

Eruv protesters given a second chance to fight

Emily Simpson

PROTESTERS against London's first eruv have been given a second chance to oppose the scheme as roadworks and building development have forced organisers to reapply for planning permission.

The United Synagogue Eruv Committee this week submitted a revised application to Barnet council repositioning some of the controversial wires and poles that would cut across North-West London to provide a notional Jewish border inside the borough.

The move has silenced those who believed the committee had quietly dropped their plans due to financial problems and other obstacles. It is expected to rekindle a storm of protest from those who opposed the scheme.

The planning application for the 11-mile enclosed zone, including Golders Green and Hampstead Garden Suburb, caused a bitter battle that split the Jewish community when it was first submitted in 1991.

It won widespread support from Orthodox Jews, who would be able to push prams, use wheelchairs and carry certain items on the Sabbath within the eruv. But it sparked a three-year protest from others including local residents whose homes had been designated as part of the boundary.

In 1993, against council officers' advice, Barnet turned down the planning application on the first of two occasions. The matter

was finally decided in 1994 by the Environment Secretary John Gummer who granted permission following a public inquiry costing the council £23,000.

Despite winning permission, no poles were erected. Many believed the scheme, which is estimated to cost £80,000 to set up, had been abandoned because of problems raising finance.

But the committee said it was roadworks on the North Circular Road that prevented them constructing any part of the eruv. The junction with East End Road would eventually form part of the perimeter.

This week Edward Black, who

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now heads the campaign for the eruv, said a revised application had been submitted because changes to the boundary had also been necessitated by the planned redevelopment of the Express Dairy site in Cricklewood - on the south west corner of the proposed perimeter. Other small changes had also resulted from the North Circular roadworks and from consultation with gas, water and electricity companies.

He expected the changes to be approved by the council automatically as the principle had already been approved by the Secretary of State. "The changes in the supple-

mentary application all relate to matters of detail. We are confident the council will recognise this and that the required approvals will be quickly forthcoming."

But Hampstead Garden Suburb councillor Frank Davis, a long-time protester to the eruv and member of the planning committee, said he would still oppose the changes. "I have no option. It runs through Hampstead Garden Suburb and the poles will cut across the Heath extension. It will not be a pretty site and will do nothing to enhance and preserve the conservation area."

He said he feared the issue would rekindle bad feeling. "Last time it set Jew against Jew, and Jew against gentile. The healing process had begun and the conflict died down."

But Jonathan Davies, who is also a member of the planning committee and councillor for Childs Hill ward, said as the principle had been established by the public inquiry "the only grounds on which the committee could legally oppose the changes is if they have a worse affect on the area in planning terms".

For the eruv to have any religious function it must be 100pc intact, so the changes must be approved for it to go ahead at all.

Of the 11 miles that make up the perimeter about 10 miles are existing boundaries such as the Northern Line and the M1 motorway. The rest is made up of posts supporting transparent wires.