

Militant atheists back legal fight to stop the eruv

ANTI-RELIGION campaigners are being petitioned for cash to help fund the battle to stop the United Synagogue erecting an eruv in North-West London.

An anti-eruv legal action launched last month is set to be supported by atheists from as far as America and Bangladesh after protesters won the support of the Holborn-based National Secular Society, described by its president as "Britain's most militant atheist group".

In the December issue of the NSS's magazine *The Freethinker*, distributed to 2,000 homes worldwide, readers are being asked to "give generously" to an appeal fund set up to support Elizabeth and Dr Jeffrey Segall's legal costs in challenging Environment Secretary John Gummer's support for the eruv.

The Segalls' legal costs have been estimated at £20,000.

Barnet Council had refused permission for the poles and wires that would mark the eruv, a six-square-mile "domain" around Golders Green in which orthodox Jews would be able to relax sabbath laws. Mr Gummer overturned the decision in September.

The Segalls think Mr Gummer's decision can be overturned in the High Court on the grounds that he did not consider their refusal to have their house in Cricklewood Lane used as an eruv boundary.

"Our declaration, as non-believers, that we do not give permission for such religious use of our property, was ignored," Mrs Segall is quoted as saying in *The Freethinker*. "A key point in our

(High Court) case is that the 'hijacking' of our house for a religious purpose violates our right to manifest our secular beliefs."

She is also quoted as saying there are proposals for eruvs in other parts of the country. "Our court challenge is therefore not simply a local Barnet matter, but is also of national significance."

The launch of the appeal, called the Eruv Challenge Fund, was welcomed by the 2,500-strong Barnet Eruv Objectors Group, which is also considering a legal challenge.

National Secular Society president Barbara Smoker said: "We are taking the common-sense approach. People have rights over their own land, and the Segalls should have the right not to have their house used as a religious boundary.

"We do not want to crush religion. But we think people should be able to live free of the trappings of other people's superstition."

The 128-year-old society has campaigned for legalising abortion and banning crucifixes in public.

"They are symbols of torture, they upset children," Ms Smoker said. "You are not allowed to put pornography on public display. Crucifixes should be treated the same."

Edward Black, spokesman for the United Synagogue's eruv committee, said: "This news does not change the substantive issue on which the appeal was heard. We are confident that the decision . . . will be upheld."

Dr Segall declined to comment.