic growth to a point of being intrusive even artificial given its location in the countryside. Moreover, it is difficult to understand how trees could camouflage four story buildings with jarring colours in the open countryside, nor does it seem possible that trees and shrubbery will contain light pollution emanating from these large edifices at night.

Several major infrastructure projects have been viewed with scepticism in part because they are deemed expensive and offer little value locally and instead are perceived to harm the countryside. Can Cabinet assure residents living in the countryside, especially those living in Edgcott and Grendon Underwood, that it will do all it can to protect the environment and the countryside allowing residents to enjoy the amenities in the countryside?

Reply given by Martin Tett, Leader of the Council

The Cabinet recognises the concerns of residents around the proposal of a new prison at the site on HMP Grendon/Springhill and believe that it is important that the Council responds to the public consultation. It is very helpful for us to hear your views as a local member, and those of residents who will be affected, so that we can take those into account as we consider the paper on our agenda today. During the discussion on this item, I will therefore ask Cabinet Members to satisfy themselves that the themes you identify are reflected in our final response.

6 Forward Plan (28 Day Notice)

RESOLVED: Cabinet NOTED the Forward Plan.

7 Buckinghamshire Council corporate response to the proposed new prison at HMP Grendon/Springhill, Grendon Underwood

Cabinet received a report on Buckinghamshire Council's consultation response to the proposed new prison at Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) Grendon/Springhill in Grendon Underwood.

On 2 December the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) launched a public consultation on 'The New Prisons Programme' which outlined their proposal to build a new prison to house up to up to 1680 additional prisoners in a category C resettlement environment in Buckinghamshire. Appendix 1 to the report set out the Council's draft response to the consultation. This had been formulated by seeking input and views from relevant departments across the Council as well as local councillors. Feedback from local residents and key partners had also been taken into consideration.

The Cabinet noted that a large number of objections had been received against this proposal including from the Parish council, local schools and neighbouring villages. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) have stated that they would consider the consultation responses before submitting a planning application. Concerns fell into two areas; the proposed location of the prison which was not appropriate and the impact on local residents and communities.

The proposed location of the prison:-

- On the site itself there was concern about the scale of the proposal and if it was built would be one of the third largest prisons in England and Wales; it would vastly increase prisoner numbers and vastly increase staff numbers of up to 5-600 coming to the area. This was a rural location on greenfield land.
- The proposal showed six/seven tower blocks located on top of a hill at this site five storeys high with the additional services required. In a recent MoJ meeting the prison was described as of urban design suitable for an urban setting. Therefore, this was inappropriate and the buildings would be difficult to screen.
- A car park would be required for 500 cars and the proposal included a football pitch on the lower end of the site. This was on a ridge and furrow field with historical interest and was very close to the community of Springhill. With the car park and building there would be light pollution and significant noise issues with the cars coming in and going at different hours with staff shift patterns.
- Environmental protection – the proposed location would be in open countryside with significant wildlife. The Council for the Protection of Rural England have objected on environmental grounds including concern regarding the closure of footpaths. Cabinet Members were referred to a series of photographs.
- This prison was suitable for a brownfield development close to an urban area.

The impact of local residents and communities: -

- HS2 was already impacting on this area with considerable vehicle movements, mud on roads and operatives working in the area. East West rail was also crossing this area, which was supported by the Council because of its connectivity, but making it marks on the area with problems arising from construction. So there were already two huge infrastructure projects in a rural area. If this prison proposal went ahead this would be yet another impact with about 1000 vehicles required in the construction phase which could take two years and combine with the peak of the construction of HS2. Cabinet Members were seriously concerned about the health and wellbeing of residents. The MoJ have stated that there were good connections but in reality but the roads were very rural. There were errors in the consultation document about the number of buses; there was only one bus and reference to nearby railway stations 5-6 miles away, but these stations had no connectivity to the area. The house prices were high and it was unlikely that prison staff would be able to afford to live locally. There were concerns about safeguarding with Category D escapes and drug dealing in prison.

Cabinet Members discussed the following:-

- Further reference could be made in the consultation document regarding the environmental impact making it a separate category to strengthen the response in this section.
- Two Cabinet Members had attended the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner Conference on reducing prisoner reoffending. A Cabinet Member then referred to the Bucks Association for the care of offenders. They had shown filming inside prisons and often prisoners were only released with £40 and there would be pressure on local organisation to provide them with support. It was also difficult to get far with this amount of money if there was reduced public transport.
- The size and scale of the proposed prison was unacceptable, bleak, ugly and monolithic which was not good for a rural area and the light pollution for security reasons was not acceptable. The proposal would also not be conducive to climate change; with the building of an urban design impacting on green fields which would also impact on Sites of Scientific Interest and wildlife. The local roads were already saturated with road traffic; the road through Edgcott was very narrow and this would carry on after construction and add to carbon emissions. There is a lack of local knowledge in the consultation response.
- The MoJ main arguments was that they own the land which was not a reason to build at this location.
- It would be chaotic with all the infrastructure projects being built at the same time. The prison community would dwarf the local villages. The MoJ would have problems recruiting staff and they would have to travel a reasonable distance to get to work.
- A Cabinet Member had concerns about the draft response and said that the response related to planning issues rather than the consultation e.g. light pollution. Not all prisons need to be in an urban area. Housing responsibilities lie with the authority where the prisoner's home was based

not where the prison was located so this would not put extra pressure on Buckinghamshire. There was also a prison located there already. There would always be disruption during the construction phase but the prison would bring employment. In times of climate change he would expect to see a large increase in the use of electric vehicles.

- A Cabinet Member recommended adding an additional paragraph to the letter that the MoJ should be looking at alternative to prisons rather than investing in new ones. There was evidence that prisons do not work and some prisoners come out and reoffend. There were good alternatives such as community based sentences, conflict resolution and improving the probation service to make it more effective. The Leader agreed that this may be appropriate for some crimes but prison was often the right solution for more serious crimes.
- Reference was made to the beauty of Aylesbury Vale and that the whole view of the landscape would be spoilt with all the infrastructure projects. This project was not in the right place and not fair on the environment or biodiversity. It was important to keep ridge and furrow fields. The Cabinet Member agreed that an extra paragraph should be included in the letter on loss of environment and biodiversity.
- The prison should be viable in terms of the labour market and housing and concern was expressed that this project had not been considered properly and the location explored. It would be difficult to recruit staff in an unaffordable area; there was a prison 40 miles away where house prices were more affordable.
- There was concern for children and young people who lived in the area who would have the presence of a foreboding building on a hill which would have a psychological and emotional impact who were used to a rural setting.
- The Leader reported that he had spoken to the MoJ who had not convinced him that this was the right location with the scale and size in terms of the footprint and the buildings would dominate the local community. He had visited the site with the Local Member and agreed with the points made in the draft response to the consultation.

Cabinet were in support of the draft response to the Government consultation, as set out in the Appendix 1, agreeing to enhance the section on the environmental impact and review the wording in the labour market and housing affordability section. On a vote being taken (with two abstentions) it was:-

RESOLVED: That the draft response to the Government consultation, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be agreed and that responsibility for submission of the final response, incorporating any further changes after the Cabinet meeting, be delegated to the Corporate Director (DCE) in consultation with the Cabinet Member/Leader of the Council.

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Date of next meeting

Tuesday 2 March 2021 at 10.00am