

Eruv back in pole position

A few poles and some fishing wire — or a boundary which will create a ghetto and harm race relations in Barnet forever; the eruv was originally envisaged more than eight years ago but still the controversy rumbles on.

Wednesday last week could have been the end of the debate. Instead, six of the 39 pole positions, which will make the eruv workable, are still to be considered.

There are eruvs in America, Israel and Australia but the scheme proposed for Golders Green, Hendon, Hampstead Garden Suburb, Mill Hill East, East Finchley, West Hendon, Childs Hill and Finchley will be the first in Great Britain.

The brainchild of Alan Kimche, a rabbi, the plan was embraced by the United Synagogue — the largest wing of the Orthodox movement — and the Chief Rabbi.

The word eruv derives from the Hebrew verb to mix in the sense of the public and private domains. It is an area with a perimeter which symbolically transforms a public domain into a private one. Things which previously could not be done outside the four walls of a home on the Sabbath — such as carrying a baby or pushing a wheelchair — would be allowed within an eruv.

Most of the 11-mile perimeter of the Barnet eruv will be defined by existing borders, including part of the M1 and the Northern line. But where no boundary exists it has to be created. And this is where the poles and wire come in: they are used in pairs to create symbolic doorways which make the eruv complete.

Practically from the moment of its

As the debate over the borough's eruv rumbles on NICOLE LAMPERT looks back at an eight-year battle

inception the eruv has caused one of the biggest debates in Barnet's history. And the argument has raged most strongly within the large Jewish community in the borough.

Opponents argue it will be divisive and ghettoise the area. It is an outdated idea, they say, and the poles can also be resisted on planning grounds.

Those for it say that if it had gone up overnight nobody would have noticed and it will not affect anyone apart from the few who will benefit from it.

The issue divided all the parties in the council. In June 1992 the council's public works committee granted the eruv but seven months later the town planning and research committee turned it down. The eruv committee appealed. A public inquiry on it ended in December 1993.

On September 20 1994 the Environment Secretary granted permission for the eruv. He said any complaints that it would destroy social harmony "are not of sufficient weight to amount to a planning objection which merits refusal of the appeal".

But the story does not end there. An article in the *Hendon & Finchley Times* in August 1996, revealing that because of the North Circular Road works some of the poles would have to be taken out of the plans and other ones brought in, stirred up the horns' nest once again.

Some eruv supporters threatened that councillors could be personally surcharged if they refused the new

permission — meaning that councillors would have to pay if there was another public inquiry.

The plans were originally due to have been decided in December 1996 but, adding to fears that another battle was due to take place in Barnet, councillors decided they wanted to do site visits before settling the matter.

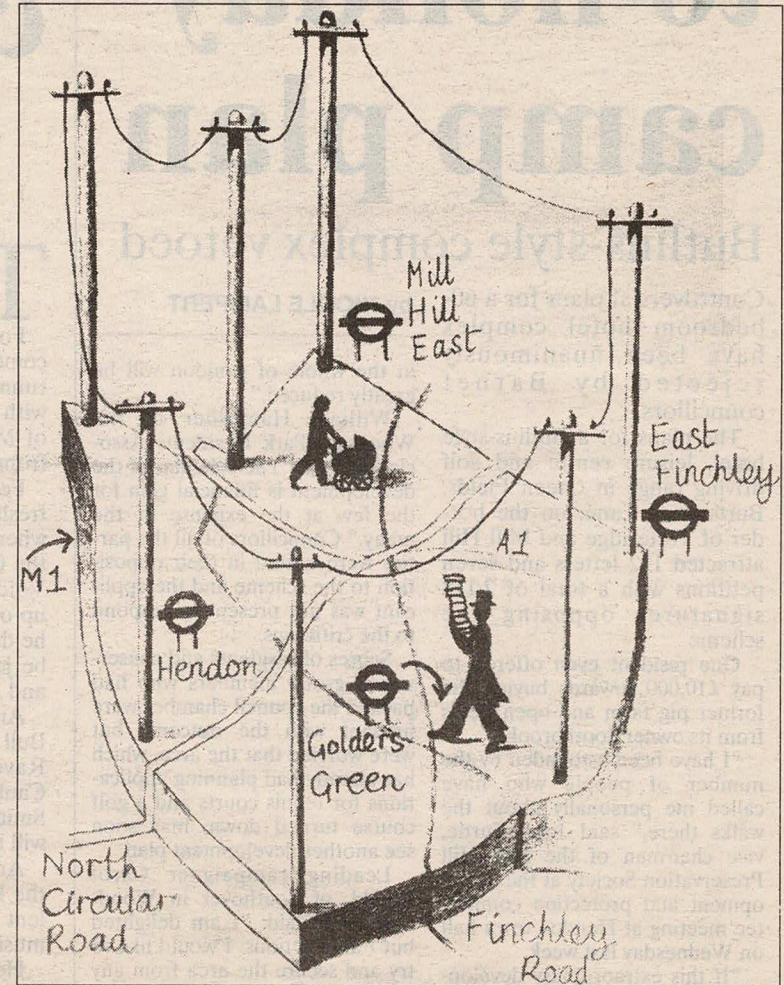
Bets as to which way it would go were at even money before the meeting last week. But while a final agreement has still not been reached, most councillors seem to feel the matter should be settled.

Two pole positions were immediately taken out of the running because they are not in the council's jurisdiction. One in Hampstead Lane is actually in the borough of Haringey, while the other, in Wildwood Road, falls onto Hampstead Heath and is therefore on Corporation of London land.

Four other positions: two in Hendon Way, one in Clitterhouse playing fields and one in Pennine Drive were turned down because of fears for pedestrian safety and of visual impact.

The rest were voted through by a large majority of the councillors — including ones who had previously been outspoken against the eruv.

Certainly, following the meeting, eruv campaigner Edward Black was happy. "We are very happy that the committee has approved the eruv application in principle," he said. "We will promptly work to ensure the refused plans for the remaining pole locations can be rapidly approved."



The area which would be covered by the eruv

But it is unlikely that the matter will be finally put to rest for some time: the six pole positions have to be resited and given permission. Then the whole thing has to be licensed.

"At the moment it cannot be implemented," said leading anti-eruv campaigner Elizabeth Segall. "It is not the end of the road as far as the objectors are concerned."