

Vigilante fear in proposed London 'community domain'

Jewish tensions rise over plan for 'ghetto'

David Sharrock

TENSION was rising in Britain's largest Jewish community yesterday over plans to create an *eruv*, or symbolically enclosed area, as fears grew that extremists plan to set up vigilante groups in the community.

Divisions within the 20,000-strong Jewish community in the borough of Barnet, north London, have been deepening for three months over a proposal by the United Synagogue — the orthodox wing of British Judaism — to create an *eruv* covering seven square miles of Golders Green, Hampstead Garden Suburb and Hendon.

The *eruv* — which would need more than 80 poles linked with wire around the area "to be symbolically indicated as gateways" — would permit the relaxation of religious law, allowing orthodox Jews to carry personal items like keys, gloves and handkerchiefs on the sabbath.

The *eruv* committee's proposal to Barnet council, which

will decide next month whether to allow it, describes its purpose as "to define the entire area within the boundary as one community domain".

The plan is opposed by the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust, dedicated to preserving the architectural integrity of the district.

In September, Lord McGregor, chairman of the Press Complaints Commission, was forced to resign as the trust's chairman at an annual general meeting said to be packed with orthodox groups.

Many non-orthodox Jews in the area oppose the plan, fearing it may create a ghetto mentality. And although two-thirds of residents in the proposed *eruv* are non-Jewish, they are said to be reluctant to object for fear of anti-semitic accusations.

A document leaked to the Hampstead and Highgate Express, reveals plans for an extremist Jewish organisation to set up a vigilante group to protect the *eruv* boundary. Minutes of a meeting of the "British section" of the Kahana Defence Group read: "If malice would

continue, tougher action would be taken after consultation with the Jewish Defence League in New York."

The name of the JDL organisation is linked to Kach, the extreme-right Israeli party banned there because of its racist policies against Arabs and Palestinians.

Roy Shutz, leader of Tory-controlled Barnet and an opponent of the *eruv*, said it was being proposed by a small, unrepresentative group. "I have received many letters from concerned people, some of them saying they are Jews who fled here during the war, and this is the last thing they want to see."

"One letter makes the point that in the past Jews have been forced into ghettos and now they seem to want to live in one of their own making." He described the document, which police have passed to the Special Branch, as "alarming".

Eruv committee members could not be contacted last night but local newspaper reports quote its chairman, David Schreiber, calling the document a hoax.