Wealden District Council

Alex Norris MP
Minister of State (Home Office)
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

By email:
alex.norris.mp@parliament.uk

31 October 2025

[redacted]@wealden.gov.uk

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01323 443322

Dear Alex

Re: Use of Crowborough Army Training Centre (Crowborough Camp) as alternative asylum accommodation

We are writing to state our strong objection to the decision you have taken to use Crowborough Army Camp as a temporary location for 600 asylum seekers, because the dire mismanagement of the situation is already causing major problems, and because we simply do not have information to reassure us that the wellbeing and safety of both asylum seekers and local communities will be properly safeguarded.

As you know, our Council was not told that you had made this decision until after the news was leaked to the press. Along with East Sussex County Council we received a strictly confidential briefing on 10th October in which our officers learned that you were considering using the Camp. We raised significant concerns about the suitability of the site, but we were told that any decision about its use was a matter for you, and you alone, as Minister.

Following that briefing we wrote to you and highlighted various concerns - quite clearly accommodating 600 men on one site with no right to work brings significant risks. We had concerns about staffing resource at the camp, about police provision and about the additional strain on already over-stretched public services. Crucially, we clarified that it would be essential for the Home Office to communicate any plans properly and meaningfully with local residents. We requested you engage with all relevant public sector partners, eg with the Town Council, relevant stakeholder groups, local MPs, the voluntary sector and the local community itself. We were assured this would happen. We were told we would be able to meet you on site so that, as local leaders, we could discuss concerns ahead of your decision.

Your team assured us that all of this would happen and that a proper plan for community engagement would be shared prior to any decision being taken by you or any announcement made. Yet you announced your decision on Monday without having met any of those commitments. This is an act of bad faith.

Since your unilateral decision was unceremoniously leaked, worried residents have inundated the Council and individual councillors with letters and emails raising significant and valid points of concern. We take no account of any racist or politically motivated communications that have also been received. Local MPs are outraged that you chose not to tell them in advance, and are repeatedly sharing misinformation about our involvement. Local stakeholders are angered by the complete lack of communication or consultation.

We note your position that you can use the relevant provision in the General Permitted Development Order 2015 to circumvent the need to make a formal planning application to this council. Your commitment to public engagement is an acknowledgement that consultation was necessary in practice despite not being required in law. It is therefore regrettable – putting it mildly – that you reneged on that commitment.

We observed your request for confidentiality only to see this breached by a leak to the media which we trust is being investigated. Did it come from within the Home Office? The leak resulted in an increase in community tensions, and the spread of misinformation. This has escalated to threats to personal wellbeing of council leadership. These tensions will only continue to rise as we get nearer the proposed opening of the site.

Please do not underestimate the gravity of the situation here. The Home Office's lack of presence locally is lamentable. Given your and your team's total failure to keep the promises made and the now obvious consequences of that failure, it is essential that you reverse your decision.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Cllr James Partridge
Leader of the Council and Governance, Waste and Local Economy Portfolio Holder

[redacted]

Cllr Rachel Millward
Deputy Leader of the Council and Culture, Community and Communications Portfolio Holder