

Community Chronicle

Board of Deputies' Central Inquiry Desk and Communal Diary is 071-387 4044. Miyad Jewish Crisis Helpline: 0345-581 999

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Lee Levitt follows the continuing controversy surrounding the proposed North-West London eruv

Inquiry reveals Barnet Jews are poles apart

The North-West London eruv inquiry revealed splits in the Jewish community when former Jewish Labour Cabinet minister Edmund Dell clashed with Lord Jakobovits and the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations (Adath) issued a statement condemning the eruv.

This contrasted with the opening days of the inquiry, when eruv supporters, including Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, put forward strong arguments in its favour.

Mr Dell accused supporters of the eruv of representing "a new fundamentalism" in Anglo-Jewish life.

His comments came during a frequently emotive public inquiry into Barnet council's decision to refuse two applications for a symbolic pole-and-wire structure to cover both the NW4 and NW11 districts, plus parts of adjoining areas.

The United Synagogue eruv committee wants to erect 85 poles connected by just over 1,000 yards of nylon fishing-line. The poles and fishing-line would complement over 10 miles of existing features — such as the M1, the Northern Line and rivers — to create a notional enclosure allowing Orthodox Jews to circumvent laws precluding carrying or pushing items on the Sabbath.

Mr Dell, whose late parents were active members of the United Synagogue, was one of over 20 witnesses called to give evidence by the Barnet Eruv Objectors' Group.

He locked horns with Lord Jakobovits after the former Chief Rabbi told the inquiry at Hendon Town Hall that denying the eruv to those who wanted it was "a denial of their religious and civil rights."

Lord Jakobovits also contended that Jews had been "emboldened" to seek facilities which had not been thought of in the past by the increasingly pluralistic character of urban life.

Mr Dell said: "May it have been that they [Anglo-Jews] had a sense of proportion, that they did not want to follow a fossilised Jewish law?"

"No," retorted Lord Jakobovits. "The need did not arise and therefore it did not become part of the Anglo-Jewish tradition."

Mr Dell later said in evidence: "If people who wish to go to synagogue are being prevented from doing so... it is something new in the practice of the Jewish religion in this country... which I would describe as a new fundamentalism... The community at large should not have to pay for it."

"There will be little suffering because there is little observance, except among extremists, of those

rules that outrage common sense and common humanity."

Meanwhile, in a statement submitted to the inquiry, the rabbinate of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, which represents several thousand Orthodox families, said the planned eruv would damage the sanctity of the Sabbath and cause "a deep split" among the Jewish communities.

"Should such an eruv be erected, we would declare it invalid," said the statement.

However, eruv committee member Edward Black told Community Chronicle this week that the union's opposition did not address issues that were of any relevance to the planning inquiry.

Lord McGregor, chairman of the Press Complaints Commission and a former chairman of the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust, accused the

United Synagogue of showing "arrogance" in proposing to make ritual observance "more convenient for its members by damaging the appearance of the [Hampstead] Heath."

The plans would involve setting up six poles between Wyldes Close and Wildwood Rise.

'I wouldn't like to see too many more [Jewish residents] because I would like to preserve the balance'

Member of Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association

Lord McGregor said that he also feared the plans, if approved, would set a precedent for other groups to erect other "symbolic artefacts" on the heath, and might attract vandals and cause anti-Semitism.

Hampstead Synagogue member Michael Max, of Wildwood Road, Hampstead Garden Suburb, criticised the US for not polling members on "this very divisive proposal."

He later said: "A large number of non-Jews said they did not want to give evidence for fear of being accused of being anti-Semitic. There will be enormous resentment if this were to get through."

Lord Soper, a Hampstead Garden Suburb resident and former president of the Methodist Conference, felt the proposals were "a piece of impertinence."

He told the inquiry: "There is a precept common to many religions: 'Love thy neighbour.'"

"This proposal demonstrates the opposite, provoking and advertising religious differences which ought to be overcome with mutual understanding."

Hampstead Garden Suburb residents' association council member Douglas Thomas expressed concern that the eruv would be a signal for more Jews to move to the area and

to "overwhelm" other religions. "I wouldn't like to see too many more, because I would like to preserve the balance," he proclaimed.

"Are you asking the Secretary of State to control the numbers of Jews in Hampstead Garden Suburb?" asked John Steel, QC, who is representing the United Synagogue eruv committee.

"No," said Mr Thomas. Psychologist Brian Simpson felt the eruv had caused "aggression" among and between all sections of the community.

"This proposal has all sorts of gaps in it."

"They should have set up mirrors on top of poles on the roofs of various houses on the perimeter with an ultra-violet laser which would produce an invisible beam," he suggested from the witness-box.

The inquiry was adjourned until Monday. The inspector, David Bushby, will submit a report in January to the Secretary of State, John Gummer, who will make the final decision.



Left to right: Joe Phillips (with mother, Terri), Elliot Mayer and Emily Lewis get to grips with "Toddlers' Tunes" at Edgware Synagogue. It is a scheme designed "to introduce toddlers to music using rhythm and music," according to session organiser Karen Barr

PHOTO: JOHN NATHAN

The well-dressed and the undressed Plan for special school

By ALBERT BENJAMIN AND JEWISH CHRONICLE STAFF

One of Anglo-Jewry's best kept secrets was revealed this week when undercover reporter Albert Benjamin witnessed a legendary Glaswegian "smoker."

A "smoker" is an all-male charity event, and for years rumours have circulated that the entertainment bill at the annual "smoker" of the Friends of the Glasgow Jewish Welfare Board featured strippers.

Now Mr Benjamin has first-hand evidence of the famous care-bares in action.

Generous contributors to Glasgow's Jewish needy, the Friends have raised thousands of pounds

each year with their traditional "smoker."

Entering the hall at the Welfare Board premises, Mr Benjamin found it "full to capacity with around 150 guests, mainly non-Jewish — all as far as I could assess, respectable, well-dressed people, shopkeepers and wholesalers with a sprinkling of professionals, including young lawyers and accountants."

"I was immediately buttonholed by a member of the committee who complained: 'What are you doing here, Mr Benjamin? This is not your scene really, it's not for you' — a sentiment with which I privately agreed."

The guests at the £25-a-head function sat down to a sumptuous

five-course meal, including chopped liver, Scotch broth and roast rib of Angus beef.

Fund-raising activities included placing bets on televised horse races.

After dinner came the entertainers — a comedian and three strippers.

By the time the third appeared, our reporter had seen enough of the near-naked truth and left, having found that his "presence was less than welcome."

"Maybe I'm something of a prude, but to me the sight of lady strippers divesting themselves of their garments in time to music is an embarrassment rather than entertainment," Mr Benjamin said.

By SIMON ROCKER

Community groups are to discuss the idea of setting up a school for physically- and multiply-handicapped Jewish children.

The proposal is part of concerted moves by Jewish organisations to improve facilities for children with special needs.

Over a dozen communal organisations — including Norwood, Binoth, Ravenswood, the Board of Deputies, the Central Council for Jewish Social Service, Delamere Forest School and two Stamford-Hill based organisations, Yad Vo'ezer and Bet Hayeled — met at the Kisharon day school, Golders Green, one of the two Jewish special

schools, earlier this month to agree to co-ordinate action.

Kisharon head Mrs Chava Lehman said there would be two follow-up meetings next month to discuss whether there was a need for another Jewish special school and to look at the problem of children with special needs who are able to attend mainstream Jewish primary schools but cannot find a Jewish secondary school to take them.

One plan already under way is to publish a directory of existing Jewish special needs facilities. "We'll be able to give it to parents so they know what is going on," she explained. Mrs Lehman urged "any parent who is floundering" to ring Kisharon on 081-455 7483.