



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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As I am sure you will be aware, an extremely well-attended rally and march was held on Saturday (16th March) in support of progress on the urgently-needed new Belford Hospital in Fort William.

With MPs, MSPs and councillors from all of Scotland's major political parties joining over 700 campaigners and members of the public, it was a clear and unequivocal message from the local community that they do not want any more delays in the replacement of the nearly 60-year-old Belford. They simply want their promised new hospital built.

For over two decades, the local community has been campaigning for a new hospital, highlighting its importance to the current and future healthcare needs of Lochaber. It is vital that this new facility, which should be under construction by now but has been repeatedly delayed, is delivered as soon as possible.

On 20th February, you told Parliament: *"It is essential that NHS boards continue to plan for how they will improve and reform services. We will remain committed to supporting them in that process."* On the 13 March, you told Parliament that, in relation to how much NHS Highland might have asked the Scottish Government to allow for planning and design work to continue, *"discussions were ongoing"* but that you remain *"committed to supporting them in that process by exploring all funding options that are available to progress projects"*.

I would therefore ask that you a) provide further details on these discussions with NHS Highland, b) whether a request for financial support has been made by NHS Highland to allow planning and design work to continue and, c) if so, how much has been requested.

I am sure you will agree that this project is vital in meeting the growing health needs of Lochaber and surrounding communities. The rally was attended by people of all ages, highlighting the importance of good health facilities for vibrant and sustainable communities.

Given the significant amount of public money that has already been committed to this project, including the purchase of the Blar Mor site, it is essential to ensure that this investment is not wasted and that real progress is made.

I would therefore also ask you to give a firm commitment that, if made, the Scottish Government would be prepared to support any request by NHS Highland for additional funding to allow the planning and design work for the new Belford Hospital to continue.

Those who turned out on Saturday, as well as the many thousands from across Lochaber who recognise the increasingly urgent need for a new hospital - were clear; they want to see no more delays and demand progress be made on a new Belford.

And they want to see the promises made by NHS Highland in Inverness and the Scottish Government in Edinburgh delivered.

Yours sincerely,



Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP
Highlands and Islands Region