

## Brethren: do not fear us

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THE Exclusive Brethren church has moved to reassure Eltham residents they have nothing to fear from a new prayer hall.

As reported last week, Beard St residents Valerie and Graham Bourne told a Nillumbik Council meeting last month they feared the neighbouring site would be "firebombed" following an alarming conversation with a member of the church.

Other neighbours held concerns about traffic, parking and noise.

Plans for the prayer hall were approved at a full council meeting last week.

But Brethren member and Eltham resident Richard Garrett told the DV Leader his church sought to lead good, quiet lives without harassment.

No Brethren church in Australia had been firebombed before, he said.

"I'm sorry the Bournes are scared about a church hall going in their street, but I'm sure they have nothing to fear," Mr Garrett said.

He said the church would not put up signage for the church not because it was afraid of being attacked, but because its halls were generally designed to blend in with residential areas.

The congregation of up to 80 members will use the hall for up to six hours a week, including a 6am service on Sundays.

The council voted five to three in favour of the application, with Eltham councillors Greg Johnson, Bronnie Hattam and Helen Coleman opposed.

Cr Johnson said the council had to reflect the community's disquiet in relation to the controversial Christian group.

"The Brethren don't do themselves any favours by being so secretive," he said.

But Cr Michael Young argued there was no sound planning justification to reject the proposal.

Cr Bo Bendtsen said he would be happy to have a Brethren prayer hall next door.

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