FACILITIES FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES IN NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CAMBRIDGE SUB-REGION

Cambridgeshire Horizons
driving forward sustainable communities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

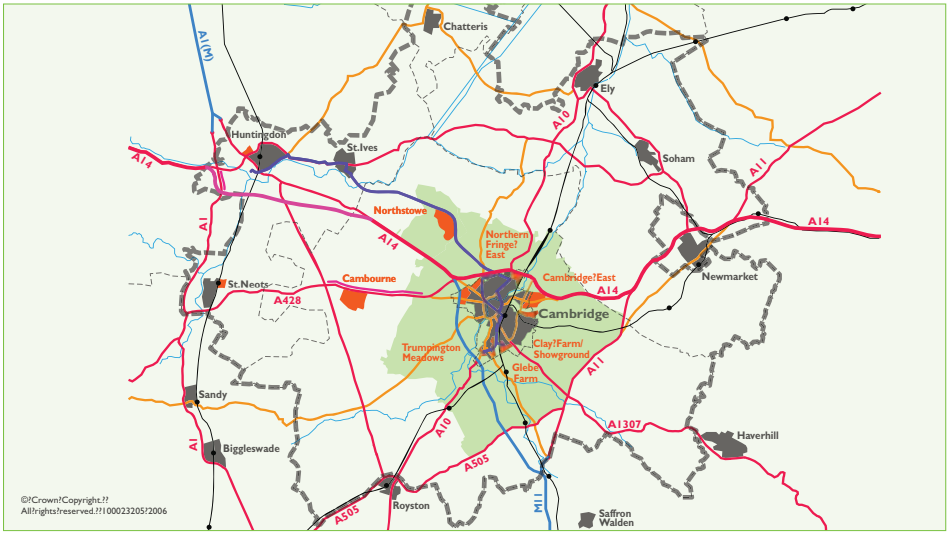
REPORT FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE HORIZONS
PREPARED BY THREE DRAGONS
NOVEMBER 2008

In 2007 Cambridgeshire Horizons commissioned a study to identify best practice in making provision for facilities for faith groups in the major new developments, as part of the wider community facility provision in the Cambridge Sub-region. The impetus for the study was the recognised role that faith groups can play in building cohesive new communities and the difficulties they may face in securing premises or other facilities.

BACKGROUND TO STUDY

The East of England has three of the country's four major growth areas at least partly within its boundaries, including the Cambridge Sub-region where there are well-established plans for significant new housing developments around Cambridge City and for a new town at Northstowe. It is well recognised that planning for growth is not simply about delivering new housing and jobs. Policy (at national and local level) is to deliver communities that meet the needs of a diverse population and support social cohesion.

Government policy has identified the significant contribution that faith groups can make to community development:



We aim to support strong and active communities in which people of all races and backgrounds are respected. We recognise faith communities as an important part of the local community and value the experience, skills and diversity they bring to wider society.

(CLG website)

The value of faith groups to the development of cohesive communities is further explored in the guide for local authorities, Community Cohesion – An Action Guide, produced by the Local Government Association (2004):

It is well recognised that planning for growth is not simply about delivering new housing and jobs

Faith communities are a key part of the voluntary and community sector and can be important contributors to community cohesion. This can be through participation in particular projects or through the wide range of services that they offer from their centres or places of worship not only to their own communities but in some cases also to others... Providing resources and support can increase their involvement.

This study offers planning guidance on making provision for faith facilities in new developments and creating a favourable environment for faith groups to contribute to building strong and cohesive new communities: its findings can be applied within the region and beyond.

STANDARDS FOR FAITH FACILITIES PROVISION

The report advocates standard provision of land, buildings or a combination thereof for faith groups in much the same way as there is provision for a range of other community facilities. As there are no current standards or generally accepted practice to guide such provision, the report proposes a set of standards based on recent local experience and a range of examples of planned provision from elsewhere.

This study recommends that facility provision for faith groups should be made in all developments of 2,000 or more dwellings. This is based on a standard land provision of 0.5 hectares of free land (or its equivalent) per 3,000 homes to be used by faiths for the most appropriate type of provision. This standard should be applied on a pro rata basis to larger sites, with land allocated in either a single location or spread across multiple locations. Developments of 2,000–2,999 units would also be expected to make provision of 0.5 hectares for faith use.

The rationale for the 0.5 hectare figure is based on experience at Cambourne and in Milton Keynes, which suggests that a site of less than 0.5 hectares is too small to provide adequate space to serve a growing congregation and support a range of community facilities. This figure will need to be tested and may vary depending on density and built form within the development.

Depending on local needs and context, actual developer contribution could take the form of:

- All land (requiring the faith group to fund its own premises)
- Smaller amount of land plus a building (new or existing)
- A financial contribution based on the value of land required to use to refurbish an existing building that would meet the faith needs of local people

This set of standards should be adopted as planning policy.

The practice of providing interim premises for a faith group early in the life of a development, before purpose built facilities are available, is proven to be of considerable benefit in helping the new community to become established. In two cases examined in this study, the developer provided a house at a discounted price to be occupied by a minister who both lived and worked on site. This practice should also be adopted across the major new developments in the Cambridge Sub-region.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Free or discounted land or buildings would be available to faith groups on the basis that they provide a wide range of community activities in perpetuity (as well as enjoying a private area for worship). In order to secure free land or buildings, faith groups would need to demonstrate that:

1. The building would accommodate, and staff would be available to support, the provision of a range of community activities that are open to all (including making premises available to other community and faith groups).
2. They had the resources and practical skills to bring forward the new facility within a reasonable time.
3. The organisation that would own and manage the building had charitable status.

SELECTION PROCESS

Where more than one faith group wishes to access land (or buildings) for faith and community use, there would need to be a process in place to find a resolution best suited to the needs of the faith groups and the community. There are various options as to who could propose such a resolution. The report proposes that in the first instance a negotiated solution should be sought, and that the East of England Faiths Council could be supported to play a role in helping to facilitate negotiation and dialogue between faith groups, bringing a suggestion forward to the landowners and/or local authority. A sub-regional Community Forum, local Development Trust or parish council could also play a role in allocating or overseeing provision. The report makes no specific recommendation on the best approach, as this is a matter best resolved at the local level.

ACCESS TO LARGER SITES

It is anticipated that there will be potential demand from some faith groups with capital who require larger premises, so the report also reviews mechanisms that give access to larger sites. One option would be to zone further sites in residential areas specifically for faith groups and other community uses (D1 in the Use Classes Order which covers places of worship, church halls, clinics, health centres, crèches, day nurseries, consulting rooms, museums, public halls, libraries, art galleries, exhibition halls, law courts and non-residential education and training centres). The very restricted nature of this usage would have a significant impact on land value.

Another option would be to allow large faith groups to bid for sites in employment areas. As the value of employment land in the Cambridge Sub-region is much lower than for residential land (around £800,000 compared with £8m per hectare), this would enable faith groups with capital to access large sites at an affordable price, without requiring subsidy from the landowner.

There would need to be a process in place to find a resolution best suited to the needs of the faith groups and the community

THE NEED FOR PROVISION FOR MINORITY FAITHS

There is also an urgent need for provision of facilities for minority faith groups who currently meet in the City of Cambridge. That need should be met within or very close to the City of Cambridge.

Research carried out by Cambridge City Council (2004) into the needs of minority faiths found that there were 10 minority faith groups who either did not have premises of their own or were operating out of premises that were too small or in poor repair. Difficulties in obtaining premises restrict the activities that faith groups can undertake and their ability to engage with the wider community.

The high price of residential land in Cambridge and planning policies seeking as much housing development as possible within the City, make it very difficult for minority faiths to compete in the open land/property market. The City Council and the faith groups have sought to work together to find solutions to this problem. The change of use of an industrial unit off King's Hedges Road to a small mosque is an example of a mechanism by which faith groups can be assisted to secure premises within the City.

However there are limited opportunities for such changes of use and it will be necessary to consider a range of additional potential options for meeting the needs and aspirations of faith groups within the City of Cambridge. Potential opportunities include:

- The release of vacant school sites (currently zoned for D1 use). Faith groups have expressed an interest in such buildings in the past, but have been unsuccessful in their bids. This will require dialogue between the City Council, the County Council and faith groups in order to establish a common understanding that appropriate policies on planning and land disposal are in place.
- Working with Cambridge University and Anglia Ruskin University. Significant numbers of students belong to minority faiths and the diversity of faith communities within the Universities adds to the richness of the University experience. The Universities are major landowners and developers. Within major developments they could seek to provide faith facilities that would both meet the needs of their own students and enhance cultural diversity across the City of Cambridge.

Research found that there were 10 minority faith groups who either did not have premises of their own or were operating out of premises that were too small or in poor repair.

The proposed new developments in the Cambridge Sub-region are neither sufficiently timely nor sufficiently centrally located to provide a convenient locus for development to meet the immediate needs of minority faiths. This does not mean that no minority faith should ever be located in the new developments. It does mean that the new developments do not offer a solution to the problems that are currently being faced by the minority faiths in the Cambridge Sub-region.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

It is hoped that the lessons from this research will be valuable to other growth areas in the UK which face similar issues concerning the role of faith groups within new communities and the development of best practice in supporting faith groups in developing and enriching new communities.

1. The standard of 0.5 hectares of free land (or its equivalent in buildings and/or financial contribution) from developers for each 3,000 dwellings (with a trigger point at 2,000 dwellings) within new communities should be adopted as planning policy (or another similar standard which is put forward after further analysis and consultation with the faith communities and developers/landowners).

2. Adequate D1 land should be zoned within the new developments to enable faith and other community groups to have access to land at an affordable price.

3. Planning policy should be introduced which allows for the use of employment land for faith communities.

4. Local authorities should work together with landowners/developers and faith groups to develop a protocol for making available free land (or its equivalent) within the new growth areas and should develop an appropriate mechanism for assessing requirements and allocations when more than one faith (or group of faiths) wishes to benefit from the free land option.

5. Each local authority should identify an officer with planning /development skills to work with local faith groups to identify opportunities where groups could be accommodated.

6. The local authorities should collect data on attendance at faith groups and access to premises within the Cambridge Sub-region, (using either nationally published sources or primary data collection sources such as the recent Cambourne Household Survey or an email survey) and keep it under regular review. This survey could form part of the evidence base to justify the 0.5 hectare standard.

7. The local authorities need to develop greater knowledge of potential sources of land/buildings in Cambridge and the sub-region (to include schools, employment sites and redundant or under-used churches).

8. Cambridge City Council should either put in place a robust and supportive plan policy or demonstrate how its existing policies can help faith groups to access land in the city.

9. Faith groups should be flexible in their approach to a search for premises and commit resources to obtaining appropriate specialist advice.

10. The Christian churches should give consideration to releasing City Centre sites to the minority faiths and to making use of the money raised to fund provision of faith facilities in the new communities.

11. Landowners should identify how early provision for faith groups can be made in the new communities. One possible mechanism would be to ear-mark premises (e.g. one or two new homes) which are available very soon after construction begins.

12. The East of England Faiths Council (EEFC) should be enabled to set up a multi-faith committee at regional or local level to continue dialogue with the local authorities and developers to help facilitate agreement, guide negotiation and comment on emerging priorities and mechanisms for the provision of facilities for faith groups.

13. The EEFC should promote opportunities for faith groups to explore joint approaches to the creation or procurement of facilities for worship and community activities.

14. Cambridgeshire Horizons should keep the issue of provision for faith groups under review and work with the local authorities to ensure that it is fully taken into account in master planning and the development of S106 Agreements.

Printed on 100% recycled paper.

This report has been prepared by Three Dragons for Cambridgeshire Horizons, Cambridge City Council, Inspire East and Communities and Local Government. Cambridgeshire Horizons is a not-for-profit company established by the Cambridgeshire Local Authorities to drive forward the delivery of the growth strategy for Cambridgeshire. A Steering Group drawn from the aforementioned sponsoring bodies and representatives from Cambridgeshire County Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, the East of England Faiths Council and English Partnerships oversaw the study.