

Ham & High

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 1994

Eruv: It's a yes from Gummer

ORTHODOX Jews in North London this week celebrated Environment Secretary John Gummer's decision to approve the eruv, but they face a concerted effort from Jewish opponents to stop the controversial religious plan.

As predicted in the Ham & High earlier this month, Mr Gummer could find no planning reason to reject the proposal for 85 poles demarking with wire an area of six-and-a-half square miles of Golders Green, Hampstead Garden Suburb and Hendon.

The decision is a victory for Orthodox Jews, who wanted an eruv so that children in prams and people in wheelchairs could be pushed within this symbolically enclosed area without violating Sabbath laws.

How quickly the eruv is erected depends on the United Synagogue Eruv Committee. It has to persuade the Department of Transport to allow wire across highways such as Lyttleton Road.

But Barnet's planning committee chairman Jack Cohen, himself an eruv supporter, warned the committee not to rush things. "There is some misunderstanding of the eruv committee's motives and these have to be tackled."

The proposal for the eruv has provoked huge controversy in North London since it was suggested more than two years ago.

Some Jews believe the eruv would divide a multicultural community — they were accused by some Orthodox Jews who want the eruv of being anti-semitic.

But after examining the report

of his planning inspector David Bushby, who held an inquiry last November into Barnet Council's rejection of the eruv, Mr Gummer agreed that the "social harmony" of the application was not a material planning consideration.

He concluded that the eruv would not seriously harm the character and appearance of the area, would leave the Hampstead Garden Suburb Conservation Area substantially unharmed and would not affect its visual impact.

Shell-shocked opponents of the eruv were this week licking their wounds and considering their options which include seeking a ruling in the High Court. Elizabeth Lawrence, co-ordinator of the 2,000-strong Barnet Eruv Objectors Group, described Mr Gummer's report as superficial.

"To say the eruv would make no difference to the environment is patently nonsense. To demarcate an area in London for minority use can't be compared with a normal planning application," she said.

She said legal advice would be sought and Barnet's view solicited, but it was too early to say whether the group would seek a judicial review. "I would feel inclined to do what we can. The eruv is a very dangerous idea."

Some opponents insisted that they would fight on. Jeffrey Segall, who can expect a pole to be erected outside his home in Child's Hill, claimed it would lead to "social disintegration", adding:

and worked in St Ives. The sculptor

Eruv

<From page one

"To me, it's the equivalent of a Nazi symbol."

But other opponents, like Hampstead Garden Suburb councillor Frank Davis, were prepared to throw in the towel. "When the umpire's finger goes up, I walk. I can take my black eyes as well as the next man."

Hendon South MP John Marshall, a supporter of the plan, said: "I do hope that it won't create a lasting schism in the Jewish community. Where there is a will to work together, people can do so."

Edward Black, spokesman for the United Synagogue's Eruv Committee, said that the decision would enable thousands of mothers, children, the elderly and disabled to enjoy their sabbath to the full.

"We do appreciate that the idea of a community eruv gave rise to anxiety among some people. We trust that all parties will now put their differences behind them, and move forward in an atmosphere of mutual respect."

"We are confident that once established, the eruv, like those in the United States, Canada, Australia, Belgium and elsewhere, will be appreciated by people who need it and not noticed by those who don't."

To back page>