

Rt. Hon. Yvette Cooper MP
Home Secretary
House of Commons
SW1A 0AA



#WethersfieldMustClose #NapierMustClose

RE: The camps must close now

Dear Home Secretary,

We are writing to you as charities and organisations on the frontline of providing support to people seeking asylum placed in unfit asylum accommodation across the UK, including organisations providing support to people warehoused in camps at Wethersfield and Napier, as well as organisations supporting migrants and racialised people.

People seeking asylum should be housed in communities, not camps. Placing people seeking protection in camp accommodation on ex-military sites is inhumane, and causes profound and long-lasting additional trauma to people who have already experienced conflict, oppression, abuse, torture and trafficking. The recent judgment by the High Court of Justice regarding the unlawful treatment of three victims of torture, trafficking and/or serious violence at ex-RAF Wethersfield adds to the growing body of evidence that camps like this are wholly unsuitable and unsafe for people seeking protection. Both Wethersfield and Napier must close now, so that no more vulnerable people are put at risk and no more Government money is wasted.

Camps which segregate people seeking asylum stoke community division and act as a magnet for far right agitators. In the wake of the terrible violence of August 2024 this is ever more important. Every day the camps remain open is another day of suffering, waste and damage to people's mental health. We urge your Government to fulfil its pre-election promise to close Wethersfield, and to commit to never opening such camps again.

The cost of cruelty and 'value for money'

We understand that this Government inherited the programme of 'large-scale' accommodation sites, and warmly welcome the steps you have taken to bring this programme to an end. In particular we welcome the closure of the Bibby Stockholm barge, and the scrapping of further camps planned by the previous Government at Scampton in Lincolnshire and Northeye in Bexhill.

We also welcome your [recognition](#), following findings by the [Public Accounts Committee](#) and others, that such sites have not constituted value for money for the taxpayer and assurances given in Parliament that lessons have been learned. We feel strongly that the same rationale applies to the continued operation of camps both at Wethersfield and Napier. According to the National Audit Office, the use of Wethersfield between 2023-24 to 2026-27 is due to cost

[£338.7 million](#). That is without counting the reported [£653.965](#) in legal costs incurred by the Government in its efforts to defend legal challenges brought by asylum seekers held at Wethersfield. Surely no ‘value for money’ case exists to keep Wethersfield or Napier open another day longer.

Mental health crisis

Organisations who have provided direct support to people at Wethersfield have documented an urgent mental health crisis there, including published evidence of high incidence of suicidal ideation and self-harm ([Helen Bamber Foundation/ Humans for Rights Network 2023](#)); data from clinical services showing extremely high levels of severe psychological distress and suicidal ideation ([Médecins sans Frontières / Doctors of the World 2024](#)); data showing high levels of safeguarding referrals and self-harm / suicide attempts ([Helen Bamber Foundation / Humans for Rights Network 2024](#)) and testimonies from residents with respect to harms caused ([Care 4 Calais / Runnymede Trust 2024](#)). Between October 2023 and December 2024, more than 62% of patients seen by clinicians of Doctors of the World and Médecins sans Frontières presented with severe mental distress, and 30% with suicidal ideation. A freedom of information request has revealed that ambulances were called [166 times](#) to the camp at Wethersfield during 2024. Similar evidence has been brought forwards regarding conditions at the camp in Napier ([Jesuit Refugee Service, 2023](#)).

This mental health crisis has been brought to the attention of successive Governments, including by the [Independent Chief Inspector for Borders and Immigration](#). We are concerned that the prison-like conditions, isolated environment, lack of privacy, lack of access to vital services and inadequate vulnerability assessments which typify conditions in the camps mean that the Home Office is taking a real and unnecessary risk in continuing to accommodate people there. This risks another tragedy such as in 2023, when Mr Leonard Farruku lost his life on board the Bibby Stockholm barge.

Lack of safeguarding

The recent High Court judgment relating to Wethersfield shone a new spotlight on the poor application of Home Office policies in relation to safeguarding vulnerable people or allocating them appropriate accommodation. It found that the then-Home Secretary [acted unlawfully](#) in accommodating three vulnerable people at the site and criticised the lack of equality assessment made before the policy was changed, amounting to “the clearest failure” to fulfil the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Harms caused by Wethersfield have been exacerbated by changes to the Home Office’s ‘Allocation of Accommodation’ policy in February 2024, making it harder for people to challenge their placement at these sites on unsuitability grounds. While some men are now being moved on from Wethersfield more quickly (after their substantive asylum interview), the current pause on decision-making for Syrian claimants is adversely affecting members of that community.

Lack of legal representation

The lack of legal provision at Wethersfield is set out in this [joint briefing](#) by seven organisations in November 2024. There have been significant problems onsite, including a lack of information regarding law firms with capacity provided; a lack of financial or logistical support provided for men to travel to legal appointments; insufficient private spaces, equipment and reliable Wi-Fi; and a lack of privacy.

There is of course a broader national crisis of provision when it comes to asylum legal aid: 63% of the population in England and Wales do not have access to an immigration and asylum legal aid provider. We welcome your commitment to clearing the legacy asylum backlog and delivering a fair and effective decision-making process. However, it is impossible to deliver a fair and effective process if people are unable to access legal support, advice, aid or representation, and pending closure of the camps urgent steps should be taken to provide this.

Racial segregation and impact on communities

People seeking protection want nothing more than to safely rebuild their lives in communities. Care4Calais and the Runnymede Trust have [reported](#) that camps like Wethersfield amount to racial segregation or ‘segregation by nationality’ and harm not only the people they contain but communities in the surrounding areas. Both Wethersfield and Napier were imposed on local communities with minimal consultation or transparency, giving rise to misinformation and disinformation that has stoked tensions. Organised far right groups, including neo-Nazi activists, have sought over the last years to infiltrate and co-opt community campaigns opposing the institution of camps.

These sites act as magnets for outside racist agitators by othering and segregating people from our communities, creating distance and space for misinformation to thrive and hatred to grow. Their existence has contributed to the toxic anti-migrant narratives which contributed to the racist riots of [August 2024](#), including attempts to burn down hotels with asylum seekers trapped inside.

Doubling down and increasing capacity at Wethersfield

We note recent [confirmation](#) that the camp at Napier is to close in September 2025, although this is an extension of the previously publicly given timeline of March 2025. We would welcome more information on the timeline for decommissioning.

In this context the continued use of Wethersfield becomes ever more indefensible. We are deeply troubled by the decision to increase the number of people placed at the site, which can only exacerbate tensions and the harms caused, and about the fact that it remains open, in contradiction to [commitments](#) given by the Prime Minister pre-election.

The harms are well-documented, for those on-site and in surrounding communities. The costs are sky-rocketing, and are failing to represent value for money. Safeguarding concerns persist, along with concerns around racialised segregation and setbacks to positive outcomes for those placed there. We urge you in the strongest possible terms to immediately move to shut down both Wethersfield and Napier; to instead move towards

housing all people seeking protection away from institutional settings and with appropriate support within our communities, and to commit to never establishing such camps again.

Signed:

**Abigail Housing
African Rainbow Family
After Exploitation
ASSIST Sheffield
Asylum Aid
Asylum Link Merseyside (ALM)
Asylum Matters
Asylum Support Appeals Project
Beyond Detention
Bristol Refugee Rights
Bromsgrove and Redditch Welcome
Refugees
Cambridge Refugee Resettlement
Campaign
CARAS
Care4Calais
Caritas Shrewsbury
Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race
& Equality Centre
Choose Love
City of Sanctuary UK
Conversation Over Borders
Displaced People in Action (DPIA)
Entraide
Erdington ESOL
Evesham Vale Welcomes Refugees
Fatima House
Freedom from Torture
Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group
Good Chance
GREAT (Greater Manchester Refugees
and Asylum Seekers Together)
Greater Manchester Immigration Aid
Unit
Growing Together Levenshulme
Hackney Migrant Centre
Haringey Welcome
Hastings Community of Sanctuary
Hastings Supports Refugees
Helen Bamber Foundation
Hope Projects Ltd**

**Humans for Rights Network
IMIX
Jesuit Refugee Service UK
Joint Council for the Welfare of
Immigrants (JCWI)
Journey LGBT Asylum Group -
LSE Student Action for Refugees
Manchester Migrant Solidarity
Columban Missionaries in Britain
Migrant English Project
Napier Barracks Drop-In Centre
Oasis Church
One Life To Live
Rainbow Migration
RAMA (Refugee Asylum seeker &
Migrant Action)
RAMFEL (Refugee and Migrant Forum
Of Essex & London)
Refugee Action
Refugee Support Group
Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Migrant
Action
René Cassin
Restore, a project of Birmingham
Churches Together
Runnymede Trust -
Samphire
Southampton Action
St Paul's Church, Birmingham
STAR Edinburgh
STAR Sheffield
Stories of Hope and Home
Student Action for Refugees (STAR)
Swansea Asylum Seekers Support
The Eagles Wing, Bury
Vauxhall Community Law & Information
Centre
Voices in Exile
Welsh Refugee Council
West London Welcome
Women for Refugee Women**

