



GURU NANAK NISHKAM SEVAK JATHA HANDSWORTH GURDWARA

STUDENT CASE STUDY

OVERVIEW

The Handsworth Gurdwara, or Gurdwara Sahib, is a Sikh place of worship in Birmingham. Built in the late 1970s, it was constructed under the spiritual guidance and leadership of Puran Singh and Norang Singh. The spiritual leadership of the jatha, translating to 'group of people', is now continued in the Gurdwara.

Its construction was enabled by an increasing Sikh community which became established in the 1940s and 1950s as a result of substantial migration from northern India to the West Midlands. It is four stories tall with a total floor space of 25,000 square metres, existing as one of Birmingham's largest places of worship. It also holds various businesses inspired by Sikh religious principals.



THE
GURDWARA
ALSO
CONTAINS A
WOODWORK
SHOP

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

The gurdwara is four stories high and spans a floor area of 25,000 square metres. It contains five main Darbar Sahib halls (which literally translates to the Royal Court), and refers to the main room within a gurdwara where the religious scripture of Sikhism sits on a raised throne.



WORSHIP ALTAR AT THE
GURDWARA

It also contains 3 Langar halls, which are the community kitchens of a gurdwara, serving vegetarian meals to all visitors free of charge, regardless of religion, caste, gender, economic status or ethnicity. In these halls, people sit on the floor and eat together.



WORKERS IN THE GURDWARA
KITCHEN PREPARING MEALS

COMMUNITY PROFILE

HOW IS THE SPACE USED BY THE COMMUNITY? WHAT DOES IT SERVE THE COMMUNITY?

Sikhism is the third most practiced religion in Birmingham, with their Vaisakhi celebrations that mark the beginning of the Sikh new year being the largest in the world outside of Punjab. In the 2011 census, 3% of the local population identified as Sikh, which is well over the national average of 0.8%.

The space is always in use by the community. Most of the activities taking place within the gurdwara are for the Sangat, a body of men and women who meet religiously, wanting to stay at the Gurdwara overnight with the provision of facilities for sleeping and washing.



WORSHIPPERS EATING TOGETHER
AT THE GURDWARA

USE

HOW HAS THE COMMUNITY USED THE SPACE IN THE PAST, TODAY AND HOW WILL IT BE USED IN THE FUTURE?

PRESENT

The main Darbar Sahib is used for Akhand Path recital, the continuous recitation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, which remains uninterrupted. It lasts 48 hours, and so a new Paath is started on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. Samagam, or community meetings, also occur in the Darbars, where a recitation of Sampat Paath is recited over 11 days of continuous reading.



WORSHIP ALTAR AT THE GURDWARA

REFLECTIONS

HOW HAVE COMMUNITIES OF DIVERSE ETHNIC HERITAGE HAD A VOICE IN THE PLANNING AND DESIGN OF SITES THAT ARE SIGNIFICANT TO THEM?

“This isn’t just a faith centre – it’s a community hub.”

The Gurdwara exists as a community hub, serving many different functions to its immediate community, where volunteer work and community efforts were pivotal in its realisation. Now, with its multiple worship, carpentry and community services, it continues to operate and thrive.

“This started off as a community cooperative and as a carpentry hub, and people were able to use their skills to do a whole load of manual work. Now it’s adapted – it’s got a small carpentry hub and these beauty kitchens. But it’s still very much operated by people who have an affiliation to this gurdwara. This is one of the ways in which a larger community is created for people who have a stake in this. They feel as though they have a stake, they want to give back to this. There are over 100,000 hours of volunteer work that went into this gurdwara.”



CARPENTRY SERVICE
AT THE GURDWARA