

“By any standards, he had been responsible for an exceptional act of gallantry...”

The remarkable story of Shropshire war hero
Kim Hughes: Pages 32 and 33

Jobs joy as plan to move training is axed

RAF COSFORD BASE SECURED

By London Reporter Sunita Patel and Wayne Beese
RAF Cosford was today saved from a massive jobs blow after the Government announced it was scrapping plans to move defence training to South Wales.

Campaigners claimed victory after Defence Secretary Liam Fox said the plans were no longer “affordable”. Mr Fox said preferred bidder Metrix consortium, which was awarded £1 billion to create a defence training super centre at St Athan, could no longer deliver a “commercially

robust” project.

The decision on the Defence Training Rationalisation Project opens up the possibility of studies for a much lower-cost replacement.

Wrekin Tory MP Mark Pritchard said: “This is fantastic news. I have worked tirelessly for many years to get this defence programme scrapped which was bad news for the nation as well as bad news for RAF Cosford and Shropshire.

“I am glad the Defence Secretary has listened to my petitions and arguments and has been brave enough to scrap the scheme.

Faith

“I would like to pay tribute to all those in the community who never lost faith or hope in believing I was doing the right thing in fighting this ill-thought through defence project.

“The future now is far more certain for Cosford as a result of this statement. And whilst changes to all defence establishments are kept under review, the scrapping of DTR has given Cosford a much longer lease of life than under the past Labour government.”

Robert “H” O’Harney, Public and Commercial Services branch secretary at Cosford, said: “We welcome the news this programme has collapsed as it was never affordable from the start.”

It has been estimated the livelihoods of about 30,000 people in Staffordshire and Shropshire depend on continued operation of the defence training centre at the base. Mr Fox said the Ministry of Defence would go back to the drawing board.

“We will now carry out some work before finalising the best way ahead; including to confirm both our training and estates requirement, and the best way to structure the solution that will meet them,” he said.

RAF Cosford’s future was put in doubt last year after the contract to become the principal training centre for all three armed forces – and with it, the creation of at least 2,500 jobs – was awarded to RAF St Athan.

Ark axe ‘won’t hit air power’



HMS Ark Royal and her fleet of carrier jets are likely to be axed immediately

Fox claims Britain will retain ability to strike

By David Burrows

Britain will retain the ability to project air power around the world despite facing an almost decade-long gap in its aircraft carrier capability, Defence Secretary Liam Fox said today.

Prime Minister David Cameron was today expected to announce that the Royal Navy’s flagship HMS Ark Royal and her fleet of Harrier jets are to be scrapped immediately when he unveils the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) later today.

The decision will leave the UK without a carrier capable of flying jets for around a decade while the Navy’s two new Queen Elizabeth class carriers are built at a cost of £5.9 billion.

However, Dr Fox insisted that the country’s ability to project force internationally would not be diminished as a result.

“The concept of carrier strike is only one of the ways in which we have air power projection,” he said.

“We have Tornado, we have Typhoon and the military viewed at the moment is that because we don’t have at the present time any problems with basing or overflights, then Britain is able to project air power in that way.”

But a former Ark Royal commanding officer described the Government’s decision as “incoherent” and “unstrategic”.

Rear Admiral Terry Loughran, who was at the helm from 1993 to 1994 during the Bosnian conflict, said he understood the funding pressures and rationale for scrapping the fleet flagship early. But he said the decision to have no flight capability on aircraft carriers for up to 10 years would lead to a massive loss of skills and knowledge.

He said it’s “the scrapping of the Harriers that gives me the greatest concern and highlights that the review is far from strategic.”

Toilet b... at bea... spot wi... demolis...

A disused public toilet foot of the Wrekin which focus for anti-social behaviour demolished, council boss

Regular walkers have dubbed it a blot on the landscape.

Rebecca Parry, spokeswoman for Telford & Wrekin Council, said: “The Wrekin is one of the most popular walks for the people of Telford and its visitors.

“It is a prominent and well-known landmark, marking the entrance to Shropshire.

“Since the attempt by Shropshire Wildlife Trust to buy part of the hill in 2004 there have been many improvements to the hill and surrounding area, such as the refurbishment of Forest Glen car park, and major clean-up events.

“However, it has proved impossible to restore the toilets. The toilets have been closed for many years now with the disused building attracting anti-social behaviour at times.

“It has been agreed that the toilet building will now be demolished.”

Demolition work is expected to start in early November.

Miss Parry said other works in the area were also due to start this winter.

She added: “Over the past few years we’ve been working with private landowners resulting in a major project on the Iron Age hill fort at the summit of The Wrekin and on our existing nature reserve, The Ercall.

“This work has only been possible because of the skill and dedication of the Wrekin Forest Volunteers.

“Over the summer volunteers have been surveying and recording the wildlife around The Wrekin. As winter approaches, we will begin practical management particularly in The Ercall woodlands.”

This is expected to include coppicing and other works to maintain the area.

Cold snap on the way

Temperatures were falling in Britain today as the country prepared for a cold snap coming in from the Arctic.

Winds were becoming increasingly northerly with temperatures expected to fall to below freezing tonight in large parts of the country.

Unseasonably cold temperatures will be accompanied by wintry showers on the east coast and in Scotland with hail, sleet and even snow on high ground.

Temperatures, which reached a mild 16C (61F) at Bournemouth Airport yesterday, were due to fall a few degrees everywhere during the day.

Don’t miss tomorrow’s Shropshire Star for the first news of all the Government’s spending cut plans

Schools set to lose specialist sports funding

Specialist funding for sports schools and colleges across Shropshire is to be axed and the cash to be distributed among all county secondary schools under the coalition’s spending cuts, it was revealed today.

By Sunita Patel and Dave Morris

Ring-fenced funding of about £129 per pupil per year – worth almost £130,000 for each of the specialist schools – will be lost and reverted to the central schools budget.

Department for Education documents leaked to Labour reveal some 400 schools will be affected across the country.

The move was greeted with disbelief and shock in Shropshire today.

One leading head-teacher claimed that county students were being “short changed”.

Schools affected in Shropshire include Shropshire School and Sports College in Shrewsbury; The Lacon Child School in Cleobury Mortimer; The Lakelands School, Sports and Language College in Ellesmere; and Idsall School in Shifnal.

Shropshire secondary heads leader Candy Garrett, of The Priory in Shrewsbury, said: “The reality is that schools in Shropshire rely on specialist status funding to deliver education in the

classroom. Any cuts to specialist school grant funding will deeply affect the teaching and learning experiences of children.

“This, coupled with the appalling funding Shropshire schools receive from central Government, means that students are being short-changed.”

Allan Gilhooley, head at Lacon Child, said: “It is a shock. It is cut which will hit frontline education despite all the promises that cuts would not. The cut is just a short-sighted economy.

“Having specialist status has enabled what was a good school to become an outstanding one. We have developed excellence across the curriculum.”

The plans also include cutting £125 million for sport in schools, tearing up Labour’s Sports Strategy for young people, and reducing the previous government’s commitment to give five hours per week of PE and sport.

Government funding for charity Youth Sport Trust, to engage youngsters in sport, will be withdrawn.