

27 January 2021

Lucy Fraser QC MP  
Minister of State for Prisons and Probation  
Ministry of Justice  
102 Petty France  
Westminster, London  
SW1H 9AJ

Dear Minister

**The New Prisons Programme Public Consultation: Proposal for a New Prison in Buckinghamshire (HMP Grendon/Springhill)**

We are responding to your public consultation, in our capacity as the local Councillors for Grendon Underwood Ward, Buckinghamshire Council. As passionate advocates for the residents we represent, and the countryside that we seek to preserve, your proposal to establish between six or seven 6 or 7 new prison block complexes housing between 1,440 or 1,680 new prisoners and in additional potentially expand the current Category D prison at Springhill is cause for significant concern.

The proposals outlined in the initial consultation document and the subsequently amended document propose a development programme that would result in what could be the largest prison complex in England and Wales (increasing the prison population by over 200%) in a rural area of open countryside surrounded by small settlements and served by an inadequate network of rural and unclassified roads.

The population of the new prison would dwarf the combined population of Grendon Underwood, Edgcott and the Springhill community. There are already strains on local services such as schools and GPs. Other public sector services such as policing and ambulance services realistically anticipate that there would be additional demand from such a large development.

The local roads are already suffering the cumulative effect of HS2 and EWR construction projects which intersect approximately a mile from the proposed development. Edgcott, the community of Springhill and Grendon Underwood are already severely affected by daily construction traffic causing damage to the road network, mud on the roads, delays created by long diversions and noise and vibration impact to properties. This enormous new prison will further compound residents' misery and coincide with peak construction phases of HS2 and EWR.

The rural road that runs through Gawcott to Grendon and Springhill and joins the A41 already, according to a recent local survey, carries around 3300 vehicles per day on average (with many travelling at or above the 30 mph speed limit). Numbers of HGV's using the road are increasing due to the EWR and HS2 major works in the locality with roads in danger of becoming gridlocked. The result of such congestion will inevitably result in vehicles using rat-runs through small local villages which cannot tolerate such traffic volume.

Even after completion of EWR and HS2 construction projects and the reduction in construction traffic, the maintenance depot at Calvert to service the HS2 line will employ at least 300 people and traffic increases will result permanently from its operation. The local rural roads are unsuitable for this level of traffic, never mind the cumulative increases that would result from the new prison. Following completion of the prison, there would be significant journeys throughout the day and night, in shift patterns that will have a damaging impact on residents and the local community.

The environmental impact of the additional journeys by up to 1,000 contractors twice daily for the estimated three year construction phase, the long term additional 1,400 staff journeys made each day after the completion, the multiple service vehicles that will need to visit the site daily plus the potential long return journeys that many visitors will have to make, will have a damaging impact on the local residents' quality of life and significantly increase local pollution levels. Building a prison in such a rural location does not comply with Government policies to minimise carbon emissions due to the amount of contractor, staff and visitor journeys that will be required during construction and beyond.

Representations from local residents and parishes cast significant doubt on the ability to deliver a robust sustainable travel plan. The prison will not be easily accessible for family members wishing to visit inmates. Public transport links to the site are limited and there are inaccuracies in the consultation document, for example, there is only one bus service operating on an hourly basis, no public transport connectivity from the nearest stations in Bicester and Aylesbury and cycling these congested rural roads is considered dangerous particularly with such large numbers of traffic movements.

Without additional housing close to the proposed site (which would change completely the character of the existing small settlements surrounding the expanded prison) there will be a significant travel element for any new prison employees which does not match with the low carbon agenda required for the future and of course would have a long- term impact on local traffic and environmental noise and pollution.

Planning policy has sought to protect both villages to ensure that area maintains its rural character. The previous district council has rebuffed large housing proposals in the area because it considered these plans to be development in the open countryside and contrary to policies in the Local Plan. This proposal moves away from the council's policy of organic growth in smaller and medium-sized villages.

The designers of the proposal, at recent on-line local consultation events, have acknowledged that the site will not conform to the local environment. Instead, proponents of this proposal are asking us to accept a cookie-cutter design better suited for an urban setting. Consequently, it is difficult to understand how trees could camouflage four story buildings with jarring colours situated on a hill in the open countryside, nor does it seem possible that trees and shrubbery will contain light pollution emanating from these large edifices at night. In addition, residents have emphasised that the site itself already has significant pressures on the sewers and there are frequent flooding and drainage issues which would

be compounded by the new prison as it concretes over a greenfield site and exacerbates the potential for flooding.

There is significant concern on the environmental destruction and biodiversity impact that the new complexes will have on the natural habitat in this rural area of Buckinghamshire. Local wildlife includes bats, deer, foxes, badgers, birds of prey, rare species of butterfly and great crested newts. In addition, the new carpark sited extremely close to houses in the Springhill community is planned to be built on a ridge and furrow field of historic local significance. There are other heritage concerns relating to the visual impact of the proposed blocks on the Grade II heritage assets to the north, and impacts of light and hard standing on local listed buildings. The existing prison gates are on Buckinghamshire Council's Building at Risk list as they require conservation works for future preservation.

Finally, the wellbeing of the residents we represent is paramount. A Category C prison presents a very different potential risk to local communities from the current prisons at the site. There has been a steady flow of escapes from Springhill and understandably residents feel very insecure about the new Category C prison. The Springhill community particularly has witnessed drug and alcohol drops and are rightly concerned that this will increase and have expressed safeguarding concerns particularly for those with young children. The siting of the proposed football pitch very close to family housing has also been raised as parents worry about their children being exposed to foul language coming from the sports pitch.

In summary, we urge you to reconsider your plans for expansion on the Grendon/Springhill site to protect the residents we represent, their quality of life and health and well-being, the environment we value so highly and to reassess the viability of more appropriate brownfield sites in more suitable urban settings where the long term negative impact would be considerably less.

Yours sincerely,

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Buckinghamshire Council

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