

Community Chronicle

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Eruv supporters still hopeful despite another council setback

Enter the lawyers as eruv inquiry nears

By JULIAN KOSOFF

The great and the good, backed by a division of lawyers and hundreds of members of the public, are preparing for battle in the fifth round of the North-West London eruv debate.

On November 30, they will cram into the committee rooms at Barnet town hall, Hendon, at a public inquiry to argue for and against the provision of a symbolic enclosure permitting Orthodox Jews to circumvent the laws about not carrying on the Sabbath.

This follows last week's rejection of a revised eruv proposal by the council's planning committee.

It was the fourth time a Barnet

council committee had discussed the eruv proposal — and the third time that one had rejected the concept.

Eruv campaign leader Edward Black acknowledged: "People are very confused. They think it is all over."

In effect, the latest rejection had been a mere skirmish, said Mr Black.

The real contest would be at the inquiry, he predicted. "There will be lines of people queuing up to give evidence for and against," he said.

They will be heard by a Department of the Environment inspector, who will report to the Secretary of State, John Gummer.

Mr Gummer will have the final decision on the fate of the enclosure,

encompassing six square miles of prime suburbia, and an 11-mile perimeter. This is composed in part of wires held aloft on slim poles.

Among the submissions will be statements supporting the eruv's construction from the former Chief Rabbi, Lord Jakobovits, and his successor, Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks.

News of their involvement will be posted in shtetls and Orthodox synagogues throughout North-West London this Shabbat.

Congregants will also be asked to make donations to fight the legal battle during what is expected to be a lengthy hearing.

The campaign has enlisted a leading Queen's Counsel, John Steel, to

argue its case. Likewise, Barnet council has retained John Taylor, QC.

The combined legal bills are expected to top £60,000.

Between now and the start of the inquiry, Mr Black is calling on eruv supporters to write to the Environment inspectorate in Bristol, or to their local MP.

A variety of objectors' groups has also enlisted their own legal representatives.

Among those with its own lawyer is the Barnet eruv objectors' group.

One of its leaders, Elizabeth Laurence said that the main thrust of the opposition would be that an eruv would create excessive street furni-

ture, and that it was, moreover, not necessary.

"The eruv supporters have been misleading people," she claimed. "They say thousands would benefit from the eruv. We believe the figure is as low as 100."

She said her group was gathering cross-community opposition — including Jews. More than 2,000 people had signed a petition.

Five years after the eruv idea was first mooted, even the public hearing may not be the end of the matter.

Hampstead Garden Suburb councillor Frank Davis — a leading eruv opponent, a town planning expert and a Jew — believes the losing side could take its case to the High Court.

The word on the street about Rabbi Sacks — 'he's a geezer'

By JULIA HOLLENBERY

"Is that the Chief Rabbi?" cried a youth from the crowds outside Carmelli's bagel bakery in Golders Green. "Wicked! Cool!"

Unannounced, the Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, and Edware Chabad's outreach youth worker, Rabbi Leivi Sudak, strolled down Golders Green High Road late on Saturday night, intent on hearing the views of Jewish youngsters.

Flanked by Board of Deputies security staff, and the bright lights of a BBC camera crew, Rabbi Sacks attracted a lot of attention and a decidedly mixed reaction.

Some of the teenagers accused the Chief Rabbi of talking to them on camera for his own publicity.

Simon Woolfson, 16, of Stanmore, was dismissive: "I don't understand what he's trying to prove."

Gavin Wiseman, 17, of Radlett, felt the Chief Rabbi was out of touch: "He's got no understanding of Jewish kids and what we are going through."

Several teenagers, clearly unimpressed, continued to swear and argue regardless. Others, thrilled by

the lure of publicity, pushed themselves in front of the cameras.

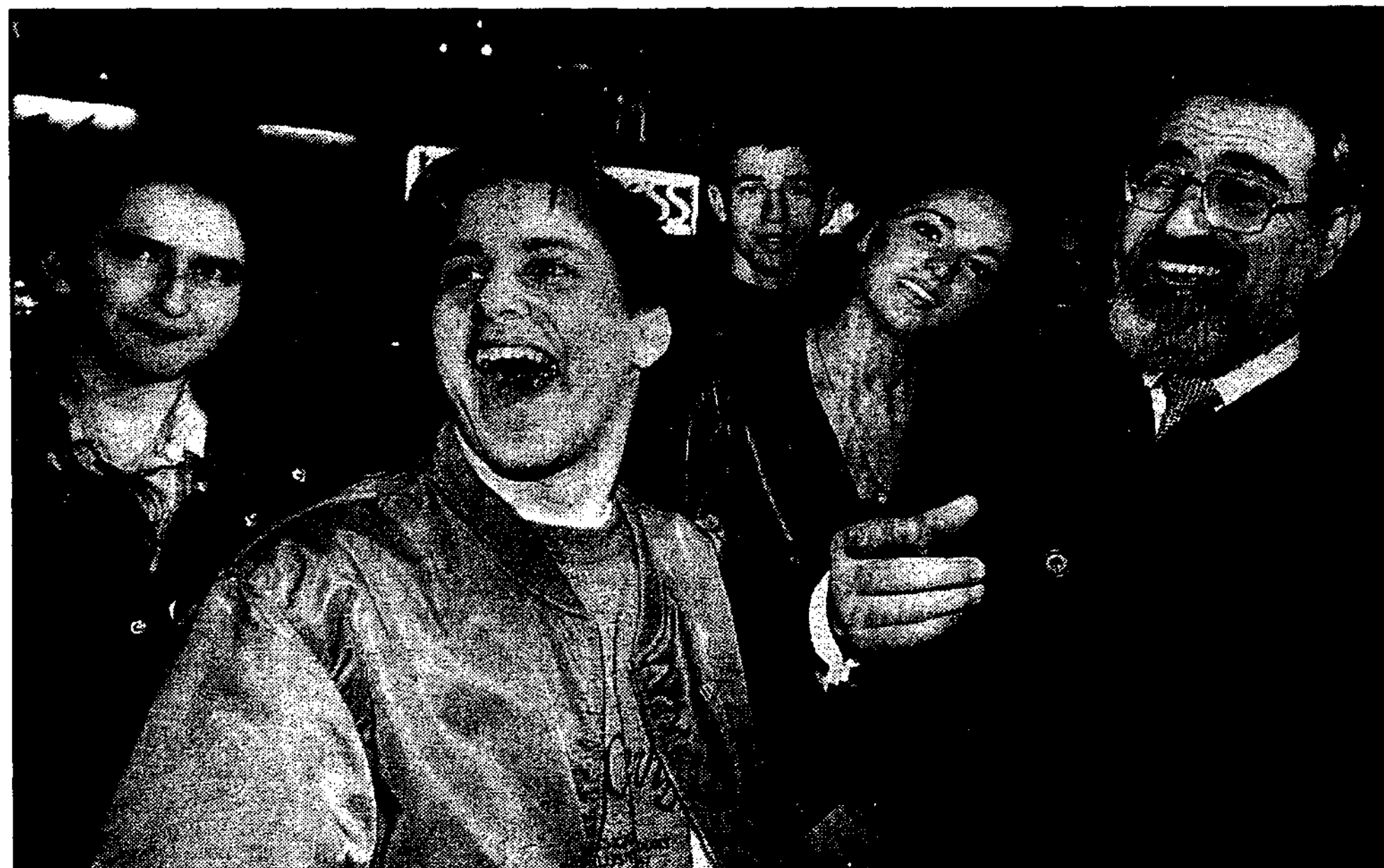
The majority appeared excited by the Chief Rabbi's presence.

Nicole Stein, 16, of Edware, said she came to Golders Green most Saturday evenings. She commented: "I am flattered he stopped to speak to me. Meeting him has changed my opinion. I belong to a Liberal synagogue and I thought the Orthodox wouldn't speak to Liberal Jews."

"He's really nice. He knows what goes on at my school, JFS, and at my synagogue," enthused Rebecca Lee, 14, of Finchley, while Mathew Jackson, 18, of Pinner, claimed: "He's a geezer! I think it's absolutely brilliant that he's here. He should come more often."

Rabbi Sacks told Community Chronicle: "These kids have been given a bad press. I found them by and large very good kids. I was surprised they were happy to talk so seriously. We owe it to them to meet them on their own ground. I have had a very pleasant evening."

Rabbi Sudak remarked: "Some people were impressed that the Jewish community is interested in their future."



Late-night line-up: the Chief Rabbi clearly delighted at his spot of Golders Green outreach work PHOTO: JOHN NATHAN

Volunteers' network is planned

By SIMON ROCKER

A group of young activists is planning a new national network to help recruit volunteers for Jewish organisations.

Jewish Community Action will be launched some time next year once its application for charitable status is granted.

Harry Rich, chairman of the new group, explained: "There are large numbers of individuals who want to do something and there are organisations who need volunteers."

"The idea is that we would match them up."

"If someone wants to raise funds, it's easy to get on to a fund-raising committee. But if you want to offer some other kind of help, it's less easy to find a role."

Mr Rich — a member of the Board of Deputies and one of the leading British activists for Soviet Jewry in the 1980s — said that the network would particularly benefit smaller organisations.

"There are some organisations already working well with volunteers and we won't step on their toes," he

said. "But there are a number of small organisations with a perhaps ageing profile who find it difficult to recruit volunteers."

"Whenever an organisation comes along with a specific need, we will try to fulfil it."

Volunteer bureaux which try to match up helpers with suitable organisations already exist in the wider community, he said.

"And in the United States, Jewish

communities have similar operations."

The committee members of Jewish Community Action — of which Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks will be a founder-patron — are in their 20s and 30s. They include Philip Rubenstein, a former aide of MP Greville Janner; Naomi Cohen, former director of the Student and Academic Campaign for Soviet Jews; and Rob Sumroy, former chairperson of the Union of Jewish Students.

La Boucherie dispute is resolved

The London Board for Shechitah has restored the kashrut licence to the capital's largest butcher, La Boucherie, of East Barnet and Ilford, after temporarily suspending it this week.

The licence was removed on Monday. It was restored on Wednesday following a hearing before the board's religious authorities.

"There was never any question

over kashrut or halachah," a board spokesman explained.

The company's owner, Stewart Cohen, had been "unacceptably rude" to one of the board's inspectors, the spokesman alleged.

"He apologised, was cautioned and is now re-instated."

In a statement issued through his lawyers, Mr Cohen said: "The matter is now resolved."

Special needs complaint

By SIMON ROCKER

The father of a 12-year-old dyslexic girl has appealed to Education Secretary John Patten after the child was refused admission to a Manchester Jewish school.

Yavneh House, a girls' high school, which is part of the state-aided King David campus, turned her down for entry in September because it said it could not cope with her special needs.

The father, who wishes to remain anonymous, said his daughter had been offered a place in the neighbouring King David High School but that it did not meet her religious requirements.

He said the family was "disgusted by the lack of decent behaviour that one would expect of people running what holds itself up to be an Orthodox school."

But Joshua Rowe, a trustee of the King David schools, said: "We have bent over backwards to try to accommodate them. But they are totally uncompromising and want a school specially designed for their daughter."

The girl's local education authority, Salford, after assessing her needs, said that she should "attend an Orthodox Jewish secondary school of her choice." It offered money to help pay for her special needs.

But the head of Yavneh, Doreen Berkley, told the parents in March in a letter rejecting their application: "We do not have the resources available to give [her] the special attention she needs."

Yavneh, founded two years ago, has just two staff of its own. For most of the classes, its 57 girls are taught by teachers from the King David.

Mr Rowe told Community Chronicle that the girl would be able to receive help at the King David High School, which employs a special teacher "partly funded by the governors."

However, the father is unhappy because whereas Yavneh is an all-girls school, King David has mixed classes.

A year ago, Mr Patten's department ordered another Jewish school, the JFS, in North-West London, to accept a boy with special needs after he had originally been refused entry.