



A PARISH COUNCIL FOR WINCHELSEA

Frequently Asked Questions

Is this a new issue?

No. Calls for a Parish of Winchelsea have been made since 1886, when the Corporation of Winchelsea was deprived of its civil powers. As Malcolm Pratt explains in his book, *Port of Stranded Pride*, when the Corporation lost its civil powers, the Town expected to be given its own parish council. Instead, Winchelsea was combined with the village of Icklesham despite vigorous protests by residents. Creating a Parish of Winchelsea would restore 700 years of independence to the Town.

Why has the issue resurfaced now?

Back in 1886, Icklesham Parish consisted of Icklesham, Rye Harbour and Winchelsea. Icklesham and Winchelsea were of fairly comparable size. Rye Harbour was a huddle of fishermen's cottages. Winchelsea Beach did not exist and the area was part of Pett (until 1952). The Parish was therefore of modest size. In recent years, the villages of Icklesham, Rye Harbour and Winchelsea Beach have grown into sizeable communities. Each has a distinct identity and very different sets of problems and priorities. The increasing size and diversity of the four wards has distanced Icklesham Parish Council from the residents of all four wards and has made Icklesham Parish increasingly cumbersome to administer.

Why do we need a separate Parish?

The size and diversity of Icklesham Parish makes the Parish Council remote from residents and irrelevant to their problems. The consequence is that, when a local problem arises, it is rarely brought to the Parish Council. Instead, local problems tend to be tackled directly by local people. For example, residents' groups have been largely or entirely responsible for youth provision in Icklesham, the re-opening of the shop and post office in Winchelsea, and the new cycle path in Rye Harbour. And much of what goes on in Winchelsea Beach is organized by the Residents Association there.

The irrelevance of the current Parish Council to local issues is very evident in the poor public attendance at Parish Council meetings and the lack of interest among residents in standing as a Parish Councillor. Seven of the current 13 Councillors are co-opted. Three do not even live in the wards they represent and one lives outside the parish altogether. This means that many Councillors are not truly representative of the residents of their ward.

Moreover, because each ward is a minority on the current Council, a proposal affecting only one ward --- even if it is supported by all the Councillors from that ward --- can be blocked by Councillors from the other wards. This is what happened about the Community Speed Watch proposal in Winchelsea. And, contrary to the basic democratic principle that representatives can be held to account at elections, the electors in the frustrated ward cannot vote out the obstructive Councillors in other wards.

The creation of a Parish of Winchelsea would strengthen interest in local democracy by allowing the Town to identify with the Council and visibly bringing decision-making back into the Town. Stronger local democracy will ensure that the unique character of Winchelsea is properly preserved. Residents of Winchelsea are the best guardians of the Town.

On the other hand, if Winchelsea remains a diminishing limb of Icklesham Parish, frustration that our three elected representatives are being outvoted by generally unelected councillors from the other wards is likely to lead to apathy, uncontested elections, the further weakening of local democracy and the neglect of Winchelsea. And the problem will get worse as the other wards continue to grow.

Does Winchelsea qualify to be a parish?

Yes. Winchelsea has over 400 electors. If it was a separate parish, it would rank 24th out of the 36 'parishes' in Rother (Icklesham would be 18th, Winchelsea Beach 20th and Rye Harbour 28th).

Winchelsea exactly matches the Local Government Commission's definition of a parish as "*a small, distinctive and recognisable community of interest with its own sense of identity.*" The geography of Winchelsea makes the Town a distinct and recognizable community of interest, and its history and traditions have created a strong sense of identity.

In contrast, the current Parish of Icklesham is large (geographically one of the largest parishes) and incorporates four physically separate and recognizably distinct communities. No one in Winchelsea, Winchelsea Beach or Rye Harbour would identify themselves as a resident of Icklesham.

Can Winchelsea afford its own Parish Council?

Yes. Winchelsea pays about 22% of the precept of Icklesham Parish Council but only has some 18% of households. Even Icklesham Parish Council's working group on the proposal for a separate Parish of Winchelsea had to admit that Winchelsea would be financially viable as an independent parish.

It is often argued that the Icklesham Parish has more money to spend on **big projects** than would the smaller Winchelsea Parish Council. However, it has four wards to fund. Winchelsea Parish Council might have to save up over a number of years for very large projects. But what difference is that with the current situation, where we have to wait our turn with three other wards?

And bear in mind that many of the heaviest expenses in the budget of Icklesham Parish Council arise from other wards, in particular, the playing fields and pavilions at Icklesham and Winchelsea Beach. Icklesham Parish Council is spending over £30,000 on draining Icklesham Recreation Ground and has decided to borrow £40,000 to repair Icklesham Memorial Hall.

It is also suggested that Icklesham Parish Council offers economies of scale in that **costs** like the salary of the Parish Clerk can be spread over more tax-payers. In reality, however, the diversity of Icklesham Parish increases the cost of administration by requiring everything to be done four times and requiring the co-ordination of four wards. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that Icklesham Parish Council has to have two Clerks! A smaller parish would be simpler and cheaper to run.

Another argument sometimes used against a separate Winchelsea Parish Council is that **overheads** like insurance might be relatively more expensive for Winchelsea. This ignores the opportunity to cut the cost of such expenses could be obtained by 'grouping' with other parishes to buy services centrally. This approach is being promoted by the Rother Association of Local Councils as a means of cutting costs and has already worked in the case of playground inspection fees.

What do the numbers show? A **shadow budget** for the Parish of Winchelsea, based on the Icklesham Parish Council budget for 2006/07 and data from Rother District Council and the Sussex Association of Local Councils, shows that Winchelsea would have:

- income of just under £16,000 a year plus any external grants
- regular current costs (eg Clerk's salary) of about £9,000 a year
- a surplus of about £7,000 a year for capital projects --- which is more than the average amount for projects in Winchelsea in the Council budget over the last three years, similar to the amount spent by the Council over the same period and more than the amount budgeted for 2006/07.

It is also worth remembering that most of the capital projects in Winchelsea in recent years (eg Little Shop, Post Office) have been organized by bodies other than Icklesham Parish Council and largely paid for by external grants secured directly by residents (over £100,000 in total).

Could Winchelsea field enough Parish Councillors?

Winchelsea would have to find at least five Councillors, but probably seven. This is unlikely to be a problem. The Town fielded five candidates for just three seats in May 1999 and four in May 2003 (there was no election because one candidate failed to register in time). Other wards rarely have elections.

Would a separate Parish Council carry less weight with the District and County Councils?

The influence of Parish Councils is a function of how actively and constructively they engage with the District and County Councils. Winchelsea is already seen as a proactive and vigorous community.

Would a separate civil parish for Winchelsea mean splitting St Thomas's from St Richard's?

A red herring. Civil and ecclesiastical parish boundaries have had no connection since the 19th century.

Would a separate Parish Council undermine the Corporation?

Another red herring. The Corporation has had no role in local government since 1886 and exists under its own Act of Parliament. The creation of a Parish Council for Winchelsea would therefore have no implications for the Corporation.

Shadow budget for Winchelsea Parish Council 2006/07

item	IPC 2006/07	WPC 2006/07	assumptions
EXPENDITURE			
clerk's salary	17,000	3,050	SALC data. 7H a week at mid-point of salary range of £8.38pH
clerk's allowance	1,300	233	pro rata with salary
clerk's travel expenses	700	0	no travel: clerk should be local
training for Councillors & Clerk	600	100	2 courses per year
chairman's allowance	400		should not be paid
personnel expenses	20,000	3,384	
office expenses	2,000	1,000	1/2 of IPC
audit fee	700	350	1/2 of IPC
insurance	1,500	1,000	2/3 of IPC
subscriptions	550	138	25% of IPC
hire of village halls for meetings	480	205	9 x 2H meetings a year
other administrative overheads	5,230	2,693	
dog bins in Winchelsea Beach	1,250		none in Winchelsea
grass cutting on Council property	5,000	414	Kent County Council quote 2006
playground equipment maintenance	2,000	500	25% of IPC
playground inspection fees	250	50	quote from NPFA to RALC
repairs to fencing of Council property	500		Winchelsea Beach & Rye Harbour item only
repairs to seats, noticeboards, bus shelters	500	265	2004/05 figure +inflation
small works	2,000		unexplained item in IPC accounts
streetlighting in Winchelsea	1,500	1,075	2006/07 figure less cost of refractors (17 x £25)
tree maintenance on Council property	2,500	625	25% of IPC
total current expenditure	40,730	9,005	
INCOME			
precept	69,819	15,592	Rother District Council data
other income	1,700	400	BT wayleave, bank interest, net VAT reclaim
external grants	0	?	depends on how many we apply for
total income	71,519	15,992	
RESIDUAL			
capital projects	29,350	6,987	available for capital projects in Winchelsea