

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 7f of the MSDC 2026 Examination updates, relating to the protection of wildlife and biodiversity and opportunities for enhancement for sites DPSC1, DPSC3, DPSC4, DPSC5, DPSC6, DPSC7 & DPA12.**

Hurstpierpoint and its smaller rural neighbour of Sayers Common share the same valued surrounding countryside land area in a common Parish setting. This countryside has already been severely reduced due to the progressive incursion of development. The surviving areas are now of even more value to local communities to preserve their rural identity, their nature conservation initiatives, and the rural life and landscape attributes that they value so much.

In 2004 parish representatives were invited to a meeting with Mid Sussex District Council Officers to encourage the formation of a local initiative to conduct a Parish biodiversity study to examine this local countryside, enhance it where possible, and safeguard the valuable assets contained. This was done by creating a volunteer organisation which was named The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group. This study took six years to complete, during which time many projects were identified and organised, with grant funding sought and obtained to achieve them, where valuable environmental assets and wildlife species were identified as struggling to survive. This foundation has been built upon progressively, and many volunteer projects have been, and are continuing to be, undertaken. The effort continues for 52 weeks of each year to maintain and enhance identified opportunities for the benefit of local countryside and wildlife.

This countryside and wildlife restoration/enhancement work undertaken has achieved remarkably successful results. So successful was this initiative, that the group was asked to attend three Mid Sussex Environmental Conferences to speak about its work and encourage other Parishes in Mid Sussex to follow its example.

The continuing welfare of this countryside is why so many people live there, and why hundreds of volunteers readily give their personal time to support this ongoing initiative. During this time which now spans two decades, these volunteers have worked tirelessly to achieve these objectives and the results that have been obtained.

Enhanced landscape features and wildlife survival opportunities have been progressively created throughout the area. Higher level assessments of national countryside biodiversity values and landscape features invariably do not capture such local natural environmental improvements, or there is a lag in national updating, which makes ongoing local authority discussions with key local groups essential.

Realisation of this was one of the reasons The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group was invited onto the Homes England committee of the Burgess Hill Northern Arc development, where such evidence was submitted by local groups to direct development and provide safeguards considered to be necessary.

With such a huge effort having been expended to reach this point, it is soul-destroying for the organisation and the volunteers who have achieved these results, for it now to be threatened with destruction under these development proposals.

Threats to the rural landscape of Hurstpierpoint regularly occurred in previous years due to the expansion of Burgess Hill town, but residents 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 them that their remaining countryside was safe. This gave the remaining countryside

between the settlements the stated safeguard required to protect it, retain the residents' rural settlement identity, and provide parishioners with the reassurance that it no further threats would be made.

DPSC1

With due consideration to the matter of protection of wildlife and biodiversity and opportunities for enhancement, development proposal **DPSC1**, reneges on this promise, with further erosion to this already much reduced area. This proposal now seeks to remove fields adjoining an ancient drover's way and a wetland biodiversity feature, supporting large migrations of frogs and other amphibians, which migrate across the drover's way in each breeding season. The development also partially encircles a valued area of semi-natural ancient woodland which supports a range of indigenous wildlife to the south.

Wildlife initiatives like tawny owl boxes previously installed in Pangdene Lane (now ruined for ongoing wildlife support and restoration by the absorption and development of the Green Circle as a public access opportunity and a Burgess Hill utility area) and the easterly located High Hatch Lane, have had to be removed, due to the erosion of supporting biodiversity land value to wildlife caused by the encroaching human activity.

Rarely are enhancement conservation initiatives productive within or on the fringes of urban areas, and to be meaningful for species survival, cannot substitute the life-supporting natural environment. However cosmetically screened around development with green infrastructure, misleadingly termed green corridors, and introduced isolated outcrops promised for nature, they always prove to be a dismal failure in terms of providing opportunities for wildlife and nature to survive, and no substitute for the natural environment they are replacing. With such natural habitat now so scarce for wildlife population survival, this demands serious attention in Local Plan considerations.

These outcomes are based on many years of experience of such previous measures introduced as mitigation for development incursions into countryside. The wording however, is doggedly persisted with by the Local Authority to camouflage the detrimental environmental impact it is creating. This proposal therefore fails to achieve any meaningful protection or opportunities for enhancement.

Further removal of Hurstpierpoint's green landscape heritage in this area must therefore be avoided, as it massively impacts on the protection of wildlife and biodiversity for which no enhancement measures can compensate for.

DPA12

Development proposal DPA12 seeks to extend Hurstpierpoint Village with the removal of valuable fields westwards to encroach the highly regarded Langton Lane Conservation Area.

It fails to achieve any meaningful wildlife and biodiversity protection or opportunities for enhancement, as a replacement for the natural landscape it will replace. With the remaining countryside landscape so precious for the continuation of the wildlife conservation initiatives The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group has implemented in the area, it totally fails in this respect. It therefore must be reconsidered for these reasons.

DPSC6 & DPSC7

The Local Plan proposals for countryside around the small settlement of Sayers Common are

even more devastating, with the fragmented development proposals degrading a huge area of existing countryside. Sayers Common is surrounded by a large amount of ecologically important landscape containing much valued biodiversity and habitat survival opportunities for wildlife. It contains some of the most ecologically significant landscape within the Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish. The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group have been working hard to enhance it further by the restoration of previously neglected biodiversity rich habitat, wildlife restoration initiatives, and the creation of new countryside features for the benefit of nature. It has therefore become an area of extreme value to local people who appreciate the rural landscape that surrounds them.

Proposals DPSC7 to the north of the seminatural ancient woodland of Furze field 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. This 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. This in turn will render useless all the effort undertaken by The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group to enhance it over decades. This asset currently appears in the LNRS consultation document as an area of future biodiversity value and must therefore be given all the protection possible. Development proposed to surround it is a recipe for its destruction, and a significant loss of a valued Sayers Common biodiversity feature.

None of the suggested clauses to protect wildlife and biodiversity can provide any meaningful enhancement of either proposal, but will instead introduce close proximity public footfall to damage irreparably the current enhancements to wildlife achieved by group volunteers. As such it fails to meet NPPF and planning guidance and should be reconsidered.

DPSC3 and DPSC4

These proposals remove valuable sections of green countryside which have collectively become an integral part of the nature conservation initiative we have undertaken to form a Mid Sussex Barn Owl Conservation Area. Immediately surrounding and adjacent to it, there are many nest site boxes in carefully selected locations, containing resident barn owls reliant on this area as food provision and hunting terrain.

Although this terrain does not have the species rich ecology of the Pond Lye Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) located in the north of Sayers Common parish, it is just as important as a wide-open Low Wealden countryside landscape, providing life supporting roosting, hunting, and feeding opportunities to these barn owls, and the many local raptors regularly identified in the area. It is the landscape and terrain that is vital to their continuing existence and therefore essential to retain. To develop it would remove a large section of the carefully selected area that this conservation initiative has been formed around.

As with our Burgess Hill development expansion experience mentioned earlier, 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. This is effort that has dominated the lives of local volunteers to achieve the natural environmental enhancement objectives sought over two decades, and cannot be casually disregarded.

We fail to understand why MSDC cannot enter discussions with local groups like ours before such proposals, rather than regardlessly going ahead with damaging and inappropriate settlement creation. Following a hastily arranged site survey after the initial launch of the Plan, to demonstrate to council officers the damage the proposals would inflict on group countryside and

wildlife enhancement projects, which confirmed a complete lack of awareness on their part, it would make tremendous sense to undertake such a meeting before any decisions were made. To proceed without it destroys previous council instigated initiatives, years of hard work by volunteers, and prevents informed planning decisions from being made.

These proposals provide a confirmation of failure to maintain the existing wildlife and biodiversity opportunities that they will remove. In both respects they inevitably fail in their stated intention to provide adequate enhancement or protection measures, so should be rejected. With such little open countryside remaining in what used to be a predominantly rural District, sensible planning decisions based on actual evidence are essential to prevent its final obliteration.

DPSC5

This DPSC5 proposal is another selected area for development on green fields under this Plan. The area of woodland it embraces is 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.

Despite regulation to prevent development encroaching within a small defined buffer strip to avoid damage to the root structure of the peripheral trees, it introduces public access to within close proximity, which is always a recipe for ecological erosion and the eventual elimination of a valued natural feature. Woodlands attract children and dog walkers to utilise it for recreational purposes. This social interaction happens every time proposals of this type are implemented, despite the standard assurances for continuous monitoring and future protection, which are now regarded as proven meaningless statements. It therefore fails to provide the necessary protection to meet the required planning criteria in respect of protection of wildlife or biodiversity.

With so much detailed examination undertaken by the local group formed at the instigation of officers from MSDC to learn about, protect and enhance our local countryside and the wealth of data this has accumulated, capitalisation of this knowledge should be made by Mid Sussex District Council to assist with their formulation of District Plans. This would avoid the catastrophically damaging countryside development proposals, currently being proposed for this area in the Local Plan, which in the absence of any council formulated policy decreed by national bodies to be necessary to provide safeguards for valued features within the Low Weald, is even more important. In the absence of such protection, this proposal fails to lay the framework to conform to the wildlife and biodiversity protection and enhancement opportunities criteria specified. It therefore requires reconsideration.

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

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