Shop Front Guide

Borough of Macclesfield
YOUR COUNCIL · YOUR SERVICES
If you have any queries or require advice, please contact the Borough Council's Planning Department on 01625 504649.

Approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance August 2002
Introduction

This design guide sets out broad policy guidance for alterations to shopfronts, advertisement proposals and security protection. Shops and shopfronts are important to the character of the Borough’s town centres. This guidance sheet is intended to assist owners, tenants, developers and architects to understand the Borough’s policy and aims in achieving successful and more attractive projects. Shopfronts can be a positive element by providing vitality and interest to the street and negative by detracting from its overall architectural character. Historically, a shopfront required something special of a building by exchanging closed walls, doors and windows for a more eye catching and accessible display.

Some streets in historic centres, both urban and rural, require shopfronts to be in keeping with the historic nature of the buildings. Others may be able to accommodate more modern designs which are interesting in themselves. In all cases the proportions, quality of detailing, colours, materials and lettering are important and require careful design.
Historic Shopfronts

In the past shopping streets contained a lively mixture of shops, each with its own identity and trade style projecting an image of quality and permanence. Georgian shopfronts often incorporate a central door with a shop window, as well as a side access to the floors above, all contained within a uniform composition. Usually the display windows had a stallrisers at their base. This is a reference to earlier times when trade took place on a flat, raised stall. A heavy cornice and frieze would project above the glazing. In modern times the frieze would provide a fascia for shop lettering and advertisement.

Generally, this style of shopfront continued until very recently but gradual modifications diluted the quality over the years. Shopfronts can be dated by assessing the moulded details and the size of the glazed divisions. Victorian and Edwardian shopfronts tended to introduce larger glazed areas, sometimes divided by mullions to reduce the blank expanse of glass.

The competitive retail market of the last fifty years has created a need to maximise the display windows and the advertisement within the shopfront design.

Unfortunately, certain changes relating to marketing images has diluted the shopfront to large glazed panels with heavily proportioned advertisements which do not relate to or respect the upper storeys of the building.

The design of signage, security and shopfronts is an important issue which can have a marked impact on the appearance of the street scene.

18th Century shopfronts are rare and should be retained intact. Victorian and Edwardian shopfronts of good quality should also be retained where possible. Where features of interest such as projecting cornice, pilasters or panelled stallrisers
survive, alterations should be restricted to the window area itself. Architectural details should never be hidden by sheets of plywood, metal or plastics.

Where existing shopfronts contribute positively to the character and appearance of the street scene, the Council will usually seek to retain them.

**Reproduction Shopfronts**

Where a historic style is desired, care must be taken to produce period details correctly and in appropriate materials. It is best to avoid bow windows, especially with ‘bottle glass’, and adapt a Victoria or Edwardian design. It is always important to understand the essence of the style used and apply it consistently to all aspects of the design.

**Replacement Shopfronts**

The Local Planning Authority will not allow permission for new shopfronts unless it is satisfied that the design, proportion, materials and finishes will respect and enhance the appearance of the building and street scene. A poorly designed and constructed shopfront can have a negative impact on a street scene and it can reflect badly on the image of the shop and its products.

The following should be taken into account when considering shopfront replacement:

(a) What is the character of the street and its buildings as a whole?
(b) What is the rest of your building like; how would a new shopfront best relate to its appearance?

(c) Is your existing shopfront of interest? Can it be repaired or modified?

(d) What trade image do you wish to project and what sort of display area do you require?

(e) How do you best achieve a high standard of design and detailing?

(f) The new shopfront should take into account the rhythm, characteristics and architectural style of the street including the wide/narrow plot widths and the strong vertical and horizontal emphasis.

An architect will help you to achieve the best results and guard you against those whose main concern is to sell you a standard design.

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**Corporate Image**

Commercial interests should use discretion in applying their ‘corporate image’ through standardised shopfronts. Standard designs and colours may have to be modified to suit a particular building or area. The Council do not accept a corporate image as sufficient justification to outweigh other criteria in assessing applications.
Combining Properties

Where more than one property is combined, the formation of one large shopfront should be avoided. There is a vertical rhythm to the buildings in most shopping streets, and this can be destroyed by a strong horizontal emphasis at ground floor level. If buildings of different identities are combined, the fascia treatment should relate to the building above rather than conforming to a standardised pattern.

Subdividing Properties

Where single buildings are divided at ground floor level into two or more separate shops, the treatment of the shopfronts should relate to one another, and to the scale and rhythm of the building as a whole. A regular height and type of fascia, and matching materials are desirable to ensure unity of appearance.

Shop Windows and Window Stickers

The introduction of large expanses of plate glass into buildings that originally had small windows can destroy the scale of the street. It is also difficult to reconcile an all glass shopfront with no visible means of support with the appearance of solid walls above. This problem can be overcome by retaining or reinstating the traditional enclosing elements of the shopfront. These act like a picture frame in setting off the shop display and helping to relate it to the wall surface of the existing...
building. Within this, window divisions should be introduced to suit the scale of the building and its neighbours.

The purpose of shop windows is to display the goods for sale. They should not be obscured by a proliferation of stickers, particularly those in day glo colours. An attractive display is a much better advertisement.

Architectural Details

Generally, the style of the shopfront will be based on an architectural frame including the elements of fascia, stallriser, pilasters and display window. The design of this frame is crucial to the overall appearance of the shopfront.
Fascias

The size and shape of the fascia board is important. Fascias that cut across architectural features such as pilasters, shopfront ornamentation or the sills and openings of the windows above, detract from the quality of the building. Where excessively deep fascias have in the past been introduced, these should be reduced to expose the wall surface between the top of the fascia and the window sill above. Areas of damaged or painted masonry exposed should be reinstated. Traditional fascias rarely exceed 15" in depth. Fascias should incorporate adequate projections to throw water clear of the shopfront and prevent rot or poor weathering.

A fascia should not extend to the sills of the first floor windows or above all architectural division below that point. Similarly, the bottom of the fascia should not extend down too far. The result of such encouragement will result in an imbalance in the proportions.

Stallrisers

Most traditional shops had stallrisers, usually faced in brick, smooth render or panelled in timber. A common temptation has been to provide extra display space by removing this and carrying the glass down to pavement level. This, however, tends to remove the building’s visual anchor to the ground, and is rarely necessary for display. Where stallrisers have already been removed, reinstatement should always be considered.

The stallriser provides an important visual stop between shopfront and pavement, and provides protection against splashing and kicking.
Doors

Doors should be preferably part glazed with a timber panel at the base to match the height of the stallriser if possible.

Conversions

Many town centre buildings designed for domestic use retain their original ground floor elevations. In the case of buildings of architectural interest, it is desirable that these be retained intact. On a domestic front, the proportion and position of a fascia board will be critical. In certain cases a projecting sign of suitable shape and materials and small name plate may be the only elements which can satisfactorily be accommodated.

Materials

The increased standardisation of shopfront design has caused the proliferation of two materials which have harmed the appearance of shopping streets - satin anodised aluminium and polished acrylic sheeting. These materials should not be used in conservation areas. Considerable care should always be given to the choice of materials and the different finishes available. For example, black or dark bronze finished aluminium is preferable to satin anodised. Acrylic sheet should always be matt or stipple finished, for glossy surfaces emphasise all imperfections in the fitting and jointing. Plastic laminates and mosaics are not suitable or sufficiently durable for shopfronts, and ceramic tiling should be used with care. Timber, the most characteristic material of all historic streets,
is the most suitable and versatile. It can be used for window frames, surrounds, decorative features and fascias. Although requiring regular painting, it is neat, durable and attractive. Timber should generally be painted as varnished and natural hardwoods are not a common feature in historic streets.

**Display Windows**

Large undivided areas of glass should be avoided to prevent the appearance of a ‘gaping hole’ at the base of the building elevation. The use of horizontal and vertical divisions in the form of transoms and mullions should be incorporated wherever possible.

**Colour**

The line of colour on a shopfront can affect the street scene as well as the individual unit. It is essential that the colour chosen should respect the traditional characteristics of the locality. Bright or intense shades will not be permitted where they are considered to have an unacceptable effect on the surroundings. Accurate colour samples or trade references (BS standards) will be requested as part of any application.

**Signage**

The signage should not adversely affect the architectural character of an historic building. They should be designed to enhance the appearance of the street scene.
Fascia Signs

To avoid visual clutter, the information contained on a fascia board should be kept to a minimum, generally the name of the trader and the nature of his trade is sufficient. It is also desirable to include the street number of the premises.

Lettering

The most satisfactory method of providing signs, particularly in conservation areas, is to paint the fascia and use a sign writer to add lettering. The choice of colours is important; they should not clash with those on adjacent properties or reduce the legibility of the lettering. Gilding or light strong colours used on a dark background reflect light and are easily readable at night. Letter styles can evoke a particular trade or market image. In general, serif letters are most effective due to their bold character and fine proportions. Quirky or gimmicky type faces may be difficult to read. Painted lettering with shading can be attractive. Alternatively, three dimensional letters can be individually applied. These should preferably be of brass or other cast metal or cut out timber, painted. The tradition of lettering painted directly onto a smooth rendered façade can be a pleasing feature when executed with skill and assurance. In exceptional circumstances architectural signs, for example at roof level, can add to the character of a building. The colouring of lettering or of advertisement displays can be important where this could conflict with traffic signs or signals.
Illuminated Fascias

Internally illuminated box fascia signs are not suitable for conservation areas. Their bulky proportions and reflective surfaces are out of place on buildings of traditional character. Where illumination is necessary, it is preferable to achieve this by external lighting such as spotlights or guarded strip lights. These techniques have the advantage of directing all the lights onto the sign, rather than into the street, and encouraging a more individualistic approach to sign treatment. The maintenance of external illumination is generally easier and less expensive than internal illumination, although care should be taken to conceal wiring wherever possible.

Projecting Signs

Where projecting signs are necessary, a hanging sign made of timber in hand painted finish can provide visual interest. Internally illuminated box signs in plastic or aluminium are not suitable in conservation areas. the width of the street, height of display and potential damage by high vehicles are important considerations. Hanging signs can be successfully illuminated by the use of spot lights.

Upper Floors

Where advertising is required by business users of upper floors, lettering in black, gold or white should be painted onto the lowest part of the window of the premises. Such signs should relate solely to the use of the upper floors and not to that on the ground floor.
Smaller Signs

Some premises have different advertisement requirements. Here fascia or projecting signs may not be appropriate. It may be acceptable to consider an alternative plate or separate sign board. This should be fixed in a suitable location that does not obscure architectural detail. The size of the board will be strictly regulated and should be properly mounted and framed.

Lighting

Where the principle of illumination is deemed acceptable, the style and source of the illumination should be discrete. Certain types of lighting will not generally be acceptable such as internal neon lighting and moving images. Also cowl and projectory spotlights are also considered to be unsympathetic types of lighting.

Canopies and Blinds

Many traditional shopfronts have retracting blinds. These can provide a lively element to the street, as well as fulfilling a practical use. Often, however, they have been removed to accommodate a box sign, with unfortunate results or have become unsightly through lack of maintenance. The modern ‘balloon’ or ‘eyebrow’ canopies in shiny plastic are essentially a means of advertising the shop, and are not suitable for historic areas.
Shopfront Security

With the rising incidence of vandalism and theft in society generally, the security needs of business properties have come to the fore. The growing number of burglaries, together with extreme practices such as ‘ram-raiding’ has lead many shop owners to consider security measures.

Security measures can and ought to take many forms, not all of which directly involve the shopfront. A good property security system will address a whole range of possible measures including:

- door and window lock reinforcement
- prevention of access via roof, side and rear
- alarms
- closed circuit television
- security lights and interior/exterior lighting generally
- as well as shopfront security itself

Other security measures are in the wider domain and include the installation of street furniture including pillars or railings as possible deterrents to ‘ramming’. Private measures of this nature may require the benefit of planning permission and the Council’s officers would be pleased to advise on this and other aspects.

This guidance concentrates on shopfront security and in particular the different types of security shutters available and their suitability for use within the towns of the Borough, from a planning viewpoint.

Listed below are some of the different types of shutter, categorised in terms of their visual impact, together with comments as to suitability from a town planning viewpoint.

Solid Lath Shutters

This form of security shutter, when in use, radically affects the appearance of properties.

Though secure and used quite extensively in industrial situations, solid shutters tend to detract from the traditional
appearance of shops and shopping streets, producing a harsh siege like impression when in use during daylight hours and darkening the normally ‘cheerful’, well lit shopping streets at night.

The cumulative effect of solid lath shutters when used on a number of individual shopfronts would be very seriously detrimental to the attractiveness of a shopping area.

Solid Lath Shutters are therefore considered to be unsuitable for use on shopfronts.

The Borough Council wishes to restrict the use of solid lath shutters on shopfronts both within the town centres of the borough where shopfronts are an important feature of any street scene and fulfil many rules such as permitting after hours window shopping, allowing supervision by police and passersby and allowing additional illumination of the street which is itself a disincentive to crime against both the property and users of the town centre, and in neighbourhood shops given their often prominent position within primarily residential areas.

External Perforated Lath Roller Shutters

This form of protection is not generally encouraged by local planning authorities for reasons which are similar to those given in the preceding paragraph.

External Roller Grilles and Removable Grilles

External ‘lattice’ roller grilles or ‘brickbond’ grilles will be considered for use when other methods such as internal shutters are not feasible. In addition to the consideration of the appearance of the grilles in themselves, there are sometimes installation problems associated with the incorporation of the box which houses the roller type of grille. The box needs to be
very carefully located so as to be hidden behind the existing shop fascia. The grilles should be painted.

There is also a need to consider the extent of coverage by the grille when in the closed position so as not to cover the stallrisers, fascia or pilasters i.e., covering the glazed areas and doors only.

Where the roller box cannot be concealed or the grille is made to extend over the whole of the shop front rather than the window openings themselves, there may well be a planning objection on aesthetic grounds.

The use of external grilles is to be avoided on listed buildings and prominent buildings within conservation areas with the exception of removable grilles.

Internal Grilles

These have the advantage of being less visually intrusive than other forms of protection and in most cases do not require planning permission, although such shutters are generally less effective against ‘ram-raiding’ than externally mounted shutters.

Other Methods of Strengthening Shopfronts

There are a number of other methods of reinforcing the front of shops to give more general security and particularly to resist both ram-raiding and theft by ‘smash and grab’.
Many of these features are integral to the overall design of the shopfront and include the following:

(a) the use of facing brick stallrisers
(b) reinforcement of brick stallrisers, eg by concealed steel rods and/or concrete barriers
(c) the use of smaller areas of glass, eg by the introduction and/or retention of mullions and transoms (glazing bars)
(d) the retention or installation of a recessed door
(e) the use of laminated glass and its labelling as such, together with details of its qualities to deter attempted break-ins.

In terms of security, many of the features of older shopfronts are better from a security point of view than the more recent open designs with large expanses of glass.

The retention of the older traditional shopfronts and the use of traditional materials such as timber and brick rather than plastic or tile also serve to protect the visual environment.

**Alarms**

Alarms should normally be located on the fascia and painted to match the adjacent surface.

**Automatic Telling Machines**

Automatic Telling Machines (ATMs) are often required within the shopfronts of banks, building societies or other shopfronts. Sometimes they can be incorporated within the architectural arrangement of the front elevation. It is undesirable to incorporate them within the shopfront itself on the basis it appears obtrusive.
Planning Permission

Planning permission is required for works that involve a material change in the external appearance of the building, including the erection of most types of shutters.

Listed Building Consent

Listed Building Consent is required for any alterations to a listed building which affects the special character or appearance. This includes alterations to the interior as well as the external appearance and can include services, paint colour and render.

Advertisements and illuminations will also require Listed Building Consent.

Advertisement Consent

Advertisement Consent will depend on the size and type of the sign and the location of the building. Please contact the Planning Department for further information.

Building Regulations

Building Regulation Approval may also be required for alterations to shopfronts as well as new shopfronts. For further details please contact the enquiry desk on 01625 504636.

Grant Aid

Grants may be available for the repair and restoration of traditional shopfronts within Conservation Areas or Listed Buildings.

Insurance

You are advised to contact your insurance company to discuss your shopfront security proposals before you make your application.