

## HEALTH

# 'Whipps Won't Wait' Won't Work

*Regular Whipps commentator Mary Burnett thinks the council needs more than a petition to get results*

Last month, Waltham Forest Council launched 'Whipps Won't Wait', a campaign calling on the Government to prioritise funding for Whipps Cross over other hospitals awaiting redevelopment. The launch event on 7th October was attended by politicians from both our borough and Redbridge and, while it's encouraging to see the councils working together, getting the hospital we so desperately need will take more than an online petition.

Government funding is absolutely key to us getting a hospital that meets our community's needs and the amount currently allocated – £400million, as of November 2019 - is nowhere near enough. The amount is so paltry that Barts Health NHS Trust are planning to sell off land for housing to earn their share of the costs, which inevitably reduces the space that can be used for the new hospital. That's perhaps why services like the Margaret Centre, which provides end-of-life care, or the Connaught Day Hospital, which offers vital intensive rehabilitation, may not reappear in our new hospital – and also why the number of beds has become such a contentious issue.

It arguably all comes down to insufficient funding and space.

Whipps Cross is one of a group of six hospitals currently awaiting redevelopment, as part of the New Hospitals Programme run by the Department of Health. The department wants the designs of these new

hospitals standardised and, in the summer, called on Barts to submit three versions of its plans for Whipps: the hospital they'd ideally like to build; the hospital they could build for no more than £400m; and a plan to build in phases, which would cause years of disruption. The five other hospitals in this group have already published their estimated costs and they're all over £400 million, in some cases by hundreds of millions of pounds.

This places Barts in an impossible position if it wants to deliver a hospital with enough beds and the excellent services its patients have come to rely on, like the Margaret Centre, the Connaught Day Hospital or even outpatient dialysis. The Government appears to be willing to provide only a woefully inadequate slice of the funding, while keeping the designers on a short leash.

However, I know first hand that a petition alone is not the answer. Back in 2020, on Valentine's Day, I and other campaigners from Waltham Forest Save Our NHS delivered a petition to the Department of Health calling for the Government to properly fund our new hospital. It was signed by over 5,700 people, a huge number for a grassroots campaign group, and yet no acknowledgement from the department was ever received.

The Whipps Won't Wait petition has so far received more than 5,000 signatures since its creation, which is a commendable figure, and will likely receive more. Sadly, however, getting a new hospital that's fit for purpose will take more than just online signatures. Our local politicians and residents need to do everything they can to put pressure on the Government and campaign for more funding for our Whipps.



Local politicians launch the Whipps Won't Wait campaign (WF Council)

Advertisement

## Still no 'definitive answer' on number of Whipps Cross beds

by Victoria Munro

Whipps Cross still has no "definitive answer" on how many beds will be in the new hospital despite expecting to get planning permission this month.

The hospital's redevelopment programme director Alastair Finney made the admission at the first meeting of a new joint committee, set up to scrutinise the plans, on 19th October.

Waltham Forest Council created the committee to allow Redbridge and Essex County Councils more of a say in the project on 2nd September, after a request from Redbridge.

Mr Finney was responding to a call from a Redbridge councillor for a "formal commitment" from Barts Health NHS Trust, which runs Whipps, that there will not be fewer beds.

He replied: "We could provide at least as many beds in the new hospital as today, should that be needed, but I do not, how-

ever, have a definitive answer today on how many beds will be needed.

"As we get closer to the new hospital, we will continue to develop our image of what that necessary capacity will be."

Essex County councillor Jaymey McIvor said there seemed to be "more clarity on the number of parking spaces than hospital beds".

He added: "It seems, in an area with a growing population, we would naturally aspire to increase beds. I find this quite peculiar."

The committee also heard from resident David Lee about the importance of the Margaret Centre, which offers specialist end-of-life care at Whipps Cross but may not be included in the new hospital.

He explained the centre cared for his wife before her death a few weeks ago and that, without it, the end of her life "would have been much poorer, if not frighteningly traumatic".

Mr Finney responded that the centre would not be lost entirely but admitted it could be moved somewhere else in north east London.