

Hearing Statement for Soundness of the Process submitted by The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group re Matter 6a of the MSDC 2026 Examination updates. Examination update statement in relation to sites DPSC1, DPSC3, DPSC4, DPSC5, DPSC6, DPSC7 & DPSC12.

We have no confidence in the Soundness of the Process consideration applied to the Local Plan relating to countryside and environmental protection. It appears that restrictions relating to development in the High Weald and the Southdowns National Park have resulted in the placement of a disproportionate number into the Low Weald without any consideration of the resulting impact or value of landscape or biodiversity contained therein.

With much of our environmental conservation work embracing all three areas of the District, we can at grass-roots level, vouch for all three land designation areas having areas of valued landscape and ecology. With the High Weald and the National Park already having policies to protect their most valuable features, the Low Weald is lacking any such similar safeguards in Mid Sussex. This makes the process unsound.

The main casualties of this flawed approach, are the people of Sayers Common and Hurstpierpoint, where policies DPSC1, DPSC3-7 and DPSC12 are proposing intrusive, damaging, and disproportionate allocations on valued greenfield sites and threatening their valued rural settlement identity. It is little wonder that the residents in these areas feel so aggrieved at proposals of the current proposed District Plan.

To make the Plan more considered and consistent in its approach, the District Council should have formulated a specific Low Weald policy that contains a land use strategy to safeguard and protect all of value in countryside in landscape, biodiversity and other valued feature terms. This should also embrace areas where The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group have continuously, at the instigation of MSDC Officers in 2004, enhanced and protected areas of this countryside for the benefit of landscape, flora and fauna. This MSDC initiative has achieved all that was intended, without any reference by their planners to the results obtained. A site post Local Plan survey organised by our group to demonstrate these achievements to Mid Sussex District Council officers, revealed a total lack of awareness of them by the officers.

Without such awareness and protection applied, the required considered approach for the selection of sites is unfair and distinctly unsound. No council promises of such a Low Weald strategy being formulated and applied to future District Plans can alter the injustice and lasting damage the current proposals will inflict on these areas.

The current District Plan considerations should therefore be halted until this correction can be applied. Without this, it is like a condemned man being told that his conviction was unfair but cannot be altered, but being reassured that the authority will change the rules so that no-one else will suffer the same fate in the future.

To fully endorse this identified failure to conform, the following legislation states the required procedures to be followed: -

In Section 19(1b) of the planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, it states that “each Local Planning Authority must identify the strategic priorities for the development and use of land in the authority’s area”.

In Paragraph 20(d) of the September 2023 version of the NPPF, it states that “Strategic Policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places and make sufficient provision in respect of sustainable development for the conservation, and enhancement

of the natural built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change, mitigation and adaption”.

In Natural England’s Landscape Character Area Profile 121, it states that the Low Wealden area is of special importance, and it requires a mapping exercise “as an evidential component in preparing Low Weald policy” which is an essential consideration required to make the Local Plan sound.

It therefore is evident that Mid Sussex District Council has failed to conduct a study to identify, map and safeguard areas of the Low Weald that require biodiversity and geological protection, and such ecological enhancement measures that have been applied by The Woodland, Flora & Fauna Group.

The non-inclusion of any Low Wealden land use policy or a well-informed strategy to fully recognise and protect identified features within this section of the Mid Sussex landscape, has a direct bearing on the Plan’s spatial strategy and breaches national guidelines.

It is also necessary that consultation with various local groups who can provide accurate data on these issues is conducted beforehand, in a similar way to our group’s involvement to guide the Homes England development in the Burgess Hill Northern Arc, by providing local and informed ecological evidence of importance to direct strategy.

We therefore urge that it can be failed on this point so that the Plan can be more accurately and fairly considered.

Michael Nailard.

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

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