

21.01.19

11 Deputy I. Gardiner of the Assistant Chief Minister regarding preferred accessed route to the hospital (OQ.5/2021):

Will the Assistant Chief Minister provide States Members and the public with diagrams of what the proposed hospital and suggested access route will look like ahead of the planned debate of our hospital preferred access route P.167/2020?

Senator L.J. Farnham (Assistant Chief Minister):

Yes, I thank the Deputy for her question. The debate of P.167 concerns the principle of access to the new hospital including ensuring that the preferred route maximising opportunities for sustainable modes of travel minimises the impact on properties, local amenities and the environment. Once a preferred access route has been agreed by the Assembly, the design team can then commence the detailed design of that route as part of the planning application process and will also be able to, importantly, continue the design of the hospital buildings itself. So, in short, a brand new road, it is proposed, will be created. It will be of a high quality with reduced gradient which is safer with broader pavements and cycle path access but of course the detail of the design, the look, the impact on the area and the environment are very much planning issues. I do not think it would be appropriate for the States to be involved in that level of detail at this stage. I think we have to agree the principle and then let the planning process deal with the details.

10.11.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:

I did not ask for a detailed plan. I asked about the diagram. Even the Waterfront, which is only a concept at this point, has a diagram for the public and the States Members to see. Why the reluctance to provide a diagram if this road is truly an improvement and extensive and detailed analysis has been undertaken?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Well, I am not sure it is as simple as drawing a picture of a road. I think we all know what good quality roads look like. They really, before we can produce meaningful visuals, do have to complete or at least start working on the detailed design itself. If the States approve the principle of the access via Westmount Road, then that work can begin in earnest and once they get started, we can then start to share some meaningful visuals and designs.

10.11.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The question I have for the Minister is he seems very evasive on this. Members want to know, for example, what the impact will be on the Lower Park in St. Helier. How many trees and how much of the park and the bowling green is going to be taken away before a vote is taken? Will the Minister give an undertaking that he will at least provide a diagram showing the encroachment on the Lower Park? Otherwise, he is going to have people voting "No" against any proposal he is making for it.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I am certainly not being evasive. I might be giving answers that the Deputy does not want to hear but that, I am afraid, has been an example. The basic diagrams that have been presented have been desecrated with all sorts of views of what it might look like by those with an interest that cannot be farther from the truth. Of course, for the debate, and we have another presentation to States Members on Thursday, we will provide as much detail as possible. I will ask the team to see whether they can provide any sort of visual idea to give Members an understanding of what the road could

look like but also I would remind Members that if we go back to the main proposition, so when we decided to build the new hospital on Overdale, studies were done on a number of other access routes approaching the hospital from different sides of Westmount and the Westmount Road proposition produced the least environmental impact. It produced the least environmental disruption by quite some margin. Much less than going up from the Inner Road, which would have not only caused a lot more environmental damage but also disruption to many more homes. Like I say, we will endeavour to provide as much information as possible but it is simply impossible to provide detailed visuals without proper design work being started and to do that, we need the approval of the Assembly.

10.11.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Will the Minister provide not visuals, just simply a diagram showing how far the road will encroach into the existing Lower Park and the bowling green so that people get an idea of how much of the park is going to be lost before this thing is debated because, if not, as I say, we will vote no.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

We have already provided a broad diagram with those details on and I will endeavour to get the team to provide some more specific detail but of course it is impossible to provide the exact detail until the detailed design work is started. That knocks the works over because that involves committing a huge amount of resource and that work is not going to start until, in line with the amendment brought by the Constable of St. Helier, we have the States approval to do so. Also, I understand that Scrutiny have now received a final draft of work they were doing on it so, obviously, we are going to be very keen for their input as well. To reassure the Deputy and Members, I will provide as much detailed information as we can prior to the debate but it will not be absolute detailed design.

10.11.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask the Minister, given that the Sustainable Transport Policy and carbon neutral strategy are far from complete, how can he know that any major structure such as this new access road will be in line with both of those policies?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

We have to produce a design that is flexible and takes into consideration the aspirations of the Assembly in what it plans to do in terms of its carbon neutral strategy. That is one of the key reasons why we chose to keep the hospital site closer to St. Helier, for example, as opposed to having something out of town or St. Saviour because that significantly reduces by perhaps many thousands, if not, tens of thousands of car journeys a year. But of course it would be impossible to do that work for any site because it is an aspiration of the Assembly and it is going to be something that we and many future States Assemblies are going to be working to deliver well into the future.

10.11.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Given, and we all hope, that a Sustainable Transport Policy is successful and takes people away from car use into other modes of transport, could the Minister not be promoting a large and unnecessary car parking area and not really have a clear picture of ways and means to travel to the hospital in a sustainable way? Is that not a risk that is there with this project?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Yes, it is. Of course it is and we have all subscribed to our carbon neutral ambitions and we will be ensuring when we complete the transport studies and the transport options that we make provision to ensure that the hospital can facilitate our carbon neutral aspirations. But I think the facilities up there, as well as taking that into consideration, we also have to be mindful that we have to provide appropriate facilities first and foremost for staff and patients although I do admit that those facilities, from a carbon neutral point of view, will certainly have to evolve over the next 2 to 3 decades.

10.11.6 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The devil is of course in the detail and would the Minister not agree that his apparent reticence to provide comprehensive details on the proposed Overdale approach risks the proposition being referred back for more information when it comes to the debate?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I am absolutely not reticent to provide additional details. I have said the team will provide as much detail as is possible but I just want to remind Members that if we do not complete this project on time, we will be failing the Island once again with the hospital project. We are already seeing orchestrated campaigns to disrupt the process and I really cannot stress enough the additional risk to Islanders' health and the cost that if we do not get the new hospital operational by 2026, the cost of maintaining and maintenance on the existing hospital will grow exponentially. So I would very much like, in an ideal world, to be able to present detailed drawings and diagrams of the exact road plan that will ultimately lead up to Overdale. But that work has not yet been done and that work has not been done because an amendment was carried by the Assembly to agree the principle of the access. Now if the States want to see detailed design road plans, that means there is a risk because we would have to commit considerable time and resource to delivering those designs and that would put an unacceptable delay on the project. Now we have a planning process and we have to trust in that planning process. The States must debate and hopefully agree the principle of the access route. When they have done that, we can really get on with producing the detail and we can share and keep Members involved at that stage but we must rely on the planning process to deal with that. There is no reticence. I do undertake to go back to the team to ensure we provide as much detail as we possibly can prior to the debate. I know the Scrutiny Report will also contain details and if we can get some visuals, even if it is only a rough idea of what it could look like ...

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, Minister. I must ask you to bring your answer to a close, I am afraid, as 2½ minutes have passed now. Thank you very much.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Thank you, Sir. I have finished the answer.

10.11.7 Deputy S.G. Luce of St. Martin:

I am going to change the question I was going to ask, given the Minister's last answer.

[12:45]

He talks about delivering a hospital for the good of the Island and I could not agree with him more but will he accept, given the challenges that this access road in planning for the hospital faces through the planning process that he mentions, that we have a quicker, cheaper option to go back to the original application and just rebuild an extension on to the existing hospital?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

No, I simply cannot accept that and I would be reluctant to open that debate again. We had considerable debate and discussion over the Gloucester Street site leading to an Assembly proposition and decision to exclude, for a number of very, very good reasons, the Gloucester Street site. It has since been discovered by the new hospital team that the former designs of the proposed hospital at Gloucester Street simply would not have stood the test of time. I firmly believe and I believe the Assembly also believes that the site at Overdale might not be perfect. We do not have a perfect site here. The option was possibly People's Park and if we think we are getting a bit of noise about Overdale, Members can only imagine what sort of noise and objections we would have had had we decided on People's Park. I am slightly disappointed that some people who I have worked with during this wanted it not to go on People's Park but said they would give it full support at Overdale are now sort of changing the rules a little bit. That is very disappointing. We will build a world-class, splendid hospital and magnificent hospital for Islanders at Overdale if we all get behind it.

10.11.8 The Deputy of St. Martin:

The Minister may well build a world-class hospital at Overdale and he will cover agricultural fields with concrete but the presentation that his officers gave to the access road had a huge number of options. Does he agree with me that the feeling of States Members after that was that they are now beginning to realise that the access to this hospital site is so difficult to make it impractical?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

The access is not difficult. If Members will recognise the challenges of the current Westmount Road - and I have been up and down that road by transport, bike, by foot many, many times in the last, shall we say, 6 to 8 months - they will realise that what we are planning will be a significant improvement on the current Westmount Road. We can make a new road. It will decrease the gradient, we can make it safer, we can improve landscaping, we can improve the environment all with absolute minimal impact on the People's Park. I am sorry that some Members do not want to see the hospital at the top of the hill at Overdale and, obviously, I do not think I am going to persuade them. I would very much like to persuade the Deputy of St. Martin and other Members that this is the right site for the hospital. I fear I might not be able to but I am not going to stop trying. There were 71 options studied in total and we kept coming back to the option to improve Westmount Road and I hope to make a very strong case that Members will be able to support.

10.11.9 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Reflecting on the Minister's previous answer that it is an orchestrated campaign, I can see it as general concerns from the residents of the area. I would like to say our advisers stated that they never saw anything like 71 routes considered in such a process. Why did they not produce a design instead of spending time considering so many lines on the map?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Well, I thank the Deputy and I completely understand that it is, to the residents immediately impacted, of course of great concern and there are different residents with different views on the matter. We have quite a number of residents who are very supportive. We have a number of residents who have been delayed in the sale of their properties and of course there are residents who do not want to be inconvenienced in any way. Of course, we can fully appreciate that and I think that would have been the case with any site that we chose to build a new hospital on but I also firmly believe that the inconvenience to residents with what we are proposing is far less than just

about any other site we have looked at. I believe the amendment of the Constable of St. Helier did ask us to look at pretty much all of the options for access to Overdale, and there was a caveat that we could not proceed with any purchase of any properties that would be affected by the road access. That had caused significant delay to the land assembly programme which is essential to building the hospital. So that was completed, 71 routes were examined and we have presented 2 to States Members. We are presenting again this Thursday and if States Members agree with the principle of improving access to Overdale via Westmount Road, then we can really get on with the design and public engagement programme of course and the planning process. We undertake to work very closely and improve and build upon the relationships we are starting to develop with the residents and of course I hope, and will make sure, that we continue to work closely with their representatives as well.