

**Parkers make the news over Otford Pond debacle**

# COUNCIL RED TAPE DELAYS PLANNING

**The picturesque village of Otford has been left blighted after maintenance work on it's famous thousand-year-old pond was halted before completion because of alleged council red tape, and Parkers have made the news both in the Daily Telegraph and on BBC TV having been inadvertently caught up in the story.**

Moves to prevent Otford pond, which is thought to have existed since Anglo Saxon times, from deteriorating have pitted the villagers and the parish council against Sevenoaks District Council.

Cllr John Allen, chairman of Otford Parish Council, said in 2002 residents began to notice the stone wall was starting to crumble. The district council gave listed building consent for repairs to take place but when the work was not carried out within five years the permission lapsed.

Concerned that the structure was becoming dangerous, the parish council went ahead and made repairs in order to rebuild the walls to stop water leaking out. Much of the historic pond wall had been dismantled before Sevenoaks District Council became aware of the works and called a halt in July last year (leaving an eyesore in the centre of the scenic Kentish village with a number of Parker Building Supplies bulk bags on view !) while the two councils argued about what to do next.

The walls of the pond were built in the early 1800s with stone from the Archbishop's Palace, which dominated the village for nearly 800 years until it was left derelict by 1600 and now only remains can be seen.

Villagers successfully got the pond, which is one of only 200 with such status in the country, listed to fight Kent County Council's plans to concrete over it in 1975. But the village could lose its Grade-II listed status as English Heritage claim the repair works "destroyed" its 19th century stone walls.

Emily Gee, EH's heritage protection leader for the south east, said: "We never recommend a de-listing lightly. As far as I can tell from the material submitted and the photographs which the conservation officer sent me, the listed structure has been effectively destroyed."

Asked whether he was concerned that if it was de-listed the pond could be at risk from developers, Cllr Allen said: "Listing is supposed to give some protection to it. People call it a roundabout but I can't imagine anyone would fill it in and cover it with trees and adverts. Everybody would be thoroughly against that."

The row with the district council has caused "disquiet" in the village, Cllr Allen said, with residents saying it is "bureaucracy gone mad".



**PARKER BUILDING SUPPLIES**