



Faith Community Profile and Places of Worship Needs Assessment

Final Report

December 3rd 2008

Final report of Faith Community Profile and Places of Worship Needs Assessment

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Prepared by **CAG Consultants** in association with **Land Use Consultants** and **Diverse Ethics**

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this document are not the views of the Oadby and Wigston Borough Council and have not been edited or amended for accuracy. The report may contain comments that are factually incorrect, but these have not been amended as they are from consultees.

The consultants have made every endeavour to ensure that write-ups of interviews with consultees are accurate. However, we strongly recommended to Oadby and Wigston BC that both in-report and relevant community mapping profiles be disseminated to faith community representatives contacted through the research, for their feedback prior to being finalised and published. The appendices to the report which contain detailed faith community profiles are not being published while this process is underway.

Executive summary

In July 2008, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council appointed CAG Consultants in association with Land Use Consultants and Diverse Ethics, to undertake and prepare a Faith Community Profile and Places of Worship Needs Assessment. The aims of this piece of work have been to provide a comprehensive profile of the Borough's Faith Communities and provide a needs assessment in relation to places of worship and associated facilities. The results of the study will inform planning policy formulation, including the preparation of Town Centre Masterplans for Oadby and Wigston, which are due to undergo further public consultation later in 2008.

Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston are home to many and varied places of worship, with a long tradition of welcoming and accommodating different religions. Although the majority of existing places of worship are Christian, there is a growing demand for other faiths to be embraced. The population of the Borough is changing, and at the last Census in 2001, the religious diversity of the Borough was shown to be increasing. The Borough's different faith communities represent an important 'community of interest'. The Council has stated that the Borough's faith communities play an important and distinctive role in the voluntary and community sector, and are crucial in the provision of local and neighbourhood services, often in areas of long-term disadvantage. For some time now, different groups have been approaching the Council searching for sites and premises for new or expanded places of worship. The Council has noted that due to its small nature and constraints such as competing development needs and land costs, it has not always proved easy to provide such groups with an appropriate long-term and sustainable solution to their accommodation needs. This is very unfortunate as the Council recognizes that meeting the needs of the diverse cultures of its residents contributes to the well-being and cohesiveness of all communities.

Rather than continue to deal with these requests on a case-by-case basis through the Development Control process, the Council felt it pertinent to commission some research into the extent of each faith community, their location and needs now and in the future. This way they can plan their development needs more effectively through the Local Development Framework process. The research also provides the Council's Community Planning team and Local Strategic Partnership with additional information, and helps to inform the evolution of the Borough's Sustainable Community Strategy and Multicultural Group.

The objectives of this study as set out in the Brief were to:

- Identify and understand the status quo with regard to the Borough's faith communities and how to implement positive change where necessary;

- Provide information by which to support and promote community cohesion and better engagement with faith communities as identified as a community of interest in the Borough;
- Identify the make up of each faith community in terms of age, gender and size and whether there are concentrations of particular communities at locations within the Borough;
- Determine the communities that are served by particular places of worship and associated facilities and their location in order to aid planning of future developments;
- Identify the needs, strengths, resources and opportunities within the Borough's faith communities and in particular the opportunities for enabling greater inter-faith networks;
- Identify the specific issues, perspectives and concerns of each faith community and sub-groups within them (i.e. women, the elderly and young people);
- Identify key contacts within each faith community and establish the aims, objectives and long-term aspirations of each community;
- Identify the scope of each faith community, the range of services they offer their community/wider community and any links to other communities outside the Borough, in particular links to Leicester City;
- Enable a sound evidence base to help formulate and support at Examination, any places of worship and associated facilities element of the Core Strategy, Allocations DPD and Town Centre Masterplans and relevant Supplementary Planning Documents;
- Provide Development Control colleagues with an evidenced needs assessment, by which they can better evaluate planning applications for places of worship and associated facilities;
- Provide the Council, and in particular its Community Planning team, with baseline information and a clearer understanding of the Borough's different Faith Communities to allow for more focussed and pro-active engagement with this community of interest; and
- Provide information that will aid the evolution of the Council's Multicultural Group and the projects it puts forward.

In response to these aims and objectives, the research comprised two main strands. A detailed engagement process was undertaken with faith communities in the Borough to map worship space needs and develop a faith community profile covering each of the

communities in the Borough. At the same time, an in-depth planning analysis was undertaken to develop a worship space needs assessment. Intensive work to deliver project outputs in line with the methodology was undertaken in the period late July to late August 2008.

Among the key conclusions from the 'engagement' side of the project are:

- Long established faith communities such as traditional Christian denominations are well catered for in regard to worship space in the Borough;
- Newer Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are growing but seem to have sufficient space for their current worship space needs. This may change in the medium to longer term as congregations continue to expand;
- Worshippers in Muslim and Hindu traditions are not catered for in relation to worship space in Oadby and Wigston, a difficult situation for them that is worsening as their numbers grow;
- Muslim faith groups have made repeated attempts to find suitable sites for worship spaces within Oadby and Wigston and have been repeatedly disappointed. Muslim worshippers have no worship spaces in the Borough and are suffering significant and urgent unmet local worship space needs as a result;
- Likewise Hindu worshippers must travel outside the Borough to worship and would prefer to have dedicated temple spaces within the Borough to better meet their worship space needs locally;
- While Sikh worshippers have a worship space in Oadby and Wigston this has only temporary planning permission so does not provide long-term security of tenure. Again, more permanent worship space in the Borough is needed;
- Almost all faith groups that do have worship space in the Borough undertake a range of community services that bring benefits to their local communities, but lack of faith space is constraining some faith groups from making the contribution they would like;
- There is a predominant view that worship space provision needs to be made in Oadby and Wigston for separate faith spaces for communities and groups who do not have any or sufficient faith space currently;
- Different groups favour different locations for new worship space provision including town centre, residential area, and employment/industrial land. Edge of Borough space is less popular and faith groups can see different issues that may arise in each type of location, including parking, noise, isolation, safety and security;

- While a multi-faith or multi cultural space would also be welcomed by a considerable number of worshippers in the Borough, this is not seen as a replacement for worship space provision for particular faith communities. Moreover, practical issues are noted in relation to shared use.

These conclusions have implications for the planning needs assessment and were taken into account in undertaking the analysis of planning arrangements in the Borough. In summary, we conclude that there is a strong case for the Borough's planning processes to address the need for new and expanded places of worship. The most significant unmet need relates to the Muslim community, because they do not have local places of worship and regular worship is a feature of their religion. The Sikh community's needs are also pressing, as the planning permission for their existing place of worship expires in 2009. Although this permission may be extended, the Sikh community should ideally have access to worship space in a more suitable location. While the strength of feeling about the need for a Hindu temple in the Borough is not completely clear, the unmet worship space needs of the Hindu community also appear to be significant, as they do not have a local temple.

Although generally welcomed by local faith communities, the provision of a multi-faith centre would not meet the specific worship space needs referred to above. A multi-faith space should not be seen to replace the need to make suitable faith space provision for worship groups.

While the engagement work showed there is some variation in views held by worship groups in the Borough, the planning needs assessment suggests that town centre locations are most appropriate for new or expanded places of worship. This reflects historical trends and is also consistent with the Government's policy approach to planning for town centres. Given the concentration of Muslims, Hindus and Sikh faith communities in the northern part of the Borough, it is clear that Oadby town centre would be a better location than Wigston town centre.

In terms of finding space for new places of worship, there is very limited scope for shared use of places of worship. We conclude that employment land and existing open space would not be appropriate, as both are in short supply within the Borough. There is some potential for re-use of existing non-residential institutions.

The principal means of securing an appropriate site will be through criteria based planning reflected in the Borough's core strategy and through the town centre master planning process.

On the basis of this planning needs assessment, we recommend that the proposal for a place of worship at the East Street car park site or Sandhurst Street car park site is confirmed in the final Oadby Town Centre Masterplan. Furthermore, the Masterplan should reflect that Muslim faith communities have the most urgent unmet faith space needs. We also recommend that the situation in regard to the Sikh and Hindu faith communities' worship space needs should be monitored during the plan period.

To provide context to the Oadby Town Centre Masterplan proposals, we recommend that the Borough's Local Development Framework Core Strategy includes reference to this needs assessment and a criteria based policy that seeks to ensure that the identified needs are met.

The discussion above contains a number of conclusions and related recommendations, which are summarised below:

- The level of need for additional or expanded Christian Churches is 'low', with the exception of the Salvation Army, which is 'medium';
- The level of need for additional or expanded Synagogues is 'low';
- The Muslim community's level of need for new places of worship in Oadby and Wigston is 'high';
- The Hindu community's level of need for new places of worship is 'medium';
- The Sikh community's level of need for a permanent place of worship in a more suitable location is 'high';
- Any development of multi-faith space in the Borough cannot not be seen in planning terms as a replacement for meeting the specific, individual worship space needs of faith groups;
- Likewise, the potential for shared use of faith space is very limited;
- The most appropriate location for new or expanded places of worship is in or as close as possible to a town centre;
- The outstanding needs of faith communities should be met in Oadby rather than Wigston given proximity to the geographical spread of faith communities within the Borough;
- With such a shortfall of employment land and premises, the Council cannot afford to lose any of its existing 'identified employment areas';
- While we fully support the need for a Sikh place of worship in the Borough in principle town centre locations are more suitable than employment land for new or expanded places of worship;
- It would be inappropriate to provide for new or expanded places of worship on open or greenfield land in Oadby's urban area;
- The research was unable to definitely answer the question as to whether the old library building in Oadby may be a feasible site for reuse as worship space;

- The Borough should be considering the use of criteria to help define where to locate places of worship in the LDF Core Strategy. Our planning needs assessment work above helps provide a basis for developing such criteria;
- Equally, on the basis of the needs assessment, a potential option for providing new places of worship in Oadby town centre appears to be through the development and master planning (Area Action Plan) process;
- The proposed locations for worship space at the East Street Car Park site or Sandhurst Street car park site, in the context of the other Masterplan proposals, have a number of key advantages of accessibility and proximity to homes, places of work and services.
- On the basis of this planning needs assessment, we recommend that the proposal for at least one place of worship at the Sandhurst Street car park site or East Street car park site is confirmed in the final Oadby Town Centre Masterplan, with preference given to a mosque as the most urgently required worship space;
- To provide context to the Oadby Town Centre Masterplan proposals, we recommend that the Borough's Local Development Framework Core Strategy includes reference to this needs assessment and a criteria based policy that seeks to ensure that the identified needs are met.

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of the project

In July 2008, as the result of a competitive tendering process, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council appointed CAG Consultants in association with Land Use Consultants and Diverse Ethics to undertake and prepare a Faith Community Profile and Places of Worship Needs Assessment. The aims of this piece of work have been to provide a comprehensive profile of the Borough's Faith Communities and provide a needs assessment in relation to places of worship and associated facilities. The results of the study will inform the preparation of Town Centre Masterplans for Oadby and Wigston, which are due to undergo further public consultation later in 2008.

It is appropriate that Oadby and Wigston Borough Council is combining the Places of Worship Needs Assessment with the preparation of a wider Faith Community Profile. Communities and individuals of faith have a great potential to make positive contributions to our society: the values enshrined in many faiths underline the importance of valuing individuals, respecting others, helping less able members of society and finding meaning in our lives. Places of worship are often used not only by faith groups themselves, but by a wide range of community groups supporting the elderly, families and young people. Faith communities provide both social and physical structures, which can play an important role in regeneration.

We introduce the report by drawing on information provided in the brief for the project provided by Oadby and Wigston Borough Council.

1.2. Oadby and Wigston – the context

The Borough of Oadby and Wigston adjoins the south-eastern side of the City of Leicester and is mainly urban in nature, but has immediate access to the attractive countryside of South Leicestershire. The Borough measures approximately 9 square miles in area and contains a population of 55,800 people. The Borough is predominantly residential but also has a significant amount of light industry, mainly located in industrial estates.

Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston is home to many and varied places of worship, with a long tradition of welcoming and accommodating different religions. Although the majority of existing places of worship are Christian, there is a growing demand for other faiths to be embraced. The Borough is proud that residents of different faiths choose to live within it. As the statistics section below makes clear the population of the Borough is changing.

Leicestershire County Council's Research and Information team produced an Oadby and Wigston Community Profile in 2005. This brought together a variety of readily available data sets to provide a baseline of the statistical nature of the Borough's population as a whole. The document incorporated a chapter on Ethnicity and Religion and included information on the Borough's population (in relation to ethnicity and religion) by ward, output area, labour market, qualifications and health. Although this profile had provided a helpful starting point, the Council stated that they wish to broaden its knowledge and understanding of particular 'communities of interest', especially where such communities themselves have expressed interest in working with the Council to achieve their goals.

One such 'community of interest' is the Borough's different faith communities. The Council has stated that the Borough's faith communities play an important and distinctive role in the voluntary and community sector, and are crucial in the provision of local and neighbourhood services, often in areas of long-term disadvantage. For some time now, different groups have been approaching the Council searching for, in particular, sites and premises for new or expanded places of worship. The Borough has noted in the Brief for this assignment that due to its small size and "*constraints such as competing development needs and land costs, it has not always proved easy to provide such groups with an appropriate long-term and sustainable solution to their accommodation needs. This is very unfortunate as the Council recognizes that the diversity of the culture of its residents contributes to the well-being and cohesiveness of all communities*".

The Borough stated in the Brief that rather than continue to deal with these requests on a case-by-case basis through the Development Control process, it now feels it is a pertinent time to commission some research into the extent of each faith community, their location and needs now and in the future. This way they can plan their development needs more effectively through the Local Development Framework process. The Borough noted that the research would also provide the Council's Community Planning team and Local Strategic Partnership with additional information and help to inform the evolution of the Borough's Sustainable Community Strategy and Multicultural Group.

1.3. Background to the project

In the Brief for the project from Oadby and Wigston Borough Council provided background information about framing elements such as local and regional policy settings to keep in mind in undertaking the assignment. The following information therefore relates to the planning guidance that the Council would refer to in relation to determining applications for places of worship and the current planning policy work that is ongoing which this study will have a bearing on.

Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands (RSS8)

The Brief noted that the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands (RSS8) provides policies relating to the location of development. In addition, the supporting text to Policy 40 - Regional Priorities for Culture, Sport and Recreation, states:

"Culture is an inclusive concept embracing a wide range of activities, places, shared beliefs, values and customs, which contributes to a sense of identity and well being for everyone. Cultural activities span the public, private, voluntary and community sectors and include:

- *the performing and visual arts, craft and fashion;*
- *media, film, television, video and language;*
- *museums, archives and design*
- *libraries, literature, writing and publishing;*
- *the built heritage, architecture, landscape and*
- *archaeology;*
- *sports participation, events, facilities for community activity (such as village halls and places of worship);*
- *parks, children's play and playgrounds;*
- *open spaces, wildlife habitats, water environment and*
- *countryside recreation;*
- *tourism, festivals and attractions; and*
- *informal leisure pursuits"*

Regional priorities for culture are set by the Regional Cultural Strategy 'The Place of Choice' (2006) developed by Culture East Midlands and available at: <http://www.culture-em.org.uk/documents>. Further research, namely 'The East Midlands Regional Plan: Reflecting Cultural Priorities' (2006) was jointly commissioned by Culture East Midlands and the Regional Planning Body to inform the Regional Plan, and is available at <http://www.emra.gov.uk/regionalplan>.

Oadby and Wigston Adopted Local Plan (as saved)

The Brief also notes that Landscape Proposal 1 of the Oadby and Wigston Adopted Local Plan (as saved) refers to the design of new development. Chapter 10 on Community, Public Utility and Emergency Services encourages the development of a wide range of

community facilities including social, educational, community, health and religious uses, distributed so as to meet the needs of the Borough's population. It recognizes that some uses need to be provided within or close to residential areas in order to ensure that they are located close to those that use them.

This chapter further relates to the uses found in Class D1 of the Use Classes Order 1987. It includes schools and colleges, medical and health service buildings, clinics, crèches, day nurseries, museums, libraries and places of worship. Service Proposal 3 of the Local Plan gives the criteria for development proposals, referring to amenities of nearby residents, parking, traffic congestion and design impact on the street scene. In addition, Service Proposal 4 refers to planning conditions that may be applied on the hours of use, noise emission, access for the disabled, car and cycle parking places and landscaping.

Places of Worship Statement of Planning Policy

It was explained in the Brief that in July 2005 the Council produced a statement of planning policy in relation to places of worship. This was produced to provide guidance for applicants submitting applications for new places of worship as to the most sustainable location for this type of development and outlining other planning related issues that would need to be taken into account when determining such applications. The Council has a good record of encouraging places of worship in the Borough and planning permission has been given to many schemes in the last few years. However, some have only been granted temporary permission, as they are not in the best location for continued use, for example sited within an employment area.

Local Development Framework

Oadby and Wigston Borough Council have intimated that they are currently preparing a number of documents that will form part of the Council's Local Development Framework. Principally, significant work has been undertaken on the preparation of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD). Issues and Options consultation took place in July/August 2005 and a Preferred Options report consulted upon in April/June 2006. A Supplemental Issues and Options Paper, exploring broad areas of search for new development, took place in June/August 2007. Copies of the consultation documents, together with summaries of consultation responses may be viewed online at www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk.

In June/August 2007 the Borough Council undertook consultation on the Allocations Development Plan Document: Issues and Options Paper. This document encompassed options for all types of new development, i.e. residential, employment, retail, leisure, recreation and community facilities. The Allocations DPD: Issues and Options Paper can be viewed online at www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk.

Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston Town Centre Masterplans

In addition to the above Development Plan Document, the Council has explained that they are also currently working on Town Centre Masterplans for Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston. As a very small urban authority, the three town centres will be the

main focus for future development especially for necessary community infrastructure. Within the concept for Oadby Town Centre, a new place of worship and associated community facilities has been proposed. Although there was anecdotal evidence to suggest that the site would be used for this purpose should this proposal be adopted, there was no clear evidence that Oadby Town Centre was the most sustainable or appropriate location, or which communities are most in need in this area. The lack of up to date independent assessment of the needs of the Borough's faith communities might see the development thwarted, if strong evidence was not there to support it and other places of worship proposals that come forward.

The Council notes that each Development Plan Document, prepared as part of the Council's Local Development Framework, must contain policies and proposals that are based on robust evidence in order for the documents to be found 'sound' at Examination by an Independent Planning Inspector. Examples of the type of evidence already prepared to inform development of the Core Strategy and Allocations Development Plan Documents are: a Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and an Employment Land and Premises Study. The Council explains that the Faith Community Profile and Places of Worship Needs Assessment will form part of the wider evidence base and will help to add credibility to proposals in the Oadby Town Centre Masterplan as well as providing the evidence for allocating additional sites if needed in the areas they are required.

1.4. Contents of the final report

CAG and its team carried out the research and engagement work over the period late July to early September 2008. This detailed report provides a comprehensive profile of the Borough's faith communities; an assessment of the current and future needs for new, additional and expanded places of worship and associated facilities up to 2026; and in general terms, the most appropriate location(s) for the provision of such facilities and the approximate amount of land to be provided. As noted in the Disclaimer above, the views expressed in this document are not the views of the Oadby and Wigston Borough Council and have not been edited or amended for accuracy. The report may therefore contain comments that are factually incorrect, but these have not been amended as they are from consultees.

The consultants have made every endeavour to ensure that write-ups of interviews with consultees are accurate. However, we strongly recommended to Oadby and Wigston BC that both in-report and relevant community mapping profiles be disseminated to faith community representatives contacted through the research, for their feedback prior to being finalised and published. The appendices to the report, which contain detailed faith community profiles, are not being published while this process is underway.

2. Demographic context

2.1. Limitations of available demographic data

It has been important in this research to understand the demographic context for the work. We have therefore undertaken some desk research to compile demographic data about faith communities in the Borough. We note that a number of faith communities questioned the accuracy of the demographic data available about Oadby and Wigston, pointing out that 2001 Census data was now out of date and in their view substantially underrepresented the numbers of various faith communities living in the Borough.

2.2. Relevant demographic points about the Borough

With this caveat in mind we note that the 'ethnicity and religion' section of the Community Profile for Oadby and Wigston Borough (2005) highlights that:

- The Black and Minority Ethnic population comprises 18.2% of the total population of Oadby and Wigston;
- The largest minority ethnic groups are Indian (6,362 people); other white (765 people) and Other Asian (566 people);
- 64.8% of the population are Christian while 21.6% are not religious or do not state their religion; and
- The largest non-Christian religious groups are Hindu (6.0% of the population), Sikh (4.2%), and Muslim (2.8%).

This diversity also has a geographical dimension. Indian and Asian communities tend to be clustered in the Northern wards of the Borough but Black and Irish communities are more scattered across the Borough.

Profile of religion in Oadby and Wigston

The 2001 Census asked people to identify their religion, on a voluntary basis. In Oadby and Wigston, 36,131 people identified themselves as Christian (64.8%). The largest non-Christian groups were Hindu (6.0%), Sikh (4.2%) and Muslim (2.8%). A large minority (over 21%) stated that they had no religion, or did not state their religion.¹ The proportion of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim groups is higher in Oadby than in Wigston, as shown in the following breakdown of religion responses by Ward.

¹ Source: Oadby and Wigston Community Profile 2005; produced by the Research and Information Team, Leicestershire County Council

Table 2.1 – Religion in Oadby and Wigston – by Ward (2001)

Ward	Christian	Buddhist	Hindu	Jewish	Muslim	Sikh	Other	Not specified
Oadby Brocks Hill	63%	0%	9%	0%	4%	7%	0%	16%
Oadby Grange	46%	0%	11%	1%	9%	9%	0%	23%
Oadby St.Peters	68%	0%	5%	1%	3%	3%	0%	20%
Oadby Uplands	50%	0%	15%	0%	7%	12%	0%	16%
Oadby Woodlands	55%	0%	16%	0%	4%	7%	0%	18%
South Wigston	69%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	28%
Wigston All Saints	74%	0%	2%	0%	1%	1%	0%	22%
Wigston Fields	68%	0%	4%	0%	2%	3%	0%	24%
Wigston Meadowcourt	76%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	0%	21%
Wigston St.Wolstan's	71%	0%	4%	0%	1%	2%	0%	21%
Borough (%)	65%	0%	6%	0%	3%	4%	0%	22%
Borough – figures	36,131	90	3,339	166	1,552	2,323	135	12,059
Leicester city (%)	45%	0%	15%	0%	11%	4%	0%	25%
Leicestershire (%)	74%	0%	2%	0%	1%	1%	0%	22%

Source: ONS Census 2001; figures less than 0.5% have been rounded to zero.

There are no more recent statistics on religion, since the 2001 Census. However, we can examine recent trends in ethnicity, which are broadly related to religion, and we present the results below.

Profile of ethnicity in Oadby and Wigston

At the time of the 2001 Census, the Borough was dominated in numerical terms by people of white ethnic origin, at 84%. Asian people were the second largest group at 13%. The Asian population consisted largely of people who classify themselves as Indian, representing 11% of the Borough's total population. The latest estimates from the Office for National Statistics, for June 2006, suggest that these figures have changed only slightly. In 2006, the Asian community was estimated to represent 14% of the total, with 82% being of white ethnic origin.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has produced a breakdown of ethnicity by Ward from the 2001 Census. This breakdown is not available for more recent years. The geographical location of Asian communities shows the same broad pattern as the distribution of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities, as might be expected. There is a greater proportion of people of these faiths living in Oadby than in Wigston. Other

minority faith groups, such as Buddhists and Jewish people, are present only in small numbers.

Table 2.2 – Ethnicity in Oadby and Wigston – by Ward (2001)

Ward	White	Mixed	Asian	Black or Black British	Other
Oadby Brocks Hill	75%	2%	21%	1%	2%
Oadby Grange	67%	1%	30%	1%	1%
Oadby St.Peters	86%	1%	11%	1%	1%
Oadby Uplands	61%	1%	36%	1%	1%
Oadby Woodlands	67%	2%	28%	1%	2%
South Wigston	97%	1%	2%	0%	0%
Wigston All Saints	95%	1%	4%	1%	0%
Wigston Fields	89%	1%	8%	2%	0%
Wigston Meadowcourt	95%	1%	4%	1%	0%
Wigston St.Wolstan's	91%	1%	7%	1%	0%
Borough - 2001 (%)	84%	1%	13%	1%	1%
Borough – 2001 figures	46,857	605	7,431	500	400
Borough – 2006 (estimate - %)	82%	2%	14%	1%	1%

Source: ONS Census 2001 and ONS estimates 2006; figures less than 0.5% have been rounded to zero.

3. Methodology

3.1. Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives for the study provided the basis for the consultants to develop a suitable methodology for undertaking the work. The aims and objectives are set out below as drawn from the project Brief.

The brief states that the aims of this piece of work are to provide Oadby and Wigston Borough Council with a comprehensive profile of the Borough's Faith Communities (who have been identified as a particular 'community of interest') and provide a needs assessment in relation to places of worship and associated facilities (to be used as a 'sound' evidence base) on which to develop policies and proposals through the Local Development Framework/Town Centre Masterplans for said places of worship and associated facilities.

The objectives of this study as set out in the Brief have been to:

- Identify and understand the status quo with regard to the Borough's faith communities and how to implement positive change where necessary;
- Provide information by which to support and promote community cohesion and better engagement with faith communities as identified as a community of interest in the Borough;
- Identify the make up of each faith community in terms of age, gender and size and whether there are concentrations of particular communities at locations within the Borough;
- Determine the communities that are served by particular places of worship and associated facilities and their location in order to aid planning of future developments;
- Identify the needs, strengths, resources and opportunities within the Borough's faith communities and in particular the opportunities for enabling greater inter-faith networks;
- Identify the specific issues, perspectives and concerns of each faith community and sub-groups within them (ie women, the elderly and young people);
- Identify key contacts within each faith community and establish the aims, objectives and long-term aspirations of each community;

- Identify the scope of each faith community, the range of services they offer their community/wider community and any links to other communities outside the Borough, in particular links to Leicester City;
- Enable a sound evidence base to help formulate and support at Examination, any places of worship and associated facilities element of the Core Strategy, Allocations DPD and Town Centre Masterplans and relevant Supplementary Planning Documents;
- Provide Development Control colleagues with an evidenced needs assessment, by which they can better evaluate planning applications for places of worship and associated facilities;
- Provide the Council, and in particular its Community Planning team, with baseline information and a clearer understanding of the Borough's different Faith Communities to allow for more focussed and pro-active engagement with this community of interest; and
- Provide information that will aid the evolution of the Council's Multicultural Group and the projects it puts forward.

These aims and objectives have been used as the basis for identifying key issues raised by the Brief and developing the following methodology.

3.2. Issues raised by the brief

The consultancy team identified a number of issues raised by the Brief's aims and objectives, which needed to be kept in mind in developing the methodology. These issues are discussed below.

Diversity of faith

The wide diversity of faith communities has been acknowledged and kept in mind in undertaking the research and engagement processes. For example, as the demographic data and the engagement findings demonstrate, faith communities have a very considerable presence in the Borough. This diversity also has a geographical dimension and as part of the Faith Community Profile and the Needs Assessment, it has been important to map the Census responses on 'religion' in detail across the Borough.

Which faith communities?

The two elements in this assignment raised slightly different issues in relation to the range of faith communities to be targeted in research and engagement terms.

For the Faith Communities Profile, it has been important to engage with a wide range of faith groups based in the Borough. In many cases, this has meant groups that already worship within the Borough, at an existing place of worship, in community facilities or

in people's homes. In other cases, it has meant reaching people who adhere to a particular faith group but currently travel to a place of worship outside the Borough. We identified the full range of faith groups, to be broadly representative of the community as a whole, including the full range of faith communities and their sub-groups in the Borough. Inter-faith, intra-faith networks and the Borough's Multicultural Group made a valuable contribution to identifying faith groups and appropriate contacts.

For the Needs Assessment, this balance was also important, as any changes to planning policy or practice needed to reflect the overall range of views in the Borough. But it was particularly important to ensure that the engagement process included groups that are expanding fast and groups that have encountered problems with the current planning system (e.g. whose planning applications have been rejected or granted only on a temporary basis; and/or whose use of buildings does not conform to current planning policy).

For the Needs Assessment, it was also be important to consider the needs of faith communities outside the Borough, as new Places of Worship could potentially serve communities outside the Borough. This is already the case with the Gulzar E-Medina and Daru Salam and Jame Mosques in central Leicester, and the Shree Swaminarayam, Ramgarhia Board Temple and Sri Murugan Temple in the north-west of the city. Some emerging forms of Christian worship, such as the Newfrontiers Church, may also seek larger premises serving a wider population. We discussed the relevance of this issue with the client and with appropriate contacts at Leicester City Council.

In the methodology, we allowed for initial networking to expand the Council's list of existing faith groups, and to identify key contacts for important faith groups in the Borough and – where relevant - in Leicester as a whole.

Engaging with faith communities

We developed a network of contacts with faith communities at the start of the project, through a 'mapping' process, and extended this as the project proceeded. We were aware that the two elements of this project required:

- Mapping of existing faith communities, their activities and their characteristics, for both the Faith Community Profile and the Needs Assessment;
- Information on their potential growth and space needs, and their specific needs and perceptions in relation to places of worship, for the Needs Assessment; and
- Broader understanding of faith communities' key issues, their long-term aspirations, and their current and potential contribution to the Borough's community life, for the Faith Community Profile.

To gather this information, we used a combination of a questionnaire to all faith communities within the Borough, and more in-depth interviews and meetings with selected groups. Where appropriate, we also contacted faith groups from adjacent areas, which could affect the Needs Assessment within the Borough. We used face-to-face meetings and interviews to reach deeper into communities. Where possible, we visited representatives of these communities (at their places of worship if appropriate).

Developing communication and trust

The community engagement method offered opportunities for improving communication and trust between different faith communities, and between those communities and the wider population. The Faith Community Profile in the report and Appendices provides a great deal of information on the nature and needs of each faith community, and specific interest groups within them. It also raises the profile of faith groups and the contribution they make to the wider community.

Diversity of practice

Within each faith, there are a range of different beliefs and forms of worship. The Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities have particular needs for spaces that can accommodate daily and weekly worship, as well as periodic holy days and festivals, which attract much larger numbers of people. Space is not only needed for worship but also for other aspects of religious practice, such as religious teaching for children. While traditional Church of England congregations are falling in many areas, some Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are growing fast. Some of these churches draw large congregations, which cannot be accommodated in a traditional church building.

Through previous work we have undertaken on these issues, we have developed a typology of four types of places of worship:

- Home-based worship;
- Local places of worship, serving an established local population;
- Local place of worship, serving an emerging or new local population; and
- Places of worship serving a wider sub-regional population.

We discussed this typology with faith communities in interviews, and included relevant questions in the questionnaire, to help explore their need for these different types of worship spaces. Information gathered on current and likely future space needs then fed into the Needs Assessment for Places of Worship.

As mentioned above, the Needs Assessment needed to consider boundary issues in relation to sub-regional or city-wide places of worship. For example, some worship spaces in Oadby and Wigston appear to attract people from outside the Borough. Similarly, some faith communities use places of worship in neighbouring authority

areas, whether for regular weekly worship, for children's religious teaching or for special holy days.

Lack of suitable places of worship

We are aware that this study has arisen from unmet needs for places of worship in Oadby and Wigston at present, particularly for faith groups that have not found suitable sites and for groups that are emerging and growing. Some of these groups are currently worshipping in houses, or using rented premises in schools, but would like to find more permanent spaces that are more appropriate to their needs. Others are using premises in employment areas, on a temporary basis, which do not conform to current planning policy and are not well-served by public transport.

Property has become expensive in many parts of Leicester, so high-street venues are beyond the financial reach of many faith groups, unless they have longstanding property holdings (as for the Church of England) or have generous donors. The lack of suitable facilities for worship is both a market failure and a failure of the planning system. Places of worship can play an important role in hosting a range of community activities and support groups (eg. for elderly people; toddler groups; young people; minority ethnic groups) so the lack of facilities has implications for the wider community, as well as the faith groups themselves.

Discrimination issues

An added dimension to this issue is that diversity of faith and practice tends to be accompanied by diversity in ethnicity and race. Many Hindu, Jain, Muslim and Sikh groups are strongly linked to the Indian community and wider South Asian groups, while other Muslim groups are linked to Arabic, African and Caribbean communities. Black and Minority Ethnic groups, particularly African and Caribbean communities, are also strongly represented amongst fast-growing Pentecostal and Evangelical churches. So the failure of the planning system, and the property market, to provide suitable places of worship is perceived by some as discriminatory.

The practical lack of facilities for worship can become a focus for misunderstandings between the faith groups and local planning authorities. This can disrupt emerging relationships which have begun to emphasise the role of religion in fostering community values, including respect, tolerance, inclusion, regeneration and sustainability.

Possible solutions

Given the decline in the size of some faith groups and rise in others, an obvious solution to explore is the reuse or sharing of redundant places of worship. Many Church of England churches have already been converted to other uses over the past couple of decades, and these are no longer available as places of worship. Others may not be needed by the Church of England and could be retained as places of worship in a different form. But traditional-style churches will not always be appropriate for new forms of worship by different faith groups: some groups may require access to much larger facilities that are purpose built.

The Brief mentions the possibility of developing a new place of worship and associated community facilities in Oadby Town Centre, as part of the Town Centre Masterplan. It was not clear at the outset of the project whether this place of worship would be dedicated to a particular faith, or would be shared between different groups and we were keen to explore such 'shared space' ideas with faith groups. Sharing is attractive in principle, but the research has found that there are sensitivities around the reuse of previously consecrated buildings and the sharing of buildings with other faiths, among some faith groups. There was also a very strong sense that some faith groups urgently need their own dedicated space.

We are aware that the proposed Pennbury eco-town site falls partly within Oadby and Wigston Borough. Although the future of proposals for the eco-town are highly uncertain at present, it has been important to consider the relationship between the Town Centre Masterplan and any potential provision for places of worship in an eco-town. Plans for the eco-town obviously also have significant implications for the Needs Assessment for Places of Worship which we have taken into account.

Issues with the current planning system/guidance

A key issue for the research has been about how the planning system and guidance operates. Any changes to planning policy must be broadly applicable to the range of faith communities in the Borough. Equally, any changes must take into account the likely development of faith groups, and their needs, across the spectrum of belief. At the outset of the work we identified a number of issues arising from the current planning system in the Borough.

Firstly, there is currently considerable flexibility within the 'Non-residential institutions' Use Class under the Planning Acts (which includes places of worship) for change of use within this class, without planning permission. This means that a redundant church could be converted into, for example, a doctors' surgery without planning permission. This may be contributing to the continued erosion of places of worship.

Secondly, 'saved' Local Plan Proposal SV5 covers a range of community facilities and does not appear to promote the use of a specific methodology for assessing the development needs of faith communities.

Thirdly, there is also the issue of non-conforming planning uses (e.g. faith group activity in industrial or office buildings), which possibly reflects the difficulty of obtaining planning permission for new sites in appropriate areas.

In undertaking the Needs Assessment, we considered these and other issues arising from current planning policy and practice.

3.3. Project methodology in detail

Based on the aims and objectives and the issues we identified for the project, we developed a research and engagement process to cover both the faith community profile and the needs assessment tasks. Intensive work to deliver project outputs in line with this methodology was undertaken in the period late July to late August 2008. We undertook the following stages using the methods noted at each stage.

Stage 1 - Project Inception, and Preliminary Mapping

In Stage 1 we undertook project inception and initial desk research of relevant demographic, policy and planning documentation. This occurred in late July, and included a tour of key sites and an in-depth briefing on the issues. At the inception meeting we gathered information about:

- Existing networks or lists of contacts for faith communities;
- The status of the Town Centre Masterplans and Eco-town proposals, and their implication for the project;
- Any planning issues that have already arisen with particular faith groups, which should inform the study;
- The extent to which sub-regional needs for places of worship should be considered;
- Appropriate contacts with the Borough Council and Leicester City Council.

In Stage 1, in early August, we then undertook preliminary mapping and networking to:

- Extend the Borough's existing list of contacts for faith communities, involving citywide and multi-faith bodies where relevant (e.g. Leicester Inter Faith Fellowship; St. Philip's Centre for Engagement in a Multi-Faith Society; Leicester Council of Faiths; the Borough's Multi-Cultural Group). We attempted, as far as possible, to identify the appropriate named contact for each faith group;
- Develop a preliminary list of faith communities for the survey, and identify possible groups for more in-depth engagement;
- Explore, with key contacts, the likely need for assistance with interpretation and translation, and identify appropriate sources of assistance;
- Review the Boroughs' planning policies and land allocation proposals;
- Review Census data in response to the question on 'religion'.

Stage 2 - Faith Community Profiling

In Stage 2 we undertook the faith community profiling. We established a presence locally and collected data for the faith group profiles through publicity, surveying and interviewing of individuals and small groups from across Oadby's faith communities. This took the following forms:

- Publicity - With the client we publicised the project to a wide range of faith groups across the Borough, including through faith networks, community networks and the Multicultural Group;
- Survey - We surveyed 27 significant faith groups whose existing places of worship are based in the Borough, using a questionnaire to gather factual information for use in both the profiles and needs assessment. The questionnaire was designed using mainly open-ended questions given the generally qualitative nature of the research. We piloted the draft questionnaire with a small number of faith groups before finalising the design, to ensure that it was clear and easy to complete.
- Engagement - We held face to face meetings (or telephone based interviews) with representatives of 22 faith communities in the Borough, where possible involving representatives from women, young people and older people, as well as leaders of the faith community. We used a question Pro Forma somewhat similar to the questionnaire but designed for use in discussion. Again this was used to gather information for both the faith profiles and needs assessment.

We analysed the information gathered from the survey in two ways. Firstly, we prepared a profile of each faith community, using information from the survey combined with more in-depth information from interviewing. Where relevant, we grouped responses from different branches of the same faith community (e.g. different churches within the Church of England). Secondly, we analysed quantitative and qualitative findings between and across different faith groups, to inform the Needs Assessment. Similarly, we pulled out messages cutting across faith communities to inform the overall commentary within the eventual Faith Communities Profile.

A copy of both the questionnaire and the Interview Questions Pro forma are found in the Appendices.

Stage 3 – Needs Assessment

In parallel with Stage 2, that of researching the Faith Community Profile, we researched the need for places of worship in the Borough. This involved three tasks.

First we researched current planning policy and practice, which included reviewing the existing context for planning policy on places of worship. We used analysis of relevant planning documents to develop our understanding of current policy towards places of worship, and issues underlying this policy. Policy considerations included:

- Protection of existing facilities from change of use to non place of worship uses;

- Allowing for the expansion of existing facilities;
- The provision of multi-denomination places of worship;
- The potential availability of new sites and policy issues associated with potential sources of land;
- Arrangements for consultation with faith communities on development plans and planning applications;
- Recognition of the wider social and community role that religious buildings often play.

In consultation with planning officers, we also researched the history of planning applications, permissions, refusals, appeals and temporary permissions for places of worship within the Borough. Our findings from this research fed into the Needs Assessment, which is documented later in this report.

Second, we analysed demographic and faith community data. We used the preliminary mapping and emerging findings from the faith community survey to analyse current provision and usage of places of worship by Borough residents, and to develop estimates of future demand for different types of places of worship.

Third, using our research findings we developed a Needs Assessment for Places of Worship in the Borough. In so doing we recognised that there is now a requirement for Local Development Frameworks to be supported by a statement of infrastructure needs (PPS12, 2008). This includes social and cultural infrastructure, such as places of worship. However, no guidance has been produced on how to undertake a needs assessment for places of worship, nor is there any peer reviewed best practice to draw on. Our work elsewhere identified needs at only a very broad, strategic level. The only other attempts to identify needs have focussed on new settlements. Therefore, drawing on methods from other policy areas (notably open space, PPG17), our approach was based on:

- Mapping (using GIS) of existing places of worship according to the typology noted in Task 7 and the different types of faith buildings (churches, mosques etc);
- Overlaying information on the capacity of the places of worship (and the capacity typically available - excluding special holy days etc);
- Overlaying 'theoretical needs', based on census data;
- Overlaying 'reported needs', based on the engagement with faith communities;

- Identification of the 'areas of deficiency', where needs are currently not being met.

This work has culminated in a reasonably robust evidence base, although the assessment is partially reliant on the inputs from the faith communities themselves. We have presented the draft Needs Assessment within this overall report.

Stage 4 - Analysis and Draft Reporting

We have analysed the data collected through all aspects of the research and prepared a draft final report, for submission as an internal report to the Borough. This meets the written output requirements of the Brief, which required a detailed report with supporting documentation to meet the objectives of the study. It was envisaged in the Brief that this part of the report will be in two parts, as follows, and we have structured the final report in this way:

Part A comprises a comprehensive profile of the Borough's Faith Communities to include:

- The make-up of each community in terms of age, gender and size;
- What sub-groups exist within each community;
- Where communities are located within the Borough;
- What each community's key issues and perspectives are;
- What are their long-term aspirations and their potential for growth up to and including 2026 (where possible);
- What services they provide to their own and the wider community and any existing or potential inter-faith networks;
- The locations in which worship and other services are provided; and
- What links, if any, exist between each of the Borough's faith communities and Leicester City and/or other neighbouring authorities.

Part B comprises an assessment of the current and future needs for new/additional/expanded places of worship and associated facilities up to 2026, and in general terms, the most appropriate location(s) for the provision of such facilities and the approximate amount of land to be provided.

This final report does not include the draft profile of each of the main faith communities in the Borough, and their sub-groups, as these drafts are being checked with those interviewed.

4. Faith Communities Profile

4.1. Introduction

This section of the final report provides in-depth information about faith communities active in the Oadby and Wigston Borough Council area. It is supported by the faith community profiles which give more detailed information about faith groups' size, composition and links to other groups; their current location of worship space (if any) and its use by worshippers and the wider community; and the faith community's key issues and aspirations. Almost all the information, apart from this introduction and census data, has all been derived from interviews and questionnaire responses from faith communities themselves.

The official guide to Oadby and Wigston lists six places of worship under the heading of 'sectarian groups'. However a much broader range of faith groups are worshipping and undertaking social, cultural, educational, and other worthwhile activities in Oadby and Wigston. There is also a range of relevant organisations to support cross faith understanding including the Oadby and Wigston Multi-Cultural Group, and to support action across denominations within faiths, including 'Churches Together in Oadby'. The section shows that faith groups are involved in a wide range of worship as well as many other socially useful activities that benefit the Oadby and Wigston community.

Meanwhile, faith groups themselves have identified a number of issues that cause them problems in making their contribution to the community and they have nominated a range of solutions to faith space issues. As this section demonstrates there is no absolute agreement on all points but a strong thread throughout is the principle of engagement with and service to others. Having access to good worship space is central to faith groups' capacity to pursue these aims.

4.2. Outline of faith communities in the Borough

Key facts about faith groups

In this section we provide information generated by mapping and engagement through interviews, meetings and questionnaires with faith groups in Oadby and Wigston, as to their location, the nature of their worship spaces, and the numbers of worshippers.

Location of faith communities

The location of faith communities varies across the Borough by religion and by faith group within that religious tradition. Unsurprisingly, long established faith communities such as the Christian church are very well represented by worship spaces across Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston. We identified Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Evangelical, Methodist, Pentecostal, Salvation Army and United Reformed churches or

places of worship in Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston. Other communities that exist in the Borough include Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, Jain, Muslim and Sikh faith groups. Interfaith and multi-faith organisations and spaces are also found. Unlike Christian churches, some of these faith communities do not have adequate - or in some cases any - faith space for their worship needs in the Borough. For Sikhs, there is a Gurdwara in Oadby, which has temporary planning permission, and some Sikhs also go to Sikh Temples and community centres in Leicester. The Muslim faith community particularly identified lack of local worship space as a problem, and many of Oadby and Wigston's Muslims go to the Central Mosque and to Masjid Umar outside the Borough to worship. For Hindus likewise, there is a lack of local worship space and people 'temple hop', hire halls and go to temples in Leicester. The small Jain community go into Leicester city to worship, as do Progressive Jews who live in Oadby but they do not see this as a problem (the Orthodox Jewish faith representative we contacted explained they have no real connection with the Borough).

Most faith groups draw worshippers from within the Borough but some faith groups also attract worshippers from outside the Borough, sometimes described by faith group representatives as coming from 'surrounding areas'. This tended to suggest that the out-of-borough worshippers may be coming from further out of Leicester, rather than from Leicester city. The balance tends to be that in-Borough worshippers predominate over out-of-Borough ones.

The number of members of the faith community

The membership numbers vary between faith communities and between sub-groups and denominations within communities. For the Christian churches membership size varies from somewhat larger number memberships of Pentecostal and Evangelical churches to somewhat smaller memberships at Baptist, Anglican, United Reformed and Methodist churches for example. The size differences were not as marked between traditional and newer Christian churches as we have sometimes found elsewhere. The Seventh Day Adventists have around 300 members, the Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall for example has around 112 active members, the Bethel Evangelical Free Church has 100, the Meadows Community Church has 80, the Catholic Church 180, and the two Anglican churches in Oadby 140 and 180 respectively.

It should be remembered that in almost all cases the number of worshippers is considerably higher than these membership figures suggest, as a number of people attend services or other religious events without being active members of congregations or other faith groups. Thus for a large established church like St Peter's Church of England, its estimated that 500-600 people visit St Peter's on an average week for worship, weddings and funerals. For Meadows Community Church approximately 200-250 people worship on Sunday mornings and 50-60 on Tuesday nights. For a Hindu festival there may be hundreds or thousands of people attending a Leicester temple. One Sikh consultee estimated 100-250 people were coming to their Oadby Gurdwara (the space with temporary planning permission) on a Sunday, but this does not count usage over the week. Another Sikh consultee said that approximately 1500 worshippers were using the space in Oadby and Wigston. For Muslims, it is

estimated that around 60-70% of Oadby and Wigston based Muslims generally go into Leicester due to lack of local religious facilities. Thus, for this faith community in particular, actual numbers for usage in Oadby represent a large undercounting of worshippers.

This reflects the fact that for some faith communities, notably Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus, there are thought to be large numbers of members of the faith community within the Borough. An issue here is that Census figures are thought to be very out of date and under-represent numbers by a significant amount. For example, one estimate was that there are 1,500 Sunni families in Oadby and Wigston, representing around 5,000 people. Another estimate was around 1,000 families or 4 to 5,000 people of Muslim faith. A third estimate was that there are around 3,500-4,000 Muslims in the Borough. These estimates are considerably higher than the Census figure of 1,552 Muslims living in the Borough at the time of the Census in 2001. Our consultees generally felt that there were significantly more Sunni worshippers in the Borough than Shia worshippers. Some of those consulted in other faith groups noted that their faith communities are aging but it was pointed out that there are a high proportion of Muslim students at Sixth Form College in the Borough. This tends to reinforce the sense of a young (demographically speaking) and growing faith group.

In the same way it is estimated there are approximately 7-8,000 Sikhs in Oadby and Wigston by one consultee while another suggests that there are approximately 3,000 to 4,000 Sikhs in the Borough and 21,000 in Leicestershire. Again it is thought that the Census figures are too low. Another Sikh estimate is that *"Oadby and Wigston has the largest Sikh population. Nearly as many as Leicester City (10,000-11,000) 11,000 in 1983 and in 2001 census roughly the same figure! Considering the movement of population surprised it's not more"*.

For Hindus likewise there appear to be relatively high numbers although it is difficult to separate out what proportion of those attending temples in Leicester are from the Borough. For example it was estimated that 8-10,000 Punjabi Hindus go to the Clarendon Park Road Temple but they may also be drawn from other parts of Leicester and its surrounding urban area. Another estimate was that there are around 5-6,000 Hindus in Leicester but these consultees said that they didn't know how many of these were in Oadby and Wigston. For specific Hindu worship groups, numbers quoted in one case were 150 and 300 in another; each associated with a particular temple or worship space in Oadby itself.

Use of the faith space(s)

The mapping and engagement results showed that there is a very wide range of activity occurring in faith spaces across the Borough. Overall these spaces contribute significantly to the community life of the Borough. For those faith communities whose needs for worship space are not being met, the lack of appropriate faith spaces affects not only their ability to worship in the borough but also their ability to contribute in other ways.

Clearly, worship is the main activity in each case, although the way this is structured varies widely depending on the faith community traditions and their usual practices. In the Christian tradition, for example, Sunday is generally the main day of worship but for Seventh Day Adventists, Saturday is the main day. Some but not all churches have daily services. In the Sikh tradition also, Sunday is the main day of worship but there are prayers morning and evening every day. The Hindus consulted said they usually meet on Sundays. For the Jewish faith community the Sabbath begins on Friday evening. In the Muslim tradition many worshippers go to the mosque daily to pray, but Friday prayers are very important. Jains, too, worship every day but also have religious classes at different times during the week for children and adults.

All the faith communities which have been mapped in the Borough use their spaces more intensely on special days and periods through out the year, to mark times of particular religious significance. For example, for Muslims the holy period of Ramadan brings extra use of faith spaces, as does Eid at the end of Ramadan, when more people attend mosques to pray and celebrate. For Sikhs three main festivals are celebrated which have particular implications for the use of faith spaces: Vaisakhi in April, Diwali in October/November and Guru Nanak's birthday in November 20 days after Diwali. At the Gurdwara there is also more regular usage for weddings, meetings, social celebrations and gatherings, religious celebrations, birthdays, funerals and an Elderly Drop In Centre.

Many faith communities use their faith space - worship space and associated centres, halls and rooms - for activities within their faith community. Some hire out or lend their spaces to others for community based activities of their own. Most faith communities are willing to provide their spaces for other activities but sometimes limits are placed on use by other faith groups or for activities that are not considered appropriate. A strong strand running through the information supplied by consultees is that worship spaces are intensively used as a community resource. In many cases spaces are used for activities every day of the week.

The different kinds of activities noted above are representative but not in any way exhaustive. More detailed information about specific activities is found in the faith group profiles in the Appendices. Many of these activities are sponsored by the faith group themselves but some are run by groups who have hired out space or been given access to the faith space. Most are held on a regular daily, weekly or monthly basis rather than being 'one off' events:

- Religious activities: - worship related activities including services, prayers, fasting, sermons, marriages, funerals, baptisms, christenings, bible study, Alpha course, religious study and teaching, devotional songs, choir practice and so on;
- Social activities: cafes, meals, lunch clubs, kids clubs, youth groups, Brownies, Guides, Cubs, Scouts, chess club, various clubs and societies and so on;
- Education and training activities: language classes, cooking classes, building tours to explain the nature of the faith, 'cook and eat' project and so on;

- Guidance activities: discussion forums with youth societies, AA, Weight Watchers, young offenders programmes and so on;
- Sports, exercise and recreation activities: yoga, badminton, karate, Indian classical dancing, keep fit, belly dancing, pilates, Tai chi, Asian dance and so on; and
- Community services: crèche, nursery, playschool, after school clubs, volunteering of all sorts, Parkinson's disease support group and so on.

Links with other faith groups and the wider community

As well as the range of activities that take place in faith spaces across the Borough, many groups make active links with other faith groups and the wider Oadby and Wigston community. Most of those we consulted in faith communities said that they either have good relationships and good links with other faith groups or are largely self-contained. No consultees reported poor relationships with other faith groups. While some reported no "official relationship" they have positive informal links. Most described their relationship with other faith groups as "very good". There were a large number of individual comments about good relationships between different faith communities. For example, one consultee explained that *"there is an issue about having a mosque in Oadby and two years ago the Churches Together in Oadby wrote formally to the Council giving full support to the Muslims being allocated a mosque in Oadby. Most Muslims in the Borough live in Oadby"*.

Many faith groups actively interconnect with others within their religion and in other religions. A number of Christian faith groups are members of Churches Together in Oadby, while a broader range of faith groups are represented on the Oadby and Wigston Multi-Cultural Group which meets regularly to discuss issues including those which are faith related. A number of faith groups attend an Interfaith Forum in Oadby. Among Hindu faith groups, for example there are representatives on the Multi-Cultural Group, while a Sikh consultee reports their Gurdwara (the worship space with temporary planning permission) *"joins in with anything that is happening locally"*. Another Sikh consultee notes that they have wider links with other faiths including Christians, Jews, Hindus and Muslims for cultural activities and to participate in religious celebrations, as well as taking part in a sub group of the Multi Cultural group. Most Muslim faith groups, meanwhile, also have active links with other faith groups. For example, they hire other faith groups' halls and facilities. Some also take part in the Multi-Cultural Group, the Leicester Interfaith Forum and other cross-faith activities.

A number of faith groups do outreach into the community, institutions and the public sector to educate people about the nature of their faith. The Jains report that they run tours of school and college students, and other visitors, to visit their centre and teach them about the Jain faith. A Hindu consultee made the point that *"A lot of hard work has gone on over the years convincing the people who work in the corridors of power. There was a lot of ignorance, inequalities and racism. It helped that people were listening and co-operative. Oadby and Wigston Borough Council listen and want to*

improve the quality of their services because they want to make sure they are doing the right thing". A Muslim faith group meanwhile reported that they have worked very closely with schools in the Borough when they need advice on interfaith/multicultural matters.

4.3. Current issues faced by faith communities

The mapping and engagement process gave rise to a large number of comments about issues being faced by faith communities in Oadby and Wigston. While some faith groups reported that they have "*sufficient space and do not require any further space*", the most serious issue is the lack of (any or suitable) faith space for some faith communities, especially those with significant numbers of worshippers. The Muslim and Hindu faith communities appear to be suffering the most in this regard, and this issue may re-emerge for the Sikh faith community if the Permission governing their Gurdwara comes to an end. Other issues were lack of funds and in regard to relationships with other faith communities, worship space problems, access and parking problems, difficulties with neighbours and planning problems. We look at each of these in turn below.

Issues in relation to linking with other faith groups in the Borough and with the Council

In some case establishing linkages is made difficult for a faith community. For example, a Muslim faith group representative makes the point that the lack of a faith space in Oadby very much constrains its capacity to interconnect locally. "*The Muslim communities of Oadby and Wigston have contacts with the wider community in the city because of the different structures existing in the city. They do not have similar contacts with the other communities in Oadby and Wigston because the local authority does not have provisions for their own places of worship within the Borough of Oadby and Wigston. Provision for residents in their own locality is important*". We also note that there were comments about religious and racial tensions from some of those we engaged with. One consultee argued that: "*Tensions in Oadby are not so obvious as in the inner city*".

Worship space issues

As noted above some faith groups have significant worship space issues in that they do not have any space in the Borough at all. A Muslim faith group consultee pointed out that Muslims in Oadby and Wigston have to go outside the Borough for worship because there is no provision within the Borough. "*With regard to needs being met sub-regionally, of course when people do not have facilities in their own localities they go to other places which may be within their reach. And of course, since the Oadby and Wigston Muslims do not have a mosque or mosques within the Borough they have no option but to use facilities outside the Borough. The whole purpose of this exercise is to try and provide Muslims and the other communities places of worship within the Borough so that these are locally available*". Another Muslim faith community consultee reinforced this point, saying "*for the Muslim community as a whole in Oadby,*

they do not have a place of worship available to them and that can be a source of much frustration for them”.

One Muslim faith group reported that they have been working hard for a long time to build their relationship with the Borough Council, in order to help find a site for a mosque in Oadby and Wigston. This group commented that *“A few years ago they invited all the faith leaders, councillors and heads of schools etc of the Borough at their group’s own expense to a presentation on what they were aiming for. They have done their best and have worked cooperatively. Have reached the end. They have been in discussion for a potential site and hope to have this confirmed by September or October but they will believe it when they see it”.* Another Muslim faith group consultee reinforced this point saying, *“Glad for any kind of space as there is nothing at the moment. Just anything that is big enough for 200 people to pray. If it’s nearby (ie in a residential area) most people would walk to the mosque. Even if it had just 20-30 car parking spaces they would be happy with that”.*

For most faith groups who already have space in the Borough, the main issue is lack of adequate space for all their worship and related needs. This appears a less widespread issue among Christian churches, who generally report they have sufficient space, than for some other faith communities. But one Christian group commented that they *“could do with even more space as [we are] running out of rooms for all the activities”.* This issue can be periodic: for example, associated with festivals and celebrations when more worshippers attend. It also reflects the fact that some faith groups have to make use of spaces which are inadequate in some way: for example, too small, poorly located, badly laid out, or lacking necessary facilities for their religious requirements. One example is from a Hindu faith group consultee who points out that *“In the city Leicester City Council owns quite a lot of community centres which are being used by all the communities for various activities. There is nothing like that in Oadby and Wigston. If there were a Council-owned community centre it would be greatly used. At the moment they go to various church halls which can only be hired during the week not the weekend”.* Another Hindu faith group consultee pointed out that *“on Sundays there is not enough space for people to sit and enjoy the meal”.*

Some groups also have concerns about the need to undertake expensive refurbishment and alterations to their spaces for general upkeep, to meet legislative requirements for disability access and fire rating, and for particular needs of their religious observance. This is an issue that cuts across faith communities. For example, some Hindu groups need a fire (Havankund) around which to say prayers, which makes existing temples in Leicester unsuitable as they are without chimneys. They would therefore need a space which could accommodate this requirement. One Christian faith group commented that *“disabled access to upstairs is a problem - it’s mainly used by dance school. Only way is to install a lift but that’s too expensive”.* The issue is not a reluctance to undertake such improvements or build suitable faith spaces but either a lack of resources that makes this financially difficult for groups, or the lack of available sites to allow suitable facilities to be located in the Borough.

A few consultees from across faith groups referred to problems of graffiti, vandalism and rowdy behaviour from young people who gather on street corners nearby their faith spaces. This does not seem to be specifically targeted at any particular group, although fears were raised by some consultees during the course of the research that certain faith communities such as Muslim and Jewish faith groups may be targeted in future by racist attacks on faith buildings.

A number of consultees made points about the scale and access needs of faith communities. These often had implications for the planning system (of which more below). However one respondent suggested this should be seen as beyond the scope the research should encompass. In this consultees' view *"The research just needs to establish whether or not there is a need for places of worship for the different faiths, especially non-Christian faiths. The duty of the planning officers is to look at the plans submitted by applicants and then decide how these plans comply with their requirements"*.

Access and parking issues

Obviously worship spaces need to be as accessible as possible to their users. Access and parking issues were a relatively common concern expressed by faith groups. A considerable number described their parking as adequate, with their own car parks, or able to use other car parks or on street parking without problems. At the same time, a Hindu faith group for whom parking is currently adequate, were concerned that parking permits may be introduced and *"that would be a problem"*. Some other groups appear to be having current problems in arranging sufficient parking; this occurs across the range of faith communities. Issues range from someone blocking a driveway from time to time, through unauthorised parking during special evening services or during particular festivals or holy days/periods (such as Eid), to there simply being insufficient parking space close by the worship space at any time. Some Christian faith groups, for example, cited issues about rising demand for limited car parking space, and the introduction of parking meters. In some instances this was seen as a structural problem (for example where the faith space was located on a main road). In other circumstances it was felt to be more about management and being a good neighbour.

One Hindu faith group consultee noted that parking was a serious issue because many of community services and facilities were right next to one another and competing for parking space. *"Parking is a serious problem. We are right opposite a Methodist church, nearby a Chinese church and few doors away is a Sikh Gurdwara and lots of pubs and coffee bars. People are struggling to find parking. It is a residential area and people living there are very tolerant but the police are sometimes heavy handed with the worshippers, fining and clamping their car wheels"*.

Points about the sustainability implications of expecting to be able to drive to faith spaces were raised obliquely. One Muslim faith group consultee made the point that *"Local Muslims in Oadby and Wigston are willing to educate their own people on how to use the facilities ie you can't bring your cars to the mosque"*. Given that a number of communities have either no local worship space or only one space that may not be in

walkable range, many of their users are likely to drive to that worship space rather than walk or use public transport.

Parking also emerged as an issue in relation to being a good neighbour and is discussed below.

Issues with neighbours

Faith groups pointed out that very good relationships have often developed with individuals and local communities around particular worship spaces. Some reported no problems. A typical comment was *"we get on well with our neighbours"*. A Hindu faith community said of this, *"they live in harmony"*. One Christian faith group pointed out that they were *"Fairly careful about letting it out for parties and take care not to allow loud music late at night. Historically there are no difficult relationships either"*. A consultee from the Salvation Army meanwhile explained there had been initial anxieties from neighbours but these had been resolved. *"Because they are the Salvation Army and people know the client group they serve, there were some concerns when the initial building commenced. There were also concerns about the levels of noise from brass bands but building well sound insulated. But since it has opened the response from local residents has generally been very positive with a few exceptions"*. At the same time this group has suffered from acts of vandalism. *"There have been about 6 incidents of vandalism since they opened in May 2005. Vehicles have been vandalised, tyres slashed, 3 burglaries. Police unable or unwilling to process properly"*.

Perhaps the most serious issue is where a faith space is not developed because of local objections. Particularly Muslim faith group consultees described examples where local objections had stopped faith spaces from being given approval. *"Yes, we have tried to get planning permission for a big house on the main road with 20-30 car parking spaces but it didn't go ahead because there were too many objections. This was approx 3 years ago...Other sites have attracted lots of objections from neighbours because of the misconception of what the faith is about. The [name of] site could have been big enough for prayers and a community facility but the application was rejected. Because of these reasons you get a small group of people who get wound up and say it's racism and cause trouble and then say that the Council doesn't want a mosque"*.

Another Muslim faith group made the point that this kind of situation reflects attitudinal problems and lack of knowledge about Islam within the community. *"There is quite a large misunderstanding of what Islam is about. A lot of people think Muslim = terrorist. There are anti Muslim feelings within Oadby and the councillors get vibes about that anti Muslim feeling. It has been reported that some people have said that the windows would be broken every day on a Muslim place of worship"*. It seems likely that such views then fed into specific objections to sites proposed for Muslim places of worship, which received *"a barrage of complaints"*. In this instance the group noted that *"The Borough Council had a consultation on policy for places of worship. In our opinion, a mosque next to the church could promote community cohesion and we could use each other's car parks as main day of worship is different. All got the church*

leaders came together to discuss it but in the end it was a question of NIMBYism ("not in my back yard").

Other issues were also raised. It was reported by a Christian faith group that, in the past, limited car parking had caused tension with local residents. Another Christian group noted this is a current area for tension at one of their churches, which is located in a residential area, saying that *"There is some irritation about the parking and some neighbours are upset by all the groups that use it. But generally they are very glad the church is there"*. This comment reflects the way that a set of interconnected issues may come together as a source of annoyance for neighbours (e.g. parking, noise, and the way the faith space makes the location busy).

Planning issues

Some of the issues covered above clearly relate to the planning system. This was an area in which some experienced a *"smooth process" or "no problems"*, while others consultees had substantial difficulties. One response from a Christian faith group about the nature of the planning system was that *"personally I find it time consuming, difficult and confusing"*, while another Christian faith group reported it was *"Very difficult to get planning permission for their current building and it is very restrictive. Tesco's in South Wigston is allowed to open 24 hours but the church is only allowed to open from 9am-10pm or 8pm on a Sunday"*. Another Christian faith group said that *"I have had no communication with the Borough Council. Neither the church nor my home or other neighbours have received any information about the [town centre] Masterplan, which has created a lot of confusion and suspicion. People [locally] have not had leaflets"*.

One Sikh consultee said they found the planning system very exhausting, complex and a long wait. Another Sikh faith consultee found conversely that the planning aspects of the process went well and that the planning staff were very helpful. Instead they have had problems in relation to building control process that appeared to show a lack of understanding of their religious practices and their building control implications. *"A lack of religious knowledge by the building control people has caused a lot of difficulties and they don't seem to understand that there are no services at fixed times and that although a few hundred people can come through in one day, at any one time there are not many. They don't understand about the 'drop in' nature of prayer. I am finding it hard to explain so they understand"*.

As mentioned above, there were a number of specific examples of Muslim faith groups finding possible sites for a faith space and then being turned down after extensive negotiations and pre-planning approval discussions, as in the example quoted in the previous section. In one case a site next to an existing Christian church was turned down for development as a mosque because Council policy was for it to be retained as green space. A consultee noted that another site has come up as possible place for a mosque and community centre but already a number of objections have been put forward. It is clear that the process has become very frustrating and as one Muslim faith group explained, *"If you keep moving the goal posts then it's difficult to keep*

up...we have been asked by county and Borough to do plans and present proposals and this takes up time and resources and money". They also commented, "Whenever we talk to bodies/agencies we don't tell our members or community because they have had so many dead ends".

Other issues

A number of consultees told us about other issues they were facing. These included lack of funds and the high costs of land and property in the Borough, which was felt to be causing issues for the growth of faith communities. One issue was that the price of property was thought to be seriously constraining faith groups' capacity to buy and develop sites for worship space. This was especially a problem for smaller and poorer groups but also for all groups that did not already have their own space in Oadby and Wigston. It also had more indirect effects such as limiting membership growth in faith communities as young families could not afford very high housing prices in the Borough.

Another particularly important issues was about faith communities being represented through faith spaces where they live. It was argued that the lack of worship space for a range of faith communities demonstrates a lack of balance that is wrong in a multicultural area. A Muslim faith community consultee pointed out that, *"There are churches in every single ward of Oadby and Wigston. 20-30 churches. At least 2 in every ward but no other faith groups' places of worship apart from the Gurdwara".* It seems clear that while this reflects a long term historically reality of a predominantly Christian community, now the community is more diverse in faith terms and worship space provision should reflect that.

4.4. Faith groups' aspirations for the future

Faith communities were generally very clear about their aspirations for the future and any likely changes they foresee which may affect their future plans. Again, we cover the key points in the following section. The most urgent aspirations relate to obtaining suitable worship space in the Borough. This is a key issue for both Muslim and Hindu faith groups and may also be important for Evangelical and Pentecostal groups.

As one Muslim faith group explained, what they would like is to *"Establish a centre/mosque for worship and prayer – (and to promote better understanding of Islam within the community) and have a community facility for community services –eg healthcare for the elderly, sports facilities for youth, crèche facilities for mothers etc. It would have flexible usage. But they are now very cautious because they have had so many disappointments".* Another Muslim faith group representative made a similar plea: *"Why can't they buy land and build a purpose built mosque. It would be good to find somewhere within the existing space. In the long term because the Muslim community is growing they have to have some kind of facility. A purpose built mosque or community centre would be a good idea with the flexibility to expand as numbers grow".* A third consultee pointed out that this was a logical conclusion of the growth of

the faith community. *"The long term aspiration in the Muslim community would be to allow to worship without hindrance from anyone and to be allowed to remain in peace and harmony amongst whom they live and have done so for a long time in England. This is a natural development of any community, and cannot really be called a long-term aspiration. It has got to be understood that as the communities expand, the need for more places of worship would naturally arise as indeed has happened with the Christian communities".* The high cost of undertaking site purchase and building was mentioned by a number of consultees, with one saying *"we don't have a large amount of capital. All mosques are self financed by the members - if not enough is raised some money will come from outside of the Borough"*. Over the long term, too, it seems clear from points made by those consulted, that ideally there would be appropriate worship space for different parts of the Muslim faith community.

For Hindu faith groups who are now "temple hopping" or making other provisional worship space arrangements, the need for local worship spaces is also an important aspiration. Again, there are different religious needs that would mean different spaces are required. One Hindu faith group said about this, *"We would like to continue but would like a small building which would be known as an Arya Samaj rather than a temple. Anything which can accommodate 150-200 with kitchen facilities because sometimes we have communal meals afterwards"*. Other consultees from the same Hindu faith perspective said that their long-term aspiration was *"To get ourselves a temple in Leicester. We would love one in Oadby and Wigston. It would be much preferred if it was in Oadby because quite a few of the members who go on a regular basis live around this area. If we had a place of our own we would like to carry out teaching, look after the elderly, organise lunch clubs for elderly Asians, special needs children, teaching Hindi, moral values classes, teaching the children prayers, also weddings"*. Another Hindu faith group which is currently going in to Leicester for worship said that their main problem was they did not have enough space for big events such as weddings, so the aspiration was to acquire nearby property (this process was occurring outside the Borough). Another Hindu faith consultee said that their group would like to build in Oadby and Wigston but pointed out the cost implications: *"We would like to build a place like Geeta Bhavan [temple] in Oadby and Wigston but since everything is so expensive it would take years. Talking about millions of pounds. Fundraising is difficult at this time"*.

In the Sikh faith community, while they have managed to establish a worship space in the Borough they may well outgrow this in the next few years. This will bring some issues including adequate worship space and parking facilities. One consultee noted that, *"In a couple of years' time we will need more space - nearly everyone owns a car and there will be a need for more parking so we anticipate problems in the future. If we stay there [current site] and all the factories are closed on Sunday it may be possible to use their car parking spaces on Sundays. But if working trends changed then there would be a problem. We can't extend this building because there is no scope for it. We can't build another floor because it is expensive and structurally unfeasible. There's a possibility to buy next door. There are lots of complications buying something and converting to a place of worship"*.

Although some Christian churches are well provided with worship space locally, other growing parts of the faith community may need more worship space as their numbers are expanding. However, plans to secure or expand worship space in Oadby and Wigston did not appear to be causing the same difficulties that Muslim and Hindu faith communities are experiencing. One consultee from an Evangelical church, for example, noted, *"In time to come it is likely that the church would look at spreading out as the membership increases but there is no immediate intention so far. It's possible that a building might be sought in Oadby and Wigston, but there are no immediate plans"*. A Pentecostal faith group reported that with their goal of increasing to 250 congregation members they would have unmet space requirements for Sunday mornings and would probably have to hire a hall. The aspirations of other Christian churches tended to be around outreach about the Christian message, increasing community service to their local communities, improving facilities including those for providing meals, and growing their congregations. One Christian faith group said *"The congregation would probably see the long term aspirations as keeping going and recruiting more congregation"*; another that *"Christian Witness - we would like to reach more people in the community with the Christian message"* while a third that their long term aspiration was *"developing another church within the parish. We are not planning to expand at the moment. Exploration - using a school"*.

For smaller faith communities, such as the Jain and Jewish communities, long term aspirations appear to focus on their existing places of worship outside the Borough. The former mentioned the need for more parking facilities on site and the latter that it is in the process of seeking planning approval for a religious school classroom. Neither focused on developing worship space in Oadby and Wigston.

4.5. Suggestions for meeting aspirations and enhancing faith groups contribution

Solutions to lack of faith space

There was a range of views expressed by faith groups engaged through the research about how best to meet worship space aspirations. Some groups said initially that they didn't know of any solutions but on further thought came up with a number of ideas and proposals. Other faith groups, meanwhile, had very clear ideas about how their worship space aspirations might best be met and thus enable them to enhance their capacity to contribute to the life of the community in Oadby and Wigston. We document these suggestions below. As can be seen in this section, not all the solutions 'fit together' as they demonstrate different perspectives about where best to locate worship space in Oadby and Wigston: whether to develop space separately for different faith communities and groups within communities, or to focus on developing multi-faith space. However, when considered together with the work on planning needs, later in this report, a clearer picture about a possible way forward starts to emerge.

An overarching comment about the nature of the research vis-à-vis finding solutions came from a Christian faith group consultee who argued that the research was top down while the drive for a place of worship was bottom up, with implications for how faith groups might regard the outcomes. *"The Council doesn't usually set the agenda. Normally if a religious group wants to expand its facilities a committee of the faith group sits down and starts looking around. If no buildings are available then they make inquiries re acquisition of land. If a building is found then the next step would be to look at planning permission re structural changes/extension etc. Therefore the drive for a place of worship is bottom up whereas this piece of research is top down. As a result it is likely that some faith groups appear to think that the Council is likely to make such provisions available."*

A Hindu faith group meanwhile suggested the Council could have a stronger role in supporting faith groups in a financial sense: *"If there is space available or if the Council is going to give any subsidies for renting or leasing premises, that would be very helpful. It would also be welcome if the Council could give them a grant or interest free loan to buy their own building or even a very long lease on an existing building. Then they would be happy with that. They would of course be willing to put the bulk of the money forward but can't manage it all"*.

Need for provision of suitable worship space

There appears to be a relatively strong agreement from most consulted that there must be a focus on provision for communities which currently have no faith space, especially the Muslim faith community in the first instance, and also the Hindu faith community. A number of those engaged with in the research clearly saw the solutions as needing to urgently address the unmet worship space needs of Muslim and Hindu worships in the Borough. A Muslim faith community consultee said they *"would prefer to wait for the report to come out and then would like the Council to seriously consider how they are going to solve this problem and try and find a solution for both Muslim groups and the Hindu community and at least find somewhere where they can do their prayers"*. Not only was this provision considered important in its own terms but was thought to have broader, positive outcomes. A Christian faith group summed this up as follows: *"There is an urgent need for the Muslim community, at least, also to have their own centre in the Borough, preferable in Oadby where most of them live. They have been trying to achieve this for several years. In the light of the general Islamophobia in the country as a whole, it is important that everything is done to facilitate relationships between the Muslim community and the rest of the community, and this can be done best when the Muslims have their own building, and their own leaders present in the Borough"*. A Jewish faith consultee stated that *"there has got to be a mosque...But where to put a mosque? The Muslim and Hindu communities have been very, very patient"*.

Another Muslim faith community consultee agreed that there needed to be worship space developed in Oadby and Wigston, first for each faith community, and over time for groups within these communities. They suggested that *"Council should be agreeable to entertaining applications for places of worship from these communities and this can be done in a number of ways: 1. Allow communities to identify locations themselves,*

and they would then make applications on that basis. Or 2. The Council could identify sites where they might be inclined to give permission and this would make it easier for the communities for making applications". They went on to say that "It would be a good start to have one place of worship for each faith community, i.e. Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, and as time goes to see how their needs develop from other groups within these communities. It has to be recognised that like the Christian community which has many denominations and many different denominational places of worship, the other faith communities too have different denominations, all of whom could ask for a place of worship of its own".

Individual questionnaire responses made similar points. One Muslim faith community respondent noted that, *"we have no place for worship in Oadby. We have been struggling with getting a place for over a decade. The Council is not very co-operative. Permission was not granted in a residential area even when the majority of Muslims live there."*

There were a number of views that supported a more 'planning-led' solution to locating worship space that would take into account the pressing need for worship space for the Muslim and Hindu faith communities. A Christian faith group consultee suggested that the Borough *"need to look at any site that comes up asking if a good site to build a mosque/temple"*. At the same time they acknowledged that *"there is a problem for other faith communities wanting to build a place of worship because the sites that become available are often in the wrong place or community within the Borough"*.

A Hindu faith group suggested a community centre might be part of the answer, *"the solution could be a community centre to which all communities can have access for social and cultural events except for worship. Would generate an income for the Borough as well! Would be self supporting in a few years time. The Council would have to make the initial financial commitments"*. Conversely, another Hindu faith respondent did not think that there was a lack of places of worship and *"you should be prepared to travel a few miles"*. Meanwhile, some views from Christian faith groups focused instead on *"using vacant space in existing buildings at times when the building is not being used."*

Location of new worship space in the Borough

Views were somewhat split about the best location or locations for new faith spaces to be developed. The suggested options included Oadby and Wigston's town centres, residential areas, industrial/employment land areas and on the edge of the urban area of the Borough. A number of faith groups commented on this 'in principle', with one group saying that *"basically a Christian church wants to be either where people are or can gather easily"*. This seemed to sum up the view of groups across faith communities.

In relation to town centre locations, there was a split between those who saw town centres as the best place for new worship space and others who saw these centres as being a poor location for a range of reasons discussed below. A common comment on

the positive side was that "a town centre location is the best place for a place of worship", while another that it was "ideal - except for parking problems!" A Christian faith group consultee said in support of these views that "Churches in town centres have a unique character and when people don't live immediately around a church they are not so close as a community, e.g. because they have to travel to the church by car". A Muslim faith group pointed out that, "since there is no such facility in Oadby, this is what we were looking for".

At the same time issues were noted with town centre locations including traffic, parking issues, noise, personal security, disabled access and lack of suitable sites. The loss of car parking space for shopping "would cause reaction". A Hindu faith consultee suggested that a town centre location was "ok as long as it doesn't interfere with anyone. It should be invisible. The Gurdwara is in an industrial area which is dead after 5pm. It doesn't interfere with anyone. If it was in Oadby Parade (which is also dead after 5pm) may be ok but it would take the car parking facilities, which is not helpful. If there is a shop vacant which was made into a place of worship that would be ok but in the Parade there will be a problem with parking". A Muslim faith group consultee argued that, "this would not be ideal because it has the potential of creating an environment of distraction of another kind and one has to be realistic and not deliberately create situations of potential conflict". Opposition also came from one Christian faith group, which said "it depends what you want the main focus of the town to be. I don't want to deny other faiths a place of worship, but I don't want the town centre to disproportionately reflect non Christian faiths". A Jewish faith consultee also felt there were issues with town centre locations. "In the Masterplan the space that is now designated for a place of worship was first of all down as public use. There are too many political (small p) problems with the town centre site".

There were some specific suggestions about town centre sites, with one Christian faith group suggesting the old Library building should be developed as a place of worship. Other suggested sites from these consultees included the following: the "Sandhurst Street car park site should be looked at carefully and the Evicta site on Harborough Rd. The land behind the Pavilion or behind Manor School". Another Christian faith group referred to sites that could have been appropriate but ended up with other land uses being developed. "In the middle of Oadby there was a hotel called the Hermitage which is now flats within last five years approximately - might have been a good place to put a temple/mosque but probably too early in the life of the community".

In relation to employment areas (often where industrial land uses are situated), views were split, and a very limited preference for this location seemed to be driven by pragmatic concerns about land availability and acceptability to local communities, rather than a free choice. It was hedged about with caveats. There was some support for such sites. For example, A Jewish faith consultee said that "Council have to find sites in the industrial area as lots of old factories. It's the area that causes the least inconvenience to the surrounding population and it's where the Sikh Resource Centre is already. There is lots of parking, it's used mainly at weekends. There are plenty of places of worship in Leicester in industrial areas. Need to avoid ghettoisation".

A number of faith groups pointed out that employment/industrial land could be problematic as too out-of-the-way, isolated, and thus cause security problems. A Muslim faith group explained they did not favour this option because *"they [employment sites] are on the outskirts. If there is any anti Muslim sentiment and people wanted to destroy or damage the centre then there would be security issues. People would feel insecure. And you'd need more people driving so would be anti the Council's green policy. Also difficult for people with disabilities"*. Another Muslim faith group view tended to agree. *"Commercial buildings can be acquired in what used to be light industrial areas, but in reality these are all becoming redundant. Muslims could buy a suitable commercial property with adequate parking as a Muslim centre for conversion to a mosque. But this would not really be the proper solution"*. One Christian faith group argued, employment sites would be suitable only if they ensured *"Visibility to the community"*. Another Christian faith group view was that *"Some have established churches in that area and but I am not happy with it as I believe that the Church is there to serve the community"*.

Residential locations were favoured by some, but not all, faith groups for locating worship spaces. A number of groups felt this kind of location would generate opposition. A Hindu faith group said that a site in a residential area was not acceptable for future development while another commented that *"No - people aren't really receptive. There will be outright opposition. However there are some churches in residential areas eg the one in the car park opposite the Methodist church and St Paul's Church in Hamble Road"*. A Muslim faith group consultee agreed saying that they *"would expect a lot of hassle from the neighbours before even to get planning permission and neighbours can be funny about it"*. Another Muslim faith consultee concurred, arguing that, *"Communities can also buy residential houses and convert those into places of worship - but that has a serious potential of conflict with the neighbours. Residential sites don't have enough parking and are surrounded by residents of other faiths who may not be so amenable to the siting of a mosque in their area"*.

Likewise, a Christian faith group said that residentially located worship space could cause significant problems with neighbours over noise and parking issues. *"The membership of any church will cause havoc re parking because of a high percentage of members in ownership of a car, therefore residents would most likely be prone to making complaints. If there is an already established church and it came on the market for sale, there is no reason why new owners shouldn't have the freedom to worship without undue molestation from neighbours, except that the new owners had a style of worship that causes genuine alarm. Building a new church/place of worship in a residential area would be approached with caution"*. Various other groups from across Muslim, Hindu and other faiths agreed parking was likely to be a problem with residential locations. There were dissenting views. One Christian faith group conversely argued that, *"Where there is new housing I would like to see an allocation for a Christian place of worship"* and a Muslim faith group argued that residential sites were *"ideal as in the heart of the community"*.

An edge of Borough location for worship space tended not to be favoured by many groups. A Hindu faith consultee noted that as to *"greenfield sites, there is opposition to Pennbury eco town. The majority are against the idea. They don't want to lose the greenfield site and it will definitely increase the noise and traffic in that area. It will affect Oadby very much"*. However there was some support. A Muslim faith group consultee suggested a good location for worship space was *"open land/housing areas where there is some spare land. People won't object so much if it's a certain distance away but mind if it's just next door"*. Another Muslim faith consultee supported this idea (by implication), saying *"We are told that Oadby and Wigston is short of open spaces for location of a mosque and other places of worship. It would be in the interest of all the residents if places of worship are made available in some suitable open spaces which would provide them with all the facilities without being obstructive to any immediate neighbourhood"*. A Jewish faith consultee proposed *"perhaps a greenfield site that's suitable. Maybe A6 near the village of Great Glen - old farm house. This was previously turned down on access grounds"*.

Conversions of existing buildings or development of new buildings

In relation to conversions of existing buildings there was again a diversity of views. There was a split between those who felt it was acceptable to convert buildings formerly used for other purposes but not religious buildings, and those who did not mind if there was re-use of any building, religious or otherwise, by another denomination or faith. A Muslim faith group consultee said conversion of a former church was not ideal. It could be done but depended on the church's outlook and conditions placed on the conversion. One Christian faith group said that they would not be happy with a proposal to convert a former church building, whereas, another said their faith space *"was just such a conversion. However conversions can be expensive"*. It was suggested by yet another Christian faith group consultee that, *"realistically, conversion of former church buildings will happen as certain communities cease to occupy their churches. We would not oppose change"*. They went on to point out that parking or noise problems to residents would need serious consideration.

A number of faith groups said they preferred to develop new buildings because they can then design and develop them to meet their worship and related space needs in the most specific way possible. At the same time land availability and development costs remain key issues. A Muslim faith consultee simply said *"Fantastic! ☺"* while a Sikh faith group said they *"Would love a purpose built building! It would solve a lot of problems. It's just a question of finding suitable land"*. One Christian faith group pointed out that they *"generally preferred new buildings as we have systems in place and have a better understanding of costs"*. There were cost issues for a number of groups. A Hindu faith group meanwhile pointed out that they had no problem with new buildings *"although it might be problematic in so far as they could raise enough money for refurbishment but not to buy one so a new building may be a bit difficult from a financial point of view"*.

Views about multi faith and shared worship spaces

Views about multi-faith spaces were rather split although this did not clearly fall along particular faith community lines. Some consultees referred to specific multi-faith and shared faith space proposals in the pipeline, and a much larger number gave views 'in principle'.

Some faith groups did not think multi-faith space would work in any form, with one describing the idea as "a red herring!" This Muslim faith community consultee argued, "This idea is designed to distract people from the main issue and take them down the road of multi cultural/multi faith understanding which has become so desirable in our society. It puts pressure on people to comply with this trend and is an attempt to submerge their real needs". Some points were about a group's perception of how other faith communities would negatively view multi-faith worship space. So, for example, a Hindu faith group commented, "There might be a problem with this e.g. the Sikhs want their own separate temple and the Muslims wouldn't like other communities using theirs. We don't mind and it wouldn't be a problem". A Jain faith group consulted said that in their opinion this would not work. Some Christian faith groups also said they "would not agree with this proposal", "would be not happy with that, and I am sure that Muslims and Sikhs wouldn't want a multi faith facility either", "we wouldn't want to do this" or that it would be "very much as a last resort. We prefer our own facilities". A Sikh faith group consultee said that a multi-faith space "will not help any faith at all".

Conversely, some faith groups saw such multi-faith spaces as a possibility, either able to be used by all faiths, or in different faith use combinations, such as two faith communities sharing a space. A common proposal was to build a community centre or centres (but this as generally not instead of but as well as dedicated faith spaces for different faith communities). A Christian faith group said along these lines, "It is likely that Oadby needs a community centre, perhaps near its village. Such a facility would probably help reduce some of the concerns of some Oadby's residents. A community centre would provide a venue that would be available for all (i.e. residents of Oadby) and for new communities". A Hindu faith group suggested that multi-faith spaces could be created that are accessible to everybody. These would be 'community places' rather than dedicated multi-faith space. "There should be more community places which are available for multi faith activities. It shouldn't be restricted or governed by any particular body. Mustn't be dominated by any one sect".

A number made the point that multi-faith space might be suitable for celebrations and social events but not as worship space. The point was raised about the difficulties of shared use of consecrated or holy space. One Christian faith group said there could be sharing of buildings but not of sanctuaries, while another noted that it "depends whether it assumes Christians would be part of it and if there are community based projects that can be run together. But there are issues in terms of worship/prayer. To have a worship space that is shared is difficult to envisage. The church is not consecrated but it is Holy space and would be contrary to [the denomination's] standing orders". A Muslim faith group consultee also thought it would be possible but raised religious practice difficulties: "the thing is if that if you have to have shared use

of prayer rooms it would be difficult as there are completely different concepts in the Muslim faith and Hindus as well. There is a multi faith facility in the hospital, which works because people just go on an ad hoc basis. In Islam you can't have any idols, statues or even paintings or pictures unless they are verses from the Koran in the prayer room so it would be difficult to use joint facilities".

Thus, one group of suggestions was for multi-faith space only for larger events rather than for all worship needs. One Hindu faith group respondent, for example, suggested that a large capacity (500-600 people) *"shared hall is acceptable across multi-faith to enable us to hold events like weddings"* or events like Diwali and Nauratri to avoid the *"daylight robbery"* charges by the private sector for hall hire. Another consultee summed up the limits on such space in worship terms as follows: *"As a multi cultural centre that would be fine but not for worship"*.

A number of faith groups who were sympathetic to the idea of a multi-faith space in theory or had *"no objections to the general principle"*, thought they presented logistical issues in practice. A Jewish faith community consultee said, *"in theory you should be able to make a multi faith centre but it would be difficult to get [different faith groups] under the same roof"*. A Christian faith group likewise suggested, *"in some ways this would be ideal, but probably impractical"*. A number of faith groups perceived issues with different faith groups being able to obtain fair access to a multi-faith space. A Christian faith group member suggested, *"The concept of a multi faith venue is good in itself. The question that might arise is that if there is a high demand there could be difficulties. Or if one group tried to book a disproportionate amount of space on successive occasions then other groups might be denied their opportunity. People's patterns of worship varies therefore depending on their commitment. Some groups may make excessive demands on limited resources"*. A Hindu faith consultee likewise said that they think that they *"would never get in or get a fair share of the space or facilities. Some of the communities tend to take over these organisations, and then you can't get in even if you try to book a year in advance. If there was a large enough facility that were fairly dealt with that might be ok but it would probably be occupied every Friday"*. Another issue is food preparation as dietary requirements such as vegetarian food and so on may be difficult to reconcile with other dietary arrangements in the same kitchen space.

Wider role of faith communities

Views were sought on the wider role of faith communities in Oadby and Wigston. The faith groups noted a broad range of roles played. Many groups pointed out that Leicester is a very multicultural city and a Muslim faith consultee noted that, *"The Muslim community is one of the biggest financial contributors to Oadby and Wigston and the whole of Leicester and brings in a lot of money to the area. It contributes to charity and the community and they are all prepared to fund their own places of worship. It's just a problem of finding the space and getting the planning permission"*. A Hindu faith group consultee meanwhile suggested, *"people are doing whatever they can"*. Another Hindu group explained that they believe in *"the social mixing up within the communities"*. They are involved in different charities, e.g. Lion's Club, and in other

social and cultural ways. *"Since the scriptures were developed, service to the community is part of their routine way of life. You have an obligation to serve the country where you live".* A Sikh faith group consultee noted similarly that they *"always like to help people in the wider sense and get along with the other faiths. Sikhs have lived in Oadby for a long time - since the mid 1970s. Over the next few years I expect the Sikh community will increase".* A Christian faith group reinforced this point, saying, *"It is good that we now have a Sikh centre in the Borough. This makes dialogue with the Sikh community much easier and productive".*

Some groups, such as Evangelical churches undertake substantial outreach work across the community, whereas some other Christian faith groups have a less overt role. At the same time, as one faith group pointed out, their congregations contained *"the usual good community focused people who happen to be [denomination]"*. Another said that people in faith communities need to be involved with the whole community, not just their members, while a member of an interdenominational Christian group suggested *"all communities should make more of an effort to meet together socially and to get to know each other at a social level. I feel concerned that all groups tend to withdraw into their own religious/ethnic communities"*. In a related way, both a Jain faith consultee and a Muslim faith consultee argued that interfaith activity and dialogue had great value in engaging with the wider community: *"I think if there is an inter faith group in Oadby, or one is setup, it would provide an excellent forum for faith groups to give back to the community and hold events etc such as the upcoming One World Week Multi Faith fair"*.

One suggestion was that faith communities should be more involved in the actual planning in the future of the Borough, *"e.g. in the vision and how they'd like the Borough to work. They are consulted at the moment but rarely. When the Borough is looking forward, instead of receiving a booklet it would be good to have some direct consultation with faith groups. Doesn't mean should have more of a say than anyone else but it should be recognised that you are representing lots of people in the Borough"*.

Conversely, another Muslim faith consultee argued that it was a bureaucratic exercise: *"This is riding on the bandwagon of the value of interfaith activities which are over hyped, artificially contrived and really designed to tick some boxes in the bureaucracy that's being created by the local authority and government. Leicester City and Leicestershire has a good record of race and interfaith relations, and the local authorities and the people take pride in what has been achieved in this field"*.

4.6. Conclusions from faith community engagement

Profile of faith communities

Oadby and Wigston is home to a wide range of faith communities including Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, Jain, Muslim and Sikh faiths. There are also active Interfaith and Multi-faith organisations and groupings. Within faith communities, including

Christian, Hindu and Muslim communities, there are different faith traditions and denominations represented in the Borough. The faith communities in Oadby and Wigston thus present a fairly complex faith picture and this is reflected in their varying worship space situations and needs.

Some groups do not currently have appropriate spaces for worship, as discussed in the engagement sections above. Among groups that have worship space, the locations of places of worship vary across the Borough, among groups that have worship space (some do not as is discussed in the engagement sections above), mirroring the geographically uneven spread of faith communities themselves. Membership numbers also vary between faith communities and between sub-groups and denominations within communities. It should be remembered that in almost all cases the number of worshippers is considerably higher than membership figures suggest, as a number of people attend services or other religious events without being active members of congregations or other faith groups. For faith communities who have increasing numbers in the Borough, including Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, there is a sharpening mismatch between growing numbers of worshippers located in Oadby and Wigston and the lack of worship space.

The mapping and engagement results showed that there is a very wide range of activity occurring in worship and related faith spaces across the Borough. Overall these spaces contribute significantly to the community life of the Borough. For those faith communities whose needs for worship space are not being met, the lack of appropriate faith spaces affects not only their ability to worship in the borough but also their ability to contribute in other ways. Meanwhile, for those groups with worship space, the way use is structured varies across groups and communities, but each shows patterns of daily, weekly and yearly usage, and all have special days, events and religious periods of more intense use.

Many faith communities use their faith space - worship space and associated centres, halls and rooms - for activities within their faith community, and some hire out or lend their spaces to others for community based activities of their own. Most faith communities are willing to provide their spaces for other activities. Sometimes limits are placed on use by other faith groups or for activities that are not considered appropriate. There is an extremely wide range of use of worship and associated spaces, encompassing religious, social, educational and training, guidance, sport and exercise, and community service activities. Faith groups and communities are thus providing a substantial level of support to the capacity of social, cultural and community services in Oadby and Wigston. Providing suitable faith spaces for faith groups currently without such space will also allow the level of community service to increase.

As well as the range of activities that take place in faith spaces across the Borough, many groups make active links with other faith groups and the wider Oadby and Wigston community. Most of those we consulted in faith communities said that they either have good relationships and good links with other faith groups or are largely self-contained. Many have semi-official linkages through the Multi Cultural Group and a

number undertake different kinds of outreach into their local communities, through activities and services at their worship spaces and elsewhere in the Borough.

The mapping and engagement process gave rise to a large number of comments about issues being faced by faith communities in Oadby and Wigston. While some faith groups reported that they have "*sufficient space and do not require any further space*", the most serious issue is the lack of (any or suitable) faith space for some faith communities, especially those with significant numbers of worshippers. The Muslim and Hindu faith communities are suffering the most in this regard, and this issue may re-emerge for the Sikh faith community when the temporary Permission governing their Gurdwara in Oadby and Wigston comes to an end. Other issues are lack of funds for purchasing land and buildings; the expense of upkeep and refurbishment of worship space; access and parking problems; difficulties with neighbours; and planning and building control problems. In some cases, establishing linkages is made difficult for a faith community because of their lack of faith space. For example, a Muslim faith group representative made the point that the lack of a faith space in Oadby very much constrains their capacity to interconnect locally.

Faith communities were generally very clear about their aspirations for the future and any likely changes they foresee which may affect their future plans. The most urgent aspirations relate to obtaining suitable worship space in the Borough. This is a key issue for both Muslim and Hindu faith groups now, and may also be important for Evangelical and Pentecostal groups in the medium to longer term as their congregations grow. Muslim faith groups wish to find space for worship within Oadby and Wigston and have been trying to do so for some years. As one Muslim faith group explained, what they would like is to "*Establish a centre/mosque for worship and prayer – (and to promote better understanding of Islam within the community) and have a community facility for community services – e.g. healthcare for the elderly, sports facilities for youth, crèche facilities for mothers etc. It would have flexible usage*".

Views were sought on the wider role of faith communities in Oadby and Wigston and faith groups noted a broad range of roles played. Service to the community was felt to be intrinsic to many faith communities, and as well as the activities noted in this section, some do substantial outreach work. Some faith groups are also involved in interfaith activities through the Multi Cultural Group and other avenues, and argued that interfaith activity and dialogue had great value in engaging with the wider community. One faith group consultee however felt that interfaith activities were "*over hyped, artificially contrived and really designed to tick some boxes in the bureaucracy that's being created by the local authority and government*". At the same time, they also noted that "*Leicester City and Leicestershire has a good record of race and interfaith relations, and the local authorities and the people take pride in what has been achieved in this field*".

Potential solutions to the lack of faith space

Various solutions to the lack of faith space were put forward. There appears to be a relatively strong agreement from most consultees that there must be a focus on separate, individual space provision for communities which have no faith space currently, especially the Muslim faith community in the first instance, and also the Hindu faith community. A number of those engaged in the research clearly felt that findings solutions for the unmet space needs of Muslim and Hindu worshippers in the Borough was an urgent priority. In regard to multi-faith space, there were diverging views. Some oppose the idea of a multi-faith space altogether, while others who support the idea do not see it as a replacement for separate faith spaces for different groups (see further discussion below). There were a number of views that supported a more 'planning led' solution to locating worship space that would take into account the pressing need for worship space for the Muslim and Hindu faith communities.

Views were somewhat split about where would be the best location or locations for new faith spaces to be developed. Suggestions included Oadby and Wigston's town centres, residential areas, industrial/employment land areas and sites on the edge of the urban area of the Borough. A number of faith groups pointed out that employment or industrial land could be problematic as it is too out-of-the-way and isolated, which could cause security problems. An edge of Borough location for worship space tended not to be favoured by many groups. Residential locations for worship space were favoured by some faith groups, but parking and noise were thought to be likely to cause problems in these locations. A number of groups felt that residential locations would generate opposition. There were some specific suggestions about town centre sites, with one Christian faith group suggesting the old Library building should be developed as a place of worship. Other suggested sites from these consultees included the following: *"Sandhurst Street car park site should be looked at carefully and the Evicta site on Harborough Rd. The land behind the Pavilion or behind Manor School"*.

In relation to conversions of existing buildings there was again a diversity of views. There was a split between those who felt it was acceptable to convert buildings formerly used for other purposes but not religious buildings, and those who did not mind if there was re-use of any building, religious or otherwise, by another denomination or faith. A number of faith groups said they preferred to develop new buildings because they can then design and develop them to meet their worship and related space needs in the most specific way possible.

Some faith groups did not think multi-faith space would work in any form, with one describing the idea as *"a red herring!"* Conversely, some faith groups saw such multi-faith spaces as a possibility, either able to be used by all faiths, or in different faith use combinations, such as two faith communities sharing a space. A common proposal was to build a community centre or centres (but this was generally not instead of but as well as dedicated faith spaces for different faith communities). A number made the point that multi-faith space might be suitable for celebrations and social events but not as worship space. The point was raised about the difficulties of shared use of consecrated or holy space. A number of faith groups who were sympathetic to the idea

of a multi-faith space in theory or had "*no objections to the general principle*", thought they presented logistics issues in practice. A number of faith groups perceived issues with different faith groups being able to obtain fair access to a multi-faith space.

Summary of conclusions from the engagement process

In summary we conclude from the faith community mapping and engagement that:

- Long established faith communities such as traditional Christian denominations are well catered for in regard to worship space in the Borough;
- Newer Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are growing but seem to have sufficient space for their current worship space needs. This may change in the medium to longer term as congregations continue to expand;
- Worshippers in Muslim and Hindu traditions are not catered for in relation to worship space in Oadby and Wigston, a difficult situation for them that is worsening as their numbers grow;
- Muslim faith groups have made repeated attempts to find suitable sites for worship spaces within Oadby and Wigston and have been repeatedly disappointed. Muslim worshippers have no worship spaces in the Borough and are suffering significant and urgent unmet local worship space needs as a result;
- Likewise Hindu worshippers must travel outside the Borough to worship and would prefer to have dedicated temple spaces within the Borough to better meet their worship space needs locally;
- While Sikh worshippers have a worship space in Oadby and Wigston this has only temporary planning permission so does not provide long-term security of tenure. Again, more permanent worship space in the Borough is needed;
- Almost all faith groups that do have worship space in the Borough undertake a range of community services that bring benefits to their local communities, but lack of faith space is constraining some faith groups from making the contribution they would like;
- There is a predominant view that worship space provision needs to be made in Oadby and Wigston for separate faith spaces for communities and groups who do not have any or sufficient faith space currently;
- Different groups favour different locations for new worship space provision including town centre, residential area, and employment/industrial land, while edge of Borough space is less popular. Faith groups can see different

issues that may arise in each location, including parking, noise, isolation, safety, and security;

- While a multi-faith or multi cultural space would be welcomed by a considerable number of worshippers in the Borough, this is not seen as a replacement for worship space provision for particular faith communities. Moreover, practical issues are noted in relation to shared use even from those who support the idea in principle.

5. Places of worship needs assessment

5.1. Introduction

This section of the report provides an assessment of need for new or expanded places of worship in the Borough of Oadby & Wigston. The assessment of need is intended to provide evidence for the Borough's Local Development Framework and inform the finalisation of the Town Centre Masterplans. It is informed by the findings from the mapping and engagement work undertaken and reported on above.

To provide a context for the needs assessment the first part of this section considers the current planning policy context and the recent history of planning proposals related to places of worship.

5.2. Current planning policy context

National planning policy

The Government is committed to "*bring about a society in which different belief systems, whether religious or otherwise, are fully understood, respected or valued*"². However, there is a noticeable absence of specific policy or guidance on how the planning system should seek to meet the needs of faith communities. Planning Policy Statement 1 provides only generic guidance, indicating that Plan policies should, amongst other things:

- "*Address accessibility (both in terms of location and physical access) for all members of the community to jobs, health, housing, education, shops, leisure and community facilities;*
- "*Take into account the needs of all the community, including particular requirements relating to age, sex, ethnic background, religion, disability or income.*"

Planning Policy Statement 12 requires LDFs to be supported by a statement of 'infrastructure needs', including social and community infrastructure.

Regional planning policy

The adopted East Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS, 2005) is silent on the matter of places of worship. However, the draft revised Regional Plan indicates broadly that:

² Department of Communities and Local Government Website

"Culture is an inclusive concept embracing a wide range of activities, places, shared beliefs, values and customs, which contributes to a sense of identity and well being for everyone. Cultural activities span the public, private, voluntary and community sectors and include (amongst other things listed) facilities for community activity (such as village halls and places of worship)".

Policy 40 of the draft Regional Plan goes on to state that:

"Local Authorities and Strategic Sub-Regional Partnerships should work with local communities to develop 'cultural infrastructure plans' to inform Local Development Frameworks and other relevant plans and strategies. These should specify:

- key elements of cultural provision, including assets needing refurbishment, relocation of facilities and new provision;*
- standards and costs for provision, including quality standards, and*
- the sources of and potential sources of funding, including from the planning system".*

Local planning policy

Chapter 10 of the Oadby and Wigston Adopted Local Plan (as saved) encourages the development of a wide range of community facilities, including religious uses, distributed so as to meet the needs of the Borough's population. This chapter further relates to the uses found in Class D1 of the Use Classes Order 1987. It includes schools and colleges, medical and health service buildings, clinics, crèches, day nurseries, museums, libraries and places of worship. Service Proposal 3 of the Local Plan gives the criteria for development proposals, referring to amenities of nearby residents, parking, traffic congestion and design impact on the street scene. In addition, Service Proposal 4 refers to planning conditions that may be applied on the hours of use, noise emission, access for the disabled, car and cycle parking places and landscaping.

However, the Local Plan was not underpinned by an assessment of the 'needs of the Borough's population' with regard to places of worship. In recognition of the need for more specific policies relating to places of worship, the Borough's planning department produced informal guidance document on 'The Provision of Sites and Buildings for Places of Worship' (2005). Although the Council approved the guidance document, it was not subjected to consultation or formally adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and therefore carries little weight in planning decisions.

The policy basis for considering planning applications has therefore been limited and this is therefore a key driver for this study.

Summary of planning context

In the absence of specific planning policies for places of worship, based on an assessment of need, the planning system can only be reactive, and is unable to respond effectively and consistently to the needs of faith groups. This is reflected in the recent history of pre-application discussions, planning applications and Town Centre Masterplan relating to places of worship in Oadby and Wigston, as outlined below.

5.3. Recent planning history relating to places of worship

Recent history of pre-application discussions, planning applications and Town Centre Masterplan proposals relating to places of worship

Since 2000, planning proposals for places of worship have related to mosques and Muslim cultural centres, and a Sikh resource centre. There has also been a proposal for a place of worship in the Oadby Town Centre Area Action Plan.

Mosques and Muslim Cultural Centres

In 2004 the Oadby and Wigston Muslim Association (OWMA), which represents the Sunni Muslim community, approached the Council to request assistance in identifying and obtaining a suitable, affordable site for a place of worship. The Association was unable to buy land at market rates. Without prejudice to any planning decision, the Borough's planners helped the Association to identify an area of Council-owned open space in a residential part of Oadby near St.Paul's Church. The Association submitted a proposed layout for a mosque and cultural centre to the Council in March 2005.

Implementation of the proposal, however, would require the sale of Council-owned open space, which is contrary to Council policy, and no formal planning application was submitted.

Two planning applications have been submitted by representatives of the Shia Muslim community. As noted in Section 4, the Shia Muslim community in Oadby and Wigston appears to be significantly smaller than Sunni community represented by the OWMA.

The first application, submitted in July 2004 was for the 'Oadby Cultural Centre' at Stourton Road South, Oadby. It involved development and change of use from a residential dwelling to a 'D1' community, educational and recreational use, with parking for 50 cars. The application was refused by the Council.

The second application, submitted in January 2007, was for the change of use of a farmhouse and associated outbuildings at Oaks Farm, Glen Road, Oadby, to a 'D1' place of worship. The Council refused the application in May 2007 for a number of reasons. In summary, these were:

- Unacceptable levels of traffic turning onto or off a main road;

- Impact of noise and disturbance on local residents;
- The location adjoins open countryside, is remote and visitors would be dependent on the car rather than sustainable transport;
- In the light of the above reasons, the proposal does not accord with structure and Local Plan policies.

Sikh Resource Centre

In September 2006, the Sikh community was granted planning permission for change of use of an industrial building on Kenilworth Drive in the Oadby Industrial Estate to a Sikh Resource Centre (a place of worship, D1 community use and an area for indoor sport and recreation). Given that the proposal would result in a net loss of employment land, which is in limited supply within the Borough, the Council resolved to grant only a temporary permission for a period of three years. The permission was subject to other conditions, including in summary that no weddings should take place at the premises, limited hours of operation, and a Travel Plan should be approved to limit car use and the need for parking.

Oadby Town Centre Area Action Plan

Partly in response to the needs revealed by the recent history of planning applications, the Council made it a priority to include a place of worship in the Oadby Town Centre Area Action Plan. The Preferred Options Report (November 2007) included a proposal for a place of worship in East Street Car Park Masterplan area, as well as significant public realm improvements.

The Masterplan, however, generated heated responses from different perspectives. The OWMA submitted a petition, with several hundred signatures, to request that they should be allowed to develop a mosque on the proposed 'place of worship' site. But other residents and businesses, as well as the adjacent Methodist Church, campaigned strongly against a mosque on this site. Some people suggested that the site should be used for a community centre open to all faiths within the Borough, but some of the opposition to the 'place of worship' proposal appears to have been racially motivated.

In the period since the Preferred Options Report consultation, the OWMA has contacted Leicestershire County Council about potential use of the old Oadby Library building. The library is moving to a new site, as its current one-storey pre-fabricated building is deemed 'not fit for purpose'.

5.4. Approach to the needs assessment

There is no established methodology for assessing the need for places of worship. The approach set out here therefore breaks new ground. For simplicity and completeness it is structured around four main questions:

- Why does the Borough need to plan for places of worship?
- What places of worship (amount and type) need to be provided?
- Where in the Borough should identified needs be met?
- How can the needs for worship space be met?

We believe this provides an objective and robust framework for planning for places of worship. While the approach is applied here to Oadby and Wigston, it could be replicated elsewhere.

5.5. Why does the Borough need to plan for places of worship?

Planning policies

The planning policy context outlined above creates an expectation that local authorities, in partnership with others, should plan for community uses, including places of worship.

Changing demography

The demography of Oadby and Wigston is changing. The 2001 Census revealed that BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) population of Oadby and Wigston was 10,165, or 18.2%. This is well above the Leicestershire County proportion of 7.3% and the East Midlands of 8.7%. Oadby Uplands and Oadby Grange wards have the highest proportions of BME population with 39% and 33% respectively (based on ONS Census 2001 and ONS estimates 2006; figures less than 0.5% have been rounded to zero). The high minority ethnic population means that community cohesion is very important.

With this changing demography comes a changing pattern of demand for places of worship. As discussed below, Christian churches that serve the traditional Oadby and Wigston population are plentiful while places of worship for some other religions are significantly underprovided.

Sustainable community strategies

The Local Government Act 2000 places a duty on local authorities in England and Wales to produce a community strategy to promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their area to achieve sustainable development. It also gives local authorities a permissive power to undertake any action to promote or improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of their area. Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) also have a statutory duty to contribute to sustainable development in the UK.

One of the four pillars of sustainable development, as set out in the 1999 UK Sustainable Development Strategy, is *'social progress which recognises the needs of everyone'*.

Leicestershire's Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS, 2008) outlines the things that local people see as a priority and the Council's Local Area Agreement sets out how it will tackle the most important of these issues. Together they form the basis of the new Leicestershire Performance Framework.

The SCS's vision for Leicestershire includes reference to respecting 'the needs of different social groups and accept social diversity and new people in their place or community'.

Oadby & Wigston's SCS (2004) recognises that Faith Groups are amongst the 'frontline delivery organisations' for strong communities. It also indicates that no individual should experience disadvantage because of their race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief.

Amongst the draft priority outcomes for Oadby Community Forum area is 'There is better cohesion between communities and cultures and people feel that they belong'.

The contribution of faith communities

As outlined in this report, the role of faith groups and places of worship extends far beyond meeting people's spiritual needs. They make a very significant contribution to social and community cohesion, through providing a variety of social, education, recreation and leisure activities, as was noted in the engagement findings in Section 4.

Finding space for worship is a problem

Despite the supportive policy context, it is often difficult secure new or expanded places of worship. High land values and site scarcity prohibit the development or extension of places of worship in suitable locations. The temporary accommodation of the Sikh Resource Centre in an industrial estate and the recent planning application for the conversion of farm buildings on the outskirts of Oadby to a mosque are local examples.

5.6. What places of worship (amount and type) need to be provided?

Key factors

To determine the quantitative (amount) and qualitative (type) need for places of worship we have considered the following range of factors:

- The range of principal faith groups present in Oadby and Wigston;
- The number of members of each faith group;

- The number of regular worshippers;
- The number of places of worship for each faith group in the Borough;
- The extent to which each faith group's needs are being met within the Borough or sub-regionally (within Leicester);
- The capacity of current provision, both within the Borough and sub-regionally.

As outlined earlier in this report, a substantial amount of information on these factors was obtained through the mapping and face-to-face and telephone consultation undertaken with faith groups in August and September 2008. **Map 1** shows the number and distribution of places of worship within the Borough. This was compiled following a brief visit to all the places of worship by the study team in July 2008.

The needs assessment seeks to cover the period of the emerging Local Development Framework (up to 2026). Clearly, this is not an exact science, as needs could potentially change during this period. However, we believe this 'forward-looking snapshot' provides a good basis for the plan period. It would be sensible to review the situation at a mid-point in the remaining plan period.

Table 5.1 sets out the findings in relation to the above factors and also attaches a 'level of need' for the provision of new or expanded places of worship in the Borough. Our assessment of level of need also takes account of the views of faith groups on whether they want a new or expanded place of worship in Oadby and Wigston. It appears that some faith groups, notably Jains and Jewish worshippers, are content to travel into Leicester to worship. The typical regularity of worship (i.e. daily, weekly) was also considered, as this is an important factor in determining the need for local as opposed to sub-regional facilities.

Table 5.1: Analysis of faith community development needs

Faith Group	Approx. number of members	Average number of regular worshippers	Number of places of worship within the Borough	Perception that needs are being met:		Capacity for additional worshippers at existing places of worship	Level of need for new / expanded place of worship
				Locally	Sub-regionally (Leicester City)		
Christian							
Baptist	110	95	1	Yes	Yes	Medium	Low
Methodist	222	200-220	1	Yes	Yes	Medium	Low
Anglican	? ³	900-1000	4	Yes	Yes	High	Low
Catholic	? ⁴	180	2	Yes	Yes	Medium	Low
Salvation Army	200 formal 400 informal	180	1	No	Yes	Low	Medium
Meadows Community Church		80	1	Yes	Yes	Medium	Low
Seventh Day Adventist	300	250-300	0	No	Yes	High	Low
United Reform Church	88	70-80	2	Yes	Yes	High	Low
Evangelical Free Church	160	100	1	Yes	Yes	Medium	Low
Jehovah's Witnesses	188	112	1	Yes	Yes	Medium	Low

³ Unclear from data collected

⁴ Data from only one Catholic Church.

Faith Group	Approx. number of members	Average number of regular worshippers	Number of places of worship within the Borough	Perception that needs are being met:		Capacity for additional worshippers at existing places of worship	Level of need for new / expanded place of worship
				Locally	Sub-regionally (Leicester City)		
Pentecostal	120 ⁵	? ⁶	2	Yes	Yes	Medium	Low
Jewish							
Progressive	100	20-30	0	No	Yes	Low	Low
Orthodox	200	? ⁷	0	No	Yes	? ⁸	Low
Muslim							
Sunni	4-5,000	500	0	No	Yes	Low	High
Shia ⁹	?	?	0	No	?	Low	Medium/High?
Hindu							
Arya Sumaj	? ¹⁰	100-150	0	No	No	Hire accommod. in Leicester	Medium
Arya Vedic Society	120	40-150	0	No	Yes	Hire accommod. in Leicester	Low
Geeta Bhavan	? ¹¹	?	0	No	Yes	Medium	Medium

⁵ Data from only one Pentecostal Church.

⁶ Uncertainty about numbers from the data supplied.

⁷ We were unable to obtain data from this community.

⁸ See note 7.

⁹ The uncertainties for data in all areas reflect that there was very little data available about the Shia faith community. We are currently following up additional contacts now supplied by the client.

¹⁰ Unclear from the data supplied.

¹¹ Unclear from the data supplied.

Faith Group	Approx. number of members	Average number of regular worshippers	Number of places of worship within the Borough	Perception that needs are being met:		Capacity for additional worshippers at existing places of worship	Level of need for new / expanded place of worship
				Locally	Sub-regionally (Leicester City)		
Sikh							
Sikh	7-8,000	100-250	1	No	No	Medium	High

The key findings in relation to each of the mapped faith groups are noted below. It should be remembered that these figures are based on data supplied by faith communities so must be considered as approximate.

Christian faith groups

There appear to be 16 Christian Churches within the Borough, with a total of around 2500 regular worshippers. With the exception of the Seventh Day Adventists, who are content to worship at a Church in Leicester, all of the Christian Churches have at least one place of worship in Oadby and Wigston.

All but one of the Churches reported that they have either medium or high capacity levels in their existing premises for additional worshippers. The Salvation Army is the exception; they reported that they have no capacity in their local church.

As a consequence of the above, we conclude that the level of need for additional or expanded Christian Churches is 'low', with the exception of the Salvation Army, which is 'medium'.

Jewish faith groups

There are around 300 members of the Jewish community in Oadby and Wigston. Although there is no Synagogue in the Borough, the community reported that their needs are being met at Synagogues in Leicester. As a result, we conclude that their level of need for additional or expanded Synagogues is 'low'.

Muslim faith groups

There are reported to be 4,000-5,000 Muslims in Oadby and Wigston, with around 500 regular worshippers. Of this number, the vast majority are reported to be from the Sunni community; there appear to be few Shia Muslims in Oadby and Wigston. There is no mosque in the Borough, so regular worshippers are either travelling to Leicester to worship, or using temporary or unauthorised facilities such as the Pavilion in Uplands Park. We consider this situation to be unsatisfactory for two main reasons:

- The population of Muslims in Oadby and Wigston is increasing;
- Unlike most other faith groups, Muslims are encouraged to attend the mosque on a number of occasions each week, so it is particularly important that suitable places of worship are provided locally.

As noted earlier, the Oadby & Wigston Muslim Association has brought the need for a mosque to the attention of the Council on number of occasions. Separately, representatives of the Shia Muslim community have also sought, unsuccessfully, to secure planning permission for a religious and cultural centre. We therefore conclude that the Muslims' level of need for new mosques in Oadby and Wigston is 'high'.

Hindu faith groups

Hindus are the largest non-Christian group in Oadby and Wigston. There are no Hindu temples in the Borough, so Hindus are currently travelling into Leicester for worship. The findings of the engagement in regard to the Hindu community's aspirations for a local temple or temples is not completely clear but suggests there is considerable support for such worship space development. The Borough has not been approached by the Hindu community about the need for a temple, or temples, locally. We therefore tentatively conclude that the Hindu community's level of need for new places of worship is 'medium'.

Sikh faith groups

There are reported to be 7,000-8,000 Sikhs in Oadby and Wigston, with up to 250 regular worshippers. As noted above, the Sikh Gurdwara on Kenilworth Drive in the Oadby Industrial Estate is subject to a temporary planning permission, which will expire in September 2009.

We conclude that, unless the existing Gurdwara is granted permanent planning permission, the Sikh community's level of need for a new place of worship in a more suitable location is 'high'. The suitability of employment land for places of worship is discussed below.

Is there a need for a community centre/multi-faith centre?

The findings of the engagement process with faith groups on this issue are mixed. While they generally support the idea of a community centre suitable for multi-faith use, there are religious and practical issues that need to be overcome; notably relating to shared use between different faiths, the use of iconography and so on.

It is clear, however, that none of the faith groups that has an established need for a place of worship (e.g. Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs) believes that its worship needs can be met through a multi-faith centre.

In this respect, it is noteworthy that South Leicester College, currently located on a site next to the Council buildings in Wigston, is moving to a new site on Canal Street in South Wigston. Part of the site was formerly the South Wigston Baptist Church. Demolition work is already underway and the church has been demolished. As part of the planning permission, it was agreed that a new 'multi-faith centre' would be developed on the Canal Street site, for use by both the South Wigston Baptist Church and potentially other faith groups.

Additionally, we understand that a new multi-faith room is proposed for Beauchamp College but are not aware of more substantial plans for a worship space on this site.

Any development of multi-faith space in the Borough cannot not be seen in planning terms as a replacement for meeting the specific, individual worship space needs of faith groups.

5.7. Where in the Borough should identified needs be met?

The important role of town centres

Internationally, places of worship are generally found towards the centre of villages, towns and cities. They are often iconic buildings, which provide a sense of place and of which communities are proud. Historically, and in the absence of modern town planning and design, this was the result of intuition, personal endeavour and financial realism: it just makes good sense. It is also an important part of most faiths to 'bear witness' to the community – both to attract new members and to show the wider population that they make a valuable contribution to society as well as meeting spiritual needs.

This focus on urban centres for places of worship has significant currency in the pursuit of sustainable development, a cornerstone of spatial planning policy and practice. Sustainable development policy, as outlined earlier, emphasises the importance of improving quality of life and increasing community cohesion in urban areas. Places of worship can play a key role in this regard. Sustainable development policy also stresses the importance of reducing peoples' need to travel by providing key services close to where people live and work. Furthermore, town centres are generally a nodal point for public transport.

This policy approach is reflected in the Government's Planning Policy Statement 6 (Planning for Town Centres, 2005). This states that the Government's key objective for town centres is to promote their vitality and viability by:

- Planning for the growth and development of existing centres; and
- Promoting and enhancing existing centres, by focussing development in such centres and encouraging a wide range of services in a good environment, accessible to all.

Town centres are 'mixed use' areas and as a result have vitality and vibrancy. Unlike many suburban or rural areas, town centres can accommodate a range of different uses without adversely affecting other uses. As a local case in point, none of the Council's reasons for refusal of the proposed Muslim Cultural Centre would automatically apply in a town centre location.

We note that the engagement findings showed faith groups favour a variety of locations for worship space including town centres, residential areas, edge of town locations and

employment land. However, in a planning sense for the reasons outlined above, town centre sites are considered the most suitable for locating faith space. Very importantly, a number of faith groups reported they want a town centre location for new and expanded places of worship. There is also the question of balance: Christian Churches are numerous in both Oadby and Wigston town centres, but there is not a single mosque / Muslim cultural centre or Hindu temple.

On the basis of the discussion above, we conclude that the most appropriate location for new or expanded places of worship is in or as close as possible to a town centre.

Oadby rather than Wigston

As noted earlier, the great majority of the Borough's BME population is resident in Oadby. Oadby Uplands and Oadby Grange wards have the highest proportions of BME population with 39% and 33% respectively (based on ONS Census 2001 and ONS estimates 2006; figures less than 0.5% have been rounded to zero). This demographic picture is further illustrated on **Maps 2, 3 and 4**, which show the distribution of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh population across the Borough, respectively.

For very good reasons, therefore, these faith groups have focused on Oadby rather than Wigston as the desired location for new or expanded places of worship.

On this basis we conclude that the outstanding needs of faith communities should be met in Oadby rather than Wigston.

5.8. How can the worship space need be met?

Having concluded that town centre locations are the most favourable for new or expanded places of worship, there remains the question as to how such development or change of use could be accommodated.

We have considered a number of options:

- Shared use of existing places of worship;
- Use of employment land;
- Use of greenfield sites;
- Use of existing buildings / land with a D1 (Non-residential Institutions) Use Class;
- Through large-scale redevelopment and master planning processes and/or criteria based planning.

We have not considered the potential of the proposed Pennbury Ecotown to accommodate established needs for places of worship because the site is some distance from Oadby and Wigston town centres and the town will generate its own needs.

Shared use of existing places of worship

By definition the offer of shared use in Oadby would need to come from the Christian Churches, as these are the only existing places of worship in the town. However, as Christian Churches do not allow their 'consecrated ground' to be used by other faiths, the potential for shared use is very limited.

Use of employment land

In the absence of suitable alternative land, it would be sensible to look to land in employment areas for potential sites for places of worship. However, the Oadby & Wigston Employment Land Study (March 2006) indicates that there was only 1.35 ha of industrial employment land in the Borough. Based on a survey of companies and historic take-up rates, it identified demand for 4.67-6.02 ha of additional industrial employment land in the Borough. This equates to less than half the remaining 1996-2016 Structure Plan allocation requirement of employment land needed for the Borough. The Borough is therefore currently undersupplied with industrial employment land.

The study concluded that, with such a shortfall of employment land and premises, the Council cannot afford to lose any of its existing 'identified employment land'. It should also consider which of its employment areas ought to be protected more strongly from redevelopment or alternative use.

As noted above, at the time of writing the Council's resolution to grant only temporary planning permission for the Sikh Resource Centre (Gurdwara) on Kenilworth Drive in the Oadby Industrial Estate was based mainly on the impact on the Borough's stock of industrial employment land. However, it does not alter the principle in relation to use of employment land for employment related uses. We conclude that it would be inappropriate to provide for any other such use of 'identified employment land' for new or expanded places of worship.

Use of greenfield sites

The adopted Oadby and Wigston Local Plan identifies a shortfall of open space within the Borough when compared with standards developed by the National Playing Fields Association. This concern was reiterated in the Borough's Parks and Open Space Strategy (2006 – 2011), which includes a key objective 'to provide and maintain open space through the planning system'.

For these reasons, we conclude that it would be inappropriate to provide for new or expanded places of worship on open or greenfield land in Oadby's urban area. Open land outside the urban area is protected as a Green Wedge or through countryside policies the Local Plan.

Use of existing buildings / land with a D1 (Non-residential Institutions) Use Class

The research was unable to answer fully the question as to whether the old library building in Oadby may be a feasible site for reuse as worship space, although in principle the Sandhurst Street car park site would be a suitable location. We were unable to clarify whether the building is fit for purpose. In principle, the use of D1 building/land in town centres for places of worship is a good approach, subject to appropriate planning conditions. We recommend that the Oadby Town Centre Area Action Plan should maintain a D1 use within the town centre.

Additionally, as noted above, we understand that a new multi-faith room is proposed for Beauchamp College but are not aware of more substantial plans for a worship space on this D1 site.

Criteria based planning and large scale redevelopment / master planning processes

The Borough should be considering the use of a criteria-based policy for places of worship in the LDF Core Strategy. Our planning needs assessment work above helps provide a basis for developing such criteria.

Equally, on the basis of the needs assessment above, we conclude that a potential option for providing new places of worship in Oadby town centre appears to be through the development and master planning (Area Action Plan) process.

The proposed location for worship space at the East Street Car Park site, in the context of the other Masterplan proposals, has a number of key advantages, including:

- Good access on foot, bicycle and by public transport;
- Good availability of car parking;
- Proximity to where people live and work; and
- Proximity to other community uses.

It is not yet clear whether there is sufficient development value to secure that land / building through a Section 106 Agreement. Likewise the Area Action Plan process could aim to identify another site for worship space in the town centre given the scale of unmet need.

5.9. Summary of conclusions and recommendations

In summary, we conclude that there is a strong case for the Borough's planning processes to address the need for new and expanded places of worship. The most significant unmet need relates to the Muslim community, because they do not have local Mosques and regular worship is a feature of their religion. The Sikh community's needs are also pressing, as the planning permission for their existing place of worship expires in 2009. Although this permission may be extended, the Sikh community should ideally have access to worship space in a more suitable location. While the strength of feeling about the need for a Hindu temple in the Borough is not completely clear, the unmet worship space needs of the Hindu community also appear to be significant, as they do not have a local temple.

Although generally welcomed by local faith communities, the provision of a multi-faith centre would not meet the specific worship space needs referred to above. A multi-faith space should not be seen to replace the need to make suitable faith space provision for worship groups.

While the engagement work showed there is some variation in views held by worship groups in the Borough, the planning needs assessment suggests that town centre locations are most appropriate for new or expanded places of worship. This reflects historical trends and is also consistent with the Government's policy approach to planning for town centres. Given the concentration of Muslims, Hindus and Sikh faith communities in the northern part of the Borough, it is clear that Oadby town centre would be a better location than Wigston town centre.

In terms of the finding space for new places of worship, there is very limited scope for shared use of places of worship. We conclude that employment land and existing open space would not be appropriate, as both are in short supply within the Borough. There is some potential for re-use of existing non-residential institutions, notably the old Oadby library building.

The principal means of securing an appropriate site will be through criteria based planning reflected in the Borough's core strategy and through the town centre master planning process.

On the basis of this planning needs assessment, we recommend that the proposal for a place of worship at the East Street car park site or Sandhurst Street car park site is confirmed in the final Oadby Town Centre Masterplan. Furthermore, the Masterplan should reflect that Muslim faith communities have the most urgent unmet faith space needs. We also recommend that the situation in regard to the Sikh and Hindu faith communities' worship space needs should be monitored during the plan period.

To provide context to the Oadby Town Centre Masterplan proposals, we recommend that the Borough's Local Development Framework Core Strategy includes reference to this needs assessment and a criteria based policy that seeks to ensure that the identified needs are met.

The discussion above contains a number of conclusions and related recommendations, which are summarised below:

- The level of need for additional or expanded Christian Churches is 'low', with the exception of the Salvation Army, which is 'medium';
- The level of need for additional or expanded Synagogues is 'low';
- The Muslim community's level of need for new places of worship in Oadby and Wigston is 'high';
- The level of 'need' for the Hindu faith community is medium, rather than high - so a site does not need to be identified urgently;
- The Sikh community's level of need for a new place of worship in a more suitable location is 'high';
- Any development of multi-faith space in the Borough should not be seen in planning terms as a replacement for meeting the specific, individual worship space needs of faith groups;
- Likewise, the potential for shared use of faith space is very limited;
- The most appropriate location for new or expanded places of worship is in or as close as possible to a town centre;
- The outstanding needs of faith communities should be met in Oadby rather than Wigston given proximity to the geographical spread of faith communities within the Borough;
- With such a shortfall of employment land and premises, the Council cannot afford to lose any of its existing 'identified employment areas';
- While we fully support the need for a Sikh place of worship in the Borough in principle town centre locations are more suitable than employment land for new or expanded places of worship;
- It would be inappropriate to provide for new or expanded places of worship on open or greenfield land in Oadby's urban area;
- The research was unable to definitely answer the question as to whether the old library building in Oadby may be a feasible site for reuse as worship space;
- The Borough should be considering the use of criteria to help define where to locate places of worship in the LDF Core Strategy. Our planning needs assessment work above helps provide a basis for developing such criteria;

- Equally, on the basis of the needs assessment, a potential option for providing new places of worship in Oadby town centre appears to be through the development and master planning (Area Action Plan) process;
- The proposed locations for worship space at the East Street Car Park site or Sandhurst Street car park site, in the context of the other Masterplan proposals, have a number of key advantages of accessibility and proximity to homes, places of work and services.