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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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This document addresses the numerous objections made by the public in relation to the proposed mosque development project. The objections raised collectively argue that the proposed development will significantly impact traffic, safety, local businesses, and community relations while being out of character with the area's established architecture. As such, the proposal is seen as conflicting with several UDP policies, SPD guidance, and the National Planning Policy Framework. Many objectors acknowledge the need for a mosque but believe the proposal does not adequately address these key issues.

The key concerns raised by the objectors are summarised as follows, a response to those concerns is provided in *italic* and **Blue** lettering for each of those concerns:

1. Parking and Traffic Issues:

- Inadequate parking provision, with only a slight increase from 17 to 20 spaces, violating Bury Parking Standards (SPD11).
- Severe congestion on local roads, particularly during peak times like Friday prayers.
- Illegal and inconsiderate parking, blocking driveways and pavements, affecting pedestrian safety.
- Increased pollution from more traffic, contrary to UDP Policy EN7 (Pollution Control).
- Conflicts with traffic from a nearby Jewish school, exacerbating congestion.
- The increased number of visitors is expected to place additional strain on local services and infrastructure.

1.1 *The management of Masjid E Bilal takes traffic and parking concerns very seriously and has proactively sought to address both current and potential issues arising from the proposed development. In line with this commitment, Masjid E Bilal has engaged SCP*



Transport, a specialist in transportation planning and infrastructure design with over 30 years of industry experience, alongside Amni Transportation, experts in transport planning, traffic management, and project management services for local authorities, developers, and architects.

- 1.2 *To assess parking demand in the vicinity of the proposed development, Amni Transportation conducted a parking survey in February 2023. This survey examined parking availability within a 300-metre radius (approximately an eight-minute walking distance) of the site, focusing on peak prayer times, particularly Friday lunchtimes between 11:30 am and 2:00 pm. The analysis revealed that during this period, between 134 and 242 on-street parking spaces were available. This capacity exceeds the parking demand expected when considering both on-site and on-street parking. While Friday lunchtime prayers may necessitate some on-street parking, the survey confirms that there is ample parking available nearby, and demand will not coincide with peak highway usage.*
- 1.3 *Furthermore, Masjid E Bilal acknowledges that being situated on Bury Old Road, the mosque often attracts visitors unfamiliar with the area, some of whom may park inappropriately. To mitigate this, the management has successfully implemented a traffic marshal system. These marshals guide drivers to designated parking spaces outside the mosque's car park but within close walking distance, as identified by Amni Transportation. This initiative has significantly reduced congestion, leading to a proposal to continue the Traffic Marshal System on Fridays.*
- 1.4 *Regarding the proposed development, it will provide a total of 20 parking spaces, an increase from the current 17 spaces. While the new building will have a larger footprint than the existing structure, its function and purpose will remain unchanged. The new development will maintain the existing prayer hall size of approximately 200m² while introducing purpose-built classrooms for children, segregated toilet facilities, and dedicated spaces for female attendees, enhancing inclusivity. It is noteworthy, that the number of attendees will not increase.*



- 1.5 *The mosque serves a local community where majority of visitors reside within walking distance, typically less than a five-minute journey. The site is in a highly sustainable location, encouraging walking and cycling, with a significant Muslim population and a relatively low level of car ownership.*
- 1.6 *Additionally, the proposed development aligns with sustainable transport measures as outlined in the submitted 'Travel Plan' (SCP, August 2024). The objectives include:*
- Reducing reliance on private cars while increasing awareness and use of alternative transport options;*
 - Promoting walking, cycling, and public transport;*
 - Minimising the environmental impact of mosque-related transport; and*
 - Encouraging healthy lifestyles and the development of accessible, vibrant communities.*
- 1.7 *Bury Council's parking standards are outlined in the Development Control Policy Guidance Note 11 – Parking Standards in Bury (May 2007). These standards, now 17 years old, predate significant events such as the 2008 financial crisis and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, both of which have had lasting effects on travel habits. Given that these are maximum standards, the proposed development is compliant. The surrounding streets and four public car parks collectively accommodate any additional parking demand beyond the on-site provision.*
- 1.8 *Furthermore, the development will include cycle stands to promote alternative modes of transport. A comprehensive 'Parking Capacity Assessment' (Technical Note – SCP, dated 29th February 2024) has been provided as part of this proposal.*
- 1.9 *In conclusion, the proposed development will offer sufficient parking in this highly sustainable location, in accordance with Policy HT6/2 (Pedestrian/Vehicular Conflict), HT2/4 (Car Parking and New Development), Places for Everyone, and Paragraph 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The proposal does not present a severe cumulative impact that would justify refusal.*



Pollution and Nearby Jewish School Traffic:

- 1.10 *Regarding concerns about pollution, the proposed development encourages sustainable transport options such as walking and cycling, thereby reducing the reliance on cars. With the general populus making the switch from ICE vehicles to hybrid and electric vehicles, the pollution levels are set to fall. Prestwich being an affluent area does show significant uptake of newer, cleaner vehicle technologies. Additionally, the implementation of travel plans will further mitigate any potential environmental impact.*
- 1.11 *With respect to traffic concerns related to the nearby Jewish school, it is important to note that the school is located 0.9 miles from the mosque in Cheetham Hill, Manchester. Furthermore, school dismissal times do not overlap with the mosque's peak period of 11:30 am to 2:00 pm, ensuring minimal interaction between the two locations' traffic flows.*
- 1.12 *Finally, to support community engagement and sustainable transport, Masjid E Bilal is introducing initiatives such as a Cycling Club and Walking Club in collaboration with Khizra Mosque, Cheetham Hill, Manchester. These initiatives will encourage healthier and more environmentally friendly commuting options.*

2. Scale and Design Concerns:

- The proposed building is excessively large and out of character with the surrounding residential area, violating UDP Policy H2 (Housing Environment and Design).
- Architectural style, including minarets, is inconsistent with local buildings, contrary to SPD6 (Alterations and Extensions to Residential Properties).
- The building does not align with the established building line, breaching UDP Policy EN1 (Built Environment).
- The height and massing of the new structure are inappropriate for the area.



- 2.1 *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, with two metal portable cabins, 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.*
- 2.2 *This proposal has been through the Pre application process with the Council, and as part of that advice and subsequently through this proposal the height of the front elevation has been reduced, and the building scaled down at the front. The overall size of the building was also scaled down to reduce the impact on the surrounding area and those concerns raised by the Councils officers. In addition, the building was set back from the highway by approximately 6.0m to allow for spill out space along the frontage to align better with the surrounding development pattern, with shrubs providing screening, thus reducing its visual impact.*
- 2.3 *A significant number of religious buildings are a focal point of their community, and it would be uncharacteristic for them to 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.*
- 2.4 *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. To provide context, the row of buildings opposite the proposed mosque has a ridge height of 7.7m, whilst the main massing of the proposed mosque building (set further back) is only 2m higher than this and the effect is further reduced as the building is to be cut into the slope of the site.*

- 2.5 *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 cars parked to the front where parking should be located away from frontages to the back of a site as dictated by design guides.*
- 2.6 *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.*
- 2.7 *Furthermore, screen planting would also be provided between the highway and the building to reduce and soften the buildings appearance within the street.*
- 2.8 *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. This would be building proportionate in size an one that would make better use of the site in this sustainable location adhering to local and national planning policy.*

3. Impact on Residential Amenity and Privacy:

- Overlooking and loss of privacy for neighbouring properties due to the height and positioning of the proposed building.
 - Increased noise and light pollution from additional visitors and activities, violating UDP Policy H2 (Housing Environment and Design).
- 3.1 *In terms of the positioning of the building. Whilst there are some properties bounding the north west boundary of the site (Woodthorpe Grange/Court), the proposal will not harm residential amenity given that trees run alongside a sizable boundary fence and*



wall which greatly limits views in to the site. In addition, a distance of approximately 37m metres would be retained to the backs of these dwellings from the side elevation of the proposed building. The dwellings on Woodthorpe Court are positioned on a substantially greater land level, furthermore, the proposed building would retain a distance of 27m to the backs of these properties.

- 3.2 The impact on residential amenity is considered minimal and manageable. It is considered height 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.*
- 3.3 The proposed building will be positioned to ensure it does not harm residential amenity, with significant distances maintained from neighbouring properties in line with local policy guidelines, also existing boundary features like trees and fences providing additional screening.*
- 3.4 In addition, a daylight and sunlight assessment has been carried out by Smith Marston Building Surveyors (RICS) which concluded that the impact on neighbouring properties in terms of light and sunlight would be minimal. This study was carried out in accordance with Establishment Establishment (BRE) guide 'Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight: a guide to good practice, 3rd Edition' 2022.*
- 3.5 In relation to noise, on-site monitoring has identified existing background sound levels in the area and a consideration of the proposed structure and activities has been undertaken. Excessively high internal sound levels have been used to calculate the impact on the neighbouring properties, and this has concluded no adverse impact will be experienced.*
- 3.6 The new layout will improve vehicle flow and reduce congestion, with dedicated drop-off points and increased parking spaces. Noise pollution is expected to be minimal as the mosque's primary activities occur during the day and early evening, and all activities will be contained within the building, no different to the existing situation.*



3.7 *The proposal also includes measures to manage traffic and parking effectively, particularly during peak times like Friday prayers. Overall, the design and siting of the new facility are intended to protect the character, appearance, and amenity of the surrounding area.*

4. Social and Community Impact:

- Concerns about increased community tensions in a predominantly Jewish area.
- Previous incidents of conflict involving the mosque and the Jewish community.
- The mosque is seen as serving a wider regional population rather than the local community, conflicting with UDP Policy CF1 (Proposals for New and Improved Community Facilities).

4.1 *This is an existing established facility which has operated from the site for more than 20 years. Generally, it has an excellent relationship with all faith groups in the surrounding area. Muslim community spaces are sparse and distanced in this particular area where there is a large number Muslim households.*

4.2 *The new mosque will address the current community needs by providing a purpose-built facility that includes a library, classrooms, community space, body storage and washing facilities, and local prayer facilities.*

4.3 *These improvements will cater to Muslims of all ages and genders, offering better-quality spaces for prayer, education, and community activities.*

4.4 *Additionally, the facility will enhance the character of the area and provide a durable layout for long-term use, ensuring it meets the needs of the local Muslim community.*

4.5 *The management of the mosque has excellent community relations with all the faith communities of the area, including CEO Churches, Catholic Churches, and Jewish*



Synagogue representatives. Every year the mosque management has been holding interfaith iftar events for all faith leaders, police, and council representatives providing kosher and halal food for all faith leaders, and vegetarian food.

- 4.6 *Regular meetings are held with the Police, Bury Faith Forum, and other community representatives to plan faith festivals, the Purim and Ramadan festivals, and other festivals such as Parklife. This year, an additional meeting is scheduled for Friday, 28th February 2025 with the Police, to discuss the planning process and explore ways to collaborate for the smooth running of the Purim festival and the Ramadan festival faith festivals. This ensures that any potential issues are ironed out.*
- 4.7 *This development should not be viewed to increase tensions in the area, it will be a place where education, respect, social harmony, and social values would be taught.*

5. Environmental Impact:

- Loss of trees and greenery, negatively impacting the environment.
- Increased vehicle emissions from more traffic, contradicting Bury Council's environmental goals under UDP Policy EN7 (Pollution Control).

- 5.1 *A detailed landscaping scheme is included as part of the development to ensure biodiversity within the site, with planting provided to the front of the site and on top of retaining walls to the rear. Conditions for integrating bird and bat boxes within the development were also considered to ensure an overall net gain in biodiversity.*
- 5.2 *The submitted 'Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment' (Pennine Ecological, Nov 2024) concludes that the current proposal would result in a -0.24 habitat unit loss (-65.83% net loss) and a 12.06% gain of hedgerow units. The scheme design has been reviewed, and it's considered that a 10% BNG cannot be achieved with on-site compensation alone. In order for the proposal to achieve the required net gain, a total of 0.28 habitat units will be*



required as off-site compensation. The mosque in agreement with the Council will be providing this compensation to meet policy objectives.

5.3 *It is not envisaged that there would be any net increase in vehicle emissions through this proposal leading to actual harm to air pollution.*

6. Economic Impact:

- Negative effect on local businesses due to increased congestion.
- Concerns about property values decreasing due to noise, traffic, and parking problems.

6.1 *The number of people attending the mosque for prayers or education will not increase, the new building is proposed to enable a more fit for purpose facility. Also, 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.*

6.2 *The Highways studies provide sufficient evidence that there will not be an impact in capacity or safety.*

6.3 *The value of properties increasing or decreasing is not a material planning consideration in this instance. However, a local community project, with special features and unique design would enhance the character of the area. Furthermore, as the project is funded by local people to meet the needs of that community, this should be welcomed. Additionally, this would enhance the social and amenity benefits of an area.*

7. Conclusions

7.1 *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 as it is an inclusive development enhancing the character of the area, should be supported by the Council.*



7.2 *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 area of Prestwich without creating a significant detrimental impact on the amenity of the local occupiers, businesses, residents, and highways safety.*