

Parish referendum rejects calls for 'Winchelsea split'

Parish Council split - the votes

- For 147 ● Against 716
(majority 569 - 40.7% turnout)
- Icklesham
For 10 Against 314 (42.55%)
- Rye Harbour
For 2 Against 105 (37.02%)
- Winchelsea
For 126 Against 69 (47.78%)
- Winchelsea Beach
For 9 Against 228 (40.7%)

'Stimulating debate good for local democracy'

THE parish poll was a resounding victory for local democracy, says Icklesham Parish Council vice chairman Charles Bronsdon.

"The turn out was fantastic - it shows people are interested in local democracy and do care what happens," he said.

"I was down at Rye Harbour and the polling station was very busy with a surprising number of youngsters coming out to vote.

"The whole process has been good because it has raised the profile of the parish council and the issues involved. In a way it has been a catalyst that has woken people up to local government.

"We have had lots of stimulating debate and now it has emerged that the majority don't want a split.

"There has been a lot of talk about this being personal and in a sense it was because people did not want to see the parish council split-up.

"People here identify with Winchelsea and value the input the town provides to the council as a whole. Winchelsea offers a different outlook which is useful and can help other parishes.

"Each ward feeds on the other and if you start reducing that you lose out. The parish would be weaker without Winchelsea.

"When you are bigger you have greater leverage to get more grants and support from other tiers of local government."

'Winchelsea should decide its own future'

THE Winchelsea parish councillor who called for the referendum was pleased by the outcome.

Richard Comotto said the results showed a significant majority of Winchelsea residents agreed with him in calling for a separate parish council.

More than 47 per cent of Winchelsea's population turned out on the day with 65 per cent voting in favour of Mr Comotto's proposals.

He argued that the overall 'for' and 'against' count for the four parishes was misleading as four different questions were asked, with only Winchelsea voting on the

4pm and 9pm on a warm evening last Thursday, with the count results being announced at 10.20pm.

Rother District Council election officer Malcolm Constable said: "It is the first time, to my knowledge, we have ever held a parish poll like this and we are pleased that people had this opportunity to take part in local democracy.

"The turn-out indicates that this is something people have strong feelings about."

The result of the poll will be considered by Rother District Council, along with the outcome of the ongoing parish household survey and reports will be prepared with any recommendations later in the year.

Richard Comotto, who led calls for a Winchelsea Council was unable to be there for the count as he was abroad, but his wife commented: "This does show that threequarters of those who voted would like to see Winchelsea have its own council and this is a strong indication of feelings in the town."

She added: "Some think it was just Richard calling for this but the voting shows many people held the same views. It is not a complete picture as there were no postal votes or voting by proxy. Also we have many weekenders here who could have voted but were unable to get to the poll."

Voting took place between

VOTERS gave an overwhelming 'thumbs down' to the idea of a Winchelsea split when the parish went to the polls last week.

A good turn-out of 40.7 per cent overall saw the four wards of Winchelsea, Winchelsea Beach, Icklesham and Rye Harbour voting 147 in favour and 716 against a call to divide the parish - a 569 majority.

They had been voting on the question:

Do you want your ward to become a separate parish?

In Winchelsea itself the majority of voters were in favour of the town having its own separate parish council status with 126 for and 69