

Police intervene over plan to bring illegal immigrants to Suffolk, and my support for Higham as residents oppose a new town



The chief constables of Suffolk and Norfolk police forces have written to the Home Office attacking the plan to use RAF Barnham to house illegal immigrants.

The RAF base – which is just outside the constituency, but near **Brandon, Mildenhall, Elveden, Santon Downham, Eriswell and Lakenheath** – is used by the police as a training facility, and the two constabularies were in the process of buying it.

Now the forces have been told to vacate the site in a matter of weeks. In their letter to the Home Office, the chief constables say this will cause a “significant reduction in our ability to train and maintain the specialist resources [we need]”, creating “a substantial operational risk.”

And – very significantly – they warn “policing demand may increase because of the proposed development of the site.” If you are opposed to this scheme as much as I am, I urge you to sign my petition [here](#).



Sarah Jones MP
Minister of State for Policing & Crime
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Via email: PS.Sarah.jones@homeoffice.gov.uk

cc: Sarah Swinford, Director General, Public Safety Group (public.safety@homeoffice.gov.uk)
Terry Jerry MP, South West Norfolk (terry.jerry.mp@parliament.uk)
Nick Timothy MP, West Suffolk (nick.timothy.mp@parliament.uk)

Dear Minister

Re: RAF Mildenhall – Operational Impact of Proposed Site Changes and Role for Continued Access to Critical Police Training Facilities

You may be aware of a proposal by the Asylum Accommodation Team at the Home Office to use the site currently owned by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) at Barnham for asylum accommodation. We understand that a feasibility study is currently ongoing, however, the site is currently used by Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies, along with colleagues from the wider Eastern region, as a specialist operations training centre. The site has been used by the Home Office for a number of years and until very recently (June this year), the Home Office was progressing the purchase of the site from the MoD. We are writing to formally raise concerns regarding the proposed timescales for the cessation of police use of the site and the significant operational implications this presents for Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies.

During recent discussions with Home Office representatives, it was suggested that the site could be vacated by April and that we were therefore expected to vacate the site by May. This does not reflect our understanding of the position we have communicated. As previously advised, a period of at least between four and six months would be required to safely vacate the site, identify and secure a suitable alternative to relocate critical operational training activities without causing significant detriment to the constabularies both locally, regionally and nationally.

Whilst September was referenced during recent discussions as a potential date for departure, we do not agree that this is an achievable or realistic timescale. At best, it represents the earliest conceivable date for a move and only if suitable arrangements could be identified, secured and made operational. At the present time, no alternative facility exists.

2. The Home Office representatives sought assurance regarding the work being undertaken to identify replacement accommodation. We can provide assurances, as was communicated at the meeting by ACC Julie Dean, that significant effort is being devoted to this. Whilst we are engaged with specialist estate advisers and wider partners, whilst several initial locations have been identified for further consideration, it is highly unlikely that a suitable site will be secured, adapted and brought into operational use within the timescales currently discussed. The practical requirements associated with acquisition, planning, construction, security, health and safety considerations and operational readiness make such a timescale extremely challenging and most likely impossible.

The impact of losing this facility extends far beyond a simple matter of estate. RAF Barnham is a critical policing asset that underpins the delivery of specialist training across our constabularies. The site supports the maintenance of essential operational competencies and specialist skills relied upon across Norfolk and Suffolk, and the Eastern region, to ensure public safety and operational resilience. These capabilities cannot simply be transferred into alternative environments without significant compromise and disruption.

Loss of this facility before a suitable alternative is secured would result in the interruption of established training programmes and a reduction in our ability to maintain critical specialist skills. We already have substantial training commitments planned to meet operational demands and national preparedness requirements. These programmes cannot simply be cancelled without creating risks to operational capability, officer safety and service delivery. A major concern is the impact on our ability to maintain the specialist public order and protection capability required in response to activity associated with the site. As you will be aware, there has been sustained public interest and protest activity linked to the proposed use of RAF Barnham since it was communicated in the media. Training delivered at the site plays a vital role in ensuring that officers have the necessary skills, accreditation and fitness to police demonstrations, manage community tensions and respond proportionately to incidents of public disorder, both locally, regionally and importantly nationally. As a result of mutual aid requests, should access to the site be removed before replacement arrangements are established, there will be a significant reduction in our ability to train and maintain the specialist resources required to respond to such demands. This presents a substantial operational risk at precisely the point at which policing demand may increase as a result of the proposed development of the site.

And the impact on training and operational readiness, we are increasingly concerned about the potential for heightened community tension and unrest arising from the proposed future use of RAF Barnham. The implications of this proposal extend well beyond the immediate vicinity and have already generated significant public interest, concern and debate among local communities, elected representatives and partner agencies both in Norfolk and Suffolk. The scale and nature of the proposal have the potential to create ongoing policing demands across both our counties. Experience demonstrates that issues of this nature are rarely confined to a single location and can generate sustained protest activity, community tensions, wider public order concerns across multiple communities. Effective management of such issues requires a coordinated policing response across both force boundaries, supported by appropriately trained specialist resources.

Therefore, particularly concerning the removal of a critical specialist training facility, we consider that the proposed use of the site is being considered at the same time as policing demand associated with the site is increasing. This creates the prospect of reduced capability occurring alongside increasing operational pressures. The consequence is a material risk to our ability to maintain public order, protest liaison and operational support functions necessary to effectively manage community tensions, reassure local communities and respond proportionately to any incidents of unrest.

3.

Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies are actively planning for a range of potential scenarios and remain committed to maintaining public confidence and community cohesion. Without sufficient time to identify and establish a replacement facility, there is a clear risk to our ability to sustain the specialist capabilities necessary to respond to emerging public order challenges across both counties which will be significantly diminished, leaving us to respond to the activity already being seen weekly at the site.

We also wish to emphasise that the decision and associated timescales have generated considerable organisational concern and we now consider the position to be a critical risk. We are currently pursuing a number of actions but, as referenced above, there is no “quick fix” to this issue.

Whilst we remain committed to working constructively with the Home Office, the Ministry of Defence and other partners, it is imperative that the operational reality for the constabularies is fully understood. Without a suitable alternative location, it is an expectation that we can vacate the site within the proposed timeframe without causing damage to our training capability, specialist operational readiness and overall resilience.

We therefore respectfully request that the Home Office urgently reconsider the timeline and engage with us to determine a realistic and achievable transition plan to ensure critical policing capability, safeguard public safety and ensure both Norfolk and Suffolk Constabularies remain able to respond effectively to any increase in community tensions, protest activity or public order demand arising from the future use of the site.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns further.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Sanford
Chief Constable
Norfolk Constabulary

Rachel Kearton
Chief Constable
Suffolk Constabulary

Your voice in Parliament

The Home Office has made an urgent application to the Ministry of Housing to allow it to house illegal immigrants at RAF Barnham. The department [wrote to me](#) confirming the details. The application is for an Urgent Crown Development and if granted, it means the Government will bypass local, democratically-elected councils to impose its decision on West Suffolk. The Home Office says it made this kind of application because of the “national importance” of housing illegal immigrants – people who should not even be in our country. This is not yet a final decision, and I will continue my fight against this proposal.

Higham is the latest community whose very existence is [under threat](#) thanks to Labour’s housing targets. Early plans to build thousands of new houses in the area were recently unveiled in response to the West Suffolk District Council call for sites. I have always said – as part of my approach to development here – that villages must remain villages. While we do need to build new houses in West Suffolk – not least because of our proximity to Cambridge – the numbers required do not necessitate a new town that would wipe out village life and undermine an important conservation area. You can find about the local campaign group [here](#).

Save Higham group formed to fight Pigeon and Higham Estate development of possibly thousands of homes which could 'swallow' village

Ross Waldron

🕒 16:08, 30 July 2026 **updated:** 16:21, 30 July 2026

Regular readers will know of my work, as Shadow Justice Secretary, opposing Labour's early release scheme. This means killers, rapists and paedophiles are due to be let out of prison early from September. In response, Colin Sutton – Reform's police and crime commissioner for Norfolk and their crime adviser – said we should empty women's prisons instead. Given that it takes a lot more for a woman to receive a custodial sentence, meaning more female prisoners are in for more serious crimes, I [explained](#) why I believe this would be a serious mistake.

This week, we learned yet more about the damage the Equality Act is causing our institutions. Citing a disproportionate effect on ethnic minorities, a judge found the police was racist for not allowing the promotion of officers under investigation for misconduct. This follows a related story about how the Treasury, in charge of this country's finances, is not allowed to test job applicants on maths – because it supposedly discriminates against ethnic minorities. In a video I published this week, I explain why this [insanity](#) must end.

Free women to solve prison crisis, says Reform adviser

Britain's most famous detective, now a PCC, says early release may be a simple way to open thousands of cells



Colin Sutton: "That would be a kind of an outside-the-box way of creating more prison space"

Listening to you

Last week, I asked for your opinions on the new prime minister, Andy Burnham. The people of West Suffolk have not warmed to our country's new leader: only 24 per cent believe his leadership will be a success. And respondents expect him to put up taxes in his first Budget this Autumn: 78 per cent said so. Click [here](#) to take part.

Nick Timothy MP Survey

Lowering the driving age to 16



Please take two minutes to share your thoughts

This week, I am asking for your views about lowering the driving age to sixteen. In rural areas like ours, I think there is a case for change, especially given the needs of many young people who have to travel to sixth form or college. Please click [here](#) for my latest two-minute survey.

Out and about in Suffolk

I visited the fascinating Ancient House Museum in **Clare** to see its great exhibition on local artefacts. The museum had an impressive range of items, including a papal bull from 1293 that was found under a local shop. Having spoken to the curators, I plan to write to the British Museum to see what other artefacts they have from West Suffolk.



St Margaret of Antioch in **Cowlinge** is a tremendous church with a fascinating history. Like other churches it is bearing the brunt of Labour's decision to strip churches of the right to reclaim VAT on repairs, putting our inheritance, identity, and community spaces at risk of being lost forever. St Margaret's is hosting a classical music concert on 26 September – please do come along if you can.



The Ickworth Estate at **Horringer** has always been a family favourite of ours, and it has just opened its Summer of Play. Tens of thousands of people this summer are expected to visit the estate and take part in a range of activities on offer. The whole estate covers 1,800 acres of parks and woodland and I recently visited to discuss the work to convert some of its remaining farmland back to woodland. I would encourage you to visit if you are looking for a great summer's day out.



In the media

My publication of the Home Office application to the Ministry of Housing to house illegal immigrants at RAF Barnham was [picked up](#) by the BBC. The article records some of the back-and-forth between the Government, local councils, and me, as well as the local opposition to this proposal. As then report notes, while this is not a final decision, it is a major escalation in the planning process.

'Urgent application' to use RAF base for asylum seekers



RAF Barnham, or Barnham Camp, has been used as accommodation for military personnel

Official Ministry of Justice statistics published this week show more than 70,000 prisoners have been let out of prison early under the Government's existing scheme. Incredibly, more criminals have been recalled to prison than released – showing the chaos of the scheme. And now Labour are due to extend the policy, applying it to some of the most dangerous criminals, and letting many out just one third of the way through their sentences. My response was reported by the [Daily Mail](#), [The Times](#), and others.

Scrutinising the Government

Over recent months, several cases have emerged where US servicemen stationed at local military bases have escaped justice in an English court, instead receiving more lenient punishments following dubious processes in an American court martial. In the case of Sarah Steele I wrote to the Ministry of Justice asking why British jurisdiction was so readily relinquished by the police, and I am pleased to hear the Government will now be conducting a proper review. I am in touch with others who suffered a similar injustice, and I will be watching the review closely.

Last weekend, I worked with the *Sunday Telegraph* to expose how Andy Burnham's new solicitor general, Andy Slaughter, previously accompanied Jeremy Corbyn to a meeting with Hamas. I have long warned about the creeping influence of Islamists in our public life, and this is yet another disgraceful example.

Solicitor General met Hamas in Jerusalem

Nick Timothy calls appointment a 'disgrace' after images resurface from £927 fact-finding trip to Palestine with Jeremy Corbyn

Sabrina Miller Whitehall
Correspondent. **Nick Gutteridge**
Chief Political Correspondent

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Andy Slaughter (left), pictured with (left to right) Ahmad Attoun, Khaled Abu-Arafah, Muhammed Totah and Jeremy Corbyn

Surgeries and support

Parliament has now risen for its summer recess, returning in September, and so I am looking forward to spending even more time listening to you in West Suffolk. If you need any help at all you can reach me at nick.timothy.mp@parliament.uk

And if you know anyone who you think might welcome receiving this email, please do forward this onto them and mention that they can sign up by writing to nick@nicktimothy.com

Very best wishes

Nick Timothy
MP for West Suffolk

**PS Please click here to sign my
petition to STOP the Forest City if
you have not already
done so. Many thanks**

Nick Timothy

Member of Parliament for West Suffolk

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