

## JBOD Backs Shul Sale

**Gareth Narunsky**

NSW Jewish Board of Deputies (JBOD) president Yair Miller has backed the board of Strathfield Synagogue to decide the shul's future, as Strathfield Council considers whether to list the shul building as a local heritage item.

The synagogue was closed in 2011, unable to garner the required numbers for a minyan. The board is now considering whether to sell its assets, with proceeds to go towards supporting Jewish life in areas that still have significant Jewish populations.

The heritage decision was deferred at a Strathfield Council planning meeting last month after councillors heard from Eddy Neumann and former Hebrew school pupils Sharon Milch and Bev Brandon, who spoke against it.

Speaking for the heritage proposal was former Strathfield Synagogue rabbi, Dr Samuel Tov-Lev, whose contract was terminated in 2011 when the shul closed its doors. Rabbi Tov-Lev remains opposed to the closure and any sale of the synagogue building.

In 2011 he and an associate, Joseph De Varda, commenced proceedings in the Supreme Court to have the synagogue board declared illegitimate, a case they lost in November 2012. They subsequently launched a petition to save the synagogue, pointing to its importance as a Holocaust memorial.

At the council planning meeting last month, Neumann refuted that significance.

"It was a factual error to say that the synagogue was a Holocaust memorial synagogue," he told *The AJN* last week.

"The petition that was circulated that figured in the consideration had a false premise to it.

"We did say [at the meeting] that the founders of the shul – and we had spoken as children of the founders, the children of Holocaust survivors – they weren't setting up any kind of memorial."

Neumann confirmed to *The AJN* the board was considering selling the property. "The constitution provides for how the proceeds have to be used, and that's basically for the Jewish community," he said.

Miller commented: "The decision on the future of Strathfield Synagogue and the use of its assets is one that is emotional and significant.

"The current synagogue leadership, as decided by a court of law, in conjunction with the communal leadership through the Board of Deputies and JCA, is looking at the most beneficial use of any proceeds from a sale of assets to support Jewish life and education.

"This is the most rational and responsible manner in which to proceed. Any attempts to block this by people with no moral or legal right to do so would be unconscionable. The legacy of all those who built up this once thriving community in the Strathfield area can make a real and substantial difference to all of Sydney Jewry for generations to come."

But Rabbi Tov-Lev, who is still hopeful Strathfield Council might decide in his favour, said the fight was not over. "I will not let it [happen – selling the shul], because it is not right," he said.

"My conviction as rabbi doesn't allow me to do it ... it is my conscience that I have to know that I did my best, and I hope with the help of Hashem we'll succeed."