

Synopsis of the Community Governance Review Public Meeting Held on Friday 4 March 2022 at The Haven Centre, Crawley Down

The public meeting organised by Worth Parish Council to discuss the request to Mid Sussex District Council to create a new Parish Council for Crawley Down was held at the Haven Centre last Friday 4th March.

Councillor Ian Gibson, the main promoter of the idea opened the meeting by pointing out that nobody present lived in Worth but were proud to live in Crawley Down. He said this was important in local government. He also said that a Village Council would provide the same level of service for very little extra cost and would have an office and hold meetings in the village. He didn't think it would be too costly or difficult to set up a new Council and the staffing would be similar to that already in place at Worth Parish Council. It would be easier to recruit new Councillors if the meetings were in the Village.

Councillor Kerry Scott spoke next pointing out his connections to the Village and saying that Mid Sussex District Council expected to hear from Worth Parish Council as to whether it supported a division or not. At this stage the Parish Council has not decided as it is evaluating the costs and benefits of this. He questioned whether identity depended on which Council a village belonged to and both Crawley Down and Copthorne had many things in common so should work together. The costs of a division are unknown but could be high and the disruption would be quite significant. He pointed out the £90K money spent on the Neighbourhood Plan in trying unsuccessfully to prevent housing development in the Village. He felt that the existing Council arrangement most effectively served the needs of the Village.

There was a period of questions; the potential cost of a division was raised by many, and various figures were suggested but nobody could say with any certainty what it would be.

The setup costs for a Council would be about £20K spent on offices, equipment and software but it was acknowledged there could be many other costs incurred both in Crawley Down, Copthorne and at Mid Sussex District Council.

A question was raised about the Financial Reserves that would be available to Crawley Down on day one. Councillor Gibson said that the Reserves at the moment in Worth Parish were about £380K some of which were dedicated to certain projects but if they were allocated according to Parish Electorate then Crawley Down would have about £150K, more than sufficient to be compliant.

Councillor Scott agreed with the starting situation but pointed out that it depended on how much Mid Sussex District Council charged back to these Reserves to make the division.

The question of how to deal with the Royal Oak was raised and Councillor Gibson was asked what a new Council would do differently when this issue has been on the table at both Worth Parish Council and Mid Sussex District Council for many years. The response was that it would be given a higher priority and there was money at Mid Sussex District Council. A Village Centre Review has been launched by Mid Sussex District Council with the first meetings due this coming week.

In response to a question about the effectiveness of a new Council, Councillor Gibson said it would hold fewer meetings and streamline decision making. Councillor Scott pointed out the economies of scale and the better resources available to a large Council and that Worth Parish Council has recently carried out a review of its structure and streamlined meetings and staff efficiency.

A resident of Copthorne pointed out that the promoters were now down to three and a majority of the Crawley Down Councillors on Worth Parish Council were against the division. Councillor Gibson said that Turners Hill Parish Council was the way a Parish Council should run.

After the Q and A session ended, Councillor Gibson said there were advantages of a division as a new Council would be more effective and every pound of Precept would be spent in the village. It would improve community engagement.

Councillor Scott said that a quick calculation of costs that all accept would occur totalled about £120K. He questioned whether it was felt that Worth Parish Council was not doing a good job, what a new Council would do differently, how many residents actually visit the offices or attend meetings and why would we want to divide if there are no benefits?

The full notes of the meeting can be found at

http://www.worth-pc.gov.uk/Community_Governance_Review_41894.aspx