

CABINET

28 September 2010

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION

Title: Revised Planning Advice Note on Religious Meeting Places	For Decision
<p>Summary:</p> <p>This report sets out proposed revisions to the Council's existing Planning Advice Note Guidance on Religious Meeting Places to help facilitate the provision of space for them. Since that Guidance was published in December 2007 the demand for religious meeting space(s) in the borough has increased significantly due to demographic changes in the borough. The revisions to the Guidance introduce more clarity on what are considered to be the preferred locations for religious meeting places. The main change is establishing greater flexibility for the location of religious meeting places within employment areas and identifies four locations where applications for religious meeting places will be dealt with favourably:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thames Road within the River Road Employment Area• South Dagenham West. Site Specific Allocation SSA SM2• South Dagenham East. Site Specific Allocation SSA SM4• Ripple Road within the Rippleside Employment Area <p>By being proactive and identifying suitable sites the Council can steer such uses to locations which are well served by public transport and which do not give rise to issues around increased noise, disturbance, parking problems or lead to having an adverse effect on the amenities of neighbouring residents and occupiers. This will help ensure that proposals for new religious meeting places contribute to rather than undermine community cohesion and equality of opportunity. The revised Planning Advice Note will be a material consideration when the Council or the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation determines planning applications for religious meeting places. The revised Planning Advice Note on Religious Meeting Places is attached as Appendix 1.</p> <p>Wards Affected: All</p>	
<p>Recommendation(s)</p> <p>The Cabinet is recommended to agree:</p> <p>(i) The revised Planning Advice Note on Religious Meeting Places</p>	
<p>Reason(s)</p> <p>To assist the Council in achieving its Community Priorities of Fair and Respectful and Prosperous.</p>	
<p>Comments of the Chief Financial Officer</p> <p>This report proposes amendments to the Councils current Planning Advice Note on</p>	

<p>Religious Meeting Places. The guidance ensures that there is no adverse impact on existing Council budgets (in terms of noise control, parking, travel, or employment opportunities). The Council currently does not provide financial support / subsidy to aid the provision of religious meeting places, and the proposed amendments do not change this; thus the only cost to the Authority will be that of printing the planning advice note (which will be met from existing budgets).</p>		
<p>Comments of the Legal Partner</p> <p>The Planning Advice Note provides Guidance within the Councils Core Planning Strategy and sets out the Council's Planning Policy for potential applicants seeking to establish a Religious Meeting Place.</p> <p>The Guidance is a material consideration that should be taken into account in the consideration of any planning applications submitted to the Council as the Planning Authority or the Thames Gateway Development Corporation (when applicable).</p>		
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1. Background

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Management Board at their meetings held on 17 October and 7 November 2007 agreed to set up a scrutiny panel to consider developing a Council policy on support for new premises of religious worship (religious meeting places) in the borough.
- 1.2 The evidence put before the Religious Worship and Associated Community Space Policy Scrutiny Panel clearly demonstrates the changing demographic of the borough. The data is provided below.
 - The 2001 census, which asked respondents for the first time about their religion, showed that:
 - There are approximately 200 different faith groups currently operating in the borough, of which 140 are registered with the Faith Forum.
 - 113,100 residents in the borough (69%) claimed to be Christian 25,100 (15.3%) stated 'No religion' and 13,800 (8.4% did not state a religion.
 - The second largest religion was Islam at 7,100 (4.4%), followed by Hinduism at 1,867 (1.1%) then Sikhism at 1,800 (1.1%), Judaism at 500 (0.3%), Buddhism 400 (0.2%) and other religions at 308 (0.2%).
 - The Office of National Statistics does not record figures for the number of people of Eastern European origin who now live in the borough, although anecdotally it is believed that these figures are rising. Of those borough

residents born in Eastern Europe, the 2001 census identified that approximately 50% were of Christian faith and 50% were of Muslim faith.

- A significant proportion of the Borough's black african community comes from Nigeria. The 2001 census showed that 84% of Nigerians were of the Christian faith (as compared to 69% of the borough's population as a whole).
- Since 2001 the Bangladeshi population in the borough has grown by 171%. The 2001 census identified that 93% of people in the borough of Bangladeshi origin were Muslim.

1.3 The Panel noted that whilst the Church of England has had a stronghold in Barking and Dagenham in the past, the Pentecostal churches have far more centres for worship in the borough at present and the number of these is on the increase. Members of Islamic faith are also increasing, although the number of worship centres is still small. Religion will continue to be an important aspect of life for a significant proportion of the population in the foreseeable future, with the Christian and Muslim faiths being particularly represented in the community.

1.4 In December 2007 the Council published a Planning Advice Note on Religious Meeting Places. The aim of this Planning Advice Note (PAN) was to provide guidance for the development of religious meeting places in Barking and Dagenham. It recognised that the provision of religious meeting places was important for community cohesion and equality of opportunity; however provision of new or expanded religious meeting places needed to be carefully considered. Careful consideration was necessary so that religious meeting places did not give rise to issues around increased noise, disturbance, parking problems or lead to having an adverse effect on the amenities of neighbouring residents and occupiers.

2. Proposal

2.1 The existing PAN advises that religious meeting places should be located:

- Where they can be accessed on foot, bicycle or public transport, rather than only by car
- Where they will not have a significant adverse effect on surrounding neighbours particularly with regard to noise, traffic and parking.
- In premises that comply with the access requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Where possible be located in close proximity to the community that the facility will serve

2.2 Within these overriding principles the existing PAN identifies the following locations as particularly suitable for places of worship:

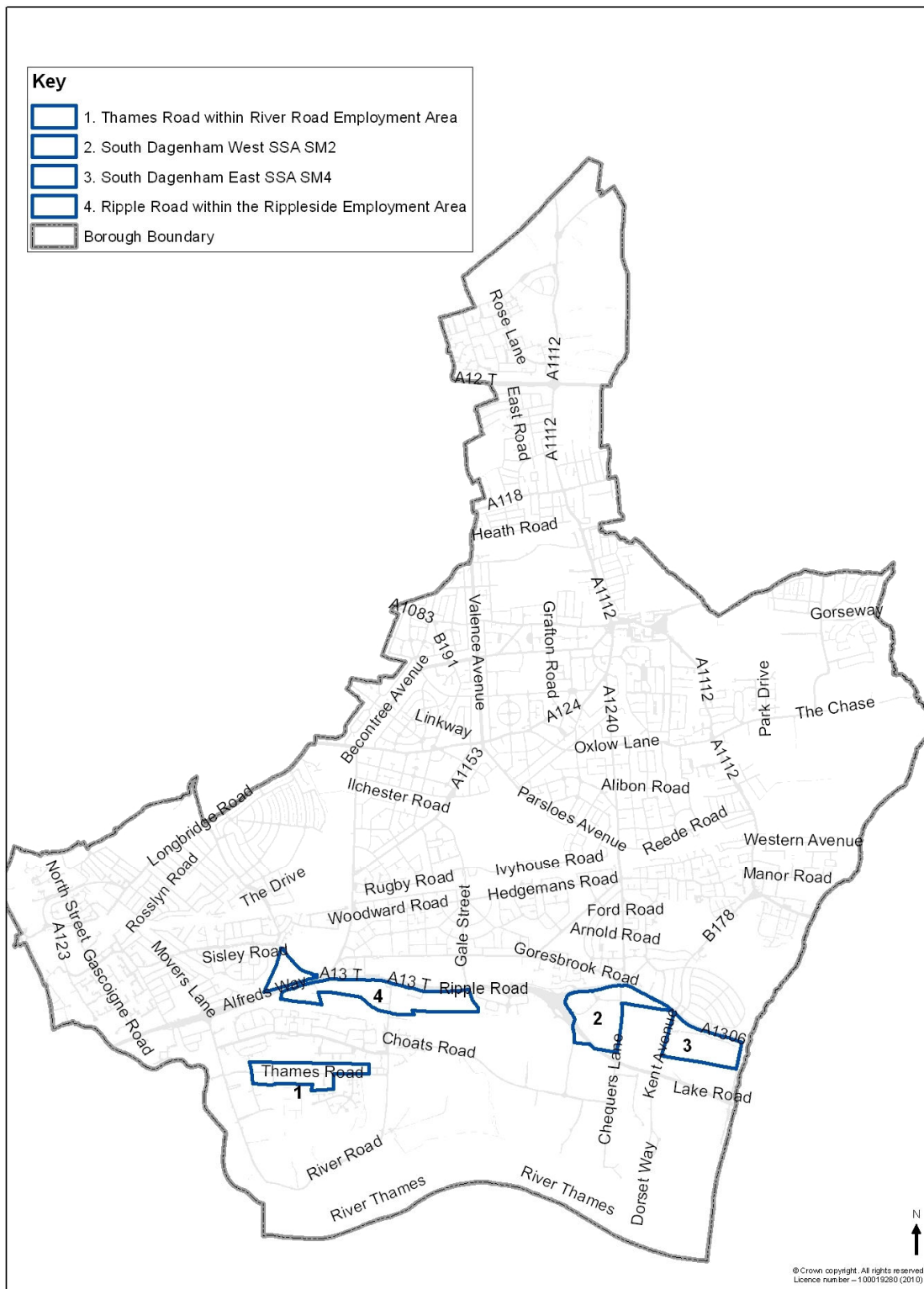
- Locations in or near to town or district centres within the Borough i.e. Barking Town Centre, Dagenham Heathway District Centre or Chadwell Heath District Centre
- Vacant sites on the edge of an employment area or industrial site
- Vacant retail warehouse buildings where it can be demonstrated that they are no longer needed for retail warehousing purposes.

- Within mixed use developments so that facilities are better linked to housing, jobs, shopping, leisure and other local services, in order to minimise travel distances;

- 2.3 The CAG report 2008, titled “Responding to the needs of faith communities: places of worship” found that in London, models of religious worship are changing and large congregations are developing for some faiths. These groups require large spaces to accommodate all worshippers in their services and in many cases experience difficulties in finding appropriate sites. Where sites can be found, issues of transport accessibility mean that the most suitable locations for these large scale places of worship are often close to good public transport links.
- 2.4 It also found that many newer and expanding faith groups require ‘space for worship’, rather than a dedicated (or consecrated) place of worship. They differ from the ‘inherited’ Christian Churches insofar as they are functionally less related to the community in which they are located and serve a wider congregation. In the case of larger communities they also require more flexible and larger spaces for increasing numbers of worshippers that many existing buildings are unsuitable to provide.
- 2.5 The demand for larger places of worship is evident. The Council has recently received a planning application for the Al Madina Mosque in Victoria Road Barking to increase its capacity from 3,000 to 5,000 worshippers. On main worship days on average 400 to 500 people visit the Gurdwara throughout the day to pray or visit the kitchen. However the facilities are extremely stretched to deal with this number of people particularly for special occasions such as funerals or weddings. A place of worship currently operating out of some industrial premises in Thames Road, Barking is seeking a site to build a large facility which will cater for thousands of worshippers the majority of whom live locally. Bethel Church who are currently located in the Parsloes area are also seeking larger premises. Lastly there are demands for a Mosque in the Thames View Barking Riverside area and in Dagenham.
- 2.6 With this in mind the Council’s existing Planning Advice Note on Religious Meeting Places has been revised to provide more clarity on the preferred locations for religious meeting spaces. Whilst the existing planning advice note limits religious meeting places to vacant sites on the edge of employment areas the revised note recognises that vacant sites elsewhere in an employment area may be suitable where this does not harm the area’s employment function, has safe public access, suitable off-street parking provision and good public transport links (e.g. on an existing bus route). In accordance with the recently adopted Core Strategy it makes clear that our first objective is to safeguard employment areas to retain and encourage employment opportunities in the Borough and therefore any proposal which is detrimental to this objective will not be permitted.
- 2.7 The other substantial change is that the advice now identifies four locations where applications for religious meeting places will be dealt with favourably. These locations, listed below, have been identified with regard to the overriding principles and therefore are locations which enjoy public transport access and are unlikely to have a significant adverse effect on surrounding neighbours particularly with regard to noise, traffic and parking.

1. Thames Road within the River Road Employment Area

2. South Dagenham West. Site Specific Allocation SSA SM2
3. South Dagenham East. Site Specific Allocation SSA SM4
4. Ripple Road within the Rippleside Employment Area



2.8 By being proactive and identifying suitable sites the Council can steer such uses to locations which are well served by public transport and which do not give rise to issues around increased noise, disturbance, parking problems or lead to having an adverse effect on the amenities of neighbouring residents and occupiers. This will

help ensure that proposals for new religious meeting places contribute to rather than undermine community cohesion and equality of opportunity. The revised Planning Advice Note will be a material consideration when the Council or the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation determines planning applications for religious meeting places. The revised Planning Advice Note on Religious Meeting Places is attached as Appendix 1.

3. Financial Issues

- 3.1 The Council is not able to provide financial support to aid the provision of religious meeting places and this revised Planning Advice Note does not change this. The only cost the Council will incur is the printing of the Planning Advice Note upon request.

4. Legal Issues

- 4.1 The revised Planning Advice Note will be a material consideration when the Council or the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation determines planning applications for religious meeting places. The revised Planning Advice Note on Religious Meeting Places is attached as Appendix 1.

5. Other Implications

5.1

- **Risk Management** The guidance includes suitable safeguards to ensure that new religious meeting places do not give rise to issues around increased noise, disturbance, parking problems or lead to having an adverse effect on the amenities of neighbouring residents and occupiers. Indeed the revisions include more clarity on the preferred locations for religious meeting places taking into account these potential impacts.
- **Customer Impact** An Equality Impact Assessment was done for the original Planning Advice Note on Religious Meeting Places and this did not identify any adverse impacts on any of the equality groups. An Equality Impact Assessment has also been done for this update of the PAN and similarly this has not identified any adverse impacts on any of the equality groups. In the time available it has not been possible to undertake consultation with the relevant equalities groups however the main changes introduced by the update is more flexibility for religious meeting places within employment areas and it is not considered that this change has any material negative impact on the equalities groups. This Planning Advice Note will be distributed to the Faith Forum.

However the Equalities Impact Assessment has identified that it will be necessary to ensure that the PAN is accessible to all groups and therefore will need to be made available in different formats. The current PAN is available on audio tape, in large print or in Braille and can also be translated into seven different languages. It is intended to make the updated PAN available in the same way.

- **Crime and Disorder Issues** In line with Borough Wide Development Policy BC7 all new development would need to incorporate Secure by Design principles.

6. Options appraisal

- 6.1 The option of not revising the existing Planning Advice Note on Religious Meeting Places was not taken and it was considered that in the light of the increased demand for religious meeting spaces that the guidance note needed to provide more clarity on appropriate locations for them. It also needed updating to take account of the progress made with the Local Development Framework which replaces the Unitary Development Plan. The main change to the guidance is the identification of Thames Road, South Dagenham West, South Dagenham East, and Rippleside Industrial Area as appropriate locations for Religious Meeting Places. Other potential locations which were considered include Freshwater Road, Freshwharf, Hertford Road, and Wantz Road Employment Areas. Although these are not referred to specifically within the guidance it makes clear that in certain situations there may be opportunities for religious meeting places within the borough's employment areas generally. However it was not considered that they warranted special mention as generally there is not the same opportunity for religious meeting places in these locations nor with regard to the issues such as car parking, public transport access and impact on residential amenity and business operation do they compare as favourably.

7. Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

- Planning Advice Note on Religious Meeting Places 2007
- Minutes of Scrutiny Management Board 17 October and 7 November 2007
- CAG report 2008, titled "Responding to the needs of faith communities: places of worship"
- Pre-submission Site Specific Allocations document 2008

8. List of appendices:

Appendix 1 – Planning Advice Note on Religious Meeting Spaces 2010