

TRADERS JOIN FORCES IN BID FOR PARKING

By Jane Bakowski

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Traders in **St John's Road**, Tunbridge Wells, have banded together to form a new association amid fears the area's only **public car park, in John Street**, is to be scrapped.

"We have heard that the borough council is planning to sell the land for building," said Andrea Afrifa, 34, of Stampede children's shoes, who called the St John's Retailers' Association's first meeting on Friday last week. She said: "We feel we are being ignored, so hopefully this will give us a voice."

More than 12 shopkeepers discussed ways of raising the profile of the area, including late-night shopping, Christmas lights and the setting up of a website.

"St John's could be great," said new trader Anna Woodhouse, 37, who opened Sass and Ben gift shop last month. "I've seen other neighbourhoods like this grow into attractive, buzzing centres."

Mrs Woodhouse who lives in the St John's area, added: "There are traffic and parking issues, but London has the same problems and yet is full of lively little hubs of shops and restaurants."

For Wendy Thomas of retro furnishing shop Back with a Vengeance, however, parking is "a major issue." She said: "The John Street car park is often completely full by 8am, and people park there all day long. I would like to see one-hour parking bays and allocated spaces for traders."

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council building services officer Adrian Bell said:

"We are looking at a number of areas of land that are in need of improvement. John Street is one of these. We are looking at the possibility of selling some or all of the car park site."

However he pointed out that *"the plans are at a very early stage and we would consult as part of the planning process."*