



**Letters to the Courier 2 December 2005**

## **Joined-up thinking will improve town**

How wonderful that the Courier reported its guided tour of Tunbridge Wells with one of our brightest young architects, Ptolemy Dean. He is sure to get people looking at the town with a completely fresh perspective.

It's important to realise that the vision for good architecture and harmonious streetscaping is best achieved through collaboration and dialogue.

Kent County Council is already going down this path, It has an architect leading the county's regeneration strategy, as well as a focus on good design through its design champion Piers Gough and through its annual Building Design Awards.

I agree with Ptolemy Dean that joined-up thinking on all aspects of design in the built environment is particularly needed at a local level too. Several towns in the south east, including Brighton and Lewes, have a panel of local architects that advises the local council. The panel works with the council to comment on out-of-the-ordinary planning applications; and can also look at proposals for details such as street furniture -bringing that essential element of vision to bear.

Riba South East would be very happy to help Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to set up an architects' panel. This would support them in achieving what Ptolemy described as "proper and appropriate and fitting and sensitive civic improvements".

Helen Wren  
Regional Director RIBA South East

Three Cheers for Ptolemy Dean! (November 25). A radical ' transformation of its street lighting, signage and seating is just what Tunbridge Wells needs to leave the Dark Ages behind.

However, it is not just the town centre that needs to be rescued from gloom. The approach, roads to the town from Pembury, South-borough, Langton and Frant could be given more sympathetic lighting and friendlier signs that welcome rather than scold the visitor to the town.

Perhaps Ptolemy Dean should be made a special adviser to the borough council so we can see a 21st century environment which enhances rather than destroys the best features of its splendid past.

Dr Alan Bullion  
Oak Road Tunbridge Wells

Full marks for your coverage of the state of an old lamppost as brought to light by Ptolemy Dean. If this had happened with the Opera Colonnade entry it may not have taken three years to make it passable.

Looking forward it would be much appreciated by pedestrians en route to the Five Ways Post Office to know why scaffolding stays up for so long with no sign of work being carried out and pavement access very restricted.

Doris Schwartz  
Goods Station Road Tunbridge Wells

Tunbridge Wells Soroptimists are delighted that the Courier is championing action to banish grot and graffiti, and to preserve the heritage items that help make Tunbridge Wells' unique streetscape. One such item is its traditional brick pavements. When we surveyed local women's views, they told us graffiti, rubbish and broken pavements were all issues of great concern to them. Our report "Green And Clean" suggested practical low-cost measures by local citizens and businesses as well as council enforcement action - which we greatly welcome.

As long ago as 1998 our report, "Whose Pavement?" drew attention to pavement parking and we have repeated our findings in subsequent reports. Surfaces are broken up, elderly people have falls, wheelchairs and baby buggies are forced out into the roadway, heavy costs fall on local budgets. There is remarkable silence about all this in the borough's transport and environment strategies. Meanwhile, as a "cost-saving" measure outside the immediate town centre, the pleasant and historic pavements are gradually being replaced by ugly "Highways Department" asphalt.

Of course asphalt costs less and is easier on the feet if vehicles are using pavements as parking lots. Poles, traffic signs, barriers, and mysterious green boxes sprout through it to create a slalom course for those on foot.

We wonder what brief the County Highways Department have been given about preserving the streetscape of this town, and how it is intended to make it stick. This should be a key environmental aspect of the Kent Transport Strategy now out to consultation.

Angela Phillips

President Tunbridge Wells and District Soroptimist Club

Ptolemy Dean's articulate description of TWBC's malaise in relation to the town's street scene spoke for many of us. However, each week your paper addresses concerns of residents right across the range of council services, such as waste collection, parking and housing.

Mr Dean hinted at the problem, but failed to say it overtly, namely the cultural environment of the average local authority.

They are not encouraged to think 'creatively, proactively or with initiative. The lamppost is an example. Whereas the residents of Bedford Terrace have a "can do" attitude, the council employee does not. There is no incentive to.

Perhaps if the services were contracted out, and payment levels dependent on speed of service and responsiveness to residents' needs Mr Dean would have his period lamppost fully working by now. This is not a political point, I have seen bad local government in rural and urban settings, from the left and the right. We residents must be more assertive. We should challenge our political master and public servants and empower them with the confidence to change their attitudes and put us first.

Mark Roelofsen

Montacute Gardens Tunbridge Wells