

Sir Kenneth Stowe

REDEVELOPMENT OF ELSTREE BLOOD LABORATORY, ELSTREE

The bid for another £16 million for the capital cost of the new development at the Blood Products Laboratory, Elstree seems to me, at first sight, to show a fairly woeful lack of cost control somewhere in the Department. We seem to have little practical alternative to seeking Treasury approval for it. I do not agree that it should be taken out of the Health Authorities capital programme - if Treasury consent to it at all - I think Centrally Financed Services will have to stand it.

I am all in favour of the fast track "design and build" approach to construction and I would like to see it spread as quickly as possible to the rest of the NHS capital programme. However I have never heard of a "design and build" contract proceeding with no ceiling being placed on the final cost. Even worse, nobody seems to have been vetting the demands for higher technology and additions to the project that have been ordered steadily over the last year.

In practice, the Special Health Authority seems to have been left in sole charge of this project and given a blank cheque. I am told that the businessmen members of the CBLA expressed surprise that they were given no cost ceiling to work to. The project seems to have been swept along by the enthusiasm of our high-powered "boffins" at Elstree who have charged us with ever-more ambitious ideas.

I have no idea what kind of 'market research' has been carried out amongst the Health Authorities for the full range of blood products that we are now likely to make and research.

The Department seems quite incapable of controlling the activities of our more formidable scientists at places like Elstree and Porton Down. We ask our Health Authorities to try to be more effective in their dealings with high-powered consultants.

I would like to be kept in touch with what is done about this. I would also like to know where we are going to find the money from.

GRO-C

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