

A Multi-Faith Centre for Cambridge?

Exploring the need for a multi-faith facility with BME faith groups

Conclusion and Summary of Key Points

- **A multi-faith centre would not be the first priority for most of the groups contacted.**
- **Most expressed a desire for space that would meet their own worship and community needs.**
- **There was support for more inter-faith activities.**
- **A socially inclusive “civic centre” was considered by several groups to be a positive alternative to multi-faith and/or multi-cultural facilities.**
- **Groups think that agencies need more awareness and training on religious and cultural issues.**
- **Several groups were interested in exploring the idea of a faith forum.**

1. Purpose of the study

- 1.1 The February 2003 Race Equality Action Plan, resulting from the November 2002 consultation event between statutory agencies and Black and Minority Ethnic Cambridge residents, identified a need to ‘establish the extent of desire for a multi-faith facility amongst the different faith groups in the city’ and arrange appropriate visits if required.
- 1.2 Cambridge City Council’s Community Development Section has commissioned this research by Ariadne Henry to engage with faith communities generally and to look at this issue specifically.
- 1.3 Funding was identified for this work in late 2003 and the research was started in February 2004.
- 1.4 Its initial findings will be presented to a follow-up meeting of agencies and residents on 1 July 2004.

2. Method

- 2.1 The city’s Interfaith Group contacted all its members on behalf of the researcher who then met with all those groups that responded and worked through a questionnaire with them. It is not known how the representatives from each group were selected. The larger minority faith groups were specifically targeted, particularly those where faith and ethnic origins overlap. The number of groups contacted was limited by the resources available.
- 2.2 The questionnaire concentrated on premises, religious discrimination, community safety, and desire or ability to work with people of other faiths. Groups generally identified key problems as
 - a lack of access to premises.
 - the need for new or better premises which will suit their individual community and/or religious needs.
- 2.3 Fifteen groups made contact and fourteen completed the questionnaire.

Abu Bakar Mosque	Ahmeddiyya Muslim group	Bah’ai Community
Cambridge Buddhists	Cambridge Sikh Group	Chinese Christian Church
Falon Gong Group	Greater Bibleway Church	Hindu Association (ICCA)
Pagan Moot	Quakers	Salvation Army
Thompson Lane Jewish Associations	Unitarian Church	Zion Baptist Church

- 2.4 Beth Shalom (Jewish reformed), the Cambridge Community Church, the Hills Road Catholic Church, Mill Road Baptist Church, St Andrew’s Baptist Church, St.

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Columba's, St. Stephen's and the Wesley Methodist Church were sent information but were unable to respond.

- 2.5 A visit was arranged to the multi-faith centre under construction at the University of Derby. Its aims are education, research and interfaith work. It will not be used for worship except possibly by smaller faith groups which do not already have appropriate facilities for this purpose.

3. Issues

- 3.1 Generally, members of BME community members see faith as a core part of their culture and consider that their culture creates the links that strengthen their communities.
- 3.2 Members of all groups generally considered that worship should follow individual religious traditions, while accepting that interfaith work is positive.
- 3.3 Although not asked specifically about a multi-cultural centre, there was significant feeling that the BME groups primarily wanted to have space for their own communities. A multi-faith centre would not be the first priority for most groups because it would not meet their current, more pressing needs for worship and/or community space. Enthusiasm for such a centre was not great.
- 3.4 Cambridge acts as a focal point providing the only access available to worship and community facilities for many people from the wider county catchment area.
- 3.5 The city's BME population has grown in size in recent years and some groups have accumulated significant levels of funds. They are, however, unable to compete in the current city property market - as similar groups in other parts of the country are - and have found it impossible to buy land/property.
- 3.6 The concept of a civic centre which would focus on social inclusion and embrace all faiths and cultures was considered as an alternative approach.
- 3.7 A wide range of community activities are provided by the faith groups.
- 3.8 Groups see a need for help in developing their community activities and groups.
- 3.9 There is a strong base for interfaith work through the Interfaith Group, which welcomes all faiths.
- 3.10 Several respondents were interested in being involved in a faith forum .
- 3.11 Groups asked for events such as a peace day, a prayer day, and environmental and cultural events.
- 3.12 There was a request to investigate the possibility of having an Eruv in Cambridge for members of the Jewish community.
- 3.13 Respondents generally considered that agencies lack understanding of different religions in both policy making and service delivery.

4. Next steps

- 4.1 To circulate the findings of the research and any relevant background information to all appropriate groups and agencies, including the groups and churches unable to participate in the project to date.
- 4.2 To organise an initial meeting to feed back on the research and consider appropriate actions including issues around the possible establishment of a faith forum.
- 4.3 To demonstrate the community activities and services provided by creating a unified programme of events and showcasing the community work of the faith groups.
- 4.4 To offer training on faith issues for public and voluntary sector staff in order to increase sensitivity in service provision.
- 4.5 To organise an event/events highlighting the work of the faith communities.
- 4.6 To facilitate discussions between interested members of the Jewish community and the planning department about the possibility of establishing an Eruv.