

Controversial eruv given go-ahead by local authorities

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Local councillors in Harrow and Hertsmere in Hertfordshire have approved plans to erect a Jewish aerial boundary spanning the two neighbouring boroughs.

The application for the eruv, submitted on behalf of Bushey United Synagogue, has provoked anger from local residents who have complained of a lack of consultation between the orthodox Jewish community and wider Bushey population.

The symbolic boundary, consisting of poles connected by wire to form 'gateways', will turn Bushey into an area where strict Sabbath rules are relaxed for orthodox Jews, such as carrying or transporting items like wheelchairs, pushchairs and handkerchiefs.

The funding for the implementation and monitoring of an eruv will be covered by the United Synagogue.

Local residents opposing the plans argued that the poles and attendant wires could have a detrimental impact on the environment and character of the conservation area.

However, Hertsmere Council said there would be "no unacceptable adverse impact".

Other objections concerning the promotion of social exclusion and the imposition of religion on the public space fell outside the realm of planning consideration.

John Dowdle, Chair of Watford Area Humanists and a critic of the Bushey eruv, said: "An eruv enforces a religious identity on all others living within the religious boundary, whether they share those beliefs or not. I have serious concerns about the detrimental impact this could have on social cohesion.

"In Israel, people driving cars on Shabbat (Saturday) are subjected to stone throwing by ultra-orthodox religionists. Are we opening the way for this kind of behaviour in Britain?"

However, at a public meeting in response to a "considerable amount of anger in Bushey village", Daniel Blake, the Bushey Synagogue board member overseeing the eruv application rejected claims that the eruv will have a significant impact on the locality or create a "Jewish exclusion zone".

He said "the Bushey Jewish community has contributed a great deal to the life of the area. We have sought to promote a model of integration, tolerance for others and community cohesion. Our application will benefit a significant number of people in the local Jewish community, without having any detrimental effect on the wider population or the visual amenity of our area."

According to Mr Blake, the local orthodox community has already raised significant funds but needs to raise additional funds before going out to tender.

Concern has also been expressed about the potential public liability insurance costs involved. The United Synagogue pays insurance but it is unclear whether the local council might be liable should the United Synagogue cease to pay it.

Eruvin are a relatively new phenomenon in the Britain. The first was created in 2003 and created a religious boundary covering 6.5 square miles around parts of Hendon, Golders Green and Hampstead in North London.

Additional eruvin have since been erected in in Edgware, Elstree/Borehamwood and Stanmore. There are also planned eruvin in Whitefield, Greater Manchester, and Woodside Park in London.

Reform and secular Jews generally disapprove of eruvs, rejecting the concept of an eruv as a valid interpretation of Jewish law.

Hertsmere Council's summary of recommendation to grant planning permission can be read [here](#).

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