

# PETER GIBSON MP



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

June 2021

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter Gibson".

Thank you for your email about Asylum accommodation conditions in particular the Napier and Penally Barracks.

I understand you have concerns regarding the conditions of these facilities. I know that the Government takes the welfare of people in Home Office care extremely seriously and is fulfilling statutory duties to ensure decent, safe and humane conditions.

Since March, the number of people within the asylum system has risen. This is due to the fact that the Government temporarily ceased ending asylum support for those whose claims have been granted or refused. This was necessary to help stop the spread of coronavirus and ensure they are able to follow social distancing guidelines.

It has therefore been necessary for the Government to act quickly to source contingency accommodation to create additional capacity and ensure obligations are met in full.

Those accommodated at Napier barracks are catered with three nutritious meals per day, with options for special dietary or religious requirements. There is a recreational building with a library. Prayer rooms are available and scheduled activities now include yoga, English conversation and art. There is a nurse on site and access to a GP. All asylum seekers housed at Napier have access to a 24/7 advice service, provided for the Home Office by Migrant Help.

Napier barracks has been happily used for many years by Army and police personnel. The army itself has continued to use barrack accommodation around the country during the pandemic, when needed. While the Government is disappointed by some of the judgment, the High Court found in the Home Office's favour in a number of areas. It rejected the claim that conditions at Napier amounted to "inhuman or degrading treatment." The judge declined to rule that dormitories or barrack accommodation could never provide "adequate accommodation" for asylum seekers, and the judge rejected the claim that the expectation that residents would be back on site by 10pm amounted to a curfew or unlawful imprisonment.

Furthermore, the judgment was based on conditions in the past before several significant improvements. These include a stronger cleaning regime, reopening of communal areas with staggered access times, limiting the period of residency and using lateral flow tests three times a week. The overall capacity of the site has also been reduced. I understand that at all stages, the Home Office believed it was taking reasonable steps to respond to Public Health England suggestions on public health, where possible.

*Member of Parliament for Darlington*

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Ministers have published the suitability criteria that they use for assessing who is suitable to be accommodated at Napier. I have been assured that if it becomes apparent that someone is resident but unsuitable, a transfer is then arranged.

Through this Government's new plans for immigration and the upcoming sovereign borders Bill, this Government is taking action to increase the fairness and efficiency of our asylum system but also to fight illegal and unnecessary migration, such as that by small boats coming across the English Channel. I will support that Bill when it comes forward, as it is sorely needed to support reform of the system.

I will continue to monitor the situation very closely. However, I welcome the action taken by the Government to ensure the UK continues to meet its obligations and commitments to the most vulnerable people. This is of course in the context of unprecedented domestic challenges caused by the Coronavirus pandemic.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to contact me and if I can ever be any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

*Yours Sincerely*  
*Peter Gibson*

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