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Church plan upsets winery

By Don Farmer

ATTEMPTS to set up a Brethren Church at Solway appear to have run headlong into problems, with neighbours objecting to the noise it would bring, especially early in the morning.

An application, under the name of Miles Suckling, has been lodged with Masterton District Council to move a building from Ashhurst on to land at Solway Crescent and to hold church meetings there six days a week. Most of these would be in the evenings, apart from 6am meetings on Saturdays and Sundays, and would cater for about 50 people. The church would also be used for weddings, funerals and "other special ceremonies".

Among those objecting to the proposal is Elizabeth Barrett-Hackel, of Solstone Estate Winery, who, in a written submission to the council, said religious meetings are already being held at 125 Solway Crescent and that the vineyard has been "subject to frequent trespassing and interference" from people attending. "Staff have also been affected by behaviour on that property with respect to the use of laser lights." Mrs Barrett-Hackel said much of the behaviour is either reckless or damaging. She said vehicles race across vineyard property pulling people behind cars. Signs are damaged or taken away and there is damage to plants. Mrs Barrett-Hackel said it was also unsafe as young children wandered into the vineyard or played in the parking lot. "Not only are we concerned for their safety since we have cars, vans, forklifts and tractors operating but also for the vineyard's security, vine safety and potential liability if an accident occurs."

Gaye and Lawrence Gray also opposed the church's arrival, saying Solway Crescent is a narrow road unable to cope with increased traffic. More cars using it would endanger Solway Crescent residents and other pedestrians who use the area for walking.

The application to establish the Brethren Church at Solway will be heard by the council's hearings committee on Thursday.

District planner Sue Southey has submitted a recommendation to the committee to turn the application down. Mrs Southey said the effects on neighbours of having church services taking place at 6am on weekends with 50 people participating would be "more than minor". She said the district plan does not provide for churches being established in

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residential areas. " To grant consent may give a false indication that churches are acceptable in residential areas, thereby setting a precedent."

The hearings committee is entrusted with the power to make a decision without matters having to go back to a full meeting of the council. Mrs Southey has drawn up a long list of conditions she believes should be imposed if the committee decides to grant Mr Suckling's application. These include a condition that no church services are to be held on either Saturday or Sunday before 8.30am.

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