

Background

It was not long ago that the District Plan for the period from 2014 to 2031 was being discussed, but the District Council has an obligation to review this on a regular 5 year basis. A new plan for the period from 2021 to 2039 is now in its public consultation period for a six-week period from 7th November to 19th December 2022.

The District Council has reviewed which policies can remain unchanged and which they believe need to be changed to meet current national policy and guidance, which itself will be subject to material changes. These changes include the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill published in May 2022 that should receive Royal Assent in 2024, within the time frame of the new District Plan. The District Plan review has already been postponed in order to have more certainty over the number of houses needed in the period to 2039, but until this Bill is consented then the original methodology and figures still apply.

“My own view is that whatever figures you arrive at nationally, ... a greater proportion of housing need should be met in urban areas on brownfield sites.”

At a recent meeting of the Levelling-Up select committee, Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities stated: *“ There’s been a lively debate about how those numbers are generated and how we make judgements about household information and population growth overall”* He added *“My own view is that whatever figures you arrive at nationally, and how it’s broken down authority by authority, a greater proportion of housing need should be met in urban areas on brownfield sites.”*

household information and population growth overall” He added “My own view is that whatever figures you arrive at nationally, and how it’s broken down authority by authority, a greater proportion of housing need should be met in urban areas on brownfield sites.”

He also said “Quite rightly it should be the case that if a local community has invested time and care in making sure it has a robust local plan, that should prevail.”

Despite this, much of the extra housing in this current plan is in rural areas, which will impose additional transport infrastructure requirements and have a negative impact on our climate. It is a Plan that is developer led, including sites that have been proposed by developers and previously rejected.

The Plan will go through several stages:

- ◆ Review of representations and amendments required in Winter 2022 and Spring 2023
- ◆ Final Plan to be published for consultation in summer/Autumn 2023
- ◆ Submission to Planning Inspectorate for examination in Winter 2023, and
- ◆ Formal adoption expected in 2024

Coincidentally 2024 is when the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act is also likely to be law.

Additionally, the Habitats Directive in place since 1992, which governs and restricts developments within the 7km zone of influence around the Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC), is also under review as part of the Brexit Freedoms Bill. This is likely to be retained in its current form until the end of December 2023, but after that more of the northern half of the District may be available for sustainable development.

Therefore the latest figure, after allowing for the houses completed in 2020/21 and the existing permissions and allocations, is 8,169. Unfortunately, due to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the north of Mid Sussex, including Ashdown Forest, and the South Downs National Park in the south, this leaves a small area in which to allocate new houses and nearly 50% of those will be within, or close to, Hurstpierpoint.

Proposals

(The policy numbers in the plan are included below, [in red] where appropriate.)

Within our locality the new Plan allocates two major sites:

[DPSC1] The first is for 1,400 new homes to “Land to the West of Burgess Hill” as an urban extension to Burgess Hill but is actually in Goddards Green and north Hurstpierpoint. In addition to the new homes the site includes a gypsy and traveller site, extra care housing, a primary school, self-service library, pitches and a pavilion, retail, leisure and workspace, allotments, sustainable transport measures and waste-water infrastructure.

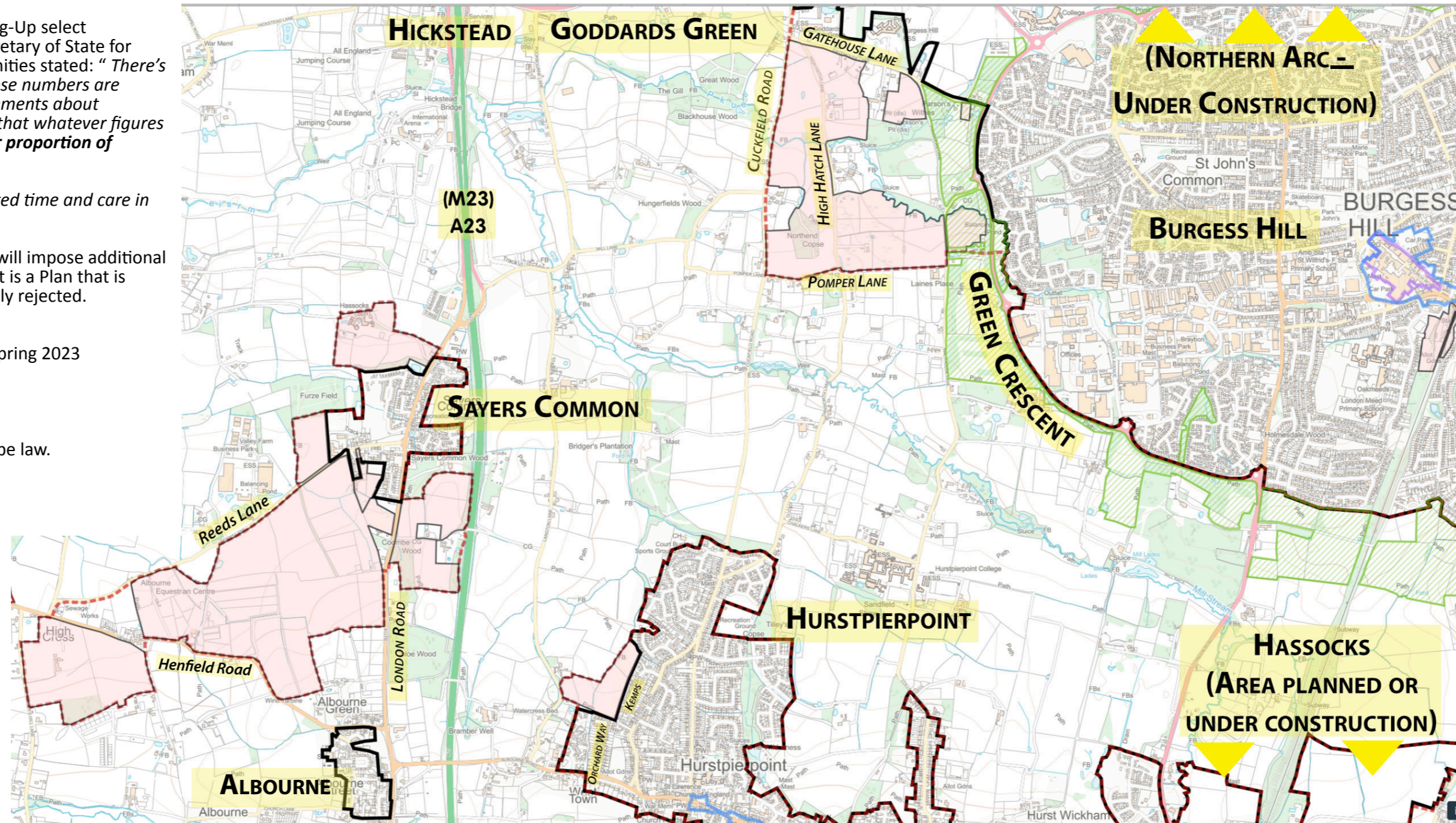
[DPSC2] The second is for 1,850 in the period of the plan but with an overall total of 2,000 on “Land to the South of Reeds Lane” described as an urban extension to Sayers Common but is mainly located in Albourne Parish. It will include community facilities, extra care housing, new primary and secondary schools that may include a sixth form, “healthcare provision”, and a new waste water treatment works.

In addition to these two major sites, another 633 further homes are planned on extra sites:

- ◆ **[DPH16]** 90 at Land west of Kemps, Hurstpierpoint
- ◆ **[DPH19]** 33 at Reeds Lane, Sayers Common
- ◆ **[DPH20]** 210 at Coombe Farm, Sayers Common
- ◆ **[DPH21]** 100 at Land west of Kings Business Centre, Sayers Common
- ◆ **[DPH22]** 200 at Land South of LVS, Sayers Common



Congestion AHEAD



These are in addition to the major building work already happening and planned for Hassocks and the Northern Arc, northwest of Burgess Hill.

Despite promising new schools and additional healthcare facilities, **[DP16]** the timing of these will be crucial to our existing services in Hurstpierpoint. With the number of houses in Hassocks already being built and putting additional

pressures on these services, at what point in the plan will these new services be built and opened? How is it proposed to staff these with medical and teaching staff when there are already problems filling these posts due to staff shortages and economic pressures?

New pedestrian and cycle links will be created **[DPT1]** with “highway improvements and sustainable transport measures” but no further details are provided. The nearest railway stations to Sayers Common are Hassocks, Burgess Hill and Wivelsfield, which all have existing traffic congestion problems during the peak periods. Hassocks station has the additional problem as its main access road from Stonepound Crossroads is the only Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in Mid Sussex. The high levels of nitrogen dioxide are attributed to the topography of the area and the volume of road traffic. The plan states that since the AQMA was declared there has been an overall reduction **[DPN9]** but the latest Air Quality Annual Status Report published by MSDC in June 2022 states: *“Since the AQMA was declared there has been an overall reduction in measured NO2. For the fourth time in the last five years, there are no exceedances within the AQMA. An AQMA can usually be considered for revocation after three consecutive years with no exceedance, but the circumstances of the last 24 months would make any conclusions unreliable at the current time.”*

The Plan emphasises the need for Sustainable Development **[DPT4]** and refers to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development but it’s difficult to see how building over 2,000 houses in Sayers Common will achieve this. This will be a community heavily reliant on motor transport to access neighbouring services and work locations. Unless there is a requirement for all houses to be built with solar panels to power electric cars or bikes, it will not achieve the stated sustainable objective.

Although highways improvements are planned around the two major sites, **[DPT1,2 &3]** it’s difficult to see how this will not result in an increased traffic flow along the existing east west route (B2116) through our High Street. It’s also difficult to see how this can be improved in a High Street dating back to medieval times and already chaotic at many times throughout the day.

Despite the words written in the Plan about individual towns and villages each having their own unique characteristics and the need to prevent coalescence, **[DPC2 & 3]** much of this additional housing will be in the areas considered to be Local Gaps, as defined in our Parish Neighbourhood Plan, Policy Countryside HurstC3, separating settlements by areas of open countryside. Hurstpierpoint is a special place and for the last 60 years Hurstpierpoint Society has tried to protect the fabric and legacy of the heritage passed on to us, so it continues to be maintained and enhanced for the benefit of residents; past present and future.

The proposals in this draft District Plan will not enhance the village and we need to ensure that we do not become a suburb of Burgess Hill and/or Hassocks. This may not be the Mayfield Town that has been discussed since 2012 but it will be just as bad, or even worse, as piecemeal developments will be spread over a wider area without the centralised, substantive infrastructure in place.

Strategic town planning is being led by a need to meet these housing requirements by building in rural locations, rather than a plan for economic sustainable growth centred on our existing large settlements, including Burgess Hill, where there is already existing community and transport infrastructure. Developers prefer building on green field sites rather than making use of derelict land, but higher structures can be built in towns requiring less land, making use of existing infrastructure and having less impact on our climate. This plan is developer led rather than a community led, and more attention needs to be given to settlement self sustainability.

This is one of the largest challenges facing Hurstpierpoint and the Society in our 60-year history. The Society will be submitting a response, but the public consultation is your opportunity to have your say on the proposals. Your response, no matter how short or long, will be important and including the policy numbers will make it clearer.

There is an online consultation form on the District Council’s Website: <https://midsussex.inconsult.uk/districtplanreg18/>, or use this QR Code (right)

You can also submit your response by email to policyconsultation@midsussex.gov.uk or by post to Planning Policy Mid Sussex District Plan 2021-2039, Oaklands, Oaklands Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 1SS

