

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.

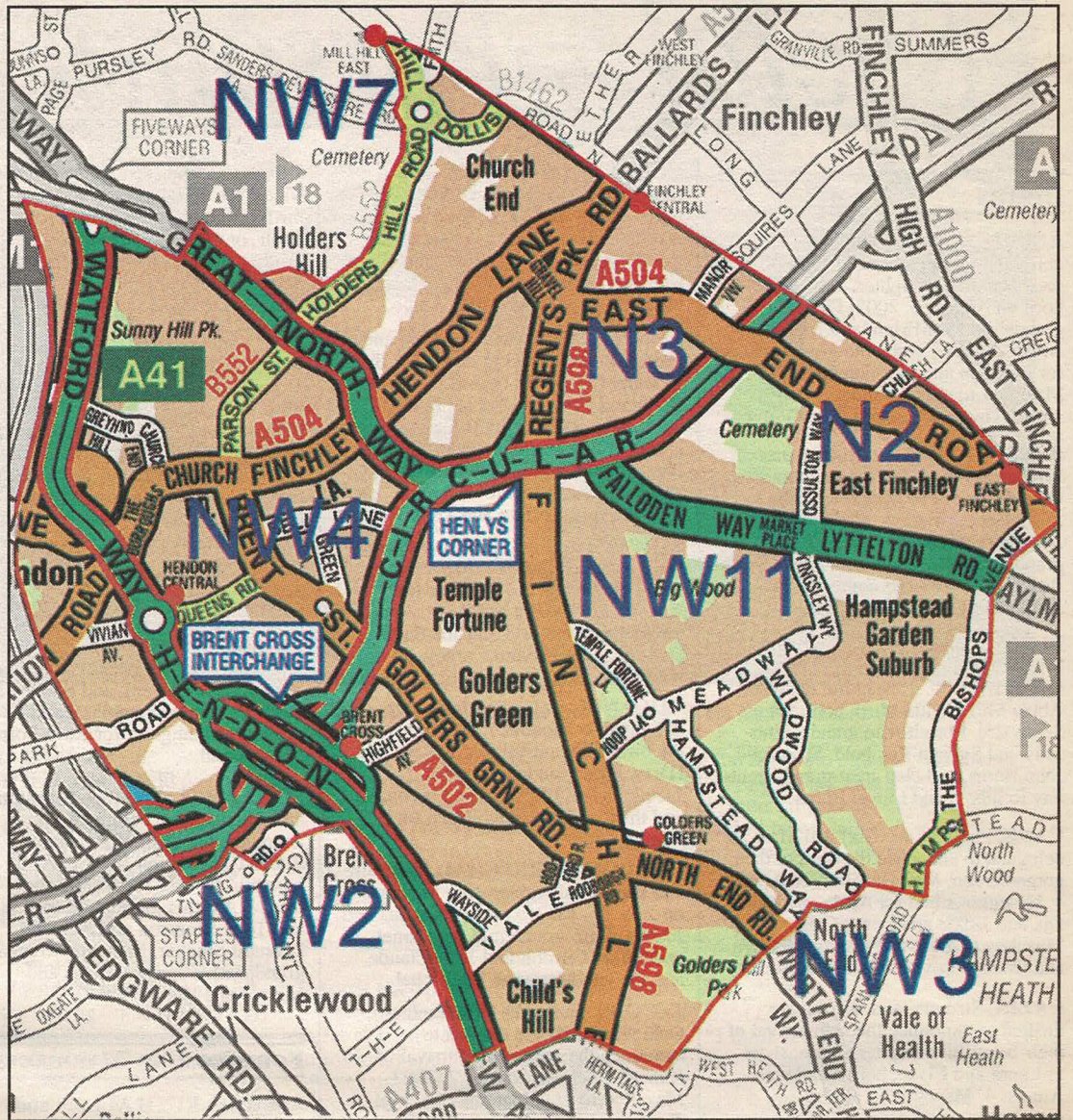
It has taken another three years for

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.

'It's inhumane, protesters ignore disabled'



Liv Sperber, 30, originally from North-West London, now lives in Ramat Bet Shemesh in Israel. She and her husband have two children, Ayelet, six, and Adi, three.

"Living in Israel, I very much take an eruv for granted. But when I come back here I realise that not having an eruv is such a handicap. It means

you can't go to shul or out for lunch if this involves carrying children. I can't imagine how young families cope. When my sister had a baby she was trapped in her house. I decided to live in Israel because there is a feeling of belonging and you don't have to fight for these sorts of things. Now I just hope the eruv gets built quickly."

MARTIN JACOBS, a 37-year-old businessman from Hendon, regularly visits his 82-year-old father, Dr David Jacobs (pictured with him, left), at Sage Home for the elderly in Golders Green.

Martin: "An eruv will make a lot of difference to our lives. In six weeks' time, my nephew, Daniel, is having his barmitzvah. Without an eruv, my father wouldn't be able to go to the barmitzvah of his first grandson, because he needs to be pushed there in a wheelchair."

"Currently my father is confined to the home on Shabbat. With an eruv, he will be able to go to shul and visit family and friends. I find it inhuman that anti-eruv people haven't considered people with disabilities. There are eruv in other capitals, and it's about time that London came up to standard."

"There is an eruv around the grounds of the apartment block, where I live. It has been up for over 10 years and you don't even notice that it's there."

Dr Jacobs: "I keep Shabbat, so if there is an eruv I will have the opportunity to go out — and also to get to my grandson's barmitzvah."



Eruvfile: do's and don'ts

What you may do within the boundaries of an eruv:

Activities you may perform:

- Push a baby buggy, pram or pushchair, and carry baby food, and a supply of nappies.
- Push a wheelchair for an elderly or ill relative.

You may carry:

- A talit, chumash, siddur or other books
- Your house keys
- Handkerchief and gloves
- Required medication
- Food for use on Shabbat
- Jackets and other items of clothing
- Household rubbish to rubbish bins
- Food from your house to your Succah
- Reading glasses

Activities you cannot perform:

- Carry items which may not be used on Shabbat, such as a pen or a mobile phone and any other item which is *muktsah* — forbidden to be touched on Shabbat.
- Carry an umbrella.
- Weekday activities deemed not to be "in the spirit of Shabbat" — such as playing football, riding a bike, going shopping — even on credit.
- Swim
- Carry anything in preparation for post-Shabbat activities, such as car keys.

Photos by Sidney Harris
Additional research by JC Foreign Staff

Feedback: views on eruv

■ "I AM delighted that construction of the eruv will now be able to begin and that it will soon be functioning. This is an ancient and humanitarian provision of Jewish law, and will enhance the Shabbat experience for many who might otherwise be housebound. My congratulations and thanks to all those who have laboured long and hard to bring this about, especially to Dayan [Chanoch] Ehrentreu, head of the London Beth Din, who has guided the project from its inception."
Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks

■ "THE WHOLE scheme is quite disgraceful. If anyone suggested there should be crucifixes outside their [Jewish] homes, there would be hell to pay. It's outrageous this is happening to allow a small handful of people to evade their

religious duties. I think there will be a good deal of vandalism. This will be very provocative. I hope the eruv is well insured."
Madeleine Simms, anti-eruv campaigner

■ "UNLIKE crucifixes, the posts do not have any religious significance. In the strictly Orthodox areas in Israel there is a pageant of people promenading on Shabbat; families are on the move, using prams and pushchairs."
Edward Black, US eruv committee chairman

■ "AN ERUV is a really wonderful scheme, which can only change the lives of thousands of people for the better. If you don't like it, don't use it, but let the other 99 per cent benefit."
Hendon resident