Faith Groups and the Planning System

Policy Briefing

AHRC Faith and Place network | October 2015
faithandplacenetwork.org

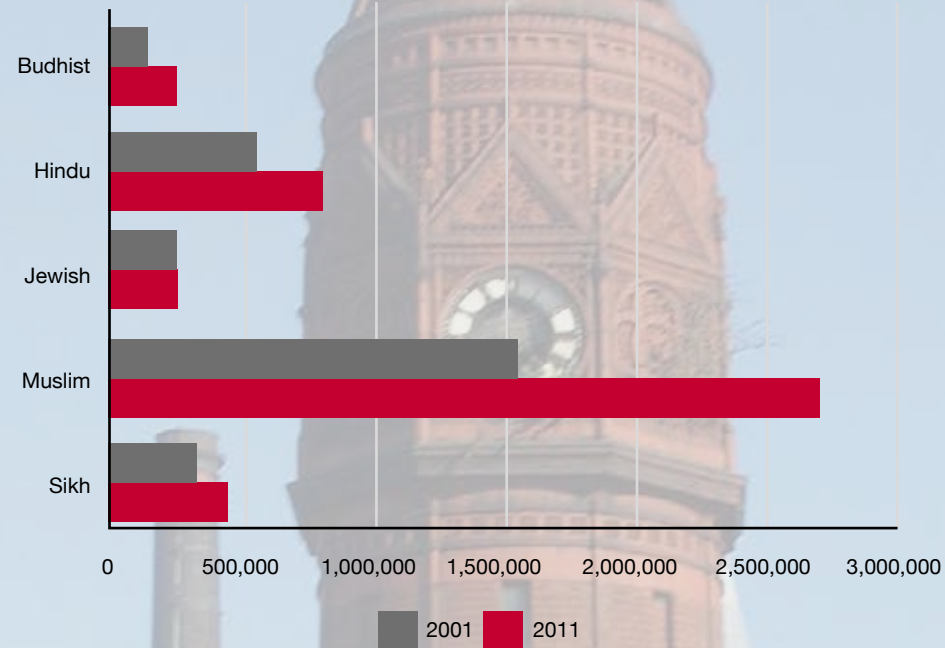**Figure 1** – Religious growth in England and Wales, 2001–2011

Legend: ■ 2001 ■ 2011

Categories (top to bottom): Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh

X-axis: 0, 500,000, 1,000,000, 1,500,000, 2,000,000, 2,500,000, 3,000,000

Table 1 – Religious population change in England and Wales, 2001–2011 (2001 & 2011 Censuses)

Religion	2001	2011	Change	% Change
Christian[a]	37,338,486	33,243,175	-4,095,311	-11.0
Buddhist	144,453	247,743	103,290	71.5
Hindu	552,421	816,633	264,212	47.8
Jewish	259,932	263,346	3,414	1.3
Muslim	1,546,626	2,706,066	1,159,440	75.0
Sikh	329,355	423,158	93,803	28.5
Other religion	150,722	240,530	89,808	59.6
No religion	7,709,267	14,097,229	6,387,962	82.9
Not stated	4,010,658	4,038,032	27,374	0.7
Totals	**52,041,920**	**56,075,912**	**4,033,992**	**7.8**

[a] The Christian population declined overall by approx. 4 million. However, this masks significant areas of growth for Christians of particular ethnic heritages. For example, while the White Christian population fell from 35,967,798 to 30,819,184 (-14.3%), other ethnic groups among the Christian population grew substantially, including Caribbean Christians, who grew from 415,912 to 441,544 (6.2%) and African Christians, who grew from 330,369 to 691,482 (109.3%).

> " Planning policies and decisions should plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities … and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments "

Briefing in Brief

Understanding One Another

- Guidance for planners on how faith groups use space and guidance for faith groups on how to engage with the planning system.
- University planning schools to address how faith groups use space.
- Local planning authorities to engage with both interfaith organisations and specific religious traditions.
- Directory of faith groups and, where there is high demand, directory of D1 use class premises to be maintained.
- Sharing premises within and between religious traditions may sometimes be a suitable measure, but has significant practical and theological limitations.
- Faith groups to be active participants and to be actively encouraged to participate in the development of the local plan.

Faith Groups and Community

- Local planning authorities to recognise the different geographies of faith communities, whether local or dispersed; their benefit for an area; and their implications for strategic social infrastructure.

Equality and Diversity

- Local planning authorities to examine planning application data to assess whether rates of planning refusal are higher for some faith groups and to address any potential inequalities if there are discrepancies.

Sharing Creative Practice

- A dossier of creative practice case studies to be developed for distribution amongst local planning authorities, recognising the diversity within and between religious traditions.
- Need for sustaining creative practice over time given changing roles within local planning authorities.

The Planning Framework

- Local planning authorities to protect space for social infrastructure, including places of worship.
- Section 106 agreements and the community infrastructure levy are legitimate means for supporting places of worship provision.
- Proactive approach to social infrastructure provision in new developments.

Introduction

This briefing document outlines a series of recommendations, resulting from the discussions of the Faith and Place Network (FPN). The FPN, which met and deliberated over the period September 2014 to October 2015, was configured with the support of a network grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The network has a diverse membership including faith group representatives, local authority planners, representatives of the RTPI and other policy professionals, civil society organisations and academics.

The FPN was formed due to awareness of changing religious demographics and the challenges this presents both for faith communities in search of premises and for planners with responsibility for regulating the use and development of land. Faith communities often find it difficult to gain planning permission for suitable premises and this is particularly the case for migrant and post-migrant faith groups. The formation of the network was also prompted by a growing body of research and reports on these issues which have informed the network deliberations (see Indicative Sources).

Some faith groups have grown over the past decades and are often concentrated in urban areas (ONS 2012, Brierley 2014, see Table 1 and Figure 1). This puts pressure on the availability of suitable places of worship, sometimes causing tensions between faith groups, local planning authorities and local communities. According to the key section of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), in order to deliver 'the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs', local planning authorities should:

> …plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and **places of worship**) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments (our emphasis) (NPPF, 2012, §8.70).

Authorities should also guard against 'the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs' (§8.70). It is the sustainability of communities and their places of worship, however configured, that is the focus of the FPN and this briefing. The recommendations below are primarily aimed at local planning authorities and faith groups, although it is recognised that they will have implications for a number of other parties, including architects, media, local / national politicians and civil society organisations.

We have grouped the recommendations around five core themes, corresponding to the main lines of discussion at the network events. These include: 'understanding one another', 'faith groups and community', 'equality and diversity', 'sharing creative practice' and 'the planning framework'.

Policy Recommendations

Understanding One Another

The FPN has identified a need for greater understanding and dialogue between local planning authorities and faith groups. This understanding may be enhanced through the following specific recommendations:

1. Local planning authorities need to develop greater understanding of how faith groups use space, which includes recognition of the differences between and within faith groups themselves. To facilitate this, specific guidance on how faith groups use space needs to be made available, for example, through supplementary planning documents that reflect the contemporary religious landscape. Generating such guidance may benefit from collaboration with the relevant professional bodies and faith groups.

2. Given the continuing significance of religion within British society (68% identifying with a religion; ONS, 2012), university planning schools should consider including teaching on understanding how faith groups use space within accredited planning courses.

3. In order to communicate with a significant proportion of faith groups, we recommend that local planning authorities use multiple strategies for faith group engagement. Interfaith groups often provide a powerful platform from which to engage with diverse faith groups. There are, however, many faith groups that have little involvement in such forums, and as such, there also needs to be engagement with bodies representing specific religious traditions.

4. Where there is high demand for suitable places of worship, local planning authorities should consider maintaining a directory of available premises for rent or purchase by faith groups, within the appropriate use class. Similarly, local planning authorities should invest in keeping up to date directories of faith groups and their places of worship in their local areas, to enable communication and mutual dialogue with regards to planning procedures and requirements. Such directories will require appropriate resourcing.

5. Faith groups also need to have greater understanding of the planning system. This might be facilitated by guides produced by local planning authorities, in collaboration with faith groups and other civil society organisations. These guides should clarify the practicalities of the planning system and also outline how planning policies can be applied to accommodate the needs of faith groups. Such collaboration, as recommended by the RTPI over 30 years ago, should not be a one-way process (1983: 62-3).

6. Sharing premises within or between religious traditions may be a suitable measure if there is local pressure on space. This has been successful in some cases and such experiences of sharing may be of benefit to other faith communities through creative practice case studies. However, for many faith groups, sharing premises will be neither practical nor consistent with their theological beliefs. Sharing of space is often only a partial and/or temporary solution, which needs to be borne in mind when conducting needs assessment.

7. Faith groups need to be active participants in the development of the local plan. Local plans are a key element of the planning process, containing important policies on long-term local development and land use. Local planning authorities should actively encourage faith groups to become involved in the public consultation process at an early stage of local plan development.

Faith Groups and Community

The definition of community is one that needs clarity. Faith groups, particularly if recent migrants, often gather to worship from across a dispersed area which may extend beyond local authority boundaries. Dispersed communities can be of benefit to each other in matters of health, welfare, law and order and hence of benefit to the wider area and to public authorities. This is likely to be the case even if the benefit is spread across more than one local jurisdiction and is thus not immediately apparent at the local scale. Therefore:

8. We recommend that local planning authorities recognise the different geographies of faith communities, whether local or dispersed, and the value that both types of faith community can have for an area (e.g. Furbey et al, 2006; SKIN Rotterdam, 2009). This recognition requires joined-up thinking for local planning authorities, particularly in the case of London and emerging city regions, where strategic as well as local social infrastructure is called for.

Case Study 1 – Being Built Together
A story of new black majority churches in Southwark

The *Being Built Together* project had a strong focus on the engagement between new black majority churches (nBMCs) and the local planning authority in south London (Rogers, 2013). The following key points emerged:

- Most churches were African majority, Pentecostal and served dispersed communities across London.
- As of June 2013, there were an estimated 240+ nBMCs in the borough, with nearly half of these in one postcode.
- This is probably the highest concentration of African Christianity in the world outside of Africa. Other London boroughs also have high numbers of nBMCs and have seen rapid growth of nBMCs over recent decades.
- Available premises in the appropriate use class for places of worship were very scarce. Rates of planning permission refusal were a cause for concern.

Southwark council invested time and resources into addressing these critical 'faith and place' issues in the borough, through funding research, conducting public consultations and producing a guide for faith premises. The Being Built Together report made a number of recommendations to aid an ongoing improvement in council and faith group engagement, which should also have significance beyond the borough.

Case Study 2 – A Creative Case Study
A story of faith community and planning policy development

The Birmingham Central Mosque is the oldest purpose-built mosque in Birmingham, standing adjacent to a stretch of the inner ring road in Highgate, south of the city centre. Planned initially in 1956, the building was completed in 1975. In the meantime, much of the surrounding area, comprising terraces of back-to-back housing, had been redeveloped as part of post-war slum clearance. Its extensive and complex history of construction dramatizes changing urban planning priorities in Birmingham, a city which has in many respects come to stand as an exemplar of 'good planning practice' around the needs of the city's faith communities.

In the late 1980s, the mosque became a test case for broadcasting the call to prayer (*azan*) from the minaret. Initially prevented through planning conditions, the mosque opposed these restrictions to enable a trial period, at the end of which calls were allowed to be broadcast for the daytime and evening prayers. Early phases of construction were also subject to conditions to ensure the building blended in with the surrounding landscape of shops, high-rise flats block and low-density public housing. More recently, however, the building has been celebrated as iconic, landmark statement of Birmingham's urban diversity, coinciding with the development of more responsive planning policies on places of worship (Gale, 2004).

Equality and Diversity

The Equality Act 2010 imposes an 'Equality Duty' on public sector institutions and their employees to ensure equal treatment of people in society with 'protected characteristics', which include 'religion' and 'belief'. Specifically, this duty requires that policies and services provided by the public sector have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. This 'Equality Duty' applies to local planning authorities no less than other public sector institutions. The RTPI Code of Professional Conduct also promotes equality of opportunity for those in protected categories, including religion (2011: §1d, §3). Accordingly:

9. We recommend that as part of their obligation to undertake an equality impact assessment, local planning authorities examine planning application data to assess whether rates of planning refusal are higher for some faith groups, as well as for other groups with 'protected characteristics' as defined by the Equalities Act 2010. If there are discrepancies in the refusal rates, local planning authorities should take action to address any potential inequalities in the planning process.

Sharing Creative Practice

The FPN identified a need for greater communication and constructive dialogue within and between local planning authorities, in order to raise awareness of the needs of faith groups. Moreover, there is a tendency for some faith groups to be represented negatively in local and national debates, which is known to have impacts on public responses to planning applications from certain faith groups in particular. To counter this, the FPN noted a need for more positive representations of some faith groups, in terms of their contributions to local community development, welfare provision and social support. As such, we recommend that:

10. With the support and direction of planning and religious organisations, a dossier of creative practice case studies should be developed for wide distribution among local planning authorities. These case studies should set out detailed scenarios where planning policies have been applied both positively and flexibly to accommodate the needs of faith groups.

11. Creative case studies prepared as part of this dossier should reflect the diversity of faith groups, including the internal diversity of traditions within faiths. The aim of these case studies will be to encourage recognition of how people of different faiths make use of space, and could include examples of faith groups working together to share space. Case studies should aim to show case the ways in which faith groups contribute positively to and shape local and dispersed communities.

12. Creative practice in relation to faith groups needs sustaining over time given changing roles within a local planning authority. For example, this may take the form of internal guidance to ensure the transferability of accumulated expertise.

The Planning Framework

As well as addressing how planning in its current form might be applied more flexibly, the FPN noted a number of areas of planning law and policy that might be reviewed, with a view to easing the difficulties faced by faith groups when dealing with the planning system. Where not detrimental to the wider public interest, we recommend the following:

13. Given the scarcity of non-residential premises (i.e. D1 use class) in many of our towns and cities, local planning authorities should prioritise protecting space for social infrastructure, including places of worship. This should also be a consideration in any future review of use classes.

14. Local planning authorities should recognise the legitimacy of places of worship being included within section 106 agreements for new developments. The community infrastructure levy may also be used to support the provision of places of worship.

15. Local planning authorities should assess the social infrastructure needs arising from new developments, including provision for places of worship. Such an approach will further enable local planning authorities to move towards a proactive mode of needs provision. For example, this might be achieved through a minimum space allocation per population beyond a certain trigger point, as has been seen in creative practice case studies (e.g. Cambridgeshire Horizons, 2008), and as is the case in other types of land use.

> "
> I commend the work of the Faith and Place network to our faith communities and to local planning authorities and encourage them to engage seriously with the Network's recommendations.
>
> *– Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury (for full statement, see faithandplacenetwork.org)*
>
> This is a timely and impressive piece of work by the Faith and Place Network. It will remove some of the mutual suspicion that exists between planners and faith leaders, allowing them to better understand the constraints and opportunities inherent in the planning process.
>
> *– Dr R David Muir, Co-chair, National Church Leaders' Forum: A Black Christian Voice*
>
> The policy briefing is a must read for planners and faith groups. It provides clear and practical recommendations that will enable planners and faith communities to navigate more effectively around the planning process for faith buildings.
>
> *– Mustafa Field MBE, Director, Faiths Forum for London*
> "

Indicative Sources

Brierley, P., (2014), *UK Church Statistics No 2 2010–2020*, Tonbridge: ADBC.

CAG Consultants, Land Use Consultants, Diverse Ethics, (2008), 'Responding to the Needs of Faith Communities: Places of Worship (Final Report)', Available: http://static.london.gov.uk/mayor/planning/docs/places-of-worship.pdf [Accessed 23rd June 2015].

CAG Consultants, Land Use Consultants, Diverse Ethics, (2013), 'Northampton Faith Communities Profile and Places of Worship Audit & Needs Assessment', Available: https://www.northampton.gov.uk/info/200024/consultations/1765/current_consultations [Accessed 23rd June 2015].

Cambridgeshire Horizons, (2008), *Facilities for Faith Communities in New Developments in the Cambridge Sub-Region: Executive Summary*, Cambridge: Three Dragons.

Department of Communities and Local Government, (2012), 'National Planning Policy Framework', Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf [Accessed 23rd June 2015].

East of England Faiths Council CIC, (2012), 'Faith in New Developments: Partnerships, People and Places', Available: http://www.faithneteast.org.uk/pdf/Partnerships,%20People%20and%20Places%20Faith%20in%20New%20Developments.pdf [Accessed 22nd June 2015].

Furbey, R. et al., (2006), 'Faith as Social Capital: Connecting or Dividing?', *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, Available: http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/faith-social-capital [Accessed 28th June 2015].

Gale, R., (2004). 'The Multicultural City and the Politics of Religious Architecture: Urban Planning, Mosques and Meaning-Making in Birmingham, UK', *Built Environment* 30(1), pp. 30–44

Gale, R., (2008), 'Locating religion in urban planning: beyond 'race' and ethnicity?', *Planning, Practice and Research*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 19-39.

Peach, C. and R. Gale, (2003), 'Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in the new Religious Landscape of England', *The Geographical Review*, Vol. 95, No. 4, pp. 469–490.

Office for National Statistics, (2012), 'Religion in England and Wales 2011', Available: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-religion.html [Accessed 22nd June 2015].

Rogers, A., (2013), *Being Built Together: A Story of New Black Majority Churches in the London Borough of Southwark*, London: University of Roehampton.

RTPI / CRE, (1983), *Planning for a Multi-Racial Britain: Report of the Royal Town Planning Institute / CRE Working Party,* London: Commission for Racial Equality.

RTPI, (2011), 'The Royal Town Planning Institute Code of Professional Conduct', *RTPI*, Available: http://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/831098/code_of_professional_conduct_2012.pdf [Accessed 7th September 2015].

SKIN Rotterdam, (2009), 'Blessings under pressure: The work of migrant churches in the city of Rotterdam – "you are a gift to the city"', Available: http://www.skinrotterdam.nl/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Blessings-Under-Pressure.pdf [Accessed 22nd June 2015].

Thomas, H., (2000), *Race and Planning: The UK Experience*, London: UCL Press.