

Crossed wires

Helen Jacobus charts the battle for the eruv, while Gaby Wine speaks to people who'll benefit

The Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, this week congratulated "all those who have laboured long and hard" to bring about the North-West London eruv, on which construction is now due to begin within weeks.

On Monday, the final administrative hurdle was crossed when Barnet Council officers decided the 84 boundary poles should be painted in "goose-wing grey," after no valid objections to the colour had been received.

The decision marked the end of a decade-long tug-of-war between communal leaders and residents' groups in the Barnet area who have objected to the project since its inception.

The United Synagogue Eruv Committee first applied in 1992 for planning permission to put up some 80 posts. Permission was finally granted in 1998, after consents by the environmental and highways authorities had been agreed. Two High Court challenges, in 1994 and in 1997, by the objectors failed.

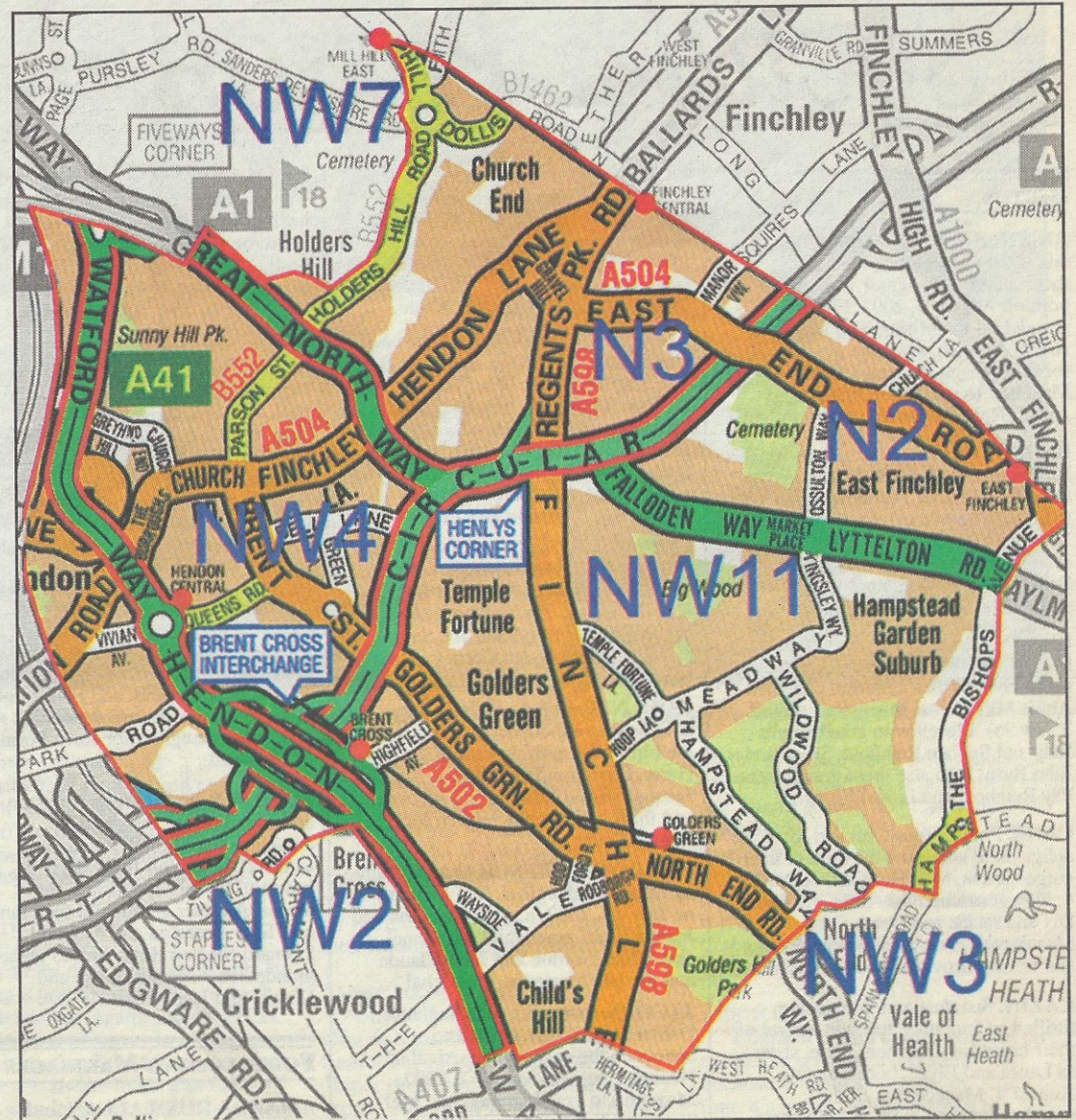
It has taken another three years for

other licences to be granted. Most of the eruv poles will be situated in the Cricklewood and Brent Cross areas. A few will be in Hampstead Garden Suburb. Committee chairman Edward Black told the JC he was concerned that anti-eruv residents had been claiming the 84 boundary poles "dotted across" the 11-mile perimeter would be 30 feet high.

"They have been exaggerating by 100 per cent," he said. "Most poles will be the height of a typical lamppost." The majority would be 3.5 metres to 4.5 metres tall. Some would be about a metre high, "to deal with specific situations." The posts will be connected by a strand of nylon wire. "We are pleased to get this, hopefully, final piece of key administrative detail dealt with," he added.

A Barnet spokesman explained that it was never up to the council to "approve" the eruv. Its involvement was limited to planning. However, the residents had a right to object.

Elizabeth Segall, chair of the Barnet Borough Sight-Impaired Group, alleged the council's decision was "invalid. I'm unaware the eruv is going ahead," she said. "The council has lied about consultation. As far as we're concerned the decision is invalid."



View from the boundary: the coloured portion shows area covered by eruv

PHOTO: A-Z MAP CO.