



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 6 March 2025

by **C Butcher BSc MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1st April 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/J0350/W/24/3356327

59 Willoughby Road, Slough SL3 8JQ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Steve Hall (Science of Spirituality) against the decision of Slough Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is P/05407/003.
 - The development proposed is retention of last known use of building as D1 Non-residential institutions (Meditation Classes, Meditation retreats & Seminars, Book stalls/displays and youth group health activities) and rearrangement of external appearance by converting the front flat roof to pitched.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I observed on my site visit that the building appeared to be disused. The evidence before me suggests that it was previously in use as a scout hut, and I note that I have a certificate of lawfulness before me, dated 9 December 2024, which confirms that the lawful use of the site is use class F2 (previously use class D2) which covers community uses. The appellant has provided a document called a 'Title Report' which suggests that the building has also been used in conjunction with use class F1(e). However, it does not provide any basis for this assessment, and it is not clear where the information originated from. As such, I afford this document very little weight.
3. The information provided on the application form, and the extract from the appellant's website which was provided by the Council, suggests that the intended use class would be F1(f), which includes public worship or religious instruction. I have therefore made my decision on the basis that the application seeks a change of use from use class F2 to F1(f).

Main Issue

4. The main issue is whether the proposed use would be acceptable, taking account of local character and highway safety.

Reasons

5. The appeal site is located within a predominantly residential area. The building in question was previously used as a scout hut which would have resulted in some level of disruption and noise. However, the use of the building would have mainly been limited to evenings, and while its use would have resulted in traffic

movements, this would have largely involved young people being dropped off and picked up. The lawful use of the building would of course allow it to be utilised for other community purposes, but it is likely that any such use of the building would be quite sporadic rather than involving regular occupation throughout the day.

6. In contrast, the proposal is to use the building for religious purposes, including meditation classes, retreats and seminars. The application form indicates that the building could be in use between 8am to 8pm, seven days a week. It therefore seems inevitable that this would involve a much more intensive use of the building than would be the case under the current lawful use. Indeed, there would be regular movements of people and cars throughout the day which would clearly result in a greater level of disturbance for local residents.
7. Moreover, Appendix 2 of the Slough Local Plan, March 2004 (the LP), sets out car parking standards for new developments. In the case of places of worship, the standards require a minimum of one space per 10 square metres of floorspace, which in this instance would result in a need for 18 spaces.
8. There are no car parking spaces on the site. The appellant has provided a parking agreement with Langley College which would make ten to fifteen spaces available. However, even at the upper end of this range, this would represent a deficit against the adopted standards. Furthermore, the agreement with the college could be terminated in future. I do recognise that there are bus stops nearby, and that a good number of cycle parking places would be provided on site. However, it seems highly likely to me that the majority of people would seek to drive to the site and therefore the parking standards should be met.
9. Given the lack of parking provision, it is likely that the proposed use of the building would result in people seeking to park on Willoughby Road and surrounding streets. This would further increase disturbance for local residents. In addition, inappropriate parking can result in highway safety concerns for pedestrians and other highway users. Indeed, while only a snapshot in time, I did note on my site visit that street parking in the immediate area was very limited, despite being a weekday afternoon.
10. Taking all of this into account, I conclude that the proposed use would not be appropriate. The development would therefore conflict with LP Policies EMP2, EMP4 and T2, as well as Core Policies 1, 7 and 8 of the Slough Core Strategy, December 2008. Taken together, the relevant aspects of these policies seek to preserve local character and the living conditions of existing residents, while also ensuring highway safety, including through appropriate parking provision.

Conclusion

11. The proposed development conflicts with the development plan when considered as a whole. The scheme would bring a disused building back into use, and there could be some economic benefits associated with the business. However, these benefits are limited, and they do not outweigh the identified harm and associated development plan conflict. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

C Butcher

INSPECTOR