

## The proposed prison in Baglan

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 7 Tachwedd 2017

Petitions Committee | 7 November 2017

### Research Briefing:

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Petition number: P-05-781

Petition title: Port Talbot Community Against the Super Prison

Text of petition: We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government not to release or sell land to the UK government for the development of a super prison in Baglan.

The UK Government, with the support of the Welsh Government, proposes to build a 1600 capacity mens' 'super prison' on Baglan Moors.

The site is near to homes and local facilities, local businesses and will place significant strain on roads and health services in the area. The site is in an enterprise zone and designated for economic use as well as being in a flood risk area.

Wales already has a large surplus of prison places with its existing prisons.

This prison would bring with it all of the associated problems with large prisons and there has been no guarantee from either government on what protections would be put in place to help Port Talbot cope with such a large number of prisoners.

There is no long term guarantee that the new prison would remain housing category C prisoners. It could be changed in future to hold more dangerous criminals.

Port Talbot can do better than this and our town deserves much more. Will you sign the petition and tell the UK Government and the Welsh Government, NO to a super prison in Port Talbot?

### Background

On 22 March 2017, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice announced in a [written statement](#) that four potential sites for new prisons in England and Wales had been identified. One of these sites was in Neath Port Talbot. She noted that "final decisions on

the new prisons will be subject to planning approvals, as well as value for money and affordability.” She went on to note that one of the reasons for building new prisons was to close older and overcrowded prisons.

During a [Westminster Hall debate](#) on 12 September 2017 the prisons Minister, Sam Gyimah MP commented:

When assessing where to build new prisons, the Ministry of Justice worked closely with the Welsh Government to identify suitable sites for a new prison build in Wales. We undertook a comprehensive evaluation of more than 20 sites in south Wales, ensuring that various factors were taken into consideration, such as preference for sites located along the M4 corridor because of their accessibility and the travel time benefits they would bring.

After careful consideration, Port Talbot was selected as the best potential site for a new category C prison build in Wales. That was for a number of reasons, including the capacity of local infrastructure to support the prison and the potential to maximise the benefits of investment in the local community. In addition, the site is owned by the Welsh Government, who are supportive of our work to progress these plans. As I mentioned, supply and demand for prison places are misaligned. For example, we do not have enough category C prison places in south Wales; the proposed prison at Port Talbot would address that shortfall.

There are currently [five prisons in Wales](#) (Prescoed is a satellite prison of HMP Usk):

- [Berwyn](#) (Wrexham)
- [Cardiff](#)
- [Parc](#) (Bridgend)
- [Swansea](#)
- Usk/Prescoed

The most recently opened prison in Wales is HMP Berwyn, Wrexham. It was opened in February 2017. It will provide over 2,000 places when fully operational. There are no prisons for women in Wales, and no prison for the highest risk offenders.

While proponents of the proposed prison in Baglan have stressed the economic benefits, there appears to be considerable local opposition. Issues raised in opposition to the proposal include the impact on the local community and businesses, the impact on public services, transport and the suitability of the land itself for building on. It has also been reported that there are restrictions on the use of the land that could be problematic for the Ministry of Justice should it decide to proceed with the development. Wider issues, such as the effectiveness of larger prisons in reducing reoffending have also been raised.

## Welsh Government action

In response to an [urgent question](#) from David Rees AM on 22 March 2017, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children said:

I have had direct discussions with the UK prisons Minister regarding the proposed site for the development of the new prison at Port Talbot. This proposal has the potential to offer south Wales a modern, fit-for-purpose facility that concentrates on rehabilitation, making our communities safer.

He went on to answer a range of questions on the issue from other Members.

The Welsh Government has written to the Chair (October 2017), confirming its previous position and that it recognises the “strength of the petitioners’ views”. The letter notes that the UK Government is responsible for prisons, and any decision to proceed with the development will be subject to the planning process which will provide an opportunity for residents to put their views to councillors.

## **National Assembly for Wales action**

Since March 2017, this issue has been raised by Assembly Members on numerous occasions in the Siambr and in written questions. Issues raised include the impact of a new prison on local services in devolved areas including health, social care, housing, education and transport. Assembly Members have also questioned whether the additional prison places will be used to accommodate prisoners from Wales. The Wales Governance Centre [published research](#) on 22 March 2017 which stated that there would be a surplus of prison places in Wales for Welsh prisoners if the proposed prison in Baglan went ahead.

On 20 September 2017, there was a Plaid Cymru debate on “superprisons” in the Senedd. The motion, amongst other things, called on the Welsh Government to oppose the construction of the prison. During the debate, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children said:

Responsibility for prisons lies with the UK Government. The Welsh Government was approached by the Ministry of Justice as part of an exercise across England and Wales to see if we knew of any land that could be developed for this scale of prison. We supplied a list of 20 sites. [...] We regularly provide this type of service for all businesses and all developers.

He went on to comment that the Welsh Government was not part of the decision process that selected Baglan as the preferred site for a new prison:

Llywydd, we have granted the Ministry of Justice two licences to carry out work on that land. These include ecology mitigation measures and, again, this is normal practice. Developers want to know what the make-up of the land is prior to putting in a planning application. We have also been asked by the Ministry of Justice to discuss an option agreement for the land. We have not sold the land to the Ministry of Justice or come to an agreement regarding the sale or discussed the value. It is not a fait accompli as many have suggested in here and externally, as we’ve heard. If alternative offers for the land come forward, there is nothing to prevent us from assessing the economic benefits of that and accepting a good offer.

The Cabinet Secretary also welcomed the Ministry of Justice’s intention to hold a two-day community event that will give visitors and residents the chance to see and comment on the proposals before a formal planning application is made.

## Media coverage

There has been a substantial amount of media coverage of the issue. Links to a number of articles can be found below:

BBC News, 22 March 2017, [\*New prison in Port Talbot announced by Ministry of Justice\*](#)

BBC News, 21 August 2017, [\*Public safety 'priority' in Baglan prison plans, MoJ says\*](#)

ITV News, 23 August 2017, [\*Former inmate criticises plans for a new 'super prison' in Port Talbot\*](#)

BBC News, 20 September 2017, [\*Port Talbot prison should be moved to Swansea, says MP\*](#)

BBC News, 11 October 2017, [\*Baglan prison: Planned site's restriction concern\*](#)

BBC News, 25 October 2017, [\*Port Talbot prison: Petition against Baglan plan presented\*](#)

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