

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The decision of the Government to finally open the car park at Europlaza for hospital users is a case of better late than never. It is yet another reflection of the poor planning that has surrounded the multi-million pound conversion of an office block at Europort into a hospital that the provision of car parking spaces for members of the public was not adequately catered for when the hospital opened, notwithstanding the fact that adequate parking was given as one of the reasons for the move from the old St Bernard's site.

The Government told Parliament in 2004 that they had agreed to purchase a floor from the developers of Europlaza to use as car parking space for the hospital at a cost of £650,000. When the hospital opened this did not materialise. It has meant that for a considerable period of time there have been no hospital parking spaces available for visitors. This has caused considerable inconvenience to many people.

The problem became so acute that in June of 2005 the Government announced that they had reached agreement with Morrison's supermarket across the road for the allocation of 25 car parking spaces to hospital users free of charge for one hour. The arrangement entailed the allocation of temporary passes from the car park attendant on a first come first served basis. Even though the Government described the arrangements as "an open agreement with no time constraints", it came to an end without warning and there were many hospital users whose vehicles were clamped in Morrison's car park as a consequence of this facility coming unexpectedly to an end.

The Opposition has constantly pressed the Government in Parliament over many years to provide adequate car parking spaces for hospital users. The delays in providing this facility, once Europlaza had been constructed, are inexcusable. When Shadow Health Minister Neil Costa asked in Parliament in April 2008, he was told that the Government was implementing a policy to operate Government owned car parks through a Government-owned company and this was in the process of being housed, staffed and activated. The House was told that "this is not something that is technically under review, which means nothing is happening. Let me explain that, when the words are used 'under review' or 'pigeon-holed meaning nothing is happening.'" The Government added that this was not one of those cases and that it should happen soon.

At six meetings of Parliament that spanned 2008, 2009 and 2010 since that answer was given, the Opposition has continued to push the Government on the issue. The indications are that nothing was indeed happening, despite the

answer to the contrary given in April 2008, given that it has taken a further two years for the car park to open its doors. In September 2008 the Government said that the new arrangements would become operational by Christmas of that year. This did not happen. In March of 2009 the Government said that the car park would open “quite soon” but it did not happen either. Parliament was told that the Government were now considering their own policy on transport and car parks generally and that the one for hospital users in Europlaza was being considered in that wider context. The Government also confirmed in June 2009 not only that there were no staffing problems as such, but that the car park was in a fit state to be operational at that time. This was then expected to happen “very, very shortly”. It has transpired since that “very, very shortly” actually meant eight months more to wait!

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Health Minister Neil Costa said:

“The Opposition consider that the Government could have saved motorists and hospital visitors a considerable degree of inconvenience had they made provision for public car parking spaces when they decided to convert the office-block and Europort into a hospital. Having failed to do that, it is totally unacceptable that people were made to wait all this time while the Government made up their minds on how to operate and staff the car park, even though the building was ready and the spaces were available for use. This is typical of the way in which the present Government operates in that no urgency or priority is given to the concerns of ordinary Gibraltarians.”

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