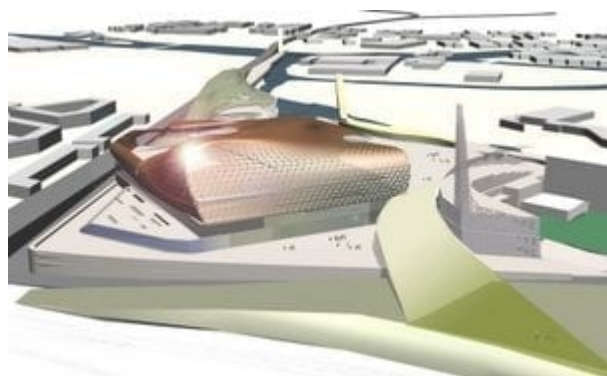



# Megamosque resurgent. East London: an old campaign has not gone away.

Our readers may well remember the long-running struggle to prevent the so called megamosque which Islamic organization Tabligh Jamaat proposed be built in West Ham East London just before the London Olympics of 2012.

To recap, and I'll provide links to the numerous blog posts I wrote during those few years, around 1991 Tabligh Jamaat bought the site of a demolished chemical works near West Ham underground station, along the banks of the Channelsea River (an overflow of the River Lea which is a tributary of the Thames). As such the land is contaminated and remedial work will be needed before any substantial development is done.



They used the land for worship for a few years in tents and some shabby low-rise buildings which I always thought were the offices of the factory that were not demolished. [Then in 2007](#) the trustees came up with a plan to build a dramatic new mosque on

the land in  time for the London Olympics which were held on what became the nearby Olympic Park. [Their vision was that](#) as the world's camera panned in over the London Olympic Park their huge mosque, of an ambitious and contemporary design (sweeping copper roof) would dominate the scene, dwarfing St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey and any other secular building of the London skyline.

To clarify names the site and project is variously called The Abbey Mills Mosque, The Riverine Centre, the London Markaz

(place) the Masjid Ilyas and The Megamosque.

[There were objections](#); the campaign group Megamosque No Thanks led by local councillor and preacher Alan Craig was active. The London Borough of Newham, led at that time by Sir Robin Wales was against; they and the Greater London Authority, (led at that time by Boris Johnson, now Prime Minister) wanted the land used for mixed development to benefit the whole community. Decontaminated and used for housing, light industry to provide employment and those facilities a community would need, shops, a school, a place or places of worship. In principle a local mosque and/or church to serve that community was not unacceptable.

At the open day in 2008 Mary Jackson and I were told that this site was to be the European HQ of Tabligh Jamaat, a [training facility with](#) a catchment area of a 70 mile radius. From east London 70 miles would take in the whole of the South Coast to Portsmouth, Peterborough to the north and Swindon to the west. Our guide spoke with pride at the attendance at their 'Thursday night gathering' of 200-300 men between the ages of 19 and 35. I thought that's not a congregation, that's a regiment.

The trustees argued with their architects and a new firm produced a more subdued less flamboyant plan. One argument was that the Muslims of Newham needed more places to worship. They didn't; Newham was and is well supplied with mosques for every denomination of Islam and many ethnicities. Either they had changed their concept or had lied somewhere.

Four years later in December [2012, a cold night](#) as I recall, [Newham Council refused](#) the Mosque Trustees application. A [public inquiry](#) followed. There were [protests by various Islamic groups](#), and [threats and intimidation](#).

Eventually the case reached the High Court. In 2018, worship having continued throughout despite there being no planning

permission for that use (temporary permission having expired many years previously), [the High Court decision was that worship must cease](#) and the buildings be cleared.

Which was a victory.

Except.

Life moves on. Sir Robin Wales was deselected as Labour candidate for Mayor of the Borough the month before the High Court decision. His replacement is Rokhsana Fiaz, a protegee of Jeremy Corbyn and his Momentum handlers. Alan Craig and the other two councillors of the Christian Peoples Alliance, who had been the only opposition to Labour on the council, had lost their seats in a previous election; Newham is now a one party (Labour) council. And the Mayor of London is Sadiq Khan, about whom enough said.

As we come out of the pandemic and look round at London you will not be surprised to hear that the Court order has not been enforced. Worship continues openly and seems to be flourishing.

What has happened, as I mentioned [briefly the other day](#), is that Tabligh Jamaat UK has split, which was confirmed later in 2018 by Pakistani paper [The News](#). The split is personal, not doctrinal. According to The News one part of Tabligh Jamaat controls the London Markaz aka megamosque and have founded a new markaz in Blackburn. The other part continue to run the Dewsbury Markaz while maintaining a presence in other London mosques and madrassas.

And the News deplores this schism because *"The plan to build the mega mosque now stands ruined not only because of the London High Court order but also because of the fact that the Tablighi elders are involved in a bitter do-or-die fight"*. The writer claims that there have been physical fights at the site, to which the police have been called. I can't confirm that.


What I can confirm is that the 'dispute' as to who now owns the land is being used by Newham Council as an excuse to delay and prevaricate enforcement of the injunction that worship cease and the site be cleared. Which was, to local residents and all of our understanding, the necessary prelude to the council purchasing the land (by their powers of compulsory purchase if necessary) with an ultimate view of genuine community development.

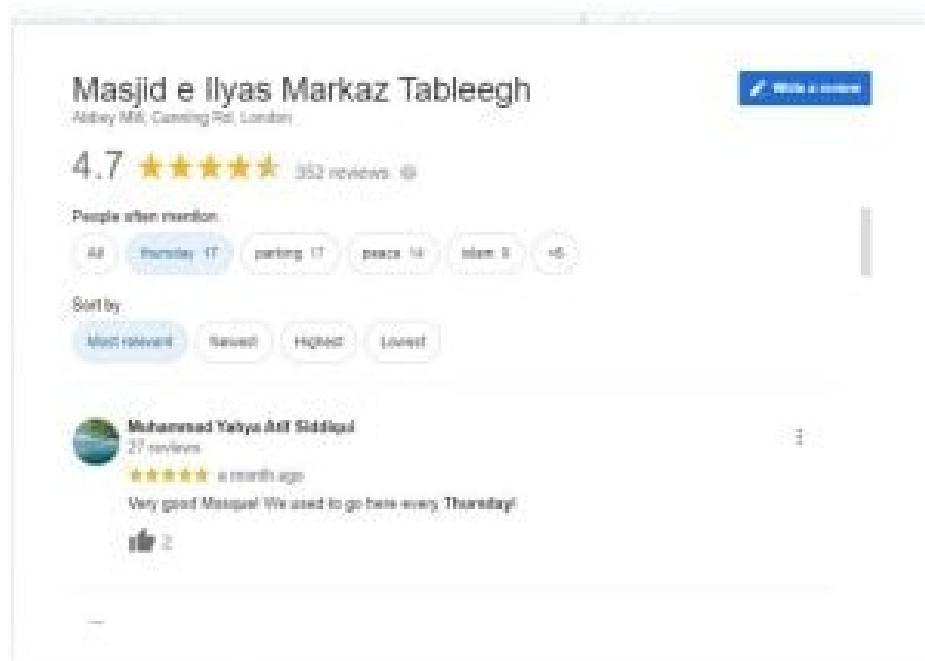
One group [promotes the plans](#); The other group [denies any involvement](#) with the others. .

We know that worship continues.

The mosque advertise services and events on their [Facebook page](#), along with events at other east London mosques in which they have, shall I call it, a controlling interest. One of those is the [Masjid e Umer in Queens Road Walthamstow](#), about which I have particular interest.

For example on 29<sup>th</sup> December they announced the arrival of the Nizamuddin Elders at the Markazi and a programme of events around east London including Saturday 1st January after Isha at 6:30 – Ulama Bayaan at London Markaz. A friend of mine spotted scores, maybe several hundred men pouring out of the site on Saturday evening that autumn.

 Worshippers give glowing reviews on Google.



I didn't see any attendees myself when I attended along Greenway one Saturday morning but I didn't need to. Their poster on the gate attests to continuance of worship during the pandemic, under Covid regulations. Perform wudu at home, keep 2 metres distance, bring your own prayer mat.





The council planning offices admit that it is happening, and that they know all about it. This is an extract (redacted to protect the identity of the correspondents) from the correspondence of a second friend and local resident with a council officer.

Dear Mr Resident

Thank you for the information regarding the use of the site. The Council are aware that the use continues and are in engagement with our Legal team regarding progression of this matter. For information, the land in question is in private ownership, and does not belong to the Council.

Kind regards Council Planning Official

In a later e-mail the officer refers to the various injunctions and court orders and says that there are legal proceedings ongoing. He reiterates that the land does not belong to the council which we do know.

Finally

Dear Mr Resident

The Council have been working to progress the issue of non-compliance, however the site is the subject of an ongoing dispute with respect to ownership which is currently being considered by the courts. Once resolved, the Council's legal proceedings will be able to be directed at the correct landowners in order to resolve this long-standing issue. Unfortunately planning legal proceedings can be extremely protracted.... Love and kisses etc Council Official.

Yes, we know that legal proceedings can be extremely protracted. We have read Bleak House.

The Megamosque No Thanks group is no longer in existence but the group behind the website [Open Newham](#) have their eye on the ball. Their fear is that

*Mayor Fiaz will instigate changes to the local planning policy and a new plan, one which is not substantively different from the two which have been rejected will be presented and passed. This will be by way of pay-back for support in getting her elected.*

*We may be wrong. We hope that we are.*

*But we are watching.*

They are not alone in that fear which I believe is valid.

Another friend who no longer lives in Newham has written to the MP of the constituency where he now lives. MPs are only permitted to deal with correspondence from somebody who lives in their constituency; luckily this mosque project is of regional, if not national importance and so this MP is prepared to take an interest. Without delay he wrote to The Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities demanding an explanation as to why the illegal use of the land



has been allowed to continue, especially given its potential for community development.

We await the answer with bated breath.



✖ Another organisation doing what it can, in the way they best can, is the [prayer group who meet](#) outside the Mosque gates once a month to pray. I passed them several times while on my observation visit earlier this month but didn't interrupt them as they were deep in prayer and contemplation. I have to agree to differ with some things that Christian Voice say, but I agree about the malign influence of a Tabligh Jamaat mosque and prayer can achieve wondrous things.

Tabligh Jamaat are a shadowy and secretive organisation about which not enough is known. [This article submitted to the School of History](#), Archaeology and Religion, Cardiff University in 2019 (after the schism) is very useful and sets out the satellite/central hub nature of their structure. They purport to be peaceful but some not very peaceable individuals have come through their ranks. The most recent is [Malik Faisal Akram from Blackburn](#) who took Jewish worshippers and their Rabbi hostage during morning worship at their Synagogue hostage in Texas at the weekend. Blackburn is a satellite of the London Markaz-megamosque.

My thumbs are pricking. His connection to the Tabligh Jamaat set up in Blackburn has been further confirmed by the Jewish Chronicle [here](#)