

Coatsworth Conservation Area Shopfront Design Guide

Supplementary Planning Document

March 2013



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This Design Guide

This management strategy was prepared during 2012 by North of England Civic Trust for Gateshead Council. The drawings in this guide were produced by Spence & Dower architects.

1. Coatsworth Conservation Area Shopfront Design Guide

1.1 Conservation Areas

Conservation areas are “areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. They are designated by the local planning authority using local criteria.

Conservation areas are about character and appearance. This can derive from many factors including individual buildings, groups of buildings, streets and spaces, architectural detailing, materials, views, colours, landscaping, street furniture and so on. Character can also draw on more abstract notions such as sounds, environmental conditions and historical changes. These things combine to create a locally distinctive sense of place worthy of protection.

Conservation areas do not prevent development from taking place. They are designed to manage change, controlling the way new development and other investment reflects the character of its surroundings. Being in a conservation area does tend to increase the standards required for aspects such as repairs, alterations or new building, but this is often outweighed by the “cachet” of living or running a business in a conservation area, and the tendency of well-maintained neighbourhood character to sustain property values.

The first conservation areas were created in 1967 and now over 10,000 have been designated across England and Wales, varying greatly in character. Gateshead has 22 conservation areas.

1.2 Why have a Design Guide?

- Shops are fundamental to Coatsworth Conservation Area, making up most of the ground floor space in Coatsworth Road. It is important they look attractive so shoppers find them appealing places to be and are enticed to stop and shop.
- The poor appearance of some of shopfronts contributes to low economic activity on Coatsworth Road.
- There are many modern shopfronts which lack design quality, use plain modern materials, and which allow signs and fascias to dominate. There are also many historic shopfronts which have been poorly repaired and altered, harming their character and integrity.
- In their numbers, poorly designed shopfronts can harm the whole shopping street, making it look tired and inferior. The effect can be particularly bad where shops are part of a terrace which is designed to have a sense of regularity to it.
- The overall impression can be a disjointed series of low quality shopfronts, many with little to make them distinctive or attractive.
- This can be turned around over time, starting to bring the district’s shopping street back to the attractive, vibrant place it deserves to be.
- A good shopfront is more than just large windows, a door and a sign. Proportions are important, as are building materials, colours, and the way it fits in with the host building and its neighbours. Getting a shopfront right is key to making the building and the street as appealing as possible to regular shoppers and those just passing-by.
- A good quality shopfront shows business confidence, which leads to shopper confidence. So, improving the attractiveness of shopfronts helps uplift the local economy as well as enhancing the street scene.

2. Context

2.1 Context

This guide is part of Gateshead Council's commitment to achieving high standards of design quality, and strong protection of its conservation areas.

It contains guidance to assist developers, retailers, designers and building owners in Coatsworth Conservation Area, to prepare designs for shopfronts which respond well to local character.

It will help the Council assess the quality of new shopfronts when determining applications for planning permission. It will also help guide new works which do not need permission.

The guide will also be used to help determine applications for grant assistance for shopfronts, where this is available. The Council has successfully bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI), which will run for five years - see right for details.

2.2 Status

This guide forms an appendix to the management strategy for the conservation area. The strategy is proposed to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). All relevant development must have regard to this guide. The guide is a material consideration when determining applications for planning permission.

Where planning permission is not required, the Council will encourage the use of this guide to help protect the conservation area's character and appearance.

2.3 Policy Context

This Shopfront Design Guide supplements the Coatsworth Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy.

It also supplements saved UDP policy ENV7, Development within Conservation Areas.

The forthcoming Local Development Framework (LDF) which is to replace the UDP, is being prepared. A draft Core Strategy - the key document in the LDF - is now published. The relevant policy is Policy CS17, Promoting Place Making.

Gateshead Council is committed to securing design quality. The Gateshead Placemaking Guide sets out, with reference to saved UDP policies (and the emerging Core Strategy), more detailed planning policy guidance on the principles of good design for all types of development within Gateshead, and explains how LDF policies will be applied in the context of recent guidance and requirements. The Gateshead Place Making guide was formally adopted by Cabinet as a Supplementary Planning Document on the 27th March 2012.

2.4 Townscape Heritage Initiative

A Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) will run in the area from autumn 2012 to 2017. A Stage I bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) was passed in 2010 and a Stage II bid was successful in June 2012.

A THI supports regeneration in conservation areas by spending Lottery and other public funds on conservation projects, public realm enhancements and community activities. The available funding is £1.9m and this money will be spent according to approved Action Plan which was been submitted with the bid.

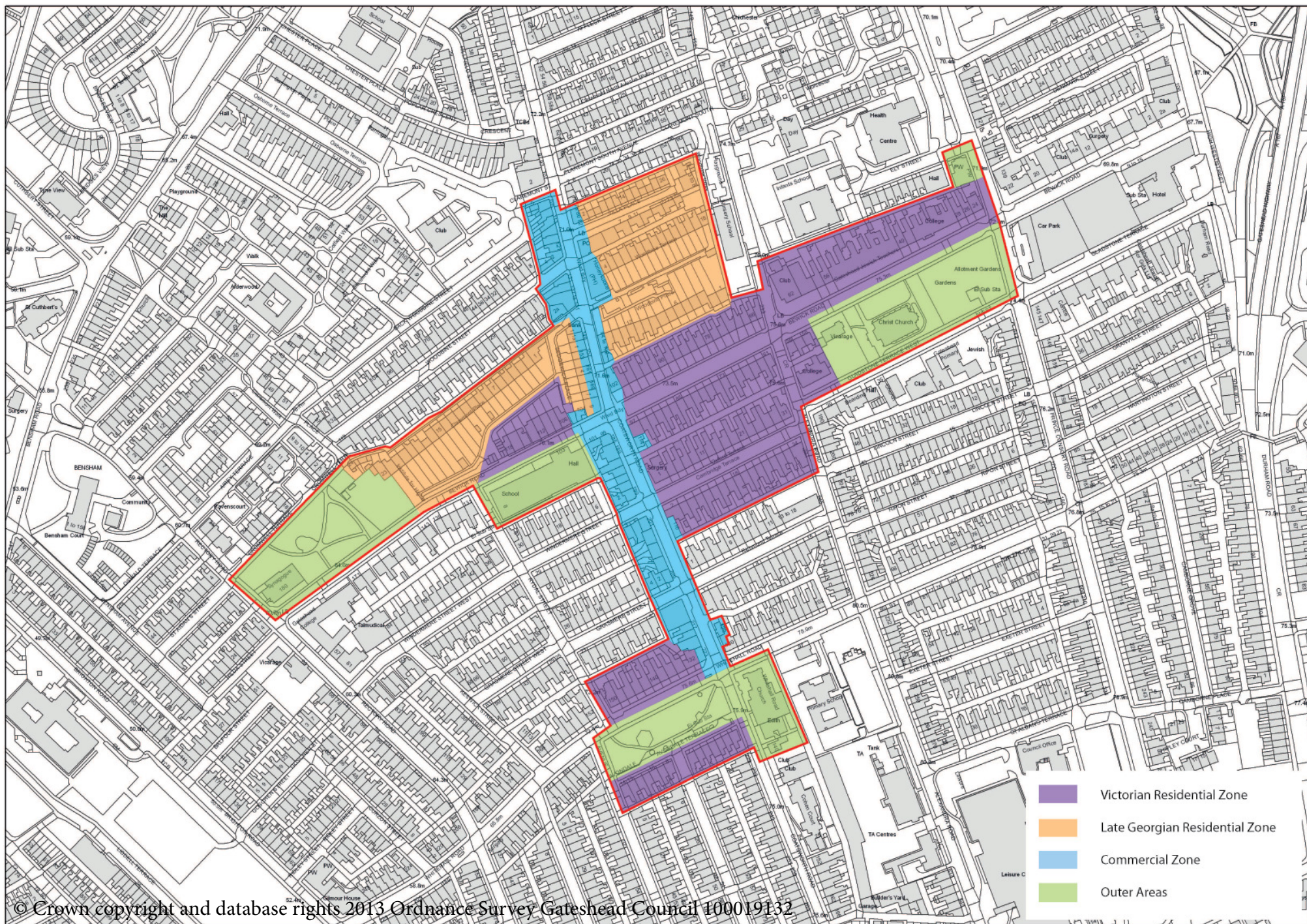
A large part of the money is set aside to help with grants to

historic buildings, to help with:

- repairs, including to shopfronts,
- reinstating lost architectural features, including shopfronts,
- bringing vacant floorspace back into use, including shops.

If the bid is successful, it means grant aid will be available to many schemes which follow this guide.

This design guide will be continue to be a material planning consideration after the end of the THI.



3. Setting The Scene

3.1 Coatsworth Road

Coatsworth has a vibrant conservation area with a busy district high street scene typical of the best historic suburbs in Gateshead. None of the buildings on Coatsworth Road are listed. One, the former Honeysuckle pub, is on the Council's own Local List.

It has a large number of shops and high street services, mostly small independent traders, with some larger local and regional outlets, plus one or two national multiple retailers.

The buildings which the shops are in date from the late Victorian period and the first decade of the twentieth century, the Edwardian period. During this time, Coatsworth Road would have enjoyed a very comfortable lifestyle, and this would have been reflected in the high quality of its shopfronts.

Many alterations to the street's shops have not been beneficial to its character. Works to the shopfronts have not always respected the host building, or the appearance and character of the wider street.

Most of the shops are in terraces and so, in any one row, each shop would have had detailing similar to the next. Random changes over time have broken down this attractive balance.

Nevertheless, looking at the shops and the first floors above, there is still a strong historic character behind, waiting to be revealed, restored and enhanced.

3.2 The Economic Environment

Unfortunately, the later twentieth century's contribution to the retail scene in Coatsworth Road has largely been to detract from the high quality of nineteenth and early twentieth century work.

A general economic decline has been the cause for this, with too little money circulating to allow adequate investment in building work.



As with many places with financial hardship in the last few decades, the emphasis has been on survival which has led to a culture of minor alterations and quick-fix solutions has left a legacy of shopfronts with a low grade feel.

Other factors have driven the ever-changing retail environment. Shopfronts designed for fashionable or modern goods and services would often be expected themselves to be fashionable, with modern designs. As fashions change, such forms can become out of date.

A change of ownership often means a new retailer who is keen to stamp their own mark on a shop. Repeated year in year out, this can result in a clamour of shops, each trying to 'shout louder' than its neighbours with oversized or aggressive advertising, to the detriment of the overall street scene.

Success in business can also lead to some harm, for example by combining neighbouring shop units into one, breaking up the happy rhythm designed into a terrace with signage spreading, unbroken, across two or more units.

3.3 The Challenge Ahead

Many modern additions to shopfronts have simply covered up original features beneath.

These can form the basis for a return to more considered designs along the street. Surviving fragments can inspire new, traditionally designed shopfronts for Coatsworth Road, shopfronts which nonetheless incorporate the needs of modern life such as security measures and disabled access.

There is every reason to see modern local businesses trading very successfully from smart, high quality, well proportioned shopfronts inspired by the long-established traditions of the vibrant Victorian high street.

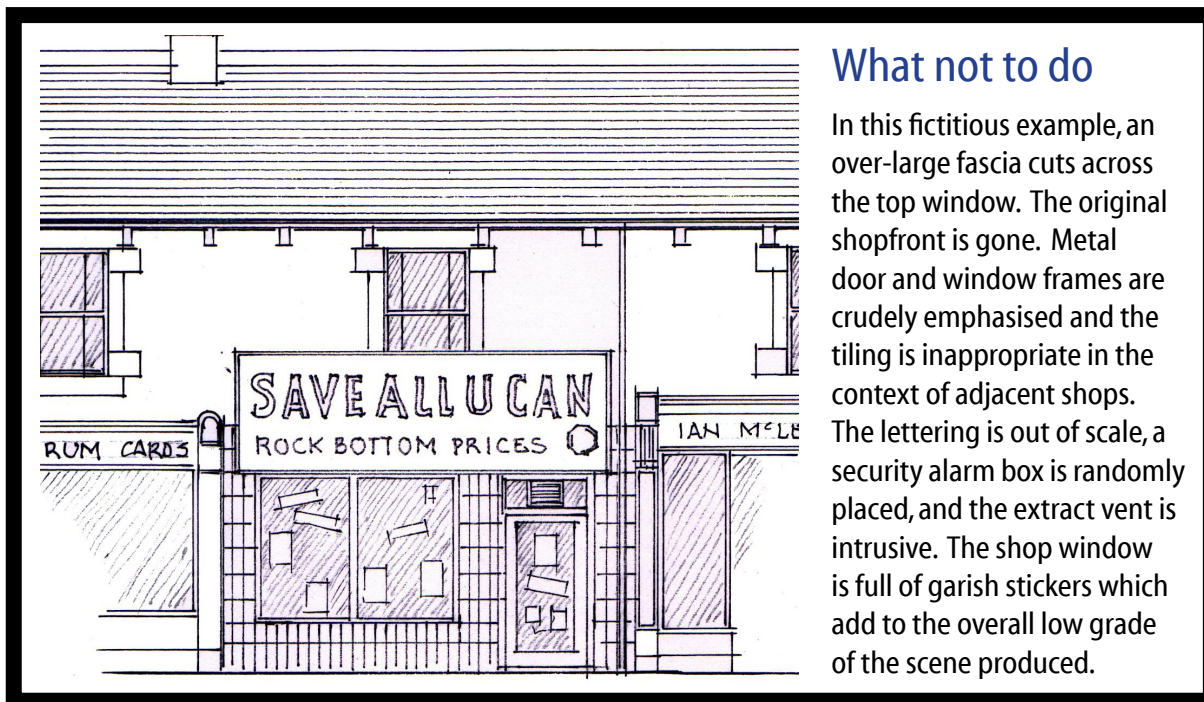


4. Historical Development of Shopfronts

4.1 From Street Vendor to Shop

Even from ancient times traders vied with each other to sell their wares. The noisy shouting of the street vendor, the pungent aromas of the covered market, the cheerful competition of hanging signs and painted notice-boards along congested streets have long been with us.

Surprisingly, much of this all over the world has been controlled by town bye-laws or government proclamation. For example hanging signs, growing ever larger, were banned in London in 1764.



What not to do

In this fictitious example, an over-large fascia cuts across the top window. The original shopfront is gone. Metal door and window frames are crudely emphasised and the tiling is inappropriate in the context of adjacent shops. The lettering is out of scale, a security alarm box is randomly placed, and the extract vent is intrusive. The shop window is full of garish stickers which add to the overall low grade of the scene produced.

4.2 Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

The classical eighteenth century shopfront, which remained the norm throughout the nineteenth century too, developed a 'language' of ornamentation which drew on the architectural culture of the time.

The rapid expansion of towns and cities in Britain during the Industrial Revolution led to a rapid growth of shops.

Manufacturers started offering catalogues of standard shopfront designs incorporating larger glass (machine produced plate glass began to appear in the 1840s though probably not in the outlying towns), slender columns and curved arches. Sun blinds could be housed in the fascia or cornice, and roller security shutters, with their boxes concealed behind the fascia, began to replace demountable panelled shutters.

All of this conformed to an overriding aesthetic of respect for building and neighbour.

Coatsworth Road is dominated by the remains of good nineteenth century shopfronts in this tradition, which relate well to the dominant architectural character of the buildings around them.

4.3 Modern Alterations

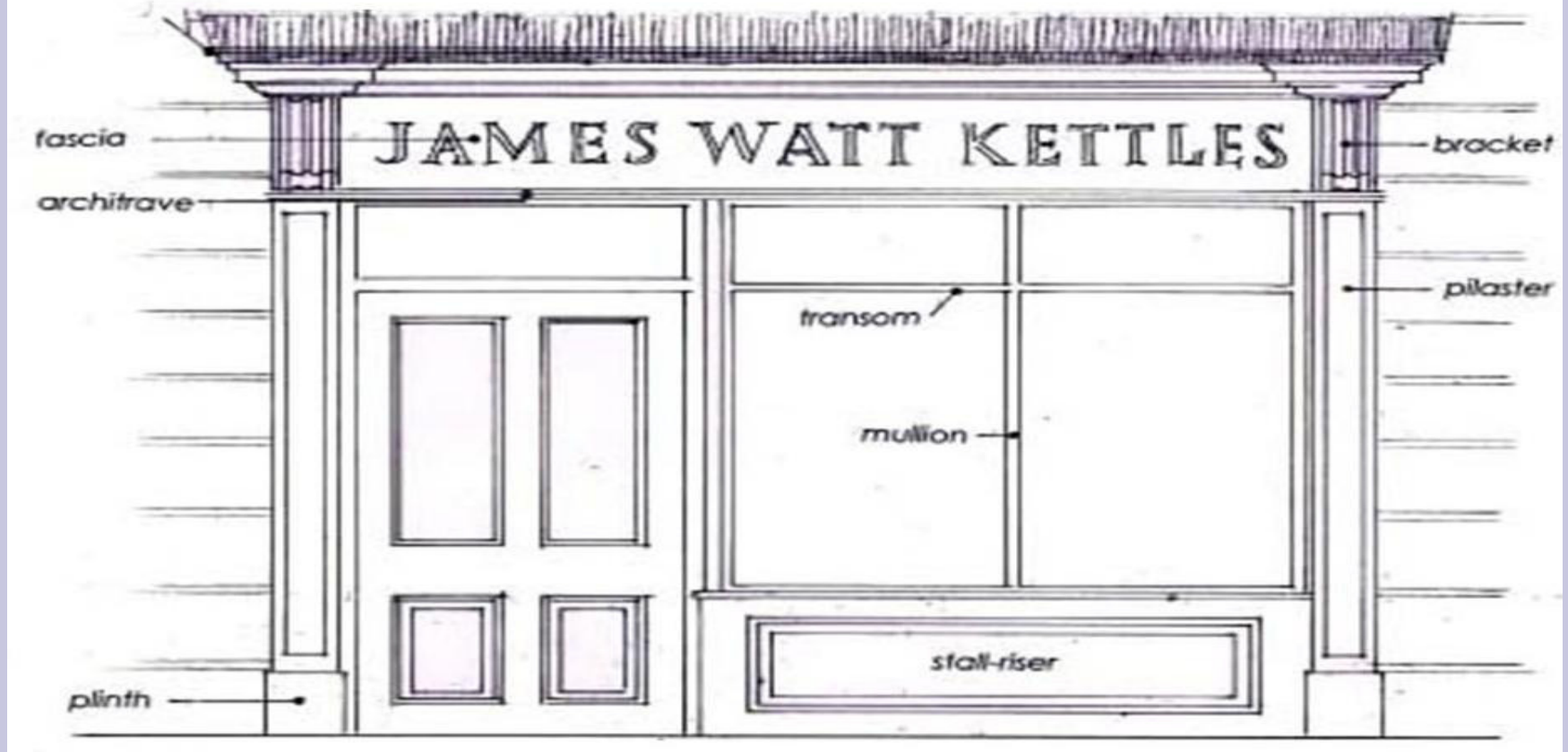
Today in spite of the work of planning authorities, our towns have been the scene of more than half a century of advertising battle.

Advertising as a specialist profession thrived on the back of competition, and drew its ethos from outdoing the competitors. The twentieth century has seen an explosion of unbridled and often ill-mannered showiness – but it is not always obvious that traders have benefited as a result of these intrusions.

Local authorities are increasingly concerned at the negative effect of brash modern shopfronts and signs on the character of retail centre conservation areas, and are urging a degree of respect both for the architecture of the buildings the shops are in, and for the interests of the character and appearance of the retail street scene.

Components of a Traditional Timber Shopfront

Image not to scale



ARCHITRAVE	The moulded, slightly projecting timber beneath the FASCIA.
BRESSUMER	A timber beam across wide openings, with the ENTABLATURE in front of it. These days, a steel girder is used.
CORBEL or BRACKET	A moulded timber element at the top of the PILASTER, notionally 'holding up' the CORNICE.
CORNICE	The moulded projecting timber at the top of the shopfront, above the FASCIA.
ENTABLATURE	The horizontal feature at the top of the shopfront, made up from the CORNICE, the FASCIA and the ARCHITRAVE.

FANLIGHT or OVERLIGHT	A window above a door.
FASCIA	The flat timber board in the ENTABLATURE which takes the signage.
GLAZING BAR	A piece of timber sub-dividing the glass in a window or door, narrower than a MULLION or a TRANSOM.
JAMB	The side face of any projecting element, such as a pilaster.
MULLION	A vertical timber dividing glass in a shop window.
PILASTER	A flat or moulded timber panel either side of the shopfront.

PLINTH	The base of a pilaster.
SILL	The horizontal element below the shop window, projecting to disperse rainwater from the STALLRISER.
SOFFIT	The underside of any recessed element, such as a recessed doorway.
STALLRISER	The timber or masonry element beneath a shop window.
TOPLIGHT	High level glass in a shop window, separated by a MULLION.
TRANSOM	A horizontal timber dividing glass in a shop window.

4.4 Recovery and Restoration

They are also concerned to protect original components of older shopfronts. Often, what seems like a recent shopfront might contain original detail hidden behind later alterations, and in sufficient quantity to enable accurate restoration or incorporation into a sympathetic new design.

In such cases restoration can result in the recovery of a balanced relationship between shopfront and building frontage, complementing the intended character of the upper floors to the general gain of the streetscape.



9-11 Wellington Street (before)



9-11 Wellington Street (after)



High Level Parade (before)



High Level Parade (after)

4.5 Shopfronts in the Conservation Area

Shopfronts in the conservation area are found in the District Centre zone, based on Coatsworth Road (see the map on page 5).

Coatsworth Road's shops are characterised by what began life as traditional nineteenth century shopfronts. The traditional shopfront combines windows and door in one Classically-inspired timber feature, usually the full width of the building. In this conservation area, they are often quite simple and free from lots of ornamentation, although there is some.

The row of shops at Nos. 151-173 Coatsworth Road – between Lloyds Pharmacy and Barclays Bank – are slightly different in that the single-storey flat-roofed shops have been added what was the rear of the original terrace of houses on Sedgwick Place. The shopfronts themselves would still have been a traditional design, but the proportions are slightly different, as is the relationship to the upper floor, which is set back.

There is one pub front (the former Honeysuckle) and two banks with commercial frontages. These are more solid and with different proportions. They have smaller windows than the shops, and more decorative features such as stonework. Much of the guidance and principles in this document will, however, still be relevant to these.



Restored traditional shop front 1-7 Wellington Street



A SIMPLE TRADITIONAL TIMBER SHOPFRONT, ALTERED BUT WITH MOST COMPONENTS IN PLACE



A SIMILAR SHOPFRONT IN AN ADDITION TO WHAT WAS THE REAR OF A HOUSE ON SEDGWICK PLACE. THE DESIGN IS LARGELY IDENTICAL BUT THE PROPORTIONS ARE SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT



A MORE SOLID BANK FRONT IN STONE, WITH MUCH SMALLER WINDOWS AND MORE DECORATION

5. Design Principles

5.1 The Way Forward

The Council is taking a lead in encouraging change because it believes that, in doing so, it will benefit traders, local people, visitors and the character and appearance of the conservation areas.

5.2 Benefits of Good Design

Following guidance on good design will have wide benefits:

- A general upgrading of the street scene which the whole community can enjoy.
- A benefit to each business in improved showcase of goods.
- A general sense of confidence in a vibrant enterprise culture, good for the local community and good for investors.
- Enhanced lifespan by planned maintenance.

The use of an experienced, professional architect or designer is advisable when seeking high quality. This will be taken into consideration when considering any consents needed (see p22), as well as for any potential grant aid for works (see p4).

5.3 Benefits of Traditional Design

This guide stresses the significance of traditional shopfront design. The reasons for this are straightforward:

- The street frontages along Coatsworth Road are largely composed of pre-1918 buildings and the traditional shopfront can be expected to blend safely with the character of the range of attractive buildings from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that line the street.
- A well-tried formula has ironed out problems and solutions which do not need to be re-invented.
- Shop owners and retailers may feel more confident about achieving successful results from a long established tradition.

Principles

Guidance must be based on sound principles for tackling good design in shopfronts in conservation areas, set out below.

1. Be willing to change. Shopfronts are the retailer's showcase and must speak well of the shop owner and trader.
2. The shopfront is part of the whole street and should therefore be considered in that context, sympathetic to the architectural character of the adjacent properties.
3. The shopfront is not the only component of a property or even the most significant. The design of the shopfront should respect the proportions and scale of the whole front elevation.
4. Where one shop occupies two or more buildings of different character, it is likely to diminish the value of each to spread one shopfront across all. It is better to respect the identity of each shopfront in the design.
5. Traces of old shopfronts are rare and valuable. In making alterations to apparently modern fronts, always look out for hidden older components, record them and be prepared to re-use them in the new design, adding appropriate materials and details to allow their conservation.
6. Existing out-of-character shopfronts should be seen as temporary intrusions failing to achieve the high standard of good design needed in the conservation areas. Plan for their replacement with designs and materials that reflect the higher standard aimed for today, and respecting the character of the conservation areas.
7. Where no original design or detail has survived, the best approach in Coatsworth Road will be a high quality traditional design accurately inspired by its neighbours. On rare occasions, a high quality modern design might be acceptable, probably in traditional materials. All cases are considered on their merits.
8. Good design is not necessarily about style – the quality of detail is crucial to any new work, whatever the style. All new work should have visual interest and be high quality, and should achieve the quality expected of a more sensitive place.

6. Guidance on Good Shopfront Design

6.1 Introduction

It is important to start with the ambition of achieving a high quality feature which will show the shop in the best light, and contribute to the character, and therefore the viability, of the whole street.

It is important to get the proportions of each component right. This is more than a matter of guesswork or convenience and it involves understanding the proportions of the host building and the space available for the shopfront. No single element should dominate. In particular the fascia should not dominate.

Where an entirely new shopfront is required, and there is good historical evidence of an appropriate earlier design (such as an old photograph), replicating this is likely to be the best option.

Where there is no historical evidence, design should be inspired by shopfronts in the same terrace or similar properties along the street.

Whilst preparing new works, it is worth investigating the survival of any historic features behind existing modern shopfronts, perhaps by removing small parts to see what is behind. This is called a 'soft strip'.

6.2 Spanning the Opening

Shopfronts on Coatsworth Road have large window openings. Wide openings are traditionally spanned by a timber beam (a bressumer) and, later, by a steel girder. Intermediate masonry piers, or steel, timber, or decorative cast iron columns, might support it along its length. So the essence and variety of traditional shopfronts is the way this 'naked' structure is hidden with timber, with windows and doors inserted into it.

For it to look right, it is important to get the elements in the right order. For example, corbels should be below the cornice so it looks like they are supporting it.

6.3 Entablature and Pilasters – the 'Goal Posts'

Traditional shopfronts are made up from a long horizontal section at the top (entablature) supported at either end on vertical sections (pilasters). As shopfronts are usually wider than they are tall, this gives the impression of 'goal posts'.

6.3.1 Entablature

The horizontal element across the top in front of the structural beam is the entablature. It consists of a cornice, a fascia and an architrave.

- The cornice has a practical as well as an aesthetic purpose. Being deeply projecting, it forms a visual 'cap' to the whole shopfront, and also protects the fascia and the window head from decay by shedding rain away from the timberwork. The cornice is usually covered in a lead flashing tucked into the masonry above. Traditionally, it may have housed a retractable canvas awning.
- The fascia is a wide band with the shop sign. There is some flexibility in how high this band can be, but it should be in proportion with the shopfront and the whole elevation. New applied fascias should not hide existing architectural detail. New works to existing tall fascias should seek to reduce their height.
- The architrave is a minor component of the entablature, sometimes no more than a narrow moulding above the window. The architrave is also another place for an awning.

6.3.2 Pilasters

The entablature is visually supported on pilasters, representing the columns of Classical architecture. They cover the jambs of the structural opening. The base of each pilaster is a plinth which is often the same height as the stallriser.

The corbels at the top of the pilasters, which support the cornice or whole entablature, are often the most varied and distinctive elements, an opportunity for interesting designs. Many on Coatsworth Road are simple and straightforward. A few are more detailed.



“Inappropriate use of tiles at stallriser”



Vertical sub-division of windows using mullion

6.4 Shop Window – the Display

The purpose of the shopfront is to showcase merchandise.

6.4.1 Stallriser

The shop window is normally raised up on a stallriser, bringing the display up to eye level. Often as high as 900mm, sometimes lower. The stallriser gives the shopfront a visual anchor to the ground and protects the glass.

It is usually in panelled timber to match the shopfront. Where historic stallriser masonry matches the rest of the façade, it should be left as such. Where masonry does not match, it might instead be plastered and painted to match the shopfront. Modern tiles should not be used on stallrisers.

Even without a stallriser, a shallow plinth should be used to protect the glass and to give visual ‘strength’ to the composition. This can carry through from the pilasters’ plinth.

6.4.2 Mullions and Transoms

These days, very large panes of glass can be made. But large windows can harm the shopfront’s composition. So windows are often subdivided into bays using moulded mullions. These enhance verticality, add balance, and provide a feeling of greater solidity. Mullions should look slender seen head-on, but might be quite deep front-to-back to hold the glass.

Horizontal subdivision can also help with appearance, using a transom at the same height as the door. This creates a toplight window beneath the architrave. Traditionally, toplights have coloured or leaded glass for both decoration and sun shading. Toplights with opaque glass can also be used to obscure a suspended ceiling inside the shop.

It is also possible to sub-divide shop windows further, using glazing bars, but these should be visually lightweight and thinner than mullions or transoms. Such subdivision is rare in Coatsworth Road and should not be a pursued without historical evidence.

6.5 Doorway – the Access

6.5.1 Position

The position of the door can be influenced by the internal layout of the shop, or by the position of first floors windows on the building, or by the layout of the adjoining shops. In smaller shops, the doorway is usually at one end to avoid breaking up the window display.

Alongside the door to the shop, a separate doorway giving access to the upper floors is common. If so, this second door should form a component in the overall shopfront design. It should be a solid panelled door rather than a glazed shop door. It is best, for its basic design to match and for it to be the same colour.

6.5.2 Recessed Doorways

Shop doors are often on the same line as windows, but in some shops, the door is often set back off the street into a recess. The recess is where a change in level from pavement to shop floor is accommodated, using a shallow ramp and avoiding a step to help with disabled access. The recess offers shelter when moving from shop to street, and the flanking window in the recess increases the shop window display space. The floor of the recess should be a non-slip material, and a mat-well just inside the door is effective.

6.5.3 Fanlight / Overlight

Where a door is shorter than the shop window adjoining it, there will need to be a panel above it. Traditionally, this would be designed as a decorative fanlight using patterns of glazing bars. Today, it is more common to have plain glass. Signage might also be incorporated in the glass here.

6.5.4 Door, Glass and Door Furniture

The door itself is best part or fully-glazed to echo the windows. The bottom of the glass should be set at the same height as the stallriser. Doors should be in painted timber, in keeping with the whole composition. Choice of door furniture, handles and closers should bear in mind character and disabled access. The position of door handles is particularly important for wheelchair users and for the frail elderly.



Shopfront including separate access to upper floors



Recessed door 1-3 Wellington Street
Good example of decorative security gates

6.6 Materials and Colour

These are crucial to the overall appearance of the shopfront. Traditional shopfronts should normally be built in timber which allows for easy working of the details. Each element should be correctly moulded to avoid a heavy, clumsy look to the shopfront.

Features should be finished with good quality paint. The colour scheme for a shopfront should be restrained and in harmony with its setting, not brash and competitive. A monochrome scheme, however, is not always essential since some detail can be enhanced by being picked out in complementary colour or a family of established colours. Fascia lettering should stand out and be legible. Clashing colours and reflective surfaces rarely achieve this.

While mullions may in some cases need the strength of metal, it will generally be expected that all features of the shopfront will be painted to reflect the colour scheme of the whole composition.

Aluminium, plastic and mosaics do not form part of traditional shopfront design and detailing in this area.



Bespoke decoration scheme forms part of the overall 'advert or signage'

6.7 Blinds and Awnings

Blinds or awnings could be incorporated to protect goods from sunlight.

The simplest, cheapest and most visually satisfactory solution is a blind inside the shop. External blinds are to be discouraged but a fully retractable canvas awning could be acceptable where there is historic evidence to support their inclusion. In a traditional designed shopfront, it would be housed either just below the cornice or in the architrave.

It should, when open, be high enough to walk beneath without ducking, and far enough back from the highway to not cause a hazard to passing or parking vehicles. This will be important on Coatsworth Road, and may prevent their use.

Fixed awnings, 'pram hood' blinds and plastic or shiny materials will not be acceptable.



'Ravel', Church Street - replacement of historic awning as part of shopfront restoration

6.8 Shopfront Security Measures

Shopfront security is an important element of a shopfront design, and a holistic approach must be considered at an early stage to ensure that the needs of the business are balanced with the need to protect the special character of the area.

The removal of solid shutters will improve community confidence and perceptions of crime.

Solid roller-shutters are generally unacceptable as they provide a hostile, deadening effect to the street scene. This type of shutter, and its external housing, obscures the appearance of the shopfronts and damages traditional details such as shopfront fascias and cornice. In addition, the solid, deadening effect of the shutters harms the pedestrian level scene and a knock-on effect for economic viability of the district centre.

The following measures should be considered,

- Reduce glass size by using mullions, toplights and a stallriser.
- Use laminated glass.
- Use alarms, internal surveillance cameras/cctv and well-sited lights for the front and rear of the property.
- Use internal shutters grilles

Grilles or shutters should be considered in the following order:

- Internal sliding or roller grilles, which are housed behind the fascia and have an open 'brick' weave appearance are the most appropriate. These allow displays to remain insitu and help the street appear to be active, even when closed.
- Demountable grilles or shutters, in a decorative or lattice design, painted matt black are an alternative to internal roller shutters and may be fixed internally or externally to the framework of the shopfront. These must then be removed during opening hours.

There is a presumption against external outer shutters and these will only be considered in extreme cases where there is clear and convincing justification which prevents the measures outlined above being effective. In this event shutters must be an open 'brick' weave rather than a solid shutter. A grille still provides good shopfront visibility when closed and is less 'deadening'. Each grille should match the width of the shop window behind. Boxes should be housed internally, behind the fascia, and guide channels positioned in the pilaster jambs.

All grilles and shutters should be opened during the day to avoid a deadening effect on the street scene during the shop opening hours.

Generally, no part of a security fitting should protrude from the architecture of the shopfront. Fittings should avoid harming the street scene.

Disabled Access

New work to buildings used by the public or as a place of work is required to provide access for disabled people on an equal basis. Disability includes those dependent on wheelchairs, those with impaired vision or hearing, the frail elderly, and others. Consideration must be given not only to manoeuvring a wheelchair but also to lighting, colour contrast, signage design, strength of door closers and obstruction to free movement in front of the shop.

The building regulations set out the requirement for door widths, manoeuvring space, thresholds and ramps, etc.



Security measures - High Level Parade, Wellington Street
Internal roller shutters

Guidance on Good Signage

6.9 The Importance of Signage

Well designed signs can add to the quality of the area. Signs which are poorly designed and sited can significantly detract from it. Signage should be integral to the shopfront, not a separate addition.

The strategy will be to optimise the number and size of signs, and their impact on the conservation areas, whilst recognising the need for signage as part of healthy trading in the district centre.

The starting point for signs should be only the name of the shop or proprietor, and the merchandise, eg:

- J A Martin – Butcher
- Wendy Arundel – Hair stylist
- Tiny Tots – Children's Clothes

National multiple retailers must be able to demonstrate how they have adapted their standard identity to fit with the area.

Signage will generally require advert consent and/or planning permission. Certain types and sizes of signs have deemed consent. The Council will review these types of signs and, where expedient, will seek to remove deemed consent rights.

6.10 Fascia Signs

Signs for ground floor shops should only be on the ground floor, and should be on the fascia; signs in other positions are not appropriate. Fascia signs should be timber or exterior grade plywood. Where there is no fascia above the shop window, the solution is either:

- A simple sign board, in timber. Plastic or metal sign-boards will not be acceptable. Its width should not exceed the width of the window itself. The depth should be in proportion to the window and the building elevation, and should leave visible

masonry between it and first floor window sills. It should not obscure architectural detail.

- Individual applied letters. These should also be in proportion with the windows and elevation. They should be fixed into mortar joints rather than the masonry face.

Generally, these solutions should be fitted above the shop window; there should be no fascia sign above the doorway unless it can be incorporated in the fanlight glass.

6.11 Projecting Signs

Projecting signs can significantly impact on the street scene, and their number and visual impact should be minimised.

Projecting signs for ground floor shops should be sited at the same height as fascia signs, and over the door. Projecting signs for upper floor premises should also be over the door.

Projecting signs should be painted timber or exterior grade plywood. Plastic or metal will not be acceptable. They should be fixed, not swinging, and be mounted on metal brackets fixed into mortar joints.

Painted signage within the fascia



Fascia sign is larger than the shopfront

Projecting box signs are unacceptable as they contradict the traditional character of the conservation area.

6.12 Illuminated Signs

Illuminated signs can significantly impact on the street scene and will only be acceptable in certain limited situations, where:

- it is advertising a pharmacy, or a business open to the public at night (eg. pub or restaurant), and
- it is a projecting sign as set out above, or
- it is a fascia sign comprising individual halo-lit letters.

Internally illuminated box fascia or projecting signs in plastic or metal will not be acceptable.

Lights should be carefully focussed on the sign to avoid nuisance or glare to pedestrians, motorists or adjacent windows.

The visual impact of light fittings can often be more intrusive than the sign itself, particularly projecting fittings. Lighting technology has advanced in recent years and very discrete fittings are now available, the use of which will be sought by the Council. Subtle and clever use of lighting can also high-light building façades attractively.

6.13 Signage for Upper Floors

Business use of upper floors is important in keeping whole buildings in use and enlivening the retail and service offer of the town centres.

To avoid a clutter of signage on buildings containing more than one business, signage for upper floors should be limited to lettering applied to the inside of windows (traditional painted letters look better than applied transfers), and a name plate by the street door.

In some cases, individual applied letters on the elevation might be acceptable where there is sufficient masonry to avoid it looking cluttered. The same conditions as with fascia signs would apply (see above).

Excessive signage can dominate the appearance of the shopfront



Individual letters applied to the fascia & enhanced by the shop window display

6.14 Other Signage Matters

6.14.1 Lettering

Lettering need only be legible to the passing pedestrian. It should reflect the shop's trade, contributing to the business' overall image. Logos can enliven lettering but should not replace it altogether.

Classical letter types are best for traditional shopfronts. A good rule is that lettering should fill the middle two quarters of the fascia length, and not exceed 2/3 of the depth of the fascia in height.

Lettering should generally be hand painted using good quality non reflective paint. Light lettering on a dark background improves legibility. Plastic lettering is unacceptable as it is out-of-character with the area's traditional scene. In addition, the plastic's reflective surface does not aid legibility by those with impaired vision.

Incorporating address numbers in fascia signs is to be encouraged. Traditional hand signwriting is still a thriving trade. The Council can offer advice.

6.14.2 Pavement Signs

Pavement signs (such as 'A'-boards or trestle signs) will not normally be permitted as they obstruct the public space and are a hazard for disabled or partially sighted people.

6.14.3 Window Displays

There is a big difference between the neatly arranged property advertisements in an estate agent's window, and the untidy clutter of random stickers in a general store. The latter tends to create an unattractive presentation, often adding to a down-at-heel feel. In contrast, logos or shop names etched into door or window glass can sometimes be very effective, particularly if cleverly back lit.

The use of applied vinyl to windows or posters to 'add' to the overall signage will be discouraged. The Council will review adverts and, where harmful, seek discontinuance and the removal or deemed advert consent.

It is also worth considering how stock, storage and display are placed inside the shop to avoid obscuring shop windows and presenting uninviting views inside.



7. Above the Shop

7.1 Upper Floor Uses

Almost every street front property on Coatsworth Road is two storeys, with shops on the ground floor.

Space above the shop may bear no functional relationship to the shop downstairs, often used by another business with separate access by a side door, or perhaps a flat reached from the rear. There is evidence of some empty or under-used upper floors, which can lead to neglect and poor repair. The Council will always encourage the re-use of empty upper floors and, even if not, keeping them properly maintained.

7.2 Contribution to Street Scene

The condition and appearance of upper floors also contributes to the street scene. Shopfronts are only a part of the conservation areas' wider architectural legacy, with historic upper floors a key part of the street frontage. However, there has been considerable alteration here too.

There are some original first floor timber sliding sash windows, cast iron gutters and downpipes, and timber eaves and verges. There are some Welsh slate roofs and many historic chimney stacks. Some roofs have been replaced in manmade materials and some chimneys have been truncated.

Extensive replacement of windows has not improved the appearance of quality – aluminium or PVCu disregard the original historic sash pattern and the appearance of timber sliding sash windows. Gutters and downpipes are replaced with plastic with a short life, often becoming brittle and discoloured when exposed to the sun.



8. Maintenance

8.1 Forward Planning

There is a strong responsibility for owners to keep up the good condition of property in the conservation area. Where the shop is tenanted, the landlord and tenant should agree who does what, and ensure that it happens.

Maintenance of the shopfront and the entire property will not only protect the value of the property and prolonging the life of its component parts, but it also keeps the local street scene looking smart and attractive. This helps maintain business and shopper confidence in the District centre.

8.2 Rainwater Protection

In particular, regular inspection and clearance of rainwater gutters and downpipes will be important to protecting the building frontage from being persistently wetted, for example by a blocked hopper or a dripping gutter.

Checking that the flashing above a cornice has not pulled out of the mortar joint in the wall above will save damp reaching the timberwork of the entablature or the bressumer beam behind.

8.3 Re-painting

Exposure to the sun's ultra violet light, plus wet conditions, will hasten the breakdown of paint and the fading of pigments.

Paint will particularly need renewal on sills and horizontal members, and at the base of pilasters, plinths, stallrisers and mullions where wet gathers and penetrates hairline cracks. The situation at low levels is aggravated by the effect of salt splash from roads and pavements, creating a hostile condition for both timber and masonry which needs to be managed.

8.4 Maintenance Pays

As with all maintenance, regular care on a planned cycle of inspection and preventative action will reduce the amount and cost of remedial or replacement work made necessary by lack of attention at the proper time.

This message is vital – overall, the cost of maintenance is far less than the cost of repair and where cash is tight, a mop and bucket or a paintbrush is far cheaper than the services of a builder, joiner or structural engineer.



The Process

1. Be clear about what you want to achieve – a new shop window? A new sign? A whole new shopfront?
2. Talk to the Council about your proposals.
3. Find out what consents you need.
4. Find out if you are eligible for grant aid.
5. Find a professional architect or designer who understands your needs and those of the conservation area. Give them a copy of this Design Guide.
6. When your plans are developing, meet with the Council to discuss the detail of your plans (and possible grant aid).
7. Ask for advice on contractors who could carry out the work to the right standard.
8. Prepare the required drawings and other information for your applications.
9. Be prepared to amend or justify your plans if they depart from this guide.

9. Getting Advice and Consent

9.1 Getting Good Design Advice

Although typical historic shopfronts in Coatsworth Road are quite simple, designing good quality shopfronts is not always a simple process. Balancing all of the above considerations takes skill and judgement.

But making the right choices often costs no more than making the wrong ones.

The services of a qualified architect or designer, experienced in carrying out similar work in historic areas, are indispensable, and need not be expensive. Using the right shopfitter and signwriter is also important to achieving a good job.

General advice is available from the Council and should be sought early in the process.

9.2 Getting Consents

Works to shopfronts, even relatively minor works, may require one or more of the following types of consent:

- planning permission
- advertisement consent
- building regulations consent

It is recommended that shop owners or retailers discuss with the Council any plans they have for works to their shopfronts. The Council is here to help you. Early consultation can lead to a smooth application process later on. Development management should be contacted on (0191) 433 3416 or enquiriesdevcon@gateshead.gov.uk

Even where consent is not required, following the guidance in this document will help protect and enhance the character and

appearance of the conservation area, to the benefit of the general trading environment in the District centre.

This is not a definitive source of legal information. If you are in any doubt, contact the Council before undertaking any work or changes to your premises. Carrying out works without necessary consent may lead to enforcement.

9.2.1 Planning Permission

You will need planning permission for most works involving shopfronts. You may also need it for other works to your premises, including changing its use. Planning permission is not generally required for internal works, or for small alterations to the outside such as installing alarm boxes. It is advised that you submit a pre-application enquiry first.

9.2.2 Advertisement Consent

You will need consent for almost all hoardings, illuminated signs (outside the deemed consent allowances), fascia signs and projecting signs on shopfronts or business premises which are higher than 4.6m above ground level, and most advertisements on gable ends. You also need permission for signs advertising goods not sold at the premises where the sign is placed. A-boards are subject to licensing.

The Council will periodically review the effects of adverts permitted under deemed consent and, where it is considered that this is detrimental to the character and appearance of the conservation area, objectives of the THI, it will seek to remove deemed consent.

9.2.3 Building Regulations

You will need approval under Building Regulations to carry out many types of building work. Such approval is very likely to be relevant for works to shopfronts, and advice should be sought from Building Control.

Information on disabled access issues can be obtained from www.drc-gb.org and the Sign Design Society (www.signdesignsociety.co.uk) which is setting standards in sign design for disabled and non-disabled users.



