

## **Name / Organisation**

Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton

(serving the areas of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire)

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## **Agent (if applicable)**

Not Applicable

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## **Which part of the Plan does your representation relate to?**

Policies relating to community facilities and social infrastructure, including the Plan's approach to places of worship.

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## **Do you support, object to, or comment on this part of the Plan?**

Support with suggested modification

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## **Please explain your representation**

The Diocese of Northampton supports the MK City Plan 2050 in principle, including its recognition of places of worship within the wider category of community facilities. However, the Diocese considers that the Plan would be stronger, more effective and more positively prepared if provision for places of worship — particularly Roman Catholic churches — were made more explicit and proactive, especially in areas of significant housing growth.

Milton Keynes is a key growth area within the Diocese and has experienced substantial population growth since 2011, with further expansion planned to 2050. Census 2021 data confirm that a significant proportion of the population continues to identify as Christian, and Roman Catholic congregations in Milton Keynes have grown in line with housing delivery, inward migration and the number of young families.

The Diocese has pastoral responsibility for Roman Catholic parishes serving Milton Keynes and surrounding areas.

Catholic parishes:

- serve defined and often extensive catchment areas, frequently spanning multiple neighbourhoods;
- require permanent, consecrated church buildings for sacramental worship;
- operate on a daily and weekly basis, generating regular and predictable patterns of use;
- provide a wide range of community and charitable services, including youth activities, family support, food banks, volunteering and social outreach and are available to the wider community regardless of faith.
- are ethnically diverse and often provide places where newly arrived immigrants find support and receive help which facilitates social integration.

It is important to note, that when provision for places of worship is not considered early in the planning process, parishes and diocesan authorities experience significant difficulty securing suitable, accessible and affordable sites once development is underway. This can result in unmet community need and avoidable planning challenges later.

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## **Is the Plan sound?**

No – the Plan would be more sound with modification

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## **If not, which test(s) of soundness does it fail?**

- Positively Prepared
  - Justified
  - Effective
  - Consistent with National Policy
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## **Please explain why the Plan is not sound**

The Plan would be more sound if it planned proactively and explicitly for places of worship as essential community infrastructure. Strengthening policy support would:

- ensure the Plan is positively prepared, by addressing the needs of faith communities in line with population growth;

- be justified, reflecting clear demographic evidence and the established role of Roman Catholic parishes;
  - be effective, by encouraging early engagement with diocesan and faith bodies, reducing uncertainty around site delivery;
  - be consistent with national policy, in accordance with the NPPF requirement to plan positively for shared community facilities, including places of worship, to support healthy, inclusive and cohesive communities.
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## **What modification(s) do you consider necessary to make the Plan sound?**

The Diocese of Northampton recommends that the Plan be modified to:

1. Explicitly recognise places of worship, including Roman Catholic churches, as essential community infrastructure.
  2. Encourage early engagement with diocesan and other faith authorities as part of masterplanning for strategic growth areas.
  3. Plan positively for the provision of permanent church buildings and associated parish facilities in accessible and sustainable locations, particularly where significant housing growth is proposed.
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