

(courtesy of TEN17 radio station website!)

## **COUNCIL WINS HOUSING APPEAL**

**The Government suffered a legal blow today over its controversial plans for building thousands of new homes in the east of England.**

A High Court judge ruled on Thursday 21 May 2009 that the Government's policy strategy relating to proposed development at Hemel Hempstead, Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield was flawed and must be quashed and reconsidered.

The three areas in Hertfordshire are identified as "key centres for development and change" in the East of England Plan, published by the Government in May 2008. Critics in the county say such large-scale development would result in huge pressure on the environment, with the loss of hundreds of acres of greenfield and green belt land, and could overwhelm the county's services and infrastructure.

Mr Justice Mitting, sitting at the High Court in London, ruled that alternatives to housing that will impact on green field sites and the Green Belt had not been properly considered before the policy strategy was adopted.

The judge ruled the Government had failed to comply with an EU directive and environmental assessment regulations that required reasonable alternatives to be evaluated.

Communities Secretary Hazel Blears will now have to consider whether to appeal against the ruling, or reconsider her strategy for the area.

The decision was a victory for Hertfordshire County Council and St Albans City Council, which could be affected by the extension of Hemel Hempstead into its district.

But the judge rejected a similar legal challenge to proposals for major greenfield housing growth at Harlow North, saying in that case there had been adequate assessment.

The East of England Plan sets out how the region is to change in the next 20 to 30 years including a requirement for Hertfordshire to provide at least 83,200 homes in the period up to 2021.

The plan includes major new developments in Hemel Hempstead and Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and in East Hertfordshire all of which, according to the council, require large-scale loss of greenfield and green belt land.

The council had expressed alarm at the scale and pace of development being considered for the county and warned the Government that it must carry out the various assessments required by law.

Council leaders said it was already one of the most densely developed counties and its roads could hardly take current traffic.