

PLANNING STATEMENT:

issued 31.03.22
for submission to council

Re: New accessible roof garden for the ICU department of the Royal Free Hospital

Prepared for: Royal Free Hospital

Site Address: Royal Free Hospital, Pond Street, London NW3 2QG
(fourth floor roof, above Rowland Street Hill)

Date: March 2022

Planning Statement

Application Details

Applicant: Royal Free Hospital

Agent: William Tozer Associates Ltd.

Local Planning Authority: London Borough of Camden

Conservation Area: none

Project: Creation of a new accessible roof garden on existing roof of hospital building

Site Address: Royal Free Hospital, Pond Street, London NW3 2QG (fourth floor)

1.0 Preface:

1.1 This document sets out the proposed works to an existing area of flat roof at the Royal Free Hospital, London. The area of roof is to the fourth floor on the South West corner of the hospital site (see fig.01). The roof is currently used for maintenance access to plant (including air-conditioning condensers) and additional egress routes. The surface is gravel-coated felt roofing, with galvanised-steel guarding to the perimeter.

1.2 The roof is currently accessed informally by staff of the Intensive Care Department in need of fresh air and a space for respite; existing doors, staircases and ramps provide direct access from the administration areas of the department on to the roof. Over the past two years in particular, this outdoor area has increasingly been sought as a welcome break-out space from the adjoining Intensive Care Unit wards and offices, providing staff with much-needed outdoor space for recuperation. This results in the existing roof being informally used as a roof terrace, more than just an accessible area of roof, with no known complaint from the building users or occupants of neighbouring buildings. In addition, the roof is accessed by hospital staff to maintain the mechanical plant and building fabric.

1.3 The area of roof has stepped and ramped access points from the adjoining wards and offices, as well as an egress route from the West Tower of the main hospital building. There is existing balustrade guarding to the perimeter of the roof, although this is not up to current standards with regards to height or spacing (see fig 02.)



figure 01: aerial view of Royal Free Hospital with area of roof terrace to the south west



figure 02: view on the existing roof deck looking west, with existing balustrade guarding to the left, and ICU offices to the right. Current informal use of the roof for respite visible.

1.4 The current informal use of the space (see fig. 02) must be formalised, to create a safe, inviting space for the hospital staff. The ICU department has raised a number of issues with the existing provisions for the department, and existing roof space:

- The ICU coffee rooms are small spaces with poor internal air quality.
- The current facilities are therefore inadequate to unwind for the c. 70 multidisciplinary team of staff working per day, on long 12 hour+ shifts over 4 'pods' with short break periods.
- The proposed garden roof terrace area is currently a quasi-abandoned terrace space outside the main ICU offices. It is in a poor condition, potentially unsafe and unkempt at present.
- Nevertheless many staff still go out there for a 'change of scene', natural light and fresh air as it is the only outdoor space they have close to their department.

The initial review of the space also raised the following:

- Not clean: unpleasant surroundings for staff to relax.
- Unsafe: building equipment and cabling lying around; existing balustrade is not compliant with current regulations.

1.5 The project has been made possible with substantial donations by a grateful patient who was successfully treated in the ICU during the first COVID pandemic, and further funds have been allocated through other charities, the hospital department and trusts, to ensure there is appropriate allowance for ongoing maintenance of the garden.

1.6 The primary goal for the hospital is that the project supports the objective of an "outstanding staff/patient experience", improving health and wellbeing of the users. The project also supports the environmental sustainability goal and the Trust's Green Plan – "[to] provide green and natural areas on our estate even where land is constrained" (refer to 'biodiversity' section 5.0 below). This roof garden will bring a much needed peaceful area for staff recuperation – there are very limited outdoor spaces on the hospital complex that can offer a peaceful space to get away from the stresses of the work, and this will development will provide such an area.

1.7 It should be clear to all that the hospital staff and the ICU department in particular have been under incredible strain during the COVID pandemic. The provision of a modest green outdoor space on existing land in close proximity to the department has the full backing of the department and hospital trust, and will significantly improve the working conditions for the staff, improving their wellbeing and therefore the care they can provide.

2.0 Neighbouring Area:

2.1 The roof terrace faces south, with views out between adjacent buildings to the cityscape of central London beyond. The closest neighbours are a development of apartment buildings ('Belle Vue' by PegasusLife developments), on the south side of Rowland Street Hill. Review of the site plan (fig. 03 below) shows that the closest portion of the apartment complex is over 20 metres from the proposed roof terrace, and angled away from the main area of occupation. This distance is in accordance with the requirements of Camden's Amenity CPG '21 (section 2: Overlooking, Privacy and Outlook). Further measures to protect the amenity of the apartments are detailed below in relation to privacy screening, orientation and layout of the proposed roof garden, and consultation with Belle Vue is being sought to review the designs and address any comments and concerns they have.

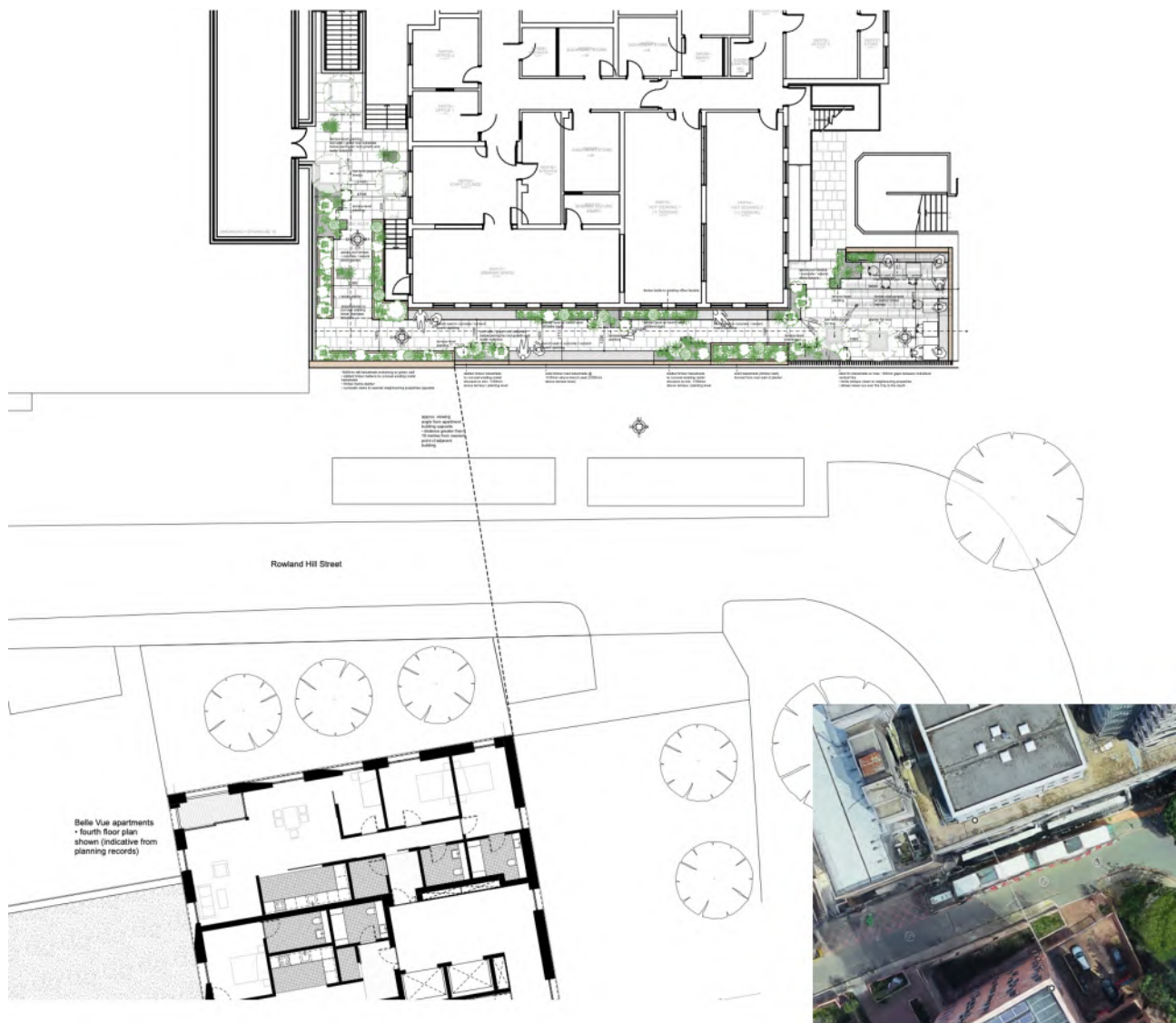


figure 03: site plan showing nearest buildings to proposed roof garden ('Belle Vue' apartments on Rowland Street Hill)

2.2 Rowland Street Hill gives access to the South Car Park, with the new Maggie's centre to be sited in the western corner. The new Pears Building sits to the north of the entrance to Rowland Street Hill, of Havestock Hill (see fig 04.).

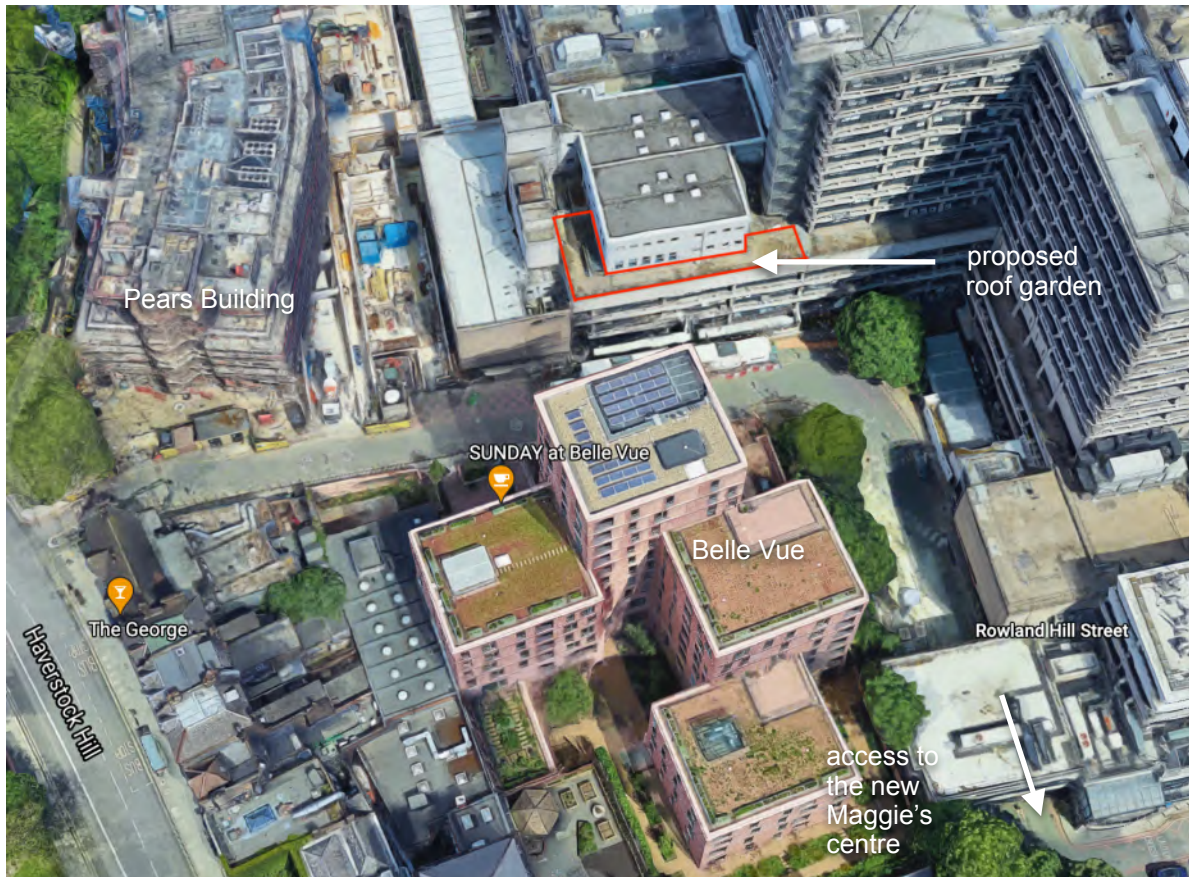


figure 04: aerial view showing roof garden location with neighbouring buildings for context

2.3 The ICU offices, wards and Rowland Street Hill are used 24 hours a day by staff and visitors to the hospital. Several hundred cars and pedestrians use Rowland Street Hill daily to access the South Car Park, as well as entrances to the RFH School of Medicine and other departments. This roof terrace will therefore have minimal additional impact on the amenity of neighbouring properties given the existing flow of people and activity in the immediate area.

2.4 The existing roof space is overlooked by the offices of the ICU department, as well as the main hospital building to the east, at a distance. The roof space has lighting for maintenance access, and is frequently illuminated from the immediately adjacent offices throughout the night. The area of roof, at fourth-floor level, is lower than several of the surrounding buildings, including the ICU offices, main hospital building, Belle Vue apartments, access towers to east and west, and the Pears Building further to the west, as can be seen in fig. 04. New screening proposed as part of the balustrade system will greatly improve the privacy of neighbouring properties compared to the current balustrade on the existing roof area.

3.0 Design, Scale, Character and Appearance

3.1 The proposed works to the roof will ensure that a safe, welcoming roof garden is provided for the hospital. As described above, the existing roof area is informally used for respite and relaxation by the ICU team, and these proposals seek to rationalise that use, upgrading the fabric of the roof and introducing planting, seating and secure balustrade screening for the enjoyment and welfare of the ICU and wider hospital staff.

3.2 The proposed roof garden provides a series of planted areas at varying heights and scales, punctuated by areas of bench seating, leading from the north western corner, along the main southern strip of roof, and round to a pergola-covered seating area to the base of the hospital's West Tower. The preparation of the roof surface will allow for areas of green roof construction, using soil-cell technology to enable the plants' root structures to grow beneath the proposed paving, improving water retention and root growth. This will ensure low-maintenance and longevity to the garden. This will also allow for ground / terrace-level planting, with users of the roof garden walking through and past the vegetation, further enhancing the experience and making a marked contrast to the surrounding existing structures of the hospital. This is a vast improvement on the existing barren flat roof structure.

3.2 The existing balustrade guarding is a galvanised metal construction, retro-fitted to the main flat roof parapet for maintenance access, and provides some safety protection for maintenance work. It does not meet the requirements for adequate guarding for general use. The proposed works will reinforce and replace this balustrade over the length of the roof garden, with a variety of timber and steel guarding structures that will allow climbing plants to grow up and along to further screen views from and to neighbouring buildings. To the western end of the roof, closest to the Belle Vue apartments, the proposal provides a tall (1.6m) screen of timber trellis and planting. The main entrance on to the roof garden is from the north-west corner, with views straight down the roof garden to the south. It is proposed that this initial view be screened on the southern edge of the roof garden, to protect the amenity of the adjacent Belle Vue apartments (see Elevation A1, A/02/103A). The balustrade steps down to the west, as views in this direction are over on to unoccupied areas of the hospital site, and will allow the south and western sunlight down on to this key area of the roof garden.

3.3 The balustrade guarding varies along the southern edge of the roof (see fig. 05 below), defining the areas of privacy screening, walk-ways and bench seating. The areas of bench seating along the main southern strip of the roof garden are staggered from one side to the other, with a significant portion facing back towards the hospital, to prevent any issues with overlooking. Where bench seating is placed to view out to the south, more densely-configured screening is proposed on the southern elevation, to maintain the privacy of adjacent buildings. As the roof garden opens up to the eastern end, so do the views to the south over central London, and here the balustrade guarding changes to a series of vertical fins, allowing views out to the south, whilst screening views obliquely out to the south-west.

3.4 The southern elevation has selected areas of tall screening to maintain privacy, but in general maintains a 1100mm height from the roof deck, so as not to impose on the view of the hospital from the south. The taller areas of the proposal are set back away from the southern facade, and these include trellis for planting on the face of the existing office building, and the pergola canopy structure to the eastern end of the terrace, defining a more formal seating area. Existing steel structures and stairs provide access to the office buildings and ICU wards, and it is proposed that these be clad in timber decking to improve their appearance and provide additional areas for planting and seating.

3.5 The roof garden will provide a variety of planting areas at varying heights, so that access and maintenance can be carried out by all. This includes low-level planters, terrace-level planting within the green roof system, individual trees, and climbing plants on trellises and balustrade guarding, to soften the new and existing structures.



ELEVATION A1 – VIEW FROM ROWLAND HILL STREET showing balustrading and screening

figure 05: southern elevation of roof terrace (at fourth-floor level, with ICU office building behind – refer to A/02/102A for full southern elevation)

4.0 Materials

4.1 The existing roof covering is a gravel-coated felt roof. The RFH are carrying out a review of the existing building fabric and the roof will be upgraded and repaired in preparation for the new roof garden. The construction will then see a robust green roof / soil-cell build-up of waterproof membrane, protective mat, drainage layer / soil cells and supports for the new paving, to maximise the available area for planting.

4.2 The roof garden will be laid with stone / concrete pavers to provide stable, level access for all, and maintain a clear egress route throughout the garden. This robust material will be easy to maintain and clean, providing a slip-resistant finish to the exposed site. The green roof construction below will allow areas of this paving to be left open, for planting at 'ground' level, and for water retention and root systems below the paving. This will also allow the raised planters to be of a modest height, with root systems continuing beneath the adjacent paving.

4.3 The planters and screening will be constructed from steel and timber framing, and clad in sustainable timber decking and cement board finishes to reflect the surrounding built landscape, and soften the existing structures by introducing the warmth of natural timber to the garden. The timber will be treated to protect against UV deterioration and rotting. The timber proposed will be sustainably sourced (options currently considered are Western Red Cedar, thermally-modified Spruce, or FSC-registered sustainable hardwoods such as Yellow Balau). Consideration is given to WPC (wood and plastic composite) decking, using recycled plastic composites, although the preference is for wholly natural materials for sustainability, biodiversity and to allow the managed weathering of materials to blend in to their surroundings.

4.4 Planting is key to the roof garden success, and the RFH are working with James Basson, multi-award winning garden designer at Scape Design, to specify suitable plant species for the roof garden.

4.5 The applicant is aware of historic criticism by local residents and stakeholders towards the RFH for not appropriately maintaining the upkeep of green spaces on the hospital site. The designs in this propose seek to utilise low-maintenance, long-lasting materials and plants that can be easily maintained. A substantial yearly maintenance budget has also been ring-fenced for the ongoing maintenance of the roof garden.

5.0 Biodiversity

5.1 The current roof space is a barren surface of gravel and felt roof, air-conditioning plant and concrete and steel structures. Bird life in the form of pigeons is prevalent in certain areas, and the RFH have methods in place to discourage these birds from settling on hospital buildings. The proposed roof garden will therefore have no adverse impact on existing habitats or species of note.

5.2 Referring to Camden's Biodiversity CPG and the Five-point Mitigation Hierarchy, it is clear that the proposed roof garden will have minimal requirement for avoidance, mitigation and compensation with regards to existing habitats. However, it will bring significant opportunity in relation to point 5: Enhancements.

5.3 The proposed roof garden will bring an abundance of biodiversity to a currently barren site. Although the RFH is close to Hampstead Heath, and not in an 'Area of deficiency in access to nature', the more immediate RFH complex is greatly lacking in green space for the enjoyment of staff, particularly with direct access from the workspace.

5.4 The roof garden is expected to create new habitat for many species of birds and insects, and this will be managed through ongoing maintenance and plant selection to ensure that there is a welcome biodiversity to the area, without impacting the necessary health and safety considerations of the hospital.

5.5 Flowering plant species will be chosen that can contribute to the London B-Line project, providing important pollinator habitat to the capital.

5.6 Funds have been secured for ongoing maintenance of the roof garden, and the designs will include consideration of irrigation systems and access to facilities for staff and visitors to assist in maintaining the garden space.

6.0 Access

6.1 Access to the roof garden is initially proposed for the benefit of the ICU staff only, as an area of respite and relaxation away from the wards and offices. A clear access route of 1.2m width is provided to the entire garden, with stepped access from the western end, and ramped access from the east, to provide ambulatory and wheelchair access to the garden.

6.2 Planters are set out at varying heights, including several accessible to wheelchair users, for maintenance and viewing.

6.3 The use of the gardens will be reviewed and consideration given for occasional accompanied access by patients in the future, although this is not the current proposed use.

6.4 Access to the garden for maintenance and transport of materials will be via internal service lifts, and / or hoist systems from Rowland Street Hill.

6.5 Low-level lighting to illuminate the terrace and plants will be provided, in addition to the existing egress and access lighting on the facade of the office building. The new proposals will have minimal impact on the surrounding area given the prevalence of existing artificial lighting and activity 24 hours a day.

7.0 Sustainability

7.1 With the introduction of vegetation to the roof, there will be a reduction in heat reflection and absorption by the building. This will help to provide a more consistent, cooler temperature to the exterior and interior of the building, reducing the demand on cooling systems, and so reduce the overall energy consumption of the building.

7.2 The green roof construction will help to retain water and reduce run-off to the rainwater drainage system and sewers. It is considered that a green roof can absorb up to 50% of the rainwater fall, and so significantly reducing the pressure on the drainage infrastructure in the area.

7.3 Materials will be sourced sustainably, using local suppliers and manufacturers where possible, and the appropriate industry certifications (FSC timber decking, for example). Materials will be reclaimed where possible and appropriate for the durability and longevity of the structures.

8.0 Adherence to Policy Documents

8.1 Full consideration has been given to the relevant policies and as such the proposals are in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework; Sustainable Design and Construction (SPD) 2013, London Borough of Camden Local Development Framework Core Strategy (DP24), (DP25) London Borough of Camden Local Development Framework Development Policies, Amenity and Biodiversity CPGs and other relevant policies.

8.2 The proposals adhere to the broad requirement of these policies to introduce a piece of high-quality architecture, with good levels of light, privacy, coherency, and positive visual impact to the surrounding area. The materials proposed are of high quality and will respectfully complement the existing building fabric. As such the proposal contributes positively to the local area.

8.3 Biodiversity and Amenity are particularly key considerations of this proposal, and further detail has been provided above in relation to these aspects of Camden's policy. The significant improvement of biodiversity provided by this scheme is clear. The proposal also actively considers the potential impact on the amenity of neighbouring properties, and seeks to minimise this from the outset by maintaining privacy and protecting views to adjacent buildings. It should be noted that as described above, the site is currently used informally as a roof terrace area by staff, for fresh air and respite from their shifts. This proposal rationalises that informal use and further protects and greatly improves the outlook from neighbouring buildings.

8.3 The NPPF requires a positive and proactive approach to development proposals focusing on solutions, and it is hoped that the council engages with the applicant and agent throughout the application process to achieve a successful, positive result.

9.0 Conclusion

9.1 This development will provide much needed outdoor green space for the ICU staff to relax and breathe fresh air after a particularly trying period. It will allow staff to de-stress, get some much-needed fresh air, all within easy access of the ICU department and without the need to leave the hospital site.

9.2 Access to green, outdoor space has been proven to improve energy levels and enhance the mood of the users, and this proposal will provide this essential facility for the staff. It also provides the opportunity for departmental engagement, and as a feature of the hospital will help further improve staff recruitment, retention and the reputation of the RFH trust. The improvement of this part of the hospital building, in a location visible from the public realm (including obliquely down Rowland Street Hill from Haverstock Hill) will not only enhance the hospital itself, but also improve the character and appearance of the surrounding area, for the benefit of the local community.

9.3 The proposals support Camden's biodiversity and green space initiatives as well as the RHF Trust's Green Plan to introduce more green spaces and biodiversity to the site.

9.4 This development has the full support of the ICU department, hospital trust and charities, and should be seen as a vital for the well-being of hospital staff, as well as having a positive impact on the local area, and we look forward to Camden's full support for the proposals.