



Leader of the Council

Martin Tett
Buckinghamshire Council
The Gateway
Gatehouse Road
Aylesbury
HP19 8FF

Martin.Tett@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
Westminster
London
Sw1H 9AJ

29 January 2021

To whom it may concern,

Re: The New Prisons Programme Public Consultation: Proposal for a New Prison in Buckinghamshire

We are writing in response to your public consultation which is seeking views on your plans to create a new Prison in Buckinghamshire and to express our objections as the local authority where the new site would be developed. This response is in no way linked to our planning process and as such will avoid discussing matters that would legally sit with the planning committee.

Context of the proposal

The proposals outlined in the initial consultation document and the subsequently amended document propose a prison complex to house either 1,440 (6 new blocks) or 1,680 (7 new blocks) prisoners in a Category C resettlement environment. It would be one of the largest in England and Wales, with prison population figures only superseded by HMP Oakwood and HMP Berwyn.

If the new site proposed in Buckinghamshire has 7 new blocks, as the consultation suggests may be the case, it will be the same size, in terms of prisoner population as the Category C HMP Five Wells which is currently under construction in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, just 40 miles away from the proposed site in Grendon Underwood.

The proposed new site is in a rural area of open countryside, adjacent to the existing HMP Grendon & HMP Springhill site, which currently houses approximately 500 prisoners. The site immediately borders the community of Springhill, the village of Edgcott and the village of Grendon Underwood is less than one mile away.

Scale and Local Resident Impact

The total prisoner population of the combined newly developed prison site would be up to 2,180 prisoners, this would equate to an over 400% increase in the prisoner population. The consultation document notes that additional options are being considered to expand HMP Springhill site as well; this would obviously further increase the prisoner population of the combined site. The current

combined populations of the 2 nearby villages, Grendon Underwood and Edgcott is approximately 1000 residents. The scale of the proposal and new development is therefore vast and is likely to have a significant impact on local residents and surrounding infrastructure.

The consultation document notes that substantial demand for new prison places is expected in the South East of England. It states that detailed feasibility work has been carried out that has led to the identification of the land adjacent to HMP Grendon and HMP Springhill as a suitable location for this proposal, particularly as the land is already owned by the MOJ. Other than a reference to HMP Bullingdon being excluded as the MOJ does not already own adjacent land, details of the feasibility work carried out and any other sites considered have not been included. We would welcome and appreciate further details on other sites considered and the reasons this location is preferred over other areas in the South East where the impact, particularly on an open countryside location, may be less.

Whilst we appreciate proposals are continuing to evolve, we have concerns with regards to the visual element of the new prison and how it will fit in within its immediate and wider setting – local residents are very vocal that the current prison building is a blight on the local landscape and an eyesore in what is otherwise a tranquil and remote location. It is unlikely that a collection of even taller buildings will be seen as an improvement by those who live nearby.

There is likely to be a significant noise impact on local residents from delivery of the proposal due to demolition and construction work as well as potential light pollution. Furthermore traffic movements and footfall around the site is likely to increase considerably, particularly around the entrance and exit to the site, creating more road safety issues for local residents.

We also perceive that public concerns regarding personal safety and the security of both personal and business properties are likely to grow should the proposal go ahead. Grendon/Springhill continues to have a number of prison absconders which create worry and fear amongst local residents. Whilst the new site is a category C there will be concerns about increased footfall in the area generated by visitors to the prison.

Labour Market & Housing Affordability

Should the proposal go ahead, we have concerns that the majority of jobs promised will be through short term construction and will not lead to high numbers of long term roles. We are concerned that roles may not be given to local companies and instead will be contracted out to large, national corporations. We would seek assurances apprenticeships and other training schemes are utilised and that the promises of economic benefits for local people, particularly to residents of the immediately local communities of Springhill, Edgcott and Grendon Underwood, are realised. We would appreciate more detail on how the proposals will deliver a comprehensive set of ongoing social and community benefits, as well as how they plan to build on and improve community relations in the local area.

It should also be noted that staff at the new prison would have to earn a significant salary to be able to afford house prices in the local area; the average house price in the local areas is currently £371,704. With a similar category C being built in Wellingborough, a well-connected market town with a population of over 76,000 people where average house prices are £232,844, we feel that having two very large prison sites so close geographically would likely mean potential prison staff more likely to want to work and live in Wellingborough where salaries are likely to go further.

Competing for potential staff in overlapping labour markets could also further exasperate prison staffing rates and could lead to difficulties in recruiting staff for the Buckinghamshire site.

We anticipate there will be a negative impact on house prices in the local vicinity should the proposal go ahead - current residents have raised concerns about the security at the current Springhill site, and we would argue that the assessment within the consultation document which anticipates house price increases to be incorrect. We are aware that some local residents have already had issues with house sales since the launch of the consultation as they have contacted us directly and foresee the attractiveness of the area will be negatively impacted to those seeking quiet village life should the proposal proceed, especially whilst construction is under way.

Transport & Infrastructure

Due to the location of the site and the affluence of the local area, we anticipate that the majority of staff would need to travel by car to the site which does not align with the low carbon agenda and of course would have a long-term impact on local traffic and environmental noise and pollution. There is also likely to be further impact from additional visitors traveling to the site which is considered hard to reach via public transport.

There is a concern that the already extended local infrastructure will be overburdened, including water and sewerage systems which are already suffering from problems that severely affect local residents and its road system which is made up of minor and unclassified roads.

The construction of HS2 and EWR is also currently commencing in the area which is also causing much disruption locally already and will be for a number of years to come. Further construction in the area would add to the problems already being experienced by residents such as increases in HGVs causing damage to the road network, lengthy road diversions causing delays, mud on roads, vibration and light pollution. All of these issues are adding to the detrimental mental health and wellbeing of some residents.

The project, should it go ahead, needs to take into account the highways powers imposed by the HS2 Hybrid Act and EWR TWAO when it produces its construction management plan to both facilitate its construction and limit its disruption.

Impact on Public Services

We work vigorously with local partners to reduce and mitigate the risks of rough sleeping with Buckinghamshire and we have concerns that additional prisoner releases from custody may lead to increased presentations to our housing services from those without a local connection. Historically many rough sleepers are known to have gone straight to the street following prison release and whilst this is something we know the MOJ is keen to improve, we have concern about how this might impact local services. There is a very high demand for social housing across the county and we have limited direct access hostels and supported housing provision. Should the proposal proceed we would seek assurance of the commitment to work in partnership between our services through duty to refer, commencing in advance of launch. This would ensure efficient and effective processes are adopted and monitored and that the best outcome for anyone released into the Aylesbury or broader Buckinghamshire Council area is planned for and achieved.

It should also be noted that delivering the proposal is also likely to incur a number of ambulance and police call outs, adding to the strain of our already stretched emergency services. It is also likely to produce a huge uptake of local resources in addition to impacting on local services including social care, mental health services and the NHS, although none of these are demonstrated in the socio-economic assessment for the proposal.

Concern regarding extension of current provision

Finally, we have concerns regarding the potential extension of HMP Grendon/Springhill and how this decision is likely to be consulted on separately from the new build proposal but will also further stretch the local infrastructure as mentioned previously.

As such we would like you to note our objections - we do not believe the site at Grendon Underwood is the correct location for the proposed new prison and believe it would negatively impact on the quality of life of residents in the surrounding area.

Yours faithfully,

Martin Tett
Leader of the Council