

the **Birmingham** plan  
birmingham's local development framework



Places of Worship and  
Faith-Related Community and  
Educational Uses

Supplementary Planning Document

may2011



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Development Directorate

# Foreword

Birmingham's population is not only growing but becoming increasingly diverse, with a broader range of faiths and increased demand for religious institutions. This has led to more planning applications for new places of worship - a trend that is expected to continue. It is against this background that the **Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Places of Worship and Faith Related Community and Educational Uses** has been developed.

The document provides clearer and proactive guidance to communities seeking to establish a place of worship and looking to submit applications for planning permission. Its main aim is to ensure a consistent approach to planning applications, not only for places of worship, but also for faith-related community and educational use.

We are confident that this new SPD addresses all relevant issues, enabling both the applicant and the City Council to better assess the needs, impact and likely success of any proposal.

Faith groups make a significant positive contribution to society. Many places of worship cater for activities such as employment training, education, and marriage counselling. Birmingham's Sustainable Community Strategy recognises the importance of faith to community cohesion, which is why we recommend the SPD unreservedly, confident that it will be of considerable benefit to a wide range of residents.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Rudge".

**Councillor Alan Rudge**

Cabinet Member for Equalities  
and Human Resources

Lead Member for Community Cohesion



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy Huxtable".

**Councillor Timothy Huxtable**

Cabinet Member for Transport, Environment  
and Regeneration

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# 1 Purpose of the document

**1.1** Birmingham City Council wishes to ensure that the needs of faith communities in Birmingham are adequately met, and that planning policies reflect the changing needs and demands of the City's growing population. This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) aims to give clear guidance for submitting applications for planning permission. The SPD aims to ensure consistency in the approach to determining planning applications not only for places of worship but also faith-related community and educational uses.

**1.2** A place of worship is defined as an establishment, or a location, where a group of people gather to perform acts of religious praise, honour, or devotion. In addition to traditional places of worship, this term can also include facilities that provide religious or faith-related training, accommodation, social welfare, as well as community and educational facilities.

**1.3** In terms of community and educational uses this policy will apply only to faith-related community and educational uses where the proposals are linked to the use/function of an existing or proposed place of worship. Therefore proposals for general education, day nurseries or community provision will not be assessed against the criteria set out in this document, but by other policies within the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) or the emerging Core Strategy.

**1.4** Following formal public consultation this Supplementary Planning Document was adopted by Birmingham City Council in May 2011 under the provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

## 2 Background to Places of Worship Policy in Birmingham

**2.1** Existing planning guidelines on places of worship were adopted in the Unitary Development Plan (2005) but it has become clear from experience of their implementation that these guidelines need to be revised and made more effective. The existing policy is of less relevance in the light of the changing demographics of Birmingham, resulting in a greater number of refusals of planning permissions, more unauthorised uses of premises, inappropriate sites for places of worship, and increased enforcement.

**2.2** The changing demographics, and a growing population, are also resulting in an increase in the number of planning applications submitted for new places of worship. It is likely that this trend will continue. Insufficient provision is leading to communities purchasing inappropriate sites or premises, and using them without permission out of necessity and convenience. Alternatively, they have to wait for considerable periods to source appropriate land and premises, usually at significant financial costs to them.

**2.3** These new guidelines seek to address the above issues. They provide greater clarity and set out criteria to allow both the applicant and the City Council to better assess the needs and impact of such uses, and gauge the likely success of any proposal.





## 3 The new context

**3.1** Following decades of decline in population, Birmingham is growing again, with up to 100,000 more people expected to live in the City by 2026. Birmingham's population is also becoming increasingly diverse with a broader range of faiths to accommodate and the increased demand for religious institutions to meet their needs.

**3.2** Birmingham (with Solihull) has been designated as one of 29 growth points in England, which will enable significant housing expansion and renewal.

**3.3** The City Council is developing an integrated growth plan, which will create sustainable communities where people want to live, work, visit and invest. This will involve supporting economic development with new opportunities for growth and jobs, significantly increasing the supply of quality housing choice; improving infrastructure including transport, utilities, local services and amenities such as schools, health, social services, improving the sustainability of both existing and new buildings, and the leisure and culture offer. New developments will be on the principles of 'sustainable urban neighbourhoods'.

## 4 Catering for community needs and social inclusion

**4.1** Faith groups are a significant contributor to society, and it should be recognised that many of the current faith based facilities go beyond just being a place of worship. In fact, the place of worship acts as a support for its users and the wider community by catering for additional activities such as employment training, education and marriage counselling, as well as other initiatives that are of direct benefit to the community at large.

**4.2** Within the context of growth and increasing diversity, the Be Birmingham Sustainable Community Strategy places a particular emphasis on community cohesion and faith in 'Making a Contribution', (Outcome 5). One of the priorities for action is:

"Increasing the scope of voluntary, community and faith sectors' activities - taking stock of current contributions of faith groups and identifying how to enhance their positive contributions."



## 5 The planning policy

### 5.1 Existing Policy

**5.1.1** This SPD has been prepared in the context of the adopted Birmingham Unitary Development Plan, and in accordance with Government guidance, largely from Planning Policy Statement 4. The document expands specifically upon policy paragraphs 8.31-8.35 of the UDP - see Appendix 1.

**5.1.2** They specifically relate to both purpose-built places of worship, and the conversion of existing buildings. Criteria are given to assess such proposals. Paragraph 8.35 deals with social, cultural and educational facilities that are linked to places of worship.

### 5.2 Location of Places of Worship

**5.2.1** The importance of finding the right location for any uses which attract large numbers of users is set out in Government Planning Policy Statements. These refer to the Government's commitment to reduce the need for travel and to achieve more sustainable patterns of development, so reducing reliance on the car. PPS4 outlines methods for identifying suitable sites for 'town centre' uses, which generate significant levels of activity. Places of worship are not specifically mentioned, but the same principles apply to them. It states that:

"Identify the appropriate scale of development, ensuring that the scale of the sites identified and the level of travel they generate, are in keeping with the role and function of the centre within the hierarchy of centres and the catchments served;" Paragraph EC 5.1(b), PPS 4.

**5.2.2** If suitable sites cannot be found within designated centres then a site within easy walking distance of a centre, and on the fringe of residential areas, should be identified. A transport statement to outline the number of worshippers, with details of maximum occupancy and frequency of prayer time and how, in general, worshippers arrive at and depart from the premises, should be submitted with the application along with an indication

of how this will be managed. This is so that a proper assessment of proposals and the impact on parking, the free flow of traffic, and noise disturbance to any nearby residential property can be made. For instance, do people tend to travel by car alone, or share the car, arrive on foot, by taxi, or is there a mini-bus service to minimise the amount of traffic generated around the premises at the busiest times of worship.

**5.2.3** As a general rule, because of the likelihood of adverse impact from noise disturbance and traffic problems, predominantly residential areas are not suitable for places of worship if they attract large numbers of people.

**5.2.4** In order to decide on the best location for the place of worship, the City Council will require details of the total floor space that would be used for worship and the likely numbers of users. This will determine the likely impacts in terms of trip generation, parking demand and noise.

**5.2.5** Premises should be found that can adequately serve the need. To fully assess the impacts and realistic numbers of worshippers (and resultant car parking needs/noise impacts), a calculation of the total useable floor area should be undertaken. Generally, the following criteria would be applied to either 'local' or 'wider' need:

#### District/neighbourhood need (local)

- The preferable location for places of worship serving a purely local need should be within a parade of commercial premises, easily accessible to the community. If suitable sites cannot be found within a parade of commercial premises then a site within easy walking distance of a parade of commercial premises, and/or on the fringe of residential areas should be identified, as long as this is in keeping with the local character of the area. It is likely that conditions would be attached to restrict the numbers of worshippers and that any parking available within the site would be controlled by marshals.

- Conditions might also be attached to prevent the place of worship being used for large scale festivals, weddings and ceremonies. Further conditions might be included to restrict the scale of the event and the number of attendees that could be permitted.
- It is preferable when considering a teaching (or similar) use, applicants should first make enquiries with local schools, local children's/ community centres to ascertain whether rooms would be available for such purposes after school. Premises within a centre/small parades are preferred for this use, although, depending on the numbers of children attending/hours of use, the use of corner residential properties may be acceptable.
- Due to the location within centres (which generally have some level of shared parking facilities) it may be possible to apply parking standards more flexibly. A travel plan would have to demonstrate that the proposal would cater for alternative travel to the premises i.e. walking, bus/rail, etc.
- Due to the local nature, users should be encouraged to walk to the place of worship.
- Applicants will be required to limit the sound impact of the place of worship.
- Any proposed external alterations will need to be sensitive to the character of the area or building.

#### Constituency need (wider)

- Proposals serving a larger population/wider need should be located within larger shopping centres with easy access to public transport. (A comprehensive list of all centres can be viewed in Birmingham's Local Centre Strategy 2006).
- Additional ancillary uses such as weddings, funerals and other festivals may be acceptable, depending on the proximity to residential or other sensitive uses, and highway/parking impacts.

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- Car parking provision should be provided as set out in paragraph 5.6.2.
- The need for additional car parking will be determined on a site-by-site basis.

If the scale of the proposals would provide facilities attracting people from the whole City - then the following criteria will be applied:

#### City-wide need

- The place of worship is likely to include a variety of other community uses and should be sited on a main arterial route near other city-wide and town centre activities.
- The site must be accessible by public transport.
- Car parking provision should be provided based on the guidelines set out in paragraph 5.6.2.
- Existing and emerging Area Action Plans and Frameworks identify various parts of the City for community uses, including places of worship, and will be used to identify appropriate locations.
- Low quality industrial sites may be considered if this does not impact on the City's supply of industrial land/employment sites. Core employment land will be protected - see Appendix 2.

#### 5.3 Changes of use within the same Use Class

**5.3.1** Groups with large congregations may find buildings in other uses suitable for conversion. Places of worship fall within Class D1 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes Order) 1987. This Use Class also includes health centres, bingo halls, museums, public halls, libraries, art galleries, exhibition halls, non-residential schools and training centres.

**5.3.2** A conversion from any of the other uses in D1 to a place of worship may be a 'permitted development' (i.e. not requiring planning permission) providing a condition has not been attached to the existing use restricting the planning consent to one specific use. Planning permission would however be required to extend such premises. Advice should be sought from the City Council prior to commencement of work or committing to the purchase of the building where external alterations are proposed.

## 5.4 Change of use from a different Use Class

**5.4.1** Planning permission is required to change the use of existing premises, which fall outside Class D1 to a building for worship or religious instruction. Not all such changes are acceptable because there are other important activities which the Council want to see protected. For example:

- Employment uses: Industrial/employment land is generally protected by Birmingham’s UDP as outlined in paragraphs 4.18-4.32. Paragraph 4.31 states that the loss of industrial land to retail or other non-industrial uses will be resisted except in cases where the site is a non-conforming use. This is to maintain the supply of industrial land. This policy is expanded upon within the adopted SPD ‘Proposals involving the loss of industrial land to alternative uses’ which must be applied when making an application for such land. Permission would not be granted for a place of worship on employment land that is protected.
- Shopping frontages: Some shopping centres are protected by primary retail policies that resist change of these premises to any other use. This is to ensure the long-term viability and vitality of established centres. Some smaller religious groups may look at the possibility of converting shop premises for their meeting rooms. Such changes of use may be acceptable depending on whether retail policies are in place or not. Paragraph’s 7.23A-7.26 of the UDP elaborate on this further. General vacancy levels and mix of uses within the centre would be a consideration in assessing any proposal to change premises to a place of worship to ensure that the primary retail function of centres is maintained.
- Public Open Space: Public open space is protected by Birmingham’s UDP as outlined in paragraphs 3.47-3.54. Paragraph 3.50 states that; “Proposals for development which would have an adverse effect on this open space will not be allowed”.

**5.4.2** Alterations to buildings that are considered to be Historic Assets (locally listed, statutorily listed, in conservation areas etc), require additional special attention. Please refer to paragraphs 3.25-3.27 of the UDP and to

PPS5. Applicants should also be aware of the additional responsibilities and costs that are associated with the maintenance of historic and listed buildings.

**5.4.3** It is always advisable to check with the City Council before making any financial or other commitments.

## 5.5 Designing and Building a new Place of Worship

**5.5.1** One of the key aims of the planning strategy in Birmingham is to protect and enhance what is good in the City’s environment, and to improve what is less good. The keynote is quality. Proposals which would have an adverse effect on the quality of the built environment will not normally be allowed.

Good Design and Urban Design Principles are laid out within paragraphs 3.14-3.14G of Birmingham’s UDP. Further advice on good design is given within the adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance; ‘Places for All.’



A design and access statement will therefore need to be submitted with the application to explain how the design approach was chosen, and how the proposals respect, or respond to, the local context and its character.

Proposals for sites affecting heritage assets (archeological remains, historic buildings, conservation areas) should comply with the aim of conserving the City's heritage assets, in accordance with advice within the UDP paragraphs 3.20-3.33 and PPS5 'Planning for the historic environment.'

**5.5.2** The City Council encourages shared use with other religions or denominations occupying an existing place of worship which might be underused. It may be more cost-effective for both groups, and result in new investment in an existing place of worship that might otherwise be in decline. In addition, it may be worth considering the building for multi-use, and as a base for community activities, which would assist in integrating the place of worship into the community.



## Design

**5.5.3** Government advice within PPS1 advises that good design is indivisible from good planning. Buildings to be used as places of worship must therefore be fit for purpose, and sustainable in use of materials and energy efficiency. They should be built to last, contribute to a high quality environment, be attractive to visitors and create a sense of civic pride. Places of worship, and faith-related community and educational uses can act as a focus for the local community and have an important role to play in facilitating community participation and cohesion. Revised sustainable development policies within the emerging Core Strategy and the SPD on 'Places for the future' will place increased emphasis on the sustainability of the buildings and locations. Opportunity to generate renewable energy and encourage efficient waste management is desirable

**5.5.4** New buildings can breathe new life into an area. Sometimes it may be desirable to create a building which provides a local landmark. More often however, it is necessary to provide a building which sits harmoniously within its surroundings. Whatever the proposal, the aim should be to provide a good quality inclusive building. In addition, other important issues which should be integral to a development include lighting and landscaping.

**5.5.5** Extensions and alterations to existing buildings should respect the local character of the building and its surroundings. This does not preclude the erection of minarets, domes or other additions, but such alterations should be carefully considered.

**5.5.6** It is advisable to ensure advice is sought from the following bodies in support of your application:

- Building Regulations.
- Regulatory Services (Incorporating legal, licensing, environmental health, trading standards and registry service).
- Fire Service.

## 5.6 Other Considerations

**5.6.1 Noise:** Many denominations use music or singing in their worship; halls associated with places of worship may also be used for celebrations such as weddings and religious festivals. These activities may generate levels of noise which can be a nuisance to adjoining occupants. Proposals for places of worship located close to housing, hospitals and schools, which are generally regarded as sensitive to noise, will need to be designed to overcome such problems. Sound generally escapes through windows, doors and other openings, but, in most cases, arrangements can be made to mitigate the effects by attention to the internal layout of the building, window details and insulation. Within residential areas, the problems associated with noise have not generally resulted from use within the premises but from people arriving at/departing from the premises and congregating outside. A statement or survey providing details on the maximum possible occupancy of the premises, frequency of prayer time and other activities proposed is therefore vital.

**5.6.2 Parking:** Paragraphs 6.49A-6.51B and 8.32 of the UDP contain guidelines relating to car parking. The Council is currently producing new guidelines relating to car parking in the City and in relation to places of worship stipulates:

“1 space per 10sq.m for those meeting local needs; 1 space per 4.5sq.m for those providing for a wider need with additional considerations including provision for Ring and Ride and Special Needs Public Service Vehicles...and 1 space per 8 children for teaching and training.”

In addition, the number of car parking spaces will reflect the location of the place of worship. There is likely to be less need for parking provision for places of worship within local centres as worshippers should be encouraged to walk or use public transport. To encourage alternative modes of travel, premises should provide secure cycle/motorcycle storage. Those based in district (neighbourhood) centres will require more parking spaces, but should also encourage public transport use. Those located outside centres will require more parking spaces in order to accommodate need. Where the building has additional uses including community and educational uses, additional

parking may be necessary. Further guidance is offered within PPS 4 and the City Council's existing policy.

**5.6.3 Access:** the City Council is committed to providing an accessible environment. In the case of new buildings, there will be very few instances where it is neither practical nor reasonable to design to at least minimum accessibility standards. In relation to existing buildings, where an application proposes changes to access, applicants will be expected to provide a minimum of 2 disabled parking bays near to entrances and to providing a parking bay for a minibus.

For reference to disability access refer to Chapter 3 and Chapter 8 (DC4) of the UDP and the SPD Access for People with Disabilities.

**5.6.4 Cumulative Impact:** the existing number and concentration of other similar places of worship within an area will be taken into account. Proposals for a new place of worship should clearly justify and demonstrate the need. For example, why existing places of worship cannot be used by the applicants group, what additional benefit or services it would bring to the community, and what strategy or mitigation is proposed to deal with any potential impacts of similar uses operating within close proximity to each other at the same time.

Note: While the criteria set out should guide proposals for places of worship each case will be assessed on its own merit. It is assumed that each case will be submitted with its own considerations but in general the LPA would seek to apply the identified criteria to formulate a decision.

## 6 Supporting information to be submitted with planning applications

**6.1** Whether the proposal is new build or a change of use, the level of activity proposed, and its effect on the amenities of an area are important considerations in the determination of any planning application. Problems have arisen in the past because not enough information on the use, the requirements of the worshippers of particular groups, and likely growth of attendance or congregations, has been sought or provided. To aid proper consideration of the impact of such uses the template in Appendix 3 acts as a checklist to ensure additional information requested has been completed and submitted with any planning application. Any application would not be valid without this information.



## 7 Further information

For further information in relation to this draft SPD please contact:

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If you have difficulty reading this document please call us on (0121) 303 4307 to ask if a full or summary version can be made available in large print, another format or another language.

## Appendix 1: UDP policy paragraphs 8.31-8.35

### Places of Worship

8.31 This policy relates to the use of land and buildings, for, or in connection with, public worship or religious instruction, which are uses which fall within Class D1 (Non-residential Institutions) of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended).

### Purpose Built Places of Worship and/or Religious Instruction

8.32 The following guidelines will apply in assessing applications for such uses:

- In the case of premises which are intended to serve a wide catchment area and/or are likely to be used for festivals and ceremonies attracting substantial numbers of people, sites should be of sufficient size and located so as not to cause loss of amenity to occupiers of nearby residential accommodation through undue noise and disturbance nuisance. Sites which may be particularly appropriate are those which adjoin main roads and/or are on the fringe of commercial areas. Where a site is located in a predominantly residential area, the development should take account of the need to avoid attracting extraneous traffic to quiet residential streets, in order to minimise disturbance to residents.
- The site should be capable of accommodating a development which may be non-domestic in scale and of non-traditional design.
- In assessing the amount of car parking to be provided regard should be had to the capacity of the road network and proximity of public transport facilities, the availability of alternative parking in the area, the scale of the development and car ownership levels. Off-street car parking spaces should be located so as to minimise noise and disturbance to adjoining occupiers and safeguard the visual amenity of the surrounding area.

8.33 The following guidelines will apply in assessing applications for such uses:

- Such proposals generally relate to premises of domestic scale, and are intended to serve the needs of more than just the local community. The Council accepts that in principle such uses may be appropriately sited in residential areas. However, in certain instances all buildings e.g. commercial/industrial may also be suitable for conversion.
- The use of detached dwelling houses or pairs of semi-detached houses will normally be considered acceptable in principle. Similarly the use of end terraced houses or one half of a pair of semi-detached houses will normally be acceptable where a Priest or other officer of the religious body occupies the adjoining house. The use of terraced houses and semidetached where the Priest or other official does not live in an adjoining house may be considered favourably. However, in such cases when considering whether a particular proposal is acceptable regard will be had to:
  - Whether the site is within an Area of Restraint (see paragraph 5.19B).
  - Results of the public participation exercise.
  - The local population characteristics.
  - The means of pedestrian access.
  - The nature of the immediate surroundings.
  - The likelihood of noise emanating from the premises, and the degree to which it can be prevented.
  - The number of non-residential uses that already exist within a residential area.
- Except where sites adjoin busy traffic routes, proposals for developments of this type will not normally be required to include provision for off street parking.

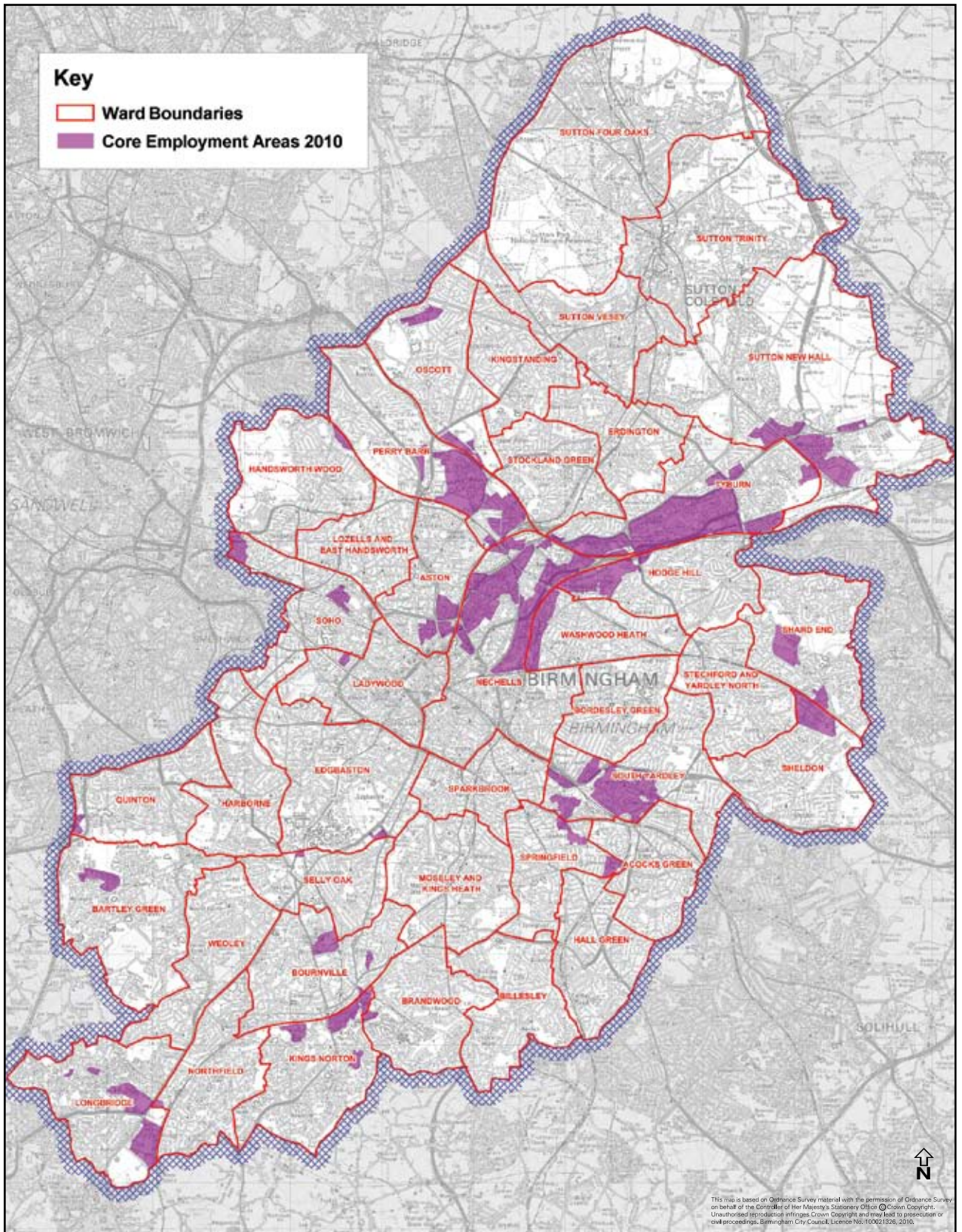
### **Local Prayer Houses**

8.34 This type of use serves only an immediate local or neighbourhood need and generally occupies smaller premises. The criteria applicable in assessing such properties are those stated in paragraph 8.33. Weddings, festivals and funerals which attract large numbers of people will not be permitted to take place in this type of facility.

### **Social, Cultural and Educational Facilities**

8.35 The most common type of use in this category is educational establishments and these will usually vary in impact with activity linked to certain hours, noise and traffic generation problems may occur particularly with arrival and departures. The criteria used to assess proposals are listed in paragraph 8.33.

## Appendix 2: Map of core, protected employment (industrial) land



# Appendix 3: Checklist of supporting information for planning applications

No.	Information requested	Attached
1	<p>Statement on how many people would normally use the premises each day and each week? Please outline what time of day and/or night, and on which days of the week the use would operate. Please also provide details of the maximum capacity of the building.</p> <p>No more than 1 side A4.</p>	<input data-bbox="1270 562 1374 667" type="checkbox"/>
2	<p>Information on any special activities, festivals, ceremonies or additional services that would be provided, and how often they would occur, and at what time of the day/or night.</p> <p>No more than 2 sides A4.</p>	<input data-bbox="1270 786 1374 891" type="checkbox"/>
3	<p>Information on how much floorspace, in square metres, would be required for each of the activities associated with the use (such as for worship, prayer, offices, storage, meetings, connected uses (education) etc.).</p> <p>No more than 1 side A4. Please attach plan annotating areas for each use.</p>	<input data-bbox="1270 987 1374 1093" type="checkbox"/>
4	<p>Statement to explain additional facilities that would be required for the use (such as kitchens, toilets, changing and cleansing areas, clothing and footwear storage areas, car parking, etc.).</p> <p>No more than 1 side A4.</p>	<input data-bbox="1270 1189 1374 1294" type="checkbox"/>
5	<p>Details of any music or amplified sound, either inside or outside the premises, or other potential sources of noise that may occur as a result of the use.</p> <p>No more than 1 side A4.</p>	<input data-bbox="1270 1368 1374 1473" type="checkbox"/>
6	<p>Information to indicate where people would travel from to the premises (such as walking, cycling, private car, minibus, coach or public transport).</p> <p>District/Neighbourhood - statement (no more than 1 A4 side).                      Ward/Constituency - statement (travel plan).                      City Wide - more detailed traffic impact study or assessment.</p>	<input data-bbox="1270 1570 1374 1675" type="checkbox"/>
7	<p>Details to outline the car and cycle parking and access arrangements, and whether drop-off facilities would be provided for larger vehicles or coaches. Please include the number of car parking spaces that would be provided, and whether any car parking spaces for people with disabilities would be provided. Please also outline any special parking management services (such as private parking attendants) that would be provided.</p> <p>No more than 2 sides A4. Attach plan if appropriate.</p>	<input data-bbox="1270 1839 1374 1944" type="checkbox"/>

Continued...

No	Information required	Attached
8	<p>Statement provided to outline the access arrangements both internally and externally to assist members of the congregation with disabilities (such as power assisted doors, designated parking spaces, ramps and handrails, coloured signage manifestation etc).</p> <p>No more than 1 side A4.</p>	<input data-bbox="1348 387 1449 488" type="checkbox"/>
9	<p>Information provided on the current provision of similar places of worship in the local area, and describe how people's needs are currently being catered for. This statement should comment on why existing places for worship cannot be used and why the site or building has been selected?</p> <p>No more than 2 sides A4.</p>	<input data-bbox="1348 633 1449 734" type="checkbox"/>



# Places of Worship and Faith-Related Community and Educational Uses

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