# Villagers say government is railroading plans for two new super prisons amid safety and infrastructure concerns



Villagers near the sites of two upcoming "super prisons" are voicing their concerns, claiming the developments are being hastily pushed through by the government, with significant impacts on their lives and properties. Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood has announced plans to invest £4.7 billion in constructing three new jails, aimed at creating 14,000 new prison places by 2031. However, local residents argue that their objections and concerns are being overshadowed by the urgency to alleviate the growing prison population crisis.

One of the proposed prisons, set to be built on green belt land near HMP Wymott and HMP Garth in Chorley, Lancashire, has raised alarms among residents already grappling with issues stemming from existing facilities, including drug-carrying drones disrupting their daily lives. Meanwhile, construction is set to commence at a second site near HMP Gartree in Leicestershire, where previous planning refusals were overturned by former Secretary of State Michael Gove.

Despite assurances from officials that the new prisons will generate approximately 600 jobs and boost the local economy, residents describe feeling "railroaded" into accepting the projects. Margaret Coy, aged 73, who enjoyed riding along what was once a tranquil bridleway, lamented the loss of access to the land now overrun by construction vehicles. As the 73-year-old reflected, “It’s obviously been pushed through, so we haven’t really got a say in it.”

Similar sentiments echoed from Jo, a district councillor who has lived in the area for a decade. Having initially participated in an action group against the new prison, Jo noted how the appeal process seemed to disregard local concerns, stating, “I feel like we've just been railroaded... now it's all diggers, it's horrendous."

Local fears extend beyond the immediate disruption of construction. Residents are apprehensive about the increased prison population that will effectively triple the number of inmates in the vicinity, raising safety and crime concerns. Jo articulated her worries about the potential for violence and increased drug trafficking, stating that the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) “aren't the greatest neighbours."

The pattern of the government overruling local planning decisions has been observed not only in Leicestershire but also in Chorley, where a similar situation has unfolded. After the planning inspectorate originally rejected the proposal for a new prison, housing minister Angela Rayner intervened, leading to plans for a 1,700-capacity facility alongside the existing jails.

As these developments unfold, questions regarding the capacity of local infrastructure remain prominent. Residents highlight the inadequacy of transport links and local amenities to accommodate the influx of new prison staff and the increased traffic likely to result from construction and operation. Diana Cook, a parish councillor, remarked that while the need for prisons is understood, the chosen locations are questionable.

Furthermore, while expansion efforts aim to address prison overcrowding, the challenges associated with such strategies remain formidable. Reports indicate that the English prison system currently faces escalating overcrowding, with over 87,000 prisoners occupying facilities designed for significantly fewer. Critically, the National Audit Office has raised alarms that the government's plans are inadequate, predicting a shortfall of around 12,400 places by 2027.

Efforts to address the prison capacity challenges extend beyond simply constructing new facilities. The Justice Secretary recently introduced measures aimed at streamlining the recall process for released prisoners, although these have drawn criticism from victim advocacy groups concerned about public safety. Mahmood’s approach embodies a broader struggle within the UK's criminal justice system, encapsulated by the balance between expanding capacity and implementing effective rehabilitation measures.

In the face of this ongoing crisis, the voices of local communities intertwined with the complexities of government policy signal that the path forward remains fraught with challenges, necessitating careful consideration of local impact and infrastructure needs as the UK continues to navigate its prison population crisis.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
2. Paragraphs 1, 2, 4, 5
3. Paragraphs 4, 5
4. Paragraphs 2, 3
5. Paragraphs 1, 2
6. Paragraphs 1, 4
7. Paragraphs 2, 3

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14726599/villages-doorstep-Britains-new-super-prisons.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/7b1b207e-a114-48b6-b451-f156989c7044> - The Financial Times article discusses the construction and controversial opening of HMP Millsike, a new 1,500-capacity category C 'super-prison' in Full Sutton, North Yorkshire. Positioned beside the notorious high-security Full Sutton prison, Millsike has sparked concern and discontent among local residents. Promoted as the UK's first fully 'green' prison, running on renewable energy, its development has been criticized for intensifying light pollution, increasing traffic on narrow roads, and straining local amenities. Planning and communication were poor, with locals feeling ignored and infrastructure inadequate. The prison's private operator, Mitie, had little experience in corrections, adding to doubts about staffing and operational efficacy. The UK prison system is grappling with overcrowding, poor conditions, and chronic understaffing, which have contributed to rising drug use and prisoner deaths. The government's solution has been to expand capacity, despite expert critiques arguing for systemic reform over mere expansion. Residents support penal reform but question the location and logistics of the new prison. The article portrays Millsike as emblematic of broader failures in criminal justice policymaking—an inadequate, superficially progressive response to a deeply rooted crisis.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/76d01ed1-7e14-4353-a9c8-7caa930a82e0> - This Financial Times article reports that HMP Fosse Way, England's newest prison, opened 19 months ago, is already 98% full. The facility, which opened in May 2023 and is privately managed, was part of a multimillion-pound prison construction program initiated by the previous Conservative government to address the capacity crisis in the English prison system. However, the lack of funding for prison maintenance has led to cells being taken out of service as quickly as new ones are opened. Between May 2010 and April 2024, only 482 places were added to prisons in England and Wales. The overcrowding crisis has led the government to release thousands of prisoners early, while long-term efforts to rehabilitate offenders and improve support services continue.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uks-overflowing-prisons-present-pm-starmer-with-early-crisis-2024-07-10/> - Reuters reports that Britain's prisons are nearing full capacity, presenting a crisis for Prime Minister Keir Starmer's new government, which inherited the challenge from the previous Conservative administration. The overcrowding issue stems from tougher sentencing laws, resulting in a rising prison population with cells often housing two inmates instead of one. Emergency measures have already been taken, including early releases and delayed court cases. As of early July, the prison population in England and Wales reached 87,453, close to the capacity limit of 88,864. Options to mitigate overcrowding include more electronic tagging and suspended sentences. Starmer acknowledges that addressing the situation will take time. The Ministry of Justice noted high reoffending rates, especially among those who served short sentences. The prison estate was originally designed for about 79,000 inmates, underscoring the urgency for solutions. The previous program to expand prison spaces is behind schedule, prompting Starmer’s government to consider further emergency measures while working on long-term solutions.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/dec/04/tory-plan-for-20000-new-jail-places-will-be-years-late-and-4bn-over-budget-report> - The Guardian reports that the National Audit Office has stated that current plans for prison capacity are 'insufficient to meet future demand,' with a projected shortage of 12,400 places by the end of 2027. The expansion plans are expected to cost at least £4 billion more than initially estimated. The Ministry of Justice has so far created a third of the places in England and Wales it committed to deliver by the mid-2020s. Expansion plans in the prison estate are expected to cost between £9.4 billion and £10.1 billion, which auditors said would be at least £4.2 billion above previous estimates. The findings have been labeled as 'unacceptable' by the Tory chair of parliament’s spending watchdog. The report also highlights that the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison & Probation Service have been unable to increase prison places in line with demand, resulting in the prison estate operating at close to or at full capacity for over two years.
6. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/06/27/super-prisons-delayed-2027-badgers-planning-appeals/> - The Telegraph reports that badgers are threatening a 'nightmare' delay to Britain’s £4 billion new prison programme aimed at tackling an overcrowding crisis. Senior Ministry of Justice officials have admitted that three new super prisons—in Lancashire, Leicestershire, and Buckinghamshire—will not open before 2027 at the earliest because of planning appeals, putting at risk the target of creating 20,000 new cells by the end of the decade. It takes three years to build a new jail. The problem has been compounded by badgers, as licensed work to evict the animals from their sets can only take place between July and November. A Ministry of Justice official stated that even if planning permission was granted immediately for the three super prisons, the time required to build and mobilise the jails would mean that the earliest they could start admitting prisoners would be 2027.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/29/plan-for-20000-more-prison-places-in-england-and-wales-wont-be-complete-until-2030> - The Guardian reports that plans for 20,000 additional prison places by the mid-2020s are not expected to be completed until 2030 due to planning delays. The £4 billion programme has been hit by further problems, meaning the new cells will not be available to head off the current capacity crisis. The disclosure comes as figures show the prison population was 87,685, close to the 'usable operational capacity' of 88,314 and up 7% in a year. The situation is exacerbated by a record backlog in the courts leading to a 50-year high in the number of people on remand. The plans for the new prison places were signed off by ministers in 2020. Two prisons have opened so far and one is under construction. However, it emerged in June that three of the new super prisons—in Lancashire, Leicestershire, and Buckinghamshire—will not open before 2027 at the earliest because of planning appeals. A senior Ministry of Justice official confirmed that the target of opening all six prisons by 2027 was no longer possible and said they hoped they would be open by 'the end of the decade'.