



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Bigotry blocks building of new Free Presbyterian church in Scotland



Rev. Noel Hughes outside Gardenstown Village Hall where his congregation worship at present.

Old-fashioned bitterness toward the gospel of Christ is alive and well in Scotland! On Tuesday 12th December, the Scottish Nationalist party controlled Banff/Buchan Area Committee of Aberdeenshire Council voted 6-3 against the application for a new church building. This decision was in spite of a recommendation from the Council's own Planning Department that the application be approved. The application complied with all the relevant regulations because it was a site which planning officials had directed us to since it was suitable for our needs.

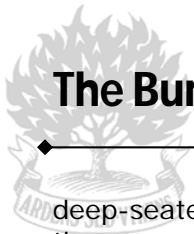
When the application was advertised, eight letters of objection were submitted, five of which contained statements of old fashioned bigotry and intolerance. Rev. Noel Hughes was described as "a trouble maker and a racist", whilst Dr Paisley's previous visits to Gardenstown Free Presbyterian Church were described as "making life intolerable, because of his hoodlums" (the objector's term for the Metropolitan Police officers who accompany Dr. Paisley during his visits to mainland Britain) who "patrolled the streets, searching whoever they desired". Added to the letters was a petition containing 88 names.

When these letters were published it wasn't long before their accusations emerged in the press. Reported comments from the objectors painted the village as becoming a veritable war zone with people afraid to leave their homes, if this church were allowed. They conveniently forgot to add the fact that the Free Presbyterian church has been established for three years in the village, during which time there has been no sign of the chaos envisaged.

The Council decided on a site meeting, at which Rev. Hughes tried to raise the subject of religious prejudice. The Chairman, Cllr Sydney Mair arrogantly refused to hear any of the Free Presbyterian minister's concerns. It soon became evident from the tone and direction of the meeting that the objectors and certain councillors were working together to devise some means of legitimately turning down the church's application.

They came up with the idea that the church would restrict future development. This was a completely new objection not mentioned in any of the letters. In fact the letters insisted that the proposed field should have no development on it. However, it was for this reason which the Councillors rejected the application.

We plan to appeal this decision because their reason is not based on the present legal requirements. The field is currently outside the settlement boundary and therefore no houses can be built on it. The new draft local plan proposes to extend the boundary to include this field but this will not become law until October 2001 after the due process of consultation. Even then the possibility exists that the field may yet remain outside the boundary. Furthermore, the local plan allocates another area for the future extension of the village. Planning officials have told Rev. Hughes that in the event that the church development should sterilise housing development then they would simply open up the other site. The whole event leaves the Gardenstown congregation with the feeling that the decision reveals the



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deep-seated prejudice in the hearts of some against a strong Bible witness being raised in the area.

One couple has written to Rev. Hughes regarding a conversation they had with one of the councillors, in which they asked him if he would vote for the Gardenstown Kirk planning application. He replied that he would not, because they were against Catholics! That is hardly a view based upon truth and therefore a wrong basis for rejecting a planning application. It shows that planning laws had little to do with the Council's decision to reject the church's application. Religious discrimination is certainly not dead in Scotland.

Please pray for the minister and congregation in Gardenstown that God will overturn the plans of evil men.