

## **‘TOWN’S CHARACTER NEEDS SENSITIVITY’**

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Street clutter and a perceived lack of sensitivity towards the character of Tunbridge Wells by highways engineers is being tackled by town hall.

Unightly lampposts and numerous road signs have been the talk of the town since they were exposed by residents Daniel Bech of Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum and renowned architect Ptolemy Dean through the Kent and Sussex Courier.

The highways partnership between Tunbridge Wells Borough and Kent County Councils was axed in March last year, in 2005.

Responsibility was resumed by the county council in Maidstone and many believe this remote control means a lack of understanding of Tunbridge Wells' unique character. Architect Mr Dean feared the town was now subject to a county-wide standard approach.

But on Monday night a report by borough council head of highways and transport services Chris Briggs, which underlined the need for sensitivity and a "presumption that sign clutter will be reduced at every available opportunity", was lauded by councillors and the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society.

Mr Briggs said it was important the county and borough councils and relevant organisations worked jointly to ensure maintenance work "reflected the local environment context".

His key points were:

- Use of appropriate materials, particularly in the footways.
- Sensitive choice of design of street lighting equipment.
- A presumption that sign clutter will be reduced at every available opportunity.

Speaking at the meeting Civic Society chairman John Cunningham welcomed the report and said the society was "very concerned" decisions on such issues had passed to "a more remote authority, which may not have the same knowledge, understanding and feel of the needs of Tunbridge Wells and which may be under other pressures, particularly financial, to skimp or reduce standards". He said: "We do not believe having aesthetically-attractive street lighting need necessarily cost more money. Nor do we think it is necessarily cheaper to replace the old with new and we would plead for older lights, particularly historic ones, to be maintained and restored."

The issue during the past four months had become the "focus of much interest among those who live and work in the town", he said. "We are delighted to see the borough council has issued such a strong report (to the joint transportation board) on the issue and we stand shoulder to shoulder with them, singing from the same hymn sheet."