

## **Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee (WASC)**

WASC is a collaboration of Parish Councils that have come together to oppose the plans, as they currently stand, for the mega prisons complex proposed for Wethersfield Airbase. WASC has been formed under the Local Government Act 1972 Section 102 which allows two or more local authorities to come together to form a committee to discharge their function. WASC currently comprises of 12 Parish Councils - Shalford, Wethersfield, Finchingfield, Sible Hedingham, Toppesfield, Bardfield, The Salings, Little Bardfield, Panfield, Castle Hedingham, Gosfield and Great Yeldham. Each PC has officially discussed and then appointed representatives at their own PC meetings.

WASC has a technical sub committee which is spearheading the opposition to the proposals. This sub committee comprises a range of people, volunteering their time, who have relevant professional skills and is chaired by a Wethersfield councillor with over 40 years experience as a senior planner in Local Government. To provide the most robust opposition to the plans a long and extensive work schedule has been underway since October. However there is a huge amount to do and WASC are currently engaging with expert consultants on the following areas - landscape, heritage, ecology, transport/highways etc.

Some of the Parish Councils, including Shalford, Gt Bardfield, Little Bardfield and Finchingfield have been able to commit funds to WASC so they are able to engage with the above consultants, however, there is a funding shortfall and we need the help of local residents to help fight this battle effectively.

Which leads on to the role of SWAP...

SWAP Stop Wethersfield Airfield Prisons is a campaign group being led by The Fields Association. This is a **residents** led campaign group, all of whom live locally and are volunteering their time tirelessly.

Their primary objectives are 1) to promote and preserve the beauty of the North Essex countryside 2) to help raise public awareness of the prisons proposal 3) to help raise funds to help WASC engage professional firms to fight the proposals 4) to consult with the local community to include their ideas for alternative uses.

So, WASC is the Parish Council led, technical response to the proposals, responsible for responding to any application with detailed expert analysis.

SWAP is the residents led group looking to raise public awareness and raise funds to help WASC in its task of fighting these proposals.

WASC and SWAP act independently of each other and each is responsible for their own strategy, for example WASC will not be on any social media and neither will it try and influence the work of SWAP. However both groups believe these proposals, as they stand, will seriously

impact upon the surrounding parishes. The potential traffic increase alone, in not only constructing one of the largest building projects in the South East of England but then servicing the largest prison complex in Europe will forever change the character of the area.

The visual impact for all surrounding Parishes , from the roads in, to the footpaths and high points will also be apparent. What currently sits as dark sky will be forever changed when over 100 acres of buildings are illuminated. We believe no amount of mitigation is possible to negate this as the airfield sits on one of the highest ridges in the district and is surrounded by open, undulating countryside on all sides.

What is also key is that these proposals currently sit upon only part of the runway, with the majority being on grassland. The prisons will sit tight in the North West corner of the base, taking up 117 acres of the 800 acre site. The existing buildings and structures are untouched in these proposals, accounting for another approx 150 acres. This area will no doubt also be open to future development.

WASC is led by parishes whose future generations will be affected by decisions made now. We intend to scrutinise any proposals but also aim to directly influence future plans for the base, in its entirety , making sure any plans put forward fall within local and national planning policy and are sympathetic and beneficial to the area. For example we believe large-scale housing is simply not possible as it will fail to meet local and national planning policy and therefore, stop dead, the misconception that the prisons are 'better than houses'. This has been confirmed to us at a meeting with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, the department responsible for the sale of the airbase

To help us fund the best opposition to these proposals, from the best highways and transport assessment to the best legal advice please donate what you can to SWAP and FIELDS ASSOCIATION . These funds will all be funnelled through to primarily fund WASCs work but also to promote alternatives that we will all benefit from

**Barclays Bank -The Fields Association      Sort code 20-19-97    Account 90231738**

**Website - [www.thefieldsassociation.org](http://www.thefieldsassociation.org)**