

PROPOSED MEGA PRISON AT GRENDON UNDERWOOD

INFORMATION SHEET 5 ON ECONOMIC BENEFITS

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.

- In the second Consultation Document issued in December 2020 with regards to the proposed new mega prison, some 'Community Benefits' were described (as Key Performance Targets for Glen Parva by 2023). The document also commented that the Glen Parva site is comparable to the site in Buckinghamshire. It is anything but comparable! Firstly the Glen Parva site used to house a previous prison which has been demolished to make room for the new prison under construction. In addition the Glen Parva site is in an urban area close to many local industries, within easy reach of many of the companies that manufacture the pre-cast concrete sections which will be used to construct the new prison, it has significantly better public transport compared to Grendon Underwood, has a much higher unemployment level than that in Buckinghamshire and a much great urban population than Grendon Underwood. Hence the two sites are not comparable in any way.
- The table below shows Key Performance Targets for the new prison being built at Glen Parva in Leicestershire, as specified in the Consultation Document, along with some comments on each one. As with much of the content within the Consultation Document, the targets are vague, made to look impressive but when analysed they are simply tokenistic. For example to work on the construction sites for new prisons like Glen Parva or at Five Wells, workers would have to be fully competent and suitably qualified for the role that they were going to perform; this is an industry requirement. In addition they would need to have the necessary level of Health and Safety (H&S) environment training required by current legislation. Certification following passing the H&S exam comprises a photo card ID with unique number, chip protection and specified role qualified to be on site to carry out. Anyone coming out of, or a Category D inmate on licence, will not have the continuity of employment to have been able to have relevant up to date credentials. The work is not general building undertaken by a local tradesman, the only tasks available will be to undertake menial roles. This might suit some prison inmates but does not represent an opportunity for local tradesmen. In any case there is a low level of unemployment in this area. In addition there are a number of other infrastructure and other development projects ongoing in the locality so it is actually hard to recruit construction workers.

Table of Key Performance targets for Glen Parva

Target	Response
25% local jobs (within 25 mile radius of site)	What does this mean? Is it that 25% of the total construction jobs are on site (i.e. the anticipated 1.000 contractors each day) or something else?
40% local employment (off site manufacturing within a 40 mile radius)	What does this actually mean? Is it related to the off-site construction work at factories where for example the pre-cast concrete parts of the buildings are manufactured? If this is the case most such factories are located not that far from Glen Parva and hence this is a straight forward target to meet. However, such a target would not be relevant to Grendon Underwood as such sites are much further away.
100 new jobs created (of which at least 25% are former prisoners or about to be released)	Even if this target is met, this is hardly a great achievement. 100 new jobs out of around 1,000 contractors on site and just 25 of these for ex-prisoners.
1,750 work placement days	What does this mean? Is this 1,750 workers having one hour of work placement or could it be 219 workers having one work placement day each or something very different?
50 apprenticeships (or jobs with a structured training programme)	A very low number for such a large project. Would these apprenticeships lead to full time work at the end or is it just a form of 'cheap labour'?
30% SME spend	No detail so what does this actually mean? Is this within a certain radius of the site? Most of the work during the construction phase will be carried out by the lead contractor's 'caravan' of service companies with little opportunity for local companies.
1,000 people upskilled	No detail, what does this actually mean? Does this mean that the 1,000 contractors on site each day will be unskilled at the start of the project and they will be trained 'on the job'? The contractors on site will be from the 'caravan' of contractor workforce who are fully trained and competent for the roles which they will perform during construction. This is an industry requirement.
25% local spend (within 25 miles of site)	No detail so what does this mean? 25% spend of what amount or what type of work? Another meaningless statement.
1 community project pa at least	What kind of project and possible financial value? Has this target been met?
£50, 000 spend with voluntary, community and social enterprise throughout the project	This is nothing but a pathetic gesture. Has this target been met and on what projects?
15 targeted events for those who have low representation in the construction industry over the period of the project	Unbelievably meaningless statement! What does it mean and how many have been held and as a result how many people have benefitted?

- It is clear that undue weight has been attributed to land ownership in the site selection process and incomplete and generic economic modelling is being used to claim benefits that will not be achieved at local level. Benefits forecast at regional (defined as the whole of the South East) and national level should not be used to justify the Grendon Underwood location and are unreliable and incomplete. There is no evidence of any consideration of the economic balance of alternative more sustainable sites.
- The Socio Economic arguments submitted to support the MoJ claims does not accurately reflect the impact of what is proposed at the Grendon Underwood location. It fails to take account of significant local factors and uses assumptions drawn from other prison proposals that are not comparable. It fails to acknowledge or address the impact on the economic cost benefit balance of locating the development in a location that is unsustainable because of the rural location, travel times, accessibility, staff resourcing and lack of alternative means of transport.
- The benefits claimed at local level are modest for a project of this size. No attempt is made to assess the impact of project cost overruns, the scope for which can be easily envisaged and are highly likely. These matters have the potential for the proposed benefits to dramatically damage the cost benefit balance and this has not been considered.
- The Socio Economic report offers no insight into the relative cost benefit assessment of alternative sites considered in the site selection process. It does however acknowledge that Buckinghamshire has below average unemployment and crime rates. Hence regional and national benefits from the prison programme would bring greater benefits in areas of greater prison demand, higher unemployment and greater deprivation as well as contributing to the governments levelling up agenda.
- The catchment area used for the assessments extends to 40 miles which encompasses large parts of Oxfordshire and parts of Northamptonshire, Wiltshire and Bedfordshire. It encompasses the major infrastructure projects of HS2 and EWR in the immediate vicinity and the construction phase which will coincide with the construction phases of these projects. These projects are already causing shortages of supplies in local construction materials and labour and the economic benefits claimed for the local area are overstated and the disadvantages ignored. The proposals will exacerbate the current shortages and not bring the economic benefits claimed.
- The economic justification cites Wellingborough and claims 51% of the construction spend went to small businesses and 25% of the onsite spend. The Five Wells project at Wellingborough is immediately adjacent to a large urban conurbation and is not an appropriate comparator for the rural project at Grendon Underwood and Edgcott. Hence the benefits claimed are a misrepresentation of the probable outcome.
- In the proposed location there are already existing difficulties recruiting and retaining suitable staff for HMP Springhill and HMP Grendon. This represents a challenge and is of concern. There is already a shortage of staff within the locality and the only way to source the quality of staff needed will result in a dilutive impact on the other local prisons. This impact will be exaggerated by the fact that Five Wells prison will need similar numbers and levels of experienced staff. There is little prospect for recruitment from the immediate locality and all staffing will result in

private transport being used with all the attendant disadvantages and contraventions of sustainability targets.

- The induced spend of £8.6m from staff and visitors appears to be modelled on a prison facility adjoining an urban area offering services and facilities that are available for staff and visitors travelling to and from the prison from some distance. They are unreliable in the context of the proposed location and neither forecast should be given much weight.
- The MoJ seek to claim the economic benefits of providing employment opportunities from the building of a new mega prison at Grendon Underwood. Various claims have been made about how many opportunities might be created during the construction phase but the actual reality of what jobs and apprenticeships have been created at the prisons currently being built falls far short of what is claimed. The long term benefits of new staff roles can only be achieved by locating the expansion where prison personnel of suitable experience and in sufficient numbers can be effectively recruited. This is to ensure that the prison environment that results is suitable and will enable retention of those staff.
- HMPs Grendon, HMP Springhill and HMP Bullingdon already find recruitment and retention of staff difficult and with another eight prisons within a forty mile radius it is hard to see how the supply of suitably qualified staff will be sourced without drawing from the other prisons and diluting their operational capacity.
- An inability to staff the prison appropriately will lead to a repeat of many of the operational difficulties already seen at HMP Berwyn (opened in February 2017) with all of the cost implications for the general public purse and the local support services funded by our local authorities and ultimately by us as council tax and ratepayers. The operational problems at HMP Berwyn included a limit in the number of prisoners transferred to the site compared to the original target due to slow recruitment of staff, major problems with violence, drug misuse, poor attendance at training courses and significant car parking issues due to misguided and incorrect car parking requirement assumptions as a result of mis-information by the MoJ on the number of staff that would actually be employed.
- If a new mega prison was constructed at Grendon Underwood it would be extremely difficult to recruit the number of staff required. The two current prisons at the site cannot recruit and retain the prison staff that they require let alone there be further staff available for the new prison. Hence recruitment would be an issue and staff would have to be recruited from outside the region, possibly from across the country. This would then result in housing issues as there is little available housing in the local area and what housing is available would be beyond the financial reach of many of the staff on Prison Service salaries. Cheaper housing is available further afield but this would result in significant numbers of longer car journeys and hence make the site unsustainable and would go against the Government's policy on minimising carbon levels.
- The remote rural location of the current prison site is not well served by public transport. There is a rail connection in Aylesbury but only a single, infrequent bus service from that town with limited daily connections to the locality. There are rail connections in Bicester, Oxford and Milton Keynes but no bus services connecting these stations to the prison site. Despite MoJ claims, the completion of the East West Rail line will not increase connectivity in the locality to help staff or visitors reach the Grendon Underwood prison site more readily. Employees and visitors will almost all need to travel to the site by motor vehicles. This is contrary to planning policy guidelines and is

completely at odds with any of the much vaunted central government environmental policies and initiatives.

- In summary, local bus services are poor, cycling is dangerous due to traffic and lack of local housing means that the staff recruited will live over a wide area and hence car sharing will be impractical.
- Another key factor is having a balance of prison officers that have a good level of experience as well as newly trained officers. With other new prisons being constructed and becoming operational over the next few years, it will make the recruitment of experienced officers particularly challenging.
- The difficulties families will find visiting inmates due to a lack of public transport will negatively impact on the inmates' wellbeing and exacerbate tension within the prison increasing management pressure. This will increase operational costs and the price will be paid by taxpayers and result in increased costs to Buckinghamshire council tax and ratepayers by increasing the demands on emergency and support services.
- The rural location is particularly concerning for prisoner's families visiting by public transport. It is a very difficult journey for families particularly if they have young children. Maintaining family relationships is important for prisoners and in real terms can contribute to reducing re-offending by having accommodation on release and a supportive family.
- A recent example of how a rural location can impact on prisoner well-being was when a resident spotted someone wondering around in a state of confusion. The resident asked him what his problem was and he stated that he had just been released from prison, had been given a token amount of cash but had no idea where he was. He came from London and the resident kindly offered the person a lift to a local train station so that he could make his way home.
- If the balance of experienced prison officers versus those with little experience is not in place problems can occur as they did at HMP Berwyn. The level of inexperienced prison officers in that new prison was one of the key factors in the level of violence experienced and being at alarming levels (Ref: *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Berwyn, by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 4–14 March 2019*).
- Another factor that will impact on recruitment of prison staff, if a new prison was built at Grendon Underwood, is the fact that there are twelve prisons within 40 miles of the site housing in excess of 9,000 prison places. Also the two new prisons at Five Wells and Glen Parva are only 40 and 62 miles away respectively from the site. This will most likely result in competition for prison staff as working within the Prison Service is not the sort of opportunity that the majority of people tend to jump at.