

Design in Central Bedfordshire

A Guide for Development

Design Supplement 6

Shopfronts and Signage



THE MAIN GUIDE AND DESIGN SUPPLEMENTS



THE MAIN GUIDE



4 RESIDENTIAL ALTERATIONS AND EXTENSIONS



1 NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT



5 THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT



2 LARGER FOOTPRINT BUILDINGS



6 SHOPFRONTS AND SIGNAGE



3 TOWN CENTRE AND INFILL DEVELOPMENT



7 MOVEMENT, STREETS AND PLACES

Shopfronts and Signage

THIS SUPPLEMENT IS ONE OF SEVEN, EACH FOCUSING ON A TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT TYPICALLY ENCOUNTERED IN CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE.

The Supplement should be read in conjunction with Design in Central Bedfordshire: A Guide for Development. The Guide sets out overall design principles for all forms of development, based on placemaking, local distinctiveness, the achievement of sustainable development, approaches to the appraisal of sites and their settings and finally, the information required for submitting planning applications.

The Design Supplements and the Design Guide were endorsed by the Council as Supplementary Planning Documents in January 2010. They will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

CONTENTS	PAGE
CONTENTS	17101
1.00 Introduction	03
2.00 Issues	04
3.00 Policy	04
4.00 Aims	05
5.00 Design Principles	05
6.00 Checklist	14



1.00 Introduction

1.01

Central Bedforshire has a number of important town and village centres; Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard, Ampthill, Sandy, Biggleswade, Shefford and Woburn and others which are not only of architectural and historic importance, often with conservation area status and listed buildings but are significant commercial centres in their own rights. (See fig 01).

1.02

Shopfronts form an integral part of this high quality street scene, and to maintain an attractive environment it is important that these should be well designed. (See fig 02).

1.03

Shopping is a dynamic activity with premises subject to frequent change of tenant or appearance. Shopfronts present the public face of business and so they are required to be eyecatching, and to convey the character of the business. The challenge is to produce an attractive and effective display. This design supplement should be read in conjunction with the general principles in

the main Design Guide, Design in Central Bedfordshire, Design Supplement 3, Town centre and Infill Development, and, in conservation areas, and should also have regard to Design Supplement 5: The Historic Environment. Shopfront and signage design is a particularly sensitive issue in conservation areas and either on or within the setting of statutory listed buildings.

1.04

The mixed use qualities of the settlements of Central Bedfordshire are a fundamental part of their character and shopfront quality and design plays a vital role in maintaining this ambience.

1.05

Traditional shopfronts have intrinsic qualities of "patina of age" and a familiarity in the local street scene which it is almost impossible to successfully replicate. For this reason there is a presumption in favour of retaining all traditional shopfronts whether on listed buildings or within conservation areas or not.

1.06

The shopfront should always be seen as part of the wider context of the host building and the host building in the street scene and its setting (see fig 03). As with any aspects of the built environment, but particularly in relation to the historic built environment. a thorough understanding of the context of the shopfront both in terms of the building within which it sits and location in the street scene should be gained and demonstrated (through the Design and Access Statement) before any proposals for change are considered.



Fig 02 Shopfront designed as an integral part of a new development



Fig 03 Excellent shopfront lettering and fascia design. Note also, well located wall mounted street nameplate

2.00 | SSUES

2.01

The use of modern materials (powder coated aluminium and uPVC) has in most cases a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of traditional buildings with shopfronts. These materials are cheaply available and are often off-the-peg units which have little or no relationship to the existing proportions or architectural style of the host building.

2.02

The amalgamation of units to form larger shops with their corresponding shopfronts and signage are out of proportion with a traditional street scale and detrimental to the character of the host building(s) (see fig 04).

2.03

Over-large, poorly designed and inappropriately illuminated signage can have a significant negative impact upon the amenity of an area and/or the character or appearance of a conservation area and/or the special interest or setting of a listed building.

2.04

The loss of historic shopfronts and historic features; such as hanging sign brackets, decorated pilasters (usually painted or defaced or neglected), unusual signage, traditionally painted signage, console brackets or original blind housings and mechanisms all contribute to a general degrading of the traditional quality of the commercial environment.

2.05

Some shop units are very difficult to access for wheelchair users or mothers with prams or the elderly. This is often due to the presence of raised thresholds.

2.06

The use of shutters and other security measures to secure shopfronts can result in a deadening effect on the street scene and discourage pedestrians from using certain streets out of shopping hours (these are often requirements of tenants insurance policies).

2.07

The corporate image and its promotion of a 'one size fits all' is a national problem and is creating so-called clone towns and an "anywhere" culture.

2.08

Where new shopfronts are introduced, often their detailed finish is of a very poor quality and often comprises out of scale console brackets and pilasters (in order to conform to standard component lengths) and stuck on mouldings and beadings which collectively result in a diminished overall quality to the High Street.

3.00 Policy

3.01 The following policies and guidance will be relevant:

- National policy; PPS1 the importance of good design is a fundamental planning consideration
- LDF Core Strategy and Development Management Policies on Town Centres and Retailing, High Quantity Development and Heritage
- EH Retail development in Historic Areas
- PPS15 for listed buildings and conservation areas



Fig 04 Biggleswade; An unbroken fascia can have a detrimental impact on the host building and is visually disruptive in the streetscene

4.00 Aims

4.01 The aims of this design supplement are to:

- Maintain the important local character of shopping streets within Central Bedfordshire
- Encourage the retention of a mix of uses in commercial areas
- Encourage the use of traditional materials and methods where appropriate in new/ replacement shopfront design
- Encourage the repair of historic shopfronts (rather than replacement) – see DS5
- Provide guidance on how to address issues of access
- Encourage and maintain a high standard of advertisement design which could enhance local distinctiveness and the quality of the retail experience in the district
- Encourage the use of appropriately designed shutters, canopies and blinds
- Encourage designers to consider a sympathetic relationship between the character of existing buildings and corporate logos and colour schemes

5.00 Design Principles

5.01 Context: The street scene and the host building

In the case of traditional buildings, shopfronts should respond to the character and architectural form of the host building. In the Central Bedfordshire there are some valuable survivals of Georgian shopfronts.

These are characterised by elaborately carved timber surrounds and multi-paned shop windows (see fig 05). The majority of traditional shopfronts date from the Victorian period but there is a wide variation in type; from the modest (see fig 06) to the grand (see fig 07).

In most cases a traditionally designed shopfront will be the most appropriate design solution although the council is not adverse to well considered high quality contemporary approaches.

However a modern design in such a building will need to be of a demonstrably exceptional quality to justify that approach and must still not detract from the overall character and appearance of the building or the area.



Fig 05 Georgian shopfront in Woburn



Fig 06 Simple single bay shopfront in Ampthill



Fig 07 Double fronted large paned shopfront in Ampthill

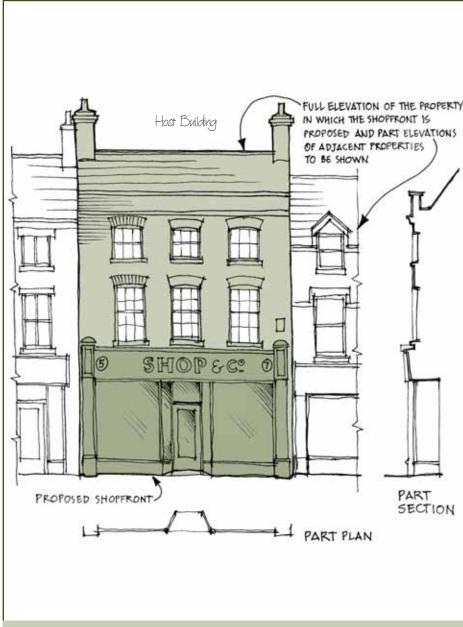


Fig 08 The proposed shopfront should be considered in relation to the proportions, scale and design of the 'host' building and its immediate neighbors

A traditional design need not be an accurate reproduction of a shopfront contemporary with the original building and often in the area this cannot be achieved as shopfronts have been inserted into buildings which did not have them originally.

When assessing the host building, the designer will need to consider the architectural character and proportions of the upper floors and should NOT design a ground floor intervention in isolation.

This requires an analysis of the component parts; the proportion of solid to void and the size and position of windows within the framework of the facade. The aim is to achieve as much continuity in design terms from ground to roof in order to harmonise the shopfront with the whole building as a single composition.

For example, mullions can be positioned to coincide with the areas of structural masonry between windows above, so that the upper floor window voids coincide with the ground floor window voids. (See fig 09).

As in many town centres in Britain, there have been cases in Central Bedfordshire where continuous fascias run across two or more adjacent buildings, ignoring former party walls or bay widths. This creates an intrusive horizontal emphasis in a streetscene characterised by the vertical rhythm of relatively narrow frontages. (See fig 04).

In designing shopfronts for existing buildings or in new infill buildings, the bay width(s) of the existing and adjacent buildings should be respected. (See fig 08 and 5.02 D).

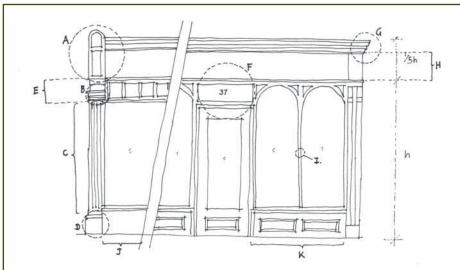


Fig 09 Integration of appropriate lettering and recessed shopfront with a classical frontage

On occasions the facades of a street will form a group of some significance and their shared architectural language, both at shopfront level and above will have to be carefully considered and expertly applied in any proposed alterations to existing shopfronts.

5.02 The components and language of shopfront design

It is important to understand the elements of a shopfront and how they are used to provide a coherent and robust design solution in each case. The following provides some key aspects of each of the component parts of the shopfront. (See fig 10).



- A. Console and/or corbel bracket
- **B.** Capital of the pilaster
- C. Pilaster (fluted)
- **D.** Plinth/ base of the pilaster
- **E.** Transom (individual panes of glazing are transom lights)
- **F.** Fanlight (with shop number)
- **G.** Projecting moulded cornice (with lead flashing)
- H. Fascia
- I. Mullion
- J. Rendered stallriser (or upstand)
- K. Panelled stallriser

Fig 10 The component parts of a traditional shopfront. (**Note** that as a general rule the fascia height (H) should be in a proportion of a fifth the height (h) of the shop window and stallriser or upstand as shown in the diagram)

FASCIA

- A The fascia board is used to display the shop name and trade, and forms part of the shopfront surround. The size of the fascia must be in proportion to the rest of the shopfront and the whole building, so that it is not too dominant.
- B A fascia should not extend beyond the shopfront surround, which is usually demarcated by the pilasters (uprights) at the outer edges of the shopfront and will normally include the door.
- The depth of the fascia should be restricted to the depth of the console. Over-deep fascias should be reduced when a shopfront is replaced.
- A fascia should not stretch uninterrupted across a number of distinct buildings or uncomfortably across a building with a series of traditional bays.

- The top of a fascia should be positioned well below the sill of the first floor windows.
- The fascia should form an integral part of the overall design within the shopfront surround, rather than be a separate board superimposed without regard to the overall design.
- The fascia top should normally be stopped off by a cornice, blind box or other projecting feature. Framing the fascia using a moulded cornice and console brackets to the sides provides a traditional means of setting the fascia into a framework.



Fig 10a Sensitive retention of original openings and features and well considered location of logo. Leighton Buzzard.

STALL RISER

KEY DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS:

- A The materials for stallrisers (sometimes also called upstands) should respect the main building and shopfront.
- In traditional buildings stallrisers will normally be required in all shop premises.
- The base of the pilasters (see fig 11) or existing traditional stallrisers in adjacent units and the proportions of the shopfront should determine the height.
- The design and details of mouldings and cills should respect the architectural period of the property.
- A solid stallriser or upstand of at least 150mm will be required.

PILASTERS AND BRACKETS

KEY DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS:

- A Pilasters should always be incorporated into the design of a traditional shopfront.
- B The width of the pilasters will naturally vary between shopfronts, but all will normally need to include some form of base and capital and/or bracket.
- Pilasters often extend up into console brackets to support or stop off the ends of the fascia (see fig 11).
- Pilasters are a traditional feature and may not be appropriate to a modern style of shopfront, but the principle of providing a clear division between units and a solid visual support for the upper facade through the provision of appropriately located uprights still applies.
- They should not be clad, treated separately on each side of the party line, or cluttered with fixtures such as signs, alarm boxes or blind fittings.

GLAZING

- A Extensive areas of unrelieved glazing are rarely going to respond well to the host building or its wider context and often creates the visual effect of a void at the base of the building.
- Where glazing to shopfronts is to be subdivided it would normally be appropriate to do this by slender timber mullions in a manner which reflected the vertical divisions of the building above fascia level.
- Sub-divided glazing assists in providing visual support for the floors above.
- Glazing subdivision gives the opportunity to express individuality to a shopfront where appropriate and can also help unify groups of buildings where necessary.
- In order to maintain the vitality and attractiveness of a shopping area, owners of vacant shops are encouraged to make display window areas available for exhibits by artists, schools or community groups.



Fig 11 Pilaster are an important part of the shopfront and often 'contain' the fascia at both ends (Woburn)



Fig 12 Decorated thresholds add interest to the shopfront and should be retained/ restored or reinstated wherever possible (Biggleswade)

DOORS

KEY DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS:

- A To avoid obstruction of the pavement, a recessed doorway is therefore necessary. Additionally, the outermost point of the swing of an inwardly opening door must not be closer than 400mm to a change in floor level internally.
- The design and positioning of doors should be integral with the design and layout of the entire shopfront.
- On many traditional shopfronts, the entrance is recessed, and the floor of the recess decorated with mosaics or tiles (see fig 12). Consideration should be given to continuing this tradition in new shopfronts a design could incorporate the number of the building.
- If a traditional design treatment has been selected, serious consideration should be given to the inclusion of a recessed doorway.

- A solid panel at the base of a glazed door to coincide with the line of the stallriser is often appropriate. The glazed part of the door should in most cases be a single pane of glass, not sub-divided into small panes.
- A recessed doorway in a modern shopfront can also be attractive, adding interest to what might otherwise be a rather 'flat' and stark appearance.
- Door furniture should be appropriate to the character of the door, shopfront and buildings. Modern fittings will not always be suitable and traditional fittings (possibly salvaged material) should be considered
- Property numbers should always be incorporated.
 Any nameplates should be neatly grouped.
- A separate door to the upper floors should be provided when the opportunity arises. The door should be designed as part of the shopfront.

5.03 Other aspects of detailed design of shopfronts to

MATERIALS

be considered

A high quality of materials, finish and detailing will be required and should reflect the pride of the town or village's commercial aspirations and the general quality of the historic centres of Central Bedfordshire.

COLOUR

The colour scheme selected should harmonise with the positive aspects of the character and materials. Whilst vibrant and clashing colours should be avoided, the appropriate choice and location of some positive areas of colour is acceptable.



Fig 13 An historic shopfront skilfully repaired and conserved. High Street, Leighton Buzzard.

HISTORIC PRECEDENTS

The survival of historic shopfronts in areas of a cohesive character such as Woburn (see fig 13) and areas of Ampthill (see fig 14) can provide good historic elements which can be reproduced in new buildings as this follows the tradition of the pattern book approach to shopfront design. The local studies centre at your local library may have old photographs of your building which may help in reinstating an historic shopfront. Care should be taken to replicate the quality of the original and not just the spirit.



Fig 14 Pavement raised to create a flush threshold to aid access. Leighton Buzzard.

ACCESS FOR ALL

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) requires that all buildings containing shops or providing public services are accessible to disabled people.

Easy access to and circulation within shops is important to everyone, including people who use wheelchairs; those who cannot walk easily, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, people who are blind or visually impaired and to the elderly, children, and people with pushchairs, prams or trolleys. (See fig 15).

It will not be possible to make all shops accessible and usable by every person but where it is reasonably practical, every effort should be made to allow as many people as possible to actively participate in the towns and village environments of the district.

In all cases, designs for special access needs should aim to achieve the aesthetic objectives set out in other parts of this design supplement and in the Main Design Guide.

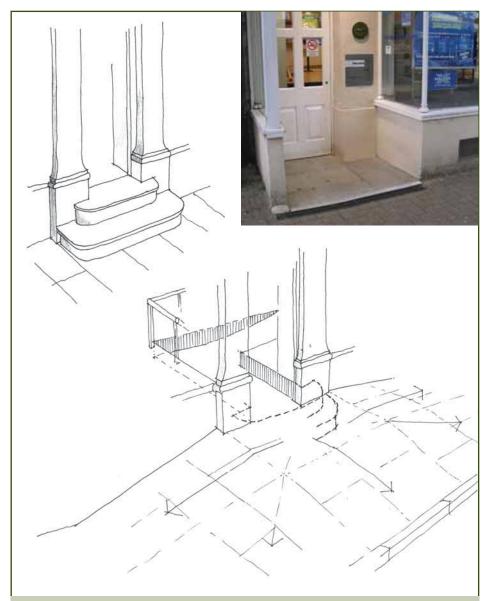


Fig 15 Existing (top) and suggested changes (bottom) to remove steps (where appropriate) and regrade pavement level. **Please note** this solution may not always be appropriate and would necessitate changes to the door height. This may be unacceptable on a listed building or within a conservation area. (photo top) Award winning solution to this. Leighton-Buzzard.

5.04 ADVERTISING AND SIGNAGE FASCIA SIGNS AND LETTERING

KEY DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS:

- A The display of fascia signs on frontages should be easily readable with lettering in a single style and adjusted in size and content to suit the proportions and detailing of the fascia.
- Fascia signs are traditionally handpainted by a signwriter or have individually applied three dimensional letters.
- The choice of lettering style employed for the fascia sign is critical to the appearance of the shopfront and will be dictated by the nature of the business and the character of the building and shopfront.
- Good lettering, subtlety and understatement with a good use of colour can make a fascia stand out without being loud and overstated.
- On traditional buildings or new buildings in sensitive areas (in conservation areas or adjacent to or within the setting of listed buildings)

- in particular, internally illuminated fascias and projecting signs are out of character and will be resisted.
- Projecting signs can also provide the opportunity for the innovative and creative use of symbols to indicate the nature of the business.



Fig 16 Signs over the highway should be a minimum of 2.1 metres (2100mm) above the highway. The sign shown is well positioned and takes maximum advantage of the architectural composition of the corner entrance to this shopfront in Biggleswade.

PROJECTING SIGNS

- A Only ONE projecting sign for each shop unit will be permitted.
- B Where a unit is located on a corner site the projecting sign should be located at that end of the fascia, which is farthest from the corner. This enables the trader to maximise presence while minimising visual clutter signs should normally be installed at fascia level and never above first floor cill level. Signs should NOT be fixed to the pilasters, decorative capitals or corbel brackets.
- Projecting signs should be co-ordinated with the colour scheme and lettering style of the overall shopfront design.
- The size of a projecting sign and any frame or support should be modest. Generally the maximum dimensions should closely relate to the size of the fascia and take care not to obscure any architectural detail of the host building.

- Projecting over the Public Highway should will need a minimum vertical clearance of 2.1 metres (2100mm) to the underside of the sign, but as a general guide 2.5 metres (2500mm) is recommended and a minimum horizontal clearance between the sign and the carriageway of 0.45 metres (450mm). (See fig 16).
- If illumination of the sign is required this should be done by external means only.
- G On traditional buildings projecting signs should be non-illuminated and of a traditional hanging or bracketed design. Existing brackets should be reused and designed so that the panel can be replaced.

'A' BOARDS

- There is a general presumption against 'A' boards on the Public Highway as they can lead to a cluttered shopping street and can be hazardous for partially sighted people, wheelchair users and parents with small children in push-chairs.
- B There may be some exceptions to this rule where there is a well defined spill out zone. (See fig 18).
- The use of hanging symbol signs will be encouraged as will innovative and creative signage of a high quality. (See fig 17).

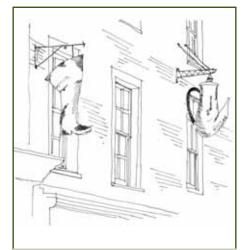


Fig 17 Hanging symbols replacing signs provide the opportunity for imaginative and original advertising which can add interest to the street scene



Fig 18 Well designed A boards may be acceptable when included within a 'spill out' area to the front of a shop

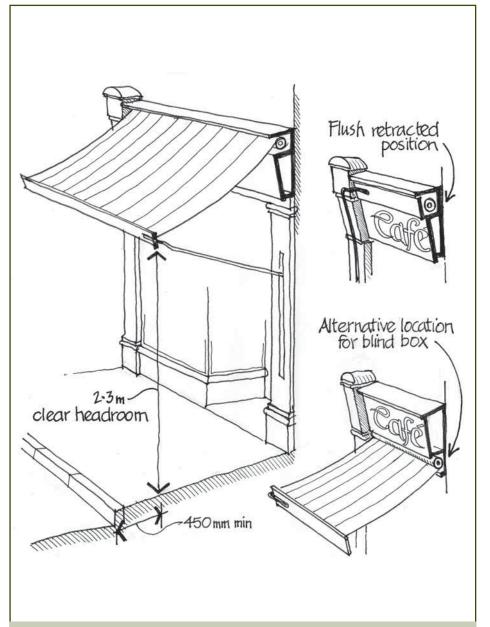


Fig 19 The location of blind boxes and the height of projecting blinds are important considerations in designing new shopfronts or fitting blinds to existing shops

5.05 BLINDS AND CANOPIES

KEY DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS:

- A Existing original or traditional canvas blinds and blind boxes should be retained and refurbished.
- B The mechanism for the blind should ideally be located at the base of the fascia, behind a blind lath. If the shopfront is not being altered, it may be appropriate to position the blind mechanism above the cornice. (See fig 19).
- A canopy or blind projecting over the Public Highway will need a minimum vertical clearance, measured from the surface of the Highway to the underside of the canopy of 2.3 metres.
- On historic buildings the design of any blind installed should relate to the architectural character of the building or area generally. The historical precedent for Victorian and Edwardian buildings constructed (or altered with the insertion of a shopfront) between 1830 and 1911 is for a blind of a straight roller or apron type.

- Modern buildings in conservation areas should use a blind of a design commensurate with the historic and architectural character of the area, normally a straight roller blind.
- Blinds should be made of canvas or a similar non-reflective material.
- The display of advertising material should be avoided unless other opportunities for advertisement are limited or non-existent.
- All forms of fixed blinds should be avoided (such as Dutch blinds) blinds should not interfere with visibility of traffic signals and signs blind supports should not interfere with or detract from the appearance of a shopfront.

5.06 SECURITY SHUTTERS AND GRILLES

KEY DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS:

A Roller shutters create an unattractive and dead appearance to a shopfront which not only detracts

- aesthetically from the host building and the shopping street in general but also perpetuates the impression of criminal activity in an area.
- The use of external solid metal roller shutters is generally unacceptable in Central Bedfordshire.
- Security measures, including the location of alarm boxes should respect the architectural and historic character and appearance of traditional buildings.
- Lattice shutters (fig 20), placed inside the shop window, allow surveillance of the premises and will be acceptable if they do not harm the external appearance of the property.
- Security glass or laminated glass has the capacity to remain intact even when broken.
- Shutter box housings should always be integrated within the shopfront (i.e. behind the fascia) or be recessed and flush with the shopfront. Shutter guides should either be removable, or integrated into the shopfront design,

- and colour coated to match the shopfront.
- Removable external shutters can be acceptable if they are appropriately designed to respect the architectural character of the shopfront (they are often though not always more appropriate for Georgian shopfronts rather than Victorian).

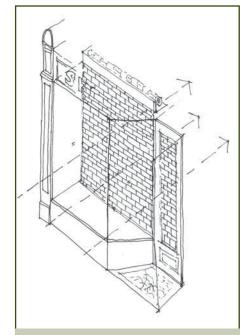


Fig 20 Open lattice shutters set behind the shopfront can be an effective deterrent whilst maintaining the integrity of the shopfront. It also allows presentation of dummy goods in windows

6.00 Checklist of key design considerations

Checklist for proposed shopfronts and signage. This list relates the whole of this Supplement and the relevant sections of the main Design Guide.

- **Does the** architectural framework of the proposed shopfront relate to the building or group of buildings on which it is proposed?
- **Does the** frame of the shopfront and give visual support to the upper floors?
- Are separate shop units visually expressed within the streetscene, creating a strong vertical rhythm and respecting the proportions of adjacent units and upper floors?
- **Do the** proposals entail the wholesale removal of an historic shopfront or elements of an historic shopfront, such as original blind boxes or fascia signage?

- Does the design of the new shopfront or alterations to an existing shopfront incorporate as far as reasonably possible easy and convenient access to the premises for everyone, including disabled customers?
- **Have the** materials been selected with the character of the rest of the building and the street in mind?
- Has the type and number of materials been kept to a minimum and are they durable and easily maintained?
- Is the proposed display of fascia signs on frontages easily readable with lettering in a single style and adjusted in size and content to suit the proportions and detailing of the existing/proposed fascia?
- Is the proposed projecting hanging sign the right size for the host building and in the correct position on the façade and does it share the design of colour and lettering with the principal fascia?

- **Is the** proposed canopy or blind designed as an integral part of the shopfront?
- Does the proposed security shutter deaden the streetscene by obscuring the shopfront completely and in this respect harm the historic fabric of a traditional shopfront surround and have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the shopping street?
- Is there sufficient information provided to give a clear picture of what the proposed shopfront or alterations to the shopfront and any proposed signage will look like on the host building and in the street scene?

Notes

Notes



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