Mauritius

PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE 3
Places of Worship

July 2007

Ministry of Housing and Lands

This document is the third in the series of Planning Policy Guidance. It is being issued under the title:

'PPG 3 – Places of Worship' **July 2007**

It has to be used together with Planning Policy Guidance 1 Design Guidance – first issued in November 2004, Revised in September 2006, regarding the following:

o Technical Sheets for Provision of Infrastructure.

Application:

This Planning Policy Guidance is applicable to Places of Worship and should be used by Local Authorities to determine development applications.

Effective Date:

With effect from **26th July 2007**.

Please do not hesitate to call on us on Tel No. 2134868 if you have any queries. For your information, Planning Policy Guidance 3 – Places of Worship is available on the website of the Ministry at ***http://housing.gov.mu***

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning for the Community
1.2 Status of Planning Policy Guidance
1.3 Definition

2. Planning and Design Principles

2.1 Approach
2.2 Context and Location
2.3 Scale
2.4 Traffic
2.5 Other Issues

3. Plot Development Criteria

3.1 Plot Layout and Plot Coverage
3.2 Building Height
3.3 Setbacks
3.4 Public Consultation
3.5 Access, Circulation and Parking
3.6 Noise Control

4. Design Sheet

4.1 Context and Location
4.2 Plot Coverage
4.3 Setbacks and Heights
4.4 Parking
4.5 Public Consultation
4.6 Noise Control
4.7 Issue of Planning Permission

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning for the Community

The basic principle underpinning the development of places of worship is to satisfy the community' spiritual need hence the reason for them to be located close to the community. However, local communities in Mauritius are made up of different ethnic groups and religions and some measure of understanding whilst planning for Places of Worship is necessary to foster social harmony. The development process should therefore strive to provide for a safe, convenient and attractive environment that will meet the diverse and changing needs of the inhabitants.

1.2 Status of the Planning Policy Guidance

This guidance is a National Planning Instrument and is designed to help those who are considering setting up a place of worship either through change of use of an existing building or construction of a new building. It is also to be used by Local Authorities to determine applications and to control development.

The guidance will be issued as Planning Policy Guidance 3 (PPG 3) and should be read in conjunction with the other design sheets (Technical Sheets) in the Planning Policy Guidance (PPG 1) already issued in 2004 and 2006. This document provides design guidance for Places of (public) Worship development in Mauritius.

The Design Sheets will provide for the typical requirements expected to be met by the development proposal.

The Technical Sheets provide standards and general guidance on the planning and implementation of infrastructure falling under the responsibility of other public agencies.

The objective is to define a set of performance criteria and design standards that are applicable to most forms and scale of development of Places of Worship. In view of the diversity and cultural specificity of each type of place of worship, the performance approach is more suitable to respond to the design criteria. On matters of health and safety, however the criteria may be more specific and have a directive approach.

1.3 Definition

A Place of Worship is a dedicated building or building complex or other location where a group of people assembled in a congregation perform acts of religious praise, honour or devotion. It also includes places where religious instructions, ceremonies and festivities associated with the faith are carried out.

Places of worship are uses which fall into the Sui Generis cluster i.e. 'standing on its own' defined in the Eleventh Schedule of the Local Government Act 2003 as subsequently amended.

2.0 PLANNING AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES

2.1 Approach

The design of a place of worship involves consideration of the following issues:

- Analyzing the site context and location;
- Determining the appropriate scale for the development;
- Studying the architectural form and quality;
- Assessing traffic management options; and
- Incorporating active and passive noise abatement measures

2.2 Context and Location

Places of worship are set up in a number of different locations and each of these has its own requirements.

The following typical locations are covered by this document:

- Mixed use areas
- Purely residential areas
- Edge of settlement location, countryside location

2.3 Scale

Places of worship vary in size and importance. While some serve only an immediate or local need, others may have a national or international importance.

- Smaller worship facilities would be allowed on plots the size of which do not generally exceed local plot size; where the local population belongs predominantly to the applicant's religion and where the level of disturbance to nearby residents would be acceptable.

- Premises which are intended to serve a wider catchment area should be of sufficient size and located in mixed-use areas where residential activities do not predominate such as town centres, main roads, and fringe of commercial zones.

- Major places of worship likely to attract a large number of devotees or crowd may be more appropriate in edge of settlement locations or in the countryside.

2.4 Traffic

Over recent years, traffic along local streets in residential areas have been causing increasing levels of noise pollution, congestion and a general decline in the quality of life in previously calm and peaceful areas. The concern of residents to keep extraneous vehicles out of residential areas has to be borne in mind whilst planning for activities likely to attract such traffic into the neighbourhood.

Road access to the development should be capable of taking the traffic generated by the proposed development without causing congestion, hazards or nuisance. Sufficient car parking facilities should therefore be provided on site.

2.5 Other Issues

The other site considerations are as follows:

Proposals should be of high design quality constraints in relation to overlooking,

The local population characteristics - where the local population belongs to the applicant's religion, the case for approval is likely to be stronger.

Factors extending beyond the site namely the concern of neighbours as well as potential overshadowing, building bulk, street character, landscaping, and screening at the interface between the development site and the adjoining properties have to be analysed and addressed.

Furthermore places of worship are landmark buildings which have to be well sited to provide focus to the locality. The context of the site has to be established to allow the successful integration between what exists and what is proposed. There shall be a strong presumption against development in environmentally sensitive areas and areas of significant landscape value. Where they are exceptionally allowed they should be subdued and fully integrated visually in the surroundings.

3.0 PLOT DEVELOPMENT CRITERIA

The layout of individual places of worship requires consideration of a number of elements. These include:

3.1 Plot Layout and Coverage

The amount of land that may be covered by building is primarily what is available for building after provision has been made for setbacks, on-site parking and other requirements inherent to the activity (crowd space, outdoor activities, landscaping etc). Plot coverage may also be controlled by the specific demands of the site's location.

3.2 Building Height

Generally, building height is controlled by the context of the development. For places of worship, the religious specificity provides for a special architectural type (spires, minarets, and domes) which is generally higher than the main body of the building. Any departure from the general skyline should also be dictated by the need to provide legibility or focus for the development.

3.3 Setbacks

Setbacks serve to protect local amenities. In the context of places of worship, an increased setback may be needed to accommodate outdoor activities associated with the place of worship. A greater setback also provides a passive buffer for noise abatement and privacy, reducing overshadowing and overlooking.

3.4 Public Consultation

The community should be made aware of all development for places of worship through consultation exercises. However, the forms of consultations will vary according to location. In predominantly residential areas, where places of worships are likely to have a greater impact on local amenities, full compliance with the consultation procedures would be justified. However, in mixed use zones or in areas along busy and noisy main roads which are less sensitive, the level of public consultation may be scaled down

3.5 Access, Circulation and Parking

The level of provision of on-site parking depends on whether the building will serve a local neighbourhood community using mostly pedestrian means of conveyance or whether the place is likely to serve a wider car-borne catchment zone. It has to cater for the traffic to be generated by the proposed development without causing congestion, hazards or nuisance.

Adequate parking should therefore be provided to enable users to park their vehicles safely and conveniently.

3.6 Noise Control

Freedom from noise has become a major source of concern for communities daily exposed to excessive street noise and other sources of noise. Calm and peaceful neighbourhoods are attractive places to live and are much sought after.

Rituals associated with the practice of religion involve certain activities which may be perceived as noisy to other residents. This source of noise may be intermittent, frequent, regular, at regular intervals daily, weekly or occasionally.

There is a range of privacy boundaries that should be protected by the authorities for the community's peaceful cohabitation. Attitudes to this type of noise are affected by cultural factors and personal preferences. Ambient noise level can also be a factor.

Acoustic privacy may not be as easily achieved as noise can be transmitted both through the air and through structures. In extreme cases, proposed developments generating noise should explore both passive and other means of abating noise.

4.0 DESIGN SHEET

In determining applications for places of worship, the permit authority should have regard to the following objectives:

4.1 Context & Location

It is the duty of the permit authority to ensure that the interests and concerns of the following three groups are given due consideration:

- Future occupants of the site – require a focus on the development site and its use
- Neighbours – require a focus on the interface between the development and neighbouring areas and
- Community – require a focus on the identity of the locality and streetscape issues.

The local authority should balance the following:

- Protection of residential neighbourhood from uses objectionable or detrimental to its amenities.
- Allowance for possible location within residential areas of civic, cultural and community facilities which serve and which are compatible with residential development.

No place of worship should be allowed adjoining a restaurant/bar or a place of public entertainment. Conversion of existing buildings will be allowed provided it meets all the criteria as laid down in the Design Sheet.

4.2 Plot Coverage

Where land is to be developed for places of worship in an area predominantly meant for residential use, the plot coverage should not be higher than the locally prevailing residential plot coverage. Plot coverage in a sensitive area should be lower to allow for larger areas of landscaped open space whereas a development in a town /local centre may be built with higher levels of coverage to match the existing grain of the area.

4.3 Setbacks and Height

Setbacks refer to distances between front, side and rear facades and their respective boundaries. A minimum setback of 3 metres on rear and side boundaries should be complied. Front setbacks will be those prescribed with respect to road category.

Indicative Building Setbacks to Road frontages

Motorways	15.0m
A Road	6.0m
B Raod	6.0m
Urban Raods	4.5m
Other Roads	3.0m

Setbacks should normally increase with additional building height (excluding spires, domes, minarets and similar features) and also in relation to the particular requirements of an existing context.

Building to plot boundaries may be permitted in locations where this is not in conflict with the existing context, and where it can be demonstrated that the building has been designed to ensure the provision of adequate daylight and sufficient ventilation.

Due attention should also be given to specific design objectives and safety restrictions in respect of overhead power lines and other utilities. Reference should be made to the relevant Technical Sheets.

Any variation in the setback requirement would be dictated by the particular requirements of the existing context.

4.4 Parking

It is essential that off-street parking be provided to ensure minimum disturbance to local residents and for road safety. A rate of 1 car space per 8m² of public floor area should be provided.

The capacity of the local road network and proximity of public transport facilities, the availability of alternative parking provisions in the area and car ownership levels should be taken into account to determine on-site parking requirements.

Car parking will normally not be permitted alongside busy main roads (A or B class roads) or other busy roads, unless they are designed in a way that ensures safe access and egress to the satisfaction of relevant authorities.

In local neighborhoods with small communities, parking for vehicles off the site may lead to cost savings and save on-site space. However, this option should only be considered when the existing street is wide enough to accommodate additional parked cars on a modest scale in a safe and efficient manner. In any case, a minimum of 2 lots should be provided on site unless exceptionally dictated by the local context.

On-street parking may be achieved as part of the integrated design of the development or by modifying the existing local street to create new parking space. The approval of the Road Development Authority and Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit should be sought and cost contribution made towards achieving these objectives.

4.5 Public Consultation

The community concerns should be addressed through public consultation carried out by the developer through

- Site notification of the proposed development,
- Press notice with publication in three dailies on three successive days; and
- In predominantly residential areas, a legal notice will have to be served on all contiguous owners and property owners across the road.

The public will have 15 days from the date of last publication to make representations to the permit authority. The outcome of the consultation exercise should be used to provide for design adjustments.

4.6 Noise Control

The developer and the permit authority should explore ways and means of abating noise emanating from the premises and the degree to which it can be reduced or prevented.

The sound level in the form of music, loud singing or clapping, bell ringing, loud speech, calls to prayers emanating from a place of worship shall be recorded at the plot boundary of the development site and should comply with the Standards applicable for Neighbourhood Noise specified in the **Environmental Standards for Noise Regulations 1997**.

Noise Exposure Limits Applicable in Mauritius

Category of Noise	Time (hrs)	Environmental Noise Standards dB(A)Leq
Industrial	07 00 - 21 00	60
	21 00 - 07 00	55
Neighbourhood	07 00 - 18 00	60
	18 00 - 21 00	55
	21 00 - 07 00	50

4.7 Issue of Planning Permission

In deciding to grant permit for places of worship, the permit authority should ensure that:

(i) the policies set out in this Planning Policy Guidance are complied with;
(ii) conditions where imposed are necessary, enforceable, precise and reasonable.