

Royal Free Hospital, Pond Street, NW3

Proposed ICU Roof Garden 2022/1758/P

Introduction

This note has been drafted in consideration of the proposed “working hours (9:00am – 6 pm)” timing restriction to the existing Intensive Care Unit (ICU) balcony space in the event that planning permission is granted to improve the amenity and general environment of this area.

The outdoor space is aimed at giving our staff a ‘breathing space’ from a very challenging work environment in ICU. It may be that they simply want to go outside for five minutes fresh air, to gather their thoughts after an emotional situation, or just to eat their lunch on a sunny day. Given the size of the RFH and the location of ICU on the fourth floor, leaving the building currently involves a long walk and lift journeys which is unfeasible during short breaks (it would take approximately five minutes to walk out of the building) and also takes staff away from patients if they are just stepping outside to clear their head. There are also few ‘tranquil’ areas outside of the hospital building where ICU staff can go for a few moments of peace.

Key Thoughts

It is understood that such a condition might be imposed on new roof terrace space in certain circumstances, such as for an office building in close proximity to residential, in order to minimise anti-social noise and disturbance to residents from social gatherings, drinking etc. We consider that this space is very different to those circumstances and have provided further context below to assist further consideration on this point.

- As described in the planning statement, this space is already used by staff in an unconstrained way, with “no known complaint from the building users or occupants of neighbouring buildings”. If a timing condition is granted it has the potential to further reduce outdoor space available to staff in an incredibly challenging 24hr environment;
- The space is also used 24/7 to access and service plant & equipment and as a fire escape route. Consequently, attempting to control access to this area and differentiate between access for different purposes will be challenging;
- Smoking and the drinking of alcohol are strictly prohibited on the RFH site, which includes this space;
- This space is only accessible to staff from ICU which is an access controlled environment, separate from the rest of the RFH; non-ICU staff do not have passes that are enabled to enter ICU, and locked doors prevent entry by other people including visitors. As referenced in the Planning Statement, there are c. 70 multidisciplinary staff working per day, on long 12 hour+ shifts with short break periods. Patients typically have 1:1 care – consequently, breaks are typically short and staggered to provide continuity of care;
- The space is adjacent to the ICU Offices and Wards. Given the nature of the condition of patients within this unit and consideration for those patients and their relatives, who may visit 24hrs/day, the space will clearly not be used for loud social gatherings. It is also adjacent to the rest of the hospital, whereby windows for inpatient areas will often be open overnight – particularly during the summer. It would simply not be appropriate or tolerated for anti-social noise to be generated from this space to the extent that it would disturb the RFH patients and in particular the patients and visitors in the ICU. In this respect, and given the high standard

of behaviour and respect that all of our staff are expected to display, the use of the space will be self-regulating;

- For safety reasons furniture would be fixed, so unlike (say) an outdoor canteen space where additional noise can be created through chairs scrapping on floors this simply will not be the case in this area. Indeed, the timber fixtures and greenery should act to absorb any sound compared to the current hard surfaces.

In summary, the space is proposed to be used by ICU staff to enable them to take a break in a green outdoor space for recuperation, reflection and contemplation to support their health and wellbeing. It is to be used by our staff who behave with respect and consideration given the sensitive environment within which they work.

We consider that access does not need to be constrained as it will be self-regulating. The garden will be serving a department that has a difficult job, is physically and mentally challenging for staff and which runs 24/7 365.