

Firebrand
High Street
Winchelsea
East Sussex
TN36 4EA

18 July 2006

The Editor
Rye and Battle Observer
Woods House
Telford Road
St Leonards-on-Sea
TN38 9LZ

Sir,

The idea that there is some sort of uncivil war in Winchelsea is ridiculous. No one has moved out of the town since the review of the proposal for a separate parish council was announced by Rother in March. No resident has cut any other resident. I am still talking (politely) to Mrs Cameron-Clark and Ben Thompson, and they are still talking (politely) to me. Winchelsea is a polite place and we are all mature enough to separate political from personal opinions.

Mr Kerr, the gentleman who has previously written with such conviction about a meeting he did not attend, is now trying to claim that the Parish of Winchelsea Action Group has denigrated other wards. I would urge people to look at our submission to Rother. Mr Kerr is trying to mislead by quoting extremely selectively and completely out of context.

The submission made the point that each ward is a distinct community with its own problems and priorities. The description of villages as 'dormitories' of neighbouring towns is not pejorative but standard planning terminology. The fact is that most residents do not work in their villages (which has consequences for the life of those villages). However, Mr Kerr attempts to turn this fact into insult by adding his word 'merely'. Similarly, describing Icklesham and Winchelsea Beach as linear settlements is a simple statement of fact. I would be interested to hear Mr Kerr's alternative descriptions.

The point is not to demean these villages but to identify the reasons for their particular problems. This intent can be seen if one reads more than two or three words at a time. Let me quote in full about Icklesham: "The lack of a 'physical heart' to the village has contributed to social problems typical of rural communities: declining sense of community, loss of facilities like shops and post office, the threat to the few remaining community facilities like the village hall and the alienation of newcomers, particularly the young".

Is Mr Kerr denying that these problems exist? If there is no declining sense of community in Icklesham, why did an Icklesham Parish Councillor dismiss the idea of a traffic watch scheme in Icklesham by saying that there was no community spirit? If there is no youth problem in Icklesham, why did the Chair of the Parish Council (from Icklesham) describe Icklesham youths as 'toe rags'?

I note that Mr Kerr tries to imply that we called the other wards 'unfriendly' by inserting that word among his very selective quotes. That word is not used anywhere in our submission. It is another measure of Mr Kerr's lack of integrity.

As for the references to Winchelsea, the point is that the town has an evident historical legacy that means that conservation is a priority, whereas it is not for the other wards. That is the whole point. Each ward has its own problems and priorities, and would therefore be best served by its own parish council.

Our submission does not say Winchelsea is 'unique'. It actually said "physically, Winchelsea has evolved from a unique, planned historic settlement..." This statement has a completely different flavour to that of Mr Kerr's selective quotation.

As for the reference to 'international importance', we are quoting directly from page 19 the High Weald AONB Management Plan, which discusses the historical significance of Winchelsea. Again, the point is to stress the priority of conservation in Winchelsea. And the submission did not say that Icklesham was not in the AONB.

Like Mr Kerr, Ben Thompson is selective. He says that those supporting a parish council for Winchelsea "might have been better advised to make their points...publicly, within the existing framework of local debate". He may recall that the proposal was first broached at a public meeting in December 2004 and again at the Town Meeting in May of this year.

The notice that appeared on the noticeboard outside the Little Shop was a call by two residents, who signed their names, for those (who signed themselves only as the 'Silent Majority of Winchelsea') circulating anonymous letters around the town, to participate in a public debate moderated by a neutral chairman or else live up to their name. They have declined to do so.

Ben appears to believe that anonymous letters are an acceptable method of political debate. This probably explains why he defaced the notice in question with offensive and anonymous comments. And the fact that he was caught doing so probably explains why he wrote his letter.

Ben believes that the other wards of the parish are incapable of managing their own affairs without the assistance of Winchelsea. He reflects the view of some that the four communities can only survive like shipwrecked sailors clinging desperately together on a sinking raft. I have rather more faith in the ability of all local communities.

As for the tale by WD Cooper to which Ben refers, he should know that Winchelsea had no boats to its name, let alone ships, after the 16th century. Cooper's claim that boats of Winchelsea were still entering Western ports in 1850 is therefore a myth --- much like Ben's arguments.

Finally, I am puzzled by Steve Detsicas's claim that a referendum is undemocratic!

There was certainly nothing undemocratic in the way the referendum was called. Under the Local Government Act 1972, as long as 10 electors support a referendum at a Parish Meeting, it has to be conducted, regardless of the number opposing the call for a referendum. The provision is to ensure that the whole parish can be consulted on important issues rather than just those who attend meetings. This is real democracy. One man, one vote.

Yours faithfully

Richard Comotto