

## Millionaire businessman Islamic creed 'as obtrusive as McDonald's sign' can stay on his house after winning fight with council

- **'There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger,' sign reads**
- **Planners banned slogan saying it was like a McDonald's billboard**
- **But Mahmood Ali, 54, wins right to keep sign after ruling is overturned**
- **'I wouldn't mind if my neighbours painted a cross on their house,' he says**

By Hugo Gye and Simon Tomlinson

A millionaire businessman today won his fight to keep a large Islamic slogan which he painted on the side of his house.

Mahmood Ali had been ordered to remove the words because they were a form of advertising comparable to a McDonald's billboard.

But he appealed the ruling, and successfully argued that the slogan was not disproportionately large or garish and did not damage the character of his neighborhood.

'Breaches planning laws': Millionaire businessman Mahmood Ali has won a court battle over this Islamic slogan on his house in Newport, South Wales, after the council ordered it be removed because it is 'advertising'

The 54-year-old painted an Arabic message meaning, 'There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his messenger,' on the side of his semi-detached eight-bedroom home in Newport, south Wales.

The council later ruled that he required planning permission to display the slogan, saying that it fell under the same category as a commercial advertisement.

Today planning inspector Tim Belcher overturned that initial ruling, judging that the sign was not so obtrusive that it damaged the interests of other locals.

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- **'I didn't put a gun to anybody's head': Mother of 11 defends her new £400,000 council house as daughter says SHE pays £200-a-month for a horse (but not how)**

Mr Ali spoke of his joy at the decision, saying that it set a positive precedent for others who wished to express their faith publicly.

'It's a good way forward so people can feel comfortable living in the UK,' he said.

'If a neighbour wanted to put a George cross on their house I wouldn't have any objection whatsoever. I would respect it fully.'

'Obtrusive': The message, in 2ft-high lettering, is written across a first-floor archway on the detached house

### **PHRASE DECLARES BELIEF IN ONENESS OF GOD**

The message on the side of Mahmood Ali's house comes from the Islamic creed, known as shahada, which declares the belief in the oneness of God and acceptance of Muhammad as his prophet.

In English, this translates as: 'There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God'

A single, honest recitation of the shahadah in Arabic is all that is required for a person to become a Muslim.

This declaration, or statement of faith, is called the kalimah.

In some sects in Shia Islam, the creed is expanded with the addition of a phrase concerning Ali at the end to say: 'and Ali is the wali (friend) of God'.

Taking this creed is one of the five pillars of Islam.

The complete shahadah cannot be found in the Quran, but comes from hadiths, sayings or or tacit approvals ascribed either validly or invalidly to the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

He added: 'It is not there as an advertisement, the sign was just to bless the house, that's the purpose.'

'The green colour means peace. This sort of thing is common in cities like Birmingham and Manchester.'

Mr Ali had the sign placed onto the side of his £750,000 home in Newport.

But the city's council later decided he didn't have the right planning permission to display the message across the home's stone archway.

The sign, which is around two metres wide and 60cm high, includes the declaration of the Islamic faith, called the Islamic creed.

Business consultant Mr Ali has also applied for permission to illuminate the sign in low voltage lighting.

A family member, who did not wish to be named, added: 'It's our home and we should be free to do whatever we want.'

'We're supposed to have freedom of speech in this country and be allowed to express our faith however we please.'

Mr Ali applied for retrospective permission, but it was turned down.

Legal fight: Council officers accused the slogan of being similar to an advert for the likes of McDonald's

Newport Council argued that the sign is an obtrusive 'advertisement' according to planning regulations.

Under these guidelines, an advertisement includes any word, letter, model, sign, placard, board or notice used for advertising, making an announcement or direction.

A council statement read: 'The property is domestic property and is not a mosque where such signs might be expected.'

'The sign consists of letters and a word that announces religious faith and so can be considered to be an advertisement and express planning consent is required.'

'The advertisement is prominently sited upon the host building and is also prominent. Its size and position on the building make it obtrusive.'