

A Petition is being circulated to propose that Crawley Down sets up a separate Parish Council.

At present, Crawley Down and Copthorne Villages are represented at Parish Council level by Worth Parish Council. Crawley Down have 9 Councillors, Copthorne 8.

The Petition asserts that the two Villages are very different, but the reality is they are both of similar size, of similar socio-economic demography and are faced with very similar issues such as over development, transport, security, and parking problems and subject to some inconsistent decision making at District and County level. Size does matter as Towns appear to have more influence in decisioning.

The Petition asserts that a separate Crawley Down Council would be able to prioritise actions in the Village, but these are already being dealt with by the Crawley Down Infrastructure & Environment Working Party, set up about nine months ago, and comprising not just Councillors but also concerned residents and representatives of the CDRA.

There is a suggestion in the Petition that Crawley Down has received less investment from the Parish Council than Copthorne. This is not evidenced by the facts. In fact, the reverse is true.

The Chairs of both the Planning and Highways Committee and the General Purposes and Finance Committees of Worth PC are both Crawley Down Councillors. These are the two mandated and most powerful Committees of the Council.

The Petition makes no reference to how and where a proposed Crawley Down PC would operate. There is no doubt that additional costs, in the short term very considerable, would be required and the costs of these would fall upon the residents of Crawley Down.

The disentanglement of Worth Parish Council into two new separate entities would be hugely complex and time consuming, with significant legal and HR costs to consider.

There would be significant disruption to Parish Council services while the process of splitting from Worth/Copthorne was taking place. Recruitment of at least 3 Council staff would be needed, equipment purchased, offices rented and set up etc etc. The Precept currently paid by residents in Crawley Down for their Parish Council is less than half that paid by Turners Hill residents for their smaller Council (about a quarter the size of WPC). Elsewhere in the nation, Parish Councils are merging to provide economies of scale and to improve their ability to influence decisions at District and County level. There is also a real possibility that District Councils will disappear in the future making it even more important to have the leverage of size.

The timing of the Petition is interesting. Until May 2021 the Chair and Deputy Chair of Worth PC were Crawley Down Councillors, then the Chair stepped down after many years' service and the Councillors elected a replacement who happened to be a Copthorne Councillor, the Deputy Chair is a Crawley Down Councillor. There remains a majority of Crawley Down Councillors on the Parish Council. There have been no indications from Copthorne Councillors that they feel disadvantaged in the past by this.

Residents of both Villages can be assured that all decisions are taken in the best interests of both Villages. Council Meetings and documents are publicly available to all residents with the exception of confidential personnel matters and sensitive contract issues.

If you are asked to sign the Petition, the questions to ask are:

1. In what way has the existing Worth Parish Council failed to represent Crawley Down Village?
2. How would a separate Council with fewer staff and less money make things better?
3. How much will it cost me?
4. Is the inevitable disruption to Council services really justified?
5. Why is it that Crawley Down should buck the national trend to consolidate parishes?