

## **GARTREE PRISON HEARING AT MARKET HARBOROUGH COUNCIL OFFICES**

*(Highlighted are items that I would like the Inspector to look into further to check questionable information supplied by the MoJ).*

**MADAM INSPECTOR:** Thank you for letting me speak here today. Whilst there are many reasons for objecting to the proposed planning application I will draw your attention to just three.

### **FIRSTLY: DESIGN OF THE PROPOSED PRISON**

It is clear for all to see that this proposed prison is completely inappropriate in such a rural location.

The Harborough District Council committee report suggests that...*'Due to the fact that the application is currently in Outline form, the external appearance of the development is not for consideration or determination at this stage. The appearance of the buildings will be influenced by the security requirements of prison development'*

**INSPECTOR: How can the impact of such a huge structure on the countryside be determined without this information being available? If this proposed planning application is granted there'll be little opportunity for influence on the design.**

One has only to drive past the new super prison at Wellingborough to see the size, scale and design of that prison to realise how inappropriate this new super prison would be on the site adjoining Gartree village.

With the buildings being four stories high and with the security constraints there is very limited opportunity to screen them or prevent the light pollution that will spread from the cells, as it does in Wellingborough. The proposed site at Gartree is situated in a 'dark corridor', therefore, the light pollution created by this huge prison will be visible from miles away.

**INSPECTOR: I believe you are going to have a look at the exterior of the prison at Wellingborough. I urge you to drive past there after dark so you can see for yourself the intrusion that such lighting would have in the countryside location here at Gartree. Thank you for doing that and I sincerely hope that the new Justice Secretary, Brandon Lewis will do the same and visit the proposed site at Gartree as well as see the exterior of Wellingborough prison.**

### **SECONDLY: THE GARTREE SITE IS CLEARLY NOT SUITABLE OR SUSTAINABLE**

Gartree is considered by Harborough District Council to be an unsustainable settlement so how can this site be sustainable for a large enterprise like a huge prison. Everyone will have to travel by private vehicle to get there and there are no shops or cafes nearby for staff or visitors to get last minute snacks or lunches.

The MoJ claimed that they looked at many sites but rejected them all saying that the rural location of Gartree is the best location for a new super prison. I have not been able to find any information of the other sites the MoJ considered before choosing Gartree. Which immediately makes one wonder if any were even considered or if this site was simply chosen because the MoJ own the land.

I was under the impression that 'The Freedom of Information' Act meant that authorities, such as the MoJ, should be transparent in all their dealings and are obliged to publish information that has been requested. I believe that Harborough District Council also offered the MoJ an alternative site at Magna Park which actually matched their requirements and is a more appropriate site due to the excellent transport links and available workforce in the local area. However, the MoJ state that the use of MoJ land would bring forward the scheme more quickly. Clearly, the MoJ had not factored into their timescale the numerous 'Appeals' they would be involved in.

**INSPECTOR: Please could you insist that information on alternative sites is provided and why they were discounted as it seems this is an integral part of the decision on why the MoJ chose Gartree as the location for a new super prison.**

Unbelievably, there are around the UK, unused brownfield MoD sites that could be used. It clearly would be a very simple thing for the MoD to transfer land to the MoJ.

Instead of which the MoJ are using taxpayers money to hire, at great expense, KC's and consultants to fight not just this Appeal but all the appeals and in turn requiring the local authorities to pay for barristers and consultants, ALL at the expense of the taxpayer!

## **LASTLY: THE NEED FOR EXTRA PRISON SPACE & RECOGNISED STAFFING ISSUES**

**If the need for prison spaces is so urgent, why has the MoJ withdrawn the application to extend the existing prison at Gartree?** This would have resulted in a much quicker build as this would be within the existing grounds and not development in the 'Open Countryside'.

We are told by the MoJ that they need additional prison spaces around the **entire** country. I cannot, however, see the logic of putting another huge prison at Gartree with the new super prison at Wellingborough only half an hour away and the new super prison at Glen Parva, half an hour away in the other direction. It is short sighted to **saturate** one area with super prisons... in fact it is a complete nonsense. Out of the six new 'super' prisons they are suggesting putting three of them in this area. There would be absolutely no hope of being able to fully staff the new prison at Gartree.

I know from very well informed sources working at Gartree and ex-prison officers that there are long-term issues with staffing levels at Gartree prison. By the very nature of their work, my sources are only prepared to speak to me off the record.

**INSPECTOR: I, therefore, urge you to look into the situation of vacancies at Gartree prison by simply asking HR team there to explain the challenges with operating a prison at this site & the impact the staff shortages has on the prison.**

As you know, Harborough District has, and always had very low unemployment levels. If the prison service and its appointed contractors can't find enough staff to run the existing Gartree prison properly, how can it possibly make the new prison work?

Gartree prison, just like the proposed Gartree 2, is a Category B Trainer Prison. Yet **staff shortages mean that there is very little training at all and due to a lack of teachers, therefore, the prisoners are not being prepared for release!** Even worse, due to a lack of officers, many prisoners are locked up for 22 hours per day... practically solitary confinement. Not only is the MoJ failing to rehabilitate prisoners, their mental health is suffering, making a bad situation worse.

**I doubt very much that the MoJ have informed you as to quite how bad the staffing crisis is at Gartree prison.**

The information I have obtained with my limited research powers, as of today, regarding vacancies in the prison, is as follows:

Healthcare Assistant  
Nurse  
Caterers  
39 Prison Officers  
7 Operation Support Grades  
Order Distributor (employed by DHL)  
Waste Management Lecturer (employed by MK College)  
Inclusion Practitioner (employed by MK College)  
Chaplain  
Prison Pharmacy Technician  
Electrician (employed by Amey)  
Family Support Worker (employed by the Prison Advice & Care Trust)

That's even without thinking about the literally hundreds of similar jobs vacancies in nearby prisons such as Wellingborough, Onley and Leicester. The Glen Parva prison is due to open next year, which will make this desperate situation even worse.

**INSPECTOR: I ask yourself and the Justice Secretary, Brandon Lewis to look into how this prison could possibly be fully staffed if it is built in such *close proximity to existing huge prisons*. I urge you to make independent inquiries to HMP Gartree to understand the impact of the staffing crisis on prisoners before you make a judgment on whether the MoJ can operate a second far larger prison in the village.**

It is disturbing, but relevant, to note that on the 'MoJ's IPP Factsheet' there are 6,500 prisoners who are serving IPP Sentences. Out of this at least **3,000 prisoners who are, at present, trapped under indefinite jail terms, should be released!** Let me give you an example: one male prisoner who was sentenced to 6 years in prison for theft is still in prison 16 years on. Another female prisoner sentenced to 4 years for theft is still in prison, I believe, 10 years on. **Is this the MoJ's idea of rehabilitation?** Campaigning is going ahead now for the release of these prisoners.

The question has to be asked... **do we actually do need the amount of extra prison spaces the MoJ claim we need?**