

Nettlecombe councillors to explore possible merger with neighbouring parishes



A TINY West Somerset parish is exploring the idea of merging with neighbours to make itself sustainable for the future.

It follows difficulty filling the eight seats on the parish council, which serves a population of only about 200 people in a parish once owned by the son of King Harold.

Nettlecombe covers several small hamlets between Williton and Roadwater, including Torre, Yarde, and Woodford.

Now, parish council chairman Cllr Robin Wichard has floated the idea of merging with somewhere such as Roadwater or Monksilver.

Cllr Wichard said some years ago the suggestion was raised of joining up perhaps with Stogumber, Elworthy, or even Bicknoller, as it was clear duplication was happening, but lack of representation was a stumbling block.

He said informal partnerships and collaborative work with neighbouring parish councils might be most effective in the interim period.

There had already been ad hoc meetings in the past year for the chairmen of about five local parishes, which might well be a solution going forward.

A good example of collaboration had been a meeting earlier in the year regarding Somerset Council's proposed closure of the Williton recycling centre which had involved a number of local parishes and unitary councillors.

Vice-chairman Cllr Iain Mackie said he had researched the legal requirements to combine with another parish and found that consent had to be sought from the electors of each parish involved, with a minimum number supporting the merger.

A parish boundaries review could be triggered if a minimum of 37.5 per cent of electors in each parish supported a merger.

Councillors agreed to informally approach chairmen of other parishes and to actively ask Nettlecombe residents if they were interested in joining the parish council.

Cllr Shelagh Laver was concerned about how the council currently communicated with residents, whether it was via its website or parish noticeboards.

She thought a mailshot to each household might only produce a limited response and recognised that data protection regulations prevented holding any data about residents.

Cllr Laver thought use of the website might encourage parishioners to step forward to stand as a councillor.