



## WAR ON THE GROT SPOTS

### Now that's what we want to hear!

Editorial Column - 13 October 2006

Just a few weeks after we warned that uncertainty over the future of the Morrison's supermarket site threatened Tunbridge Wells with yet another so-called got spot, a clarion call hails a borough council initiative to banish such eyesores.

Robert Cottrill, just appointed as the council's head of planning and development, clearly does not intend to let the grass grow under his feet, if you will pardon the expression. The 39-year-old, in post just a few weeks, signals his intention to do battle on behalf of this lovely spa town.

For a start, the grot spots' days appear to be numbered. Mr Cottrill has already spoken to "as many developers as possible" about their plans for properties, the festering presence of which shames the town.

These even include the elusive owners of the former cinema site, an eyesore opposite the Town Hall which would be an embarrassing disgrace in Grozny, let alone Tunbridge Wells.

He also talks, refreshingly, about the need to develop a strategy and a vision for the town (*does this mean that we have not got one already?*) and to work co-operatively with key developers rather than against them.

His other priorities include addressing the problem of the so-called north-south divide between the expanding Royal Victoria Place shopping centre and the Pantiles, the historic magnet for tourists, discerning the commercial competition to Tunbridge Wells and keeping up with it and helping to ensure that the council departments collaborate more effectively.

The problems the borough council has faced in recent years have been well documented. A year ago a new dynamic chief executive took up the challenge to effect changes.

In that time there has been a lot of soul-searching and re-structuring. These things can be difficult and painful: there are farewells and new people move in. The result is a new streamlined administration which we should all wish well.

So it will be no surprise at the Civic Dinner tomorrow night (Saturday 21 October 2006) if both councillors and officers take to the floor with a spring in their step.

For if Mr Cottrill is a guide, the borough's environmental problems are not so much out of sight, out of mind but firmly fixed on the radar and high on the agenda!