

Gareth Dorrian 15/08/2009

## Royal spa town's battle over a very modern mess

Clutter-hating residents in genteel Tunbridge Wells have set about clearing the town's streets of satellite dishes, plastic window frames and unsightly annoyances.

The Town Forum and local civic society are pressuring the borough council to enforce planning limits on homes in the town centre's conservation area.

Long-standing residents fear not nearly enough is being done to retain the royal spa town's history and appearance.

Forum activist Daniel Bech said his group merely wanted the council to do its job.

He said: *"The council has an obligation to protect the conservation area. If you look at the amount of for sale signs, there are so many of them that it looks as if there are more houses up for grabs than there actually are. This does not have a good effect on house prices. The more signs that are put up, the more devastating it looks."*

Forum chairman Chris Thomas said his group also wanted shot of front-garden parking and uPVC windows in the town centre, among other things.

He said: *"If you buy in a town centre, you expect a parking space outside your door. But the reality is, in this town, there often isn't enough space."*

Mr Thomas adds Tunbridge Wells was picked out by English Heritage as one of the most "at risk" of damaging its conservation area.

*"A lot of these properties have flats in and are on leasehold,"* he said. *"Satellite dishes are put up without any authority or reference to the landlord and the landlord is quite happy, because they get their money. That's where the council should be coming in and saying "you shouldn't have that dish there'."*

He thinks the council has to enforce Article 4 of the Planning Act, which would give more influence over what is, and isn't, allowed.

Councillors recently agreed to Article 4 directions on Prospect Road and Claremont Road.

Mechanic Duncan Sage, 57, has had a home in Prospect Road for more than 35 years.

He claims it took the council nearly two years to grant permission to turn his front garden into a parking space. He said: *"I need my car, there's no space on the street and these people all of a sudden want to stop me parking it."*

Tunbridge Wells' head of planning (correction by RTW TF editor: *Principal Design and Heritage Officer*) Alan Legg admits the cost of enforcing Article 4 about permitted development rights in the conservation area is the main obstacle. Enforcing them would mean residents would need planning permission for various kinds of building work at properties.

Mr Legg said some residents could be a little over-zealous about their neighbours' apparent planning decisions: *"One woman called to complain someone nearby had their washing out, which is going a bit far."*

Royal Tunbridge Wells Conservation Area at Risk – damaging changes to streetscape / streetscene



signs & satellite clutter  
parking on pavement (damage to bricks)



removal of walls, fences, no kerb dropped  
front patios / gardens converted into car parking spaces



clutter on façade - multiple satellite dishes