

REGENERATION SERVICES

# Shopfronts, Signs and Advertisements

Supplementary Planning  
and Design Guidance

## INTRODUCTION

This Guidance Note is published by the Planning Services Division of the Directorate of Development and Leisure, Fenland District Council.

This supplementary guidance is intended to assist the general public, shopkeepers, shop fitters and advertising sign manufacturers when making applications under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

The majority of shops are found in the centres of the District's towns and villages, which are essentially public areas. Shop fronts have a considerable impact on the appearance of these areas and care and sensitivity in all proposals for new shopfronts is needed, particularly in Conservation Areas and where listed buildings are involved.

Through the control of the design of shop fronts the District Council seeks to ensure that proposals for the alteration or construction of new shopfronts do not harm the character of an area established by the existing buildings and shops in that particular town or village, and that they themselves' make a positive contribution to the street scene.

The Planning Services Division of the District Council maintains a record of existing shopfronts within the District. These have been assessed for their historical and architectural merit and those of high quality should be retained and maintained. Those of lesser quality may be altered or replaced subject to the appropriate consents being obtained.

## SIGNS AND ADVERTISEMENTS

With the exception of the town centres of Chatteris, March and Whittlesey, and part of the town centre of Wisbech, Fenland was designated as an area of special advertisement control in 1976. Special restrictions apply within the area to the display of advertisements (details are available from the Local Planning Authority).

The objective of the Local Planning Authority in controlling the display of advertisements is to safeguard local amenity, by minimising the obtrusive nature of advertisement displays and protecting the architectural integrity of the building on which: they are displayed and to ensure public safety by, for example, avoiding confusion with traffic signs and signals.

## POLICIES

Persons wishing to apply for Planning Permission, Listed Building Consent, Conservation Area Consent or Advertisement Consent should familiarise themselves with the relevant policies of the Adopted Edition 1993 of the Fenland District Local Plan described below.

***El 7 New shopfronts and the fronts to other commercial buildings both in and adjacent to town and village centres should normally,***

***i) Display a unity with the building of which they are a part (including the use of appropriate materials).***

***ii) Incorporate the traditional elements of shop front design.***

***iii) Reflect the scale and proportion of adjoining buildings and the street scene as a whole.***

## **El8**

***Advertisements should normally;***

***i) Be designed so as not to detract from the character or appearance of the building on which they are to be displayed, or from the character or appearance of the street.***

***ii) Be of a size, format and design (using appropriate materials colouring or lettering) which compliments the visual amenities of the building and the locality.***

***iii) Be externally illuminated only, if illumination is essential.***

***iv) Avoid an unsightly, confused or cluttered appearance.***

***El9 Planning permission for advance warning signs will not normally be granted. Exceptional need will require to be demonstrated in cases where rural amenity is likely to be adversely affected.***

Applicants or their agents should enquire of the relevant Area Planning Officer or the Conservation Officer into which category the shopfront in question falls before making elaborate plans.

If the shopfront is found to be suitable for alteration or replacement the applicant or their agent should follow this procedure:

NB: In the case of Listed Buildings or traditional buildings (particularly those in Conservation Areas) owners are strongly recommended to appoint an architect familiar with historic buildings to act as their agent.

i) Assess which consents are required for the project proposed. Obtain appropriate application forms.

ii) Study the building in question carefully, particularly the relationship of the shopfront to the upper floors. Also assess how the building relates to its neighbours. Prepare a survey drawing of the existing building and another showing it in the context of the street scene (if any).

iii) Prepare a sketch scheme showing the proposed new or altered shop front. This design must reflect the whole building and should relate harmoniously to its surroundings. Applicants and their agents are welcome to have informal discussions or site meetings with the Area Planning Officer and Conservation Officer at this stage.

iv) Make any amendments needed following the informal consultations and prepare application drawings as proposed. It may be necessary to supply drawings containing a high level of detail such as large scale depictions of timber mouldings, door furniture, etc.

v) Submit applications for all the necessary consents. Applications are usually dealt with in 6-8 weeks -but where national bodies such as English Heritage have to be consulted the procedure may take longer.

## DESIGN BRIEF

The design factors to be taken into account are:-

### i) Character of the building.

The character of the building must be the first point of reference. It should dictate the scale of the shopfront and the scale of its parts, and, to some extent, the style of the detailing. Considering scale, a small building will dictate a narrower fascia and pilasters. Considering style, it would be incongruous to use an 18th century design below a 19th century facade,

There may be details on the upper facade such as a pattern of glazing bars or cornice brackets which could be reflected in the details of the shopfront.

The fenestration of the facade and strong elements of composition, such as a central focus or the division of the facade by pilasters, must be considered in the shopfront design, particularly in the siting of the entrance doors and the framing.

### ii) Buildings with more than one shopfront.

In these cases the design of the shopfronts, even in different ownership, should be co-ordinated to form a unified whole.

Where one appropriate shopfront exists it will be sensible to preserve it and to base the replacement of adjacent shopfronts under the same facade on its design.

Where none of the existing shopfronts are appropriate, any replacement will be considered as the first step towards reaching a satisfactory design for the whole building.



An eighteenth century building with modern shops



An early nineteenth century style front is substituted for the above

Where possible the Local Planning Authority will encourage co-ordinated colour schemes for adjacent shopfronts under a common facade.

iii) Shops occupying more than one building.

The most damaging tendency in recent years has been that for placing a single shopfront and fascia across a number of building facades.

In the future, new shopfronts will be expected to reflect the scale and pattern of facades above fascia level.

iv) Composition and elements.

The form of new shopfronts will normally be the traditional form of fully framed timber or stucco construction with:

- Framing pilasters.
- Fascia with architrave and cornice.
- Stallriser.
- Windows with an appropriate pattern of glazing bars.

Stallrisers can be capped with engraved metal stall plates. Where these still exist, they should be retained (as at No.5 Market Place, Wisbech)

The relationship between these parts and their proportions must be carefully worked out to make a pleasing whole.

There are many published guides and pattern books to assist the designer but the most important sources are the existing shopfronts of merit recorded by the Planning Services Division of the District Council.

It may also be possible to work from old photographs which show original shopfronts.



The building on the left has two incompatible styles.



The effects of modern facias and plate glass on an old building



The effect of following the good traditional example



The same building from a view of Wisbech Market Place in 1990

The insertion of display windows into walls, leaving a plain, unframed jamb, will not be approved

The use of bare brick piers will not be approved.

The placing of isolated fascia boards will not be approved.

#### v) Fascias, Materials and Colours.

It is worth considering fascias in detail because they give rise to the most difficult design problems.

The topmost part of the fascia should normally be at least three brick courses (225mm) below the sills of the first floor windows. In some cases a much deeper gap will be required, for example, to miss an 18th century brick string course.

Care is required to ensure that the shopfront is not too tall or too short in relation to its neighbours.

The top of the fascia should have a cornice which crowns the whole shopfront. In the past the box containing awning blinds was often made part of the cornice.

Fascias should not normally be more than 450mm deep. They should be in scale with the facade and the adjacent fascias.

Where ugly modern fascias of excessive depth are under consideration, the Local Planning Authority will favour their replacement, and will not be bound by past decisions. Often the removal of a deep fascia will reveal steelwork or damaged brickwork. These problems are not insurmountable where there is a will to make improvements. The repair of brickwork in such cases is an appropriate subject for possible Town Scheme grant.

Stained tropical hardwoods, plastics and plain metal sections will not be approved.

Colours cannot be considered in isolation. Normally, black, white, cream, buff and rich dark greens, blues and reds were the traditional colours.

It is important to be sensitive to colours used elsewhere on the facade and on adjacent shopfronts.

#### vi) Blinds, Awnings and Canopies.

Traditional cloth awnings which fully retract into a box which forms part of the design of the shopfront will normally be approved provided that they do not cause a hazard when extended. Where they extend over the footway or carriageway, consult the Highway Authority (contact at the back of this booklet).

Shaped continental style canopies, sometimes called Dutch blinds, are not appropriate to the close-knit frontage of town centres and will therefore not be approved.

Where in outlying areas they are considered suitable they will only be approved if:

Of matt cloth.

Of single colour.

Of simple shape.

The front edge is parallel to the shopfront.

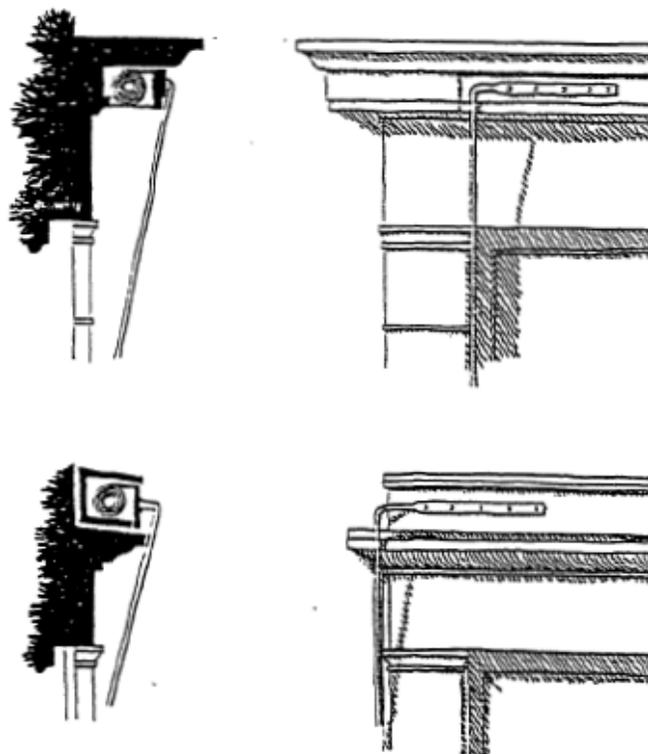
#### vii) Security.

Shopkeepers displaying high value wares may be concerned about security. Traditional shopfronts with stallrisers are the best protection against "ram raiding" (the driving of stolen motor vehicles through shop fronts to facilitate theft); fully glazed shopfronts are particularly vulnerable.

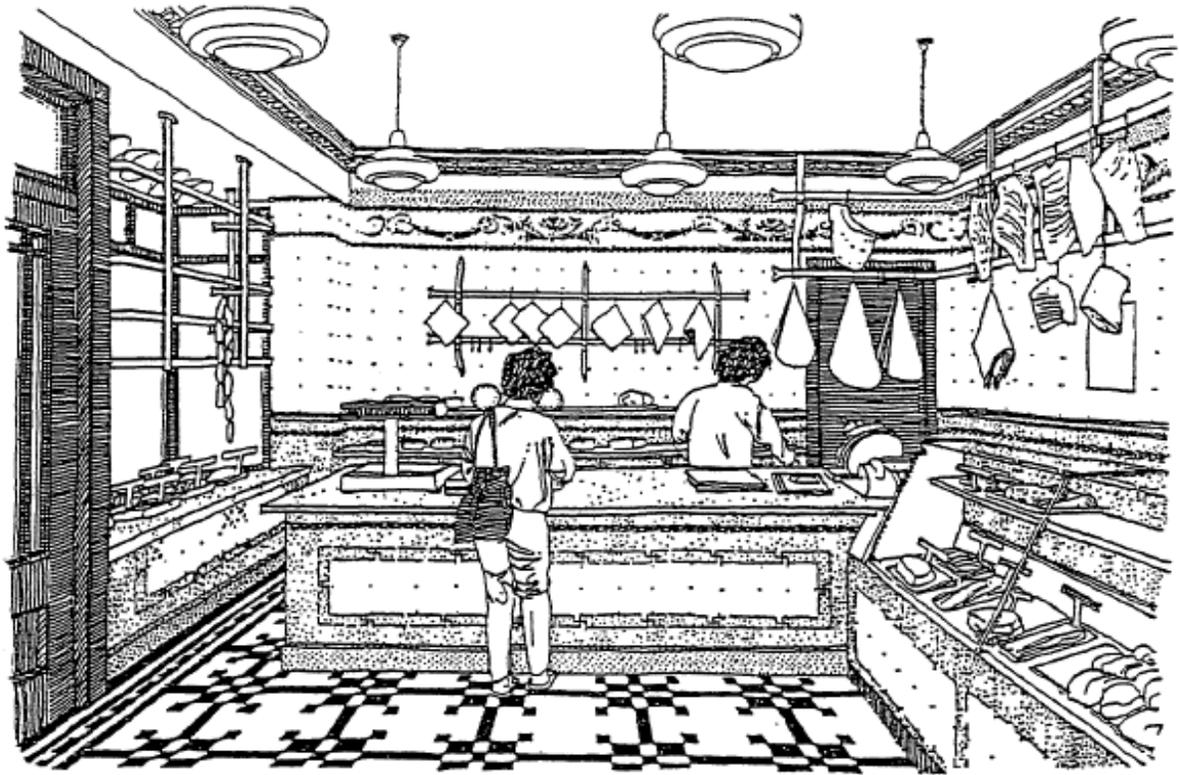


#### COMPOSITION

- a) Cornice
- b) Facia
- c) Pilaster
- d) Stallriser
- e) Glazing Bars



Traditional roller-blind boxes



No. 10, Market Place, Wisbech

A fully tiled, period interior

Stallrisers can be of solid masonry and can be reinforced internally with steel.

Security shutters that cover an entire shopfront or glazed area present a visually unattractive barrier outside shopping hours and can give a street an unwelcoming, fortified appearance. Retractable mesh or metal grilles behind the glazed area may be acceptable in shops displaying goods such as jewellery or electronic equipment. Normally consent will not be given for obtrusive security measures. Where other means are employed, alarm bell boxes, CCTV cameras, etc. should be sensitively located.

#### viii) Modern Shops.

Generally historical buildings require traditional shopfront design but there are exceptions.

For example, No.10 Market Place, Wisbech, an early nineteenth century building, has a butchers shop at the ground floor. G W Frank has an extremely fine "Art Deco" shopfront and interior dating from the 1930s (see above). This, being a Grade II Listed Building, is an inappropriate place for restoring an historic style shopfront.

Where more modern buildings exist in historic streets, they may require a more modern treatment in shopfront design. A mock-Victorian shopfront inserted into a 1960s building can look as incongruous as vice versa. However, new or altered shopfronts in modern buildings need to respect the content of the town or village street. The guidelines for traditional shopfronts should still be followed in relation to cornices, fascias, pilasters and stallrisers but these can have more modern detailing to suit the age of the building as a whole.

## SIGNS AND ADVERTISEMENTS

Signs and advertisements are designed to attract attention and are usually displayed in prominent locations. Well designed displays can not only enhance the appearance of individual buildings, but can also impart in the most effective way, the message that the advertiser is trying to get across. An unsympathetic clutter of signs with each advertiser trying to out-do his neighbour not only detract from the quality of the environment but presents a confused image to the public, which is self defeating from the advertiser's point of view.

In considering the display of advertisements care must be taken over the size, colour, materials and illumination. Normally only buildings used by members of the public at night justify illuminated signs.

### i) Corporate image.

Chains of shops, barks, building societies, etc. often have a "corporate image" of logo, typeface and shopfront design. These standard house styles cannot be used indiscriminately and a flexible approach must be taken by such firms in adapting the style, colours and materials to suit local conditions.

### ii) Illumination.

Internal illumination of fascias and projecting box signs will not be approved.

External illumination will only be approved for premises operating outside normal shopping hours, for example, public houses, restaurants and late night pharmacies. Lighting units should be discreet and of suitable design. Strip lighting or excessive numbers of spot lamps will not be approved. Electrical wiring should be concealed.

### iii) Lettering

The choice of letter style or typeface is largely a matter for the individual but totally incongruous varieties should be avoided. The ranges of possibilities for good lettering are such that any commercial image can be conveyed. The scale and size of the letters should be in proportion to the size of the fascia or signboard.

Three dimensional lettering has included stock lettering of block form and of decorative types, in various materials; cast iron, enamelled sheet metal, ceramic and wood. Lettering was also cut deeply into stone, marble, or granite stall risers, or appeared in brass or bronze panels or cartouches.

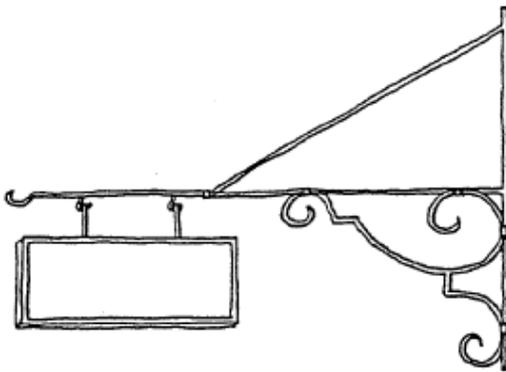
Gilding behind glass may be appropriate and should be retained where existing, such as at VI C. Allen, 23, Hill Street, Wisbech.

### iv) Materials

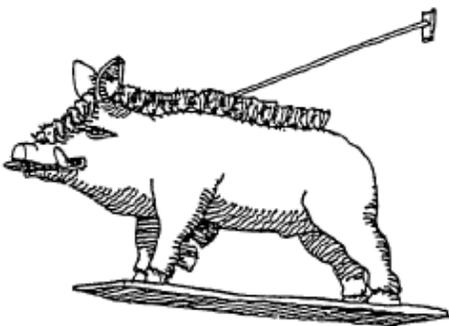
Normally, fascias should be painted timber with signwritten lettering. Hard, glossy, modern materials should be avoided. Plastics, aluminium and the like will not normally be approved.



A teapot advertises a tea shop



A traditional wrought iron bracket



A "bristling" hog once advertised a brush shop

#### v) Hanging Signs

The Local Planning Authority will not approve internally illuminated projecting or hanging signs.

Hanging signs are a very effective form of advertisement. They will normally be approved if:

- positioned so as not to cause a hazard.

- made of painted timber.

- no larger than 500mm on any side.

- attached to an attractive metal bracket.

The external illumination of hanging signs will only be approved if the light source is discrete and complies with (ii) above.

#### vi) Advertisements.

The signs may only advertise the name of the business and/or the service being provided. Advertisements for individual products such as brands of cigarettes, photographic film or ice cream, will not be approved.

Traditional trade symbols such as the striped barbers pole and chemists mortar and pestle can be used and should be retained where existing, such as at 22 High Street Chatteris. Modern interpretations, such as revolving, internally illuminated poles will not be approved.

"A' boards and other free standing advertisements obstruct the footway and will not be approved. They are also a hazard to the blind and wheelchair-bound.

vii) Advance Warning Signs.

Great care needs to be taken in placing advertisements in the open countryside as these can easily become an eye -sore by virtue of their numbers, size and appearance.

In the interests of road safety and visual amenity advance warning signs, for developments such as shops, petrol filling stations and public houses, should only be allowed where exceptional need can be demonstrated.

The need referred to in Policy E19 above relates to the requirements of the travelling public and not the commercial desires of the applicant.

The Local Planning Authority can control advertisements when it is justified in the interests of "amenity" and "public safety" and will take discontinuance action to remove inappropriate signs.

## CONTACTS

In all cases it is sensible to contact the Area Planning Officer before preparing plans or placing orders for work or materials.

Write to- Planning Services Division, Planning and Development, Fenland District Council, Fenland Hall, County Road, March. Cambs. PE 15 8NQ or telephone: (01354) 654321

For specialist advice on specific matters contact:

Listed buildings and Conservation Areas- Conservation Officer, Fenland Hall, County Road, March. Cambs. PE 15 8NQ or telephone: (01354) 654321

Access for the disabled - Access Officer, Fenland Hall, County Road, March. Cambs. PE 15 8NQ or telephone: (01354) 654321

Highways and vehicular access- Development Control Section, County Highways Department, Directorate of Transport, Cambridgeshire County Council. 0845 045 5200

Crime Prevention in retail premises- Crime Prevention Officer, Fenland Police Sub Division, March Police Station, Burrowmoor Road, March. Cambs. (01354) 652561

Storage and collection of commercial refuse- Environmental Services, Fenland District Council, March, Cambs. (01354) 654321



Two shopfronts presently in the Market Place, Wisbech



The same building from a photograph of 1856

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following publications will be of interest to anybody involved in the design of shopfronts, signs and advertisements for historic buildings and towns:

"The Art and Craft 'of Signwriting" by William Sutherland, reprinted by Omega Books 1989.

"Bath Shopfronts, Guidelines for Design and Construction", by Graham Finch, published by Bath City Council 1993.

"The Georgian Group Guides". These booklets primarily discuss houses but the volumes on doors (No. 3), paint colour (No. 4), render, stucco and plaster (No. 5), mouldings (No. 1) and ironwork (No. 8) are also relevant to shops.

"Shop Fronts", by Alan Powers. One of the "Chatto Curiosities of the British Street" series of books, 1989.

"Shopfronts and Advertisements in Historic Towns", produced by the English Historic Towns Forum 1991.

"Outdoor Advertisements and Signs, produced by HMSO is a simple guide to the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1989.

## NEO-CLASSICAL SHOPFRONTS

Three main forms of shopfront were developed over the period 1660 to 1860. Despite the various changes in neo-classical style that took place over this period the acceptance of basic rules (by the builder who created the building and the joiner who supplied the shopfront) created complimentary design.

### THE COLUMN

This illustrates the most nearly correct use of a classical "order" (in this case the Tuscan) with the elements that make it up. This would be used on a building with equally correct details to its upper stories (window architraves, pilasters, stucco or stone facing).

The two plans are those invariably used.

Glazing bars enclose simple rectangular panes so that there are no distractions from the details and proportions of the surround.

### THE CONSOLE

A boldly projecting cornice sits over a simple fascia between consoles. Sometimes the door pilasters also have matching consoles over.

Because of the bold detailing the simple flush front (sometimes with a recessed entry) is used.

Glazing bars can have a pronounced vertical emphasis, often with shaped tops to each light.

## THE PILASTER

This is the most widely used form of shopfront with several variations on the theme of the classical cornice, fascia and architrave (the latter is sometimes omitted, while the modillions illustrated are an optional feature to any cornice).

Pilasters frame bow windows, projecting canted bays and plain flush windows as shown. Bow windows are not suitable for the styles of buildings after 1820.

One variation of the pilaster used on a flush front is to use the more elaborate capitals of the Ionic or Corinthian styles.

Another variation is the fanlight front, where semi-circular or semi-elliptical fanlights are set above pilasters (and under the fascia) over both doors and windows.

On small buildings where a reasonable proportion of the facade is wall or domestic windows the base of the pilasters can sit on top of the stallboard (a high wall plinth can support the latter).

The depth, variety and sculptural interest of the mouldings is what gives these fronts their character. This applies to such details as panels correctly sunk behind their mouldings, glazing bars with moulded cross-sections and the interest of traditional joinery details to all elements of the shopfront.

