

8 Modern Shopfronts



A modern shop development in Leicester with a glass canopy. Note the minimal use of signage to create an attractive unit

8.1 In modern buildings well designed shopfronts which incorporate distinctive materials will be suitable so long as the design does not detract from the surrounding area and the shopfront is in proportion with the building.

8.2 Innovative design will always be supported, but not to the loss of the Borough's distinct history and character. Modern shopfronts which include inappropriate materials or ignore traditional proportions are not appropriate for historic buildings. If in doubt classic design principles can be applied to modern shopfronts and still achieve designs that are both distinct and contemporary.

9 Principles of Shopfront Design

9.1 Purpose built shopfronts can be traced back to the 18th century when they began to appear on the ground floor of traders homes. The classical ideas of the time heavily influenced these shopfronts with architectural "orders" of antiquity. These were used to create a frame for the window, in much the same way a frame is used to display a painting, and to highlight the entrance to the shop.



This illustration identifies some key features of traditional design, but many modern designs follow the same principles and proportions

9.2 Providing a visual frame is important for the architectural appearance of the building frontage and providing a satisfactory relationship between the shop and building as a whole. The upper part of the building needs to appear to be supported by the ground floor and appropriate shop frames can provide this apparent support.

These components and principles can still be applied today for the reproduction of traditional style shopfronts or by creative interpretation as the basis for more contemporary shopfronts.

9.3 Traditional shopfront design and details vary across towns and regions, however, they generally all have the entrance door set back from the pavement, a stallriser at low level running the full width of the shop front, one or two vertical mullions and a transom rail at door level with transom lights over it.

9.4 Shopfronts were traditionally constructed from timber and sat within an architectural frame comprising of two pilasters at either side, a corbel, a cornice and a frieze or fascia generally with a hand painted sign.

Cornice

9.5 Cornices frame and protect the shopfront and can display simple or more decorative moulding. Traditionally the mouldings of the cornice or architrave are used to house and conceal the retractable blinds or awning.

Fascia/Frieze

9.6 The fascia sits below the cornice and provides advertising space, with typically hand painted signs fixed to the fascia.

There should always be a gap between the bottom of the first floor windows and the top of the fascia. The size of the fascia must be in proportion to the shopfront and to the building

as a whole. The proportions of the fascia should be long and thin rather than short and thick.

A cornice should be incorporated above the fascia to provide a visual break between the ground and first floor, while helping to protect the fascia and shopfront from the weather.

Pilaster and Corbel

9.7 Pilasters and Corbels help to distinguish the shop from those adjacent to it. Pilasters comprise of three elements; plinth, trunk and a capital (above the pilasters can also be the consul). The corbels sit on top of the pilasters and vary in decoration, with the pilasters providing the side framing of the shop. The pilasters define the overall width of the shop and are often formed in different materials for example, plaster, granite or terracotta.

Entrance Door

9.8 These doors are usually glazed and set back from the pavement into a recess with a kickplate at the base of the door incorporating the letter box. Door furniture is usually brass or iron.

In-go

9.9 Recessed entrances into the shop often have mosaic or tiled flooring. The recess allows for more display space and acts to invite the customer into the shop. The recessed doorway also adds interest and balance by giving the shopfront depth.

Glazing

9.10 Horizontal and vertical bars are used to keep the glazed panels of the shopfront in proportion to the upper floors. Large plate glass windows can give the visually unsatisfactory appearance of heavy buildings floating above insubstantial ground floors and are expensive if broken.

Window displays

9.11 Window displays are a traditional and important feature for the character of historic shopping areas.

The use of window displays is actively encouraged. In general posters, stickers and window vinyls should be avoided. If used they should be as part of an overall window display scheme and should not dominate the glazed area. An easy view into the shop or the window display should always be maintained.

As with other signage posters, stickers and window vinyls should be of good quality design and fit in with the character of the overall property.

Stallriser

9.12 Stallrisers provide a base to protect the shopfront at low level adding character. They provide a solid base for the display window above and can be reinforced to safeguard against

ram raiding, reducing the need for freestanding bollards in turn reducing street clutter. They also provide physical protection at ground level giving visual weight to the base of the building.

The stallriser should be considered as an integral part of shopfront design. Moulded timber panels are normally the best form of construction, however stallrisers can also be of plain timber or stonework construction depending on the building and street front. To achieve a consistent look, as a rough guide, the stallriser should not be less than 50cm high.

Signs

9.13 Traditionally signs were painted directly onto the fascia. This ensured that they were in proportion to the rest of the building and did not obstruct any of the architectural features of the shopfront. This is still the preferred method of application and will be actively encouraged in conservation areas and on Listed Buildings.

9.14 Some styles of lettering are more appropriate than others and in some cases, in place of a fascia, restrained lettering applied directly to the wall surface or shop window may be appropriate. However on modern buildings raised or block lettering can be effective providing they follow the same principles in terms of scale and proportion in relation to the fascia.

Lettering must not be too large. As a guide lettering should be no more than 65% of the height or 75% of the width of the fascia and should be centrally placed.

Take into account the distance at which the sign will be read. There is no point in overlarge lettering if the street is narrow. Raised lettering is difficult to read at an angle and will not be effective down narrow streets.

The writing on the fascia should be confined to the name of the shop and should not be used as an advertising hording. Avoid the use of sponsored fascia signs advertising other products in addition to the name of the trader or retailer. A single clear sign is better than several confusing ones.

9.15 Companies with multiple retail outlets will be expected to take a flexible approach to the design of shopfronts and lettering, particularly in conservation areas and listed buildings. The vast majority of house styles can be adapted to suit particular situations. The general principles of design will enable multiple retailers to find viable alternatives which still retain familiar identities.

Awnings & Canopies



Note the use here of a traditional retractable roller awning which does not obscure architectural detailing

9.16 The main purpose of shop blinds are to protect goods from sunlight or protect shoppers from the rain. Traditional blinds were canvas retractable roller awnings pulled down from the fascia (or more accurately either the cornice above the fascia or the architrave below) and did not obscure architectural detailing on the shopfront. These are appropriate for many of the traditional shops within the Borough.

9.17 Modern glass canopies are an attractive approach too. They do not obscure architectural detailing and allow the existing character of the building to dominate, while offering a modern approach to protecting shoppers from the elements.

Dutch blinds and balloon type plastic blinds however are not traditional streetscape features. These modern styles of bright, shiny canopies tend to dominate the street scene and are often used for additional advertising space. They are not traditional of the character of the Borough and are unsuitable for historic shopfronts.

Materials

9.18 Timber is the traditional material for shopfronts. It is the most versatile and appropriate material for all situations whether a historic building, conservation area or for a contemporary design project. The timber should be softwood and finished with paint. Stained hardwood tends to be unsuitable for shopfronts as it is not a traditional material, however in some circumstances it may be acceptable. Timber from unsustainable resources should be avoided.

9.19 The use of metal within traditional shopfronts is not acceptable however they can be appropriate for modern shopfronts. Aluminium should be powder coated rather than self-coloured or anodised. Powder coating provides a good finish and is available in a wide range of colours. Unfinished galvanised steel should be avoided; again powder coating is available and provides a suitable finish.

9.20 In areas where high quality modern design is used the materials in the shopfront should

reflect this. In these areas there is more scope for modern finishes and materials provided they are used in an innovative and original way.



Here a historic building has been reinvigorated by sensitive repairs that do not detract from its overall character

Disabled Access

9.21 Shop owners have a statutory duty under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to provide reasonable access for people with disabilities. Where existing shopfronts are of historic interest or are Listed but do not provide reasonable access cases will be looked at on an individual basis. Assessments will then be made to see how access can be improved without compromising the original appearance of the shopfront.

9.22 Generally access doors should be of adequate width to admit a wheelchair. Where doors have two leaves it should be possible for wheelchair users to obtain access without having to open both doors. Doors should be easy to open by people with limited strength; it is possible to install door opening mechanisms on heavy doors which do not affect the integral character of the shopfront. However automatic doors should not be used in traditionally designed or historic shopfronts.

9.23 Swing doors are often useful as some people find it easier to push a door than pull it towards them. Frameless glass doors are dangerous as the partially sighted and children may not see them, while wheelchair users may damage or break the glass. Features such as bells and door handles, where possible, should be situated one metre above the ground and for ease of use lever handles are preferable to knob handles. Self closers, if fitted, should not be so strong as to hinder access to people with limited strength.

9.24 Ramps to enable wheelchair and pushchair users access can be suitable in some instances. Internal ramps are preferable to external. It may also be possible to raise the access to the shop to eliminate difficult steps. For further advice please contact the Highways Authority at Northamptonshire County Council.

Security

9.25 The character and appearance of existing shopfronts can be damaged by badly designed

ill-conceived security measures. The Council appreciates the need for security and advise that security measures should be appropriate to the likely risk.

9.26 Before deciding what measures to take it is advisable to consider the security of the building as a whole taking advice from the Police, insurance company or the Police Crime Prevention Officer who operates the secured by design scheme. In many instances break-ins take place to the rear of the property while the front is more at risk from casual vandalism. With the advent of CCTV in town centres the need for serious measures to deter the casual criminal has been reduced. However, shop owners should still explore the need for additional security measures for individual properties.

The design and character of the area should be considered carefully when deciding on what security systems to install. If security requirements are included at the initial design stage for a new shopfront, innovative and attractive solutions can usually be found. Internal systems including alarms, special glass and in some instances internal grilles are the best form of security in terms of the character of an area.

9.27 The shopfront itself can be designed to contain security measures. A re-enforced stallriser can protect from ram raiding and ground level attack. Smaller panes of glass and glazing bars can help to strengthen the shopfront making window breaking more difficult and less inviting for graffiti; they are also cheaper to replace than large expansive panes of glass.

9.28 Generally high footfall outside the shop is a deterrent to casual criminal activity therefore the more inviting the street appears the more likely people are to use it well into the evening. Another way of increasing general use of the street outside shopping hours is to encourage residential units above the shops. This provides natural surveillance outside shopping hours and again can be a deterrent for criminal activities.

Alarm Boxes

9.29 Care should be taken over the siting of alarm boxes. They should be visible without being obtrusive and sited to be inaccessible except with the use of ladders. Suitable locations depend upon the individual buildings, however just below eaves level is often the easiest and least prominent site. The boxes may be required to be a colour which suits the building or the setting.

Security Glazing

9.30 Toughened, laminated or anti-bandit glass can be used instead of ordinary float glass. The frame strength also needs to be adequate in relation to the strength of glass. Planning permission is not normally required to replace the glass, however if the building is Listed and may retain its old glass it is desirable to keep this. As such Listed Building Consent is normally required for any alterations.

Shutters

9.31 In some circumstances internal shutters may be suitable. These should be of an open mesh design to allow the shop window display to be visible and light to filter through. They should be the same colours as the shopfront. Internal grilles do not normally require planning permission, again Listed Building Consent may be required if the building is Listed.

9.32 On new shop developments shutters should be designed as part of the building and located internally to prevent retrofitting of security measures to the detriment of the property. Security measures should be incorporated at design stage to prevent the installation of shutter housing at a later stage.

External shutters which completely obscure the shopfront present a hostile, bleak street scene. They invite graffiti and fly posting and can deter people from entering these areas in the evenings when general surveillance is a good form of security.

9.33 The installation of shutters may damage historic shopfronts and any proposal affecting a historic shopfront or Listed Building should be discussed with a Development Officer before any work commences.

Illumination

9.34 Illumination on shopfronts should be kept to a minimum. The shopfront itself should rely on internal illumination visible through the shop window. Illumination for fascia signage should be concealed within the shopfront itself, for example within the architrave or the cornice. The best form of illumination is through strip diode lighting; this is easily concealed and gives good levels of illumination.

9.35 Internally illuminated box signs are not acceptable however individually illuminated or halo light lettering may be appropriate on modern shopfronts if used in an original manner.

10 What Consents Do I Need?

Planning Permission

10.1 Commercial units have virtually no permitted development rights therefore much of the work involved in constructing a new shopfront or replacing an existing one requires Planning Permission.

Advertisement Consent

10.2 The display of advertisements, which include features such as fascia, boards and hanging signs is controlled by the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements Regulations 1992). Please refer to the Department of Communities and Local Government guidance “Outdoor Advertisements and Signs: a guide for advertisers” which is available on their website at: www.dclg.org.uk.

Listed Building Consent

10.3 Some buildings are deemed to be of sufficient special architectural or historical interest to be Listed. Listing does not preclude development but provides a building with protection to ensure that no changes are made, which would affect its historic character without first giving full consideration to any proposals. The majority of works to a shopfront on a Listed Building, apart from works of like for like repair, require Listed Building Consent.

Important

Please note that unauthorised work without the relevant permissions could result in enforcement action and may constitute a criminal offence.

Pre-application advice

10.4 Kettering Borough Council now runs a pre-application advice service. This enables you to get informal advice from an Officer on the relative merits of the proposal prior to an application being submitted. Applicants and their agents are strongly advised to take full advantage of this service. Details can be found on our website at www.kettering.gov.uk/planning or there are forms and leaflets available from the Council Offices.

Historic building grants

10.5 Kettering Borough Council has previously offered grants towards costs involved with the reintroduction of historic detailing and continues to do so. A grant may be available to help towards the costs involved in replacing modern, inappropriate signage or decoration with more traditional designs. Please check with Development Services as to the availability of such grants, as financial help may be available to help reinvigorate shopfronts in historic buildings in the future.



With your plans and ideas we can start to create town centres that are characterful, distinctive and fun.

If you have any questions or for more information on shopfront guidance please contact Development Services on:

Email: planning@kettering.gov.uk

Phone: 01536 534 316

Or visit our website at: www.kettering.gov.uk

Kettering
Borough Council