

EXAMINATION NOTE/FACT CHECK

Thank you for the responses to my earlier questions and Examination Notes. Following a review of the policies and the representations, I have a several questions for both the Parish Council and BDBC. The responses will enable me to ensure that I recommend appropriate modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan to ensure it meets the Basic Conditions.

1. Policy SIL1: Settlement Boundary

(1) The Policies and Inset Maps identify the settlement boundary and other policy designations. However, there are symbols and numbers which, in places, obscure the line of the settlement boundary. My understanding from the Neighbourhood Plan is that the intention is to define the settlement boundary as set out on Inset Map 22 by reference to the Silchester (Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan Update. However, the Draft Policies Map Booklet, January 2024) extends the settlement boundary to include the built part of the proposed site allocation at Little London Road.

Is my understanding of this, correct?

(2) For clarification purposes, could the Parish Council provide a plan clearly identifying the settlement boundary, including the site allocation, preferably to a scale used in the Local Plan's Inset Map booklet. In general, I find the policies and inset maps confusing and lack clarity given the extent of the numbering and symbols on the plans.

(3) Part C of Policy SIL1 seeks to support small scale residential development of up to four units and rural exception sites more broadly across the parish unless the proposal represents '*isolated homes in the countryside*'. Criteria (a) to (e) in Part C simply duplicates national provisions set out in paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It would be helpful if the Parish Council could explain why the national criteria '*responds better to the circumstances given the location of Silchester*' and why it is necessary to rehearse the criteria from NPPF?

It would also be helpful to understand how the policy supports the implementation of '*Velocity*' set out in the support text – an explanation of this term and how it applies to Silchester would also be helpful.

2. Policy SIL3: Locally Important Views

(4) The supporting text states that the existing Silchester Village Design Statement from 2007 refers to '*Treasured Views*' which have been used as the starting point for this policy. Members of the community have taken a number of photographs around the areas described, that highlight both the historic past of the parish and its tranquil, rural setting of today. BDBC in its

representations state that the Silchester Conservation Area Appraisal forms part of the evidence base for this policy. I also note the Silchester Design Code provides some guidance on important views.

A representation seeks to include a Treasured View from the ‘*Romans Hotel*’ to the village. Has the Parish Council considered this view and does the Parish Council consider that this proposal meets the necessary criteria to be identified as a locally important view?

3. Policy SIL4: Retrofitting in the Conservation Area

(5) I acknowledge and recognise the key aspirations to secure higher standards of energy efficiency and sustainable construction to move to a lower carbon future. However, the proposed weighting to be given to proposals that affect the Conservation Area is not consistent with advice provided in NPPF.

Could I have the Parish Council’s view on a policy approach that would support solutions that save energy and carbon, and which prioritise interventions that are proportionate, effective, and sustainable whilst preserving or enhancing the character of the Conservation Areas? This reflects an approach advocated by Historic England.

4. Policy SIL5: Energy Efficiency

(6) It is considered entirely appropriate for the Neighbourhood Plan to encourage zero carbon homes and high levels of energy efficiency. However, ministerial statements have made it clear that policies should not require local technical standards requirements relating to the construction or performance of new dwellings.

As BDBC comment, recent Examiners have removed local requirements from Neighbourhood Plans. Part A of the policy requires a Post Occupancy Evaluation Report for all new and refurbished buildings, and I note the details in Appendix D. It would be helpful if the Parish Council could comment on how a decision maker might define ‘*poor energy performance.*’

(7) Part E requires major developments to be accompanied by a Whole Life Cycle Carbon Emissions Assessment. I note this approach is adopted in the London Plan 2021 for developments that are referred to the Mayor e.g. developments over 150 homes.

Could the Parish Council comment on why such approaches are a viable policy approach in Silchester and appropriate in view of the ministerial statements and recent recommendations on Neighbourhood Plans elsewhere.

5. Policy SIL8: Housing Mix and Type

(8) It would be helpful if the Parish Council could comment on why the policy should only apply to proposals of five homes or more? I note this is a different threshold to that set out in the adopted Local Plan which suggests the policy might not apply to developments of less than three dwellings (paragraph 5.29 of the Local Plan).

I note that the final part of the policy requires dwellings to meet either the M4(2) or M4(3) accessible and adaptable standards and some explanatory commentary is provided in paragraph 5.38. Nevertheless, is there any detailed justification for these requirements as required by footnote 51 of NPPF?

6. Policy SIL7 – Affordable Housing

(9) I recognise the intention to secure a greater proportion of affordable housing in the parish to meet local needs. It would be helpful if the Parish Council could clarify why the site threshold of five dwellings or 0.5ha is appropriate to Silchester? As I understand the position from the Borough Council's comments, Silchester is not a '*designated rural area*' and would not normally qualify for the lower threshold set out in NPPF.

(10) It would also be helpful if the Parish Council and BDBC could comment on the extent to which the proposed housing mix should be decided by housing providers. Additionally, could the Parish Council and BDBC comment if the allocation to those with a local connection, as defined in the policy, is consistent with the Council's existing Lettings policy and whether the policy wording is sufficiently clear to decision makers.

7. Policy SIL8 – Site Allocation – Land at Little London Road

(11) I have reviewed the representations and evidence submitted in respect of the proposed site allocation. I have been provided with a copy of the Site Assessment Analysis Report as it was not submitted to BDBC as part of the Neighbourhood Plan file of documents and therefore has not formed part of the Regulation 16 consultation. I have obtained a copy of the Planning Inspector's appeal decision dated 1st September 2021 on part of the site allocation. It would be helpful to have the Parish Council's views on a number of issues.

(12) Both the Site Assessment Analysis and the SEA prepared by ONH consider a smaller site to that now identified on the Policies Maps. The site allocation includes proposals for a large, single plot for a self-build property separated from the main housing development by a wide landscape belt and a driveway. Could the Parish Council confirm when the additional land to the east of the site was added to the site allocation and why the additional site area was not considered as part of the SEA or site assessment analysis? The Parish Council may wish to comment on the impact of this extended parcel of land on their existing analysis.

(13) In dismissing an appeal on part of the site in 2021, the Planning Balance and conclusions of the Inspector on an appeal against the refusal of an application for Permission in Principle (ref 20/1285/PIP) are clear. What consideration has the Parish Council given to the conclusions set out in the Planning Inspectors decision? These seems to have an important bearing on the subject.

(14) The site allocation includes approximately one hectare of land which is to be designed as a new functional '*public open space*' to serve the development and nearby residential estates. I note the Neighbourhood Plan states that the use of the land has not yet been determined. However, it would be helpful if the Parish Council would expand on the community's aspirations for additional '*public open space*' in the village and the type of activities or buildings that it might consider. Is there a recognised demand or need for additional public open space in Silchester? Has such a use come forward as part of the community consultation process?

(15) Could BDBC comment on the extent to which it has enough suitable development permissions to meet the identified demand for self-build and custom house building as required by Self Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015? It would be helpful if the Parish Council could state how the policy achieves efficient use of land as detailed in NPPF paragraph 129 given the extent of the self-build plot requested by the landowner.

(16) Could the Parish Council advise what is meant by '*defensible boundaries between the site and the countryside to create a definitive settlement edge.*'

(17) The policy requires a pedestrian link to the bus stop at Hydes Platt and a safe connection to the footpath on the western side of Little London Road. Has any discussion with the Local Highways Authority taken place on these issues or the standards required to provide safe access from the site to the west side of Little London Road?

8. Policy SIL9: Local Employment

(18) The policy is broadly compatible with national policy which supports the expansion of economy in rural areas ensuring that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits opportunities to make the location more sustainable.

However, there would appear to be a degree of inconsistency in how the boundaries of the employment sites have been defined.

- The site area of Silchester Farm (site 3) includes a substantial area of land to the north of the main venue which appears to be in more agricultural / informal use.

- The defined area to the northeast of site 5- Park Business Centre appears to include land outside the employment area.
- In contrast Culham Mill includes only the building and not the curtilage of the site which is clearly part of the employment use.
- The school is clearly defined on site. However, the inset map is rather confusing creating a site divided into three sections. The intention is clear but the mapping leads to a degree of ambiguity when interpreting which policy applies to which section.
- In addition, it is not clear on the inset map what is the extent of the Arms.

(19) Can the Parish Council explain the rationale for the different approaches and provide a plan which clearly shows the extent of the policy areas for each of the five sites identified in SIL9?

9. Policy SIL12: Education

(20) I note the Borough Council's view on this matter. Does the Parish Council have a view on what additional benefit this policy has when the school is also detailed in Policies SIL11 and SIL9?

10. Policy SIL13: Green Infrastructure

(21) Paragraph 5.64 of the Neighbourhood Plan usefully explains the purpose of the policy and sets out some of the key features of the Network. The Neighbourhood Plan then refers to the data on the map having been sourced from Natural England and Hampshire's Biodiversity Information Centre. Given the complexity of the policy and the lack of explanatory information in the supporting text, I find that there are a large number of issues which need further clarification from the Parish Council.

- Can the Parish Council provide information on the source of categories used on the Infrastructure Map and their contribution to the '*Network*'
- Part A – Can the Parish Council explain what it means by '*these features under current legislation*'?
- How has the Parish Council determined the appropriate '*network opportunities*' detailed on the map? What consideration have you given to the needs of distinct species, habitats and environments, biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping stones (NPPF 192b)?
- What consideration has been given to the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Hampshire Ecological Network Mapping?
- The Borough Council highlights the different functions of open spaces for recreation and network of habitats. What consideration has been given to these different functions in identifying network opportunities (also relates to Part B)?
- Part B – Does the Parish Council intend '*green infrastructure assets*' to mean '*the Network*' referred to in the opening paragraph?

- Part C – Does the Parish Council intend to keep all trees and hedgerows irrespective of the quality, safety, or appropriateness to the locality?
- What is meant by ‘*species adaptation to climate change*’?
- What considerations have been given to the hierarchy of international, national, and locally designated sites and the principles contained in paragraph 193 and 194 of NPPF. For example, loss of irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodlands and ancient or veteran trees should be refused.
- Does the Parish Council have a view on the proposed changes by the Borough Council?

11. Conclusions

(22) I appreciate that a number of points have been raised, but I would be grateful for responses in the near future. I note that there are areas that undoubtedly require further information and analysis. However, it would be helpful in programming the Examination timetable if the Parish Council and Borough Council could give an indication of the likely time needed to respond to these questions.

EDWARD COUSINS

Radcliffe Chambers

11 New Square

London WC2A 3QB

5th September 2025