

PLANNING REF : 250543
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 6 Winnersh Fields
: Gazelle Way, Winnersh, Wokingham
: RG41 5QS
SUBMITTED BY : Mr N S Mahabhashyam
DATE SUBMITTED : 28/03/2025

COMMENTS:

Dear Planning officer,

I am writing with reference to the proposed change of use application by the Islamic education, worship and community centre within the Winnersh Fields Business Estate, a designated business estate with offices operating a range of commercial activities.

While we have full trust in the Wokingham Council's commitment to impartiality and due diligence, we strongly believe that this application is fundamentally unsuitable for the premises in question. The estate has been designed and approved for business use, and allowing a community or religious facility to operate within it would be a serious deviation from its intended purpose.

Regardless of the intentions or commitments stated by the applicant, the practicalities of running such an organisation within a business estate raise significant concerns. These include, but are not limited to, operational feasibility, traffic management, and the impact on existing businesses.

It is also concerning that, as is mandatory, no public notice has been displayed around the premises. This lack of visibility is precisely why many of us were unaware that such a proposal had been submitted, until it was brought to our attention by someone from the local neighbourhood. Proper procedure should include notification to all impacted parties, and in this case, that standard does not appear to have been met. This raises serious doubts about whether this application was intended to be processed without appropriate public scrutiny. We have also not received any letters from the Council, as we are accustomed to in such matters, further adding to the sense that standard consultation processes may have been overlooked.

I would also like to bring to your attention our own experience when we applied for a change of use at Unit 1, Winnersh Fields (Application Number: 220113) within the same estate for our tuition business.

Despite being a small-scale, children-only service restricted to evenings and weekends, and having received approval from other businesses within the estate and the maintenance company, our application was rejected on the grounds of not providing a transport plan despite our categorical assurance that no students would enter the estate unaccompanied, and that all drop-offs and pick-ups would happen outside the barrier.

Unfortunately, our application was dismissed without sufficient engagement or flexibility from the department. In fact, we were led to believe that everything was in order until we received a message on the final day of the decision window, informing us that the application had been rejected. As a result, we lost the opportunity

to occupy the building, as the planning process took so long that the landlord could not wait any longer and sold the property to another business. This decision had a significant material and business impact on us. Ultimately, we had to compromise and purchase Unit 6 within the same estate with a view to apply for change of use permission at a later date.

Should the current application be approved, it would set a clear and troubling precedent one that would raise serious questions about the consistency, transparency, and fairness of planning decisions made by the Council. In contrast to the current proposal, our own application, which was modest in scale, limited to evenings and weekends, and had support from neighbouring businesses and the estate's maintenance company, was rejected with minimal engagement. That decision not only denied us the opportunity to operate but also caused tangible business loss, as we were forced to abandon our plans after months of delay and financial investment. The property we had earmarked was ultimately sold to another buyer due to the prolonged planning process, leaving us with no viable option at the time.

We therefore state in no uncertain terms that if the current application is granted, we will immediately reopen our previously rejected case (Application Number: 220113), and pursue legal redress for the financial, operational, and strategic impact we suffered. Any such approval would demonstrate an inconsistent application of policy, and we will be compelled to challenge it vigorously through all appropriate legal and procedural channels.

Moreover, we now occupy an office opposite the previously considered unit Unit 6, Winnersh Fields and have intentionally limited its use to administrative purposes due to the planning constraints previously imposed on us. The floor above remains vacant, and we have already received multiple enquiries from third parties interested in using the space for activities such as yoga, meditation, and other community-based purposes. Should the current application be approved, we will have every reason to explore similar avenues, including our own tuition-based setup, and will actively seek change of use permission in line with the precedent being set. It would only be fair, under such circumstances, for our application to be assessed under the same standards or lack thereof as applied to the present case.

To conclude, the decision made in this matter will have long-term implications. It will not be seen as an isolated case, but as a benchmark for what is deemed permissible within this business estate. We trust that the Council will assess this application thoroughly and without bias, taking into account past decisions, the integrity and intended use of the estate, and the interests of all existing businesses.

In doing so, we urge the Council to ensure that the consultation process is not evaluated solely on the volume or weight of general support, but rather on the views and concerns of those who will be directly and materially affected on a day-to-day basis. While it is expected, and understandable, that community support will be

expressed for such a proposal, those sentiments must be balanced against the operational realities and potential disruption faced by the businesses that operate within the estate. Broader traffic concerns, including congestion around the business park, Halfords, Wickes, and the main roundabout, will likely intensify. While those impacts may trigger separate objections from other stakeholders, our focus remains on the disproportionate and immediate effect this application would have on the estate's internal environment. If the Council feels compelled to support such an initiative, it should do so by allocating a more appropriate location, one that is independent, non-commercial in nature, and compliant with the Council's own planning guidance, to ensure that all relevant access, usage, and operational parameters are properly satisfied.