

SILCHESTER PARISH
NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

FINAL SITE ASSESSMENT REPORT

FEBRUARY 2025

Published by
Silchester Parish Council

SILCHESTER PARISH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

SITE ASSESSMENT REPORT: FEBRUARY 2025

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Silchester Parish Council (SPC) is preparing its first Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish (SNP). An essential part of the process for neighbourhood plans proposing to allocate land for development is an assessment of the suitability and deliverability of the alternative sites put forward by land interests for assessment.

1.2 The process differs from the equivalent process for Local Plan allocations in two ways. Firstly, it must be proportionate, acknowledging that allocation policies in neighbourhood plans do not have to meet the 'tests of soundness' and do not have access to the same resources. Secondly, the process must take into account community opinion, given the fact that to be made (adopted), proposed neighbourhood plans must pass a referendum.

1.3 This report summarises the site assessment process that has informed the selection of housing site allocations in the SNP. The SPC has been advised throughout this process by the planning consultancy, ONH.

1.4 SPC has been mindful of the intention of the local planning authority, Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council (B&DBC), to review and roll forward its adopted Local Plan to 2040. The draft Local Plan enables the SNP to take responsibility for planning to meet local housing need in the Parish for the plan period rather than that being left to the new Local Plan. The SNP therefore includes a housing site proposal to meet that need up to 2040, indicated by B&DBC as being a quantum of 15 homes for the parish.

1.5 To achieve this has required a site assessment process comprising two stages. The first stage generated a 'long list' schedule of all potential housing development sites, derived from the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) published by B&DBC in December 2023 for emerging Local Plan and then a local Call for Sites undertaken by the SNP Steering Group between May and July 2024. Sites were disqualified if they were deemed unsuitable as a matter of principle, unavailable or otherwise unachievable.

1.6 The second stage is to carry out three suitability tests on any 'short listed' sites:

- a technical assessment via the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA);
- a community assessment via a community opinion survey; and
- a further assessment of deliverability (including viability)

1.7 The SHELAA at B&DBC details one site being put forward for Silchester. The local Call for Sites resulted in a long list of four sites.

1.8 Following an initial screening process, this resulted in a single site being carried forward to stage 2. This site formed the basis of the SEA Screening Opinion being carried out by B&DBC in July 2024 ready for the preparation of a technical assessment on the site via SEA and initial dialogue with the site landowner and developer taking place.

1.9 The site was also tested with the local community as part of an informal engagement period taking place between 2nd and 20th September 2024.

1.10 From the combination of the tests is drawn conclusions for site-specific development principles, including any mitigation measures identified in the SEA and any necessary supporting infrastructure requirements. It will then be for SPC to propose to allocate the site in the Draft SNP with a capacity to meet or exceed that which SPC judges to be a robust housing target number local.

1.11 This report is published for consultation alongside the Pre-Submission version of the SNP and draft SEA report.

2. STAGE ONE ASSESSMENT

2.1 The process began with the Parish Council forming a Steering Group to oversee the assessment on its behalf. The group observed that the last B&DBC Call for Sites had only resulted in two sites for Silchester being proposed and so carried out its own Call for Sites process in early summer 2024. This resulted in four sites being submitted for assessment by within Silchester, of which one was submitted by a landowner (a duplication of a SHELAA site) and three by local residents.

2.2 To aid the process, a settlement boundary was drawn to define the existing edge of the built-up area of the village. Silchester has not previously had a settlement boundary and so the B&DBC Policies Map does not show it, although one is proposed as part of the emerging Local Plan and this has been used for this purpose. It was considered that only land that lies within or adjoining the boundary would be considered suitable in principle by being consistent with national policy and with adopted Local Plan policy for managing the growth of settlements and protecting the countryside.

2.3 Three sites were considered unsuitable for further consideration as they do not adjoin the settlement boundary. During the process the land interests of a further site confirmed their land would not be available for assessment and they have also been excluded.

2.5 For the one remaining site the team has liaised with the landowner to clarify how the land may be developed. The summary information is included in Table A below, which shows if the site qualifies for Stage 2 (green) or if it is excluded from further consideration (red).

Site No.	Site Name	Gross size (Ha)	Site Capacity	Remarks	Stage 2
1	Land east of Little London Road, Silchester	2.42	15-26	Site comprises of two fields on the south-eastern side of the village, currently used as grazing paddocks. There is housing development opposite at Early Lands to the west. The site is relatively flat with an existing field gate access onto Little London Road with a bus stop next to the entrance 20m to the west is the Flex Ditch scheduled monument and the northern part of the site falls within the Silchester Conservation Area. The site is also within the SSSI impact zone and AWE safeguarding area. There are overhead power cables which cross the site. The site was subject to a Pip application in 2020 which was refused and dismissed at appeal (for. Up to 9 dwellings) The site adjoins the proposed settlement boundary, as defined within the emerging Local Plan. This site has also been included within the B&DBC SHELAA site ref: SIL001.	Y
2	Land to the south west of Early Lands Silchester	-	-	Owner has confirmed site not available.	N
3	Land to the west of Pamber Road	-	1	Located within a small existing development, <u>this site is located outside of the proposed settlement boundary, adjoining the SSSI and within the conservation area.</u>	N
4	Silchester Common	-	-	Located within the SSSI. Site not available	N
5	Land to the west of Little London Road, Silchester	1.2	13 pitches	Located to the southwest of the parish immediately to the east of the Silchester Sewerage Treatment Works (STW). To the north and east is dense woodland and to the south industrial/commercial units with yard areas. To the west of the STW is the Pamber Forest Nature Reserve. <u>The site is outside the proposed settlement boundary.</u> Following an application in 2017 for change of use to residential caravan site of 13 plots, an enforcement notice was subsequently imposed, with the appeal dismissed in July 2022. There is currently a prohibitive injunction to prevent occupation of the site.	N

Table A: Stage One Sites Schedule

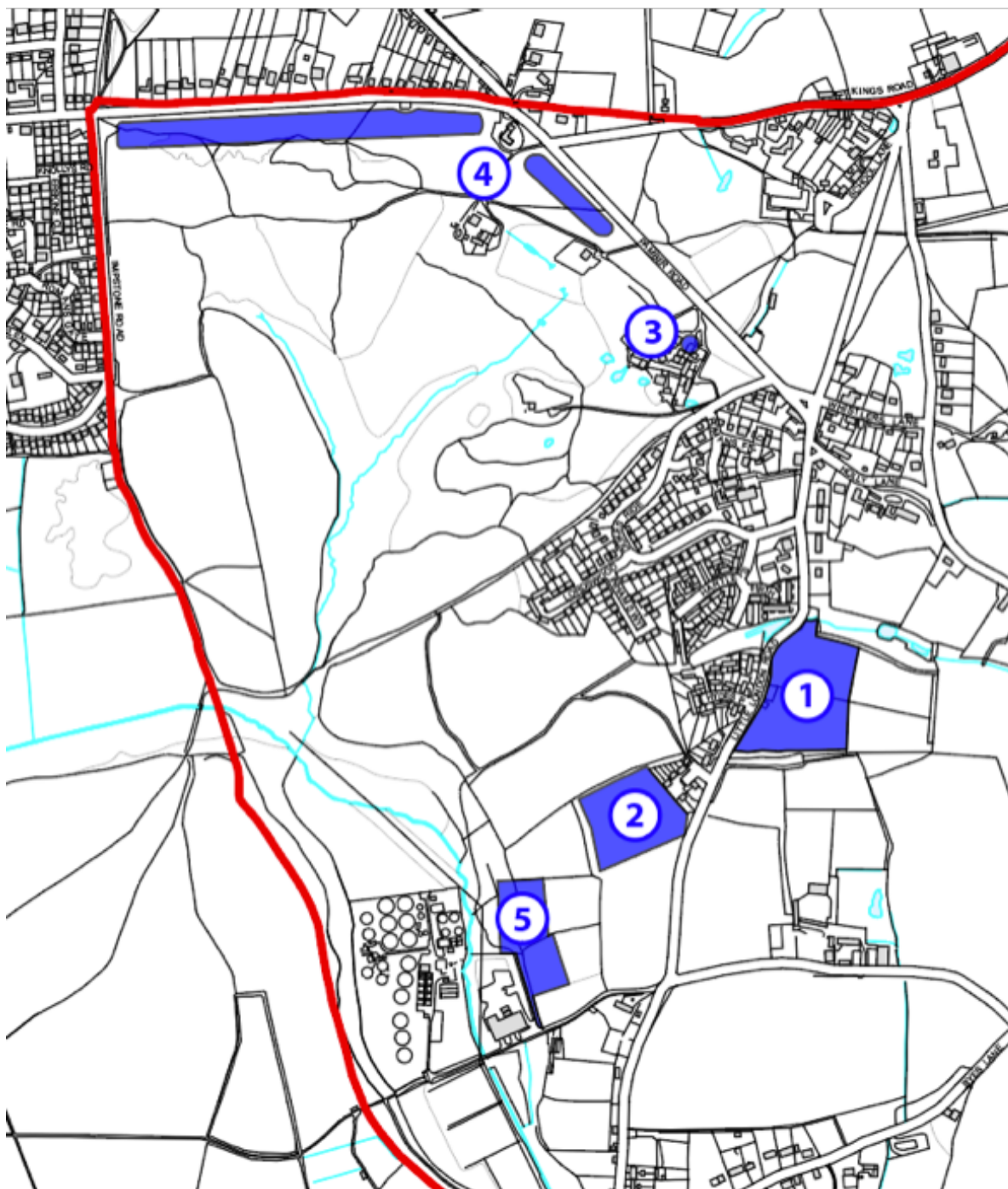


Figure 1: Stage one Site Map

3. STAGE TWO ASSESSMENT

3.1 This second stage of the process combined three assessment exercises: the SEA, informal community engagement and a deliverability assessment. The first provides an assessment of

the technical attributes of the single site to progress to this stage (Site 1) using a set of agreed environmental criteria as required by the Regulations.

3.2 The second exercise has been used to understand the opinions of the local community on the site, bearing in mind that the Plan can only be made following a successful referendum in due course. The third indicates the confidence level that a desired development solution will be considered viable by the relevant land interests and able to be delivered.

3.3 To inform these exercises, the SG used the information gathered from the owner/developer of the site. An indicative proposal and scheme layout has been provided, together with confirmation of access rights and offers of providing community benefits as part of a scheme.

Technical Assessment: SEA

3.4 The SEA has been carried out in stages by ONH using the environmental objectives and baseline data agreed in the SEA scoping exercise undertaken with statutory consultees during September/October 2024. For this purpose, the assessment of the chosen site assumes no mitigation measures are in place and notes the likely scale of positive and adverse effects of developing the site.

3.5 The SEA indicates the type of measures that may be necessary to avoid or successfully mitigate any identified potential adverse effects. For the site selected for allocation, the SEA assesses the proposed allocation policy, including their mitigation measures, as part of the overall assessment of the NP.

3.6 The outputs of the SEA can be found in the separate report accompanying the Neighbourhood Plan.

Community Assessment

3.7 As outlined above, it was also necessary to consider the opinions of the local community on the proposed site through informal engagement. This was undertaken in September 2024. Where the community was invited to express opinions on the proposed site. The comments can be found in the Consultation Statement - Feedback summary of Second Informal Consultation.

3.8 Although the survey and engagement activities have been effective in terms of the number of local people engaging with the project, it is acknowledged that no survey can provide a definitive view of community opinion. However, experience elsewhere suggests that those people that do engage at this stage of a neighbourhood plan project are also more likely to comment at the Pre-Submission (Regulation 14) stage, as well as to turn out to vote at the referendum. It is therefore a helpful insight and its conclusions must be given some weight in the final decision as to whether to include the site.

Deliverability Assessment

3.13 Finally, it is important that the SNP is able to demonstrate that there is a high level of confidence that any site allocation proposal will be delivered in the plan period. This enables the team to take into account any site viability issues identified by the land interest or by other stakeholders, as per the national guidance.

3.14. The SG engaged with the land interest to gauge the extent to which they were serious in promoting their land and to which they were interested in delivering affordable housing and non-housing benefits.

3.15 A round table discussion was carried out with the SG, site owner, site promoter and site developer together with the Neighbourhood Plan appointed consultants ONH, in September 2024. This concluded that the land interest was serious and had sufficient control of the land in question at present to deliver a housing scheme and would look to bring forward the land for development once the Neighbourhood Plan was in place. The landowner also indicated that he wished to live on the site himself with his family and thus indicated that an additional self-build plot should be included within the site allocation. In terms of judging viability, the team requested the land interests to make clear any potential viability issues that may compromise the ability of a proposal to be policy compliant. No matters were raised at this stage.

4. SITE SELECTION

The Pre-Submission Stage

4.1 Stage Two of the site assessment process resulted in the single proposed site being taken forward for inclusion in the draft plan.

4.2 The size of the site is such that it alone could deliver all of the housing supply the SNP is choosing to plan for. With the position in terms of the indicative housing figure for the village being 15, allocating a site of this size (up to 26) may result in an over-supply of housing for the plan period. However, in view of the proposed National Planning Policy Framework and the accompanying revision to the calculation of the standard method for allocating housing numbers resulting in an increase to the figure at Basingstoke and Deane of 37% this allocation is considered prudent and is not so excessive to be contrary to the position of Silchester within the settlement hierarchy.

4.3 In addition, the feedback from the survey and from previous engagement activity had indicated as a matter of principle that the community favoured a spatial strategy that concentrated development in one location rather than across several small sites, due to the desire to include affordable housing as part of the development. It is also important to note that the developer of this site has indicated that, whilst the site had previously been subject to an unsuccessful planning application for a Permission in Principle (PiP), they would now wait for the Neighbourhood Plan to be in place before submitting a further application, demonstrating their support for the process and the community engagement involved.

The Submission Stage

4.4 At the Regulation 14 Stage, there were no comments raised by the community in respect of the proposed site. Basingstoke and Deane commented that *"Whilst the inclusion of a site allocation to meet identified needs is strongly supported in principle"* they raised concern over the potential adverse impacts on landscaping and heritage and a further meeting was arranged with them in January 2025 to review the proposal in more detail.

4.5 As a result, the developer has prepared technical notes on both Heritage and Landscaping and Visual Impact as supporting evidence to address these concerns. These have been supplied to Basingstoke and Deane and are now available to view on the Parish Council website.

4.6 It was indicated in writing by the LPA that whilst the Neighbourhood Plan sought to take a pragmatic approach in seeking to bring forward a site which could deliver much of the affordable housing need identified within the village, *“a lower yield of 15 dwellings may help to mitigate the heritage and landscape impacts.”* At the meeting with Basingstoke and Deane, officers questioned why the SNP was not looking to allocate more, smaller sites rather than a single larger one, requesting more detail be provided in the site assessment report to evidence that all other reasonable alternatives had been considered.

4.6 In response the SG Chair and the consultants indicated that the site assessment process had not resulted in any other meaningful sites coming forward so there was no ability to consider any other reasonable alternative to the proposed allocation site, with the exception of not making an allocation within the SNP, which would not serve the community well. In addition, there would be a risk to the referendum process if the site yield was insufficient to bring forward a meaningful quantum of (or indeed any) affordable housing for the village to address the evidenced need, which could have been the result if smaller sites had come forward.

4.7 In response, the developer produced an indicative site layout plan for 15 (plus one self-build plot)(figure 4) and 20 (plus one self-build plot)(figure3) to illustrate the result of a lower yield on the site. This demonstrated that this would not alter the developable area and thus would have little impact on any perceived concerns over heritage and landscape impacts, compared with a development for 25 (plus one self-build plot)(figure 2)

4.8 The developer indicated that in terms of viability, if the site allocation were reduced from 25 on the main developable area to 15, the mix of houses would need to comprise of mainly larger 3, 4 and 5 bed homes, rather than smaller 1 - 3 bed, which would not meet the Silchester Neighbourhood Plan Policy SIL6 Housing Mix and its stated provision of 50% or more smaller (1-3 bed) dwellings.

4.9 There was also a concern raised by the LPA over the function of the land proposed to be designated as public open space between the proposed development and the conservation area. In response the LPA was advised that this will have both an open space and community function and should therefore be seen as part of the village fabric that connects the settlement, much like a village green and not the empty buffer space that they perceive it to be.

4.10 In conclusion, on balancing the concerns of the LPA, the wishes of the community for affordable housing and in dialogue with the developer, the parish council has concluded that the site allocation for policy SIL8 should remain as per that proposed in the Pre-Submission version of the Neighbourhood Plan, with the supporting evidence prepared by the developer to address the concerns raised by the LPA.



Figure 3: Indicative Layout for 20 units plus 1 self-build plot



Romsey T: 01794 367703
 Portsmouth T: 01275 407000
 London T: 01794 367703
www.thrivearchitects.co.uk

This drawing is the copyright of Thrive Architects Ltd. All rights reserved. No part of this drawing may be reproduced without the written permission of Thrive Architects Ltd. For all other purposes DO NOT scale from this drawing. Contractors, Surveyors and others are to check all report dimensions and levels of the site and building before commencing any work. Any discrepancy should be reported to the architect. Thrive Architects Ltd. is not responsible for any errors or omissions in this drawing. The architect's liability is limited to the design and construction of the building only.

Rev Description Date Au Ch
 P1 Preliminary Issue 14.02.25 CLMT -/-

Project Land east of Little London Road, Silchester
 Drawing Sketch Layout - 03

Client SHOREWOOD HOMES
 Job no. SHORE40927
 Date 14.02.25
 Rev. P1
 Author GR/SWD Checked -/- Scale 1:500@A1
 Status PRELIMINARY Office Romsey
 Client ref. -



Figure 4: Indicative site layout proposal for 15 units plus 1 self-build plot