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HEADLINE: LONDON COUNCIL REJECTS JEWISH PLANS FOR SYMBOLIC WALLED CITY

DATELINE: LONDON

BODY:

A local council in north London has rejected plans by Orthodox Jews to set up a symbolic walled city that would allow them to move freely on the Sabbath.

The planning and research committee of Barnet council, citing environmental reasons, voted 11-7 Wednesday against the plan by Britain's largest Jewish community to allow it to erect an "eruv" - a symbolic domain with boundary markers- of about six square miles.

The area involved includes Golders Green, Hendon, and Hampstead Garden Suburb.

Joy Myers, a spokeswoman for the council, said, "The plan would entail poles being erected, which the committee considered would be environmentally damaging because it would change the character of the area."

The Talmud, the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law, forbids Jews from working on the Sabbath. Orthodox Jews interpret this to mean they cannot do such things as push prams and carry keys outside the home.

An eruv creates a symbolic extension of the home or community. The proposals defeated Wednesday called for 85 poles to be linked with 950 yards of wire to complete boundaries already marked by a road and an underground railway line.

The eruv was sponsored by the United Synagogue, the leading orthodox wing of British Judaism, which said it was essential for young mothers, the elderly and the disabled.

"On the Sabbath I personally can't go out because I have a child who cannot walk and I can't carry," Tanya Robinson told the Guardian newspaper. "The majority of my friends are in the same situation. It certainly affects hundreds of people."

Critics said the eruv would be a sectarian divide that would encourage anti-Semitism and lay the foundations for a ghetto.

But Laurence Bagner, a member of the eruv committee, said, "A ghetto is something totally different. Ghettos have always been created by people trying to persecute Jews... It's hardly likely the Jews would create a ghetto for themselves."

A smaller area already exists as an eruv in London and much of central Washington, D.C., is an eruv.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH