

## **Submission by Coalition to Close Campsfield**

The Coalition to Close Campsfield is a coalition of some 30-40 groups and of individuals in Oxfordshire with the common aim of closing Campsfield immigration detention centre in Kidlington, north of Oxford, and all immigration detention centres.

### **1**

#### **The harm done by immigration detention should weigh in the Planning Inspectorate's assessment and decision making**

The evidence is clear that detention causes serious, irreversible damage to people, notably to their mental health. The Planning Inspectorate should not allow its official planning remit to rule out consideration and respect for humanity and for basic human rights.

The government's own UNHCR-supported community-based Alternatives to Detention pilots provide clear evidence of cheaper, better value, and more humane alternatives to detention. This is clear evidence that more immigration detention beds are not needed.

This is the position of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the government's own National Independent Monitoring Board: *'Campsfield House IRC reopened in December 2025, following its closure in 2018, despite IMB concerns about the expansion of the immigration detention estate – most people are released from detention, and less costly and harmful alternatives exist.'* (Independent Monitoring Board's National Annual Report, June 2026)

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has specifically warned that expanded use of immigration detention is likely to increase demand on wider mental health services (which are being cut).

The immense harm of detention is not just to detainees but to families, local communities.

The harm caused by detention makes it even more important to scrutinise outdoor space and recreation facilities, healthcare access, emergency evacuation, local services, community impact, legal access, safeguarding, fire safety, dignity for those detained. It is hard to see how granting Outline planning permission can satisfy these concerns.

The harm caused by detention also makes it even more important to assess whether the Home Office has properly justified the need for this expansion.

### **2**

#### **The need for more immigration detention capacity has not been demonstrated in the application**

The 'detention estate' is not effectively managed. As of March 2026, 1,705 people were recorded as held in IRCs, leaving 651 unused IRC spaces, around 28% of stated IRC capacity. (Home Office, Immigration system statistics, year ending March 2026). On the face of it, it is

clear that an additional 1000 places at Haslar and Campsfield are not needed. Instead, the management of the 'detention estate' requires substantial improvement.

In 2022 when it was announced, the rationale for the 1000-bed reopening and enlargement of Haslar and Campsfield was the Rwanda deportation flights plan. When that was dropped by the incoming Labour government in 2024 the rationale changed - expansion was needed to deport more people. However, a significant increase in numbers deported has been largely attained without expansion.

There is plenty of evidence that many people are still being detained who should not be because they are vulnerable, for example being victims of trafficking. Correcting this situation will mean that more detention places are not needed.

A greater proportion of people detained are currently held for periods of over a week than at any time since 2010. This must be put right before any proposed expansion of detention is countenanced.

Finally, most people who are detained are released into the community, raising the question of why they were detained in the first place. Indeed, the Home Office pays a lot to immigration detainees for wrongful imprisonment (£12 million in 2023-24). What is required is an improvement in the quality of decision-making. Failure to deliver this is not an adequate pretext for an expansion in immigration detention.

As stated above, alternatives to detention exist. No expansion of immigration detention should be permitted without completion of the planned series of four UNHCR-supported community-based pilot alternatives to detention schemes.

The Home Office does not need more bedspace. Instead, the ministry ought to exercise its immigration detention powers more responsibly, purposefully and efficiently.

For these reasons the application should be refused.

### 3

**The applicant has failed to demonstrate that the proposed development will provide safe and humane living conditions for people who are compelled to remain within it.**

### 4

**The expansion proposal is not 'value for money'**

Little or no evidence is provided to support such suggestions in the application. It is arguable - and has been in a study published by the Refugee Studies Programme in Oxford in 2005 - that expansion of immigration detention is driven in part by private construction and operating companies, that is for shareholders pockets, rather than to meeting a genuine public need. Immigration detention is inordinately costly.

### 5

**Expansion of immigration detention should not be permitted as long as the recognised right of immigration detainees to access legal advice is denied, as is currently the case for many if not most people detained.** (Bail For Immigration Detainees, Access to Legal Advice in Immigration Detention Falls to Record Low, June 2026)

6

**The urgency of the application, by comparison for example with the application to expand Campsfield, has not been established**

7

### **Key planning and environmental considerations**

Flood risk: We question whether the proposal is safe for a locked 600-bed detention centre on a coastal site that is increasingly affected by climate change is safe.

A very large immigration detention centre will profoundly affect the neighbouring area. The applicant has not adequately demonstrated that the impact of the following would be acceptable or could be adequately mitigated; traffic and the road network; impact on other infrastructure and services; noise and lights; intrusive tall fencing; amenities such as the coastal path; wildlife, notably overwintering birds; disruption and disturbance during construction.

8

### **‘Outline planning permission’ and information not provided**

We cannot see how it is possible for the Planning Inspectorate to make a decision in principle about whether a very large detention centre should be built on this site without the provision of a great deal more detailed information.

What security reasons can there be to justify redactions in plans, or failure to provide data, which have been provided in previous similar planning applications?

We understand that information denied the public includes site layout; elevations and sections; floor plans; landscaping; lighting; accommodation blocks; a ‘Care’ and Separation Unit; the dining hall; flood evacuation; coastal modelling; ecology and biodiversity; transport and travel planning; local community impact; heritage; landscape and visual impact.

Crucially, assessment of likely major impacts on the neighbourhood and on the welfare and safety of those who would be detained, or indeed work, in such a centre must surely be key to the Inspectorate’s considerations. In the absence of such information, the Inspectorate should we believe refuse the application.

9

**For public good, not private profit**

For the above reasons, expanding a planned detention centre at Haslar is not in the public interest. There is a further public harm in the proposal.

There is no private company that runs detention centres that has not been severely criticised by people detained, by government inspectors, independent monitoring boards, visitors and campaigners.

Mitie, which runs Campsfield and the Harmondsworth centres, is just one example.

At Campsfield, Mitie currently cannot provide sufficient staff onsite and has had to/is having to bring in staff from other centres to make up numbers; they are staying in local hotels.

Mitie has been forced to launch an investigation into allegations of racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia and hate speech among staff working in immigration removal centres.

[Guardian 11/6/26]

Mitie's performance at Harmondsworth was described in a 2025 Prison Inspectorate report as 'Drugs, despair and decrepit conditions' providing 'the worst conditions they had seen in immigration detention'.

Detention centres are run for profit by private companies. This does not benefit our citizens, only shareholders.

Immigration detention centres should not be opened or expanded and this application should be refused.

**10**

### **We object strongly to the use of Crown Development Order process**

It is profoundly undemocratic, and insulting to local people and their elected representatives. The use of this procedure should be discontinued by the government.

**11**

### **Conclusion**

We ask the Planning Inspectorate to refuse the application. If it does not, we call for a Public Inquiry so that the public and relevant authorities can adequately scrutinise the proposal.

If there is a hearing or Public Inquiry we should like to attend.