

PROPOSED MEGA PRISON AT GRENDON UNDERWOOD

INFORMATION SHEET 7 ON GOOD DESIGN

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.

Scale and Landscape

- The prison site landscape is part of the Poundon – Charndon Settled Hills (LCA 7.1) and consists of rolling countryside with domed hills. The majority of the area is grass land with some arable farming. The condition of the landscape is good with strong hedgerows. The landscape has a distinctive character and a good sense of historic continuity. This produces a moderate sense of place.
- The main part of Grendon Underwood is part of the LCA 7.4 Kingswood Wooded Farmland (LCT 7) and the landscape character is of a 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.
- The landscape around the Grendon Underwood prison site is generally unified by its hedgerows and settlement pattern and has few visual detractors. However, the main visual detractor is recognised and acknowledged to be HMP Grendon and HMP Springhill, i.e. the two current prisons on the site. Hence even though they were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s they are still regarded as detractors to the local landscape.
- The proposed new ‘mega’ prison would be on a scale and of a design that would conflict with both the NPPF and the Aylesbury Vale Local Plan. The site planned for the new ‘mega’ prison is over an area of 29.5ha, significantly larger than the current two prisons on the site. The height of the planned accommodation blocks is four storeys (c. 17.5 m) but in reality they are five storeys high as many services will be located on top of each block. The other buildings on the site would range from one to three storeys high and c. 9.5-17.5 m high. The scale and height of these buildings will be exaggerated further because many of them will be situated on one of the highest parts of the local landscape, even with some site levelling these heights will be significant and have a detrimental impact on the landscape and visual impact. The nature of the buildings is more suited to an urban site rather than urbanizing a rural, green field site. As a result they will be visible from a very large part of the surrounding area and in particular from the majority of Edgcott, Springhill housing estate and the northern part of Grendon Underwood Main Street as well as a large part of the surrounding area.
- The proposed new prison would dwarf the existing prisons due to its scale and hence would be an even bigger detractor to the local rural landscape. The design of the buildings is much more suitable to an urban environment and would be constructed from blocks of pre-formed concrete.

Each and every building would be totally out of character with a rural location and would not achieve any of the following points specified in the AVL P:

- *New developments should be designed to reflect the traditional character of the area and use locally traditional materials;*
 - *Retain and enhance views from publically accessible land;*
 - *Maintain the strong rural character of minor roads with management of verges and hedgerows;*
- The above matters in the AVL P are related to housing developments but still remain relevant to any development in the countryside. After all we are the ones who have to live with the out of character design of the proposed buildings and the resultant and irreversible changes to the local landscape.
 - Furthermore the NPPF Paragraph 127 states that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:
 - a. *Will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
 - b. *Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
 - c. *Are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
 - The proposed design of the new mega prison would fail to meet any of the above criteria. Policy GP35 in the AVL P also states that the design of new development should respect and complement:
 - a) *The physical characteristics of the site and its surroundings;*
 - b) *Building tradition, ordering, form and materials of the locality;*
 - c) *The historic scale and context of the setting;*
 - d) *The natural qualities and features of the area; and*
 - e) *The effect on important public views and skylines.*

Due to the rural nature of the site, the local landscape and the surrounding heritage settlements, the proposed design and scale of the new mega prison fail to meet any of the criteria stated above.

- The proposed new 'mega' prison may be functional and meet requirements to function as a prison but the design is inappropriate and of a scale that is unsuited to a rural, green field setting. The fact that there are existing prisons on the site does not make the construction of a significantly larger prison, and of inappropriate design for a rural area, any more acceptable. The outline planning application for the proposed development should be rejected outright.

Heritage Assets (Listed Buildings)

- The prison site is surrounded by two important Heritage assets, namely Grendon Hall and Lawn House, and the construction of the proposed new mega prison would have an irreversible and high spectrum of harm on the setting of each of these assets. In addition Grendon Hall was

surrounded by a Historic Park and Pleasure Gardens a few years after it was built in the late 19th century.

- Grendon Hall is a country house built in the 1880s. Like other country houses of that era it had a park and pleasure gardens including a terrace, informal lawns with mature trees, shrubberies and parkland. The details of this Historic park have recently been reported (*Ref: Report by the Bucks Garden Trust on Grendon Hall, March, 2021, revised June 2021*). The 1880s design incorporated hedgerow trees as specimens in the new park and a straight main drive was framed by an avenue. Some of the early specimens of the gardens and park survive to this day. However, elements of the park have been lost to development including the 7ha housing estate in the south park and prison buildings east and south of the Hall. The rural setting of the Hall enjoys views over the Vale of Aylesbury but has been damaged by the large prison development immediately to the east. The building of a new mega prison in the setting of Grendon Hall, and of the proposed design, would cause further irreversible and significant harm to this remarkable and historic country house. To convert part of the Historic Park and Gardens of Grendon Hall could hardly be described as a feature of 'good design'; in fact it would be yet another irreversible form of urbanisation to an area of a rural design and nature.

 - **Paragraph 130 of the NPPF 2021** states that Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:
 - a) *Will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;* The proposed development adds no quality to the area but causes irreversible and substantial harm to public amenity, landscape and visual impact, noise and light pollution and Heritage assets.
 - b) *Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;* The proposed buildings are designed to be functional for a 'mega' prison and have been designed to a model which can be sited anywhere in the country, urban or otherwise and no account is taken of the setting in which they are transposed.
 - c) *Are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);* The proposed development will have an irreversible and significant impact on the density of buildings on the site and would involve developing 60 acres of land which is currently open countryside.
 - d) *Establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;* This aspect is clearly more relevant to housing developments. However, a 'mega' prison can hardly be described as welcoming to local residents and the current rural environment. The materials to be used are essentially all pre-fabricated concrete and could not be further away from the materials used to create the local heritage buildings nearby.
 - e) *Optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks;* There is no such mix in the proposed development. It is a standard 'prison kit' of buildings which be dumped on the top of a hill and resulting in the loss of 60 acres of green field space.
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f) Create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience. The prisoners will be well served with a high standard of amenity but the harm that results from that is a significant loss of amenity value for local residents.

2. Any Other Points

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

Residents to include further thoughts and views.