



GRENDON UNDERWOOD PARISH COUNCIL

In association with **EDGCOTT PARISH COUNCIL**

FAO Ms Danika Hird, Senior Planning Officer

Re: Outline Planning Application with all matters reserved except for access and scale for the construction of a new Category C prison (up to 67,000 sqm GEA) within a secure perimeter fence together with access, parking, landscaping and associated engineering works (application reference 21/02851/AOP). Applicants being the Ministry of Justice (MOJ).

Dear Ms Hird,

In response to recent, late submissions by the applicant, the Parish Councils of Grendon Underwood and Edgcott, both jointly and severally, further object to subject application in respect of the loss of local amenity space and the safety of local residents. Currently, the inmates of HMP Springhill use the field on the northern edge of the site for sporting and recreational purposes. Located there is a football pitch, an indoor gym and a large field for general recreational purposes. There is a public footpath GUN/17/1 that runs along the edge of this field before passing into land used for agricultural purposes. This footpath starts on Springhill Road, passes in front of Grendon Hall where parts of the historic gardens can be admired and then passes by some of the prison buildings (security fence between the buildings and the footpath) and into the ecological area where the pond is located. This path then enters the recreational field mentioned above. Residents currently have a choice as to how far along this path they walk if they want to avoid coming into contact with any prison inmates. Some residents walk the full length of the path and pass through the prison recreational field and beyond. However, some residents feel uncomfortable walking much past the section that passes in front of Grendon Hall and would prefer to turn round at the point before the footpath leads to the first set of prison buildings. In effect there is a 'soft boundary' between the amenity space available to residents and the recreational area used by the inmates.

As the whole of the current recreational field is to be used as part of the construction site for the new 'mega' prison, the football pitch is to be relocated to the field which lies between Edgcott Road and Grendon Hall along with some external gym equipment. In addition flood lighting will be installed for the football pitch. Furthermore and very significantly this whole field will become the recreational space for the inmates of HMP Springhill. It is only right that the inmates should have some recreational space but these changes mean that there will no longer be a 'soft boundary' between residents and inmates. This will result in uncontrolled mixing between inmates and residents as residents will never know in advance whether or not they might meet inmates when going for a walk along the public footpaths or a run round the proposed running track, if they are allowed access to the latter. As a result many residents may choose not to use the public footpaths anymore due to safety concerns and hence will lose one important amenity space very close to where they live.

As well as the changes outlined above, a new site road will be constructed along the edge of this field and will run from Edgcott Road to the proposed new prison site and would be around 600-700 m long. Also some further planting is proposed at the top end of this field. All of these changes outlined here will result in a loss of approximately 80% of the current ancient ridge and furrow located in this area. This particular area of ridge and furrow is part of a much larger region of this ancient agricultural practice and this field also is part of the Historic Park and Gardens of Grendon Hall. This particular field offers a green edge to Willow Lodge and the housing in Springhill and is an important feature of the local landscape. Rather than being irreversibly destroyed, this area of ridge and furrow and the landscape features and open green space that it enhances should be preserved.

By transforming the field mentioned above from an historic landscape and green space into a recreational space for HMP Springhill inmates will also have further negative impacts on local residents and amenity values. Even when the inmates play football on the current pitch the aggressive noise and foul language associated

with this sport can be heard across much of Edgcott and the Springhill estate. If the pitch is relocated to the proposed position the noise pollution will be significantly increased for those on the edge of the Springhill estate, Willow Lodge and the southern part of Edgcott along Grendon Road. Furthermore it is clearly planned for the pitch to be used when flood lights are required hence extending the periods of time when local residents will have to experience the noise pollution and in addition they will also suffer light pollution. Some 2m high acoustic fencing is proposed along the side of the football pitch adjacent to Springhill Road. This is purely a gesture and will make virtually no impact on the noise levels that will be experienced by local residents. To have a respectable impact on the noise levels the fence would need to be 5m high and surround the whole football pitch.

The largest concentration of young children in the area is on Springhill and these children would be exposed to the noise and light pollution from the football pitch, potential disturbance when trying to sleep and more importantly their lives would be dominated by the knowledge that prisoners are located nearby and would become too common a feature of their lives. Although residents in the parishes of Grendon Underwood and Edgcott have reluctantly accepted the presence of the current prisons, there has been no development of any significance on the site for around sixty years. Hence this site is an established and stable environment. The changes proposed would cause significant and irreversible changes for residents in the form of a reduction in the available amenity space plus concerns about safety and security.

One other factor that residents local to the current prisons have had to tolerate over many years is the constant hazard of drug, food and clothing drop offs for inmates. It is not the drop offs alone that cause concerns to local residents, it is the kind of people that such activities draw to the area. The drop off zones are widespread and vary from hedgerows close to the prison as well as the field adjacent to the ecology area which is owned by Lawn House. The owners of this property regularly have their boundary fences damaged due to inmates climbing over to retrieve the drop offs. As the recreational area for the HMP Springhill inmates would move to the field discussed in detail above, it would be close to more housing and become a potential hotspot of drop off activity. This is something clearly not considered by the applicant because they don't have to live with this issue on a weekly basis. There will be an even more significant risk of youngsters or pets discovering drop offs and unease from residents that the people making these drop offs would be travelling even closer to properties than before, with a resulting greater security risk.

All of the changes and issues discussed above are due to one reason. That is the site selected for a new 'mega' prison in Buckinghamshire is purely because the Ministry of Justice own the land. The site is unsustainable, is in a remote country location and is compromised in both shape and size. Hence there is insufficient room on the main site to accommodate both the new prison and maintain all the existing facilities on that site. The football pitch is only being relocated due to a poor choice in location for the proposed new 'mega' prison.

In conclusion the steps that would need to be taken to address the challenges with constructing a new 'mega' prison on the proposed site would result in significant and irreversible harm to the amenity space and value for a wide range of local residents. The level of noise and light pollution from football games would be unacceptable and a stark reminder that prison inmates are located nearby. There would no longer be a 'soft boundary' between the Springhill prison inmates and local residents which would result in residents feeling less secure. The area destined for the football pitch and the running track is highly likely to become a hotspot for drop offs for drugs and other items which would be closer to residential property than is currently the case. This could easily give rise to conflict between local residents and those making the drop offs.

The problems identified are due to a fundamental flaw in the site selection process and the compromised shape and size of the site proposed. This application should be rejected outright.

Compiled by Grendon Underwood and Edgcott Parish Council Joint Working Party. Chairman: Dr Rod Baker