



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Round Three: The Fight against Discrimination Continues!



Rev. Noel Hughes outside the village hall where his congregation worships

A report from Gardenstown Free Presbyterian Church, Scotland, by its minister, Rev. Noel Hughes.

Members of Gardenstown Free Presbyterian Church in the North East of Scotland have recently submitted their third attempt to obtain planning permission for a new church building. Two previous applications were rejected by Councillors on the Banff and Buchan Area Committee back in December 2000 and March 2001. On both those occasions Councillors argued if the proposal were to go ahead it would prevent future housing development in the area. A subsequent appeal to the Scottish Executive also failed to have the decision overturned.

In reality a campaign of blatant prejudice and discrimination was launched in the community to prevent the church being built. Letters objecting to the proposal were submitted to the Planning Department containing defamatory statements. One letter branded the minister of the church, Rev. Noel Hughes as a "racist and trouble maker." Another stated, "this proposed church is run by the Rev. Dr. Ian Paisley and we have already sampled what life would be like if his church was built. During his stays the life of this relatively peaceful village was made intolerable by: a) the police presence, and, b) Mr Paisley's hoodlums who demanded to search anyone who they wished and caused a lot of disruption and unpleasantness in the village. "This cannot be allowed in a village like this when people are intimidated in this way."

Although these letters had little relevance to the planning details of the application they were still published by the Council in their Planning Report. Added to this, two petitions against the church were submitted and used by the Chairman during the Committee meetings. When the Rev Hughes later asked the Chairman, Cllr Sydney Mair, to produce both petitions for inspection he only produced one. The second petition was eventually produced 15 weeks later and when examined, it was found to contain a sizeable number of fraudulent signatures. This suspicious development was immediately raised with the Chief Executive of Aberdeenshire Council and a meeting subsequently arranged. Since that meeting the Chief Executive has expressed concern at the handling of the applications but stated he did not believe the Chairman had any part in the fraudulent petition. The matter is now under investigation by Grampian Police.

In light of these events the Church Committee has been forced to search out another building site and submit a new application. In doing so the congregation would gratefully value the prayers of God's people at this time that every obstacle may be overcome and permission obtained for the building of God's House.



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We commend our young brother and his flock for their courage and tenacity in the face of this determined attempt to stop them building a meeting house in which they may worship God. We would ask our readers to remember in prayer this struggle against discrimination and bigotry, born of man's animosity toward Christ and His people. " . . . I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" Matthew 16:18.