

Objection Letter to Planners from the Occupiers of The Pastures Business Park Winnersh

Planning Application Number: 250543

Site Address: Unit 4, Winnersh Fields Gazelle Close Winnersh Wokingham RG41 5QS

Description: Full application for the proposed change of use of the building to an Islamic education, worship and community centre (Use Class F1 and F2).

Dear Sir / Madam

We are writing to you collectively as both the business owners and occupiers of Winnersh Fields Business Park. This is to object to this application on the basis that the location is not suited to the proposed use. This is a secure (access controlled) office estate which is designed specifically for business uses. It is not open to the public so we collectively object to this application on the following grounds –

1) Public Access

The Planning Statement provided states people arriving by train or bus would have a 6 min walk. Whilst this is technically correct, people must cross the A329 with limited crossing points and cars travelling at least 40mph. This is not a safe route. Further, once on the business estate, access to Unit 4 is via the wider commercial estate. This requires negotiating a path past the large double gates for access to Winnersh Plant Hire site which is in constant use. It is therefore not safe for general public access. This needs a much more detailed safety assessment by the Highways Agency.

We are aware of the recent consent granted in August 2023 for a Gurudwara & Community Centre as a change to the office building (Mizuno House), but this has direct access from to Reading Road. Therefore public access is safe and achievable.

Mizuno House is also self-contained and has a substantial number of parking spaces (72) while parking in the Winnersh Fields estate is very limited with only 14 allocated parking spaces for Unit 4.

2) Traffic Generation

At present there is already a backup of cars travelling to and from the site. Access from the Wokingham Road (A329) backs up regularly with cars waiting to cross this road (southern facing) to access the site. Leaving the wider estate back on to the A329 is filtered directionally, meaning additional generation of traffic on to the roundabout with further delays for all residents. Combine this with commercial vehicles accessing the site will make this a very congested and dangerous area for general public access at all times.

3) Dropping Off / Barrier Access

There is no provision for cars to stop / drop off pedestrians either on or adjacent to the Winnersh Business Park site. The only safe areas might be on either the Halfords or Wicks parking areas.

This is something that they would also heavily object to and would disrupt their business activities.

The Planning Statement refers to using the existing access road via the automated gates, which the business park itself installed to provide barrier-controlled access 24/7. This would remain in place and cause further access difficulties for the existing businesses on the park. This barrier cannot be removed due to past issues we have experienced with the travelling community. They are a security requirement for the business occupiers on the estate. The Barrier would cause significant issues for general public access as suggested in the Planning Statement.

Often in the evening and at weekend there are large articulated vehicles parked across the pedestrian entrance to Winnersh fields, waiting to make deliveries to the heavy plant and machinery to Winnersh Plant Hire or to businesses on the trading estate. The Winnersh Plant Hire's gates are next to the Winnersh Fields pedestrian entrance.

4) Parking

Parking for cars on Winnersh Fields Business Park is very restricted, with only 14 spaces allocated for the unit. There are no unallocated parking spaces on the business park - every car space is already allocated. Parking spaces are at a premium with cars often double parking within the existing allocation for the occupiers.

Further, parking spaces on the surrounding commercial sites belong to the trading companies and there is no other easily accessible off-road parking in the area. The nearest public car parking is at the Winnersh Park and Ride at the Railway Station, which is on the Winnersh Triangle side of the busy A329.

Whilst the Planning Statement references just use of the 14 car spaces, given the proposed use and hours of operation the parking for this use is not sufficient. Clearly members of the public will use alternate places to park which will affect our businesses. In contrast the recent planning consent granted for the Gurudwara & Community Centre, there are 72 car spaces which are on a self-contained site. Unit 4 has 14 on a shared site. There is not the capacity for this use on our site.

5) Physical Infrastructure

We understand the new Wokingham Local Plan has now been submitted for Examination and is capable of being afforded a degree of weight in decision making. Policy HC2 deals with community infrastructure, requiring proposals to be of a suitable nature and scale to meet identified needs, and to be compatible with the character of the area. Given the number of people expected to use the space significantly exceeds the planned capacity of the office space, the building cannot be said to be of a suitable scale to meet identified needs.

This office building (Unit 4) has very limited toilet facilities (4 toilets) and no washing facilities (Muslims are required to wash before prayer) and is designed to accommodate less than 40 people working on a 0900 – 1800; 5 days a week basis. The proposed use will have significantly more than this number of people on site over 7 days a week and longer hours. The drainage infrastructure for the estate was designed for a very different use and would not cope with the additional volumes required.

In addition we also have concerns around the potential number of people (general public) attending this office building if over 40 as it was not designed with the buildings fire safety or

other health & safety issues in mind. These concerns have not been addressed in the applicants submissions.

5) Noise & Disturbance

Community centres often host gatherings, events, and prayers, which may lead to increased noise. This is a private and secure office park setting and therefore under Policy HC2 of the new Wokingham Local Plan, the proposed community use would not be compatible with the employment use of the existing private business park.

6) Loss of Use / Incompatible Use

The business estate is built entirely on private property and the access roads leading into the estate are not Adopted Roads by the Highway. There are real concerns about who would be responsible for these roads if public access were granted through this use. This proposed use is incompatible with every one of the surrounding uses in the existing buildings on the estate.

Further we understand Adopted Core Strategy Policy CP15 seeks to avoid an overall net loss in B1, B2 & B8 uses across the Borough. The applicant has suggested that the marketing undertaken for the application site demonstrates that it would be acceptable to lose the existing office use. However, there is very little detail provided regarding the marketing efforts or the extent of interest received, and marketing has only taken place for a limited period.

It has not been adequately demonstrated that there is no reasonable prospect of the existing high quality office building being occupied for office uses in the future. Furthermore, the change of use of the existing office building has the potential to undermine the attractiveness and viability of the wider business park, which could result in further loss of employment space.

The day prior to this application being made public, Unit 5 was sold to a business (TEGH Ltd) who chose this location precisely as it is a secure office location. The applicant has not shown there is not demand when clearly there is.

7) Management Company Approval

Whilst not strictly a planning matter, there is a requirement for all building owners on the estate to obtain the approval of the management company for a use which is not in keeping with the rest of the estate. This is for office use only – and the restriction is in place until October 2040. In this case the management company would not approve such a use based on the above reasons. This not a site suited to general public access.

As a group we are every business on Winnersh Fields Business Park. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the lead planning officer and / or committee to discuss any of the above. Further should this change in use be consented, many of us as businesses will have to reconsider staying in this area and it will be harder to attract employment uses into an unsecured site if it were to be open to the general public.

As such all the below occupiers and business owners object to this proposal.

Unit 1 – Media First – Mr James White

Unit 2 – FullCircl – Mr Mike Blackadder

Unit 4 – Borer – Mr Robert Chapman

Unit 5 – TEGH – Mr Jaspal Singh

Unit 6 – XL Education - Sriram Mahabhashyam

Unit 7 – Twice2Much – Ms Kate Donnelly

For and on behalf of

The business occupiers of The Pastures Business Park Winnersh

1 April 2025