

Time for eruv peace

October 30, 1998

IT HAS been a debate in which the air has been much hotter than necessary, and in which all sides have erred in terms of tactics and intolerance.

The fact is, however, that the proposals for an eruv covering parts of Hampstead Garden Suburb, Golders Green and Hendon has passed its final local authority hurdle and, once a formal licence is obtained from the Highways Agency (a draft licence has already been issued), the eruv will become a reality.

Whatever non-Jews, and non-religious Jews, feel about the theological issues and conundrums of this symbolic extension of believers' domestic domains on the Sabbath, the essential point is that it will exist largely only in the minds of those who believe in it.

If you don't believe in it, or even find the idea absurd, then ignore it and it won't affect you.

The poles and wire that will span the gaps in the eruv's boundaries cannot be portrayed as monstrous or intrusive. There are so many around already that no-one - including flying birds - should be affected by a few more.

No ghetto is being created - no-one will be confined in, or excluded from the eruv. And, given the narrow band of Orthodox Jewish belief that accepts the idea of an eruv, it is unlikely to result in an "undue influx" of Jews to the area - whatever some wiley estate agents may be saying.

In any case, that argument smacks distastefully of insidious intolerance. Would we oppose the building of a church, a mosque or any other kind of religious building on the grounds that its adherents might alter the demographic character of the surrounding area?

With the issue now decisively settled by Barnet councillors, it is time for opponents of the eruv to accept, gracefully, that it will be in place quite soon, and to drop some of the more absurd arguments - such as protesting about the fact that their garden wall might be included in someone else's entirely imaginary boundary.

Continuing protest could cause divisions in our community very much more serious than the moral and theological issues and arguments heard so far.