



Looking to The Future – 2026 and beyond

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Author: Simon Edge (Chairman) with contributions from BRA Board of Directors and Committee members.

On 9th March 2026, Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) concluded its Community Governance Review (CGR) and agreed that Bookham Residents were against creating a Bookham Parish Council (PC). The same 'No' result was recorded in Fetcham, Leatherhead and Ashtead.

At the Council meeting some Councillors spoke of their disappointment with the CGR results. Others spoke of the CGR being rushed, badly conducted and that it failed to provide residents with sufficient information on the pros and cons of having a PC. Two Councillors professed a lack of knowledge about PCs, at least initially, to answer resident's questions¹. The inadequacies of the CGR process were compounded by MVDC's freely admitted rush to conclude the process before the enactment of the Surrey Orders which would constrain its implementation, with the Council's vote on 9th March preceding the Orders coming into effect on 10th March by less than five hours. These comments echoed the BRA's and other Residents' Associations (RAs) views of the CGR being: premature, lacking sufficient information, rushed and potentially undemocratic.

The BRA's Elected Directors met on 4th March to discuss the BRA's future depending on whether MVDC would or would not create a PC for the Bookhams. With the CGR now concluded the BRA can look forward to continuing its work for the community. However, the residents' comments included in MVDC's CGR report gives us an opportunity to think about how we might further enhance what we do and how we do it.

Members of the BRA's Main Committee and Planning Committee have contributed to this paper and agreed the areas of focus for the BRA from 2026 to 2030. We will now produce a "one page summary" of our plans to be shared with residents for their information and comment.

The BRA's 2026 AGM could be an appropriate point to formally announce what is decided – celebrating the BRA's 100 years of service to the community and presenting our aims for the future.

This paper includes three Appendices covering:

- A. a list what the BRA does now;
- B. a BRA Strategy for 2026 to 2030;
- C. copies of the parts of MVDC's CGR report that relate specifically to the Bookhams.

We will start with a summary of residents CGR comments and the BRA's responses, in the table overleaf, but before that we need to think about the new UA context the BRA will be working in.

¹ https://molevalley.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/1075805 (at 31.32 and 35.41 minutes of the debate)

The new Unitary Authority ('UA') Context

The next few years are going to see a wholesale change in how local government services are provided across Surrey. Even allowing for the benefit of a year of shadow-running, and no doubt the best efforts of everyone involved, we need to keep in mind that the UA is unlikely to be either a panacea or a catastrophe.

The UA is bound to have teething issues in its infant years, and even when it is working smoothly the wants/views of Bookhams' residents will not always prevail. Some things it will do well, providing better services and better value for money than its predecessors. Some things it will not get right first time or, in some cases, at all. History teaches us that we should not be surprised at that. Although being capable of good work, MVDC and Surrey County Council (SCC) have both been deficient in their dealings with some important local issues. MVDC did not heed residents' opposition to aspects of the MVDC Local Plan, or the 250+ objections to the Preston Farm development, then there was the debacle of the interpretation of the consultation on the Bookham Master Plan. SCC has repeatedly struggled to deliver mowing schedules that respect Blue Heart verges, dismissed concerns over potentially 35% - 45% rises in peak hour traffic from developments on the Lower Road, and think also of the years of delay in SCC's delivery of the new Youth Centre.

One issue the BRA will need to keep an eye on is the much-hyped proposition that fewer UA local Councillors will produce a Democratic Deficit. The BRA does not see that proposition as 'a given'. We expect a broadly similar ratio of Cllrs to Population to be applied across the new UA providing equitable representation. Democracy is about more than simply the number of Councillors representing an area. It is about the quality, capacity and diligence of the individual Councillors elected by residents, and the integrity of the culture and systems of the UA.

A true democratic deficit would occur if the UA was to lack legitimacy, transparency and accountability. If that happened Councillors, RAs, other concerned groups and individuals would need to hold the UA to account – by persuasion, direct challenge, and ultimately via the Ballot Box and, as a final resort, the courts.

A new and potentially important forum for liaison in the future will be the Neighbourhood Area Committee ('NAC'). These are intended to be a forum at which existing representative groups of residents (such as RAs, PC's where established) plus providers of services, such as healthcare, can all meet to discuss issues of common interest and provide a channel of communication into the UA. A number were trialled last year in the south of Surrey under the auspices of SCC. The feedback from the trials was positive and they were deemed to be a success. This would be a forum where the BRA can play an active role representing and advocating the interests of the residents of the Bookhams.

BRA Volunteers

Everything the BRA does for the community is 'powered by volunteers'.

The BRA is effective because it is blessed with many skilled and experienced volunteers who give their time freely. The more people who volunteer the lighter the collective load will be and the more the BRA will be able to do for the community. However, we must not overload individual volunteers – each volunteer must decide what and how much they are prepared to do. Where needed, the BRA will from time to time also engage specialist services, and budget accordingly.

We will start with the assumption that the amount of work that the new UA environment will bring to the BRA will be largely the same as now, but different. Having one UA and two UA Councillors to work with, and attending NAC meetings should be broadly similar to current commitments. The

BRA will continue to perform its various activities for the community (see Appendix A). The BRA will not replace the former MVDC councillors or do the new UA Councillor's casework for them. We will lobby the new UA Cllrs on behalf of residents as we do currently.

One constant that Bookham residents can rely on is that the BRA will continue to work on their behalf, maintaining its core purpose in the new UA context:

The BRA remains an apolitical voluntary membership organisation for all residents of Great and Little Bookham.

Putting our Villages before politics, the BRA will continue to work on:

- Understanding local issues, helping to inform residents views, and to make those views heard
- Delivering practical work to benefit the community
- Reporting to residents on its work; and helping to improve / holding to account those responsible for the services residents rely on and are affected by.

MVDC's CGR Report - Residents Comments (Summary)

Residents Comments (Full text at Appx. C)	BRA Response
Those <u>not</u> in favour of a PC	
<p>Many expressed satisfaction with the current arrangements with the Residents' Association.</p> <p>The BRA is repeatedly praised as effective, voluntary, low-cost and well-run, with residents believing it already fulfils the functions a PC might provide.</p>	<p>Noted, appreciated and agreed.</p> <p>A broadly accurate summary, with the exception of a PC having tax raising power, and direct control of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies. The BRA will aim to work closely with the new UA, and the community to secure appropriate CIL handling arrangements.</p>
<p>Many note that the 2017 referendum resulted in a strong majority against forming a PCL, arguing nothing has changed to justify revisiting the matter.</p>	<p>Agreed. We need to see how the new UA performs under 'normal load' before judging its performance, and before considering whether a parish council might be the answer to any particular problems.</p>
Those <u>in</u> favour of a PC	
<p>The most common argument: with the replacement of MVDC and SCC by East Surrey UA, Bookham and Fetcham will share only two councillors, down from the current seven (district + county combined). Many fear this creates a "democratic deficit".</p> <p>Comments were received about reduced demographic representation under the new</p>	<p>The new UA Cllrs will be Bookham's statutory voice.</p> <p>UA Cllr effectiveness will depend on the capability, capacity, and ability to work with others of those elected. Any 'democratic deficit' will reflect the quality and capacity of Councillors, and the integrity of the culture and systems of the UA.</p>

Residents Comments (Full text at Appx. C)	BRA Response
UA and that Bookham should have a formal, statutory local voice.	The planned NACs should give RAs a strong voice in addition to the local Cllrs, especially if the RAs work in harmony on issues.
Several respondents believe a PC provides legitimacy and influence – particularly on planning matters, local assets and service provision	Parish Councillors only 'statutory voice' is as a consultee on planning matters. The BRA's Planning Committee already fulfils that role as a non-statutory consultee. It is active in promoting/defending Bookham on planning matters, local assets and service provision. SPACE and the new Youth Centre show that groups of local volunteers can run devolved community assets.
Some argue that the BRA, while appreciated, is not an elected body, lacks statutory powers, and does not represent all residents equally.	The claim that the BRA "does not represent all residents equally" has no foundation or basis in fact. The BRA represents the views received from residents so anyone with something to say simply has to say it. With its limited statutory powers, a PC is unlikely to have a stronger voice than an active RA.
Bookham could look to petition the East Surrey UC in the future, if they felt a PC could be beneficial in the future	Agreed, if the new UA underperforms under 'normal load'. The minimum waiting time between CGRs is two years (though they are conducted usually at 5-10 year intervals).

The BRA's Response

Residents' praise for the BRA is very welcome, showing that our volunteers' hard work is appreciated. We must thank the BRA's supporters for the trust and confidence they have in the BRA. However, residents' comments do give us an opportunity to think about what might be done to further enhance what we do and how we do it.

What we do and how we do it

Residents' comments cluster around two broad themes:

- How the BRA Engages with residents,
- How the BRA Represents resident's views to service providers.

These themes are interrelated and create also a third theme i.e. How the BRA's management arrangements support the first two themes?

Engagement with Residents

The quality and value of our Newsletters and other communications such as emails social media posts, and our notice boards are often commented on. We should continue to develop these, and other available channels, and encourage more residents to give us more feedback – accepting that it is up to residents if and how they choose to respond.

The BRA will:

- 1. Continue to publish the dates of BRA Directors, Main Committee, and Planning Committee meetings, and the Agenda and Minutes of those meetings, on the website.*
- 2. Consider creating a short online quarterly "Business Update", based on Committee minutes to keep information and what we do 'in view' for residents.*
- 3. Explore how to make BRA information more accessible and encourage residents to send "Feedback".*
- 4. Consider increasing the frequency repetition of important posts to keep them current.*
- 5. Try to build closer liaison and raise awareness of the BRA/ its work with other local Groups such as: Rotary, WIs, U3A, Scouts/Guides, the Colts, Schools – as we do with Bookham Youth and Community Association (BYCA) and Churches Together.*
- 6. Encourage more residents into membership and volunteering roles, to achieve a broader spread of age that better reflects the profile of the community.*
- 7. Produce handouts for Village Day, Notice Boards, and other events and locations.*

Representing Residents

A significant part of the BRA's role is about Representing Residents - understanding local issues, informing and voicing views, and reporting back. It is also about helping to improve and holding to account those responsible for service delivery. In doing so the BRA sometimes has to present views to Councillors and other public servants that the recipients would rather not hear. We have to be clear and steadfast in saying that doing so is a fact of life, not a political act.

The BRA will:

- 1. Continue to understand local issues, inform residents views, make those views heard and report back to residents. It will help to improve and hold to account those responsible for the services residents rely on and are affected by.*
- 2. Seek to improve representation through improved information provided by greater engagement.*
- 3. Cultivate good relationships with the new UA's Councillors and key Officers, as soon as the opportunities to do so present themselves.*
- 4. Work with the RAs (/PCs if adopted) of Leatherhead, Ashted and Fetcham on planning policy and other matters of common interest.*
- 5. Take an active part in the workings of the new NACs expected to be established by the UA.*
- 6. Welcome working with the new UA's Councillors – sharing information and being mutually cooperative.*

BRA Management Arrangements

The BRA's management arrangements enable its Engagement with and Representation of residents' priorities.

The BRA will:

1. *Publicise the BRA Strategy 2026 to 2030 (timespan to allow for the settling in of the new UA and our working with it).*
2. *Extend our Financial Planning profile – fundraising, donations, membership fee levels (£ and numbers), accessing CIL and other grant funds to maintain financial health.*
3. *Budget for the payment of commissioned 'professional services', over and above reasonable volunteer input.*
4. *Consider meeting management and committee structure – to promote residents' involvement and manage meeting duration.*
5. *Update the BRA Company's Memorandum and Articles of Association recognising the new UA environment, retaining participation of UA Cllrs as invited guests.*
6. *Seeking volunteers for specific roles and succession planning e.g.: Legal, Fundraising, Deputy Chair.*

Appendix A - What the BRA does now

Education and Youth work

- BYCA & Bookham Youth Project support
- Support – local Schools, including Admission plans
- Supporting King George V Hall & Fields improvement works
- Supporting Youth Work/ the new Youth and Community Centre

Project Work

Local landmarks and infrastructure installed and maintained:

- The War Memorial, Notice Boards, Benches, public artwork, village sign
- Major works - Lower Road playground refurb
- Supporting the High Street with improved Christmas Lights

Environmental

- Litter Picking
- Trees Green Spaces and Planting
- Blue Hearts
- Watercourses and their environment

Community Safety and Police Liaison

- Keeping community safety in Bookham in the forefront of Police minds
- Offering practical advice on topics that residents can act on themselves

Planning Matters

- Reviewing all of Bookham's planning applications
- Sending letters of representation
- Reporting impacts from MVDC's Local Plan: Green Belt, Traffic, Ecology, Ground & Wastewater, Housing, and protecting Heritage both built and natural
- Evaluating major developments and commenting as appropriate
- Contributing to/and challenging MVDC's approach to Planning in Bookham

Keeping Residents informed, engaged and lobbying on their behalf including:

- Twice yearly Newsletters, Notice Boards display, email campaigns, BRA website, social media, telephone message line and website "Contact Us" page
- Online Event Calendar, The Service Requests & Reporting Portal; Hosting Election hustings for the community

Accountability & Governance Infrastructure

BRA is a company registered (No. 10053863) at Companies House

- **Company Secretariat** functions; **Membership management**; **Accounts**, annual returns, tax matters, accounts reviewed by a qualified Examiner
- Account of activity given at the AGM; BRA Directors elected by rotation by members at the AGM.

Appendix B - The Bookhams Residents' Association Strategy 2026 to 2030

The BRA remains an apolitical voluntary membership organisation for all residents of Great and Little Bookham. The BRA will continue to work to:

- Understand local issues, help to inform residents views, and to make those views heard
- Deliver practical work to benefit the community
- Report to residents on its work; and help to improve/hold to account those responsible for the services residents rely on and are affected by.

Areas of focus for 2026 to 2030

Local Government Reorganisation

- The BRA will Lobby the new UA for the benefit of the Bookhams
- Hold the UA to account in delivering services for residents
- Join with other local RAs (/PCs) to become part of the North Mole Valley NAC.
- Enhance Engagement with and Representation of residents and their views

1. Community Support and Improvement

- **Education & young people:** Support youth work, the new Youth Centre, and schools/youth groups
- **Highways:** address capacity, parking, flooding, speeding, repair & improvements
- **Infrastructure & Safety:** lobby to improve police, health, and transport services
- **Environment & Amenity:** support Tree Warden, Blue Hearts, Litter Picking, watercourse environment protection, practical cycling and walking schemes
- **Project work:** provide beneficial projects e.g. Christmas lights, benches, notice boards, and other local features. BRA centenary celebrations

2. Communications

- Newsletters, quarterly business updates, noticeboards, social media, and email campaigns to residents
- Collaborate with other community organisations

3. Planning

- a. **Strategic:** Consulting with neighbouring RAs and PCs on strategic planning matters. Lead the review/refresh of the Neighbourhood Development Plan. Comment on National Planning Policy Framework, Green & Grey-Belt proposals, application of the Local Plan; lobby for improvements in planning's response to environmental protection, flooding and watercourse issues

- b. **Operational:** Review and comment on planning applications, as needed, to preserve the character of the Bookhams

4. Heritage

Promote awareness/appreciation and protection of Bookham's heritage both built and natural.

Appendix C

MVDC Report: 9 March 2026 Mole Valley Community Governance Review – Final Recommendations (Page EC26)

Bookham Recommendation 9:

That, as per the draft recommendation, no changes are made to the unparished area of Bookham.

Reason for recommendation. A number of written representations were received, 189 wrote in support of the draft recommendation and 72 against. Another 17 responses provided views on the draft recommendation without directly expressing support for or against it.

Those in support of the recommendation cited their opposition to another tier of local governance with no clear benefits. Concerns were expressed about the cost implications of parish and many expressed satisfaction with the current arrangements with the Residents' Association. Some felt that nothing had changed since they last considered the issue in 2017 and questioned why residents were being asked again. Concerns were expressed about the timing of the CGR and felt that such a change should only be considered once the East Surrey Council was up and running.

Written representations against the draft recommendation felt that things had changed since 2017 and that a parish would now be of benefit. Comments were received about reduced demographic representation under the new unitary authority and that Bookham should have a formal, statutory local voice.

Some respondents expressed concerns about the consultation process and the limited information provided and the timing it took for some residents to receive the consultation letter especially given the short consultation.

These comments were taken on board and while there was both support for and against the draft recommendation, those against this were in the majority. It was therefore felt that there was sufficient support for the draft recommendation and saw no reason to change this. It was noted that as suggested by some respondents, that Bookham could look to petition the East Surrey Council in the future, if they felt a parish could be beneficial in the future.

Pages EC42 to 44 - Summary of responses received:

Written consultation responses: agree with the draft recommendation (i.e. no PC for Bookham) 189; disagree with the draft recommendation (i.e. yes to a PC) 72. General Feedback 17

Summary of written response

In agreement with draft recommendation

Strong opposition to another tier of governance

Residents consistently argue a parish council would be an unnecessary additional layer of bureaucracy offering no clear benefits.

Cost concerns

Many express concern that a parish council would increase council tax, placing further financial strain on households without the guarantee of delivering improved services.

Confidence in existing arrangements

The Bookham Residents' Association (BRA) is repeatedly praised as effective, voluntary, low-cost and well-run, with residents believing it already fulfils the functions a parish council might provide.

Reference to the 2017 referendum

Many note that the 2017 referendum resulted in a strong majority against forming a parish council, arguing nothing has changed to justify revisiting the matter.

Timing concerns linked to Unitary Authority creation

Many argue the CGR is premature, given the upcoming 2027 transition to the East Surrey Unitary Authority. They believe changes should only be considered once the new authority has bedded in.

Fear of inefficiency or poor value

Some express distrust of parish councils generally, citing examples from nearby areas where they believe such bodies waste money, pursue niche interests, or lack impact.

In disagreement with draft recommendation:

Reduced democratic representation under the new Unitary Authority

The most common argument: with the replacement of MVDC and SCC by East Surrey Council, Bookham and Fetcham will share only two councillors, down from the current seven (district + county combined). Many fear this creates a "democratic deficit".

Residents' Association seen as limited

Some argue the BRA, while appreciated, is not an elected body, lacks statutory powers, and does not represent all residents equally.

Need for a formal, statutory voice

Several respondents believe a parish council provides legitimacy and influence— particularly on planning matters, local assets and service provision.

Changed circumstances since 2017

They argue the 2017 referendum is now out of date, as the context was entirely different before the Unitary Authority plans emerged.

Access to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds

A frequent point: without a parish council, Bookham may lose access to valuable CIL money for community projects and fall behind parished neighbours such as Fetcham [*sic*], Ashtead [*sic*] or Effingham.

Perceived inequality with other unparished areas

Many highlight that other unparished parts of Mole Valley (Ashtead, Leatherhead, Fetcham, Dorking) are being recommended a parish council, while Bookham alone is excluded—viewed as "discriminatory" or "undemocratic". Calls for a new referendum. Many request a fresh, fully democratic vote, rather than decisions based on low consultation response rates.

Concerns over the consultation process

Problems cited include:

- Late arrival of letters

- Inconsistent information
- Short consultation period
- Heavy reliance on social media in Phase One

Other comments:

Concerns about the Unitary Authority as a whole

Some residents express anxiety about East Surrey Council:

- fear of diminished local identity
- reduced councillor accessibility
- potential service disruption
- financial risks associated with council mergers
- concerns over pressure on Green Belt land. Criticism of the consultation process

Several residents describe the process as:

- rushed
- poorly communicated
- confusing
- inconsistently administered
- lacking transparency

Need for clearer information before decisions

Many feel they cannot make an informed judgement without better explanation of:

- parish council powers
- cost implications
- alternative local governance models (e.g., Neighbourhood Area Committees)

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