

SILCHESTER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

MARCH 2025



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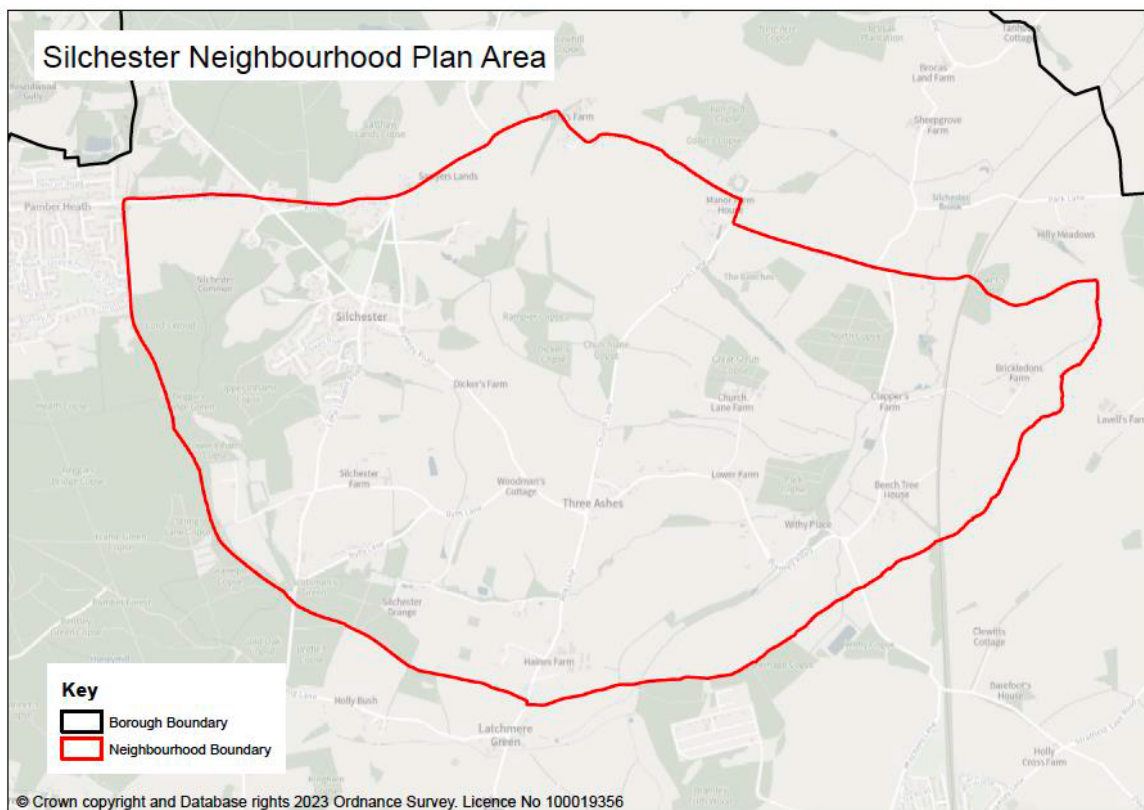
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1. INTRODUCTION

Background

1.1 ONH has been commissioned by Silchester Parish Council (SPC) to undertake an independent Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), of the Silchester Neighbourhood Plan (SNP). The designated SNP area coincides with the Parish boundary (see Plan A). This document is the Final Environmental Report that follows on from the statutory consultation on the SNP and Draft Environmental Report in November – December 2024, per the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.



Plan A: Silchester Designated Neighbourhood Area

1.2 The purpose of the Environmental Report is to assess the extent to which the SNP will contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The SNP is being prepared by SPC as the qualifying body under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

1.3 The Screening Opinion & Scoping Report demonstrated why an environmental report is necessary to inform the preparation of the SNP. The Opinion concluded that only two of the SNP policies need be screened in for assessment and only in relation to their potential to have significant heritage, landscape and biodiversity effects. During the consultation on the proposed scope of the assessment, the statutory bodies made no recommendations that the scope should be amended.

1.4 In its comments on that report, the local planning authority, Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council (BDBC), suggested that the assessment need now only focus on heritage and biodiversity matters and not landscape matters. However, given such a change would

require further consultation with the statutory bodies, the proposed scope covering all these matters is retained. In any event, at Silchester the historic landscape is a feature of the significance of many of its heritage assets and would be difficult to examine apart.

1.5 The SNP process has now reached the final plan stage. Its purpose is to set out a series of planning policies that will be used to determine planning applications in the area in the period to 2040. The Plan will form part of the development plan for the Parish, alongside the policies of the adopted B&DBC Local Plan (2011-2029). The current Local Plan will be replaced by the emerging B&DBC Local Plan, which will also run to 2040. The assessment of the SNP has been undertaken as guided by Planning Practice Guidance following the main stages of the SEA process:

- Stage A – Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on scope (summarised in Section 2)
- Stage B – Developing and refining alternatives and assessing affects
- Stage C – Preparing the SEA
- **Stage D – Consultation on the draft plan and the SEA**
- Stage E – Monitoring implementation of the plan

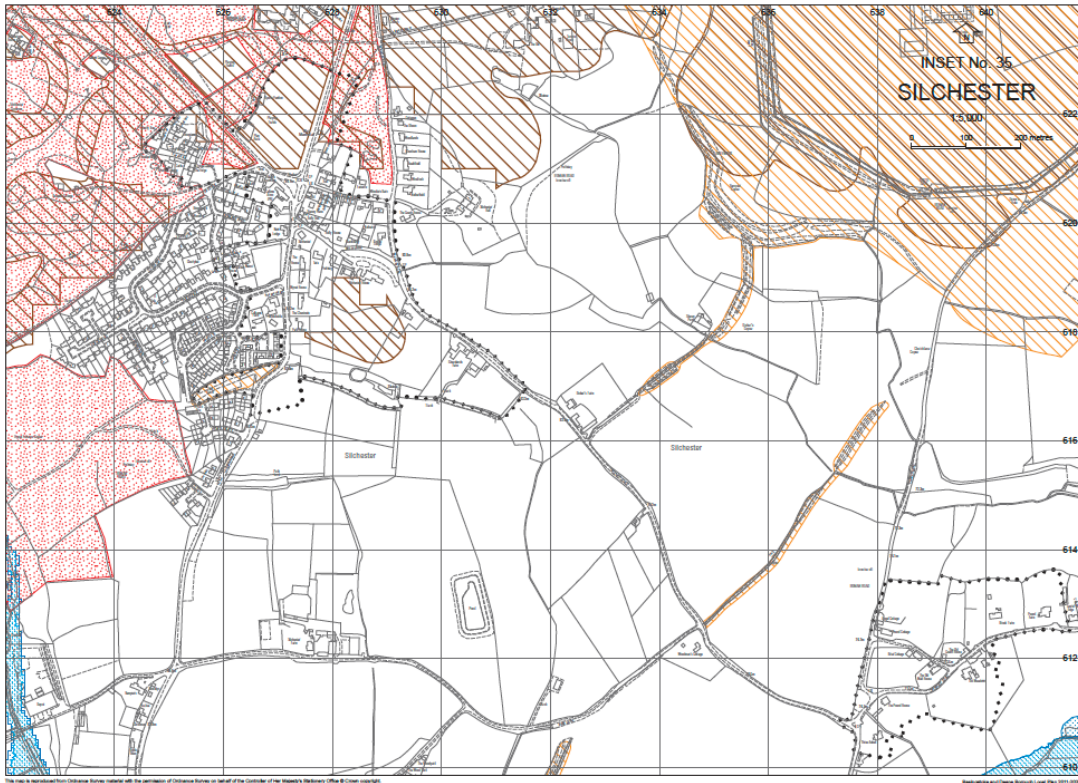
1.6 This report therefore shows how the SNP policies have been informed through their iteration with the SEA framework (Stage B) and is the output (Stage C) which has been the subject of a statutory consultation (Stage D) alongside the Pre-Submission SNP. It has been modified to assess some modest changes made to the final version of the SNP following comments made during that consultation exercise.

Planning Policy Context

1.6 The SNP has to have regard to national policies and guidance. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the latest version of which was published in December 2024, and the accompanying Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) , are an important guide in the preparation of neighbourhood plans.

1.7 Until S102 of the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act 2023 is implemented, the SNP will also need to be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan which currently comprise policies of the adopted Local Plan. It is largely silent in respect of Silchester but it is defined as “other settlement”. The Parish currently has no settlement policy boundary and as such has no defined built-up area (see Plan B).

1.8 Development in the Local Plan is directed principally at urban areas and larger villages, with “other settlements” either delivering new development through infill or where Neighbourhood Plans are in place *“These plans will need to sit within the context of the Local Plan. As outlined in Policy SS5, an additional 150 homes are expected to be delivered through Neighbourhood Planning across the borough, and a number of areas have been designated for neighbourhood planning purposes in parishes outside of those where specific number allocations have been made.”*

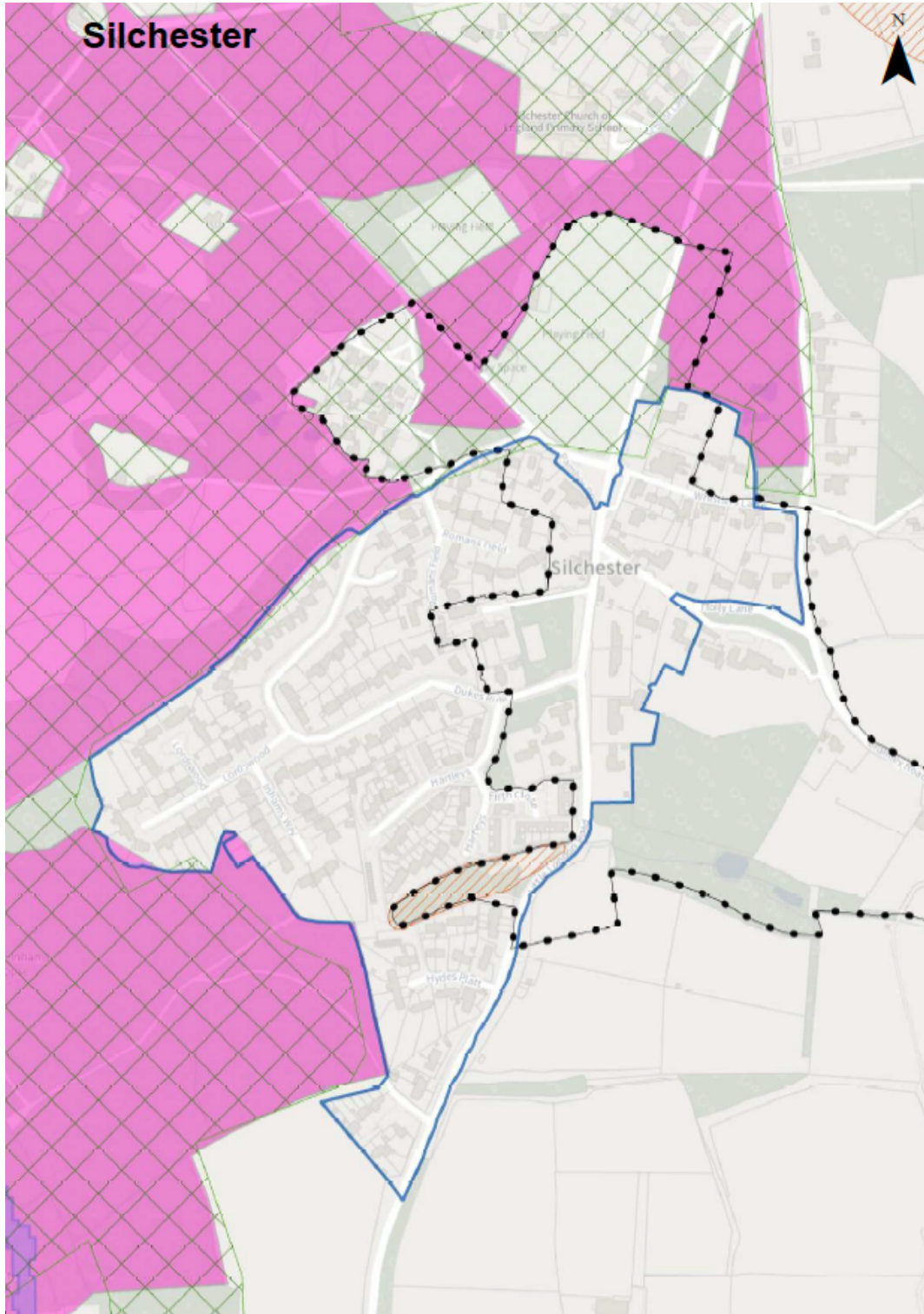


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|---|--|---|
| Plan Area Boundary | Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (7km) buffer zone (Policy EM3) | Strategic Employment Areas (Policy EP1 and EP2) |
| Settlement Policy Boundary (Policy SS1) | Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (Policy EM4) | Town/District/Local Centre Boundaries (Policy EP3) |
| Housing Site Allocations (Policy SS3) | Groundwater Protection Zone 1 (Policy EM6) | Primary Shopping Area (Policy EP3) |
| Remaining Marydown Area in land ownership within which wider masterplanning will take place (Policy SS3.10) | Groundwater Protection Zone 2 (Policy EM6) | Primary Shopping Frontage (Policy EP3) |
| Country Park (Policy SS3.10) | Groundwater Protection Zone 3 (Policy EM6) | Secondary Shopping Frontage (Policy EP3) |
| Basing View (Policy SS8) | Flood Zone 2 (Policy EM7) | Mineral Safeguarding Area |
| Leisure Park (Policy SS9) | Flood Zone 3 (Policy EM7) | Oakley and Deane Neighbourhood Plan (2011-2029) |
| Chineham Railway Station (Policy SS10) | Critical Drainage Areas (Policy EM7) | Housing Site Allocations (Policy 3 and 4) |
| Whitchurch Railway Station Car Park (Policy SS11) | Upstream of Critical Drainage Areas (Policy EM7) | Local Green Spaces (Policy 7) |
| North Wessex Downs: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Policy EM1) | Conservation Area (Policy EM11) | Area of Views and Vistas of St Leonard's Church (Policy 8) |
| Strategic Gaps (Policy EM2) | Scheduled Monument (Policy EM11) | Oakley Settlement Policy Boundary as revised in Oakley and Deane Neighbourhood Plan |
| Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (5km) buffer zone (Policy EM3) | Historic England Registered Parks and Gardens (Policy EM11) | |

Plan B: Adopted Basingstoke & Deane Local Plan (2011 – 2029) Policies Map for Silchester (Inset 35)

1.9 The emerging replacement Local Plan was subject to a Regulation 18 consultation in early 2024. It is understood that the Plan will not now progress in its current form given the uplift to housing numbers and as such a further Call for Sites is currently underway. Therefore, whilst the SNP will be judged against the adopted Plan, the emerging evidence base prepared for the emerging Plan has been taken into consideration.

1.10 The emerging Local Plan proposes to create a settlement boundary at Silchester and has indicated that the village should seek to identify 15 dwellings over the plan period to 2040 (see Plan C). Given the likely increase in housing requirement across the district arising from the revised National Planning Policy Framework and standard method calculations, the Silchester Neighbourhood Plan is taking a pragmatic approach in seeking to allocate a single site which is modestly in excess of this number.

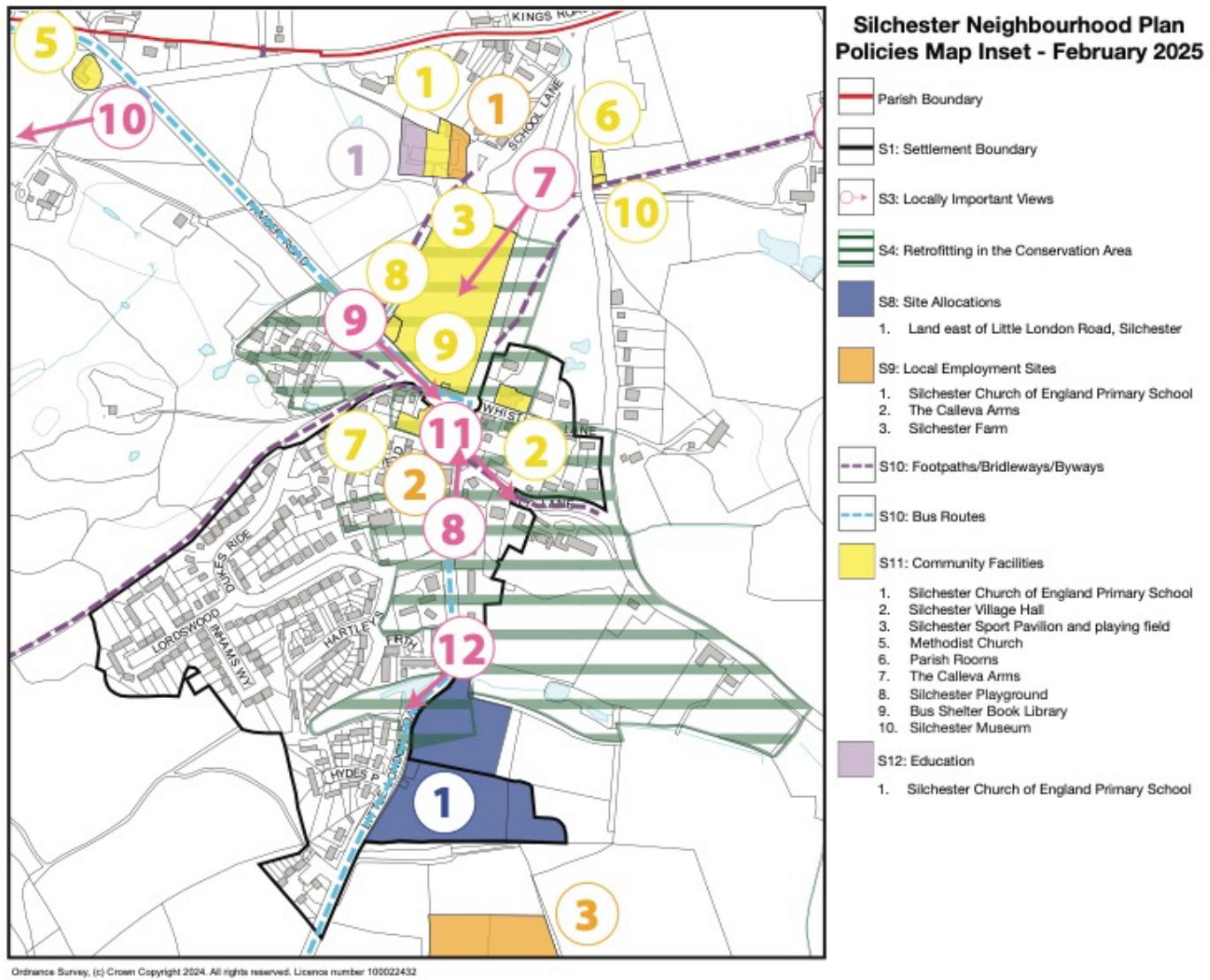


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Plan C: Draft Basingstoke & Deane Local Plan 2040 Policies Map for Silchester

SNP Scope

- 1.11 The SNP Policy SIL1 defines a settlement boundary around the main built up area of the village for the operation of adopted and emerging Local Plan policies relating to proposals lying within built up areas and in the surrounding countryside. Although BDBC has used settlement boundaries as a policy device for many years, it has not yet been applied to Silchester village. However, the emerging Local Plan does propose to apply it to Silchester alongside providing the neighbourhood area with a housing requirement figure and it has drawn the boundary on its initial draft Policies Map (see Plan B below).
- 1.12 The final version of the policy has been modified to improve its clarity in respect of how it translates the provisions for isolated homes in the countryside, and for countryside development principles more generally, of national policy (NPPF §84) and of strategy policy (notably policy SS6). The settlement boundary has also been modified to remove that part of the allocation site of Policy SIL8 that will remain undeveloped.
- 1.13 Its supporting text states, “The policy is intended to distinguish between the built-up area of the main settlement in the Parish and the surrounding countryside in order to manage development proposals accordingly, defining where and how proposals in both the village and the wider countryside locations of the parish will be judged”.
- 1.14 The SNP Policy SIL8 allocates land for housing development adjoining the proposed boundary on the south-eastern edge of the village to meet that requirement figure following an initial site sieving process. It also includes a range of other spatial and development management policies that are common to most neighbourhood plans. It has been modified to add a requirement to make it clearer that a Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment will be required of a planning application.
- 1.15 The supporting text explains that the policy proposes a single housing allocation in Land east of Little London Road for a small-scale housing scheme of approximately 25. The land is in a single ownership and has been made available for development within the plan period. The northern half of the site is partially located within the Conservation Area and close to the scheduled monument of the Flex Ditch. As such this area is sensitive and it is proposed should not be developed for housing but dedicated as public open space.
- 1.16 Both policies are shown on the Policies Map (see Plan D).



Plan D: Silchester Neighbourhood Plan Policies Map Inset

2. ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK & EVIDENCE BASE

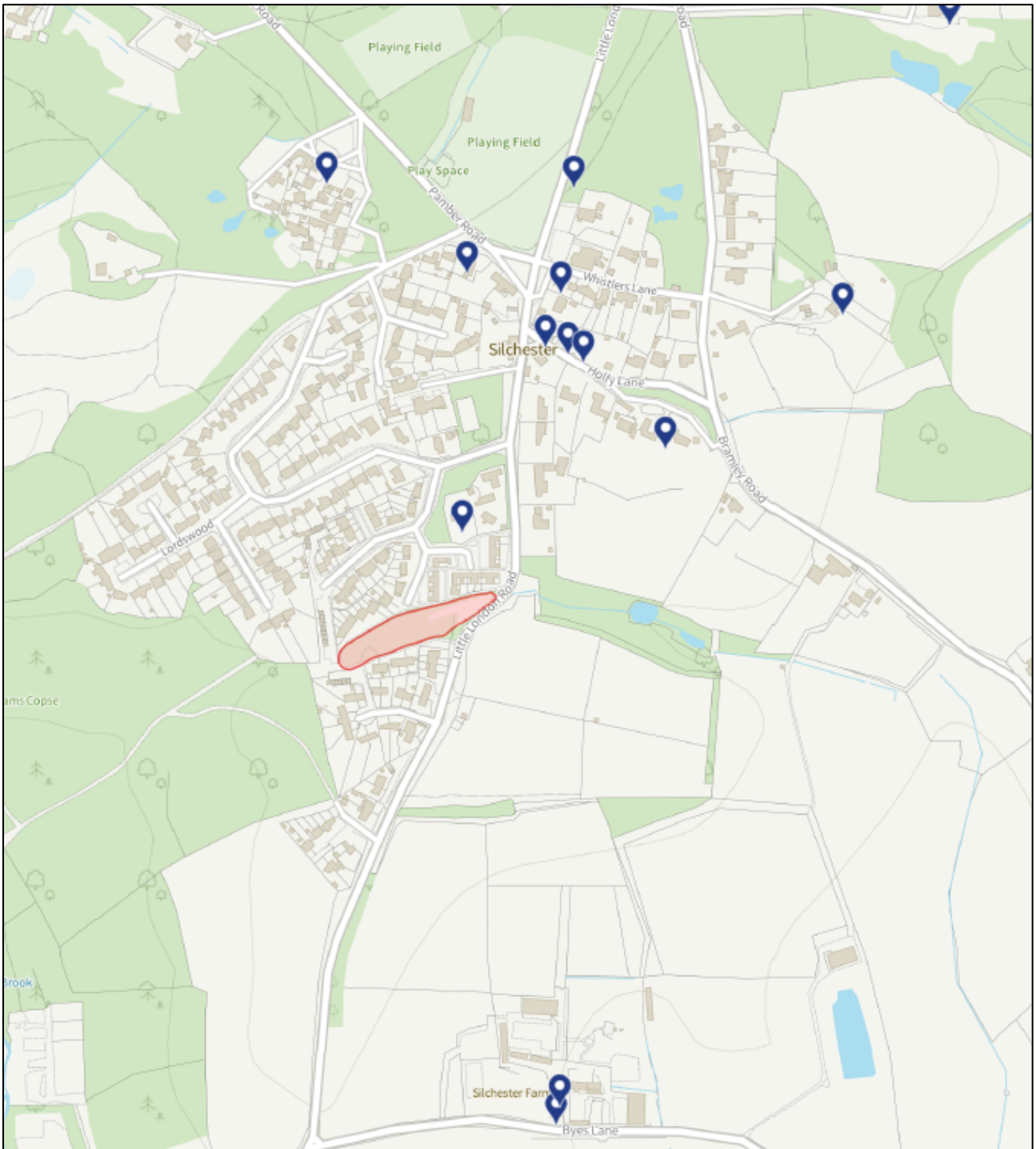
2.1 Developing the scope for the SA/SEA has involved:

- Identifying other relevant policies, plans and programmes, and sustainability objectives ('Context')
- Collecting baseline information ('Baseline')
- Identifying problems or opportunities ('Key Sustainability Issues')
- Considering all of the above information in developing the SA/SEA framework ('Objectives' and 'Design-aided Questions')

2.2 The agreed framework presented in the table below reflects the general sustainability issues of the Parish and the potential for significant effects.

Theme	Key Issues & Trends	Objective	Assessment Measures
Heritage	<p>The designated heritage assets (scheduled monuments, listed building and conservation area) have seen little change to their condition or settings over the last few years as there has been very little new development within or adjoining the village.</p> <p>There is therefore no harmful issue or trend that the SNP needs to address and rectify. However, the combination and clustering of those assets in and around the village (see Plan E) presents a sensitive context within which new development must fit well in terms of location, scale and design.</p>	To conserve and enhance heritage assets	<p>Will the proposal conserve and enhance the significance of the setting of scheduled monuments?</p> <p>Will the proposal conserve and enhance the significance of the setting of listed buildings?</p> <p>Will the proposal conserve and enhance the significance of the Conservation Area and its setting?</p>
Landscape	<p>Whilst there are no currently designated valued landscapes around the edges of the village, the emerging Local Plan does make a proposal covering land around its western edge ('Pamber Forest & Heaths', see Plan F). More generally, there is a valued relationship between the landscape and heritage at Silchester, as the surrounding countryside provides the setting to many of those assets.</p> <p>Again, the quality of the landscape has changed little in recent years as there have been no significant extensions of the village. But some edges of the</p>	To minimise harm to the landscape, both in terms of its intrinsic value and of it providing a valued setting to heritage assets.	<p>Will the proposal be located within the proposed Pamber Forest & Heaths Valued Landscape or its setting?</p> <p>Will the proposal be designed in such a way as to minimise the harm to the landscape?</p>

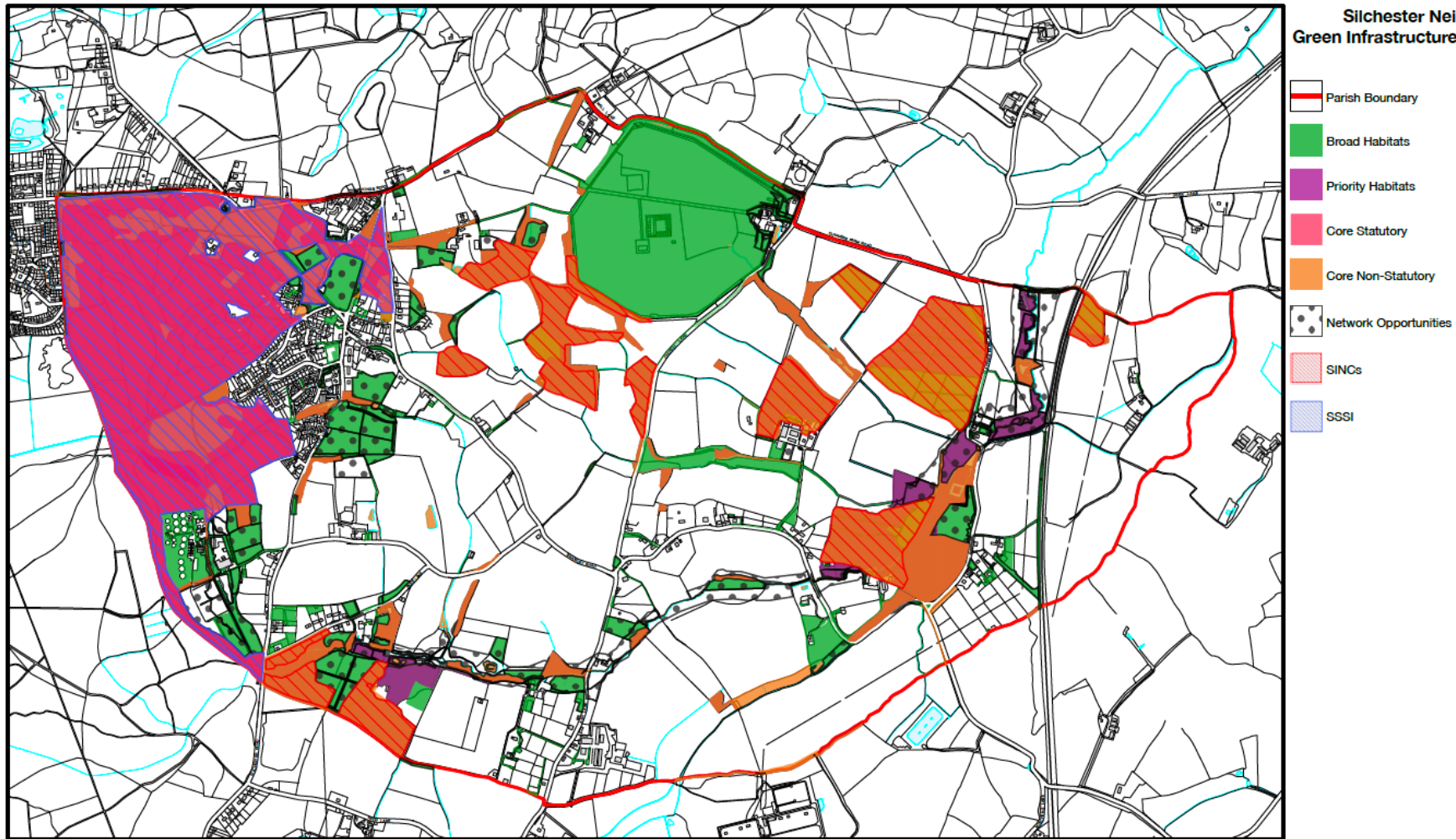
	village will comprise landscape settings to heritage assets that are more sensitive to new development than others.		
Biodiversity	<p>There are a number of biodiversity designations in the Parish and within and around the edges of the village. There are also mapped broad habitats, priority habitats, core non-statutory and network opportunities (see Plan G).</p> <p>The Network Opportunities are a Hampshire device to inform proposals to achieve net gain for biodiversity and to promote the restoration and re-creation of priority habitats including increasing the size of existing wildlife sites; to enhance connections between sites, either through physical corridors or through 'stepping-stones'; and to enable the recovery and enhancement of priority species populations. Aside from new development avoiding harm to designated biodiversity assets, it provides an opportunity to realise one or more of those benefits in its location, layout and on-site green infrastructure provision.</p>	To avoid harm to designated biodiversity assets and to realise biodiversity network opportunities.	<p>Will the proposal avoid harm to a designated biodiversity asset?</p> <p>Will the proposal realise a biodiversity network opportunity?</p>



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Plan E: Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments at Silchester (Source: Historic England)

Silchester Neighbourhood Plan
Green Infrastructure Map - September 2024



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Plan G: Silchester Green Infrastructure Map (Source: BDBC)

3. ASSESSMENT OF POLICIES & REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES

3.1 The conclusions of the assessment of the SNP policies are set out below (note: Green = Positive Effect, Amber = Neutral Effect, Red = Adverse Effect, White = N/A). The assessment addresses only instances where a policy has the potential for a significant positive or adverse effect, or where any mitigation measures included in the policy will likely result in a neutral rather than adverse effect. The iteration of this assessment with the drafting of the Policies SIL1 and SIL8 has allowed that exercise to be mindful of the key environmental issues.

3.2 As part of the iterative process, attention has been paid to the possibility that there may be alternative ways that those two policies may have chosen to address the same policy objective. In the case of Policy SIL1, there is no reasonable alternative as the settlement boundary has been drawn by the local planning authority using the well-established conventions for doing so. There is no other reasonable way to draw a boundary.

3.3 For Policy SIL8 the site assessment process has demonstrated that there are no reasonable alternatives against which to compare the chosen site. All the other available sites submitted for assessment are located in the countryside beyond and not adjoining the settlement boundary, itself a disqualifying, in-principle, criterion.

3.4 The assessment concludes that the two policies will have a combination of neutral and positive heritage, landscape and biodiversity effects. The potential for any significant adverse effects has been avoided or mitigated by the policy requirements.

POLICIES	SEA FRAMEWORK		
	Heritage	Landscape	Biodiversity
	<p>Will the proposal conserve and enhance the significance of the setting of scheduled monuments?</p> <p>Will the proposal conserve and enhance the significance of the setting of listed buildings?</p> <p>Will the proposal conserve and enhance the significance of the Conservation Area and its setting?</p>	<p>Will the proposal be located within the proposed Pamber Forest & Heaths Valued Landscape or its setting?</p> <p>Will the proposal be designed in such a way as to minimise the harm to the landscape?</p>	<p>Will the proposal avoid harm to a designated biodiversity asset?</p> <p>Will the proposal realise a biodiversity network opportunity?</p>
SIL1 Settlement Boundary	<p>Yes, the value in defining a boundary is to contain and direct development to the most suitable land in a planned manner. Provided it operates alongside other development plan policies to manage the use of land and design of proposals that are deemed suitable in principle inside the boundary, the policy has no inherent adverse effect on heritage assets. Conversely, in constraining development outside the boundary the policy will have a positive heritage effect in discouraging speculative proposals beyond the edge of the village that are likely to have harmful heritage effects.</p> <p>Here, the process of using the boundary proposed by the emerging Local Plan to sieve potential housing sites that adjoin it</p>	<p>The defined settlement boundary forms the edge between the built up area of the village and the Pamber Forest & Heaths Valued Landscape to its west and north. The policy requirement that development outside the boundary (i.e. in the Valued Landscape) must be of a type suited to a countryside location will complement that designation. Further policy criteria relating to the Valued Landscape will be contained in other development plan policies.</p> <p>Again, the modification of the boundary at the SIL8 allocation site will play an important role in framing the landscaping setting of the scheme.</p>	<p>The policy performs a spatial function which takes no account of biodiversity value.</p> <p>IT IS THEREFORE CONCLUDED THAT THE POLICY WILL HAVE A NEUTRAL BIODIVERSITY EFFECT.</p>

	<p>(there are no available sites within that boundary) ensures that the plan-led system maintains its currency in managing the effects of development on the various heritage assets.</p> <p>Further, the modification of the boundary at the SIL8 allocation site makes the distinction between the developable and non-developable areas of that site much clearer. The non-developable area will play an important role in conserving the setting of the Conservation Area.</p> <p>IT IS THEREFORE CONCLUDED THAT THE POLICY WILL HAVE A POSITIVE HERITAGE EFFECT.</p>	<p>IT IS THEREFORE CONCLUDED THAT THE POLICY WILL HAVE A POSITIVE LANDSCAPE EFFECT.</p>	
<p>SIL8 Site Allocation</p>	<p>The site partially lies within and adjoins the Silchester Conservation Area and lies within the setting of Flex Ditch, a scheduled monument. It also lies within an area of high archaeological potential.</p> <p>In respect of the Conservation Area, only a small part of the site in its NW corner off Little London Road lies within the boundary, which coincides with the area of high archaeological potential. The remainder of the site lies within its setting in some glimpse views through the dense mature landscape boundary along the road NE views to the woodland belt that forms the southern edge of the older village.</p>	<p>The site does not lie within an existing or proposed Valued Landscape. It is however a set of small fields that forms part of the character of the wider open countryside to the SE of the village. In which case, the principle of developing the land will have an adverse landscape effect, but this will be lessened by preserving the open space between the scheme and the existing built up village edge to the north (per the boundary change described above).</p> <p>Following the draft report, a Landscape & Visual Technical Note has been produced for the evidence base of the policy. It concludes:</p>	<p>The site lies within that part of the proposed green infrastructure network shown as 'broad habitats' with 'network opportunities'. It does not have any formal designated biodiversity status by way of the existing habitat, nor any priority status.</p> <p>A combination of the statutory biodiversity net gain requirements, of Policy SIL13 and of the allocation policy itself (requiring the gain to be delivered on the site, not offset elsewhere) will ensure that the existing biodiversity value of the land must be improved by at least 10% and in a way that enhances local habitat network connectivity. Given the other policy requirements on the location of the developable area and provision of open</p>

	<p>The Conservation Area Appraisal notes, “The main village is essentially residential and intimate in character, with an informal arrangement of buildings around narrow lanes and the common. The lanes link together small pockets of spaces often defined by key buildings ...”</p> <p>The development and design principles of the allocation policy will ensure that its layout and building forms will maintain this informal character and include a small pocket of space between the developable area and the Conservation Area boundary.</p> <p>Its also notes, “Hedges contribute extensively to the south and east of the settlement, especially where they form high barriers along the verges of the roadsides. They bring cohesion to the village linking the informally arranged buildings together, and add interest by providing glimpses of the buildings behind”. The allocation policy therefore makes it a requirement that the tree belt along the Little London boundary is retained and reinforced.</p> <p>Otherwise, the Appraisal contains no specific reference to the site in respect of its contribution to defining the heritage significance of the Area.</p> <p>The scheduled monument description notes that “Flex Ditch forms part of an extensive complex of earthworks lying to the south and west of Calleva which is thought to be associated with the town's</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overall landscape value of the site is considered to be low, as it is largely featureless and commonplace within the character area. • The sites low value combined with its medium susceptibility to accommodate a small amount of change, is considered to be of medium to low sensitivity. • The development proposals will likely only directly affect a quarter of the site but will influence the character of the whole site, therefore, the overall magnitude of change to the sites landscape is considered to be medium to small adverse. • Taking account of value and sensitivity, five of the technical notes seven receptors are considered to be of either negligible or small/negligible adverse magnitude. • Only viewpoint 1's transitional road users exiting Silchester's conservation area on Little London Road and those frequenting Silchester Farm and Shop, viewpoint 4 are considered likely to experience a greater level of effect born of the development proposals at a medium adverse magnitude. 	<p>space and landscape buffers within the gross site area then this gain can practically be delivered on site, as set out in the biodiversity strategy that is required by the policy.</p> <p>IT IS THEREFORE CONCLUDED THAT THE POLICY WILL HAVE A POSITIVE BIODIVERSITY EFFECT.</p>
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Iron Age precursor. The ditch is of such a size that it remains well-preserved despite the loss of the bank at its northern side during the construction of the houses and associated structures which now surround it ... The Roman road between Calleva and Sorviodunum (Old Sarum) passed close to or cut across the south side of the ditch at its north eastern end. This end of the ditch has been more recently disturbed by the construction of the road between Little London and Silchester.”

There is no evidence that the allocated site had any functional relationship with Flex Ditch. Although very close to it, the site is also visually severed from it by the road and mature trees and hedges on both sides of the road. The site therefore makes no positive or adverse contribution to the significance of the heritage asset and there is no in-principle potential for an adverse effect. However it has been recommended that the allocation policy requires the scheme layout creates a wider buffer to the road frontage on this part of the site and that any planning application heritage statement shows how the detailed design meets its statutory heritage obligations.

In respect of the potential archaeological interest of the site, the allocation policy requires an archaeological assessment is carried to inform a planning application. It is noted too that the policy requires the developable area to be located on the southern part of the land, i.e. beyond the

The reports notes that there are ways in which the effect can be mitigated to the extent that it is not significant. The allocation policy requires layout and design proposals to adhere to the design code to conserve and enhance the landscape character and requires the provision of new defensible boundaries between the developable area and the countryside beyond. It also now requires an LVIA to demonstrate how these mitigation measures will succeed.

IT IS THEREFORE CONCLUDED THAT THE POLICY WILL HAVE A NEUTRAL LANDSCAPE EFFECT BY CONTAINING MEASURES THAT WILL AVOID ANY SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECTS.

archaeological area of interest, which it requires is retained as a public open space.

Following the draft report, a Heritage Technical Note has been prepared for the evidence base. It concludes:

- The site contains no historic structures and does not contribute to any of the key elements making up the character and appearance of the conservation area
- there is no direct historical connection between the site and the listed Culham's Farmhouse, the significance of which does not rely in any way on the ability to see parts of it from the site.
- if there is found to be any harm arising to the conservation area from the proposals, this must in my view be considered at the lower end of the spectrum of less than substantial harm
- the retention of open space in the northwestern paddock will continue to allow views towards the upper part of the façade of the listed building and preserve open land beyond the road.

IT IS THEREFORE CONCLUDED THAT THE POLICY WILL HAVE A NEUTRAL HERITAGE EFFECT BY CONTAINING MEASURES THAT WILL AVOID ANY SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECTS.

4. CONSULTATION AND NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 The modifications made to the submission version of SNP have been assessed against this framework and the final version of this report has been modified to show the result of that re-assessment. There make no material differences to the assessment conclusion of effects.
- 4.2 The report will now be submitted alongside SNP and its basic conditions statement to demonstrate for the examination of SNP that its policies contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and will not cause significant adverse environmental effects.