

 Havering LONDON BOROUGH	Strategic Planning Committee – Developer Presentation 13 November 2025
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Pre-Application Reference:	W0225.22
Location:	222-226 South Street, Romford, RM1 2AD
Ward:	St Alban's
Description:	Partial demolition of existing building(s) and redevelopment of the site to erect a new Havering Islamic Community Centre
Case Officer:	Richard Byrne

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This proposed development is being presented to enable Members of the committee to view it before a planning application is submitted and to comment upon it. The development does not constitute an application for planning permission and any comments made upon it are without prejudice and along with the comments received as a result of consultation, publicity and notification subject to full consideration of any subsequent application.
- 1.2 The proposal has been the subject of 4 pre-application meetings with officers. The scheme was presented to Havering's QRP meeting on Tuesday 2nd September. Informed by the feedback gained from the meetings and the QRP, the scheme has gradually evolved.
- 1.3 The scheme is not finalised and it is anticipated that the proposals will further evolve before submission of a planning application. At this stage however, Member feedback in regard to broad principles for the development will be constructive in taking the scheme forward.

2.0 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1 The site is immediately south of Romford Town Centre with a PTAL score of 6a. Although not in a Conservation Area the site is occupied by the locally listed Page Calnan building, which is a large double-height single storey building, constructed with yellow stock brick and stone tile cladding to the front in Art Deco style. There is recessed brick panelling to the sides and rear with a Diocletian window in the rear gable. Attached to the side and rear are single and two storey additions occupied by other commercial uses.

- 2.2 To the rear of the Page Calnan building is an area of hardstanding used for vehicular parking which is bound to the west by the River Rom. Access is taken from Oldchurch Road, adjacent to the signalised junction with South Street.
- 2.3 Further to the east along South Street are two-storey 19th century houses, where numbers 230-268 are locally listed for their strong architectural character and build quality of Victorian Villas. To the northwest is a four-storey commercial office building.
- 2.4 Flood Zone 3 is adjacent to the southwestern boundary with flood zone two encroaching into the southern part of the site.
- 2.5 A tree preservation order is in place for a horse chestnut tree immediately adjacent to the site's southeastern boundary.

3.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 3.1 Due to the proposed redevelopment of Bridge Close (under P1165.23) recently granted planning permission (subject to completion of a s106 legal agreement) the Havering Islamic Community Centre are exploring the feasibility of relocating to the site at South Street.
- 3.2 The scheme before Members involve the partial demolition of the Page Calnan building within the site to erect a rear extension to form an Islamic Community Centre. The facade of the existing building would be retained with a Qubba (dome) and minaret added to the retained building. The proposal is then to create a building set over three floors to provide an enhanced environment for prayer and religious classes for the community.
- 3.3 Owing to the site level difference a lower ground level would be created for addition prayer and community use space which is accessed from the northeast elevation and southwest facing entrance. A men's prayer hall is situated on the ground level with access taken from South Street and a women's prayer hall / education space at first floor with access taken from the west side of the building facing the River Rom. Overall, the proposed floor space would equal 2453 square metres.
- 3.4 The existing building entrance facing South Street would be used with the intervening space between the footway and building edge to create additional spill out space. Circulation space for visitors would principally be down the west side of the building leading to the rear of the site. Further to the south adjacent to the River Rom the site extends along the backs of 230-240 South Street. This area of the site is proposed to provide 8 disabled driver bays (2 for electric vehicles) and 1 loading bay. Access to the bays would be taken from Oldchurch Road.
- 3.5 In terms of quantum the proposed Islamic Community Centre would accommodate up to 1200 worshippers.

4.0 PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 None relevant.

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 Members should note that the proposal being presented to them now may have changed to reflect the QRP's comments below.

Havering QRP comments – 2 September 2025	
Strategic approach and access	
The panel strongly supports the provision of a new mosque in Romford, to help meet a growing local need and to provide an important community use. It also welcomes the council's assistance in finding a suitable site for the applicant.	
However, the panel has concerns about whether the site can accommodate a mosque designed for this many users, and the impact it is likely to have on surrounding streets and spaces. How crowds will be accommodated and managed requires further thought.	
Further analysis and design development is required to demonstrate that the expected volume of users, and any expected future growth, can be comfortably accommodated on this highly constrained site.	
A more detailed assessment to understand how people travel to and from the mosque would be welcome. This should include how movement patterns will vary during the day and week, any impact on the context, and the capacity and quality of surrounding streets and spaces.	
To help strengthen the proposal, the applicant should also develop a strategy to mitigate the potential impact of any future redevelopment of Romford's existing car parks, which are used by mosque visitors.	
Developing a comprehensive and future-looking sustainable transport strategy is encouraged, to help identify ways to encourage active travel by a higher proportion of mosque visitors.	
The applicant should engage with officers to understand the council's wider ambitions for changing movement behaviours. The proposal should help facilitate this and accommodate the expected number of users.	
The proposed drop-off area is small and far from the mosque entrances, making it unsuitable for the number and type people who will need to use it. An alternative approach is needed to ensure all users can access the building safely and comfortably.	
<u>Applicant comment:</u> Travel movements to and from the existing Mosque have been surveyed and the design team has a good understanding of patterns of movement. Capacity modelling has been undertaken based on a worst-case scenario and this will be set out in full in the Transport Statement that will accompany the forthcoming planning statement. A Travel Plan is being developed for submission with the planning application. This will encourage sustainable travel. Drop off and pick will be off site, using existing public car parks. A Visitor Management Plan is being developed for submission with the planning application.	

Site layout
The overall arrangement of buildings and mix of uses is appropriate
While there is a requirement for separate male and female entrances, it is important that both entrances are of equal quality. However, the female entrance is furthest away from the street. This should be reconsidered to make this access feel more visible, generous and welcoming.
Careful thought should be given to the arrival and departure experience of mosque visitors.
A robust servicing strategy is needed, to avoid any conflict between vehicles and pedestrians.
<u>Applicant comment:</u> The riverside approach provides a distinctive and welcoming entry experience, characterised by a quieter, more tranquil setting away from road noise. It offers enhanced privacy, natural shade, and a generous spill-out area that encourages social use and relaxation. This entrance is being designed as a primary frontage in its own right, receiving equal architectural attention and visibility. Its significance will continue to grow as new residential and park developments emerge across the river, strengthening its role as a dignified and inviting access point for all users. A covered portico has been introduced at the south-western corner of the building to guide visitors towards the Rom Entrance when approaching from South Street. This feature also ensures safe and convenient access through the narrowest section between the building and the riverside boundary. The light filled arrival court under dome and serene riverside entrance welcome visitors on arrival and these, along with carefully designed external amenity areas offer comfortable dispersal from the building. A detailed servicing strategy will be submitted with the application.
Landscape and public realm
A clearer and more compelling landscape proposal is needed. This should include a greater emphasis on soft landscape and a clearer sense of how the proposal accommodates the amount and needs of mosques users.
A range of drawings, visualisations and detailed information (including an ecology study) are needed to provide greater assurance on the quality of the landscape and public realm.
The design team (including landscape) should visit other mosques to better understand how the open spaces around them function, and to strengthen the proposal. These are important social spaces, a dimension which can't be addressed by movement studies.
The existing cherry trees along South Street are reaching the end of their life, which presents an opportunity to develop a more holistic and persuasive proposal for the frontage on Oldchurch Street and South Street.
Engaging with officers will be important to understand the Council's requirements for the public highway.
The impact of the proposed two-metre-high fencing and gates was not fully presented because they did not appear in the visualisations. However, based on the information presented, the proposal is likely to feel oppressive and will compromise both the street and the quality of the mosque's entrance and open space.
While the need for a secure boundary is clear and understood, a more sensitive approach and additional design development is necessary.

The approach to managing surface water, re-naturalising the banks of the River Rom and the use of permeable paving, are positive.
Engaging with the Environment Agency and surrounding landowners is encouraged, to help develop a more coordinated approach to the River Rom's re-naturalisation.
The potential to capture and re-use water on site, including for the maintenance of the landscape, should inform the sustainable drainage strategy.
The existing horse chestnut tree to the rear is of tremendous value and in a good condition. A thorough arboricultural assessment is needed to address the panel's concerns about the impact the building could have on tree, to inform the area of developable land and the construction methodology.
The panel recommends consulting with the council's tree officer for assistance in gaining access to the tree.
<u>Applicant comment:</u> The landscaping scheme has been updated following the QRP. A range of drawings and visualisations will be submitted with the application. The design team have visited other mosques, and these have influenced the design process. The location of soft landscaping has been revised to optimise space. Ecology surveys and a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment will be submitted with the application. The application site now excludes public highway land (including the cherry trees). A secure boundary is necessary for safety and security reasons. Following QRP, the boundary treatment has been developed, drawing on lessons from Cambridge Mosque. The fence itself has been redesigned so it sits back within the planted edge, creating a greener public realm to the front. Multiple openings in the boundary ensure it remains visually and physically permeable. The design uses a sequence of pillars and fence panels with climbing plants to soften the appearance and prevent it from feeling imposing. The impact of the development on the horse chestnut tree is being considered. Trial pits have been dug to check impact on RPA.
Design concept and architecture
The panel welcomes the retention of the locally listed building and the applicant's careful consideration of its heritage significance.
While the proposed scale and massing of the mosque appears acceptable, a clearer and more compelling architectural approach is needed. Exploring the potential for a bolder architectural language, in scale and articulation, which confidently reflects this important community use, is encouraged.
Identifying positive precedents of mosques in similar urban contexts, such as those designed by Shahed Saleem, will help to inform and strengthen the proposal.
A clearer sense of the views in and out of the building are needed, to ensure they provide adequate privacy where necessary.
To ensure the building ages well, the architectural language, details, and materials, should be high-quality and robust to avoid creating any onerous or unsustainable maintenance regime for the occupiers.

<u>Applicant comment:</u> The Design is in harmony with retained building and refined detailing provides design quality. Following the QRP the Minaret has been made taller. Cambridge Mosque and Shahed Saleem designs have been studied and lessons applied. The Design and Access Statement will include precedent studies. Interior design development has commenced and additional perspectives will be provided with the panning application. Materials will be high quality and durable.
Internal layout
Some of the internal spaces appear complex and inadequate for the number of users who will access them, such as areas for shoe storage and ablutions. Consideration of how these areas can be made more intuitive, generous and welcoming, is needed.
The experience of accessing and using the building should be tested from a variety of perspectives. Engaging with a range users is encouraged to strengthen the design approach and resolve known issues with existing mosques.
The panel encourages the applicant to seek out meaningful opportunities for co-design. Involving women in the process would be a positive step toward Havering Islamic and Cultural Centre's goal of attracting more women to its mosque.
Opportunities to create some spaces with a sense of grandeur should be explored further.
The potential for spaces to adapt at different times of day, to meet the needs of different uses and users, requires careful consideration.
<u>Applicant comment:</u> Layouts have been updated to improve legibility and usability of spaces. Community consultation and discussion with existing worshipers has informed access design. Diverse user groups were consulted in the design decision making process. Visuals of key spaces like arrival court under the dome and double volume hall will be provided. The column free prayer hall adapts to different uses (educational, community space) without physical adaptation.
Sustainability
The panel supports the ambition to meet Passivhaus standards, but clearer sustainability commitments for construction and operation are needed.
A greater emphasis on circularity is needed, including the potential to retain and re-use existing materials on site.
Detailed information on embodied carbon and the environmental performance of different materials choices is needed.

Further thought should be given to how overheating will be managed and how climate change resilience can inform the design of the building.

Applicant comment:

The building will meet the sustainability objectives of the London Plan.

Circularity will be addressed in the Energy Statement, which will detail the retention/re-use of existing materials.

The Energy Statement will also demonstrate how London Plan Whole Life Carbon Policies have been addressed.

Over-heating and climate resilience - Passive measures such as external shading, managing internal gains, passive vents, MVHR and limited active cooling.

5.2 At this stage, it is intended that the following will be consulted regarding any subsequent planning application:

- Mayor of London
- London Fire Brigade
- Thames Water
- Essex and Suffolk Water
- Environment Agency
- Transport for London
- Place Services (Ecology)
- Place Services (Heritage)

6.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

6.1 The following engagement has been undertaken:

- In person meeting with the Leader and Cabinet Members on 23rd January 2025.
- Wider community consultation launched 12th February 2025 with 1,900 flyers distributed.
- Virtual consultation open for comments on the project's website between Wednesday 12th February 2025 and Friday 14th March 2025.
- Community drop-in session on Thursday 27th February from 3.30pm to 6.30pm at The Brewery Shopping Centre.
- Virtual Meeting with Romford Society on 29th May 2025.
- Meeting with Faith Leader Forum on 11th May 2025.

6.2 The feedback will form part of the Statement of Community Involvement submitted by the Applicant at submission.

7.0 MATERIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 The main planning issues raised by the proposal relate to:

- Principle of Development
- Design Quality and Scale
- Access and parking
- Offsite Movement and Highway Safety

- Open space
- Energy and Sustainability
- QRP Feedback

Principle of Development

- 7.2 It is acknowledged that the Bridge Close regeneration scheme results in the loss of the HICC site and gives rise for the need to re-provide this community facility in Romford Town Centre. In land use terms the principle of locating the HICC adjacent to the Town Centre boundary and within the Strategic Development Area is acceptable.

Design Quality, massing and Scale

- 7.3 The proposal has a civic function given the purpose is to provide a prayer and community use. As such Officers consider the building follows a form of size, scale and massing which reflects the civic function. The scheme has used the difference in levels through the site to result in a height and massing that sits subtly within South Street which respects relatively low-rise existing buildings. The massing inevitably increases to the rear of the site facing the River Rom, however, the massing has been articulated to add visual interest to the building.
- 7.4 The extension's flat roof which forms a main component to the body of the Islamic Community Centre is an appropriate approach and has been detailed with decorative parapet coping, full height window reveals and subtly celebrated building entrances. The evolved design assimilates with the retained part of the building and historic facade whilst accentuating the Qubba and minaret.
- 7.5 Officers welcome the combination of the terracotta cladding and weathered steel. Samples of the material will naturally be required but the patterns in the stonework and detailing approach is positive.

Onsite Access, Movement and Parking

- 7.6 There is a pinch point between the northwest and southwest corners of the building and the site boundary with the river / carriageway. The proposal has sought to address concerns of safe visitor movement and visibility by opening up the lower ground floor area so visitors have additional space and lines of sight thereby increasing opportunities for movement. It is welcomed for Members' views regarding pedestrian safety and movement of visitors, particularly as this area of the building is predominantly used by females some of which will be elderly and / or with children.
- 7.7 It is acknowledged that the proposal promotes a car free approach and the parking within the site is for disabled persons only. However, there are concerns with how arrival and departures are managed for the parked vehicles on site and if they coincide with the arrival/departure of the volume of worshippers.
- 7.8 There remains concerns if there is sufficient space to the front and side of the building to have sufficient capacity to accommodate the number of worshippers entering and exiting the building, particularly at peak times.
- 7.9 The applicant has advised that following discussions with the Police that there is a requirement for the front of the site to be enclosed with fencing in the interest of site security which is understood by Officers. However, there are concerns as to how this enclosure would affect how visitors enter and exit the building particularly given the volumes at peak times and its impact on the visual amenity of the locality.

Offsite Movement and Highway Safety

- 7.10 There are concerns for health and safety of the volume of worshippers using the adjacent signalised junction and the impact at peak capacity which is likely to place significant pressure on the surrounding infrastructure and the capacity of the site proposal.
- 7.11 The updated proposal for the drop-off location for religious educational events would be for the users to use the Oldchurch Rise Car Park which is some 250m walk to the west of the site off Rom Valley Way. However, a car-parking survey will be required to demonstrate that the carpark capacity is adequate to accommodate peak times of use with other users.

Open space and landscaping

- 7.12 The security measures to enclose the site with a fence with railing and planted with climbers would be designed with pillars integrated with railings and generous greening that are of the same design/material to the existing building, so the boundary design reads cohesively.
- 7.13 Details of the ground surfacing is required to ensure the materials are discrete and the use of stainless steel to black metal would lessen the visual impact on the street. Details of the security kiosk are required which should ensure the building fully integrates into the landscape.
- 7.14 In terms of the relationship of the Horse Chestnut TPO to the proposal as the building footprint is within the root protection area, the applicant needs undertake careful tree pit digging to establish the root system for the tree and details submitted under the application for assessment.
- 7.15 The proposal to re-naturalise the River Rom positively responds to the key blue ambitions for the River Rom within the Romford Town Centre Masterplan and Local Plan. Further details are required of discussions with the EA and how the scheme demonstrates the 10% BNG upgrades. Further details on the 1.1m balustrade along edge of river naturalisation zone is required if the bank is to be graded as the purpose of re-naturalisation should include social benefits of better access, visual and physical engagement with the river.
- 7.16 The proposed Urban Greening Factor (UGF) of 0.34 is positive.

Energy and Sustainability

- 7.17 The proposed Passivhaus standard is positive and Officers encourage the applicant to demonstrate with the ambition targets for airtightness / U-Values for example to support a planning application. Further information on the heating and cooling strategy would bolster the application and how overheating risk would be managed through the design, such as how the façade incorporates natural shading.
- 7.18 It is positive that the scheme aims to achieve a minimum 35% on-site carbon reduction beyond national Building Regulations Part L by following the energy and cooling hierarchy.
- 7.19 Further updates on the location heat pumps to the first-floor roof will be required and how the proposal will respond to the London Plan Whole Life Carbon and Circularity Statement policies.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The proposed development remains in the pre-application stage and additional work remains to be carried out. The scheme will be progressed through a design led approach over the coming months. At this stage, Members' guidance will be most helpful to incorporate as the various elements are brought together.