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5 July 2015

Dear Minister

During a recent visit from representatives of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), officers of Winchester City Council were informed that the Sir John Moore Barracks at Flowerdown, Winchester were being considered for closure as a military facility. They were given to understand that an announcement is imminent.

The Council would be very disappointed should the DIO conclude that the Barracks may have no future as a defence establishment. Winchester has a long and proud tradition of strong connections with the military that the City Council is keen to maintain, particularly with the contribution the military make to the vibrancy and economy of our city. I would ask you to reconsider the options for Sir John Moore Barracks, which is a large, modern, purpose-built training base close to another complementary defence training facility at Worthy Down, which is itself being expanded.

During the meeting with the DIO representatives, Council officers explained the planning status of the land occupied by these barracks. The recently adopted Local Plan – which is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework - sets out how the housing needs of Winchester (4000 additional homes by 2031) will be met. This includes 2000 houses being delivered via a strategic housing allocation on a site very close to Sir John Moore Barracks. Winchester is delivering housing to meet assessed need, and there is no housing shortfall in the district.

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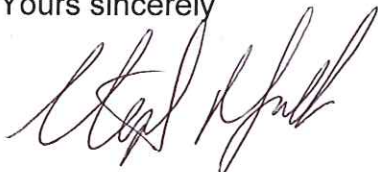
Planning policy does not support housing on the Flowerdown site. The barracks sit in land designated as countryside, being outside the settlement boundaries, and our adopted Local Plan does not generally support new market housing development in such areas. About half the land of the barracks falls within a 'Settlement Gap' between Winchester and the nearby village of Littleton. As a result, any proposals for housing that may be brought forward at this time would be contrary to national and local policies. The Council would have no option but to strongly resist such a significant departure from the Local Plan.

I would hope that any Ministerial decision about the closure of any defence establishment in Winchester is not made on the assumption that the site can be developed for housing. If it is to be promoted for redevelopment, this can only be carried out through the proper planned process as part of a future review of the Local Plan. This would allow proper consultation and consideration of the many other sites that have previously been promoted for housing when the current plan was being developed. It would also allow evidence to support any alternative use of the Flowerdown site to be gathered and considered to justify such uses, exactly as Government policy requires.

Our policy covering development in the countryside (MTRA5) of our Local Plan Part 1 does support the retention and development of major commercial and educational establishments, including Defence establishments. Should a decision be made to vacate these or any other military facility in our District, Winchester City Council would have a very strong desire to see such sites retained for high value employment, such as a science park. Having spoken to the Universities of Southampton and Winchester and many other organisations in recent months, I know that there is great interest for such a scheme in or around Winchester.

Winchester City Council is very keen to exploit opportunities for use of any redundant public land, particularly to retain local employment. Should a decision be made to vacate Sir John Moore Barracks, the DIO should be aware that Winchester City Council will resist any proposal to develop the barracks primarily for housing. I would expect the local community would also voice significant concerns about such a proposal. However, we would be very supportive of any appropriate proposal that conforms with our Local Plan.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Stephen Godfrey
Leader of the Council

cc Rt Hon Greg Clarke MP
Steve Brine MP