

## PROPOSED MEGA PRISON AT GRENDON UNDERWOOD

### INFORMATION SHEET 9 ON IMPACT ON CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF SURROUNDING AREA

#### 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.*

#### General Landscape

- The site of the proposed new mega prison is located within the 'Poundon – Charndon Settled Hills' Landscape Character Area (LCA 7.1) and the 'Woodland Rolling Lowlands' Landscape Character Type as defined by the Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment 2008. It is a predominantly pastoral area with limited woodland, although there are trees on top of the small rounded hills which are a feature. The LCA assessment of the 'Poundon - Charndon Settled Hills' concludes that the condition of the LCA as a whole is 'Moderate', with 'Moderate' sensitivity. The landscape is unified by hedgerows and the settlement pattern, with few visual detractors, this therefore makes the area strongly unified in terms of landscape character. Overall the landscape has a distinctive character and a good sense of historic continuity. However, Grendon and Springhill prisons are visual detractors at the far southern end.
- 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.

#### Grendon Hall and the Park and Gardens and their Contribution to the Character and Appearance

- The area within the prison site boundary represents the significant coherent remains of the original designed landscape. The Historic Park and Gardens for the 1880s country house, Grendon Hall, included terracing, informal lawns with mature trees and shrubberies, and the parkland. The layout survives considerably intact, except for a 7 ha housing estate in the south park and prison buildings in the pleasure grounds around the Hall to the east and south. A large prison compound lies adjacent in the setting to the east. The area within the site boundary represents the significant coherent remains of the designed landscape.
- Part of the site of the proposed new mega prison (*see Figure 1 below*), namely the field adjacent to Willow Lodge, is also part of the Historic Park and Gardens associated with Grendon Hall (*Report: Bucks Gardens Trust, Site Dossier: Grendon Hall, Aylesbury Vale Area March 2021, revised June 2021*). The area within the site boundary represents the significant coherent remains of the designed landscape.
- The layout of the Historic Park and Gardens of Grendon Hall comprises a largely typical ensemble of pleasure ground and park for a country house developed in the 1880s with buildings in Jacobean style. The 1880s design of the Grendon Hall Park and Gardens incorporated hedgerow trees as specimens in the new park and a straight main drive was framed by an avenue. Some of the early

specimens survive enclosing the informal lawns within the modest pleasure ground. Elements lost to development include the 7ha housing estate in the south park and prison buildings east and south of the Hall. The rural setting enjoys views over the Vale of Aylesbury but has been damaged by the large prison development immediately to the east of the Hall.



*Figure 1 Outline of the Grendon Hall Historical Park and Gardens*

### **Impact on Character and Appearance of the Area**

- The proposal would conflict with policy GP35 of the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan and would not constitute sustainable development. It would fail to comply with the core planning principles of the NPPF to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, to conserve and enhance the natural environment and to reuse land that has been previously developed. The development is of a scale and nature which would intrude into the rural amenities of the countryside at this green field site and would unacceptably increase the built form of this site to the detriment of its character and appearance. The development would give rise to significant adverse landscape and visual impacts on the landscape itself.
- Significant harm would be caused to the character and appearance of the area if a new site entrance and road to the development site, as well as the relocated football pitch, was placed in the field adjacent to Willow Lodge. This harm would be particularly evident and highly visible as the field slopes upwards towards Grendon Hall and hence could not be screened.

- The proposal for a new 'mega' prison would be poorly related to the existing settlement and would result in a harmful incursion into the local landscape and result in a significant and irreversible level of urbanisation.



Figure 2 Proposed layout of new 'mega' prison

- In the 20th C areas around Grendon Hall were built over, with the development of the prisons, much of which sits outside the historic boundary of the Historic Park and Gardens, and an area of the south park was lost to the Springhill housing estate. *Grendon Prison to the east was noted in 1994 as having bleak buildings of 1962 by the Ministry of Works (Pevsner)*. Views remain from the house north-east towards Edgcott and from the Historic Park and Pleasure Gardens south-west towards Mill Hill, Doddershall Wood, and south to the village of Grendon Underwood and Waddesdon Hill in the distance. The proposed development of the new 'mega' prison would further and irreversibly destroy the character and appearance of the landscape surrounding Grendon Hall as well as other parts of Edgcott and the Springhill housing estate.
- The proposed development would alter the landscape character of the whole site from open countryside to a very large urbanised development of tall and extremely large buildings positioned on the top of a hill. This change would be irreversible and cause significant harm to the site, its immediate setting and would be adverse in nature. A major concern is that the proposed development will lead to an extension of urbanisation into the open countryside, which would decrease the rural experience and approach when travelling from Grendon Underwood from the south, from Edgcott in the north and from Quanton and Buckingham from the east and north of Edgcott.
- Development of the new site entrance and road to the development site, and relocation of the football pitch to the same area, would have the effect of eroding the otherwise more open and rural landscape between the Springhill housing estate and the settlement of Edgcott. The development as a whole would appear particularly intrusive and out of place in the landscape

setting when viewed from parts of Edgcott, Grendon Road and from parts of public rights of way and pavements. Existing properties to the east of the Springhill housing estate would experience a significant and permanent change in their current countryside and rural view should the development go ahead.

- The proposal for a new mega prison would not accord with the design, character and appearance requirements of policy GP35 of the LP and paragraphs 170b and Chapter 12 of the Framework. Furthermore, there would be similar conflict with the design, character and appearance requirements of policies BE2, S1, S2 and NE4 of the VALP, given the consistency of these policies with the Framework.
- The proposal for a new 'mega' prison would have significant 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 Framework.
- Also see map plus landscape photos taken by Martin Rogers to highlight the views of the prison site from around the locality (*available from the Edgcott Parish Council website*).
- The new site entrance proposed from Grendon Road seems out of place in this location where the current prison gates and fencing, Grade II listed, are reminiscent of a grand entrance to a stately home through parkland, it feels unnatural for this type of development to be even considered.
- There are two public rights of way located within the site itself and users of the one that passes past Grendon Hall and onto the main site where the prison would be constructed, would experience direct views into the proposed car park and new prison buildings. These views at present are of open countryside, ecological areas of interest and provide a sense of peace and tranquillity in a countryside setting. Development in this location would make this a very different and deleterious experience for the public, causing visual disruption, altering the perception of tranquillity and open landscape that at present the site provides.
- Whilst it would be possible to opt for significant belts of additional planting, as shown on the indicative plans, this would take many years to reach maturity.
- The field designated for location of the new site entrance, road to the new site and the football pitch forms a green edge to the Springhill housing estate and the impression one gets when driving along the main road and past the site is an area which is rural and open in character. Given the open and green nature of the site it contributes positively to the prevailing character and appearance of the immediate area.
- The residential property, Willow Lodge, located at the entrance to the Springhill estate would experience significant and irreversible adverse visual effects if the development were to proceed, due to its sensitivity and close proximity to the proposed site entrance, new road and football pitch. No landscape mitigation could detract from this matter and the resulting harm that would be caused.
- The proposal 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 houses on the northern part of the Springhill estate are highly sensitive residential receptors, these properties face the application site and would experience permanent and significant adverse effects if the proposal were to go ahead.
- Night time visual effects in a rural context also have to be considered. A development of this scale within an area of mostly undeveloped countryside would have major adverse effects on the surrounding landscape in terms of night time visual experience with the significant level of lighting required for the operation of a 'mega' prison. Due to the main part of the site being on a hill and visible from most directions the night time visual effect would be highly significant. The lighting of the new road into the site and football pitch, especially during the darker months of the year would cause a major adverse effect on the Springhill estate and other properties in Edgcott, Quainton Road/Lawn Hill Edgcott and those in Main Street of Grendon Underwood.
- In summary it is considered that the current site, both the field adjacent to Grendon Road, and the area to the north of Grendon Hall currently contribute to a sense of place and belongs to a network of open fields in the surrounding landscape. The development of a new 'mega' prison would not represent the natural evolution of the existing settlement. The site is widely prominent and the visual impact of the proposal would be apparent from public vantage points from around the whole area, from roads and from the residential properties near the site and in particular to the north and east of the site.
- The proposed development of the new 'mega' prison would be likely to result in significant adverse landscape character and visual impacts to the immediate site and the surrounding countryside. As such the development would be contrary to policy GP35 of the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan and to the aims of the NPPF and this matter should be afforded significant negative weight in the planning balance.
- The proposed development of a new 'mega' prison development would lead to an extension of development into the open countryside. As a result, this would not be in keeping with the settlement pattern as described in the LCA assessment, nor would this contribute to or enhance the physical characteristics of the site and its surroundings.
- The site field adjacent to Willow Lodge as well as the area both west and north of Grendon Hall has recreational value to local residents and users of the public rights of way. The site contributes to a sense of place and belongs to a network of open fields in the surrounding rural landscape.
- This site where the development is proposed is nucleated, rural in nature and the proposed development would not respect or complement the existing characteristics of the landscape base line and therefore is in conflict with saved policy GP35 of the Aylesbury Vale Local Plan (AVLP).
- New landscaping would take some time to become established and whilst it would soften the appearance of the proposed development to a mild extent it would not screen it from view. In addition the proposed screening landscaping is deciduous. In any event the proposed development would be visible above and through gaps in the landscaping and through the access drive. Thus the existing, and any proposed landscaping, would not overcome the harm identified. Furthermore, any relocation of the public rights of way would not outweigh the harm to users of the public rights of way arising from the character and appearance of the proposed development.

## **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 Character and Appearance 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 character and visual impact in this part of the site.

## **2. Any Other Points**

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

**Add any other resident thoughts and views.**