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THIS WEEK'S ISSUE



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NEWS

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Twelve-year battle for Jewish boundary goes down to wire

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LONG-awaited plans for Britain's first eruv in Hampstead Garden Suburb and Golders Green are poised to clear their final hurdle.

Barnet Council is set to grant the controversial scheme a licence after years of debate over whether it should go ahead.



Plans for the North London Jewish eruv – a six-and-a-half mile square area in which orthodox Jews can carry out certain basic tasks such as pushing prams and possessing personal items normally forbidden on the Sabbath – were first unveiled in 1989.



The scheme involves putting up 87 poles at 39 different locations around Barnet, from which fishing line would be strung to create a "notional" boundary next to buildings, fences and other obstacles.

Final approval for the eruv area, which will be bounded by the A406, A41 and A1 major trunk roads, now rests with Barnet and Transport for London issuing a simultaneous licence.

Edward Black, of the United Synagogue Eruv Committee, said: "We believe that permission for the eruv is now close to being granted. Almost 3,000 families in the area will benefit from it and its presence will not inconvenience or prejudice anybody."

The move comes despite last-minute objections from Finchley and Golders Green MP Rudi Vis who has asked Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott's Department of the Environment, Planning and the Regions to re-examine the scheme "in some detail".

Critics of the eruv, including Mr Vis, claim the poles will be potentially hazardous and could cause accidents. They also feel the "notional" boundary is an infringement of human rights – creating a private domain which would only benefit a minority of people.

The establishment of eruvs dates back 3,000 years to

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There are more than 150 eruv in cities around the world, including Canada, Australia, Belgium and France – but none in England.

A spokesman for Transport for London said negotiations “were still ongoing” with the United Synagogue Eruv Committee, which is pressing for the plans to be finalised by the end of the month.

Earlier this year opponents attacked Barnet Council for approving changes to the eruv boundary without applying for planning permission. But Barnet, which originally granted permission for the poles in 1998, insisted that its handling of the alterations had been proper and fair.

Elizabeth Segall, a spokeswoman for the Eruv Boundary Opponents Group, which has campaigned against the scheme, said: “My understanding is that negotiations are still continuing. Permission would still be needed from the utility companies and the affected households.

“Whatever Barnet did in the planning stage does not overrule the duty of the applicants in informing affected householders.”

Ms Segall said that the findings of its own survey of residents within the proposed eruv area suggested that “the vast majority of affected households would be

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