

OBSERVER MAILBAG

Why change what has worked so well?

I HAVE read Mr Comotto's letter in your last issue with more than a little surprise.

While it is clear Mr Comotto is leading the pressure for Winchelsea to separate itself from the other wards of Icklesham Parish Council, it does seem to be scraping the barrel to seek to go back to 1886 (120 years ago - and in Queen Victoria's time!).

That was a different world. No doubt that was taken from p.80 of Malcolm Pratt's excellent book on Winchelsea, "A Port of Stranded Pride".

On that footing why not go back to 1832, before which Winchelsea returned two Members of Parliament (with only a handful of voters) while up-and-coming centres like Birmingham had none! No doubt Winchelsea, at that time was upset about that too!

And in any case, Icklesham is much older than present Winchelsea. In fact Edward I leased most of the land for Winchelsea in 1288 from the Vicar of Icklesham. It was a case, in 1886 of returning to the fold.

The point is that the four wards worked wonderfully well together - and I was a parish councillor for some years.

There was one particularly use-

ful aspect. If a matter or problem arose in one ward alone, it was usually raised by a councillor from that ward (where the problem may have been over close) and then discussed by those from all the wards - and as a result a more balanced conclusion was invariably reached - on the footing that 'the observer sees most of the game'. In particular, discussions were always courteous, even though searching, and respectful of others viewpoint. There was no question of the council being too large.

Previously the argument has been that Winchelsea Town is somehow 'different'. It is true that it is a head Cinque Port (and I have been speaker) but that tradition is splendidly taken care of by Winchelsea Corporation - see its excellent Town Guide, which sells by the thousand each year. The Parish Council is essentially concerned with day-to-day matters which is entirely different.

In fact there are very close links with the other wards in various aspects. The Rector of St Thomas' Church is also the Vicar of Icklesham Church and the incumbent of St Richard's Winchelsea Beach.

St Thomas' School takes far more children from Winchelsea Beach and the other wards than it does from Winchelsea. The same goes for our Bowls Club, and I be-

lieve the Cricket Club. There is great co-hesion between the four wards. To suggest that financially the separation of Winchelsea would be more favourable or, at worst 'neutral' seems impossible to credit.

Apart from the fact the cost of a clerk and hall rental is at present shared four ways, there is the fact Winchelsea alone has street lighting and that, together with the considerable cost of servicing and maintaining the lamps themselves, is similarly shared.

In the last two years or so there have been substantial injections of Icklesham Parish cash to the Little Shop, Post Office and Community Office - which is much appreciated - whereas, as far as I am aware, all other businesses in Winchelsea and the other wards have had to stand on their own feet.

If grants of this order were to continue in a separate Winchelsea, I think the residents would be in for something of a shock.

Rother District Council, in its recent paper on possible 'separation' wisely warned about disregarding any 'vociferous minority'. I think we would be foolish to rush into a substantial change from what has worked so well for many years.

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