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HAM & HIGH

Eruv blessings are disputed

A CLAIM that tens of thousands of Barnet residents stand to benefit from an eruv have been dismissed as "an extraordinary fantasy" by a newly formed objectors' group.

The Barnet Eruv Objectors' Group, based in Wentworth Road, Golders Green, has calculated that the eruv would possibly not even help as many as 100 Orthodox Jews.

Within the boundaries of the proposed eruv, the usual Sabbath restrictions on pushing and carrying would not apply, enabling parents with young children to use prams and the disabled to be pushed in wheelchairs.

Responding to a letter from eruv committee chairman David Schreiber published in the Ham & High last week, the objectors' group pointed to the United Synagogue's annual report for 1992, which said that the four United Synagogue congregations in the eruv area had a membership of 6,000 people. It also cited research conducted for last year's United Synagogue review, which said only 10pc of its members regarded themselves as strictly Orthodox and that no more than an additional 9pc could in any way be seen as consistent in their observance of the more demanding practices.

"That means that only 1,140 men and women of the four congregations in Barnet would directly benefit from the proposed

eruv in some way. An even smaller number is, of course, 'chairbound' in any sense."

"Even if we assume that all the parents of under fours are pushing prams and that all the over 65s are physically handicapped, the total number of those for whom the special pleading is made so strongly drops to just 250. Can the real total be as many as 100?"

The objectors' statement said the group aimed to show Mr Schreiber and the eruv committee the strength of opposition to the proposal. The group consisted of Jews and non-Jews who had come together formally to provide a focal point for people opposed to the proposed eruv, it explained.

Mr Schreiber said the objectors' figures were misleading because his committee had attracted 3,299 signatures without much effort, in many cases with only one for each household. He estimated that only one in three of potential signatures were collected on the petition, which was audited by independent inspectors.

"Statistically, Jewish people have a slightly higher proportion of children to adults. Therefore one can very conservatively extrapolate a figure of over 10,000 people just from the petition alone. The opponents' figures are theoretical. These are names of real people and real addresses."