



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State
Ministry of Defence
Floor 5, Main Building
Whitehall
LONDON SW1A 2HB

20th July 2018

Dear *Gavin*

Future of Royal Military School of Music – Kneller Hall

There are plans by the MoD to close Kneller Hall, in my constituency, the longstanding home of the Royal Military School of Music. I am writing to suggest that this is potentially an ill-judged, short-sighted, decision which will be strongly opposed not merely by local residents, which greatly value the School, but by those in the Army who have seen the value of its work, which could be seriously diminished if moved (as I believe is planned) to the naval base of Portsmouth.

As I understand it, the Hall is judged to be not 'fit for purpose' and the Commandant recently briefed me on the serious physical deficiencies of the buildings. I believe the current estimate is that it could cost £20m to bring the buildings up to the standard required by the army. These same deficiencies, combined with the Listed Building Status of the Hall and the protected 'green' status of the grounds mean that it is not an attractive proposition for most buyers. I know that several potential purchasers, including the local university (St Mary's), have discontinued an early expression of interest. The poor state of repair means that other suitable buyers – say a boutique hotel or a conference centre – cannot afford it. The likelihood is that the Army will be left with an unused building that it has to maintain or be forced to sell at a knock-down price.

My understanding is that the School is being moved onto the Naval Base at Portsmouth where it will coexist – separately – with a similar facility for the Royal Marines. Those who have looked at the Portsmouth site tell me that it is unsuitable and does not allow for an expansive approach, for example, to training overseas bandsmen and women. At a recent, and brilliant, public concert in the grounds of the

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Hall prominence was given to the (fee paying) Omani trainees and I believe that if the Hall were modernised it could perform an important function training musicians from other countries – like Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states – where there is already a good connection. It is not too difficult to see how a refurbished facility could be a money spinning opportunity as well as a generator of goodwill for the Army. That is over and above the goodwill generated for the army locally. You would have been proud to see hundreds of Union Jacks being waved at the recent 'Last Night of the Proms' concert.

I hope your staff will think again about the matter. I intend to pursue it through Adjournment Debates and other opportunities in the House.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Vince Cable'.

RT HON SIR VINCE CABLE MP
MP for Twickenham