

## PROPOSED MEGA PRISON AT GRENDON UNDERWOOD

### INFORMATION SHEET 13 ON SITE SELECTION

**Note:** *In the consultation documents there was no specific site selection criteria included but there were some general comments made on this topic (see below). Following some research we now know what site selection criteria have been used for other new prisons, from HMP Berwyn in 2013 to the latest one at Full Sutton in 2017 and 2018. The site selection criteria used for the site at Grendon Underwood, in any outline planning application, will be scrutinised and may have an impact on the nature of the objections to make.*

#### 1. Objections

**Site selection and justification is an important aspect in the planning balance and so the objections need to be strong and well supported.**

*One main aspect to consider is that any development will cause some degree of harm to a site so what would it be in this case? If the particular site has been selected based on suitable criteria from a range of sites, and good justification is presented, the Local Council will work with the developers to seek a mitigation plan to minimise the harm. However, if no real site selection process has been carried out, the harm could possibly be best overcome by going to a different site. This is the point that we need to make to the Planning Department as part of our objections.*

*Objections can include the fact that there has not been a clear, well-structured and transparent site selection process. In addition there has been no cost/benefit analysis carried out to justify the selection of the Grendon Underwood site. It may be possible to build a new prison on this site but there would be many challenges and hence cost implications in operating a large prison on this site. These include for example the problems with recruiting and retaining staff (the existing two prisons on the site already have problems in this area) and the site is in a rural location with poor connectivity to public transport and hence fails to meet transport targets.*

#### Justification

- Because the MoJ already own the land they are desperately trying to fit a supersized prison onto a site that is undersized, of an inappropriate layout and poorly appointed with no opportunity for future expansion without further purchase of adjacent green field land. They can just about squeeze six massive four-story concrete houseblocks onto the site to accommodate 1,468 prisoners. So why invest £250m plus of public money in a site that is flawed and has no opportunity for future expansion? Unless of course (like HS2 has done with devastating effect in this community) the MoJ is planning to purchase green field land adjacent to the prison.
- These plans are shameful. It would be absolutely impossible to properly screen these massive concrete four-story buildings, plus services on top, in such an elevated site so they will dominate the rural landscape for miles in all directions. Not only will this be an eyesore, inevitably it will significantly increase the light and noise pollution already generated by HMP Springhill and Grendon prisons.

## **Car parking at the proposed site**

- The number of car parking spaces detailed in the Outline Planning Application is a total of 453 (430 for staff and visitors and 23 for disabled users). Considering there will be up to 734 staff employed on the site, plus visitors and service vehicles the number of car parking spaces, despite sophisticated modelling is an underestimate. A similar analysis was carried out at HMP Berwyn in North Wales and an additional 194 car parking spaces had to be added later.
- At HMP Berwyn in North Wales a similar car parking situation arose and two major issues resulted:
  - A lot of staff were recruited prior to prisoners being transferred to the prison to make it operational but they had no parking facilities on site as the construction work was only completed four months later.
  - Once the car park had been completed it soon became clear that there was insufficient parking and a temporary car park was put in place and this later received planning permission to be made permanent. A further 194 spaces were created.
  - The reality is that there will be many other brown field sites across the South East Region that would be more suitable and that won't have such a catastrophic effect on a rural community that has already been badly affected by the construction of HS2, the East West Railway and a new incinerator.

## **Information on Site Selection at the Consultation Stage**

- The total acreage of the prison site at Grendon Underwood is approximately 60 acres; this includes the field (12.6 acres) where the new site entrance and road into the site as well as the football pitch will be located. Apart from the field in front of Grendon Hall, there is land totalling approximately 50 acres at the rear of the two current prisons and this is where the proposed prison would be located ('construction site').
- The only access to the construction site is at the top left hand corner of the car park field and a new entrance from Grendon Road is proposed which would run the length of the field to the access point (see Figure 1).

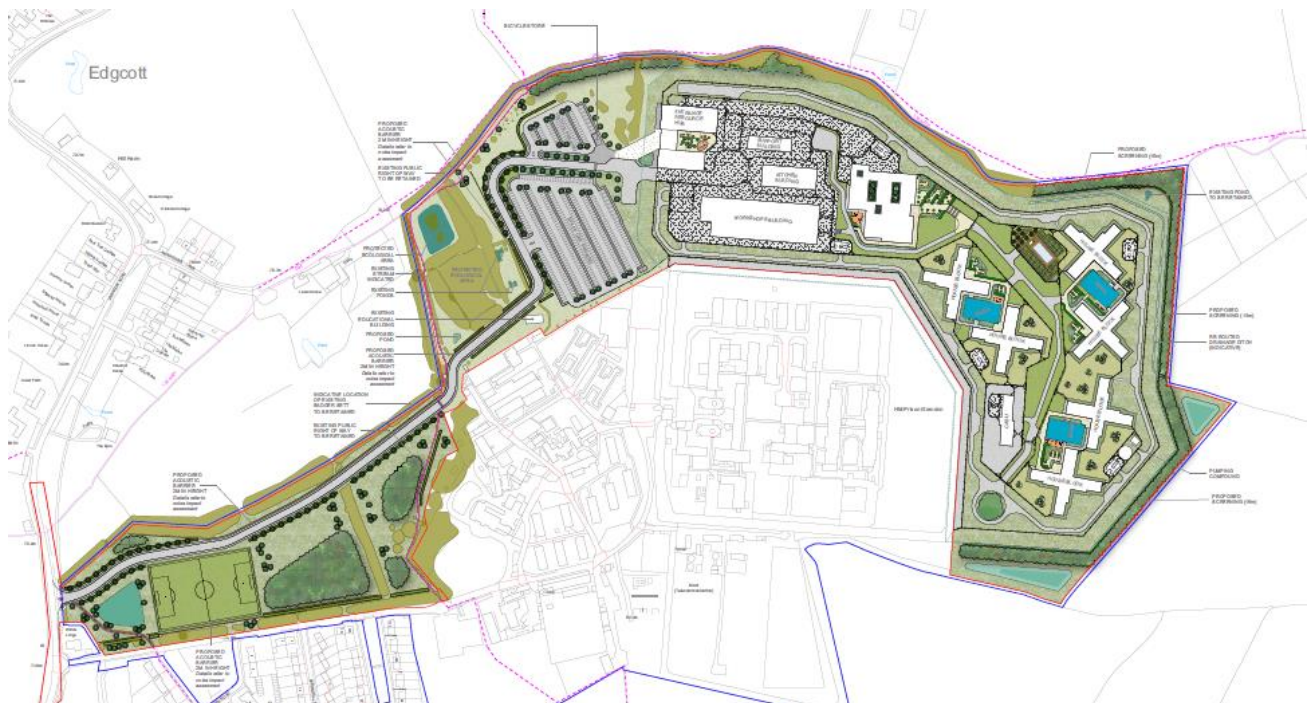


Figure 1: Layout of Site at Grendon Underwood

- From general comments made in the two consultation documents, the MoJ selected Grendon Underwood as a site for a new mega prison because:
  - “...where we have the space available to develop quickly and in locations where the prison population is likely to grow most quickly..;
  - The MoJ own the land;
  - “Building a new prison at this site would respond to demand with an expected requirement for places in the North West and the South East linking directly to the large urban areas located there”;
  - “The site is situated in an area of the South East where they expect substantial demand for new prison places”;
  - “The site is relatively close to existing urban centres, in this case Aylesbury, Bicester and Buckingham”;
  - “The site is on land already owned by the MoJ and they have discounted Bullingdon as an option as they do not own sufficient land on that site and hence it would be more challenging to develop”;
  - “The MoJ have carried out surveys to determine whether the construction of a new prison is practical at this site and they concluded that it is”.
  
- In the letter that was sent to local residents within 3km of the proposed prison site in December 2020, the MoJ stated “Having reviewed a number of sites across the country. We believe that land next to HMP Grendon/Springhill in Buckinghamshire would be an appropriate location.”

**Information Gathered Since the Consultation Stage:**

- The Working Party has written various letters to the MoJ and in responses some references to site selection were made and these include the following:

- In a letter from Gary Badley dated 11<sup>th</sup> March, on behalf of Antonia Romeo the Permanent Secretary for the MoJ, he stated that *“We have considered brownfield sites in England and Wales as part of the site selection process, but are unable to disclose a list of sites we have looked at, as this is commercially sensitive information and may hinder future development plans...”*
- The Working Party has initiated a number of Freedom of Information (FOIs) requests to the MoJ and other parties and those relevant to the site selection process are summarised below:
  - 107 local authorities in the South East of England were contacted to request details of any pre-planning discussions held between them and the MoJ during 2018, 2019 and 2020 in relation to prison expansion plans. In addition a request for details on any brown field sites in their region was requested. The majority of these local authorities responded and commented that the MoJ had not held any discussions with them with regards to a new prison.

Subsequent to the above information the MoJ, in response to a Freedom of Information request, commented that no pre-planning application discussions had taken place with any other local authorities. Hence it is clear that the MoJ had not seriously considered the pros and cons of the Grendon Underwood site versus other alternatives.

Further information gathered from local residents and by the Joint Working Party is summarised below.

- There is no evidence that the MoJ has carried a full and proper risk/benefit assessment of the Grendon Underwood site.
- The proposal would significantly consolidate and intensify development which lies in open countryside, in an unsustainable location. The sporadic form of development would be contrary to the overarching principles of the NPPF. Equally, the proposal does not enjoy any policy support from the Development Plan nor the emerging Local Plan and therefore requires an overriding justification. None of the material adduced by the MOJ or its representatives to date meets this evidential hurdle, which is set out in more detail below. In particular, the site ‘selection’ process and the consideration of less harmful alternatives has been, at best, derisory.
- The Grendon Underwood site is within 40 miles of 10 existing prisons with a capacity of 7,804 prisoners which is over 10% of prison capacity for England and Wales. (76,461 places). With the new mega prison it would have over 12% of the new capacity for England and Wales.
- The MoJ owned land is undersized and poorly appointed with no opportunity for future expansion without purchase of adjacent green field land.
- HMP Bullingdon already serves the local courts. The demand for additional places in the South East will predominantly come from London, so locating a new mega prison in North Buckinghamshire does not make sense. Ideally for the cost efficiencies of prisoner transport and for families visiting prisoners a new mega prison would be best located within (or near) the M25. MoJ officials will know this and are pursuing this option at Grendon Underwood as it is easiest for them because they own the land and will compulsory purchase any additional land that they might require.

- As the plans in the Consultation document show, there is clearly not enough room for a seventh houseblock on the site which is MoJ owned. So, whilst the MoJ may certainly want to add a seventh they did not want to state that in the Outline Planning Application as it would draw attention to the need for purchase of further land. As a starting point, the proposal would significantly consolidate and intensify development which lies in open countryside, in an unsustainable location.
- The MOJ have deliberately underestimated the number of car parking spaces that will be required. They did this because they were trying to fit the car parking into the space available to them on land that they own. The MoJ have estimated the number of staff at between 500 and 600 staff to be employed at the prison. A prison of this size will also require between 250 and 300 non-directly employed staff who are employed by other organisations working in the prison including education and training, healthcare, facilities management, substance misuse, housing and other third sector organisations which are essential to support resettlement activity. Hence the number of car parking spaces required is significantly larger than the number proposed in the Outline Planning Application (as was the case at HMP Berwyn in North Wales).
- The reality is that there will be many other brown field sites across the South East Region that would be more suitable and that won't have such a catastrophic effect on a rural community that has already been badly affected by the construction of HS2, the East West Railway and a new incinerator. The proposed site in Buckinghamshire, which has some 3% unemployment compared to over 7% in some of the deprived areas have been promised to gain the advantage of "levelling up" (Source: ONS statistics). This proposal clearly is in contradiction to this Government promise.
- North Bucks already has 3 Enterprise Zones at Westcott Venture Park, (~4 miles from the proposed site), Silverstone Park (~15 miles from the proposed site) and Aylesbury Woodlands (~15 miles from the proposed site) (Source [www.buckstvllep.co.uk](http://www.buckstvllep.co.uk)).
- Ongoing construction work no more than 5 miles from the proposed site includes the building of HS2 and the East West Rail (EWR) link and a permanent HS2 maintenance depot at Calvert. From the above it is clear that North Bucks is in no need of "levelling up" and that to embark on a large government infrastructure project in the area quite clearly contradicts Government policy.
- There are many acres of Ministry of Defence owned land, some nearby, and a simple transfer of title from one government department to another would allow brown field development. It is also true that in areas in need of "levelling up" there are many brown field sites caused by deindustrialisation and demilitarisation. These could easily provide sites for a new mega prison. It should also be noted that the new prison under development at Wellingborough is only some 40 miles from the proposed site.
- Because the MoJ already own the land they are desperately trying to fit a supersized prison onto a site that is undersized and poorly appointed with no opportunity for future expansion without the purchase of adjacent green field land.

- Why invest £250m plus of such of public money in a site that is flawed and has no opportunity for future expansion? Unless of course (like HS2 has done with devastating effect in this community) the MoJ is planning to purchase further green field land adjacent to the prison.

### **Site Selection Details in the Outline Planning Application**

- In the Outline Planning Application (OPA), the MoJ claim that their site selection process included the following steps:
  - Land in MoJ ownership was considered as priority given the potential for quicker delivery to meet challenging delivery programme and avoid additional costs and time delays associated with the purchase of land.
  - On a national scale, several sites were shortlisted against the criteria and four sites were selected for further consideration. Others were discounted, for example due to site constraints, areas of flood risk, infrastructure requirements, contamination issues, and accessibility.
  - Of these four potential sites, two are in the north and one is located centrally and potentially being developed as a Category B training prison. Category B training prisons are national resources with different geographical requirements.
  - The remaining site is the land adjacent to HMP Grendon and HMP Springhill which is strategically located to meet substantial forecast demand in the south region.
  - The proposed site satisfies many of the site search criteria and is situated in a region where substantial demand for additional prison places is expected. The site is already owned by the MoJ.

It is clear that the only part of the above statements which can be guaranteed to be accurate is the last sentence in the last bullet point, i.e. *“The site is already owned by the MoJ”*. This is the crux of the MoJ justification. Every other aspect of the so called site selection criteria is a convenient fabrication and where if any further information is sought, as in Freedom of Information, the MoJ brush away such requests as “commercially sensitive information”.

It is also clear from the details in the Outline Planning Application that the MoJ initiated some surveys on the Grendon Underwood site in 2018. Hence they had earmarked this site for the development of a new mega prison three years ago.

Hence in conclusion, the MoJ site selection process has been secretive, derisory and highly biased towards justifying the Grendon Underwood site.

### **Site Selection Criteria Used for Other New Prisons:**

The site selection criteria used for a new prison near Wrexham, HMP Berwyn, which opened in February 2017, is shown below.

**Mandatory Requirements** were that sites would be:-

- a minimum of 20 hectares (circa 50 acres) developable area;
- in North Wales/North West with priority given to sites in Lancashire, Manchester, Cheshire, Flintshire, Denbighshire and Wrexham followed by sites adjoining the priority areas or within up to one hour travel from Liverpool Magistrates' Court;
- in London, with priority given to sites in the London Boroughs followed by sites in the counties adjoining the London Boroughs, or within an hour travel from Westminster Magistrates' Court.

**Secondary Requirements** were that sites would be:-

- sufficiently flat;
- have good access to public transport and the motorway/trunk road network;
- accessible for construction without major enhancement of existing transport infrastructure;
- not overlooked so as not to compromise security;
- capable of connection to utilities without unreasonable cost; and
- outside floodplains.

**Tertiary requirements** were that sites would preferably be:-

- previously developed / brownfield;
- a suitable shape for prison development;
- manageable in terms of ground conditions / contamination;
- not prejudiced by major ecological or historic designations; and
- not affected by significant public rights of way or other similar issues.

The MoJ received responses from a number of local authorities proposing potential sites. Within the North Wales/North West region fifteen sites were put forward. Seven of those failed to satisfy the mandatory requirements stipulated by the MoJ and were immediately discounted as less

suitable for prison development. A further two sites were assessed as being less suitable due to security concerns.

The remaining six sites were considered further and in greater detail by a panel of MoJ officials using the criteria set out above. The panel recommended that two sites were the most suitable for the proposed new prison, including the former Firestone site. This decision was ratified by a moderation panel made up of senior MoJ officials (including representation from the NOMS) who agreed that the former Firestone site best met the MoJ's requirements.

On 27 June 2013 the Justice Secretary announced that the new prison would be built in North Wales. Subsequent to the evaluation process he formally announced, on 4 September 2013, that the preferred site for the new North Wales prison was the former Firestone site. This will be the first prison in North Wales and will provide an opportunity for offenders from the region to be held closer to their home areas, an important factor in reducing re-offending. Moreover, the investment in a new prison will provide a significant boost to the North Wales economy.

- It is clear from the Mandatory Criteria that in this case other sites were evaluated and a detailed site comparison was made before the final site was selected. However, one of the key reasons given for selecting this site was that it would predominantly house prisoners from the local area,

mainly North Wales. By 2019 the prison population in HMP Berwyn consisted of 30% prisoners from Wales and the remaining 70% were from England.

- For the two prisons currently under construction, HMP Glen Parva and HMP Five Wells, and the one at Full Sutton which has received planning permission, the most significant change in the criteria used for site selection was the Mandatory Requirements and those used at these sites are shown below.

**Mandatory Requirements** were that sites would be:-

- A minimum of 12 hectares developable area; and
  - In the preferred area of search with a requirement for at least one location in each region.
- Hence the criteria for reviewing a range of different sites had been removed. For the Glen Parva and Five Wells sites this was perhaps not such a significant change as these two prisons had a prison on each site which had been closed and these were demolished prior to construction of the new prisons. However, at Full Sutton the new prison is to be built on land owned by the MoJ and adjacent to a current higher category prison. The Full Sutton site is also rural and hence is very similar to the Grendon Underwood site.
  - The only other change in the site selection criteria used at Full Sutton was under the Secondary Requirements. The details with regards to the site being overlooked were modified to make this criteria more flexible. The modified wording was:
    - Not *significantly* overlooked so as not to compromise security.
  - The site selection criteria used for selection of the site at Grendon Underwood and how the local site measures up against the criteria is shown below.

<b>Selection Criteria Used at Grendon Underwood</b>	<b>Grendon Underwood Site</b>
<b>Mandatory Requirements:</b>	
A minimum of 12 hectares developable area	<b>Yes</b> However, the elevation and layout of the site is totally inappropriate for the construction of a new mega prison.
In the preferred area of search with a requirement for at least one location in each region	<b>Partly</b> In the broadest of terms yes but the south east of England is a huge region and Grendon Underwood, in north Buckinghamshire, is a long distance from the postcode addresses where the majority of prisoners from London and other south east counties would be located.
<b>Secondary Requirements:</b>	
Sufficiently flat	<b>No</b> The GU site is on a hill.
Have good strategic access to public transport and the motorway/trunk road network	<b>Only partly</b> The local roads around the prison site are narrow, windy and already used by a high number of vehicles, large and small due to other major and long-term infrastructure projects. There is also extremely limited access to public transport.



<b>Selection Criteria Used at Grendon Underwood</b>	<b>Grendon Underwood Site</b>
Accessible for construction traffic without major enhancement of transport infrastructure	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p> <p>Not without building a new site entrance and a long road up the whole length of a green field to access the main construction site. The new site entrance and road will destroy the local landscape and have a significant impact on the volume of traffic in the locality. In addition some modifications will have to be made to the local A41/Broadway junction.</p>
Not significantly overlooked so as not to compromise security	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p> <p>The proposed prison would be close to the existing Springhill housing estate and other residential housing in both Edgcott and Grendon Underwood.</p>
Capable of connection to utilities without unreasonable cost	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p> <p>Due to the locality new surface water and foul waste pipes will need to be laid and these will be hundreds of metres in length with some crossing green field space. In addition a new electricity substation will need to be installed from Waddesdon which is approximately 6 miles away. Hence the cost of the infrastructure is exacerbated due to the site location.</p>
Outside flood plains	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Partly</b></p> <p>However, there are severe standing water issues both within the prison site as well as the surrounding areas due to the heavy clay soil in this region.</p>
<b>Tertiary requirements:</b>	
Previously developed/brownfield	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p> <p>And this is despite the fact that no evidence has been provided that the MoJ has given any consideration to the tens of thousands of hectares of brownfield sites in the south east and London regions.</p>
A suitable shape for prison development	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p> <p>Who would select a horse shoe shaped site to build a new mega prison rather than a rectangular like shaped site?! The site is not suitable for the proposed plans due to the, site layout, narrow and restricted access to the main area of the site where buildings would be located. A new and long site access road will have to be built. As a result some further green space land is going to be purchased to fit the planned buildings into the site.</p>
Manageable in terms of ground conditions / contamination	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Heavy clay.</p>
Not prejudiced by major ecological or historic designations	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p> <p>Due to the amount and nature of wildlife both in the grounds of the current prison and the surrounding area and the irreversible harm that will be done if the prison is constructed, despite the proposed mitigation plans.</p>

Selection Criteria Used at Grendon Underwood	Grendon Underwood Site
	<p>The site is in the setting of two Grade II Listed properties and will also have an impact on many other Heritage assets nearby in both Edgcott and Grendon Underwood. In addition part of the site formed part of the Historic Park and Gardens of Grendon Hall and this site has historic ridge and furrow which is the remaining section of a larger expanse of this local agricultural history.</p>
<p>Not affected by significant public rights of way or other similar issues</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p> <p>There are public footpaths running through the current prison site which are significant to and widely used by the local community. The construction of the new mega prison will have a significant and detrimental impact on the local amenity space.</p>