



GRENDON UNDERWOOD PARISH COUNCIL

All correspondence to the Parish Clerk on clerk.gupc@outlook.com
Tel: 0787 368 3043 Web Site: <https://www.gupc.org.uk/>

28 January 2021

FAO: Permanent Secretary Antonia Romeo
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
Westminster
London
SW1 H9AJ

Ref: Public Consultation by the Ministry of Justice in regard to proposals to build a 1440 bed Category C prison on green field & next to two current prisons in Grendon Underwood, Buckinghamshire.

Notified 3rd December 2020 with closing date of 30th December 2020 - later extended to 29th January 2021.

Grendon Underwood Parish Council Response.

To all whom it may concern,

At a properly constituted meeting of Grendon Underwood Parish Council, in collaboration with Edgcott Parish Council, it was resolved to oppose any Planning Application that may arise following this Consultation – on the grounds detailed in this response. You will also have received objections from Gawcott with Lenborough Parish Council & East Claydon Parish Council.

1 Public Response

Both Councils have distributed two flyers to every household in the two parishes and held open meeting for residents and stakeholders on 10th December 2020 and 19th January 2021. Minutes are posted to the GU Parish Council web site.

At the 19th January meeting, representatives of the MoJ gave a presentation in support of the proposals and this is posted to the Parish council web site at www.gupc.org.uk

The public response was as near unanimous as could be measured and the Council has a duty to represent residents as to their overwhelming opposition.

In addition, there have been several hundred responses from the local population representing a clear and present public opposition. It is estimated some 75% of residents have objected.

The MoJ presentation on the 19th was unanimously held to be patronising, offensive, dismissive and contemptuous of the communities involved, the safety of staff at the current prisons and the sustainability of local infrastructure, amenities and environment. This was obviously a stock presentation designed for urban locations & completely inappropriate & unsympathetic of the proposed facility being in a rural location. The nature and content of the presentation created a widely held impression that meeting with communities was a minor irritant that had to be gone through as a tick box exercise. It was held that the Ministry came so unprepared & unprofessional because they felt anything more was unnecessary as the Planning Application would be submitted regardless of any external consideration. They chose not to confirm or deny this. This is further expanded below.



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It was ill-prepared, ignorant & dismissive of local conditions and demonstrated a contempt for local people and their children. There were no relevant fact-based considerations of location, fitness for purpose, alternative locations or HMG stated policy on 'levelling up' or its green space/ net zero carbon objectives. They were unable to answer queries on how Grendon was selected in preference to other locations or whether other locations had even been considered at all. Overall, to call this "community engagement" was condemned by all present as insulting to the intelligence, as lip service to a legal requirement, arrogant, full of misrepresentation, downright deception, full of obfuscation & callously dismissive of local people's lives.

The full unabridged transcript of the ZOOM Chatbox is posted to the Parish council web site.

Multiple topics, more of a Planning nature, but of great of concern to residents were raised of which the MoJ team attending is aware and which will be pursued point by point in evidence based detail should the Planning Application be forthcoming.

2 Elected Officials' Response

The local MP, Mr Greg Smith (Cons) has publicly, and on the record, expressed his opposition both on BBC 3C Radio and in a public ZOOM enabled meeting with your Project Director, Mr Robin Seaton and his team on 19 Jan 2021. His opposition is based on the public response, his doubts as to the project compliance with government policy (of which more below) and the overall unsuitability of the site. He has also raised several parliamentary written questions concerning the choice of the site. In the reply it is claimed that a list of other sites considered cannot be revealed because it is "Commercial-in-Confidence" information. This is not credible and brings the whole consultation process into serious disrepute with accusations of cover up and lack of transparency. This notwithstanding the fact that consideration of the site at Grendon Underwood is in the public domain.

Please do discuss this with him.

Our Buckinghamshire County Council member (and deputy leader of the Council) Mrs Angela Macpherson also has publicly expressed her opposition to the proposal. At a meeting of the Council Cabinet on 25 January 2021 she presented her case for opposition following which the Cabinet debated the MoJ proposal. Every speaker except one was in opposition and the Cabinet voted to enhance its written response, to the consultation, which is in opposition with no votes again and one abstention.

Should this be of any interest to you, a link to the cabinet meeting is on the Parish Council web site.

3 Conduct of the Consultation – Due Process



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i) The GOV.UK “**Code of Practice on Consultation Gov.uk**” updated 2018, identifies eleven Consultation Criteria reproduced at Appendix 2. Criterion 2 clear states that “Consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks”. The current consultation falls far short of this, even after our MP obtained an extension to the allowable time for public comments to 29 January 2021.

Please explain the reason for this haste which contravenes the Government guidelines, which include at the paragraph STATUS OF THE CODE. *“This code sets out the approach the Government will take when it has decided to run a formal, written, public consultation exercise”.*

ii) **The Consultation Document**

The publication contains very little detail of how the proposed prison would be amalgamated into the green field and rural site on which it would be placed. It also contains factual errors such as incorrect details of local bus services. Clearly, little research has been done into the local area of Grendon Underwood and Edgcott which has resulted in an essentially generic document with the addition of a photograph of the current entrance to Springhill and Grendon Prisons and a proposed site map which is too small to be easily studied.

iii) **The Project Team’s Presentation**

Project Director, Mr Seaton and his team delivered a presentation at the ZOOM meeting on 19 January 2021 which was met with derision by many members of the public present. The data presented were sketchy, of little detail and contained no attempt to justify the choice of the site for the development. The presentation merely outlined the plan as though it was certain to go ahead. In particular, the team constantly referred to the building as being “typical of what you would find in an urban setting” despite being reminded several times, via the ZOOM chat box, that the proposal is in a rural setting. When challenged to provide evidence of brown field sites which had been considered before Grendon Underwood had been selected, the team declined to offer anything. Further to our MP’s raising several parliamentary questions in this regard, the Ministry advised such information is commercial in confidence. This is not credible and only exacerbates the impression of coverup, lack of transparency & obfuscation.

To emphasise, the team made no attempt to justify their choice of Grendon Underwood for the project.

iv) During a site visit on 20 January 2021 attended by Bucks County Council Leader and his Deputy and the Chairs of Grendon Underwood and Edgcott Parish Councils it is alleged that Mr Crenshaw,



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Project Manager, was heard to say that if the site was found to be of insufficient size, compulsory purchase of adjacent land would be enacted and that the plan was to submit plans for approval on 12 February 2021. A witness has confirmed that they would be willing to testify that this was said.

If either of these alleged statements is true, then the consultation **document could be considered incomplete, misleading and illegitimate and should be withdrawn.**

You might care to discuss this with your team.

4 Adherence to Government Policy

The Government's commitments to the electorate are contained in the Conservative Party 2019 Manifesto. Which does include the statement "We will add 10,000 more prison places....." (p20) (subsequently increased to 18,000) but does include other pledges which, if honoured, would invalidate the choice of Grendon Underwood for this project. Of course, it is understood there is also policy to deliver these places as quickly & as cost effectively as possible and situated in proximity to large urban conurbations. There are no urban conurbations around Grendon Underwood and there are, or will be soon enough, several prisons capable of delivering on the directive in the designated area without prioritising a prison-based population over local communities. We would suggest the new prison at HMP Fivewells in Northants [40 miles away], an expanded HMP Bullingdon near redundant MoD land at Bicester [12 miles away], Woodhill in MK and multiple other brown field sites readily available should be considered. We see no evidence that any alternatives have been considered at all. To claim such consideration is commercial in confidence just compounds suspicions of zero meaningful engagement.

The Council would like information on how this Ministry seems to be able to act with impunity in overt contradiction to the following stated Government policies.

i) There is "*an agenda for levelling up every part of the UK*" (p26).

In the immediate vicinity of Grendon Underwood is the crossroads of HS2 and East West Rail both of which have confirmed government funding. Construction of both lines is underway with a very significant impact on the environment and traffic movements. There is also to be an HS2 permanent maintenance depot at Calvert, some 4 miles away and a new East West Rail station at Winslow some 8 miles away.

Recently, a new Energy from Waste facility designed to burn 300,000 tonnes of waste annually and to produce a guaranteed output of 25 MWatts has been constructed some 0.5 miles from the proposed site.



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These programmes are all very major infrastructure projects and as Greg Smith MP said on BBC 3C Radio - ENOUGH.

North Bucks has three formal enterprise zones at Westcott Venture Park (~4 miles from the site), Silverstone Park and Aylesbury Woodlands (both ~15 miles from the site). These provide substantial opportunity for SME and employment creation.

From the above it is clear that North Bucks is not in need of levelling up.

This proposal contravenes this Government policy & makes a mockery of its objectives.

ii) *“We will protect and enhance the Green Belt. We will improve poor quality land, increase biodiversity and make our beautiful countryside more accessible for local community use. We WILL CONTINUE TO PRIORITISE BROWNFIELD DEVELOPMENT (my caps), particularly for the regeneration of our cities and towns” (p31)*

Although not a regeneration project, the proposal clearly comes within the scope of this commitment. There exists a huge surplus of MoJ and MoD brownfield land in the country which would be suitable for the construction of a new large prison and yet, when challenged to do so, the Project Team failed to identify any that had been considered.

This proposal contravenes this Government policy & makes a mockery of its objectives.

iii) *“Our Environment Bill will guarantee that we will protect and restore our natural environment after leaving the EU. Because conservation has always been at the very heart of Conservatism” (p43)*

This proposal contravenes this Government policy & makes a mockery of its objectives.

iv) *“In the 21st Century, we need to get away from the idea that “Whitehall knows best” and that all growth must inevitably start in London. Because we as Conservatives believe you can and must trust people and communities to make the decisions that are right for them” (p26)*

This proposal contravenes this Government policy & makes a mockery of its objectives.

v) The Government has committed to work towards a carbon neutral target by 2050. To build the proposed prison in a rural environment which inevitably would lead to road journeys by staff

This proposal contravenes Government policy & makes a mockery of its objectives.



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The Council would like to see much greater transparency in approaching local communities and hopes further information such as to comply with government consultation guidelines comes forward.

Yours faithfully,

Kim Moloney

Chairman

Grendon Underwood Parish Council

Copy by email:

The Right Honourable Robert Buckland, QC MP, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
Lucy Frazer, QC MP, Minister of State for Prisons and Probation

Mr G Smith, MP (Buckingham)

Mr M Tett, Leader Buckinghamshire Council

Mrs Angela Macpherson, Deputy Leader Buckinghamshire Council and Member for GU Ward

Mr Cameron Branston, Buckinghamshire Councillor

Mr Robert Webster, Edgcott Parish Council

Mrs Stephanie Gassor, Edgcott Parish Council

Mr Bob Kay, Edgcott Parish Council

Mrs Carole Jackman, Clerk Edgcott Parish Council

Mr Roger Behagg, Prison Committee

Mr Rod Baker, Prison Committee

Mr Robert Webster, Edgcott Parish Council

Mrs Stephanie Gassor, Edgcott Parish Council

Mr Bob Kay, Edgcott Parish Council

Mr Barry Martindale, Clerk Grendon Underwood Parish Council

Mr Paul Jackman, Grendon Underwood Parish Council

Mr Andrew Benfield, Grendon Underwood Parish Council

Mr Mike Hedgecox, Grendon Underwood Parish Council

Mrs Helen Mackenzie, Grendon Underwood Parish Council



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Appendix 1

Objections to the Ministry of Justice New Prison Proposal – A Summary

1. Justification

- Bucks and particularly the Vale of Aylesbury is a low crime area so why build it here?
- Resulting imbalance of local population with local villages being swamped by the largest prison complex in the UK.
- Unemployment not a major problem so extra jobs not an incentive.

2. Location

- Green field site and too large for a rural area.
- More suitable brown field sites such as land at MoD Bullingdon and other MoD sites.

3. Visual Impact and Landscaping

- Loss of much green field space with Edgcott joining the prison.
- 4 storey blocks totally unsuitable for a rural location and cannot be screened adequately.

4. Traffic

- Cumulative impact of multiple infrastructure contracts in the area.
- Local roads already struggling to cope with HS2/EWR traffic.
- Extra 1,000 contractors per day will bring traffic chaos and gridlock.
- Staff and visitors on completion will overload the local roads.

5. Environmental aspects

- Traffic pollution during and after construction particularly if staff are unable to live locally.
- Light pollution.
- Flooding increase by concreting over the fields.
- Public footpaths under threat.

6. Wildlife

- Fields and woodland on and around the site are full of wildlife which will be lost.

7. Local infrastructure

- No capacity in the local sewerage system to cope with an extra 2000+ users every day.
- Local surface water drainage system would require a massive overhaul in an area that floods badly.
- Unacceptable increase in demands on local ambulance/fire/police/doctors.

8. Housing

- Where will up to 700 staff live?
- If locally then large scale housing development will swamp the area.
- Local house sales currently falling through due to the proposed prison.
- House prices will almost certainly fall.

9. Economic aspects

- Can we believe the MoJ job figures when they have got Five Wells at Wellingborough so wrong?

10. Further potential development

- Concern that a 7th block and Springhill expansion will be included in the same scheme.

11. MoJ Consultation due process

- Local anger that this came out of the blue on 3 December allowing only a 3 week consultation period. Since extended but still a good time to bury bad news over the Christmas period and during a pandemic.



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Appendix 2

CONSULTATION PRINCIPLES UPDATED 2018 – REF: GOV.UK

A. Consultations should be clear and concise

Use plain English and avoid acronyms. Be clear what questions you are asking and limit the number of questions to those that are necessary.

Make them easy to understand and easy to answer. Avoid lengthy documents when possible and consider merging those on related topics.

B. Consultations should have a purpose

Do not consult for the sake of it. Ask departmental lawyers whether you have a legal duty to consult. Take consultation responses into account when taking policy forward. Consult about policies or implementation plans when the development of the policies or plans is at a formative stage. Do not ask questions about issues on which you already have a final view.

C. Consultations should be informative

Give enough information to ensure that those consulted understand the issues and can give informed responses. Include validated impact assessments of the costs and benefits of the options being considered when possible; this might be required where proposals have an impact on business or the voluntary sector.

D. Consultations are only part of a process of engagement

Consider whether informal iterative consultation is appropriate, using new digital tools and open, collaborative approaches. Consultation is not just about formal documents and responses. It is an on-going process.

E. Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time

Judge the length of the consultation on the basis of legal advice and taking into account the nature and impact of the proposal. Consulting for too long will unnecessarily delay policy development. Consulting too quickly will not give enough time for consideration and will reduce the quality of responses.

F. Consultations should be targeted

Consider the full range of people, business and voluntary bodies affected by the policy, and whether representative groups exist. Consider targeting specific groups if appropriate. Ensure they are aware of the consultation and can access it. Consider how to tailor consultation to the needs and preferences of particular groups, such as older people, younger people or people with disabilities that may not respond to traditional consultation methods.

G. Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted

Consult stakeholders in a way that suits them. Charities may need more time to respond than businesses, for example. When the consultation spans all or part of a holiday period, consider how this may affect consultation and take appropriate mitigating action, such as prior discussion with key interested parties or extension of the consultation deadline beyond the holiday period.

H. Consultations should be agreed before publication

Seek collective agreement before publishing a written consultation, particularly when consulting on new policy proposals. Consultations should be published on gov.uk.

I. Consultation should facilitate scrutiny

Publish any response on the same page on gov.uk as the original consultation, and ensure it is clear when the government has responded to the consultation. Explain the responses that have been received



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from consultees and how these have informed the policy. State how many responses have been received.

J. Government responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion

Publish responses within 12 weeks of the consultation or provide an explanation why this is not possible. Where consultation concerns a statutory instrument publish responses before or at the same time as the instrument is laid, except in very exceptional circumstances (and even then publish responses as soon as possible). Allow appropriate time between closing the consultation and implementing policy or legislation.

K. Consultation exercises should not generally be launched during local or national election periods.

If exceptional circumstances make a consultation absolutely essential (for example, for safeguarding public health), departments should seek advice from the Propriety and Ethics team in the Cabinet Office. This document does not have legal force and is subject to statutory and other legal requirements