

# Understanding and Celebrating Religious Diversity in Britain: A Case Study of Leicester since 1970 making comparison with Flushing, Queens County, New York City

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**Abstract:** How much pluralism and what kinds of pluralism can a pluralist society stand?' (John Courtney Murray SJ). After 1965, the South Asian population of Leicester increased rapidly, an even stronger surge of immigration transformed Flushing in Queens County, New York City, from a Protestant–Catholic–Jewish community into a microcosm of the world's religions. Leicester was the first planning authority in the UK, and also in Europe, to produce in 1977 a policy on places of worship, strongly reinforced by a restated and refined proactive policy a decade later. At the other extreme, weak planning controls and limited overarching inter-religious and inter-cultural groupings such as is provided by in Leicester by a Council of Faiths and a Society for Inter-Cultural Understanding, has resulted in a plethora of religious buildings in Flushing with few minimum standards and with many places of religious worship acting as islands unto themselves. Further study of these two examples of diverse societies will help an understanding of both the limits and potential of religious and cultural pluralism for civil society.

'Anyone who has lived here less than 20 years is still regarded as "foreign"', so a newspaper article proclaimed in 1956.<sup>1</sup> Until recently, the author has

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suffered from the disability that befalls all incomers to Leicester, but now that the 20-year 'rule' for residence for incomers has been passed, for the first time he has felt able to describe what makes Leicester different from other cities in the UK.<sup>2</sup> It sometimes takes others to show us something about ourselves that otherwise lies hidden. Three foreign scholars — Joseph Seliga from Chicago, Professor Kiyotaka Sato from Tokyo, and Professor R. Scott Hanson from Philadelphia — have studied the phenomenon of religious and cultural diversity in Leicester. The rapid rate of cultural change brought about by south Asian migration in Belgrave between 1965 and 1995 was the particular subject of Seliga's research.<sup>3</sup> A simple comparison with the newspaper article in 1956 cited above, in which all eight persons photographed were white makes a telling comparison with the changes that have since occurred: Belgrave is now primarily a south Asian area of Leicester. Professor Sato has created a unique photographic archive of the visual images of Leicester's diversity, seen through the camera lens of someone coming from what is, by comparison, a largely mono-cultural society.<sup>4</sup> Most recently, Professor Hanson has drawn the author's attention to the significant parallels and contrasts between Leicester's diversity and that of Flushing in the Queens district of New York City.<sup>5</sup> Two articles from the *New York Times* can be cited to make the comparison. 'A snapshot of World Faith; on one Queens Block, many prayers are spoken' (7 November 1999);<sup>6</sup> and 'There is greater diversity in two or three square blocks here than anywhere I can think of in Europe', the author's remark, amended for an American audience, which became the website 'quote of the day' of the *New York Times* on 8 February 2001.<sup>7</sup>

### **I. Comparisons and Contrasts in Historical background: Leicester and Flushing**

As a Roman settlement, it is obvious that Leicester has experienced a much longer period of immigration than Flushing, which was founded in 1645. Many of the oldest places of Christian worship had been established in the Middle Ages, the original centre for the faith being at St Nicholas', which reused building materials from the Roman settlement. In the later Middle Ages, Lollardy was of considerable importance in the region, so a long tradition of religious dissent can be traced within the Christian traditions. The Reformation saw the destruction of Leicester Abbey, of which no more than archaeological remnants survive, as well as the

removal of images from the formerly Catholic churches.<sup>8</sup> Catholicism was no longer practised within the City until after Catholic Emancipation in 1829. Instead, beginning with the Unitarian congregation at Great Meeting, a brick-built chapel of some distinction constructed in 1704–8,<sup>9</sup> religious dissent from the Anglican established church was widespread and became a distinguishing feature of Leicester civic life. Although the data is not considered particularly reliable, the religious census of 1851 demonstrated an unusual degree of religious pluralism in Leicester. The interesting point is to compare the data on church attendance with the number of chapels/churches and places of worship. There were more Baptist chapels in Leicester (10) than Church of England churches (9), although the latter were usually bigger. The various types of Methodists had 7 between them, the Independents 3, the Quakers 1, the Mormons 1. As yet the Catholics had only one church, but while the Irish had been arriving in parishes like St. Margaret's since the 1845–8 famine, they had yet to become institutionally organized: at no stage in the nineteenth century, however, was the Irish presence in Leicester more than 1,000 people.<sup>10</sup>

Which non-Christian religions were practised in medieval and early modern Leicester? There is no clear evidence of either Islam or Judaism. The most telling document, which aroused some controversy in Christian evangelical prayer circles in 2001,<sup>11</sup> is the charter of Simon de Montfort issued against the Jews of Leicester at some date allegedly before 1239.<sup>12</sup> There is, however, little substantiating evidence for the presence of a Jewish community in Leicester before the later nineteenth century. The Orthodox Jewish community was present in Leicester by c. 1874<sup>13</sup> and on 17 February 1897 obtained planning consent for its synagogue, which was finally built at a cost of over £2,500 and inaugurated by the Chief Rabbi on 5 September 1898.<sup>14</sup> The leader of the Orthodox Jews, Sir Israel Hart, was Mayor of Leicester four times and a major figure both locally and nationally.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to Leicester, with its poor record concerning Simon de Montfort's charter, many residents of Flushing claim that it as the birthplace of religious freedom in the USA. Its town charter of 1645 was one of the first in colonial America to grant religious freedom, or 'liberty of conscience' as it was called then, which was important to the local Quakers, or Friends, who settled there. When this right was jeopardized by Director General Peter Stuyvesant, who was bent on persecuting anyone

who was not a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, the people of Flushing came together to defend their town charter. In 1657, they drafted a document that has become known as the Flushing Remonstrance, which has been called a ‘pioneering plea for religious freedom’. Stuyvesant was not moved, however, and it was not until 1663, when John Bowne was banished from Flushing for holding Quaker meetings in his house and then successfully appealed to the Dutch West India Company, that the town and the rest of the colony would more fully enjoy this liberty. On 10 October 1945, Flushing celebrated the tercentenary anniversary of its founding and, for the occasion, residents and politicians chose to dedicate Bowne House, on Bowne Street, as ‘a national shrine to religious freedom and toleration’. The oldest house in Queens (1661), it now serves as an historical society and museum. The original Flushing Remonstrance document was received by Mayor Robert Wagner of New York on the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of it being issued (1957) and the mayor and Governor Harriman addressed the crowd on Bowne Street. The Remonstrance is now regularly referred to by leaders of other faiths when defining their position within the civic polity.<sup>16</sup>

In Scott Hanson’s analysis, for 200 years, religious pluralism in Flushing consisted of the Friends’ Meeting House (built in 1694, the oldest place of worship in New York City), St. George’s Episcopal church (1702), and the Macedonia African Methodist Episcopal church (1811).<sup>17</sup> From the 1830s to 1860, many Irish and German Catholics (and Lutherans) settled, and a variety of different Protestant denominations also arrived. Part of a second wave of immigration from the 1880s to the 1920s, Jews from eastern Europe began settling in Flushing by the late nineteenth century, with Conservative, Reformed, and Orthodox synagogues being established once the groups began to consolidate their presence.<sup>18</sup>

## **II. Comparisons and Contrasts in Recent Immigration: Leicester and Flushing**

After 1965, Flushing was transformed from a Protestant–Catholic–Jewish community into a microcosm of the world’s religions. The effects of the Immigration Act of 1965 were not at first noticed, but Queens became the most ethnically diverse county in the United States by the 1990s according to the Census statistics, with perhaps the most striking changes taking place in Flushing<sup>19</sup> — it gained a large South Asian community (the first major settlement in the USA), a second Chinatown for New York, and

the largest Korean community on the East Coast (in contrast, there are some Chinese Christians in Leicester, but few if any Koreans). Ironically, the 'birthplace of religious freedom' in the USA became at times a place of real conflict and tension. As more Asian immigrants began to settle in the 1970s and establish new places of worship, hostility, vandalism, and attacks were fairly common. There are still isolated incidents in later decades (for instance, Afghani mosques and businesses, along with Sikhs, were targeted after 9/11), but a general acceptance had come about by the 1980s, when long-time residents realized their Asian neighbours had helped revitalize the commercial area of Flushing. The 2000 Census data for Queens NY emphasizes the cosmopolitan nature of the population (Table 1)

**Table 1. Queens County, NY: Census data, 2000**

Birthplace	Queens County		NY	US
	Number	Pct	Pct	Pct
Born in the same state	1,014,682	45.5	65.3	60.0
Born in another state	135,300	6.1	11.6	27.7
Born outside the US	51,058	2.3	2.7	1.3
Naturalized citizen	466,608	20.9	9.4	4.5
Foreign born, not US citizen	561,731	25.2	11.0	6.6
<b>Population 2000:</b>	2,229,379			

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census; ePodunk

It was at more or less at the same time, but for a different combination of reasons, that south Asian immigration to Leicester increased rapidly. Overall, as Table 2 demonstrates, the rate of increase of South Asian migration to Leicester between 1961 and 1971 was an average of 55.5 per cent per annum, albeit from a relatively low base.

**Table 2. South Asian Migration into Leicester, 1951-1981 according to place of birth (Ahmed Andrews, 1995, based on decennial censuses)**

Country	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991
India	569	1827	11510	18235	20841
Pakistan	49	109	775	1305	1155
Bangladesh	-	-	685		
East Africa	18	1630	6835	18622	17168
Total	636	3566	19805	38162	39164

Yet this was also the era of Enoch Powell's speeches against immigration ('like the Roman, I see the River Tiber foaming with much blood', Powell had stated in April 1968.)<sup>20</sup> It seems certain that more Asians came to Leicester from Kenya and Malawi than from Uganda, but 1972 was the turning point because of the unprecedented suddenness and short time-scale for resettlement of Ugandan Asians imposed by the (British-supported) dictator Idi Amin. National Front agitation and demonstrations and counter-demonstrations had gathered pace and the City Corporation showed its nervousness on 15 September 1972, when at the height of the forced Ugandan Asian exodus, it notoriously placed an advertisement in the *Ugandan Argus*. This stated that 'present conditions in the City are very different from those met by earlier settlers'. On housing, it claimed that 'several thousands of families' were already on the Council's waiting list; on education, it claimed that 'hundreds of children are awaiting places in schools'; and on social and health services, it claimed that they were 'already stretched to the limit'. Accept the advice of the Uganda Resettlement Board, the advertisement pronounced, and do 'not come to Leicester'.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the *Leicester Mercury* followed the lead of the City Council on 31 August and proclaimed Leicester 'full'.<sup>22</sup> Even Dr Kundan Seth, Vice-President of the British South Asian Welfare Society, stated that Leicester should be used only as a place of transit and not as a 'dumping ground for the majority of Ugandan evacuees'.<sup>23</sup> The City Corporation wanted £300,000 from the central government in financial assistance, while Tom Boardman MP for S. W. Leicester and Minister of Industry talked of the 'dangerous strain' on Leicester's race relations if there was further immigration.<sup>24</sup>

Already on 6 September 1972 there were said to be 290 Asian children who had arrived in the past three to four weeks and were on the City's school waiting list. One house, 336 East Park Road, was expected to be home to fourteen Ugandan Asians the following week.<sup>25</sup> There had been 6,835 East African Asians in the city in 1971; there were 18,622 a decade later (Table 2). Overall, the rate of increase in the South Asian population of Leicester had slowed down between 1971 and 1981, to an average of 19.2 per cent per annum, but from a much higher base.<sup>26</sup> These figures are at variance with the national trend, where the highest rate of increase of Britain's South Asian population was between 1971 and 1981.<sup>27</sup> In other words, Leicester's South Asian population grew faster earlier than the national trend in the immigration figures. By 1981

Leicester had approximately 10% of the UK's South Asian immigrants from East Africa.

Though it may not be a correct assumption that the whole difference of 11,787 was made up by the Ugandan Asian migration, there is no doubt that Leicester was the principal point of concentration in the UK outside London. 'The net geographical impact [of the migration]', comments Dr Vaughan Robinson of the Migration Unit of the University of Wales, 'was to ensure that the East African Asians were more concentrated within the UK than either the Indian or Pakistani labour migrants which had preceded them, with particular concentrations being found in London and Leicester.'<sup>28</sup> And the East African Asians generally, and the Ugandan migrants in particular, have created in Leicester a distinctive 'twice migrant' experience. Their business acumen (the Gujaratis are in any case noted for it) has also been proverbial in Leicester's urban regeneration.<sup>29</sup>

By 1991, Leicester had 63,994 Asians (23.7 per cent of the population), of whom 60,297 (22.3 per cent of the population) were of Indian origin. Although it did not receive a complete response, the ethnicity and religious affiliation question in the UK Census of 2001 has provided us with some interesting results to judge the size of Leicester's main non-Christian religious communities in comparison with other UK cities. There is a high proportion of the population born outside the EU: in absolute terms, Leicester ranks 12th in size of the population born outside the EU and 20<sup>th</sup> in terms of proportion of the population of the city born outside the EU. In ascending order, at 11,796 Leicester's Sikh community is the eighth largest Sikh community in England and Wales. (It seems that the earliest South Asian settlers in Leicester were Punjabi Sikhs.)<sup>30</sup> At 30,885, the Muslim community of Leicester was larger than had been expected, and was the only religious community to have increased significantly in size since an informal survey held in 1983; indeed it constitutes the 10<sup>th</sup> largest community in England and Wales. But Leicester has always been regarded as principally a Hindu city: at 41,248, Leicester's Hindu community is the second largest in England and Wales. These three groups represent respectively 4.2, 11.0 and 14.7 per cent of the population of Leicester, or a combined total of 29.9 per cent of the city's population of some 280,000. Somewhat surprisingly, the decline in Christianity since 1983 is accounted for more by the increase in those with no religion at all or who fail to disclose their religion, than by significant increases in the minority communities except for the Muslims.<sup>31</sup>

### **III. Contrasts between Leicester and Flushing: The Issue of Redundant Church Buildings**

As yet, Flushing has no problem with redundant places of worship. This is a phenomenon that it will certainly face in the future, with over 200 very different places of worship densely concentrated in an area no bigger than 2.5 square miles. There are so many Korean churches in particular (over 100 of them!) that it is undoubtedly an ‘over-churched’ area, but one which has yet to face up to the long-term consequences of excessive provision leading to later redundancy.<sup>32</sup> Europe has a recognized problem with redundant places of worship, which resulted in a report of the Committee on Culture and Education to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly in 1989,<sup>33</sup> and the adoption of a Resolution of the Council. This Resolution noted that ‘when a religious building is no longer viable as such, efforts should be made to ensure a future use, whether religious or cultural, as far as possible compatible with the original intention of its construction’. It welcomed ‘the successful examples throughout Europe of the preservation and protection of redundant religious buildings, through their sensitive adaptation to new uses’.<sup>34</sup> But the admirable provisions of the Resolution have not, for the most part, been implemented.<sup>35</sup>

The Council of Europe report stated that ‘in England the problem is the most serious in Western Europe’, but also indicated that ‘it is also in England that most work and the earliest has been done to save and preserve redundant churches’. It noted that large nineteenth-century churches ‘which may often be of considerable architectural and historical importance’ were ‘particularly at risk’. Between 1969 and 1985, 1,053 Anglican Churches out of a total of some 18,000 were declared redundant. By 2003, some 1,600 Anglican churches or nearly 10 per cent of the national total had closed.<sup>36</sup>

In May 1977, the City Planning Officer John Dean authorized a report based on a previous questionnaire held to estimate the demand for places of religious worship in Leicester.<sup>37</sup> The report pointed to the fundamental change that had taken place within the urban space since the last quarter of the nineteenth century:<sup>38</sup>

#### **UNDER-USE OF CHURCHES**

In the last half of the 19th century, a great religious revival resulted in the erection of numerous, often imposing, places of



worship designed to serve what are now the inner suburban areas. These large churches housed Anglican, Congregational, Baptist and Methodist congregations, were capable of accommodating 500 to over 1,000 people, had associated Parish Rooms and/or a Sunday School hall, and were located close to each other in the densely-populated housing areas. Since that time, conditions have changed due to such factors as the 'flight to the suburbs', the redevelopment of inner-city areas and a marked decline in church attendance. The result today is that churches in areas of Victorian origin tend to be under-utilized, with small congregations (only a tenth to a quarter full) and only a small range of church-organized activities. These phenomena are especially found in certain Anglican churches, and to a lesser extent, in the Methodist following.

#### THE CHURCHES' VIEWPOINT

The Anglican Church Authorities admit that the inner-city areas of Leicester have too many churches, and informal discussions involving local priests and church members have taken place with a view to rationalizing the situation by, for example, the amalgamation of congregations and the declaration of certain churches redundant. However, there is little hope of translating words into action at the present time as strong forces are operating to keep as many churches in use for as long as possible. A congregation, however small, is unlikely to relinquish voluntarily a church building in which its associations, traditions and loyalties lie. Hence, the attitude of the church authorities tends towards retaining the status quo, and of course, decisions of this nature must remain with them.

The factors for retention of 'redundant' Churches notionally within the Anglican community identified in 1977 remained true in 2003.<sup>39</sup> As far as is known, no Anglican church in Leicester has been transferred to a non-Christian body as a place of worship, since such a transfer would appear to contravene past and current Church of England national guidelines.<sup>40</sup> St Michael and All Angels, Melton Road/Moira Street, has been transformed into residential flats and, since 1995, has become the base of operation for the Asian broadcasting station, Sabras Sound.<sup>41</sup> St John the Divine, off Waterloo Way / South Albion Street, was sought by communities from other religions before being sold for redevelopment as residential apartments.<sup>42</sup> St George's, a large and important nineteenth-century

church, the first to be built in Leicester since the Reformation,<sup>43</sup> was leased to the Serbian Orthodox Community in March 1973 for 21 years;<sup>44</sup> this scheme was subsequently revoked on 16 March 1983, and the freehold of the building was sold to the Orthodox Serbs, including the tombstones, monuments and memorials. The Bishop of Leicester was empowered to dispose the contents of the church, including the font and communion table. This conformed to the pattern of possible transfers of Church of England property to other Christian denominations.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the Polish Community has bought the former Baptist church in Melbourne Road for £14,000 and renamed it St Pawla.<sup>46</sup> St Mark's Belgrave, a nationally famous Church because of its association in the early twentieth century with the Christian Socialist movement, was disposed of in a private sale in 1983 and remains on the English Heritage at risk list.<sup>47</sup>

The problem is far from confined to the Anglican Church. The Council of Europe report also noted that it was an issue also confronting the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodists and the United Reformed Church. The three most important cases in Leicester of a change of use for an existing church or chapel to worship by another faith have occurred with these denominations. Leicester's largest Hindu Temple, the Shree Sanatan Mandir, was converted in 1971 from the former Carey Hall Baptist Church, built in 1898.<sup>48</sup> It was ironic to convert an underused Baptist premises named after the great missionary, linguist, translator and educator William Carey, who is still revered by many Indians today, not least because it was situated close to the growing Hindu community of Belgrave: but irony has no part in the process of disposal and acquisition. In reality, the Baptists had acquired a new premises on Harrison Road for their congregation<sup>49</sup> and sought to sell off the property as a business store. They ran into initial planning difficulties, since this transfer was considered to deprive 'the immediate neighbourhood of a building eminently suited for religious and social activities for which there is a potential demand in a residential area of the this type'.<sup>50</sup> Ultimately, the Hindu community purchased the church for £9,500, raised with money from door-to-door collections, bank loans and personal loans; a further £900 was needed for repairs to the building.<sup>51</sup> Once transferred to other religious use, the exterior façade of the church was largely preserved unaltered for thirty years in its new role as temple, though the Christian decorations were removed internally. Although images were gradually introduced into the temple, for example in July 1984,<sup>52</sup> it was only in 2002 that a major

renovation of the exterior and interior of the former church was carried out to make the Shree Sanatan Mandir more distinctively a Hindu temple in appearance. The evidence of the Charity Commissioners shows that the temple had become big business by the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with an income in excess of £140,000 and assets of over £800,000.<sup>53</sup>

The second conversion was that of the former Our Lady of Good Counsel (later renamed St Patrick and Our Lady of Good Counsel) Roman Catholic Church, which was built c.1947 and was converted after 1975 to the Shree Shakti Mandir Hindu Temple.<sup>54</sup> The statue above the door of Mary, Mother of Christ, was retained and is decorated as a representation of Shakti, the Hindu Mother goddess, for special occasions. The cross of the old Catholic church on the church front has also been retained.<sup>55</sup> The Roman Catholic Church has decamped to a modern premises in Rushey Mead. The third conversion was that resulting in the Jain Centre, established at 32 Oxford Street in a property formerly belonging to the United Reformed Church. Jain life in Leicester<sup>56</sup> began with a few devotees meeting in a small house to celebrate the festival of Paryushana in 1969. The Jain Samaj (Europe) was founded in Leicester in 1973 as a social and religious organization by the Oswal and Srimali castes, who had never previously joined in a collective venture, but this alliance broke down after four years and the Oswal caste withdrew from the venture.<sup>57</sup> As the community grew in size, the need was felt for a building where Jains could come together for worship and study.<sup>58</sup> In November 1978, the URC had sought planning consent for a change of use for the place of worship to a wholesale and retail discount furniture warehouse, but this was refused. Early in the following year, it obtained consent for the additional use of the place of worship for social gatherings and receptions, but this was insufficient to keep the URC congregation together. Instead, the Jain Centre purchased the property<sup>59</sup> and on 5 December 1983 sought planning approval for the erection of side and rear extensions and alterations to the Church including a new front façade. Unusually, this application received unconditional approval on 31 January 1984. Three further planning applications received conditional approval and the result has been the creation of Europe's first Jain temple and educational establishment.<sup>60</sup> The front elevation of the building made up of white marble cladding and eight pillars depicting Jain doctrine symbolically has transformed the built landscape of the area. The temple presents a magnificent piece of Jain architecture, made from Jaselmere

yellow stone. It has 44 carved pillars, in addition to the eight pillars on the front elevation, a temple dome, a ceiling with traditional Jain carvings, white marble floor, mirror finished walls, concealed lighting and traditional doors at the Garbhagriha.<sup>61</sup>

Churches and chapels are not the only redundant buildings which have been converted in Leicester for use by new religious communities as places of worship. The Guru Nanak Gurdwara at 9 Holy Bones received planning consent for a change of use from a factory to a place of worship in August 1988.<sup>62</sup> (The Gurdwara had formerly been located in New Walk, close to the City Council offices, but was accidentally destroyed by fire in c.1986.) Subsequently, the Guru Nanak Sikh Museum was established in 1992 and won the Leicestershire County Council/*Leicester Mercury* Heritage Award in 1993. In June 2001 the museum achieved the status of full registration under the Museum Registration Scheme administered by the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries and has become the first Sikh Museum in the UK and probably in Europe.

The Museum was officially launched as a registered museum on 4 August 2001. The ceremony was performed by the Honourable Makhdoom Sayed Chan Pir Qadri, the ninth successor of Sai Hazrat Mian Mir who laid the foundation stone of Shri Harimandir Sahib (the Golden Temple), Amritsar. Sikh history has been illustrated in different ways in the museum which houses paintings on Sikh history mainly painted by local artist Mr Sarup Singh, ranging from portraits of the Sikh Gurus, Sikh scholars, paintings relating to Sikh rule in the Panjab in the nineteenth century and the persecution of the Sikhs. Visitors can view models of the Golden Temple (Amritsar), Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak the founder of Sikhism and other five distinguished Sikh Shrines in different parts of India known as *Takhats* ('seats of authority'). The photographic gallery displays photographs dating from the 1840s of those who took part in the various struggles faced by the Sikh Nation. A photographic collection depicts the role played by the Sikh soldiers in both World Wars, the struggle for the freedom of India from British rule and the Sikh separatist fighters killed in 1984. A selection of Panjabi handcraft (*Phulkaris*), ancient Sikh coins and hand-written manuscripts is displayed.<sup>63</sup>

### III. Contrasts between Leicester and Flushing: Planning Controls on Places of Worship

How did the extreme diversity in places of worship which Flushing provides – 200 places of worship in an area no larger than 2.5 square miles – come about? The chief explanation is to be found in the extraordinarily flexible zoning laws, which from have allowed many different immigrant groups to build so-called ‘community facilities’ (a definition which includes religious institutions) in residential neighbourhoods as long as they met Building and Fire Department Codes. Nowhere else in New York other than in Flushing can religious communities do this. Community facilities are also allowed to be built to twice the size of the ‘zoning ration’ of homeowners, and many fund-raising new immigrant groups eventually demolish temporary religious centres in converted old houses for large new structures. Moreover, the parking space requirement for places of worship (one parking space for every fixed pew that seats six) can be circumvented by Islam and the eastern religions, which have no seats at all<sup>64</sup> — in effect, for new religious buildings in Flushing there is a planning free for all. Parking is undoubtedly an issue, and one which causes resentment among the local population: ‘they take up the whole street’, is one, not unrepresentative, comment.<sup>65</sup>

The May 1977 Report on *Places of Worship in Leicester* identified demand for 15 places of worship from Hindu groups and a new mosque for Muslims. Though the report considered that ‘the Sikh community appears to have been successful in obtaining an adequate number of suitable premises to cater for their requirements in the foreseeable future’, it suggested that in other areas ‘the current high level of demand is also probably a “bulge” rather than a continuing long-term trend, reflecting of course the relatively recent arrival in large numbers of the Hindu community in Leicester’.<sup>66</sup> The figures for places of worship in 2003 suggest that 15 new places of worship for Hindus in addition to the two already created was in fact an accurate estimate. What the City Council did not appreciate in 1977, and what has been recognized only recently, was the similar ongoing demand for mosques.

The Muslim population of Leicester has probably always been underestimated (for example, the counting of names is no indicator since Muslims and Hindus from Gujarat share similar names),<sup>67</sup> until the census data from 2001 became available: many of the most recent immigrants, from Kosovo, from Somalia<sup>68</sup> and from other places of turmoil in the

world, have been Muslims. By 1995 all but four of Leicester's mosques were located within the Highfields area; while the Hindu organizations were predominantly located in Belgrave and the Sikh organizations were the most widely dispersed of the three.<sup>69</sup>

The Report of the Working Party on Sites and Buildings for Places of Worship, entitled *Places of Worship in Leicester*, 1987, consolidated previous working practices and guidelines. It noted that the Council's knowledge of religious groups had increased significantly since 1977. The Planning Department's advice was proactive, groups being given an opportunity to meet an officer and obtain 'advice as to how they might go about finding a site or building to meet their requirements'.<sup>70</sup> In particular, by 1987 the City Planning Department had produced an informative booklet entitled *Your Place of Worship. Finding a site / Getting Permission*,<sup>71</sup> which outlined various stages and issues in what was perceived as a difficult process in obtaining planning consent.

The 1987 Report referred to the planning application details between 1974 and 1987 to ascertain whether 'the policies set out in the 1977 Report' had succeeded in reducing the rate of refusal. The answer was that in some years there were no refusals at all, and overall the Council's policies were 'not unduly restricted nor weighted against the applicant'. In total, 124 applications had been made between 1974 and 1987, of which 22 had been refused. It was particularly striking that the applications for newly-built places of worship were only a small proportion of the total. There had been fewer than 3 in any one year (13 in all during the period, of which 4 had been refused). Even in the most difficult category of applications, the conversion of dwelling houses to places of worship, about two-thirds of the total applications were approved, although about one-third of the approvals were only for a limited period. Dwelling houses and shops formed the most numerous category of buildings subject to applications for change of use, but also the types of properties where applications were least likely to be successful. In contrast, it was relatively easy to obtain extensions to existing premises (33 approvals in the period but only 8 refusals).<sup>72</sup> There were 8 cases of enforcement action during the period: 'the small number... should not diminish the importance of the cases involved and the extreme sensitivity required in handling them.' Case studies of difficulties, with the names of the groups removed, were included to describe the sort of problems that could occur.<sup>73</sup>

Acceptance of the 1987 Report committed the Council to a system of monitoring allocations of properties, particularly those owned by the Council, which could be used by those groups seeking new places of worship. This policy was implemented by a Report of the City Planning Officer and the City Estates Surveyor in June 1988. The report noted that 'most of the religious groups searching for premises, or likely to be searching in the future, belong to the non-Christian faiths'. Adoption of the proposed policies therefore had an equal opportunities implication, and could be seen as part of the Council's commitment to 'help people of all faiths to sustain their religious and community life in the City'.<sup>74</sup> A register of groups seeking new places of worship would henceforth be kept by the City Council. Priorities would be assigned according to the length of time the group had been looking for premises; whether the group had an existing place of worship (in which case it had a lower priority unless the premises was severely inadequate); whether the group had any special needs; and whether it passed a test of financial viability ('the group must demonstrate that it will be able to meet the cost of the site and of a development of the quality required by the City Council'). A subsequent report of the City Planning Officer, dated August 1990, listed existing demand from 27 groups, which included eight which had no premises of their own. John Dean emphasised the need to distinguish between places of worship and community centres, with retention of places of worship (justified by 'the considerable unmet demand... in the City') an important condition to be included in the draft City of Leicester Local Plan which was finally adopted in 1994.<sup>75</sup> Between September 1989 and September 1991, as a result of the more proactive policy of the Planning Department, with a named lead officer acting as a contact point between the City Council and the religious communities, there were 14 approvals for new places of worship or significant extensions to existing places of worship. In the same period, there were no refusals.<sup>76</sup> Yet by 1996 there were still 22 groups on the register, 10 of which had no existing premises and 12 of which were seeking better provision.<sup>77</sup>

Several new, purpose-built mosques have been built in Leicester, notably the so-called Central Mosque in Conduit Street,<sup>78</sup> which opened in 1993, and the Masjid Umar in Evington, which opened in 2001:<sup>79</sup> but none has gained primacy over the diverse Muslim population of Leicester. The concept of diversity remains, with links between autonomous religious buildings formed by an association or federation (Leicester Indian

Muslim Association, Federation of Muslim Organizations, Gujarati Hindu Association, and so on). This highlights the fundamental point that no one can easily claim to speak for all Hindus, all Muslims and so on: the status of independent temples and mosques, which lack any overarching hierarchy, is akin to that of the evangelical free churches in the Christian tradition. Though Leicester has succeeded in some cases with entirely new buildings, there are also examples of real difficulty which have arisen, chiefly because of opposition to the plans from residents, not all of whom have been white. In 1991, the Leicester Brahma Samaj sought to extend their premises and build a large temple which would have dominated the Belgrave skyline. The £600,000 project had to be dropped after complaints of noise and congestion from nearby residents, which resulted in the refusal of planning permission. Caste competition may have formed part of the background both to the plan and the opposition it aroused.<sup>80</sup>

This was as nothing, however, compared to the passion that a proposed development on 7.5 acres of council land<sup>81</sup> at Manor Farm, Hamilton, provoked after a provisional allocation in January 1994. In 1994, there were over 5,500 signatures to two petitions presented to the Council against the plan. A further two petitions, one containing 30 signatures, and one containing 256 signatures, were presented to the City Council meeting on 26 March 1998, but the Council reaffirmed the allocation of sites for places of worship at Manor Farm, Hamilton on 26 June 1998. In spite of 692 letters of objection, and on the recommendation of the Director of Environment and Development on 12 January 1999,<sup>82</sup> three groups, the Dawoodi Bohara Jamaat Anjuman-e-Saifee Muslims based in West Knighton,<sup>83</sup> the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission based in London<sup>84</sup> and the Ramgarhia Board for the Sikhs,<sup>85</sup> obtained conditional planning approval for their proposed buildings, subject to a start within five years (i.e. by 2004). Partly because land values have risen and commercial developers have sought to make counter-proposals for the construction of numerous domestic dwellings,<sup>86</sup> the consents have never been transferred into new religious buildings. Not only has the 'milestone' temple which was to shine for the Sikhs (according to the Ramgarhia Board's projection of their plans to the *Leicester Mercury*) not been built; the group has dropped their £3 million plan altogether.<sup>87</sup>

The inescapable fact about new buildings for religious groups, as against the adaptation of existing premises, is that they are enormously expensive. If we take the example of Leicester's Central Mosque, work on



phase one (the main mosque) was completed in 1993, when the mosque was inaugurated. A second prayer hall, ablution hall and women's gallery was added subsequently in the second phase. Phase three, which started in March 2002, includes a sports hall which can be used for community events such as weddings for up to 800 people, improvements to the car park and the construction of a minaret. The total cost of the three phases is estimated at £2½ million. Could the project have been started at all if the City Council had not in 1986 sold off the Conduit Street site (1.35 acres) at a discounted price of 75 per cent below the market rate?<sup>88</sup> Similarly, Professor Scott Hanson identifies high costs for new religious buildings in Flushing, with the record held by the Full Gospel New York Mission Centre (established in 1993), which paid \$8.5 million for its 140,000 square foot nine-storey complex on five acres of land with parking for 600.<sup>89</sup> More comparable with Leicester's scale of activity was the \$3.4 million Muslim Centre of New York (MCNY), inaugurated in September 1996.<sup>90</sup> These are the sort of sums that can only be found when an incoming group is already very wealthy or when it has been established some time in the city and nurtured its community finances.

### Conclusion

The Council of Europe, in its landmark Recommendation 1396 on religion and democracy adopted on 27 January 1999, has defined some of the pre-requisites for the development of religious pluralism in a tolerant democratic society.<sup>91</sup> In the view of the present writer, the central formulation in this Resolution is the emphasis on the need to 'safeguard religious pluralism by allowing all religions to develop in identical conditions'. The UK Local Government Association drew up in 2002 a booklet entitled *Faith and Community: a good practice guide for local authorities*. This included a section on planning issues, which suggests that at a national level many of the issues highlighted in Leicester in the 1977 report are still prevalent.<sup>92</sup> It noted that there were around 100 inter-faith initiatives across the UK, of which several (Birmingham, Leeds and Wolverhampton) had been in existence for over 25 years. Leicester's Council of Faiths is somewhat younger, having been formed in 1986.<sup>93</sup> The report also commented on variations in the scale of religious diversity in the UK:<sup>94</sup>

The extent of religious diversity varies from area to area within the UK. There is a marked contrast between the situation in,

say Leicester or the London Borough of Tower Hamlets on the one hand and rural Cumbria or Norfolk on the other. But there is some degree of diversity everywhere and in all areas faith communities have an important role to play in local society. The relationship with faith communities is therefore not just an issue for large urban authorities or metropolitan areas. In rural and largely rural areas too there will be much to be gained by considering this relationship.

It is our opinion that Leicester was the first planning authority in the UK, and also in Europe, to produce in 1977 a policy on places of worship, strongly reinforced by the restated and refined proactive policy a decade later. Certainly, to ascertain how the growth of diversity in religious buildings has happened, and to learn something of its architectural richness, and the vibrant social and cultural associations which underpin it, there is no better place to start than with Leicester. The planning authority provided a 'level playing field' for applications from different religious communities, a tradition of equity, from which planning authorities from many European cities would have much to learn.

It is, however, a very different model from that of Flushing in the Queens County of New York. There, in large measure, a planning 'free for all' has witnessed an even greater profusion of religious buildings and a diversity of faith traditions which, it seems, is even more intensive per square mile. Professor Hanson comments that 'there may be no adversity in diversity, but it can be challenging'.<sup>95</sup> Weak planning controls and as yet only limited overarching inter-religious and inter-cultural groupings such as are provided by the Leicester Council of Faiths and the Society for Inter-Cultural Understanding, Leicester (SICUL), apart from various bilateral or trilateral dialogue groups, has resulted in a plethora of religious buildings in Flushing with few minimum standards sufficient to allay the disquiet of residents and with each place of religious worship acting as an island unto itself. The potential risk is that, without appropriate ground rules concerning such activities as processions and proselytism, conflict between communities will result. 'Community cohesion' may be the latest planners' buzz phrase in the UK, but the comment that 'many communities and individuals... live... "parallel lives", with little meaningful interaction or contact with other communities and people' has been found, on the basis of detailed research in Leicester, to be correct.<sup>96</sup> 'Because of this,

feelings of fear and distrust can easily arise.<sup>97</sup> When the interim report on which this paper is based was published in the summer of 2003, the Editor of the *Leicester Mercury* commented:<sup>98</sup>

Applications for temples and mosques are bound to attract strong feelings — after all, faith is all about strong feelings. But at the same time it is important that proper investigations are made to ensure new venues have the minimum impact on the quality of life in surrounding areas.

The suggestions put forward by a major new study from a Leicester University expert could not be more timely. Rev Professor Bonney wants to see Leicester City Council spending more time advising religious groups on planning places of worship and much more in-depth discussions between religious leaders, planners and residents about new venues.

We urge everyone to listen hard to what he has to say. While we should never pretend there are no lingering problems, our city does have an enviable reputation for multicultural harmony and we are getting better at talking to each other.

More dialogue gives us a better chance of reducing the tensions that can attend plans for new places of worship.

It is precisely such dialogue which is yet to be fully developed in Flushing.<sup>99</sup> The limited cross-community structures in Flushing may yet present a danger to that extraordinary profusion of religious pluralism which makes it one of the few places in the western world to exceed Leicester's diversity. Given that the creation of diverse yet harmonious societies is one of the greatest issues facing the advanced democracies, further comparative study of the contrasts and similarities between these two vibrant multi-faith and multi-cultural areas is not merely desirable but imperative since it will help illustrate both the limits and potential of religious and cultural pluralism for civil society.

## NOTES

1. 'Introducing a Grand New Feature about Leicester Folk: Friends and Neighbours. This Week: meet the people of Belgrave', a weekly series by Gerry Clayton. *The [Leicester] Illustrated Chronicle*, 11 Jan. 1956.
2. R. J. Bonney, *Understanding and Celebrating Religious Diversity. The Growth of Diversity in Leicester's Places of Religious Worship since 1970* (Studies in the History of Religious and Cultural Diversity, 1: University of Leicester, 2003).

3. J. Seliga, 'A neighbourhood transformed: the effect of Indian migration on the Belgrave area of Leicester, 1965-1995', *The Local Historian*, 28/4 (1998), 231. This publication was based on material in the author's University of Leicester MA thesis (Centre for Urban History): Seliga, 'Neighbourhood, religion, community: the role of religious institutions in the Belgrave area of Leicester, 1965-1995'. These materials may be consulted at R[ecord] O[ffice for] L[eicestershire,] L[eicester and] R[utland, Wigston Magna] L291.17.
4. The Centre for the History of Religious and Political Pluralism, University of Leicester, is the UK repository for Professor Sato's collection.
5. R. Scott Hanson, 'City of Gods: Religious Freedom, Immigration, and Pluralism in Flushing, Queens – New York City, 1945-2000', unpublished paper delivered at 1st Global Conference – Critical Issues in Pluralism, Mansfield College, Oxford University, 19-21 September 2003. Professor Hanson has generously deposited a copy of his Ph.D. thesis of the same title (University of Chicago, 2002) with the author. Page references are to the thesis. The originality of making the comparison between Flushing and Leicester rests entirely with Professor Hanson, whose work we hope will soon be published both in article and book form, respectively with *The Local Historian* and Oxford University Press (NYC). Hanson's work developed from research he undertook in New York for the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, where he is listed as a Project Affiliate: <www.pluralism.org/affiliates/shanson/index.php>
6. Somini Sengupta, 'A Snapshot of World Faith; on one Queens Block, many Prayers are spoken', *New York Times*, 7 Nov. 1999. <www.query.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=F70F12F93E5E0C748CDDA80994D1494D81>  
     Hanson, 'City of Gods', 243 (fig. 4.1) reproduces the map from the article, which shows a small sample of the actual number of places of worship in Flushing.
7. One of the differences between the UK and the USA being that there are no 'square blocks' in the UK! Warren Hoge, 'British City Defines Diversity and Tolerance', *New York Times*, 8 February 2001.
8. On this general phenomenon: Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars. Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1992).
9. *Leicester's Architectural Heritage* (Leicester City Council, 1975), 27.
10. Henrietta O'Connor, 'The Irish in Leicester: an invisible community?', *Migration Processes and Ethnic Divisions*, ed. N. Jewson (Centre for Urban History and Ethnicity Research Centre, University of Leicester, 1995), 47, 60. The material for Table 1 in Bonney, *Understanding and Celebrating Religious Diversity. The Growth of Diversity in Leicester's Places of Religious Worship since 1970*, is drawn from evidence which underlies K. D. M. Snell and P. S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems. The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2000).
11. *The Times*, 17 January 2001; *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 January 2001. *Leicester Mercury*, 13 January 2001, p. 3; 16 Jan. 2001, p. 3; 19 January 2001, p. 7. The evangelicals were moved to pray for Leicester's forgiveness for this blot on its reputation for tolerance and there were anachronistic moves to 'rescind' the charter. Professor Aubrey Newman, an historian at the University of Leicester and prominent member of the Orthodox Jewish community, gave a robust view of the Jewish community's

- position, which was that the de Montfort family had a bad record with regard to persecuting the Jews, but that such was the standard of the time.
12. ROLLR BR I/1/11.
  13. It received a licence from the Chief Rabbi to hold Jewish marriage services in 1875.
  14. A. N. Newman and P. Lidiker, *Portrait of a Community. A History of the Leicester Hebrew Congregation* (Leicester Hebrew Congregation, 1998), the centenary volume.
  15. Alderman Harris was the first Jewish Lord Mayor and Sir Mark Henig the second. Hart was Mayor four times, in 1883–4, 1884–5, and 1885–6 followed by a fourth term in 1893–4. The author is grateful to Professor Aubrey Newman for this information.
  16. Hanson, 'City of Gods', 93 (fig. 2.25.), 274 (fig. 4.41).
  17. *Ibid.* 46 (figs 1.11, Friends Meeting House; 1.12, St George's Episcopal Church and fig. 1.13, Macedonia AME Church).
  18. *Ibid.* 85 (Figs. 2.9 and 2.10, free Synagogue of Flushing).
  19. *Ibid.* 158.
  20. <www.sterlingtimes.org/powell\_speech.doc>
  21. Seliga, 'A neighbourhood transformed', 230. *Leicester Mercury*, 2 Sept. 1972, p. 1, claimed that the Resettlement Board had placed the 'Don't go to Leicester' ads. *Ibid.* p. 11: job opportunities would be better elsewhere in the longer term.
  22. The City Council decided on 31 August to inform the Government that the housing, social services, health and education services of the city were 'already stretched to capacity'; that although emergency measures would be taken to shelter and receive Ugandan Asians as a temporary measure, the city could hold out little promise of absorbing 'any great number on a permanent and satisfactory basis'; that before such emergency measures could be considered more information was required; that substantial financial and physical assistance would be required from national resources; that every effort should be made through the Ugandan Resettlement Board 'to persuade refugees that they should look elsewhere for permanent settlement'. The leader in the newspaper stated that 'both resolution and debate could and should have been so much stronger'. The petitions against immigration were said to be 'Leicester speaking'. 'What its people are really saying is: we are coming to terms with 30,000 immigrants in a population of 270,000. But dump another 10,000–15,000 on us and we face disaster.' *Leicester Mercury*, 1 Sept. 1972, pp. 1, 22. The figure for immigrants in 1971 should have been 20,000, not 30,000.
  23. *Leicester Mercury*, 4 Sept. 1972, p. 18.
  24. *Ibid.*, 8 Sept. 1972, p. 23.
  25. *Ibid.*, 6 Sept. 1972, p. 5.
  26. Seliga, 'A neighbourhood transformed', 231. Slightly different figures are cited by Ahmed Andrews, 'A history of South Asian Migration into Leicester: an essay on Hindu / Muslim segregation', *Migration Processes and Ethnic Divisions*, ed. Jewson, p. 70, table 2, which forms the basis for Table 2 here.
  27. R. Ballard, 'The emergence of Desh Pardesh', *Desh Pardesh. The South Asian Presence in Britain*, ed. R. Ballard (London, 1994), 7: 106,000 or 0.23% of the UK population (1961); 413,155 or 0.85% (1971); 1,215,048 or 2.52% (1981); 1,431,348 or 3.04% (1991). The East African figures nationally were 44,860 in 1971 and 181,321 in 1981.

28. <[www.ralph.swan.ac.uk/refugeedisp/drVR.htm#Ugandan Asian](http://www.ralph.swan.ac.uk/refugeedisp/drVR.htm#UgandanAsian)> 27,000 Ugandan Asians are thought to have come to the UK and 4,000 to Europe: <[www.asiansfromuganda.org/25/media/asianage.html](http://www.asiansfromuganda.org/25/media/asianage.html)>
29. Paul Harris, 'They fled with nothing but built a new empire', *Observer*, 11 June 2002. <[www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4479509,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4479509,00.html)>  
'My Journey from terror to triumph' (Jayanti Chandarana), *Leicester Mercury*, 16 Feb. 2002, p. 10. 'Immigrants have made our city a beacon of diversity', *ibid.* 25 May 2002, pp. 6-7.
30. S. Narain, 'Sikhs in Leicester', *Migration Processes and Ethnic Divisions*, ed. Jewson, 91. *Ibid.* 92: the East African Sikhs are generally from the Ramgarhia caste, whose status is traditionally inferior to that of the Jat Sikhs who have arrived straight from India. The East African Sikhs also have more orthodox views of their religion and are more culturally conservative than the Jat Sikhs. *Ibid.* 97: divisions between the two groups over the Vaisaki celebrations in 1989. The balance between the two groups is roughly 40% Ramgarhias and 60% Jats: *ibid.* 91.
31. Bonney, *Understanding and Celebrating Religious Diversity. The Growth of Diversity in Leicester's Places of Religious Worship since 1970*, tables 7-11.
32. Hanson, 'City of Gods', 163, 167.
33. *Report of the Committee on Culture and Education on Redundant Religious Buildings* (Doc. 6032, Strasbourg, 1989).
34. For some of the U.K. literature on sensitive adaptation to new uses: Ken Powell and Celia de la Hey, *Churches: a Question of Conversion* (London: Save Britain's Heritage, 1987). Derek Latham, *Creative Re-use of Buildings* (2 vols., Shaftesbury: Donhead Publishing Ltd., 2000), 1.40-2, ii. 78-95.
35. 1) taking effective measures to preserve redundant religious buildings and secure wherever possible their appropriate future use; 2) consolidating (in compatible computerised form) surveys of redundant religious buildings, of their architectural and historical significance, and of their current use, and regularly updating such surveys which should also reflect contemporary interest and include nineteenth and twentieth century buildings; 3) ensuring effective protection for the survival of the original fabric and fittings of such buildings pending future re-adaptation; 4) avoiding, except in cases of exceptional architectural, historic or commemorative interest, the preservation of religious buildings as ruins; 5) promoting projects for reuse and re-adaptation which are not incompatible with the original function of the building and do not cause irreversible alteration to the original fabric; 6) providing funds or tax benefits for the restoration, repair and maintenance of religious buildings, whether in use or redundant, in order to ensure they are not abandoned; 7) encouraging a more imaginative use of existing religious buildings; 8) assuring the supply of appropriate building materials, and encouraging the research, crafts and support work necessary for the continuous upkeep of religious buildings; 9) encouraging the inclusion of redundant religious buildings in the redevelopment of cultural itineraries throughout Europe, and ensuring that the proceeds of cultural tourism are channelled into the preservation of the buildings tourists visit. <[www.assembly.coe.int/Documents/AdoptedText/TA89/eres916.htm](http://www.assembly.coe.int/Documents/AdoptedText/TA89/eres916.htm)>

36. *Report of the Committee on Culture and Education on Redundant Religious Buildings* (Doc. 6032, Strasbourg 1989), 100 [the author is indebted to Mr David E. Gillman, who drew his attention to this important document]. ‘There have been a number of successful and sympathetic conversions of and uses for redundant church buildings, about 1,500 in total from the Church of England. The number in any year is stable at about 20–25. ‘Many suitable new uses have been found for redundant churches *including places of worship for other Christian bodies* [author’s italics]; civic, cultural or community use; arts and crafts, music or drama centres; museums; sports use; storage; office or light industrial use; housing.’ The Church of England welcomes proposals for new uses: <[www.cofe.anglican.org/rcsale/](http://www.cofe.anglican.org/rcsale/)>
37. ROLLR L726 *Places of Worship in Leicester* (Leicester City Council, May 1977). The survey attempted to meet its stated objectives by obtaining detailed information for 90 of these congregations, the sample including all the numerically larger religions and a cross-section of the smaller groups. This information included details of the size and facilities of the present meeting place, the range of activities held, the number of persons attending and the aspirations of the particular congregation with regard to the suitability of their present meeting place and the range of activities desired in the future. The survey information was supplemented by more general information from a variety of sources.
38. *Ibid.*, 9.
39. The 1987 Report, cited below, commented further: ‘Opinion is divided in the Anglican community and it may be that, in time, the present conviction, deeply held by many Anglicans, that consecrated church buildings should not be used for worship by people of another faith will change or cease to hold sway within the Church. Too much may be made of this by critics of the Church of England. It must be recognised that the Church’s current view is purely theological and it is not the Council’s role to seek to change it. The number of buildings concerned is relatively small. For some of them their Christian character is of such importance to their historical and architectural qualities that use by a non-Christian group who would, quite rightly, wish to adapt the design of the building to reflect their own faith, would not be suitable. Some groups seeking premises are Christian and consecrated Anglican churches may be sold to these congregations without difficulty. The Church of England also has a stock of non-consecrated buildings such as rectories and church halls which may be converted if they became available to non-Christian places of worship free of the restrictions which apply to consecrated buildings. Whether or not the future brings a change of policy in the Church of England, it and other Christian churches can and do make a contribution to, the supply of buildings for use by other faiths and by Christian ethnic minority groups.’ Joseph Seliga, ‘Neighbourhood’, 36, notes that the Board of Mission of the General Synod of the Church of England report, *Communities and Buildings. Church of England Premises and Other Faiths* (1996) amended earlier guidelines from 1983, so that redundant Churches should be offered first to other Christian groups, then to educational or social welfare providers and then to another faith, but ‘only with wide consultation and agreement’. The Diocese of Oxford accepts that ‘there is a genuine feeling amongst many that allowing other

- faiths to worship in any Christian building is a denial of Christianity and the unique revelation of God in Jesus. This feeling is often particularly strong if it is suggested that a redundant church might be sold to a community of another faith. Yet, if Christians fail to recognise and respond to the spiritual needs of members of other faiths, this will produce alienation and be a deterrent to interfaith dialogue.’ <[www.oxford.anglican.org/info/faiths.shtml#Use%20of%20Church%20Buildings](http://www.oxford.anglican.org/info/faiths.shtml#Use%20of%20Church%20Buildings)>
40. Though it seems to have happened elsewhere in one or two cases. ‘There have been a number of successful and sympathetic conversions of and uses for redundant church buildings, about 1,500 in total from the Church of England. The number in any year is stable at about 20–25. ‘Many suitable new uses have been found for redundant churches *including places of worship for other Christian bodies* [author’s italics]; civic, cultural or community use; arts and crafts, music or drama centres; museums; sports use; storage; office or light industrial use; housing.’ The Church of England welcomes proposals for new uses: <[www.cofe.anglican.org/rcsale/](http://www.cofe.anglican.org/rcsale/)>
  41. The church had been erected in 1887 on a site given by Isaac Harrison JP of Newfound Pool House. The parish was formed in 1888 from Belgrave. UPRN: OJB 6189. Consent of 4 Mar. 1986 to conversion of part of the church to 21 flats and a car park. Consent of 19 Dec. 1994 for the remainder of the church to be converted to a local radio station. Consents for single-storey extension and installation of satellite dish, 6 Oct. 1995. The station commenced broadcasting on 7 Sept. 1995. [UPRN refers to the unique identifier for each planning site in the Leicester City Council planning consent database: <[www.leicester.gov.uk/endev/planapps/FullSearch.asp](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/endev/planapps/FullSearch.asp)> .]
  42. The difficulty in disposal of this redundant church is illustrated by the planning consent of 22 March 1975, which allowed conversion to an art gallery (other than for business purposes), a museum, a public library / reading room, a public hall or an exhibition hall. Consents of 21 September 1982 and 31 May 1983 allowed conversion to auction rooms. An application for a snooker hall / recreation hall was withdrawn on 6 Dec. 1984. As late as 2 July 1984 the *Leicester Mercury* reported (p. 13) that it ‘could become a centre for a non-Christian religion’. The conversion to residential use came with consents of 31 Jan. 1986 and 20 May 1988: UPRN: NOC1773.
  43. Pevsner records that it was ‘paid for entirely by the Church Building Commissioners, at a cost of £16,600, the largest sum spent on any Leicestershire church in the 19th century’. N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England. Leicestershire and Rutland*, 2nd edn revised by E. Williamson (1984), 210–11.
  44. They had use of the premises for the St George’s Day service in Sept. 1972, when they were declared ‘royalists all’: *Leicester Mercury*, 1 Sept. 1972, p. 22.
  45. ROLLR L726/3. Orders in Council confirming submission of Church Commissioners, 23 Oct. 1972 and 19 Oct. 1983 [Commissioners’ Scheme of 4 Oct. 1983 concerning revocation of clauses 2 and 3 of the 1972 scheme]. Originally the lease had been envisaged to apply to the Greek and Serbian Orthodox communities.
  46. *Highfields Remembered*, 20.
  47. ‘We must act to save St Mark’s’, *Leicester Mercury*, 28 Aug. 2003. ‘Call to turn St Mark’s into museum’, *Leicester Mercury*, 3 Sept. 2003. ‘Guardians of our heritage’, *Leicester Mercury*, 11 Sept. 2003. ‘Rev calls for restoration’, *The [Leicester] Mail*, 11 Sept. 2003.



48. Seliga, 'A neighbourhood transformed', 237.
49. For a cost of £6,222.61: ROLLR N/B/179/13/9, Annual Church Meeting, 16 Feb. 1972.
50. ROLLR DE3277/217, p. 182. Minute 550 of 5 Feb. 1969. However, this refusal was amended by minute 104 of 2 July 1969, subject to approval of detailed plans. The consents listed for the Shree Sanatan Mandir are at UPRN: OKE6939.
51. ROLLR DE1825/3, minutes of the General Church Meeting of Carey Baptist Church, 23 June 1971, confirming the original offer from 'Pakistanis' on 7 Oct. 1970 [changed to 'Hindus' on 17 Feb. 1971]. The Baptists refused to take up the repair costs of £900, as requested by the Hindu group [meeting of 7 April 1971]. Seliga, 'Neighbourhood', 50, states £11,000.
52. *Leicester Mercury*, 2 July 1984, 13.
53. Charity Commissioners registration 500704.
54. UPRN: OJD3709. On 23 June 1972 the Church had received planning consent for the establishment of a social club. On 26 Feb. 1979 the temple's application for a six-foot concrete fence surrounding the development was rejected, but on the same date a single-storey extension for an entrance foyer and kitchen was approved conditionally (approved unconditionally on 27 Dec. 1979 and 18 Aug. 1980). The erection of a community hall for educational and religious purposes was refused on 29 June 1982; but a day centre / resource centre was approved conditionally on 17 Mar. 1987, 14 Jan. 1992 and 11 Dec. 1996.
55. Seliga, 'A neighbourhood transformed', 238. Seliga, 'Neighbourhood', 42.
56. On this, the definitive study is that of Marcus Banks, 'Jain ways of being', *Desh Pardesh. The South Asian Presence in Britain*, ed. R. Ballard (London, 1994), 231-250, which seeks to explore 'the ways in which the Gujarati Jains living in Leicester have set about maintaining their corporate identity'. Most had come to Leicester via Kenya, which in 1948 had had 6,000 Jains as against only 400 in Uganda at the same date. *Ibid.* 236.
57. *Ibid.* 244, 246.
58. <[www.jaincentre.com/main/main.html](http://www.jaincentre.com/main/main.html)>
59. M. Banks, 'Competing to give, competing to get: Gujarati Jains in Britain', P. Werbner and M. Anwar (eds.), *Black and Ethnic Leaderships in Britain: the cultural dimensions of political action* (London, 1990; repr. 1991), examines the financial and leadership strategies of the Leicester Jains.
60. Planning consents of 31 Jan. 1984, 4 Dec. 1987, 13 Jan. 1989 and 7 June 1996 at UPRN: MNU4444.
61. <[www.shubhlabh.net/leicestercentre.html](http://www.shubhlabh.net/leicestercentre.html)>
62. UPRN: LMV9357 reproduces planning consents of 16 Aug 1988, 7 July 1992, 28 Aug. 1992, 10 Jan. 1997, 30 July 1997, 26 March 1999 and 28 Jan. 2001. The Arts Council made an award towards the Sikh Museum which was noted in *Local Arts UK* in July 1990 (p. 9) and the *AIM Bulletin* (October 1990), p. 6. There were grants from LCC and Leicestershire County Council.
63. <[www.thesikhmuseum.com/home.htm](http://www.thesikhmuseum.com/home.htm)>
64. Hanson, 'City of Gods', 171-2.

65. Ibid. 180.
66. *Places of Worship in Leicester*, 3.
67. Ahmed Andrews, 'A history of South Asian Migration into Leicester: an essay on Hindu / Muslim segregation', *Migration Processes and Ethnic Divisions*, ed. Jewson, 74, nevertheless tries to differentiate between Hindu and Muslim names on the electoral rolls. The point was made to the author forcefully by a Gujarati Muslim as one possible explanation for the persistent underestimate of the Muslim population of Leicester.
68. In July 2002, Leicester City Council was supporting 130 families of Somali origin 'unable to work, or claim benefits, because the government is refusing them national insurance numbers. It claims it cannot establish their identities':  
<[www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4466946,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4466946,00.html)>
69. *Migration Processes and Ethnic Divisions*, ed. Jewson, 77.
70. *Places of Worship in Leicester*, 1987 (Leicester City Council, 1987), 11. Copy deposited by the author at ROLLR L726.
71. Ibid. The date of the booklet is clear from the last page, which outlines fees payable from 1 July 1987.
72. *Places of Worship in Leicester*, 1987, 13-14, tables 3A and 3B
73. The alternative sample case histories were: 3.11) A place of worship successfully set up but outgrown; 3.12) Planning permission granted to unauthorised use which later begins to outgrow its premises; 3.13) Houses converted to place of worship and religious school overcoming apparent planning difficulties; 3.14) A new place of worship on a vacant site; 3.15) A place of worship set up without planning permission and eventually moving to more suitable premises; 3.16) Planning permission granted but never taken up; 3.17) Unauthorised use, conflict with local residents, and attempts at moving to more suitable premises; 3.18) Limited period permission followed by refusal; 3.19) A place of worship set up in a converted factory later replaced by a new building.
74. Report 7196, copy deposited by the author at ROLLR L726.
75. Copy deposited by the author *ibid.* Financial aspects of acquiring places of worship had been considered in report 7535 of the City Planning Officer, dated March 1989. *Ibid.*
76. *Leicester City Council, An Appraisal of the Ethnic Monitoring of Planning Applications in Leicester, 1980-92. Details of an appraisal of a system recommended to other planning authorities. Submitted by Leicester City Council Planning Department for the Royal Town Planning Institute Annual Award for Planning Achievement, 1992*, p. 5. Copy deposited by the author *ibid.*
77. Report of the Director of Environment and Development, 12 Jan. 1999. *Ibid.*
78. UPRN: ONP4580. Conditional approvals, 6 Jan. 1986, 31 July 1987, 4 Jan. 1988. Limited period approval, 11 Feb. 1993. Conditional approvals, 8 Feb. 1994, 2 May 1997. Refusal and subsequent conditional approvals to ground floor mortuary and first floor flat, 3 Dec. 1998, 6 May 1999 and 16 Feb. 2000.
79. UPRN: QPJ0218. Refusal of consent, 14 Oct. 1992; application withdrawn, 31 Dec. 1997; conditional approval, 7 Nov. 1997; conditional approval, 17 March 1999.

80. Seliga, 'Neighbourhood', 57, citing *Leicester Mercury*, 21 July 1991, 27 July 1991 and 26 October 1993. The group raised funds for a smaller temple dedicated to Lord Shiva.
81. One of the objections was that 'the proposals by virtue of their size, scale, design and prominent location, w[ould] dominate the local environment'. Councillor Scuplak was concerned 'about the prominence of the buildings on the horizon of North-East Leicester and state[d] that the local Asian community are concerned whether the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim Communities can co-exist harmoniously on one site'. In his interview for the East Midlands Oral History Archive, John Dean criticized the plan for making the religious buildings too much of a self-contained enclave rather than an integral part of the development. He also considered that the size of the original three projects was perhaps too large in proportion to the overall development.
82. Places of Worship / Community Centres. Planning Applications at Manor Farm, Hamilton. Report of the Director of Environment and Development, 12 Jan. 1999. Copy deposited by the author at ROLLR L726.
83. Consent of 13 Jan. 1999 [application 19980760]. UPRN: UJH8051. The mosque facility comprised a floor space of 1,250 metres (830 sq m net). The group had 280-300 members in its community and was meeting in a former warehouse in Wellington Street considered to be far from ideal 'on account of poor access, no classrooms, and no on-site car park'. Average usage was estimated at 90-100 persons, with up to 250 persons during the 4 main days of Ramadan. It had had, according to the Chief Planning Officer in August 1990, 'an unfortunate history of problems' at Vernon Road and subsequently at Wellington Street. There were 114 letters of support for this project.
84. Consent of 13 Jan. 1999 [application 19980756]. UPRN: UJH8051. According to the Director's report, the gross floorspace would be 4,090 sq m. (1,806 sq m. net). The SHM community represented 3,000 to 4,000 persons, less than 10% of the Hindu community in Leicester, and currently worshipped at a temple in St James Street near Lee Circle. [It had obtained consent on 23 Aug. 1978 to a change of use from a trades union meeting hall to a temple at 3 St James' Street. UPRN: NML0564.] Peak attendance was around 300 persons. The Group did not expect the temple to be 'a substantial tourist attraction like the Neasden temple in London which is the primary Hindu temple outside India; the proposed temple would only be comparable to other provincial Hindu temples in the UK'. There were 1,007 letters of support this proposal. The group was organizing a sponsored walk for the temple appeal as late as 6 July 2003, suggesting that it had not yet raised the necessary funds: *Leicester Mercury*, 5 July 2003, p. 17.
85. Consent of 13 Jan. 1999 [application 19980896]. UPRN: UJH8051. According to the Director's Report, the Gurdwara and Community Centre were 1217 sq m. and 1247 sq m totalling 2,645 sq m. There were facilities for 700 worshippers, but even high rank festivals were likely to attract no more than 280 persons a day, and a maximum of 400 between the peak times of 10 am and 2 p.m. Weddings might attract 400 or 500 persons. The Ramgarhia Board estimated that it represented 250 families and 1,500 to 2,000 persons, that is approximately 20% of Sikhs in the City.

86. Application 20000686, dated 8 May 2000, for a development of 12.3 acres at Manor Farm. Decision pending.
87. *Leicester Mercury*, 25 July 1998, p. 5. At that date, the Sikhs had raised £260,000 plus £50,000 in bank securities. Narain, 'Sikhs in Leicester', *Migration Processes and Ethnic Divisions*, ed. Jewson, 97, notes a dispute in April 1989 between the Ramgarhia Board and the Leicestershire Federation of Sikh Organizations (of which they were not a member): the Ramgarhia organization was 'trying to distance itself from the other Sikh organizations, which are predominantly Jat'.
88. Bonney, *Understanding and Celebrating Religious Diversity. The Growth of Diversity in Leicester's Places of Religious Worship since 1970*, 95–6.
89. Hanson, 'City of Gods', 207.
90. *Ibid.* 191.
91. The Assembly consequently recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite the governments of the member states: I) to guarantee freedom of conscience and religious expression within the conditions set out in the European Convention on Human Rights for all citizens and, in particular, to: a) safeguard religious pluralism by allowing all religions to develop in identical conditions; b) facilitate, within the limits set out in Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the observation of religious rites and customs, for example with regard to marriage, dress, holy days (with scope for adjusting leave) and military service; c) denounce any attempt to foment conflict within and between religions for partisan ends; d) ensure freedom and equal rights of education to all citizens regardless of their religious belief, customs and rites; e) ensure fair and equal access to the public media for all religions; II) to promote education about religions and, in particular, to: a) step up the teaching about religions as sets of values towards which young people must develop a discerning approach, within the framework of education on ethics and democratic citizenship; b) promote the teaching in schools of the comparative history of different religions, stressing their origins, the similarities in some of their values and the diversity of their customs, traditions, festivals, and so on; c) encourage the study of the history and philosophy of religions and research into those subjects at university, in parallel with theological studies; d) co-operate with religious educational institutions in order to introduce or reinforce, in their curricula, aspects relating to human rights, history, philosophy and science; e) avoid – in the case of children – any conflict between the state-promoted education about religion and the religious faith of the families, in order to respect the free decision of the families in this very sensitive matter. III) to promote better relations with and between religions, and in particular: a) engage in more regular dialogue with religious and humanist leaders about the major problems facing society, which would make it possible to take account of the population's cultural and religious views before political decisions are taken and to involve religious communities and organisations in the task of upholding democratic values and promoting innovative ideas; b) encourage dialogue between religions by providing opportunities for expression, discussion and meetings between representatives of different religions; c) promote regular dialogue between theologians, philosophers and historians, as well as with representatives of other branches of knowledge; d) widen and strengthen partnership with religious communities and organisations, and

especially with those which have deep cultural and ethical traditions among local populations in social, charitable, missionary, cultural and educational activities. IV) to promote the cultural and social expression of religions and, in particular, to: a) ensure equal conditions for the maintenance and conservation of religious buildings and of the assets of all religions, as an integral part of the national and European heritage; b) ensure that redundant religious buildings are reused in conditions which are, as far as possible, compatible with the original intention of their construction; c) safeguard cultural traditions and different religious festivals; d) encourage the social and charitable work undertaken by religious communities and organizations.

<[www.assembly.coe.int/Documents/AdoptedText/TA99/erec1396.htm](http://www.assembly.coe.int/Documents/AdoptedText/TA99/erec1396.htm)>

92. *Faith and Community: a good practice guide for local authorities* (LGA code F/CA 152, 2002), 21. A Muslim praises this document as ‘an encouraging acknowledgement in the wake of an increased necessity of building cohesion among communities’: *The Quest for Sanity. Reflections on September 11 and the aftermath* (Muslim Council of Britain, 2002), 178.
93. It owes its origin to a visit in 1986 of the Archbishop of Canterbury to Leicester, who had expressed his wish to meet faith community leaders. The Lord Mayor of the city, Councillor Janet Setchfield, together with the Bishop of Leicester, the Right Reverend Richard Rutt, convened a meeting of faith community leaders in the City Council chamber at which it was decided to form a steering committee to launch a Council of Faiths. By November 1986 a formal constitution was approved and office bearers were elected. Baha’is, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs have always been represented on the Council from this time. Its first Chairman was the Venerable David Silk, the Anglican Archdeacon of Leicester, who left Leicester in 1994 to become Archbishop of Ballarat in Australia: <[www.leicestercounciloffaiths.org.uk](http://www.leicestercounciloffaiths.org.uk)> At no stage in its history does the Council of Faiths seem to have played a significant role in giving planning advice about religious buildings.
94. *Faith and Community*, 8.
95. Hanson, ‘City of Gods’, 234.
96. Asaf Hussain, Tim Haq, Bill Law, *Integrated Cities. Exploring the Cultural Development of Leicester* (Society for Inter-Cultural Understanding Leicester; University of Leicester, Studies in the History of Religious and Cultural Diversity, 2, 2003).
97. *Taking Forward Community Cohesion in Leicester. Summary of the Report of the Improvement and Development Agency* (Leicester: Leicester City Council, 2003), 2. Cf. *Leicester Mercury*, 3 Jan 2003, ‘Report turns spotlight on our harmonious city’.
98. *Leicester Mercury*, 11 Aug. 2003, p. 12.
99. In 7 Nov. 1999 *New York Times* article, Professor Hanson, then a doctoral student, was quoted on this point: ‘there are occasional organized efforts to reach across religious lines, like a nascent interfaith coalition that has begun among Jewish and Asian-American Christian clergy. For the most part, says Mr. Hanson, the doctoral student who has been studying religious pluralism in the area, there are those who are content to worship among their own and leave the others alone. “Sort of live and let live”, he says.’