

**STRATEGY AND PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY 12 JANUARY 2012**

Notes of Visit to Bicester Garrison 24.11.11

Hosted by: Lt Col R Gascoigne – Chief of Staff Bicester Garrison
Maj J Huxley (OCC liaison)
Mrs E Teasdale – Hive co-ordinator

Councillors in attendance:

Nick Carter (Chairman)

Norman Bolster

Liz Brighthouse OBE

Tim Hallchurch

Charles Mathew (substitute for Cllr Hilary Hibbert-Biles)

David Wilmshurst

Jean Fooks

Officers in attendance:

Claire Moore (Strategy & Communications Team)

Julia Lim (Strategy & Communications Team)

Councillor apologies:

Hilary Hibbert-Biles – Cllr Mathew attended in her place

A M Lovatt

Dr Peter Skolar

Chip Sherwood

Summary of visit

Councillors heard from Lt Col Gascoigne on the key functions of Garrison:

- The majority of the buildings on the Garrison are logistics related; supplying and distributing military materials. The Garrison is part of the 145 Brigade which is run by Brigadier Baverstock.
- The Garrison's core purpose is, with support from local communities, to provide a secure environment for army staff providing training, welfare and supporting operational deployment.
- This role involves both supporting soldiers and engaging the public. Where these two activities overlap there is a need for partnership working with local stakeholders. This partnership working is articulated through the Community Covenant and the civil and military joint working which delivers on the Covenant.
- Support for the soldier includes:
 - A permanent Army Welfare Officer
 - Facilities at The Hive – welfare and advice
 - Close working with schools to support military families
 - An education centre
 - Gymnasium and community centre both available for civilian use
- Engagement with the community involves:
 - Regular meetings with the Town Council and voluntary groups
 - Service Children Support Network working with local schools

- Home coming parades
- Oxfordshire Civilian / Military Partnership
- Involvement with the Local Economic Partnership

Issues around the **future development of the Garrison** were discussed, these include:

- Plans to replace and upgrade the storage facilities on the Garrison through the re-development of the Graven Hill site.
- The Defence Explosive Munitions Search School is due to relocate to the Garrison and be fully operational by July 2012. This will bring around 200 extra soldiers to the Garrison. A unit which specialises in the disposal of munitions is also likely to relocate.
- These developments present an opportunity to build Bicester Garrison into a centre of excellence and national logistics hub, drawing in related suppliers and job opportunities for the wider community.

An in depth discussion on the **Graven Hill development** took place, this involved Commodore Paul Cunningham (Royal Navy Director Logistic Commodities and Services) who is leading the plans to redevelop the site on behalf of the Armed Forces. Key issues discussed were:

- The sale and development of the site at Graven Hill is integral to the funding of improved logistics facilities on the Garrison. The Treasury have confirmed that the proceeds raised by the sale will be re-invested in the Bicester Garrison.
- Currently opportunities for improvements to business of the Garrison are limited by the physical estate. Investment from Graven Hill will enable these issues to be addressed and the centre of excellence / national logistics hub described above created.
- The Armed Forces are confident that improvements to the Garrison will bring in new jobs to Bicester as army suppliers chose to locate close to a major military hub.
- Planning applications have been submitted to Cherwell District Council and initial misgivings about the redevelopment are being resolved. There now appears to be support from both the District and County.
- 1900 homes are planned for the site, alongside the Royal Pioneers who will remain in their base at Graven Hill.
- The project is expected to generate around 2270 jobs.

Issues raised by Committee members which may require further Oxfordshire County Council involvement:

- Army role vs. Police - the role of the Army in civil contingency and resilience was discussed as the Army can provide key resources in cases of extreme weather or terrorist threats. The Lt Col. felt further clarity around the role of the Army versus the role of the Police in terrorism situations would be helpful. This is an issue to be resolved at Brigade level not locally but maybe something the County's military partnerships help to push forward.
- The Army and MoD civil servants are due to continue to experience redundancies over the coming year. Strong exit support is provided by the Army however these redundancies may create additional pressure on local

job and housing markets. Good Links to the LEP via the Community Covenant are in place to help identify Army Skills and Employment opportunities. This is crucial to support those becoming redundant.

- Considering impact of the Graven Hill site development on local infrastructure requires strong joint working between the County Council and Cherwell District Council.
- Councillor Carter stressed that the Council is keen to support the Army throughout the planned changes and encouraged the Garrison to be proactive in raising issues that it would appreciate Council involvement with.

Members of the Committee offered their thanks to Lt Col Gascoigne, Major Huxley, Commodore Cunningham and Emma Teasdale.

Notes of the visit will be presented at the next Strategy and Partnerships Committee meeting for discussion.

Julia Lim 24.11.11