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## Brethren get church go-ahead

By Don Farmer

**THE Exclusive Brethren has been given permission to establish a church at Solway with three-monthly checks for the first year to satisfy Masterton District Council that it is abiding by the conditions of the consent.**

In a written decision out today, councillor Gavin McLachlan, chairman of the council's hearings committee, said the application in the name of Miles Suckling to move a building from Ashhurst to Solway Crescent to be used as a church was granted.

The church would not be restricted to specific times for church services but if during reviews it was found noise generated from the site was excessive then conditions to mitigate this, which could include time restrictions, would be imposed.

Permission for the Exclusive Brethren to set up the church at Solway comes after a contested hearing last month when neighbouring landowners objected. Their objections were largely based on noise and artificial lighting concerns, especially early in the morning on weekends when church members gather for what is known as The Lord's Supper. Several Brethren families have already bought residential properties close to where the church will be located, since the Exclusive Brethren researched Masterton as a likely town for them to settle.

Most of the conditions imposed on the council's consent relate to normal building issues, such as ensuring the relocated building is safe and secure and properly maintained. All boundaries are to be screened to a height of 1.8m with a densely planted buffer or fence and a \$5000 bond is to be lodged with the council before moving the church building on to the site. Provision will also have to be made for 15 on-site parking spaces.

Mr McLachlan said the setting up of a church in a residential area was not a permitted activity, but needs resource consent. He said granting the Exclusive Brethren consent to establish its church in a residential area "does not set a precedent". "Each application will be assessed on its merits in relation to the environment into which it wishes to establish."

The Brethren intend to hold church services at the Solway church on all days apart from Thursday. Most of these will be in the evening but on

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Saturday and Sunday early morning gatherings will be held. The church will also be used for weddings, funerals and other special ceremonies. Around 50 people are expected to regularly attend church services and the brethren has plans to built a "City Room", or larger church, elsewhere in Masterton within two years.

Mr Suckling said today the church was thankful for the support the district council had shown. He said a lot of work had gone into the proposal to bring the church building to Solway. "We are very appreciative." The Exclusive Brethren would have no problem complying with the conditions imposed by the council. "We are not above council rules and regulations and will have no difficulty abiding by them."

Mr Suckling said the Exclusive Brethren were in Masterton to contribute to society and can assure the Solway neighbourhood that "we are, and are going to be, good neighbours". "We are not here to knock anybody." Plans would now be put in place to physically move the building on to the site. Mr Suckling said the end result would be to improve the streetscape of Solway Crescent. "This will be a quality addition to the neighbourhood."

He said since publicity of the brethren's bid to set up a church at Solway he had received many calls of support from people in the wider community.

One of the principal objectors to the church's arrival in Solway, Solstone Estate Winery director Elizabeth Barrett-Hackel, had no comment to make today. Some other objectors said they had not yet received the full decision from the hearings committee and would not comment until they had done so and evaluated it.

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