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SHOPS ARE AN EYESORE ON ESTATE

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"IT Looks like Beirut," fumed a resident of Ramslye as he surveyed the boarded up and decaying shops in Ropers Gate which have stood empty for years.

Seventy-two-year-old John Simons said he had written to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, which owns the two shops, calling for them to take action.

He was infuriated by the response of the council to an article in the Kent and Sussex Courier on November 4 about eyesore sites across the town.

In it the council stated "we have a wide-ranging clean neighbourhoods initiative" but Mr Simons, of Summervale Road, said the authority had failed to look after even its own properties.

Grasping the press cutting, Mr Simons, who moved to Ramslye in 1951, said: "Look at it. The council has neglected them and don't seem to care. I have written on three or four occasions and had no reply, so when I read the article, I thought 'they say this, but they've got this here'. I am proud of where I live and I will die here."

He believed one of the shops had closed in 1995 and the other followed.

He wanted the properties converted into flats or re-used as shops.

Next door 34-year-old Easan Sadadcharam opened Ramslye Store and Post Office six months ago and has breathed life into the parade.

He is keen to re-open the adjacent shops and his ideas included a chemist, fish and chip shop, pound shop or launderette - "whatever the community wants, as long as I have permission", he said.

He added: "I have applied to the council to give me these premises. I appreciate they can not just say, 'have the premises'. They are looking in to it. I am sure they will come back."

Council leader Cllr Melvyn Howell said: "We arranged some time ago for a change of use of these properties from retail to residential.

"Negotiations have taken longer than we would ideally have hoped but we are now optimistic that they can be concluded in the very near future.

"As a result, in partnership with High Weald Housing Association, we shall be able to achieve a much needed addition to the borough's social rented accommodation.

"The realisation of these plans will also bring a significant improvement to the environment of Ropers Gate."

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