

PLANNING REF : 250543
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 11 Stilton Close
: Lower Earley
: RG6 3AD
SUBMITTED BY : Dr Ramazan Saeed
DATE SUBMITTED : 02/04/2025

COMMENTS:

Dear Reader

I am writing in support of the planning application (ref: 250543) for a Muslim community centre and praying facility and would like the following thoughts to be considered as part of your deliberations.

Wokingham needs a Mosque

One doesn't need a huge amount of statistical inquiry to be persuaded that there is definitely a need for such an establishment that caters for Muslims spiritual and community needs. A cursory review up of some nominal figures gives enough evidence

1. Taking census figures from 2011 and 2022, it shows a 70% increase in the Muslim population in the borough. The supply of community services to cater for this growth has not remained in line with the increase.
2. On 31st March 2025, for the bi-annual Eid celebration, there were over 8 different congregations held this side of Reading, and most if not all were oversubscribed, bringing immense pressure on ancillary services.
3. Every Friday and on other major events the main establishment this side of Reading, Aisha Mosque, is hugely oversubscribed. The neighbouring residents will easily testify to this and I'm sure your respective committees are acutely aware of this.

Reasons to support

As well as demand being an overwhelming reason for supporting this application there are other reasons.

1. A new Mosque or community centre will alleviate pressure on existing establishments. Aisha Mosque is oversubscribed, this will distribute the load - granted there is a concern around parking here but there is a solution to that.
2. With primary focus of this establishment being a community centre, this gives a potential resolution plan to some of the malaises in current society, including loneliness and the issue of youth being left behind. This will serve to remove pressure on your council for social care and other services, and thus reducing pressure on council budget.
3. With the Sikh Gurdawara opening opposite (as far as I'm aware), this area can act as a Multi Cultural community hub. The benefits of this are obvious. Imagine during the pandemic we had these two institutions up and running how this would have helped smoothen the vaccine rollout. Whilst I don't expect another pandemic soon it still could help today as an entry point for community members that

may have different religions but essentially the same bio-ethnic proximity.

Location

The community centre will be offering community services for the local inhabitants within reach. With all the cuts to public transportation, an aging populace that should not be driving, accessibility is a major attraction and that's what makes this location so desirable.

But let's tackle the elephant in the room. Parking. Whilst there will always never be enough parking, our car usage is increasing year on year, this is as good as it gets in Wokingham. What makes it workable however is that there is plenty of additional parking capacity that can be used at peak times, but only if there is collaboration with retail and business outlets in the vicinity, near and as far as the showcase cinema and winners triangle.

I stress, this is as good as it gets.

However the council and councillors here also have their part to play in helping facilitate this collaboration. This can't be a unilateral endeavour.

Other Opportunities

Finally there are a lot more opportunities that I can foresee coming from this venture. With the creation of this multicultural hub, some opportunities that I can rattle off the top of my head could be

1. Retail outlets. For example, currently the Sandwich Van outside Wickes could really do with some more custom and variety. This will increase their customer base and then some, potentially allowing other food outlets to setup
2. Winners triangle round the corner is struggling (that is my anecdotal view, I'm sure your committee will know better), but considering a lot of the Muslim community are working in sectors like IT, Telco, this really could act as one of the major facilitators of growth.

On closing, I would summarise that there is an indisputable demand for this service. The question is where? I don't think the location options gets better than this. I would strongly urge the approval committee to approve this application, but also work with the neighbouring residents to allay their concerns and also help the organising committee to collaborate with retail and other business outlets in the neighbouring area to, on a quid pro quo basis, to make this a success for all.