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Written representations

< Back to list

CROWN/2026/0000004

James Wilson on behalf of Detention Action

Date submitted	24 July 2026
Submitted by	Interested party

Dear Planning Inspectorate,

We are writing to object to the Home Office's proposal to expand Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) by 240 places, from 160 to 400 places. The application reference is CROWN/2026/0000004.

We are responding as a human rights charity dedicated to supporting people in immigration detention. We are concerned about the Home Office's proposal as we believe it will exacerbate the harms and costs caused by immigration detention to individuals, families, communities, and the wider public.
We object for the following reasons.

Green Belt harm:

We understand that Campsfield is on Green Belt land. Green Belt land is meant to stay open and protected from unnecessary development. The proposed expansion would add large new accommodation blocks, up to 16 metres tall, compared with the tallest existing building at 9.4 metres. It would also add more parking, fencing, lighting, hardstanding and security infrastructure. This would make the site more built-up and less open.

The Home Office's main argument is that the site should be treated as "grey belt". Our understanding is that 'grey belt' is a category within the Green Belt. It does not mean the land has stopped being Green Belt, and it does not mean development should automatically be allowed. The Home Office still has to meet the relevant planning tests, including showing that there is a clear need for this type of development.

We are concerned that the expansion would harm the openness of the Green Belt and further urbanise the Langford Lane / A44 corridor.

We are also concerned about the wider Langford Lane Green Belt context, including the remaining open gap between Kidlington and Begbroke. Cherwell District Council has previously raised concerns about nearby Green Belt development in the Langford Lane / A44 area, including concerns about unrestricted sprawl and the coalescence of Kidlington and Begbroke. We think similar concerns should be properly considered here, alongside the scale, height and intensity of the proposed Campsfield expansion.

The Planning Inspectorate should require the Home Office to show clearly which parts of the site are already developed, which parts remain open, and how the new buildings, fencing, parking, lighting and hardstanding would affect the openness of the Green Belt.

The need for expansion has not been properly shown:

The Home Office has not clearly explained why 240 extra detention places are needed at Campsfield specifically. It relies on broad claims about projected demand, immigration enforcement priorities and resilience across the detention estate, but the public cannot properly test the evidence behind those claims.

The Home Office should be required to explain:
- why existing IRC capacity is not enough;
- what alternatives have been considered;
- why the expansion has to happen at Campsfield;
- why permanent development on Green Belt land is justified.

This matters because the Home Office is relying on claimed need to justify development that would otherwise cause serious planning harm, including harm to Green Belt land. If the need for more detention places has not been properly evidenced, the Home Office has not shown that the harm to the Green Belt is justified. The expansion should not be approved.

Furthermore, we are concerned at the Home Office's decision to use the Crown Development Route, as this would bypass established local democratic structures that would require a decision from Cherwill District Council and the residents it must answer to. The decision to withhold information and evidence that would justify the proposal from the wider public also jeopardises the transparency of the decision as well as the ability for the public to understand and challenge the proposal.

Local infrastructure and environmental impact:

The application does not provide enough evidence about the impact of a much larger detention centre on the local area.
We are concerned about the effect of this proposal on local infrastructure. The Planning Inspectorate should consider these impacts alongside other planned and permitted development in the area, not look at Campsfield in isolation. The local area is already

facing major development pressures, including housing, business and innovation development, and other large projects.

The redaction of transport information is especially concerning because traffic, access, parking and construction traffic are central planning issues. The public needs enough information to understand how the expansion would affect the local road network and local infrastructure.

Conflict with local planning priorities:

We understand that the area around Langford Lane, London Oxford Airport, Oxford Technology Park and Begbroke Science Park is identified for high-value employment and economic growth.

A large immigration detention centre is not the same kind of use as science, technology, research, innovation or airport-related employment.

The Home Office should not be allowed to rely on general job creation alone to claim that the proposal fits the local economic strategy. The Planning Inspectorate should consider whether the expansion genuinely fits the adopted development plan and local planning priorities for this area.
Given the evidenced harm caused to people by immigration detention, including physical, mental, and financial harm as well as significant repercussions that impact wider communities, we are not convinced that an immigration detention centre should be treated as high-value employment.

Redacted and withheld information:

Important information has been withheld or redacted. This includes material about layout, design, lighting, transport, drainage, landscape and visual impact, and how the site would operate.

Some security-sensitive information may need to be protected, but the public still needs enough information to understand the planning impacts.

The Planning Inspectorate should not approve a major expansion of a detention centre on Green Belt land without proper public scrutiny.

The withholding of key information makes it harder for local people, community groups and public bodies to understand the real impact of the proposal. This is especially serious because the Home Office is using the Crown Development route, which removes the decision from ordinary local determination by Cherwell District Council.

Public scrutiny and human impact:

Immigration detention causes serious harm to the people held there. The effects of that harm do not stop at the perimeter fence. Families, legal representatives, community groups, health and advice services, faith groups, local residents and local authorities are often left responding to the consequences of detention, including distress, release into hardship, safeguarding concerns, destitution, emergency support needs, removal, protest and public concern.

Detention Action (originally known as London Detainee Support Group) has existed since 1993, providing direct emotional and practical support to people in detention, primarily at the 2 immigration removal centres (IRCs) at Heathrow (Colnbrook and

Harmondsworth). We support over 500 people detained per year. Every day, we speak to people via our helpline who are suffering intense physical and mental distress, indefinitely detained in a system in which (in recent years) a majority are eventually released, their detention having served no purpose.
Conditions in immigration detention mirror those of a prison where, in most cases, people are held in small cells where they are locked in for several hours during the day and at night. The Government holds people – including those who have lived in the UK since childhood and those who have survived war, persecution, and trafficking – in immigration detention centres for periods ranging from days to several years. Healthcare services are often under-resourced and access to legal support and contact with friends and family is extremely limited.

Furthermore, indefinite detention has a high financial cost to the Government and taxpayers, and running the immigration detention estate is projected to cost billions in addition to pay-outs associated with unlawful detention claims.

The application does not properly address this harm or the wider impact of expanding detention capacity at Campsfield.

We understand that the Planning Inspectorate's decision will focus on material planning considerations, but this representation is also part of the public record. Humanitarian concerns are valid and should be recorded, especially where they reinforce the need for full scrutiny of a development of this scale and sensitivity.

This proposal is not ordinary infrastructure. It is a major expansion of a detention centre, and it should receive the closest possible scrutiny.

Request for refusal and public inquiry:

For these reasons, we object to the application and ask that it is refused.
If it is not refused at this stage, we ask the Planning Inspectorate to examine the application through a full public inquiry after the consultation closes.

This application raises serious questions about Green Belt harm, the scale and height of the new buildings, local infrastructure, the evidence for the expansion, and the impact of withholding parts of the application from public view. These issues should not be decided through written representations alone.

A public inquiry would allow the Home Office's case to be scrutinised in public and the evidence to be properly tested before any decision is made.

Yours faithfully,
James Wilson
On behalf of Detention Action
24 July 2026

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