

Rossendale Borough Council

Shopfront Design Guide

Draft Supplementary Planning Document

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Rossendale Borough Council

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ROSSENDALE SHOPFRONT DESIGN GUIDE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared by Rossendale Borough Council as a guide to assist owners and others with an interest in the design of commercial shopfronts. The guidance is applicable across the Borough and is relevant where premises have a frontage to the public realm - streets, squares, side roads, corners, in the town or country.

Shopfronts are a vital part of Rossendale's economic life. They are the window through which businesses are advertised and promoted, and are intended to be eye-catching and distinctive. They are also a highly visible part of the Borough's physical fabric, lending character to our towns and villages. Where the appearance of shopfronts has deteriorated, the environmental and commercial quality of an entire area can be undermined.

The guide encourages good practice in the design of new shopfronts and the improvement of existing frontages. It provides advice on the principles of good design and recommendations on issues such as the detailing of fascias, signage and security measures. Its objective is to encourage design practices which meet the commercial requirements of local businesses whilst also providing shopfronts that are in keeping with the character, scale and appearance of Rossendale's townscape.

2.0 SHOPFRONTS IN ROSSENDALE

Rossendale has many traditional shopping streets. Bank Street in Rawtenstall, Deardengate in Haslingden and St James Street, Bacup are examples where local businesses and historic building types combine to create an attractive market town setting.



Traditional
terrace

Two storey shopfronts
- adapted terrace and
purpose built

Three storey shopfronts -
adapted terrace and purpose
built

Three storey arcade - purpose
built

In general, 3 basic building types exist which contain shopfronts:

- The stone built two storey terrace. This is the most characteristic building type in Rossendale, readily adaptable to commercial uses and surviving in large numbers throughout the Borough. The two storey frontage may originally have been adapted from domestic premises, or purpose built with shopfronts inserted on the ground floor.
- The three storey terrace. The earliest examples date from the 18th century and have the simple detailing and proportions typical of the period. As with the 2 storey terrace, the character is more domestic than commercial and many may have started life as private residences, with shopfronts inserted later.
- The three storey shopping parade. Dating from the later 19th and early 20th centuries, these are purpose built to impress. The stonework is of a high quality and the shopfronts themselves finished with distinctive detailing such as ornamental tiling and woodwork. Examples include the Coronation Buildings in Stacksteads, the Pioneer Buildings in Bacup and Jubilee Buildings on Bank Street in Rawtenstall.

3.0 COMPONENTS OF A TRADITIONAL SHOPFRONT

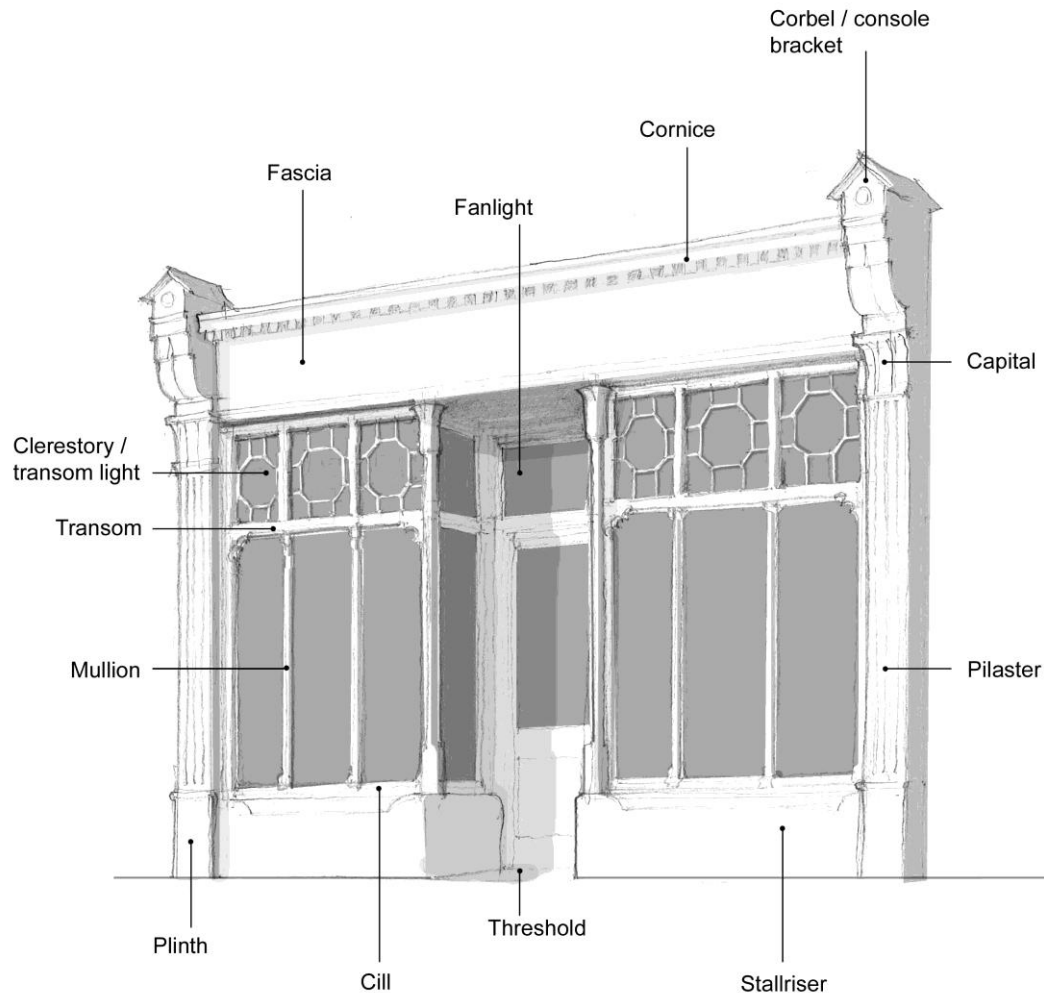
In Rossendale, where a large number of older town centre buildings have survived, the design elements of the traditional shop window remain appropriate to the scale and layout of the host buildings and the streetscape as a whole.

Although design details can vary, traditional shopfronts share a number of common features:

Stall Riser. This is the solid base to the shopfront, set at the back of the pavement and protecting the area below the display window from accidental damage. It raises the window display to a viewable level and provides a robust architectural platform for the shopfront as a whole.

Pilasters. These are the vertical elements at either side of the shopfront, providing a frame for the whole structure. They can be elaborate, supported by *plinths* at the level of the stallriser, and capped by projecting *capitals* and *consoles* at the level of the fascia. In purpose built parades, the pilaster is often an integral part of the overall building façade.

Fascia. This is the horizontal board fixed between the *capitals* and running the full width of the shopfront over the windows and doorway. It provides the main area for displaying the name and function of the shop. It can be elaborated with architectural mouldings, for instance a projecting *cornice* along its upper edge, and often incorporates a roller box either on its upper or lower edges, housing a retractable canvas awning.

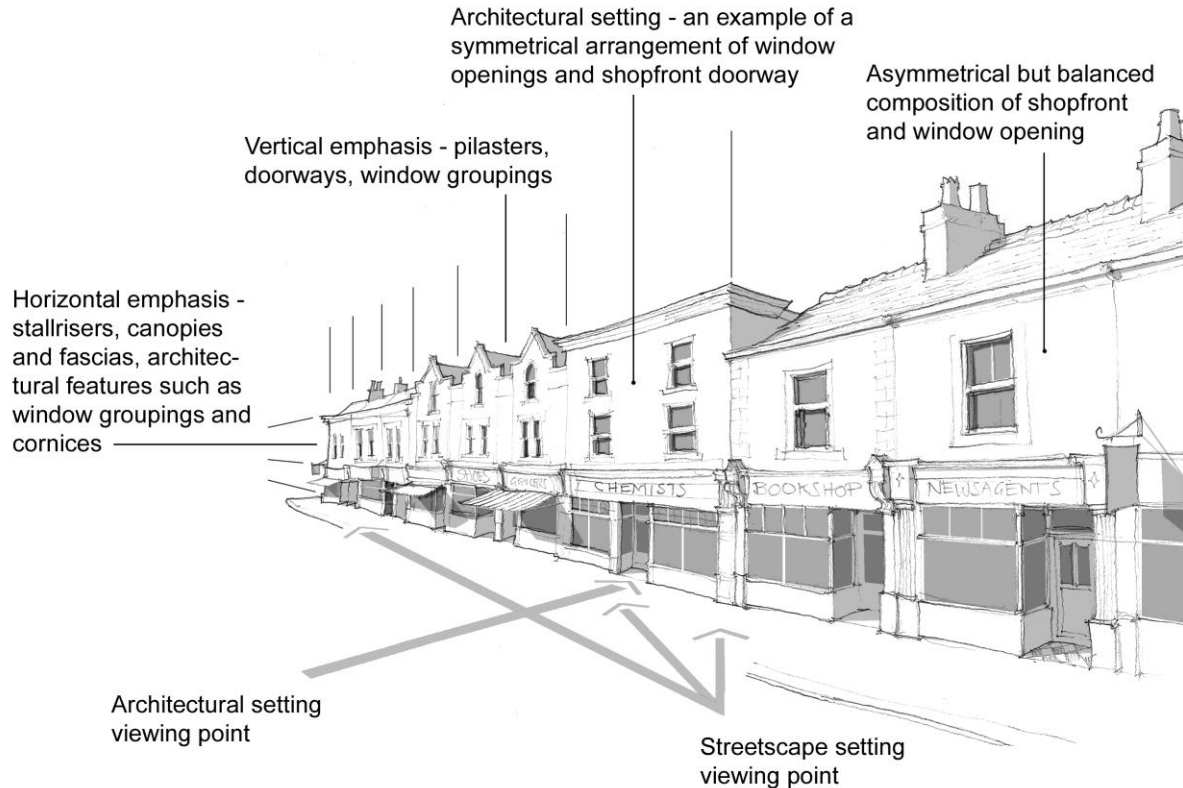


4.0 DESIGN PRINCIPLES

This section sets out some basic principles for shop front design throughout the district. The Council recommends that owners planning changes to their shopfronts should speak to officers in the planning department, who will be willing to provide more detailed advice.

4.1 Sensitivity to Context

The setting of the shopfront is the single most important factor governing scale, height and proportions as well as aspects of detailing. The Council will expect proposals to take into consideration both the streetscape setting of the shopfront, and the architectural setting provided by the host building.



4.1.1 Streetscape Setting Shopfronts are a conspicuous part of the streetscene, being at or just above eye level and designed to be eye catching. It is important, therefore, that the design of new shopfronts respects the established pattern of frontages in the vicinity.

When considering a site at the survey stage of the design process (see Section 5), the location should be considered from a number of viewing angles. From a viewpoint at the opposite side of the street the relationship with neighbouring properties will be important, drawing attention to the design of framing elements such as the fascia and stall risers. From further along the street, and at a more oblique viewing angle, projecting elements such as canopies, external shutter boxes and hanging signage will be noticeable in relation to a larger number of adjoining properties. To be acceptable, the design will have to complement its setting from all reasonable viewing angles.

Contextual design does not mean uniform design; proposals can reflect the variations in scale and materials visible in a typical Rossendale shopping street, as well as the character of the business itself. The traditional shopfront is capable of absorbing reasonable contrasts in scale, colour and detail, whilst maintaining an attractive consistency of overall streetscape.

4.1.2 Architectural Setting Shopfronts are usually the ground floor portion of a larger building frontage, which may have one or two floors above. The most typical types of commercial frontage found in Rossendale are described in Section 2.

The designer must take into account the character and layout of the 'host' building when considering the design of a shopfront. It provides an architectural frame that can help determine the position of key shopfront elements, for instance structural subdivisions such as window mullions or the framing and position of doorways. Even on the more modest frontages there is usually a visual relationship between the scale, materials and arrangement of the upper floors and the shopfront on the ground floor.

It is particularly important when planning shopfronts to ensure that vertical and horizontal subdivisions within the frontage and between adjoining properties are taken into account. Overly large signage, for instance, can mask details such as vertical bay rhythms and proportions. Proposals which fail to take the layout of the host and adjoining buildings into account will not be accepted.

4.2 Restore or Renew?

Council policy is to '*seek the retention of shop fronts of architectural or historic interest*'. Normally, this will include Victorian or Edwardian shopfronts as well as examples from other periods, if of sufficient quality and historic value. It is important that the significance of the existing shopfront is assessed at the survey and analysis stage (see Section 5), and the Council's conservation staff are available to assist with this. Owners should note that historic features are sometimes concealed under more recent additions, for instance original fascias hidden by modern signage, or pilasters contained within later box sections.

Original features should not be removed, damaged or concealed by new construction. Partial retention of period features may be more appropriate than the conservation of a whole shopfront, for example a doorway, entrance tiling, console brackets or a cornice. Where possible, the design of the replacement shopfront should incorporate these retained features using new materials and forms sympathetic to the historic features.

Where a shopfront is to be restored or repaired, advice should be sought from the Council's Conservation Team on techniques, design, choice of materials and finishes. Modern materials are often unsuitable from an aesthetic and practical point of view and many manufacturers supply heritage ranges of building materials, for instance paints, which can provide a more satisfactory and longer lasting finish.

4.3 Traditional or Modern?

Where new shopfronts or complete replacements are being planned, the Council will encourage designs which are *compatible with the style, character and form of the building ... and the character of the street scene..'*

The traditional shopfront, for reasons noted in Section 2, provides a ready solution to most street frontage sites in Rossendale. However, where the owner requires a more modern approach the Council will consider designs which include but simplify the following key components of the traditional shopfront: stall risers, pilasters and fascias (see Section 3). It is necessary to differentiate between these separate elements, so a simplified interpretation of plinths and capitals is also usually required. High quality modern designs which omit some of these elements may be acceptable provided they can be justified in terms of their contribution to the streetscene.

Where shopfronts are being provided in a completely new development, it may be possible to adopt a more modern approach to design. However, if the development affects the setting of existing traditional shopping street frontages, the same contextual rules governing scale, design, materials and detailing will apply.

4.4 Materials

Timber (hardwood or softwood) offers the best combination of strength, durability and flexibility required by the various components of the traditional shopfront such as the fascia, pilasters, window and door frames, mullions and transoms (the stall riser can also be timber – see 4.5.3). It is a visual complement to Rossendale's characteristic building material (locally quarried sandstone), and when maintained with regular coats of paint it can last indefinitely.

The paint colour and finish should be chosen with the appearance of the building and its setting in mind; avoid strong colour contrasts or use of large areas of white paint or primary colours. A matt finish is often more suitable than gloss. In some circumstances a clear or stained timber finish may be acceptable.

Synthetic materials such as plastic or acrylic will not be accepted in Conservation Areas or on Listed Buildings, and will be resisted elsewhere. Additional materials that may be considered for limited decorative applications include wrought iron, mild steel and (if painted) aluminium.

4.5 Doors, Windows and Stall Risers

The door, display window and stall riser are the parts of the shopfront most likely to be noticed by the customer as they look at the goods and enter the shop. In traditional shopfronts some of the most ornate detailing is found in this area; tiling in recessed

doorways for instance, curved glass panels and ornately carved door panels. The Council will expect these details to be retained when renewal works are proposed.

More generally, and for new shopfronts, the general arrangement of doors and windows is an important part of the overall shopfront composition, and should always be considered in relation to the overall building frontage. Doors, for instance, should be positioned in relation to windows on upper floors in a way that maintains the vertical rhythm of opening and structural elements. Offsetting a doorway can undermine the visual integrity of the frontage. Stall risers underpin the shopfront composition; the Council will expect them to be retained in existing layouts and included in new shopfront proposals.

4.5.1 Doors The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires the provision of access to shops for all members of the public. All designs should conform to current standards of the Building Regulations where applicable. Further details are available from our Building Control Section. Where it is necessary to adapt listed properties or shopfronts in Conservation Areas, it is strongly suggested that applicants contact the Conservation Team for advice.

Recessed doorways, either central or offset, are a feature of traditional shopfronts and should be retained. The type should also be considered for new shopfront design; advantages include an increased window area, for instance, and a larger display. They can also be used to provide a shallow ramped access by bridging any change of level between the shop floor and the street level. The clearly defined entrance and threshold provided by recessed doorways helps to reinforce the separation between the shop interior and the street.

4.5.2 Windows Original windows in shopfronts are valuable survivals and the Council will expect them to be retained. In Rossendale, these include features such as coloured glass and curved panels, as well as decorative window framing elements.

Where modern glazing is being considered, it should be borne in mind that large window panels are often out of scale with traditional shopfronts, and are expensive to replace. The use of mullions and transoms to subdivide the window area into smaller units will be encouraged where appropriate, provided care is taken to specify a frame design that is appropriate to the scale and setting of the shop unit. Successful designs usually involve regular vertical subdivisions (mullions), corresponding to the architectural bays of the building frontage, with horizontal transoms often dividing off smaller panes along the upper edge of the window.

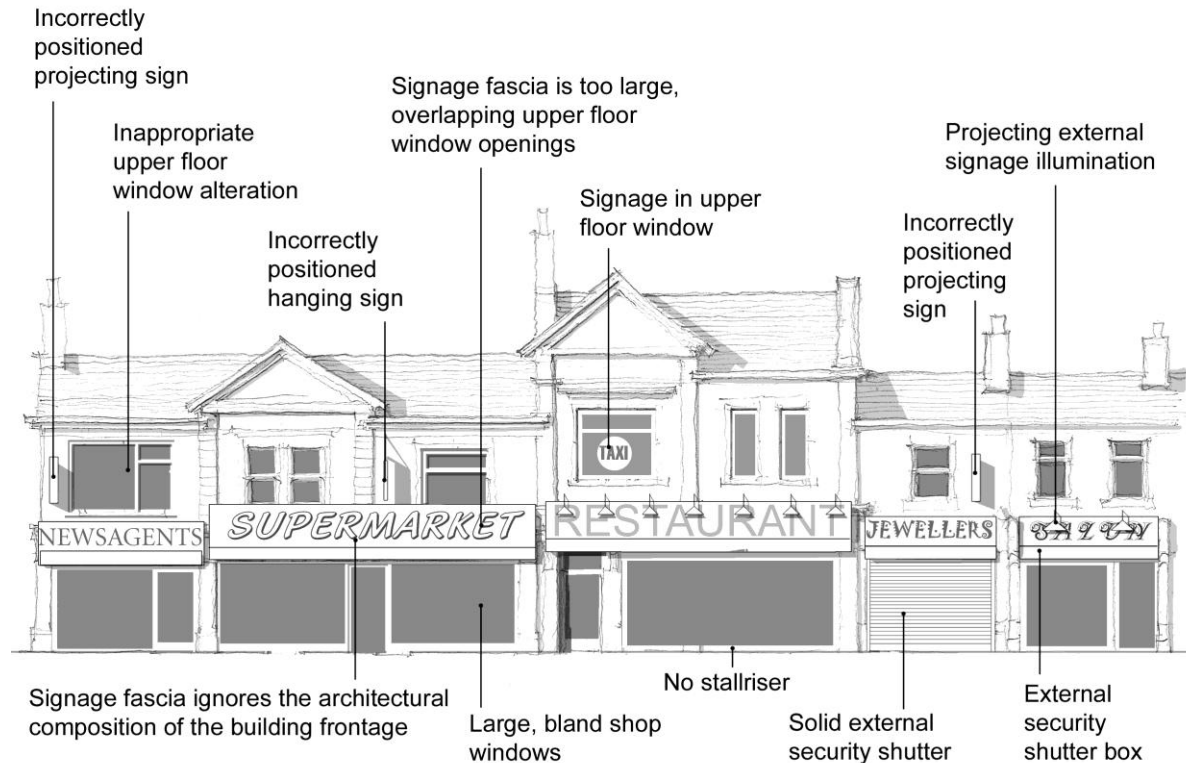
Proposals for the excessive subdivision of windows into small square panes with 'bullseye' glass inserts – a kitsch effect at odds with the character of Rossendale's shopping streets - will be resisted.

4.5.3 Stall Riser The gap between the bottom of the window and the pavement is a functional part of the shopfront that plays an important role in the aesthetics of the overall design. It supports and balances the other elements, as well as providing a raised platform for the window display, and protection against accidental damage. The Council will expect existing stall risers to be retained, and modern shopfront proposals to include them.

Stall risers are often timber constructed or clad, though in Rossendale they are equally likely to be sandstone walling; either material would be suitable. For timber finishes, panel mouldings can add to the character of the shopfront. Excessive ornamentation should be avoided, and the use of cladding materials such as laminates and mosaic tiles.



A well designed group of shopfronts with traditional features such as fascias, pilasters and stallrisers integrated into an overall architectural composition.



The same shopfronts but poorly designed; individual signs are too large and badly detailed and there is no coordination of design within individual building elevations or between adjacent elements of the street frontage.

4.6 Fascias

The primary function of the fascia is to bear the name and type of business as well as offering some weather protection to the frontage and in some cases providing storage for fabric roller blinds. Although a prominent part of the shopfront design, the fascia must be designed as an integral part of the overall layout, in proportion with other shopfront elements and the overall composition of the building frontage.

A fascia should preferably be contained within the horizontal frame provided by the pilasters and capitals / consoles (see Section 3). In addition, a cornice provides additional visual definition, some weather protection and separates the shopfront from the upper part of the building elevation. The council will welcome designs which make use of these architectural cues, or a simplified modern version of them.

The Council will not accept designs which do not respect the scale, materials and detailing of the shopfront and building frontage. In particular, fascia designs will be resisted which:

- Extend over adjoining property boundaries.
- Conceal architectural features, for instance the cills of upper floor windows (a gap normally exists between the top of the fascia and the lower edge of the cill).
- Are enlarged to conceal suspended ceilings, light fittings, shutter / blind fixtures.
- Are out of proportion with the established fascia height, depth and width of neighbouring properties, or the scale and elevational layout of the host building (traditionally, fascias and their mouldings rarely exceed one fifth of the total height of the shopfront, and are shallower in many cases).

4.7 Signage

Signage proposals are covered by Advertisement Consent Regulations. Applicants are advised to contact the Council's Planning Department to check if specific consents will be necessary (see Section 6). The Council takes breaches of advertising consent seriously, and will be active in pursuing enforcement action where unauthorised works have been carried out.

4.7.1 Design Principles The shop name on the fascia is the distinctive feature that makes the shopfront stand out from its neighbours, provides a brand for the business, and attracts customers. This involves creative design, and the use of a variety of lettering types, graphic symbols and colours.

The preferred approach is for signage that conveys essential information simply and clearly, and is scaled and detailed to complement the overall shopfront design and streetscape. Complex, fussy and poorly detailed graphics add to visual clutter and should be avoided.

Corporate design approaches will be resisted where they are likely to have an inappropriate impact. The Council will work with applicants to adapt corporate styles in order to protect the site and its setting as well as brand image.

The use of traditional materials will be encouraged, and will be required for Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings. Wood should normally be used for signage, painted in a colour to match the rest of the shopfront and the setting, with handpainted lettering.

4.7.2 Position of Signage The main location for signage lettering and associated graphics is the fascia; as a general rule, signs will not be permitted above this level. Businesses located on upper floors (involved in commercial activity unconnected with the occupier of the ground floor) can apply for discrete lettering fixed to the windows. Hanging signs can be hung at either first floor level or at the level of the fascia (see 4.7.5).

It may also be possible to incorporate lettering and graphics into the main window display; these will be assessed on a case by case basis, and it is expected that the design will be subservient to the fascia and carefully scaled and detailed to minimise the impact on the character of the building and shop front.

4.7.3 Lettering Design The nature of the business will dictate the type of lettering used, but the setting should also be taken into account. Avoid graphics and typeface designs which are too large within the frame of the fascia, or make use of excessive colour and texture contrasts. For traditional shopfronts, lettering should normally be hand painted by a sign writer, or formed from separate letters of wood, bronze or brass. Plastic lettering will be considered, although it is less likely to be acceptable in Conservation Areas or on Listed Buildings.

4.7.4 Illuminated Signs Internally illuminated box signs and projecting box signs will not be permitted in Conservation Areas and on Listed Buildings, and their use will be discouraged elsewhere. The Council prefers design solutions which make use of indirect illumination, either from existing street lighting, or security lighting left on within the shop.

Where direct illumination can be justified by the applicant, it should be provided as down lighting, either by spotlamps of appropriate design or by trough lighting concealed within the profiles of the fascia's cornice. In exceptional cases illuminated signs using halo lighting or internally lit individual letters may be acceptable subject to an appropriately designed overall layout.

4.7.5 Hanging and Projecting Signs Signs can be hung at either fascia level or at first floor level and the units should be in scale with the buildings to which they are attached. They should not project (from the face of the building to the outer edge of the sign) more than 900mm. The lowest edge of the sign should be a minimum of 2.3 metres above the pavement surface, and the outer edge of the sign a minimum of 450mm from the edge of the kerb.

The type of materials, lettering and graphics likely to be approved for a hanging sign is more restricted than for a fascia sign; it is a traditional type, and a simple wooden construction (with or without a frame moulding) will be preferred to plastic, metal or other materials. Lettering should be handpainted.

Where brackets already exist for hanging signs, they should be reused if they are of an appropriate design and in a suitable position. If not, old brackets should be removed and the fixing points made good. New brackets should be carefully designed to match the character of the property and the locality. Simple designs work best, using traditional materials such as painted wrought iron.

Projecting signs are generally less acceptable, and proposals for illuminated projecting signs will be resisted unless a case can be made for their suitability in their street setting.

4.8 Canopies

Traditional straight fabric awnings are an attractive feature of Rossendale's shopping streets, providing colourful shelter for shoppers and designed to retract into recesses in the shopfront fascia.



Fabric roller blinds are a traditional feature of the high street. Blind boxes should be located within recessed boxes below the fascia



Dutch style canopy blinds are too intrusive and will not normally be acceptable

The Council will encourage the restoration of historic examples where they exist, and the installation of new units provided they can be installed without concealing or damaging historic shopfront features. Canvas canopies will be preferred over other materials, and associated fittings and fixtures should be carefully designed to match the proportions and character of the shopfront. A minimum of 2.3m clearance must be provided beneath the awning, and its outer edge must be set 450mm back from the edge of the kerb. Bulky and visually intrusive roller boxes will be rejected.

'Dutch' style canopies are visually intrusive, manufactured in some cases from synthetic materials such as plastic and are typically left permanently open so that they function as a prominent fascia. The type is not suited to Rossendale's shopping streets and will not be allowed within Conservation Areas and on Listed Buildings. Elsewhere, their use will be resisted unless the applicant can demonstrate they will not have a negative visual impact on the shopfront or streetscene.

Applicants should note that awnings and canopies bearing logos and/or advertising may need Advertising Regulations consent (see Section 6).

4.9 Security

Shop owners are entitled to take measures to protect their premises against vandalism or theft. However, certain types of security fitting can have a detrimental effect on the appearance of individual businesses and can convey the impression that an area is susceptible to crime. Of particular concern to the Council is the visual impact of solid metal shuttering which (when closed) has a 'deadening' effect on the appearance of the street and can lead to antisocial consequences such as fly posting. External roller-type shutters also have bulky shutter boxes which cannot be easily incorporated, visually, into traditional shopfronts.

Where no external alterations are proposed to the shop front or change of use so planning permission is not required, the Council wishes to still encourage owners to open their shutters as a minimum between the hours of 9am to 5pm. Owners could consider the fitting of timers in order to do this. It is considered that any measures that lessen the impact of dead frontages in town centres and parades improve the amenity of the local environment and that this in itself can lesson occurrences of anti social behaviour.

Any security designs should be considered as part of the overall design of the shopfront, rather than as 'add-ons', maintaining the visibility of the window display and protecting the character of the premises and the streetscape. In particular the following will be supported:

- Internal security screens that can be fitted behind the shop window. Vertically opening lattice or horizontally opening scissor types are acceptable. Solid or pinhole perforated shutter types will be rejected.
- Security (laminated) glass or similarly toughened glass products. Subdividing display windows into smaller panes can reduce breakage costs, and the use of mullions and transoms can complement traditional shopfront layouts.

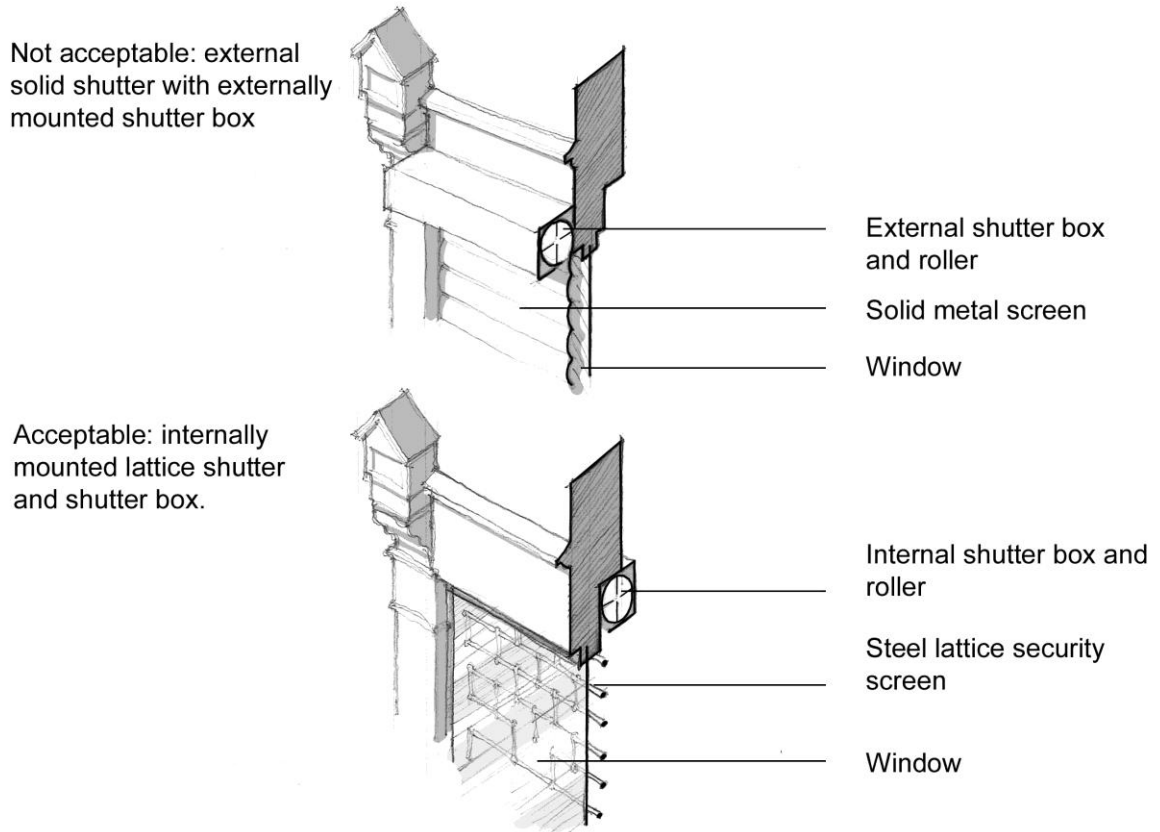
The Council is willing to discuss individual cases with applicants, and accepts that in a limited number of cases compromise on the design solution may be necessary. However, in general terms the following security measures should be avoided:

- External solid metal shuttering, fixed or retractable.
- External metal shuttering of the pinhole / perforated or punched-hole slat type.
- External metal shuttering with an external roller box or other bulky attachment which cannot be reasonably incorporated into the shopfront / fascia design without spoiling the appearance of the shopfront or building frontage.

The following will be accepted where a case can be made for their use (for instance space limitations that make any other kind of fixture impractical) and where associated fixtures such as roller boxes can be incorporated into the shopfront / fascia design without spoiling the appearance of the shopfront :

- External metal shuttering of the 'chain link' or 'lattice' grille type.
- External collapsible gates or wrought ironwork.
- External demountable mesh grilles
- External fixed or demountable vertical bar grilles, using narrow section bars set at a minimum 100mm spacing
- Solid wooden shuttering of a hinged opening or demountable single panel type may be considered provided the design complements the shopfront and streetscape setting, and (particularly in the case of listed buildings) can be installed without causing damaging alterations to the existing window frame / architectural frame.

Note that external fittings should not cover the stallriser or the pilasters, and associated fittings and fixtures should be designed to integrate with the shopfront frame. The paint colour and finish should complement the shopfront setting.



5.0 PROJECT PLANNING

When considering works to a shopfront, the design process should be approached in a systematic way. Project planning ensures all relevant issues are taken into account and can avoid delays and expense once an application (if needed) is submitted. The Council encourages property owners to contact the Planning section to discuss their project prior to submitting an application; officers can provide advice on the design and planning process.

There are three stages to the design process; Survey, Analysis and Design.

5.1 Survey

- This could include photographs and notes of the street setting and the elevation of the building into which the shopfront is to be set.

- The planning policy background should be checked by contacting the local authority (see section 6). Advice can be provided on the need for planning permission, and any additional restrictions that might apply (for instance if the building is listed, or in a Conservation Area).
- The owners requirements should be listed, for instance the need for visibility, disabled access, security and other practical issues.

5.2 Analysis

- The issues identified at the survey stage should be assessed before any design work is carried out.
- As a result of the appraisal, preferred design approaches should be identified. In a Conservation Area, for instance, restoration of an existing shopfront may be more appropriate than replacement. In a row of traditional wooden shopfronts, it may not be acceptable to apply for a modern aluminium frontage.
- The owner's requirements should be reassessed in the light of identified issues, for instance alternative security arrangements or locations for signage in order to create a more appropriate design.

5.3 Design

- Once a design approach has been agreed, detailed design work can begin. By this stage the general arrangement of the proposals should be clear, for instance the appropriate style, materials and scale. As the detailed design of the shopfront is developed, it should continue to reflect the basic design approach.
- Material from each of these stages should be used to support a planning application: survey and analysis notes for the Design and Access Statement, and detailed design drawings for the application itself.
- The Council recommends that prospective applicants appoint competent architects or designers familiar with the requirements of good shopfront design, and with the process set out above.

6.0 PLANNING PERMISSION FOR SHOPFRONTS

6.1 Planning Permission Planning consent is required for any alteration or change which materially affects the appearance of a shopfront. This might include the replacement of an entire shopfront, removal of a stallriser or the installation of a security shutter. 'Like for like' replacements do not normally require permission provided the new construction is an accurate match with the original in terms of materials, scale, detail and appearance.

You may need a 'change of use' permission to change the type of business carried out in the premises. This might apply, for instance, if you wished to change a retail use into a restaurant or residence.

6.2 Advertisement Consent This may be needed depending upon the type of signage being proposed. Applicants should contact the planning office for advice on specific issues.

6.3 Listed Building Consent Required for any changes which affect the character or appearance of a listed building.

6.4 Conservation Area Consent Higher standards of design are normally required in Conservation Areas.

6.5 Building Regulations Construction works may also require the council's approval under the Building Regulations.

If you have any doubts about the permissions and consents required, you should contact the Development Control and Conservation Teams:

One Stop Shop
Town Centre Offices
Lord Street,
Rawtenstall
BB4 7LZ
Tel: 01706 252580

7.0 POLICY CONTEXT

Below are some of the Council's policies on shopfront design and advertisements, set out in Rossendale's Adopted Local Plan (1995) and included in the Saved Policies document. Note that these policies are subject to review, and will ultimately be replaced by policies in Rossendale's Local Development Framework, currently being produced.

HP.5 Shop Fronts

The Council will seek to retain shop fronts of architectural or historic interest and ensure that new shop fronts respect the character of the building to which they are attached and the townscape in general.

Normally, therefore:-

- a) Existing Victorian and Edwardian shop fronts and other shop fronts of quality and historic value should be retained and restored.
- b) The style and design of new and replacement shop fronts should be compatible with the style, character and form of the building into which it is being inserted and the character of the street scene in which it is situated.
- c) Modern shop fronts will generally be acceptable on new development on post-war buildings provided the materials, colour and design relates satisfactorily to the buildings and its surroundings.
- d) Shop fronts should not obscure or detract from important features on buildings.

DC.5 Advertisements

Applications for advertisement consent will be determined having regard to the issues of amenity and public safety as required by the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992, and generally in the interests of maintaining attractive urban townscape and rural landscape, devoid of unnecessary clutter.

In the case of ground floor shop, office or other commercial premises in buildings comprising more than 1 storey, consent for the display of advertisements will not normally be granted where:-

- a) The proposed advertisement would at any point be above the height of the existing fascia (or, where no fascia exists as such, above the lowest part of any window in the wall of the building at first floor level).
- b) There is no window in the wall upon which the advertisement is proposed to be displayed.