

<b>APPLICATION NO</b>	<b>PA/2011/1306</b>
<b>APPLICANT</b>	Ahmadiyya Muslim Association
<b>DEVELOPMENT</b>	Planning permission for change of use to mosque, community use and living accommodation
<b>LOCATION</b>	Concorde House, Bessemer Way, Scunthorpe
<b>PARISH</b>	<b>SCUNTHORPE</b>
<b>WARD</b>	Crosby and Park
<b>CASE OFFICER</b>	Emma Stanley
<b>SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>Refuse permission</b>
<b>REASONS FOR REFERENCE TO COMMITTEE</b>	Significant public interest

## **POLICIES**

**National Planning Policy Framework:** Paragraph 17 states that planning should take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs.

Paragraph 70 states that planning policies and decisions should plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities (such as shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments.

**Regional Spatial Strategy for Yorkshire and the Humber:** No specific policies apply.

**North Lincolnshire Local Plan:** Policy C5 (Churches, Prayer Houses and Other Places of Worship)

Policy IN2 (Alternative Uses of Industrial and Commercial Sites in the Urban Area and Principal Growth Settlements)

**North Lincolnshire Core Strategy:** Policy CS2 (Delivering More Sustainable Development)

Policy CS22 (Community Facilities and Services)

## **CONSULTATIONS**

**Highways:** No objection but recommend a condition to retain the parking, access and turning facilities shown on the plan submitted with the application.

**Environmental Protection Team:** Raise concerns regarding the impact of surrounding industrial uses on the occupiers of the proposed flat in terms of noise, and concerns about contaminated land, as data suggests that the site is within 120 metres of a former landfill site.

## **PUBLICITY**

Advertised by way of a site notice, press notice and letters sent to adjacent commercial properties. Letters have been received from four objectors, one containing a 467-signature petition.

The petition is against the opening of another mosque in Scunthorpe, and concern has been expressed that the applicants are considered to be a non-Muslim religious group, and if the application is approved, the project would seriously disrupt community relations.

Other issues raised are:

- industrial land is subject to contamination therefore the site is not suitable to include a residential unit
- although there may be low demand for office space now, when the economy recovers demand will increase and office use is more appropriate
- a residential use is inappropriate in this area and would set a precedent for other residential proposals
- the site is a significant distance from the town centre and residential areas making the site difficult to access on foot, which would mean a significant increase in vehicular traffic, with increased parking and congestion on an already busy road
- there is no need for another mosque as there are already five others within 2-3 miles of the site

## **ASSESSMENT**

Planning permission is sought to convert a large detached purpose-built office building to a mosque with associated offices, community uses and caretaker's/religious leader's flat. The proposal also involves the provision of on-site car parking. Access to the site is from the existing access onto Bessemer Way. The site is within the urban area of Scunthorpe and has no site specific allocation in the local plan, but is surrounded by commercial uses, including industrial premises and car showrooms. The application description requests permission for a mosque, which in planning terms is a place of worship which falls within Class D1, Non Residential Institutions, of The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987. This class of the Order also includes clinics, health centres, day nurseries, museums, public halls, libraries, law courts and non-residential education and training centres.

**The main issue in determining this application is whether it is appropriate to provide a mixed community and residential use in a commercial/industrial area.**

The proposal involves the change of use of a large two-storey office building on a prominent corner site to a mixed use which includes a mosque, community uses with meeting rooms, offices, and a flat to be occupied by the religious leader/caretaker. In

relation to the mosque, prayers are said five times a day, the specific times of which vary throughout the year according to the times of sunrise and sunset. The applicants have confirmed that there will be no amplified call to prayer and no loud speakers will be used outside. Due to the varied times of worship, the applicants consider that a flat is required to accommodate the religious leader, who will also act as caretaker for the site. Due to the living/working nature of the site, the applicants are satisfied that a residential use is appropriate for the area and, being ancillary to the overall use, will not set a precedent for other residential units in the area. The building will also be available for community activities which will include charity events, conferences and sporting activities. The mosque would be open to visits from other organisations, including schools, which the applicants consider would help to develop social ties in the community.

The proposal has been the subject of public consultation and a number of objections have been received. As referred to above, a number of issues have been raised, including highway and environmental issues. However, it is considered that the main issue is whether or not the principle of allowing a community use to be located away from the town centre and residential areas is acceptable in planning terms.

Guidance contained in the recently published National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) seeks to ensure that all development proposals are sustainable, and located in the best place. Paragraph 70, as referred to above, advises that such developments should enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments. The location of the proposed mosque is such that it is not close to either the town centre or to residential areas and is not located within the community that it will serve. The proposal, in its current location, does not appear to enhance or sustain the local community, or promote a strong neighbourhood centre.

Policy CS22 of the Core Strategy supports the principle of new and improved community facilities where they meet the needs of local residents. Such developments should be focused on allocated sites, in town centres, market town centres, district or local centres, or in residential areas where there is no impact on residential amenity. Policy CS22 also supports new community developments provided that they are accessible by public transport, cycling or on foot. As the site is not located in the town centre, or other defined centre where there is access to public transport and other services or close to residential areas where visitors to the mosque may be able to travel by cycle or easily on foot, it is considered that the majority of journeys to the site will be by car. Under these circumstances, the proposed use would not promote a healthy inclusive community, but would encourage a fragmented pattern of development, that would draw visitors away from areas where the majority of services are located.

Policy C5 of the North Lincolnshire Local Plan supports the provision of new, or alterations to, places of worship, provided that there is no adverse impact on the amenities of neighbours. The aim of the policy is to assist local communities in providing places of worship for all religions within the neighbourhood that they serve.

Other issues raised include the amount of traffic that the new use will generate, and that the increase in traffic will create congestion and parking difficulties. The applicants have submitted a plan with the application which demonstrates that at least 60 car parking spaces can be provided on the existing hard-standing areas within the site. The Highways department is satisfied that this is adequate to serve the proposal. However, as the site is set in such large grounds, there is ample space to provide additional parking if required. It is

therefore not considered that the proposal will have a detrimental impact on highway safety, or result in on-street parking.

Concern has also been expressed about the provision of living accommodation on the site and that such a use is inappropriate in an industrial area. Members of the public and the council's Environmental Protection team are concerned that occupants of the flat will be adversely affected by noise and disturbance from surrounding industrial uses. The applicants have confirmed that the flat will be used by the religious leader/caretaker and will always be linked to this position, and would not be occupied by anyone unrelated to the mosque. On this basis, it is not considered that the provision of a small flat in the building would be inappropriate, and that with conditions, the noise issue could be adequately addressed. It is not considered that a flat linked to the mosque use would set a precedent for other residential properties being applied for in the area, as this is a unique set of circumstances, and any subsequent application for similar developments in the area would need suitable justification.

The permanent loss of an office building has also been mentioned, and that the site could be required in the future, when the economy improves. The selling agents have confirmed that the building has been on the market since January 2010, in excess of the requirements of policy IN2, but without success.

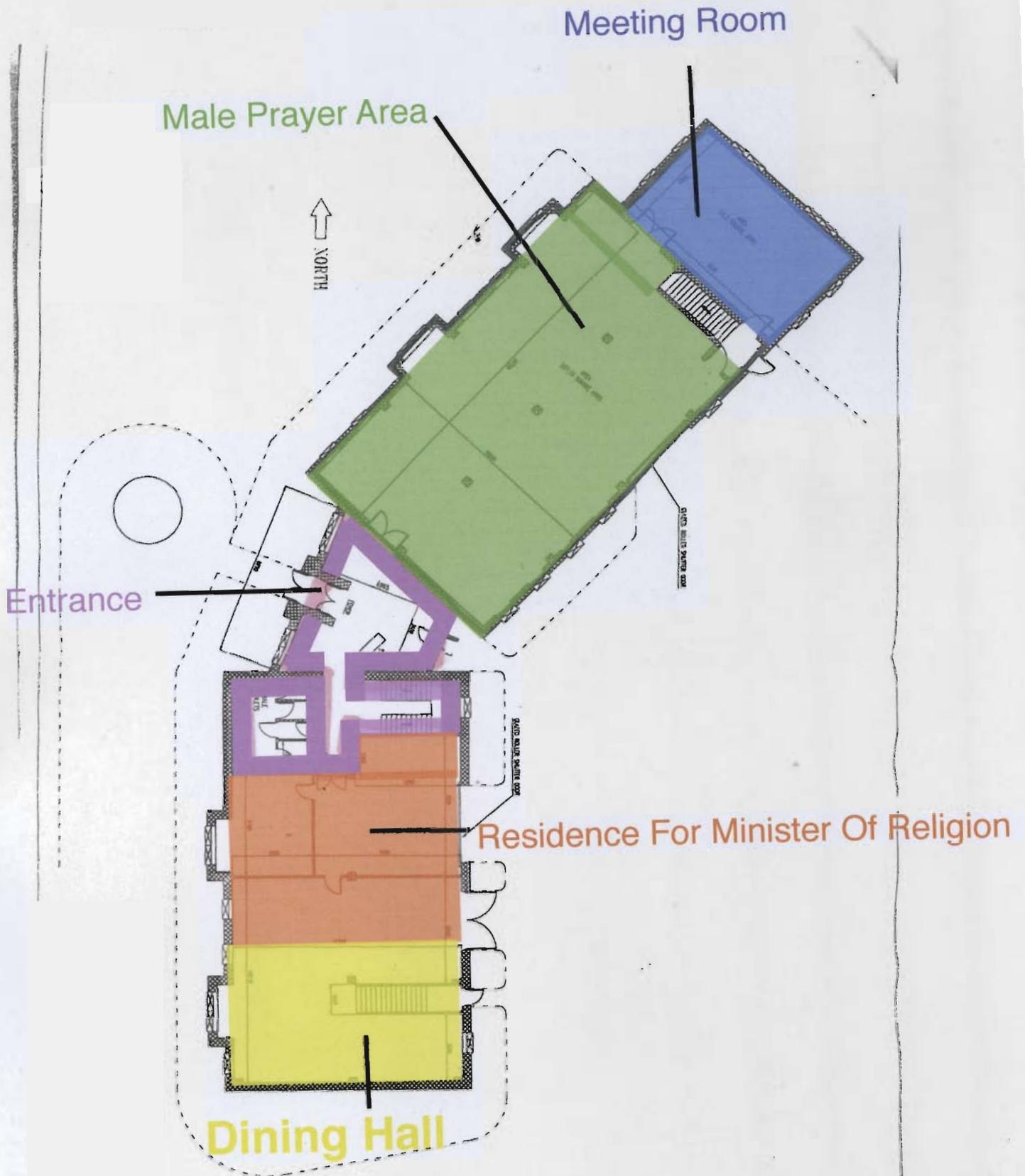
Contaminated land has also been raised as an issue, but only in connection with the land to the rear of the site which currently remains undeveloped, but is in the applicants' control. On this basis, the Environmental Protection team have no objections subject to conditions.

A petition has also been received, which raises concerns about the need for another mosque in Scunthorpe and the religious background of the applicants, but in planning terms, the proposal is for a place of worship. Whilst a mosque has been specified, the planning use of the proposal is the main issue, not necessarily the faith of the applicant. In this particular case, however, it is considered that the use of the site as a place of worship, with associated community uses is inappropriate on policy grounds, and is recommended for refusal.

**RECOMMENDATION      Refuse permission for the following reasons:**

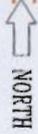
Due to the location of the site, being outside the town or other defined centre, or within a residential area, it is considered that the proposal would create an unsustainable, poorly accessible, isolated community facility, with limited access by public transport, cycle or on foot, contrary to the advice contained in the National Planning Policy Framework, paragraphs 17 and 70, policies CS2 and CS22 of the North Lincolnshire Core Strategy and policy C5 of the North Lincolnshire Local Plan.





PA/2011/1306  
PROPOSED GROUND FLOOR PLAN  
NOT TO SCALE

Female Prayer Area

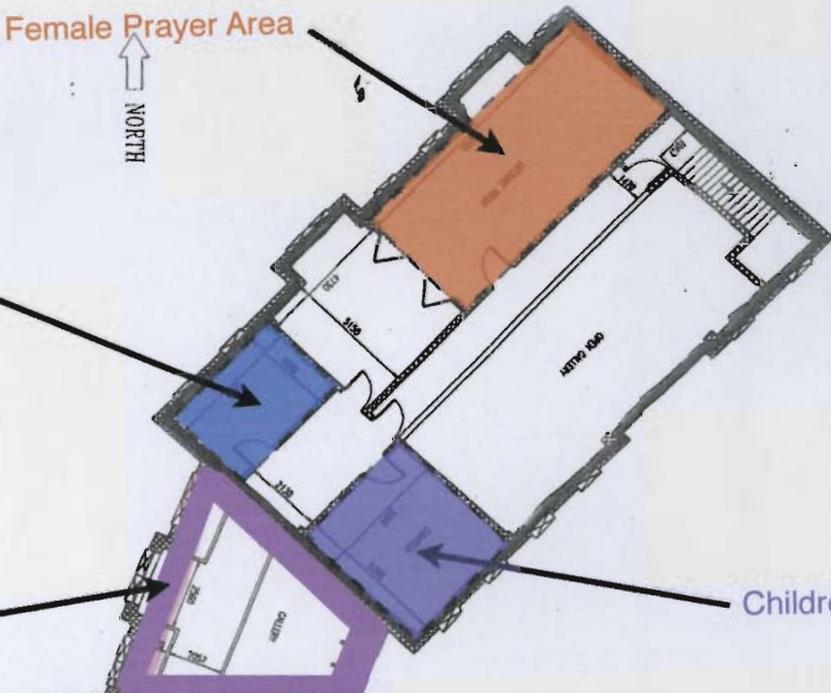


Toilets

Entrance

Children's Play Area

Offices



PA/2011/1306  
Proposed First Floor Plan  
Not to Scale