

PRESS RELEASE
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CAMPSFIELD EXPANSION: WRONG, ABUSIVE, AND UNNECESSARY - WHO BENEFITS?

An application to expand Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre is expected to be submitted to Cherwell District Council imminently. The plans would more than double the number of people imprisoned at the Centre from 276 to 556. Bill MacKeith, of the Campaign to Close Campsfield, has described the plans as “wrong, inhumane and unnecessary”.

Opposition to the plans

Already the plans have attracted substantial opposition. Nicola Blackwood, the MP for Campsfield, and her two principal challengers at the next General Election, Labour's Sally Copley, the Liberal Democrats' Layla Moran and the Greens' Larry Sanders, have all opposed any expansion.^{i ii iii iv} Oxford East MP Andrew Smith has done likewise.^v Oxford City Council has existing policy calling for Campsfield to close.^{vi} Local residents, community organisations, churches and trade unions have all expressed concerns to the Campaign to Close Campsfield. More than 50 people attended a public meeting against the expansion held in Kidlington on 20 October.

Cherwell District Council's role

Cherwell District Council's Planning Committee will not be able to consider the wider arguments against the expansion and must make a decision on planning grounds alone. Local residents and others can contact councillors on the planning committee and make submissions by emailing planning@cherwell-dc.gov.uk with their concerns. Liz Peretz, of the Campaign to Close Campsfield, has said “We believe there are strong planning grounds for turning this application down, and hope Cherwell District Council will do so.”

Immigration detention is wrong

Bill MacKeith of the Campaign to Close Campsfield has said: “It is wrong to imprison people who have not committed a crime. Immigration detention is an administrative convenience for the Home Office not a punishment for a crime - migrants are rounded up not sentenced.”

People detained in Campsfield include those whose asylum claim is still under consideration and people deemed failed asylum seekers but whose case has not been properly heard because of poor translation at interviews, a lack of legal representation and a culture of disbelief at the Home Office. Detainees wanting to go home often wait in detention for months before arrangements for travel documents are made by the HO. Some cannot be returned because they are stateless, travel documents cannot be obtained or there is a nationality dispute. Most have not committed crimes, although some are people who have already served a sentence for a crime and are in effect being punished twice because they are foreign. All are detained indefinitely, without judicial oversight. They lack many of the protections in law that are given to prisoners convicted of an offence.

Immigration detention is abusive

Dr Peter Young, the recently retired director of mental health services at detention centre service provider International Health and Mental Services (IMHS) in Australia recently blew the whistle on the impact of detention, showing that it meets international definitions of torture.^{vii} Other reports show that detention of those who have not committed a crime without a release date causes harm to the mental health of detainees.^{viii} This is especially the case for those who have experienced trauma, such as torture survivors. The Home Office is not supposed to detain torture survivors, but there is evidence to suggest they routinely refuse applications for the release of torture survivors. There have been 25 violent deaths in detention, over half by suicide. Others have been released shortly before their deaths or have died during removal attempts. Numerous claims have been made against guards and immigration officials for racist and sexual abuse but witnesses are often deported before cases come to court. Immigration detention facilitates abuse but is also abusive in itself.

The expansion is unnecessary

According to the Home Office's own statistics, while the number of detention places continues to go up, there is a long-term trend in the proportion of detainees being removed - down to 56% in the year ending June 2014.^{ix} In the last year there was an increase in the number of immigration detainees granted temporary admission or release from 34% to 36%.^x Even under the Home Office's own rules, these people could not be removed and should never have been detained in the first place. Asylum seekers and other migrants are being "warehoused" in detention centres to justify the costs of the private security firms running them. If the Home Office released unreturnable migrants earlier, the equivalent of three detention centres could be shut without reducing the number of people removed from the country.^{xi} The Campaign to Close Campsfield believes the human costs of detention are more significant than the financial costs, but people should know that detention of unreturnable migrants costs the taxpayer £75 million per year.^{xii} The true cost of detention is unknown as Home Office figures do not include legal costs, compensation, or escort costs.

Who would benefit from the expansion?

Detainees would be harmed by the expansion. Expanding the number of places in Campsfield would cost the taxpayer millions without doing what it set out to do. The only benefits would be to MITIE, the company that runs Campsfield, and its shareholders. When MITIE took over the Campsfield contract in 2012 it was the first time they had handled a major security contract. Despite presiding over multiple hunger strikes, deaths in detention and a fire for which they and their insurers were deemed financially responsible,^{xiii} they were subsequently awarded the contract for the larger Harmondsworth and Colnbrook detention centres.^{xiv} Since then they have presided over a major pest infestation at Harmondsworth.^{xv} They run Campsfield on the cheap by paying the very detainees locked up there £1 an hour to do vital tasks.^{xvi} These wheeler-dealers are the only beneficiaries of the plans to expand Campsfield.

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ⁱ Nicola Blackwood MP has said "This proposal makes no sense for Kidlington or for our immigration system. We should be looking for alternatives to detention rather than expanding our detention programme and Campsfield House in particular has already struggled to manage with its existing numbers resulting in a series of

serious incidents... I am quite clear that doubling the size of Campsfield would be wrong for Kidlington and wrong for detainees." (Source: online petition here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/campsfield>)

ii Sally Copley has said "It's clearly wrong to detain at all people who are not criminals but instead are fleeing conflict, let alone indefinitely. The Home Office have not made a satisfactory case for why they want to extend Campsfield House, and it's a shame the District Council are only allowed to consider this on planning grounds, as there are strong humanitarian reasons for rejecting it." (Source: quote given to Campaign to Close Campsfield.)

iii Layla Moran has said "We should be aiming to close the centre, not expand it... if the moral grounds for not expanding weren't enough, in the UK the number of people being deported in the UK is in fact declining. Expanding Campsfield now makes no sense in this climate. Given that we are deporting fewer people we need to be aiming to detain fewer too. (Source: *The Vulnerable Deserve To Be Treated With Compassion*, Oxford Mail, 11/9/14, http://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/11465021.The_vulnerable_deserve_to_be_treated_with_compassion/?ref=ms)

iv Larry Sanders has said "the detention of asylum seekers... is costly, traumatic, inhumane and totally unnecessary. It would be perverse to squander large sums of money on the expansion of Campsfield and additional millions of pounds every year on maintaining it while we are said to lack the money to provide decent housing, and even adequate food, to hundreds of thousands of people." (Source: quote given to the Campaign to Close Campsfield.)

v Andrew Smith MP has said "I'm against the plans to expand Campsfield House, which are contrary to government claims that detention is a last resort. The Home Office should await the outcome of the current Parliamentary Inquiry into alternatives to detention and a time limit on detention. They should also listen to the views of local people." (Source: quote given to Campaign to Close Campsfield.)

vi Oxford City Council's policy on Campsfield, which has been renewed each time it has come up for renewal, can be found here: <http://mycouncil.oxford.gov.uk/CeListDocuments.aspx?CommitteeId=0&MeetingId=670&DF=17%2f09%2f2004&Ver=2>

vii See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/05/-sp-australias-detention-regime-sets-out-to-make-asylum-seekers-suffer-says-chief-immigration-psychiatrist>

viii See, for example: Ali McGinley and Adeline Trude (2012), Positive Duty of Care? The Mental Health Crisis in Immigration Detention. Briefing paper by the Mental Health in Immigration Detention Project, Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees and Bail for Immigration Detainees,

<http://www.aviddetention.org.uk/images/positive%20duty%20of%20care%20final.pdf>

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group (2012), A Prison of the Mind: The Mental Health Implications of Detention in Brook House Immigration Removal Centre

<http://www.gdwg.org.uk/downloads/gdwg-prisoninthemind.pdf>

Pourgourides, C., Sashidharan, S. & Bracken, P., (1996) A Second Exile: The Mental Health Implications of Detention of Asylum Seekers in the United Kingdom, Birmingham: Northern Birmingham Mental Health Trust.

ix According to the *Quarterly Immigration Statistics, April-June 2014*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-april-to-june-2014/immigration-statistics-april-to-june-2014#detention-1>

x Ibid.

xi Detention Action, *The financial waste of long-term detention*, 2013, <http://detentionaction.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/costs-briefing-03131.docx>

xii Detention Action, *An economic analysis of alternatives to long-term detention*, September 2012, <http://detentionaction.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Matrix-Detention-Action-Economic-Analysis-0912.pdf>

^{xiii} According to the answer to a Parliamentary Question asked by Andrew Smith MP,
<https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2014-07-22b.206467.h&s=%28section%3Awrans%29+speaker%3A10545#g206467.q0>

^{xiv} For a comprehensive examination of Mitie's performance since winning the Campsfield contract, see
<http://www.corporatewatch.org/news/2014/sep/01/care-custody-mities-detention-centre-contracts>

^{xv} <http://www.corporatewatch.org/news/2014/sep/13/video-reveals-pest-infestation-deportation-site>

^{xvi} <http://www.corporatewatch.org/news/2014/aug/22/scale-captive-migrant-labour-revealed>