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WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR 2007

Thursday, October 1, 2009

80p

Both sides claim victory in battle over green belt

Confusion over 4,000 city homes

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GOVERNMENT acceptance of legal challenges has raised a huge question mark about green belt policy in Oxford.

The Government has effectively admitted that its long-awaited planning blueprint setting out where homes should be built in the South of England was legally flawed.

And it now looks like the whole issue of developing areas of the green belt for housing will have to be reopened.

The South East Plan proposed an extension of Oxford on to green land south of Grenoble Road, where Oxford City Council wants to build 4,000 new homes.

But the Grenoble Road scheme and plans for a selec-

tive review of the city's green belt have been thrown into chaos, as the Government this week announced that it is not to contest six legal challenges to the planning proposals for Oxford.

One of the successful challenges to the plan was mounted by Oxford University, which claims it had been "unfairly treated and misrepresented by the decision-making process". It also argued that any review of green belt land "should be done properly, not piecemeal".

The other five legal challenges focused on the Government's failure to look at alternative sites to the large area of land near the Kassam Stadium.

And it could now mean other sites, such as university land near Yarnton and Begbroke, will have to be reconsidered for thousands of new homes.

The Government decision not to go to court will avoid pro-

longed legal proceedings centred on the legality of the South East Plan, which has been years in the making.

But there was uncertainty today about whether the climb-down would clear the way for a full-scale review of Oxford's green belt, instead of a limited review focused on the southern edge of the city around Grenoble Road.

A measure of the confusion is that both campaigners for and against building houses in Oxford's green belt were both trying to claim a victory as a result of the Government decision.

Michael Crofton Briggs, head of development at Oxford City Council, said: "We are awaiting formal confirmation from the Government, but it appears that this news means that we don't have to wait for the Government to take this matter to the High Court."

Continued on Page 3



INSPIRATION: Eden Habtemichael reads her poem inspired by her daughter, Segen, from the book *See How I Land: Oxford Poets and Exiled Writers*. The book is an anthology of poetry from the city's refugee and asylum seeker communities and is an Oxford Brookes University project. Picture: Mark Bassett

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