

# Winchelsea Survey on Council Set-up

**THE future of Winchelsea will be decided in a major review which starts this month.**

It comes as households in the historic town declare their intention for Winchelsea to break away from Icklesham and have a council in its own right.

At present Winchelsea is just a ward of Icklesham Parish Council, along with Rye Harbour and Winchelsea Beach.

The bid for independence is thought to be the first of its kind in the county and was the dominant issue when Icklesham Council held its annual parish AGM on Tuesday evening.

Addressing the meeting, Rother's district secretary Trevor Elliott promised a wide-ranging review which would take place in four stages and could take up to six months.

It will involve sending a questionnaire sheet to every household in the parish, asking for views and opinions.

Mr Elliott said: "I would like to think this a bell and braces operation.

**By Andy Hemsley**

We want to tease out local views and test the support throughout the parish.

"We have no pre-conceived ideas either in favour or against. We accept the need for a review, we have not accepted the principal of the formation of a separate Winchelsea parish council.

"This is not the occasion to express views for or against. That will come when the review is launched later this month and everyone will have the fullest opportunity to make their views known to the district council. I must not be seen in anyway to be pre-judging the matter."

Some Winchelsea residents at the meeting were unhappy that households were being surveyed rather than individual voters.

David Bourne said: "Why can't we have a referendum? What happened to one man one vote?"

Mr Elliott responded: "It would cost Rother Council £4,200 to hold a referendum. I do not believe a ballot box

arrangement would be more effective or democratic than a survey which could penetrate every household. We will give equal weight to all the forms we receive.

"At the end of the day we will make a view in light of all the arguments made to us."

Clr Wendy Myers said: "It is a good thing for us to work together. It is not a numbers game. We are trying to get creative ideas for the best way forward."

Some people were unhappy the parish council had set up a working party to look at the issue with its members selected by chairman Mrs Merricks.

Mike Terry, from Winchelsea, said: "The parish council should now stand aside and let Rother take the lead and not try to sway people with working groups. The idea of hand-picking individuals for a working group is not a good idea and not fair or democratic."

Mrs Merricks said: "The people we asked were well informed and have lived in the parish for a long time."

## Parish too large

THE article last week (Rye Observer) is quite correct to say there are problems in Icklesham Parish Council.

However, the call for a separate Parish of Winchelsea arises because of the size and diversity of Icklesham parish, not because of the personalities currently on the parish council.

The nature of the problem can be seen from the fact that calls for a separate Parish of Winchelsea have been made ever since the Corporation of Winchelsea lost its civil powers in 1886.

At that time, Winchelsea expected to have its own parish but was instead combined with the village of Icklesham despite vigorous protests.

The issue now is that the villages of Icklesham, Winchelsea Beach and Rye Harbour have grown into sizeable communities, each with different problems and priorities.

As a result, Icklesham parish has become too large and too diverse to provide effective local government for its individual wards. The problem will only get worse.

The Local Government Commission says a parish should be 'a small, distinctive and recognisable community of interest with its own sense of identity.'

That definition fits each individual ward of Icklesham parish but not as a whole. Residents identify with their ward, not with the parish.

The proposal is not just about Winchelsea. It is that each ward of Icklesham parish should democratically decide its own future.

Each ward is large enough to become a parish and each could stand on its own feet. An independent Winchelsea, for example, would rank 23 out of 33 in Rother (between Etchingham and Iden) and separation would be financially neutral.

Moreover, independence will not sever the day-to-day links between the four wards.

After all, none of the communities in Icklesham parish is isolated from Rye, Pett, Guestling or Udimore because they fall into different parishes.

Independence will, however, help to revive local democracy and provide more effective local government.

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