

Summary Notes - meeting with organiser of Ijtema UK 2026 - Shrublands Hall

7 July 2026 17:00-18:00.

Present: Cllr Tim Weller (chair) Cabinet Member Environment Wellbeing & Culture
Cllr John Whitehead – Ward Member/Parish Councillor
Cllr Dave Penny – Ward Member/Parish Council Chair
Cllr Sarah Gregory – Parish Council Chair
Mr Khalid Khan – Event Organiser

Overview

Following introductions Mr Khan advised he is a retired Police Inspector with experience of organising religious festivals such as the Ijtema, for up to 15,000 guests in the North. In response to requests from Muslim communities in the South a more southerly event has been in development for a year, the identification of Shrubland Hall as a location was determined around 5 or 6 months ago.

The festival expected to host c10K men (16yrs plus for safeguarding reasons), from across the UK and abroad. The festival would essentially comprise; prayers five times a day, and speeches. Meals would be shared and all visitors were expected to remain on site for the duration of the festival (between Thursday evening and Sunday afternoon – some visitors may remain on site later). The focus of the festival was for attendees to become better Muslims after spiritual guidance and enrichment, and better citizens.

The site would be self-contained without drawing on any local community resources; a medical camp would be set up with qualified clinical staff and pharmacists. Fire Marshalls would be in place to execute the plan already agreed with Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service. Food will be cooked on site, dry goods are on site with perishables to be delivered. MSDC Environmental Health (Food Safety) team completed an inspection today (07 July 2026) and Mr Khan advised feedback from the visit was positive.

[TW commented: there are no licensable activities taking place on the site. It does not require Food Hygiene certificate and neither is there a statutory duty to inspect. But the organiser voluntarily cooperated with the Council's inspection to provide assurance to both parties].

Mr Khan continued that he had been part of planning meetings with local statutory services (e.g. Police, Highways, District Council) and relevant agencies had approved the plans in place for the event. He prioritised minimum disruption to local communities.

Q&A

Visitor Numbers - is the event ticketed, free to attend, how can you anticipate numbers?

Mr Khan advised that Ijtema is always free to attend and is not ticketed. Estimated numbers are generated from local Muslim groups around the country and abroad who arrange transport, collect data and report it to Ijtema Organiser HQ in Dewsbury for planning purposes. It is expected that c.10,000 visitors will attend. There is capacity (and contingency) for more visitors.

We heard a figure of 100,000...?

Mr Khan stated this volume of visitors had never been discussed or entertained by the organiser. He believed this originated from a social media account and it was 'useful' to that party for drawing popularity for their own account and unwelcome public attention for the event.

How many vehicles are expected?

Visitors will arrive by coach (c100) and car (c200/300). It was queried whether the site had sufficient capacity to manage this and/or an unanticipated larger volume of traffic. There were contingency arrangements to cover larger than expected volumes of traffic and the Site Management Plan accommodated this within the 300 acres available. Coaches were expected to drop visitors off and then leave the site.

How will vehicles enter/exit the venue?

The main entrance on Old Norwich Road and the side entrance on Sandy Lane will be used as part of an on-site one-way system for all arriving and departing traffic respectively. Whilst consideration was given to using an additional entrance (which was created) TW confirmed enforcement action was taken by MSDC prohibiting further use of this opening.

What arrangements are in place regards congestion on highways and for managing traffic?

A Traffic Management Plan has been approved by Police and Highways. Arrangements include signage from jct 51 to the site. Jct 52 is not to be used to mitigate nuisance to Barham. Additional signage was in place to prohibit use of unapproved entrances. JW noted that the signage from the A14 was good, but some signage (approximately 1.5 – 2 miles from the venue itself) was absent. Mr Khan confirmed that marshals would be stationed at these points to direct traffic to the venue. Additionally, CCTV was in place to monitor entrance/exits from the site. This would also identify unauthorised casual parking at those locations which would be addressed by dedicated marshals. A central control room would be staffed to ensure CCTV was monitored and reactive action taken. Mr Khan believed that residents of Old Hall Estate, in particular, should be assured by these arrangements.

Coaches and cars have been requested to arrive at staggered intervals to reduce potential for congestion.

Marshals deployed at the entrance/exit, were selected from among 'sensible volunteers' (i.e. "not youngsters who might be liable to flare up").

What are the arrangements for visitors when on site?

Large marquees had been constructed for the main arena, cooking, eating, washing/toileting and sleeping. There is adequate capacity to deal with increased visitor numbers as necessary – comfortably, if upwards of an additional 5,000 visitors arrived. It was believed the site would provide all amenities required to maintain visitors on site. Maintaining visitor safety was a priority and CCTV was implemented for this purpose.

And toilet arrangements?

Four septic tanks have been delivered to site, each has capacity to handle 50,000 litres of waste. This was thought to be sufficient but the waste management contract enables emptying of tanks over the weekend if necessary.

Noise abatement

A PA system has been installed in the arena. The arena itself acts to abate noise and tests have been conducted to mitigate noise nuisance to nearest neighbours. Out of deference to neighbours, the PA will not be used for the call to prayer for Fajr, the first prayer of the day occurring at around 4am or for Isha/Witr which occurs at around 11pm. Prayers during the day take around 10-15 minutes. Prayer and speeches will be confined to the arena. SG commented that testing of the PA system had been quite loud for some residents, depending on the wind direction.

Statutory Agency Briefings

Daily briefing with statutory agencies will take place 11am daily any concerns arising from any party to be addressed in this forum.

Sustainable sourcing

Fresh produce and perishables have been sourced locally where possible.

Festival Closedown Arrangements

A week has been scheduled to take down, tidy up and restore the site to original standard. On this matter, a query was posed regarding loss of trees/habitat when the unofficial entrance was created. Mr Khan advised that a budget had been pre-agreed to ensure the site was restored to original standard, he advised he would take ownership of any damage and replacement would include any trees damaged.

Adjacent business – shooting ranges

There was conflicting information regarding whether neighbouring shooting ranges would remain open throughout the weekend. The police had advised Mr Khan that they would remain open and the sound of gunshot should not give rise to concern to festival visitors. One of the shooting ranges had advised DP they would close for the weekend out of respect for the festival.

Adjacent business – Sorrell Horse/Greyhound

Mr Khan advised he had met with the venue owner and the licensee of one of the local pubs; their visit had been well received. It was noted that a World Cup match was scheduled and potential for related ASB was considered. Mr Khan described having robust arrangements in place with Suffolk police, though did not expect to draw on their resource.

Public Rights of Way – potential for anti-social behaviour

No temporary restrictions had been applied for so footpaths would remain accessible for the duration of the event. Mr Khan advised that CCTV and marshals would be deployed on PRoWs to ensure the safety of festival visitors. It was hoped the event would however pass peacefully as all previous events had done.

Fire Risk

It was noted that hot weather was forecast with a N/E breeze. Mr Khan advised that no open fires or BBQ were permitted on site and that the designated area for cooking away from main arena. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service were content with the arrangements in place.

Further engagement with residents

Mr Khan had hoped – depending on Mr Farmer's agreement – to make direct contact with immediate residents. The meeting concluded that this was a positive gesture and would be supportive of it.

TW thanked Mr Khan for his engagement. It was noted (by TW) that earlier engagement with communities would have been warmly welcomed, both to provide assurance and to reduce the level of contacts directed to Ward Members who were not briefed to respond. Mr Khan concurred and described his attempts at contacting Parish Councils directly where out of date telephone numbers were published. He agreed that earlier engagement would have been helpful but was pleased to have been passed TWs contact details on 6 July and to meet with representatives today.

Actions

1. Chair/minute taker (TW) to circulate notes to all invited parties and seek any further queries/clarifications.
2. Chair/minute taker (TW) to share contact details for Mr Khan with Ward Members.