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Eruv challenged with Jewish law

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THE humanist couple who dropped their High Court battle against the North-West London eruv in February have switched their challenge to Jewish law by questioning a cash payment made by synagogue heads to Barnet Council.

Dr Jeffrey and Elizabeth Segall have called on Barnet to return a £4,000 gift it received from the United Synagogue eruv committee in a drive to force eruv backers into a further consultation exercise – which the couple believe would sink the scheme.

While the 1991 gift was officially made to fund a council feasibility study into the project, the Segalls believe that acceptance of the donation has broader implications under Jewish law.

Information the Segalls have obtained into the launch of similar projects in the US reveals that by accepting the gift, Barnet has, under Jewish religious guidelines, released the eruv committee from obligations to consult residents whose homes are set to form part of the eruv boundary.

As the Segalls believe a feasibility study, as defined by the committee, was not carried out, they have opened a campaign to

get the money returned, and present eruv backers with an "enormous" consultation hurdle.

"If the money was returned the eruv committee would have to get approval from everyone whose homes form part of the eruv boundary," said Mr Segall. "There is no way they would be able to get approval from everyone."

The new campaign by the Segalls, whose home in Child's Hill would be affected, follows their decision to abandon legal

Councillor Jeremy Davies, chairing the meeting, replied that an ombudsman's report last year found Barnet had "acted reasonably" in accepting the gift, and referred the couple to earlier correspondence with the council.

"The chief executive has said in his letter to you of January 17, 1994, that this was not a symbolic payment," Mr Davies said. "This remained the view then as it does now."

The commissioned feasibility study, he said, had been reported to two meetings of the council's public works committee, and considered the relevance of the Highways Act on the scheme around Golders Green.

The 1992 committee papers said: "The staff and resource costs committed to considering the eruv have been dealt with by a gift from the eruv committee."

Mrs Segall said: "This is not the same thing as a feasibility study, as defined by the eruv committee's agents. The donation was made on the condition that the money, if not used for a feasibility study, should be returned."

Edward Black, a member of the eruv committee, said: "I have absolutely nothing to add to the comments of the council and the ombudsman."

Humanists claim gift to council throws doubt over consultation of residents affected by boundary

efforts to deny the eruv the effect of planning permission granted by the Government last year.

While the eruv, a form of Jewish parish marked by wires, buildings and natural landmarks, has won widespread support from groups including Orthodox Jews, who would be allowed to follow less stringent Sabbath laws within the boundaries, the scheme has been criticised as divisive.

The Segalls' latest challenge was launched at a meeting of Barnet's town planning and research committee last week.