

## **LDP Supplementary Planning Guidance Note 02:**

# **Shop Fronts**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This Note is one of a series of Supplementary Planning Guidance Notes (SPGs), amplifying the development plan policies and other issues in a clear and concise format with the aim of improving the design and quality of new development. The Notes are intended to offer broad guidance which will assist members of the public and officers in discussions prior to the submission of planning applications and assist officers in handling and members in determining planning applications.

### **2. Status and Stages in Preparation**

- 2.1 The Council's SPG Notes are not part of the adopted plan. However, they have been the subject of both a formal Council resolution and public consultation. The Welsh Government has confirmed that following public consultation and subsequent Local Planning Authority (LPAs) approval, SPG can be treated as a material planning consideration when LPAs, Planning Inspectors and the Welsh Government determine planning applications and appeals. This Note was approved by the Council on 13th November 2013 for use in development control.
- 2.2 These notes have been prepared in accordance with guidance contained in Planning Guidance (Wales), Planning Policy; Local Development Plans; Technical Advice Notes.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 It is generally accepted that shop fronts make a very important contribution to the overall character of our town and district shopping centres. They enable shops and other commercial premises to present their goods and services. The town and district shopping centres in Denbighshire consist of a variety of styles which have evolved over time and contributed to the unique character of each.
- 3.2 Occasionally shop fronts will be part of a proposed new building and will be the subject of an application for planning permission. In determining such an application, the council will take account of the relationship of the shop front to the building as a whole and to its neighbours. It is not the intention of the council to be over prescriptive or to stifle innovative design but the success of an application for planning permission will depend in part on how well a new building or shop front fits with the overall street scene, and the elevation and architectural style of the building it is part of.

- 3.3 Over the recent past there has been a very significant deterioration in the quality of shop front design. All too often there has been a misguided presumption that the shop front can be viewed independently of the overall building design or with its neighbours. The major issue addressed in this guidance however is the design of shop fronts for existing buildings whether they be alterations of existing shop fronts or new shop fronts for buildings presently in another use. This leaflet will offer guidance on the various elements that go some way towards good practice in shop front design.
- 3.4 Shop fronts are usually accompanied by advertisements, whether in the form of fascia signs or projecting / hanging signs. In considering the design and materials it is necessary to have regard to the type of advertisement as the two will go 'hand in hand'. More detail on signage can be found in SPG 17 'Advertisements'.
- 3.5 N.B. For the purpose of this guide a shop includes non retail premises such as amusement arcades, betting offices, building societies, cafes, dry cleaners, estate agents, hairdressers, laundrettes, restaurants and travel agents as well as the more usual retail premises, and any other facade designed to look like a shop.

#### **4. Policy**

- 4.1 There is no formal development plan policy relating to shop fronts. However, the broad thrust of the Council's approach is to provide well designed shop fronts to match particular local circumstances, which vary across the County. This note is primarily concerned with the traditional shop fronts found in many of the County's town and village centres although the guidance will also be generally applicable to shop fronts in modern shopping precincts. The Council acknowledges the commercial needs of businesses to 'open up' their premises to make them more inviting to customers. However, limits and control are needed, especially as most of the town and village centres will contain listed buildings and conservation areas. In these cases, particular regard needs to be taken to ensure that the essential character and integrity of the building is maintained and enhanced. Commercial centres need to compete; one of the best ways in which to do this is to retain their local distinctive character and ambience by retaining their particular architecture and not allowing this to be damaged or diluted by uniform company styles.

#### **5. History**

- 5.1 Shops as we understand them today are largely a product of the 19th and 20th Centuries. Most of the more successful designs date from the Georgian, Victorian or Edwardian periods and are extremely high quality. Georgian shopfronts tended to have simply an enlarged window in the ground floor, an entrance door and a small fascia with perhaps a hanging sign. The development of the traditional shop front was an attempt to fulfil a number of requirements:

- to provide a display area;
- to advertise the business;
- to provide adequate security;
- to protect the wares from the elements;
- to draw customers to the premises.

5.2 The lifting of excise duty on glass in 1845 and improvement in materials and building technology allowed shop fronts to be designed often across the whole width of a property thereby providing large display areas. The provision of a recessed entrance door was not only more inviting for customers but again allowed for the window display to be extended. Many Victorian and Edwardian shopfronts with such features have influenced later shop design.

5.3 Most traditional shop fronts are of what could be broadly termed classical design. This is a particularly appropriate way of allowing the often heavy appearance of the first and second floors to be carried visually by the fascia and pilasters. In reality the loads were taken by steel and or iron beams and columns.

5.4 It should be remembered that the design of shop fronts has always been influenced by fashion and the prevailing architectural trend of the time. It is not uncommon for an older building to have a later shop front of a differing architectural style but which is within complete harmony with the building. Shop fronts need not necessarily reflect the original age or style of buildings but their design, including in particular fascia size and materials, should take account of the building, its neighbours, and the character of the area as a whole.

## **6. Features of a Traditional Shop Front**

6.1 The most effective way of explaining the main elements which make up a traditional shop front is by means of illustration. The elements are also described in turn:

### Stallrisers

6.2 These provide the base of the shop front, both physically and visually. It is the area between the ground and the sill and is typically solid. Stall risers should usually be of the same material and finish as the rest of the shop front or should be sympathetic to the building. Examples will include painted timber panels, stone or render. They can also be reinforced internally to provide added security, particularly from ram - raiding.

### Pilasters and Consoles

6.3 A pilaster is a flattened column that slightly projects from the wall. It is not structural but provides a strong edge to the shop front and help define the shop front itself and the relationship to the building above. Pilasters

may be fairly plain, or incorporate decorative features in the form of console brackets. These are decorative architectural features, forming the junction between the pilaster and the fascia, separating the shop front from adjoining shop fronts.

### Fascias and Cornice

- 6.4 The top of the shop front has traditionally incorporated a fascia. It is typically timber and is where the shop sign is normally positioned. The depth of the fascia, as a rule of thumb, should be no more than a one fifth of the dimension from its top down to the pavement. Fascias can be flat to the shop front or they can be angled so that any signage can be read easily. Effective signage tends to be engraved lettering, handpainted or applied lettering in a style suited to the scaled and design of the original shopfront. A cornice is the top part of the fascia. It usually projects from the fascia and creates a visual break between the shop front and the floors above. A cornice can be a purely decorative above the fascia or can be used to hide retractable blinds or roller shutters.

### Shop Windows and Doors

- 6.5 These fit into the frame or surround, provided by the stall risers, pilasters and fascia. They should provide a balanced appearance taking into account the shop front and the positioning of windows at first floor level. Where appropriate, dividing up the shop windows with glazing bars to add strength to the shop front and minimise the size of each pane of glass may be considered. Smaller panes may reduce the cost of replacing any broken glass. Glazing bars are normally vertical but they can also be horizontal towards the top of the windows. The use of toughened or safety glass can be used to provide additional strength and security.
- 6.6 The positioning of the door will again need to be sympathetic to the 'balance of the shop front and building above. Doors may be central or at the end of a shop front. They may either be flush with the shop front or recessed to provide shelter, and to create a well-defined and inviting entrance. Some doors have fanlights above, typically rectangular and sometimes decorative. The bottom panel of the door should relate to the height of the stall-riser and the door material in keeping with the rest of the shopfront.

## **7. Design / Altering Traditional Shop Fronts**

- 7.1 Care is advised when designing shop fronts. Each case has to be looked at individually and full account should be taken of the factors which will affect the design both functionally and visually.
- 7.2 In designing or altering traditional shop fronts care must be taken in using appropriate details relevant to the overall context of the building as a whole and the wider street scene. There is a trend to look at shop front

design and ignore these very important issues. This can result in unsatisfactory detailing and the finished shop front can look very much like a parody of the genuine article. References are given at the end of the leaflet which should be of assistance.

- 7.3 Particular care will be required in proposals where two or more shops or 'retail units' are combined to form a single shop. The use of a continuous fascia across several shop fronts can be unattractive and visually dominant. Ways should be devised of visually linking the units together to ensure a common theme for the shop concerned, perhaps through matching shop fronts separated by pilasters.
- 7.4 It should be noted that many shop fronts will be within town or district shopping centres many of which are designated as conservation areas. Others may well be part of listed buildings. In both cases, particular care will be needed to ensure a satisfactory shop front which is in keeping with the building and locality.

## **8. Materials and Finishes**

- 8.1 The majority of traditional shop fronts were constructed in softwood and painted. However, as many of the softwoods that are easily available now can be of poor quality there is a tendency to use tropical hardwoods instead. Such hardwoods are often difficult to paint because of their natural oils and the result is either a poor quality paint finish or a non traditional appearance. Consideration should be given to the use of microporous paints which allow the timber to 'breathe' thus reducing flaking.
- 8.2 Occasionally a varnish may be appropriate particularly where a high quality timber has been used such as Welsh Oak although this can prevent the timber breathing. A more suitable alternative is 'Danish' or 'Teak' oil. Almost invariably a stain finish is not acceptable. In all cases, care will be needed in the both the choice and application of finish to ensure a high quality and durable appearance.
- 8.3 Great care should be taken in choosing colours and these should be appropriate to the period in which the buildings were constructed. Do not choose bright colours in order to attract more attention as the overall effect is gaudy. Most of the major paint suppliers now produce ranges of colours appropriate to particular periods which are subtle and attractive.

## **9. Blinds or Canopies**

- 9.1 Many traditional shop fronts had some method of screening displays from direct sunlight, providing shelter and allowing window shopping in wet weather.
- 9.2 Fixed canopies of the traditional type constructed of cast iron and glass have a very major impact on the street scene. Where original they should

be retained but new canopies where there is no tradition for their use would have to be very carefully considered. Traditional retractable blinds should also be retained where they are an existing feature. New blinds of this type are also to be encouraged subject to satisfactory compliance with safety requirements for pedestrians and vehicular traffic. Blinds should fit within and not obscure pilasters (where they are a feature of the shop front). The housing for the blind, when fully retracted, should be hidden within the cornice or at least below the fascia. The blinds themselves should be of a canvas material rather than shiny plastics.

- 9.3 'Dutch' blinds which have a curved or bulbous shape are not traditional to Denbighshire and are rarely satisfactory additions to our towns and villages.
- 9.4 New blinds or canopies may require planning permission and/or advertisement consent. Planning Officers will be able to advise on individual cases.

## **10. Security**

- 10.1 Security in the High Street is an increasingly important issue. It is required to combat three separate elements, theft, vandalism and ram raiding. Measures to make shops secure are not new. Early shops would have been secured with demountable wooden shutters held in place with iron bars. In the mid 19th century wooden or metal roller shutters became common and were integrated in the shop front design.
- 10.2 In designing a new shop front all aspects of security including items like burglar alarms should be an integral part of the design to avoid a "tacked on" effect. Traditional shop fronts with smaller paned glass, transoms, mullions and stall risers can be more difficult to break into than the large areas of unrelieved glazing (and smaller panes are easier and cheaper to replace). Stall risers can be substantial concrete structures (disguised externally) and glazing bars can be reinforced with metal "T" sections.
- 10.3 Often a shutter is necessary as it is a requirement of insurance companies or because of the nature and location of the business. If this is the case an internal lattice grill or shutter will be the preferred option. Depending on the nature and value of goods on display in the shop front it may be possible to locate a lattice shutter behind the window display particularly in those areas where CCTV is in operation. Lattice designs will enable night time window shopping, internal inspection by the police and contribute to an attractive night time environment.
- 10.4 A solid shutter is not recommended by the police as it does not allow the internal space to be viewed. External solid roller shutters are by far the worst option. They obscure architectural detail and invite graffiti which contributes to the overall portrayal of decline. If so their design should be integrated as far as possible into the shop front, it should be perforated to allow views into the shop and the colour should be appropriate to the

building and area as a whole. As a general rule, all external shutters will require planning permission whereas internal systems do not.

10.5 Glass is an important consideration in the security issue. There are really only two types of glass that properly combine safety with security, laminated or toughened glass. Of the two laminated glass is more difficult to break through and probably provides most security. The type of glass used will also be important in preventing injury as a result of an accident.

## **11. Permissions**

- Planning permission is required where any work constitutes "development" such as the renewal and alteration of a shop front. Minor alterations or the repair of shop fronts would not require planning consent provided that works are carried out on a like for like basis.
- If a building is listed then any alteration internally or externally would require listed building consent. It would be necessary to demonstrate that any work is not detrimental to the character of the building. This consent is in addition to any planning permission that may be necessary.
- If a building is within a Conservation Area it was necessary, until recently, to obtain Conservation Area consent for the partial demolition of a building including shop fronts. Following a recent High Court decision this is no longer the case. Nevertheless, before proceeding with any demolition within Conservation Area it is advisable to seek advice from this department.
- The legislation relating to advertisements is complicated. Before carrying out any work associated with shop advertisements it is worth checking with this department about obtaining permission.
- Building Regulations approval may be necessary for certain works associated with shop fronts. Again it is worth checking with this department before carrying out any work.

## **12. Access for People with Disabilities**

12.1 Where Building Regulation approval is required then it will be necessary to comply with part "M" of the Building Regulations which deal with disabled person access. Building Regulation approval would be necessary where for example a new shop is being created in a building which was formally used for a different purpose. Where a new shop front is simply replacing an existing one Building Regulation approval may not be necessary. However this Authority would encourage the provision of access for people with disabilities where it was reasonably possible to provide it. In some instances the provision of disabled access may detract from the character of a listed building. For advice on overcoming

these difficulties it is worth having discussions with Officers from Planning & Public Protection Services.

### **13. Repair or Renewal**

- 13.1 Where a traditional shop front is still in place it is advisable to consider refurbishment on a like for like basis rather than renewal. Planning permission and building regulation approval would not be required plus it can often be cheaper and result in a better design. Sometimes the original shop front has been hidden behind a later alteration which simply needs to be removed. If a traditional shop front has deteriorated beyond repair take note of the design and details and try to reproduce it as far as possible. Historic photographs can be a useful guide. Employing a conservation architect may be preferable in some cases.

### **14. Modern Buildings / Indoor Shopping Precincts and Parades**

- 14.1 There will be instances where more 'modern' shop fronts in terms of design and materials may be acceptable provided that the end result is high quality. The Council will still seek to ensure a shop front is in keeping with the building and adjoining shop fronts. The principles contained in this note will still provide useful guidance.

#### **Summary of Key Advice**

- Seek advice from the Council's Conservation Section.
- Relate a shop front design to the building as a whole, its neighbours and the character of the area.
- When designing a traditional shop front look at similar traditional shop fronts and pay attention to detail.
- Take care in choosing the right materials, finishes, and colour.
- Use only traditional blinds.
- The shop front should be designed bearing in mind the intended advertisements as the two should be in harmony.
- Take account of security needs but don't let security dominate the design.
- Check what permissions are required before ordering materials or commencing work.
- The design should cater for people with disabilities.
- Repair traditional shop fronts if possible.

## Further Information

- Cadw – The Welsh Government’s historic environment service
- Welsh Office Circular 61/96 ‘Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas’
- Book of Details and Good Practice in Shop-front Design (1993) – English Historic Towns Forum
- Shop-fronts and Advertisements in Historic Towns (1991) – English Historic Towns Forum
- Shop-fronts (2010) – Historic Scotland
- Traditional Shop-fronts – A Short Guide for Shop Owners (2010) – Historic Scotland
- Showcase your Shop-front – Edinburgh World Heritage Trust
- Shop front security report (1994) - British Retail Consortium
- Modern Practical Joinery (1908) - G Ellis