



Toppesfield Parish Council



C/O 2 Gunces Farm Cottages
Stambourne Road
Great Yeldham
Halstead
Essex
CO9 4RB

Ministry of Justice
PO Box 347
Manchester M21 3ES

5th November 2021

Dear Sirs

Re: Wethersfield mega-Prisons Proposal – Response to Consultation Paper

I have been asked by Toppesfield Parish Council to respond to the Consultation Paper issued by the Ministry in September 2021.

These comments are based on a discussion of the Parish Council on the topic which, itself, has been informed by a well-attended public meeting held in the village on 28 October 2021.

The proposal has raised a several issues of concern to a large number of people in the village. The public meeting on the topic resulted in an overwhelming vote by those present to oppose object to the proposals.

- The objections raised include but are not limited to:
 - Inadequate road infrastructure, including narrow lanes and bridges; for much of the year there is a large volume of agricultural traffic on many of the roads – tractors, combines, grain lorries etc. The problems this already causes will be exacerbated by the high level of traffic movements that would result from the proposed project.
 - Distance from main roads and public transport. The A120 is 10 miles away from the airbase and is accessed only by small roads.
 - Impact on built environment: there are very many listed buildings along the narrow roads in the area and these would be at great risk from the passing heavy traffic.
 - Impact on natural environment: the greater part of the airbase has been effectively protected for decades and is a haven for flora and fauna.
 - Pollution: light, visual and noise pollution would have a negative impact on the surrounding villages and hamlets as the base is on an elevated position in an area of designated landscape value; the prison would be visible for miles around.
 - This is an area of relatively low unemployment, so the provision of a large number of new jobs would address a problem that does not exist.
 - This is currently an area with a mix of limited housing availability and expensive properties. The resulting influx of new people would worsen this problem, with an impact especially on the young.
 - Concerns over security: this relates not so much from possible escapees, but from the perspective of the increase in drugs coming into the area and the impact this would have on local schools and on neighbouring landowners.
 - Pressure on local NHS services, especially ambulance services, which are already stretched.

- The sheer scale of the proposed project: this would be, by far, the largest prison complex in the UK developed in a relatively remote, rural location.

It is understood that with the MoD vacating the site by 2025, there needs to be a plan for this large site. A review of potential uses, involving the local population would be a constructive approach. One idea that has been suggested is, while the eyes of the world are focused on COP26, to use this site in England's sunniest region to address the real No.1 challenge we face, viz. the climate and environmental crisis, and develop a solar park. There are many other possibilities that would not have the same impact as a mega-prison.

Yours sincerely

KBerry

Kaaren Berry

Clerk to Toppesfield Parish Council