



Essential Reference Paper "B"

East Herts Retail Frontages: Design & Signage SPD

Consultation Draft





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1 . Introduction



1 Introduction

The Purpose of this Guidance

- 1.1** This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been produced by East Herts District Council as a material consideration to be taken into account when determining planning applications or listed building consents for works to or for new shopfronts and advertisement consents for the display of signage. The advice advances the policy requirements set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (July 2018) and the relevant policies of the East Herts District Plan 2018.
- 1.2** The aim of this SPD is to provide guidance to applicants, agents, architects, retailer and independent traders on the requirements for high quality retail frontages, the replacement of existing and the installation of new shop fronts throughout the district, in order to raise the standard of design quality and to enhance the attractiveness and local distinctiveness of the District's shopping environments.
- 1.3** The Council attaches considerable importance to suitably-designed shopfronts, not only for the preservation of the character of individual buildings and retail areas, but also for the attractive overall appearance of shopping streets and the impact on their commercial success. This includes signage and lighting. It explains the strong role of shopfronts and associated signage in historic environments which are of particular relevance to the East Herts, given that the retail and commercial areas of the five main settlements fall within conservation areas, containing many listed buildings.
- 1.4** Where shopfronts of character do survive, particularly if they are of some age, every effort should be made to keep them. Modern and traditional styles are equally acceptable, subject to their design quality, materials and context.
- 1.5** The purpose of the SPD is not to suggest a rigid application of a set of rules but to provide guidance on designing, altering and improving retail frontages and in a number of cases, restoration or appropriately designed replacements. It also explains the expectations arising from planning policy for well-informed applications where planning permissions and listed building consents are required. It also seeks to ensure that any impact arising from changes to our retail frontages is positive and enhancing. It relates not only to retail units, but also to Banks, Building Societies, Estate Agents, Betting Offices, Public Houses, Restaurants and hot food outlets or, indeed, to any premises which have a window display and/or signage.



2 The Issue

- 2.1** As the prime retail and commercial areas of the main settlements are within conservation areas and contain a high percentage of listed buildings, the character and appearance of individual and groups of buildings and street scenes can be harmed by insensitive and inappropriate shopfront designs and signage. For example, an overly large plastic fascia may be inappropriate in terms of size and materials and may cover traditional architectural features. Also, standardised corporate 'house designs' of multiple 'chain' franchise retailers present a particular problem when they are applied insensitively to existing buildings, adopting a one-size fits all approach.
- 2.2** Whilst the desire for corporate identity and image is appreciated, in some cases standard designs will need to be modified in order to fit sympathetically with the period and architectural style of the building they are being applied to and where there are statutory heritage designations. It is important, therefore, that alterations, restoration and replacement are sympathetically carried out, especially in conservation areas and on listed buildings, in order to protect their special character.
- 2.3** Size, scale, elaborate or simple design and detailing, the use of correct materials and colour schemes are all important in making shopfronts an acceptable part of existing buildings and areas. With that, there is a strong relationship between the attractiveness of town centres and their economic competitiveness. Consistently well-maintained shopfronts therefore affect the prosperity of individual businesses. This guidance is intended to strengthen those links.
- 2.4** Due to the nature and characteristics of the settlements in East Herts, the extent to which there is an issue with shopfront design and signage varies. This is due to the size of the settlement but also the designations that exist. In East Herts the majority of the historic centres and their retail areas are within conservation areas, and contain a considerable number of listed buildings.

The main settlements

- 2.5** The five main settlements experience issues to varying degrees. For instance:

Buntingford:

- 2.6** Buntingford's main shopping area starts where Station Road meets Market Hill, the location of the former cattle market. It continues northwards along the High Street. It retains an attractive environment which is largely due to

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the fact that it is within the conservation area and contains historic buildings ranging from the 15th to the 19th century, many of which are in commercial use.

- 2.7 Despite the historic sensitivity of the shopping street, modern shiny fascia signs, wall mounted signage, window decals and the considerable use of external lighting have made an appearance. A-boards are apparent as well as retail clutter spilling onto the pavement.
- 2.8 Sections of properties that once accommodated shops have returned to their original domestic use yet still retain the evidence of the former shop display window or shopfront.



Figure 1 – Formerly a house but adapted to provide a double fronted shop to the ground floor.



Figure 2 - A conversion to a commercial use considered to be less successful in terms of the treatment of the historical significance of the building.

Sawbridgeworth:

2.9

The main shopping area is contained within the medieval core of the settlement which is part of the conservation area. It starts at the junction of London Road and Bell Street, stretching eastwards to the Square, Bell Street, Church Street, and part of Knight Street. With a number of medieval properties still in existence, it is not uncommon for buildings to have retail uses to the ground floor with residential above or the ground floor being split. More modern developments have occurred to the west side of London Road with a parade of shops to the rear 1 – 7 Bell Street, utilising former burgrave plots. A Budgens Store is located to the east side of London Road. There are a limited number of national retailers present. Independent

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retailers are more prevalent. Financial institutions are present but display their corporate identities in a more muted manner. Some former coaching inns have remained.

- 2.10** Shopfronts are typically of painted timber, small in scale, with generally modest fascias and signage, apart from in London Road, where there are some poor aluminium shopfronts and over-sized or garish signs. Some are 19th century or earlier, and a few are of very high quality, with sophisticated classical detailing.
- 2.11** However, there are the exceptions. Over time some fascias have been over-boarded with plastic, shiny signboards, including variants with an aluminium frame. Disproportionately long fascia signs and wall mounted signage is noticeable, particularly on buildings where there is no defined fascia area. Supermarkets tend to see their display windows obscured with window decals and there is an evidential preponderance for the use of bulky external lighting.



Figure 3 - A Medieval building with two different retail displays.



Picture Figure 4 – A blank frontage.

Ware:

- 2.12** The shopping environment in Ware is largely contained within the historic market area of the town and its medieval streets including the approach along Baldock Street, High Street, West Street, East Street, Bridge Street and Amwell End, all within the Ware Conservation Area. Many premises are listed and a number of buildings are identified as making a positive contribution to the Ware Conservation Area.
- 2.13** In general there are a number of attractive shopfronts and signs that have sought to respect the buildings into which they have been inserted. As a larger retail environment compared to Buntingford and Sawbridgeworth, there are more issues with fascias and hanging signage, materials and colours, canopies, window decals and A-Boards. In some cases, little respect is paid to the characteristics of the building as a whole or the streetscene.

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Figure 5 - A variety of architectural styles, some inappropriate shopfronts and blinds



Figure 6 – Turning the corner



Figure 7 - A late 19th/early 20th century shopfront with traditional elements.



Figure 8 – Some features lost and with an imbalance between signage and other treatments.

Bishop's Stortford:

- 2.14** The shopping area of Bishop's Stortford is contained by the River Stort, Castle Gardens, Hadham Road to Station Road/Newtown Road. The historic core is centred on the junction of High Street, North Street, Bridge Street and Market Street/Market Square which coincides with the heart of the shopping environment which also continues along Potter Street and South Street. Some side lanes and 'walks' also accommodate retail premises with the main shopping mall, Jackson Square, is located between Potter Street, Bridge Street, Riverside and The Causeway. The majority of the shopping area falls within the Bishop's Stortford Conservation Area and contains many listed buildings and buildings that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 2.15** Due to the nature of the buildings, there is clear change between North Street, Potter Street and South Street. Buildings span from the medieval period to the late 19th/early 20th centuries, some retaining historic shopfronts and traditional features including signage. There is a greater percentage of national multiple stores with corporate identity signage in Bishop's Stortford than in other centres of the district. Some companies have adapted their signage to respect the host building whereas others have had little regard to the building or the street scene.
- 2.16** Regrettably, the area includes a number of reproduction frontages, poor quality fascia signs concealing historic features, projecting internally illuminated fascia boxes, garish colour schemes, overly large lettering, sign boards, banners, window decals and a clear over presence of A-boards. Trough lighting and inappropriately placed roller shutters are equally jarring.

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Figure 9 – a 15th century timber-framed house converted to retail use on the ground floor. The shopfront dates from the early 20th century and is of an appropriate design.



Figure 10 – A less than successful 1960's parade of shops on the corner of South Street & Station Road.

Hertford:

- 2.17** This market town sees its main retail and commercial area along St. Andrew Street, Old Cross, Mill Bridge /The Wash, Parliament Square, Maidenhead Street, Bull Plain, Market Place, Bircherley Green, Railway Street, and Fore Street. This area is within the Hertford Conservation Area and contains a



high percentage of listed buildings with a number identified as making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

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- 2.18** There are a number of surviving, good quality shopfronts and signs as well as an attractive variety of traditional materials and details. Equally, and within the central historic core, there are a number of poor quality shopfronts, fascias and advertisements that detract from, not only the buildings themselves, but the streetscene. In many cases fascia signs are placed below the 'integrated' fascia area; and therefore the frontage may have two fascias, one above the other. This is particularly noticeable in Maidenhead Street.
- 2.19** Others tend to be overly large obscuring architectural details; made of shiny materials. Some traditional shopfronts have seen the introduction of unacceptable window display areas, a poor choice of colours, even to the traditional wooden shopfronts.
- 2.20** There are many examples of buildings being subdivided into separate units with frontages that do not match. Swan neck, bulk head downlights, strip lighting, poorly added blinds (Dutch and roller), security cameras and alarm boxes add to the visual clutter on frontages.

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Figure 11 – Pizza Express signage adapted to fit.



Figure 12 – Discordant adjacent colours.



Figure 13 – The 15th century jettied, timber-framed building, St. Nicholas Hall or Verger's House accommodating retail.



Figure 14: Signage respecting the medieval buildings.

3 . Historical Background



3 Historical Background

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3.1 Retail and commercial uses have been a defining element of our town centres. Just as towns have evolved over time so shops have changed in response to factors such as design, lighting, security, environmental health and fashion. Retail methods have also changed from service to self-service and shopping has progressed from a functional to a recreational activity. Both corporate organisations and individual traders endeavour to highlight their location and products in competition with rivals. Shopfronts remain an important feature in the street scene of the towns and villages and this is evident in East Herts where the main settlements have their origins in historic medieval market towns.

3.2 Historically valued shopfronts saw their origins and influences emerge from the medieval period when the 'shop' was a market stall. There was then a move toward more permanent buildings where one or two rooms became shops with the upper floors used as living accommodation. The earliest shops were open fronted, typically having shutters that folded down to form the stall. This was supported by the infilling of the lower part of the opening, which is still known as the stallriser. A primary factor is the shopfront because it provides the welcome and frames the display of goods and services.



Figure 15 – An early 18th century shopfront inserted into a medieval building with simple detailing (Buntingford).

3.3 It is only from the mid-18th century that shop fronts, as we know them, begin to survive in reasonable numbers. Their greater elaboration coincided with accelerating commercial activity connected with an increase in what we now call consumer goods – articles of luxury and fashion rather than necessity. The appearance of the shops in which such things were bought became increasingly important from the 1700s.

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Figure 16 - Early 18th century frontage to a 16th - 17th century building. Generally retaining traditional details but with some modern signage and swan neck lighting.

- 3.4** The majority of 18th and 19th century shop fronts were designed on an individual basis, utilising a variety of architectural detailing and styles. As the importance of the shop in its own right was recognised, this led to the move toward increasingly large, purpose-built frontages.
- 3.5** The 1830s saw the introduction of larger windows as manufacturers were able to provide glass panes of varying sizes for the 'new' shop front types, far cheaper than ever before. This marked a move away from small-paned bow windows towards large-paned ones of varying types (although there was a brief return to small-paned windows with the 'Queen Anne revival in the late-19th century).

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Figure 17 - Early 19th century frontage, double fronted with multi-paned oriel bays including slim glazing bars and traditional features.



Figure 18 - late 19th century Emporium with multi-paned display windows to first floor with altered 20th century timber shopfronts.



Figure 19 - Neo-classical revival building with defined fascia and architectural features.

- 3.6** The use of plate-glass windows led to a different scale in the design of shop fronts, with the stallriser at the base of the window virtually disappearing and the front being carried much higher up, thereby increasing natural internal light and display space, for instance, the aptly named 'Deco' building in Hertford which is contained within the ground floor of a 4-storey building of the neo-classical period, early 1900's.
- 3.7** Another often overlooked aspect of shopfront design is the use of shutters. These would have been a necessity, both for security and in order to prevent 'accidental' damage to the glazing and the contents of the shop which they protected.
- 3.8** Early shutters, comprising wooden panels on a framework, were normally put in place at the end of the working day. They would be slotted into position in a groove under the architrave, located on the sill with pins and held in place together by an iron strap. Fixings and metal plates with holes for the pins can still be found on old shopfronts. In some cases, the design of the front permitted the shutters to be housed externally, often hinged and folded back into boxes to the sides of the windows.
- 3.9** A further innovation in the early-to-mid-19th century was the introduction of roller blinds on springs. These served to shade the customer, protect goods and reduce reflections and glare in the windows. They could easily be fitted to the cornice and operated by a long boathook opening on metal stays fixed to the pilasters on either side.

3 . Historical Background



- 3.10** By the mid-19th century, only fresh food shops had open fronts. These persisted into the 20th century until the benefits of fresh air were overtaken by concerns for environmental health. Ventilation grills or opening lights above the top transom/fanlight were then used instead.
- 3.11** Competition in the high street of the late-19th century produced a range of styles with Gothic, neo-Georgian and Art Nouveau influences. Stonework and terracotta surrounds became common. New materials also included decorative glazed tiling with terracotta insets. Recessed entrances increased the area of window displays and transom lights allowed for cast-iron ventilation grilles and coloured glass to hide gas-light fittings.
- 3.12** With the introduction of pattern-book designs, shopfronts became an integral part of new town centre buildings in the early 20th century. Structural elements could be made more elegant with the use of bronze and polished stone, while Art Deco styles of the 1930s introduced features, such as sunbursts and stepped fascias, with new materials, such as chrome and Vitrolite/Carrara (a pigmented structural glass), chrome metalwork and chrome lettering. From the 1950's onwards the trend was for further simplicity in shopfront design and more minimal styles of modern architecture that have made much of the structural system of shopfront redundant. This was at a time when 'float' glass became available in large sheets. Although creating larger areas for window displays these also brought with them the added concerns of safety and security, and led to the widespread installation of security shutters and grilles. It was not until the 1970's when new interpretations of classical designs became popular.
- 3.13** Today many of the shopping streets in East Herts are not only of local, but national and international importance and display some fine original shopfronts of historic and architectural significance. There is a rich variety of styles and types from those inserted in medieval timber-framed buildings to Victorian, Edwardian and late-19th / early-20th century buildings. Using its statutory powers as a planning authority and through providing advice, the council is committed to preserving the retail heritage of its shopping environment.



4 Legislation and Policy

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Legislation – the need for Planning Permission

4.1 A new or replacement shop front will always require Planning Permission. Alterations to an existing shop front that involve a material change in its appearance will also require Planning Permission. Typical examples are:

- The removal of a shop front in whole or in part.
- The replacement or alteration of architectural features such as window frames and doors, decorative cornices, corbel brackets or other mouldings.
- Altering the frontage line (i.e. installing or removing a bay window, closing or creating a recessed entrance).
- Enlarging or reducing the size of a shop window or changing its shape, form, proportions or materials.
- Removing or adding mullions, transoms or glazing bars.
- Moving the position of the entrance.
- Replacing the shop door(s) with one of a different design or in different materials.
- Enlarging or reducing the size, depth or bulk of the fascia.
- Installing reflective or obscure glass.
- Applying stone, artificial stone, timber, plastic or tile cladding to pilasters, stall risers etc.
- Removing or installing steps or a ramp.
- Boarding up a shop front.
- Adding a blind or roller shutter. Where a roller shutter previously existed, changing the colour of the fabric or adding lettering will result in the need for planning permission and possibly Advertisement Consent.

4.2 Works of repair or minor 'like for like' replacement do not require Planning Permission. Redecoration does not require planning permission unless the property is covered by an Article 4 Direction.

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Listed Building Consent

4.3 A new or replacement shop front within or attached to a listed building and any alterations which affect its special architectural or historic interest will always require Listed Building Consent. For example, in addition to the items requiring Planning Permission mentioned above, the following works will require Listed Building Consent:

- The removal, addition or alteration of entrance floor tiles.
- The removal of an original blind and/or blind box.
- The installation of an extractor fan outlet.
- Painting any previously unpainted areas of the shop front.
- Repainting in a markedly different colour.
- Painting with a textured paint.
- Alterations to the interior.

Advertisements

4.4 Under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Advertisements) Regulations 2015, shop owners and retailers are able to display signage under 'deemed' consent or 'express' consent. However, where signs are erected under deemed consent provisions, harm can still arise. This includes the use of overly large fascias obscuring features and details, poor quality materials, garish designs, colours and overly large letters.

Enforcement

4.5 Where shop fronts that fail to comply with the advice in this SPD and are installed without the necessary permission, the council will consider taking enforcement action to secure compliance with the design guidelines set out in this document. The Council does not embark on enforcement action lightly, but considers that the protection of the character of retail areas of the District and their vitality is important.

National Planning Policy Framework 2018

4.6 In addition to legislation, the government has set out guidance on a range of planning matters in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2018. Central to this is the need to ensure the vitality of town centres. This is supported by expectations for good design but equally, the need to reinforce local distinctiveness and to safeguard heritage assets.

4.7 Section 7 'Ensuring the vitality of town centres' sets out the planning framework to safeguard and promote the sustained vitality for town centres. Whilst no specific reference is made to the detail of shopfronts paragraph 85 states:



“Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation”.

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- 4.8** Section 12 ‘Achieving well-designed places’, sets out the requirement for good design to be at the heart of planning policy and decision making, paragraph 124 states:

“The creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.”

- 4.9** Section 16 ‘Conserving and enhancing the historic environment’ places greater emphasis on proposals affecting or related to heritage assets. This is particularly important as the main five settlements fall within conservation areas and contain a high proportion of buildings that are listed or identified as making a positive contribution. Proposals for change will be required to take account of the special historic or architectural interest of conservation areas and listing buildings when submitting proposals for change.

- 4.10** This SPD sets out best practice design guidance and a set of principles that will act as supplementary guidance to the East Herts District Plan. The guidance will meet the requirement for well-informed design guidance contained in the NPPF (2018) and at the same time seek to maintain quality at the heart of the Districts town centres and promote vibrant retail environments.

East Hertfordshire District Plan, 2018

- 4.11** The East Herts District Plan was adopted in October 2018. Chapter 7 addresses Retail and Town Centres issues and sets out that:

“East Herts’ town centres play a vital role in providing for the every-day needs of residents, providing not only a varied retail offer, but also for banking and administrative needs, leisure and social opportunities.”

- 4.12** All of the towns in the District are historic market towns. The town centres have an identified hierarchy with Bishop’s Stortford identified as the principal town centre. Hertford is identified as a secondary town centre and all others are minor town centres. The policies (RTC1) identify town centre boundaries within which main town centre uses (as defined in the NPPF) will be supported in principle. Policies RTC2, 3 and 4 address primary shopping areas, and primary and secondary shopping frontages. The Plan also

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recognises that a range of facilities in local centres and villages support people's day-to-day retail and service needs whilst also helping to reduce the need to travel and promoting local employment. The Council recognises that a crucial aspect of the attractiveness of a town centre is its accessibility to all members of the community, whichever mode of travel they choose. Retail and leisure facilities should be accessible to all users and access for people with disabilities should be provided.

- 4.13** The District Council recognises the importance of retaining vitality within town centres, and the associated advantages of establishing and maintaining residential accommodation above retail units. These benefits include environmental sustainability, economic regeneration, security, and conservation of the District's heritage.
- 4.14** Chapter 17 sets out policies relating to design, policy DES4 covering a range of issues that all development proposals would be expected to address. Policies DES5 refers to crime and security matters. It sets out the requirement that measures to achieve those aims should not significantly compromise the provision of high quality design. With regard to advertisements and signs, policy DES6 specifies that these must respect the character and appearance of the environment.
- 4.15** Policies relating to heritage assets are set out in Chapter 21. Development proposals should preserve and, where appropriate, enhance the historic environment of the district. As indicated, the centres of all the historic retail areas in the district are designated as conservation areas. Policy HA4 indicates that, within these, development will be permitted where it preserves or enhances the special interest of the area.

Policy HA5 addresses Shopfronts in Conservation Areas specifically stating:

- I. Proposals for a new shopfront or commercial premise frontage or alterations to existing ones will be permitted where the proposed design follows historic shopfront design, is sympathetic to the scale, proportions, design details and materials of the structure or adjoining buildings and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.*
- II. Shopfronts of architectural or historic interest shall be retained and repaired as necessary.*
- III. Security features should be designed in a sensitive manner which respects the overall character of the frontage and location, facilitates natural passive surveillance and maintains an attractive street scene. The use of architectural solutions combined with the use of an internal open lattice grill is preferred. Alarm boxes should be of a discreet colour and size, located carefully in relation to the elevation of the building, whilst being obvious enough to deter an intruder.*



4.16 In its consideration of applications within Conservation Areas for express consent made under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisement) Regulations 2015 (policy HA6), the Council will only accept advertisements where they:

- a. are either painted or individually lettered in a suitable material of a proportionate size and design in relation to the building or fascia upon which they are to be displayed;
- b. are preferably be non-illuminated or does not contribute to an escalation of shopfront lighting along the street scene. Where illumination is proposed it should be external illumination which is discreet in size and of a minimum level. Internal illumination of shop signage will not be permitted;
- c. are of a traditional fascia or hanging type; and
- d. are of a traditional and appropriate size to the architecture of the host building.

4.17 Policy HA7 addresses the issues raised when proposals relate to a listed building. All other policies relevant to the development proposed should be considered when schemes are being formulated. The East Herts District Plan can be viewed, in full, on the Council's website: www.eastherts.gov.uk.

Neighbourhood Plans

4.18 In addition, where a Neighbourhood Plan is in formulation or has been finalised and agreed ('made') it may also have policies which relate to town centre and retail locations. These policies should also be taken into account.

Pre-application contact

4.19 The Council is able to offer the provision of advice and informal consideration of schemes being devised, before a formal application is submitted. This process will assist in ensuring that the correct permissions/consent are applied for and that all the issues have been taken into account at an early stage. The Council does have to charge for this service and its current charges, and how to request pre-application advice, are set out on the website; www.eastherts.gov.uk.

Building Regulations

4.20 Approval under the Building Regulations is required where a new shopfront is proposed, or where works involve a material change to the existing, structural alterations or changes to the means of escape. In East Herts, the Council's Building Control service is provided through Hertfordshire Building Control (HBC), who can be contacted at; building.control@hertfordshirebc.co.uk

5 . What to take into Account



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5 What to take into Account

- 5.1** Most of the best new shopfronts are professionally designed by architects. It is important, though, that you choose an architect who has experience both of working on shopfronts and, where applicable, a knowledge of the requirements of working in a conservation area and on historic buildings. Before considering a full replacement, the existing shopfront should be evaluated to see which (if any) elements make a positive contribution to character and therefore merit retention. The following list of questions are often a good starting point when considering alterations to an existing shopfront and the premises.

Existing Shopfront:

- What is the character of the existing shopfront?
- What are the strongest features of the existing shopfront?
- Is the current shopfront listed or in a Conservation Area?
- Can the existing shopfront be repaired?
- Do the elements of the architectural surround, ie pilasters, corbels, cornice, frieze, stallriser, survive?
- What is the proposed use of the shop, and is the shopfront appropriate?

The rest of the Building:

- What are the qualities and proportions of the rest of the building?
- Is there a particular architectural style?
- What materials are used?
- How well does the existing shopfront fit with the rest of the building?

Street scene and local context:

- What is the rhythm of the street elevation in which the shopfront will be located?
- Is there a consistent pattern to the shopfronts of adjoining buildings?
- What are the materials and colours used in the local buildings?
- How would a new shopfront fit in positively with the street scene?

Local Planning Authority:

- What are the specific East Herts District Plan policies?
- Have you checked the guidance set out in this SPD?
- Are there any restrictions such as Areas of Special Advert Controls?

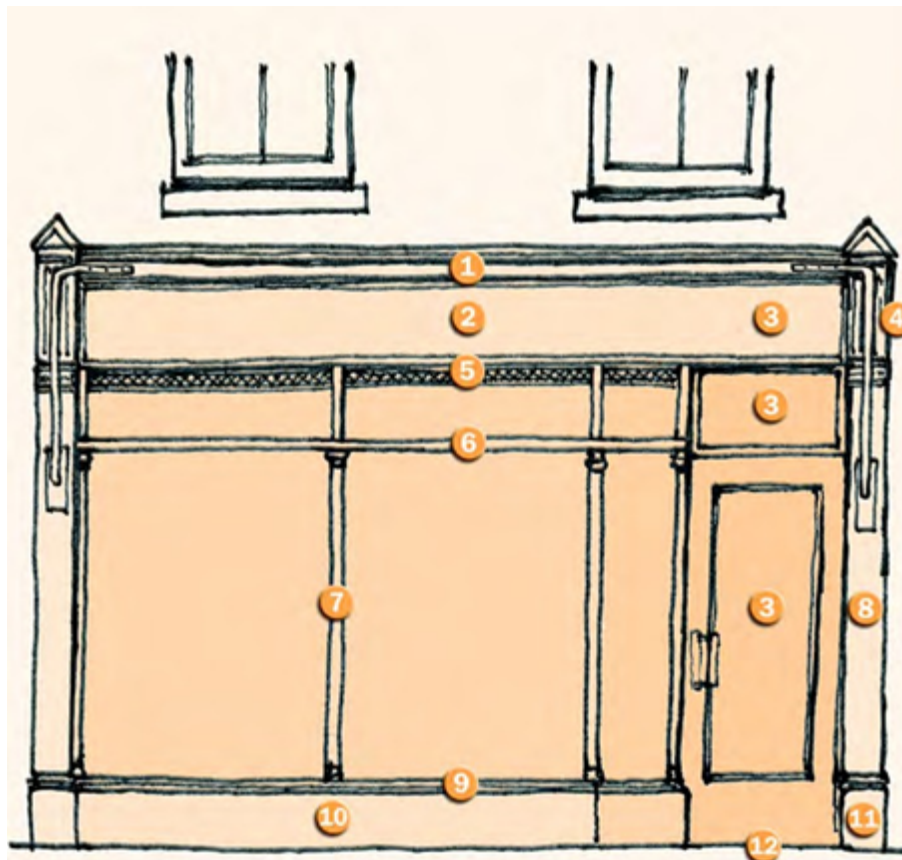
- 5.2** Once the existing shopfront has been appraised, it is important to assess the design approach to be taken. In all cases, where a traditional or historic shopfront exists, the council will encourage its retention. Many traditional shopfronts only need repair or re- establishment of the traditional architectural frame of the shopfront to give many future years of use.

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Traditional Design

5.3 A traditionally designed shopfront often has the entrance door set back from the pavement. It will normally consist of pilasters, with architectural details such as capital and plinth, a corbel or console bracket, and an entablature with cornice and frieze or fascia, which generally has a hand painted sign. The shop window will typically include two vertical mullions and a transom rail at door head level with clerestory or transom lights above. It will mostly be made of timber and sit within the traditional architectural framework around the opening. In some cases, a side door is included to serve the separate living accommodation to the upper floors.



1. Blind Box
2. Fascia
3. Location for property number
4. Corbel/console
5. Ventilator/grill
6. Transom
7. Mullion
8. Pilaster
9. Cill
10. Stallriser
11. Plinth/base
12. Threshold

Figure 20 – Basic elements of a 'traditional' shopfront.

5 . What to take into Account



- 5.4** Even where the original shopfront has been removed, much of the architectural framework often survives, sometimes covered up by modern fascia boards and signs. Therefore reinstatement would be encouraged. Another option is to propose carefully proportioned, well-resolved high quality modern designs in appropriate locations and where the existing building can accommodate the extent of change.

Modern Design

- 5.5** Modern designs may be a product of their time, responding to trading patterns with larger display windows, the growth of chain stores and multi-nationals, and the amalgamation of single shop units into larger stores. The response is often to extend the fascia across all units in an attempt to create unity but more so to accommodate corporate signage that often dominates a building and creates an unacceptable horizontal emphasis.
- 5.6** Plastic signage, particular internally illuminated box framed fascias in overly bright, garish colours and large lettering, has the sole aim of attracting attention. This may be what the retailer had in mind but it is often unsuccessful in its impact on the building itself and jars with its neighbours. Where more than one negative frontage sits alongside another, the cumulative impact is particularly harmful to the streetscene and quality of the shopping environment.
- 5.7** Not all modern design is negative as it can adopt traditional principles to meet trading and retailer needs whilst being sympathetic to the character of the host building. This is particularly important with regard to subdivisions, bay widths, architectural features, colour schemes and the context of the building in question. Some companies are more successful than others at adapting their corporate identities.

5 . What to take into Account



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Figure 21 – The identity of a chain store respecting the style of the curved shop with its fascia supported on barley twist columns with plinth and ornate capital.



Figure 22 – this retailer now has a unique presence in Bishop's Stortford with a subtle fascia.

5 . What to take into Account



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Figure 23 - The specific character of each building is reflected in the design of shopfronts in the top image, but ignored when the ground floors are amalgamated into one large unit.



6 Shopfront Design Advice

6.1 The overall design of a shopfront encompasses a number of elements, any one of which, if inappropriately executed, can have a detrimental effect on not only the individual shop itself, but also the immediate locality. Therefore, proposals for either alterations to existing shopfronts or new shopfronts need to take account of a number of factors to ensure the end result relates sympathetically to the rest of the elevation including upper floors. Any details or features of interest should be incorporated into the design.

6.2 Generally In their design, replacement shopfronts should:

- Reflect the architectural style of the individual building(s) with which they are associated, particularly insofar as their overall scale and glazing proportions are concerned. Where a shop occupies more than one building it is important that the individuality of each is clearly retained.
- Be generally well-proportioned and detailed, respecting existing decorative features and limiting signage to clearly defined elements.
- Utilise colour schemes sympathetic to the surrounding area in general and neighbouring buildings in particular.
- Employ traditional signwriting or utilise applied individual metal/timber lettering rather than vinyl, perspex or other non-traditional forms.
- Make use of discreet lighting and security measures in keeping with the building and its surroundings.
- Facilitate easy access through the use of appropriately detailed entrances – recessed where appropriate to overcome level changes – and door furniture.

Fascias and fascia signs

6.3 Most shopfronts have a fascia and this is perhaps the most dominant feature. They play a dual role in both communicating the name, trade and number of the shop and forming an important design element in the 'framework' of the shopfront. As a general rule, Georgian and early Victorian designs employed upright fascias, with plain or decorative ends on top of any pilasters. In later periods the fascias were more often placed between console brackets (or other forms of termination) and canted forward. Fascias should be appropriate in terms of size and form to the architectural period and style of the building.

6.4 Traditional fascias tend to be:

- Relatively narrow (around 18 inches/0.5 metres high).

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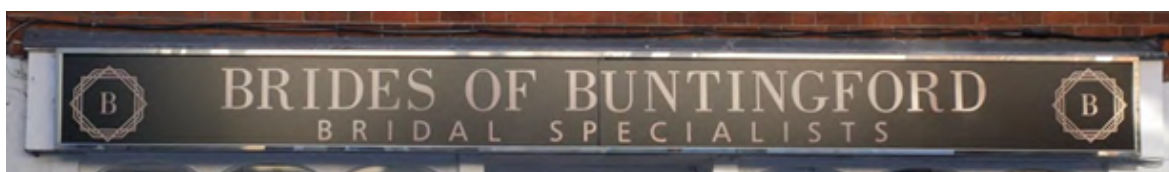
30

- Proportional to the design of the shopfront and the building as a whole.
- Kept well below the cill level of the first floor windows whilst not extending down disproportionately far over the shop front proper.

Figure 24 - Various sign and fascia issues



b) The sign has been located within the fascia area, contained by the corbel. It would have been more successful if painted onto the wooden fascia boards with the main name reduced in size.



c) Although easy to read, the lettering is too large and thus crowds the applied fascia board. A hand-painted fascia would have been more successful.



d) A plastic fascia board that is overly bright with large lettering and external lights that overpowers this building.



e) An inappropriately positioned plastic board placed above the ground floor with large lettering. An uncomfortable relationship.



- 6.5** All too often, excessively deep fascias – often boxing over earlier forms – have been introduced to reflect the fashion current at the time. Where such fascias are out of place, their presence should not influence the design of any replacement. Instead, this should be based on the original form where physical or photographic evidence is available.
- 6.6** A desire to insert a suspended ceiling should not be used as justification for increasing the fascia's depth as there are other, less visually intrusive solutions which could be adopted to conceal such a false ceiling.
- 6.7** Traditionally, fascias have a moulded cornice running above them to help throw rainwater clear of the shopfront and thereby prevent rot. Such cornices normally have an appropriately detailed lead weathering to protect them and were often used to conceal roller-blind boxes.
- 6.8** A general set of principles should be applied:
- The fascias and signage should be in harmony with the other elements of the building.
 - The depth of a fascia should not exceed one quarter of the height from the pavement level to its underside.
 - The fascia should not extend below the head of the pilaster nor above the perceived floor level below the first floor windows or its cills.
 - Where corbels exist above the pilasters, these contained the fascia and determined its height and extent and should be respected.
 - Where corbels have been lost, they should be reinstated to create that frame and space.
 - Existing windows and architectural details such as string courses, friezes, cornices and pilasters should not be obscured, altered or defaced by fascias or projecting signs or advertisements.
 - Acrylic, plastic or other shiny materials applied to fascias should be avoided.
 - On 19th Century buildings painted timber fascias are more appropriate with either painted lettering or individually mounted letters of another material.
 - Box Fascias, usually of plastic and/or metal, often project out of the existing fascia panel, and are too large and bulky and unsympathetic to the style of most buildings, and should be avoided.
 - Individually illuminated letters are preferred to box signs and in some cases may not need Advertisement Consent.

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- Highly reflective materials should be avoided.
- Good contrast and simple lettering will make signage more legible. Standard shopfront designs used by national retail chains may not be suitable

Pilasters and Corbels/Consoles

6.9 Pilasters are half columns that act as supports for the corbels/console and provide a clear division between each shop. Corbels are effectively the brackets or 'end stops' to a fascia and together with the supporting pilaster, complete the frame to the shopfront. Corbels are normally decorative rather than functional features and are derived from classical architectural orders but can vary significantly in size and detail from the classical and neo-classical to art deco designs of the 1920's and 30's. Pilasters also vary in detail from plain to moulded or fluted.

6.10 Pilasters and corbels make a significant visual contribution to individual shopfronts and, where they are used as a common element in a row of shops, can help to provide a unifying theme particularly evident in set-piece buildings purposely designed for retail use.



Figure 25 - Examples of corbels of the influenced by the classical period.

6.11 Any such original features that survive should be retained. Where new shopfronts in the 'traditional' style are being proposed, care should be taken to ensure the quality and proportions of the detailing of the individual elements is appropriate so as to avoid the visual blight arising from either 'pastiche' or 'standardisation'.



Canopies and blinds

- 6.12** Roller blind boxes were often incorporated into shop fascias. These were primarily intended to shade the shop-window displays from the sun and are not, therefore, commonly found on north-facing shopfronts. However, they also provide some protection to the shoppers and shop window against rain and sun and can be a lively addition to the streetscene, provided that they are designed as an integral part of the shopfront and are confined to it.
- 6.13** Where such blind boxes may have fallen out of use, resulting in the removal of the external ironmongery necessary for their function, the boxes themselves (often still containing the blinds) may survive in situ and, where this is the case, they should be refurbished and their mechanisms restored to full functionality where/if feasible.
- 6.14** Where canopies or blinds are being proposed as part of a shopfront design, they should normally be of the traditional, retractable type. Care should be taken to ensure that their size, shape and position are compatible with the character of the building. Architectural details should not be obscured when blinds are installed. The colour and materials should be in keeping with the materials of the shopfront and building.
- 6.15** Planning permission is normally required for all blinds, unless they are replacing existing blinds on a like-for-like basis. Blinds that carry symbols or lettering may be considered to be advertisements and may require advertisement consent. Listed building consent is required where blinds are to be installed on a listed building.
- 6.16** The Council will generally not permit blinds above first floor cill level. However, on existing buildings which are designed to accommodate blinds on upper levels, renewal will be acceptable if the blinds are concealed behind a traditional valance and do not carry advertisements. Folding or pseudo (fixed) 'Dutch' blinds are alien introductions to the traditional streetscene, perhaps owing more to sponsored advertising than any practical need. As such, the use of these latter types will be discouraged.

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Figure 26 (left) - Section through a traditional fascia with integral roller blind (blue) and roller security shutters (purple).
Figure 27 (right) - Dutch v simple roller blinds.

Stallrisers and thresholds

- 6.17** The stallriser traditionally forms the lower horizontal and solid element of the 'frame' which encloses the display space and provides some protection against accidental knocks. Historically, the height of the stallriser was often dependant on the goods which were being sold, with those which would benefit from being viewed from above resulting in a low stallriser.
- 6.18** Higher stallrisers may have served to support projecting display shelves or tables, often associated with vertically-opening windows, of the type used historically by greengrocers, butchers and fishmongers, for example, in their shop designs.
- 6.19** Traditionally, stallrisers were constructed of render or wooden panelling on a rendered or stone / brick plinth. Early stallrisers were plain but in later centuries timber stallrisers included raised and fielded panels with mouldings. The modern reproduction versions are often inferior, utilising flat, un-profiled panels or applied mouldings which lack longevity.
- 6.20** Some stallrisers including decorative tiling relating to the type of business and in some instances incorporate terracotta panels, mouldings and lettering. Some pubs and butchers have glazed decorative tiles whereas some banks employed marble stallrisers. Modern alternative have included laminates, mosaics and reflective tiles which are not considered to be suitable materials and should be avoided.

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East Herts District Plan | East Herts Retail Frontages: Design & Signage SPD (2019)



Figure 28 - A well-balanced frontage with stallriser of an appropriate height.



Figure 29 - Tiles with moulding and terracotta to the stallriser.



Figure 30 - Glazed blue tiles appropriate to this stallriser.

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6.21

Historically where larger panes were used the building had a shallow stallriser or plinth, for example, the former Green Dragon Hotel dating from 1903 with its low blue green moulded plinth and dado and plate glass windows. Today the former hotel has been converted into retail and commercial units. Some modern shopfronts or commercial buildings can accommodate this minimalist approach but not all. Council policy requires that in certain locations, stallrisers should be incorporated into new frontages. Whatever their use it is possible for modern designs to incorporate these traditional features. In general stallrisers should not exceed the base of the pilasters of approximately 450mm in height. However, there may be cases where the stallriser could be higher, so seek advice first.



Figure 31 - The former Green Dragon Hotel design with full plate glass windows.



Figure 32 - Two examples where full glazing works.

- 6.22** Thresholds marked the point of entry and, as such were frequently used to display the shop name. This often took the form of mosaic-work which might survive a number of changes in ownership and, where found, should be retained.

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Figure 33 - A selection of the few tiled thresholds.

Mullions, transoms and glazing bars

- 6.23** Mullions and transoms served as the main vertical and horizontal elements subdividing larger openings, in a pattern which reflects the proportions of the shop and the rest of the building. Transoms often enabled openable windows to be introduced for ventilation or the incorporation of ventilation grills.
- 6.24** Shopfronts from the late-18th to early-19th centuries often had full moulded or barley twist mullions into which the glass was set. The moulding was provided to the interior as well as the exterior creating visual richness.
- 6.25** Glazing bars of an increasingly slender, refined character were introduced as a means of holding small glazed panes in place within a larger frame, providing a particularly 'traditional' character. Though large sheets of plate glass have been used in shopfronts since the mid Victorian period, smaller divisions of glazing have remained in use for most traditional shop designs.
- 6.26** A transom should divide the window at the same level as the line between the door and door light. Mullions should line up above and below the transom and may reflect vertical alignment of windows in the upper floors or the bays of the building.
- 6.27** Unless a large expanse of glass is a principal feature of the design, then this practice of incorporating transoms and mullions should be followed. Therefore, where there is evidence of such features having previously existed in a shopfront it may be appropriate to consider reinstating them, not only for aesthetic reasons but also for practical ones. There is



considerable potential for saving on glass replacement costs as, where casual vandalism or accident is concerned, it is unlikely that more than one pane would be damaged.

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Figure 34 - An interesting Edwardian decorative glazing bar and a moulded mullion from the late-19th century.

Doors and door furniture

- 6.28** The choice of door handles, letter boxes and other associated items of furniture is of importance as careless selection may be visually inappropriate and/or impracticable, particularly for the elderly or disabled. Again, these elements should reflect the overall character of the shopfront whilst remaining both robust and functional.

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Figure 35 - Original Doors.

Shop signage

- 6.29** Signage on fascias is best limited to details of the shop name and street address. Too much information creates clutter and visual confusion. Ideally, traditional signwriting or applied individual metal/timber letters should be used with painted timber as a base. The use of 'standard' vinyl, Perspex or similar materials is not considered to be appropriate, particularly in conservation areas and when applied to listed buildings.
- 6.30** Size of lettering should be determined by the need to be reasonably legible to shoppers, but not be too large to swamp the fascia or the shopfront. Generally individual letters and symbols should be no greater than 1/2 to 1/3 of the height of the fascia. Each shop must have its street number clearly displayed on the shopfront. Numbers can be positioned on the fascia, on glazing above doors or on the door.

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Figure 36- Appropriately scaled lettering to height of fascia.



Figure 37 – Example of a fascia with a too much lettering and an inappropriate Dutch blind.

- 6.31** Historically, other areas used for the display of more temporary advertising materials included the reveals of recessed doorways, where chalkboards might be put up or the sloping edges to the window display platforms above the stallrisers. As previously noted, stallrisers and adjacent paving surfaces might incorporate decorative tiling or mosaic work relating to the shop name and/or business.
- 6.32** The practice of displaying brash advertising material in the form of window stickers or banners draped across fascias or on elevations above ground floor level is inappropriate and can effectively compromise the character of the street, creating cluttered appearance and detracting from the appearance of the building/s.

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- 6.33** Such inappropriate advertisement and signage prevents people from seeing into shops and has a detrimental visual impact on the character of an area. By contrast, attractive window displays have a positive effect on the perceived quality of the shopping area that will attract the interest of visitors and residents alike.



Figure 38 – Excessive signage significant in number and scale.

- 6.34** It must be remembered that a shopfront provides the framework for displaying goods. The method of display is crucial, not only in attracting the customer, but also making for a lively street. Shop windows should not be obscured by a proliferation of stickers and decals. A few carefully chosen and well-arranged items will be more eye catching than a display window crammed with goods.

Corporate Styles

- 6.35** Company logos, signs and standard shopfront designs may not be suitable for either individual buildings or in Conservation Areas. The overall appearance of the building and the area is more important than promoting a 'corporate house style' for different branches of the same company. Care should be taken to adapt the design and incorporate the company logo in the overall design. Multiple stores need to co-operate in modifying their standard 'corporate' lettering, especially in conservation areas and on listed buildings.

Signage on Glazing

- 6.36** Large areas of glazing can be a useful location for shop signs, which can be painted or etched onto the internal surface of the windows. This may be particularly suited to frontages that have an architectural form that do not lend themselves to the attachment of large external signs or fascias. However excessive signage can make windows look cluttered, especially when combined with additional advertisements and posters. Large vinyl



stickers, often with exploded photos of products and used by convenience stores, are particularly harmful to the building and the character and appearance of the area and must be avoided.

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- 6.37** Large areas of uninterrupted glazing should be easily identified to prevent people from walking into them accidentally. This should be with permanent marking 1.5m above street level. Clearly visible handles or push plates on fully glazed doors may also help to prevent accidents. Young children and people with a visual impairment may not detect the edge of a fully glazed door, and these should have a clearly visible frame or edge.

Projecting or Hanging Signs

- 6.38** A well designed hanging sign suspended from traditional brackets can enhance the appearance of a shopfront and add vitality to a traditional shopping street. Sign-written hanging signboards of a modest size are an established feature of traditional streets and should be retained. Where the original brackets still exist, their reuse will be encouraged. Where new brackets are required, they would need to be detailed to fit in with the overall style of the building and their location should be carefully selected so as to minimise any potential for detrimental impact on the building itself or its neighbours. Any board should be painted timber and sign written. Bespoke hanging signs such as those used by chemists, barbers or ironmongers will be supported where of an appropriate design, appearance, material, and finish.
- 6.39** If original brackets are not present, a projecting sign may be accommodated centrally on a pilaster, at fascia level, at a minimum height of at 2.4m clearance from the pavement and 1m minimum in width from the outer side of the kerb line. The signs should be simple and limited to the relevant information relating to the shop and the services provided. No more than one sign will be considered acceptable per retailer or business and with deemed consent, should not exceed 0.75m². Where exceeded, or a sign of any size is illuminated, advertisement consent may be required and Listed Building Consent will be required where attached to a listed building.
- 6.40** In conservation areas or on listed buildings, internally illuminated projecting box signs are considered unacceptable. Where illumination is required and justified, the most appropriate form for hanging signs is 'picture-lighting'. Other forms of external lighting will be considered on their merits.

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Figure 39 - Positive examples of hanging signs using traditional brackets, or the original in respect of Pizza Express.

Illumination (general)

- 6.41** Neon signage, illuminated letters and internally illuminated box signs and fascias are generally considered inappropriate, particularly for historic streets. Such signs tend to be too obtrusive and are usually constructed from unsympathetic materials.
- 6.42** Signs illuminated externally by means of trough lights or carefully positioned spotlights are potentially more acceptable but such illumination should only be considered for premises which are normally open after daylight hours, such as dispensing chemists, public houses, restaurants and other places of public entertainment.
- 6.43** The use of external floodlighting or downlighters is rarely necessary or appropriate as they add light pollution. In this context, it should be borne in mind that additional illumination should not be necessary where the level of street-lighting is adequate.



Figure 40 – Unnecessarily extensive lighting.

Upper floors

- 6.44** All advertising above ground floor level should relate solely to the use on that floor, rather than the commercial use below. For businesses operating from upper floors, painted lettering on window panes is preferred. Black or gold lettering is the traditional solution for this purpose. Etching can also be employed. Additional signs fixed to the outside of the building should be avoided, although “low key” signs e.g. brass plaques, may be appropriately sited next to entrances to the upper floors.

Security Shutters and Grilles

- 6.45** Many retail frontages in the UK have been blighted by long stretches of solid aluminium shutters. At night these shut off light from within the shops creating an intimidating atmosphere. They prevent observation of break-ins and attract graffiti. There are some examples of shutters in the main shopping areas but not to the extent that they have created the negativity experienced elsewhere. There is evidence of runners of hooks for external mesh steel grills on a number of shops. Some premises have internal expanding grilles which do not appear unattractive. Should proposals be presented for shutters account should be given to the following guidance and advice.

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Figure 41 (left) - An imaginative use of external shutters. Figure 42 (right) - Poor Visibility through this inappropriate shutter

6.46

External shutters often retract into external boxes below the fascia and vertical runners attached to the pilasters. These both harm the appearance of a shopping streetscape. However, there are alternatives that avoid these problems:

- Security Glass is an ideal solution with no detrimental effect on the appearance of the shop. Modern toughened and laminated glass can give very high levels of security and there is a wide range of products available from standard 7mm laminated glass to bulletproof glass.
- Internal Grilles: Internal shutters require no external additions to the shopfront, and when they are the open link grille type, allow a clear view into the shop and give an open appearance from the street.
- Removable External Shutters: External shutters can be acceptable if they are appropriate to the shop and designed to suit its character. Traditional timber shutters that can be removed completely are fitted over each window; steel framed meshes with heavy gauge wire across fit over a larger area of glazing.
- External Roller Shutters: In exceptional circumstances external roller shutters can be used but they should be chosen carefully and fitted sensitively, so that:
 - They are of the open grille type allowing clear vision through.



- The housing is contained within the design of the shopfront, preferably behind the fascia.
- The runners should be built into the frame of the shop.
- Solid External Shutters are only acceptable on traditional open shopfronts with no glazed window display, such as some fishmongers or butchers.

Alarm boxes and security cameras

- 6.47** Burglar, fire alarm boxes and security cameras should be discretely sited and painted so as not to detract from the visual and architectural character of the building, whilst ensuring adequate visibility for deterrent purposes. Any necessary wiring should be routed in such a manner so as to be as unobtrusive as possible. These considerations are particularly important where listed buildings and conservation areas are concerned.

A-boards and Banners

- 6.48** 'A'-boards are often displayed to attract custom to nearby premises. The unauthorised positioning of such signs on highway land is considered hazardous to highway users, particularly the visually impaired and introduces visual clutter into the streetscene and may result in action being taken to secure their removal.



Figure 43 - Examples of A-Board clutter.

- 6.49** The Highway Authority normally does not allow signs to be displayed on land in its control and has the power to remove them. Advertisement Consent is required for such signs on private land.

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Modern Shopfront

- 6.50** In certain circumstances, it might be appropriate to design a modern shopfront either within the traditional surround or within a carefully articulated new shop frame that reinterprets the proportions and forms of the adjacent shopfronts in a contemporary manner. The design of modern replacements should be of a high standard in order to bring diversity and vitality to the street. At the same time, proposals should always take account of adjacent shopfronts where these are of traditional design and should relate in terms of fascia lines, stallriser heights, bay widths and materials.
- 6.51** Shopfronts combining two shop units often disrupt the strong vertical emphasis, relate poorly to the buildings and introduce a visually unacceptable horizontal emphasis. It may be necessary therefore to retain or introduce an intervening pilaster and to break the fascia so that it looks like two separate shop units. Corner shopfronts have an important visual and practical role to play in shopping areas. Special care will be required for shops of 'double' aspect and window displays.

Construction material and finish of shop frames

- 6.52** Materials should be selected to harmonise with the character of the building concerned. As a general principle, the type and number of materials used should be kept to a minimum, should be durable and easy to maintain. Shiny, reflective materials or lurid colouring should be avoided.
- 6.53** Traditional materials such as painted timber, glass, steel, render, stone, glazed tiles are still the most commonly used materials for good shopfronts and will appear in most better- quality designs. In well-established shopping areas with historic interest, painted timber, combined with other traditional materials are the most appropriate usually matching the features of the upper floors. Traditional shopfronts should not normally have a natural or varnished timber finish and exposed tropical hardwoods are especially unsuitable.
- 6.54** Modern framing materials such as extruded aluminium and UPVC, which are smooth, flat in texture and plain in section, are unlikely to be considered acceptable on historic buildings and certainly not in an attempt to mimic a traditional design. There are some steel-framed shopfronts in the District and these can result in elegant simple modern designs which should be retained. Powder-coated cast aluminium, stainless steel and frameless glazing can all suit contemporary design.
- 6.55** Shop fronts which comprise a series of folding doors, usually proposed for café and restaurant uses and which enable the entire frontage to be open in fine weather, can be problematical in historic buildings. When fully open they result in a ground floor void lacking any solid base to the building, whilst when closed the proportions of the folding doors can result in too much



vertical sub-division particularly if the frames are heavy. This approach is generally discouraged in historic buildings and within conservation areas, except in some cases, where the property is set back from the pavement with a reasonable private forecourt. However, alternatives could be considered such folding windows or horizontally sliding windows which sit upon a solid stallriser. This can achieve the same effect in fine weather whilst retaining a solid visual base to the shop front at all times.

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Colour and finishes

- 6.56** The key to a successful colour scheme is to avoid colours with a high intensity which would make them overtly dominant in the street scene. Traditional joinery colours are dark blue, dark green, burgundy, brown, black, pale grey, creams and broken white. Using a consistent colour is preferable for all joinery. This approach will often still be the most appropriate one. However there are some exceptions, such as Lussmanns, a Grade II* listed building in Hertford which dates from the Georgian period. It was remodelled in the 19th and 20th centuries with the ground floor housing a unique Egyptian revival style shopfront and a unique use of colours. It should be remembered that this is a one-off and does not justify some of the solid colours or colour schemes that are now evident elsewhere.
- 6.57** The choice of appropriate colour will depend upon the character of the particular building, street or area. Additionally, the council may seek to limit colour schemes where the shopfront is an original example, in a conservation area or forming part of a listed building.



Figure 44 - One-off special buildings like Lussmanns may be able to accommodate a stylized appearance and unusual colours. It does not apply to all.

- 6.58** Colour can be used to emphasise important elements of the design, to reinforce certain aspects and to pick up details, such as mouldings and lettering. Pilasters and corbel brackets should be a consistent colour. Where shared by adjoining shops they should not be painted half one shopfront

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colour and half the adjoining colour. Traditionally rendered stallrisers and pilasters were painted in a contrasting colour to the joinery in smooth masonry paint. Original facing brick, steel and bronze or hardwood frames should not be painted and textured coatings should never be used. Joinery is normally best painted in a gloss or semi-gloss finish; a stained finish is almost always inappropriate in historic areas. The character or appearance of historic areas can be harmed by the use of strong and vivid colours. Restraint is required, preferably through the choice of traditional paints, colours and finishes.

- 6.59** It is helpful to emphasise the location of shop entrances for people with a visual impairment. This can be done through use of colour and textural contrast, on the vertical plane between entrance and the rest of the shop front and underfoot, by emphasising the change from pavement to shop floor.

Empty Shops

- 6.60** It is recognised that there will be occasions when properties are vacant with shopfronts possibly needing to be boarded up for security reasons. It is important that this is only done as a temporary measure whilst steps are taken to bring the shop back into use. The boarding up of premises has a significant impact on a building's appearance and on the surrounding area.



7 Access Provisions

- 7.1** Wherever it is practicable, the design of a new shopfront, or proposals to remodel existing premises should provide access to everyone regardless of age or disability. Thus the principles of inclusivity should be employed whereby the whole scheme is designed to be accessible without the need for separate entrances or facilities which can only be accessed by request. A number of existing shops and premises in the shopping areas have ‘at grade’ level or gently sloping entrances. Due to the medieval pattern and street systems, some benefit from a double aspect or a shopfront to another street which can be utilised to provide suitable access.
- 7.2** Obviously, this requirement has great implications for the design and layout of sites and buildings, both externally and internally. Most buildings will have to comply with the Building Regulations and access requirements. Designs should be undertaken with this in mind.
- 7.3** It should be remembered that those with special requirements related to access are not limited to wheelchair users, but includes people with impaired vision, hearing or mobility. In addition to the possible regular users of the development, occasional visitors will also need to be considered.
- 7.4** It is recognised that in certain instances the character of listed buildings or other existing structures will mean that compromises may have to be made regarding the overall aim of inclusivity.



Figure 45 – An historic shopfront that could not accommodate access for the less able without significant harm.

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- 7.5** Alterations or new frontage should ensure access for all through the main entrance by creating a clearly defined, well-lit, unobstructed and level approach. Where this is not possible, a secondary accessible entrance should be considered. Only in exceptional circumstances should disabled people be obliged to ring a bell or wait to be escorted onto the premises.



Figure 46 - A historic entrance with original handrails assisting entry (left). An additional step to ease entry (right), however a uniform surface treatment would have been more appropriate.

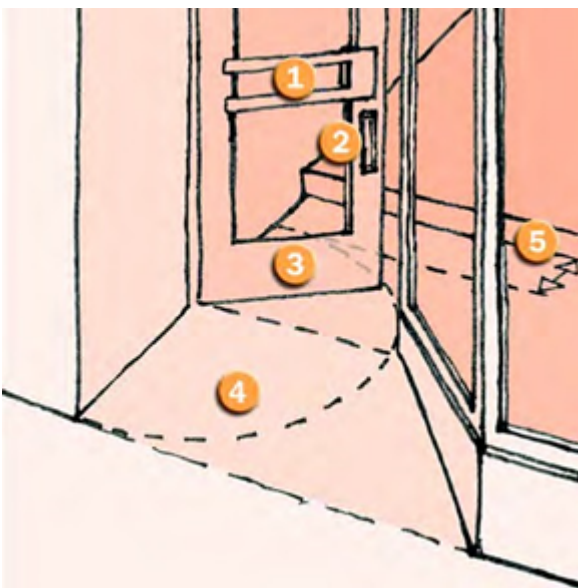
- 7.6** The following points should also be borne in mind:
- The entrance to the shop should be level with the pavement. If this is not possible, a non-slip ramp (maximum gradient 1:12) should be provided, to allow access for people with limited mobility, including elderly people and shoppers with pushchairs.
 - Doors should have a clear opening width of 900mm, with a clear 300mm space adjacent to the opening side of the door. Where there are double doors, there should be a clear opening width of 800mm through at least one of the leaves. Where building constraints make these recommended widths impossible, the minimum clear opening width should be 750mm.
 - Where space is limited automatic doors are helpful, and there are a variety to suit most situations. Traditional shops may choose power-assisted doors, or automatic doors operated via a push plate. If manual, doors should be light, well hung, and self-closing forces kept to the minimum necessary. Revolving doors are not recommended.

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- Where there are unavoidable steps, these should be easy going, have a handrail on both sides and should be easy to see by including contrasting step nosings.
- On many traditional shopfronts the entrance is recessed. These recesses add variety to the shopping street. However, if open at night, they should be adequately lit for safety reasons.

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1. Handle of appropriate height & design
2. Letterbox at convenient height
3. Kicking plate
4. Door hung to swing without obstructing pavement
5. Any necessary internal step 400mm beyond door swing

Figure 47 - Recessed entrances can accommodate appropriate access for the less able making the shopping experience 'user friendly' but care is required with detailing.

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Figure 48 - Both the ramp and shopfront make for an unacceptable impact on the building and streetscene

1. Showcase
2. Landings (min900m2)
3. Ramp (1 in 20)
4. Safety Glass

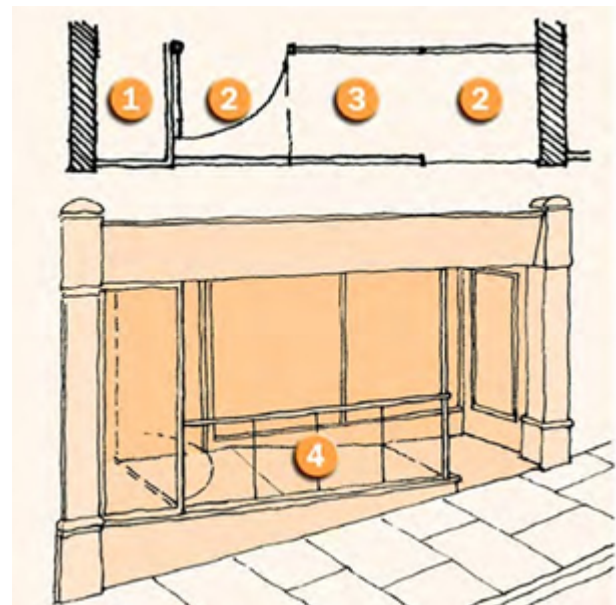


Figure 49 - Highways rarely permit level changes on pavements within their control. Where practical and achievable, this approach may offer an alternative and less intrusive approach.



8 Summary

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- 8.1** The history of retailing and the availability of building materials and their associated construction methods are largely responsible for the appearance of our shopping centres and high streets today.
- 8.2** Alterations to existing commercial premises need to be carried out in a manner which is sympathetic to the original design and scale of the building and its setting. Demands from corporate businesses and the need for a higher retail profile has done much to destroy harmonious streetscapes. Modern materials and advertising methods have been used in ways which are out of context with the character of areas.
- 8.3** An understanding and appreciation of the development of the shopfront is useful when making changes and it is particularly important to conserve historic features and detailing in conservation areas and areas where the historical character is an important aspect of local distinctiveness.
- 8.4** It is not always easy to control the precise appearance of shopfronts and signage, especially when recent changes have been introduced which are not sympathetic to the existing fabric and design. Care is needed in the detailing of the fascia, canopies and blinds, pilasters and consoles, stallrisers, mullions, transoms and glazing bars, door furniture, shop signage, upper floors, illumination, security and alarm boxes.