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RE: An Coimisiún Pleanála - Case reference: PL29N.323482, Rotunda Hospital Campus, Parnell Square, Dublin 1.

To whom this may concern,

I write in respect of the proposed Rotunda Hospital Critical Care Wing and the planning appeal submitted to An Coimisiún Pleanála.

I very much respect the right to appeal the decision of Dublin City Council. However, it is my view that the proposed extension to the Rotunda Hospital for this critical care wing is essential and must proceed.

The Rotunda Hospital, established on its current premises in 1757, is the oldest continuously operating maternity hospital in the world. It is also one of the busiest in Europe and it is the case that the Rotunda Hospital will be remaining on this site for decades to come.

There is a stark reality that the space is a major constraint in this hospital. Despite the excellent care provided in the hospital, unfortunately it is being provided under very significant physical constraints. This is true both for the neonatal intensive care facilities and for the labour ward.

I ask that An Coimisiún consider the following key factors of the Rotunda's history and the necessity to repurpose existing physical space on the hospital grounds to ensure the safest health service conditions possible, when deciding on the planning appeal.

1. The Rotunda as a key part of the heritage of the city

The Rotunda hospital is a fundamental part of the fabric of our city. 8,324 mothers gave birth in this hospital just last year - 39% of all deliveries in Dublin. The Rotunda's birth rate continues to increase year-on-year. Hundreds of thousands of women from across the city have given birth in this hospital over its illustrious history.

For multiple generations of families, this hospital has been such an important part of their lives. It is at the very heart of our city in every sense of the meaning.

Parnell Square is one of Dublin's foremost Georgian squares. The Rotunda is an integral part of the Square. I understand care has been taken to ensure that the wing will integrate well to the adjacent Garden of Remembrance and that the architecture of the Square is respected.

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2. Current Service provision

It is crucial to say that the current single story outpatient department has little relation to the historical built heritage on the square. In that regard, the proposed new building will represent a significant improvement on the built environment on the Rotunda site.

Currently, services are being delivered in sub-par accommodation.

It should be noted that none of the current labour ward accommodation is of a Health Building Note (HBN) standard - the accepted standard for healthcare in Ireland. This alone demonstrates the urgent need to extend and refurbish the hospital. Currently, the Rotunda has only 11 rooms for deliveries. Two of these rooms can rarely be utilised. This presents a major capacity issue.

It is my understanding that the neonatal unit in the Rotunda is the busiest in the country. None of these spaces in the unit are single spaces for babies, some of whom are very premature. This is an unacceptable situation from an infection prevention perspective. The critical care wing will ensure that there will be reduced risk for those most vulnerable babies.

3. Long standing promise for the critical care wing

The Critical Care Wing has been spoken about for more than twenty years and must be built.

The new wing proposes a labour ward which would expand the capacity of the hospital, postnatal rooms which will be a significant improvement to the current arrangement where women share two wards, and additional space to offer modern neonatal care to more babies.

The Critical Care Wing will allow the Rotunda to expand its services, respond to the pressures placed on its services which are constrained, and ensure that deliveries take place in facilities that are of an acceptable standard. This increased capacity is required for the Rotunda.

This hospital and its incredible staff must be able to provide the best possible care in a fit-for-purpose facility. This is especially true for babies who require intensive special care.

I ask that An Coimisiún Pleanála consider the reality of the Rotunda Hospital's operating environment and how difficult it is for staff of the hospital to provide safe quality services to women and infants. I urge An Coimisiún to uphold Dublin City Council's decision to grant planning permission to this much needed national infrastructure in the heart of our capital city.

Yours sincerely,

Marie Sherlock T.D.