

Firstly I would like to give my thanks for allowing me to speak in opposition of this appeal.

There are three substantive points I would like to speak about and being mindful of others wishing to address the meeting I will keep my points brief but also try to convey my utter dismay with the fact that we even find ourselves here today;

The first point I wish to highlight is the rather under-hand and distasteful tactics that have been used by the MoJ or those representing its interests during both the original and this appeal process.

Despite attempting to display an outward sense of engagement and consultation, this application has been conducted using fear, misinformation, or no information, and with a complete disregard for the opinions and views of the local communities. As time is somewhat limited I will highlight just a couple of examples.

At the public meetings representatives in support of this application made a point of telling people “better to have a prison than 300 houses on the land”, implying that local residents should prepare themselves for either one or the other to happen. What makes such comments even more cynical is the fact that they were used, predominately, when talking to the elderly and the more vulnerable people in our communities. To be clear, this is not ‘hearsay’ I have been present at meetings and whilst I will not be fooled by such ambiguous statements it was a significant worry raised by many of senior citizens of our local communities. Clearly any such application for an expansive housing development would need great scrutiny and would have to follow a due process and, just like the application currently being discussed, many of the issues which make this inappropriate, they would also apply to such a large scale housing development but this fact didn’t stop representatives treating local residents with complete disdain in this matter.

At the time of the public meetings significant 106 inducements for the local communities were contained within presentations and were highlighted at every opportunity, items touted included vehicle activated signage, improvements to pedestrian refuge, traffic calming, enable Foxton to be a 20mph zone, gateway features at the entrance to villages plus others.....I note that virtually every direct and quantifiable community benefit offered now appears to have disappeared completely. Whilst some of these items may not have carried a legal obligation for completion, there certainly existed a moral obligation to make good on such promises.

There are further examples but what this does, I believe, is highlight is a distinct Modus Operandi in trying fool and scare local communities into accepting this proposal and the people involved should be ashamed of such a disingenuous approach.

My second point is in relation to the location of the proposed 'Super Prison'. I don't not believe, when searching for a suitable location for such a development, anyone would suggest or recommend a location opposite a village school, close to a Grade Two listed tourist attraction, one which will have a massive negative impact on local ecology, with the likelihood of contributing to existing flooding issues, with poor local road access, that has attracted wide-spread condemnation and objection from within the local communities with thousands objecting and signing petitions and within an economic area with a proven inability to attract the necessary workers to adequately staff such a facility. This last point is of vital significance; HM Inspector of Prisons reports highlight the issues at the current Gartree facility as a direct result of inadequate staffing, and I quote some headline facts from various reports spanning more than 8 years;

The prison has lost its way

Stability previously praised, undermined by staff shortages

Acute staff shortages were having considerable and detrimental impact on prisoners' daily regime

Prisoners are regularly locked up for substantial periods of the day for an amount which the HMIP considered excessive

Acute staff shortages prevented the prison from delivering a full and decent regime that was appropriate for a training prison

Too many prisoners remained locked in their cell because of insufficient uniformed staff to escort them to purposeful activities

Staff shortages have led to inadequate substance misuse abuse provision and psychological support services

Patient access to secondary care services were also affected by staff shortages with 10% being cancelled altogether.

It appears the location selected would not even be in the best interests of the likely prison population or the under-staffed, over-worked people employed at the site.

The prime reason for selecting the Gartree Site for this prison seems abundantly clear. I have read the hastily compiled Site Search document which resembles little more than a timeline extrapolation and the Needs of Evidence document which, interestingly is dated some 4 months after the decision to appeal the planning application. Therefore, I conclude my second point by stating the decision for selecting the Gartree site is simply that the MoJ already owns the land and believes it makes Gartree a simple and cheap solution and this is quite clearly both a flawed and incorrect site selection approach for such a massive, large scale development.

My final point concerns the increased traffic, subsequent nuisance, air and noise pollution and the ensuing danger to local residents and visitors alike. I noted from submissions that it is stated that there will be 0.0% additional traffic through Foxton; this assertion is neither true nor credible, however, even if traffic to the prison does not use Foxton as a 'cut through' the increased traffic the prison development would bring would certainly mean local traffic will try to avoid the inevitable bottle necks and pinch points and use Foxton village roads as a means to avoid the congestion, hence creating a lose-lose situation for the community of Foxton. I would strongly urge, and respectfully suggest, a closer look at the road network through Foxton; the sharp bends, the single file pass points over hump-backed canal bridges and lack of pedestrian footpaths along some of the roads the MoJ have suggested could be used to alleviate the parking problems which will manifest themselves outside the school. One should further keep in mind the significant congestion and dangers already caused when, for example, the church is used for weddings and funerals, the village hall for parties and events and that the village pub has just lost a significant amount of car parking due to a residential dwelling approval. With no true plan to mitigate these dangers, it is another reason why this proposal is clearly unacceptable and should fail.

I would like to raise just two points in summary:

The first, given that the hard pressed local communities have essentially, through taxes, funded the MoJ defence of this appeal, funded the HDC in their objections and have now also had to dig into savings to fund the community defence, then when justice is served and this appeal fails, the MoJ should seriously consider refunding the local residents so that, perhaps, instead of having to fund the defence of such frivolous and ill-conceived proposals, they will be able to afford to pay to heat and light their homes in what is one of the worse cost of living crisis in the last 50 years.

The last statement is very short and I ask that you take note of the recent statement made in July this year by none other than the Prime Minister herself, and that was:

To "put the power back in Local Councillors hands who know far better than Whitehall what their communities want". Perhaps the people concerned with this appeal will follow the wishes of the leader of the country and agree with the decision already unanimously and democratically arrived at by HDC and indeed, allow Local Councillors to deliver what their communities so obviously want.

My wife and I would like to place on record our gratitude to the people who have donated thousands of pounds and 100 of hours of unpaid time to fight the injustice of this ill-conceived, ill-thought-out planning application. At a time when Foxton church is in need of £25,000 for restoration work, we are having to spend money on this?