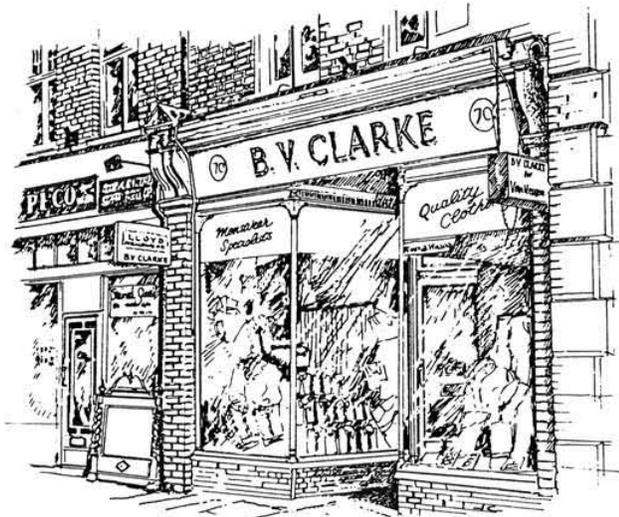


# Design Guidelines for SHOPFRONTS AND SHOPSIGNS



These guidelines are intended to influence those involved in the design of shopfronts and shop signs in the Borough, including retailers and shopfitters. It is not the intention to inhibit imaginative and sensitive design, but to offer a general guide to solutions that have been found acceptable.

For the purposes of these guidelines, a 'shop' is defined as a retail outlet having a fascia sign and/or a display window. Non-retail premises such as banks, betting offices, estate agents, restaurants, building societies and public houses are included.

The erection of a new shopfront or the significant alteration of an existing shopfront is development requiring planning permission under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 [Section 55].

These guidelines form supplementary planning guidance to the Council's Unitary Development Plan policies for shopping and the environment. A principal Council objective is 'to ensure that shopping centres are attractive to shoppers and retailers by improving their appearance'.

Improving the standard of shopfronts, fascias and other related advertising has a dual outcome, improving both the quality of the built environment and the economic well-being of shopping areas. The large number of listed buildings and conservation areas in the Borough indicates the quality of its buildings and spaces. The shopfront is such an immediate and visible element that it, too, must reflect this quality and maintain the standard for the whole Borough. **Planning permission may be required for the removal of an existing shopfront. If the shopfront is in a conservation area and makes a positive contribution to the area this will be a material consideration.** Obtaining consent for the removal of a shopfront identified as a Building of Townscape Merit or specifically mentioned in one of the Council's conservation area studies is unlikely. Listed building consent will also be required for alterations to shopfronts in listed buildings.

Signs often form part of the shopfront and in certain circumstances will require consent under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992. If, for example, the signs are illuminated, or above the level of the bottom of any first floor window, or if the letters or symbols exceed 0.75 metres in height, consent must be obtained.

When considering a shopfront installation or replacement there are invariably different and conflicting interests. The shop type and retailing method, and the style and type of building into which the shopfront is being fitted, all have a bearing on the design. Owners should ensure that any change takes into account the needs of all users and does not worsen accessibility. Professional advice will be required to ensure good quality for new shopfronts.

## Shopfront retention

1. Preference should be for the retention of any well designed and proportioned shopfronts which in the traditional form may have recessed entrances, fascias, stall risers, pilasters and other architectural embellishments.
2. Before considering a proposal to remove or alter an existing shopfront of any date, an evaluation of its quality should be made. If necessary, investigation should be made in order to establish the quality of any earlier shopfront or features which may remain behind later alterations.
3. The quality of joinery, upon which the appearance of the traditional shopfront has depended, may be difficult to equal. Removal of later alterations, and repair and redecoration of the existing may be the preferred solution and provide the best result.
4. Quality fixtures and fittings of retained shopfronts equally should not be discarded. Blind boxes, ventilation grilles, hanging signs and their brackets, door furniture, tiling, shutters and engraved, etched or 'brilliant' glass are a selection of features worthy of repair or reuse.

## The new shopfront

1. In support of planning or listed building applications for new shopfronts, drawings adequate to demonstrate the proposals should be submitted. Elevational drawings at 1:20 and some construction details at full size will be required. Full details of proposed materials and colours must be specified. Upper floors above the shopfront, and adjoining buildings, should be shown.
2. The new shopfront must not be designed in isolation. Care should be taken to respect the design of the building into which the shopfront is fitted and its neighbours. Structural divisions within the upper elevation of a building should be seen to continue through the shopfront to the ground.
3. New shopfronts should be satisfactorily detailed in their junctions to adjacent shops. Relative heights of stallrisers and fascias may vary to suit different buildings but must continue to respect group value. Bay widths are a key factor which may be shared by an entire parade. In such cases subdivision of larger units may become necessary. Any change that proposes to ignore the separate identity of two adjoining buildings, in an attempt to give the appearance of a single shopfront is never necessary and will be strongly resisted.

## Materials

1. The design of the shopfront, and the materials used in its construction, should be compatible with the character of the area as a whole.

Although plastic and exposed aluminium shopfronts may have their uses in certain locations, they will rarely be found appropriate in an historic environment such as within a conservation area, and will be resisted. Glass fibre and plastics tend to discolour and become tawdry in a very short period of time, and do not lend themselves to redecoration. Their texture is frequently at variance with that prevalent in a particular location. Stained or varnished hardwood joinery is also seldom satisfactory.

2. Shopfronts have traditionally been constructed in painted softwoods. Many hardwoods do not readily take a paint finish. Whichever timber is selected check that it is from a sustainable source.

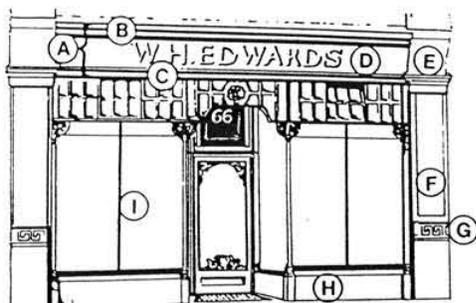
Regular maintenance and cleaning of any shopfront is essential, whatever the material. Repainting every three to five years should be more than adequate to maintain the original appearance.

## Design

1. The new shopfront must observe the Council's UDP design policy in which a 'high standard of design' is required throughout the Borough. In conservation areas new shopfront design must as a minimum 'preserve' but preferably should 'enhance', the local character. Issues of scale, access, relationship to existing townscape, height, form, frontage, materials and detailing will all be considered in the examination of a shopfront proposal.

**Whether modern or traditional, new designs which are distinctive and original will be encouraged as long as they are of a high standard.**

2. Improvement to the shopfront should, wherever possible, be accompanied by an improvement to the facade including the removal of earlier ill-considered additions, such as surface cabling, redundant services, alarms and other obsolete fittings.
3. In order not to obscure the building, all parts of the new shopfront and fascia should be kept below the floor level of the first storey. Important architectural and historic features of the building should not be altered, defaced or obscured. The new design can sometimes be based on features already found on the building.



A Entablature      B Cornice      C Architrave (correct position for blind box)  
 D Fascia            E Console      F Plaster  
 G Moulding        H Stallriser    I Mullion

4. Stallrisers can be an important characteristic of a group of shops and therefore should be given consideration in the new shopfront design. They may be finished in a variety of materials. Mosaic tiles were often used to display the shop name or trade and may offer considerable decorative opportunities both on stallrisers and in recessed entrances. Hard wearing surfaces at this level of the shop also have maintenance advantages. Where the preference is for genuine framed and panelled timber construction the use of appropriate mouldings is to be expected.

## Fascias and shop signs

Poorly sited or over-large shop signs and badly designed or over-bright fascias can have a seriously detrimental effect on the visual quality of an area. There is no reason, however, why shop signs cannot be satisfactorily integrated into a commercial centre or shopping street. Fascias and shop signs perform a useful function by helping to emphasise the commercial core of a town and identify individual businesses. Adding vitality and colour to what should be a lively, busy and attractive area must be an objective for each sign.

1. As a general rule the fascia should be no deeper than the combined depth of the cornice and architrave. The combined cornice, fascia and architrave should not exceed one fifth of the total shopfront height. Modern designs should equally respect these proportions.



Fascias and lettering should be correctly proportioned. Street numbers should always feature.

2. Where a fine quality fascia conflicts with a change in the present business being conducted in the shop, it should simply be covered over and preserved by the new fascia board.
3. Acrylic or other highly reflective sheet material should be avoided. The preference is for painted timber sign boards, sign-written, or for individual applied lettering.
4. The fascia sign should state only the name or trade of the premises and its street number and should not carry extraneous advertisements. Unnecessary duplication of a name on a single fascia should be avoided.
5. On large buildings there may be a case for dispensing entirely with the fascia board. Applying individual letters directly to the building may in some circumstances be preferred where this treatment will minimise disruption of existing architectural features.

6. **In all situations the fascia must bear the street number of the shop.** The Council has powers to enforce the display of street numbering in the interest of rapid identification of premises in emergency situations. Please consider the number as part of the overall design.
7. The standard designs and corporate images of the multiple retailers are not always appropriate and modifications of 'house' styles may be necessary. Over-large fascias displaying company colours may be useful for brand identification in the High Street but are frequently quite inappropriate and in most situations will be resisted.
8. Illuminated fascias will be carefully considered for their visual impact on the streetscape and the compatibility of the proposed light levels with adjacent properties in the area.
9. Internally illuminated box fascias will normally be resisted. Halo and fret-cut lettering on solid background boards are an exception. Carefully designed exposed neon may also be considered acceptable.
10. Externally illuminated sign written fascias are normally preferred throughout the Borough. Only the fascia should be lit and not the first floor or the rest of the shopfront. Light levels should be strictly controlled as should the number and design of light fittings. Where consent is required conditions will be imposed limiting the level of illumination.
11. Normally only one projecting sign per shop is appropriate, and generally the style of the projecting sign should complement the fascia. Simple methods of support are invariably more successful than 'decorative' ironwork brackets.
12. Hanging signs or symbols may be positioned at higher than fascia level between windows provided they do not spoil the facade by obscuring architectural features, or affect interior spaces by limiting daylight. They must be conceived as appropriate and worthy additions to the buildings to which they are to be fixed and add to the quality of the area in which they are located. They will generally be painted or sign-written and may be illuminated externally. The content of the projecting sign should be limited to relevant information relating to the shop and services provided.
13. Simple lettering in traditional form can give individuality and distinction to the shopfront. Lettering should be in proper proportion to the size of the fascia.

### *Access for all users*

If at all possible there should be level access between the pavement and the shop. If a change in level is unavoidable, a non-slip ramp is preferred to steps. Where there is sufficient space, both could be provided. The ramp should be no steeper than 1:12 if the flight is less than 5m, 1:20 if longer. The overall width of any door should be a minimum of 850mm and preferably 900mm. Revolving and heavy doors should be avoided, and plate glass doors should be easily distinguishable, perhaps with a brightly coloured band at about 1575mm. Door handles should be

clearly visible, easy to grasp and use, and approximately 1m above floor level. (See "Design for Maximum Access"). To check that the shopfront complies with structural, fire and access for disabled people requirements, contact Building Control (0181 891 7348).

### *Retractable canopies & blinds*

Retractable canopies and blinds can also add liveliness to the street. Where blinds are to be fitted they should form an integral part of the shopfront design with blind boxes being designed as part of the cornice.

Permanently open 'Dutch style' canopies can spoil a shopfront by masking its features and will be resisted.

Whether retractable or fixed, a canopy requires planning permission under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. If the building is a listed building it will require Listed Building Consent. If the canopy carries any motif or lettering it will also require consent under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992.

### *Cash dispensers*

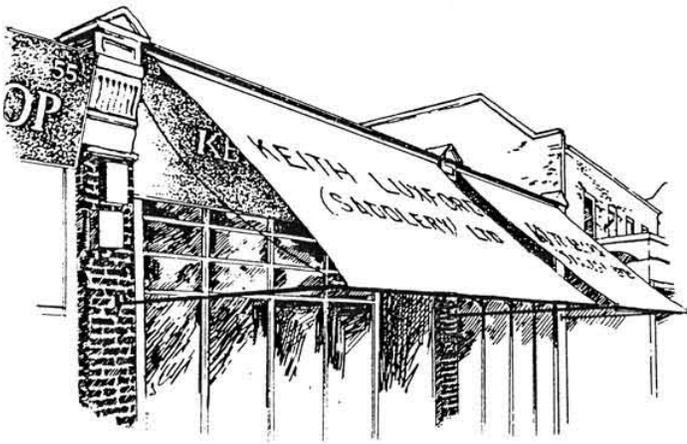
The location of cash dispensers must be carefully considered in relation to existing features found within the shop front. Adjustment of the standard position and size of equipment must be explored in advance of any proposal which may otherwise result in destructive installation.

### *Burglar & fire alarms*

Although these items are necessary for many premises they are generally unsightly in appearance and if possible should not be mounted on the front elevation. Where a new or altered shopfront is proposed it may be possible to locate such items



*Contemporary designs for distinctive shopfront treatment should nevertheless respect the form of the building into which they are fitted.*



*Retractable canopies add liveliness, colour and relief to the street scene besides providing shelter in bad weather.*

## **Roller shutters**

External security grilles will not normally be permitted. Where total security is required by insurance companies, the shutters should normally be located inside the shop window. Traditional horizontally-operated lattice security gates can in some cases be employed to protect recessed shop entrances, but should not extend across the windows. On traditional shopfronts, removable timber shutters may be employed to good effect. Bollards or strategically positioned planters to frustrate ram-raiding will need to be considered in each case against emergency service requirements, and for their appearance. Strengthening of individual shopfronts may be achieved through horizontal reinforcement of stall risers with ground beams.

## **Glass**

Plate glass has been used for many years in shopfront construction, but when broken fragments into sharp shards of glass. Restrictions placed on new glass by Building Regulations mean that there is more emphasis on safety and security; this has led to greater use of laminated glass. Laminated glass for shopfronts comes in two grades; 6.4mm safety glazing and 7.5mm security glazing. Use of the latter can often minimise the need for other extraneous security measures. Glass is usually the largest single cost in new shopfronts so reducing the area of single sheet glazing by providing sub-divisions can improve appearance, reduce costs and improve security.

## **Traffic signs**

For traffic safety reasons it is important that shop signs should not obscure or be liable to be confused with statutory traffic signs. Lettering colours similar to road sign formats should be avoided.

## **Upper floors**

Where the upper floors of buildings are used for business, any lettering should be applied directly to the window and be not more than 10 cms (4") high. The wording should relate only to a separate business above and not be the commercial use of the building at street level. Upper floor windows should not be used to display goods unless the windows have been specially designed for the purpose. Windows should be screened if goods are stacked on upper floors.

Following national concern over the bleak appearance and lack of vitality of shopping areas at night, the Council is encouraging the use of 'Over the shop' accommodation as living space rather than storage. Financial assistance may be available from the Housing Department. (Contact Cheryl Ould 0181 891 7405). This can also improve security for the shop concerned.

## **Change of use**

The change of use of shop premises to non-retail use, such as residential, has design implications for the entire street. Where such change of use is permitted, attention will be paid to whether a shop-like appearance is retained, or whether an appropriate and sympathetic alternative design solution is possible. The quality of the shopfront will be the determining factor in such situations.

## **Shops on corner sites**

There has been some pressure from retailers to convert the traditional double-aspect corner shop to single aspect by blocking side windows in order to create more wall display area. Any such alteration of the symmetry of the ground floor may upset the overall design of the building and its contribution to the townscape.

## **Ventilation**

Large areas of louvred window in a shopfront should be avoided and only be considered if there is no alternative solution to the problem of ventilation. This is seldom the case. Opening transom lights or decorative grilles over entrance doors or shopfronts offer all necessary possibilities in this respect.

## **'Listed' shopfronts**

A few of the shopfronts in the Borough are contained within buildings which are on the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. Listed building consent will be needed for any alterations to these shopfronts. More stringent controls will apply than to those shopfronts in conservation areas. It is however frequently possible to make improvements through repair and modest alteration.

## **Grants**

If you are considering carrying out repairs and/or restoration of a shopfront the Council may be able to provide financial help in the form of a grant.  
(Contact Policy & Design Section 0181 891 7335)