This report is authored by [redacted] **RG40 2DB**

What is a Community Governance Review?

WBC is asking for feedback on a Community Governance Review (CGR) to ensure the arrangements for our towns and parishes are as effective and appropriate as possible.

This is a legal process where we consult residents and other interested parties on the most suitable ways of representing the people in our towns and parishes.

A CGR is required to take into account:

- The impact of community governance arrangements on community cohesion; and
- The size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish

WBC is required to ensure that community governance will:

- Be reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that area; and
- Be effective and convenient

In this report I am focusing on why including the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location (SDL) should be situated in Wokingham Town parish boundaries from the perspective of the identities and interests of the community in that area; accordingly, the parish boundary should be redrawn (in accordance with the Wokingham Town Council submission).

Recommendation

The South Wokingham SDL should be part of Wokingham Town Parish.

Executive Summary

1. Wokingham Borough Council consistently messages that the new South Wokingham SDL **is** part of the Town (see later evidence, **Appendix 1**).

There has been a consistent message that the South Wokingham SDL is an extension of the town and will contribute to the vitality of the town centre. Documentation also constantly includes the physical separation of the new development and Pinewood/Crowthorne. Finally, and most tellingly, it is noted in the South Wokingham SDL Supplementary Planning Document that "*Good physical connections to Wokingham Town to ensure* ***community integration*** *and access to new and existing facilities.*"

This messaging appears in the following planning and strategy documents:

- The Core Strategy
- The response of the Inspector to the Core Strategy
- The South Wokingham SDL Supplementary Planning Document
- The Wokingham Strategic Sites Report
- Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023 - 2040 Proposed Submission Plan Appendix B
- The Wokingham Town Centre Strategy (2025-2035)

With such a weight of evidence, why would this area not be part of the parish of Wokingham Town? WBC has already identified that the identities and interests of the community in that area is with Wokingham Town. To allocate the area to Wokingham Without is contradictory at best, and perverse at worst.

2. Developers are already marketing the area as being advantaged by its location close to Wokingham Town centre (see **Appendix 2**)

   This is a practical and pragmatic argument. Unless the draft recommendation changes residents will be very confused, should they buy these properties that, in fact, they are considered to be part of Wokingham Without. Their community identity is being forged from the time they purchase their new home.

3. The new residents will look to the Town for community facilities (see **Appendix 3**)

   This argument is about identity and community building. In the absence of existing facilities in the area which will be added at a much later date than occupation of first houses, residents will look to Wokingham Town, and naturally forge an identity there. This will be especially so for children, teenagers and young adults.

   One only has to look at the timeline for Arborfield Green - which started in 2015 but only in 2025 had a Sainsburys open in its district centre – to see why residents would look to their nearest town.

4. Community governance is more convenient if located in Wokingham Town (see **Appendix 4**)

   The polling stations in Wescott are accessible on foot or by cycle, as well as by car, on roads that are lit and have a pavement. The polling station in Wokingham Without is not easily accessible and there is no credible plan for an additional site.

5. The notion that a decision needs to be made about which parish the residents belong to must wait until houses are occupied is based on a false premise.

   A decision being made to keep the area in Wokingham Without is just as much a decision on new residents' behalf, as moving the parish boundary so that they come within Wokingham Town parish. To argue otherwise is not logical.

Appendix 1: Wokingham Borough Council consistently messages that the new South Wokingham SDL is part of the Town

Considered in this Appendix is evidence from:

- The Core Strategy
- The response of the Inspector to the Core Strategy
- The South Wokingham SDL Supplementary Planning Document
- The Wokingham Strategic Sites Report
- Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023 - 2040 Proposed Submission Plan Appendix B
- The Wokingham Town Centre Strategy (2025-2035)

The Core Strategy (extant until 2026)

https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Final%20adopted%20Core%20Strategy%20inc.%20cover.pdf

The Core Strategy is described by WBC as a high-level document setting out the strategy for managing development until 2026. This includes policies and strategies to provide new housing, schools, roads, places to work and other services. It was adopted by the council on 29 January 2010.

Below where emphasis is shown it has been added.

2.84 *The Council recognises that development around Wokingham could help reduce traffic flows through the town and* ***would support the vitality and viability of the centre through increasing its population. However, proposals would need to ensure that they maintain the separation of the town from nearby settlements.***

3.29 ...**the catchment for the Town Centre will include the SDLs to both the north and south of the town.**

Both the above paragraphs indicate that the new area is oriented toward the town, and there will be separation from nearby settlements. The nearby settlements are defined in CP21 (Wokingham).

CP21 – South Wokingham Strategic Development Location

4) Measures to **maintain separation from** Binfield/Bracknell, **Crowthorne/Pinewood** (Crowthorne) and Finchampstead North;

9) Measures to improve **access by non-car modes to Wokingham town centre** (including the station interchange).

This effectively acknowledges that there is no join up with the majority of housing within Wokingham Without, and deliberately so. The orientation is toward the town centre.

Should the housing allocation be left in WW parish, it will look very peculiar, with two distinct settlements, and a large gap in between. Why should residents feel any affinity with the rest of the WW settlement when, by design, there will be a planned gap. Allocating the housing to Wokingham will look, and be, more joined up.

CP21, 4.92 *Development around Wokingham* ***will help support the rejuvenation of the town*** *through increasing its catchment population and could remove traffic from the centre leading to an improved environment.* ***It is therefore important that development south-east of the town***

is accessed from a distributor road through the SDL to connect into the A329 east of the town and the A321 to the south....*Furthermore,* ***it is necessary to improve links by non-car transport modes to the town centre*** *(including the station interchange) to both* ***support the vitality and viability of the centre and reduce overall private car trips***.

CP21, 4.93 ***Development further south and east of this location would encroach into the gaps separating Wokingham from Binfield/Bracknell, Finchampstead North and Pinewood (Crowthorne)*** *contrary to the Core Strategy's Spatial Issues (paragraph 2.68) and Spatial Vision (paragraphs 3.1 and 3.5).* ***The former and latter gaps also accord with the adopted Bracknell Forest Core Strategy (policies CS4 and CS9 together with paragraph 123).*** *The study of Gaps and Green Wedges found that it is essential to maintain them and this reflects the Community Strategy and Audit Report.*

All of the above points to this area being part of the town, being orientated to it, and being separate from Crowthorne/Pinewood. These parts of planning strategy offer strong evidence that Wokingham Borough Council, through its own plans, regards this area, as South Wokingham and not, for example, north Pinewood or north Crowthorne, within Wokingham Without.

The response of the Inspector to the Core Strategy

https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/CD03.03.04%20Wokingham%20Core%20Strategy%20Report.pdf

At 5.49 the Inspector notes in relation to the South Wokingham SDL:

"*Most of the comments about the sustainability of North Wokingham SDL also apply to this SDL on the opposite side of the town. The new dwellings would be located reasonably close to a range of services and employment opportunities* ***in the town centre****. The western part of the area is close to* ***other employment at Molly Millars Lane and the Tesco store adjoins its boundary****. The site scored well in the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) for all potential SDL locations."* [emphasis added].

At 5.49 the Inspector notes: "*The proposals include a new Southern Distributor Road (SDR), which would be used for a new subsidised bus route with services every 15 minutes. Pedestrian and cycle routes would be provided along the SDR and improvements to existing routes made elsewhere."*

At 5.52 the Inspector notes: *"Given its* ***relatively close proximity to Wokingham Station in railway terms****, even if placed at the eastern end of the site..."*

The approval of the Inspector to the Core Strategy rests on representations made by WBC in respect of sustainability, employment prospects and transport links. It would seem unreasonable to decide now that, in fact, the Core Strategy is disapplied.

The South Wokingham SDL Supplementary Planning Document

https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-07/ED.7.3%20South%20Wokingham%20Strategic%20Development%20Location%20Supplementary%20Planning%20Document.pdf

Where shown, emphasis has been added.

Preamble: *South Wokingham is a major opportunity to deliver an infrastructure rich and high-quality* ***urban extension to Wokingham town****.*

2.1.1 ***The South Wokingham SDL is intended as an urban extension to the South of Wokingham****, on land at Buckhurst Farm (south of London Road A329 and north of the London to Wokingham railway line) and land extending between the Borough boundary with Bracknell Forest in the east and Finchampstead Road (A329) in the West.*

The message is once again clear, that the South Wokingham SDL is an urban extension [to the town]. This is strengthened in other parts of the document.

3.1.1 *The South Wokingham SDL offers a unique opportunity to create one of the highest quality living environments in the Borough.* ***Close to town centre amenities and transport links****, with the open countryside on its doorstep and the potential excellent public transport connections in the future,* ***it already has many of the credentials for a sustainable and attractive urban extension****.*

3.1.9 *Local needs of its residents should be catered for through provision of a mix of services which are easily and safely accessible on foot, bicycle or by public transport. Higher order needs and employment opportunities can be met through* ***ensuring safe and attractive accessibility to Wokingham town centre and the railway station…****The Local Planning Authority will need to be reassured that incentives and innovations are in place to encourage residents to adopt sustainable travel patterns from the scheme's inception.*

3.2.1 "*Good physical connections to Wokingham Town to ensure* ***community integration*** *and access to new and existing facilities."*

I don't think there is a clearer message that this community is an urban extension to the town and that community integration is to be with Wokingham Town.

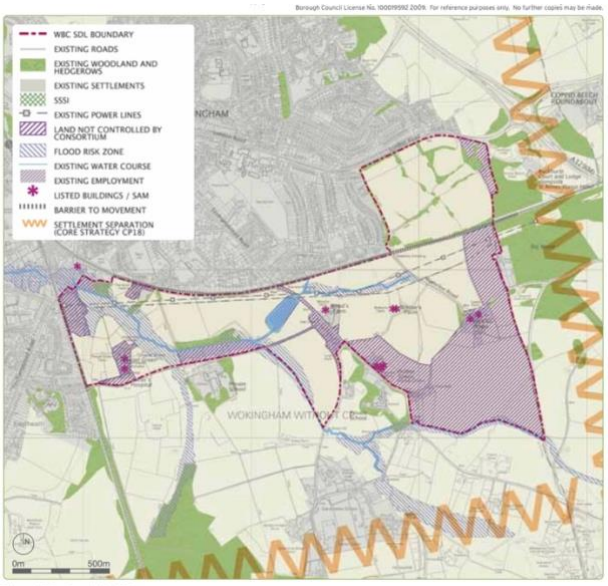
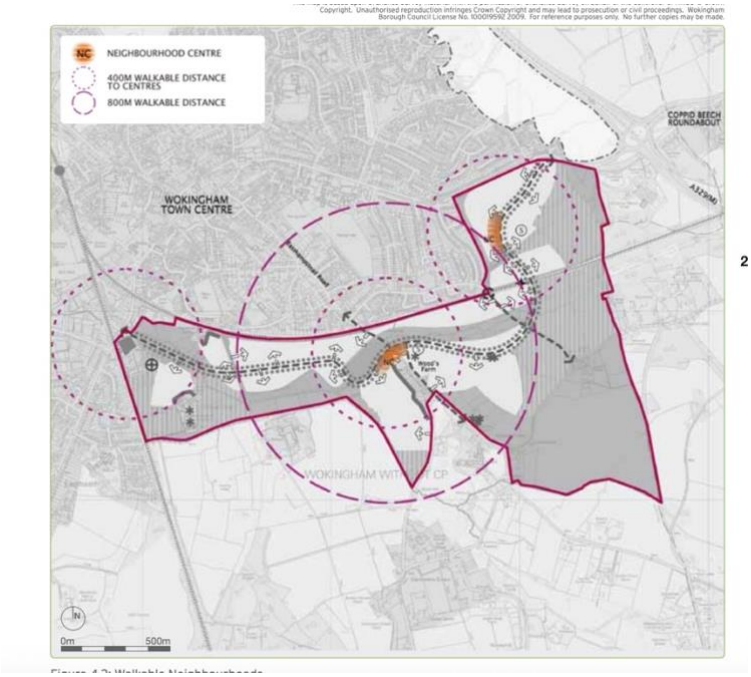


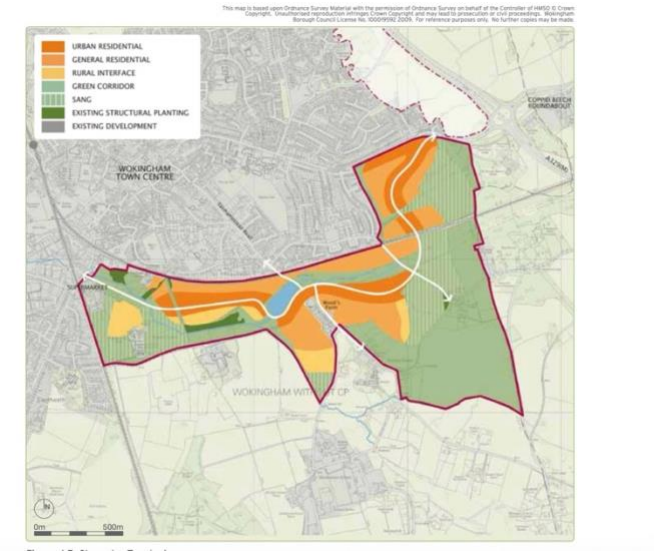
Figure 2.2: Constraints Plan

Page 10 shows the settlement separations (marked by yellow zig zag lines). There is a separation between the SDL and the rest of Wokingham Without. The community being created is clearly intended to be part of Wokingham.



Page 35 shows the walkable neighbourhoods; note the walkability of Wokingham Town centre and the absence of any walkable infrastructure in the south of Wokingham Without: For example. Pinewood, Polling stations and Crowthorne retail areas.

This area is once again focused on community building with Wokingham, not Wokingham Without, which is some distance, and certainly not walkable or reached by cycle due to fast, unlit roads with no pavements.



Page 43 gives the clearest possible view of how the development is adjacent, and continuous with, the rest of Wokingham Town.

If you were living in the east, surely you would think that you were, in effect, joined with Montague Park? Well, that is part of the SDL, and is shown in this picture, just north of the railway line, with a bridge over it. In the west, well this part of the SDL is also in Wescott, a Town ward.

5.2.1 *The SDL will be a sustainable development which provides for local needs and contains a mix of jobs and homes to reduce travel. The overall development concept for South Wokingham should create accessible neighbourhoods in which* ***all homes are within approximately 5-10 minutes walking distance of each Neighbourhood Centre and the existing supermarket at Finchampstead Road and Rances Lane.***

Both the supermarket on Finchampstead Road (Tesco) and Rances Lane shops are in Wescott, a Wokingham Town ward.

The through road, shown white, passes through Montague Park (Wescott) and exits onto Finchampstead Road, near Tesco (also Wescott). It is called William Heelas Way along its length.

Wokingham Strategic Sites Report

https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-07/Wokingham%20Strategic%20Sites%20Report%20November%202021%20%281%29.pdf

This is part of the evidence base for the latest LPU submission.

The earlier Core Strategy polices are cited as providing context for the South Wokingham SDL, including CP21, see above.

5.1: "*Potential development land at South Wokingham is partly within the south of the allocated South Wokingham Strategic Development Location (SDL). It provides an opportunity for further planned* ***urban expansion close to the existing built area****."*

This document also notes on page 64: *"The most notable opportunity for improved transport and connectivity is the proximity of the Wokingham Southern Distributor Road (SDR), which offers immediate access to public transport and walking and cycling routes* ***for onward travel to Wokingham centre, Wokingham station****."*

And, page 71: "*The site is comparatively close to the centre of Wokingham and Wokingham station; therefore, development in this location (including within the SDL)* ***offers opportunities to improve active travel modes, and particularly cycling, into the town centre."***

The vision states on page 74 that: "*Additional land at South Wokingham will enhance the opportunity provided by the SDL for* ***a strategic expansion to the town****, capable of offering choice and variety within the wider town."*

The community to which this development is oriented is Wokingham.

Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023 - 2040 Proposed Submission Plan Appendix B

https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2024-09/Local%20Plan%20Update%20Proposed%20Submission%20Plan%20Appendices%20A-J.pdf

B3.9 The South Wokingham SDL amounts to what will essentially be an urban extension to Wokingham.

B3.8. Further development around Wokingham would help to continue to support the rejuvenation of the town centre through increasing its catchment population and providing supporting infrastructure to facilitate the diversion and redistribution of traffic from the town centre leading to an improved environment.

In essence, the Borough Council envisages the South Wokingham SDL as a part of the town, contributing to a thriving town centre.

3.8(i) To provide continuous vehicle access through the site via the SWDR, providing a link to the Tesco supermarket on the A321 Finchampstead Road and the A329 London Road/Coppid Beech roundabout.

The new road will

3.8(i) (iii) Be a key public street ***within*** *Wokingham, with a civic quality.*

Both these end points are in Wescott, in the parish of Wokingham Town, and the road is considered part of Wokingham (not Wokingham Without).

Wokingham Town Centre Strategy

https://wokingham.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s75905/Wokingham+Town+Centre+Strategy+0612.pdf

The recently issued Wokingham Town Centre Strategy (2025-2035) prepared by WBC also reiterates some of these ideas as well as singing the praises of the Town Centre (page 4). These advantages are all reasons why new residents will orientate to Wokingham Town.

Wokingham Town Council run an annual grant award programme to support local community and charity groups to continue to thrive.

Wokingham has a bowling alley, swimming pool, laser tag venue, soft play centre, cinema and outdoor spaces including playgrounds.

The history of Wokingham is showcased through its virtual museum and range of walking history tours available to download. Heritage Open Day, Museum open days, and ongoing work with local history groups.

There is a wide variety of arts, culture and history groups that run events such as the arts trail, history walks and talks.

Recognising and celebrating residents who go above and beyond for their community is a tradition in Wokingham with both WBC, WTC and the local paper running award programmes.

Wokingham Town Council and charities such as the Lions run a good range of events, often free and family focused. They are well attended and over 50% of residents we surveyed said they were satisfied and 20% very satisfied with the quality. The town also benefits from a programme of successful markets across the week, feedback from residents indicated that markets are something that people want to see continue to thrive and would welcome a wider diversity of stall holders.

Crucially, the document notes:

"In addition to the town centre regeneration already undertaken, ***Wokingham has two planned urban extensions, one situated in north Wokingham and a second in south Wokingham.*** *The north Wokingham development has delivered just under 2100 new homes and the South Wokingham development to date has delivered 700 of the planned 2500 new homes.* ***This increase in population represents a significant opportunity for our businesses, and it's important that we ensure our town centres can meet the demands of this growing population."***

As you can see, the Borough Council recognises, again, that the South Wokingham SDL is part of Wokingham Town and will contribute to its success.

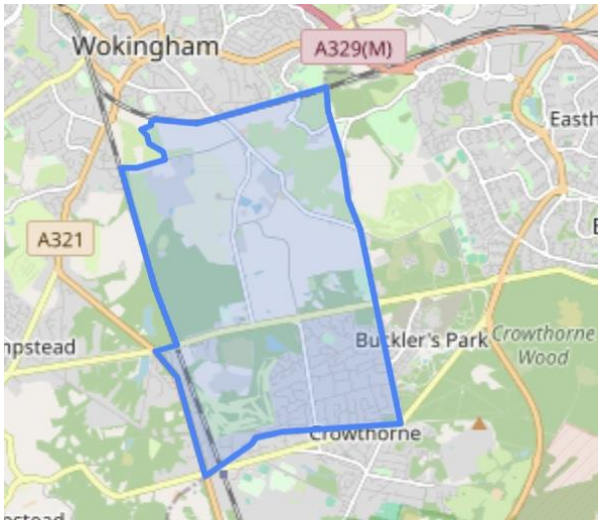
Appendix 2 The area is being marketed with all the attractions of a Town location

Holme Meadows, one of the current areas being marketed says:

This brand-new community is perfectly situated close to Wokingham town centre with its array of shops, eateries and leisure facilities as well as benefiting from excellent transport links, including Wokingham train station and access to the M4 and A329. This exciting development has also a new primary school, green open spaces and a local centre included within the plans.

People moving there will obviously think they are moving to Wokingham. They are going to be somewhat surprised, in my opinion, that they are, in fact, considered to be part of 'Wokingham Without'. The reference to the school is a little economical with the truth: this school will only be built if there is demand; those of us who attended the presentation by Connor Corrigan from WBC, can attest to that being said. Plus, the facilities such as schools and the local centre are often the last to be built.

Appendix 3: The new residents will look to the Town for community facilities



The area of the South Wokingham SDL, currently in the north of Wokingham Without, is immediately adjacent the town, and some distance from the main centre of Wokingham Without, which is around Nine Mile Ride (see grey area on the map).

The access to Crowthorne, the nearest retail centre, from the SDL, is along an unlit, fast road, with no pavements. This is not a sustainable travel option.

Conversely, it will be walkable or cyclable to Wokingham Town Centre via Montague Park to the east, the Gipsy Lane railway crossing, Star Lane Crossing in the centre and Finchampstead Road to the west along safe, lit roads. There is also easy car access.

St Sebastian's Primary School is popular but it is small, oversubscribed, and only accessible along a road that is unsuitable for walking and cycling. Families without access to a car will not find this easy to get to as there is currently no public transport. This is not a sustainable option. From the east, the nearest primary is Floreat Montague, from the centre it will be Wescott/Westende, and from the west, Evendons Primary. Families will be drawn to Wokingham and develop a sense of community with Wokingham Town. A primary school is included in the plans but this will be opened only if there is less than 5% spare capacity elsewhere in the Borough.

There is no secondary school in Wokingham Without and none is planned for the South Wokingham SDL. Teenagers, who like a bit of freedom, will be drawn to St Crispin's, which is walkable or easily reached by cycle along lit, safe roads. Bohunt may also be attractive provided there is public transport, and capacity. Teenagers will tend, in my opinion, to think they are part of Wokingham Town due to attending school there. This will be helped by the attractions such as the Super Bowl, the swimming pools, and numerous cafes. They will find it

nigh on impossible to get to Pinewood, the major leisure centre in Wokingham Without, under their own steam due to unsafe roads.

There is no credible current plan for a GP in the new development. New residents will therefore be drawn into Wokingham for medical services es.

For all the above reasons, residents in the new development will feel an affinity with Wokingham Town, and this will mean they look to it for events and facilities, some of which are provided by the Town Council.

For the need to be reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that area, the South Wokingham SDL should be in the parish of Wokingham Town.

Appendix 4: Community governance is more convenient if located in Wokingham Town parish

WBC is required to ensure that community governance will be effective and convenient. The polling station in Wokingham Without is not convenient, and neither is access to the parish council offices.

The Wokingham Without polling station is at St Sebastian's Memorial Hall, Nine Mile Ride, Wokingham. There is no credible plan for another polling station. The parish offices are at Pinewood Centre, Old Wokingham Road. These are toward the south of Wokingham Without parish, some distance from the South Wokingham SDL, and not walkable or cyclable due to fast, unlit roads without pavements. They are reachable by car, but not everyone has access to a car. This is neither effective nor convenient.

The Wescott ward of Wokingham Town (which is, at least initially, the likely ward in which the new houses would be situated) has polling stations at The Salvation Army Hall, Sturges Road and St Crispins Leisure Centre. The parish office of the Town Council is at The Town Hall, Market Place, Wokingham. The polling stations can be reached by walking and cycling (along safe roads that are lit) from the new development via Montague Park to the east (for St Crispins), the Gipsy Lane railway crossing, Star Lane Crossing in the centre and Finchampstead Road to the west for the Salvation Army Hall, as well as by car. Both polling stations are reachable by walking or cycling from the town centre. Bus routes are planned along the SDR (William Heelas Way) to the town centre. For the residents of South Wokingham SDL, these locations are effective and convenient.