

# Design Guidance No.10 Shopfronts



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## Introduction

This Guidance Note is one of a series giving advice on various types of development within Barnet. It advises on designing shopfronts. The principles and guidelines set out below will be used when the council assesses planning applications.



Figure 1: Shopfronts

The main purpose of a shopfront is to display goods on sale. Shopfronts help to project the image of a shop. A well designed shopfront constructed of quality materials will project a good image and enhance the display of items on sale.

Shopfronts have a vital role to play in our shopping centres. They are obvious to the observer because they are at the pedestrian level. They can help to attract shoppers and contribute to the health of a shopping centre. Inappropriate and ill-designed shopfronts can downgrade a shopping centre. An attractive centre is more likely to be a

profitable shopping centre. The majority of our shopping parades and shopping centres have evolved through time. Most line our main roads and have a mixture of old and new shopfronts. Historically shopfronts were designed as an integral part of a building. They framed the goods on display like a picture frame. They tended to display the basic and timeless lessons of good design, being well proportioned and detailed. They had rich decoration to add interest.

Today shops tend to take less pride in their shopfronts. Traditional shopfronts are often removed and replaced with new shopfronts

which are little more than a sheet of glass with a name panel above, paying little regard to the building as a whole or the shopping street. The character and quality of an area is easily eroded by this type of poor, careless and unsympathetic alteration. There is no reason why a modern shopfront cannot be attractive and relate properly to the design of the building which it fronts. By putting careful thought into the design and choosing appropriate materials, a modern design of shopfront can enhance the shop and the street, while at the same time achieving the type of display necessary in today's competitive retail world.

It is the standard shopfronts promoted by some manufacturers, regardless of design of the building or the character of the street, which can do so much to spoil the special character of a place. These standard shopfronts are often promoted as being suitable for any location. If this were the case it would eventually lead to every shopping centre looking the same which would erode local character.

We hope that the advice in this Note will help you design a shopfront that will enhance your shop and your sales while also respecting and contributing to the character of the area.

## Part 1 – Design principles

This advice aims to set down a number of principles of good design to enable local retailers, when the opportunity arises, to improve the image of their shops and thereby the quality of the shopping parade or centre generally. The Council and local retailers need to work together to ensure that our shopping centres attract shoppers.

This design guidance is intended to help achieve this. Before choosing a shopfront design, you should consider the context that the shopfront will be set in and the detailed design.

### The context

The context or setting of each shop should be understood, respected and reflected in any proposed works to a shopfront. Any new design must be appropriate to the shopping centre, the street and the building it fronts. First you should consider whether it is more appropriate to retain or replicate a traditional shopfront or replace it with a modern design. Traditional shopfronts are often attractive adding interest to the street. In a conservation area these should always be retained, including traditional blinds if fitted. However, it is recognised that often a contemporary shopfront will be desired and in some circumstances be more appropriate. We need to make sure that these are as well designed as the old ones were.

## The street context

Each shopping street has its own characteristics depending on its situation, dimensions, history, architecture, status and the business or trade carried out. You should think about the effect of your shopfront design on the rest of the street. It should add quality to the shopping street. The scale, proportions, materials, and details should fit in with the others in the street. The shopfront should reinforce the differences between the buildings rather than create visual discord by linking buildings of different architectural styles.

Some town centres have fora, partnerships representing local businesses, organisations and the Council, which may put forward ideas to improve the area's identity and appearance. You should take these ideas into account when choosing a new shopfront.

## The building context

The design of the shopfront should be appropriate to the scale, proportions, design and in many circumstances age of the building as a whole, for example, storey heights, sub-division, detailing etc. So that it does not dominate a building with more than one floor its height should be no greater than the height of the ground floor. Good design should reinforce the individuality and quality of the building.

## Quality and detail

Each shopfront should be designed as a whole and not merely as an assembly of separate elements. Remember a shopfront is three dimensional and its interest relies on its detailing. Quality of design should be reflected in the chosen style, proportion, and choice of elements, modelling, decoration, materials used, colour and finish. The shopfront should add quality and interest to the street. Variation in detailed design of each shopfront is the key to creating an interesting shopping street.

## Customers with special needs

There are a variety of ways you can make visiting your shop easier for people with disabilities. Issues relating to access are included within the section on doors and doorways which you will find further on in this leaflet, but please note it is an offence to reduce the accessibility of a shop. (See the section on Building Regulations at the end of this leaflet). You may also like to consider using Braille, large letters and tactile surfaces to help people with sight impairments. For example a Braille and/or embossed letter sign could be used giving the shop name and number. For further advice on such signs please contact the Access Consultancy Service at the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) Tel: 020 7391 2002.

## Part 2 – Detailed design guidelines

Traditional shopfronts were based on a set of principles which was particularly successful in achieving a satisfactory relationship between the shopfront and the building as a whole. Various elements were used to enclose a shop window and entrance eg. pilasters, fascia, stallriser. Each had its own visual and practical purpose which is explained in more detail later. Where a traditional shopfront is proposed these features should be carefully incorporated in the design.

These principles are still valid for contemporary designs. Successful modern shopfronts normally employ and creatively interpret in a modern way the most satisfying features of the traditional that have stood the test of time. In such cases a fascia supported by pillars should be the starting point, built into a thoughtful design which takes into account local architecture and character, and uses good quality materials. A faithful copy of a traditional shopfront will only be appropriate in certain circumstances (for example for particular older buildings and conservation areas). This kind of reproduction shopfront does not allow for creative designs which can help add interest to an area. All proposals for shopfronts will be considered on their own merits, but individual design solutions will be encouraged where they respect the basic rules of scale and proportion and enhance the street.

## Part 3 – Elements of a shopfront

The following detailed guidance is intended to provide some basic ground rules for the design of shopfronts and their advertisements. In most cases the elements of a shopfront explained below should be incorporated in your design.

The advice may not be applicable in all situations. It is not intended to inhibit imaginative design but should form the basis for dialogue with developers, retailers and shopfitters.

### Pilasters

These separate each shop from its neighbour, defining the width of each building and usually coinciding with the party wall. Traditionally they were columns which projected slightly from the wall. They were often decorative, particularly at the top where they projected to form a bracket called a CORBEL. The pilasters and corbels provide the “frame” to a shopfront and are particularly important in a row of ground floor shops within taller buildings.

If omitted from your design the definition between buildings can be lost and your design can look frameless. Where a pilaster covers the boundary line between two shops it is best to discuss any colour changes with your neighbour. Try to use the

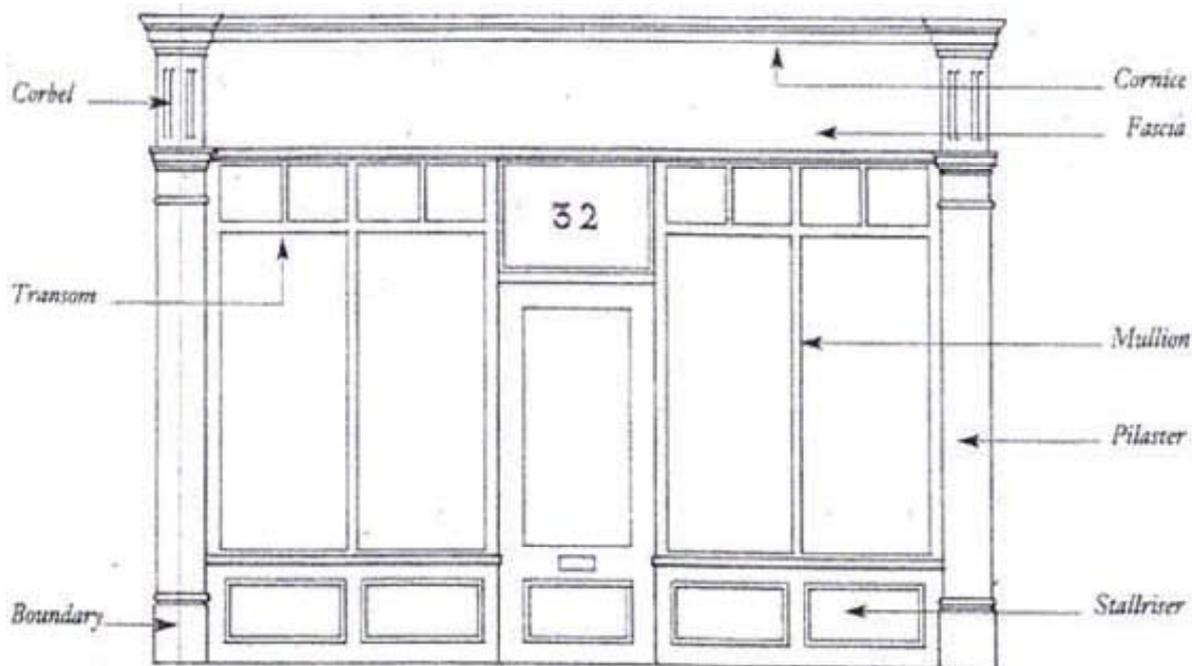


Figure 2: Elements of a shopfront

same or harmonising colours for the pilasters to avoid two contrasting colours meeting at the centre line.

## Cornice

This defines the top of the shopfront, providing a break between the shopfront and the rest of the building. It sheds rainwater away from the face of the shopfront. Many cornices are decorative. If omitted, the shopfront can look uninteresting and incomplete.

## Fascia

This is one of the most dominant elements of a shopfront, displaying the name and type of shop. It is good practice to include the shop number on the fascia. This makes

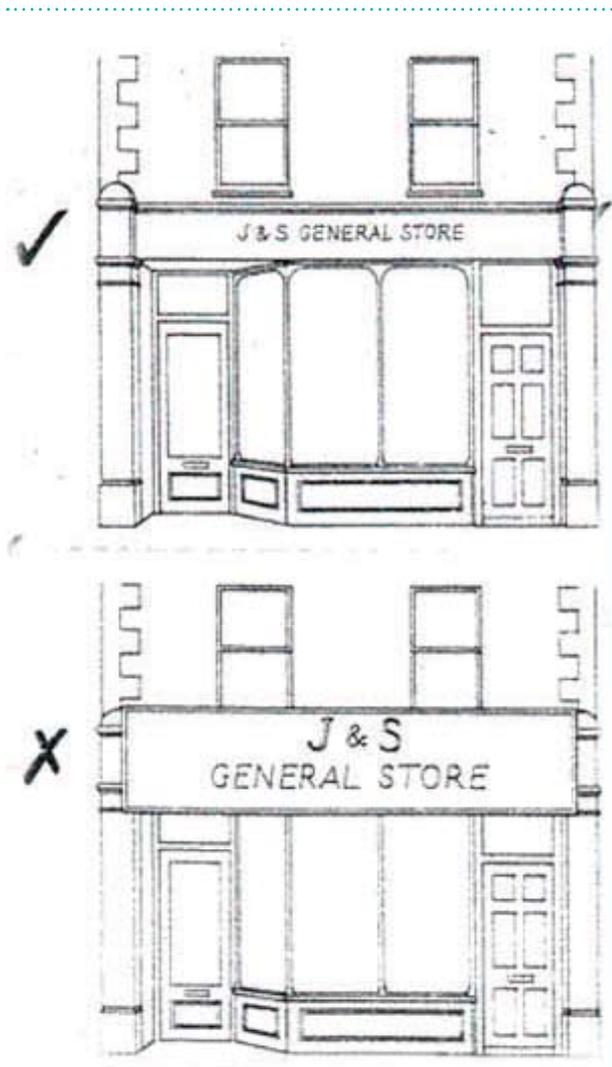
it easier for both delivery vehicles and shoppers to find your property. The fascia should be contained within the shopfront, separated from adjacent fascias by pilasters.

For good appearance, it should be kept well below the first floor window cills. If it is too deep it can appear to 'slice' a building in two and mar the street scene. Sometimes, a fascia that is too deep is used to hide a false ceiling. This can be avoided by stopping false ceilings short of the glazing. The appearance of an area is enhanced if retailers coordinate fascia depth in a shopping parade.

A traditional fascia is usually no more than 380 millimetres deep.

## Stallriser

A stallriser protects the base of the shop window from damage and splashing, and provides the building with a visual anchor to the ground. It brings the bottom of the window closer to the observer's eyes, encouraging more interesting displays. A traditional stallriser should be at least 500 millimetres high, or to the top of the pilaster base. In a modern design a solid base where the glazing meets the ground could be much shallower, but care should be taken



**Figure 3:** An oversized fascia dominates the shopfront, obscures architectural features and appears to “slice” the building in two

to ensure that it balances with the fascia. It should have a solid appearance eg. Stone, panelled timber, brick. It is often possible to unify the facade of a building visually by using the facing material of the upper floors for the stallriser.

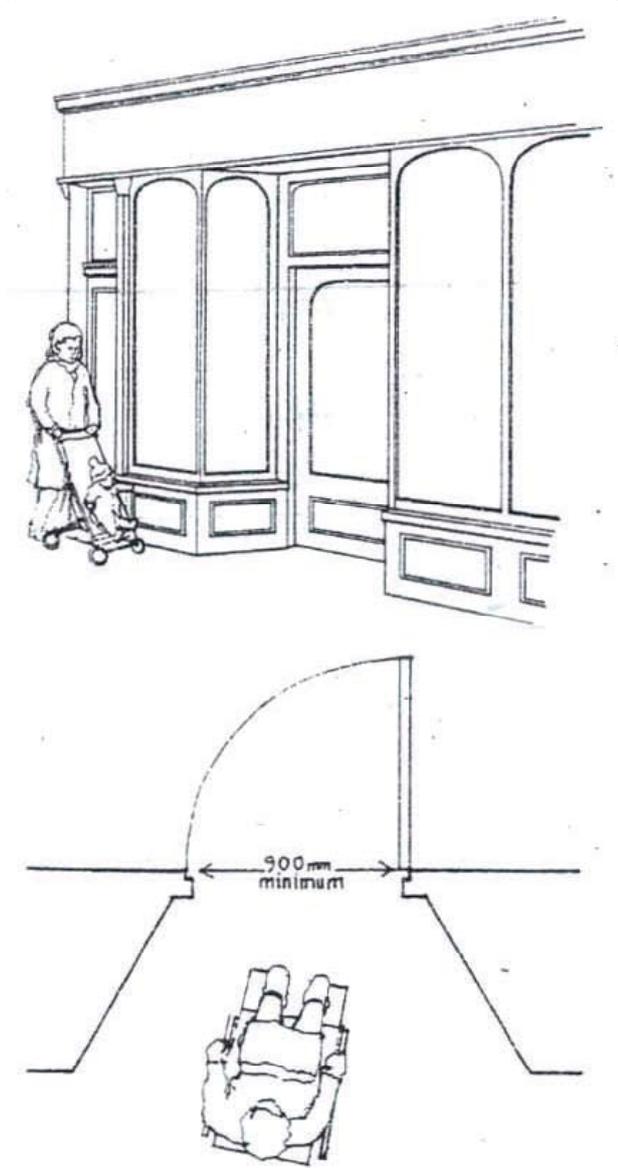
## Door and doorway

This gives an important first impression of the shop. Traditional shopfronts often have a recessed doorway which invites shoppers in. This also provides relief in the frontage and helps to break down the scale of the shopfront. The design of the door should be in keeping with the window frame, using the same material. In a traditional design the door should, generally, have a ‘kick plate’ or bottom panel with a height matching that of the stallriser or the base of the shopfront.

For safety and security reasons, a recessed doorway should not be set back more than 1.5 metres and it should be well lit. To ensure the entrance is safe and convenient for all, including those with disabilities, the door should be clearly visible, should not be left projecting outwards and the entrance threshold should be flush with the pavement.

If there is a change in levels a ramp should be provided, preferably with a gradient no steeper than 1:20 surfaced in a nonslip material. Where practical, easy going steps should complement a ramped approach.

Entrance doors should have a clear opening at least 900 millimetres wide to allow access for people with disabilities and parents with a double buggy. Double doors should normally



**Figure 4:** Entrance doors should have a clear opening at least 900 millimetres wide to allow access for people with disabilities and parents with a double buggy.

only be used where each leaf can be at least 900 millimetres wide. The door should not be too heavy, easy to push and preferably should open both inwards and outwards to help people in wheelchairs and those pushing buggies.

Where inner and outer doors open into a lobby there should be enough space for a person inside the lobby to easily open the second door. If your shop is not inviting and easily entered by all you are losing business.

In dealing with historic buildings, access requirements need careful thought to ensure that the special character of the shopfront is not lost. On a large or corner property it may be possible to provide a separate dignified access for people with disabilities.

## Window

This allows the display of goods for sale and attracts the customer. The window area should usually be framed and sub-divided to relate to the divisions of the upper floors and achieve a more friendly scale. This was traditionally achieved by vertical and horizontal glazing bars called mullions and transoms. This solution is still used today especially as large expanses of glass are vulnerable to vandalism, expensive to replace and often look out of place on an old building.

## Materials

These should be in keeping with the rest of the building and its surrounds. Painted softwood was traditionally used for shopfronts and will often be appropriate for a traditional design. For a new design, aluminium, bronze, or a matt dark coloured anodised finish are often appropriate. If choosing bright or light coloured metal finishes care should be taken that these do not stand out and disrupt the appearance of a shopping parade. The use

of non-sustainable tropical hardwood is environmentally unsound and often alien to the street.

## Colour

The colours used should harmonise with the remainder of the buildings and the street sensitively highlighting important elements of the structure, design and detail of the shopfront. Greens, blacks and browns are appropriate for traditional shopfronts and historic areas. Vibrant and garish colours are inappropriate in many areas.

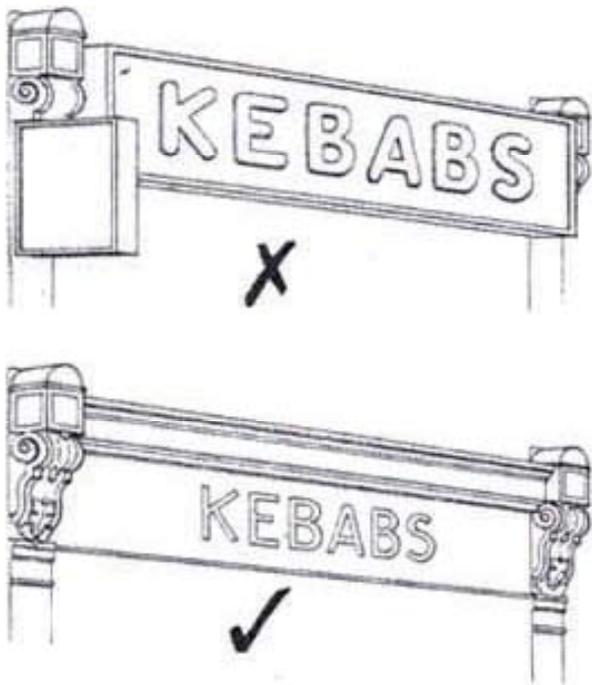
## Part 4 – Advertisements, displays and blinds

### Fascia sign

Signs need to inform and attract customers. Often the simpler the sign, the stronger the message. If one shop has an oversized design, others feel that they need a bigger sign to compete. This tends to lead to “size competition” which becomes counter productive. Excessive, cluttered, oversized and brightly lit signs create “high street mess” and downgrade a shopping centre. The fascia is the best place to advertise your business. Traditionally, fascia signs were hand painted or had individually applied letters. This is often the most appropriate type of lettering. Modern, box fascia signs projecting from the fascia board often hide or damage architectural features. They are usually metal or plastic and can be internally illuminated. They can often unbalance a shopfront and are rarely appropriate to a traditional design solution. In a new design care should be taken to ensure that a fascia design is of a size and bulk appropriate to the composition of the shopfront as a whole, fitting comfortably within the fascia panel.

### Lettering

Lettering and marking needs to be thought of as part of the architectural detail of a building. The size should be determined by the need to be legible to shoppers, and the



**Figure 5:** Bulky box fascia signs projecting from the fascia board often hide or damage architectural features.

proportions of the fascia. Thirty centimetres is usually sufficient. The style can help convey the image of the shop but care needs to be taken to ensure it does not conflict with the other elements of the building. National firms should modify their standard lettering if this does not fit in with the individual shop style.

## Projecting or hanging signs

Projecting box signs are often bulky metal or plastic boxes with internal illumination.

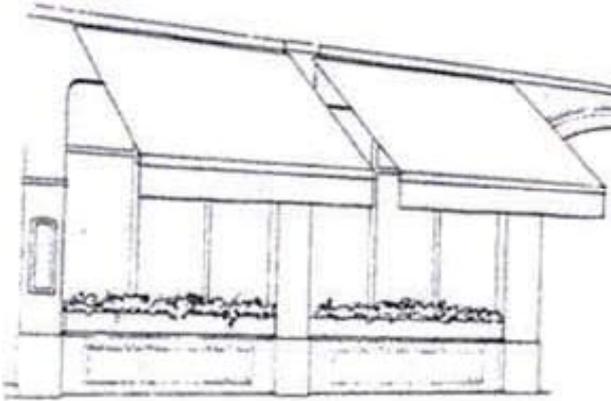
A projecting sign should usually be sited at fascia level and should not obscure architectural details. To ensure pedestrian safety it needs to be at least 2.4 metres clear of the ground. To achieve good appearance it should have a depth of no more than 0.75 metres and project no more than one metre from the face of the building. It should be as

narrow as possible and certainly no more than 0.3 metres wide. If it is any bigger it can look oversized, bulky and can unbalance the shopfront. Colours relating to the shopfront and the fascia sign are best. Words and pictures look best if simple and limited to the relevant information. Remember duplication of the message weakens its impact. On a historic building, one traditional timber hanging sign fixed to the building by a simple bracket is preferred.

## Illumination

Shopfronts usually do not need illumination if the light from the shop window and street is adequate. If illumination is needed, it should be restricted to fascia-level, and preferably be external to the signs i.e. through lights or spot lights. The level of illumination will be carefully controlled by the council to ensure that it is not too bright, does not distract drivers or shine into homes. It will need to comply with recommendations on the type and scale of lighting set down in the Institute of Lighting Engineers Technical Report No 5 (Second Edition). Neon lights and internally illuminated signs can be unsightly while flashing signs will almost always be inappropriate for traffic safety reasons. Illumination on listed buildings needs to be very carefully considered. It is usually inappropriate. Discreet floodlighting for public houses, hotels and other public buildings can look good.

## Canopies and blinds



**Figure 6:** Blinds can add interest to the shopping street.

When well designed and sensitively located these can add to the attractiveness of shops, and provide weather protection for customers and goods. They should be designed to fit in with the style of the building, both when opened and closed. Blinds should be retractable and fold into the fascia so that architectural features are not obscured. The design should be neat and simple. A straight awning with folding arm mechanism usually looks best. It should normally be sited below the fascia so that it does not dominate the elevation or obscure adjacent shops. For good appearance it should not extend more than 1.5 metres from the shopfront. Dark colours are less dominant and show the dirt less. Fixed plastic “Dutch blinds” with a curved section obscure and dominate a shopfront and neighbouring shops. For this reason they are frequently inappropriate. To ensure pedestrian safety a canopy or blind should clear the pavement by 2.4 metres at its lowest point.

## Window display

This is crucial for attracting customers and creating a vibrant atmosphere, whether through a formal display in the window or by allowing views of the shop activity. It is best not to obscure shop windows by a visual clutter of advertisements and stickers or by placing display racks with their backs to the window. Banks, building societies, bookmakers and some other businesses often feel they have little need to provide visual interest and some block their windows up. This can result in an uninteresting shopping centre. It is better to create an interesting street which encourages window shoppers and aids the vitality of the shopping street or centre as a whole.

## Part 5 – Security

In assessing security for your shop, you need to balance your security needs against any detrimental effect on the appearance of the shopping centre or parade. Insurers may specify high security products.

However, there are many options available that successfully reconcile security with maintaining the appearance of the shopping centre. A shopping centre which is safe and attractive both at day and night is likely to be used more.

Security should be considered when designing a new shopfront and measures incorporated within the design, for example a stall-riser built of brick, or of concrete with an external panel of a suitable material; internal steel reinforcement to the shopframe; mullions and transoms to reinforce glazing; security lighting; and laminated glass. Adding security measures at a later date can be full of problems and disrupt the attractiveness of the shopfront. It is also likely to be more expensive.

Security grilles and shutters can create a particularly unappealing and dead street scene at night. Those that require a permanent bulky housing attached to the fascia are generally unsightly. If grilles or shutters are necessary, the housing should be concealed within the fascia ensuring that this does not protrude too much.

### Shutters

Solid shutters can be particularly unattractive. They attract graffiti, stop light reaching the street and create a forbidding atmosphere at night. This can actually encourage crime and vandalism. Additionally, they completely obscure the display area.

Goods for sale cannot be seen by passers by and nor can an intruder. For these reasons solid shutters are usually inappropriate. A combination of solid and grille shutters can work well however. There are also a number of secure perforated and polycarbonate shutters available which are not opaque. In exceptional circumstances of extreme security risk when solid shutters are the only option, they should either be brightened up, for example by a mural of a relevant shop display, or should be painted a colour that blends in with the rest of the building.

### Grilles

There are a number of grille shutters on the market. These protect goods on display, allow intruders to be seen from if painted in a colour appropriate to the rest of the the street, and permit “window shopping” when the shop is not open. The best solution is an internal grille mesh set immediately behind the window in front of the display area. This can be retracted during the day and can be electronically operated for convenience. An external mesh grille may be acceptable in certain locations. Where practical it should be recessed into the shopfront and cover

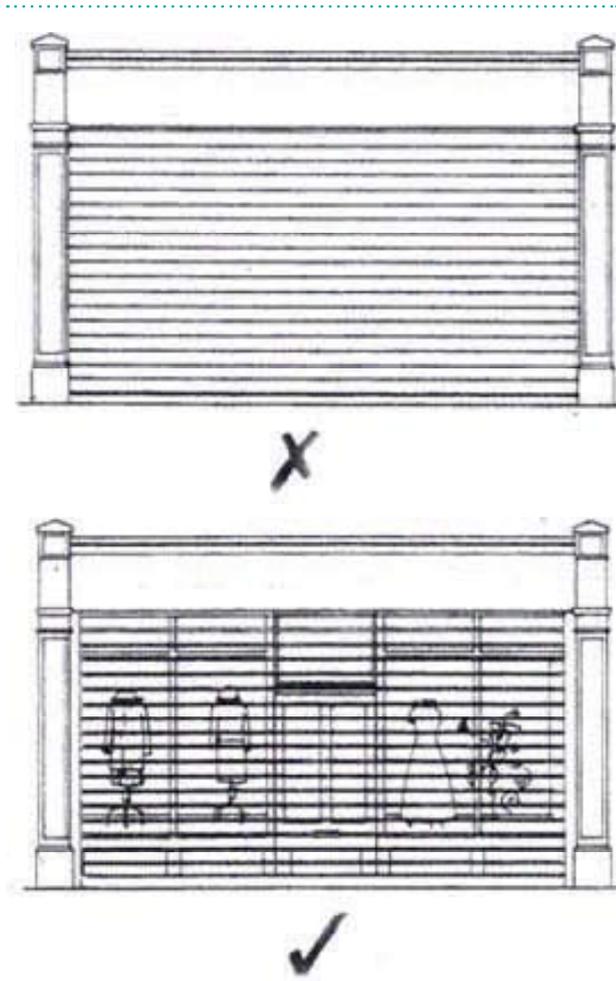


Figure 7: Grilles allow the goods on display to be viewed.

only the vulnerable glazed areas. It looks best inside of the shopfront. The shutterbox is best set behind the fascia, hidden from view.

## Alarms

These are best mounted on the fascia in an unobtrusive but visible place, ensuring that architectural features are not hidden. They should be painted to blend in with the background.

## Other measures

There are other measures that retailers can take to protect their merchandise. These include using dummy stock in the window display, keeping expensive stock in secure areas of the shop, fixing dye marker systems activated when the shop front is broken, alarm systems and close circuit television (CCTV). These measures are only effective if the intruder is made aware of them.

## Part 6 – Special rules for listed buildings & conservation areas

A listed building is a building included in the council's Statutory or Local List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. If a listed building has a shopfront, the shopfront is likely to be an important element of the building contributing to its special architectural or historic interest. Usually the removal or major alteration of a listed shopfront will not be permitted, unless it is an unsympathetic later addition. External shutters and grilles will be strongly opposed. Signs should be painted directly onto the fascia or formed from individual letters in timber, bronze or other metal. One traditional hanging sign at fascia level will usually be accepted. Blinds, where appropriate, should be traditional in design and comprise a straight awning with folding arm mechanism. In circumstances where a new shopfront is appropriate, high standards of design and materials in line with advice in this leaflet will be expected.

Conservation areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest. To preserve their special qualities, the council will require a high standard of design and materials in new shopfronts in line with advice in this leaflet. The retention of the whole of an historic shopfront will almost always be required.

## Part 7 – Do you need planning permission?

### Planning permission

You will need planning permission to install a new shopfront, external grilles or shutters or any permanent non-folding blind. A leaflet giving advice on submitting a planning application is available from planning services.

### Advertisement consent

You may need advertisement consent for your advert. This will depend on its size, whether it is illuminated or not, and the location of your property. In some areas, the rules are stricter than others. Advice and a leaflet giving further guidance are available from planning services.

### Listed building consent

You need listed building consent for a new shopfront, new blinds or any alteration to an existing shopfront on a statutorily listed building.

### Conservation area consent

You need conservation area consent to demolish or remove elements of a shopfront in a conservation area. If you do not know whether your property is in a conservation area, please contact planning services.

## Building regulations

Approval under the Building Regulations may be required for your shopfront. This approval is separate from planning permission and you should contact the building control group of the council for advice. The Building Regulations state that alterations to a shop must not make access more difficult.

## Unauthorised work

If you fail to obtain the relevant permissions, the council may take enforcement action. This may mean that your new shopfront, advertisement, blind etc is removed, which will mean a lot of unnecessary cost, loss of business and inconvenience. It is a criminal offence to carry out works to a statutorily listed building without consent, punishable by fine or imprisonment.

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This document supplements and expands upon the policies contained within the adopted Unitary Development Plan (UDP). The advice it contains is consistent with those policies and therefore has the status of supplementary planning guidance.

The document has benefited from council resolution and a public consultation exercise. This has enhanced its status, and due weight will be accorded to it as a material consideration in the determination of development proposals.

Following boundary changes in April 1993 and April 1994, several small areas formerly within Hertsmere district and the London Boroughs of Camden, Enfield and Haringey are now included within Barnet. Pending the statutory review of the UDP, the policy context in these areas remains the relevant statutory development plan of the former local authority, together with any design or other guidance prepared to supplement the plan's policies.

Approved by the Development and Protection Committee 23.01.96

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