

**PROPOSED MEGA PRISON AT GRENDON UNDERWOOD**  
**INFORMATION SHEET ON LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT**

**1. Objection Details**

*Describe the main objections to the proposal in relation to the subject. Make sure that, where possible, the objections are backed by factual information and or data.*

**Note: Landscape and visual impact is the** *“Process of identifying potential effects on the landscape resource and visual amenity of a specified location or area”.*

Valid points to consider in any objection:

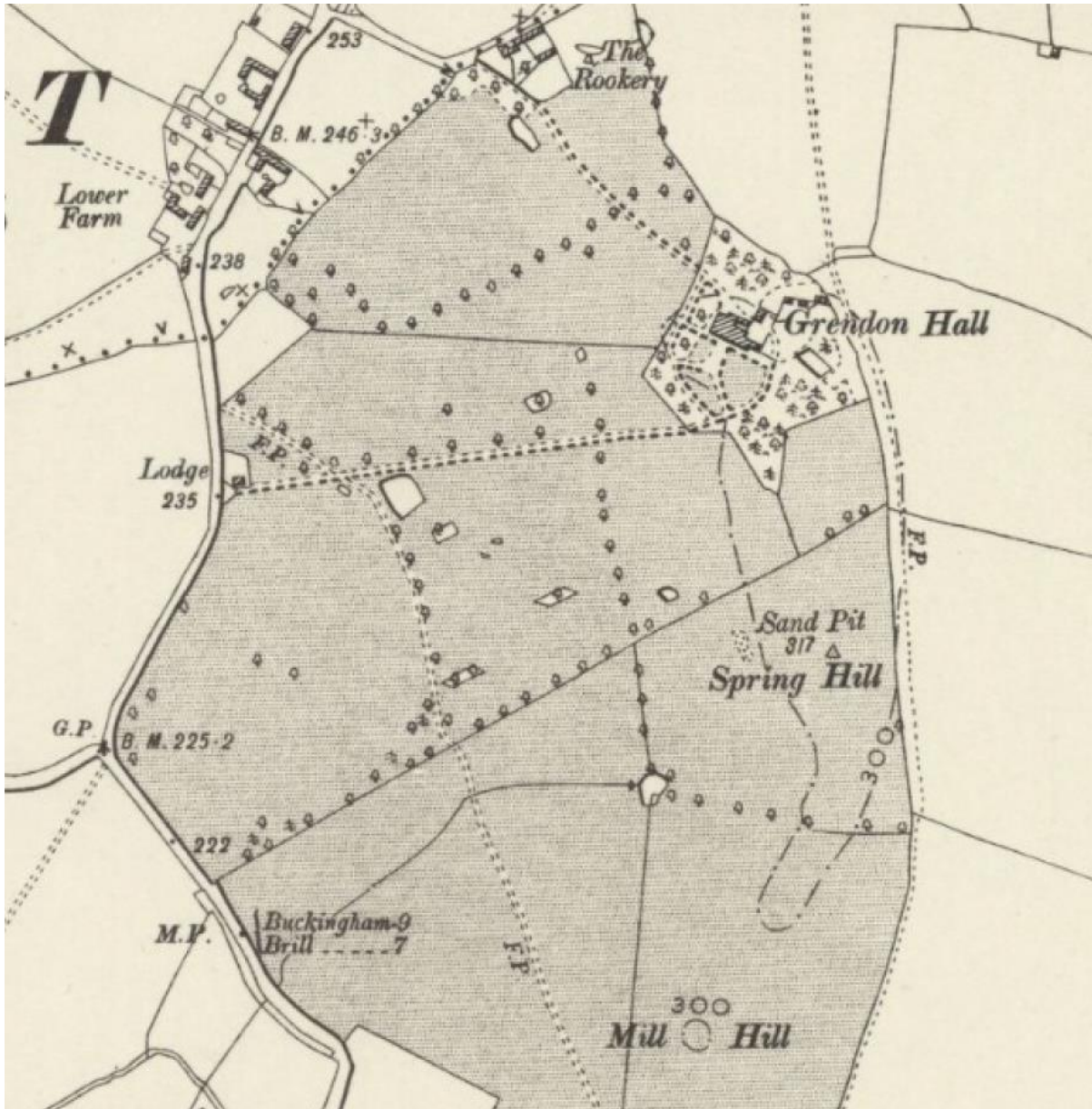
- The scale of the development in terms of total area (buildings covering approximately 60 acres of green field land);
- The size and height of the proposed buildings c. 9.5 to 17.5m, especially the accommodation blocks. These will be 4 storeys high and have services on top making them effectively 5 storeys high. Even the other buildings proposed are tall, 1-3 storeys high;
- The total number of buildings on the site (60 acres of development);
- The boundary fences and road around the perimeter;
- The buildings would dominate and have a significant impact on the local landscape;
- The prison will be sited on the top of a hill and it will not be possible to screen such high buildings from view, even with some levelling. The buildings will be clearly visible from the South-East through to the Western part of the site from a long distance away;
  
- The site proposed for the new mega prison is located within the ‘Poundon – Charndon Settled Hills’ Landscape Character Area LCA7.1 and the ‘Woodland Rolling Lowlands’ Landscape Character Type, LCT7, as defined by the Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment 2008. The site, comprises a series of low domed hills, forming a slight ridge across the surrounding lower vale landscapes. It is largely in agricultural use and fields are small or medium sized and defined by generally well-maintained hedgerows. Tree cover is limited to small fragments of woodland and isolated hedgerow trees. Settlement is dispersed with three small settlements: Poundon, Charndon and Edgcott. There are relatively well-used minor roads cross the area and a freight railway runs south-west to north-east across the LCA. There are expansive views across the surrounding countryside to the north-east. The Grendon Young Offender Institution and Springhill Prison are already intrusive built elements in a largely rural setting. The landscape condition is fair due to the detracting influence of the Poundon mast and prison buildings. The presence of the prison, noise from local roads, and lighting from settlements means that tranquillity is medium.
  
- The main part of Grendon Underwood is located in the LCA 7.4 Kingswood Wooded Farmland (LCT 7). The landscape character is of gently sloping or undulating landform with some small hills. It is predominantly pastoral with large areas of ancient woodland. The south of the area was once part of the medieval hunting forest of Bernwood. Hedgerows are generally strong and clipped with fine mature oak trees adding to the sense of a landscape with good tree cover. To the south of Grendon Underwood there is a line of small hills. Although there is settlement within the area it is mostly at the edges, much of the area retains a slightly forgotten character with areas of less intensive management and narrow curving lanes.

- Paragraph 174 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) requires planning decisions to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and to support thriving rural communities, amongst other things. Policy GP.35 of the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan 2004 (LP) requires proposals to respect and complement the physical characteristics of the site and its surroundings, the historic scale and context of the setting, the natural qualities and features of the area and important public views and skylines. There is nothing to suggest that this policy is not consistent with the Framework or applicable to outline planning applications. Policy GP.38 requires development to include landscape proposals to help buildings fit into their surroundings and conserve natural features. Policy GP.40 presumes against the loss of trees and hedgerows of landscape value. The proposed new mega prison development could hardly be described as meeting any of the above mentioned factors.
- The development of a new mega prison as a whole would appear particularly intrusive and out of place in the landscape setting when viewed from most parts of Edgcott, the northern part of Grendon Underwood and the wider panorama as well as from parts of the public rights of way in the locality. In conclusion the proposal would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area.
- The current prison site is an area which is rural and open in character and where any limited built form is sporadically located and more rural in appearance. Given the open and green nature of the site it contributes positively to the prevailing character and appearance of the immediate area. As a result the proposed new 'mega' prison would result in irreversible and significant harm to the landscape and the visual impact in the area and as an amenity space. Furthermore the development would have an undesirable urbanising effect on the local landscape and would result in the irreversible and permanent loss of countryside.
- The field where the new site entrance and road will be located as well as the football pitch is part of the Historical Park and Pleasure Gardens of Grendon Hall which were completed by the late 1880s (Ref: *The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project, Grendon Hall March 2021, modified in June 2021. See aerial photo from 2019 and old map from c1890 below*). As a result this land forms part of the Historic Park of a Grade II listed property and hence should be given significant weight in the planning balance.
- The field where the new site entrance and road will be located as well as the football pitch, consists of historically important ridge and furrow land. This particular field used to be connected to a more extensive region of ridge and furrow in the area including on Springhill and Mill Hill before the two prisons and the Springhill housing estate were built in the 1950s and 1960s. It would be extremely harmful to irreversibly destroy the remaining part of the ridge and furrow land in the vicinity of Grendon Hall. The building of the new entrance, the new road and locating the football pitch would severely distract from the landscape and current visual impact as well as causing significant harm to the historic ridge and furrow.
- The landscape guidelines related to developments are to encourage the preservation of historic earthworks and ridge and furrow by maintaining a continuous grass sward and not to destroy them.

- The development would result in a major degree of urbanisation with resultant harm to the open countryside, both in front of Grendon Hall and in the space behind the current prisons.
- At night time the additional lighting required for a new prison would dominate the landscape and result in harm to the rural countryside as well as impacting on wildlife.
- All the current trees and hedging on the main site where the buildings will be located are deciduous and hence offer no screening from autumn through until spring. In addition the existing trees are relatively young and too small to offer any reasonable level of screening, even in summer. The additional screening proposed is also deciduous and would offer limited screening only during the summer months, even after the new planting had matured.



*Aerial Photo (2019) Showing the Boundary of the Remaining Parts of the Historic Park and Pleasure gardens of Grendon Hall*



Old Map (c1890) Showing the Historic Park and Pleasure Gardens of Grendon hall (Shaded area) |

- The proposed development for the ‘mega’ prison would introduce a large-scale development to a currently open area of farmland and green field space with consequent and irreversible effects on the character and visual amenity of both the site and adjoining countryside.
- The proposal for the new prison would fail to comply with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, to conserve and enhance the natural environment and to reuse land that has already been developed. The proposed mega prison development is of a scale and nature, on a green field site in the open countryside, which would cause significant and irreversible harm. This is due to the significant adverse impact that the proposed development would have on the surrounding landscape character and much valued visual amenity.
- The construction works of the proposed prison buildings, security walls and fences, and landscaping would result in extensive and irreversible changes to the site.
- The proposal for the new ‘mega’ prison would have significantly harmful impacts on the character and appearance of the landscape and the setting of Grendon Underwood and Edgcott, and is, therefore, contrary to LP Policy GP.35 and relevant provisions of the NPPF.
- The proposed development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area and would therefore be in conflict with saved Policies GP35 and GP84 of the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan Written Statement Part 1 (2004) (LP) which seek to achieve good design, protect the character of an area and the enjoyment of public rights of way.
- The development for the new prison as a whole would appear particularly intrusive and out of place in the landscape setting when viewed from most parts of Edgcott, parts of Main Street Grendon Underwood and the wider panoramic area and from the public rights of way around the prison site.
- The prison site and field adjacent to Willow Lodge is an area which is rural and open in character and where any limited built form is sporadically located and more rural in appearance. Given the open and green nature of the site, it contributes positively to the prevailing character and appearance of the immediate area.
- One of the positive and defining characteristics of the prison site is one where, in the main, the land is devoid of significant numbers of trees/vegetation, strong hedgerow details and where the essentially open and rural landscape adds positively and distinctively to the character and appearance of the area.

### **The Expansion of HMP Springhill**

- From reading the Outline Planning Documentation (OPA) (Traffic Assessment Appendix L) it is very clear that, in addition to building a new ‘mega’ prison on the Grendon Underwood site, the MoJ intends to expand HMP Springhill by 120 places. The expansion of HMP Springhill was mentioned in the second consultation document issued in December 2020 as a possibility which was being considered. However, there is now clear evidence in the OPA that the HMP Springhill expansion will be the next development on this site. Although no application has yet been submitted for this extension, it is justifiable to consider the harm that would be caused to the Landscape and Visual

Impact as a result of the cumulative impact of the new prison and the extension of HMP Springhill. In fact HMP Springhill is closer to both Grendon Hall, Lawn House and the public right of way that passes to the west and north of Grendon Hall and hence there will be a detrimental and harmful impact on the landscape and visual impact to that part of the site and from public rights of way.

## **2. Any Other Points**

*Include any other relevant information or sources that might help in making the objection.*

**Residents to include other thoughts and views plus any relevant photos.**