



Shopfronts, Shutters and Signage Design Guidance for Tewkesbury Borough

Supplementary Planning Document

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Design Guidance for Tewkesbury Borough

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Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to promote good shop front design in the historic settlements of Tewkesbury Borough and to offer guidance to designers and applicants in submitting planning proposals. The guidance is primarily for towns but could equally be applied to historic villages. The intention is to promote good design practice and not to dictate a particular style or stifle innovation. However the period and style of the property needs to be respected, and so there is a particular focus on traditional detailing. The character of many historic towns and village centres is heavily dependent on the quality and condition of their shop fronts. An attractively presented, tasteful shop front gives a favourable impression of the business and reflects well on an area.

As our historic towns and villages continue to serve the needs of the local community, their individual characters are under constant pressure to adapt and change. New shop owners, new uses or just periodic rebranding creates pressure for new frontages and different signage, which can unintentionally erode the character of an area.



Most town centres in England are facing substantial challenges due to changes in shopping habits, a factor that may have accelerated due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The population served by the towns in the borough is also set to rise significantly such as the Garden Town initiative at Tewkesbury and other housing developments. It is not possible for the borough's towns to compete with the retail parks on the outskirts of Cheltenham and Gloucester but it is necessary for them to play on their strengths to attract and maintain customers and serve the local communities.

“The distinctiveness of our heritage makes places special and fosters a place identity which in turn attracts businesses and people to place”.
(Gustaffson, 2019).

“In my generation as retailers, we successfully cloned every town in Britain so they all looked the same, but clearly that doesn't work. All towns have a heritage and history and their reason for uniqueness needs to be brought to the fore”. Bill Grimsey, former head of Wickes, Iceland and Focus DIY (BBC, 2018).

“Over the long term, places with strong, distinctive identities are more likely to prosper than places without them. Every place must identify its strongest, most distinctive features and develop them or run the risk of being all things to all persons and nothing special to any”. (Nobel Prize winning economist, Robert Merton Solow in Licciardi et al. 2012).

The historic environment provides a sense of authenticity, beauty and distinctiveness. This attracts people, businesses and investment, and can provide places with their competitive advantage. Managing the historic character of town and village centres and their shopfronts and signage is therefore an integral part of their prosperity. Many of the business and building owners in the Boroughs towns and villages recognise this and it is reflected in the presentation of their shopfronts. This guide will assist in maintaining this and also provide direction in situations where improvements can be made.



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Architectural context of the borough

Tewkesbury Borough covers a wide area of Gloucestershire with two distinct architectural characters. Despite this, most historic shops have shopfront designs from the 19th century and these remain generally similar across the borough. In architectural terms, the east of the borough is characterised by the Cotswold vernacular with a tradition of stone buildings. The west of the borough is within the Severn Vale and is characterised by red brick or earlier timber framed buildings. The borough has two towns, Winchcombe and Tewkesbury.

Winchcombe is within the east of the borough and was formed around its Abbey in the medieval period and benefited from the wool trade. Architecturally, Winchcombe is firmly in the Cotswold stone vernacular tradition, albeit with some early timber framed buildings. The town generally contains a collection of small historic shops predominantly with stone frontages and 19th century timber shopfronts. There are also a high number of shops with curved bay windows, some of which are thought to be historic.



Winchcombe High Street

Tewkesbury is the larger of the two towns and it was also formed around its Abbey in the medieval period. The town is served by two major rivers, the Severn and the Avon. Both rivers are navigable and provided access to goods and markets from the principal surrounding cities and beyond. This resulted in a mix of trade and industry within the town from its early origins.

The architecture of Tewkesbury town is varied with a mixture of shop sizes. The town is noted for a number of important timber framed merchant's houses from the 17th century and earlier. A number of purpose built medieval shops survive, some of which are still in use albeit with later shopfronts. The remaining buildings generally have red brick Georgian style frontages many of which conceal a much earlier timber framed building beneath. Some pockets of modern development are also present. There are a large number of traditional 19th century timber shopfronts surviving within the town.



Traditional shop front, Winchcombe

The largest historic village is Bishop's Cleeve. This has a historic core that remains legible but does not contain any historic shops or shopfronts. Despite retaining some historic buildings, the core of the village has been much expanded in the post war period with modern shops and two supermarkets.

The design guide would also be applicable in other villages and settlements within the borough where the assimilation of shop frontages with the existing historic character of the area is considered important.



Tewkesbury High Street

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The history of shop fronts

It is useful to understand a little about the history of shop fronts so that the appropriateness of designs for specific buildings can be more fully appreciated.

Medieval period

The idea of shopping as it is known today is a relatively recent development. For centuries, goods were spread out onto the street or displayed on a drop-down shutter that served as a counter during the day.

C18

With the universal spread of classicism in the C18, the shop front became an integral part of the design of the building. Display windows became more prominent and often took the form of square projecting bays or bow windows, although they remained subdivided into small panes.



Restored C15 Medieval shop in Church Street, Tewkesbury

Late C18 to mid C19

Classical design principles became more pronounced. The shop window was framed by pilasters, which provided visual support for the top, or entablature. Projecting bay windows were now outlawed in most places to avoid obstructing the pavement.

Late C19

More emphasis was now given to the name of the shop and the fascia became more prominent at the expense of the cornice. Sometimes the fascia was tilted to accommodate a blind box. Decorative console brackets appeared at either end of the fascia. Decoration often became more exuberant and a variety of new materials, such as cast iron and terracotta, were introduced. The invention of plate glass enabled display windows to become much larger, frequently of full storey height.

Early C20

Generally, the established principles of shop front design stayed the same but adapted to changes in architectural fashion, which moved away from classicism. Increasing concerns about hygiene encouraged the use of easily cleaned ceramics for food shops such as butchers and fishmongers.

Later C20

The 1960s and 70s saw a fundamental break with the principles of traditional design. Plate glass windows, dominant fascias, artificial materials and a focus on the shop front in isolation from its host building spoilt the character of many shopping streets.



Traditional shop front, Winchcombe



Surviving C19 jewellers shopfront, 141 High Street, Tewkesbury



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Early shop front design was based upon a set of principles, derived from structural requirements, which was noticeably successful in achieving a satisfactory relationship between the shop front and the building as a whole. The influence of classical architecture during the early development of shops established many principles of shop front design which are still relevant today.

Classical features

Various architectural elements can be used to frame the shop window and entrance. These include the fascia, pilasters, cornice and stallriser, all of which has its own visual and practical function. A shop front design based on incorporating these traditional elements is always likely to be the most appropriate in a historical setting. However there is still scope for the creative interpretation of traditions, which adds to the variety and interest of the townscape, provided that this basic vocabulary is followed.

Entablature

Entablatures were derived from the lintels in classical architecture and a horizontal feature spanning across the width of the shop front ultimately evolved into the fascias. Georgian entablatures are typically quite shallow and are often surmounted by a projecting cornice, which provides a positive 'lid' to the shop front.

Fascia

The fascia is usually the most prominent feature on a shop front as it carries the name of the business and so will be designed to attract attention. The scale and design should be in proportion to the design of the shop front and to the rest of the building as a whole. However, a common fault is to make the fascia too deep in an

attempt to maximise signage space or conceal a suspended ceiling level. The fascia, which is normally topped by a moulding or cornice, should terminate below first floor window level and ideally leave a margin to separate the shop front visually from the upper floors.

Cornice

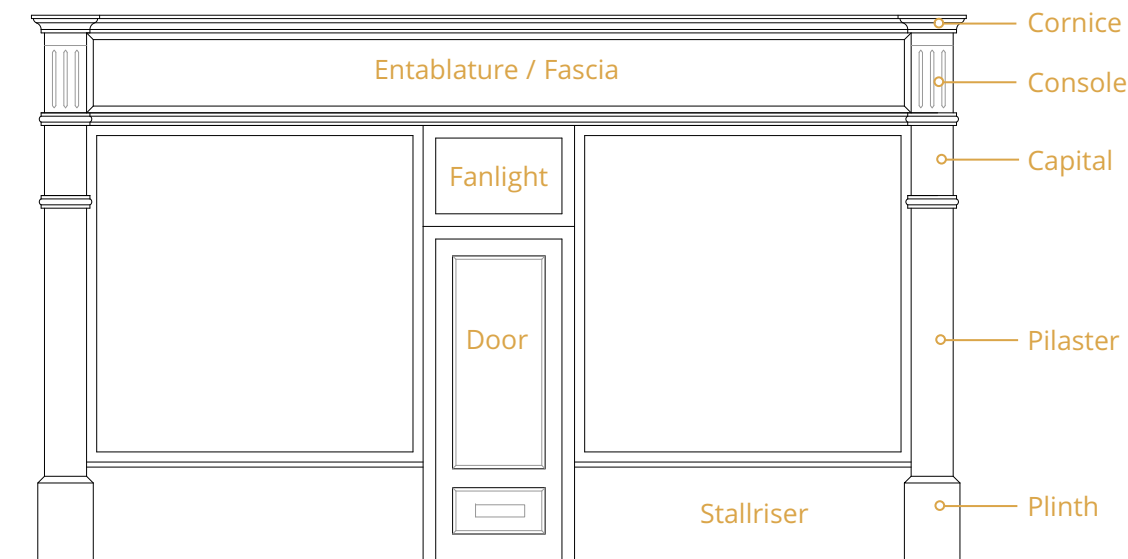
The cornice is a direct survival from classicism and is both a decorative and functional feature of the shop front. In terms of decoration it forms a conclusive termination to the top of the fascia and thus the shop front as a whole. Functionally, it projects forward of the elevation to direct water clear of the fascia. On late 19th–early 20th century shop fronts it is common to find a blind box incorporated within the cornice.

Pilasters and consoles

Pilasters and consoles are residual forms of classical columns and scrolls and in general, their roles are decorative rather than functional. Nevertheless they make a critical visual contribution to the shop front by supporting and 'bookending' either end of the fascia, and consoles in particular were often exaggerated for decorative effect.

Mullions and glazing bars

Windows historically were restricted by the size and cost of glass and traditional shop fronts invariably are subdivided to reflect this constraint. The vertical mullions and horizontal transoms necessary to support the panes were incorporated into the wider composition of the shop front and often provided further decorative opportunities.



Components of a traditional shopfront

© Maureen Turland - Tewkesbury Civic Society



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Stallriser

The stallriser is a long established shop front feature which originally houses boards or stalls, which hinged out over the pavement and carried goods for display. Stallrisers typically survive in residual form as a plinth giving physical and visual support to the shop window. Visually it completes the frame enclosing the display space and also protects the window from impacts at pavement level.

Respecting the building

A shop front should relate to the building it belongs to so that it forms an integral part of the elevation rather than an isolated element at ground floor level. This can be achieved by taking account of the scale and architectural style of the building and by respecting the arrangement of windows and walling on the upper floors in the subdivision of the shop front.

Symmetry

Many C18 & C19 buildings in shopping areas are symmetrical and to maintain harmony, this symmetry should be extended to the shop front. Sometimes internal planning makes it difficult to achieve exact symmetry, but it is often possible to use elements of the shop front such as intermediate columns or window mullions to contribute at least some visual balance.

Street rhythm

A major consideration in the design of any shop front is how the building fits into the street scene. Most traditional shopping streets contain a great deal of variety. The width and height of the buildings help define the character of the street. Plot widths were often quite narrow so the

buildings lining streets in historic towns tend to have a vertical emphasis. This is known as the rhythm of the street, and where a shop front extends across two or more buildings, it can easily disrupt this rhythm. There should be some break in the shop front to coincide with each plot boundary and if the buildings differ in size or style, varied shop fronts are likely to be more appropriate.

Visual support

Many C20 shop fronts have large expanses of plate glass window, which make the building above appear unsupported. This can look particularly uncomfortable if the shop window straddles two or more buildings. Windows should be punctuated by columns, mullions or areas of walling to give the building visual support.

Modelling

Interest can be given to a shop front by recessing or projecting some of the details and elements that make up its design. Traditional shop fronts had a projecting cornice that jutted out from the face of the building. Console brackets, fluted pilasters and deep glazing bars give 'depth' to the façade. Similarly, recessed doorways provide a visual break to a flat window. This 'modelling' of the shop front allows a play of light and shadow that enlivens the street. Modern shop fronts with no projecting features tend to have a flat, two dimensional appearance, which makes a poor contrast with the richness of traditional buildings.

Scale

In small-scale buildings, the shop front should also be small. The size of the display windows, the depth and height of the fascia and the proportions of the details should all be modest.

In larger buildings the shop front can be larger but should still be in proportion to the building. Excessively large modern fascias are the single most common detrimental element on historic buildings and they often obscure important architectural details.

Materials

Timber was always the traditional shop front material and it remains the most appropriate and versatile. It can be worked to any shape, is durable and can be painted in any colour required. Generally speaking, modern sheet materials such as vinyl, Perspex, or aluminium are not compatible with historic buildings. However, modern materials can be accepted where they are used with care and it can be shown that they will enhance the building.

Colour

Colour is one of the most important factors affecting the character of historic shopping streets; an otherwise perfectly preserved shop front can be spoilt completely by an inappropriate colour scheme. Non-traditional or vivid colours draw undue attention to themselves and should be avoided. Darker colours work well as they leave the window display to provide the highlight, and neutral whites and creams are also traditional. The imposition of corporate colour schemes regardless of the nature of the buildings involved may erode the character of an area, but tailoring the corporate identity to specific areas such as the fascia may be acceptable.



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Fascia signs

Most shop fronts incorporate a fascia to denote the shop name. Excessive advertising on the fascia should be avoided, as should unnecessary duplication of the shop name. The most effective signage is generally limited in content, and does not attempt to overload the fascia with text or graphics. It is noticeable that the better quality the shop, the more discreet the signage.

Oversized and garish modern fascias are some of the most unattractive features of shopping streets. This can spoil the appearance of buildings by obscuring stringcourses and first floor windowsills as well as hiding features of original shop fronts. The scale of the fascia should be appropriate to the character, height and period of the building and in proportion with the design of the shop front. As a guideline, fascias should generally be no deeper than 1/5 overall height of the shop front.

Hanging signs

Hanging signs are a traditional feature on shops in historic towns and, when well designed, they can add vibrancy and interest to the street. Timber hand-painted signs are usually preferred but metal pictograms have a long tradition and offer particular scope for invention. Bracket design and fixings methods are also important: bolts should be drilled into joints, not into the face of bricks or stone blocks, and the brackets should be designed with slots to allow for tolerances.

As a general rule, only one hanging sign per shop will be allowed. The conventional position for signs is at or just above fascia level. The latter position is normally appropriate for public houses or restaurants where a pictorial sign is used, but

they should not be so high as to be above normal sightlines. Care must always be taken to ensure that architectural features are not obscured by the signage. The over proliferation of signs creates visual clutter which cancels out their effectiveness so therefore a balance needs to be struck between the commercial demand for visibility and the architectural character of the building involved.

The size of the sign will need to relate to the size and scale of the building façade and to the street as a whole. Generally, the area of the sign should be no more than 0.75m² and for safety and security purposes the bottom of the sign must have at least 2.6m clearance above the pavement and its outer edge at least 1.0m from the kerb.

Printed graphics

The widespread availability of printed vinyl decals and photographic images has led to a proliferation of ill-considered fascias and window displays which are garish and incongruous. The use of such products and techniques are generally incompatible with historic buildings or areas.

Window posters

There is often a temptation to use shop windows as additional display space for posters, decals and illuminated signs. This type of ephemeral advertising can detract from the overall appearance of the shop front and further contributes to visual clutter in the street. Businesses should keep this to a minimum and should not regard window displays as a supplement to permanent signage.

Lettering

The effective use of text and graphics can create

an attractive image which invites custom to the shop. However care must be taken to select an appropriate font, which not only complements the age and character of the building but is also of a proportionate size. In broad terms, lettering height should be around 3/8 the depth of the fascia, with a maximum height of 300mm, subject to the scale of the building.



Examples of good, traditionally presented shop fronts



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Corporate identities

National chains understandably wish to project an easily recognisable corporate identity but the blanket imposition of standardised colour schemes and signage can have an anonymising effect which erodes local distinctiveness. Multiples should be prepared to relax their design guidelines in the interests of conservation, but it should still be possible to use recognisable fonts, colours, logos etc if they are tailored to the characteristics of individual buildings.

External illumination

Modest and subtle lighting can add sparkle and vitality to the night-time scene. However over-illumination can be garish and intrusive and there are many businesses where illumination may not be applicable at all.

Fasia illumination

The illumination of fasia signage and hanging signs are not essential for all shops, especially for those that do not trade at night. Internally-illuminated fasias and signs are often too bright and are not generally acceptable on historic buildings. Subtle and concealed lighting may be acceptable however, depending upon location. The light source should be unobtrusive and carefully directed at the sign to avoid glare and light leakage; modern LED 'halo' lighting can be particularly controlled in this regard.

Blinds

Retractable blinds are a traditional device to protect display goods from sunlight and to provide shelter for shoppers. They can add

interest to the street scene but they should be appropriate to the character and period of the building. Blinds made of canvas or similar non-reflective materials are preferred. Fixed blinds and plastic canopies, such as Dutch blinds, detract from the appearance of historic streets and will not be permitted.

Burglar alarms and services

Burglar alarms, junction boxes and other service installations should not conflict with architectural features or be located in over-conspicuous positions. Wiring runs should be sited to be as discreet as possible.

Shutters, screens and grilles

Some types of shop may need special security measures. External window shutters require planning permission, but they tend to give streets a hostile, beleaguered atmosphere when closed so they will not generally be approved in historic areas. Solid roller shutters housed in boxes at fasia level are particularly unacceptable. There are several preferred alternative security measures.

Security glass is preferred, perhaps coupled with a security alarm. Reducing the size of window panes can provide less of a temptation to vandals and reduces the cost of replacing glass, but the suitability of this will depend on the design of the host building. Internally fitted see-through grilles are another option especially as there are a number of attractive designs available. Alternatively, demountable external security screens can be fixed to the window outside normal trading hours, but it is important that

these are designed so that they cannot be left in situ.

Residential Conversion

In cases where a change of use is granted from retail to residential use, the removal of historic shopfronts would generally be resisted due to their positive contribution to the street-scene.

Planning and other permissions

Planning permission is required for all new shop fronts, or alterations to existing shop fronts, that materially affect the external appearance of a building.

Conservation areas

Both the market towns and many of the villages in the borough are designated as conservation areas, and special attention should be paid to preserving and enhancing their character and appearance. The quality and detailing of development proposals must meet the preservation and enhancement objectives.

Listed buildings

Any alterations to a listed building will require Listed Building Consent if the works affect the character and significance of the building. This can include relatively small changes to features such as signage, as well as internal works. Owners are therefore strongly advised to consult planning services before embarking on any alterations to a listed building.

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Signs and Advertisements

Some signs need advertisement consent from the council so owners are strongly advised to check with planning services before erecting any. Shops are normally limited to one fascia sign, and if required, one hanging sign.

Consent is always required for:

- All posters.
- Any illuminated sign in a conservation area.
- All signs above a first floor window.
- All signs that have letters over 0.75m high.
- All signs that have the highest part more than 4.6m above ground level.
- All signs on listed buildings.
- Repainting a shop front may require listed building consent.
- Any signs, posters, banners on windows are likely to require listed building consent.

Design Guidance Appendix

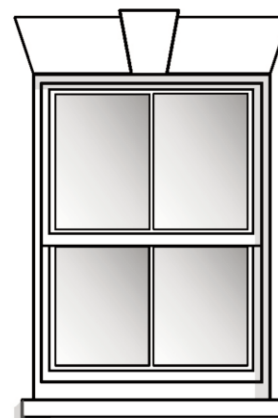
Examples of good and poor design

Annotated images of good design and poor design, for comparison, can be found in the appendix on pages 9 and 10.





Simple fascia signage incorporating painted or applied lettering or projected lettering.



Traditional hanging sign on an ornamental bracket. Hanging signs can be metal or timber. It may also be acceptable to hang a sign in the form of an object relating to the nature of the shop and the goods sold.

Internal window displays can provide distinctiveness to the shop and attract customers.



Subtle window decals may be appropriate.

Traditional well-proportioned timber shopfront sympathetic to the historic character of the town.

