

# Allerdale

Local Plan



Cockermouth Conservation Area

## Shopfront Design Guide





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# 01

## Introduction

Shops make a significant contribution to the distinguishing character of our town centres and they represent an important link with the social and cultural history of a place.

The primary purpose of a shopfront is to attract the attention of shoppers. Appropriate signage, paint finishes, inviting entrances and attractive window displays all influence the potential customer. Conserving the historic features of shops enhances shopping districts and may, in turn, bring economic benefits to an area by encouraging tourism and improved footfall. In contrast, shops of poor appearance detract from an area, can discourage shoppers and may contribute to an overall loss of townscape character.

Like any property, it is important to carry out a regular maintenance regime for a shop. A building is a valuable asset and a planned maintenance approach will ensure that it retains its value as well as potentially encouraging retail trade. Effective maintenance can minimise the need for more costly works in the long term. This guide

provides information to help you understand your shop and aims to ensure that informed decisions are made regarding alterations to traditional shops and their interiors.

# 02

## Historic context

Market Place constitutes the historic core of Cockermouth and has been used for trading since the 11th century. The town prospered during the 15th century and expanded rapidly, extending over the River Cocker and leading to the creation of Main Street.

The width of Main Street is due to that fact it was originally constructed to accommodate the beast market. Whilst the buildings fronting onto it were built largely as residential and hotel buildings, trading was undertaken from windows or stalls attached to the frontages.

18th Century wealth, derived from a rapidly expanding textile industry, led to the almost total rebuilding of the town in a smart but low key Georgian style. Shop 'windows' began to appear in the town during this period.

Further expansion of the commercial core of the town occurred following the arrival of the railway in 1848, leading to the creation of Station Street and the subsequent relocation of the beast market to a dedicated auction mart nearer the station (the present site of

Sainsbury's supermarket)

Following the relocation of the beast market, Main Street became the primary shopping street in the town. Many buildings were redesigned or remodelled with an integral shop front at ground floor level. Great importance was placed on the formal design of shopfronts - the framework and the vertical proportions of the building as a whole as well as the doors and windows. The role of shopfronts became more important; as a 'showcase' to the quality of the business inside.

# 03

## Shopfronts in Cockermouth

Virtually all of the present buildings in Market Place and Main Street have a Georgian style frontage with classically proportioned shop fronts. There is great diversity with regards to shopfront design, which stems from the fact that the width of buildings varies, which is an important part of Cockermouth's character.

Shop 'windows' began to appear in the town during the 18th century. Shop design was heavily influenced by the size of glass available. Late 18th and early 19th century windows utilised numerous small panes, sometimes set in a bow window. The Georgian bowed oriel windows that still remain on Castlegate are such an example.



18th Century shop 'window'

Advances in glass manufacturing technology and the introduction of plate glass in the 1820's allowed the fabrication of larger and more affordable window panes and shopfront designs in the town changed as a result.

Classically inspired architectural detailing like pilasters and console brackets became widely used for shopfront decoration. Mullions were required to hold the larger and heavier sheets of glass. Windows were subdivided into two, three or four lights (panes).



19th Century shopfront—with deep stallrisers

In the Edwardian period and into the 1920's, taller shopfronts appeared with larger window panes, lower stallrisers and deeply recessed entrances.



20th Century shopfront—with low stallrisers

A significant number shopfronts from this period survive in Cockermouth, particularly in Station Street, and are an important component of the Town's character together with the Victorian shopfronts.

# 04

## Basic design considerations

In the design of all shopfronts, whether traditional or modern, the following general considerations should be taken into account:

help shoppers and will make shopping an easier task, especially for people with a particular disability or mobility problem.

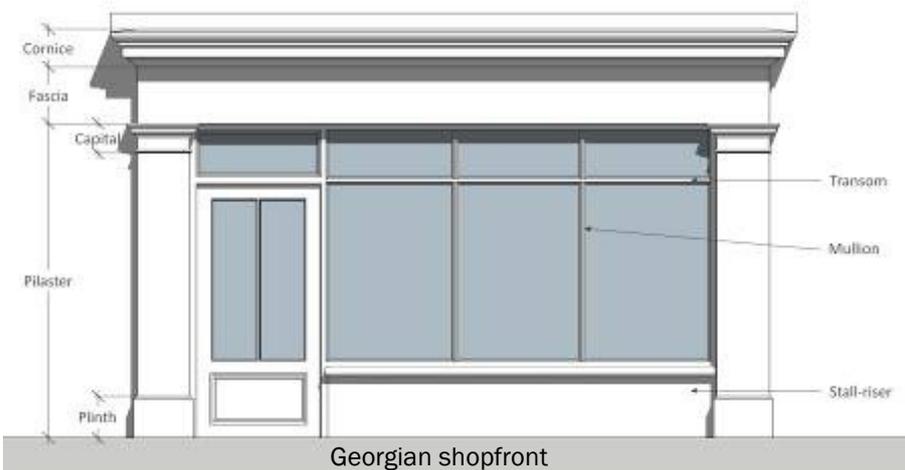
**The streetscene:** it is important to consider the effect of the design on the rest of the street and the immediate area. Proportions, materials and details should maintain the variation and hierarchy of the buildings and should not seek attention or dominate them unnecessarily

**The building as a whole:** it is important to consider the effect of the design on the whole building, and on the adjoining shopfronts. Sensitive design should enhance the individuality and character of the building. The structural integrity of the traditional frontage should be maintained

**The details:** details in the design are equally important. Original ornaments and other details provide visual interest. Carefully selected colours may enhance the building as well as the whole street. Special care in the design of the entrance, windows and signs will

# 05

## Traditional shopfront components



**Architrave:** The moulded, slightly projecting timber beneath the fascia.

**Corbel:** A moulded timber element at the top of the pilaster, notionally 'holding up' the cornice.

**Cornice:** The moulded projecting timber at the top of the shopfront, above the fascia.

**Fascia:** The flat timber board below the cornice which takes the signage.

**Mullion:** A vertical timber dividing glass in a shop window.

**Pilaster:** A flat or moulded timber panel either side of the shopfront.

**Plinth:** The base of a pilaster.

**Stallriser:** The timber or masonry element beneath a shop window.

**Transom:** A horizontal timber dividing glass in a shop window.



# 06

## Designing a shopfront

When designing a replacement shop front, regard should be paid to the age, history, scale, style, materials and colours of the whole building. These should be referred to in the design progresses in order to create a harmonious piece of architecture.

If there is an existing shopfront to be replaced/upgraded, in the first instance there should be a check to ascertain whether there is any historic material behind modern additions. Often larger sign boards have been attached to original fascias which may still be intact. If so, removing the modern boards and repairing the original will reclaim some of the building's lost character such that it will enhance the architecture and street. This may also be true of pilasters and stall risers.

If a new shopfront is to be installed, it should be aligned and in proportion with windows/other architectural detailing on the floors above. Typically, in order to achieve symmetry, the shopfront should be centralised in relation to the building,

Respect the scale and proportions of the building and its neighbours so that the new shopfront will harmonise with the street scene. If the building is smaller than its neighbour, then its shopfront would normally be smaller.

In circumstances where the building is wider than the shopfront needs to be, the remainder of the ground floor walls should be finished in a smooth render (ashlar), lined out (originally to look like natural stone blocks) as this was the treatment given to almost all of the Georgian style buildings.

Avoid shopfronts and fascias cutting across two buildings. Two separate shopfronts with matching colours and signage will look considerably better.

Use appropriate, sustainable and good quality materials such as painted wood. UPVC or aluminium is not appropriate for listed or traditional buildings in the conservation area. Lead should be used to protect the top of the cornice above the shopfront.

Large expanses of plate glass should normally be avoided as it will make the building above appear unsupported and floating.

Design-in any necessary security or shading measures from the outset.

Consider how the design fulfils the functional requirements of the shop, including ease of access. The Disability Discrimination Act requires new shopfronts to have level or ramped access and a door of a metre wide if possible (however this may not be possible, particularly in listed buildings).

### **Key Elements**

Although the individual style of the elements varies, almost all good quality shopfronts incorporate the same basic elements:

- Large, preferably vertically emphasised windows for display
- Pilasters made of wood providing the

appearance that the remainder of the building is supported by them and providing a vertical separation between shops/ buildings. These are often topped with a corbel (or capital) and a console to hide the edges of the fascia. These vary from simple to elaborate.

- A wooden cornice providing framing and weather protection, topped with lead (or zinc).
- A wooden fascia providing advertising space, with cornices to hide the structural support beams. However, these should not be too deep (max of 350mm) otherwise they will have an overly heavy appearance that dominates the remainder of the shopfront. The top should normally be well below the sill of the first floor windows and should not overhang the shop window.
- A stall riser providing internal and external protection and a solid base at ground level, so that the building above

does not appear to 'float'. A stall riser of between 350-500mm constructed of solid masonry is recommended.

- The shop window should normally be divided with mullions (and often transoms). In addition to dividing the glass (and making any required replacement panes considerably cheaper), mullions and transoms increase the apparent structural strength of the shopfront and its apparent ability to support the building above.
- The shop door should be an integral part of the design. It should be timber to match the shop framework and largely glazed, with a panel at the bottom to match the height of the stall riser. If the existing/previous door was set back, then this feature should if at all possible be retained (and certainly should in a listed building)
- Good quality construction materials were

used historically to provide the business with durability and an image of quality. The choice of colour for the shopfront is important (see section on Colour below). Normally the same colour is applied to the pilasters & entablature in order to unify and distinguish the shopfront. The stall riser should normally be of masonry and painted the same colour as the main building façade.

- Design elements should be structural rather than applied e.g. panelled doors had fielded panels with mouldings, not mouldings applied to flush doors.
- Detailing is as important to the quality of the shopfront as the proportions and materials. Poor quality detailing or workmanship can be very damaging to a shop front's character and the local environment

# 07

## Canopies

Shading from the sun is desirable where the sun hits the shop window directly in order to reduce glare and unwanted solar gain. Canopies are a low energy way of achieving this. However they will only be required in certain weather conditions and certain times of year so permanently open canopies are not considered acceptable as they obscure the shopfront and architecture above as well as views along the street.

Traditionally, canopies were made of canvas and were fully-retractable into 'blind boxes' which were carefully designed to be integral to the shopfront.



It is still possible to get traditional blinds and boxes repaired, or new ones manufactured locally. These were traditionally hand operated with winders but can sometimes be made with motor operation if desired. The blind boxes should not extend beyond the width of the fascia.

Modern flat canvas retractable blinds may be an acceptable alternative on some unlisted buildings. However, these often have plastic blind boxes, and although these can be fitted with timber covers, they often have frills which do not fully retract and can look unsightly, particularly as they get dirty. These modern

versions are often motor operated and the operating mechanism makes them more bulky than the traditional blinds, and so disrupt and detract from the architecture.

Modern plastic or plastic-coated fixed 'Dutch blinds' (like a pram hood) are not appropriate in the conservation area as they do not look traditional and they permanently obscure the shopfront. There are some of the partly retractable versions of these, which fold back partially, within Main Street, but these also look unsightly when shut and should be avoided particularly as they often also obscure the fascia such that the sign has to be forced elsewhere

# 08

## Security

The extent of security measures should be in proportion to the level of risk and should, if needed, form an integral part of the shopfront design.

Stallrisers, mullions and transoms can contribute greatly to shopfront security and reduce the costs of replacement glazing following any breakages. These can be internally reinforced without visual detriment.

Where historic glass does not exist, then laminated glass can be used to aid safety and security.

Any additional security devices, if necessary, should be positioned behind the glazing, minimising any restriction of views into the shop, for example by the use of perforated grilles and shutters.

External roller shutters and grilles will not be acceptable in the Conservation Area. Apart from their modern appearance which is out of keeping with the age and architecture of the buildings, they create a closed and less

interesting environment, out of keeping with the purpose & character of a shopping street and preventing out of hours window-shopping. This can also convey the idea that the area is in decline.



# 09

## Facia signs

To many people, the shopfront sign is the most obvious element. As such it is critical that the signage is carefully thought out and treated as integral to the overall design.



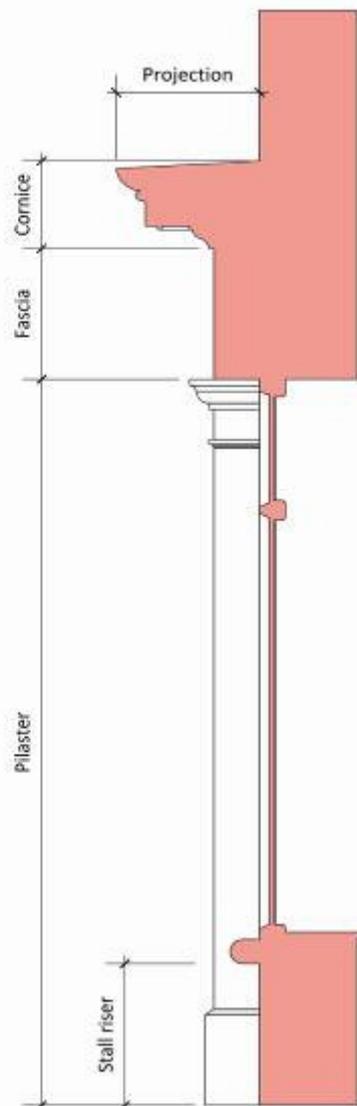
Historically, sign writing and manufacture was an art form and a skilled craft. This meant that each sign was bespoke to the business, architecture and town. A creative and bespoke approach to signage will be encouraged within Cockermouth. Size, materials and quality of detailing must be appropriate to the Conservation Area

The number of signs on each shop should be

kept to a minimum. Often a fascia sign is enough, but (where appropriate to the architecture) a small hanging sign can add interest and allow the shop to be spotted from along the street. This can be particularly useful to shops with narrow frontages. Sometimes neither fascia, nor hanging signs are possible or necessary and a minimalist sign works well.



Too much advertising will defeat its purpose by causing confusion and creating a cluttered appearance to the detriment of the business and the character of the Conservation Area.



In the case of traditional shopfronts, the main sign always sits within the fascia. Fascia's themselves should account no more than 20% of the total shopfront height.



The sign itself should constitute separate letters attached or painted on, rather than fascia boards.



Oversized or deep sign boards that do not relate to a traditional fascia have a heavy and clumsy appearance which is detrimental to the street scene and architecture of the building as well as to the image of the business.



Signage should not obscure any architectural features or reach or appear to reach the edges of the fascia. Reflective or fluorescent colours and materials should be avoided .



# 10

## Hanging signs

A good quality hanging sign carefully placed to avoid interfering with architectural features will normally be acceptable if it is of an acceptable scale and design.



Where appropriate to the shop front and its fascia, a hanging sign should normally be placed at fascia level. Where this is not possible a hanging sign may be appropriate just above the fascia, although ideally it should be sighted below first floor windows in order to avoid causing a nuisance to first floor users. The bottom of the sign should be at least 2.6 metres above the pavement in order to comply with Highway Regulations

Signs and letters should normally be of

painted timber although good quality metalwork can be used particularly where it reflects the design or nature of the shop. Plastic and plastic-coated signs are considered inappropriate in the conservation area.

Wall-mounted or hanging signs above fascia level will only be allowed where these are of the highest quality and the design of the building above allows space for the sign without interfering with windows and other architectural features. The size of the sign must be proportionate to the size of the building and shopfront.

### **Supporting brackets**

If the building has an existing supporting bracket, then this should normally be re-used. If a new bracket is required, it should be of wrought iron and must be appropriate to the size of the building, the shopfront and the sign, in order not to attract more attention than the sign itself and to enhance the character of the building.

# 11

## Window signs

Carefully designed individual letters or symbols applied to the glass may be acceptable if they are of the highest quality. Etched glass can be very effective, but etching historic glass with signs will not be acceptable (as the occupant is unlikely to last as long as the building).



An excessive number of window signs, stickers or notices will give a cluttered and unwelcoming appearance, as it becomes difficult to see into the shop.



# 12

## Alternative signs

Sometimes businesses don't have a traditional shopfront that allows for a fascia or traditional sign. In these instances, alternative signs can be acceptable in certain circumstances, however they will need careful thought.

### Gable & doorframe signs

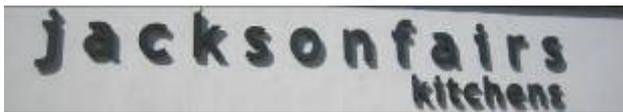
Occasionally individual letters can be attached to the wall of the building at ground or upper floor level (where there is historical precedent).



# 13

## Lettering

The lettering style and any symbols must be simple and clear. Simple fonts also provide the best image and are the easiest to read.



Fussy fonts and joined up lettering can look messy, giving a poor image as well as being difficult to read. Using more than one colour or creating artificial shadows can also be difficult to read and look confusing.



Some slightly decorative lettering can create a specific image of the business, although this must be carefully thought out, taking account of the character of the building as well as the business. Unusual and decorative fonts will probably date more quickly than simple lettering, as will patterned backgrounds.



# 14

## Lighting

Internally illuminated signs will not be allowed in Cockermouth's Conservation Area, neither will any intermittent or moving lights or reflective materials.

In order to protect visual amenity, vehicular and pedestrian safety and to reduce light pollution and minimize energy consumption, only minimal illumination of signs will be allowed where appropriate.

If required, illumination equipment must be as small and unobtrusive as possible, preferably a slim strip light that is completely hidden within the architecture or its shadows. For fascia signs, these should be hidden under the cornice.



A hanging sign whose fussy bracket and chunky light fitting competes for attention with the sign, without providing any positive effect.

External lighting must not be overly bright or prominent and must not be a safety hazard to motorists.

Slim, hidden trough lights can be acceptable (if sited appropriately) in relation to the architectural details), as can simple and small carefully positioned spot lights, which should be a similar colour to the surface they are attached to. However the number of light sources should be kept to an absolute minimum so as not to compete with or distract from the signs or the architecture.

# 15

## Colours

Colours are an important part of any street, building or architectural feature. The colour of the shopfront framework, i.e. the Stall riser, Pilasters and Entablature, (together with its signage) will have the greatest impact on the image of the shop and the impact on the street scene. The colour of the shopfront clearly needs to avoid clashing with the colour of the main building above as well as the colour of adjacent buildings and shopfronts.



The shopfront colour would normally be a different colour from the building above, in order to stand out. Traditionally this was a darker colour, in order to look like a strong

base, but also so that it doesn't show mud & dust from the street.



A palette of naturally derived colours is available to help choose complimentary colours for shopfronts and for renders. These colours are colours that could have been available at the time the buildings were built and are appropriate to the Georgian style of architecture that characterises Main Street and Market Place.



# 16

## Planning permission

Planning permission is required for any alterations or changes that materially affect the appearance of the shopfront or building.

Listed building consent will be required for any alteration to a shopfront in a listed building (including alterations to signage).

Advertisement Consent is required for most shopfront signs in Cockermouth.

Detailed plans will need to be submitted as part of any application for a new or altered shopfront and new signage. It is strongly advised that you contact Allerdale Planning Department to check which what permissions and/or consents you may need before commencing an works.

Points to consider when considering when submitting planning permission and listed building and advertisement censored applications:

1. The design and quality of shopfronts contribute fundamentally to the

appearance of a shopping street but they also significantly affect its character and image, and therefore the economic confidence of the whole town.

2. As such it is important that shopfront design is recognised as a very important part of the character and prosperity of the whole of Cockermouth. .