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INTRODUCTION

Retail premises in town and village streets are an important part of the scene. As competition requires retailers to advertise their whereabouts and display goods and services for sale, so shop fronts and signs can also help to create the character and quality of the shopping environment in that location.

Well designed buildings and sensitive detailing give a sense of visual pleasure to shopping and can be a more effective way of attracting custom. Trade can be stimulated by good design in signs and shop fronts.

On the other hand, clutter, brashness and poor design can disfigure the character of a building, and if repeated on successive shops, the whole street can deteriorate in quality.

Most shop fronts and many signs need permission from the Council. This booklet aims to raise standards and assist applicants in preparing satisfactory proposals. It establishes some basic principles to lead the designer/retailer to a higher quality of shop front design. It is not intended to stifle creative design as long as proposed schemes respect the architectural heritage of the individual building in question.

The guidelines do not apply solely to shops inside Conservation Areas as the principles apply anywhere. Schemes for important locations can be guided by the document as can the more ordinary shop front.

The guidelines begin by a brief introduction setting the historical background to shop front design, and later establish six basic principles for good practice.



*SHOP FRONT SYMPATHETICALLY
ADAPTED TO HALF TIMBERED
BUILDING*

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest centres of trade were open markets and fairs where barter and exchange took place at rough market stalls.

Originally shops were crude stalls with wooden shutters set into the ground floors of buildings, using commercial symbols to advertise their trades, such as the pawn broker's three golden balls. In the 18th century many shops operated from domestic buildings through simple ground floor sash windows, and some good examples still exist throughout the country.



MEDIEVAL

The 18th and 19th century shop fronts developed from the classical facades using first Roman then later, Greek mouldings and details. This basic form gradually became refined with shallower bow windows, thinner glazing bars and elaborate pilasters and columns. Stall risers became solid with panels and the fascia sign increased in importance displacing the trade symbol.

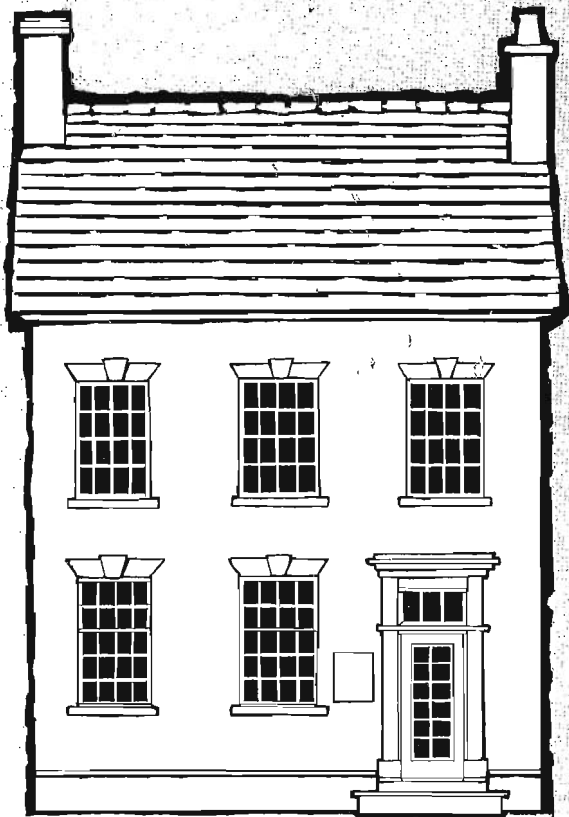
In the early 19th century shop fronts were considered part of the overall design of the building. Arcades became fashionable and unified shopping frontages or shopping parades were developed on "estate" shops in towns and cities.

Gradually during that century, panes of glass which had been restricted to about 5 feet high were replaced by plate glass. This evolution created difficulty in resolving the architecture of the building and the shop front. Cast iron was used more extensively for pilasters and columns and with an expanding Empire, tropical hardwood increased in use.

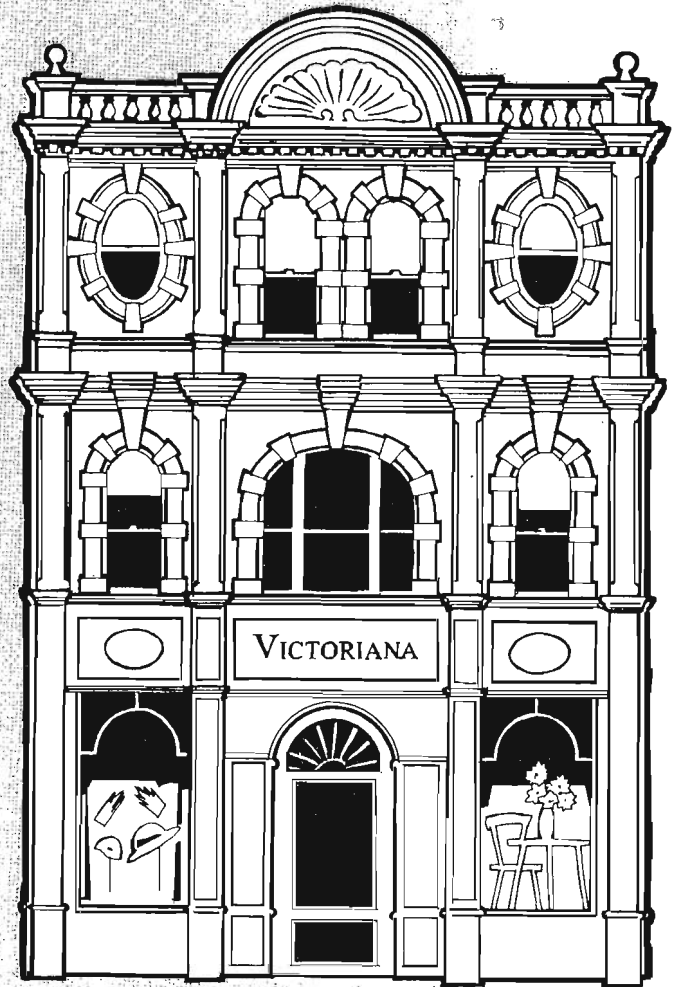
The architectural style of the day during the later 19th and early 20th Century, became reflected in shop fronts such as the Arts and Crafts movement and Art Nouveau.

Hardly any good quality shop fronts from the past remain in Solihull Conservation Areas but it may be possible to recreate a past style where appropriate.

GEORGIAN

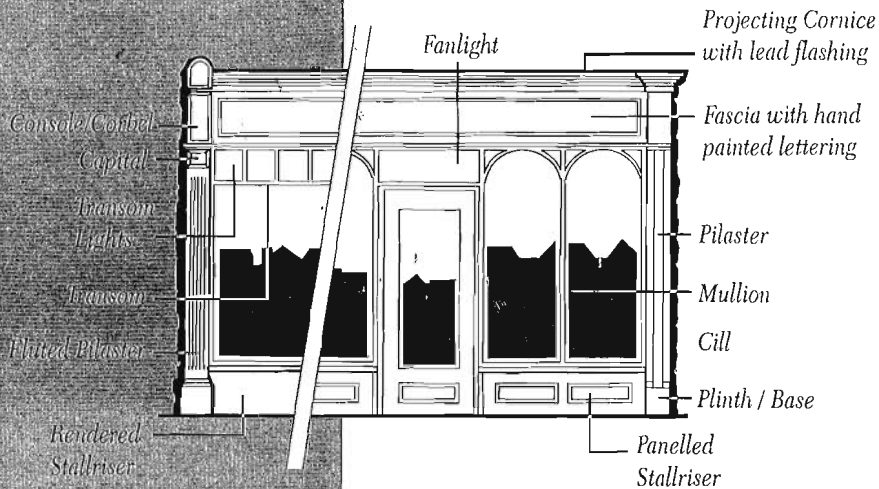


VICTORIAN

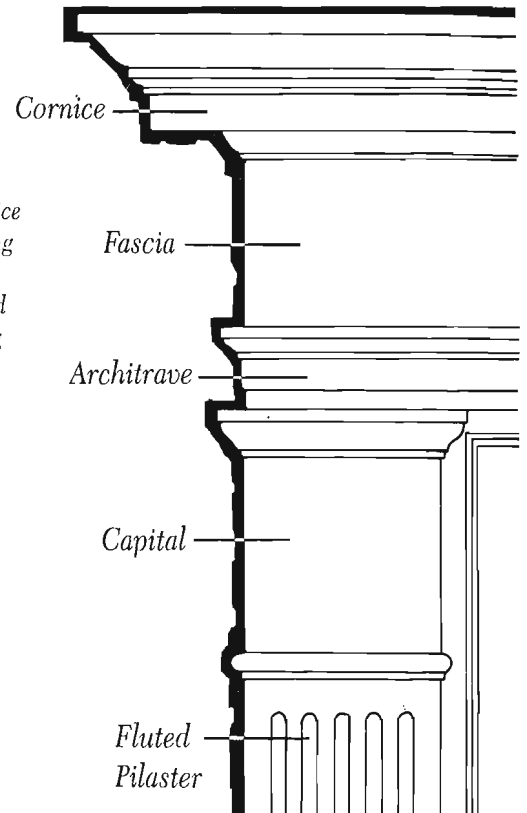


STANDARD SHOP FRONT DETAILS

The illustrations below indicate typical architectural details found in traditional shop fronts and show how styles vary. Some of the details are referred to in subsequent sections of this booklet.



Shopfront Terms



Classical Details

SIX PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD SHOP FRONT DESIGN

- 1** SHOP FRONTS should respect the design of the building and character of the street.
- 2** SIGNS should be restrained, uncluttered and respect the character and design of the building.
- 3** ILLUMINATION should be subdued and be appropriate to the building and area in general.
- 4** CORPORATE IDENTITY should be tailored to suit the context of the building or street.
- 5** MATERIALS, LETTERING AND COLOUR should be sensitively chosen to be appropriate to the building and area in general.
- 6** SECURITY SAFEGUARDS should be restrained and unobtrusive.

1

SHOP FRONTS SHOULD RESPECT THE DESIGN OF THE BUILDING AND CHARACTER OF THE STREET

The shopping streets in Solihull Town Centre and the district, local or village centres within the Borough have a variety of building styles. Over the years where careful control has been exercised the character of the shopping street has been improved and enhanced. However changes are ongoing and a degree of understanding and cooperation between shop owners, and their designers, amenity societies and the Council is therefore necessary. In order to maintain street character it is important that new shop fronts respect the design of buildings to which they relate, whether older or modern and that in turn any new elements successfully blend with the character of the street as a whole.



FROM BAD TO WORSE...

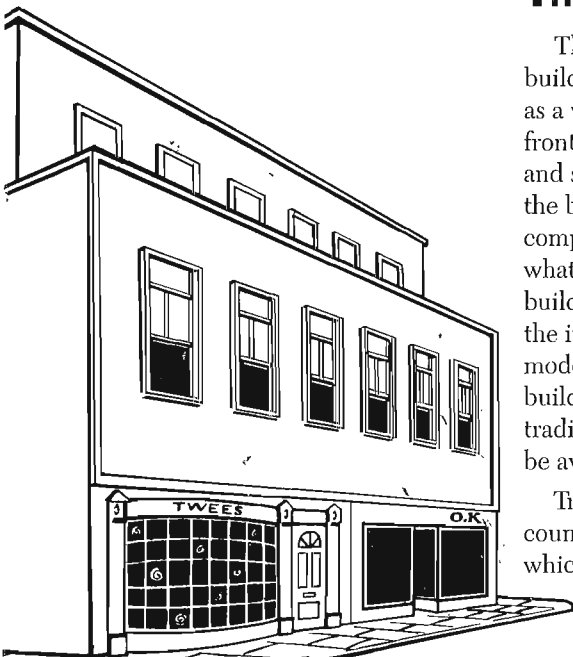
THE BUILDING

The design of any individual part of a building should complement the building as a whole. Each element of the shop front contributes to its overall character and so the shop front should complement the building just as the building should complement the street. Never ignore what is above or to the side of the shop or building and aim to be sympathetic with the immediate surroundings. Good modern shop fronts often suit modern buildings more than reproductions of traditional styles and the designer should be aware of this.

Traditionally stall risers extended up to counter level to give a base to the shop on which goods could be displayed.

Low stall risers with frames close to pavement level collect dirt. If designed properly, stall risers should be at least 60 cm high constructed of timber, brick or plain rendered brick. If timber is used it should be painted and not stained.

Where a firm occupies more than one building and each is of a different age and character, any new shop fronts should respect the vertical rhythm of each individual building rather than try to amalgamate different buildings. Conformity at fascia level destroys the street scene. A variety of fronts with differing stall risers, window design and fascia boards can create a distinctive identity and interest in the street where the buildings are of differing designs.



PSEUDO REGENCY IN 1960'S FACADE

MORE APPROPRIATE TREATMENT





SIGNS

SHOULD BE RESTRAINED, UNCLUTTERED AND RESPECT THE CHARACTER AND DESIGN OF THE BUILDING

RESPECT AND RESTRAINT

Advertisements and signs should contain letters or symbols no more than 40cm high to keep in scale with buildings and avoid dominance in the street scene. Fascias should not cut across adjacent frontages as this may destroy the rhythm of the street frontage.

Signs should convey the name and nature of service provided without appearing cluttered.

Identities of individual products, or

telephone numbers should be avoided where possible, or at least be unobtrusive, placed for instance, on the door.

Window stickers should be restrained - the Council will expect no more than 25% of the window area covered by stickers.

All signs, including hanging signs, should be positioned below first floor level.

Occasionally a hanging sign can add interest in a street, but care should be exercised in trying to repeat that too often.

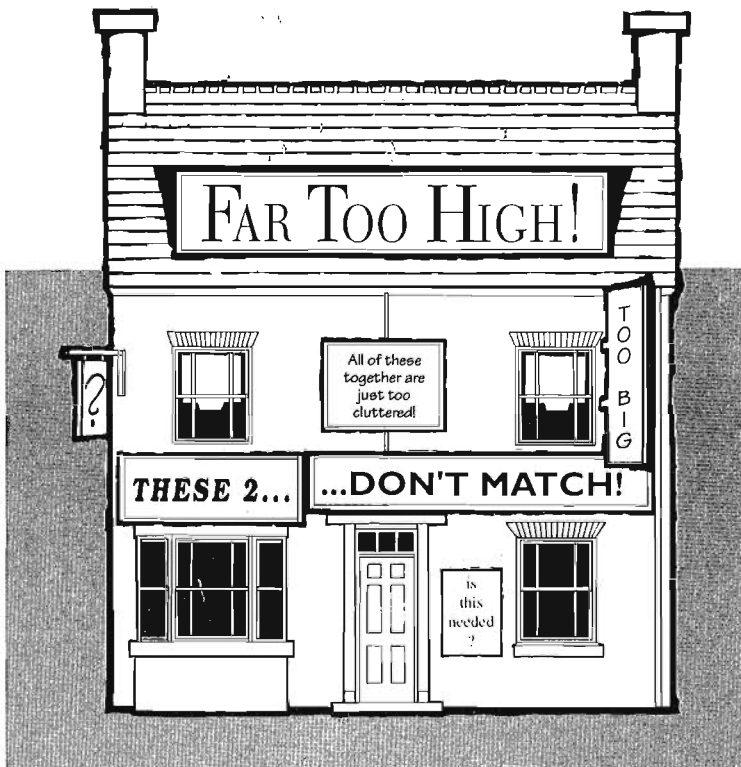
Hanging signs should not dominate the facade or obscure the architectural detail of the building. There may be instances where a row of hanging signs on individual premises may lead to a cluttered street scene, which should be avoided.

FASCIAS

If there is no proper shop front, signs comprising individual letters fixed directly to the wall or window glass should be used.

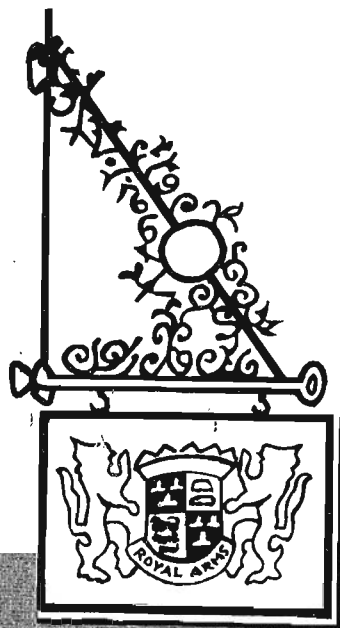
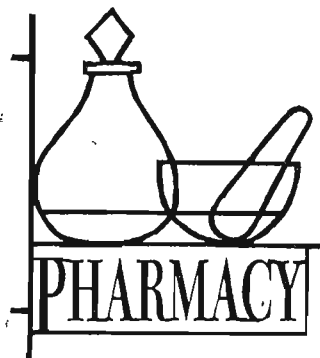
Fascias should normally be shallow in depth, as deep fascias can sever ground floor from upper floor and result in a visual imbalance.

Painted wooden fascias are preferred to reflective glossy perspex material. Large box signs are out of keeping on Conservation Areas and will generally be refused.



PROJECTING SIGNS

Attractive projecting hanging wall signs or symbols can enhance the character of the area, provided that they are restricted in number in the street. Lettering on windows of upper floors using gilt paint of appropriate style and size are sufficient to indicate the separate occupiers of the first floor. Internally illuminated projecting signs detract from the character of buildings and should be avoided in Conservation Areas. A well designed symbol and hanging bracket provide an effective advertisement and should be made of wood or metal not plastic.

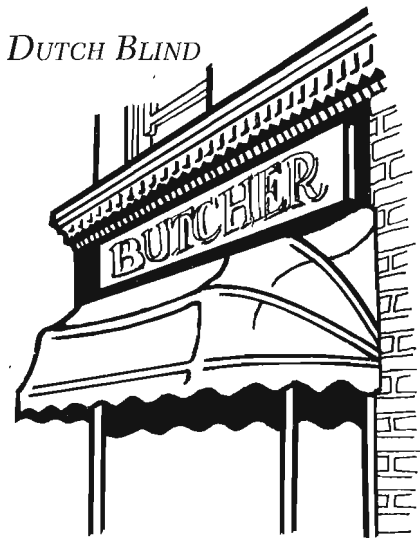


*GOOD EXAMPLES OF
HANGING SIGNS*

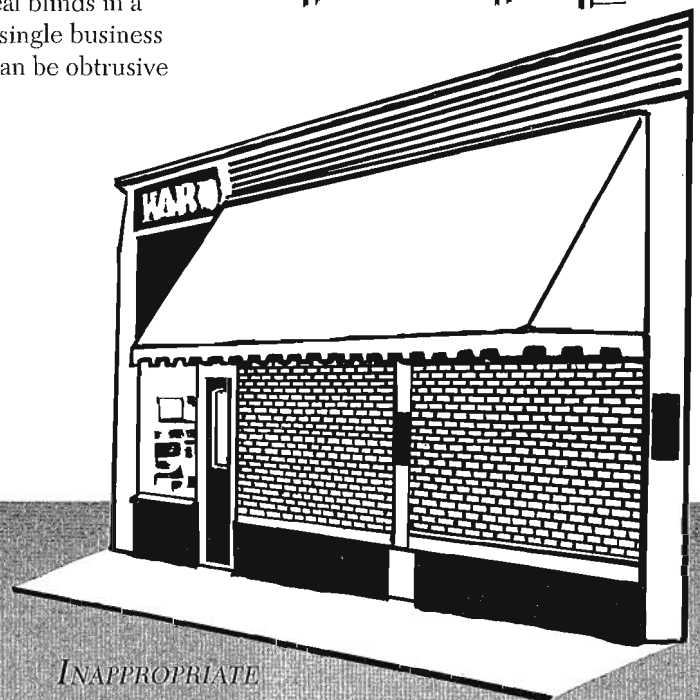
BLINDS

Traditional retractable blinds and canopies necessary for sun shading can be a lively element in the street scene. Where they are used, they should be integrated with the individual shop front and building. Where the blinds are specifically designed to accentuate or advertise, the presence of garish or inappropriate colours will not be considered acceptable. **Hooded fixed plastic canopies or "dutch" blinds** are rarely appropriate to a shop front in a Conservation Area. Where they are suitable they should be of woven fabric not plastic. A series of identical blinds in a row where, for instance, a single business has a 'run' of shop fronts, can be obtrusive in the street scene.

DUTCH BLIND



TRADITIONAL BLIND



INAPPROPRIATE

3

ILLUMINATION SHOULD BE SUBDUED AND BE APPROPRIATE TO THE BUILDING AND AREA IN GENERAL

ILLUMINATION DESIGN

Bulky, illuminated box signs are clumsy and heavy. They give the clear impression of an unplanned afterthought by the designer. Individually illuminated letters are much more satisfactory. Spotlighting can clutter the building too. Street lighting and lighting from window displays can be quite sufficient with a simple painted fascia. Internal illumination of signs may be permitted provided it is not excessive. Halo illumination with concealed fittings can be a bright, often most effective solution in some circumstances. Where box signs are unavoidable these should be fully recessed with matt dark background and fret cut letters. Only the lettering and not the background should be illuminated. The box frame should be appropriately coloured and designed so as to appear part of the sign itself or part of the building.

*INAPPROPRIATE
SPOTLIGHTING*



INTENSITY OF ILLUMINATION

The level of intensity of illumination can both have a dramatic effect on the visual amenity of an area and can distract drivers of motor vehicles. It can add to the design of a sign but taken to the extreme, it can be very intrusive and spoil an area. Light sources should be well shielded from the view of drivers to avoid the risk of distraction and accidents.

The Institute of Lighting Engineers have publicised recognised guidelines on levels of illumination. Conservation Areas should normally be treated as unlit zones to ensure that the proposed illumination is in keeping.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF MAXIMUM LUMINANCE (cd/m ²)		
ILLUMINATED AREA (m ²)	LIT ZONE	UNLIT ZONE
Up to 0.49	2000	1000
0.5 to 1.99	1600	800
2.0 to 4.99	1200	600
5.0 to 10.0	1000	600
Over 10.0	800	400

“cd/m²” refers to candellas (a unit of measurement of illumination), per square metre of surface area.

“Unlit Zones” are areas where there is no road or foot way lighting or where the background is unlit by artificial lighting.

For example, for a sign in an unlit zone measuring 3 square metres, the maximum intensity of illumination should be 600 candellas.

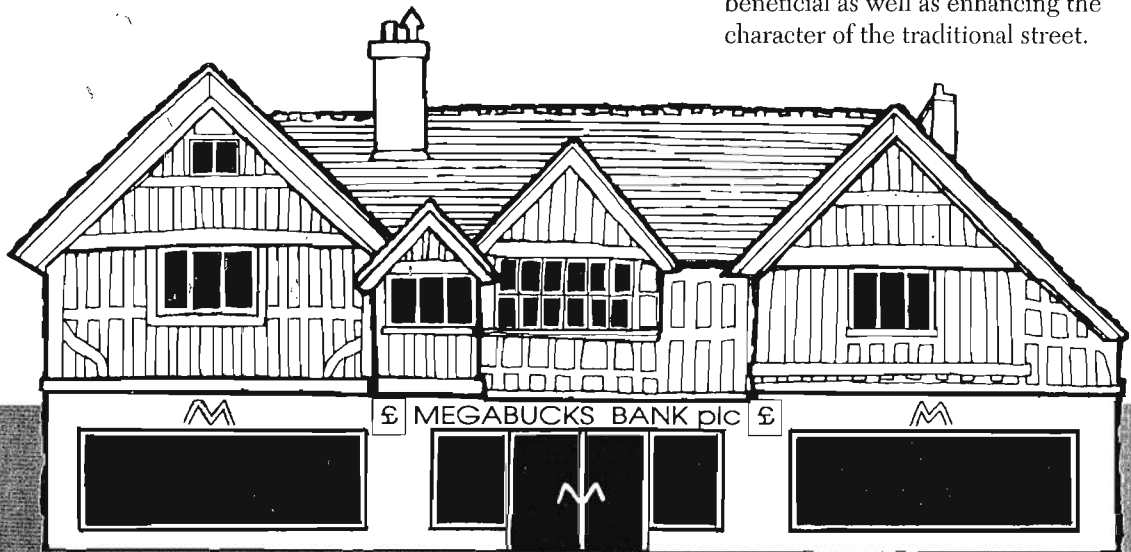
Where the whole background of a sign is illuminated the overall area of the panel is the illuminated area. For fret cut or individual letters, the illuminated area is the sum of the individual illuminated areas.

4

CORPORATE IDENTITY SHOULD BE TAILORED TO SUIT THE CONTEXT OF THE BUILDING OR STREET.

The use of corporate images in the design of modern shop fronts tends to standardise the appearance of the shopping street.

Whilst the Council appreciate the desire of corporate operators to promote their company image, standard design/colours should be tailored to take account of the context of the building or street. It should be recognised that corporate identity may not translate successfully to every site. A distinctive yet sympathetic shop front may be commercially more beneficial as well as enhancing the character of the traditional street.



UNSYMPATHETIC SHOP FRONT



MATERIALS, LETTERING AND COLOUR

SHOULD BE SENSITIVELY CHOSEN AND BE APPROPRIATE TO THE BUILDING AND AREA IN GENERAL

MATERIAL MATTERS

Selecting the right materials for the shop front will complement the building. Satin anodised aluminium and reflective acrylic sheets are out of keeping with buildings in Conservation Areas.

In some cases dark bronze aluminium and matt fascia sheeting can be suitable, including some Victorian or Edwardian replica designs. Terrazzo or tiled pilasters should be avoided in favour of brick or moulded timber. Stall risers should normally be brick, timber panelled or rendered. Overall the fewer materials used in the shop front the better.

LETTERING

The most appropriate signs in Conservation Areas are usually produced by sign writing on painted fascias. Applied 3D lettering can also be satisfactory. Standard plastic signs or letters are not appropriate on historic buildings.

Individual letters in an appropriate traditional material and style should be used instead.

The choice of lettering should be dictated by the architecture of the building, the design of the shop front and the nature of business.

Letter size should relate to the fascia depth and should rarely exceed 40 cms in height.

COLOUR

Ideally shop fronts should be painted in muted or subdued colour whilst liveliness can be best expressed by window display. The paint work for windows, gutters, eaves and bargeboards should also be subdued. Overall the range of colours used on a shop front should generally be kept to a minimum.

WINDOWS

Large areas of glass destroy the character and scale of buildings. Shop windows should be divided with vertical mullions as this can keep the proportion and scale in harmony with the upper floor. Timber can be used to produce attractive moulded mullions. Windows should not be taken down to pavement level - a substantial stall riser is preferable.

6

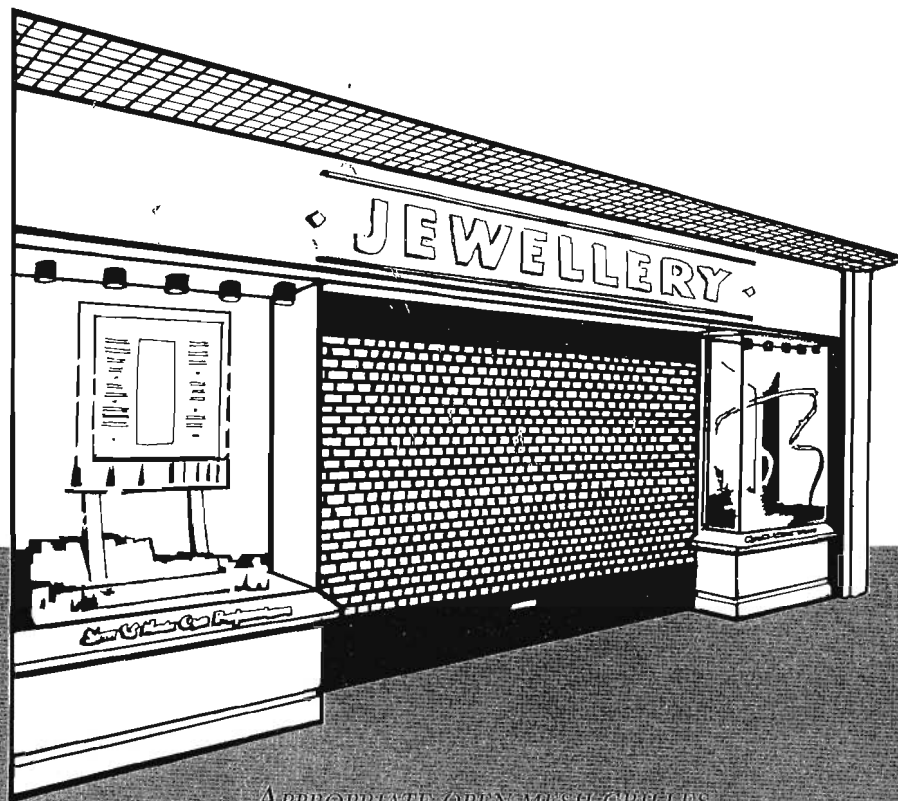
SECURITY SAFEGUARDS

SHOULD BE RESTRAINED AND UNOBTRUSIVE

Installation of security shutters is increasingly used as a response to crime and vandalism. However shutters and grilles are often out of character with a shopping street, especially in Conservation Areas, since they need boxes and track which often appear bulky and can spoil the appearance of the shop and street.

Where shutters must be used the open mesh type are preferred thereby providing light from inside the shop which will illuminate the pavement and street outside and thus enhance natural surveillance. Aesthetically this type of shutter is more pleasing to the eye. In any event balance between security and environmental quality needs to be struck.

Planning permission and sometimes Listed Building consent are necessary to erect permanent security shutters on the external face of premises, and it may be more appropriate for shop owners to consider alternative security measures.



APPROPRIATE OPEN MESH GRILLES

SECURITY SAFEGUARDS

Alternative solutions to security shutters should be considered:
Some possibilities are:

Additional glazing bars	Fig. 1
Laminated glass	Providing safety and security
Internal window grilles	Fig. 2
External roller shutters	(Open mesh grille types preferred)

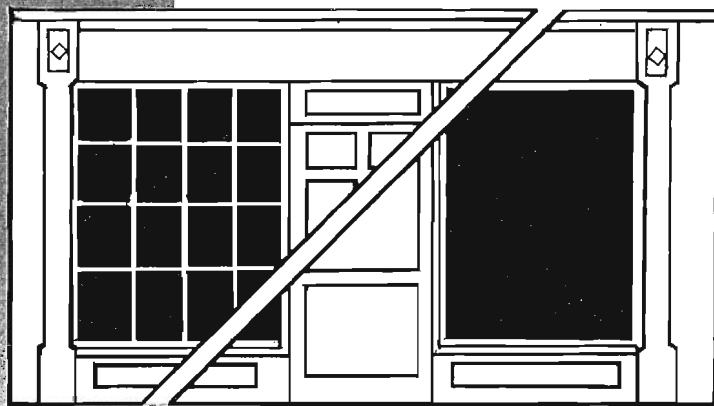


Fig. 1

GUIDELINES

External grilles or solid metal shutters and metal shutter boxes should not be used in Conservation Areas or on Listed Buildings

External grilles are preferred to solid shutters in all other locations, but should be demountable

Spindle boxes for roller grilles **must be recessed** behind the fascia board. Where this is not practicable the box should be clad or adapted to make it less obtrusive.

Grilles should be painted in a dark colour and cover only the display area and not the pilaster or fascia.

Burglar or fire alarms should be sited in obscured positions and should not form advertisements themselves.

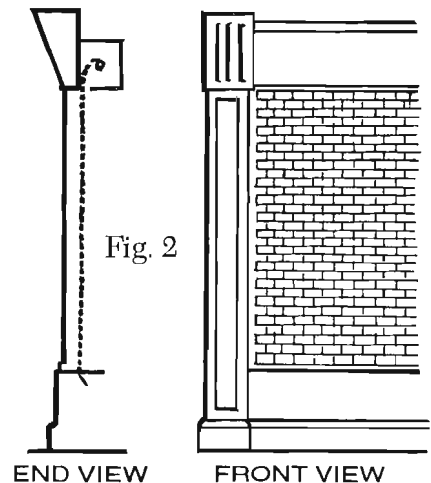


Fig. 2

END VIEW

FRONT VIEW

1 Advice

Planning Officers and the Council's Conservation Officer are happy to offer advice and you are urged to discuss your proposals with them at an early stage and not to proceed until you have all necessary consents. Officers' views are personal and given in good faith but any decision rests with the Council.

2 Planning Permission

You should consult the Council's Planning Department for advice if required as most shop fronts or alterations require planning permission, especially within Conservation Areas. Leaflets are also available on how to complete application forms and guidance on what information is required.

3 Advertisement Consent

The Town and Country Planning Advertisement Regulations are very complicated and you will need to be sure whether your proposal needs consent or whether the Council might take action in a case where consent is deemed but the signs are insensitive. A Department of Environment leaflet "Outdoor Advertisements and Signs" is available to explain the system of Advertisement Control and the Council publish a leaflet about obtaining Advertising Consent.

4 Listed Buildings and Conservation Area Consent

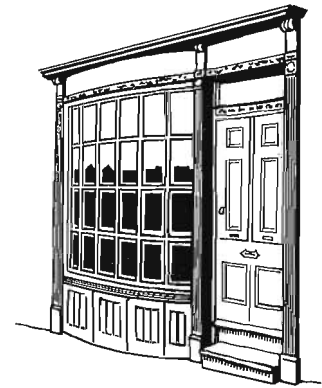
If the building concerned is statutorily "Listed" it will need specific Listed Building Consent to replace the old shop front or to do most other internal or external works, and sometimes works such as painting or repair works. Sometimes Conservation Area Consent may be required for demolition.

5 Building Regulations

In some cases you may need consent under the Building Regulations to alter or extend shop premises. You should contact the Council's Building Control Division for further information.

6 Access for Disabled

Opportunities to improve access for the disabled should be taken when redesigning shop fronts. Steps should be replaced by ramps, doors widened and changes in levels inside should be avoided. Advice on this can be obtained from the Building Control Division.



CHECKLIST

Before submitting proposals to the Council for consideration you should remember to:-

Assess building character -
is it a Listed Building?

Prepare details and choose
materials carefully

Assess street character -
is it in a Conservation Area?

Submit appropriate applications,
Showing all relevant details including
cross section.

Discuss draft designs with
appropriate Council's officers

Start work only when you
have permission

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