



## **Shop Front and Design**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This leaflet was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance, following approval by the Council's Development and Transport Committee on 22nd April 1998. It has been produced in Consultation with Parish Councils, Local Traders associations and Sussex Police.

This Supplementary Planning Guidance has been prepared to give guidance to retailers and shop fitters on the main components that contribute to a well designed shopfront. It is not intended to stifle individual designs, but to offer an overall guide to what is appropriate. In the District's Conservation Areas in particular, very many existing shopfronts are attractive and well related to their setting. The Council hopes that these will remain unchanged. In particular, historic shopfronts which still contain many of their original features should be retained. Others have been altered in the past and are unsympathetic to the high quality of the environment. The opportunity for improvement will arise when retailers undertake replacement or alteration work, and it is for these occasions that the guidelines have been prepared.

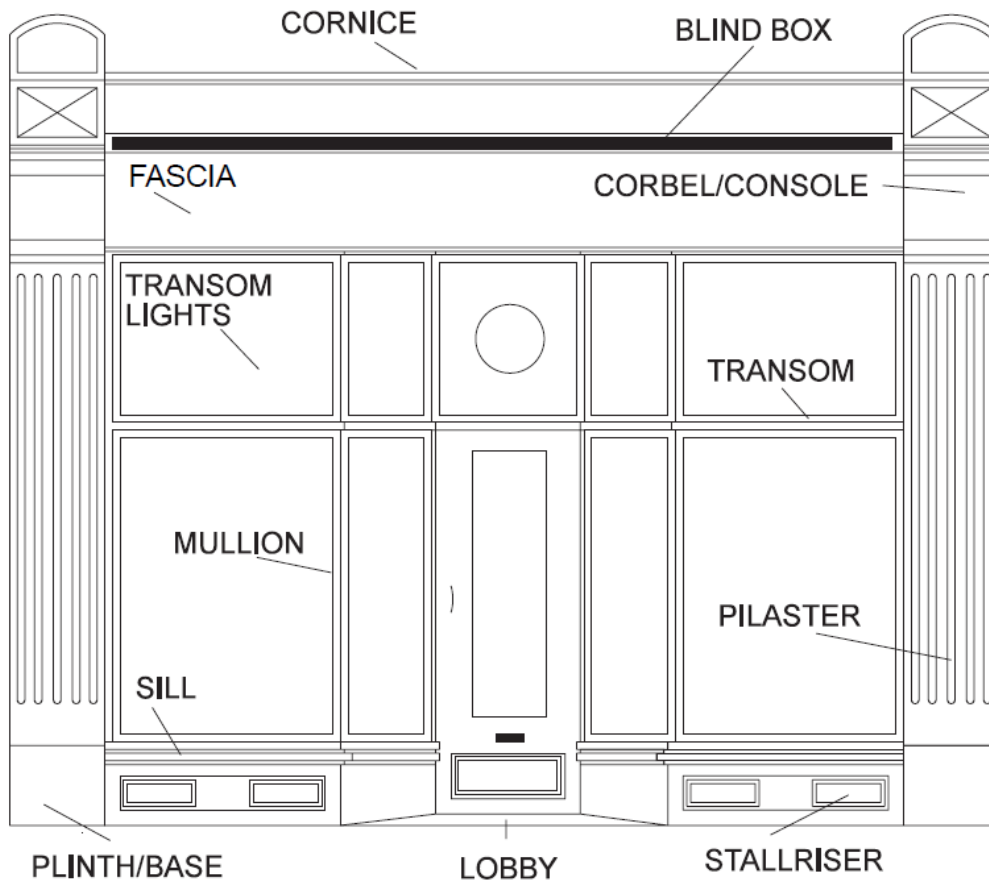
The Council only has control over certain aspects of advertising and shop front alteration but it is hoped that the advice in this leaflet will be adopted by retailers even when planning permission is not required. Consultation at an early stage with the Council is encouraged. Some shops are 'Listed Buildings' and control over these is greater. "Listed Building Consent" must be obtained from the Council for any alteration work that will affect the character or appearance of the building.

The guidelines apply to shops and all other ground floor premises including banks, building societies, estate agents, pubs and restaurants. It is hoped that their use may lead to an improvement in the design of shopfronts throughout the District and not just to those premises within Conservation Areas.

### **CONSERVATION AREAS**

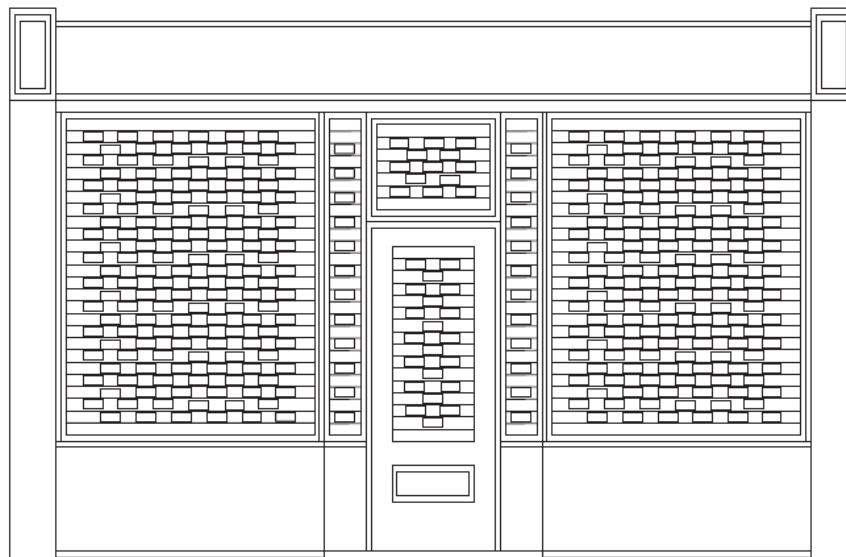
Conservation Areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest whose character or appearance should be preserved or enhanced.

The emphasis of the designation is on overall character rather than individual buildings and therefore it is important that shopfronts and shop signs should harmonise with, and enhance, the character both of the general scene and of the individual buildings which contain them. There are 35 Conservation Areas in Mid Sussex and several of these contain shops. The design and materials used in shop fronts in Conservation Areas should be of a high standard. They should enhance the street scene, and should respect the individual building in which they are situated. In these sensitive locations the design principles set out in this guide will be strictly applied.



The main elements of a traditional shopfront

These minimise the impact on the appearance of the building and let light shine onto the street at night, thereby making an area more attractive and enabling passers-by to see inside the shop.



An open mesh shutter

Only in situations where it can be demonstrated that none of the preceding measures are feasible would the Council consider granting consent for a solid shutter. Even then, only those shutters

which are available with transparent polycarbonate infill laths will be considered. Opaque shutters are not acceptable.

The fitting of an internal shutter would not normally require planning permission. External shutters, on the other hand, are likely to materially affect the external appearance of a building and thus require planning permission. If the building is Listed, the fitting of either internal or external shutters would also require Listed Building consent.

External shutters should ideally be removable, rather than fixed and retractable which require bulky box housings and guidance rails, particularly when the proposal affects a Conservation Area and/or a Listed Building. Where a retractable shutter is proposed, the housing box should be concealed behind or beneath the fascia and the shutters should cover only the glazed area. Pilasters and stall risers should not be covered. In exceptional circumstances, where recessed entrances are agreed to be a security risk, a shutter which extends across the entire shopfront and lobby may be acceptable.

Further advice on providing access for all can be obtained from the Council's Access Officer at the address shown at the end of this leaflet.

### **SHOPFRONT SECURITY**

There is an increasing demand to secure shopfronts against crime. However, a balance needs to be struck between making shops secure and ensuring that the attractiveness of the shopping area is not harmed. In many cases shopfront security can be increased by reducing the size of the window panes, by incorporating transoms and mullions and improving their strength by using laminated or polycarbonated glass. The use of stall risers can help to safeguard against 'ram-raiding'.



A solid roller shutter

Solid roller shutters, which are often advocated as affording the best protection, are highly unattractive in the street scene and make the street feel more threatening. They have a 'deadening' effect, can encourage graffiti and deter the public from walking through the area after the shops have closed. This reduces the benefit of passive surveillance and makes an area more attractive to criminals. If a shutter is felt to be essential, the use of a roller shutter will not normally be acceptable and an open mesh shutter, preferably located behind the window, should be considered instead.

## SHOP FRONTS

In terms of style and scale shop fronts should be treated as an integral part of the facade and not as an isolated ground floor unit. It is therefore particularly important that the shop front reflects, rather than distorts or ignores, the scale and proportions of the rest of the building. This can be achieved by paying particular attention to the following elements:

### (1) Windows

Large panes of glass should be avoided. It is more appropriate to sub-divide the window using vertical mullions and/or horizontal transoms to reflect the character and proportions of the overall building. This allows an adequate display area, while maintaining a balanced appearance, and avoids having so much uninterrupted glass that the rest of the building appears to be 'hovering in mid air' above it.



Sub-division of the windows results in a balanced appearance

### (2) Framing

Scale should be maintained by the use of exposed framing around doors, between window sections and corners. It is important that the thickness of the frame is in proportion to the overall design of the shopfront. Thin aluminium frames and large fascias are not appropriate to Conservation Areas. Where larger fascias are considered to be appropriate they require a thicker frame to give the shopfront a bolder outline.

### (3) Stall risers

Stall risers are important elements in shopfronts and should be retained. They have a practical purpose, in addition to a visual benefit, and are important in helping to provide protection to the shop window from kicks and knocks, as well as security from ram-raiding. It is inappropriate for windows to extend to ground level and a stall riser can help to break up such a large expanse of glass. The height of the stall riser will vary according to the height and width of the shopfront, but in general the amount of glazing and the height of the stallriser should be in proportion.

### (4) Doorways and lobbies

A key component of a shopfront is the design of the entrance. A recessed doorway or entrance lobby helps to break up the expanse of the shop window and gives depth and interest to a

shopfront. In Conservation Areas projecting signs should be of a traditional hanging design rather than a modern box sign. In all cases the size and design of the sign should relate well to the character of the building on which it is situated and it should be located on the same horizontal line as the fascia.

Many retailers with more than one outlet have developed a corporate image which may not be suitable for a Conservation Area setting. The modification of 'house-styles' by toning down colour, reducing size and using materials more fitting to a sensitive environment will be encouraged.

Other forms of advertising, for example posters in windows and signs promoting particular product ranges, detract from the building and add a cluttered appearance which is detrimental to the character of the Conservation Area. These should be discouraged.

The law relating to advertising is set out in the 1992 "Advertisement Regulations". A disregard of these regulations can sometimes result in prosecution.

### **ACCESS FOR ALL**

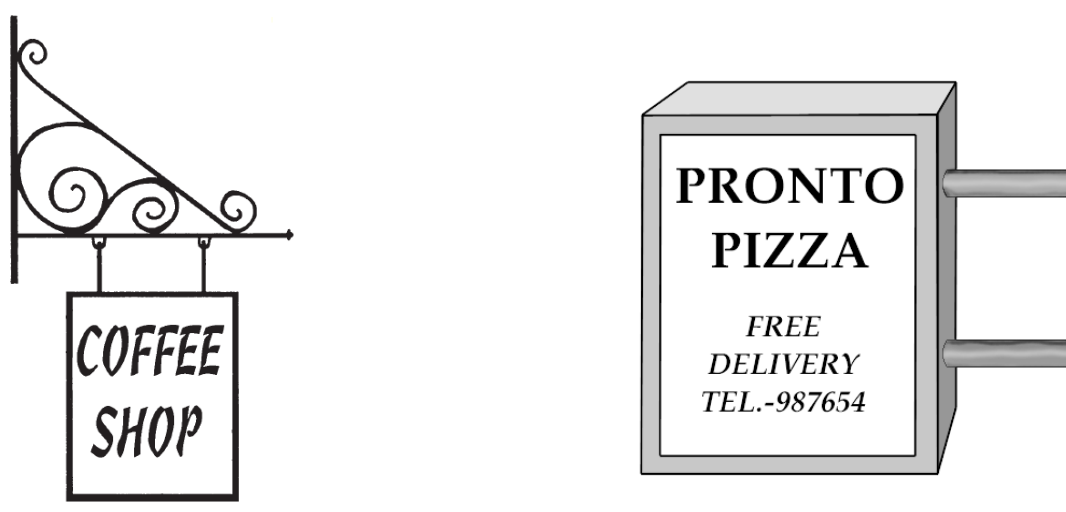
All shop entrances should incorporate design features that make access easier for people with disabilities, for wheelchair users and for those with prams or pushchairs. However, care needs to be taken to ensure that, in the case of a Listed building, any historic features are retained and the character of the building is not harmed.

Wherever possible a level access should be provided or, where this is not possible, there should be a ramp with a gradient which is no steeper than 1:12.

Access doors should be easy to open by persons of limited strength and, ideally, should be fully automated. The doorway should have a minimum clear opening of 900mm width, and any glass doors should contain visual warnings and kick plates.

### **SIGNS AND ADVERTISEMENTS**

Signs and advertisements are essential to give information about the type of business carried out but in sensitive locations they can sometimes have a detrimental impact. In Conservation Areas fascia signs should be designed to reflect the style of the building and the character of the area. Hand painted lettering is usually preferable and the best results are achieved when the style and colour of the lettering, and colour of the background conforms with the character of the Conservation Area. Internally illuminated box fascias and pencil line neon tubes are not appropriate in Conservation Areas and will normally be resisted.



Traditional hanging sign

Modern box sign

Where illumination is acceptable it should be by an external light source such as low intensity back lit ('halo') illumination of individual lettering, or by discreet low intensity spotlights. In less sensitive locations internal illumination is normally acceptable provided that the intensity of illumination is appropriate to the area and not a distraction to road users. In all cases, the fascia sign should state only the name of the company or the trade that is carried out from the premises, together with the street number of the premises (which is required by law). Where there are office or business premises above street level a nameplate next to the street entrance is the most appropriate form of signage.

This is particularly important with modern shopfronts which often lack the detailing of more traditional shopfronts. Whilst lobbies can provide shelter for shoppers, and help to increase the display area of the shop, they can also create problems of litter and vandalism. A shallower lobby can be used if there is a concern over security. The depth, width and position of the lobby will depend on the design of the overall building, but centrally located lobbies are often appropriate within a large parade of shops to break up the frontage into smaller elements.



An entrance lobby can help to break up the expanse of the shop window

#### (5) Fascias

Fascia boards should respect the alignment of buildings and should not cut across more than one frontage. If a shop occupies more than one building, the fascia should be subdivided, emphasising the individual character of each building. The fascia should primarily be in scale with its own building whilst respecting its neighbours.



Modern, poorly-designed shopfront with excessive fascia

Well-designed, balanced shopfront with modest fascia

Where a single building or uniform terrace is occupied by several shops the fascias should normally be located at a regular level to reflect the horizontal emphasis. Fascias should be located below the first floor window sill and should not obscure upper floor windows or other architectural details such as string courses, cornices etc. In some instances a fascia board may not be absolutely necessary and lettering could be applied directly onto the building or window.

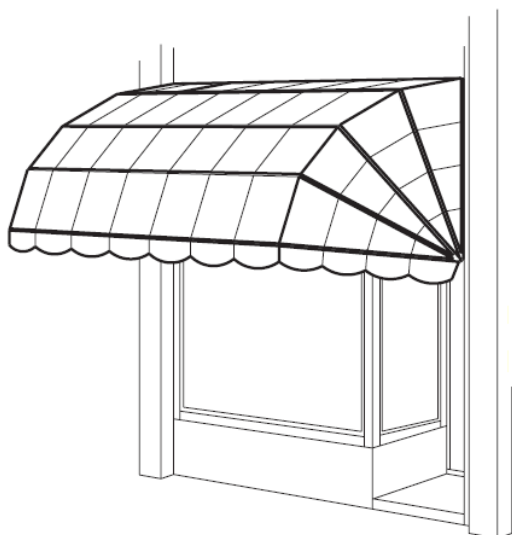
Fascias should not be larger than necessary in order to avoid them dominating both the building and the shop front.

#### (6) Existing features

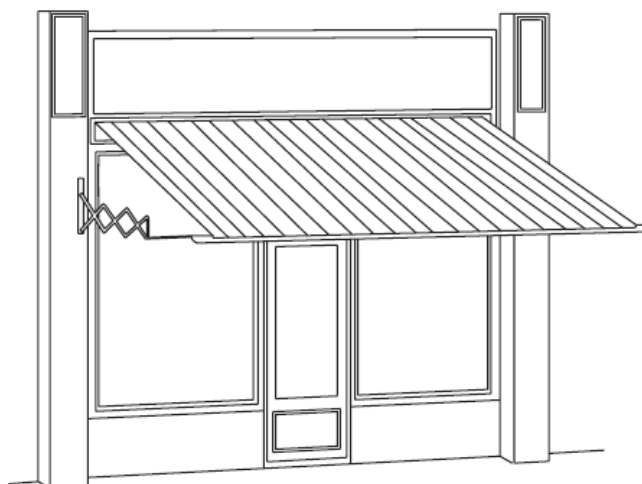
Many older buildings are embellished with features such as moulded stone or brickwork string courses, cornices, sculpture, pilasters, curved windows, tiles and decorative iron-work. These add interest and should not be removed or obscured.

#### (7) Canopies and Blinds

Blinds should preferably be retractable so that they do not permanently obscure the fascia and any other important architectural features. The colour, fabric, size and shape of the blind should be sympathetic to the area and it should not be installed principally as a means of increasing advertisement space. Fixed blinds are relatively large and bulky and are unsuitable features in a Conservation Area. The use of a more traditional canvas roller blind, or retractable fan canopy, is more appropriate.



Retractable fan canopy



Traditional canvas blind

### (8) Materials

The materials used in shop front construction should be in keeping with the character of the area and the general range of materials in the vicinity. They should take careful account of the colours and tones of the surroundings. Bright or shiny materials, such as metal or acrylic sheeting, are not appropriate in a Conservation Area and wooden frames should be painted rather than stained. Stall-risers should be in brick, wood or have a rendered finish.

Further advice on crime prevention can be obtained from the Crime Prevention Design Adviser at the following address:

Community Safety Department  
Sussex Police Station  
Newtown  
Uckfield  
East Sussex  
TN22 5DL  
Tel: (01444) 445893  
Fax: (01444) 445899

### USEFUL REFERENCES

- "Outdoor Advertisements and Signs" – published by the Department for Communities and Local Government and available on GOV.UK.
- Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992 – available from HMSO
- Circular 5/94 - "Planning Out Crime" – published by the Department for Communities and Local Government - available from HMSO

### FURTHER INFORMATION

If you require further information on any aspect of shop front design, or clarification on advertising and works which do and do not require planning permission, then please contact:

Planning Department  
Telephone: (01444) 458166  
Fax: (01444) 454665  
website: [www.midsussex.gov.uk](http://www.midsussex.gov.uk)