

£50,000 needed for construction and start-up costs

North-West London eruv operational 'within a year'

By SIMON ROCKER

Britain's first eruv, approved last week by Environment Secretary John Gummer, should be operational within a year, according to its promoters.

But it will be some months before the installation of the first of the poles marking the boundaries of the six-and-a-half-square-mile zone covering Hendon, Golders Green and parts of Finchley and Hampstead.

"There are a number of bureaucratic hoops that still have to be jumped through," commented United Synagogue eruv committee spokesman Edward Black.

Most of the eruv will be marked by existing railway lines and highways. But there are 37 locations where the boundaries will have to be delineated by sets of poles linked by thin wire in order to comply with the strict requirements of rabbinic law.

In fact, only 85 poles will be needed overall, so most of the designated spots will require merely one pair of linked poles ranging from 16 to 20 feet high.

The eruv committee has already purchased the fishing line that will be used to wire the poles — for the princely outlay of £12.95.

Several technical details remain to be sorted out with Barnet council,

but should pose no problem — for example, what shade of green, brown or grey to paint the poles. Formal consent from the Department of Transport will also be required for poles erected on public highways.

The committee will also have to raise £50,000 to fund the construction and start-up costs, and launch a public information campaign to explain exactly what people will be allowed to carry on Shabbat within the eruv.

According to Mr Black: "We'll be producing educational material for schools, shuls and communal groups."

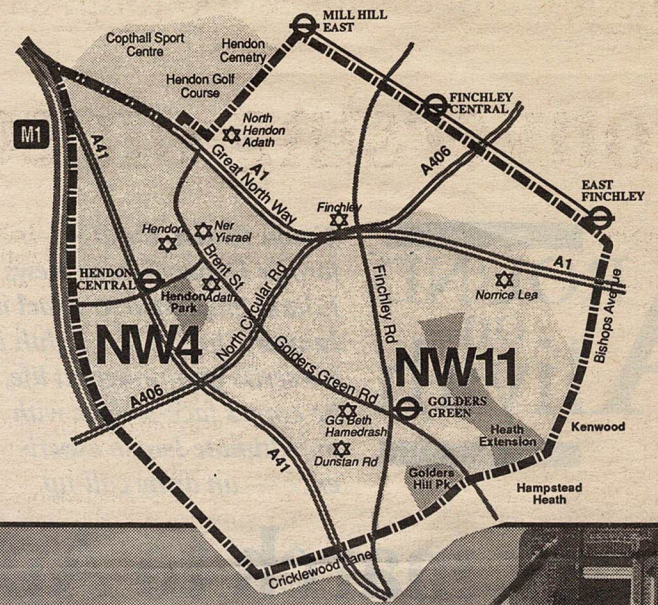
One suggestion for funding maintenance of the eruv is a premium-rate hotline which people would be able to call before the onset of Shabbat to check that the eruv is intact.

Responsibility for the religious supervision of the eruv will lie with the senior dayan of the London Beth Din, Dayan Chanoch Ehrentreu.

It remains to be seen whether local rabbis from the Orthodox Union of Hebrew Congregations who have strenuously opposed the creation of an eruv, will relent

and allow their congregants to use it. A OUHC source said that no decision would be taken until after this week's festivals.

Mr Black stressed: "We hope everyone will put their differences behind them and move forward in an atmosphere of respect and co-operation."



Blink and you'll miss it: the arrow marks an eruv pole held up by a workman in Cricklewood Lane during an on-site visit by inspector David Bushby as part of last year's public inquiry. Top, a map illustrating the boundaries of the North-West London eruv

Women and children first among the beneficiaries

By SIMON ROCKER

Mothers, young children, the disabled and the elderly will benefit most from the eruv.

Under the religious authority of the London Beth Din, the eruv is designed to permit Orthodox Jews to carry items on Shabbat which

enhance the celebration of the day.

It will thus become permissible to push people in wheelchairs or babies in buggies and prams. Parents will be able to carry around what they need for baby care — nappies and food. The elderly will be able to take walking sticks or carry such items as medication or reading glasses.

It will also presumably be possible to take grapes to a sick relative or a bottle of wine to friends when visiting for Shabbat lunch.

But many things will remain off the portable list for the eruv area, notably umbrellas, which cannot be used since it is not permitted to open and shut them on Shabbat and

Yomtov. Nor would it be permissible for observant Jews to take a football to the park.

This is not because the action would technically violate the laws against carrying, but because ball games would still be prohibited as incompatible with the spirit of the Sabbath.

Factfile: the fight for the eruv

January 1988: A Hendon-based group composed of members of local United synagogues and the independent Ner Yisrael explores the possibility of setting up the eruv. But five influential rabbis in Golders Green associated with the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations come out against the plan.

March 1988: "We want eruv now" stickers appear in shop and car windows as popular support gathers pace. But the principal rabbinic authority of the OUHC, Rabbi Henoch Padwa, tries to scupper the idea by declaring his opposition.

July 1992: The first stage in the battle for local authority support is won when Barnet council's public works committee votes in favour of the plan.

September 1992: Opposition heats up, notably among some residents, Jewish and non-Jewish, of Hampstead Garden Suburb.

January 1993: Eruv campaigners present a petition to the town hall in advance of make-or-break council meeting.

February 1993: With the eruv now attracting the attention of the world media, Barnet council's planning committee rejects the proposal despite the recommendation of council officers. Eruv campaigners appeal to the Department of Environment.

December 1993: Lord Jakobovits and his successor as Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, give evidence to a public inquiry. The Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations publicly opposes the eruv. Other Jewish opponents of the eruv proposal include the former Labour cabinet minister Edmund Dell.

September 1994: Cheers in synagogue on Succot as news breaks that Environment Secretary John Gummer has finally approved the eruv.

Objectors ponder action

By RUTH ROTHENBERG

Eruv objectors were this week considering their next step, following the government's go-ahead.

"We are taking legal advice," said Elizabeth Lawrence, co-ordinator of the 2,000-strong Barnet eruv objectors' group. "There are many procedures to go through and it will not all be all plain sailing."

The decision has also caused the resignation from a founder member of the Finchley Council of Christians and Jews, Norman Burgess.

Mr Burgess, a Methodist, said that while he was not against the concept of an eruv, he objected strongly to the form of its implementation.

"The erection of street furniture

for private purposes will set a dangerous precedent," he told the JC.

In contrast, other communities with eruv plans reacted with delight.

In Manchester, consultations have been taking place under the direction of Dayan Osher Westheim.

"With community consensus, maximum use of natural features, discreet use of posts or poles, and education on what exactly is involved, we hope to have an eruv within a year," said a Manchester Beth Din spokesman.

Outer London suburbs, such as Ilford in the east and Cockfosters in the north, are actively considering establishing an eruv.

Both Edgware and Elstree support the idea of a local eruv in principle, with certain halachic reservations.

What the papers said...

By JEREMY LESTER

Those looking to the national press for the real story about what an eruv actually is could well have got the wrong end of the pole.

In a hard-hitting Daily Mail opinion piece, Jewish MP Gerald Kaufman opposed the eruv under the headline: "The danger of creating your own ghettos." However, its introduction described the eruv as an area "fenced off from the surrounding streets" for religious reasons.

The Guardian headline, "Gummer allows first Jewish eruv," seemed to suggest the possibility of a non-Jewish eruv — or more likely, to explain the provenance of the idea for a wider reading public.

Indeed, the report did a fairly accurate job, until its last paragraph,

which said: "No Orthodox Jews were available for comment yesterday because of the festival of Yom Kippur."

The Daily Telegraph declared: "First Jewish 'freedom zone' wins approval" — news which must come as a great relief to all those hitherto "enslaved" in the Suburb.

After freedom zones and fences, maybe the most sensible reaction came from the Ham and High, which commented: "The eruv, after all, will exist almost entirely in the minds of the people who proposed it, will use it, and who will pay for the erection of and maintenance of its few poles and wires. Everyone else, as Mr Gummer found, should hardly notice its few physical manifestations, and will not in any way be affected by its theological implications."



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