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TIME TO TAKE UP THE GAUNTLET

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News item: TV expert and Tunbridge Wells resident Ptolemy Dean has shed new light on the declining street environment.

To what extent is the town of Tunbridge Wells a wasted opportunity? That is the key question as the 400th anniversary approaches.

As we have long argued, the spectacular fortunes of the town, with its long history, splendid location and elegant architecture, offer characteristics that other towns can only envy.

If these could be brought together under a strong brand, married to strong marketing, all supported by significant investment (mostly in improved transport infrastructure), then the future of Tunbridge Wells as an economic unit is considerably brighter.

But, as TV expert and town resident Ptolemy Dean says with great gusto in this week's Kent editions, the outlook is fairly gloomy.

And we use the word advisedly because street lighting is a substantial bee in a bonnet that is buzzing with fresh ideas.

He pinpoints one lamp as a totemic example of what's going wrong. In a key location near the High Street some style and grace (and thought) should have been applied to the type of lamp set in place. Perhaps Victorian ornate or something with a simple elegance.

But, no, a motorway style brutal stanchion emerges from the pavement with scant regard for the resulting decline in the sum of the scenery.

He points to this and other features showing how the street environment grows, almost by stealth, passing most of us by.

Bollards, road signs, facades. All require forethought to ensure the gracefulness of the whole.

Mr Dean says (and many of our correspondents and, indeed, this newspaper agree) that the 400th anniversary is a perfect time to apply the brakes to thoughtless additions and bring greater aesthetic rigor to the planning process.

What finer legacy would there be for the town than an environment that, for years to come, still enhances and delights.

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