# HMP Five Wells’ ambitious vision crumbles amid violence, drug abuse and unsafe conditions



HMP Five Wells, a £253 million facility in Wellingborough, was touted as a pioneering example of the so-called “prison of the future.” Its innovative design, constructed from recycled materials and featuring student-hall style rooms with en-suites, was intended to foster a rehabilitative environment devoid of the harsh aesthetics commonly associated with incarceration. However, recent investigations reveal that the ambitious vision for this super-prison has deteriorated into a chaotic environment plagued by violence, drug abuse, and severe staff shortages.

The facility, which opened in 2022, has witnessed an alarming surge in its inmate population, with over 70% convicted of sex crimes. This numbers shift marks a significant departure from traditional practices where sex offenders are typically segregated from the general prison population due to the risks they face from other inmates. Video footage has surfaced showing convicts engaging in alcohol and drug-fuelled parties while brazenly violating prison protocols, raising grave concerns about both security and safety.

Accounts from former inmates and their families paint a disturbing picture of daily life within HMP Five Wells. One inmate recounted that the integration of violent offenders and sex offenders led to a surge in assaults, claiming, "There are people getting slashed, getting beat up... The screws are doing nothing about it." Such sentiments are echoed by family members who express fears for their loved ones. One woman, visiting her partner—a non-violent financial criminal—described the anxiety of taking her daughter to see him, particularly with child rapists residing in proximity: "It makes my skin crawl."

Amidst these harrowing conditions, the impact on staff has been equally troubling. Reports indicate that prison officers face daily assaults, often going without the necessary equipment to ensure their safety. An anonymous officer stated, "We get urine and faeces thrown in our face... An officer got stabbed a few weeks ago." This sentiment is reflected in a report from the Independent Monitoring Board, which highlights the increasing availability of contraband—including drugs and homemade alcohol—and stresses the urgent need for reforms to safeguard both inmates and staff.

An initial inspection by government authorities found that nearly a third of the prisoners were actively using drugs, with over half reporting ease of access to illegal substances. Inspectors noted that incidents of self-harm had also skyrocketed, and the prison's inability to provide adequate food, alongside high rates of violence, calls into question the effectiveness of its rehabilitative promises. A staggering 75% rise in assaults compared to the national average of 11% signifies a systemic failure in management and care within HMP Five Wells.

The original vision for HMP Five Wells underscored an emphasis on rehabilitation rather than punitive measures. Critics, however, have likened the environment to a “five-star hotel” for criminals, suggesting that the government's approach has veered dangerously towards leniency at the expense of safety and order. Notably, former Justice Secretary Dominic Raab defended the initiative by suggesting that a rehabilitative focus would reduce reoffending rates, yet the grim realities observed within the facility suggest that the opposite is occurring.

The overwhelming influx of sex offenders has not only intensified the risks faced by all inmates but has also exacerbated mental health issues, with increased reports of depression and drug use among those incarcerated. Families report instances of self-harm and escalating substance abuse as inmates grapple with the harsh new realities of their surroundings. One mother noted her son's struggles with self-harm and feelings of hopelessness, exacerbated by a sense of inequity regarding job privileges afforded to those convicted of sex crimes.

As HMP Five Wells continues to grapple with these profound issues, the challenge ahead is how to implement effective reforms that restore order, ensure inmate safety, and create a genuinely rehabilitative environment. The unfortunate reality faced within this allegedly modern prison starkly contrasts with the government’s laudable vision, underscoring the urgent need for introspection and substantial action moving forward.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14715897/HMP-Woke-overrun-violent-rapists-child-abusers-white-collar-criminals-families.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14715897/HMP-Woke-overrun-violent-rapists-child-abusers-white-collar-criminals-families.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://news.sky.com/story/a-prison-officer-will-get-killed-staff-warn-of-chaos-and-violence-inside-flagship-super-prison-12974748)
* Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14715897/HMP-Woke-overrun-violent-rapists-child-abusers-white-collar-criminals-families.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 4: [[2]](https://news.sky.com/story/a-prison-officer-will-get-killed-staff-warn-of-chaos-and-violence-inside-flagship-super-prison-12974748), [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-northamptonshire-68765335), [[4]](https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2023-09-13/inmates-going-without-food-at-253m-super-prison), [[5]](https://www.northamptonchron.co.uk/news/people/concerns-at-wellingboroughs-ps253m-super-prison-hmp-five-wells-with-drugs-hooch-mobiles-and-sim-cards-and-staff-safety-issues-4288652)
* Paragraph 5: [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-northamptonshire-68765335), [[6]](https://www.northantstelegraph.co.uk/news/people/hmp-five-wells-report-highlights-serious-concerns-at-wellingborough-prison-with-upward-trend-for-phones-hooch-and-weapons-and-drugs-routinely-available-4826339)
* Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14715897/HMP-Woke-overrun-violent-rapists-child-abusers-white-collar-criminals-families.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.northamptonchron.co.uk/news/people/hmp-five-wells-inspection-teams-find-self-harm-drug-use-staffing-issues-inadequate-education-classes-and-bad-food-at-ps253m-wellingborough-prison-4583484)
* Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14715897/HMP-Woke-overrun-violent-rapists-child-abusers-white-collar-criminals-families.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.northamptonchron.co.uk/news/people/concerns-at-wellingboroughs-ps253m-super-prison-hmp-five-wells-with-drugs-hooch-mobiles-and-sim-cards-and-staff-safety-issues-4288652)
* Paragraph 8: [[2]](https://news.sky.com/story/a-prison-officer-will-get-killed-staff-warn-of-chaos-and-violence-inside-flagship-super-prison-12974748), [[6]](https://www.northantstelegraph.co.uk/news/people/hmp-five-wells-report-highlights-serious-concerns-at-wellingborough-prison-with-upward-trend-for-phones-hooch-and-weapons-and-drugs-routinely-available-4826339), [[7]](https://www.northamptonchron.co.uk/news/people/hmp-five-wells-inspection-teams-find-self-harm-drug-use-staffing-issues-inadequate-education-classes-and-bad-food-at-ps253m-wellingborough-prison-4583484)
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14715897/HMP-Woke-overrun-violent-rapists-child-abusers-white-collar-criminals-families.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://news.sky.com/story/a-prison-officer-will-get-killed-staff-warn-of-chaos-and-violence-inside-flagship-super-prison-12974748> - An investigation into HMP Five Wells, a £253 million 'super-prison' in Wellingborough, reveals significant issues including widespread drug use, staff shortages, and safety concerns. Prison officers report daily assaults, inadequate equipment, and a lack of support, leading to fears of potential fatalities among staff. The Independent Monitoring Board highlights the prevalence of illicit items, with drugs available on most houseblocks, and expresses serious concerns about staff safety and the prison's management. The report underscores the urgent need for substantial reforms to address these systemic problems.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-northamptonshire-68765335> - The first government inspection of HMP Five Wells, a new Category C jail in Wellingborough, found widespread illegal drug availability and insufficient staff support. The report noted high levels of self-harm among prisoners and poor food quality. Inspectors highlighted that about a third of prisoners were active drug users, with over half finding it easy to obtain illegal substances. The prison acknowledged these issues and has implemented an action plan focusing on recruitment, retention, and addressing drug ingress to improve conditions.
4. <https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2023-09-13/inmates-going-without-food-at-253m-super-prison> - A report on HMP Five Wells, a £253 million 'super-prison' in Wellingborough, reveals concerns about food shortages, widespread drug availability, and staff safety. Inspectors found that inmates occasionally went without meals due to delivery shortages and that drugs were available on most houseblocks. Homemade alcohol, mobile phones, and SIM cards were also discovered. The report raised serious concerns about staff safety, particularly in the education department, and highlighted a lack of appropriately qualified staff due to recruitment difficulties.
5. <https://www.northamptonchron.co.uk/news/people/concerns-at-wellingboroughs-ps253m-super-prison-hmp-five-wells-with-drugs-hooch-mobiles-and-sim-cards-and-staff-safety-issues-4288652> - Concerns have been raised about HMP Five Wells, a £253 million 'super-prison' in Wellingborough, following a report highlighting issues such as drugs, food shortages, and staff safety. The Independent Monitoring Board found that drugs were available on most houseblocks, and inmates occasionally went without meals due to delivery shortages. The report also highlighted staff safety concerns, particularly in the education department, and noted a lack of appropriately qualified staff due to recruitment difficulties.
6. <https://www.northantstelegraph.co.uk/news/people/hmp-five-wells-report-highlights-serious-concerns-at-wellingborough-prison-with-upward-trend-for-phones-hooch-and-weapons-and-drugs-routinely-available-4826339> - A report on HMP Five Wells, a £253 million 'super-prison' in Wellingborough, highlights serious concerns including an upward trend in the availability of phones, homemade alcohol, weapons, and drugs. The Independent Monitoring Board found that drugs were routinely available, with over a quarter of prisoners testing positive. The report also raised concerns about staff safety, noting that assaults on staff were a daily occurrence, and highlighted issues with inexperienced staff and inadequate equipment.
7. <https://www.northamptonchron.co.uk/news/people/hmp-five-wells-inspection-teams-find-self-harm-drug-use-staffing-issues-inadequate-education-classes-and-bad-food-at-ps253m-wellingborough-prison-4583484> - Inspection teams at HMP Five Wells, a £253 million 'super-prison' in Wellingborough, found issues including self-harm, drug use, staffing problems, inadequate education classes, and poor food quality. The report noted that about a third of prisoners were active drug users, and the rate of self-harm was high. It also highlighted staffing issues, with inexperienced staff lacking confidence in their supervisory roles, and inadequate education classes due to high staff vacancies.