

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Masjid E Bilal Islamic Centre

52 Bury Old Road

Prestwich

Manchester

M25 0ER

Proposal

Demolition of the Existing Mosque and Community Facility and the Erection of a Replacement Mosque and Community Facility (F1 (f)).

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.0 This Design and Access Statement is submitted on behalf of Masjid E Bilal Islamic Centre which occupies the site at 52 Bury Old Road, Prestwich, Manchester. The Islamic Centre has been operating from the site since circa 1999. The site is a popular community facility for both adults and children in the surrounding local area.
- 1.1 Masjid E Bilal Islamic Centre is run by local volunteers with funding by donations from the local community. The centre for the most part provides a prayer hall for the local Muslim community for their 5 obligatory daily prayers. During evenings and weekends, the centre also provides a facility for teaching Islamic studies, including Quran classes and Arabic studies mainly to children. Also, there are numerous activities being held for all walks of life, for both male and female residents. The facility also provides services including dispute resolution, marriage counselling and support for local women.

2.0 PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

- 2.1 An Outline application was submitted in April 2023 (Planning Reference 69525) for the ‘Demolition of existing mosque and for the erection of replacement mosque/Islamic Centre (Class F1(f)) with details of access and layout (reserved matters for appearance, landscaping and scale)’. However, a number of issues were identified by the Council as part of this proposal, and therefore the application was subsequently ‘Withdrawn’ in July 2023 in order to discuss and overcome the issues raised.
- 2.2 The Council officers have helpfully provided a response by email which highlighted their concerns, and the further information required to make a robust and insightful decision to any forthcoming application. The email response from the Council is provided in ‘Appendix A’ of this document.
- 2.3 To summarise and for ease the issues raised by the Council are provided below;
- The 3 storey scale of the building would indicate a much more intensified use than existing;
 - The size and footprint of the building makes the site constrained in terms of overdevelopment and how much parking can be provided;
 - The proposed one-way arrangement would not be supported;
 - The position of the building close to the frontage would not be in keeping with the pattern of development of the area;
 - Environmental Health require a Noise Report;
 - United Utilities require a Drainage Strategy;
 - Greater Manchester Ecology Unit – would require biodiversity enhancement mitigation proposal.
- 2.4 In addition to the above a pre-application enquiry for the proposed development was submitted in late 2023 (planning reference 02891E) with an improved site layout and design of the building taking the above advice into consideration. Bury Council, reviewed the pre-application submission and provided a consultation response dated 4th December 2023. The issues raised by the Pre-application include:

- **Parking and Impact on the Highway** – A separate ‘Transport Statement’ and ‘Travel Plan’ are submitted as part of this proposal which takes into consideration and justifies the level of parking capacity and how the site would operate. In addition, the layout of the site has changes to provide further on site parking. Please refer to the submitted documents and the Highways section of this report.
- **Scale** – the pre-application response stated that the scale of the building to the front in its surrounding context was too high and it needed to be scaled down to two storey and setting the footprint back. The Councils advice has been taken into consideration and the proposed plans now show a two storey building along its front elevation whilst also being set back from the highway. The overall design is further discussed below and in the separate ‘Planning Statement’ submitted as part of this application.

2.5 This Design and Access Statement will discuss and explain each issue in turn and how changes and amendments have been made to overcome reasons for refusal and concerns of the Council whilst taking local and national planning policy into consideration.

3.0 SCALE OF THE BUILDING AND INTENSIFICATION

- 3.1 The Islamic Centre has long term plans in providing a more permanent building for the site. The mosque is ready to make a material start for the development with support from the local community. This proposal will provide a new purpose built Islamic Centre that would be both functional in terms of its use, and provide a durable layout of the site as a whole for its long term future.
- 3.2 The Committee members of the facility do not find it feasible nor viable for a continuation of extensions added to the existing building which add limited value to the actual function of the mosque. The extensions to the building have been ad hoc, and over a long period of time, leading to a number of uncharacteristic additions to the original building which are considered to not relate well with the overall character of the area. Furthermore, the mosque is not viable as it doesn't provide segregated facilities for children including welfare facilities. In addition, bespoke community spaces are required which are not provided by any other organisation in the area.
- 3.3 Community facilities such as this site are an essential and indispensable feature of any area. Services such as religious facilities help to support the quality of life in a community. Everyone benefits from community facilities at one time or another, whether that is through going to school, or just visiting a local library.
- 3.4 The size of the proposed building will provide extra amenities such as a library, social space (a dedicated hall for children's assemblies, women's and men's group activities, elderly group activities, school visits, multi faith group visits for community integration purposes, morgue facilities (refrigeration and washing for both males and females), and purpose built segregated class rooms for both males and females resulting in improved quality of education.
- 3.5 The proposed increase in building size would provide a library, youth area, dedicated community space and mortuary, in addition to separate ablution (wudhu - obligatory washing of limbs; face, arms, feet, before prayers) facilities for both adults and children.



The new building will ensure that children will have their own dedicated, separated, washing facilities, without the need of staff ensuring that adults are not using the same facilities at the same time.

- 3.6 These extra facilities are not going to increase traffic flow as they are not part of the main prayer facilities. It is important to maintain this community structure and facility as it has proven to be very beneficial to the community over many years.

SCALE

- 3.7 In terms of the scale and external appearance of the proposed building. This would naturally be taller than the single storey building it replaces. Constructive discussions over the past year have been had with Councils planning officers in terms of the height of the building and its positioning hard up to the highway of Bury Old Road.
- 3.8 Given the concerns raised a number of positive changes are made as part of this proposal, these changes include and are not limited to setting the building back from the highway, reducing the height of the front elevation, and further reducing the width of the building making it smaller in overall size.
- 3.9 Therefore, due to the above changes, the proposed building although of three floors internally would not be much taller than the residential dwellings positioned on Woodthorpe Grange, and only approximately 2m taller than the adjacent property No.48 Bury Old Road. This is due to the raised land levels on which these neighbouring residential properties sit, and the flat roofed design of the proposed building.
- 3.10 The land levels within the site would be reduced which would in turn also reduce the overall height of the proposed building, especially along the main front elevation. Consideration should also be given to the natural land level drop from north to south along Bury Old Road where the proposed mosque would be consistent in terms of its height and how that is read within the street. In addition, the distance between buildings on either side of the mosque should also be acknowledged.

- 3.11 The set back position of the mosque from the highway and landscaping along the frontage would further soften its appearance from public vantage points. The design of the building with large glazed transparent windows and details with its engaged appearance rather than hard blank finish would be a much more welcoming and appealing building in the street scene.
- 3.12 A site plan has also been provided which indicates the 'Spot Levels' of each of the surrounding buildings so that a comparison with the proposed building can be made to evidence the difference.
- 3.13 Given the plans and justification provided, the height and size of the proposed building would not appear out of scale or out of character to the detriment of the surrounding built environment.

INTENSIFICATION

- 3.14 There would be no further significant intensification in use of the site. The existing use of the site as a place for public worship and teaching would be retained, whilst the proposed new facility although over three floors would provide much needed space for offices, library, IT room, a dedicated medical facility in the event of any first aid required which can also be used for multi-purpose uses such as health seminars (diabetes, heart disease, healthy eating etc), a purpose use prayer hall, and improved classroom facilities for existing children to study, these would all be ancillary uses.
- 3.15 This proposal does not include any further uses that would intensify the use of the site at any given time to what is already provided by the Islamic Centre. Essentially, the existing prayer hall size is approximately 200m², whilst the new prayer hall size would also be 200m².
- 3.16 The purpose of the proposed building is to provide local residents and children who use the facility a better-quality experience and flow through the building. As such, the existing teaching spaces for children at ground floor would be replaced. In addition,

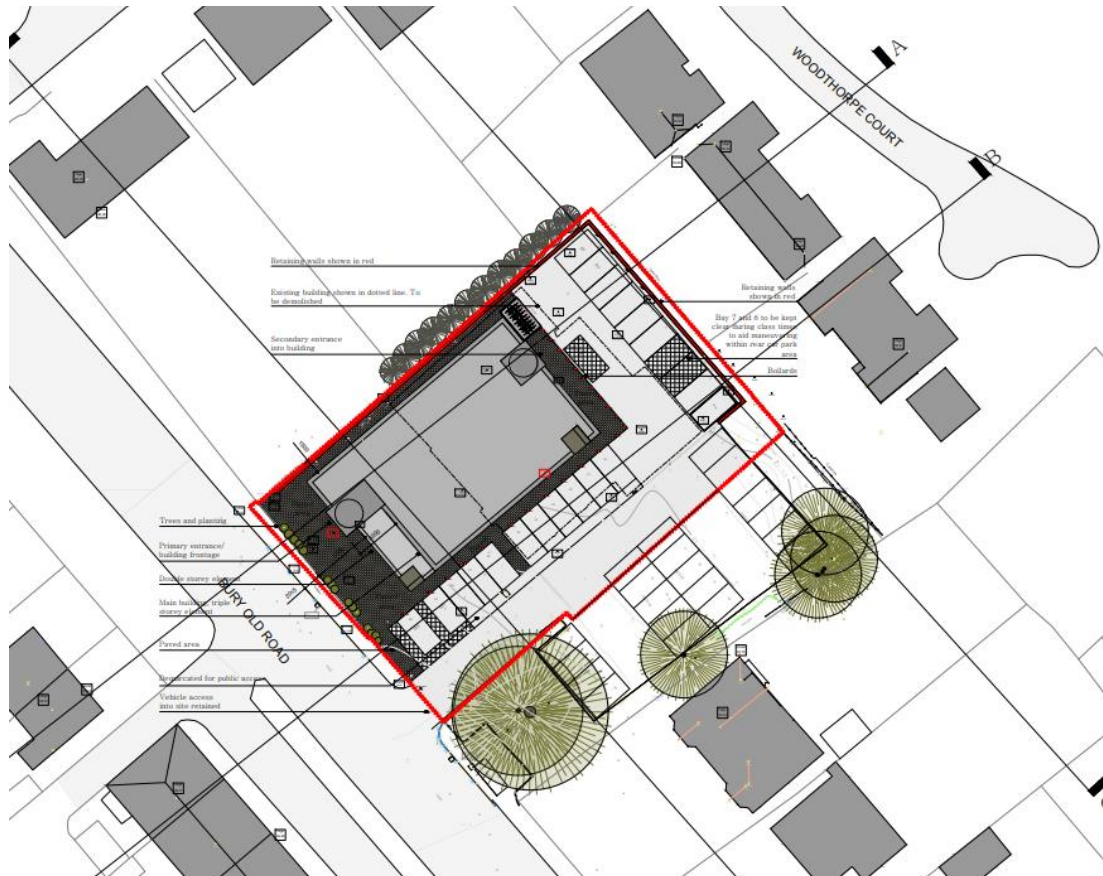
these teaching areas as existing conflict with adult prayer times (dependant on time of year) and are better placed in their entirety at first floor level for reasons of safeguarding.

- 3.17 It should be acknowledged that there would be no increase in the total number of children being taught by virtue of this proposal.
- 3.18 In conclusion the aim of the proposal is not to provide a larger facility and intensify its use further, but to provide a quality development which improves the facility overall including its internal layout with better functional space for users of the community.

4.0 FRONTAGE, PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT, AND DESIGN

FRONTAGE

- 4.1 It has already been discussed above that the height of the proposed building would not be much taller than those semi-detached residential properties to the north along Woodthorpe Grange, and the detached properties to the south along Bury Old Road.
- 4.2 However, concern has been raised by the Council due to the positioning of the building close to the front of the site and in proximity to the highway of Bury Old Road. The proposed site plan below clearly shows that the proposed building has now been set back from the highway and would therefore sit behind the building line of the residential property on Woodthorpe Grange.
- 4.3 Although the proposed building would still be positioned forward of the property No.48 Bury Old Road, this property is set well back of the highway, and if the proposed building was to be positioned in line with this dwelling, then parking arrangements would be to the front of the building and lead to poor design with a sea of parking adjacent to the highway, this would lead to poor design where parking should be located away from frontages to the back of a site as dictated by design guides.
- 4.4 In addition to the above, there is significant separation distance between the proposed building and the dwelling at 48 Bury Old Road (32m) where the building line and frontage with intervening trees and screening would not detrimentally impact on character or necessarily be read together from views within the street scene.
- 4.5 Furthermore, screen planting would also be provided between the highway and the building to reduce and soften the buildings appearance within the street.



- 4.6 The proposed site plan shows the proposed building set back from the highway with screen planting adjacent to the highway to further reduce its overall impact. The plan also shows the significant separation distances of neighbouring dwellings with trees, planting and screening between.

PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT, AND DESIGN

- 4.7 In terms of the pattern of development in the area. The indicated two storey height of the building above existing ground levels would not represent an overbearing or dominant feature and would meet the interface distances between properties as set out by the Council. Given the level differences and boundary, there would not be overlooking or privacy issues. As such, the proposal would have no impact on residential amenity.
- 4.8 Initial early discussions with the Council raised concerns relating to how the buildings design and layout would look within the street and that it would appear out of character. However, the issue of 'pattern of development' is subjective and there is no agreement here with the Councils assessment on the matter. It is argued that the proposed

development would be of bespoke design and would be a vast improvement to the character and appearance of the area than the existing situation. Significant positive changes have been made since, and the latest Pre-application discussions with the Council ensured the revised (submitted) design is now considered a betterment and acceptable.

- 4.9 It should not be, given the use and nature of the building as a community facility, that the proposed building be read within the street in conjunction with traditional neighbouring residential properties. The building has a different role and use altogether, is widely separated in terms of distances to neighbouring dwellings, and functions in a separate fashion.
- 4.10 Taking the above into consideration, this building is designed to best serve the needs of the community and be recognised. It does not however mean that design has not been considered as part of this proposal, please see montages below which shows the indicative visuals of the building which clarify the high level of design, time, effort, and expense that will go into the site.



- 4.11 **Above:** Street Scene shows the comparative scale of the building.



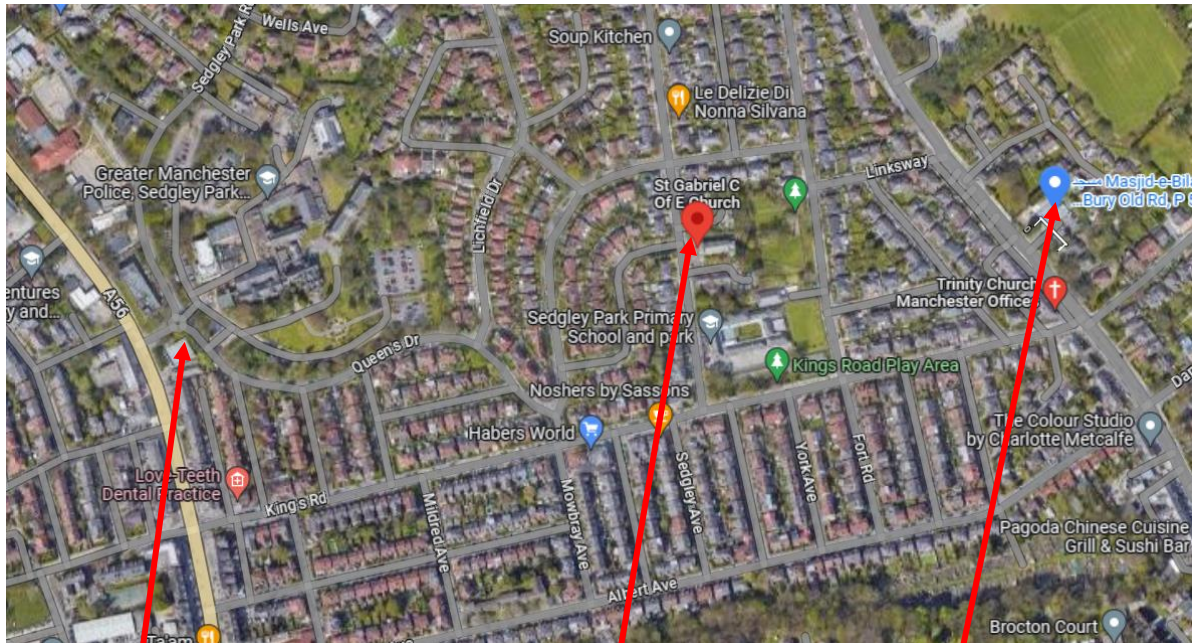
4.12 **Above:** Street Scene shows the height of the building similar to buildings opposite.



4.13 **Above:** In summer a large portion of the building would be screened by adjacent trees.



- 4.14 **Above:** This shows the quality design and appearance of the building when compared to existing.
- 4.15 A significant number of religious buildings are a focal point of their community, and it would be uncharacteristic for them to be shunned away to the back of a site. They should be in the open, visible, available and should solidify the character of a particular area. Religious buildings should be welcome additions to any street scene, especially when they are well designed as in this instance.
- 4.16 In order to further understand the point being made above I provide a couple of examples of religious buildings in the area, within a residential setting where they are a focal point of an area, and which binds the community together. Please see below;



Example 2 - Beis
Hamedrash Shaarei
Mordechai, Bury

Example 1 - St
Gabriel Church,
Bishops Road

Application





- 4.17 **Above:** The two images above show the building and setting of St Gabriel Church, Bishops Road. The building is within a residential setting with similar distances to neighbouring properties when compared with the application site. The Church building is a focal point for the community and differs considerably in terms of its character and appearance to neighbouring dwellings and buildings.



- 4.18 **Above:** The building to the left on the above image is the Beis Hamedrash Shaarei Mordechai, on Bury New Road. It is located within the heart of community and is of a



considerably different design to neighbouring dwellings. The building and materials do not relate well with their surroundings.

5.0 OVERDEVELOPMENT AND PARKING

- 5.1 Currently, access into the site is directly off Bury Old Road via a ramped access with parking provided for approximately 17 cars in front of the building.
- 5.2 As part of the Withdrawn Outline application, a one-way system was introduced, however given concerns raised in terms of highways safety, the one way system has now been omitted, and the building has been moved closer to the north western side boundary of the site (Please see proposed site plan). As such further dedicated car parking space is now introduced within the site. The siting of the building and introduction of external areas and parking now overcomes the concerns of overdevelopment at the site.
- 5.3 A total of 20 spaces is now proposed to the side and rear of the building. In addition, the existing entrance into the site would be retained shared with the Council car park adjacent. This would provide safe entry and exit from the site simultaneously with minimal conflict on the highway of Bury Old Road.
- 5.4 A further 21 spaces are provided for users if required in the adjacent public car park as detailed on the Site Plan.
- 5.6 In addition to the above, 18 cycle stands would be provided to the rear of the building where alternative modes of transport to the site would be encouraged.
- 5.7 The overall car usage to the site is considered to be very low on a general day to day operation. The proposed development is not considered to result in any more on street car parking than the existing situation as there would be no further intensification of the site, as such there would be no severe impact on highways safety and congestion in the area by way of this proposal outside of Friday prayers which is further discussed in detail below. As stated above, the intention of this proposal is not to increase the number of classes or public using the site, but to provide a better service to locals.
- 5.8 The site is positioned in a highly accessible and sustainable location where such community facilities are to be located as dictated by local and national policies, within

the heart of the community. Other travel modes besides the car such as a bus would also be suitable for patrons given the type of proposal, it is considered that promotion of these modes will be beneficial in order to manage arrivals and departures at the site, in particular in relation to staff who undertake regular journeys to/from the site and are likely to live in the local area in addition to guests with convenient access to public transport services serving stops in the vicinity of the site. There are also a number of bus stops along Bury Old Road close to the site which are quite frequent and lead to the site and other parts of Manchester.

- 5.9 As mentioned, the proposed site is in the heart of the community and is easily accessible by foot, the majority of local people who visit the centre live within a walking distance of the site, this distance can be covered in less than 5 minutes from these properties; and it is these households for which the proposed development is intended. Walking is the most important mode of travel at the local level and offers the greatest potential to replace short car trips, particularly under 2 kilometres. Walking also forms an often-forgotten part of all longer journeys by public transport and car.
- 5.10 Paragraph 111 of the NPPF makes clear that ‘Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be **severe**’.
- 5.11 Overall, it is considered that the majority of people attending would be local and choose to do so by walking to the site. Given the details, the proposed development as demonstrated would provide sufficient parking in this highly sustainable location.

6.0 NOISE REPORT

- 6.1 A Noise report is provided a part of this full application as required by the Councils Environmental Health Section. In any case, the noise generated from the site would not be significantly more than existing given the functions of the site would not change to a significant degree.

7.0 DRAINAGE STRATEGY

- 7.1 United Utilities require a Drainage Strategy. This is provided as part of this full application ensuring sustainable drainage methods are used to reduce the impact of rainwater on local drainage systems and reduce the chances of flooding in the area.

8.0 BIODIVERSITY

- 8.1 Greater Manchester Ecology Unit require biodiversity enhancement as part of any future proposal. As such, a detailed landscaping scheme is provided as part of a full application ensuring mitigation measures have been taken in terms of providing net gains in biodiversity. Planting would be provided to the front of the site and on top of retaining walls to the rear. In addition, conditions can be attached for the development to integrate within the build bird and bat boxes.

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Community facilities play an important role in people's quality of life. For example, community mosques perform a number of different roles and are a central feature of community life. Some community mosques are situated in old buildings that are in need of refurbishment or demolition and rebuild to bring them up to modern standards. The Council should support such proposals provided that there is not a significant detrimental impact on local residents.
- 9.2 Given the details, the proposal would provide a better and quality community facility in the locality and therefore reduce the need to travel, provide a focus for young adults and children and help further their education without the need to travel long distances. As a whole this would be of benefit to the individual and wider community and should be supported by the Council.
- 9.3 It has been demonstrated that the proposed development can be carried out in full compliance with the Council's policies in the Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework. The development would provide a much-improved facility for the local community that would bring a positive contribution and better services into the local area of Prestwich without creating a significant detrimental impact on the amenity of the local occupiers and residents, and highways safety.

APPENDIX A

Bury Councils E-mail response to Planning application reference '69525' (Withdrawn);

The application is in outline but proposes details of the access and layout for the development. In considering layout, the submitted plans show the footprint, position of the build, the access and parking location/ provision. Whilst scale has not been included as part of the detail for approval, the proposed plans indicate a 3 storey building. This would suggest a much larger size of development and more intensified use than currently exists on site and with the position and size of footprint, the site becomes constrained in how much parking can be provided plus other associated elements.

Furthermore, in terms of siting the footprint of the building so close to the frontage, the position of the building would not be in keeping with the pattern of development of the area particularly being a 3 storey building which is indicated in your proposals.

To summarise –

- The Highway section would not support the one-way arrangements being proposed which would involve the creation of a sub-standard parallel entrance and egress/exit onto Bury Old Road and a proposal should instead focus on using and improving the existing shared access.
- The low level of proposed parking would need justifying/increased.
- Size, suggested scale and position of the building and over-development of a constrained site area.

Other matters –

The Environmental Health Pollution Control Section require a noise report prior to determination of an application.

United Utilities require a drainage strategy prior to determination of an application.

Greater Manchester Ecology Unit – would require biodiversity enhancement mitigation proposals.

You have chosen not to include 'scale' within the considered matters. However it is clear from your indicative plans that the extent of uses, floor plans, footprint position and likely car parking that the scale of development is intrinsic to the consideration to manage expectations.

As above, we already have concerns and feel that the application as it stands cannot be supported without substantial redesign and a review of the matters being considered in the application.

You would therefore be advised to withdraw the application as we cannot accept any amendments under the current submission or alternatively we would have to proceed with a determination. Either way, the scheme would benefit from a pre-application enquiry prior to any resubmission.