CGR response:

Wokingham Borough Council has made the recommendation to keep the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location (SDL) of the Borough within Wokingham Without. This decision by the Borough's CGR Working Group does not take into account the strategic direction of other parts of the Borough Council, and its view of the area under consideration being a southern extension of Wokingham Town.

I am writing to ask that the Borough Council CGR Working Group reconsider this decision, and recommend that the SDL become part of Wokingham Town Council's boundary.

This boundary change would better reflect:

- the **identities and interests** of the new community being created in the SDL;
- the **effective and convenient** delivery of local governance and services; and
- the **strategic policy intent** of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC), which consistently describes the SDL as an *urban extension of Wokingham Town*.

The "**Guidance on Community Governance Reviews**" (DCLG, 2010; updated by LGBCE 2023) requires that principal councils ensure governance arrangements:

1. **Reflect the identities and interests of the community;**
2. **Provide effective and convenient local governance;** and
3. **Support community cohesion, clear boundaries, and efficient representation.**

The guidance also recognises that **major housing developments and changes in settlement pattern** are legitimate reasons to review and adjust parish or town boundaries.

This submission demonstrates that these statutory criteria are satisfied by transferring the SDL area into Wokingham Town Council.

The identity and interests of the community

The SDL has been described by Wokingham Borough Council as an urban extension of Wokingham Town

Wokingham Borough Council's own planning documents describe the South Wokingham SDL as *"an urban extension of Wokingham town"* (WBC, *South Wokingham Major Development webpage*, 2024).

The *Local Plan Update – Right Homes, Right Places* further states:

"The South Wokingham SDL amounts to what will essentially be an urban extension to Wokingham." (Appendix A-J, 2024)

The adopted **Core Strategy (2010)** and subsequent planning documents confirm that the SDLs around Wokingham were designed to:

- increase the **catchment population** of the town centre;

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- provide supporting **infrastructure and amenities**; and
- form an integral part of the **urban area** of Wokingham.

The Borough Council has imposed upon new residents of the SDL a rural, parish identity, by keeping the area in Wokingham Without. At best, this will be confusing for residents. At worst, it will lead to them being disenfranchised by a Parish area that is unable to represent them due to lack of proximity, lack of electoral representation and lack of access to services and amenities that people living in the SDL area will want and expect to have.

Functional and social integration

Residents of the SDL will naturally identify with Wokingham Town because:

- All principal transport routes (including the South Wokingham Distributor Road, and active travel routes) connect directly into the town. They do NOT support access to Wokingham Without's facilities.
- SDL neighbourhood centres, schools, and green spaces are designed as local extensions of existing Wokingham Town facilities.
- Retail, leisure, employment, and community activity will focus on the town centre.

For these reasons, the SDL community will form part of the same social and economic catchment as Wokingham Town residents. Placing the area within Wokingham Town Council ensures that governance arrangements reflect this **shared community identity**.

The Wokingham Area All-Age Autism Strategy 2024 -2029 states as one of its aims that:

"To create a society where everybody, including autistic people, can thrive, we need all of the right building blocks in place: access to secure housing, good jobs with fair pay, quality education and much more. These building blocks underpin this strategy and our action plan will include links to related strategies and action plans aimed at particular 'blocks', guided by the Marmot principles."

One of Wokingham Town Council's values is "Involving Everyone" and all of the events put on by the Arts & Culture Committee take into account the needs of a neuro-diverse population. For example, our Children's Fun Day is attended by a local community group for neuro-diverse children and those with additional needs. The area where they are located is intentionally a quieter space, to provide young residents with an opportunity to minimise sensory overload, and be able to cope with the day and enjoy it.

Party in the Park includes provision for a British Sign Language interpreter on screen, and a separate viewing section for residents with additional needs, to facilitate wider participation in the event. Our Tabletop Takeover events also have quieter games areas for people who might struggle with too much background noise. These are only 3 of our events, but we ensure and embed inclusivity in all our events, and moving the SDL boundary into Wokingham Town's boundary will ensure that new residents will be represented by a Town Council that understands their needs and welcomes them.

Furthermore, we have elected Town Councillors who either have family members with a diagnosis of Autism or other neurodivergent conditions, or have a diagnosis themselves. What

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better way to embed the first Principle of your Autism Strategy "We will be guided by autistic people and their families" than by having people who are neurodiverse or who have neurodiverse family members as elected members? As a Town Council, we are therefore in a strong position to provide effective, convenient, and **representative** local governance for future South Wokingham residents.

One of your stated ambitions in the Autism Strategy is to "Work in partnership with local facilities, services, community groups and businesses to embed consistently neuro-inclusive practices and to develop opportunities, including volunteering and paid employment." We have a long history of working well with the Borough, and are currently are working with the Borough Council on your Town Centre Strategy. We work with the Borough on the Children's Book Festival, and we already have a track record of being an example of how to embed neuro-inclusive practices in our events, and volunteer opportunities, such as Wokingham in Bloom. We also have several businesses in the town and its wider boundaries. Kimel Café is a flagship business that supports people on the Autistic Spectrum to be supported to enter and remain in work.

Wokingham Without Parish's nearest facilities (Pinewood) are almost 2km away from the new SDL boundary. As one WW Parish Councillor recently declared in a Borough Parish Liaison Forum meeting, being a pedestrian on Nine Mile Ride would be "suicide". How will new residents of the SDL access Wokingham Without if they don't have a car? This undermines not only the Borough's traffic plans, but also undermines the Borough commitments to reduce the barriers Autistic people face in their day to day lives. The Strategy notes that these include barriers , in using public transport, going shopping, or filling out forms (p.16 of the Strategy).

The Borough's stated vision for Adult Social Care states that the Borough will bring about positive change by, amongst many things:

- Treating everyone with honesty and fairness
- Respecting the diversity of people
- Including and listening to everyone
- Building on people's strengths, their networks, and resources from the local community

All borough plans indicate the SDL is an urban extension of Wokingham Town, but the CGR decision states this won't be the case, and that people who move there will be governed by a Parish Council that is predominantly rural in setting. Is this treating residents with honesty? Does Wokingham Without represent the diversity of urban areas? Wokingham Town Council's Councillors are fully elected in contested elections; are diverse in age, ethnicity, identity and neurodivergence. The Town Council has an excellent track record of engaging with its residents in a variety of ways, from hosting town meetings in the town centre square, hosting in-person and online events, and reaching out through social media.

The networks of future residents in the SDL will undoubtedly be within Wokingham Town. And there will be residents with social care needs within this new part of the community, who will look to the town to provide social care services in their own homes. The nearest train station for residents in Wokingham Without is Crowthorne. Paid carers will undoubtedly access the SDL via train and bus routes going through Wokingham Town, and SDL residents themselves will use these same routes. There are already several social care groups who use Wokingham Town

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facilities to run them. These will all be accessible via active travel routes for new SDL residents. Furthermore, new residents will access GP services, pharmacies and other health and care services from Wokingham Town, not Wokingham Without. But they won't be able to vote in Wokingham Town elections and have representation from the Town.

This goes against the stated social care aims of the Council.

Effective and convenient local governance

Alignment with service delivery and infrastructure planning

The South Wokingham SDL includes major infrastructure funded and delivered in partnership with WBC and designed to serve **Wokingham Town**:

- The South Wokingham Distributor Road
- Two new primary schools
- Two neighbourhood centres
- Public open space and SANG provision

Wokingham Town Council already plays a central role in coordinating local urban services, town centre management, and community events. Aligning the SDL within the Town Council boundary avoids duplication, ensures coordinated planning, and creates **efficiency in service delivery**.

The new draft Town Centre Strategy, written by the Borough Council states that "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". The new area currently within Wokingham Without is seen as being part of a development, of which almost a third of it has been built in the boundary of Wokingham Town. It is vital that the CGR amends its proposal so that the SDL residents are not cut off by an outdated boundary that bears no resemblance to the future vision and development of the Town.

According to an Executive Member of Active Transport, Travel and Highways, the new SDL routes will take residents to *Wokingham Town*, not to Wokingham Without. Anyone without access to a car, which so often are people with additional needs, young people or older residents, will be unable to access the community in which you intend to place them – Wokingham Without. Instead, the infrastructure plans you are putting in place will actively encourage people in the SDL to engage with and access Wokingham Town, which will further develop their sense of identity with Wokingham Town, not Wokingham Without.

Governance coherence

If the SDL were to remain in a rural or semi-rural parish (e.g. Wokingham Without), residents would have representation through a council whose focus, character, and priorities are not urban in nature. Wokingham Without has not had a full council of elected members in recent memory, and therefore does not have the capacity to represent more people, when it is unable to represent its current electors effectively.

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This would risk:

- potential confusion for residents over which council represents their local interests; and
- reduced democratic representation for new residents to the area

Incorporation into Wokingham Town Council ensures **governance coherence and convenience** by aligning administrative boundaries with physical, social, and service realities.

Community cohesion and boundary clarity

The SDL development (approximately 2,500 new homes) represents a significant extension of the Wokingham urban area.

- Retaining historic parish boundaries would no longer reflect the true settlement pattern.
- The new boundary should follow clear and identifiable features — such as the new distributor road and existing green buffers — consistent with the statutory guidance on clear and logical boundaries.

Including the SDL within Wokingham Town Council therefore promotes **community cohesion**, reflecting the real social geography of the expanded town.

Policy alignment with Wokingham Borough Council strategies

This proposal aligns fully with WBC's strategic objectives:

Policy / Strategy	Relevant statement / effect
Core Strategy (2010)	SDLs around Wokingham designed to expand the town's population and support its centre.
Local Plan Update – Right Homes, Right Places (2024)	"The South Wokingham SDL amounts to what will essentially be an urban extension to Wokingham."
South Wokingham Major Development webpage (2024)	Describes the development as an "urban extension of Wokingham town" with housing, schools, shops and green space.
Town Centre Strategic Framework (2025)	Aims to strengthen Wokingham's town centre vitality through integrated growth and catchment population increases.
Open Space, Sport & Recreation Strategy (2013)	Identifies SDLs as key areas for future development principally serving Wokingham Town.
Vision of Adult Social Care 2025	States that everyone should have the support, resources and opportunities to live in a place they call home, with the people and things that they love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing the things that matter most.

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Autism Strategy 2024-2029	For Wokingham borough to be a community where all autistic people feel heard and understood, safe and secure, valued and included

Together, these policies show that WBC's own development strategy intends the SDL to function as part of Wokingham Town, and that its strategic intentions will be realised through its inclusion in Wokingham Town, where facilities and services exist to support them. Boundary realignment ensures **governance consistency** with that policy direction.

Based on the statutory criteria and the Borough Council's adopted policies, it is clear that:

- The South Wokingham SDL will be functionally, socially, and physically part of **Wokingham Town**;
- Inclusion in the Town Council boundary will better reflect the **identities and interests** of residents;
- It will ensure **effective and convenient** local governance; and
- It aligns governance boundaries with **strategic planning objectives** and **community cohesion**.

Therefore, I strongly urge you to reconsider your position and include the SDL as part of Wokingham Town Council's boundaries. We have an opportunity to support and enrich the lives of new residents, by representing them the way the Borough Council has strategically envisioned, and the way residents to this area will see themselves. I look forward to the Town Council being able to represent these new residents in all we do.

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