

# Cautious welcome for parish report

**A STRONG** contingent from Winchelsea went to Bexhill Town Hall yesterday (Thursday) to hear if they had been successful in their bid for separate parish status.

The campaigners had given a cautious welcome to the report, published by the district council, prior to Thursday's meeting.

Winchelsea councillor Richard Comotto said: "The report concludes 'Winchelsea would undoubtedly reflect a small, distinctive and recognisable community of interest with its own sense of identity and it is likely effective and convenient local government would thereby be secured.'

"These are the main criteria for a parish, as laid down by the Local Government Commission. However, the report fails to make a recommendation to councillors and some campaigners were cautious as to how it would be interpreted.

"The substantive arguments were clearly overwhelmingly in favour of a separate parish, but I suspect officers felt uncomfortable making a positive recommendation because that would not go down well with their bosses, who have been hostile to the proposal from the start, or with local district councillors, one of whom is a former parish councillor of Icklesham, who appear to have been lobbying hard behind the scenes against the proposal for a separate parish of Winchelsea."

Cllr Comotto said he was concerned the district council would ignore the basic conclusion and opt for the status quo.

He said: "There are two get-outs offered to them in the report, namely the argument that Winchelsea's separation from the other three wards would leave an unusually shaped parish, and a suggestion the wishes of Winchelsea for a separate council may be vetoed by other wards.

"The parish is already oddly shaped if you look at the distribution of homes rather than artificial ward bound-

**By Andy Hemsley**

aries that cross open fields. And the idea other wards should have a veto over the wishes of the majority of Winchelsea residents would be the only time a demand for devolution has not been based on the wishes of the community seeking devolved government."

Winchelsea campaigners were upset the report had failed to assess the quality of arguments.

Resident David Bourne said: "The report just lists sections of arguments for and against, but it is biased. It misses out some key arguments for a separate parish while duplicating several of the arguments against.

"Most of the anti-arguments are just unsubstantiated assertions. For example the report quotes someone saying the proposal was a waste of time and money, but fails to say whether this was substantiated by any facts and figures.

"I do not think the district councillors have the assessment they need to make an informed decision. The report is also marred by basic inaccuracies, such as the statement that Icklesham is well served with shops. This suggests the officers do not know much about the parish."

Resident Mike Terry was concerned about the consequences of Rother District Council rejecting the proposal and said: "The Parish Poll showed a large number of Winchelsea residents have no confidence in Icklesham Parish Council. This problem will not go away, indeed it will be compounded if the wishes of the majority are frustrated by resort to pretexts.

"Parish councillors will have to sit down and try to reach some constructive and conciliatory agreement between the four wards on how they can work together to the satisfaction of all."

*See next week's Observer for the decision in full.*

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