

'Plot' allegations as eruv date is shifted

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ACCUSATIONS of a conspiracy and a groundswell of protest have blown up over a surprise decision to bring forward by a month a crucial meeting on the Barnet eruv.

Barnet's public works committee was due to meet on November 24 to decide whether to grant the controversial plans a licence, bringing to an end a six-year dispute.

Residents have protested furiously against the plans to create the six-and-a-half-square mile eruv – a first in the United Kingdom – which will involve putting up a total of 87 poles at 39 different locations connected by 1,100 yards of fishing wire to create an area within which Orthodox Jews can carry and push pushchairs and commit other actions, otherwise forbidden on the Jewish Sabbath.

Protesters against the religious zone, which will encompass Golders Green and Hampstead Garden Suburb, had launched a major campaign in the run-up to the decisive meeting to lobby councillors and residents over the next five weeks.

Now objectors say they are "appalled" and "outraged" by Barnet's decision, announced out of the blue this week, to move the meeting to Tuesday, October 20.

Crucial meeting is brought back a month leading to conspiracy theory

"It is quite outrageous and an unspeakable thing for Barnet to do" said Elizabeth Segall of the Eruv Boundary Opponents Group. "Barnet Council knows there is a lot of opposition built up and they want to short circuit it."

"For eight years, council officers have facilitated the eruv committee's aims to impose the eruv on the public and now that the council is aware of increasing public opposition it is endeavouring to push the application through quickly, virtually behind people's backs, to avoid a proper public discussion."

Finchley and Golders Green MP Rudi Vis said he was very "annoyed" about the decision, which he felt was "quite wrong", and he would demand that the item was pulled from the meeting on Tuesday.

A spokesman for the council explained that the special meeting had been moved because of the council's planned re-structuring, which will

mean the public works committee ceases to exist from November 3.

He said: "It is felt appropriate that present members of the committee who have been so closely involved in the eruv and other issues should be allowed to complete their task before the new system takes over."

The Highways Agency has already issued a draft licence for the poles and wires that go over its trunk roads, which will become a proper licence after the meeting.

Edward Black, of the eruv committee that has made the application, said: "The first I heard about this was today. We understand that the detailed report of the officers has considered all the relevant issues in detail and that it has recommended the application be approved."

The fundamental issues before the committee are no different to those which have been considered before over the years."

But Elizabeth Lawrence, another eruv protester, said: "I am appalled and absolutely furious about this decision to give us one week's notice of a meeting when we thought we had four weeks."

"This suggests there is a hidden agenda and it will now be impossible for everyone to get themselves organised."

Action

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