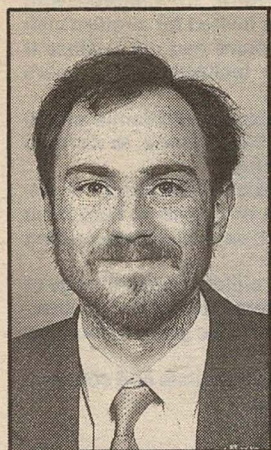


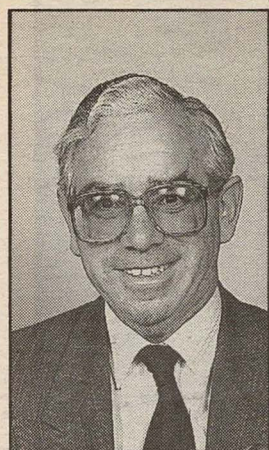
NICKY BOLSTER FINDS OUT HOW THE JEWISH MEMBERS OF BARNET COUNCIL FEEL ABOUT THE ERUV CONTROVERSY



● Julian Czarny: "There is nothing contentious."



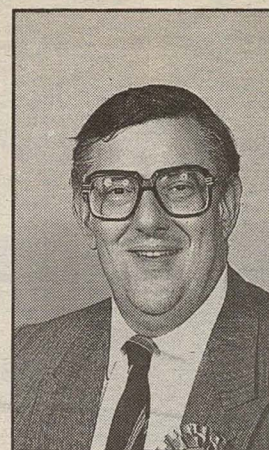
● Joan Levinson: sees nothing to stop approval.



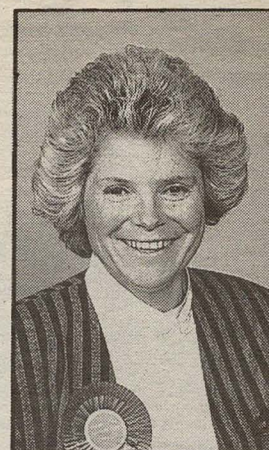
● Victor Lyon: religious aspects are irrelevant.



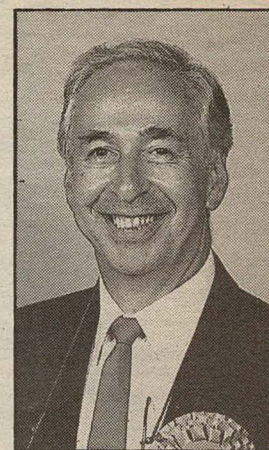
● Eva Greenspan: "It doesn't do any harm."



● Anthony Finn: "People are frightened."



● Helen Hart: "Every right to object to poles."



● Jack Clarfelt: "I hope it goes to full council."

Councillors as divided as community

FOR many of the Jewish members of Barnet Council — almost a third of the 60 councillors — the United Synagogue's controversial planning application to create an eruv poses a terrible dilemma.

Their views are as diverse as those of the Jewish community, and those representing wards where feelings are running high find themselves in an unenviable quandary.

Some feel the religious aspect of the planning application has nothing to do with the council and say the matter should be decided on planning grounds alone. Several have admitted they would benefit personally from the eruv while others welcome the difference it would make in the lives of Orthodox Jewish families.

The more secular councillors have no truck with the idea at all and believe the eruv, which would take in Hampstead Garden Suburb, Golders Green, Hendon and parts of Child's Hill, could have adverse effects on the community.

An eruv is a symbolically enclosed area within which Sabbath laws can be relaxed to permit carrying and the pushing of prams and wheelchairs. The United Synagogue eruv committee is seeking consent to put up poles between which they plan to span wire to mark parts of the boundary not defined by existing features such as the M1.

Liberal Democrat Jack Cohen, one of the councillors for Child's Hill ward, which is earmarked for a substantial number of the poles and home to a number of the most vocal objectors, said it was difficult to object on planning grounds. But he has not yet totally made up his mind how to use his vote on the planning committee.

"If you look at the wider issues it is problematic. Firstly my ward has the majority of poles and the most vociferous objectors. I understand their views, which are that it could cause division. They have put those views to me very strongly. An elected councillor has to take those into account — I can't ignore the strength of feeling."

His position is made even more difficult by the fact that more than 300 residents of his ward have signed the pro-eruv petition. His original view was that it would make people's lives easier.

"I still hold that view. I don't think it is any job of the councillor to make decisions about the religious aspects of it. I take the view that the application is a genuine one. It comes from the mainstream Orthodox institution and as such it is very valid indeed."

At the planning meeting he would be putting forward the sensible objections which have been made to him. "There have been a lot of crazy things said and a lot of distressing and disturbing things. Some objectors who met with the eruv committee came away a lot happier. I think some fears are exaggerated."

He had listened to the people who would have poles outside their houses, and some locations had been changed. "I can't win whichever way I vote. I feel I need the judgement of King Solomon. I am not sure even he would be able to make the right decision."

"I wish the residents would make as much fuss about all the cuts in education and other services which are much more important."

Planning committee member Frank Davis, a Tory, said he was going to vote against the eruv.

"It is my impression that most of the Jewish councillors are not in favour of the eruv on various grounds, either for town planning or demographic reasons."

In my opinion nobody should look upon it with their religious beliefs either in the forefront or back of their mind. They should look upon it as a town planning matter or what is best for the London Borough of Barnet. . . . My view is that it is a blight on parts of the Garden Suburb ward."

The original eruv committee petition sought to encourage members to bear in mind the religious aspects of the matter, he added.

"I have also to bear in mind that a substantial number of Child's Hill residents are so totally dissatisfied with their representation on the town planning committee by Jack Cohen that they have requested me to speak on their behalf and dissociate themselves from any comments he might make."

He was not satisfied that the eruv item on the town planning agenda complied with the law. "It appears to be in breach of various sections of English law."

Tory Jack Clarfelt said he would vote against the proposal if he were on the planning committee. "I would hope that it would go to full council as it is something that affects so many different wards."

"If it does I shall vote against it because I feel it introduces a degree of sectarianism into the community."

He believes that an eruv would encourage a ghetto. "Those Jews who are religious will naturally gravitate to inside it and I think that isn't desirable."

He describes himself as a secular person and belongs to a reform synagogue. "I am opposed to any form of extremism or fundamentalism in any religion of any kind."

Tory Anthony Finn said the eruv had become an issue that people did not understand. "People are scared and frightened. There are silly arguments for it and against it, but mainly against it."

"If the thing was put up tomorrow no one would know it was there. If you stick purely to planning grounds the argument then is: do these 85 or 90 poles really harm the population of the area? If one sticks just to those grounds I can't see really how anyone can ob-

ject to it.

"For myself it isn't an issue. I can manage very well without it. If I was on the committee I would vote in favour."

Tory Julian Czarny, on the planning committee, said he would be supporting the application. "In planning terms there is nothing that should make it very contentious. We are talking about adding relatively few poles to the street furniture. It has been exaggerated by opponents to represent something that it isn't."

Mr Czarny, who belongs to the United Synagogue in Edgware, understood people not wanting anything new near their houses but did not have much sympathy with the wider objections.

Liberal Democrat Monroe Palmer, a member of Golders Green Synagogue, said he was in favour of the application because it would make life much easier for Orthodox women with young children and the disabled without any real harm to anyone else. His rabbi Ivan Binstock is a strong supporter.

"I am rather upset sometimes at the comments that it would attract more Jews to the area. I don't think it would form a magnet in any way. It is rather offensive that people should even think it."

"The application might seem weird and strange to people but it is of negligible harm to the general populace. I would support it whatever religion it was. The Jews who object are mainly people who believe in assimilation of Jews into the populace and don't want to be seen to be different."

Planning committee member Victor Lyon, a Tory who describes himself as a Liberal Jew, said he had heard a lot of arguments for and against. "What one has to be careful of here is getting involved in any possible religious aspects. I am keeping an open mind."

"It will depend partially on letters and we have to make sure it doesn't contravene the Unitary Development Plan. Every planning application is supposed to be judged by its merits but very often those precedents are cited by others."

Tory Joan Levinson said it should be decided on planning grounds and nothing else. "My own view is that there is nothing to prevent it being agreed."

Her colleagues Malcolm Lester and Helena Hart agreed. Mr Lester said it was a planning matter and should be decided on that alone. "If I state my views I will upset people and I don't want to do that. If it goes to council I will vote for it as a planning matter."

Ms Hart also said such a matter should be decided by the planning and public works committees (she is not a member of either). People who would have an eruv pole outside their house had every right to object.

Tory Brian Salinger did not think an eruv

would be in the best interests of the broadest community in the long term. "My concern is that the council, in deciding this on technical criteria, hasn't given itself the opportunity to debate the wider issues."

Labour's Gerald Shamash supported the application but did not see the concept of relaxing religious law in the same way as the eruv committee. "You have a nonsense to cure a nonsense. That is their business. On planning grounds I can't see for the life of me how this can be turned down. It doesn't harm anyone."

He did, however, feel the eruv campaigners had handled the matter badly. "I have been lobbied by every rabbi known to mankind."

If the scheme had been proposed by any other religious group he would have treated it in exactly the same way.

Council leader Roy Shutz, who has in the past described himself as "wholly opposed" to the idea of an eruv, said he would have voted against the application if he had been on the planning committee. "I am going to leave it to the members of the planning committee who are experts to decide."

"I don't seek to usurp the role of the members of that committee. It is a rather technical committee and I don't pretend to be particularly knowledgeable about town planning matters."

Tory Veronica Soskin said she was against the eruv because all communities should live together. "We should not have a marked-off area for any particular community. We should all live as one."

She would say the same thing if the application had been made by the Catholic church. "I enjoy living in a multi-religious, multi-cultural society here in the Suburb. May we long continue to do so. Once you start, where do you stop? That is the problem. I don't see how you can make a decision to do this for one."

Tory Eva Greenspan, a member of the planning committee, said the issue would be decided on planning considerations alone. "There is nothing that one could object to. It is neither obtrusive nor detrimental to the environment."

"Personally I am for it. It doesn't do any harm. It doesn't cost any ratepayer's money. If it is going to help some people in some way I don't see why we should object to it."

Labour councillor Ellis Hillman was quoted in the Ham & High last week as saying that he would use the eruv personally if it got consent. He said it was the right of people to do what they believed in terms of their religion or non-religion as long as it didn't interfere with others.

Tory Leslie Sussman did not want to comment. The Ham & High was unable to contact planning committee member Melvin Cohen because he was out of the country.



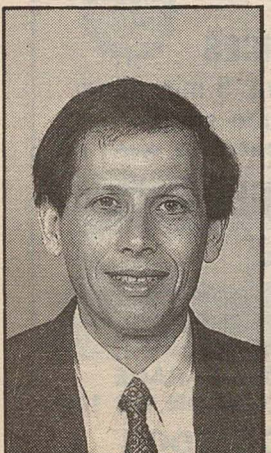
● Veronica Soskin: "No marked-off area."



● Malcolm Lester: "My views will upset people."



● Monroe Palmer: "I am upset at comments."



● Jack Cohen: "I need the judgement of Solomon."



● Brian Salinger: "My concern is wider debate."



● Gerald Shamash: critic of pro-eruv lobbying.



● Ellis Hillman: would use the eruv personally.



● Roy Sutz: "not very knowledgeable."



● Frank Davis: "A blight on parts of the Suburb."



● Leslie Sussman . . . refused to comment.