

Objection to the Proposed Expansion of Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre (Phase 2)

Application Reference: CROWN/2026/0000004

Submitted by: Cllr Ian Middleton, Kidlington East Ward

Introduction

I strongly object to the proposed expansion of Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) through the provision of an additional 240 detention places. This objection is based on clear planning, transport, economic, environmental and public-interest grounds, and on the failure of the application to demonstrate either a proven need for the development or its compatibility with the established planning framework for the area.

The proposal conflicts with the development plan, including the Cherwell Local Plan 2011–2031, is inconsistent with the Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) 2022–2050, and fails to accord with key provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024).

Furthermore, significant deficiencies in the submitted information prevent meaningful public scrutiny and make a fully informed planning assessment impossible.

1. Need for Additional Detention Capacity Has Not Been Proven

The Government's justification for this proposal rests upon an assertion that additional immigration detention accommodation is required. However, no convincing evidence has been provided to support this claim.

The Government's own detention statistics for March 2026 indicate that **651 detention places were vacant out of approximately 2,356 available places nationwide**, representing more than one-quarter of the existing estate. The existence of substantial unused capacity fundamentally undermines the argument that a further 240 places at Campsfield House are necessary.

Equally significant is the fact that the majority of detainees released from immigration detention do not leave the United Kingdom. Government data indicates that approximately **56% of individuals leaving detention remain in the UK**, raising serious questions about the effectiveness and necessity of detention itself.

In these circumstances, the claimed "national importance" of the proposal is not evidenced. The Planning Inspectorate should attach limited weight to assertions of need that are unsupported by robust evidence.

This is particularly important in light of the NPPF's presumption in favour of sustainable development and the requirement that planning decisions contribute to economic, social and environmental objectives in an integrated manner (paragraphs 8–11 of the NPPF). The Government has not demonstrated that this development represents sustainable development when measured against those objectives.

2. The Proposal Is Inappropriate in a Strategic Employment and Innovation Area

The site lies within an area that has been the focus of long-term strategic planning for knowledge-based employment growth associated with:

- Oxford Technology Park
- Begbroke Innovation District
- London Oxford Airport employment corridor
- The wider Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor

The land surrounding Campsfield was removed from the Green Belt specifically to facilitate economic development associated with high-value employment uses.

The proposal directly conflicts with the following planning policies:

Cherwell Local Plan Policy SLE1 – Employment Development

Policy SLE1 seeks to support economic growth, innovation, research and development, and high-value employment opportunities. The Langford Lane corridor and adjoining innovation districts form a key component of this strategy.

A secure detention facility cannot reasonably be characterised as the form of high-value employment envisaged by that policy. As former MP Nicola Blackwood observed when considering an earlier Campsfield proposal:

"I cannot see how this Local Plan Policy, calling for higher value employment uses such as high technology industries in the research and development sector, could possibly be interpreted to include employment at an Immigration Removal Facility."

That criticism remains equally valid today.

Policy Kidlington 1

Policy Kidlington 1 promotes:

- Investment in Begbroke Science Park
- The Langford Lane technology corridor
- High-value employment opportunities
- A strong, innovation-led economy

The expansion of a custodial institution in the centre of this strategic employment area is fundamentally at odds with those objectives.

The proposal risks undermining the attractiveness and reputation of neighbouring investment locations. Companies involved in advanced engineering, digital technologies and life sciences seek environments associated with innovation and collaboration. A significantly enlarged detention centre introduces reputational risks and ongoing controversy that may discourage future inward investment.

There is also the likely possibility of sustained and continued demonstrations against the operation of the facility along with disruptions as a result of internal unrest as was demonstrated during the previous period of operation of the facility. None of this is conducive to the character of the area as a high-tech innovation district intended to attract significant overseas investment. As such this runs contrary to the government's stated aim to increase economic growth.

Furthermore, the proposed development site is not genuinely "previously developed employment land." The application itself acknowledges that the land is not currently developed. The proposed three-storey detention block would represent a substantial and incongruous built form and would materially alter the character of the site.

3. Conflict with National Planning Policy on Economic Growth

The NPPF requires planning decisions to support economic growth and productivity.

Paragraph 85 states that planning decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Paragraph 86 requires significant weight to be placed on supporting economic growth and productivity. The proposal does the opposite.

As referenced above, rather than supporting the expansion of strategic employment uses, it sterilises land within one of Oxfordshire's most important innovation corridors with a use that contributes little to the area's economic vision and may actively deter future investment.

The proposal therefore conflicts with both local and national economic development policy.

4. Infrastructure Impacts and Conflict with Strategic Transport Objectives

The development is at odds with the growth assumptions incorporated into Cherwell's adopted and emerging planning frameworks.

The application would impose additional pressures on :

- Langford Lane
- The A44 corridor
- Local junctions
- Public transport services
- Drainage infrastructure
- Water resources
- Wastewater capacity
- Flood management systems

These impacts have not been comprehensively assessed against cumulative growth already planned in the area which is very extensive and only now starting to become evident on the ground.

This is particularly important given:

- Expansion plans at Begbroke Innovation District
- Oxford Technology Park growth
- Major housing allocations as part of the Local Plan Partial Review
- The proposed Oxford United stadium development
- Wider Oxford-Cambridge Corridor growth

Conflict with Oxfordshire LTCP 2022–2050

As a County Councillor I am particularly concerned that the proposal is inconsistent with the objectives of the Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 2022–2050.

The LTCP seeks to :

- Reduce unnecessary motor vehicle trips
- Prioritise walking, cycling and public transport
- Support sustainable growth in strategic employment locations
- Reduce congestion and carbon emissions
- Create healthier and more connected communities

The proposed expansion will generate additional staff, contractor, security, visitor and operational vehicle movements while contributing nothing to the delivery of the LTCP's transport transformation objectives.

Instead, it represents a land use that is heavily dependent on vehicle-based operational activity, and which sits awkwardly within an area where transport planning is being shaped around innovation-led development and sustainable movement.

The proposal therefore conflicts with both county transport strategy and NPPF provisions relating to sustainable transport.

Paragraphs 109–118 of the NPPF emphasise that development should provide safe and suitable access, support sustainable transport modes and make effective use of transport infrastructure.

5. Serious Concerns Regarding Redacted Information

The application should not be approved because critical information necessary for proper assessment has been withheld or heavily redacted.

This includes:

- Floor plans
- Operational arrangements
- Detainee movement information
- Parts of the transport assessment

Without access to these documents, local authorities cannot properly assess impacts, residents cannot scrutinise proposals, welfare implications cannot be understood, and transport impacts cannot be independently verified.

Such omissions undermine confidence in the application and frustrate meaningful public participation in the planning process.

6. Unsupported Financial Claims

The application repeatedly suggests that the proposal represents "value for money". No evidence has been provided to support that assertion. No business case, cost-benefit assessment or financial appraisal has been published.

Consequently, the claim carries little or no evidential weight and should be disregarded.

7. Predictable Human Harm and Ongoing Community Impacts

Successive government reviews and independent inspections have confirmed that immigration detention causes significant harm to mental health and wellbeing.

The previous operation of Campsfield was marked by :

- Hunger strikes
- Disturbances
- Escapes
- Acts of self-harm
- Fires
- Deaths

The centre was ultimately closed in 2018 after years of controversy and sustained campaigning.

A large-scale detention facility inevitably generates ongoing protest activity, reputational damage and social tension. Those impacts are material in an area whose future is intended to be based on innovation, research, collaboration and investment.

The proposal therefore conflicts with the social dimension of sustainable development and with NPPF objectives promoting healthy, safe and inclusive communities.

8. Conflict with Design and Landscape Policies

Policy ESD15 – Design

Policy ESD15 requires development to deliver high-quality design that responds positively to local character and context.

A substantial three-storey custodial building surrounded by security infrastructure does not positively contribute to the emerging character of this area as a leading science and technology district.

Policy ESD13 – Local Landscape Protection and Enhancement

Policy ESD13 requires conservation and enhancement of landscape character and visual quality.

The proposed development would introduce an institutional and defensive built form that is visually inconsistent with surrounding innovation and business development and the growing residential area.

Policy ESD1 – Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change

Policy ESD1 requires developments to contribute to sustainable patterns of growth and reduced carbon impacts.

Given its operational nature and transport demands, the proposal fails to demonstrate alignment with those objectives.

9. Widespread and Sustained Local Opposition

This proposal lacks a social licence to operate.

Opposition has been expressed by :

- Parish councils
- Cherwell District Council
- Oxford City Council
- Oxfordshire County Council
- The local Member of Parliament
- All local councillors, including myself
- Community organisations
- Many individual residents

Cherwell District Council passed a motion in 2024, brought by me (see below), opposing the reopening and expansion of Campsfield. The County Council also passed a similar motion.

Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council and the University of Oxford are all associated with the City of Sanctuary movement, reflecting a markedly different vision for how migrants and asylum seekers should be supported.

The Planning Inspectorate should give substantial weight to this exceptionally broad and sustained local opposition.

10. Better Alternatives Exist

Sir Stephen Shaw's independent reviews concluded that immigration detention is frequently harmful, ineffective and poor value for money.

The subsequent move towards community-based alternatives led directly to the closure of Campsfield and other detention centres.

Evidence from those programmes demonstrated higher engagement rates, lower costs and more humane outcomes

The Government has failed to explain why those alternatives should now be displaced by a significant expansion of detention capacity.

11. A Further Public Inquiry Is Necessary

Given :

- The scale of local opposition
- Conflict with local planning objectives
- Conflict with strategic employment aspirations
- Significant transport implications
- Landscape and design concerns
- Redacted evidence
- Uncertainty regarding need

it would be inappropriate for the application to proceed to approval without a full and comprehensive public inquiry.

The Crown Development process should not be used to circumvent proper democratic scrutiny where a proposal has such profound implications for the local area.

12. Conflicts with adopted CDC policy as per motion passed on 21/10/24

Having read the recommendation from officers on this application I am surprised to see that there is no reference to the motion that was passed by full council on 21 October 2024 opposing the reopening and expansion of Campfields IRC.

The motion was proposed by me and seconded by Cllr Walker and read as follows :

“Campsfield House Immigration Detention Centre in Kidlington was closed in 2019 after decades of campaigning by refugee support groups and Cherwell residents, and the publication of two government commissioned reviews criticising the UK’s migrant detention system. The leader of the reviews, the Prison Ombudsman, Sir Stephen Shaw, described the detention system as indiscriminate, inhumane and hugely wasteful.

In 2022 the Conservatives announced plans to re-open and double the size of Campsfield House to support its Rwanda Resettlement Scheme. The new Labour government have thankfully cancelled that scheme, removing the main rationale for the plans for Campsfield, but they have since announced their intention to continue with the re-opening. This has been criticised by migrants’ rights groups including Asylum Welcome, Detention Action, The Refugee Council, Amnesty International UK and the Keep Campsfield Closed group.

Cherwell has a proud tradition of welcoming refugees and providing sanctuary from oppression and war. The re-opening of Campsfield House is a stain on our district and contradicts government recommendations into migrant detention in the UK.

Council therefore requests that the Leader of the Council writes to the Home Secretary calling on her to :

1. Abandon the re-opening of Campsfield House.
2. Outline plans to reduce, rather than increase, the number of people held in detention.
3. Focus on accelerating the processing of asylum claims to reduce the huge number of individuals trapped in the system.

4. Develop a more humane migration policy, including the establishment of safe and legal routes for people to claim asylum.”

As this motion was adopted by council it became a policy CDC which remains in place.

Much as I appreciate that the CDC is responding to the current proposals on the basis of planning matters, I feel it's a notable omission that the council's position on the re-opening, and by the same principle, the expansion of Campsfield IRC has not been included in our response to the government. At the very least I feel there should be a reference in our response to point 1 which fundamentally opposes the re-opening of the site.

I'd be grateful if members could raise this issue during the debate on this application, given that non-members and ward members are not able to speak on the application for reasons that I don't feel have been fully explained.

This is a very important issue for the area I represent and, in my opinion, for the council as a whole, especially bearing in mind recent proposals to use the Bicester Garrison site to house refugees awaiting determination of their asylum claims.

Conclusion

For all of the reasons set out above, the proposed expansion of Campsfield House:

- Conflicts with **Policy Kidlington 1, SLE1, ESD1, ESD13 and ESD15** of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011–2031;
- Conflicts with the objectives of the **Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 2022–2050**;
- Conflicts with key provisions of the **National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)** concerning sustainable development, economic growth, transport and design; and
- Fails to demonstrate either a genuine operational need or an acceptable planning justification.
- Flies in the face of evidence that better, cheaper and more humane options are available.
- Conflicts with established CDC policy as adopted by motion 21/1024

Cllr Ian Middleton