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**Christchurch could become part of Hampshire again**

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CHRISTCHURCH could seek to turn the clock back 43 years by becoming part of Hampshire again. That’s the view of the town’s MP as Dorset waits for news on plans to reorganise local government.

Christchurch council is opposing plans to create a big new authority combining the borough with Poole and Bournemouth. Under the scheme, being advanced by most of the county’s nine main councils, another new authority would cover the remainder of Dorset.

The idea would need approval from Sajid Javid, the secretary of state for the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). It had been thought he could make an announcement today before Parliament breaks for the summer, but no announcement has so far been promised.

There have been suggestions locally that Christchurch could seek to turn its back on any new Dorset authority and combine with New Forest. Tentative talks have been held with NFDC and the Daily Echo understands its council leader Barry Rickman is receptive to the idea.

Christchurch MP Chris Chope said it could be more fruitful for Christchurch to explore the idea of remaining a “second tier” council, but in Hampshire rather than Dorset.

“If Christchurch is being abandoned by Dorset County Council, then naturally Christchurch will want to retain its identity as an individual sovereign borough,” he said. Maybe you might think if Dorset doesn’t want Christchurch as a second tier authority, then maybe Hampshire would, which is different from a combination with New Forest. It would mean going back to what it was like before 1974.”

Under the reorganisation of local government which took effect in 1974, Christchurch and Bournemouth were “moved” from Hampshire into Dorset. One legacy of the old arrangements is that Christchurch’s Red House Museum is still owned by Hampshire County Council.

Mr Chope said he was not expecting a dramatic announcement from the government this week.

“My own view is that it’s on a very slow, slow track and I don’t detect any appetite for any structural change in local authorities,” he said.

Bournemouth and Poole councils recently announced that they were looking to merge their officer structures, regardless of whether the shake-up of councils goes ahead.

Mr Chope said: “The argument put forward for local government reorganisation was that they had already made all the savings they could – and they’re now finding things they can do which don’t need government intervention.”

Christchurch council leader [**Cllr David Flagg**](http://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk/search/?search=Cllr+David+Flagg&topic_id=4080) said: “[**Christchurch Borough Council**](http://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk/search/?search=Christchurch+Borough+Council&topic_id=4075) is opposed to local government reorganisation and this position remains unchanged. If the Future Dorset proposal is unsuccessful then we will look at alternative options including working with other councils. Until a decision is made, there are no ongoing discussions with [**New Forest District Council**](http://www.nfdc.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1&CFID=3829726&CFTOKEN=90489358) or any other councils.”