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# Section 9





## 9.00 Town Centre Vitality

### 9.01 Introduction

#### 9.01.01

The performance and vitality of high streets is a visible indicator of how well, a local economy is doing. They are recognised as important hubs of social interaction and cohesion, as well as providers of local jobs. Central Bedfordshire's high streets and town centres continue to face serious challenges from out-of-town shopping centres and the growth of online and mobile retailing. Thus it is recognised that high streets need to evolve to offer something new and different that neither shopping centres nor the internet can match. They need to offer an experience that goes beyond retail and in addition offers a destination for culture, health, wellbeing, socialising, creativity and learning, with schools, doctors' surgeries, offices and small scale workshops along with shops. High streets should also be social places that make creative use of public spaces and support a vibrant evening economy. Overall, town centre sites should perform as highly sustainable locations, with direct access to a wide range of facilities within easy walking distance and good accessibility to public transport routes and connections.

#### 9.01.02

Central Bedfordshire has a number of important town and village centres; Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard, Houghton Regis, Ampthill, Sandy, Biggleswade, Shefford, Woburn and others which are not only of architectural and historical significance, but are significant commercial centres in their own right. These towns all have their own unique identity and are assets that should be preserved, enhanced and celebrated.

#### 9.01.03

As town centre development will usually consist of a range of mixed uses, including residential, retail, commercial and leisure; these will often occur within the same development. Redevelopment can be small scale through the replacement or re-use of buildings on one or two plots, or larger scale, involving the comprehensive redevelopment of considerable sized parcels of land.

#### 9.01.04

The aim of this Supplement is to provide design guidance to ensure that this development results in a sustainable and high quality town centre. This includes shopfront design, which forms an integral part of the town centre streetscene. It will also be necessary to consult other relevant supplements in this guide to ensure that all the appropriate design elements of a town centre development are addressed.

## 9.02 Issues

The following issues require resolution during the design and planning process.

### Limited Space

#### 9.02.01

Town centre sites and other infill locations are often constrained and thus there are issues involving access, ownership, infrastructure, existing structures (above and below ground), trees, and possible contamination to be resolved.

#### 9.02.02

Due to the nature of these sites, some relaxation of normal standards regarding privacy distances, amenity space, density, vehicular servicing and parking may be sought in order to achieve an acceptable and viable solution overall.

## Historic Context

#### 9.02.03

Many of these sites will be within Conservation Areas, possibly including Listed Buildings or trees covered by Tree Preservation Orders. These considerations will exert a major influence on layout, massing and design.

## Economic Considerations

#### 9.02.04

Economic considerations regarding the size, shape, location, height and servicing requirements may conflict with the established scale and grain of the site and the adjoining properties.

#### 9.02.05

Decisions will have to be made regarding the degree of compromise between the qualities of the existing buildings and street scene (to be defined in detail) and the requirements and mix of the proposed development with degrees of fixed and negotiable factors identified.

#### 9.02.06

Where the development involves 'backland' locations, these can be outside the established pattern of shoppers' footfall or out of sight. Thus these could be less profitable unless questions of exploiting existing or potential desire lines, the creation of mix of 'magnet' uses are addressed, to ensure viability.



**Fig 9.01** Liegton Buzzard Town Centre is an Historic Conservation Area

## Ownership

9.02.07

The clear distinction of public and private space and the degree or the desirability of control through the 'gating' of a development should be addressed, especially in relation to car parking and servicing.

## Access for All

9.02.08

Town centre locations should be designed to be accessible for all modes of travel, and buildings themselves should allow level access to cater for all users.

## Car Parking

9.02.09

Consideration of the appropriate level of car parking provision for any development will need to be carefully thought through, particularly where parking is located e.g. front or back? Further guidance on the design of car parking is given in Placemaking Principles (1.13 to 1.14) and the Movement and Streets supplement (10.04).

# Section 9

## Residential Uses

### 9.02.06

'Living Over The Shop' in town centres can be an attractive concept to a range of residents who welcome being close to the amenities and facilities of a town centre. However, nighttime disturbance, personal safety and the impact of vehicular servicing could prove to be a serious drawback, unless properly considered at the planning and design stage.

## Diversity of Uses

### 9.02.07

Redevelopment of existing town centres can mean the loss of small scale, less profitable uses, which nevertheless contribute to diversity, vitality and the 'unique selling point' of a town. Thus the potential loss of these enterprises should be recognized and positively planned for (possibly by cross subsidy from highly profitable uses in the development mix) in order to reduce the phenomenon of the 'Cloned High Street' of almost exclusively nationwide multiple retail outlets. 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.

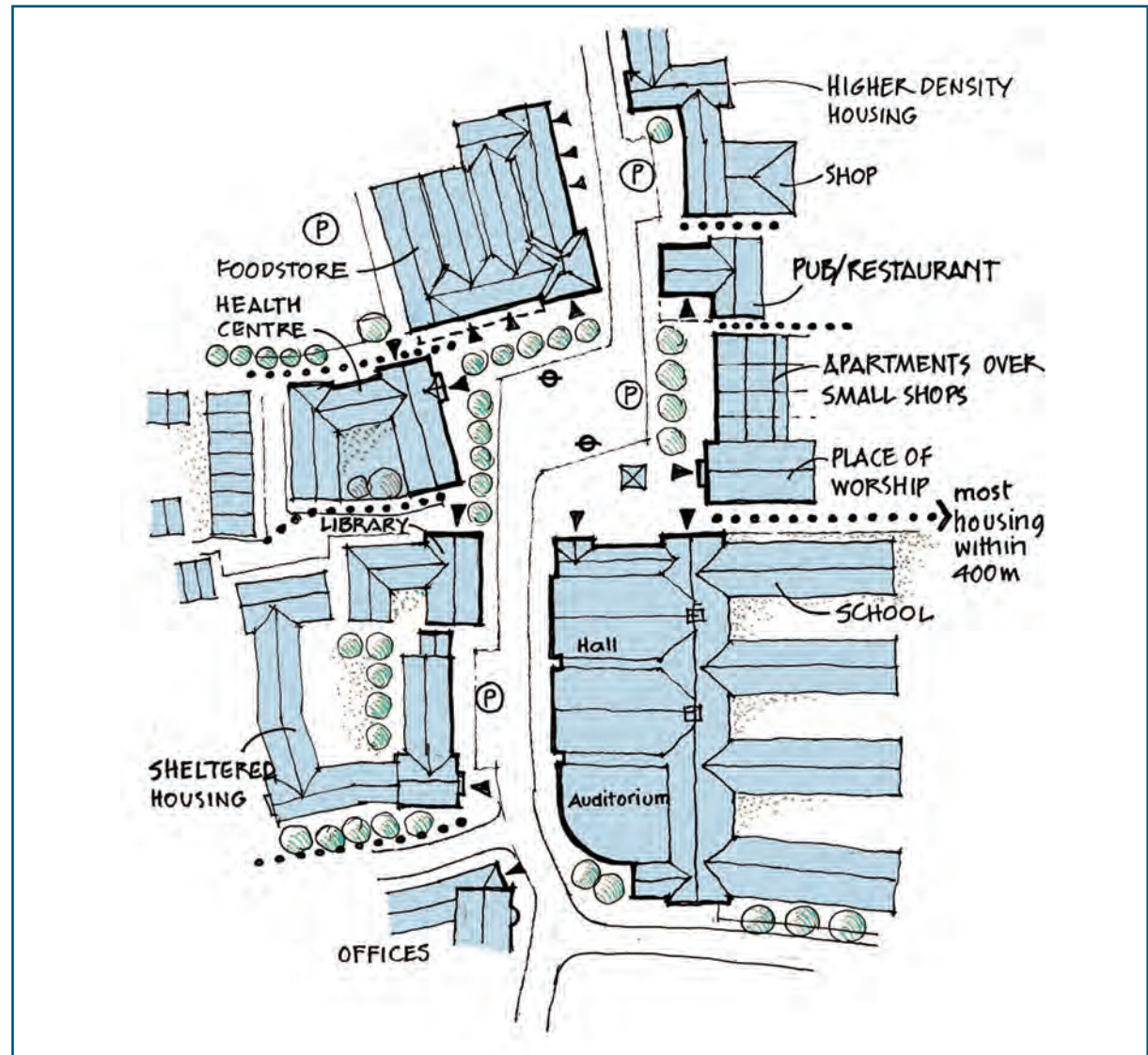


Fig 9.02 Indicative layout of town centre development showing possible mix of uses



## Density

### 9.02.08

The need to increase residential density in town centre sites to address the general issues of falling footfall and changes of building usage to address the evolving nature of high streets will present additional challenges.

## Infill Development

### 9.02.09

The perception of the 'role' of the infill development within its wider street scene context will be an important factor in the physical character of the scheme and should influence the design from the outset: e.g. should it reflect its pivotal prominent position, its sense of continuity and conformity in the street scene, or its need to adopt a subservient role like a backland location.

## Shopfronts

### 9.02.10

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)

### 9.02.11

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.

### 9.02.12

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.

### 9.02.13

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).



**Fig 9.03** Recent development incorporating a shopfront elevation designed as an integral part of the street scene and to terminate the view from a side street.

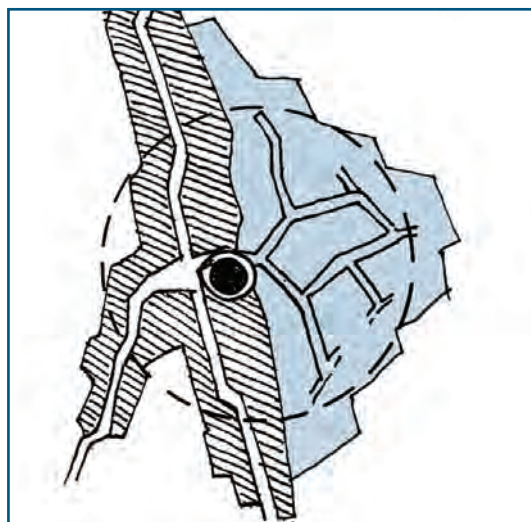
### 9.03 Policy

Further policy and design guidance can be found at:

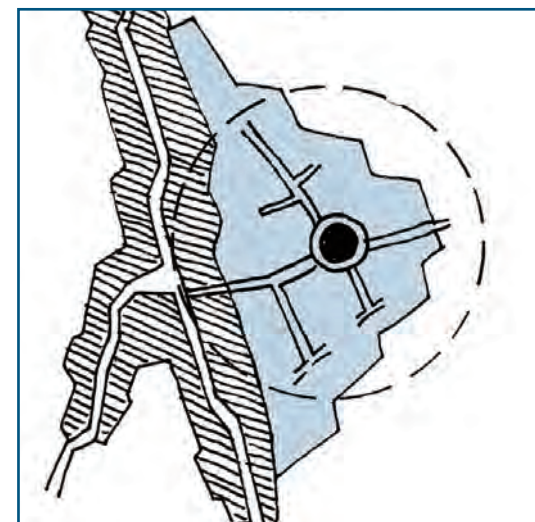
- National Planning Policy Framework – Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2012 .  
*Specifically section 2, Ensuring the vitality of town centres; which highlights the need to promote competitive town centre environments, support their viability, vitality and recognise them as the heart of communities.*
- Local Transport Plan 3, Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC)
- By Design  
Department of the environment, Transport and Regions (DETR) 2000
- Manual for Streets,  
Department for transport (DfT) 2007
- Manual for Streets 2,  
Department for Transport (DfT) 2010
- Urban Design Compendium  
Homes and Community Agency (HCA) 2013
- Setting of Heritage Assets  
English Heritage (EH) Oct. 2011
- LDF Core Strategy and Development Management Policies on Town Centres and Retailing, 2009

Climate Change, High Quantity Development, Heritage, Sustainable Construction, Water Efficiency & Housing Mix

- Production of Design Briefs for key sites.
- Conservation Area Character Statements
- Retail development in Historic Areas (EH)
- Portas Report – Key findings



**Fig 9.04** Indicative layout of new town centre as the interface is likely to be more viable.



**Fig 9.05** Indicative layout of new town centre at the heart of development likely to be less viable.



## 9.04 Aims

### To ensure that the proposed development:

- A** Is of the appropriate volume, massing, layout and scale for its setting
- B** Contributes to the vitality, viability and safety of a town centre, though a mix of uses and densities
- C** Maintains, and where appropriate, increases street continuity in retail, commercial and community activity through a high incidence of active frontages.
- D** Accommodates pedestrian, cycle, public transport and vehicular access whilst providing cycle and car parking in the most appropriate way.
- E** Maintain the important local character of high streets within Central Bedfordshire by ensuring:
  - The retention of a mix of uses in commercial areas
  - the use of traditional materials and methods where appropriate in new or replacement shopfront design
  - that historic shopfronts are repaired rather than replaced
  - that a high standard of advertisement design which could enhance local distinctiveness and the quality of the retail experience in the district is maintained
  - the use of appropriately designed shutters, canopies and blinds
  - that designers to consider a sympathetic relationship between the character of existing buildings and corporate logos and colour schemes

# Section 9

## 9.05 Analysis of Site and Setting

### 9.05.01

It is essential to consult the site appraisal section in Placemaking Principles. This will be necessary in the process of establishing the massing, roofline, layout and scale of the proposed development. It will also be necessary to establish the role of the proposals within the street scene and the townscape as a whole. (For example, will the development include a pivotal corner location, a frontage terminating views, the need to maintain street continuity, to create a landmark, or adopt a subservient role with its neighbours? The analysis of Site and Setting should also include reference to:

- A** Historic maps and photographs of the site and its immediate vicinity (this can often provide clues to the importance of grain, boundaries and plot coverage) and
- B** The Conservation Area Statement for the area where this is relevant (remembering that the setting of a Conservation Area is a material consideration).

### 9.05.02

The analysis of Site and Setting will be an important element in the rationale for the design as required for a Design and Access Statement. It is advisable to seek pre-application consultation with the Council.

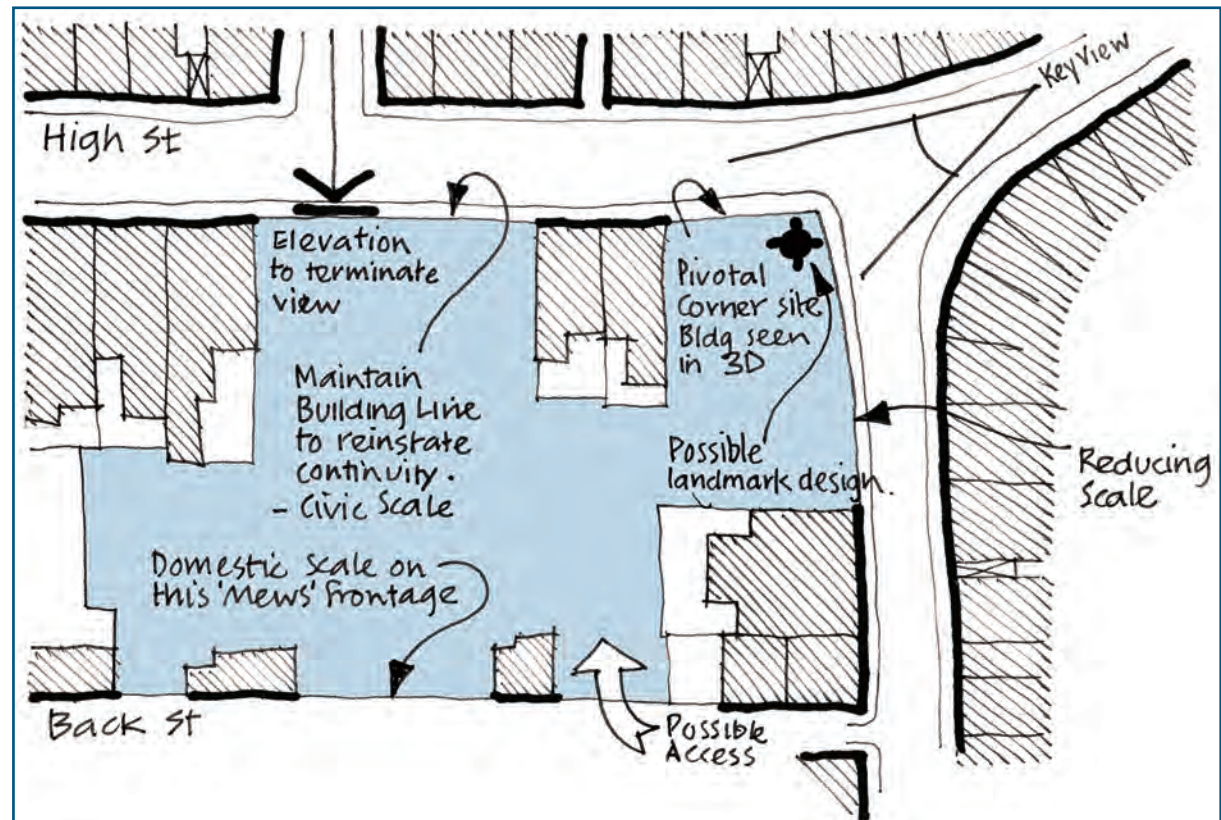


Fig 9.06 Analysis plan to establish roles of a town infill site

## 9.06 Design Principles

### Town Centre Locations

#### 9.06.01

Mixed uses should be integrated into the layout and design. These should be in close proximity to each other, horizontally and vertically. This relationship should contribute to the vitality and viability of the centre in that the centre is used for different reasons on the same visit. Schools should be located within the centre, to facilitate the use of halls and other facilities by the community.

#### 9.06.02

Ideally town or neighbourhood centres should be located within walking distance of residential development and especially sheltered housing; but this isn't always possible with larger centres. In this regard, locating it at the junction of streets that take the most traffic, and are the bus routes for a development, should be a key locational requirement.

#### 9.06.03

Residential development should be integrated into the centre where appropriate. It is essential that there is a 'critical mass' of population within easy reach of the town centre to support the projected range of uses. A 'widened High Street' configuration would be appropriate in most cases. This allows for good foot, cycle and bus

accessibility and connection/ integration with the existing urban fabric.

#### 9.06.04

A Town Square could be included in this pattern positioned for maximum solar capture, to allow for open air markets, bus stops and events. These areas could be sensitively laid out as shared spaces in order to maximize pedestrian movement and calm traffic speeds. If the proposed development is located on the periphery of an existing settlement, its centre should create a link between the existing and the new development, to maximise the footfall in the new centre and facilitate its visibility by proximity to the existing settlement

#### 9.06.05

Town centres are the focal points for pedestrians and therefore the overall design of the town centre for a new development must maximize pedestrian comfort. This should include:

- Designing for the shortest most direct pedestrian routes to and within the town centre
- Making the key pedestrian desire lines into the highest quality pedestrian routes
- Clear wayfinding
- Appropriate street furniture that does not result in the accumulation of street clutter
- Clear definition of public and private space

- Recognising where pedestrian footfall will be highest and having sufficient footpath width to accommodate this movement
- Position of public spaces to maximise solar gain capture
- Take account of the guidance given in the Historic Environment Supplement where applicable

#### 9.06.06

Consideration must also be given to access by cycling and public transport. The highway layout should be designed to accommodate cyclists including their existing patterns of movement and any potential desire lines, and parking provision should be on-street, convenient and well designed. Town centre locations must be well served by public transport and sufficient facilities must be in place to accommodate bus movements, bus stops and associated infrastructure in key locations. Further guidance on accommodating cyclists and public transport is available in the Movement and Street Supplement. Reference should also be made to the Council's current cycle parking guidance.



# Section 9

## Determining subdivisions

9.06.07

The existing grain and plot widths or other determining subdivisions should influence the widths of the proposed development. This is particularly important in a street of continuous frontages, in order to maintain the scale and vertical emphasis of the street elevation.

Incorporating and integrating large stores into a high street development without offering undesirable long blank façade will require careful consideration and might be more appropriate as a backland magnet store provision. Where large foodstores are integrated into town centres, care needs to be taken that they don't offer inactive and blank facades onto the key areas of public realm. The store entrance should be located on the main pedestrian route in the most accessible location. Where sides of a foodstore do face onto areas of public realm these facades can be enlivened through small single aspect units that 'wrap' the side of the foodstore and provide an active frontage onto the public realm.

Where active frontages can't be achieved every effort should be made to at least allow views into the store.

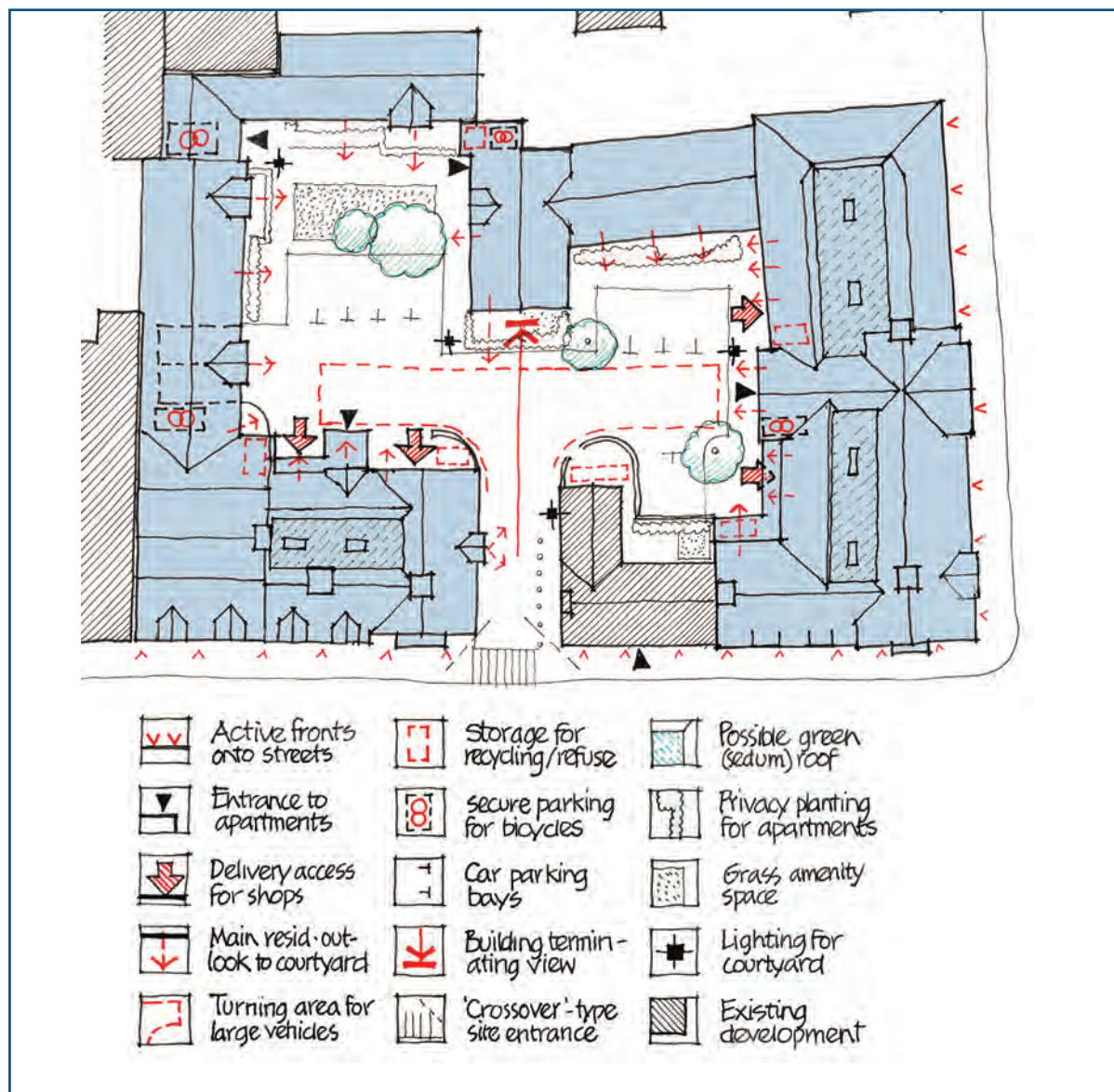
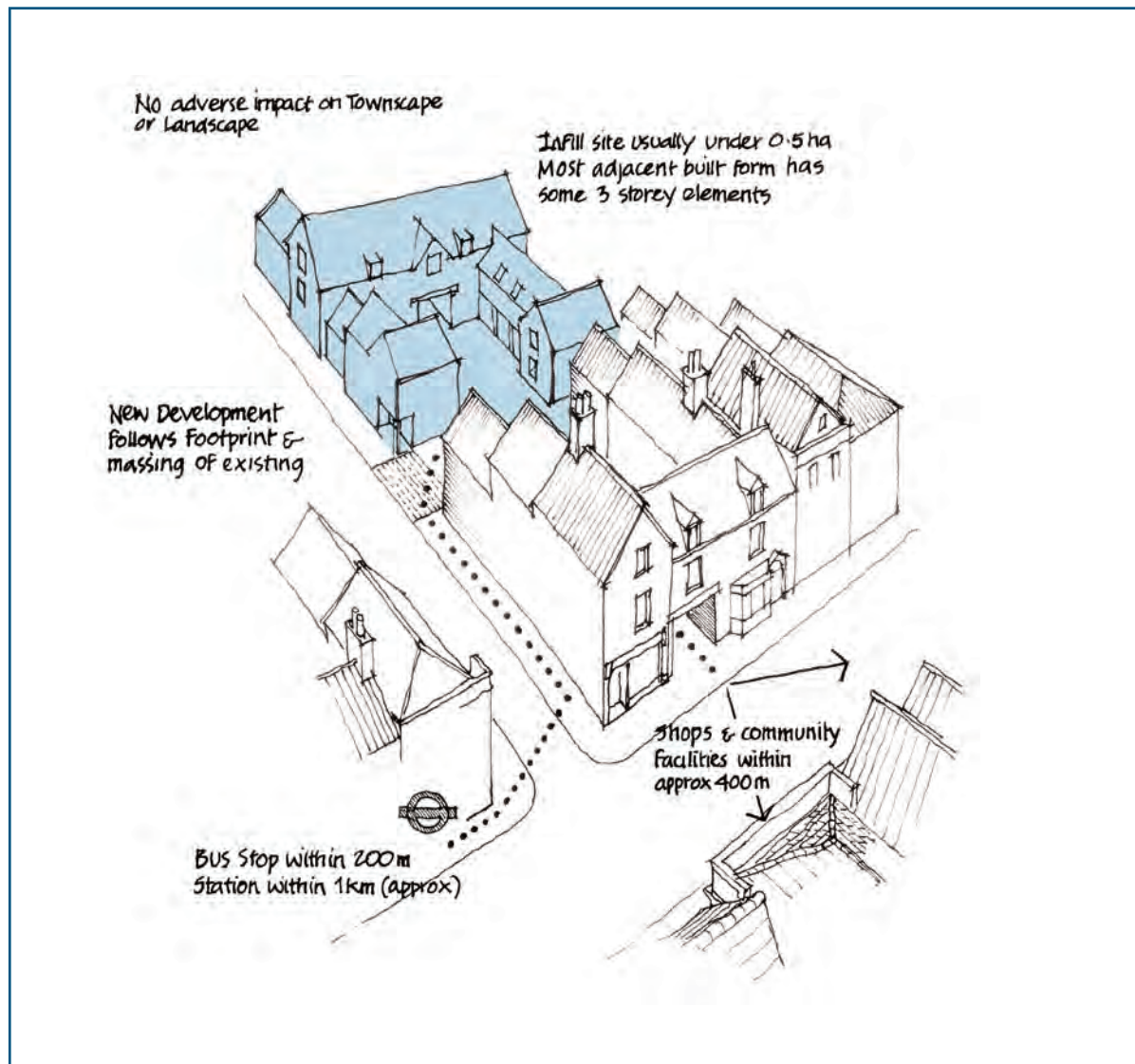


Fig 9.07 Analysis plan to establish roles of a town infill site



**Fig 9.08** Indicative layout of town centre development showing possible mix of uses

## Pedestrian permeability

9.06.08

The appropriateness, desirability and convenience of providing pedestrian permeability through the development will need to be balanced with considerations of privacy, safety and possible sources of nuisance. Thus the subtle but effective need to distinguish between public and private space will be essential. High levels of natural surveillance and lighting at certain points will be necessary. A 'gated' internal area may be necessary.

## Building Lines

9.06.09

In order that street continuity and enclosure is maintained, the established building line should be adhered to unless there are exceptional reasons to depart from this norm.

## Internal courtyards

9.06.10

It is often difficult to ensure the commercial viability of shops fronting an internal courtyard ('out of sight, out of mind') and thus unless the courtyard is part of a well established through-route to a well established destination, this solution is unlikely to succeed.



## Service areas

9.06.11

Service areas, such as collection areas for recycling material (for residential, retail and other uses), will require dedicated areas which are convenient for collection, be relatively unobtrusive and situated where they cause the least disturbance to residents and shoppers. Service areas should therefore be located on the least important street in terms of public access. A Waste Audit will be required and should give detailed information on these points. Safe and convenient storage for residents' bicycles must be included.

## Active frontages

9.06.12

It is essential that Active frontages are incorporated into the design of all elevations facing the public realm. It will be expected that entrances, windows to residential habitable rooms, office windows and shopfronts will be provided on main elevations that follow the key pedestrian desire lines and, to a lesser extent, to flank walls. Active frontages help to maintain commercial continuity in shopping streets, and provide passive surveillance and visual interest. Blank walls, unless unavoidable and in very short lengths would not be acceptable on street frontages.

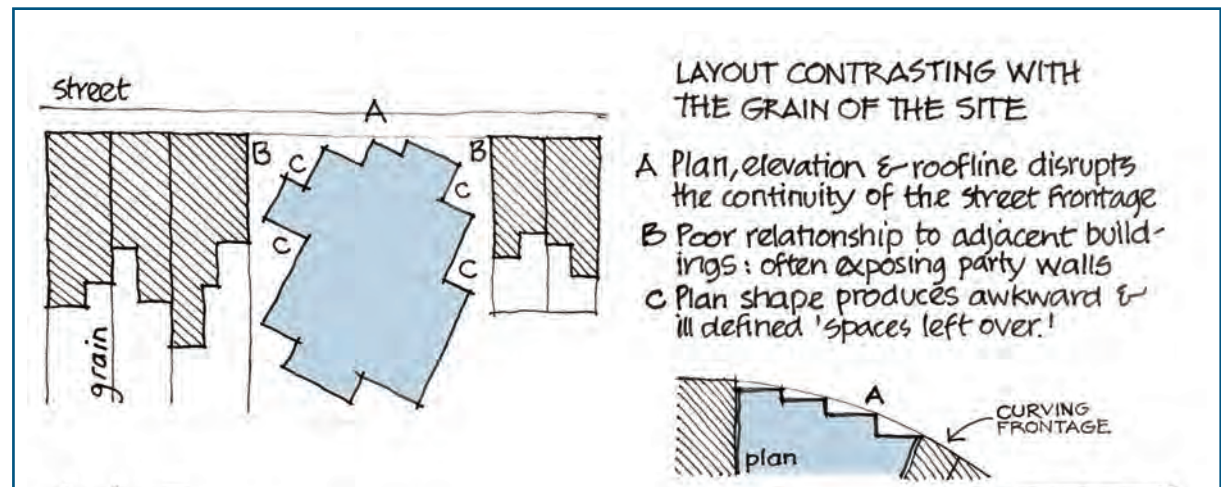


Fig 9.09 Inappropriate building layout

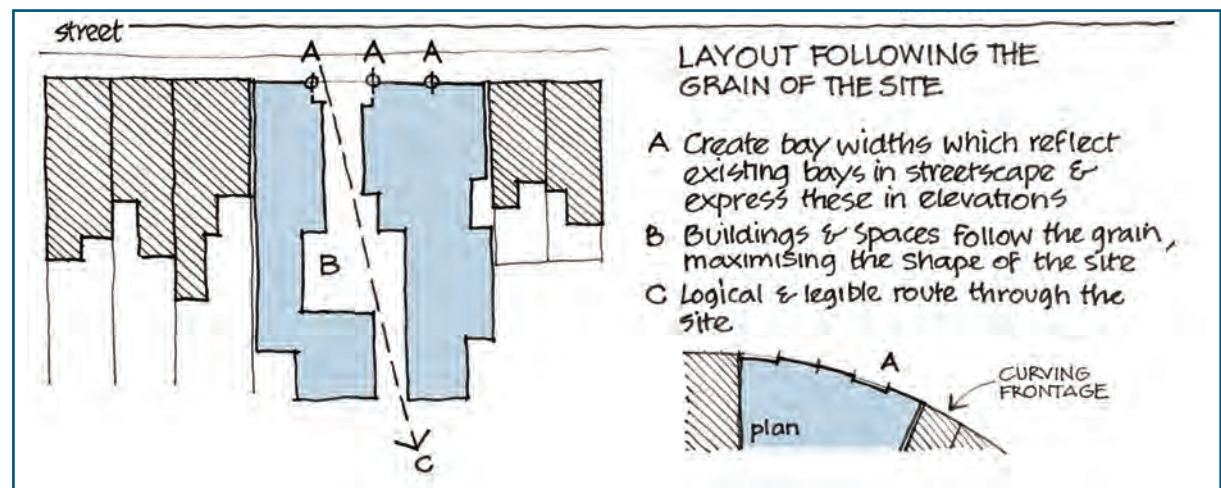


Fig 9.10 Acceptable building layout



## Layout of infill sites

### 9.06.13

The internal layout of a site in constricted infill sites will require detailed, three-dimensional design from the early stages in the design to ensure adequate daylight, privacy, amenity, vehicular access, parking (where appropriate) and placemaking is achieved. Whilst the usual distance standards may not be relevant, it is expected that the designer will be able to demonstrate reasonable levels of daylight, aspect, visual privacy and external amenity space in the disposition of residential, commercial and community uses.

## Vehicular access

### 9.06.14

Where vehicular access into the site is required, the location of the access way should minimize any disruption to the continuity of principal frontages and pedestrian amenity. In any location, the width should be the absolute minimum necessary for the tracking of vehicles. It should be borne in mind that it would be extremely rare for two large vehicles to pass within the width of an access opening. Shared surfaces should be adequate for a single width vehicle together with pedestrians and/or cyclists unless high levels of vehicular movement are specifically predicted. Openings of less than 5.5 metres should be adequate in most situations.

Early consultation with the Council's highways officers is recommended. In some cases the access way dimensions should be determined by the tracking of, for example an 11 metre refuse vehicle and the approach to limited visibility splays as set out in the 'Manual for Streets'. Two storey height vehicular access archways should be avoided, as these introduce and emphasise a large scale to the streetscene. Where the usual 3.7m headroom is not considered adequate for predicted vehicle usage, archways should not be used.

## Car and cycle parking

### 9.06.15

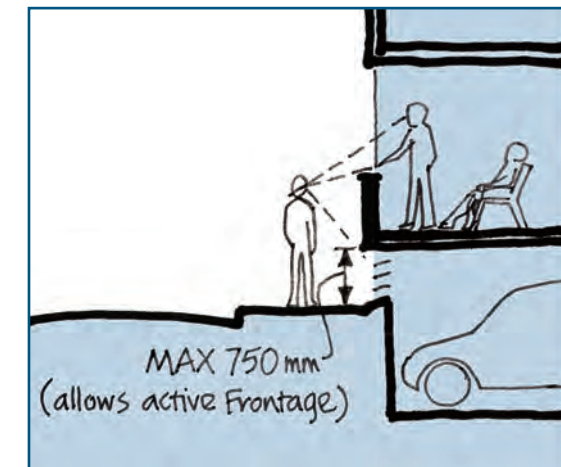
Levels of parking provision should take into account location and opportunities for sustainable travel to key services and facilities. Details of acceptable parking standards are available in the Council's Parking Strategy and current Cycle Parking Guidance (part of the Local Transport Plan). However, in some situations this level may not be achievable. Alternative measures such as a car club, 'smart car' type parking bays, and the inclusion of charging facilities for electric cars may be appropriate. In terms of the location of parking a balance needs to be struck between the ability of parking to animate the public realm (improving activity) and its potential to dominate, clutter and spoil the public realm.

### 9.06.16

As a general rule public parking should be located in clear public areas and not internal to blocks. Where public parking is located internal to a block it must be designed such that the space feels public and with features that make both cars, cyclists and pedestrians safe.

### 9.06.17

It is unlikely that undercroft parking will be feasible in existing town centres, due to the limited size of sites and the necessity to avoid blank frontages. However, in new towncentres, undercroft arrangements in a semi-basement configuration could be appropriate if the floor level above is no more than one metre above street level.



**Fig 9.11** Indicative layout of undercroft arrangements in a semi-basement configuration

# Section 9

## 9.06.18

This would ensure that the parking area has minimal impact on the streetscene and ensures that the accommodation above has window sills at an appropriate level (see fig 13). Multi-storey car parks should not have parked cars visible at street level, nor blank walls creating a blank frontage. Wrapping with single aspect development might be appropriate in these situations.

## 9.06.19

Multi-storey car parks that are visible from the public realm should be seen as a piece of architecture in its own right

## Density

## 9.06.20

It is generally accepted that residential densities will be higher in town centre locations than in other suburban locations. Actual densities will vary depending on the location and surrounding context and the ability of the scheme to demonstrate that it can achieve. It is likely that in smaller town centre sites, for example, of around 0.3 hectares, the relative density could exceed 50 dwellings per hectare. Densities above this figure will be determined as appropriate, if the scheme can be demonstrated to achieve reasonable levels of amenity, privacy, daylight and placemaking, as well as a sensitive response to the scale, height and massing of its setting.

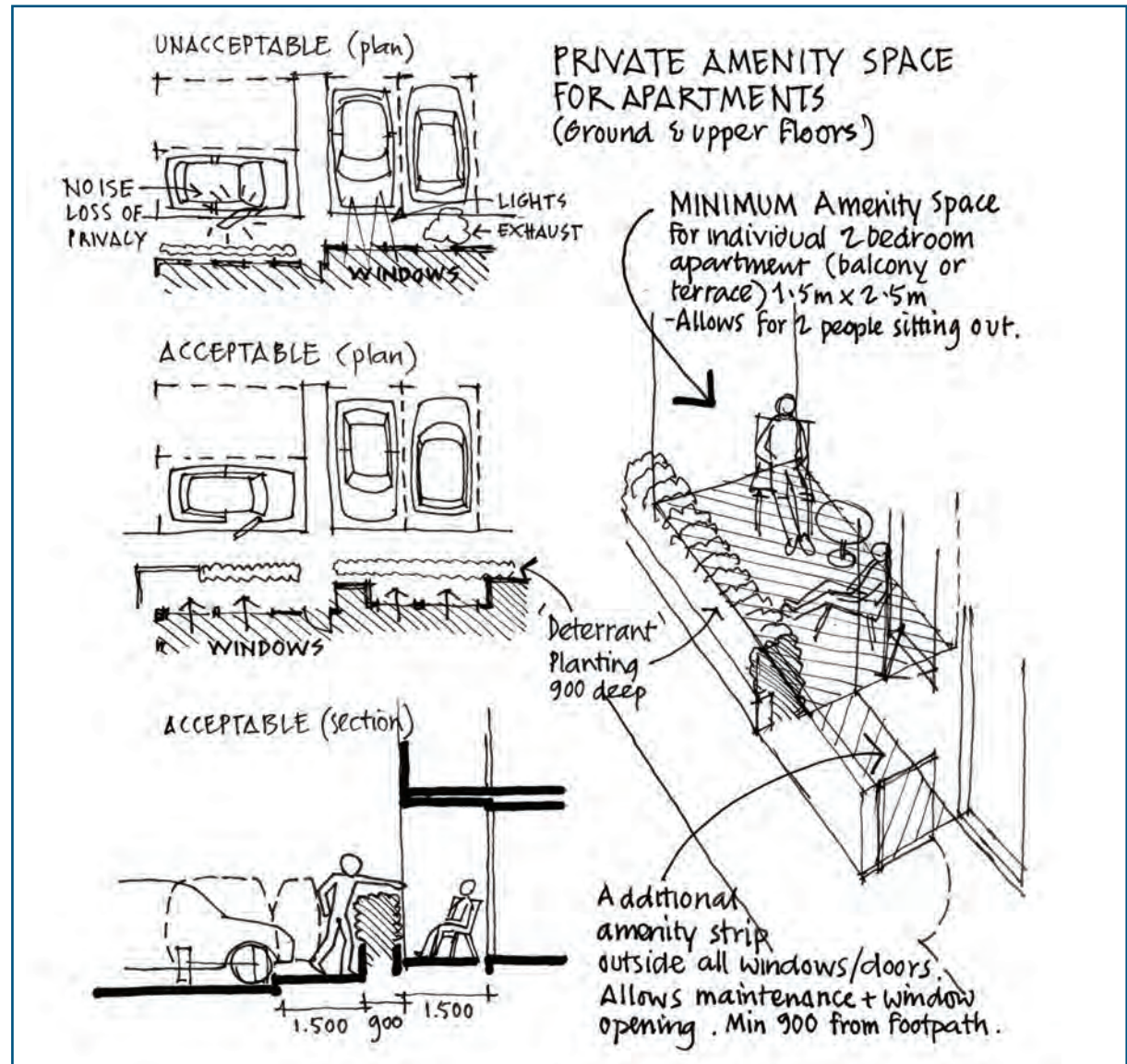


Fig 9.12 Private Amenity Space for Apartments

## Movement

### 9.06.21

To ensure that town centres are not too orientated towards traffic and parking, Transport Assessments will be required to determine the traffic impacts of proposals. These Transport Assessments should cross reference the Movement and Street Supplement and identify any appropriate mitigation measures.

## Flexible development

### 9.06.22

When designing new development in Town centre or High street locations it is important to consider 'future proofing' of the proposals, this will require careful thought on designing buildings which are capable of conversion to other uses at a later date. floor space, floor plate design, floor to ceiling heights, and scope for enabling independent access to upper floors should be considered.

## Green Infrastructure

### 9.06.23

A water management and landscape strategy, including SUDS, should be incorporated into the design process. Consideration should also be given to the potential preserving and enhancing biodiversity through the use of roost bricks for example. Further guidance is included in the Green Infrastructure supplement.

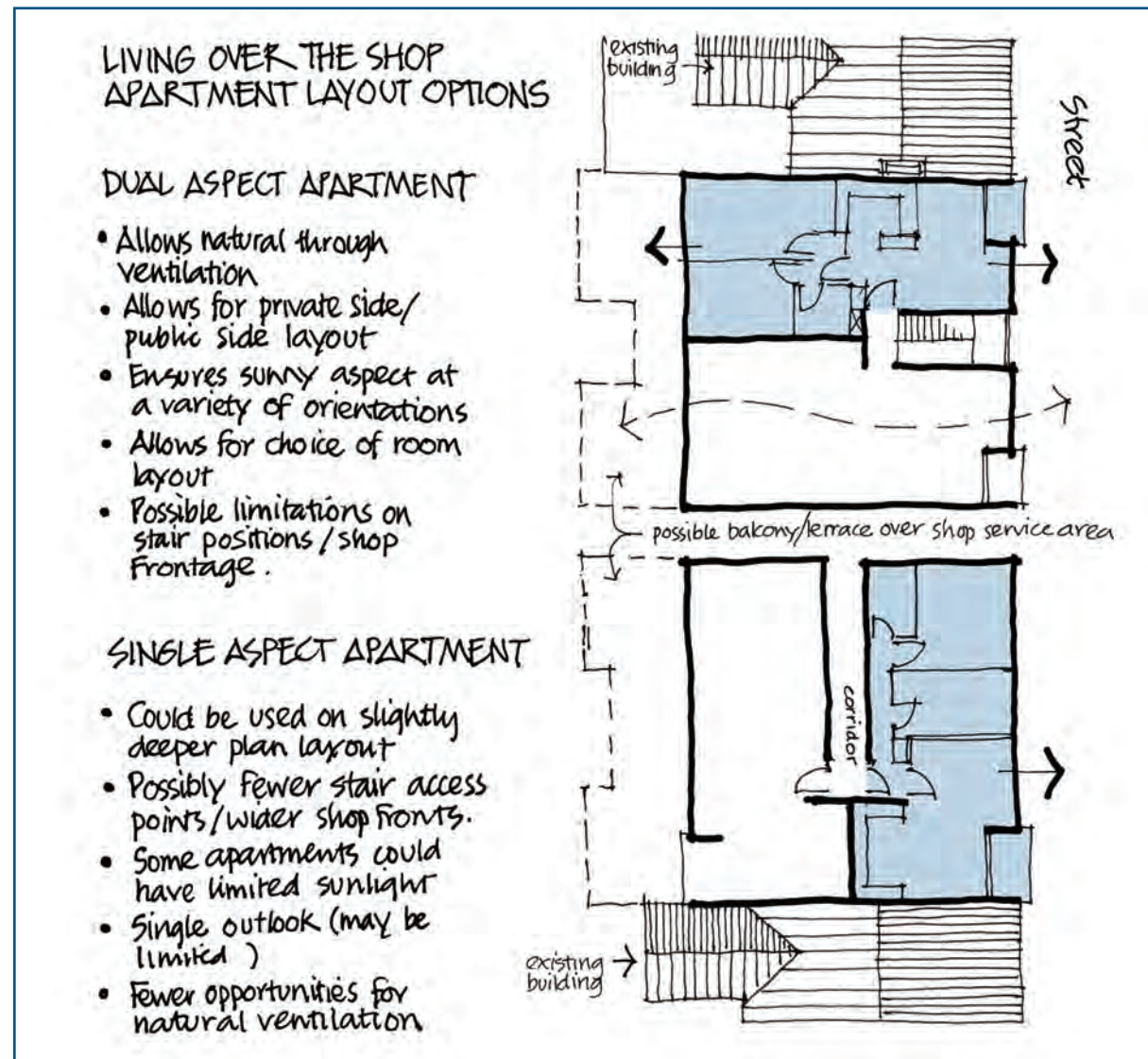


Fig 9.13 Apartment layout options



## Building heights

9.06.24

Building heights will be considered on their merits, taking into account the height of surrounding development, roofline impact, views and scale of development. In existing towns, it is likely that town centre development will be within the range of 2.5 to 4 storeys. In new settlements, building heights would be determined by the relevant masterplan or design code. In this case, contextual factors such as impact on the landscape, the placemaking principles detailed in section 1, and the need to create a landmark focus will be relevant factors.

## Storey Heights

9.06.25

Whilst commercial development often requires greater floor to ceiling heights than some traditional building types, every effort should be made to reduce the differential between existing and proposed storey heights and floor depths. In most cases the differential which results in two storeys of proposed development being of the height of three storeys of existing would not be acceptable. Wherever possible, differentiation between storey heights, reflecting different uses on ground, upper floors and attic floors, should be used to give articulation to a façade.

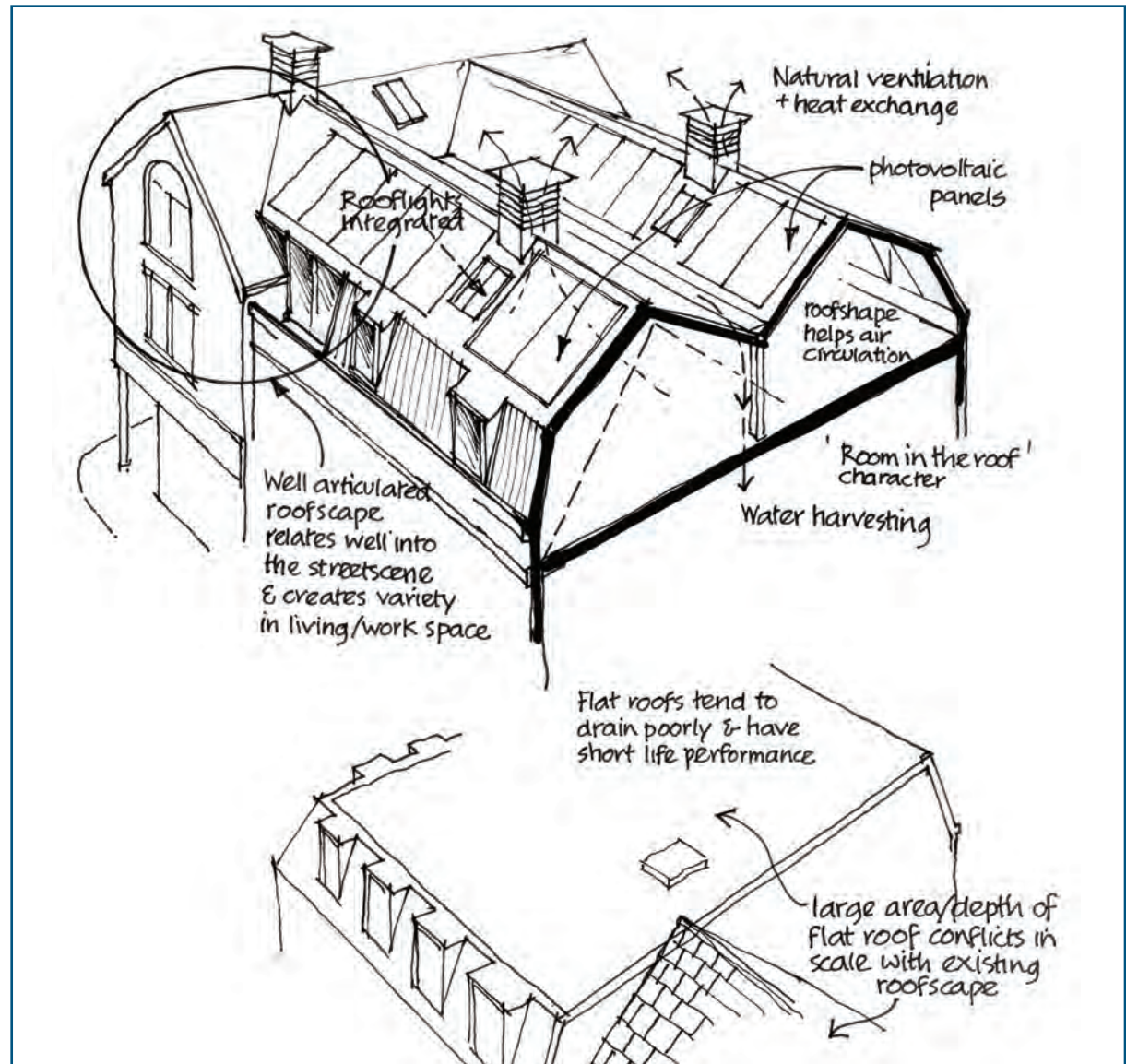


Fig 9.14 Roof design in Town Centres

## Roof design

### 9.06.26

Roof design will be an essential component in the process of ensuring that the proposed development is successfully integrated into the existing townscape. Whilst many street level retail uses are of relatively deep plan, residential and office uses should not usually exceed 12–14 metres, for purposes of daylight and natural ventilation. A design of flat roof with false mansard elevations is a conventional solution, but should be avoided unless a 'green' roof is proposed which does not conflict with the street scene. A roof profile which includes fully pitched roofs, possibly incorporating renewable energy generation extract and heat exchange cowls and roof terraces should be considered, in order to create roofline interest.

## Window Proportions

### 9.06.27

Window proportions should generally have a vertical emphasis especially on first floors. Vertical emphasis will usually assist in relating the proposal to the existing development. The depth of the window surround or the window panel may assist in reducing the apparent disparity of depth in storey heights. Vertical emphasis can also be achieved in the spacing and expression of mullions.

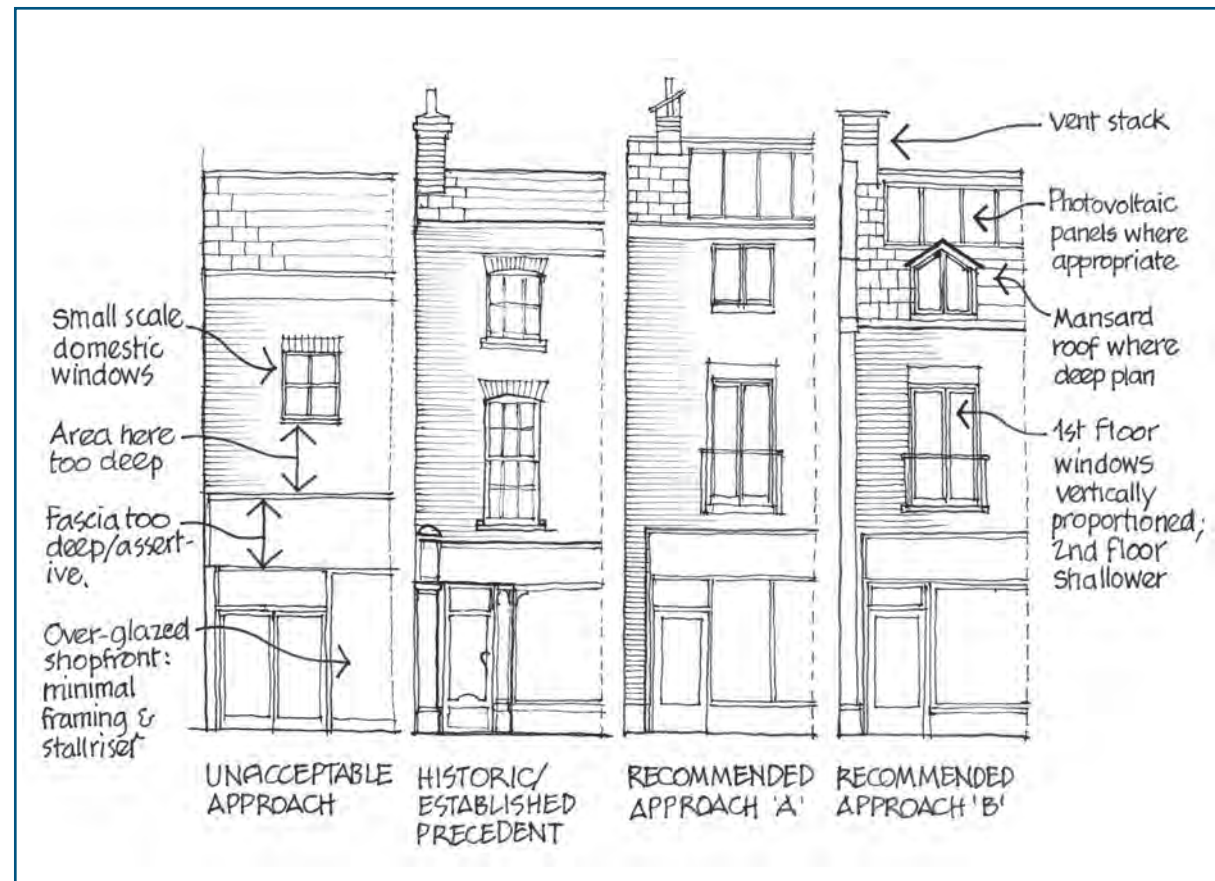


Fig 9.15 Proportion and Scale



# Section 9

## Town Centre Public Realm

9.06.27

The design of the public realm and the inter-relationship with transport and movement systems is one of the most significant elements in shaping the future character and image of town centres. Each town centre will have a unique range of public realm products and materials so careful and informed design of the public realm is fundamental to the quality of any town centre development, and will contribute greatly to the attractiveness, identity and vitality of the town. All development should consider the relationship to the way we arrive or move around the town by foot, cycle, public transport or car; the relationships between movement patterns and the design of associated streets and spaces; and thus creating a coordinated approach to development proposals. Highway layout should consider pedestrians and cyclists including their existing patterns of movement and any potential desire lines.

## Shared surfaces

9.06.28

When designing shared surfaces as part of a development proposal, careful consideration will need to be given to :

- Undefined surfaces leading to poor parking behaviour

- The position, quality and quantity of planting, street furniture and other features that can create visual clutter and
- Vulnerable road users feeling threatened or disorientated by having no definition or space protected by vehicles.

Further guidance on shared surfaces and level surface streets is included in the Movement and Streets supplement.



**Fig 9.16** Well considered public realm and shared surface scheme in Leighton Buzzard Town Centre



### 9.07 Checklist for proposed town centre and infill development.

- Ensure that the development relates to its streetscene setting, enhancing it where the context is mediocre, in a conservation area or in the setting of a Listed Building. What role/s will the development play?
- Do the layout, massing, heights, roofscape, fenestration and storey heights create a scheme which relates to the grain of the surroundings?
- Will the scheme create commercial and streetscape continuity e.g. active frontages, appropriately sited and sized site entrances?
- Is the density proposed appropriate in terms of the capacity of the site to achieve the above and to ensure appropriate privacy, safety and security, daylight, sunlight and parking?
- To what degree is public access and pedestrian permeability within the site balanced with achievement of active frontages, projected footfall, safety, desire-lines, clear delineation of public and private space and commercial viability?
- What is the proposed vehicular servicing regime? Are the entrances, spaces, surfaces and tracked areas appropriate to this regime?
- Is the parking provision and layout appropriate to the density of the scheme and does it respect the privacy and amenity of residents in the scheme? Has the parking provision been located in the most accessible and appropriate place?
- In schemes for new town centre development, has the provision for mixed uses taken into account the creation of a 'critical mass' of population within walking distance to support the proposed mix? Are the mixed uses within close proximity to each other?
- Are the proposed materials appropriate in terms of sustainability, context, placemaking and durability?
- To what degree does a Water and Landscape management plan affect the design and surfaces of the spaces between buildings and the design of the roofscape?
- Is a waste management plan in place? Has sufficient storage and collection of recycling containers been well considered regarding access, primary pedestrian routes and minimum disruption?

## 9.08 Shopfronts

### 9.08.01

In the case of traditional buildings, shopfronts should respond to the character and architectural form of the host building. In Central Bedfordshire there are some valuable survivals of Georgian shopfronts. These are characterised by elaborately carved timber surrounds and multi-paned shop windows. The majority of traditional shopfronts date from the Victorian period but there is a wide variation in type; from the modest to the grand.

### 9.08.02

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.

### 9.08.03

A shopfront design need not be an accurate period reproduction of the original building. Often this cannot be achieved in any event, 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.

### 9.08.04

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

### 9.08.05

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.



**Fig 9.17** Simple single bay shopfront, Ampthill



**Fig 9.18** Georgian shopfront in Woburn

## 9.09 The components and language of traditional shopfront design

### Key design considerations:

#### 9.09.01

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.

### Fascia

#### 9.09.02

- 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.
- C 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.
- D A fascia should not stretch uninterrupted across a number of distinct buildings or uncomfortably across a building with a series of traditional bays.
- E The top of a fascia should be positioned well below the sill of the first floor windows.
- F 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.
- G 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 traditional means of setting the fascia into a framework.

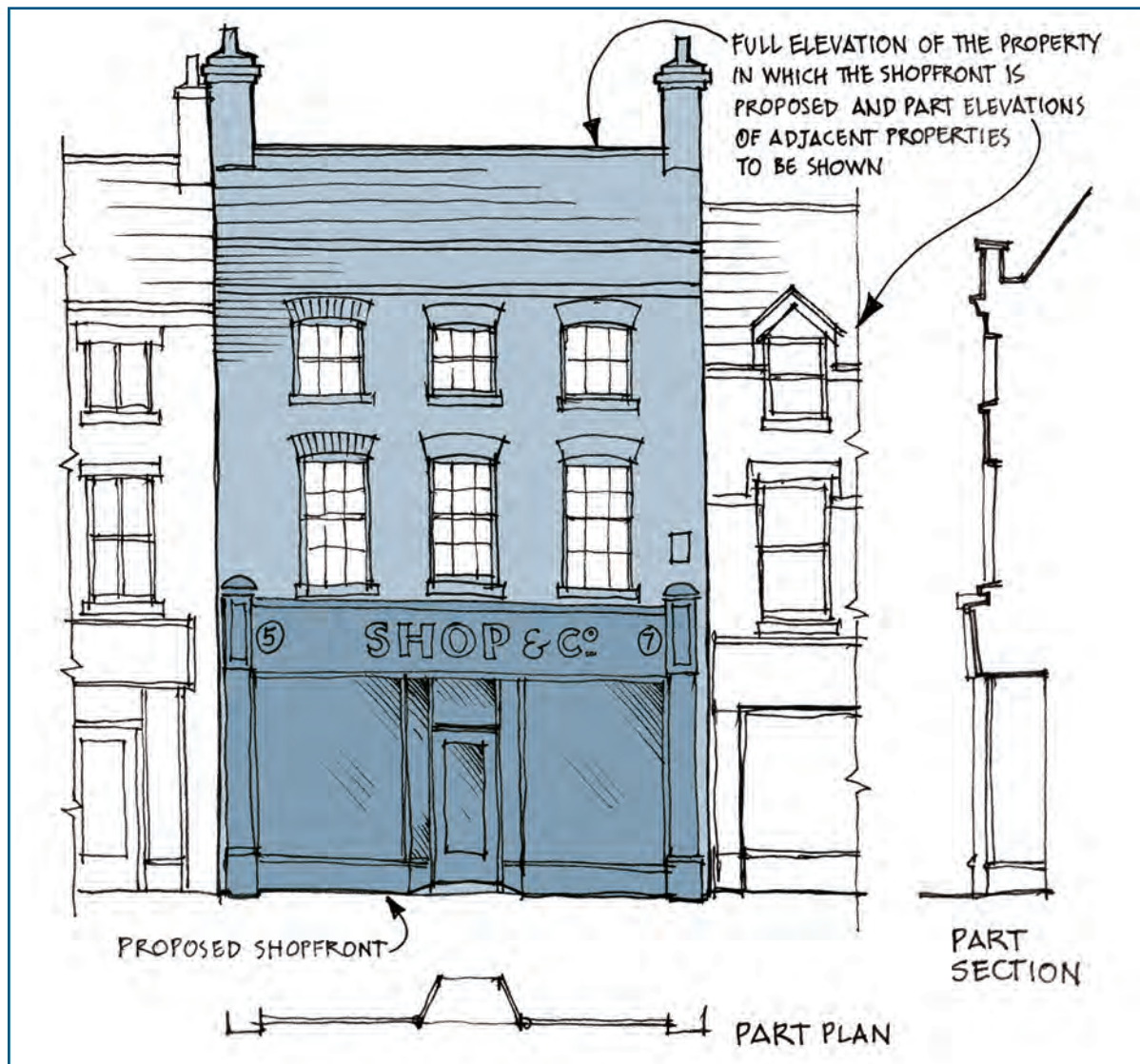
### Stall riser

#### 9.09.03

- A The materials for stallrisers (sometimes also called upstands) should respect the main building and shopfront.
- B In traditional buildings stallrisers will normally be required in all shop premises.
- C The base of the pilasters (see fig 9.20) or existing traditional stallrisers in adjacent units and the proportions of the shopfront should determine the height.
- D The design and details of mouldings and cills should respect the architectural period of the property.
- E A solid stallriser or upstand of at least 150mm will be required.



# Section 9



**Fig 9.19** The proposed shopfront should be considered in relation to the proportions, scale and design of the 'host' building and its immediate neighbours. The proposed shopfront should be shown on an elevation of the whole host building and part elevations of adjacent properties in any planning application.

## Pilasters and brackets

9.09.04

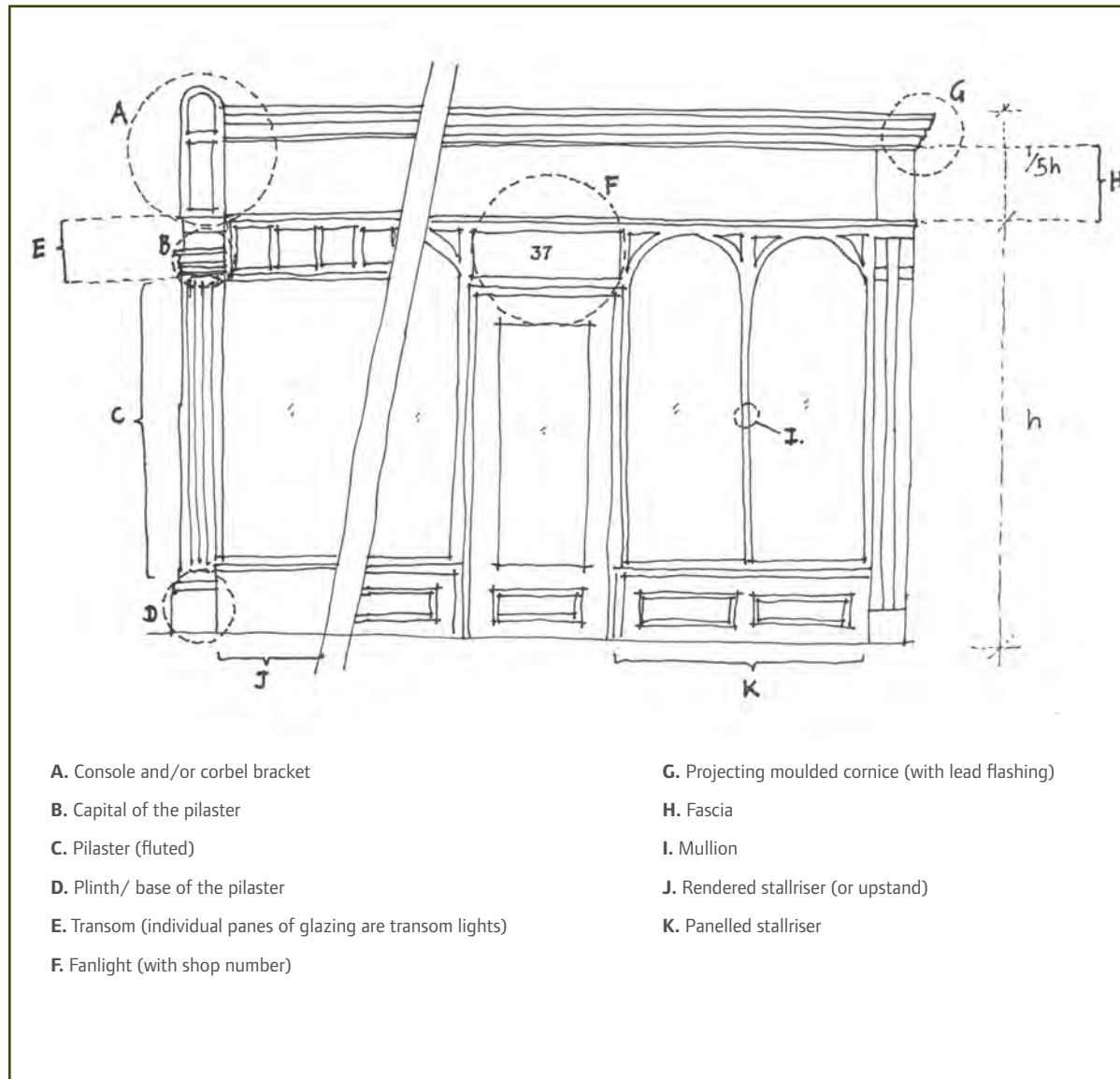
A Pilasters should always be incorporated into the design of a traditional shopfront.

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.

C Pilasters often extend up into console brackets to support or stop off the ends of the fascia (see fig 9.23).

D 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.

E 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.



**Fig 9.20** The component parts of a traditional shopfront. (Note that as a general rule the fascia height (H) should be normally in a proportion of a fifth the height (h) of the shop window and stallriser or upstand as shown in the diagram)

## Glazing

### 9.09.05

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.

B 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.

C Sub-divided glazing assists in providing visual support for the floors above.

D Glazing subdivision gives the opportunity to express individuality to a shopfront where appropriate and can also help unify groups of buildings where necessary.

E 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.

# Section 9

## Doors

9.09.06

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.

B The design and positioning of doors should be integral with the design and layout of the entire shopfront.

C 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.

D If a traditional design treatment has been selected, serious consideration should be given to the inclusion of a recessed doorway.

E 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 subdivided into small panes.

F A recessed doorway in a modern shopfront can also be attractive, adding interest to what might otherwise be a rather 'flat' and stark appearance.

G 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.

H Property numbers should always be incorporated. Any nameplates should be neatly grouped.

I A separate door to the upper floors should be provided when the opportunity arises. The door should be designed as part of the shopfront.



**Fig 9.21** Pilaster are an important part of the shopfront and often 'contain' the fascia at both ends (Woburn)



**Fig 9.22** Double fronted large paned shopfront in Amptill



**Fig 9.23** Decorated thresholds add interest to the shopfront and should be retained/restored or reinstated wherever possible (Biggleswade)



## 9.10 Other aspects of detailed design of shopfronts to be considered

### Materials

#### 9.10.01

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

#### 9.10.02

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



**Fig 9.24** An historic shopfront skillfully repaired and conserved to create a flush threshold to aid access High Street, Leighton Buzzard.

# Section 9

## Historic Precedents

### 9.10.03

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

### 9.10.04

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 9.25** Steps removed and pavement raised to create a flush threshold to aid access. Leighton Buzzard.

## Access For All

### 9.10.05

The Equalities Act (2010) requires that all buildings containing shops or providing public services are accessible to disabled people.

### 9.10.06

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.

### 9.10.07

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.

### 9.10.08

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 Placemaking Principles.

## Advertising And Signage Fascia Signs And Lettering

### 9.10.09

- 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.
- B Fascia signs are traditionally handpainted by a signwriter or have individually applied three dimensional letters.
- C 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.
- D Good lettering, subtlety and understatement with a good use of colour can make a fascia stand out without being loud and overstated.
- E 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.
- F Projecting signs can also provide the opportunity for the innovative and creative use of symbols to indicate the nature of the business.

## Projecting signs

### 9.10.10

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.

C Projecting signs should be co-ordinated with the colour scheme and lettering style of the overall shopfront design.

D 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.

E A sign (or hanging basket) 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).

F 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

### 9.10.11

A 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).

H The use of hanging symbol signs will be encouraged as will innovative and creative signage of a high quality. (See fig 17).



**Fig 9.26** 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.



# Section 9

## Blinds and Canopies

9.10.12

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).

C 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.



**Fig 9.27** Hanging symbols replacing signs provide the opportunity for imaginative and original advertising which can add interest to the street scene

D 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.

E 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.

F Blinds should be made of canvas or a similar non-reflective material.

G The display of advertising material should be avoided unless other opportunities for advertisement are limited or non-existent.

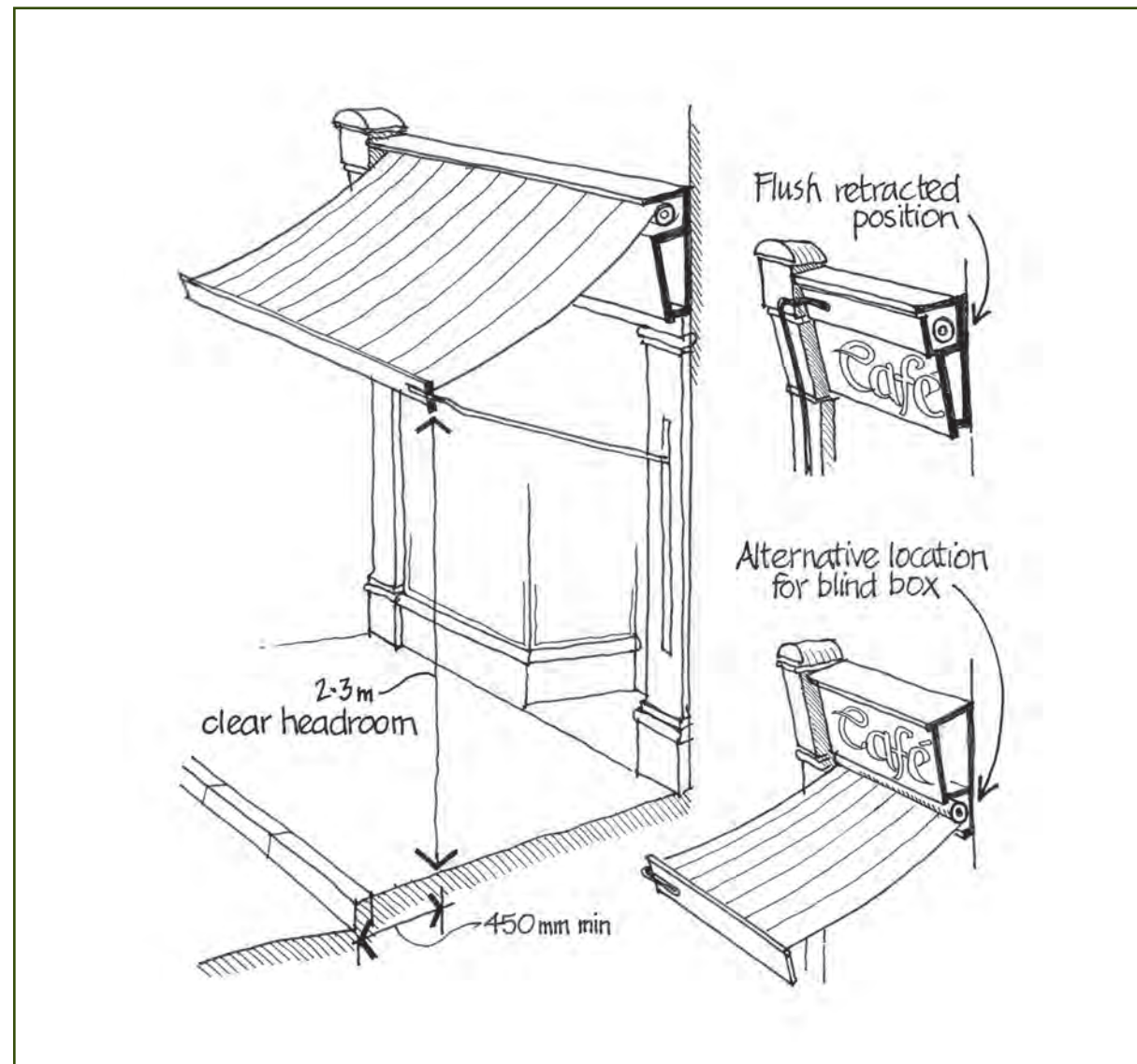
H All forms of fixed blinds should be avoided (such as Dutch blinds) blinds should not interfere with visibility of traffic signals and signs blind supports should not interfere with or detract from the appearance of a shopfront.



**Fig 9.28** Sensitive retention of original openings and features and well considered location of logo. Leighton Buzzard.



**Fig 9.29** Well designed A boards may be acceptable when included within a 'spill out' area to the front of a shop



**Fig 9.30** The location of blind boxes and the height of projecting blinds are important considerations in designing new shopfronts or fitting blinds to existing shops

## Security shutters and grilles

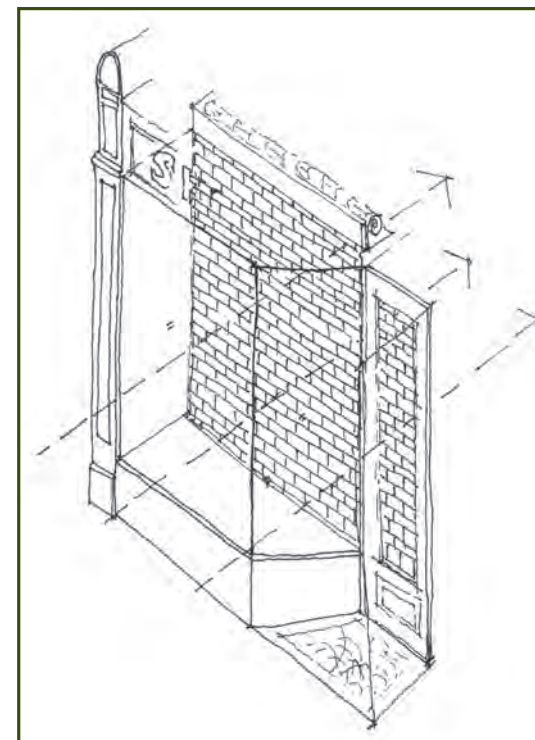
### 9.10.12

- 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.
- B The use of external solid metal roller shutters is generally unacceptable in Central Bedfordshire.
- C Security measures, including the location of alarm boxes should respect the architectural and historic character and appearance of traditional buildings.
- D 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.

E Security glass or laminated glass has the capacity to remain intact even when broken.

F 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.

G 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 9.31** Open lattice shutters set behind the shopfront can be an effective deterrent whilst maintaining the integrity of the shopfront. It also allows for lighting and display of dummy goods in windows.



## 9.11 Checklist for proposed High Street and Shopfront Development

- 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 proportions of windows and signage 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?
- In this respect will it 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?