

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

12 May 2021

Dear Home Secretary,

Re: Proposed new immigration removal centre for women in County Durham

We are writing to raise our serious concerns about the plans to open a new immigration removal centre (IRC) for women in County Durham, in Autumn this year.

We are MPs, councillors, faith leaders, people seeking asylum and refugees, charity and community group leaders, health workers, academics and university staff, and public figures raised or based in the North East of England. We care deeply about justice and social cohesion in our communities. As you will know, the site that your department is planning to use for this new IRC has a disturbing history. During the 1970s and 80s, hundreds of young men were physically and sexually abused by members of staff while held at Medomsley Detention Centre.

The re-opening of Medomsley as an IRC will mean that it continues to be a place of suffering. Research shows that the majority of women who are detained under immigration powers are survivors of serious human rights abuses, including torture, rape and trafficking. Locking these women up has a devastating effect on their mental health.

In 2015 the charity Women for Refugee Women conducted research with women in Yarl's Wood, then the main IRC for women, which found that 40 per cent of the women they interviewed said they had self-harmed while in detention. In the same year, the Chief Inspector of Prisons called Yarl's Wood 'a place of national concern'.

It is also the case that the detention of women often serves no purpose. Most women in Yarl's Wood were released not to be removed from the UK, but back into the community to continue with their immigration cases. Indeed, is it more straightforward and less expensive, as well as less traumatic, to allow people to resolve their immigration status while living in the community.

Following Stephen Shaw's reviews of vulnerable people in detention in 2016 and 2018, the Home Office took important steps towards reducing the use of immigration detention. You will be aware that one of these steps was commissioning the 'Action Access' alternative to detention

scheme, based in Newcastle, which has supported women who would otherwise have been detained to resolve their immigration cases in the community.

In fact, over the past couple of years the number of women in immigration detention has fallen significantly, from more than 200 in September 2018 to just 27 in September 2020. The plans to open a new IRC for women appear to mark a worrying step away from this welcome reduction in the use of detention.

We are also concerned about the disregard shown for the local community in the development of these plans. As you will know, Homes England had planned to remove the buildings at the Medomsley Detention Centre site and to replace them with housing. The housing development proposed would have had provision of 20 per cent affordable housing, along with approximately £1m commuted funds for investment in the local community.

Indeed, building new homes on the Medomsley site would have meant investment in local health and education services, new landscaping for local people to enjoy and environmentally friendly management of the land over the coming decades. Yet, without any local consultation, these plans have now been cancelled.

The mental health impact of re-opening the Medomsley site on those abused at Medomsley Detention Centre also appears not to have been considered. Durham Police's investigation into the abuse, Operation Seabrook, is ongoing, and to date over 1,800 men have come forward to give evidence. A key local question which comes up again and again is, 'Why are the Home Office so keen on re-traumatising vulnerable men at a time when a positive use for the site had already been found?'

For all of the reasons above, we urge you to reconsider your decision. Please do not turn the Medomsley Detention Centre site into an immigration removal centre for women.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Kelly Foy, Member of Parliament for City of Durham

Ian Mearns, Member of Parliament for Gateshead

Kate Osborne, Member of Parliament for Jarrow

Emma Lewell-Buck, Member of Parliament for South Shields

Neil Tennant, Pet Shop Boys

Peter Flannery, Scriptwriter

Jamie Driscoll, Mayor, North of Tyne Combined Authority

Umme Imam, Executive Director, The Angelou Centre

Michael Fawole, Centre Director, North East Law Centre

Dr Mohamed Nasreldin, Director, North of England Refugee Service

Hannah Barnes, Director, West End Refugee Service

Dr Alessandra Mondin, LGBT Asylum Community Worker, Rainbow Home

Julian Prior, Chief Executive Officer, Action Foundation

Jennifer Laws, Campaigns Manager, North East Asylum Matters

Dr George Rae, Chair, British Medical Association North East Regional Council

Dr Bethan Roberts, Co-chair, Forensic and Secure Environments Committee, British Medical Association

Dr Rachael Pickering, Co-chair, Forensic and Secure Environments Committee, British Medical Association

Dr Michael Shaw, Deputy Chair, British Medical Association Northern Regional Consultant Committee

Dr Karen Horridge, Consultant Paediatrician (Disability), South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

Councillor Heather Liddle, Durham County Council

Councillor Maura McKeon, Durham County Council

Councillor Marilyn Charlton, Gateshead Council

Councillor Bala Nair, Stanley Town Council; BAME Officer, North Durham Constituency Labour Party

Rabbi Sybil Sheridan, Newcastle Reform Synagogue

Father Adrian Tuckwell, Episcopal Vicar for Caritas Hexham and Newcastle, Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle

Abolish Detention - Hassockfield, Campaigning group

Owain Gardner, No to Hassockfield Campaign

Julie Ward, No to Hassockfield Campaign

Owen Temple, No to Hassockfield Campaign

Suzanne Fletcher, No to Hassockfield Campaign

Alison Hiles, No to Hassockfield Campaign

Fiona Ranson, No to Hassockfield Campaign

Angela Hanson, No To Hassockfield Campaign

Rachel Cope-Thompson, Student, Durham University

Severin Baker, Student, Durham University

Mollie Brown, Chair, Durham People's Assembly

Sunjeev Sahota, Author of *The Year of the Runaways* and Lecturer, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Anne Jenkins, Coordinator, Women's Economic Imperative

Mrs Rachel Wing, Volunteer/Treasurer, Refugee and Asylum Project, Stockton on Tees

Professor Cheryl McEwan, Head-Elect of Department of Geography, Durham University

Professor John Nash, Head of Department of English Studies, Durham University

Professor Catherine Donovan, Head of Department of Sociology, Durham University

Rachel Meenan, Secretary, North East Against Racism

Michal Chantkowski, Member of the Race Equality Advisory Group, People's Powerhouse

Steve Newman, Secretary, Wearside Amnesty International Group

Tony Dowling, Chair, People's Assembly North East

County Durham Unites

Canny Little Library Collective, Canny Little Library

Phil Watson, Chair, Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle Justice and Peace Co-ordinating Council

Catherine Ruth Jowett, Licenced Reader (Lay Minister), Church of England

Kieran Thompson, Head of Talent, Diversity, and Inclusion, Cundall Ltd

Elaine Malcolm, Solicitor, Slater and Gordon Lawyers

Dr. Christine Chettle, Research Co-ordinator and Networker (Grief, Loss and Trauma Recovery Project), The Stoplight Approach

Ines Cardoso, Curator

Sam Slatcher, Director of Citizen Songwriters, Citizen Songwriters

Michal Chantkowski, Secretary, The Sunderland Black and Minority Ethnic Network Limited (SBMEN)

Dr Shereen Al-Khabouri, GP

Lya Vollering, 'New Story' Eco-Community Walled Garden, Minsteracres Retreat Centre

Sharyn Maxwell, Copy Editor

Ashley Brown, Committee Member, North East Regional Council, BMA

Professor Nayanika Mookherjee, Professor of Anthropology; Co-Founder of BAME Network, Durham University

Dr Noreen Masud, Early Career Fellow, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Professor Patricia Waugh, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Dr Gillian Skinner, Associate Professor, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Dr Fraser Riddell, Lecturer, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Dr Marco Bernini, Assistant Professor in Cognitive Literary Studies, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Dr Angela Woods, Associate Professor of Medical Humanities, Durham University

Dr Eleanor Spencer-Regan, Vice-Principal and Senior Tutor, St Chad's College

Professor David Lawton, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Dr Chris Vardy, Teaching Fellow, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Dr James Robinson, Assistant Professor, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Dr Samuel Thomas, Associate Professor, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Professor Jane Macnaughton, Professor of Medical Humanities, Durham University

Dr Helen L Thompson, Postdoctoral Research Scientist, Department of Biosciences, Durham University

Grace Norman, Hatfield Development Officer, Durham University

Professor Sue Black, Professor of Computer Science and Technology Evangelist, Durham University

Dr Karen Milek, Associate Professor, Department of Archaeology, Durham University

Amy Cutts, Human Resources Administrator, Durham University

Donna Carr, Careers Adviser, Durham University

Dr Kris Kovarovic, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Durham University

Lynn Gibson, Research Institute Manager, Durham Energy Institute, Durham University

Dr Alison Jobe, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Durham University

Nicky Sawicki, Corporate Marketing Officer, Durham University

Dr Katherine Puddifoot, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Durham University

Laura Smith, Employer Services Manager, Durham University

Dr Julia Knapp, Assistant Professor, Department of Earth Sciences, Durham University

Laura Dorian, Senior Project Manager, Durham University

Dr Marzieh Kouhi Esfahani, Teaching Fellow, School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University

Dr Sui-Ting Kong, Assistant Professor in Social Work, Durham University

Dr Joanna Berry, Associate Professor in Entrepreneurship, Durham University

Adriana Salazar Méndez, Lead Business Analyst, Computing and Information Services, Durham University

Dr Geetanjali Gangoli, Associate Professor in Sociology; Co-Chair of BAME Network, Durham University

Dr Amitabh Trehan, Associate Professor, Department of Computer Science, Durham University

Professor Simone Abram, Department of Anthropology, Durham University

Dr Maja Kutlaca, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Durham University

Beth Barnes, Teaching Fellow, Department of Engineering, Durham University

Elizabeth Gordon, Head of Collaboration Services, Durham University

Joanne Spence, Learning and Teaching Manager, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Dr Sophie Clough, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Department of Biosciences, Durham University

Dr Liadi Mudashiru, Senior Regional Manager (Middle East and Africa), Durham University

Lucy Morris, Scholarship Officer, Durham University

Nicola Silcock, Assistant Manager (Learning & Teaching), Department of Philosophy, Durham University

Dr Megan Baker, Post Doctoral Research Associate, Department of Geography, Durham University

Roger Smith, Professor in Social Work, Durham University

Dr Michael Crawley, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Durham University

Pauline Dowson-Pounder, Partnerships Co-ordinator, Durham University Business School

Rachel Bickerdike, Enterprise Manager, Durham University

Professor Rachel Kendal, Professor in the Department of Anthropology, Durham University

Miss Ann Herzog, Employer Engagement Coordinator, Durham University

Dr Nikki D'Souza, Teaching Fellow, Department of Sociology and Criminology, Durham University

Alishya Dhir, PhD Researcher, Department of Sociology, Durham University

Dr Hannah Brown, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Durham University

Dr Paolo Fortis, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Durham University

Helen Jackson, Work Experience Manager, Durham University

Dr Emma Short, Lecturer in Modern & Contemporary Literature, Durham University

Rosalind Jelfs, Information Services Manager, Durham University

Dr Jinrui Pan, Assistant Professor in Economics, Durham University

Dr Stephen Burrell, Assistant Professor (Research), Department of Sociology, Durham University

Kelly Brown, Learning and Teaching Administrator, Department of History, Durham University

Elkie Robinson, Finance Manager, Durham University

Lottie Ayres, Pharmacist and PHD research student, Department of Chemistry and Pharmacy, Durham University

Laura Todd, Vice Principal & Senior Tutor, College of St Hild & St Bede, Durham University

Dr Sally Street, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Durham University

Michelle Taylor, Senior Organisation Development Manager, Durham University

Simone Devine, Enquires Administrator, Durham University

Melanie Earnshaw, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Durham University

Dr Donna Marie Brown, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Durham University

Leanne Britton, Enquiries Manager, Durham University

Dr Stephen Ashe, Teaching Fellow in Sociology, Durham University

Dr Julie Crane, Associate Professor, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Laura Bielby, Faculty Placement Manager, Durham University

Dr Sitna Quiroz, Assistant Professor in the Study of Religion, Durham University

Danielle Cameron, HR Team Leader, Durham University

Eloise Hepburn, Teaching and Learning Administrator, Durham University

Dr Alice Stefanelli, Lecturer in Mathematics, Durham University

Sabine Tenge-Heslop, Lecturer in German, Durham University

Janet Cummings, Administrator, Durham University

Dr Adam Talib, Associate Professor/Director of Studies in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Durham University

Professor Gerald Moore, Professor in French Philosophy and Digital Studies, Durham University

Dr Charlotte Branchu, Lecturer and Honorary Research Fellow, Department of Sociology, Durham University

Professor Ita Mac Carthy, Professor in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Durham University

Owen Walpole, CRM Campaigns Officer in the Recruitment and Admissions, Durham University

Professor Thomas Wynn, Professor in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Durham University

Dr Kerstin Oloff, Associate Professor in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Durham University

Dr Hazel Donkin, Assistant Professor (Teaching) in the School of Education, Durham University

Dr Edward G. J. Stevenson, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Durham University

Dr Jesse Proudfoot, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Durham University

Dr Jana Bacevic, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Durham University

Dr Jennifer Terry, Associate Professor of English, Durham University

Dr Jonathan Saha, Associate Professor of History, University of Durham

Professor Abir Hamdar, Professor in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Durham University

Hayley Duffy, Accommodation and Allocations Manager, Durham University

Dr Sadaf Noor E Islam, Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Anthropology, Durham University

Dr Stefanie Kappler, Associate Professor in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding, Durham University

Professor David Cowling, Professor of French, Durham University

Dr Sarah McLusky, Institute Manager, Durham University

Dr Harriet Evans Tang, Post Doctoral Research Associate in the Department of Archaeology, Durham University

Dr Zanna Clay, Associate Professor, Departments of Psychology, Durham University

Dr Roisín Laing, Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Dr Sam Riviere, Assistant Professor, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Dr Sarah Hickmott, Assistant Professor, School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Durham University

Dr Hannah King, Assistant Professor Criminology, Durham University

Dr Lucy Szablewska, Researcher, Durham University

Dr Elizabeth Swann, Assistant Professor, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Dr Heather Allinson, Technology Transfer Manager, Durham University

Dr Helen Charman, Teaching Fellow, Department of English Studies, Durham University

Dr Jane Wilcockson, Senior PostDoctoral Research Associate, Department of Sociology, Durham University

Nuria Polo-Pérez, Lecturer in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Durham University

Rowan Stace, Senior Research Administrator, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Durham University

Dr Jessica Lehman, Assistant Professor of Geography, Durham University

F.W. Pritchard, Hon. Secretary in the Unions, Durham UCU

Dr Anna Rowlands, Associate Professor of Catholic Social Thought, University of Durham

Dr Elizabeth Powell, Assistant Professor (Research), Theology and Spirituality, Durham University

Dr Alex Fry, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University

Dr Kimberley Fowler, Lecturer in New Testament, Durham University

Sol Gamsu, Lecturer/Trade Unionist, Durham University/Durham UCU

Professor Gerard Loughlin, Professor of Christian Theology, Durham University

Professor Alec Ryrie FBA, Professor of the History of Christianity, Durham University

Alex Rowe, PhD Candidate and Teaching Assistant, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University

Professor Mike Higton, Professor of Theology and Ministry, Durham University

Professor Karen Kilby, Bede Professor of Catholic Theology, Durham University

Professor Simon Oliver, Professor of Divinity, Durham University

Rowan Stace, Senior Research Administrator in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Durham University

Mary Robson, Research Associate and Creative Facilitator, Durham University

Revd Professor David Wilkinson, Principal, St John's College, Durham University

Dr Jessica Eastwood, Lecturer, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University

Dr William Crozier, Lecturer, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University

Eli Auslander, PhD Candidate, Department of Politics, University of York

Dr Julie Rugg, Senior Research Fellow, University of York

Jean Grugel, Professor of Development Politics, University of York

Kate Crane, Librarian, Cambridge University Library

Dr Adam Stock, Senior Lecturer in English Literature, York St John University

Professor Kathryn Cassidy, Professor of Geography and Environmental Sciences, Northumbria University

Dr Peter J Forman, Lecturer in Human Geography, Northumbria University

Chiara Broglia, Student at Durham University

Emily Raikes, Student

Harley McCourt, Activist

Sally Capes, Volunteer, Mary Thompson Fund

Louise Maxwell, Head of Continuous Improvement

Alison Stancliffe, Global Issues Educator, Tyneside

Clare Brown, Volunteer, Canny Little Library

Danielle Baker, Student

Piers O'Connor, Resident

Johannes Kotzee, Resident

Natalie Keogh, Local resident

Caron Naude, Member of the community

Rosa Stourac McCreery, Local resident

Ruby Topping, Student, Durham University

Anna Hutchinson, Concerned local resident

John Lowe, Durham City resident, City of Durham Trust

Sherene Meir, Community Organiser

Mr Lameck Sibanda, Protection seeker

Sarah Hopwood, Local campaigner

John Stenhouse, Retired HR practitioner

Laura Nicol, Resident

Judith McSwaine, Volunteer

Floor van der Hout, Activist

Sehrish Mushtaq, Protection seeker

Maria Luck, Westminster Researcher

Petra Todd, School student

Angela Tracy

George O'Donnell

Margaret O'Donnell

Fiona Ranson, PhD student

Elizabeth Millican, Student Support Administrator, student, mother

Jodie Brown, Collections Coordinator

Victoria Morgan, Education within Secure Estate

Caroline Todd, Lecturer in Art and Design (long time resident of Durham)

Eleanor Crane, Secondary Teacher

Sarah J Brown, Finance Officer

Dr Nicolete Burbach, Incoming Social and Environmental Justice Lead, Jesuit Centre