

# **Full Council – 11 December 2018**

## **Opposing the closure of Norton Manor Camp and relocation of 40 Commando Royal Marines out of Taunton Deane**

### **Motion proposed by Councillor Marcia Hill, seconded by Councillor Simon Coles**

#### **Preamble:-**

The Council will be aware that the closure of Norton Manor Camp, with expected disposal in 2028, was announced by the Secretary of State for Defence in November 2016 in 'A Better Defence Estate', with a key objective to raise £1 billion from land sales, including the statement "opportunities to release value from surplus land and property must be maximised".

The Somerset County Gazette reported "False Hope"<sup>(1)</sup> after the Defence Secretary said in Parliament on 22 October 2018 that 40 Commando Royal Marines would remain in Taunton "for a long time into the future" but his Ministry of Defence (MOD) spokesperson then described these words as "vague" confirming the Camp remained scheduled for closure.

The National Audit Office (NAO) has said implementing the plan will be "extremely challenging" and there is a "significant risk" to defence capability.

No operational military reasons or objectives have been given by the MOD for the closure, and the Government's National Security Capability Review begun in summer 2017 has led to proposals to cut up to 2,000 Royal Marines over the next decade; cuts which the Defence Select Committee of the House of Commons described as "militarily illiterate"<sup>(2)</sup>.

At a time of significant reductions in footfall in Taunton Town Centre the value of 700-800 personnel at the Camp to the local economy has been estimated at £10 -14 million per annum (on the basis of the proportion of locally spent average family incomes).

#### **Recommendations:-**

- (1) The Council opposes the decision of the Government to close Norton Manor Camp and relocate the Royal Marines out of Taunton Deane; supports the retention of the 40 Commando Unit and stands behind the local 40 Commando community of serving and veteran Royal Marines who want the Camp to remain in the Borough;
- (2) The Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State for Defence strongly opposing the closure of the Camp, urging him to remove Norton

Manor Camp from the list of sites to be disposed of on the Ministry of Defence website; and

- (3) The Leader of the Council also writes to all of Somerset's Members of Parliament pointing out that the County is in danger of losing 40 Commando Royal Marines, urging them to take up the importance of Norton Manor Camp to the County of Somerset and to Taunton Deane in particular in Parliament and oppose its closure and the relocation of 40 Commando to another area and that the Chief Executive should report back to the whole Council placing copies of any replies received on the public record.