



RASHID ALI | ARCHITECTS
77 Leonard Street
London
United Kingdom
Tel +44 (0) 793 993 1608
E info@rashidali.info

Manchester City Council Planning
Town Hall, Albert Square
Manchester M2 5DB

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PLANNING STATEMENT

Background

The establishment of the Al Furqan Islamic Centre is stemmed with the migration of Somali community to Manchester, from the early 1990's onwards. As the community began to grow, there was growing need to find a centre space to cater for the community's diverse needs such as for prayer, community social gatherings, celebration of Islamic events and festivals, and for Islamic education, as well as for other subjects such as GCSE curriculum and language support. In 1997 the community rented the existing property and Al Furqan Islamic Centre was formed.

Due to its location in the city centre, Al-Furqan Islamic Centre became one of the most important Islamic Centres in Greater Manchester. It became a hub for the diverse Muslim Community that have their origins from across the whole globe, and in 2009 the community managed to purchase the entire building, which has since come to serve their spiritual, educational, cultural and social needs.

Building

The existing structure is a three-floor brick former factory building. In terms of levels, the stacking consists of a lower ground floor, upper ground floor and a first floor. The plan of the building is a 'U' shape, formed by a courtyard that mostly separates it from the adjacent building. This courtyard is part of the property and is used as an entrance into both the lower and upper ground floors from the south elevation, along Rutherford Avenue. There is another entrance from Great Southern Street, with a stair that runs through all three existing floors. In addition, there is an emergency fire escape from the basement to the street at Crofton Street, and a small internal stairs along the courtyard connecting all three floors.

Existing Functions

The building is broadly used as a masjid and educational centre. The opening hours are 8am-8pm, during which time the building is not used intensively. It is used most intensively during prayer times (5 times a day) across the day, whereby congregation takes place at set, short period of around 15 mins for each prayer. For each prayer the congregation would number approximately 100 persons. In addition to daily prayers, there is a main Friday prayer around midday when the congregation could number around 750 persons. The Friday prayer lasts around one hour, between 12-1pm. The other main use of the building is for education, with classes taking place between 5pm-8pm on weekdays and 9am-5pm on weekends.

The lower ground floor, which is approximately 1.2 metres below existing ground has large windows along north, west and south elevations is a multi-functional hall that is mostly used as a prayer hall. In addition, it has main toilets and ablution areas. This floor is accessed from Great Southern Street and through the Courtyard along Rutherford Street. The main space is mostly used as prayer space and as a social space by the elderly and families with young children. In addition, the main toilets, and ablution are located here.

The upper ground floor is used as the main prayer hall, and as such there is other use other than a small room used as office and for housing the audio related equipment. Small stairs along courtyard lead to the first floor and the basement. The first floor is used for education social functions. The spaces include classrooms, office and toilets. The classrooms are flexible spaces that can be enlarged for different functions with movable partitions.

Proposed extension and functions

The proposal seeks an additional floor extension to the existing building, which will be used for educational and social uses. Most of the spaces are flexible classrooms, but also include reception, offices and a small canteen. The three street facing elevations of the proposed extension will be clad mostly with sandblasted double glazed panels with small sections of composite panels on elevations facing Great Southern Street, Crofton Street and Rutherford Avenue. The elevations facing the courtyard will be clad in composite panels, with some windows for natural light and ventilation. The extension is set back 1 metre from all existing external street facing elevations along Great Southern Street, Crofton Street and Rutherford Avenue. The three elevations facing the courtyard are clad with composite panels. The proposed external materials and the setback of 1 metre from the existing street facing elevations and the adjacent neighbouring walls are based on advice given by Manchester City Council Planning on a similar scheme that was given consent in 2021. The extension is accessed from existing stairs along Great Southern Street and a new external stairs in the courtyard that would run across all floors. Due to accessibility requirements, the proposal also includes an external lift shaft located next to the new stairs at the courtyard. The lift will run from basement to a roof garden on top of new extension. The extension on top of the existing stairs along Great Southern Street will be clad in brick to match existing material. The proposed scheme is almost identical to the scheme that was given planning permission in 2021. However, it was decided to seek a new planning permission because an additional fire escape and a disabled access were needed. This was a mandatory

requirement set out by fire engineers. The existing use is for education and as a place of worship so there is no change of use. The proposed extension generally matches the adjacent property in height, which is four floors. The reason for using the sandblasted double glazed facade on the street facing facades is to avoid any potential noise or overlooking in relation to the nearby residential properties.

Waste storage and collection

There are large waste storage bins located in front of the building along Crofton Street. The small section of the land of approximately 2 metres wide in front of the building, on which the bins are placed is owned by the centre.

Broadly, the new extension is needed to meet the growing educational and social needs of the community, and to make the existing building fit for use; with a new lift and stairs to make it more accessible. The M & E components of the whole building will also be upgraded in order to make this dilapidated former factory building more fit and sustainable to inhabit for the community's needs.