



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Planning approval granted to Gardenstown church



The hall on the site where planning approval has been granted

A report of victory for the gospel over bigotry by Rev. Noel Hughes, Minister of **Gardenstown Free Presbyterian Church**, Scotland

The long, hard, and often times disheartening battle to obtain planning permission is finally over. The members of Gardenstown Free Presbyterian Church were granted planning permission to build a new church on 18th November, 2002.

The church first approached the planning department on 30th March 1998 about the possibility of building a new church in the village. Little did we know then of the path which awaited us during the four and a half years that were to follow. Those years would witness two applications refused, one planning appeal to the Scottish Executive refused, a third application withdrawn because of misleading information, and in between times a barrage of opposition and prejudice against the cause of Christ. In spite of the seeming setbacks, God was working providentially on behalf of his people. When the planning department informed us that our third application would be recommended for refusal, at the same time an old church hall situated on 1.5 acres of land approximately 1 mile from the village came on to the property market. As one door closed another was opening. The site was purchased by the church for £30,000.

Options

The church committee was then faced with two options, either to renovate the existing building or build a new church. The estimated cost of renovation was set at £80,000. In light of this figure the committee felt it would be better to use such an amount of money in the construction of a new purpose-built church. This decision, however, would mean submitting a new planning application. Given the experience of the past and our lack of confidence in the Area Committee's impartiality, we braced ourselves for another round of struggle and strife. But this was not to be so, for God had set in motion a number of favourable circumstances which would benefit the new application!

Deceit

To begin with, the deceitful actions of evil men had been exposed. A fraudulent petition had come to light which had been used against our second application. This matter was raised with the police who investigated the complaint and found evidence of fraud. Names of individuals who attended the church, along with others, had been signed on the petition. The Police report has since been submitted to the Procurator Fiscal. This evidence confirmed that proper procedure had not been followed by the Area Committee in handling the Church's application, thereby putting the Council in a vulnerable position. Added to this, a meeting with the Chief Executive brought about a change of Council policy relating to the publication of representations. Previously the Council had published letters of objection against the Church which contained defamatory statements based on religious grounds. This concern was raised with the Chief Executive and resulted in a circular being sent to Council Departments stating that the Council had a statutory obligation not to publish letters of a defamatory nature. The most significant change however, concerned the local SNP councillor, who had voted against the church's previous application. As the Church was preparing to submit its new application, a row broke out amongst the SNP. The local councillor fell out with his comrades and resigned from the party and his council seat. His res-



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ignation brought about a by-election in September, in which the SNP were defeated by the Conservatives who gained the seat by 24 votes. This turn of events took place literally days before the application was submitted.

Providence

This event was providential, as the local Councillor plays a crucial role in determining planning applications. According to Scottish law if a planning application receives more than 5 objections the decision automatically rests with the Area Committee, but if there are 5 or less objections, the matter is put first to the local Councillor who can decide either to hand the decision to the Area Committee, or accept Planners' recommendation.

The Church's new application received only one objection, subsequently the decision rested with the new councillor, who, not being prejudiced against the Church, decided to accept the Planners' recommendation to allow planning approval.

Looking Back

Looking back over these circumstances the words of Psalm 75:7 come to mind, "But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another." The Lord has truly intervened and given a great victory. The path of the last 5 years has not only revealed the deep seated enmity of man against God, it has reinforced the absolute sovereignty of God, who has given Christ to be head over all things for the sake of His church.

We offer our sincere congratulations to the minister, office bearers and congregation of Gardenstown Free Presbyterian Church and rejoice with them in God's wonderful answer to prayer. **The Editor.**