

Tidworth

Military personnel move 'double-edged sword'



Salisbury Plain is the largest military training area in the UK

An influx of service personnel to Salisbury Plain would be a "double-edged sword" for the local area, a Wiltshire councillor said.

Defence Secretary Philip Hammond announced the number of troops in Wiltshire would be increased by about 3,000 in a shake-up of army bases.

The move is part of the gradual withdrawal of troops from Germany.

It is seen as good news for the local economy but is expected to place extra demand on services in the area.

Wiltshire has a long history with the Army, with Tidworth, Bulford, Larkhill and Warminster barracks based on Salisbury Plain.

New homes are expected to be built and bases refurbished as troops and Ministry of Defence staff return to the country.

'Large influx'

Tidworth Mayor Chris Franklin said: "This is good news for businesses and good news for the local community.

"My only concern is it needs to remain a garrison within a town and not a town within a garrison, and I think this is something the MoD need to take on board."

Wiltshire councillor Mark Connolly said he welcomed the move but was concerned land earmarked for civilian housing would now be used for troops coming into the area.

"For Tidworth, a large influx of more service personnel will be a double-edged sword," he said.

"It will be good that Tidworth is seen as an expanded garrison town and has a long term future with the Army, but the downside is that the 20 years work of trying to redress the balance is going to be

undone as the military will take over a large portion of new housing that was to have been civilian housing.

"If the MoD are going to use this land, more needs to be released for civilian housing to rebalance the situation."

He added, with higher numbers of people in the town they would also need better infrastructure and facilities to support the increased population.

'Good news'

More than 12,000 members of the armed forces are housed across Tidworth and Bulford barracks, which are the largest in the South West and within 20 miles of Salisbury.

This is expected to increase to 15,000.

Devizes MP Claire Perry, whose constituency includes Tidworth and Bulford barracks, welcomed the announcement.

"I am delighted that our local towns and villages will be welcoming new soldiers which will give a real boost to the local economy," Ms Perry said.

"The Salisbury Plain training area is the only place in the country where the Army can carry out the complex and demanding training they need to undertake and it makes perfect sense to concentrate units that work together around the Plain"

Salisbury Mayor John Collier said: "We welcome the relocation, we've known it was coming for a while.

"If there is a net increase of personnel into the area, that's going to be very good news for the local economy.

"Salisbury is very well placed to serve those coming back."

Bulford parish councillor John Clee said: "We are aware there is going to be an influx and that that is going to bring with it a requirement for more family quarters in the parish, but this is not causing the council any concern."

He said the move could place pressure on infrastructure and medical services but added that civilian housing developments do just the same.

Salisbury MP John Glen added: "I think this is extremely positive news for Salisbury and the surrounding area.

"Wiltshire is more than capable of coping with the extra influx. The towns are set up for military families and the challenges they face, as is Wiltshire Council."

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