

PRESS RELEASE 26 MAY 1998

The United Synagogue Eruv Committee has been informed that at its meeting on Wednesday June 17 the Barnet Council Planning Committee will consider the revised planning application which the Eruv Committee filed in December 1997.

The December 1997 revised planning application relates to the six pole sites for which planning permission has yet to be granted and a seventh for which further details were required to be submitted. This will permit the establishment of an eruv covering Golders Green, Hendon, Hampstead Garden Suburb and part of Finchley. After the Council approves the application, the Eruv Committee will be in a position to establish the eruv.

The Barnet Council Planning Committee granted planning permission for 33 pole sites in January 1997 by a vote of 18-0 with two abstentions. The full application comprises 39 pole sites of which six remain to be approved and a seventh was approved in outline only.

Between January and December 1997 it was necessary to deal with various technical minutiae -- in particular with respect to the completion of roadworks on the North Circular Road in East Finchley which had a material impact on the site for which further details were required to be submitted.

Edward Black, a member of the Committee said:

The Eruv Committee is confident that the revised application meets the objections raised by councillors in January 1997 and that the outstanding sites will be approved.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS:

The proposed North West London Eruv is an important amenity which will enable thousands of Orthodox Jews in North West London, particularly families with young children and with elderly or disabled members to enjoy the Sabbath (Shabbat) to the full. The eruv will enable these families to attend the synagogue and to participate in community life on Shabbat. Although the eruv will greatly enhance the religious and spiritual life on Shabbat for those who accept its significance, taken in context and as a whole the eruv should have practically no impact on those who do not make use of it. An eruv is not in any sense mystical or holy, nor is it a claim on territory. It is of no more significance to those who do not make use of it than a postal district or street sign.

Under Orthodox Jewish law, Shabbat is a day set apart from the working week. Family time and spiritual pursuits are emphasised and certain activities associated with the working week are prohibited. Carrying and pushing wheelchairs and baby buggies is permitted in private homes and in community areas whose symbolic boundaries are marked by an eruv. An eruv is simply a practical method of denoting the area within which carrying and pushing wheelchairs and baby buggies is permitted.

There are well over 150 eruvim in communities all over the world -- and many more in Israel. Every major city in North America has one - Toronto, Phoenix, Memphis, Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, Providence, Miami, New York City and Washington, D.C., to name but a few. Outside North America there are eruvs in Johannesburg, Melbourne, Gibraltar, Antwerp and Strasbourg. The Washington, D.C. eruv includes the White House. The Strasbourg eruv includes the European Court of Human Rights. The proposed North West London Eruv is the first large scale eruv proposed in the UK.

The proposed eruv has a circumference of about 11 miles. Approximately 10.4 miles consists of existing boundaries such as the M1 and the Northern Line of the Tube. In order to complete the eruv, the United Synagogue Eruv Committee has applied to Barnet Council for planning permission to put up a small number of posts to support some single strands of transparent nylon line which will span the gaps in the existing boundaries. The current proposal calls for a total 87 posts and 1042 metres of nylon line.

The principle of the eruv was approved by the Secretary of State for the Environment in October 1994 following the recommendation of a planning inspector after a full public enquiry.

Jewish law permits carrying and pushing prams and wheelchairs on Shabbat in a private home and in an area surrounded by an eruv. Under Jewish law there are limits on the size of the area which an eruv may cover. It is, therefore, impossible to implement suggestions made in certain earlier press coverage that the M25 or the shores of the British Isles should be the boundary in an eruv. Similarly, there is no mechanism in Jewish Law which permits religious authorities to grant dispensations declaring carrying to be permissible. - nor to change any other centuries-old laws.

The United Synagogue Eruv Committee consists of the rabbis and lay representatives of the four United Synagogues within the proposed eruv and a number of independent orthodox synagogues within the area. The supervisory authority with respect to matters of Jewish law is the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Jonathan Sacks and the Court of the Chief Rabbi headed by Dayan (Rabbinical Judge) Chanoch Ehrentreu.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT EDWARD BLACK (PHONE) 0171 246 6216; (FAX) 0171 329 4465

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