

### Prison Break

- 1 The announcement by the government that it is to sell off Victorian prisons and build nine new ones is welcome. Prisons built nearly 200 years ago have had their day. At worst they are, as the chief inspector of prisons reported in July, places of violence, squalor and idleness. Furthermore, they are often located on prime inner city land on which thousands of new homes could be built. The case for rebuilding and reform is compelling. The Justice Secretary is to be commended for identifying the problems and coming up with solutions.
- 2 This is not simply a question of bricks and mortar. The prison population of England and Wales stands at 85,000. Levels of violence are rising. A report in March by the Centre for Social Justice concluded that prisons were awash with drugs.
- 3 Building new prisons affords the opportunity to "design out" the dark corners which facilitate drugs and violence.
- 4 And while construction is expected to cost up to £2 billion, it is claimed that reduced running costs will save taxpayers about £80 million a year. Moreover, with half of prisoners reoffending within 12 months of release, modern buildings are more easily equipped with the training and rehabilitation facilities which help bring about a reduction in recidivism.
- 5 The director of the Prison Reform Trust is right to say that reform is about more than building new prisons. Investment is also needed in mental health care and treatment for addiction. But it is a start. Imprisonment is already a last resort for judges who are well aware that all too often it fails to work. Incarceration in antiquated buildings is counterproductive. Selling them to help solve the housing shortage is sensible. The Justice Secretary must push ahead with his plans. It is in everyone's interests that he prevails.



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