



Defence Estate Rationalisation

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Author: Claire Mills
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Over the last three years a number of recommendations for the reconfiguration of the Armed Forces have been made. All of those decisions have offered requisite opportunities for the future rationalisation of the defence estate, including the sale of surplus land and buildings.

Following the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review, the conclusions of an initial basing review were announced in 2011. Recommendations included the transfer of a number of RAF bases to the Army and the closure of several sites. However the MOD also made clear that work on rationalising the defence estate would be ongoing and that further detailed work was necessary on the location and timeframe for British forces withdrawing from Germany.

The main changes to Army basing, including decisions on the location of forces withdrawing from Germany, were subsequently announced in March 2013. The details of that review are available in Library briefing SN06598, [Army Basing Review 2013](#).

This note provides a summary of the other main changes to the defence estate that have been announced since the Army basing review was published. Further decisions on aspects of the defence estate, including the training estate and the Reserves estate are expected to be made over the course of 2013. This note will be updated as and when those plans are announced.

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1 Background

Over the last three years a number of recommendations for the reconfiguration of the Armed Forces, by 2020, have been made. All of those decisions have offered requisite opportunities for the future rationalisation of the defence estate, including reductions in running costs and the sale of surplus land and buildings.

The main basis for change was the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review. That review recommended a reduction in the number of Armed Forces personnel by 17,000 by 2015,¹ a reconfiguration of the Army into five regionally-based multi-role brigades, a restructuring of the RAF around fewer fast jet platforms and to withdraw all British forces from Germany by 2020.²

Initial decisions on basing were subsequently announced in July 2011, including the transfer of a number of RAF bases to the Army. However the MOD also made clear that work on rationalising the defence estate would be ongoing, whilst more detailed planning would also be required on the timeframe for the effective drawdown of troops in Germany and where

¹ 7,000 personnel from the Army and 5,000 personnel from the Royal Navy and RAF

² Further information is available in Library Research Paper RP11/10, *UK Defence and Security Policy: A New Approach?*, January 2011

they would be relocated. Further details are available in Library briefing SN06038, [Defence Basing Review](#).

Since then, however, further changes to the size and structure of the Army have been announced which have altered some of the decisions taken in 2011. Most significant was the decision to make additional reductions in the size of the Army which would see the overall strength of the regular army decrease by 20,000 personnel and an increase in the Reserve contingent to at least 30,000 personnel. A major restructuring of the Army (*Army 2020*) was also announced in July 2012, which included the disbandment or merger of a number of Army units.

On 5 March 2013 the MOD subsequently announced the details of its basing plan for the Army. Although largely motivated by the withdrawal of British forces from Germany over the next few years, the basing plan has also been informed by the need for military capability to be generated in the most optimal and cost effective way. A summary of the key decisions is available in Library briefing SN06598, [Army Basing Review 2013](#).

2 Defence Estate Rationalisation

At the time of the Army Basing Review the MOD made clear that further decisions on the rationalisation of the remaining defence estate, including the Reserves estate, would be announced over the course of 2013.

On 25 March 2013 the MOD provided an update the House on the progress of defence estate rationalisation, including a decision on the future basing of the UK's Joint Strike Fighter aircraft. The following is a summary of the decisions set out in that statement.

This briefing will be updated as further decisions are made. An announcement on the Reserves estate is expected to be made before the 2013 summer recess.

2.1 RAF Estate

Basing of the F-35 Lightning II (Joint Strike Fighter)³

In 2005 the previous Government announced that RAF Lossiemouth was the preferred location for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter when it enters services towards the end of this decade. In 2011, however, the Government announced that RAF Lossiemouth would become a main operating base for the Tornado GR4 and the Typhoon fast jet aircraft, the latter of which would be relocated from RAF Leuchars. At the time it remained unclear whether the 2005 decision to base the JSF at Lossiemouth would still go ahead.

In its update on 25 March 2013 the MOD confirmed that the main operating base of the JSF fleet will now be RAF Marham in Norfolk. Armed Forces Minister Andrew Robathan argued that given RAF Lossiemouth will host three squadrons of Typhoon, combined with plans to

³ Information on the Joint Strike Fighter programme is available in Library briefing SN06278, [The F-35 Joint Strike Fighter](#), 12 April 2013

drawdown Tornado aircraft (which are based at RAF Marham), RAF Marham is the “most appropriate station” for the F-35 aircraft.⁴

Drawdown of RAF Leuchars

The 2011 basing review confirmed that the Typhoon aircraft based at RAF Leuchars would be re-deployed to RAF Lossiemouth from 2013 and that transfer of the base to the Army would take place before 2015.

In the 25 March statement, the MOD confirmed:

- No 1 (Fighter) Squadron and No 6 Squadron which provide the Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) Interceptor North aircraft will relocate to RAF Lossiemouth in summer 2014, with a view to ceasing flying operations at RAF Leuchars in autumn 2014. The move of the Typhoon squadrons will involve the transfer of 347 Service personnel to RAF Lossiemouth, and will also affect 148 civilian staff.
- No.6 RAF Force Protection Wing Headquarters and No.58 Squadron RAF Regiment will be disestablished. Personnel (187 military posts) will be reassigned to other RAF force protection tasks across the UK during spring 2014.

Closure of the Airfield at RAF Wyton

Due to the significant costs of maintaining an operational airfield at RAF Wyton the MOD has announced its intention to relocate the flying units currently based at the site:

- No.57 (R) Squadron, which undertakes Elementary Flying Training, will relocate to RAF Cranwell by the summer of 2013.
- Cambridge and London University Air Squadrons and No.5 Air Experience Flight will relocate to RAF Wittering by mid-2014. In order to achieve a more efficient use of manpower and assets, it has also been decided to relocate the East Midlands Universities Air Squadron and No.115(R) Squadron at RAF Wittering.

18 Service personnel will be re-deployed as a result of this decision. It is currently expected that part of the Wyton airfield will be sold off for housing development.

Closure of RAF Church Fenton

Reductions in the flying training pipeline, as directed by the SDSR, means that RAF Church Fenton is now surplus to requirements and will close by the end of 2013.

The units based at the site, including the Yorkshire University Air Squadron, will be relocated.

Relocation of Military Air Traffic Control at Prestwick

Military Scottish Air Traffic Control currently operates from the NATS Air Traffic Control centre at Prestwick. Due to technological advancements the MOD has decided to rationalise the current system and operate military air traffic control for the whole of the UK, from the London Air Traffic Control Centre at Swanwick.

The relocation of approximately 30 RAF personnel from Prestwick is expected to be complete by the end of 2013.

⁴ HC Deb 25 March 2013 c65WS

Disposal of the former airfield and technical site at RAF Kirton in Lindsey

The closure of RAF Kirton-in-Lindsey was first announced in 2008.⁵ Currently the site is being used to house personnel from nearby RAF Scampton. In its March 2013 statement, the MOD confirmed that this use will continue. However, no alternative defence use has been identified for the former airfield and technical facilities. Therefore these parts of the site have been earmarked for disposal.

2.2 Army Estate

Rationalisation of Shorncliffe Garrison

While the MOD has identified an enduring requirement for facilities at Shorncliffe Garrison, the cost of infrastructure maintenance is high. Therefore the garrison will be redeveloped and rationalised in order to deliver a long-term sustainable estate.

Surplus land is expected to be released for sale in phases over the next decade and has already been identified for potential housing development.

Rationalisation of MOD St Athan

Despite the termination of the Defence Training Review in 2010, which would have seen the consolidation of defence technical training at St Athan, the decision was taken in the 2011 basing review to retain the site for defence purposes. However, the precise nature of the defence presence at St Athan has been under review.

The Army Basing Review in March 2013 confirmed that 14 Signal Regiment would relocate to St Athan after 2018. In its update to the House on 23 March the MOD also confirmed that:

- Beyond 2017 the MOD has no requirement for the 'super hangar' at St Athan which will therefore be progressively made available for commercial occupation.
- The intent remains to relocate No.4 School of Technical Training to Lyneham as part of the Defence Technical Training Change programme.
- The RAF's No.71 Investigation and Repair Squadron will move from St Athan and will be collocated with other elements of No.42 Expeditionary Support Wing at RAF Wittering.

As a result the defence presence at the site is expected to be focused in one area (St Athan West Camp), thereby releasing the remainder of the site for other opportunities.

Future of MOD Ashchurch

MOD Ashchurch is currently the hub for MOD vehicle operations. However, the MOD has determined that continued effective operation at the site will require significant investment in the infrastructure. In addition, the vehicle numbers that the site supports are reducing as a result of decisions taken in the SDSR.

⁵ HC Deb 28 October 2008, c25-26WS

Therefore the MOD has confirmed its intention to withdraw from the site entirely unless retention of a small number of specific buildings is considered to provide better value for money.⁶

Rationalisation of MOD Bicester

The Graven Hill site at Bicester will be released to accommodate a mixed use development, including housing and a new MOD logistics facility on part of the site.

⁶ The proposed redevelopment of MOD Ashchurch has been the subject of public consultation. Further information is available at: <http://mod-ashchurch.info/>