

North Kesteven District Council Shopfront Design Guide



Consultation draft 2016

Introduction

The main objective of this guide is to improve the quality and design of shopfronts within North Kesteven. It supplements and supports policies HE6, HE7, HE10, HE11, C1, C18, R4, and R5 of the saved North Kesteven Local Plan and relevant policies within the emerging Central Lincolnshire Local Plan.

It is intended to provide guidance on shopfront and advertisement design to owners, developers, retailers and all those involved in the planning process. The advice given applies to all settlements within North Kesteven although it relates primarily to Sleaford town centre.

The majority of Sleaford's retail units are located within the town centre conservation area. This area forms the historic core of Sleaford with origins dating back to the medieval period. Its historic streets and buildings give the centre of Sleaford its distinctive character and unique identity. However the quality of shopfronts has declined over the past thirty years which has had a negative impact on the overall character and appearance of the town centre. This guide forms part of a range of initiatives to reverse that decline and restore the historic environment of the town centre.

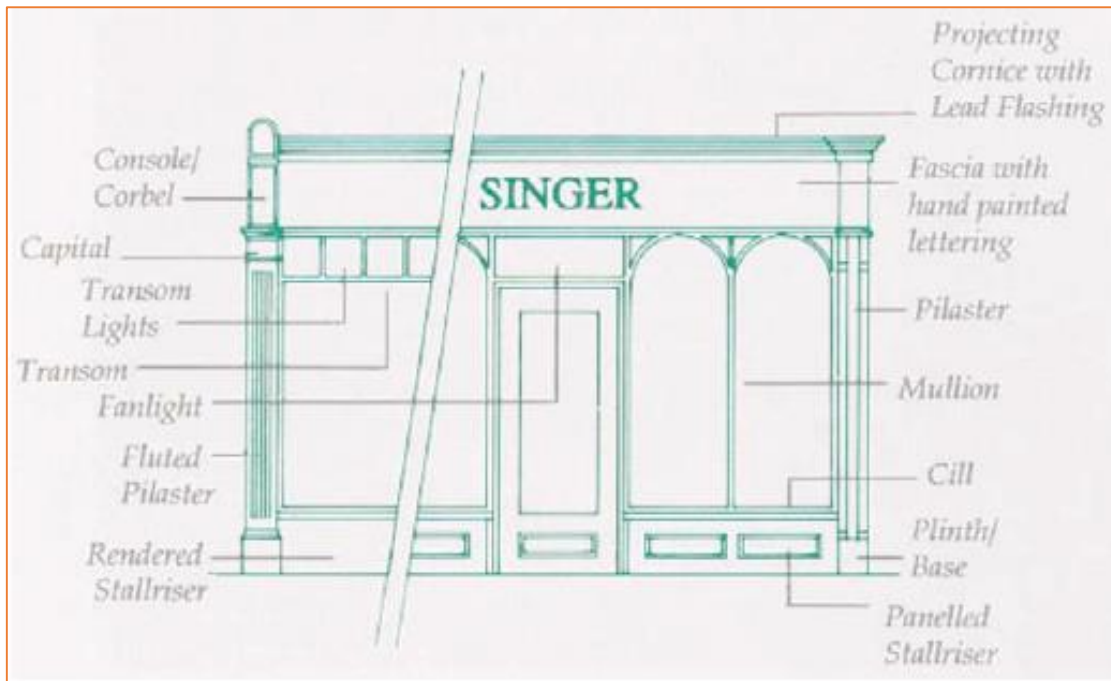
The Council may be able to offer financial assistance to encourage the replacement of inappropriate shopfronts in Sleaford town centre through a discretionary grant scheme. Please contact the conservation department on 01529 414155 or at Planning@n-kesteven.gov.uk for further information.



Traditional Shopfronts

Traditional shopfronts generally conform to a basic pattern which has evolved over time to allow effective display of goods and an attractive appearance. The component parts can vary in size, proportion and detailing from building to building but the basic elements remain the same.

The cornice and fascia mark the point at which the scale and design of the building changes from domestic to display. The cornice projects from the face of the building and provides weather protection while the fascia allows space for advertising.



Above: Shop front terminology. Image from Herefordshire Shopfront Design Guide

Pilasters provide visual support for the cornice, fascia and the rest of the building and frame the shopfront.

Stallrisers provide a solid base for the display of goods at a suitable level and inform the vertical proportion of the windows above.

Mullions and glazing bars reduce the scale of the display windows, relating them to the smaller windows usually present on the upper floors of the building.

However the inclusion of these features will not automatically make for a successful design. Each shopfront will require a bespoke design to take into account the individual characteristics of the building involved.

Existing Shopfronts

Original features often survive underneath later shopfronts and their retention is usually the best way of preserving the positive contribution they make to the building and the streetscape. Special care needs to be taken to ensure such features are identified, protected and restored. The Council will encourage the retention, restoration and reinstatement of historic features where they contribute positively to the character and appearance of the building. The removal or concealment of such features will be resisted.



Design Principles

Many of the older buildings in the town centre are domestic in scale with small windows on the upper floors which reflect their original residential use. As a general rule a traditional shopfront will be the appropriate choice for these buildings.

Where new shopfronts are required on 20th/21st Century buildings appropriate designs which follow the principles set out in this guide will be encouraged. The incorporation of traditional elements such as pilasters, fascia, cornice etc can help new shopfronts to sit harmoniously in the streetscene without resorting to poor quality pastiche of earlier shopfronts.

Shopfronts should relate to the rest of the building rather than being seen as an isolated element. The scale, materials and architecture of the elevation should be taken into consideration when designing a shopfront. Each of the elements of a shopfront should be in keeping with the scale of the rest of both the building and the shopfront. It is important that the rest of the building does not appear to 'float' unsupported on a large expanse of glass but is instead supported by columns, walls or pilasters as appropriate.

The variety of building height, width and architectural style within the conservation area contributes greatly to its character and appearance. It is important that this variety is reflected in the design of shopfronts and that the individual character of a building is respected. Where shopfronts extend across more than one building the impact of each individual building can be lost. In these cases a variety of shopfront designs would be expected.

A shopfront should normally be flush with the rest of the building façade. Recessed shopfronts and splayed back windows can leave a building looking incomplete and exaggerate the contrast in appearance between the ground and upper floors. Well-proportioned recessed doorways can, in contrast, add interest and visual balance in addition to increasing display space and providing shelter.

Individual display windows with a horizontal emphasis should be avoided as a rule. The use of carefully designed mullions will allow a more vertical emphasis relating to the rest of the building as well as adding visual interest.

The abandonment and neglect of the upper floors of a building can have a significant impact on its external appearance and internal condition. The alteration or replacement of a shopfront can offer an opportunity to consider the future of the whole building. The provision of separate access can open the possibility of a range of viable uses for the upper floors of a building.

Materials and finishes

Sleaford's shopfronts have traditionally been of timber construction and this will continue to be the most appropriate material when a new shopfront following traditional design principles is proposed. Timber is versatile, can be finely detailed and moulded to many different profiles and therefore easily adapted to suit the needs of the majority of buildings in the town. It is also durable and can be freshened up or changed by repainting without detrimental effect on the overall character of the building.

Alternative materials may be acceptable for shopfronts on non-traditional buildings provided they are used sensitively to produce a well-designed shopfront appropriate to both the building and locality. High quality design and attention to detail will still be expected where non-traditional materials are used.

The colour of a new shopfront has an important bearing on the appearance of a building and must be carefully considered as part of the design process. This consideration must also be given to a change in the colour of an existing frontage. If the property is listed any change in colour will require listed building consent.

Rich dark colours are preferred for traditional shopfronts and are particularly important where the shopfront extends across all or most of the building or has wide pilasters. As well as being historically appropriate these colours help emphasise the effect of the shopfront supporting the rest of the building.

A single colour should be used for all of the major elements of the shopfront. The use of alternative colours on major features such as pilasters, stallrisers, fascias or cornices should be avoided as this weakens the overall appearance of the shopfront. However a secondary colour can be used to good effect to highlight decorative or architectural features provided it is carefully chosen to complement the main colour and used selectively.

Glazed fanlights and pelmets are often important elements in the design of a shopfront which should not and should not be obliterated by painting over the glass panels. Where a false ceiling finishes lower than a fanlight or pelmet the front section should be raised or angled upwards to take account of these features. If this is not possible dark screening set behind the glass is a possible alternative.



Corporate Identities

In sensitive locations such as the town centre the use of standard shop fronts, colours and signage can result in the dilution of local distinctiveness. It is often possible to achieve a compromise in order to maintain corporate image without negatively affecting local character. Where necessary it is expected that corporate identity will be relaxed in order to maintain the special character and appearance of the conservation area.

Canopies and Blinds

The need for a blind to protect goods from damage by sunlight should be considered when a new shopfront is being designed. If a blind is required it should be included as an integral part of the shopfront design and should be fully retractable. The preferred position for blinds is to incorporate them into the cornice but where this is not possible they may be located immediately below the fascia. The fabric of the blind should be of a plain colour and be non-reflective.

Dutch blinds and plastic or synthetic window and door canopies are not acceptable as they have little practical use and can obscure and sometimes destroy part of the shopfront.

Advertisements

The advertisements displayed on a building can have a significant effect on its appearance and should be considered as part of the overall design of a shopfront. On traditional shopfronts lettering should be signwritten onto the fascia in a single style. Where this is not possible, individual letters attached to the fascia will be considered as an alternative. However reflective plastic or metal lettering should be

avoided as the visual effect can be over-prominent. Lettering should be easily readable and adjusted in size and content to suit the size and detailing of the fascia. Overcrowding of the fascia with information should be avoided.

External illumination will always be the preferred choice for advertisements and the only acceptable option for traditional shopfronts. Strip lighting concealed within a projecting cornice can be unobtrusively and effectively included within the design of a new shopfront but is less easily added to existing shopfronts. Small floodlights are also acceptable provided they are sparingly used and sensitively located. One or two will usually be sufficient and will preferably be fixed directly to the building. Projecting brackets should be avoided where possible as they tend to make the lights more prominent than the advertisement itself. Where there is no reasonable alternative such lights should be simply designed and few in number, with the minimum possible projection from the wall.

Where a prefabricated fascia is proposed as part of a modern shopfront, the advertisement should be designed as an integral feature rather than being added later as a separate element. If internal illumination is proposed the background should be masked so only the lettering appears to be lit. Large expanses of brightly illuminated panelling will not normally be acceptable as they are overly bright and tend to dominate the streetscape.

Advertisements on buildings where there is no purpose-designed fascia will be considered on an individual basis. Possible options include individual letters fixed to the wall, signwriting or transfers on a window, a small plaque or a simple projecting sign. The design and detailing of the building will dictate the most suitable form and scale of signage in each case. Prefabricated fascia panels are unlikely to be acceptable on such buildings regardless of their materials.

Temporary advertisements fixed to the inside of doors and windows can spoil the appearance of a building. They should be kept to a minimum and removed as soon as possible. An excessive number of stickers and signs on windows and doors can give a cluttered appearance and should also be kept to a minimum.



Projecting Signs

Hanging signs have long been a simple and effective form of advertising. A well-designed hanging sign can also be an attractive addition to both individual buildings and the wider streetscene.

The use of a variety of shapes, sizes and profiles to add interest will be encouraged where appropriate. As with shopfronts the use of rich, dark colours or neutral shades will ensure that a sign is not over-dominant.

Lighting of hanging signs should be as unobtrusive as possible. Concealed strip lighting can be an effective way of achieving this. The bulb housing should be the same width as the sign and can be incorporated into the design of the board itself. It can also be designed as a separate element above the sign, coloured to match the frame. Simply designed small lamps on short projecting brackets can also be acceptable, as can carefully located spotlights fixed to the building. Large lamps with ornate brackets draw attention to themselves rather than the sign and will not be supported.

Other forms of projecting sign, such as rigidly-fixed boards and internally illuminated boxes, which are unsympathetic to the character and appearance of the conservation area will not be supported.

The overall design of a building should be the major influence when considering the positioning, size and design of a sign on the façade. The sign should not obscure important features of the building or shopfront and its size should be in keeping with the scale of the building. As a general rule not more than one projecting sign should be present on a building. However not every frontage will be suitable for projecting signs and the merits of each case will be considered individually.

Security

The need for shops to have adequate security is widely recognised and a wide variety of options are now available. Some of these will have a greater impact on the appearance of a building than others and it is important to consider the effect on both the building and the wider streetscene.

Burglar alarm boxes should not conceal architectural features or be located in over-conspicuous positions. Wiring should be hidden where possible and if not should be neatly fixed. Non-ferrous fixings should be used to avoid problems with rust. Consent for these may be required on a listed building.

External shutters require planning permission but tend to create a hostile ambience when lowered so they will not usually be approved in the town centre. In particular, solid shutter boxes fixed to the outside of the building have an unacceptable visual impact.

Less visually intrusive security measures are preferred. Security glass can be coupled with an alarm for added protection. Reducing the size of window panes to avoid large expanses of glass can be less tempting to vandals and cheaper to replace. Internally fitted see-through grilles are often acceptable and are available in attractive designs. Removable security screens can be fitted to windows outside trading hours and can be designed to fit in with an individual building and its surroundings. Consent for any of these measures may be required on a listed building.



Planning Permission

Planning permission is required for any alteration to a shop or similar property which materially affects its external appearance. This includes changing windows or doors, using different materials on any part of the shopfront, enlarging the fascia or adding canopies or blinds, and permission would be required for the installation of an entirely new shopfront.

A separate form of consent is required for the display of advertisements, even where the sign proposed has been shown on planning application drawings. Some signs on shops and business premises can be displayed without the need to obtain advertisement consent, depending on their size, position and content. If in any doubt, it is always best to seek the advice of the planning department as to whether or not an application is necessary.

Some shops are located in listed buildings; any alterations to such buildings which affect their character or appearance require listed building consent. This could include works such as exterior painting (including advertisements), the affixing of lettering, sign boards or projecting signs, security grilles, blinds, alarm boxes and internal alterations. It is required in addition to any planning permission or advertisement consent which may be necessary. As above if in any doubt as to whether consent is required it is advisable to contact the planning department.

Before undertaking any alterations to a shopfront it is essential to ensure that all the necessary approvals have been obtained. Enforcement action can be taken against any unauthorised works and can lead to further alterations or reinstatement being required. Unauthorised works to a listed building are a criminal offence which can be punished by up to two years imprisonment and an unlimited fine.

When applying for listed building consent, planning permission or advertisement consent it is essential that the plans and accompanying information are of an appropriate scale and level of detail, and show exactly what is proposed to be done and how the finished works will look. Schemes which seem to be satisfactory on a small-scale drawing can easily be spoiled by poor detailing and finishes when a builder has had to rely on guesswork and assumption in the absence of clear illustrations and instructions.

Details of how to apply and the information required to accompany a planning application can be found at www.n-kesteven.gov.uk. Applicants are encouraged to enter into pre-application discussions with the council prior to submitting a formal application and details on how to do this are also available on the website address above.