



Ministry of
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Dear Robert

North Wales Prison – Prisoner Visits and Car Park provision

Note to support the planning consideration for the North Wales Prison on the anticipated visits and proposed car parking arrangement.

The Ministry of Justice has submitted a planning application to build a prison in Wrexham, North Wales. The prison has been designed to accommodate approximately 2,100 prisoners.

The Ministry of Justice is responsible for the procurement and construction of the prison. Responsibility for its operation will be passed to the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), which is a department within the MoJ.

NOMS will have overall responsibility for overseeing the operation of the prison regardless of whether it is run by NOMS or by a private sector contractor.

The MoJ has asked NOMS to provide some additional information on visits to the prison and the trends and patterns of visits and parking which are commonly observed by NOMS staff. The information in this note is based on our experience across a range of custodial facilities, and in particular on HMP Oakwood in Staffordshire.

In this note we consider the following:

- the number of visits each prisoner is allowed per month and hence the theoretical maximum number of visits that must be facilitated by the prison each month;
- the theoretical maximum capacity of the proposed visitor suite;
- the number of visitors per visiting session
- the patterns of the visits observed by staff throughout the MoJ's custodial estate and the implications of this for parking at Wrexham.

These are considered in turn.

Prisoner Visits

The proposed facility would operate as a Category C male training prison. Prisoners in such facilities are allowed one visit per month. Some prisoners may be visited more regularly than this for a variety of reasons. However, the maximum ratio of visits that typically take place to Category C male training prisons is approximately 1.2 per prisoner per month. This is a generous maximum figure and in many establishments the ratio is much closer to one visit per prisoner per month.

If we assume that each prisoner would be visited 1.2 times per month, the maximum theoretical number of visits that the prison must accommodate each month is 2520 ($1.2 \times 2,100$).

Capacity of the Visitor Suite

The visitor suite proposed at Wrexham could accommodate up to forty prisoners in “open” conditions (i.e. sitting face to face with visitors at desks) per visitor session. In addition, the suite would have five closed visit spaces. During closed visits, prisoners and their visitors would be separated by a partition. Closed visits cannot take place in the open visiting areas. Conversely, prisoners who are entitled to open visits would use the open areas only. However, the visitor suite would be staffed to accommodate a maximum of forty prisoners. The total number of prisoners in the suite at any one time would not exceed forty.

Visiting hours at most prisons are typically between 9.30 am and 19.00 pm. Visits last for a maximum of ninety minutes (although many are shorter) and there are four visiting sessions per day. The visitor suite at the proposed prison would operate in this way.

Therefore, the proposed visitor suite at Wrexham could facilitate a maximum of either 140 open visits and 20 closed visits per day, or 160 open visits only per day. The visitor suite would be used seven days per week. In total, it could facilitate a maximum of 4,800 visits per month.

The maximum total number of visits that the prison is likely to facilitate is 2520 per month. Therefore, if all prisons take their full allowance, and some receive 2 visits per month, the visitor suite would still be used at just over half of its theoretical maximum capacity.

Number of Visitors Per Visit

Each prisoner can be visited by a maximum of three people during each visit. However, this is relatively uncommon. In category C male training prisons NOMS staff typically observe either one or two visitors per prisoner during each visit. There are various reasons for this. For example, visits from the wives or partners of prisoners are commonly one to one and are not usually shared with other visitors. Visits from parents are commonly single or pairs of visitors. Visits from friends and other relatives commonly involve either one or two visitors.

The broad pattern observed indicates that about fifty per cent of visits involve one visitor, approximately thirty per cent involve two and as few as twenty per cent of visits involve the maximum of three visitors.

Observed Patterns of Visits and the Implications For Wrexham

The broad experience of NOMS suggests that there is no particular preference for visits at weekends. The number of visits arranged at prisons tends to be similar every day of the week. The afternoon visiting sessions are more popular than morning slots, but not significantly so.

Groups of visitors (for example two parents; a partner and child or friends) typically travel from the same location. Groups who travel in private cars usually do so together, both for convenience and in order to reduce cost.

We expect the visitor suite at Wrexham to operate at approximately half of its maximum capacity seven days per week. This means there would be approximately twenty visits per session averaged out across a typical day, with perhaps fifteen visits in the morning sessions and 25 in the afternoon.

If it is assumed that each visit would involve two visitors (which is a generous estimate) there would be an average of 40 visitors per session. If we assume that all visitors use private vehicles and only half of the visitors share, the demand for parking spaces would be 30 spaces (20 visitors travelling separately would occupy 20 spaces and the other twenty visitors sharing would occupy 10 spaces).

The proposed capacity of the visitor car park is 120 spaces. Therefore, even allowing 100% overlap between visits, and assuming no visitors would use public transport, the maximum number of spaces likely to be occupied during normal operating conditions is 60.

In reality, the overlap between the occupation of spaces would not be 100%. Furthermore, some visitors are likely to use public transport, which would further increase the number of available spaces per session.

It is acknowledged that there may be times when the occupation of the visitor suite exceeds the average conditions explained in previous paragraphs. The total number of visitor spaces proposed (120) includes a large contingency which would meet parking demand when such extraordinary conditions arise. The extra spaces would allow the efficient management of staff and visitor spaces in order to meet varying demands.

In summary, based on knowledge of the visiting regime observed at various custodial establishments, NOMS is comfortable that the visitor car park would provide sufficient spaces. Accordingly, there would be no need for visitors to park elsewhere, for example on roads around the site.

Yours sincerely

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