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Gospel Hall proposal for Stow causes controversy

Saturday, November 01, 2008, 08:00

RESIDENTS have branded a planned Gospel Hall in Stow-on-the-Wold as a 'closed shop'.

More than 140 people packed into St Edward's Hall to question Stow Exclusive Brethren's plan to build a 600-strong meeting place and 81-space car park on a field next to Tesco at the town's A429 Fosseway northern entrance.

Residents said the hall would not be for community use as the 120-strong reclusive Brethren do not open their doors to outside worshippers.

Townsppeople did not totally oppose the scheme, but said if the site was developed it should be dual purpose – with a doctor's surgery or fire station.

The 4.5 acre agricultural plot outside Stow's development boundary can only be built on for community use.

The Brethren didn't attend the meeting as they had been advised it could 'prejudice' their case.

One resident said: "I was part of the Brethren. The Stow Brethren are sincere and honest, but I believe they are misguided.

"You can't say that building is going to be used for community use. If you want to go into their building you have to ring up the corresponding elder.

"And you have to sit in a different part from them."

Resident Kit Ayres said: "The biggest threat to us is the traffic created by these meetings.

"It's a prime site. If we're going to break the boundary let's do it for community need, not to bring outsiders in who don't bring anything to the town or spend a penny in it."

Resident Steve Greenwold added: "The Exclusive Brethren have every right to have a meeting place but they have a hall already, which should be large enough.

"And I see no reason to build a large parking area. No other religious meeting, church or chapel in Stow has a large car park. Why are they special?"

Stow deputy mayor Robin Jones urged people to write to Cotswold District Council before the consultation deadline on November 21.

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