

THE NORTH WESTMINSTER ERUV

Frequently asked questions

What is an eruv?

An eruv is a type of boundary, defined by Jewish law and designed to 'enclose' an area. Most of the boundary is made of existing features, which may include walls, houses, fencing or railings. In order to make a continuous boundary between these features, poles are erected with thin nylon wire strung between them to fill the gaps.

Why is there a need for an eruv?

Outside of a private area, such as the home, Jews are not permitted to carry or push objects on the Sabbath, which lasts from sunset on Friday to nightfall on Saturday. Such carrying or pushing outside of the private area constitutes 'work' that is forbidden on the Sabbath. An area within an eruv is counted under Jewish law as 'private', so carrying or pushing is then allowed within this area.

The eruv primarily addresses the needs of two groups of people within the Jewish community.

1) Parents and young families

It is not permitted to push a pushchair or carry a small child on the Sabbath, unless within an eruv. Traditionally, a religiously observant mother therefore would have to stay at home to look after her young children whilst the father fulfils his religious obligation to attend synagogue services. An eruv emancipates the woman in this situation, as it enables her to accompany her husband and bring her children to synagogue, and so fully involve them in community life. An eruv also enables other forms of social activity such as families visiting each other for festive Sabbath meals and enjoying outdoor recreation. This gives a very welcome added social and spiritual dimension to parents and young families on the Sabbath.



2) The elderly and people with disabilities

We are becoming increasingly sensitive to the responsibilities we bear to the elderly and people with disabilities. An eruv enables someone who uses a wheelchair or walking-stick to move freely within the eruv boundary, instead of otherwise being housebound on the Sabbath.

Several hundred families will benefit from the eruv in North Westminster.



How does an eruv work?

In ancient times, the rabbis decided that if several houses were built round a closed courtyard, they could be considered as a single common area, so things could be carried between them. Today, the continuous boundary

of an eruv effectively turns a large area into a sort of imaginary courtyard, within which anyone is allowed to carry objects or push prams or wheelchairs – activities which would otherwise be forbidden on the Sabbath.

Of course, Jews and non-Jews alike may enter the eruv area, both on the Sabbath and at other times. It has no effect at all on those who do not observe the Jewish Sabbath.



Do any other eruvs exist?

There are over 200 eruvs in the world. Within London, there are eruvs in Barnet and Edgware, and planning permission has been received for eruvs in Borehamwood and Stanmore.

How will the eruv be constructed?

We are requesting planning permission for the construction of 38 pairs of poles and wire on streets within North Westminster. We are working hard to ensure that each pole will be discreetly located and relatively imperceptible, blending into an area currently including many more prominent items of street furniture.

Typically, a pair of poles, joined at the top by a wire, crosses each road that cuts across the eruv route. The poles are 5.5 metres tall and very thin. The wire is invisible from the road.

Where will the eruv be?

The eruv will reach approximately to Boundary Road in the north, Avenue Road in the east, Regent's Canal in the south and Shirland Road in the west.

Will the eruv cause street clutter?

An eruv is, to all intents and purposes, invisible and will have no effect upon the visual environment of the borough. The poles are designed to have a minimal physical impact on the street scene. They are less intrusive than lamp posts and telegraph poles, and certainly less obtrusive than the telephone masts that are becoming a common feature of our streets.



Who will pay for the eruv?

All the construction and maintenance costs will be met by the local Jewish community. There will be no cost to the public.

Does the eruv imply a territorial claim to the land or property within it?

No. The ownership of the land is unchanged, and the eruv does not affect any rights that anyone has to a property which falls within it. The eruv has no significance other than within Jewish law.

Will the eruv encourage segregation or become a ghetto?

No. Anyone, Jewish or non-Jewish, religious or non-religious, is free to live and work as normal within the area of the eruv. If you do not observe Jewish law, there is no significance to it.

It is already the case that religious Jews usually choose to live within walking distance of a synagogue. There is therefore no reason to suggest there will be any change in the religious character of the area.

For further updates and information, or to make a comment, visit www.northwestminstereruv.org

