

‘Whipps Cross’ beds are still under threat’



Mary Burnett with other campaigners protesting plans to reduce beds at Whipps Cross

Mary Burnett, from Action4Whipps, worries the commitment not to cut beds in the new hospital is not set in stone

The good news, Waltham Forest Council tells us, is that the NHS have agreed not to cut bed numbers at the new Whipps Cross Hospital. But are they celebrating a bit too soon?

In a letter to concerned local MPs, dated 3rd September, the hospital’s redevelopment director wrote they would maintain bed numbers at the new Whipps, but only “should that prove necessary”. The NHS trust that runs the hospital, Barts Health, are making similar vague assurances, claiming bed numbers will stay the same “if that is required for healthcare at the time of opening”.

Barts emphasise their “flexibility in both planning and design” but the size of a new building isn’t flexible; it’ll be fixed if the planning application currently with the council goes ahead. Equally important is that the Government have capped the costs of the rebuild at £400 million. So where would extra beds go and how would they be paid for? What services or spaces for staff would have to be cut? A recent newsletter from Barts mentions the potential to convert office space into additional wards but office space is essential, as are beds for patients.

The rationale for cutting 51 beds has always been that improvements in services in the community will reduce admissions and the length of patient stays. But anyone trying to get through to their GP or other much-needed social care services will seriously

question this. Social care budgets have been cut to the bone, bursaries for nurses have been slashed and GP training has been underfunded for years. So how does Barts plan to “maintain a relentless focus on delivering improvements to services – in the hospital and across the local health and care system – each year between now and when the new hospital opens”?

Even if there was a vast improvement, there’s compelling evidence we’d still need more hospital beds than we have now. The Greater London Authority (GLA) estimates there will be almost 11,500 more people in the borough by 2026. Furthermore, Barts’ plan for the new hospital is for it to be a centre of expertise for the treatment of frail and older people, as was confirmed in their newsletter in March. Not only do older people take longer to treat in hospital but the number of over 65s across the hospital’s catchment area is projected to increase by 25% by 2029, according to the Office of National Statistics.

Barts Health NHS Trust are up against considerable financial pressures when it comes to delivering this much-needed new hospital. If we want a Whipps Cross that meets our community’s needs, the plans must be closely scrutinised and we must keep campaigning.