

Bicester Advertiser : "Asylum plan is put on ice" - 23/06/10

Contributed by Emma Ginn
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"PLANS to build Britain's largest asylum removal centre on the outskirts of Bicester have been shelved.

Immigration minister Damian Green has confirmed that the Government has "no plan to commence construction at this time."

The move comes after North Oxfordshire MP Tony Baldry lobbied the minister, asking for clarification in whether or not it still intended to build an immigration centre.

Mr Green, replying to Mr Baldry's letter, said: "I appreciate that delays in making a decision are unsettling for local residents, but the construction of the centre is currently unaffordable and so there is no plan to commence construction at this time.

"The UK Border Agency will, however, be considering a variety of options for expanding the detention estate in the run-up to the spending review due in the autumn. If the situation at Bullingdon changes, I will ensure you are notified."

Mr Baldry said later: "If the Home Office hasn't got the money to build a new immigration removal centre at Arncott now, it is difficult to see, given the country's present financial circumstances, when at any time in the foreseeable future they are ever going to have the money to build it."

The Home Office was given planning permission to build Britain's largest secure immigration removal centre, which could have housed up to 800 people, on surplus MoD land known as A site, between Arncott and Piddington, more than a year ago.

The Home Office had previously said that the centre, which would house failed asylum seekers or illegal immigrants awaiting deportation, could create 500 jobs and be open by 2012.

In 2005 villagers successfully fought proposals by the Labour Government to build an open-door asylum centre at the site.

Rebecca Mitchell-Farmer, chairman of action group the Coalition Against Bullingdon Immigration Removal Centre, said: "We are pleased to hear that there are no immediate plans to proceed with this centre.

"Given the current financial climate it would be a grave mistake to proceed with such an expensive, inefficient and inhumane policy.

"We are continuing to press the Government to abandon the use of detention and actively explore more humane alternatives."

On the Bicester Advertiser website