

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

159/2009

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The Government is more concerned about pouring millions of pounds into grandiose schemes of questionable benefit to the community than in tackling the concerns of ordinary citizens which often costs considerably less. This attitude is reflected in the state of the facilities of many play parks around Gibraltar and the low priority which the Government has given to resolving the issues.

The children's play area in the Westside reclamation was completely destroyed by the severe storms of October last year. The park and play area have still not been repaired and opened to the public. This was a popular leisure area for parents and children of all ages. Its location in the Westside residential area meant that it was within easy reach of hundreds of people who used the facilities on a regular basis.

The Government said at the time of the storm damage last year, that there had been a change in wave patterns as a result of an area of reclaimed land on the Spanish side of the Bay which meant that the area where the park was located was exposed to stronger wave action. However, from October last year until the present day precious little appears to have been done to address the problem and open the park. There is also damage at the children's park in Laguna Estate, some of which dates back to the storms of October last year as well.

In addition to the state of disrepair of these play parks, there is also a lack of commonsense in the way in which the Government organises some of these facilities. There is a play area for children in Camp Bay. This area is used during the summer months, when more people go to the beach, but it is also used extensively during the winter months when parents take their children there to spend a few hours playing in and around the park.

It would make sense if the toilet facilities at Camp Bay were the same as the opening hours of the park. There is a sign outside the park which gives different opening hours for the park to those of the toilet facilities. This means that even though there are people in Camp Bay in the morning and well before lunch, since the park opens at 10.00am, there are no toilets available until 2.00pm in the afternoon. The toilets also close an hour before the playground. This is an issue that would not even cost so much to address.

The low priority that the Government has given these playgrounds is reflected in the miserly amount of money that has been spent. In the financial year 2007/2008 Parliament voted £150,000 for the construction, upgrading and maintenance of playgrounds. The Government's figures show that only £1000 was actually spent. The following year in 2008/2009 Parliament provided a token £1000 for the same projects. The Government figures show that nothing was spent at all. Moreover, it is no longer possible to determine exactly how much has been allocated for 2009/2010 from the estimates book because the Government have hidden this exact sum by merging it with other accounting figures that have nothing to do with play parks.

It is disgraceful that the Government has spent millions and millions of pounds on projects like the Theatre Royal and the construction of the new air terminal and yet little or no money has been spent in improving the play parks and facilities for our children.

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