

A Guide for Shop Front Design



**North Warwickshire
Borough Council**

September 2003

About this Guide

North Warwickshire is a rural area with distinctive villages, and small market towns. Fortunately there has not been the wholesale redevelopment of our town centres which has damaged other towns. They still have many fine properties, preserving their individual identity, whilst retaining a retail base. It is no coincidence that the centres of Atherstone, Coleshill and Polesworth are designated as Conservation Areas.

By providing street markets and convenience goods and services to their own local catchment areas, they perform an important economic and social function. However, in times of economic downturn their continued trading base has sometimes been marginal, and the upkeep of the fabric has not always been maintained, and the option of more modern materials and cheaper solutions is evident.

The Council has to balance these interests, so as to retain a viable retail base whilst preserving the historic and traditional appearance of our town centres. This Guide offers some simple design solutions and principles as to how the upkeep and design of shop frontages can retain the quality of the existing built environment in our centres. When opportunities arise to refurbish property then these should be taken, so that our attractive centres can be retained whilst ensuring a continued retail presence. Government too recognises the importance of good design as a material planning consideration. The Council will not support proposals which have ignored guidance in this publication.

It will show:-

- how new or modified shop-fronts can be better integrated into their surrounding areas;;
- how a good standard of design can be achieved;
- how particular detailing can respect and reinforce local character and distinctiveness;
- how advertisements should be seen as an integral part of shop-front design, and
- how the issue of security can be dealt with.

The guide offers advice for those concerned with the design, alteration and installation and repair of shop-fronts. It establishes a basic framework within which there is scope for imaginative and sensitive design. It applies to all retail shops, and uses such as banks, building societies, estate agents, restaurants, pubs and betting offices. It is relevant throughout North Warwickshire but emphasises the special needs of the town centres.

Whilst the advice and illustrations in the Guide have been adopted by the Council in September 2003, it has also been endorsed by other groups. Consultations have taken place with all of the Parish and Town Councils in North Warwickshire, as well as the three Civic Societies and Chambers of Trade. Alterations to the Guide have been made as a consequence of representations received.

The planning control service will improve the quality of the built development in North Warwickshire as a consequence of this Guide. Its use on a day to day basis in amending and altering initial proposals will be seen as a measure of the service in adding quality to the built environment.

This Guide will be regularly reviewed.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The idea of a shop-front, or a shopping street is a fairly recent occurrence. Goods were formerly sold from properties which would have had no recognisable shop-front, or in an open market. It was only from the eighteenth century onwards that high street buildings exhibited shop-fronts as an integral part of the building, and when display windows were introduced to advertise goods. Traders congregate together and we have the traditional shopping high streets and market squares in North Warwickshire. The Georgian, Victorian, and Edwardian eras all introduced their own particular styles and recognisable designs.
- 1.2 More recently the quality and craftsmanship of shop-fronts has declined. They have become increasingly standardised and utilitarian in appearance, particularly when redevelopment has taken place. Many outlets adopt “house styles”, and corporate logos of modern trading activity. When combined with the use of modern materials and exuberant advertising, these often lead to insensitive adaptations of buildings. The loss in terms of character and proportions of older buildings can lead to the complete removal of quality within the street itself.
- 1.3 In North Warwickshire the three main market towns of Atherstone, Coleshill and Polesworth are essentially single street shopping towns. With no major redevelopment they still retain traditional and historic built forms and layouts. In Atherstone there is a linear retail street with mostly Victorian additions to older buildings, with narrow frontages and three storey buildings. There has been some modern infill, mainly with two storey buildings but this is relatively minor in scale. Similarly in Coleshill there is a single main shopping street, but this is marked by a Georgian backdrop with later Victorian and modern additions. The main retail area is much more concentrated and limited. Polesworth, the smallest centre, is mainly a two storey environment with a mixture of more modern designs and buildings. There is much left of the traditional retail street scenes in all three centres, and this guide is very largely designed to retain, preserve and enhance this heritage.
- 1.4 There are of course many other styles of retail outlet in the Borough – single village shops, corner shops in terraced areas, and parades of shops that can be found in residential areas. The basic design principles outlined in this guide will apply to all of these premises. However, recognition will be given to the existing setting of the building and its overall content.

2 Shop Front Design

Good Design

2.1 The principle purpose of a shop-front is the advertisement and display of goods and services provided inside the building. Good design will reinforce the shop's identity and its location in the street, but by reflecting the style of the whole building above street level, and that of its neighbours. A good design will treat the shop-front as an integral part of the whole building and street frontage without focussing exclusively on the retail outlet alone.

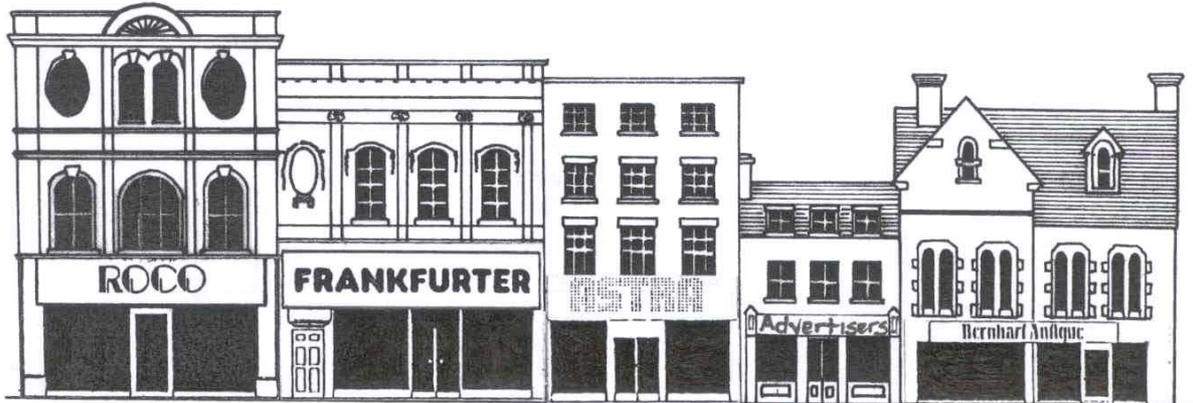
2.2 In particular:-

- the proportions of the shop-front should harmonise with the main building;
- materials should reflect the existing range on the original building;
- the shop-front should not be treated separately from the upper levels;
- it should add interest and attract custom;
- it should avoid standardisation, reflecting the diversity of a street scene.

2.3 The illustration below shows a series of shop-fronts in a street scene which harmonises in scale and style with the original buildings and their neighbours.



2.4 In the example below, the same street has been affected by poor insensitive design. The poor design elements will be explained in subsequent paragraphs.



2.5 In the case of the example below, then the same design principles are illustrated in relation to single properties.



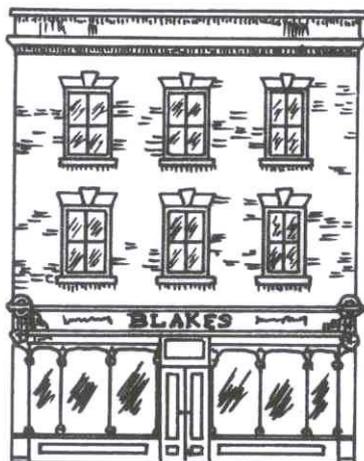
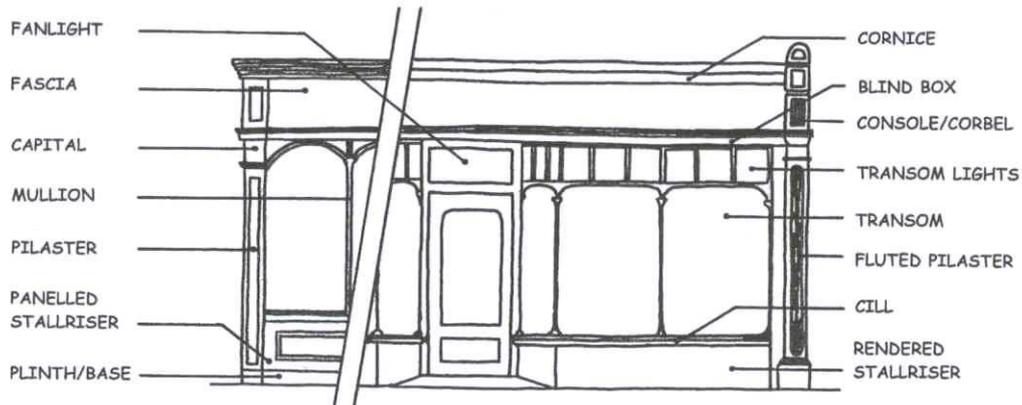
existing



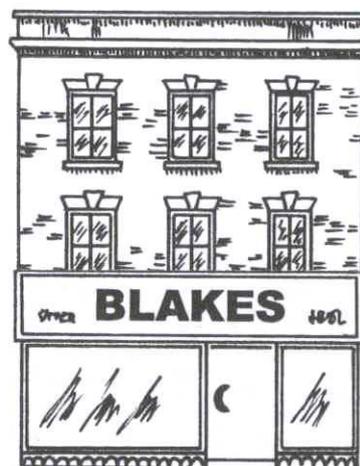
proposed

Elements of the Shop Front

- 2.6 Although shop-front design should be seen as a whole, it is made up of component parts, each of which has its own visual and practical function. These features define the style, and help integrate it into the rest of the building. These elements effectively enclose the shop window and entrance in the manner of a picture frame. They direct the eye to the entrance and provide a solid “base” for the building above. The pilaster identifies the vertical division between shop-fronts; the fascia provides advertising space and the stall riser gives protection.

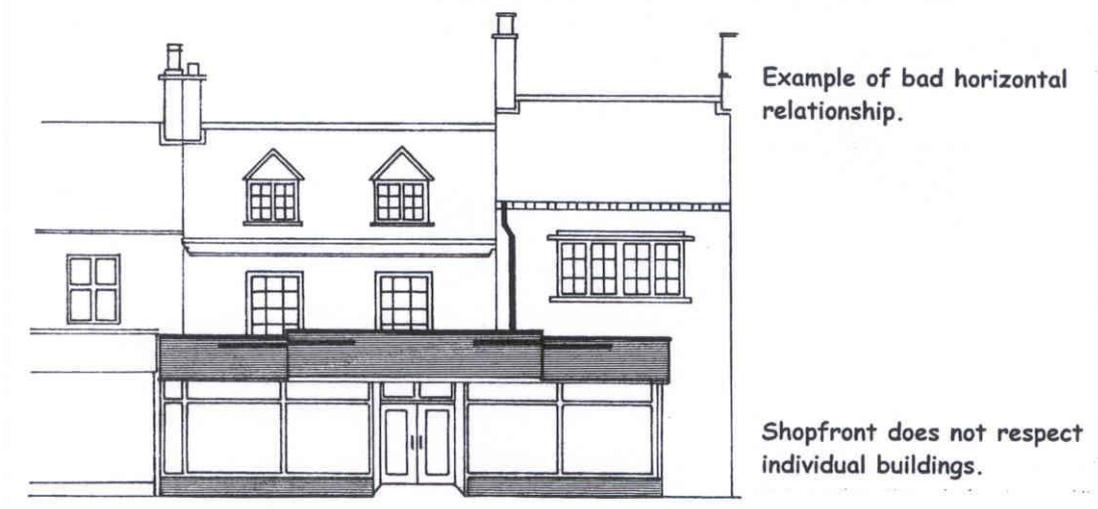


“old”



“modern”

- 2.7 In contrast, a modern shop-front as illustrated above, tends to incorporate materials, colouring and a character that is at odds to the main façade above. A large window has little impact on framing the opening, and a deep fascia and the use of glossy materials are out of place against a traditional façade. It fails to hold interest.

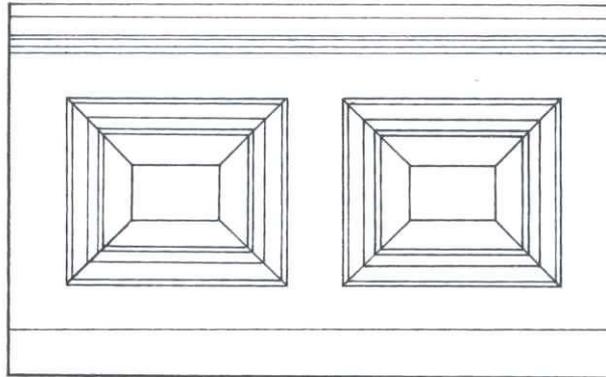


Fascias

- 2.8 The fascia is probably the most important and noticeable element of a shop-front. It is the area where the name of the shop is displayed and as such has the potential to have a major impact on the quality of the street scene. It should be seen as an integral part of the shop-front, and not just as a form of advertisement. It needs to be appropriate in character, style and proportion to the building.
- 2.9 It should usually be separated from adjacent fascias by pilasters, or some other form of vertical division. It should not extend, uninterrupted across a number of buildings, even if they are in the same ownership. Nor should they obscure other architectural details such as cornices, or upper storey windows.
- 2.10 Oversized or deep fascias can have a heavy clumsy appearance. As a rule they should be no more than $\frac{1}{5}$ th of the depth of the shop-front, and kept well below first floor windowsills. If a deep fascia has been installed in the past, an opportunity should always be taken to improve the situation.
- 2.11 Modern boxed fascias which project forward of the face of the building are often bulky and detract from the appearance of the shop-front. They have become heavily standardised and use aluminium frames and bright acrylic panels. They need to be discouraged in traditional shopping frontages and always so in Conservation Areas or on Listed Buildings.
- 2.12 Where a false ceiling is proposed inside a shop, it will not be acceptable to increase the depth of the fascia in line with this. The change in level can be dealt with through careful detailing of the shop window itself – eg transom lights with opaque glass or setting the false ceiling back within the shop.
- 2.13 The fascia should generally be made in timber with hand painted lettering advertising the name and nature of the shop.

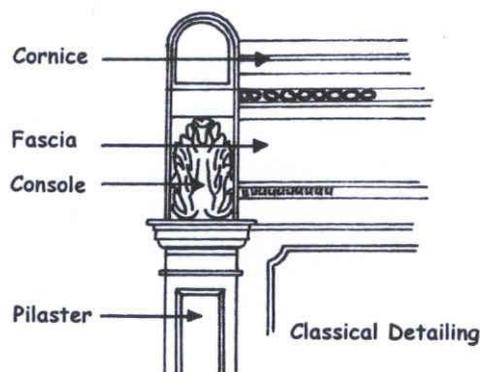
Stallriser

- 2.14 The stallriser is the area of the shop-front below the display window. It gives a solid visual base to the building and provides a protective area between the shop window and the street level. It also adds a sense of security.
- 2.15 Where stallrisers exist, they should be retained, and where they have been removed they should be replaced.
- 2.16 Stallrisers should be constructed of substantial and hardwearing materials. Preferred materials include painted timber, panelling, rendering or other non-reflective materials. Appropriate heights will usually be between 450mm and 700mm.



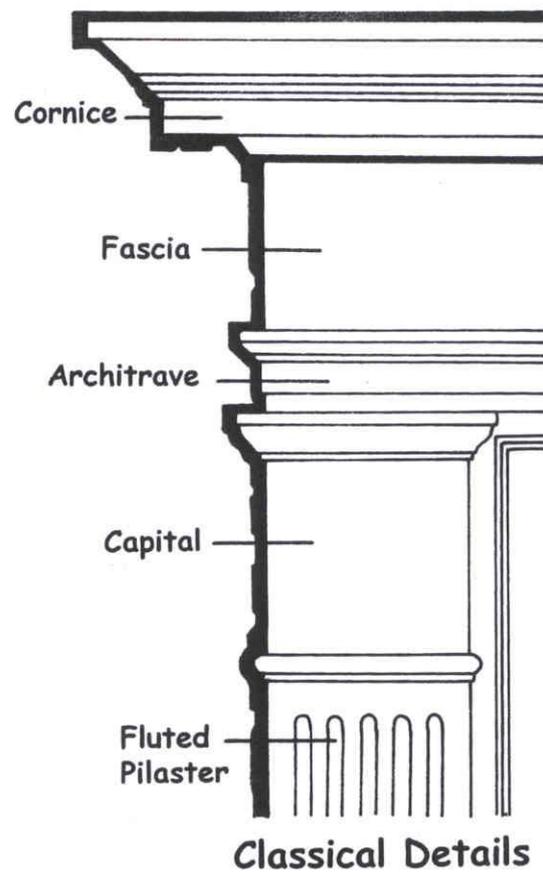
Pilasters and Consoles

- 2.17 Pilasters are shallow piers or columns that project slightly from the wall on each side of the shop-front. Above the pilasters are projecting heads known as consoles. Together they provide visual and physical support to the fascia to form a type of picture frame.
- 2.18 Pilasters and consoles vary from being very elaborate and highly decorated to being relatively plain but they usually have some moulding or surface decoration. Where traditional pilasters and console details exist they should be retained. If new ones are introduced they should be designed to reflect the level of detail in other elements of the shop-front and constructed of an appropriate material.



Cornices

- 2.19 The cornice defines the top of a shop-front and helps to distinguish the shop from the rest of the building. It also throws rainwater clear of the shop-front and prevents decay. A structural or applied cornice projection is required as part of nearly every shop-front design.



Blinds and Canopies

- 2.20 Blinds and canopies protect goods from damage by sunlight and give shoppers somewhere to shelter in bad weather. They also provide colour and interest. However, it is important that they are appropriate to the period of the building and the character of the locality so that they do not adversely affect the appearance of the street scene. For this reason, Dutch blinds or balloon canopies will be discouraged.
- 2.21 Blinds should be of a traditional design in a canvas or similar non-reflective material rather than plastic or stretch fabrics. They should be retractable and clear the pavement by at least 2.4 metres when open. When not in use they should be stored in a blind box which is flush with the fascia. Blinds should integrate well with the overall shop-front design and not obscure any architectural features. They should therefore fit between the pilasters.

Typical Dutch-blind



BAD EXAMPLE

Are fixed open

Intrude into the street

Usually made of unsympathetic materials such as shiny plastic

May obscure shopfront detailing

Typical flat roller-blind



GOOD EXAMPLE

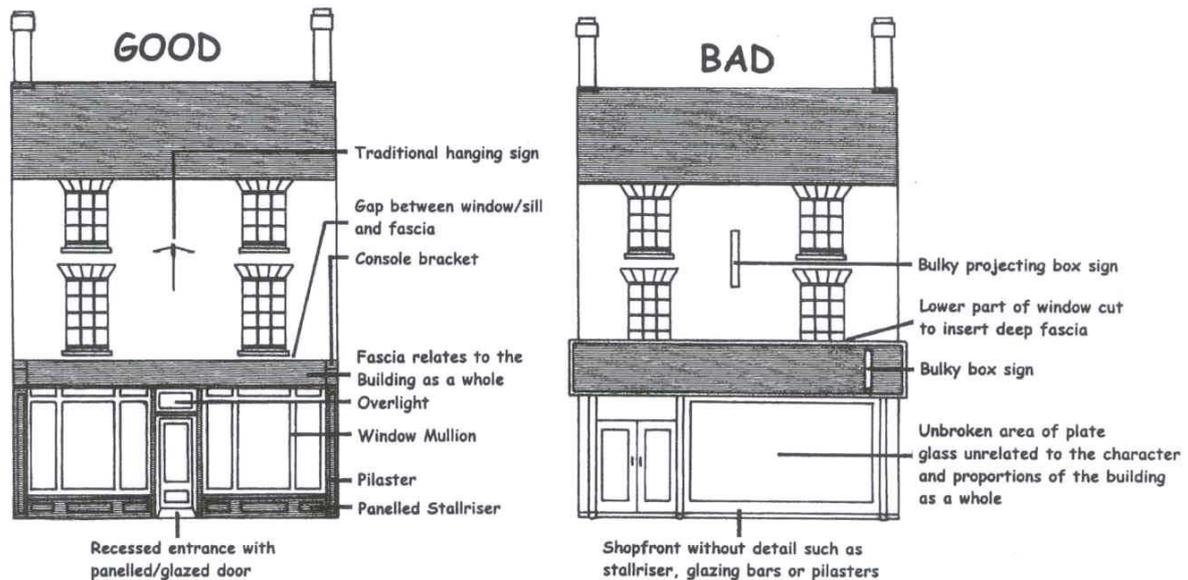
Can be open or closed

Retract into fascia when closed

Made of canvas

Windows

- 2.22 Windows form a large visual element in the shop frontage and are used to display goods and attract customers. Their design should be dictated by the building's style. Large areas of undivided plate glass should be avoided as they give a blank aspect to the street and are expensive to replace. To overcome this the window should be subdivided with vertical glazing bars known as mullions. Windows should not be obscured by the proliferation of stickers or coloured film. Consideration must also be given to the display in windows.



Doors

- 2.23 Doors give an important first impression and can have a significant impact on the appearance of the building. Where the door is recessed extra interest is created.
- 2.24 The design of the door should reflect a co-ordinated approach. The colour and materials of the door should match that of the window and be appropriate to the age of the shop-front. All doors should have a kick plate or bottom panel whose height matches the stallriser.
- 2.25 Particular care should be taken to ensure that there is adequate provision for the access of the disabled in so far as it is practical and reasonable. This is a requirement under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Details on how this can be achieved without detriment to the design of the shop-front is discussed in more detail in a separate Guide on accessibility. As a general principle steps should be avoided and an entrance ramp and handrails should be provided.

Materials

- 2.26 The materials selected for shop-fronts should be a high quality, durable and selected to complement the building. Traditionally shop-fronts were constructed of timber. Timber is durable, versatile and inexpensive. It is also easy to maintain by painting. Timber along with other traditional materials such as brick and stone are the preferred choice of material especially for Listed Buildings and buildings in Conservation areas.
- 2.27 Non-traditional materials such as plastic, aluminium, acrylic sheeting and UPVC should be avoided. Where it is demonstrated that they preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area and are not detrimental to the character of the building on which they are proposed, they can be considered.

Colour

- 2.28 When considering the colour of new or replacement shop-fronts it is important that the colour scheme complements the character and appearance of the building rather than conflicting with it.
- 2.29 The range of colours used should be kept to a minimum. Dark rich colours are most appropriate, colours such as navy blue, black, dark red and dark green. These muted colours allow liveliness to be expressed in the window display. Harsh gaudy colours such as fluorescent colours should be avoided as they are over dominant in the street scene. They are especially inappropriate in a historic context. The change of colour of a shop-front which is part of a listed building, will require listed building consent. It will be useful if colour samples are provided when an application is submitted.

Security

- 2.30 Security measures are an integral part of the shop-front. They should be considered at the design stage and not 'added on' as an afterthought. A balance must be struck between ensuring that shops are safe and secure while considering their impact on the appearance of the street. Careful forethought should be given to the siting, appearance and colour of security measures.

Laminated glass

- 2.31 Laminated glass offers protection without adversely affecting the appearance of the shop-front as no additional or fixings are required. Laminated glass should therefore be the first solution to be considered.

Internal grilles and shutters

- 2.32 These consist of light mesh grille or lattice roller shutters and are placed immediately behind the shop window. They are easy to keep clean and in working order because they are not exposed to the weather. They allow the window to retain an 'open' appearance but maintain a high degree of security for the goods.

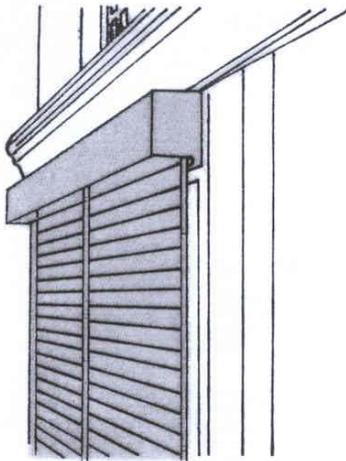
External removable grilles

- 2.33 Grilles are fixed to the outside of windows and doors on runners or on hooks and padlocked to the window frame. They also give security while maintaining an open appearance. Their physical impact is minimal because they do not require any box housings or side rails. The grilles should be removed during hours of business and stored internally. They should be lightweight and not damage any architectural features.

External roller grilles and shutters

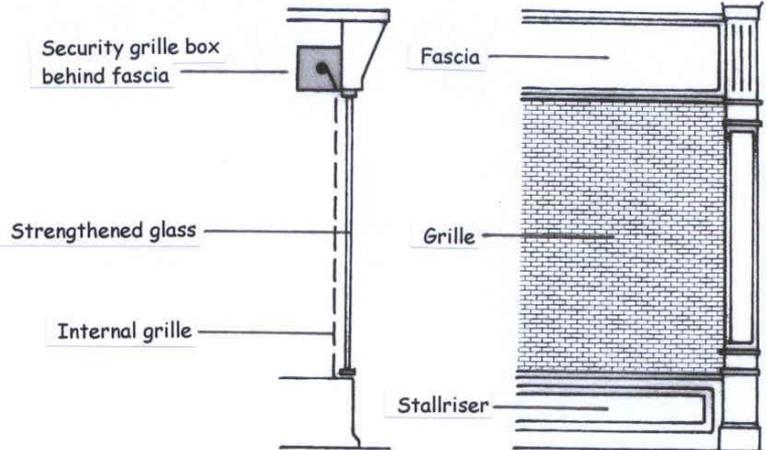
- 2.34 Solid external roller shutters can create an unwelcoming and hostile environment. They are vulnerable to graffiti and encourage illegal fly posting. The need for shutter box housings and side runners also means that they can give the shop-front a bulky unattractive appearance. They are therefore the least acceptable form of security. They are unlikely to be supported in Conservation Areas or on Listed Buildings.
- 2.35 Where external shutters are used, roller grilles or open weaved shutters are the preferred solution. The box housings that store them must be concealed behind the fascia or incorporated flush beneath it. The guidance channels should be concealed or painted to match the shop frame or be removable during the day. The architectural details of the shop-front must not be obscured or harmed by the fixtures. When the shutters are pulled down the pilasters should not be covered.

BAD



Bulky roller grille box visually harmful to the character of the building

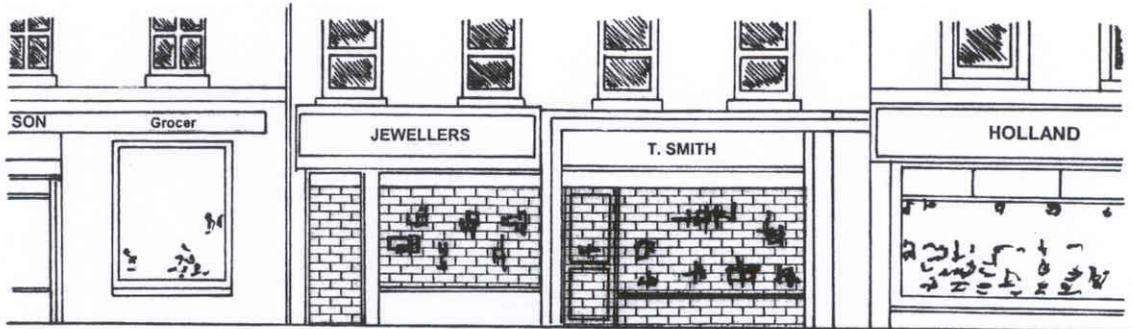
GOOD



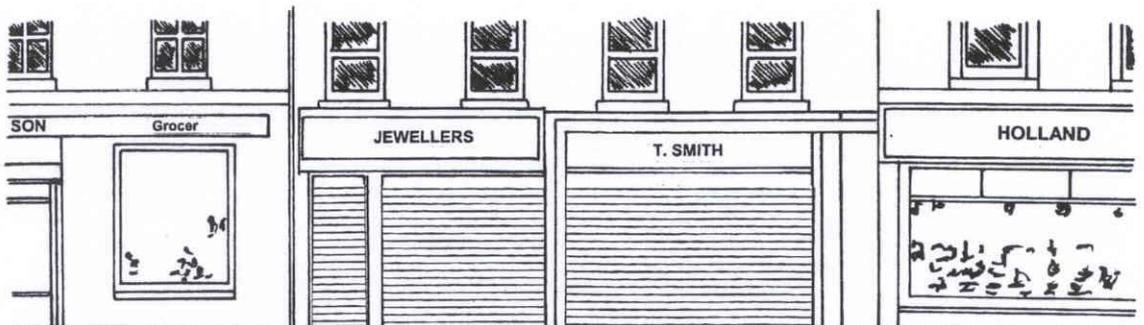
The preferred means of securing shop premises

Appropriately fitted roller grille in position

GOOD



BAD



3 Signs and Advertisements

The Street Scene

- 3.1 External advertising is important for commercial activity and comes in a range of forms. Its impact can be significant. This may be negative if it is poorly sited, overlarge, over-bright or badly designed. There is therefore a need to create a careful balance between satisfying commercial needs of advertising and protecting amenity and character of shopping areas.

Fascia Signs

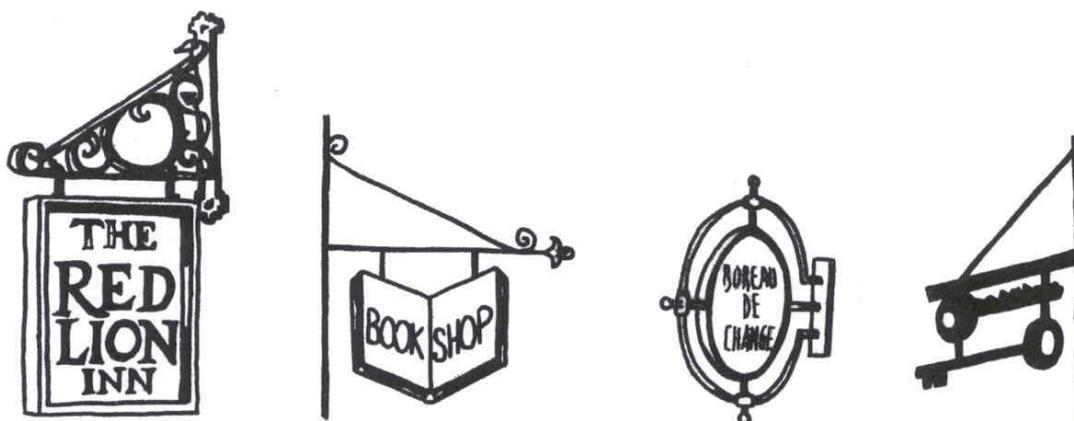
- 3.2 Well-designed fascia signs can add decorative interest and project an image of quality, confidence and permanence. However, if poorly designed they generate visual clutter and present an unattractive appearance.
- 3.3 Traditional fascia signs have a timber background and are hand-painted or have letters individually applied. This is considered the most appropriate form of sign. Reflective glossy or brightly coloured plastic signs are generally considered inappropriate and will not normally be acceptable.
- 3.4 The contents of fascia signs should normally be limited to the name of the shop with a simple graphic motif or minimal information such as the type of trade and the telephone number.
- 3.5 The lettering and graphics on the sign should relate well to the nature of the business and the architectural style of the building. They should be moderately sized and in proportion to the dimensions of the fascia. The text should be clear, simple and readable and therefore styles should not be mixed.
- 3.6 Colour is also important. Gilding or strong tones on a dark background reflect the light. Rich effects can be achieved by shading and blacking letters.
- 3.7 Firms with corporate images and standard house styles should be prepared to modify their house style where it fails to relate to the building or the surrounding area.



Projecting and Hanging Signs

- 3.8 Hanging signs are a traditional feature of shops and if well designed can add interest and originality to a building and to the street scene. To ensure these signs should be carefully designed, relate to the size and scale of the building and be positioned to ensure that they do not damage or conceal architectural detailing. Signs are best placed in line with the level of the fascia and should not be above the level of the first floor sills. To avoid clutter only one sign will be allowed per shop.
- 3.9 Projecting signs tend to be bulky and constructed of inappropriate modern materials. Hanging signs on metal brackets are aesthetically more pleasing and are therefore preferred to projecting signs. Hanging signs should be largely pictorial rather than written and artistry and imagination is encouraged where it makes a positive contribution to the street.

GOOD



BAD



Illumination

- 3.10 Modest and subtle lighting can be the key to a lively and safe night time environment. However, too often illuminated signs are bulky or poorly designed and sited so adding unwelcome clutter to shop-fronts. Careful forethought with regards to the design and location of the fittings is therefore required especially in Conservation Areas or on Listed Buildings. Shop-front lighting should not adversely affect the character of a building or its surroundings.
- 3.11 There are two basic ways of illuminating fascias; either internally through box signs or externally by means of spotlighting or strip-lighting. Full internal illumination of signs is considered inappropriate as it is out of character with traditional shop-fronts and historic buildings. More subtle forms of lighting include backlit lettering, individual halo letters and cold cathode tubes where only the lettering and not the background is illuminated.
- 3.12 The preferred choice of lighting is external lighting. They should be concealed as much as possible and carefully directed to avoid glare. Only the fascia should be highlighted. "Swan neck" lighting should be avoided.
- 3.13 In the interests of minimising obtrusive light, illuminated projecting signs and flashing/neon signs in the interior of shop windows is unacceptable.

4 Do I Need Permission?

Planning Consent

- 4.1 Under Section 55 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), planning permission is required for all new shop-fronts or alterations to existing shop-fronts that materially affect the external appearance of a building. This includes alterations to the fascia, the windows or the doorway, changes to the materials used or the installation of blinds or security shutters.

Advertisement Consent

- 4.2 Signs and advertisements are controlled by the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisement) Regulations 1992. Under certain circumstances Advertisement Consent will be required. As the regulations are complex it is advisable to seek advice from the planning officers who will be pleased to help you.

Listed Building Consent

- 4.3 Any alterations to a Listed Building require Listed Building Consent if the works affect the character of appearance of the building. This can include small changes to features such as window frames and decorative details, as well as interior details. Owners or traders are therefore strongly advised to consult the planning division before carrying out any alterations to a building that is or might be listed. Demolition work too may require consent. An application for listed building consent will need to be accompanied by a justification of the proposals.

Conservation Area Consent

- 4.4 Parts of Atherstone, Coleshill and Polesworth town centres are designated as Conservation Areas whose character and appearance it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Demolition of all or substantially all of a building in a Conservation Area needs Conservation Area Consent. This includes demolition or removal of a shop-front or any features which give character to a building.

Building Regulations

- 4.5 In addition to planning and advertisement consent certain works on shop-fronts may also need to comply with Building Regulations legislation for example if work involves structural alterations, if the means of fire escape is affected, and where accessibility matters are raised.

Pre-Application Discussions

- 4.6 In light of all the various matters raised above, it is very worthwhile to contact the Planning Division **BEFORE** an application is submitted. We can help with all of the different consents together. This will save you time.

Submitting an Application

- 4.7 When submitting a planning application, 4 copies of the following scaled drawings in addition to the form and an Ordnance Survey location plan will be required.
- i) Front elevation of existing shop-front and building
 - ii) Elevational drawing of proposed shop-front and building
 - iii) Horizontal and sectional drawings to a scale of at least 1:10
 - iv) An indication of materials and colours to be used.

5 Getting Advice

5.1 The Council's Planning Control Officers are always willing to discuss your proposals and offer advice on this Guide. Applicants are recommended to consult with the planning division at an early stage of the design process.

5.2 If you are contemplating alterations to your shop-front please write to:-

The Planning Department
North Warwickshire Borough Council
PO Box 6
The Council House
South Street
Atherstone
Warwickshire
CV9 1BG

or if telephoning:-

01827 719434.

or if you use a fax:-

01827 719363

or if you e-mail then:-

planningcontrol@northwarks.gov.uk

or if you call into the office then:-

- please make an appointment first, or please
- call into the office in the afternoons only.