



WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

PLACES OF WORSHIP



SUPPLEMENTARY
PLANNING
GUIDANCE
No. 6



SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE

NOTE NO. 6

PLACES OF WORSHIP

Approved by Wolverhampton Planning &
Environment Committee on 22 February 1996,
following Public Consultation.

Contents

	PAGE
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT	1
3 DESIGN REQUIREMENTS	2
4 ACCESS AND PARKING	4
5 NOISE DISTURBANCE	5
6 ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES	6
7 EXTENSIONS AND ALTERATIONS TO PLACES OF WORSHIP	6
8 LISTED BUILDINGS	8
9 PLACES OF WORSHIP IN AREAS OF POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE	8
10 CHANGES OF USE OF EXISTING BUILDINGS TO PLACES OF WORSHIP	9
11. USE OF PRIVATE HOUSES FOR RELIGIOUS MEETINGS	10

I Introduction

1.1

Supplementary Planning Guidance documents (SPG) are being prepared by the Council on a range of development related subjects. Their purpose is to supplement the policies of the Council's Unitary Development Plan by providing more detailed guidance on the application of these policies. They also draw on advice given to Local Authorities by the Department of the Environment in national Planning Policy Guidance.

1.2

This SPG No 6 is about Places of Worship. It explains the issues that need to be considered when preparing planning applications for places of worship. It is not a set of rigid standards, as each proposal is different and is considered individually taking into account all relevant planning considerations. There may be

occasions where the Council is able to relax some guidelines while in other cases these may have to be exceeded. In all cases it is worth discussing a proposal with Planning Officers before formally submitting an application.

1.3

'Places of Worship' refers to Churches, Mosques, Temples, Church Halls or any other places where public worship takes place. Places of worship may be in new buildings or occupy existing ones. Planning permission from the Council will always be needed for the building of a new place of worship or an extension to an existing one and in most cases for the change of use of an existing building to a place of worship.

2 Planning Policy Context

The principal Unitary Development Plan (UDP) Policies that are relevant to planning applications for places of worship are:-

ENV1 - Development Principles.
ENV2 - Design Standards.
ENV15 - Safeguarding Historic Buildings.
ENV16 - Alterations and Extensions to Listed Buildings.
ENV18 - Preserving and Enhancing Conservation Areas.

ENV21 - Protection of Archaeological Sites.
C4 - Planning Standards -
Provision of Community Services.

Reference must be made to the UDP for full details of these policies.

3.1

New places of worship and religious organisations seeking location in existing buildings need to achieve the following requirements:-

- (i) to make a positive visual and environmental contribution to the character and appearance of the area;
- (ii) to avoid or minimise adverse amenity effects on surrounding residents;
- (iii) to avoid or minimise adverse effects on traffic flow and highway safety in the area;
- (iv) to ensure that the place of worship can be fully accessible and usable by people with disabilities;
- (v) to avoid or minimise environmental damage, for instance to existing trees, hedges or watercourses.

3.2

The Council will not normally wish to specify the architectural religious 'style' that a new place of worship may adopt. Such buildings may be important representations of a particular faith or culture, and the Council will want to respect this in assessing proposals. However, the quality of design, layout and materials is of critical importance, to reflect and respect not only the religion concerned but to enable the building to be satisfactorily accommodated in the proposed location.

3.3

In principle the Council would normally support locations for places of worship that are well served by public transport, particularly in the town centres or local shopping centres of the Borough. Locations in residential areas are

not ruled out, but they are bound to be sensitive because of the need to avoid disturbance to surrounding residents. Locations within employment areas may be considered, because of greater capacity of surrounding roads and less sensitive adjoining land uses. However the prime purpose of the Council's Defined Employment Areas (UDP Policy E4) is to safeguard sites and premises for industrial and business use, and this will be a consideration in assessing proposals for places of worship to locate in these areas.

3.4

For all planning applications for places of worship, whether for new buildings or changes of use of existing buildings, the following information will normally be required:-

- (a) Existing and proposed elevations, where existing buildings are under consideration.
 - (b) All proposed elevations and roof plans of proposed new buildings.
 - (c) Existing site layout and features, including the position of trees, hedges and water courses and other natural features.
 - (d) Proposed site layout, including access, parking, servicing areas, boundary treatment and landscaping areas.
 - (e) Floor plans indicating how the rooms and spaces within the place of worship are to be used and their person capacity.
- As a guideline, a typical seating layout can accommodate 1 person/0.5sq m of floor area, over those parts of a hall that are used for seating, as distinct from space used for access and leading worship etc.

- (f) The numbers of people who will lead worship or serve in any other capacity.
- (g) The purpose and overall uses of the place of worship, for instance worship, weddings, funerals, community uses, educational uses etc.
- (h) Time and frequency of activities including an assessment as to whether this may change over time and an indication of peak levels of activity and when these will occur.

3.5

When a religious group is considering a new place of worship, it may be worth investigating the shared use with another religion or denomination of an existing place of worship that might be under-used. This may be more cost effective for both groups and may result in new investment in an existing place of worship that might otherwise decline. It is also worth considering the use of the building for a range of community activities as this may be welcomed by local people and assist in the integration of the place of worship into the community. Applications for such multi-purpose use are more likely to be given favourable consideration.

4.1

The normal parking requirements for places of worship will be one car space for every 5 to 10 persons that can be accommodated in the building. This is expressed as a range to take account of the location, size and type of the place of worship. For instance, for a place of worship sited on a busy main road the Council may require a higher standard of provision. For a site within the Town Centre, which is well served by public transport and public car parks, a low or minimal standard of provision may be acceptable.

4.2

Parking spaces for people with disabilities will also need to be provided. There should be a minimum of three spaces for each place of worship, and for a car park of up to 200 spaces, 6% of its capacity should be designed for use by disabled people. For a car park of over 200 spaces 4% of the capacity plus 4 additional spaces should be available.

4.3

As part of the Council's objectives for sustainable development, it is important to encourage cycling as a means of transport. The provision of secure bicycle parking should be considered in proposals for places of worship.

4.4

The design of access points must have regard to highway safety and the appearance of the road. Visibility splays at the entrance will normally be a minimum of 4.5m x 45m, rising to 9m x 120m for main road locations. These visibility

requirements need to be achieved outside any gates or walls that are proposed. There may be instances where a lesser standard of visibility could be agreed, where circumstances permit, in order to retain structures or mature trees or hedges that contribute significantly to the character of the road. On the other hand there may be sites where an access position cannot be made acceptable in planning terms because of a conflict between visibility requirements and retention of existing street features or buildings.

4.5

The circulation space within the site needs to be designed to allow the anticipated vehicular traffic to enter and leave in a forward gear, stop to set down passengers and enter and leave parking spaces and provide any servicing requirements, eg delivery of goods and materials. If the place of worship is to receive wedding and funeral cars, or coaches, the Council will normally require that these be accommodated within the site.

5.1

For both new and existing buildings used as places of worship, noise attenuation measures may be essential to prevent disturbance to nearby housing. These measures may need to be capable of preventing noise escaping from the building at any time. They may take the form of, for example:-

- acoustic double glazing incorporating sound attenuated mechanical ventilation (and venetian blinds to prevent solar gain if necessary)
- an independent ceiling
- a separating floor
- an independent leaf on a separating wall
- acoustic doors
- provision of lobbies in areas where a door opens from a noise source to the outside.
- a limitation on the hours of use.

It is important that a competent person is engaged from the outset of design, to advise and make recommendations for implementing appropriate acoustic treatment to the building. These recommendations should be submitted with the planning application.

5.2

The use of a public address system, for example to call members to worship, will generally only be acceptable outside residential areas and even when acceptable in principle, will need to be the subject of a condition restricting its hours of use.

Access for People with Disabilities

6.1

Proposals for places of worship must show in detail the following features:-

- (i) The external layout of the site, to be designed to permit ease of movement by people with disabilities. e.g. Some parking spaces to be designed and reserved for disabled persons use and the route from the parking spaces to the entrance to the building to be free of obstructions, have dropped kerbs provided where appropriate and be adequately lit.
- (ii) Level or ramped access from external areas to the main entrance. If this is not physically possible on an existing building, then one other entrance to be appropriately designed and clearly signposted.
- (iii) At least one fire exit providing level or ramped egress.

6.2

The following internal features are desirable, and may be required under the Building

Regulations:-

- (i) Floor levels and internal layouts, including door widths and seating layouts, which allow access and use by disabled people.
- (ii) Where toilets are provided, at least one unisex disabled persons toilet to be provided to current design standards.
- (iii) Induction loops to assist people with hearing impairment in the areas used for worship and any meeting or community room, larger than 100 sq.m floorspace.
- (iv) Lift access to floors above or below ground level.

6.3

UDP Policy ENV2 - Design Standards, and C4 - Planning Standards, (Community Services) provide the policy context for these guidelines. The Council's SPG No 2, Access for People with Disabilities, gives more detailed information on this subject.

Extensions and Alterations to Places of Worship

7.1

The extension and alteration of places of worship needs careful consideration and expert architectural advice. Many of the Borough's places of worship have medieval origins and form important parts of conservation areas. They are often the oldest and finest buildings in the communities which they serve. Most have already been altered or extended several times

over the centuries to meet new religious needs and the Council is aware that they must continue to adapt and change to meet these needs if their future is to be secured. However, there may be occasions where places of worship cannot be physically extended without their character or appearance of original design being destroyed.

7.2

The following considerations are important to alterations to places of worship:-

- (a) The alteration/extension should respect and enhance the form and character of the original building and its relationship with the immediate surroundings.
- (b) Materials of construction and architectural detail should be compatible and sympathetic to the existing building.
- (c) There should be minimum disturbance to or destruction of historic fabric. Important fixtures and furnishings should be retained.
- (d) Any new work should generally be reversible so that if removed at a later date, the original structure is left intact without unsightly scars.

7.3

Old Churches and other places of worship often stand in graveyards that have not been substantially altered for centuries. These graveyards are important for the following reasons:

- (a) They will be valued by local people who have relatives buried there.
- (b) They may be very attractive places with fine old trees, hedges, undergrowth and walls, that give much pleasure to local residents.
- (c) They may be of considerable nature conservation value.
- (d) They may contain valuable archaeological remains of earlier Churches on the site.

- (e) They may be of significant historical value in terms of local or national cultural events.

Proposals for extensions to a place of worship that affect a graveyard must address these issues. Funerary monuments and other structures in graveyards may be Statutorily Listed Buildings in their own right or may be Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Applicants should check with the Planning Officers if any works within a graveyard are likely to affect such structures.

7.4

Proposals that involve disturbance to or removal of old graves need special consideration. A Licence is required from the Home Office and permission from the Church authorities before exhumation of graves can take place. If a Licence is granted, it will specify conditions under which the work must take place. The Council's Department of Law and Environmental Protection will supervise such operations. Disturbance of graves may also be an emotive issue for local residents. This is more a matter for the Church Authorities, though if this is not sensitively handled, the applicants may expect a public reaction that can translate into considerable pressure to dismiss a proposal.

8.1

Many of the Borough's places of worship are Statutorily Listed Buildings. In many cases however, works to these buildings are exempt from planning control because of the provision of the Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Order 1994. The Order provides exemption (where places of worship are in active ecclesiastic use) for the Church of England, Church of Wales, Roman Catholic Church, Methodist Church, Baptist Church and the United Reformed Church. Places of worship of these denominations are covered by internal systems of control approved by the Department of the Environment. The Exemption may be extended to other denominations in the future.

8.2

Places of worship of other denominations are subject to Listed Building and Conservation Area control. Religious organisations considering alterations to their buildings are advised to contact the Council to see if they have exempt status. The exemption does not apply to buildings (of any denomination) that are redundant, or to structures, eg boundary walls or monuments, within the boundaries of the place of worship. The Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment, Section 8 gives full information on the Ecclesiastical Exemption.

Places of Worship in Areas of Potential Archaeological Importance

9.1

Many of the Borough's places of worship are within Areas of Potential Archaeological Importance (APAI). Details of the extent of these areas can be obtained from the Planning Division. Works to such places of worship, and new build sites within an APAI, where survival of archaeological deposits is likely, will require an archaeological evaluation to be submitted with the planning application.

9.2

The results of such an evaluation may result in one of the following responses from the Council;

- (i) No archaeological implications.

- (ii) Application of a condition on permission requiring a watching brief during development affording an opportunity to record any features of interest revealed as a result of operations.
- (iii) A requirement for archaeological excavation and recording in advance of development.
- (iv) Alterations to the siting or design of the development in order to preserve archaeological remains.
- (v) Refusal of permission.

Applicants are advised to discuss likely archaeological implications of their proposals with Officers of the Council before submission of a formal application.

Changes of Use of Existing Buildings to Places of Worship

10.1

The Planning Legislation allows for the change of use of certain buildings to other uses without the need to apply for planning permission. Class D1 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 includes the following uses:-

- (a) for the provision of any medical or health services except the use of premises attached to the residence of the consultant or practitioner,
- (b) as a creche, day nursery or day centre,
- (c) for the provision of education,
- (d) for the display of works of art (otherwise than for sale or hire),
- (e) as a museum,
- (f) as a public library or public reading room,
- (g) as a public hall or exhibition hall,
- (h) for public worship or religious instruction.

This means that a building used for any purpose listed above can change to any other use described in this list without the need for planning permission.

10.2

In exceptional cases, a condition on an earlier planning permission for a building may have removed this facility to change from one use to another within the same use class. It is advisable therefore to check with the Planning Officers as to the agreed existing use of the building, and whether any special restrictions apply. Planning permission will still be required for any alterations to the external appearance of a building even though there may be no change of use involved.

10.3

Changes of use of buildings to places of worship may also require consent under the Building Regulations and be subject to Environmental health legislation. Advice should be sought in the first instance from the Planning Division.

Use of Private Houses for Religious Meetings

11.1

Many people hold small religious meetings in their houses. Such events can occur almost unnoticed, and most residents will tolerate a small number of people calling occasionally at a house in their road for such purposes. In these cases, if it was brought to the attention of the Council, it would probably be held that no material change in the use of the private house had taken place. The house would still be regarded primarily as a private residence.

11.2

Problems can occur when frequency of meetings and numbers of people attending, reaches a point where disturbance to adjoining properties is caused. For instance, if a private house is regularly used for religious meetings, for a significant number of people, the level of use can reach the point where a material change in the use of the house has occurred - it has become a place of worship as well as a private house. The Council may then request a planning application to regularise the use for public worship or consider action under planning legislation to stop the use if it is concerned about adverse impact on surrounding property, or reduce it to levels which will not require planning permission.

Wolverhampton Council
Civic Centre St. Peter's Square
WOLVERHAMPTON WV1 1RP

Tel: (01902) 556556 Fax: (01902) 555403



**WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL**

