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17th April 2025

## Mole Valley District Council's Cabinet Approves the Bookham Masterplan. BRA concerns about failings and misrepresentation remain unanswered.

On 16 April 2025, MVDC's Cabinet approved the Bookham Masterplan (and the Dorking equivalent). The Cabinet's deliberations can be seen here:

[molevalley.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast\\_interactive/979754](https://molevalley.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/979754) (Agenda item 14 of 16).

Although Cllr Cooksey (Cabinet Member for Planning) acknowledged that there had been "unease in some quarters", the concerns raised by the BRA were not discussed in any detail by the Cabinet. Rather, Councillors referenced the public consultation as "excellent" and "exemplary" – two words the BRA would not use.

Holding meetings, talking to groups of people, and putting up posters are all appropriate forms of communication. However, the acid test of opinion was the Survey, the results and representations of which speak for themselves. Here are just three examples:

1. Total responses to the survey = **225, or 2%** of the Bookhams' c11,400 population. This was cited as a good response, failing to contrast with two votes in 2017 on a Parish Council and the Neighbourhood Planning Referendum which achieved responses of 43.2% and 42.4% (20 times that of this survey).
2. It is said there is a strong mandate in favour of pedestrianising the High St. In reality, it is **only 103** respondents in favour, **or 0.9%** of the population. Such a minority response cannot be taken as a mandate to support such a fundamental change with significant risks to the retail health of the High Street. It requires a full exploration, and a consultation must engage directly with retailers.
3. When it came to other proposals such as a regular Artisan Market, the reality of support for the latter is **46 or 0.4%** of the population. Such a low number is closer to a statistical margin of error, not a strong mandate.

### **The Bookhams' future should not be decided upon such low survey responses.**

Some Councillors appeared to recognise that the Masterplan does not represent an approved plan, rather it is a starting point for further consultations with any progression being subject to funding and planning approvals. However, others said the Masterplan gave MVDC a basis to press ahead and seek funding to undertake the projects. There is an inherent contradiction between these views in terms of support and future engagement. Such a lack of clarity is not what residents and local businesses need.

The BRA asks MVDC to commit to undertaking further comprehensive consultations with residents and businesses before seeking to progress any of the individual projects in the Masterplan. The act of applying for funding implies that there is a sufficient depth of support for a project, which the BRA believes has not been demonstrated to date. Indeed, with proper consultation some of the projects in the Masterplan may gain sufficient support to be put into effect.

MVDC must listen to concerns, rather than brush them away, and not hold Scrutiny discussions in closed meetings, open to Councillors but excluding residents.

The BRA has revealed a lot about the way MVDC operates, from its yearlong participation in the Masterplan process. Sadly MVDC's approach has not reflected that participation in the process of compiling or in the reporting of the Masterplan.

Residents can rely on the BRA to continue to work cooperatively with willing organisations and individuals for the benefit of the Bookhams. Being entirely independent of any political party means the BRA can engage in local issues without having to follow 'party lines' as it is free from political interference. The BRA will not be discouraged from speaking-up on important issues, without fear or favour.

**END.**