

Speech: Opening of the RBLI Invictus and Victory Houses

INTRO

It's a huge pleasure to be here today to open these magnificent new apartments and meet their future occupants who I look forward to chatting to in a few minute's time.

I remember standing across the road from here three years ago not long after I'd been appointed Defence Secretary. Back then there was nothing but a barren patch of land and set of ambitious plans.

Three years later what a transformation! The unwavering drive of Royal British Legion Industries unstinting support of the Morrison's Foundation, the ABF The Soldiers' Charity, Chelsea Barracks Foundation, and unending ingenuity of Blesma, have not just produced modern adapted homes and tranquil gardens but an entire village, a community fit for heroes.

It's not only RBLI who have transformed three years on. So too has defence. And, in the face of intensifying threats, the respect I have, the public have, for our courageous personnel has soared to new heights.

REMEMBERING

This year we've had particular cause to reflect on their service and sacrifice. We've remembered the Great War and the mud and blood of Paschendale that triggered the creation of RBLI itself.

We've commemorated the 35th anniversary of the Falklands conflict. This weekend I'll be in the Middle East to mark three years of our Counter Daesh campaign.

But the reason we're here today the reason the Government has put almost £2m into this project through Libor funding is because our relationship with the veteran community is about much more than respect.

RESPONSIBILITY

First, it's about our responsibility, the nation's responsibility, to serve those who served us.

That means helping solve critical housing problems so former soldiers, sailors, or pilots, single-male or female veterans, older service personnel and their families, and those who have suffered life changing injuries, can get the vital accommodation they need.

I asked the Brigadier why they named one of these blocks Victory House instead of referencing any particular victory. His answer was profound. He said the name was chosen to honour the everyday victories those little

critical steps that our veterans achieve as they work towards recovery and independence and build new lives.

RECOGNITION

Second, we're here today to recognise what our veterans still have to offer. It's no coincidence the other block is named Invictus.

Three years ago the first Invictus Games showed the nation and the world how despite appalling injuries our brave men and women remained capable of achieving amazing things.

In a few days' time our latest Team GB Invictus athletes, will be taking to the field once more in Toronto in a bid to outdo their predecessors.

Whether they come home with bronze, silver, or gold all will have proved worthy of the title of that immortal poem Invictus, "unconquered".

And this village is making sure they will continue making a difference by offering its inhabitants employment opportunities and the chance to shape the community in which they live.

REAFFIRM COMMITMENT

Thirdly, we're here to rededicate ourselves to the service of our veterans today and tomorrow.

This is only the beginning. Phase 1 might be over but there's a plan for Centenary Village to grow with more family housing and a new community center. I look forward to returning here in two years' time when RBLI celebrates its centenary year, to find that first spade in the ground and phase 2 well underway.

But there's something that matters as much as these houses. That's the example you're setting. By forging powerful partnerships between charities like RBLI and Cobseo, and between local leaders, you're turning the Armed Forces Covenant into practical reality, so that no-one who belongs to the forces' family suffers disadvantage.

You are the Armed Forces Covenant made manifest.

Today we open a house named victory. It is your victory.

CONCLUSION

So let me salute you on a marvellous achievement.

You've built homes for the heroes who helped build our future.

You are an inspiration. And I wish you, and all who live here, every success in your future endeavours as I officially declare these two great houses, open.

I now declare Invictus and Victory House open.