

Who is to Blame? KCC for poor standards or TWBC for its 'can't be bothered' attitude?

by Daniel Bech

On 1st April 2005 Kent County Council became responsible for delivering highways services across the county. It created three divisional offices and set up a central Call Centre for all enquiries. This means that you can no longer blame Tunbridge Wells Borough Council for not providing regular inspections, safety repairs and improvements to our roads and pavements. Our Town Hall bosses are no longer responsible for signs and bollards, nor for most of our street lights.

KCC claims that its top priority is to enhance and protect our environment, but you need not walk very far to encounter the first evidence contradicting that statement.

In 2001, street improvements were made to the Calverley Precinct. The total cost was £268,000 (source: Financial Report and Statement of Accounts 31 March 2002). Only 5 years later, the revamp, which received a Civic Society award, has been brutally blighted by several crude black tarmac repairs. We are told that KCC is responsible for the work, but that the contractors had no suitable slabs available. Apparently it will be 'looked into'. The question was raised at the Conservation Award evening in October 2006. To-

day, in February 2007, the tarmac patches seem to be blending in, camouflaged by spat-out and trodden-on chewing gum. Do we need to wait until RVP carries out its expansion plans to see like-for-like replacements?

Brick pavements are a feature of Tunbridge Wells, but they, too, are under threat from tarmac. The Civic Society believes that their retention is desirable and that they contribute to the unique character of our town. Repair contractors, however, find it easier to just throw a handful of tarmac into the gap left by the odd missing brick. Workmen employed by Gas, Electricity, Water and Cable companies must have served their apprenticeships in "*Borat's Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*". Why else would they disregard our heritage and ruin the appearance of every single footway they lay their hands on? But surely KCC has a duty to inspect the work and monitor that our pavements are kept to the standard you would expect of a Spa town?

Walking along Calverley Park Gardens or Warwick Park, one can hardly avoid noticing the corroded lampposts, the faded and grubby signage, the many malfunctioning lights. The proclaimed regular inspections must take place via



Black tarmac blight in the Precinct (left) and Calverley Road

satellite on very foggy days.

In early spring Pembury Road lifts the spirits with daffodils and crocuses popping up in the verges to make even congested traffic bearable. But a new breed of vandals on wheels has appeared in that area. According to local residents, not a single day passes without lorries, vans and 4x4's parking on the verges and obstructing the footpath leading to Dunorlan Park. I went there to see for myself and could only look on in despair at the damage our authorities tolerate so easily. On my return an angry walker had just sent me a picture which seems to show a Highways' official standing with his car in the midst of the Daffodils.

Ptolemy Dean, the BBC presenter who dared to stand up against Highways' bureaucracy and who can be

proud of a beautifully restored lamppost in Cumberland Walk, has not given up his campaign to introduce a dignified standard of lampposts in the town centre. Two years ago at the Conservation Awards ceremony he pointed out that Mount Pleasant deserves better than the motorway-style street lights flooding the town at night with their gloomy yellow glow. He called for the restoration of all lampposts of heritage value that we still have left.

I believe there is little doubt among members of our Society that we should join him and ask TWBC to stop telling us that all this is not their problem, as it is managed by KCC.

We live here and want to remind Tunbridge Wells Borough Council of their responsibilities for the appearance of the town that we entrust to them.

4x4 amongst the daffodils, and corroded lamp-posts

