

Shopfronts and Signs

Supplementary Planning Guidance

July 2003



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This guide was subjected to a six week consultation period as set out in Annex A, and was approved for adoption as Supplementary Planning Guidance on 3 July 2003.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This supplementary planning guidance has been prepared by the Council to provide clarification and advice on applications concerning shopfront design, including associated adverts and signs. It amplifies national policy guidance and policies included in the adopted West Berkshire District Local Plan.
- 1.2 It is intended that this guide should lead to a speedier processing of applications, a more consistent decision making process and, ultimately, good quality commercial environments. The aim is to assist the designer in making a positive contribution to the character of West Berkshire's towns and villages. The advice, however, is not a substitute for professional help, nor should it be interpreted as a set of inflexible rules where new and creative designs will not be considered.
- 1.3 For the purposes of this guide a 'shop' is defined as any street premises having a fascia, sign and/or display window and includes such non-retail premises as banks, betting offices, restaurants, estate agents etc.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The centre of every town has its own unique character. Interesting buildings, local styles and materials and the pattern of streets and spaces all contribute to the special qualities of each place. Shopfronts form a dominant visual element in the townscape. In recent years town centres have come under increasing pressure for extensions to and redevelopment of their shopping facilities. Not only is there strong pressure for new shops but also pressure for regular refurbishment of existing shopfronts to maintain a 'progressive' retailing image. Many shopfronts have a relatively short life span.
- 2.2 This guidance has been produced to show that good design and commercial interests need not be exclusive. An attractive shopfront with good proportions and well thought out signage should enhance the street scene, emphasise local distinctiveness and help make our towns a more attractive environment for all users. Conversely, unsympathetic design and badly positioned or intrusively illuminated signs can harm the appearance of a building or an area and may also be dangerously distracting to road users.
- 2.3 This guidance emphasises the traditional elements of shopfronts, which are of particular importance to historic areas. Though it is applicable throughout West Berkshire it is especially important in conservation areas and where listed buildings are affected. The commercial cores of West Berkshire's five town centres, Newbury, Hungerford, Thatcham, Pangbourne and Theale are all largely within designated conservation areas.

3. POLICY GUIDANCE

- 3.1 Relevant government guidance is included in Planning Policy Guidance Note 19: Outdoor Advertisement Control (PPG19) and in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment. (PPG15).
- 3.2 The following policies in the adopted West Berkshire District Plan are relevant to the design of shopfronts and the control of advertisements:

Policy OVS.2. *The Council will require, where appropriate, all development proposals which accord with other policies of this Plan to;*

- (a) Show a high standard of design including landscape treatment which respects the character and appearance of the area; and....*
- (d) Preserve or enhance the character and setting of listed buildings and conservation areas; and....*
- (f) Use materials of a quality appropriate to the nature of the development, the site and its surroundings*

Policy ENV.32 *The Council will only permit proposals affecting a listed building which preserve and enhance the character, historical or architectural integrity and setting of the building. Materials and design details should be used which complement the listed building and its setting. Proposals to extend a listed building will need to be of a scale and massing which do not harm, in particular by competing with or overpowering the character and setting of the listed building.*

Policy ENV.33 *The Council will not permit development which would harm or prejudice the special character or appearance of a Conservation Area.*

4. LOCAL AUTHORITY CONTROLS

4.1 Planning Permission

Planning permission is normally required to alter or extend a shopfront (except for repair or minor alterations, which do not materially affect the appearance of the building). Planning permission is not required to physically alter the inside of a building although permission may be needed to change the use. Within conservation areas the design of the shopfront will be closely examined to assess its contribution towards preserving or enhancing the character of the conservation area.

4.2 Listed Building Consent

Where a shop is a listed building, a separate Listed Building Consent may be required. Controls apply to all works, both external and internal, that would affect a building's special interest. This covers minor changes, including advertisements and signs. Consent is not normally required for repairs, unless they involve alterations which would affect the character of the listed building.

4.3 Advertisement Consent

Signs and advertising are controlled under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992 in order to protect both amenity and public safety. Some types of advertisement are exempted from detailed control, and other specified categories of advertisement qualify for what is termed "deemed consent". As these regulations are fairly complex it is always best to check the requirements with the Council.

In assessing impact on amenity, the Council will have regard to the effect of the advertisement on the appearance of the building or on the visual amenity in the immediate neighbourhood. Considerations such as the scenic, historic, architectural or cultural features in the area, including the presence of listed buildings or a designated conservation area, will be relevant. Criteria

which will be considered will include the position, size, colour, materials and detailing of the proposed advertisement and its cumulative effect with other advertisements.

In Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and conservation areas, stricter controls usually apply to the display of advertisements. For example, the "deemed consent" for certain internally illuminated advertisements does not apply.

When making an application for Advertisement Consent or Listed Building Consent the applicant should supply enough information, including fully detailed plans, so that the Council and consultees can easily assess the proposal. Plans should be drawn to a suitable scale (i.e. 1:50) and should include the elevation of the building concerned, together with materials and colours proposed.

5. HISTORIC SHOPFRONTS.

Wherever historic shopfronts of merit survive, they should be retained, renovated and restored

5.1 The towns of West Berkshire are fortunate in still possessing a wealth of interesting buildings, many of which are included on the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. Though few examples of shopfronts have survived from the earlier periods, groups of Victorian shops still survive with their decorative brackets, cornice, pilasters and fascias, which form the basic framework of nineteenth century shopfront design. Many of the unsympathetic alterations made to buildings of architectural interest were carried out before planning legislation was in place and before there was a public awareness of the issue. However, now that powers are available, proposals for alterations must be consistent with the conservation of these historic shopfronts, which are a vital part of the character of our towns and villages.

5.2 Great care should be taken to ensure the retention of traditional shopfronts. There should always be a presumption in favour of repair rather than replacement, especially on listed buildings and in conservation areas, except when the original features have already been replaced by inappropriate design. In such circumstances replacement with a sympathetic design will be encouraged rather than repair. There will be a presumption against unsympathetic replacement of shopfronts and encouragement towards sensitive replacements that respect the historic environment.

5.3 If a shopfront is to be fitted in a traditional style then it must be historically accurate and appropriate to the building and to the locality. Old records, local libraries and photo libraries can assist in establishing appropriate precedents.

6. SHOPFRONT DESIGN

- (a) New shopfronts and alterations to existing shopfronts should be appropriate and sympathetic in character, design, construction and materials to the buildings of which they form a part, and to the street scene.
- (b) When an existing shopfront is replaced, the Council will look for a reduction in the depth of the fascia where this is considered to be excessive and detrimental to the appearance of the building.
- (c) Applications for the enlargement of existing windows to ground floor level will be resisted.
- (d) Where a number of shops occupy a single large building, applications for new shop fronts will not be considered acceptable if they would create separate architectural identities within the building.
- (e) Applications for shopfronts will not be considered acceptable if they link two or more buildings that have separate architectural identities, unless the design respects these separate architectural identities.
- (f) West Berkshire Council will expect commercial interests who have adopted a 'corporate image' to use discretion with regard to the use of their standardised shopfront designs and corporate colours. Where considered necessary, one-off designs will be pursued.

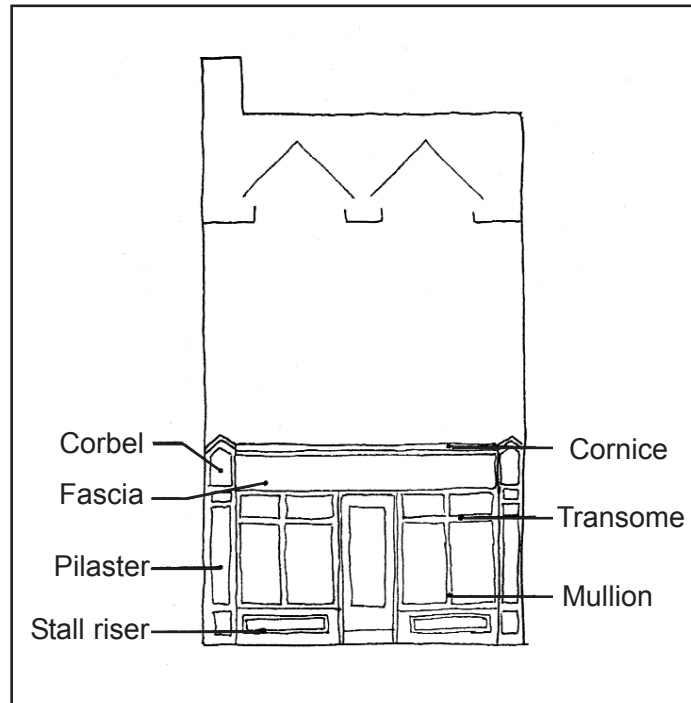
6.1 Where an existing shopfront is to be replaced should it be a traditional or a modern design? Although there are no hard and fast rules, an important principle is that the shopfront should not be designed in isolation. It should be considered as part of the architectural composition of the building, respecting the period and style of the whole building, as well as the area in which it is located, with the overall aim of enhancing the street scene. The application of this

principle is important in more recent shopping areas as well as in the more historic centres. Traditional design principles may be applied to modern shopfront design, whilst avoiding pastiche copies. Though modern interpretations of traditional features can be successful, good modern shopfront design is preferable to reproduction shopfronts applied to facades of modern buildings in new areas.



This Victorian shopfront is full of interest and includes details such as the original blind, glazed tiles and interesting corbel details

Elements of shopfront design



6.2 Fascia Design

Fascias must be correctly proportioned in relation to the building and the street scene. Since the eighteenth century, when the use of fascias became widespread, there has been a steady increase in their depth in relation to the rest of the shopfront. This has resulted in the mutilation of a number of buildings in West Berkshire. The depth of a fascia should be kept to a minimum and respect the overall height of the shopfront. Fascias should not occur above the level of the cills of first floor windows and architectural features, such as decorative brickwork or pilasters, should not be obscured by fascias or signs.

In a uniform terrace, or where a number of small shops occupy a single large building, fascia positions, projection and depth should generally line-up to maintain continuity.

The linking of two distinctly different buildings by a common fascia is however, inappropriate. In this instance, they should be read as two units with different architectural characteristics.

Where excessively deep fascias have been introduced in the past, the overall height should be reduced to expose the wall surface above. The existence of a former unsuitable fascia should not be allowed to influence the design of the replacement. Where a false ceiling is being inserted within the shop it will not be appropriate to increase the fascia depth in conjunction with it. Other methods should be considered to hide a false ceiling such as setting back and forming a splayed bulkhead, or in the detailing of the transom.

Fascia Design

Fascias are an important element in the design of shop fronts and require detailed consideration. The following examples illustrate some of the principles that should be reflected in the design of fascias. These cannot be seen in isolation but have to be considered in relation to the building as a whole

1



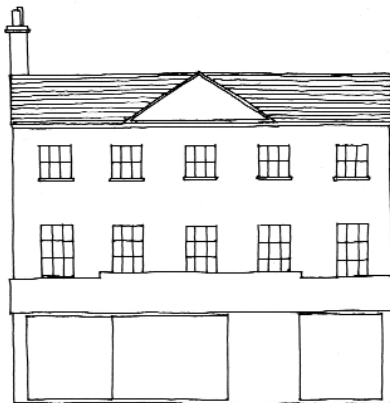
A typical example of a badly proportioned fascia. It detracts from the character and appearance of the building

2



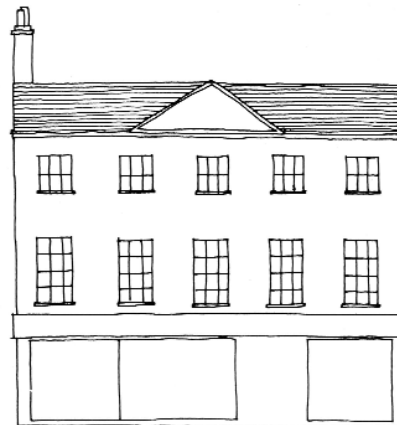
An alternative fascia of a suitable depth which does not intrude onto the first floor and allows the windows to be seen as separate elements

3



An existing shop front with an excessive fascia depth. It upsets the classical fenestration of the historic building by cutting across the first floor windows.

4



Where the height permits, a fascia should be reduced in depth to expose the wall surface between the top of the fascia and window cill above, thereby preventing the shop front from dominating the rest of the building.

5



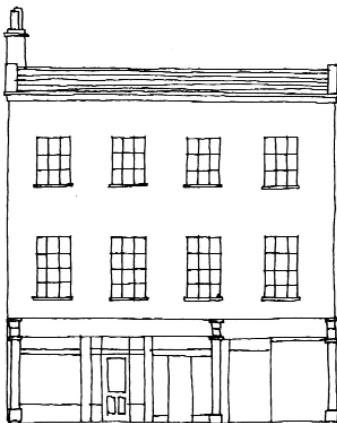
When the horizontal expansion of business premises is being considered, any attempt to link two buildings by a common fascia can be seriously detrimental to the appearance of the buildings concerned.

6



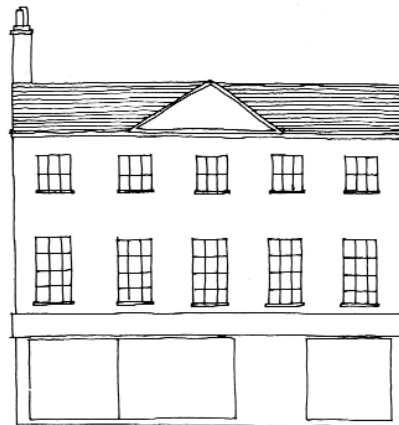
Here two adjacent buildings are seen as individual units with different architectural characteristics. It is important that this should be expressed by a vertical break at fascia level. Unity of commercial activity can be adequately expressed by the use of similar colours and materials at ground floor and fascia level.

7



The first and second floor elevation of this building was designed as an architectural entity.

8



The change in use from several small units to one large one can be satisfactorily expressed by a common fascia running the full width of the building.

6.3 Pilasters

Pilasters are primarily structural elements to the building. They frame the side of a shopfront and emphasise the sub-division of a street frontage into separate units. When a single shop unit covers the width of two or more separate buildings, the shopfront should respect the individual identity of each building. The shopfront should be framed with the use of pilasters which helps to emphasise the sub division of buildings.

6.4 Cornice

The cornice provides a full stop to the fascia and is one of the classical elements of a traditional shopfront. A cornice should be provided above the fascia to provide a visual break between the shopfront and the upper floors.

6.5 Windows

Windows need to be in proportion with the elevations. Large expanses of plate glass are generally unsuitable alongside traditional shopfronts or in a conservation area. Windows should be sub-divided by means of mullions or a centrally located door. Individual windows should not be so large as

to have a dominating and disruptive effect within the street scene. The scale and proportions characteristic of the street should be maintained.

6.6 Stall Riser

Stall-risers consist of solid panels below shop windows and provide a visual base for the shopfront. Traditionally stall-risers were often made of timber. Where the restoration of a period shop is being considered, traditional timber stall risers should be used. These should be at least 500mm deep.

6.7 Doors

Doorways are an important element of traditional shopfronts, and are often recessed. If the entrance door is brought flush with the shopfront it can reduce the visual interest of the frontage. Doors should be in a style and in materials which match the rest of the shopfront and the building as a whole. This means they are usually part glazed with a timber panel to reflect the height of the stall riser. If there is a separate door to upper floors it should be retained to allow independent and separate use of these floors.



This restaurant shopfront has taken a modern stance on the classical elements of shopfront design to good effect

6.8 Blinds

Blinds can add colour and interest to the street scene if they are appropriate to the period and character of the area. Existing traditional canvas blinds and blind boxes are valuable features which should be repaired and retained. Where new blinds are considered necessary, they should form an integral part of the shopfront design and be fully retractable. Traditional canvas roller blinds with a matt finish are usually better suited to older buildings. They should be constructed from traditional materials with wood frames and battens with a matt material for the blind itself. These have the advantage of being concealed from view when fully retracted within the blind box.

6.9 Corporate Image

The pervasive commercial practice of adopting a 'corporate retailing image' is one

of the most powerful and destructive influences on design. It has had a seriously detrimental affect on the appearance of many historic towns.

Whilst it is understandable that retailers should wish their branches to be clearly identifiable, there must be discretion in the use of 'corporate colours', standard designs, detailing and materials as well as illuminated signs, fascias and lettering. This discretion must be exercised especially in the conservation areas and on buildings of special historic or architectural interest. Each case will be unique and will need to consider features of interest which are worthy of retention and enhancement. These could include, for example, old pub names and pictorial signs. The Council expects multiple traders to use sensitivity and modify their standards where this would be desirable in the interests of conserving the character of the historic setting.



This modern shopfront follows the basic classical principles and respects the proportions of the overall building



This modern shopfront has created interest by introducing arched transomes

6.10 Shopfront Security

While respecting the need for security, the Council will not normally grant consent in conservation areas and on listed buildings for the introduction of security blinds in the form of heavy, boxed metal roller blinds, or other solid shutters in unsympathetic materials and colours. If increased security is necessary, shop owners are recommended to consider more acceptable alternatives. These include security glass and open mesh grilles, normally fitted

behind the glass of the shop window. Unwanted external cabling, alarm boxes, etc. should be removed to keep the street scene uncluttered.

The introduction of closed circuit television (CCTV) schemes has helped to reduce crime. Within conservation areas and on listed buildings the siting and appearance of CCTV cameras need special consideration in order not to detract from the character and amenity of the street scene.

6.11 Access Issues

Shops and commercial premises need to take into account the needs of disabled people and special user groups. Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, service providers will, from 2004, have to take reasonable steps to remove, alter or provide reasonable means of avoiding physical features that make it impossible, or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use their service.¹ Below are some basic principles that allow easier access for customers with varied access issues. The following should be provided wherever possible:

- Flush thresholds, dropped kerbs
- Ramped access where necessary or steps of appropriate dimensions
- Non-slip well lit surfaces
- Doors with easy operation, preferably wide enough for wheelchair access (900mm minimum)
- Grab handles and door pulls at suitable height
- Satisfactory space for manoeuvring in lobbied areas

- Space to place wheelchairs alongside circulation routes
- Easily identifiable entrances
- Clear unobstructed approach on pavements

The following should be avoided:

- Loosely gravelled surfaces
- Access via steps only
- Open drainage grilles that can catch walking sticks
- Heavy doors

6.12 The Use of Materials and Colour

Materials for shopfronts should be durable and of high quality with colours appropriate to the setting. Particular care should be exercised in the selection of materials and colour in conservation areas and where shopfronts form part of a historic building. Generally, subdued colours are more traditional and they help to emphasise lettering and window displays. Traditional materials are mostly matt and non-reflective, such as timber. Modern materials with shiny, glossy surfaces like aluminium, perspex or acrylic sheeting should be avoided as they are generally inappropriate on older buildings or in conservation areas. The Council will not approve schemes where the design employs a large number of different materials.

¹. The Disability Rights Commission have published a series of guides for small shops to help them comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, available free from DRC tel:08457 622633. For more information please contact the Council's Access Officer.



This modern shopfront is bold and attractive and uses a simple and effective colour scheme



This shopfront, probably re-modelled in the 1930's, follows a 'Regency' styling and adds interest to the streetscene

7. INFORMATION, SIGNS AND ADVERTISEMENTS

Signs should be in keeping with the character of the existing shop front or building on which they will be erected and the area as a whole.

- (a) Signs should usually be limited to a fascia sign with the name of the shop or business indicated not more than once on each elevation
- (b) The Council will seek the removal of lurid and oversized signage from buildings and shopfronts wherever the opportunity arises.
- (c) The Council will expect commercial interests who have adopted a 'corporate image' to use discretion with regard to the use of standardised shop signage and corporate colours.
- (d) Fascias and signs should normally consist of traditional materials, avoiding lurid colours and shiny or reflective surfaces.
- (e) All lettering should be of a good design, appropriate to the architectural character of the building involved.
- (f) Historic signs and lettering, which impart character to the local area should be retained even where there is a change of use

7.1 Fascia Signs

Fascia lettering should convey the essential message of the retailer. The design of a fascia sign should normally state only the name or trade of the premises and should not carry extraneous advertisements which can be confusing and detract from the shopfront. The letters should be correctly proportioned in relation to the fascia, and in general should not exceed 60% of the depth of the fascia. New fascias should not be added over the top of existing ones, and sign writing should always be applied directly to the fascia, as applied boards detract from the appearance of the shopfront.

7.2 Lettering

The character, location and extent of script on a building or a shopfront can play a

major part in the overall appearance of a scheme. Traditional painted or applied letters are encouraged, in various tones including silver or gold. Raised gilded and fine metal moulded letters can be appropriate on certain types of building. Wherever possible, script style and scale should complement the period of the building and the scale of space available. Individual letters can be useful particularly where there is no fascia and the lettering is attached to the natural materials of the building. Simple solid shapes will normally be appropriate and the traditional gilded lettering with a half round section is particularly appropriate for pubs and hotels. The council will expect multiple traders wishing to incorporate a corporate image to use sensitivity and modify their standards where this would be desirable.



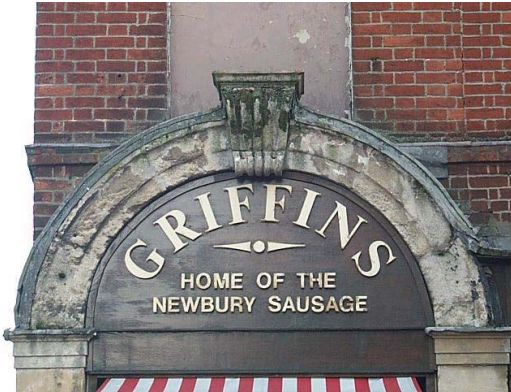
This sign in high relief adds interest to the pub's façade



An unusual 19th Century sign contributes significantly to the overall character of Newbury Market Place and conveys a sense of historic continuity with the commercial history of the town



This contemporary sign makes good use of the building's architectural form



This lettering makes good use of the surrounding architectural form



This lettering has replicated the shiny ceramic background of this interesting historic shopfront to good effect



A fascia sign on this building would be inappropriate. These applied letters convey the message whilst retaining the character of the building

7.3 Colours

Lurid colour schemes should be avoided. Gilding or strong tones on a dark background reflect light and are clearly visible at night. Rich effects can be achieved by shading and blocking of letters.

Many prime colours can look more elegant if given an element of black pigment in the content as this avoids a garish appearance. Painted timber is always preferred to stained or varnished hardwoods, although

'solid' colour stains are sometimes acceptable. Bright white and high gloss finishes will not look as effective as softer finishes on historic buildings - traditional oil based paints and pigments should be considered

Many high quality schemes revolve around minimalist and monotone paint combinations. Such simple decorations teamed with stylish script can provide a very successful result.

7.4 Projecting Signs

Projecting signs can add interest to the street scene and impart a historic atmosphere. The traditional projecting or hanging sign was often painted and hung from a decorative bracket. Wherever these brackets exist, they should be retained.

New brackets and signs should complement the scale of the building. The content of the sign should be kept simple and visible on both sides. Such signs should not come below 2.5m over pavement level, or project over the carriageway or conceal traffic signs. They should be no more than 1 square metre in size.



A contemporary hanging sign looks effective on Northbrook Street, Newbury



This sign in Bartholomew Street relieves a blank wall. The 'finger pointing' directional adds to the traditional character of the sign's shape and material

Projecting box signs will not normally be acceptable in historic areas especially if they are constructed from plastic or perspex and internally illuminated.

7.5 Upper Floor Signage

Where a business exists in upper floors, signage should take the form of lettering applied directly to window panes. Brass plaques at ground floor level can be acceptable, but should be in scale with the building and generally no bigger than 300mm x 225mm.



A good example of discreet upper floor advertising which is accompanied by a brass plaque at ground level

8. ILLUMINATION

Illumination should be used sparingly and only where it will not have an inappropriate effect on the appearance of an area or building. Internally illuminated box signs, fascias and individual signs, neon and florescent signs will not normally be appropriate in conservation areas or other areas of significant amenity value.

- 8.1 Proposals for lighting will only be considered where used sparingly and where the cumulative effect on the appearance of an area or building will not be inappropriate. Lighting can provide interest and life to town centres if sympathetically designed. Flood lighting should be very carefully considered. Although it can sometimes enhance the appearance of a building, it can also appear out of place and garish.
- 8.2 Internally illuminated box fascias and neon and fluorescent lighting will normally be out of place in conservation areas and other areas of significant amenity value. Shop signs should not need special illumination if
- the level of street lighting and the light from shop windows is adequate for trade. Where additional illumination is required, raised lettering with individual backlighting could be considered.
- 8.3 It will not generally be appropriate to illuminate projecting signs. Where this is desirable, this should take the form of spotlights. To ensure that illumination does not appear excessive, spotlights should focus light on the script only. Lighting brackets should either be of traditional or unobtrusive, simple modern design.

FOR FURTHER ADVICE

If you would like further advice, or application forms, please write or telephone the Planning Control Section of the Planning and Transport Strategy Service. Our address is:

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e-mail: planning@westberks.gov.uk

Annex A: Statement of Consultation

The draft Supplementary Planning Guidance was published for a six week consultation period from 3 March 2003 until 14 April 2003. All 62 Parish and Town Councils, neighbouring local authorities, 11 local organisations and the Government Office for the South East were informed of the consultation and invited to comment. The draft SPG was made available on the Council website.

Responses were received from:

- Newbury Town Council
- Lambourn Parish Council
- Pangbourne Parish Council
- Thatcham Town Council
- The Newbury Society
- Government Office for the South East
- Wokingham Unitary Authority

The responses indicated broad support for the guidance, but some issues were highlighted. The following section details these, and how they were addressed. Changes to the draft SPG were approved by the Council Executive on 3 July 2003.

Consultation Responses

Section on Illuminated Signs and Advertisements should be more specific and refer to conservation areas rather than "historic areas". Newbury Town Council suggested their policy on illumination as an addendum:

"Illuminated Fascia Signs are likely to have a harmful impact on visual amenity in the Conservation Area. Internally illuminated signs should therefore be limited to business hours only."

The reference to historic areas has been changed to conservation areas. The SPG guidelines state that internally illuminated signs will not normally be appropriate in conservation areas. Where illumination is appropriate the Council would not necessarily wish to restrict its use to certain times.

Security protection in the form of latticework grilles outside the glass should be acceptable in areas suffering from vandalism.

The reference to open mesh grilles has been amended to refer to them being normally fitted behind the glass of the shop window.

Would wish to encourage the display of street numbers, particularly at boundaries between street name changes, to assist in the location of residential properties.

Although this is not really a planning consideration, the Council could encourage well-designed numbers.

Support for the retention of old pub names and the use of pictorial pub signs rather than corporate logos, particularly important for older and more historic pubs. Reference to retention of old pub names and signs added to paragraph on corporate image.

Old and historic features eg three-dimensional signs and inscriptions should be retained even where there is a change of use.

Additional policy guideline to this effect has been added

Concern that guidance may be too detailed

It is considered that the level of detail is required in order to provide clarification, to aid decision-making and lead to better quality commercial environments. However, some editing has been undertaken to streamline the document.

Would like to see examples of shopfronts the Council doesn't like as well as those it does.

The diagrams include examples of inappropriate fascia design, which are based on examples in the district, without identifying individual establishments, which the Council is reluctant to do.

Would like to see guidance on need for upgrading of more recent shopping areas.

The guidance is intended to apply primarily to the older areas within the district, but many of the principles apply to newer shopping areas. Additional text has been added to the section on design guidelines, referring to design in more recent shopping areas. Most of West Berkshire's retail areas are, however, within conservation areas, which contain many listed buildings.

Some repetition in section on use of materials.

This has been rectified

The reference to “paint colours which should not jar with the character of the building” may be difficult to interpret

This phrase has been removed

Would like to see a limit on the size of projecting signs

A size limit of no more than 1 square metre is proposed.

Would like to see reference to removal of unwanted external cabling, alarm boxes etc.

This has been added to the section on shopfront security.

Section on Access Issues could include points to assist people with a visual impairment.

Easily identifiable entrances and clear unobstructed approach on pavements have been added to the list of recommended features to be provided. Reference has also been made to a guide published by the Disability Rights Commission.

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