

Rt Hon Bob Ainsworth MP
Minister of State
Ministry of Defence
Main Building
Whitehall

7 May 2009

Dear Bob

Maritime Change Programme

Devonport's expanded role in providing deep maintenance and confirmation of our status as a centre of excellence for amphibious warfare is good news. I am also pleased that the four Type 22 frigates will remain based at Devonport until they are withdrawn from service and that the seven Type 23 will remain here for at least the next five years.

In a City which is home to so many serving personnel and their families there is an underlying appreciation of the need to get value for money from defence expenditure in every sphere. We hope that as well as securing jobs in the City, the deep maintenance, in which we will have an expanded role, will provide a service to the Royal Navy for many years to come. Perhaps the value of this specialism will only become evident when the TOBA (Terms of Business Agreement) with Babcock in relation to the sale of the Dockyard is finalised. We would welcome an update on when this is likely to happen.

We make no apology for continuing to press for a resolution of those key issues that remain open:

1. The relocation of Royal Marines to Devonport;
2. The release of long-vacant land in the South Yard for the use of the City (Project Roundel);
3. The base porting requirements for the Future Surface Combatant (FSC). We outline our key concerns about this in the attachment to this letter.

We are also calling on our City Development Company to ensure a full and proper benchmarking of our defence and security sector in Plymouth so that the City can develop a strategy to go forward to make the most of this important part of our economy. I hope the MOD will co-operate fully if they agree to do this. I enclose a copy of our letter to the Chair of the CDC Mr James Brent.

The relocation of Royal Marines to Devonport

We would be grateful if you would outline by when you might expect (a) the funding and (b) the timetable to be in place for the relocation of 1 Assault Group Royal Marines and 539 Assault Squadron from Poole and Turnchapel into Devonport.

We would also be interested to know estimates of the number of landing craft and personnel that this will involve.

Project Roundel

You will know from our previous meetings that there are already a number of businesses and institutions from Plymouth who have their eye on this land for relocation or expansion. The current economic crisis places a greater urgency on realising these plans in the interests of safeguarding jobs and investment in the City.

The release of land must be done in a way that takes into account the environmental condition of the land and the listed status of certain buildings. The MOD must not cherry pick the prime areas and leave the City with pockets of poor quality polluted land. It would also be unfair for Plymouth to face paying both full retail price of the land and the cost of any necessary clean up.

It will not be reasonable to expect the RDA, which has one of the lowest per capita incomes in the country to fund this from their resources. If the MOD are not going to fund this we would expect you to be involved in some cross departmental discussions about this and in the first instance would like to meet with you and the Regional Minister to discuss how this might be secured at the earliest opportunity.

Because of the exceptionally high local public interest in this matter we are sending a copy of this letter to the Plymouth Herald

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Linda Gilroy MP
Plymouth Sutton



Alison Seabeck MP
Plymouth Devonport

cc Plymouth Herald

Base porting - Future Surface Combatant

We think there is a very strong case not only for the seven Type 23 frigates to remain at Devonport beyond the next five years, but also for Devonport to serve as base port for a significant number of the next generation Future Surface Combatant.

We would appreciate a brief on the terms of reference of the base porting study including: (a) who is involved, (b) who will be consulted, (c) any opportunities that exist for third party input and feedback and (d) by when you expect it to report.

We would also like to take this opportunity to restate the many factors in Devonport's favour which we expect the Review to consider very seriously:

- The strategic implications of base porting the entire escort fleet at one location. Necessary consideration must be given not only to conventional threats and terrorism, but also to civil protest. I remind you that in the run up to the Iraq War anti-war protestors blockaded the entrance to Marchwood Military Port in Southampton.
- Devonport is the largest naval base in Western Europe with some 640 acres of land and four miles of waterfront, compared to Portsmouth's 297 acres and three miles of waterfront. In the years to come Portsmouth will be crowded with the two new 65,000 tonne carriers, 6 Type 45 destroyers plus minesweepers for patrol craft. There are serious doubts whether it could have the capacity to host the entire range of Future Surface Combatant vessels.
- Portsmouth has demands and limitations on its capacity from cross channel ferries, historic dockyard and BVT shipbuilding. Devonport on the other hand has both the capacity and the flexibility to support the Navy's future requirements.
- Devonport has undergone a massive renewal of its single living accommodation. Portsmouth already has insufficient accommodation for service personnel. It has to compete for accommodation spaces with training establishments in the surrounding areas leading to shortages - service personnel have to go to Fareham or share accommodation with Sea Cadets aboard the veteran destroyer hulk HMS Bristol.
- The impact on those service personnel with homes and families in Plymouth and the surrounding area.
- The flexibility which some of the alongside work will give to ensuring the maintenance of the skills base for the deep maintenance work on submarines and frigates