

EDGCOTT PARISH COUNCIL

12th February 2021

Mr Robin Seaton
Programme Director
New Prisons

Dear Mr Seaton,

**UPDATE TO KEY STAKEHOLDERS FOLLOWING THE PRE-PLANNING CONSULTATION FOR A NEW PRISON IN
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

Thanks for your letter of 5th February 2021.

We are not at all sure what your letter represents. We presume it to be general update to the completion of the consultation on Friday and is not intended as a response either to the letter of complaint we wrote to the Permanent Secretary on 28th January or to the many questions raised at the public Zoom meeting on 19th January 2021 which you undertook to answer within 48hrs. We have still not had the answers you promised.

Your letter instead simply reflects that there have been responses and suggests that should a planning application go ahead – further work will be done on the areas raised by respondents.

This is to misunderstand one of the things you were asked at the event – which was about the process followed to reach this point and what alternatives were considered.

Our understanding of consultation is that it means a process to set out the requirement, to give the arguments for and against possible solutions and to invite comments.

We do not feel that the background or the arguments have been adequately explained, making it difficult for people to put forward their comments in an informed manner.

Perhaps it would help if we outlined the points more clearly and you sought to answer the general questions the consultees are asking rather than the ones you choose to answer.

For any project like this a set of criteria will be set. We would like to know what those were, what the case was for meeting them at Grendon and what other options were considered.

We suppose that the following are likely to be the relevant criteria – so perhaps you can explain how this project meets them or let us know what criteria were actually used.

CLERK

**Carole Jackman, 1 Darley's Close, Grendon Underwood, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP18 0SE
Tel: 01296 770568**

edgcottparishclerk@gmail.com

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- **Cost** – we understand that you would look at places where land was owned. However once you realised that there is not enough land for the project you have in mind – meaning that you will almost certainly have to compulsorily purchase additional land – plus the cost of ‘mitigating’ the myriad problems with the scheme – it is really hard to believe that there are not cheaper options available.
- **Prisoner population** – Grendon is within 40 miles of 10 existing prisons with a capacity of 6772 prisoners. If built approx. 10% of the prison population of England and Wales would be concentrated within this small area. We have seen no case made to support claims for there being a shortage of accommodation in the area.
- **Employment** – Grendon is in an area which is well below the national average for unemployment.
- **Access** – Grendon is 7.5 miles from Bicester and 11 miles from Aylesbury which are the nearest centres of population. There is no rail station closer than those towns and no meaningful public transport from either.
- **Travel and the environment** – the rural roads in the area are already clogged by construction traffic. Even if potential construction or prison workers wished to cycle the distances required, there is no safe route for them to do so.
- **Development of Brown Field sites** – this is a green field site in a rural area.
- **Local impact** – the site is on top of a hill – meaning that the proposed prison will be highly visible for many miles around.
- **Planning environment** – existing and draft local plans do not include provision for such a project and would therefore have to be overridden.

As part of the consultation the limited number of people who were able to attend the event (many more were excluded as a result of a ceiling of 100) raised questions about how the decision was reached – and would still like to hear more about this. We are genuinely confused as to how this site meets any sensible criteria.

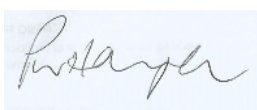
We note that in similar projects (Full Sutton) when the move was made to planning – much was made of the quality of the consultation process followed. We very much hope that you will not decide to proceed in this case, but should you do so, I trust we will not see similar claims made. I would like to draw your attention to the official complaint raised about the process (attached). We are still awaiting a response.

In addition, and for the sake of clarity will you please confirm our understanding that:

- 1) You still intend to answer the direct questions arising from the public meeting. The link to the Zoom Meeting follows and the questions you promised to answer can be found in the chat window.
<https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/play/cGDLP3OxR00JZouXWxQPRrKcK7y5x60Q-BDXhW7kRJVdljTMxs5FGseZJMtiBX0JIWx2EZwonkRODww.WCl9AvT2u5pt-vl>
- 2) We can expect a response to our complaint to the Permanent Secretary about the failure to deliver a proper consultation.
- 3) You will provide us with a more comprehensive response to the findings of the consultation shortly

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Peter Harper
Chair Edgcott Parish Council

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cc. Permanent Secretary Antonio Romeo (via PSDenquiries@justice.gov.uk)
Greg Smith MP
Cllr Martin Tett
Cllr Angela Macpherson
Cllr Cameron Branston