



This leaflet offers advice on the design of shop fronts and signs for retail and non-retail premises including building societies, restaurants, estate agents & betting shops, etc.

It explains how Hart District Council will seek to improve the quality of the shopping environment by encouraging retention of the best of the existing shop fronts and by requiring a high standard of design and materials for the installation of new shop fronts.

Poorly designed shop fronts, the use of brash colours, signs and materials, and the use of excessively large display windows, irrespective of the surroundings, can considerably reduce the appeal of a shopping street.

Installation of new shop fronts or alterations to existing ones may require planning permission, listed buildings consent and/or advertisement consent.

Figure 1 shows how the elements of a traditional shop front are well designed and proportioned. They also respect the overall proportions of the building to which they belong. Good examples of traditional shop fronts should be retained and repaired. All too often these shop fronts are amended to their detriment and the street scenes suffer in terms of visual quality.

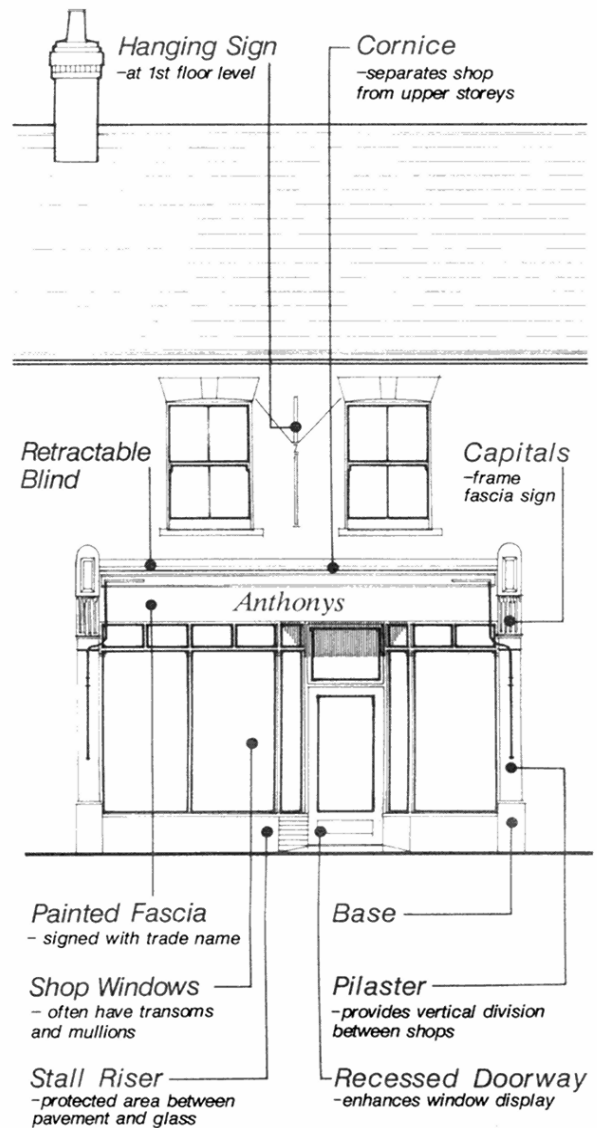


FIGURE 1: Elements of Traditional Shop Fronts.

Existing Shop Fronts

I. Fascias and Signs

- Fascias and signs should be appropriately proportioned to the shop and the building in which they are situated. Avoid large fascias, particularly where these cover up details worthy of retention. (E.g. cornices, blind boxes, string courses etc.)
- The top of the fascia should relate to the ground floor and should not extend into the first floor zone.

- The fascia should not mask pilasters or destroy the individuality of buildings by being taken across multiple frontages.

- Colours should not be garish or clash with adjacent fascias. The use of acrylic, plastic or other shiny material should be avoided on traditional shop fronts, particularly where they are to be internally illuminated.

- Where illumination of signs is appropriate, consideration should be given to 'halo' lighting of individual letters or to rear illumination through a mask.

- Internally illuminated projecting boxed signs at fascia level should be kept to a minimum to convey specific information only (e.g. Pharmacy).

- Traditional hanging signs with well designed brackets can add interest to the street scene as well as 'signing' a shop although these also need to be used in moderation.

- Lettering should be well proportioned within the fascia zone.

- In certain cases the local planning authority may support the use of soft floodlighting which may enhance certain premises after dark and also provide an illuminated sign.

2. Windows and Entrances

- Shops that combine two or more units should still respect the rhythm of the buildings above. Any changes to the shop fronts should be carefully designed to preserve these vertical subdivisions. Continuity can be incorporated by the use of colours, lettering and even fenestration.

- Stall risers should be retained on traditional shop fronts.

- Recessed entrances add interest to the street scene as well as providing porches and additional display window area. These should be retained where possible. Consideration should also be given to disabled access to all shops.

- Window stickers should be kept to a minimum to allow the attractive display of goods.

Too much advertising defeats the object and becomes an eyesore.

3. Canopies and Blinds

Canopies and blinds can add interest to the street scene, but should be designed to be contained between pilasters and capitals. However, fixed plastic canopies below fascias can add excessive advertising as well as being discordant by their colour and the nature of the materials used. The use of these should be avoided.

4. Materials and Colours

The excessive use of satin anodised aluminium and shiny acrylic sheet in replacement shop fronts has led to a harmful standardisation which has particularly detracted from the character of Fleet town centre in recent years.

Textured paint finishes and mosaic tiles have been used to mask pilasters and cornice details with a consequent loss of character and quality.

It is not possible to provide specific advice on materials and colours except that they need careful selection, and a limited range will generally result in a better design.

5. Signage above Ground Floor Level

- Wall signs at first floor level advertising the use can sometimes be appropriate, although this should be restricted to special cases. Examples where this is successful are the Post Office in Hartley Wintney, D.R. Wright & Sons in Fleet and on public houses generally where there is a tradition of signage.

- In all these cases careful selection of the type of sign is essential.

- More commonly the first floor has a second business that requires some form of signage. This is normally best done with relatively modest lettering on the glass of the windows and discreet nameplates at entrances.

6. Roller Shutters and Grilles

There are very few cases where roller shutters covering the whole shop front will be appropriate, as they contribute nothing to the street scene when closed. Security grilles, where required, should be fitted internally and be of the open mesh type.

7. The Street Scene

Apart from the design aspect already mentioned relating to individual premises, consideration should also be given to the building in relation to its neighbours and surroundings.

Often shops are grouped: matching pairs, terraces, parades or malls. Each shop needs to be designed within the constraints of its context. For example, there will often be a definite zone for fascia signs, stall risers and the sub-division of shops by pilasters

FIGURE 2 below shows the results of poor design.



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Modern Shop Units & New Shops

A significant number of shops have been built in recent years in Fleet, Hook and Yateley and in small parades throughout Hart. Many of the same decisions about design that apply to traditional shop fronts will need to be taken with modern shop fronts.

Practically all new shop units leave installation of shop fronts to the occupier. It is necessary therefore that the design of the building provides a framework for this installation. For instance, a zone should be allocated for signage.

Generally provision will be made for several units and, where this is done, a column should divide units and separate the sign zone. Developers should also consider provision of some design guidance to occupiers to achieve continuity in the design of the shop fronts and avoid disharmony and discordance.

Shops in Conservation Areas & Listed Buildings

Conservation Areas are areas of special architectural and historic interest whose character should be preserved and enhanced.

Both Hartley Wintney and Odiham centres have village centres of great character in which the retail frontages obviously play a large part. Other Conservation Areas in Hart contain small groups, individual or corner shops which again are important in their setting. In addition, many of these buildings are listed.

Whilst the design criteria for traditional shop fronts will still apply, the Council will be looking for an even higher standard of design in these areas.

The following additional design guidelines should be followed in Conservation Areas and to Listed Buildings with shop frontages.

1. Shop Fronts

Proposals to replace or alter a shop front will be strongly resisted by the Council, unless the changes preserve or enhance the character of the building and/or locality.

Any changes to shops must respect the original plot widths and elevational rhythm of the street.

Where it is proposed to combine two adjoining properties, ignoring their separate identity by trying to give the appearance of a single shop front, this will be strongly restricted.

In Conservation Areas and particularly with Listed Buildings it will normally be appropriate to install a reproduction of a traditional shop front. In these circumstances, care should be taken to ensure that the design is correctly proportioned and composed.

2. Canopies and Blinds

Only traditional blinds should be used in Conservation Areas and on Listed Buildings. Shiny plastic canopies are not appropriate.

3. Signs

- Traditional painted signs are the most appropriate in these areas. Reflective acrylic sheet, boxed fascias and especially internally illuminated signs are not generally considered suitable.

- Fascia signs should be integrated into the shop front design and avoid obscuring windows or other architectural details (e.g. friezes / string courses).

- Lettering should be of simple traditional forms and be in the proper proportions in relation to the fascia so the neither dominates the other. It should be sign-written in an appropriate type face or may be applied as individual letters in another appropriate material.

- Hanging signs at fascia and first floor level on traditional, well-detailed, brackets can enhance the character of the street. They must be used in moderation, however, as a plethora of them would give the street a cluttered appearance.

4. Materials and Colours

Materials and colours are a very important consideration and should be selected with care.

Softwood and hardwood shop fronts will generally be more suitable. As has already been mentioned, aluminium, acrylic sheet and shiny plastic have limitations on their uses. The sympathetic selection of materials and colours should be used to enhance the character of the shopping environment.

Is Permission Needed?

Below is a summary of when permission is needed but, because of the complexity of planning and advertisement controls, you are advised to contact the Planning Department to determine which consents are required.

Advertisement Consent is required for:

- Virtually all posters.
- Most illuminated signs. In Conservation Areas all illuminated signs need consent.
- Most advance signs and directional signs.
- Fascia signs on shop fronts or business premises where the top edge of the sign is above the bottom of first floor windows in the wall in which it is displayed (or 4.6m if there are no windows).
- Virtually all advertisements on gable ends.
- Sandwich boards not on enclosed forecourts.

Planning Permission is required for:

- the erection of a new shop front or the material alteration of an existing shop front, including the installation of security grilles.

Listed Building Consent is required for:

- practically all work to Listed Buildings including painting or re-painting to an amended colour scheme.

Conservation Area Consent is required for:

- the whole or partial demolition of a non-listed building greater than 115 cubic metres.

Even when consent is not needed it is hoped that the advice in this leaflet will be followed and prove useful to shop owners.

Further Advice

For further advice on the points raise in this leaflet please contact the Planning Department who will be pleased to discuss your particular situation in greater detail.

There may be a fee for pre-application advice. Central Government produces a booklet that summarises the legislation regarding signs and advertisements. It is available from the Planning Office on request or on-line at www.communities.gov.uk

The Building Control section of the Council should be contacted to establish whether Building Regulation and Public Health approvals are required.

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