

## Questions mount as government stays tight-lipped on Whipps Cross rebuild

The government is yet to provide a clear timeline for its review into the New Hospitals Programme, or release any details on its progress, reports Marco Marcelline



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As concerns grow over the future of Whipps Cross Hospital’s rebuild, questions about the viability of the New Hospitals Programme remain unanswered two months after the government announced a major funding review.

In July, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves announced that the New Hospitals programme – Boris Johnson’s promise of 40 new hospitals by 2030 – would undergo a “complete review”.

In a move that prompted strong criticism from the opposition, the Chancellor said that the previous government’s commitment to build 40 new hospitals by 2030 was “undeliverable and unaffordable” as she promised a “reset” that would put the programme on a “sustainable footing”.

She added that hospitals deemed the most “urgent” to be built will

continue to be delivered in a “realistic timeframe” – though it is not yet clear if Whipps Cross is one of those hospitals.

The construction of a new 500-space multi-storey car park at Whipps Cross is currently underway, and work on the hospital’s redevelopment was slated to begin next year.

In the two months since the review was announced, both Labour and Conservative politicians have sought to ensure that the government commits to funding the rebuild.

The government is however yet to provide a clear timeline for the review, or release any details on its progress.

A spokesperson for the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) told the *Echo* that it would set out more details on the review “shortly”.

Adding that “no decisions have yet been made” on the scale of the updated hospitals programme, the spokesperson said the government aims to “provide a thorough, costed and realistic timeline for delivery...to ensure we can replace the crumbling hospital estate in England”.

There was no response when the *Echo* asked if Whipps Cross was deemed a priority hospital by the department as it conducts its review.

At Prime Minister’s Questions today (11th September), Epping Forest MP Neil Hudson asked if the Prime Minister could commit to the rebuilding of Whipps Cross.

Sir Keir Starmer responded: “He’s right to champion the hospitals in his constituency. The problem with what the last government promised was this: they promised 40 new hospitals, but there were not 40, they were not new, and many of them were not hospitals. We need to review what we can do and put it on a sustainable, deliverable basis.”

Chingford and Woodford Green MP Iain Duncan Smith last week expressed disappointment on social media that the government had been so far unable to provide a “simple update” on the future of the Whipps Cross rebuild.

Writing on X, he said: “As promised, I am fighting the government’s decision to pause the rebuild and I will maintain pressure on the Health Secretary Wes Streeting to ensure that urgent progress is made.”

Yesterday (10th September), MPs Calvin Bailey (Leyton and Wanstead) and Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) held a meeting with health minister Karin Smyth. The meeting, Creasy said on Facebook, was to “lobby for the funds needed to complete the project”.

Posting a photo of the trio together, she added: “Whipps won’t wait and neither will we – as soon as we have news on what will happen next, will update residents!”

The *Echo* understands that Bailey also held a meeting on the issue with health secretary Wes Streeting yesterday.

Prior to the 4th July election, Labour committed to rebuilding Whipps Cross as well as five other London hospitals, and Labour candidates running for election in Waltham Forest had made the Whipps Cross Hospital rebuild front and centre of their electoral campaigns.

Lisa Halton from campaign group Action4Whipps remarked on the situation: “Why is there no news about Whipps Cross? Probably because the whole New Hospital Programme is in a mess.

“Underfunded given the wild political promises, and poorly managed; anyone who doubts this should read the National Audit Office (NAO) and the Public Accounts Committee reports. We now have to look to our MPs to press the case for a hospital with more, not fewer, beds, and no loss of services like the [palliative care unit] Margaret Centre.”

Released in September last year, the NAO report into the government’s new hospital programme, found that Whipps Cross would have a “cheap modular design”.

The NAO said this plan – to build hospitals as quickly and cheaply as possible to provide the “minimum viable set of services” – risked the construction of buildings that are “too small”.