HURSTPIERPOINT & SAYERS COMMON
PARISH COUNCIL

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Cllr Jonathan Ash-Edwards, Leader
Mid Sussex District Council
Oaklands, Oaklands Road,
HAYWARDS HEATH
West Sussex, RH16 1SS

29 July 2022

Dear Cllr Ash-Edwards,

Thank you for considering the response the Parish Council made to the first round of consultation to "consider whether a new parish and parish council should be created for Sayers Common" *(Ref: MSDC Terms of Reference Paragraph 1.2)*

On 17 May 2022, MSDC issued its report for its Scrutiny Committee at the time called "Community, Customer Services and Service Delivery", containing draft recommendations as to whether a new Parish Council should be created for Sayers Common.

A community governance review is not and never had been a review of the existing Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council. You may argue this is minor semantics but there is an important implied difference. MSDC's recommendations seem to have extended beyond the agreed brief set out in the terms of reference. It is the Parish Council's view that recommendation 5 should never have been included or published.

**Scrutiny Committee Report 25 May 2022**

The Parish Council was disappointed with the content of the report and the ensuing discussion at the MSDC Scrutiny Committee meeting on 25 May 2022. The Parish Council was surprised by a number of the critical statements made in submissions and the language used. The Parish Council's detailed review has found no evidence to support the issues raised. Given that the draft recommendation 5 made to the Scrutiny Committee appeared to give credit to these somewhat erroneous statements, the Parish Council would have hoped that the Scrutiny Committee did not find the Parish Council guilty by default, based upon the information provided by a small number of respondents containing factual errors. One strong criticism was actually of Mid Sussex District Council and not the Parish Council but that was not corrected. Sadly, the Scrutiny Committee agreed to accept the Recommendation 5 (although we believe it was outside their remit), took the criticisms as read, and asked its officers to work with the Parish Council to help the Parish Council "examine dissatisfaction by residents of Sayers Common with the Parish Council".

Of course, where there are areas that we can continue to improve upon, we have taken them on board whole-heartedly and have done so through our existing well tested and tried internal governance process.

The Parish Council's Strategic Policy & Resources Panel met on 27 June 2022 to consider the outcome of the first stage of the CGR set out in the letter issued by MSDC dated 6 June 2022 to electors. Sadly, as a Statutory Consultee, the Parish Council was not formally advised of the outcome of the Scrutiny Committee meeting or sent a copy of the letter sent to electors, but can see from the Minutes of the meeting that:

**The Scrutiny Committee for Community, Customer Services and Service Delivery agreed to:**

**(i) Note the findings of the first public consultation.**

**(ii) To provide advice upon, and further to that advice, to agree the principal electoral authority's draft recommendations for Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common Parish Council, upon which a second public consultation would be conducted.**

**(iii) To note that following the second public consultation, further findings and the final recommendations of the principal electoral authority will be presented to this committee on 14 September 2022.**

**(iv) To note the final decision will be taken by Council in the light of the consultation responses received through the Community Governance Review.**

The seven draft recommendations were discussed in detail by the Panel and the deadline for responses of 1 August 2022 was noted. The Panel agreed that the matter go on the 30 June 2022 Parish Council meeting agenda for discussion and that a final response would be agreed at the 28 July 2022 Parish Council meeting.

**Response to Draft Recommendations:**

On 30 June 2022 the Parish Council met and ran through the seven final recommendations:

**Point 1** – Noted. MSDC feel the change of Governance arrangements seems premature due to the potential development of 3,803 new homes in the local area.

**Point 2** – Noted. A proposed budget for a new Parish Council is the responsibility of the petitioners, however, the current economies of scale for staffing, room hire and operational costs would be lost by separating into two parish councils.

**Point 3** – Noted. It is a challenge to recruit new councillors from across the parish indeed the one councillor appointed to the existing vacancy resigned within a week as they felt the role would take up too much time.

**Point 4** – Noted. There is an evolving community identity for Sayers Common.

**Point 5** – Firstly, the Parish Council believe this recommendation strayed from the Terms of Reference and should not have been included, however, if there were matters to be corrected then the Parish Council wished to address them. Naturally we have reviewed every submission to identify any areas that the Parish Council could collectively improve upon in the way that it operates and engages with the Parish, in particular Sayers Common.

The Parish Council has found that the communications and engagement with residents has never been higher. Cllr Sampson, who with Cllr Jee is one of the two Parish Council Councilors currently representing Sayers Common, had not received any complaints from residents of Sayers Common. The Chairman had also always had a positive dialogue with residents of Sayers Common. It was noted MSDC had not corrected factual errors such as MSDC owning the land at Berrylands Pond. Also, the complaint implying residents of Sayers Common having to fund their own Village Gateway was incorrect. Cllr Jee did not recognise the issues raised and confirmed he will defend the Parish Council if he ever meets people who do not feel updated. The Chairman confirmed there was no differentiation between Sayers Common and the rest of the parish in governance terms. The Parish Council must operate within legislative boundaries however the outputs for residents across the entire parish have increased significantly. Residents do not always understand which local authority is responsible for what and the Parish Council is often blamed for delays by WSCC and MSDC.

**Point 6** – Current arrangement to continue with a further review in 2025 or 2029. Disagree. Dates for a further review in 2025 or 2029 will result in short time scales leaving too much uncertainty for the Parish Council. The Parish Council has held back on recruiting extra staff so it wouldn't need to make any employees redundant. The Parish Council needs more certainty to invest in the community. The former date would not give us sufficient time and certainty to make further changes and investments within our current services. With the CGR hanging over the Parish Council for the last 2+ years the Parish Council have deliberately held back from addressing the current shortfall in staff capacity, and therefore the ability to deliver projects and change across the estate and at the tempo that the Parish Council want to achieve. The earlier date, whilst probably of advantage to other Councils as significant parts of the Northern Arc will have been delivered, could also perhaps suggest to local residents that the 3800+ houses stated for Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common and Albourne parishes will have been delivered early. Therefore, Sayers Common village could be a viable parish council at that point. The Parish Council is not sure that making the connection with the District Plan Review and the possible impact upon the Parish in this decade would be helpful at this stage of the review.

The Parish Council does not underestimate the strength of feeling expressed by many living to the east of the A23, and south of the A2300, that they align themselves with Hurstpierpoint village and not Sayers Common village. This matter will need to be addressed in any future CGR and not set aside as stated in the current report. LAA and LAB were polling station boundaries established in 2000 and specifically created to enable two ward councillors to be apportioned to and represent Sayers Common. The CGR review should acknowledge the new geographical features and boundaries.

**Point 7** – Noted. The Parish Council await the challenges that will arise in this area on the back of it being incorporated by default into the new "Downland Villages" ward for MSDC. You will recall that we flagged this incoherence and the implications therein, in our submissions to the Boundary Commission.

**Further Summary Statements**

- The Parish Council notes that MSDC feels the change of Governance arrangements seems premature due to the potential development of 3,803 new homes in the local area
- There is an evolving community identity for Sayers Common which may warrant a separate parish council in future once a significant number of new homes are built
- It is a challenge to recruit new councillors from across the parish
- Recommendation 5 strayed from the Terms of Reference and should not have been included
- Dates for a further review in 2025 or 2029 leave too much uncertainty which does not allow the Parish Council to move forward and invest accordingly
- Any future reviews must take account of residents' views on appropriate new boundaries.

We note the deadline for the second consultation period ends on 1 August 2022, when you will evaluate further and prepare your final recommendations for the MSDC Scrutiny Committee now called "Community, Leisure & Parking", on 14 September 2022, with a decision being made by MSDC on presumably, 28 September 2022.

We would be grateful for an official notification of the outcome.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Groom

Miss Sarah Groom
CLERK TO THE COUNCIL