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Wes Streeting says Whipps Cross Hospital rebuild ‘is going to happen’

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Speaking on a visit to King George Hospital in Goodmayes today, the Health Secretary said he was ‘absolutely committed to redeveloping Whipps Cross’, reports Sebastian Mann, Local Democracy Reporter & Marco Marcelline



Inset: Wes Streeting, Credit: Parliament UK

The long-awaited redevelopment of Whipps Cross Hospital is “going to happen,” the health secretary Wes Streeting confirmed today.

The rebuild was proposed as part of the Conservatives’ New Hospitals Programme, but the scheme was paused in late July.

The NHS previously warned the target date of 2030 had become “highly unlikely” and the government is now carrying out a “complete review” of the project.

Though many have worried the hospital may not be included in the New Hospitals Programme which is currently under review, Streeting told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS): “I am absolutely committed to redeveloping Whipps Cross. It is going to happen.

“It might not happen as fast as I would have liked it to, and I share everyone’s anger and frustration about this.”

Speaking during a visit to the King George Hospital on 18th October, the Ilford North MP said the timelines drawn up by the previous government were “a work of fiction” and £3.7billion in funding was due to run out in March.

He added: “What I’m currently doing is looking at Whipps and all of the other projects so I can come forward with an honest and realistic timetable, so people can have the clarity and certainty they deserve.” He did not indicate what the new timetable will look like.

First proposed by the previous government, the new Whipps Cross would include more clinical space, single-patient rooms, and double the number of MRI machines. Some 1,500 homes were also proposed for the surrounding area.

It was one of 40 new or redeveloped health centres promised in 2019. So far, only one new hospital had been completed and work had begun on just six others.

Rachel Reeves, the chancellor of the exchequer, is expected to announce revised funding for the project as part of the Autumn Budget, due to be unveiled on 31st October.

She [previously said](#) the “unfunded scheme” had given people “false hope” and a “thorough, realistic and costed plan” would replace the programme.

Reacting to Streeting’s comments today, local MPs Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) and Calvin Bailey (Leyton and Wanstead) told the *Echo*: “We are relentless in making the case that Whipps Cross needs to be rebuilt as quickly as possible.

“We want our residents to benefit from the modern healthcare facilities and the wider gains from this project, including new housing too. These welcome words from the health secretary show our case is being heard. We will continue to focus on making this case because our constituents deserve nothing less.”

Speaking in parliament this week, both Creasy and Bailey highlighted the hospital programme, with Creasy asking if Labour can commit to getting “diggers or spades” in the ground, a feat she said the Conservatives had not achieved.

Speaking to the *Echo* following Streeting’s promise today, Bailey said: “Me and Stella have been working so hard to lobby for this. We’ve been lobbying everyone to not only make the case for the building, but also that the treasury needs to recognise that this scheme means 1,500 new homes.”

Chingford and Woodford Green MP Iain Duncan Smith said: “I am surprised that Wes Streeting was able to provide this update this morning as he was unable to reaffirm this commitment from the despatch box in Parliament this week”.

Duncan Smith also raised the issue of Whipps Cross in parliament this week, asking that Streeting confirm that an extra “£5 million” be granted to the project to mitigate the inflationary consequences of delaying it.

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He said: “The Whipps Cross team estimate the inflationary consequences of delay to be an extra £50m per year, in terms of how much the new hospital will cost to be built. This should not be about party politics – the priority is to deliver a much-needed new hospital for Chingford and Woodford Green residents, and today I’ve asked the Secretary of State if he will go back to the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that the hospital receives that money.”

Meanwhile, council leader Grace Williams, said: “For years we have been campaigning for a modern Whipps Cross hospital that meets the needs of our community in the 21st century. We welcome the commitment to an honest timeline that will help us plan ahead properly so that the redevelopment can take place, a project that will also provide much-needed new housing alongside the world-class hospital that Waltham Forest deserves.”

Barts Health NHS Trust, who manage the hospital, told the *Echo* it would not comment on Streeting’s announcement today. This week the trust said it was “on track” to deliver the first of two new multi-storey car parks for Whipps Cross by August 2025. The car park will include 100 electric vehicle charging bays, parking for 24 motorcycles and 50 accessible spaces.

The trust added that from “mid-November” work of installing the concrete staircases and erecting the steel frame of the building will begin.

Despite the confidence from the health secretary, local campaigners are worried the new Whipps Cross could still be unfit for purpose.

Concerns have been raised that the plans did not include enough beds and issues with ambulances queuing outside would not be alleviated.

Norma Dudley, an activist with Action 4 Whipps, said: “We’re faced with the same old chestnut.

“If it’s too small and we lose services like the Margaret Centre, there’s a real risk that it won’t be fit for our community’s future health needs.”

The future of the Margaret Centre, a dedicated end-of-life care unit at Whipps Cross, still hangs in the balance.

Though councillors from Waltham Forest and Redbridge said there was “no case” for it to not continue, Barts Health has been unable to commit to carrying it over to the new hospital.

Representatives previously told councillors the rebuilt Whipps Cross would still offer palliative care, and the hospital was “moving away from solely having a dedicated ward for specialist end-of-life care”.

Streeting added there needed to be a “real debate in this country” about “how to give everyone a good death”.

He told the LDRS: “I don’t think end-of-life and palliative care is in a good enough place in our country.”

He said there was a “lot of work to do” elsewhere, including in hospice and home-based care.

Editor’s Note (21/10): This article was updated with a comment from Waltham Forest leader Grace Williams