

Hearing Statement submitted by The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group re whether the plan adequately lays the framework for the sustainable development of each site – in respect of **Matter 7e of the MSDC 2026 Examination updates, relating to the effect of the appearance of the area, for sites DPSC1, DPSC3, DPSC4, DPSC5, DPSC6, DPSC7 & DPA12.**

The small rural village of Sayers Common and its adjoining neighbour of Hurstpierpoint are both inextricably linked by the shared valuable areas of countryside around them. The amount of this countryside has already been severely reduced due to the ongoing incursion of development. The surviving areas are now very precious to local communities to preserve their rural identity and the rural life and landscape attributes that they value so much. This rural area of Mid Sussex is the reason that most of them chose to live there.

The continuing welfare of this countryside is why so many have supported the call instigated by Mid Sussex District Council Officers in 2004, to provide voluntary effort to safeguard and enhance it with the formation of The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group. Hundreds of group volunteers have worked tirelessly for two decades to achieve these objectives and have achieved remarkable success. Enhanced landscape features and wildlife survival opportunities have been progressively created. This success story was acclaimed at three MSDC Environmental Conferences to encourage other parishes to follow this lead.

For MSDC to now ignore these achievements and the elevated status of the rural area, to utilise it as a location for the majority of their future housing development proposals, is to disregard the effort of these residents and volunteers as meaningless, and is a total snub to their significant effort.

Hurstpierpoint was always threatened by the expansion of Burgess Hill town but fought hard to retain its rural identity. The formation of the Green Crescent (now called the Green Circle) was formed to limit this spread westward and reassure the residents that their remaining countryside was safe. This allowed the remaining landscape between them to continue as countryside and retain the residents' rural settlement identity.

DPSC1

In terms of appearance and character of the countryside, this proposal completely ignores this previous undertaking, and proposes further erosion of this area with proposals which remove fields adjoining an ancient drover's way and a wetland biodiversity feature supporting a massive frog, and other amphibians' populations. These migrate across the drover's way at each breeding season, and measures have been implemented on numerous occasions by our group to save them from death by passing traffic along the narrow lane.

The proposed development also partially encircles a valued area of semi-natural ancient woodland to the south which supports a range of wildlife. Our group had originally installed wildlife supporting initiatives like tawny owl boxes in woodland adjoining Pangdene Lane and High Hatch Lane, which had to be removed due to the resulting erosion of value to wildlife. This was caused by countryside degeneration resulting from the increasingly close proximity of human activity generated by the development of the Green Circle as a public access area. This must not be compounded by this proposal's further removal of the area's remaining green heritage.

Its effect on the appearance of the area as proposed, is irregular, in isolation to surrounding developed areas, and by removing valuable existing greenfield and wildlife terrain reduces any possible protection to the wildlife that exists there despite any mitigation measures that are proposed in the Local Plan. It also renders remaining areas between the two as defunct areas of

insignificant value not creating any positive contribution to the appearance or character of the local countryside. It therefore does not conform with the stated objectives for appearance, mitigation measures, and character of the countryside.

DPA12

With due consideration of the effect of the appearance and character of the countryside, DPA12 proposals seek to extend Hurstpierpoint Village westwards with the removal of valuable fields and encroachment onto the highly regarded Langton Land Conservation Area. This proposal will provide lasting damage to the area of countryside between the settlement and the lane and its conservation status. The narrow, winding lane is highly valued for its tranquillity, quaintness of character and rural charm, and with countryside on either side, is a favourite route for local people to enjoy. Development incursion into it will completely ruin its status as a buffer between the western edge of the village and the rural conservation feature the lane provides.

These damaging consequences are highly opposed by residents for the destruction of an area of value and the elimination of yet more precious green fields to achieve them. Since the biodiversity study of 2004 undertaken in Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common, it was known that ownership of this land was held awaiting an opportunity to develop it, without any reference to the value it presented to the village settlement and local residents, who have a continuing wish for a rural identity in close proximity to the surrounding countryside.

The appearance of this proposed development will severely damage the conservation area and the surrounding rural landscape. No measures to mitigate its removal to prevent the inevitable damage to its character and appearance these proposals will obviously inflict, are possible. It therefore requires reconsideration.

DPSC6 & DPSC7

Proposals DPSC6 & DPSC7 development proposals will severely impact the appearance of the area and the existing natural character of the countryside. DPSC7 to the north of the seminatural ancient woodland of Furzefield in Sayers Common and DPSC6 to the south, directly impact the wood and the recently created woodland pond within it. They propose walkway infrastructure and green corridor linkage to embrace this area, which will bring an interaction of general social human activity to its borders, and is guaranteed through experience, to inevitably lead to its demise as a valued natural asset. It will therefore, ruin the existing character and appearance of the area and additionally, severely damage the considerable effort undertaken by The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group to enhance its ecological conservation qualities over decades.

These fragmented development proposals, despite the stated mitigation measures, which flimsily frame it and provide green infrastructure and public access adjacent to it, cause damage the existing character of this valued countryside feature and the supporting countryside it relies on to retain its quality. They also reduce the protection for biodiversity and wildlife, with suggested enhancement proposals dismally failing to maintain existing levels, and causing erosion of the current distinctive rural appearance of the area, which is so valued by residents. It therefore fails to conform to the required criteria and is detrimental to the area in these respects.

DPSC3 & DPSC4

Proposals DPSC3 and DPSC4 are utilising land in the parish of Albourne and adjacent to Reeds Lane in Sayers Common to the detriment of both settlements. The damage to the appearance of the area and the character of the countryside will be immense as a result. They also remove

valuable sections of green countryside which have become an integral part of the nature conservation initiative The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group have undertaken to form a Mid Sussex Barn Owl Conservation Area. In surrounding countryside immediately adjacent to it, there are many nest site boxes containing resident owls relying on this land for food provision and hunting terrain. These proposals, if implemented, would prove devastating for their continuation and wreck a large part of the effort required over many years to create it. It would also dramatically alter the appearance of the local countryside that local residents value so highly for its landscape and wildlife sighting opportunities.

We would urge MSDC to enter discussions with local groups like ours before such proposals are made, rather than blindly going ahead with damaging and inappropriate development allocations which destroys previous council inspired initiatives, and years of hard work by volunteers. This would allow informed planning decisions to be made.

These fragmented development proposals are therefore in direct opposition to Matter 7e objectives, both on the sprawling appearance of the countryside development, which severely damages the appearance of the area and its character despite any suggested mitigation measures, and impacts detrimentally on both the neighbouring settlements of Sayers Common and Albourne in respect of their surrounding countryside and its character. As such, it fails to achieve the stated objectives and should be reconsidered.

DPSC5

This proposal is for the development of a remote area of Sayers Common disconnected from the existing settlement. It also embraces an area of semi natural ancient woodland which requires precious protection. In the LNRS Consultation document it is denoted as an “area of particular importance to biodiversity, with the surrounding area classified as “an area that could become important for biodiversity.” The area as such, supports many populations of indigenous wildlife which need to be protected.

With the DPSC5 proposed area being remote from the main settlement of Sayers Common and in an area of elevated countryside, the proposed site development will therefore be conspicuous and highly damaging to the surrounding landscape, despite the mitigation measures proposed. It will badly impact the surrounding landscape when viewed from all directions of adjoining countryside.

With the absence of any council formulated policy decreed nationally to be necessary to provide safeguards for valued features or landscape within the Low Weald, it is even more important to discuss issues and gain information from local working groups to provide the necessary information to make the Plan sound. This would avoid the damaging countryside development proposals, currently being applied to this area in the Local Plan, which devalue large expanses of valued existing countryside, its character, and its appearance, and replace it with inappropriate and widespread housing accumulations on greenfield sites. We therefore ask for it to be reconsidered.

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On behalf of **The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group**.

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