

René Cassin Response to Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre Expansion (CROWN/2026/0000004)

Dear Planning Inspectorate,

I am writing to you as Advocacy Coordinator at René Cassin, a Jewish human rights organisation that works to promote and protect universal rights in the UK, drawing on Jewish experience and Jewish values.

I write to object to the Home Office's proposal to expand Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre from 160 to 400 places (application reference CROWN/2026/0000004).

This objection is based on both the planning impacts of the proposal and the wider consequences of expanding immigration detention. In particular, I am concerned that the Home Office has failed to demonstrate that a substantial expansion of detention capacity on Green Belt land is necessary, particularly when effective and less harmful alternatives to immigration detention exist. The expansion is therefore not in the national interest.

René Cassin's concern is also informed by Jewish historical experience. Jewish memory includes the internment of Jewish refugees who sought refuge from Nazi persecution in the UK. While historical circumstances differ, that experience reminds us of the dangers of approaching displaced people primarily through systems of detention and control rather than through dignity, protection and rights. Our concern today is rooted in the same commitment to human dignity and universal human rights that informs René Cassin's wider work.

As such, it is important to raise not only the practical issues with expanding the Campsfield site, but the matter that it proposes a serious humanitarian failure.

Green Belt Harm

Campsfield is located on Green Belt land. The proposal would more than double the operational capacity of the site, nearly triple the floorspace, introduce significantly larger accommodation blocks, and add further parking, lighting, fencing, hardstanding and security infrastructure.

The cumulative effect would be a substantial increase in the scale, intensity and permanence of development within the Green Belt.

The Home Office relies heavily on the contention that the site should be regarded as Grey Belt land. However, describing land as Grey Belt does not itself justify development. The Home Office must still demonstrate that the proposal satisfies the

relevant policy tests and that any harm to openness is clearly outweighed by a demonstrable need for the development.

We are concerned that the proposal would further urbanise the Langford Lane corridor and contribute to the gradual erosion of openness in an area already facing significant development pressure. The purpose of Green Belt designation is not simply to preserve landscape character but also to prevent urban sprawl and maintain separation between settlements. The Planning Inspectorate should pay particular attention to the cumulative impact of development in the wider Kidlington-Begbroke area and to longstanding concerns about incremental encroachment into the Green Belt.

The Home Office argues that the site does not significantly contribute to certain Green Belt purposes because it is already developed. However, the fact that some development already exists does not automatically justify a substantial increase in the scale and intensity of that development. The Inspectorate should require the Home Office to demonstrate clearly how the proposed accommodation blocks, security infrastructure, parking provision and associated works would affect openness and the wider Green Belt context.

In section 6.17 of the planning application, the Home Office argues that Green Belt purpose B, namely the prevention of neighbouring towns merging into one another, is not engaged because Kidlington is a village rather than a town.¹ This distinction is unpersuasive. As of the 2021 Census, Kidlington had a population of approximately 13,600, substantially larger than many recognised market towns.² Furthermore, in February 2026 Kidlington Parish Council voted unanimously to become Kidlington Town Council, stating that “the move formally recognises what has long been the reality: Kidlington has the population, the services and the infrastructure of a town.”³ The Inspectorate should therefore be cautious about dismissing concerns regarding coalescence between Kidlington and Begbroke based on terminology alone.

Failure to demonstrate need

The Home Office's case rests heavily on the proposition that additional detention capacity is required. In Section 6.40 of the planning application, the Home Office argues that there are Very Special Circumstances that outweigh the harm to the Green Belt as there is an urgent and pressing need for the provision of the accommodation.⁴

However, the evidence presented demonstrates policy ambitions rather than an objectively established need for 240 additional places at Campsfield.

¹ [Planning statement: Campsfield IRC extension, Home Office](#), p.31.

² [Kidlington \(Parish, United Kingdom\) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map and Location](#)

³ [Kidlington Becomes a Town – Kidlington Town Council](#)

⁴ [Planning statement: Campsfield IRC extension, Home Office](#), p. 35.

The Home Office points to increased irregular arrivals, a desire to increase enforced returns, pressure on prison capacity and demand relating to foreign national offenders. These factors may demonstrate increased operational demand within the Home Office's preferred enforcement model, but they do not demonstrate that a major expansion of detention capacity on Green Belt land is necessary.

The application fails adequately to explain:

- why existing detention capacity is insufficient;
- why Campsfield is the appropriate location;
- why the proposed increase from 160 to 400 places is necessary;
- what alternatives to detention have been properly considered; and
- why permanent development on Green Belt land is justified.

This omission is particularly significant because the Home Office's own argument for Green Belt development depends heavily upon demonstrating need.

Alternatives to detention have not been properly considered

There is substantial evidence that community-based alternatives to detention can deliver immigration compliance while causing less harm and at lower cost.

René Cassin has previously highlighted successful UK pilots, including the Action Access programme and the King's Arms Refugee and Migrant Advice Service.⁵ These initiatives demonstrated that case-management, legal support and community-based accommodation can achieve positive outcomes while costing significantly less than detention.

The evidence for alternatives extends beyond these UK pilots. International research has consistently found that alternatives to detention are significantly less expensive than detention and can secure high levels of compliance with immigration processes. Research collated by the International Detention Coalition found that community-based alternatives to detention are generally significantly less costly than detention and can achieve very high levels of compliance with immigration procedures. Case studies reviewed by the Coalition reported appearance rates of up to 95% and independent departure rates of up to 69% for individuals whose claims had been refused.⁶ Such evidence demonstrates that increased migration pressures do not inevitably require increased detention capacity.

⁵ [Updated: Alternatives to Detention Briefing 2025 - René Cassin](#)

⁶ <https://idcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/There-Are-Alternatives-2015.pdf>

International evidence similarly demonstrates that alternatives to detention can achieve high levels of engagement and compliance while protecting dignity, reducing harm and lowering public expenditure.

Where viable alternatives exist, the claimed necessity for a major expansion of detention infrastructure must be scrutinised particularly carefully. The Home Office's evidence demonstrates demand for detention under its chosen policy model. It does not demonstrate that detention expansion is the only, or best, means of achieving immigration objectives.

Before relying on "need" as a justification for substantial harm to the Green Belt, the Home Office should be required to explain why these less costly and less harmful approaches have been rejected.

As a result, we do not consider that the application establishes the level of unmet need required to justify significant harm to the Green Belt.

Local infrastructure and cumulative impact

The Planning Inspectorate should also consider the proposal's cumulative impact on local infrastructure.

The area surrounding Campsfield is already experiencing substantial development pressures through the growth of Begbroke Science Park, Oxford Technology Park, London Oxford Airport and associated housing and employment development.

Against this backdrop, concerns arise regarding traffic and transport impacts; parking demand; construction activity; drainage and utilities; pressure on local infrastructure and services; and the cumulative impact of continued development along the Langford Lane corridor.

These impacts should not be assessed in isolation. The Inspectorate should consider the extent to which this proposal adds to existing and anticipated pressures arising from nearby developments.

We are particularly concerned that the redaction of transport-related information limits the ability of the public and stakeholders to assess these impacts properly.

Public scrutiny and transparency

We are concerned by the extent to which important information has been withheld or redacted from public scrutiny.

We recognise that certain operational and security matters may require confidential treatment. However, significant information relating to layout, operational

arrangements, landscaping, lighting, transport and related impacts is not available in a form that allows meaningful public scrutiny.

This concern is heightened because the application is proceeding through the Crown Development process rather than the ordinary local planning route. By its nature, this process already reduces normal local democratic oversight. It is therefore particularly important that the highest standards of transparency are maintained.

Major development proposals affecting Green Belt land should be subject to rigorous public examination. Public confidence in the planning process depends upon objectors, statutory consultees and local communities having sufficient information to understand and assess the case being advanced.

Without adequate disclosure, meaningful participation is undermined and scrutiny of the proposal becomes more difficult.

Human rights and community impact

Immigration detention carries substantial and documented human costs.

René Cassin's work on alternatives to detention has drawn attention to extensive evidence of physical and psychological harm associated with detention. The most recent Medical Justice annual review found that 99% of detained people assessed by independent clinicians had at least one diagnosed mental health condition. The mental health of 97% deteriorated during detention, whilst 74% experienced an increased risk of suicide. The review also found that 23% had self-harmed during detention and three individuals had attempted suicide.⁷

The same review found that 82% of those assessed were survivors of torture and 63% reported a history of trafficking. Healthcare screening processes failed to identify 77% of torture survivors and 89% of those with a reported trafficking history. Furthermore, 90% were ultimately released from detention, raising serious questions about whether detention was justified in the first place.⁸

Many individuals subjected to immigration detention are survivors of torture, trafficking, persecution or other serious forms of abuse. Women in detention are disproportionately likely to have experienced gender-based violence, including rape, domestic abuse, forced marriage and sexual exploitation. For many, detention replicates patterns of control and coercion they have previously experienced.⁹

Detention also separates individuals from families, communities, legal representatives and support networks. The consequences extend well beyond detention facilities

⁷ <https://medicaljustice.org.uk/research/medical-justice-annual-review/>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ [DIGITAL] [A decade of harm: Survivors of gender-based violence locked up in immigration detention](#)

themselves and are often borne by local communities, faith groups, charities, legal advisers and public services.

We recognise that humanitarian concerns are not the sole basis upon which this application will be determined. However, they are relevant to assessing whether the claimed benefits of expansion genuinely justify the harms associated with a significantly larger detention estate.

Human rights risks

The expansion of immigration detention capacity inevitably raises concerns regarding compliance with fundamental rights protected under the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Article 5 protects the right to liberty and security of the person. Whilst immigration detention is capable of being lawful, the courts have consistently held that detention powers are heavily constrained. In the landmark case of *R v Governor of Durham Prison, ex parte Hardial Singh* [1984] 1 WLR 704, the court established that detention may only be used for the purpose of removal, may only last for a period that is reasonable in all the circumstances, and must cease once removal can no longer realistically be achieved within a reasonable period.¹⁰ The Secretary of State must also act with reasonable diligence and expedition throughout the detention period. These principles remain the foundation of immigration detention law and have repeatedly been endorsed by higher courts.

The Home Office's own detention guidance acknowledges that detention interferes with Articles 5 and 8 rights, and that decision-makers must be satisfied that detention is proportionate to the legitimate aim pursued.¹¹

The Home Office's own latest detention statistics also raise questions about the necessity of substantially increasing detention capacity. In the year ending March 2026, just over half of those leaving detention were released on immigration bail rather than removed from the United Kingdom.¹² This indicates that detention frequently does not result in removal and reinforces the need for the Home Office to explain why a significant increase in detention infrastructure is required rather than greater investment in alternatives and case-management approaches.

Where large numbers of individuals are detained and subsequently released, serious questions arise as to whether detention is truly being used as a measure of last resort and whether the interference with liberty and family life is proportionate in practice.

¹⁰ [R v. Governor of Durham Prison, Ex parte Singh | Refworld](#)

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/offender-management-caseworker-guidance/detention-general-instructions-accessible>

¹² <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201719/jtselect/jtrights/1484/148407.htm>

Article 8 protects private and family life. Detention frequently interferes with relationships between spouses, partners, children and wider family networks. It can interrupt legal representation, medical treatment, employment, religious life and community participation. Expanding detention capacity inevitably expands the scale at which these interferences occur.

Article 3 prohibits torture and inhuman or degrading treatment. While immigration detention is not inherently incompatible with Article 3, the state remains under a positive obligation to ensure that detention does not expose vulnerable individuals to conditions or treatment that undermine their dignity or cause serious harm.

This concern is particularly acute given the evidence regarding the composition of the detained population and the impact of detention upon them. The Medical Justice evidence mentioned earlier emphasises the severe harm that detention often causes. These findings raise profound concerns regarding the compatibility of continued expansion of detention capacity with the state's obligation to protect vulnerable individuals from foreseeable harm.

Of particular relevance is the Brook House Inquiry, which concluded that there was credible evidence that acts and omissions occurring within Brook House Immigration Removal Centre were capable of amounting to inhuman and degrading treatment contrary to Article 3 ECHR. The Inquiry identified a culture of dehumanisation, failures of safeguarding, inappropriate use of force and serious inadequacies in protections for vulnerable detainees.¹³ While the present application concerns Campsfield rather than Brook House, the Inquiry demonstrates the risks that arise when detention infrastructure expands without adequate safeguards and scrutiny. Indeed, Medical Justice has since argued that many of the same structural failings continue across the detention estate.¹⁴

This evidence is particularly important because the Home Office seeks not merely to maintain existing detention capacity but to expand it significantly. Before approving major new detention infrastructure on Green Belt land, the Planning Inspectorate should scrutinise carefully whether the claimed benefits justify increasing reliance on a system that carries such well-documented risks of harm.

The proposal to expand Campsfield does not reflect the expansion of ordinary infrastructure. It is a major expansion of a detention centre, and its consequences should be examined with the greatest possible care.

Conclusion

¹³ [Brook House Inquiry - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/68444/Brook_House_Inquiry.pdf)

¹⁴ https://medicaljustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Annual-Review_2024_Final.pdf

For the reasons set out above, René Cassin requests that the Planning Inspectorate refuse application CROWN/2026/0000004.

The Home Office has not demonstrated that a substantial expansion of detention capacity on Green Belt land is necessary, nor has it adequately justified the resulting harm to openness, cumulative impacts on the surrounding area, or the wider humanitarian consequences of expansion.

This point is particularly important because the Home Office seeks to rely on need both for its Grey Belt argument and, alternatively, as a Very Special Circumstance justifying Green Belt harm. If effective, lower-cost and less harmful alternatives to detention exist, and if they have not been properly implemented, then the Home Office has failed to establish the level of need necessary to outweigh the acknowledged planning harm caused by the development.

In particular, the Home Office has failed to demonstrate why effective alternatives to detention cannot meet the objectives it seeks to achieve. The existence of proven and less harmful alternatives substantially weakens the case that expanded detention capacity is necessary.

We also request that the Planning Inspectorate require greater disclosure of information relevant to the planning impacts of the proposal.

If the application is not refused, it should proceed to a full public inquiry. The issues raised by this proposal - including Green Belt harm, the claimed need for detention expansion, the existence of alternatives to detention, the adequacy of the evidence base, infrastructure impacts and the consequences of reduced public scrutiny - warrant thorough examination in public before any decision is reached.

Yours faithfully,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of René Cassin.

Advocacy Coordinator René Cassin