

Non-orthodox.NEW NORTH
LONDON
SYNAGOGUE

The Manor House, 80 East End Road, Finchley, London N3 2SY

081-346 8560

קק בית חדש

To the Chair of the Planning Committee,
London Borough Of Barnet.

5.9.93.

Re. Eruv

Dear Sir,

After giving the matter a great deal of thought I have decided to write to you asking that you consider with favour the second application for planning permission for an Eruv in part of the Barnet area.

I am rabbi of the New North London Synagogue, a Masorti - that is traditional - community. We have some four hundred families on our membership list, most of whom live in Barnet. I am therefore well aware of the difference the creation of an Eruv in this area would make to very many Jewish people, myself and many of my congregants included. The Eruv is a concept developed by our rabbis to encourage the sharing of family and community life on the Sabbath by allowing certain necessities to be carried from one place to another within it. It would thus enable family members to attend Synagogues who, at present, because of their fidelity to Jewish law, are not able to do so. It would enhance their spiritual and communal lives on our day of rest.

I cannot claim to have followed the debate which lead to the rejection of the first application for planning permission as closely as I should have done. But it would appear that there have been regrettable misunderstandings on both sides.

The real issue seems to me to be whether it is possible to have regard for the needs of one particular religious grouping within a multi-ethnic area, even though their satisfaction will have a (small) impact on the district as a whole. The answer should be "yes".

As I understand it, three arguments lie behind the previous "no". Firstly, if one community asks for such a privilege, surely others will as well. The response to this must be: let us then consider each one, always with a bias in favour. The overriding concern must be the welfare of all the people who live in the borough.

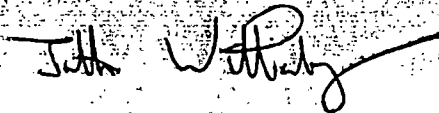
This leads to the second argument, which is that the poles needed to create the Eruv will be eyesores, spoiling familiar views. While the poles required should certainly be kept to an absolute minimum, they will hardly stand out amongst thousands, if not tens of thousands, of others which are there for much more mundane purposes.

Furthermore, if so much can be tolerated for the material needs - and greed - of our area, should a certain amount not be done for its spiritual wellbeing, that is, for the wellbeing of each of the various religious and ethnic communities within it? After all, the purpose and meaning of an Eruv is to create community: surely that is something laudable and to be encouraged. I am an admirer of the churches and other religious buildings in Barnet. Unlike so much else, they do not deface the landscape, but rather mark it with testaments to the higher values of those who live there.

The third argument advanced against the creation of an Eruv is that there are indeed Jewish people who are opposed to it and even fearful about it. Unfortunately we have been through experiences which lend serious justification to the feelings of those Jews who want above all not to stand out, not to be visible in society at large. But good relations will ultimately be created through courage, tolerance and openness, rather than through anonymity and the hiding of our identity. Nor in the past has the attempt to keep a low ethnic profile ultimately saved the major part of any group from racist or religious persecution. On the contrary, the message which should be given is that in this open society all are free to express their beliefs and live according to their traditions, within the limits imposed by the respect for others and the need to live together.

I therefore urge the Council to support the application for planning permission to create an Eruv. Furthermore, I believe that it should do so not with reluctance and a sense of being under pressure, but as part of a considered policy of pluralism, and as a way of encouraging the values of community and spirituality in an all too materialistic age.

Yours respectfully



Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg.