



Faith in New Developments: Partnerships, People and Places

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1. Introduction

Despite the current major economic downturn there are still significant plans for growth in the East of England and several major developments are being delivered or close to receiving planning permission. Our region will play a key role in the economic revival. Although this is good news it also presents some real challenges. How do we ensure that new developments are sustainable, conducive to the wellbeing of all their residents, and contribute effectively to wider society? It is in all our interests that we achieve this, and faith groups have an important part to play in building cohesion and wellbeing.

This brief guide is intended for people of faith and inter faith groups; for elected members (Councillors); for officers and planners from Local Authorities; and for commercial developers. We have deliberately produced one publication for all these stakeholders, so that each can see where the others may fit in as partners in the overall enterprise.

The case studies in this guide, together with the publications referenced, illustrate both the critical role of community spaces in new developments and the vital part that faith groups can play in creating social cohesion and sense of place in areas of new housing.

2. The planning process

An application to build a new development has to go through a process of consultation, submissions and approvals. At various stages there are opportunities for community intervention. This process is shown as a flow chart at Appendix A.

3. What are we aiming for?

Faith Needs

Faith groups need space for meetings, prayer and worship and this can be very difficult to deliver within shared community buildings. There must be flexibility of building design to either adapt or grow as the community grows, and reserved land for places of worship to be built when there is a critical mass of adherents. In 2008 Cambridgeshire Horizons, a public sector planning facilitator, commissioned a study about the impact and needs of faith communities.

This report, *Facilities for faith communities in new developments in the Cambridge Sub Region*, established 14 key recommendations, including:

- Set aside of 0.5 hectares of free land per 3,000 dwellings with a trigger point of 2,000 dwellings
- D1 land (i.e. land that can be used for community purposes) to be set aside to enable faith groups to access land at an affordable price
- Earmarking new homes for embedded faith workers
- Co-operation between Local Authorities to enable protocols for their new growth areas, and officers identified to work with faith groups
- More flexibility on the part of faith groups in their assessment of 'suitable' premises
- The strengthening and enabling of inter faith groups to act as a reference point/negotiator and promote dialogue.

The study was endorsed by the planning authorities and noted as best practice by central government.

Faith contribution

Additionally the study identified a number of ways in which faith contributes critically to the success of a new development. However, faith communities need to be given the opportunity for full involvement from the very start of the planning process through the long term life of the new settlement.

A key opportunity for **inter faith reference groups** to exert influence is to identify the need for community space when the Local Development Plan is drawn up as this will make it considerably easier to achieve such space when specific planning proposals are put forward.

Key issues/ questions for an Inter Faith Group when considering community space:

- Specification – how is the space to be used? What are the specific requirements?
- Design - faith and other stakeholders should be given the opportunity to help inform the design brief, work with designers and appoint architects.
- Advocates for green living – the concept of stewardship translates into sustainable housing and supply of utilities. Community spaces can play an exemplar role.
- Governance/Management - establishing mechanisms for community groups, including faith groups, to be included in the process, in order to engender a sense of ownership in what is being planned, and ensure its longevity.

What is agreed needs to be secured in the **Section 106** agreement.

CASE STUDY: Cambourne, Cambridgeshire **'It's not just about buildings'**

Buildings enable human interaction, connectivity and belonging, but human resources to facilitate that community life are just as important. Cambourne is now 11 years old and still growing, and shows the critical importance of embedding community workers from the earliest stages. Revd. Peter Wood has been the Christian minister there for 10 years, and plays a crucial role: he speaks of the community's journey from 'longing to belonging'.

Although a one acre plot was set aside for a church building the S106 planning obligations did not provide any funds for it, so in the early days a converted portakabin, The Ark, served as a key component of community infrastructure. By 2009 Cambourne Church had raised sufficient funds to build a multi-denominational church, and an extension to that building is being planned.

The needs of community have changed considerably since the initial vision of three interlocking villages. The demography is more complex and diverse than had been anticipated - for example there is now a significant Muslim community, which is at the point of needing its own facility, and 22 languages are spoken in the faith primary school. There are over 300 community groups in Cambourne competing for only six possible meeting spaces, including the church.

4. Working together

Faith and Understanding the Local Context

Faith communities can enable human flourishing and encourage social cohesion. They inhabit and understand the local context and are part of the wider community: this is invaluable for a developer, especially in today's climate of localism and the new planning guidelines. These require evidence of community engagement during planning and permit communities to object to proposals collectively. Faith, and other community groups, should be involved at the earliest stages of a new development.

Although much social delivery is undertaken by single-faith groups, an **inter faith reference group** is invaluable during the planning process, allowing developers and planners to have a point of contact and information, and providing an arena for faiths to consider their individual and collective needs and contributions. Some places may already have an inter faith group nearby which can be the basis for such a reference group; in other cases, one may not exist. Appointing an external 'faith consultant' may be complementary, but is not an alternative that will provide the necessary information and long-term partnership.

The critical point, however, is that planners and developers must understand that such a group cannot be an effective partner unless it is properly resourced and supported, and an inter faith group or faith reference group may need support whilst retaining its independence. It is important to recognise that the consequences of true engagement may well mean relinquishing some control.

Huntingdonshire is a good example, where the District Council provides a venue and some administrative support for an independent Inter Faith Council, one of whose objectives is to engage with the major development at the Alconbury Business Enterprise Zone.

The complex role of the Local Authority

Local Authorities have a statutory role as managers and guardians of the planning process. They have responsibility for the Local Development Plan, which lays down standards and principles against which all applications are measured. It may, however, be helpful to approach the planning process more as framework than as straitjacket. In addition there are two other roles that a Local Authority may play:

- Facilitating engagement and inclusion of the existing community within the planning process and helping to meet the needs of the emerging community.
- Governance and management of public facilities once they are built.

Issues for developers

Communicating and working with faith groups is about understanding the basics of community - belonging, nurturing, leading, providing, celebrating, and mourning.

Community engagement requires transparency and clear information flow. Creating trust between developers and communities may take considerable effort and resources but ultimately delivers far better outcomes.

Some risks may have to be taken, and there must be a willingness to manage risk, particularly in the early phases of a development where commercial viability may not yet have been achieved.

Making every effort to involve faith groups early will enhance the sustainability of the development - and so retain the value of the asset.

CASE STUDY: North West Cambridge

The University of Cambridge is both landowner and developer, and two Local Authorities have planning jurisdiction over the site, which will provide housing and other facilities for both the private sector and for the University's future academic and research needs. A Faith Reference Group (FRG) was formed by several different faith traditions at an early stage in the stakeholder consultation process to ensure that the pastoral and spiritual needs of residents and workers would be taken into account. The FRG's 'Pastoral Plan' therefore covers both faith and wider community needs, and makes suggestions relating to the provision of 'faith worker' housing on the site; scopes the appropriate size and design of a community building; and encourages a vision for a multi faith centre. To date only the 'faith worker' housing has been fully accepted.

The University and Cambridge City Council have recently signed a Joint Venture Agreement to manage community facilities and the site has received Outline Planning consent. The FRG will continue to engage with this process and will also contribute whatever added value it can to the wider issues.

Negotiation between partners

Each partner needs to be clear about their own goals but also responsive to what the others are proposing. Compromise is involved but so is consensus: it is therefore important to recognise what is critical and non negotiable, and what is desirable but less vital.

Starting points for negotiation are:

- Auditing the current faith and wider community provision
- Considering how the community and its facilities will be affected by a development and what additional pressure will be placed on existing assets, such as meeting and worship spaces
- Identifying what is needed to mitigate the impact of the development and what is required for the new community, including its changing needs as it is built out
- Recognising the importance of building-in flexibility to meet future needs

Understanding sensitivities of language and developing a shared vocabulary that simplifies without reducing will make dialogue easier.

CASE STUDY: Wixams, Bedfordshire

Local churches became involved in this four-village development at an early stage and although the economic slowdown caused a hiatus building began in 2008. There is now an ecumenical minister in post who is also on the Board of the Management Company for the first Village Hall to be built. Bedford Council of Faiths was part of this process, and negotiated with the developers and LA about a multi faith worship space, which was eventually included in the S106. A permanent location for this is being identified as part of the town centre development plan and faith groups will be able to acquire a lease for this space to build a multi faith centre. Until permanent facilities are completed a small temporary multi faith meeting place will be provided. . and subsequent provision of worship space on a commercial basis may be considered.

5. The way forward

These guidelines cannot answer specific challenges, but give background that may be helpful in meeting them.

The case studies illustrate some of the key features that face new developments and each contains examples of good practice. They are not exemplars, but highlight the variety of challenges and approaches taken and also show the significant role that faith communities can play in the success of new communities.

Given that sustainability of growth is vital for economic recovery it is equally critical for developers, planners and faith groups to build on the foundations of good practice and to learn from others' experience.

Resources

The handy guide to planning 2012, revised edition, Urban Planning and Forum Aid, available from www.urbanforum.org.uk

A guide for faith groups to meet their needs for spaces and places in the East of England and Cambridgeshire Horizons Study Facilities for faith communities in new developments in the Cambridge Sub Region

Both available from the East of England Faiths Council, www.faithneteast.org.uk/publ.htm

Multi Faith Spaces - Symptoms and Agents of Social and Cultural Change – for papers from this 2012 Manchester University conference: www.multi-faith-spaces.org

Some commonly used planning terms

Section 106 An agreement between the developer and Local Authority that secures infrastructure and services to meet the needs of the development and/or to mitigate its impact on existing communities and environments. The agreement forms part of the planning permission. The term comes from the clause in the 1990 Town & Country Planning Act.

D1 Zone All land is divided into zones of different use in the planning process. D1 land is non residential – e.g. places of worship, church halls, clinics, health centres, crèches, day nurseries, day centres, schools, galleries, museums, libraries, halls, non residential education and training centres.

Planning gain The increase in the value of the land as a result of the development. A proportion of this can be applied as a levy to address the needs of the development and will form the Section 106 agreement. An alternative system of a Community Infrastructure Levy is also now in operation which raises a charge from major developments, but is used for strategic infrastructure projects, rather than solely addressing the local impact of a development.

Outline planning permission The initial consent granted by the planning authority for a specific site. The detail of the proposal is not necessary at this stage but the perimeters or 'footprint' will be set. The planning permission is also subject to reserved matters which will have to be addressed before building work can start. The reserved matters may include landscape, design and site access and will often address objections to the planning application. For major projects, further applications will be submitted for each detailed phase of the development.

APPENDIX A

Flow diagram of an overview of the planning process, highlighting opportunities for **inter faith groups** and other stakeholder engagement.

Planning Application Process for a major/strategic project

