

Development Delivery Team
Wokingham Borough Council
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Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Full Planning Application Submission under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)

128 Church Road, Earley, Reading, RG6 1HR

On behalf of my client, Buddhist Gumba UK ('the Applicant'), please find enclosed a Full Planning Application for the alterations to the exterior of 128 Church Road, Earley, Reading, RG6 1HR ('the site').

The Application documents comprise:

- Completed application form and certificates
- This Planning Statement letter
- Drawing refs:
 - SL-02
 - PL-04A
 - PL-01C
 - PL-02B
 - PL-03B
 - SL-01B

The application fee of **£613** will be paid directly by our client under separate cover.

The following documents are submitted in support of the application:

Document	Prepared by
Application Form	Boyer
Covering Letter	Boyer



The following drawings are submitted in support of the application:

Drawing Number	Drawing Title
SL-02	Site Location Plan
PL-04A	Street Elevation
PL-01C	Front Elevations
PL-02B	Proposed Elevations
PL-03B	Roof Plan
SL-01B	Site Layout

Background

The site is located to the east of Church Road (B3350) in Earley, Reading, within the administrative boundaries of Wokingham Borough Council. The building comprises a single-storey bungalow (with existing habitable rooms in the roof) set within a generously sized curtilage plot.

The site is bounded to the north by no.130 Church Road (comprising a similar-sized bungalow), Church Road to the west, and an area of open grassed land to the south and east. This land is designated as the Bulmershe Site of Urban Landscape Value ('SULV').

The Proposed Development

This application seeks Full Planning Permission for the erection of the following additions to the existing building:

- A Dharma Wheel and accompanying Deer (x2) statues (made of copper coloured gold) above the main front entrance to the property
- Ganjira (Gajur) x3 (made of copper and coloured gold) which are proposed to be erected at the centre of the property's existing roof and standing above the ridge line,
- Prayer Wheels, in total 108, (made of copper) with some affixed to the external elevations of the property, and
- A Buddha statue (made of copper and coloured gold) which will be placed at the front of the property and upon a raised platform/plinth.

The above additions, all of which have substantive religious connection and meaning, are described in further detail below.

Dharma Wheel and Deer – Item 2 on Drawing SK01

The Dharma Wheel (or Dharmachakra) comprises an eight-spoked wheel, which represents the first turning of the Dharma Wheel by the Buddha. The interior eight spokes represent the moral conduct of discipline among the 'Three Trainings', whilst the intermediate eight spokes represent the training in wisdom and the noble 'Eight-fold Path', and the outer eight spokes represent the training in 'Samadhi', or meditative concentration.

The male and female deer to the right and the left of the wheel represent the male and female disciples who enjoy and take pleasure in listening to the teachings of the holy Dharma.

The Dharma Wheel and the two deer ornaments are made of copper metal with gold colour.

These additions to the building will sit above the main entrance to the property, with the two deer flanking the wheel in the centre (on the west facing elevation). The Dharma Wheel is 140cm in height and 80cm in width. Both of the deer are 76cm in height and 80cm in width.

The Dharma Wheel and associated deer ornaments would be affixed to the property via screws and would be removable/replaceable for the purposes of maintenance.

Ganjira (Gajur) – Item 3 on Drawing SK01

The three Ganjira (Gajur) will be located above the main entrance siting on the properties ridge line, positioned at the very centre of the property. The Gajur (Pinnacle) are required to be and are the topmost part of the temples.

Each Ganjira (Gajur) is built with 6 distinctive parts. At the bottom is a lotus base, which represents the seat that all the Buddhas sit on. Above that, stacked on top of the others, are representations of the five Buddha families. Above the lotus there is a bell, which represents Amogasiddhi Buddha. Above him is another lotus representing Amitabha Buddha. Next is a vase symbolizing Akshobya Buddha, and above that is the wheel of Vairochana Buddha. The jewel represents Ratnasambhava.

When Buddhists enter the Buddha Hall, they are entering a blessed place, a space where they practice leaving behind their tendencies toward confusion, craving, and hatred and train to replace them with genuine and unbiased love and compassion. In the Buddha Hall, monastics and lay friends aspire to create peace in a chaotic world. Therefore, when the symbolism of the roof ornaments is understood, they remind Buddhists of their aspiration and strengthen their motivation to progress along the path.

The central Ganjira is 110cm in height and 45cm in width. The two smaller Ganjiras that sit to either side are both 90cm in height and 30cm in width. All three Ganjiras are made of copper metal with gold colour.

Prayer Wheels – Item 1 on Drawing SK01

Prayer Wheels are used by worshippers to help the practitioner cultivate wisdom and compassion, make progress on their spiritual path, accumulate merit, and gain liberation from the cycle of karma. The wheels are inscribed with mantras and other sacred symbols.

The Prayer Wheels are made of copper metal and will be affixed to the external elevations of the property individually via a fixed bracket. The prayer wheels do not make noise. They are 40cm in height and 15cm in width and will sit 1.5m above ground level.

In total 108 wheels will be affixed around the building, at the same height, along all four elevations. The Prayer Wheels would be accompanied by a protective shelf which will be affixed to the property approximately 20cm above the wheels, to shield them from rain and heat. The covering shelf would be made of metal. This will be painted a dark maroon cover to be more sympathetic with the existing character of the property.

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the number '108' carries a great deal of symbolic meaning. It is believed to represent the cyclic existence of spiritual beings and serves as an offering to deities.

Buddha Statue – Item 4 on Drawing SK01

Buddha statues are considered to be sacred objects and are venerated to cultivate inner peace, tranquillity, and spiritual connection. It is believed by many that Buddha statues emit positive energy and can bring blessings and good fortune to the environment they are placed in.

The statue will be placed at the front of the property and sit upon a raised platform/plinth. It is made of copper metal and coloured gold. The height of the statue is 160cm and its width is 100cm. The platform is 90cm in height, 80cm in length and 80cm in width.

Pre-application Enquiry

We submitted for pre-application engagement (Ref. 242950) on 22 November 2024, followed by a meeting with case officer James Fuller on 10 January 2025. Pre-application feedback was received on 15 January, which advised that the project accords with national and local policy and therefore is likely to be acceptable.

Community Engagement

Following pre-application advice, the applicant engaged with the immediate neighbours at the property and provided a site plan, and a letter that explained our proposals to five addresses, two of which responded. The two neighbours that responded stated their objection to the proposals, due to the following:

- Out of character for Church Road;
- Visual appearance;
- Too intrusive.

Development Plan

Paragraph 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') (2024) states '*Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise*'

In this case, the Development Plan comprises:

- Wokingham Core Strategy Development Plan Document (January 2010)
- Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (February 2014)

Key material considerations for the purpose of decision making include the NPPF (2024) and National Planning Practice Guidance ('PPG').

Planning Considerations

The key issues regarding the subject of salient policies in the Development Plan, together with national policy, are:

- The Principle of Development
- Impact(s) on Visual Amenity and Character of the Area
- Impact(s) upon Residential Amenity

Principle of Development

The national planning policy framework at Paragraph 97(a) states:

To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

- plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;'

The adopted Development Plan likewise holds a similar position. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies of the Development Plan will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Planning permission was granted for the use of the property as a place of worship (Ref. 231300) in August 2023. Proposals to decorate and ornament the premises in accordance with the traditions and requirements of the religious community utilising the building, where appropriate, are therefore considered to be acceptable in principle, provided that no serious harm results in terms of visual amenity and the character of the area, residential amenity, or highway safety.

Set out above is a detailed description of the proposed alterations to the property, including commentary setting out why each of the proposed features are important to the Temple, which is an existing place of worship. As explained, all of the proposed additions offer something completely unique and are principal to the beliefs and practice of Buddhism. In spiritual terms the Temple is not capable of operating to its fullest purpose if these aspects of a traditional Buddhist Temple are not incorporated.

As such, the proposed additions assist in creating a community facility for those who practice Buddhism (a minority group), but also a temple for others who may choose to use the facilities and services provided as a result of the application.

It is therefore considered the principle of the development proposed by the application is compliant with national policy and the policies of the Development Plan.

Impact on Visual Amenity and Character of the Area

Policy CP3 of the Wokingham Core Strategy (2010) sets out a number of criteria against which Development proposals are required to be considered against. These include being of an appropriate scale of activity, massing, layout, built form, height, materials, high quality of design, etc.

Policy TB22 of WBC's Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plan (February 2014) states permission will only be granted for development proposals within or affecting Sites of Urban Landscape Value (SULV) where they demonstrate they retain and enhance the special landscape features and qualities that make the site valuable to the character, townscape and urban form:

minimise the visual impact of the development site on the SULV, or protect, manage and enhance the sites' capacity for informal recreation.

In general terms, the additions to the property will change the properties contribution to the street scene. and its role within the immediate surrounding area accordingly. Notwithstanding, the additions are of a scale (individually and collectively) which is appropriate and sympathetic to the existing building, i.e. they are not overtly or overly large, etc. It is important that religious communities can express their architectural traditions and meet the devotional requirements of their faith. Requiring such premises to conform to the design and character of adjoining buildings may not therefore always be appropriate.

The proposals would not involve any significant alterations to the structure of the existing building, which will retain its original form. The alterations proposed are essentially of a decorative nature and would not require any irreversible changes being made.

Consequently, whilst the proposals will alter the external appearance of the premises, it is considered they would not result in any demonstrable harm to the property's visual aesthetic. Neither is it considered the introduction of these external additions would be so harmful to the character of the area such that the departure from the prevailing residential street character would result in clear demonstrable harm such that permission should not be granted on this basis. Moreover, the additions to the property will speak to the properties lawful use as a temple, such that the departure from its existing appearance, whilst the property is used as a temple continues, cannot be considered harmful in itself, as it relates to the lawful place of worship.

When assessing the impact to the street scene and/or wider area, it is considered that the three Ganjira statues would have the most significant impression, being located on the ridge of the existing property, with heights ranging from 0.9 to 1.1 metres. In contrast to the other additions, these would be visible throughout views of Church Road. However, it must be acknowledged that the statues would be contained to a small section of the roof line, which is set back from the road, such that they would not be overly imposing additions.

The additions, specifically the Gajur, will have no adverse impact upon the setting or use of Bulmershe Park and the allotments to the east.

In summary, the proposed additions are reflective of the use of the building as a place of worship. Whilst they would cause a departure from the existing residential appearance, it is not considered there would be any harm to the visual amenity of the existing property as a result, nor would they be overly imposing within the setting of Church Road. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with Policies CP1 & CP3 of the Core Strategy. This conclusion was shared in the Council's written response to the pre-application enquiry.

Impact upon Residential Amenity

Due to the nature of development and the separation distance between the application property and neighbouring sites, it is not expected that the proposal would give rise to any neighbouring amenity concerns.

Impact upon Bats

During our pre-application engagement with WBC, we were advised that upon submission of a full application, the means of affixation for all components of the development will be required to be assessed further, most notably for the three Ganjira statues proposed to be installed on the ridgeline, which may have the potential to impact on bats.

As such, please see the below commentary provided by the client regarding how they plan to implement the three Ganjira without affecting the roof's interior:

1. There will be no effect/change inside of the roof/loft as the Ganjiras will sit at the top of the ridge.
2. Builder takes out a ridge tiles (two for each Ganjira) and one roof tiles from each side of the roof slope next to the ridge.
3. Ganjiras will be sat on a wooden board (same size as Ganira base) and sealed with lead flashing material. The wooden board/platform and the associated roof rafters to screw together to firmly sit on the ridge beam. Once placed on to the ridge beam it will be covered with roof lead flashing material. The Ganiras are light weight.
4. Once this is installed on the ridge line then the slope roof tiles will be replaced back to the rafters.

Application Documents and Application Fee

We look forward to receiving your formal acknowledgement of this application and trust you have sufficient information to favourably consider this full application for alterations to the exterior of 128 Church Road.

Should you require any further information or wish to discuss the proposals further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Jude Aggett

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