



AL-MAJID CENTRE

Planning and Access Statement

**Proposed Change of Use from
Library (Class D1) to
Community Centre (Class
F2(b)) and Place of Worship
(Class F1), with two car
parking bays and associated
access.**

Address: 215 Northumberland
Avenue, Reading, RG2 7PX

Applicant: Al-Majid Welfare
Trust

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1. Introduction and Context

This planning application seeks approval for the change of use of the Old Whitley Library, located at 215 Northumberland Avenue, from a Class D1 facility to a dual-purpose community centre (Class F2(b)) and place of worship (Class F1). The building, vacant since 2017, requires regeneration to prevent further disrepair and aligns with Reading Borough Council's objectives to support sustainable, inclusive, and community-driven development.

The proposed Al-Majid Centre will address the needs of the local Muslim and wider community in South Reading, fostering social cohesion and providing essential services in one of the borough's most socio-economically deprived areas.

2. Background and Rationale

Previous Use

The site served as the Whitley Library from 1935, offering a public resource managed by Reading Borough Council. Following council cost-saving measures, library services were relocated to the South Reading Community Hub in 2017, leaving the building vacant for several years before its sale at auction.

Allowing the site to remain unoccupied is contrary to council policies on regeneration, conservation, and sustainability.

Establishing a Need

The Applicant: The Al-Majid Welfare Trust, founded in 2004 and registered as a UK charity (No. 1103759), has provided spiritual, social, and welfare support to South Reading's Muslim community for over 20 years.

Demographics:

- Church Ward: 11.6% of residents identify as Muslim (Census 2021).
- South Reading: Rapidly increasing diversity, with 30% of the population from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds.

The area faces significant socio-economic challenges, including low income, high social exclusion, and at-risk youth. A permanent facility is essential for the Al-Majid Centre to sustainably deliver its

services, replacing temporary arrangements that have constrained its operations.

3. Proposed Use and Benefits

Place of Worship (Class F1)

- Daily prayers accommodating up to 12 attendees.
- Friday congregational prayers with up to 90 attendees managed across multiple sessions.

Community Centre (Class F2(b))

The facility will host a wide range of services, including:

- **Educational programs:** Language classes (Arabic, English, and others), citizenship workshops, and supplementary education.
 - **Youth activities:** Crime prevention, career guidance, and skill-building workshops.
 - **Support services:** For the elderly, women, and vulnerable groups.
 - **Health initiatives:** Fitness sessions, health awareness workshops, and partnerships with the NHS for vaccinations and health checks.
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4. Policy Compliance and Planning Justification

Reading Local Plan (2019–2036):

- **Policy CC3 (Community Facilities):**
The proposal repurposes a vacant building to meet critical community needs, providing accessible facilities in an underserved area.
- **Policy EN9 (Design and Heritage):**
Minimal external changes ensure the architectural and historical integrity of the building is preserved.
- **Policy TR4 (Cycle Routes and Facilities):**
Secure cycle racks and pedestrian-friendly access enhance sustainable transport options.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

- **Section 8 (Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities):**
The centre fosters social cohesion, supports vulnerable groups, and provides a safe and inclusive space for diverse activities.
 - **Section 9 (Promoting Sustainable Transport):**
Its location ensures accessibility via public transport, walking, and cycling, reducing reliance on private vehicles.
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5. Transport and Accessibility

Public Transport:

The site is well-served by high-frequency bus routes, including numbers 5, 6, and 9, all within a 5–10 minute walk.

Cycling and Walking:

Seven secure Sheffield stands provide parking for seven bicycles.

Additional cycle parking can be added as needed. Pedestrian pathways ensure safe and direct access.

Vehicle Access and Parking:

- Two designated parking bays and one for disabled users.
- Limited vehicle access to encourage sustainable transport.

6. Community Engagement and Benefits

Collaborative Efforts:

The Al-Majid Centre has a history of organizing inclusive events such as family fun days, NHS vaccination drives, and interfaith community gatherings.

Social Inclusion and Crime Prevention:

Programs aimed at youth engagement reduce social exclusion and crime. Activities include Imam-led sermons, good citizenship courses, and sports initiatives.

Wider Community Benefits:

The facility will support integration, provide vital resources for diverse groups, and address health and educational disparities in the local area.

7. Proposed Activities and Schedule

Weekly Timetable

Activity	Max Attendance	Duration
Daily Children's Classes	18 per session	Mon-Fri, 4:30–6:30 PM
Youth Activities	15	Tues/Thurs, 6:30–7:30 PM
Women's Groups	20	Mon/Wed/Sat, 10 AM–12 PM
IT Training	10	Mon, 7–9 PM
Elderly Support Club	12	Sun, 3–5 PM

Prayer Schedule

Prayer	Max Attendance	Duration (minutes)
Dawn Prayer	8	10
Mid-Day Prayer	10	15
Evening Prayer	12	25
		30 each
Friday Congregation	90+ (3 slots)	

9. Conclusion

This proposal represents a sustainable and socially beneficial reuse of a historically significant building. By meeting urgent community and religious needs, the Al-Majid Centre will strengthen social cohesion, enhance local infrastructure, and contribute to the Council's broader objectives.

The development aligns with national and local planning policies, emphasizing sustainability, inclusivity, and accessibility.

Supporting Documents:

- Location plan.
- Existing Site Layout.
- Proposed Site Layout.
- Noise Report.
- Landscape Report
- Transport Speed Survey.

Kind regards

Walid Omeir

PhD Arch, BSc Arch, MSc PM.
MASKAN Architectural and Planning Permission
M: 07866 504 914.

WWW.MASKAN.UK

