

MP's delight after she wins her fight to secure funds for health centre

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Plans for a health centre alongside 365 new homes at the former St George's Hospital site in Hornchurch will benefit from £17million additional funding as part of a nationwide boost for the NHS, it has been revealed.

On Monday prime minister Boris Johnson confirmed a new health centre at the development in Suttons Lane will be one of 20 healthcare projects to benefit from an extra £1.8billion capital fund for the NHS.

The money will be handed over to the Barking, Havering and Redbridge Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

The news follows a sustained campaign in parliament by Hornchurch and Upminster MP Julia Lopez to get the health centre project over the line after it failed to secure funding at the last capital bidding round earlier this year.

Reacting to the news, Mrs Lopez said: "I'm absolutely thrilled that the prime minister and health secretary have listened to the case I have been making to them about the importance of St George's."

"This is a major breakthrough for our local health and social care system as it will reduce pressure on Queen's Hospital, provide more services in the community and improve residents' access to GPs and mental health care."

"It also reassures residents that growing populations will be catered to by new services rather than just placing pressure on existing ones."

The St George's Hospital site in Suttons Lane had stood empty since 2012 and was sold by the NHS to developer, Bellway, in March 2018.

In March 2018, it was revealed NHS Property Services had sold the former hospital site to Bellway for £43million.

That was, at the time, the single largest capital receipt for a surplus site in



Boris Johnson with Hornchurch and Upminster MP Julia Lopez

NHS Property's history.

While 365 new homes are already being built there, the health centre pledged for the site became mired in funding and planning difficulties in spite of consensus among local councillors, campaigners and health commissioners that a new facility was sorely needed.

Speaking on BBC News on Monday morning following the announcement health secretary Matt Hancock said: "The economy is growing strongly and, ultimately, all public services, the long list you gave, and of course the biggest amongst them is the NHS, they are paid for by having a strong economy."

"There is a record number of people in work at the moment, that means a record number of people paying income tax, a record low number of people who are claiming unemployment, so that gives you more money."

He added: "That money is now, and that money for the NHS is flowing in in this year, it is immediate. We've got the 20 upgrades where the shovels can go in the ground."

However, some healthcare experts say the sum, while desperately needed, is just a fraction of what is required to fix ailing NHS buildings across the country.

Ben Gershlick, from the Health Foundation charity, said that "years of under-

investment in the NHS's infrastructure means this extra money risks being little more than a drop in the ocean".

He warned that NHS facilities are "in major disrepair" in England, with a maintenance backlog of more than £6 billion, a figure also cited by other experts.

The Royal College of Nursing's chief executive Dame Donna Kinnair said the funding would be backed by colleagues "who have to work in cramped and outdated conditions".

"However, after this announcement, nursing staff will look to the prime minister with even greater expectation of addressing the workforce crisis," she added.

Only two projects in London received additional funding, with Croydon Hospital also being awarded £13m.

Sir David Sloman, NHS London's regional director, said: "London's NHS offers some of the most outstanding healthcare in the world, and it has the most talented staff but our medical facilities do not always match this."

"The much needed funding boost announced today is a significant start towards delivering the hospitals and wider NHS services patients and staff deserve and will undoubtedly improve care in these areas, helping to make London the best city in the world in which to be treated."

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