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As you may be aware, three large British Army exercises will take place in or near your constituency over the coming month. I am writing to explain the rationale for continuing this vital military training and the safeguards which have been put in place to protect against COVID-19.

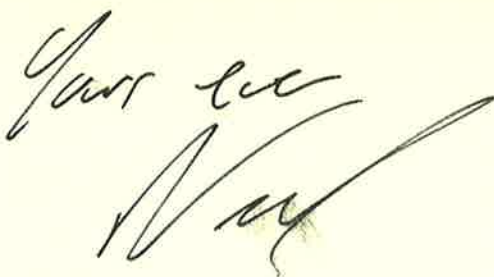
The Army has maintained its operational commitments throughout the pandemic by understanding and mitigating the risk posed by COVID-19, pausing non-essential activity but ensuring vital tasks continue safely and our national obligations are met. While some basic training and exercises were stopped, the Army has continued to fulfil non-discretionary activities such as operations overseas, the readiness of the UK's rapid intervention forces, and meeting our international commitments. The pandemic has made the world less secure, with malign actors wishing to exploit the virus, and it is vital that the British Army, alongside the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, remains prepared for any challenge and ready to protect the UK. The three exercises are:

- **Ex LOYAL LEDA** - an exercise by the UK-led NATO Allied Rapid Reaction Corps HQ, whose home is in Gloucester. The exercise begins on 10th November and will last until 20th November. Some 600 personnel will be based in South Cerney, and a further 380 in Fairford. The exercise serves as the final validation of the HQ as NATO's warfighting Corps Headquarters.
- **Ex CERBERUS** is exercising 3<sup>rd</sup> (UK) Division. It is currently underway on Salisbury Plain and is due to end on 22nd November. The exercise involves 2,400 personnel drawn from across the country and serves the crucial purpose of confirming the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division's role as the Army's formation at readiness for high-intensity conflict.

- **Ex WESSEX STORM** is led by 16 Air Assault Brigade. It began on Salisbury Plain on 2nd November and will finish on 14th December. The exercise involves around 1,500 personnel, drawn mostly from Colchester. These troops are principally from 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion the Parachute Regiment, who are being tested as the British Army's rapid intervention force. They are training with French and US airborne forces to ensure we maintain inter-operability with our key allies.

The Army takes its responsibility to protect our people and the community very seriously. The following mitigations have been put in place in order to ensure the protection of local communities, the personnel involved, and the families and communities personnel return home to.

- All activity has been re-designed to comply with public health guidance and to operate within Government policy. On all three exercises, personnel are operating within 'bubbles' to allow the necessary close contact of soldiering, while preventing any infections from spreading.
- Personnel on all the exercises underwent either COVID testing or screening before deployment.
- Teams from Public Health England will monitor the conduct of Ex LOYAL LEDA in order to ensure safe practices.
- Ex CERBERUS has a dedicated team of medics who will monitor health protection measures throughout the exercise.
- Ex WESSEX STORM has a bespoke COVID-19 management cell of medical specialists to process and isolate any cases. French and US troops have been in isolation since arriving in the UK.
- Across all exercises soldiers and officers of every rank are required to understand and strictly adhere to the health protection guidance of personnel in their area, as given by the Army's Senior Health Advisor. Those who experience symptoms isolate and are tested in accordance with Government guidelines.
- Those participating in the exercises will not mix with the local community, for example going to local shops is banned. Where it is necessary to leave the exercises, for example contractors using hotels or moving between locations, Government guidelines will be followed and no unnecessary stops will be made on journeys.



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Chief Executive Wilshire Council