

## COMMENT



FELLOWSHIP IS LIFE

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Waltham Forest Echo is the borough's free community newspaper. We publish monthly and distribute 10,000 free copies of each issue – and we will continue to do so during the ongoing public health crisis

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# Campaigning to protect hospital beds

Eva Turner wants to ensure the new Whipps Cross meets local needs



Parts of Whipps Cross Hospital pre-date the founding of the NHS

**T**he Covid-19 pandemic has starkly highlighted that having sufficient hospital capacity is vital for our community.

Before the pandemic, Whipps Cross Hospital was running at between 98% and 99% bed occupancy, sometimes with no free beds. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance states that once bed occupancy goes above 90%, increased infections, re-admissions and mortality are likely. It is fair to describe Whipps Cross as an overstretched hospital.

Yet when Barts Health NHS Trust, which runs the Leytonstone hospital, released a public update of its redevelopment

plans in May, it suggested there would be 50-60 fewer beds at Whipps Cross (based on a likely 67% success rate for its community care model, the report suggested 525 beds were needed at the new hospital, down from 586 as at late 2019). That's despite East London having the fastest population growth in the capital.

Since the start of 'austerity' in 2010, the NHS has been underfunded and under-resourced, with more finances being diverted to the private sector instead. Hospital beds are expensive, so the focus of planning has been to promote better health services in the community, to help keep people out of hospital. The number of general acute hospital beds in

England has fallen from 110,000 to 100,000 over the last ten years.

This time last year the government promised to spend £2.7 billion on building six hospitals, one being the new Whipps Cross. No exact figure was given for each one, but the funding equated to £450 million per hospital. Barts later submitted revised plans for the rebuild of Whipps Cross, which haven't yet been made public. But we do know which

land sale of parts of the Whipps Cross site is taking place, with new homes set to be built there.

Residents in Waltham Forest, Redbridge and beyond completely depend on Whipps Cross to provide NHS services for the whole community. We know that our beloved old Victorian hospital does not now meet the requirements of our growing population and we welcome the proposal for a new hospital.

But the great risk is that Barts will decide to build fewer beds. Whipps Cross is also planned to become a centre of excellence for the care of frail and elderly people – but there is a danger that the new hospital's designation for geriatric care could see some other surgical specialisms disappear.

We've scrutinised the Barts plans carefully. They are pursuing an untested, aspirational strategy that doesn't take into account the underfunding of community resources, nor the fact that older people in hospital take longer to treat. Although Barts say they will "refresh" the assumptions in the plans, the direction of travel is clear; a new hospital with fewer beds.

We are now building a community-wide campaign to ensure that we have a big enough general hospital with an adequate number of beds, plus a 24/7 accident and emergency department. Please join us and help campaign for a better Whipps Cross.

**For more information:**  
Email [whipps.cross.campaign@gmail.com](mailto:whipps.cross.campaign@gmail.com)

**"The great risk is that Barts will decide to build fewer beds"**

assessment the plan is based on.

A recently-published health and care services strategy maintains that new care models in the community will reduce the volume of A&E attendances, emergency admissions, and average length of stays in hospital. Organisational improvements are said to reduce the need for patients to be admitted, as well as their length of stay. This is being used by Barts as part of the justification for reduced bed numbers, despite no information or evaluation of our current community health services.

Key to all this is that the funding promised by the government is not going to be enough to fund the entire hospital redevelopment. To raise more funds, a

## Back to school

*An introduction from editor James Cracknell*

**H**ello and welcome to Issue 66 of *Waltham Forest Echo*.

Children are returning to schools this month and while the risk of spreading coronavirus remains a very real threat, it is one that must be weighed against the impact that several months of lost schooling has

had on the most disadvantaged pupils. Some children are fortunate to have had online lessons, a parent who can stay at home to school them, or even private tuition, while other children have had none of these things – some may not even have a computer to work on. This has undoubtedly worsened inequality and I know that my own step-daughter, whose school has not been running any online classes, has suffered a huge setback just as

she begins preparing for GCSEs.

Let's hope schools are able to return safely and children can get their education back on track, but local lockdowns have been necessary in other parts of the UK this summer and while London has avoided this fate so far, we can take nothing for granted. Just as the *Echo* went to press Waltham Forest Council launched a very useful Covid-19 dashboard on its website which enables residents to monitor the

latest data on coronavirus cases in the borough. You can access this at [walthamforest.gov.uk/content/covid-19-data-dashboard](http://walthamforest.gov.uk/content/covid-19-data-dashboard).

In the paper this month, on Page 5 an anti-violence campaign is turning heads in its mission to help young people thrive, on Page 11 our regular columnist Michelle Edwards scores a victory in her long-running battle to win greater council transparency, and on Page 14 Jim Nichols looks ahead to the return of football at Brisbane Road.