

**SHOPFRONT DESIGN  
GUIDE**

## 1. Preface

- 1.1 This document is a Technical Document for the Local Development Framework. The document was adopted by the Cabinet of Dartford Borough Council on 21 September 2006.

## 2. The Shopfront Design Guide: Its Purpose

- 2.1 This design guide has been produced to assist those considering designing, replacing or repairing retail unit frontages within the borough of Dartford. It will also be used to assist our Development Control team in assessing the appropriateness of applications for shopfronts, in conjunction with the Local Development Framework and other relevant guidance and legislation.
- 2.2 This guide should be read in conjunction with any associated Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.

## 3. Local Authority Controls

- 3.1 The authority will seek to protect valued elements of the town centre and other shopping areas, and in particular shopfronts and premises that contribute to the area or are listed buildings. New proposals should strengthen and complement the local character.

### Planning Permission

- 3.2 Normally, if you want to alter or extend your shopfront, planning permission will be required. The authority has general policies relating to shopfronts in the Local Development Framework, and detailed advice is offered in this document.

- 3.3 The only situations where you will not require planning permissions are carrying out repairs or minor alterations that do not 'materially' affect the appearance of the building and it is not listed. You can alter the inside of the building without needing planning permission, but note that you may require Building Regulation approval. (For more guidance on Building Regulations, please contact the Building Control Team on 01322 343294). You are advised to contact the Council to ensure that the works do not require planning or Building Regulation consent.

- 3.4 Where the premises is in a conservation area, it does not affect the need for a planning permission, but it will affect the likelihood of a permission if this guidance is not followed.

### Listed Building Consent

- 3.5 Where a premises is listed, a separate listed building consent will be required. The Council has full control over any changes that might harm the character or interest, including even minor changes and alterations to the interior or exterior.

### Advertisement Consent

- 3.6 The control of advertisements and signs is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992. These are complex regulations. If you require guidance, please contact the Development Control Team on 01322 343023.

#### **4 Policies**

The Adopted Local Plan (April 1995) has been 'saved' under the provision of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Saved policies B1 'Criteria for consideration of development proposals' and B13 'Consideration of proposals for shopfronts and advertisements' will be used when determining shopfront applications.

This guidance note updates Adopted Local Plan Appendix 21 'Guidelines for Shopfronts and Advertisements' and will be used for Development Control purposes. These are transitional arrangements. In the future the Local Development Framework Core Strategy will contain a design policy which this guidance will support and supplement.

## 5 Shopfronts

- 5.1 The Town Centre has a wide range of shopfronts. These range in design from large scale integrated designs such as the Co-op frontage in Orchard Street (in bronze) to small, modern interpretations of older timber designs. (Plates 1,2).
- 5.2 Other shopping areas in the borough generally are much smaller scale and therefore have a more restricted range of designs, but still need to fit into the street scene.
- 5.3 The authority will not accept the introduction of 'standard' shopfronts from large retail chains that do not respect the character of the building and the surrounding units.
- 5.4 Where historic shopfronts pre-exist, there is a presumption for the repair of these and not replacement. Special care is required to ensure they are preserved. Note that early shopfronts are generally of high quality with fine detailing and are often cheaper to retain and refurbish than replace.
- 5.5 Original features such as pilasters, corbels or fascias often survive hidden behind later work. Other elements such as cast iron or brass grilles, profiled glazing bars, terrazzo or tiling may remain also remain. These features

should be retained, and repaired to enhance the appearance of the shopfront.

## 6 Improving Frontages/ Maintenance

- 6.1 There are several aspects to improving frontages that go beyond the shopfront. Replacement of inappropriate windows with sensitively designed and proportioned alternatives, repairing or replacing broken guttering and downpipes, redecoration of joinery or masonry all play a part in presenting the shop to the street.
- 6.2 Often, minor improvements at modest cost can have a big impact on the appearance of a unit. Applicants and owners need to consider these items and incorporate them as complementary work to any new or repaired shopfront.
- 6.3 Carrying out simple maintenance on the building will also ensure that the building presents the best aspect to the street. Particularly, attention to decoration of surfaces and maintenance of rainwater goods needs to be undertaken.
- 6.4 Most modern shopfronts are constructed out of square section aluminium sections with little visual interest or appeal, and have large



Plate 1– Bronze shopfront from 1930's



Plate 2– Modern replacement



Plate 3– New paired, mirrored design on a two property knock-through to form a public house frontage, with adjacent listed building



**Figure 1– Preferred proportions of the shopfront**



**Figure 2– Result of poor design (in the same structural opening as Fig 1).**

sheets of glass. Often door openings are right on the frontage line and this does not add to the overall articulation of the shopfront. With flat, often plastic faced square fascias, the result is particularly unattractive.

6.5 The key to a pleasing shopfront is balancing the openings and the overall proportions of each element in it. Over-scaled fascias are often incorporated, and the lack of more traditional details such as stall risers, pilasters and cornices often reduce the shopfront to a series of uncoordinated elements that are unrelated to the building in which they sit.

## 7 What are the main design requirements a good shopfront?

- 7.1 The shopfront needs to respect the rhythm and characteristics of the street. In some instances it may be appropriate to introduce a new style of shopfront that sets the standard for the street, rather than continuing with a reiteration of a bad design. Note that the town centre contains a variety of building styles. In these situations uniform shopfront designs may be inappropriate. However, where a number of shops are within a terraced building, the designs should reflect a single composition.
- 7.2 Where a shop includes more than one individual building or facade, the character and identity of each facade should be respected by a change in the shopfront design, such as separation between fascia boards at the notional party wall line. The identity of multiple units should be retained by using a unified colour, lettering and the window display (Plate 3). Conversely, where more than one retail outlet occupies a terraced building, individual shopfronts should be designed to a consistent design theme.
- 7.3 A good shopfront consists of a series of elements that combine to create a harmonious piece of architecture forming part of the whole elevation. The

shopfront needs to be constructed to certain proportions to balance the various elements (see Figure 1). These proportions may require some modification to the current shopfront opening or a compromise to these proportions. If there is a large divergence from the recommendations, the shopfront may be refused planning permission.

7.4 Therefore, a design proposal should be in sympathy with the architectural style, materials and form of the building of which it will form part, except in those cases where the building itself is architecturally incompatible with the character of the area. Exceptionally, a new style of shopfront will be considered if it is of quality design and materials.

7.5 The shopfront should relate to the width of the building or a logical vertical subdivision created by the upper storey. Where a single retail unit has been formed by amalgamated shop units, shopfront design should relate to the original unit widths.

7.6 Large areas of unrelieved glazing should be minimised through the appropriate use of mullions and/or transoms. Pane widths should relate to window openings on upper floors and the proportions of the building as a whole.

## 8 General Design Parameters

### 8.1 Fascias

8.11 The fascia forms the primary function of advertising the premises and therefore is a key feature in shopfront design. The proportion of the fascia should not exceed 20% of the overall height of the total shopfront. This is to prevent the fascia being over scaled and dominating the facade. (Figure 2).

8.12 For traditional shopfronts, the fascia needs a strong moulding at the top that helps produce a visual stop to the top of the shopfront (Figure 3). This also provides a substantial detail with a drip to help protect the fascia from weathering. The flashing needs to be lead (zinc is not appropriate) installed to the recommendations of the Lead Development Association, with joints set out equally from the centre line of the shopfront. Additional detail such as dentils enrich the shopfront and provide good shadows. (Figure 4)

8.13 On modern developments, fascias normally should be subservient to the structural opening (Figures 5,6). Thinking early about how a shopfront is to fit into a new structure can easily improve the look of the whole development. The junction at the top of the fascia and the structure needs careful attention to provide clear and



Figure 3– Strong mouldings

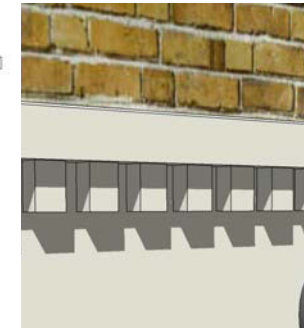


Figure 4– Dentils for more interest



Figure 5– Relationship of the structure to the shopfront



Figure 6– Close-up of relationship of the structure to the shopfront

simple detailing. Consider whether the fascia projects or is recessed within the opening and how the shopfront will sit in relation to the front of the opening.

- 8.14 Providing a 'bald' opening to receive a subsequent shopfront will only be appropriate if there is space above the opening to provide a properly proportioned and detailed fascia, the structure can provide suitable division of a long shopfront into bays that relate to the openings above and the whole shopfront relates to the architecture of the façade.

## 8.2 Entrance Doors and Thresholds

- 8.21 The entrance to the shop give the first impression of the premises. Giving enough space for ease of access should be a primary goal.
- 8.22 Doors need to accommodate the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2003 and Part M of the Building Regulations. These documents set out the recommendations for the opening size and configuration of approach for the disabled that need to be accommodated in any new shopfront design. These requirements infer the need for a flush threshold. The easiest way to accommodate changes of level from the footpath to the shop floor is

with a set back entrance door and lobby. A lobby also helps articulate the shop front by breaking down it's scale and provides shelter for customers entering the premises.

- 8.23 The door itself needs to reflect the design of the shopfront- in particular, the bottom panel needs to be the same height as the stall riser, and the door material needs to be the same as the rest of the shopfront. Carefully consider door handle design to have an appropriate size and shape. Often a well designed pull handle will be more appropriate to cranked 'pad' handles often found in modern aluminium shopfronts and be more usable with less able bodied people.
- 8.24 The floor of the lobby needs to be a non- slip surface, with a colour and appearance appropriate to the shopfront design and to the adjacent paving surface.

### 8.3 Glazing bars

8.31 Glazing bars are important elements to reduce the size of the glazed area into smaller pane sizes. This has the advantage of reduced cost of replacement and increased security as small panes are less of a temptation to wilful damage than large sheets of plate glass, and are cheaper to replace.

8.32 The cross section of the glazing bar needs to be appropriate to the shopfront design, and always needs to be smaller than the surrounding frame. Examples of the types of appropriate mouldings for historic shopfronts are shown in Figure 7.

### 8.4 Lighting

8.41 The lighting of the shopfront and fascia may not be appropriate in all circumstances. In particular, shopfronts in conservation areas should not normally be lit.

Where lighting can be used, multiple projecting fittings can dominate a fascia and over-emphasise it (Figure 8). The use of high power spotlights will not be approved. Use of individual fittings to highlight certain parts of the fascia may be acceptable if these complement the general design.

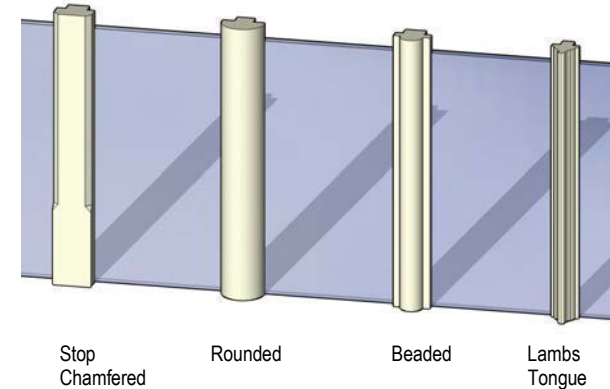
8.42 The use of linear lighting fittings may be appropriate if they can be accommodated successfully in the fascia design or over the fascia.

8.43 Internally illuminated signage needs to be of an appropriate size and shape to complement the overall design of the shopfront and the building frontage. Strong colours need to be used in a limited way. Individual, 'halo' illuminated letters often give more pleasing results than a fully illuminated box fascia.

8.44 Projecting sign boxes need to be in scale with the building frontage. Over-large box signs will be refused consent. The location of the projecting sign needs to sit correctly either on the building or within the fascia, where it can complement the general fascia signage.

8.45 The light output of an internally illuminated sign will be controlled and intensively bright installations will be refused. Refer to the Institute of Lighting Engineers Technical Report No 5 for guidance.

8.46 The distance a sign can project will depend on the location and may be subject to Kent County Council Highways requirements if it projects over the carriageway.



**Figure 7– Types of glazing bar giving lighting different effects**



**Figure 8– Poor lighting scheme that dominates the fascia**





Figures 9,10– The same shopfront but with a full external shutter

## 8.5 Security

8.51 There are several aspects to maintain security of the shopfront. The major design issue is the provision of shutters (Figures 9,10). Solid steel roller shutters offer a high level of security but have their drawbacks:

- it is not possible to see if anything is happening inside the shop so thieves may continue unobserved;
- a street of solid shutters creates a lifeless and hostile environment discouraging pedestrians from using the streets, increasing the opportunities for crime;
- deters return visits as window shopping outside of opening hours is impossible;
- external shutters and boxes detract from the design and appearance of shopfront and cannot be successfully integrated due to their size.

8.52 In conservation areas, provision of a solid external shutter and it's box that is used to form a fascia will be refused. In other areas, provision of an external shutter will be resisted.

8.53 With recessed entrance doors, providing continuous protection is difficult unless incorporated between

the fascia and the shopfront lines (Figure 11). An alternative solution is to put the shutter or grille at the rear of the entrance door to protect the shop and only have display items within the intervening space between the shopfront and the shutter. (Figure 12).

8.54 Wherever possible, grilles should be incorporated internally, either by using the space behind the fascia or within the ceiling void, or using an opaque transom to hide the box if below the ceiling line, and combining this with an external grille for recessed doorways. (Figure 13).

8.55 Alternative means of protection such as laminated glass and/ or clear anti-shatter films should be considered.

8.56 Protection against ram raiding should be provided by the introduction of reinforcement in the stall riser. This can be thickened to accommodate steel posts and rails fixed to the structure. These can then be covered by the shopfront construction. Provision of anti- ram raid bollards beyond the shopfront will normally be discouraged.

## 8.6 Materials

8.61 The choice of materials and finishes is a major factor in determining the long-term attractiveness and integrity of a shop front. Materials and finishes should be carefully chosen on the basis of their appropriateness to the character of the area; their visual sympathy with the building in which they sit, their long term durability and their environmental sustainability.

8.62 The use of man-made wooden materials such as plywood with applied mouldings is not acceptable, so the selection of materials needs careful consideration. For traditional timber shopfronts, well seasoned softwood or hardwood should be used. Use of the correct timber with the right moisture content for the use will prevent splits and shrinkage in the shopfront.

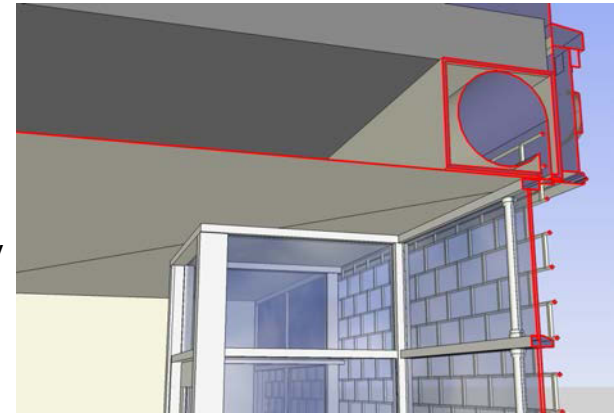
8.63 The Building Research Establishment's 'Green Guide to Specification' is a reputable source of information on the comparative sustainability of various construction materials. There are summary ratings within this for different materials in each category, based upon a range of seventeen different sustainability criteria. The ratings are A, B or C where A is the most sustainable material overall and C the least. Whilst

the Guide does not have a category specifically on shopfronts, it does have a category on 'Windows'. In this category the typical materials likely to be used for shop fronts are rated overleaf. This rating includes assessments on the embodied energy of the product and its potential for re-use. For instance, UPVC has the lowest rating because of the lack of re-use, whilst aluminium, while re-usable, has a high embodied energy.

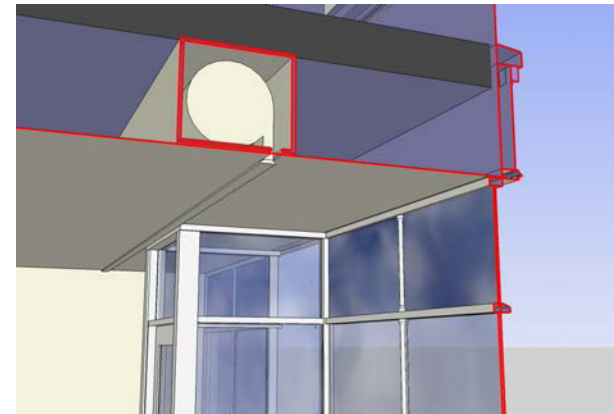
Hardwood	A
Softwood	B
Aluminium	C
Steel	B
UPVC	C

*Note The ratings for hardwood and softwood are based upon the use of timber sourced only from sustainably managed forests*

8.64 Modern shopfronts should be constructed out of high quality natural materials wherever possible. Reconstituted materials, such as stone amalgams will only be accepted if of the best of their type.



**Figure 11– External grille arrangement behind fascia**



**Figure 12– Internal grille arrangement for recessed door**



**Figure 13– Internal/ external grille arrangement for recessed door**



**Figure 14– Properly designed retractable blinds can provide shade**



**Figure 15– Fixed canopies are often inappropriate.**

## 8.7 Ventilation

8.71 If required, ventilation provision should be formed as part of the overall design of the shopfront. However, the provision of grilles for extract fans or natural ventilation is not appropriate within the shopfront. If mechanical ventilation is required, alternative locations for the termination must be found off the main elevation.

8.72 For natural ventilation, an opening fanlight over the entrance door is one of the preferred solutions. Use of louvered openings is not recommended as these are easily forced and removed. Alternatively, slot ventilation in the soffit of the entrance area may be appropriate, or slots/ openings integrated within the overall design of the shopfront as a feature.

## 8.8 Blinds and Canopies

8.81 Retractable blinds or canopies are encouraged for traditionally designed shopfronts (Figure 14). The blind box or space for the rolled– up blind needs to form a part of the fascia design and construction, and consideration on the detailing of this integration is required.

8.82 Whilst retractable blinds may be acceptable on listed buildings and within conservation areas, canopies are likely to be refused as they are more difficult to recess into the shopfront as they need retract into a hood, leaving the supporting arms and excess material free.

8.83 Blinds or canopies on modern buildings may be considered, provided they harmonise with the architectural style of the building and the shopfront and are not inappropriate (Figure 15).

8.84 The use of a fixed, plastic canopy that appears to be retractable is inappropriate in conservation areas and will be refused. In locations outside of conservation areas, these may be acceptable if they do not obscure the fascia, and the overall projection and height do not exceed 600mm.

8.85 Canvas or woven material blinds with a matt finish (possibly imprinted with a logo or some text) will normally be acceptable for listed buildings and within conservation areas. Outside conservation areas, reinforced PVC can be used as alternative. Plastic or very glossy materials will be refused. The colour of the material should normally match the shopfront or be left natural if canvas.

## 8.10 Colour and Decoration

8.101 It is recognised the colour of the shopfront may need to reflect a corporate style or brand. However this approach will not be allowed to dominate the shopfront, particularly if there is a strong corporate colour that is incompatible with the surrounding shopfronts and area. In these cases the branding is to be developed by use of signage and limited use of the corporate colour scheme in conjunction with other colours that will provide a harmonious shopfront in the street.

8.102 With traditionally painted shopfronts, whether new or refurbished, preparation is the key to longevity of the finish. Provision of two full undercoats and one or two gloss coats will outlast a simple rub down and re- glossing of a previously painted surface.

8.103 Metal shopfronts are recommended to have self- finished coloured surfaces rather than post applied paints. Unless the surface preparation is full undertaken, the paint will fail in a very short period (Plate 4). The use of plain anodised aluminium will be discouraged.



**Plate 4** Attempted repainting of an aluminium shopfront

## 8.11 Signage and Advertisements/ Stickers

8.111 Signage forms yet another important part of the overall design. Care should be taken in choosing lettering, colouring and materials which respect the building and area. Fascia signs should complement the existing building and their size and position should reflect adjacent properties and the street scene in general.

8.112 Projecting signs are to be non-illuminated unless opening hours require this, the location is not within a conservation area. where suitable, projecting signs following traditional hanging design will be permitted, subject to relative size and design. These will be limited to one per building, unless two street frontages are involved and are not located above the fascia level.

8.113 Forecourt signs will be assessed having regard to their affect on visual amenities and do not contribute to street clutter. Within pedestrian shopping areas freestanding external signs will be discouraged as they are an obstruction, especially to disabled and elderly groups.

8.114 A well designed display will often be more eye catching than a window crammed with goods. A sympathetic and sensitively lit display, especially

after closing, can make an attractive contribution to the street scene and should be considered as a preferred option to illuminated external signs.

8.115 In those cases where shops do not display goods, such as building societies, estate agents, banks and bookmakers, an imaginative approach will assist in avoiding the deadening effect these premises can have on the character of the street scene in these areas.

8.116 A proliferation of window stickers can detract from the character of the street scene. If such stickers are used, they should be preferably grouped together and generally cover no more than 10% of the total window area.