



14 January 2021

Dear Scrutiny Panel Member

Review of Preferred Access Route to Overdale

As a resident in the affected area of the proposed new hospital, I am grateful for the opportunity provided by the Scrutiny Panel Review of what is described by our Government as the 'Preferred Access Route to Overdale' to comment specifically on the access proposals.

Before responding to the questions posed by the Scrutiny Panel, I would like to take the opportunity to comment generally on the overarching proposition, notwithstanding that the decision has, incredulously in my view, already been taken to site the new hospital at Overdale.

Having lived at the top of Westmount Road for over 15 years, we are used to having a hospital on our doorstep. The site is perfect for a secondary (non emergency) healthcare facility. Sadly, many of the current buildings at Overdale have been neglected, such that the potential of the facility has not been maximised.

Had the site been maintained effectively, and developed/expanded appropriately, non emergency healthcare could continue to be provided at Overdale in an efficient manner, reducing the pressure on existing facilities and potentially allowing for the operation of cost-effective split site hospital facilities with limited additional investment.

That opportunity has not yet been lost; the use of Overdale can be improved and maximised, without having to decimate much of People's Park, create a 12m-wide superhighway up Westmount Road or, significantly, spending hundreds of millions of pounds, facilitating the development of a smaller and affordable General Hospital that is fit for purpose and meets the needs of Jersey in the 21st century.

Having just approved the Jersey Care Model, which devolves much of the responsibility for primary and emergency care back into the community and can be delivered through GP surgeries and community-based facilities, it seems incredible to be investing up to a billion pounds (as that is what it will inevitably be) in a health facility that is inconsistent with the Care Model and will damage the wealth of the island for decades to come.

Turning to the decision to locate the island's primary healthcare facility at Overdale, it is clear that little thought has been given to the fundamental question of access and the ease with which users can get to and from the island's main hospital. Even if it were concluded that Overdale represented the best option for the new hospital (all other factors referenced above

being disregarded), an inaccessible site should render its selection null and void. The number of options considered, many of which were disregarded out of hand (some inexplicably with little more than a dismissive comment), provides an indication of the challenge associated with locating a primary healthcare facility at the top of a hill. That only one of these options – access via Westmount Road – is deemed to be possible (and thus becomes the preferred route) speaks volumes for the integrity of the entire project. Yet there seems to be a determination to keep the project on track at any cost, sticking to the plans with a total disregard for anyone or anything in its path. It is, under any construction, a folly.

The dictionary definitions of ‘folly’ make interesting reading:

- A lack of good sense or normal prudence or foresight;
- An act of foolishness or madness;
- Criminally or tragically foolish actions;
- A costly ornamental building with no practical purpose;
- An often extravagant picturesque building erected to suit a fanciful taste;
- An excessively costly or unprofitable undertaking.

Hopefully, once it has finally been realised that the plan is flawed and unaffordable, and that the positioning of, and access to, the hospital is unworkable, the new hospital will (again) go back to the drawing board.

Key Questions posed by Scrutiny

1. Will you be affected by the proposed access route to Overdale? If so, how?

Yes. Living on Westmount Road we will be directly impacted, on a daily basis and for many years during the decimation of the neighbourhood, the demolition of three houses, the impact of construction traffic (deliveries, landfill removal, staff access (700+ apparently)), road realignment, noise, dust, property access issues, rockface removal and general construction work, (potentially 7 days per week).

2. How do you think the access route will affect the homes, leisure facilities and surrounding areas and the overall impact on the landscape?

In addition to the unnecessary destruction of three new properties at the top of Westmount Road, the proposed access route will render all properties in the area unsaleable/unrentable for many years and reduce property values permanently. In terms of leisure facilities, in addition to the loss of the Bowling Club, the Children’s Play Area at People’s Park will be lost, as will a large part of the public amenity that is People’s Park, including over 50 trees and many of the walkways. The car park at West Park and all parking on the edge of People’s Park will disappear, removing a further amenity.

The overall landscape will be decimated, with the creation of a 12 metre superhighway, similar to Elizabeth Avenue, the destruction of Westmount Road and Gallows Hill, both important historic sites in the history of Jersey, the loss of much of People’s Park and the surrounding amenities, trees and walkways.

It is somewhat ironic that on 6 January, the Chief Minister celebrated the 240th anniversary of the Battle of Jersey. Major Peirson led his troops into battle from the very part of Westmount Road that will be destroyed; at a stroke, the Chief Minister is achieving what the French forces failed to do. Shame on you Chief Minister.

3. Do you feel the plans offer easy access using bus, bicycle or walking and take into account appropriate sustainable methods of transport?

No, not at all. Walking or cycling up Westmount Road is a challenge, even if you are fit. Imagine being ill and having no available transport to get to the hospital and having to walk to Accident and Emergency? Shuttle buses will not address the access concerns of users. No demographic studies of hospital users and transport needs and preferences have been undertaken in support of the plans. As with much of this project, metaphorically, the cart is well and truly before the horse. Talk of cable cars and funicular railways are simply fanciful (but perhaps not surprising in the context of the ridiculous concept of building a primary care facility at the top of one of Jersey's steepest hills).

4. Do you feel the public were given adequate time to properly consider all the information provided by the States to engage properly in consultation?

No. The information provided was poorly constructed and lacking, focusing solely on the preferred solution (which was, for reasons which are unclear, Overdale) with other options dismissed as unworkable, without any, or scant, justification. Consultation was very poor and only commenced after the decision was made on the location of the hospital and it was, to all intents and purposes, a done deal.

It is only now that people are realising what the issues are. The process has been far from transparent, with lip service paid to any attempt made to question any element of the project.

5. Do you feel that any views of the public (whether minority or majority views) were adequately addressed by the Government of Jersey?

No. They only engaged (if the low level of communication can be regarded as engagement) after the location decision was made.

6. Was your voice heard?

Other than by a handful of States Members (and particularly by Scrutiny Panel members), no. Senator Farnham purportedly listened but did not hear, playing lip service to any of the issues raised by residents at a public meeting. He is intent on delivering this project at any cost, with disregard for anyone or anything in its path.

Yours sincerely



Neville Benbow