

# Could Red House become mosque?

by Nick Horner  
News Reporter

A historic house in Great Barr could be turned into a prayer centre for the Islamic faith if plans from a businessman receive the go ahead.

Shiraz Peer from Waddington Avenue would like to transform the deserted Red House in parkland off Hill Lane into a mosque.

Mr Peer, founder member of the Great Barr Muslim Association and colleague Taher Mahmood, have made preliminary inquiries with Sandwell Council about revamping the

167-year-old home and opening it for religious worship.

Ideally Mr Peer, who runs Immigration Assist Limited in Witton, has said he would want the downstairs area of the Grade II listed building to be used as a mosque.

He proposes that the upstairs would be used for madrasah classes - Islamic instruction. Neighbouring buildings would then be converted for community use.

Alternatively, the businessman suggested that the upstairs of the home could be open to the community, with the lower floor used for prayer.

"With the main part of the building we want to make it into a Muslim prayer hall - a mosque," Mr Peer said.

"We also want to create a community centre with a library, internet cafe and meeting area."

The ambitious plans would require an investment of £1.5 million, which Mr Peer would obtain from Islamic governments, including Saudi Arabia.

"We heard rumours that the Red House was going to be demolished. It is a nice building and we really would like to use it," he said.

Friends of Red House Park chairman Bill Gunn has welcomed the plans, provided they allow the wider community to use the building.

"I would sooner it was used as a mosque with community use than go for development," said Mr Gunn.

"However, that park and house are

for the community around here. It shouldn't solely be used by any group, whether they are Catholics, Protestants or Muslims."

The building is currently leased from Sandwell Council by British Trust Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), who have mothballed it until they can transfer the lease.

Mr Peer said his initial meeting with a Sandwell planning officer was less than favourable but he confirmed the plans were 'very much alive'.

"We are still looking for premises in Great Barr and would still like to use the Red House," he said.

"We are happy to work with everyone but we will need prayer facilities."

Sandwell Council's cabinet member

for regeneration and transport, Councillor Bob Badham, said: "Sandwell Council is keen to secure a long-term future use for the Red House and continues to look at all of the options. Any sub-letting of the Red House would need to be approved by the council."

The mosque proposals will be discussed at The Friends of Red House Park's next meeting on Monday at 6.45pm at the Council Training Office at the rear of Hill Lane Clinic.

• What is your view on the future of the Red House? Contact the Observer by emailing [greatbarobserver@cintamworth.co.uk](mailto:greatbarobserver@cintamworth.co.uk)

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