



Defence Committee

From the Chair

Rt. Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Defence
Ministry of Defence
London SW1A 2HB
(by email)

Tuesday, 30 January 2024

Future of the Albion Class amphibious ships

Dear Secretary of State,

Given recent media speculation around the future of the two Albion Class ships, the Committee welcomed the FCDO Minister of State's undertaking to the House last Wednesday when you were both present for the debate that neither will be scrapped (Hansard, 24 January, cols 399-400); and the assurance in response to Sir Julian Lewis that you are also supportive of them not be mothballed (Hansard, 24 January, col 401). On this basis we have decided to postpone our planned oral evidence on this subject. However, we would be grateful for clarification and further detail.

First, can you confirm that the Government plans for both HMS ALBION and HMS BULWARK to be available (together or alternately) for immediate operations until their out-of-service dates in 2033-34, with no capability gap before they are replaced?

We understand that one of the vessels is likely to be on extended readiness and cycled through long-term maintenance at any given point; but were concerned to hear reports that HMS ALBION would not be operationalised again but rather cannibalised to sustain HMS BULWARK. Can you confirm that this is not, and will not, be the case?

Finally, what has been the practical impact of personnel shortages on the ability to deploy and maintain the Albion Class ships, and what measures is the Government putting in place to address this impact?

We understand that First Sea Lord is keen to give evidence to the Committee on this subject. We would very much welcome this. It would be helpful if he could also answer questions about the plan for the Royal Marines that you have commissioned.

Rt. Hon. Sir Jeremy Quin MP

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