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Response to Planning application from Hertfordshire County Council (T and CP GDP Order 2015)

Director of Planning

North Hertfordshire Council
Council Offices
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
Hertfordshire
SG6 3JF

District ref: 25/02092/FP
HCC ref: NH/26398/2025
HCC received: 17 July 2026
Area manager: Manjinder Sehmi
Case officer: Senober Khan

Location

45 Bury Mead Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1RX

Application type

Full Application

Proposal

AMENDED PROPOSAL

Full Planning Permission : Change of use from Class E (g)(office and light industrial) to Class F.1(Mosque) including enlargement (Alterations to roof and the addition of domes) and alterations to the building form of both buildings (including external cladding) and fenestration. Provision of 16 parking spaces, cycle store and bin storage following demolition of existing two outbuildings

Recommendation

Notice is given under article 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 that Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority recommends that permission be refused for the following reasons:

Based on the information submitted, the HA's assessment remains unchanged. The proposal would introduce a high-footfall congregation-based use into an active industrial estate where significant pedestrian activity, parking demand and vehicle movements would conflict with the established HGV and servicing functions of the highway network. The additional information submitted does not demonstrate that safe and suitable access can be achieved for all users or that unacceptable highway safety impacts would be avoided.

The HA therefore maintains its recommendation that planning permission be refused on highway safety and accessibility grounds.

Highways comments:

In response to the Highway Authority's (HA) comments dated 16 April 2026, the applicant has submitted a Highways Clarification Note (HCN) dated 15 July 2026, together with updated swept-path analysis, an additional parking beat survey undertaken on 26 June 2026 and indicative highway mitigation proposals. The HA has reviewed the submitted information and provides the following comments:

Whilst the HCN seeks to address certain parking-related matters raised by consultees, it does not alter the HA's principal concern that the proposed mosque represents a congregation-based use with significant peak pedestrian and vehicular activity located within an active industrial estate primarily designed to accommodate HGV servicing, loading and operational movements. The fundamental land-use incompatibility identified within the HA's response dated 16 April 2026 therefore remains unchanged.

HCN Review

1. Fundamental highway concern remains unresolved

The HCN focuses principally on:

- on-site parking operation;
- swept-path analysis;
- parking capacity calculations; and
- indicative verge protection measures.

However, the HCN does not address the fundamental issue identified within the HA's previous response, namely the suitability of locating a high-footfall congregation-based use within a movement-led industrial estate environment characterised by regular HGV activity, servicing operations, turning movements and loading activity.

The HA's objection has never been solely a parking capacity issue. Rather, the concern relates to the interaction between concentrated periods of pedestrian activity, vehicle arrivals, departures, drop-offs and informal parking behaviour within an environment that functions primarily to accommodate industrial traffic.

The HCN does not alter the operational characteristics of Bury Mead Road. The proposal would continue to introduce congregation peaks that are fundamentally different to the existing industrial uses that occupy the estate.

Accordingly, the HA's position regarding the incompatibility of the proposed use with the surrounding highway environment remains unchanged.

2. On-site parking operation

The HCN confirms that Bay 6 is intended to be reserved exclusively for mortuary use and is not included within the operational parking provision available to worshippers. The HA acknowledges this clarification.

However, the HCN continues to state that parking will be "managed accordingly" when the mortuary bay is in use. This remains an operational management measure rather than a permanent design-led solution. The HCN provides no detail regarding how such management would be undertaken, who would undertake it, or how compliance would be secured.

The HA therefore remains concerned that the operation of the site relies partially upon behavioural and management assumptions rather than self-enforcing design.

Swept path analysis

The revised swept-path analysis seeks to demonstrate vehicle manoeuvrability into Bays 1-9. The submitted tracking indicates that standard estate cars can enter and leave the parking spaces under the modelled scenarios.

Whilst the HA notes this additional information, the exercise only demonstrates theoretical parking manoeuvres under controlled conditions.

The tracking assessment does not demonstrate:

- operation during periods of peak arrival and departure activity;
- interaction with pedestrians moving through the site;
- operation where informal parking occurs;
- operation where multiple vehicles arrive simultaneously;
- operation associated with funerals or other higher-demand events.

Whilst the additional tracking assists in understanding the proposed layout, it does not alter the HA's wider concerns regarding the suitability of the development in this location.

3. Updated parking assessment

The applicant has undertaken an additional parking beat survey on Friday 26 June 2026 between 10:00 and 15:00 and concludes that the study area contains a parking capacity of 203 spaces, with a peak observed demand of 90 vehicles. The HCN concludes that 113 spaces remained available during the busiest survey period.

The HA notes that the revised methodology excludes private roads and seeks to apply more realistic parking lengths than those criticised within previous submissions. Whilst this represents an improvement on earlier survey work, the revised survey does not overcome the HA's concern regarding parking behaviour.

The assessment remains focused on theoretical parking availability across a relatively broad survey area rather than actual parking demand in the vicinity of the application site.

The HA has consistently advised that congregation parking stress occurs closest to the destination rather than evenly across a survey area.

The HCN does not provide any evidence demonstrating that worshippers would distribute themselves throughout the survey area in the manner assumed.

Parking demand assumptions

The HCN continues to rely upon a 13% car-driver mode share and concludes that Friday peak attendance would generate demand for 28 spaces, of which 8 would be accommodated on site, leaving a requirement for 20 off-site parking spaces.

The HA remains unconvinced that the 13% mode share represents a robust basis for assessment.

The previously stated concerns remain applicable:

- the existing Florence Street facility operates in a materially different environment;
- the proposed site is located within an unrestricted industrial estate;
- public transport accessibility remains limited;
- parking restrictions present at Florence Street are absent at Bury Mead Road;
- the proposed location is likely to encourage greater car dependence.

The HCN provides no substantive new evidence demonstrating that existing travel behaviours would remain unchanged following relocation.

Consequently, significant uncertainty remains regarding likely future travel demand and parking requirements.

Sensitivity testing

The HCN concludes that a 43.3% car-driver mode share would be required to create parking stress of approximately 85% within the survey area. The applicant argues that such a scenario is unlikely.

However, the HCN provides no substantive evidence demonstrating why that scenario can reasonably be discounted.

The HA remains concerned that:

- Ramadan;
- Eid events;
- funerals;
- inclement weather;
- visitors unfamiliar with the area; and
- future growth in attendance

could all result in parking demand materially exceeding the applicant's central forecast.

The sensitivity testing therefore does not remove uncertainty regarding likely operational impacts.

4. Parking stress and highway safety

The HCN concludes that parking stress within the study area would increase from approximately 44% to 54% under the applicant's preferred scenario.

The HA's concern remains that parking stress is not experienced uniformly across the study area.

The submitted analysis does not adequately assess:

- parking concentration close to the mosque;
- vehicle circulation by drivers searching for spaces;
- repeat manoeuvring and turning movements;
- informal stopping and drop-offs;
- impacts on servicing activity;
- impacts on HGV turning movements.

The existence of parking opportunities elsewhere within the study area does not demonstrate that users will utilise those locations.

Accordingly, the HCN does not remove the HA's concerns regarding parking-related safety impacts.

5. Indicative verge protection measures

The HCN introduces indicative verge protection bollards and associated signage intended to discourage verge parking.

The HA notes that these measures are indicative only and have not been subject to detailed design, technical approval or agreement with the HA.

More importantly, the measures do not address the principal objection.

Even if delivered, verge protection measures would not address:

- concentrated pedestrian activity;
- HGV conflict;
- congregation dispersal;
- drop-off activity;
- parking demand; or
- the underlying land-use incompatibility.

The proposals therefore cannot be relied upon as mitigation capable of overcoming the HA's objection.

Furthermore, the HCN acknowledges that any such measures would require future agreement with the HA. No certainty exists that an acceptable scheme could be delivered.

6. Pedestrian environment

The HCN does not materially alter the pedestrian environment previously assessed by the HA.

Accordingly, the following concerns remain:

- the site frontage footway remains narrow;
- pedestrians would continue to share space adjacent to frequent industrial traffic;
- vehicle crossovers and servicing activity remain present;
- HGV movements continue to coincide with Friday prayer periods;
- the proposal would generate concentrated arrival and departure peaks.

The HCN does not provide any physical highway improvements capable of addressing these constraints.

The HA therefore remains of the view that the proposal fails to provide a safe and suitable environment for the scale of pedestrian activity proposed.

Overall HA position unchanged

The HCN, additional parking survey and revised swept-path analysis do not alter the HA's overall position.

The information submitted does not overcome the fundamental concern that the proposal would introduce a congregation-based use with significant peak pedestrian and vehicle activity into an active industrial estate designed principally to accommodate HGV movements, servicing activity and industrial operations.

The submitted information focuses predominantly on parking capacity calculations and operational assumptions but does not resolve the underlying incompatibility between the proposed use and the highway environment.

The HA remains unconvinced that:

- safe and suitable access can be achieved for all users;
- pedestrian safety impacts have been adequately addressed;
- parking demand has been robustly forecast; or
- the proposed mitigation measures would overcome the identified highway concerns.

The proposal therefore remains contrary to the requirements of NPPF (2024) paragraphs 116 and 133, together with the principles of HCC's Place & Movement Planning and Design Guidance.

Recommendation

Based on the information submitted, the HA's assessment remains unchanged. The proposal would introduce a high-footfall congregation-based use into an active industrial estate where significant pedestrian activity, parking demand and vehicle movements would conflict with the established HGV and servicing functions of the highway network. The additional information submitted does not demonstrate that safe and suitable access can be achieved for all users or that unacceptable highway safety impacts would be avoided.

The HA therefore maintains its recommendation that planning permission be refused on highway safety and accessibility grounds.

Signed

Senober Khan

2 August 2026