

PLANNING REF : 250543
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 152 Norreys Ave
:
: RG40 1UQ
SUBMITTED BY : Miss Oz Khan
DATE SUBMITTED : 22/03/2025

COMMENTS:

I support the proposed Islamic community centre in Wokingham and would like to address the troubling and prejudiced objections raised against it. Many young people raised in Wokingham work hard to be productive, engaged members of society contributing through their career, volunteering, and community support. These efforts include free tutoring during home-schooling and assisting teachers in schools.

I have taken part in such initiatives, including tutoring during lockdown, supporting teachers during and after my education, and volunteering as a carer from the age of 14 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time marked by a critical shortage of carers when many were understandably afraid to leave their homes. As a Muslim woman from Wokingham, I have witnessed the positive contributions of young British Muslims. I feel compelled to challenge harmful misconceptions directed at our community.

Speaking out is essential not only to counter misinformation but to highlight the value this centre would bring. Wokingham's Muslim community includes highly skilled professionals engineers, doctors, IT specialists I myself work in finance. Our community also includes students, volunteers, and experienced individuals dedicated to public service. I've met many of them through muslim community gatherings. Many, including myself, contribute to the community through mentoring, education, care work, and charitable activities efforts that were especially important during the pandemic, and even now, during the cost of living crisis.

Some objections included discriminatory claims linking Islam to crime. These are entirely inaccurate and rooted in prejudice. Associating a whole faith group with criminal behaviour is unjust - Islam strongly condemns abuse and exploitation. Muslims are raised in homes rooted in respect, dignity, and moral responsibility, and misrepresenting these values only fosters division.

Islam has long upheld women's rights ensuring access to education, financial independence, and public participation. A historic example is the founding of the world's first university al-Qarawiyyin by two Muslim sisters in Morocco over 1,200 years ago. Education is a religious *obligation* for both muslim men and muslim women. Many non-Muslims have also found inspiration in Islamic values like discipline, charity, and civic responsibility. It's important to distinguish true religious teachings from cultural malpractices. No faith should be judged by the actions of a few who misrepresent it. In under three months, Wokingham's Muslim community raised nearly 200,000 to support this centre. A substantial share came from *Muslim women* who made personal financial sacrifices to back this vision.

Such widespread support shows the community's deep belief in the

value this centre would bring not just to Muslims but to Wokingham as a whole.

No Islamic community centre currently exists within five miles of our home. Other facilities are out of town, overcrowded, and difficult to access especially for families, the elderly, or those without transport.

This centre would create a nearby, inclusive space offering tutoring, mentoring, wellbeing workshops, and accessible support services open to all, regardless of faith or background.

The centre would provide a safe, inclusive environment for women and families, particularly those seeking culturally appropriate services.

Many, including myself, currently feel excluded due to a lack of nearby suitable facilities.

Children would benefit from structured educational and values-based programmes that promote confidence, belonging, and moral development.

Concerns about footfall are unfounded. In planning and economic terms, footfall is a positive sign of activity and growth. It supports local businesses and boosts visibility.

Suggestions to hide community or commercial spaces are counterproductive - visibility and access are vital. A well-used community centre boosts nearby commerce rather than detracting from it. In other towns, Islamic centres have increased property values and community investment strengthening neighbourhoods and contributing to long-term stability.

This centre would benefit all of Wokingham. It would reduce social isolation, promote inclusion, and provide educational and wellbeing support for all age groups.

Activities like interfaith events, mentoring, and charitable initiatives will foster better understanding and community connection. The centre would stand as a model of inclusive, modern community development.

Wokingham should take the opportunity to set a positive example by supporting a forward-thinking, inclusive space that will provide long-lasting value for generations to come.