

PLANNING REF : 250543
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 18
: Rushall Place
: RG415SY
SUBMITTED BY : Mr Jahangir Khan
DATE SUBMITTED : 25/03/2025

COMMENTS:

Dear Planning Committee,

I am writing to express my firm support for the proposed repurposing of the existing building in Winnersh into an Islamic community centre. As a law-abiding, tax-paying, and working professional who has lived in the UK for nearly two decades, I have navigated the challenges of integration while maintaining my religious and cultural identity. This initiative is not just about religious worship but about fulfilling an essential community need, encouraging inclusivity, and strengthening social cohesion in Winnersh and the broader Wokingham area.

The Muslim community in Wokingham has grown significantly, from approximately 4,000 residents in 2011 to over 8,600 today. Despite this growth, there remains a severe shortage of dedicated facilities to serve their spiritual, educational, and communal needs. Existing places of worship in Reading, Maidenhead, and Windsor do not sufficiently address the needs of local residents, requiring extensive travel, which is inconvenient for families, the elderly, and those without access to private transport. A local centre will not only accommodate worship but also provide a hub for community engagement, interfaith dialogue, and social services for all residents of Winnersh.

There have been concerns raised about parking and traffic congestion. However, similar developments, such as the nearby gurdwara, have been assessed based on established planning criteria and should set a precedent for fair assessment. The proposed mosque will help reduce pressure on existing places of worship, decreasing congestion in Reading and surrounding areas. Furthermore, structured traffic management strategies can be implemented, including staggered Friday prayer timings, carpooling initiatives, and agreements with local parking facilities to ensure minimal disruption.

It is important to recognize the positive contribution of the Muslim community to Wokingham. Muslims in this area actively contribute to vital sectors, including the NHS, education, finance, technology, and social services. A community centre of this nature would not only cater to religious needs but also enhance local initiatives, including charitable work, educational programs, and outreach activities that benefit the entire community.

Some have expressed concerns that a mosque will cause noise pollution. It is worth clarifying that unlike some other religious institutions, modern mosques in the UK do not use loudspeakers for calls to prayer, ensuring that noise levels remain minimal. Furthermore, all places of worship must comply with council regulations concerning noise and public disturbance, which this proposed centre will adhere to.

Others have suggested that existing facilities in Reading and other neighbouring towns should suffice. However, as Wokingham's Muslim population continues to grow, it is only fair that local provisions reflect the demographics of the borough. Just as churches, synagogues, and temples exist to serve their respective congregations, an Islamic centre is a natural and necessary addition to the religious and social infrastructure of the area.

Moreover, this project aligns with Wokingham's values of inclusivity and community spirit. The centre will serve as an open and welcoming space, fostering understanding and engagement among people of different faiths and backgrounds. It will provide educational programs, youth engagement initiatives, and charitable activities that will positively impact the entire Winnersh community, not just its Muslim residents.

While some objections have been raised regarding the building's location, we urge the council to assess this application based on fairness, merit, and the genuine needs of the community. The repurposing of existing structures for faith-based supports sustainability and community use is not unprecedented, and similar applications have been granted for other religious communities in the area.

We believe that allowing this Islamic community centre will enrich Winnersh's social fabric, promote understanding, and contribute positively to the borough's diversity and inclusivity. We ask that the committee consider the needs of the growing Muslim population and the broader benefits of this proposal when making its decision.