

Breckland Market Town Shopfront Design Guide

Issue 02

June 2025



Purcell®
1 Quayside, Bridge Street, Cambridge CB5 8AB
sally.humphries@purcelluk.com
www.purcelluk.com

A team of experienced consultants from Purcell jointly contributed to the completion of this Conservation Area Appraisal.

Name	Position and Qualifications	Role
Sally Humphries	Associate Heritage Consultant	Reviewer
Lucie Clark	Heritage Consultant	Author
Helen Warner	Assistant Heritage Consultant	Co-Author
Tracey Rowe	Senior Graphics Assistant	Report Design

Date	Issue	Recipient	Reviewed	Approved
March 2025	01	Breckland District Council	SH	SH
June 2025	02	Breckland District Council	SH	SH

BRECKLAND MARKET TOWN SHOPFRONT DESIGN GUIDE

CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION	04	3.0	SHOPFRONT DESIGN PRINCIPLES	17
1.1	Purpose of the Design Guide	04	3.1	The Building as a Whole	18
1.2	Why have a Design Guide?	04	3.2	The Building in the Context of The Street	20
1.3	Policy Context	05			
1.4	Listed Buildings	05			
1.5	Conservation Areas	05	4.0	PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT	21
			4.1	The Shopfront	22
2.0	SHOPFRONTS: A BRIEF HISTORY	06			
2.1	Pre-1700	06	5.0	ADVICE	39
2.2	Georgian Period (c.1700-1840)	07	5.1	Design Process	39
2.3	Victoria Period (c.1840-1900)	08	5.2	What Permission Do I Require?	40
2.4	Edwardian Period (c.1900-First World War)	11			
2.5	Modernist Period (First World War-c.1980)	13			
2.6	Commercial Streets Today	14			
2.7	Public Houses	15			
2.8	Banks	16			

SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Design Guide

This document aims to guide future changes to shopfronts within conservation areas in the Breckland District by providing advice on the process, design and quality of work to shopfronts. The five key market towns of Thetford, Dereham, Swaffham, Attleborough and Watton are used as examples throughout the guide. It provides an overall guide to what is appropriate in the conservation areas by outlining the main components that contribute to a well-designed shopfront. This guidance is aimed at retailers, owners, developers and shopfitters and will assist in discussions with the Council prior to the submission of and, consequently, in the determination of future planning and listed building consent applications.

The public face of a shop is by nature designed to be a conspicuous presence in the street scene. Consequently, shopfront design can significantly contribute to, or detract from, a good quality environment within a town. The needs of today's shoppers are different to those of the past; with the growth of online retail presenting a major challenge to our town centres, the decline in number of shoppers and change in the types of goods and services required in a town centre, shops and shopfronts must continue to adapt. These pressures can compromise the quality and design of shopfronts. This guidance is therefore not about stopping development but rather managing change, improving the local area, meeting the needs of today's shoppers and encouraging new users.

1.2 Why Have a Design Guide?

The benefits of well-designed shopfronts include:

- Creating a positive shopping experience;
- Increasing property value;
- Protecting and enhancing the heritage of Conservation Areas;
- Higher footfall and increased sales turnover;
- Help with the creation of a shopping community, which includes those who buy and sell locally;
- Improve public safety; and
- New investment and long-term sustainability.

Shopfronts are key elements in towns and local centres and their appearance can make a significant positive contribution to the streetscape, adding a visual interest and can often reflect the vitality and viability of an area.

Heritage is a key driver for regeneration and tourism, and historic buildings and shopfronts all add to the local distinctive character of Breckland's historic market towns. A coordinated approach to shopfront design will help to enhance the appearance of the built environment and the overall attractiveness of each town, as well as protecting remaining historic shopfronts.

Heritage need not conflict with economic development; improving the visual appeal of properties benefits users and owners by both improving tourism to the area and encouraging existing residents of the area to shop locally.

Within the key commercial streets of each of the five market towns there are numerous high-quality historic shopfronts which are attractive and relate well to their setting in historic market towns, illustrating the economic development of Breckland. This document will explain why historic shopfronts in Breckland are important and advise on their management and retention.

Where in the past there have been unsympathetic interventions to shopfronts throughout the five towns, there is opportunity for gradual and natural improvement over time as retailers undertake renovations. This document has been prepared to inform decision making when these opportunities arise, promoting a high standard of design for new shopfronts and alterations to existing shopfronts.

Many of the changes referred to in this guide will require planning permission, advertisement consent or listed building consent. Therefore, owners are advised to check online or seek professional advice on what consents you require and the acceptability of your proposals. For more information see Section 5.

The guidelines apply to shops and all other ground floor premises including banks, building societies, estate agents, pubs and restaurants. It is hoped that their use may lead to an improvement in the design of shopfronts throughout the market towns of Breckland.

SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION

1.3 Policy Context

The *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) sets out the government's intent in relation to all planning matters. Those of relevance to this document include the need to secure high-quality design, promote the vitality and viability of our main urban areas and conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

This document also responds to policies laid down in local planning policy, namely the *Breckland Local Plan 2023*, adopted September 2023 which include policies GEN 02 Promoting High Quality Design, ENV07 Designated Heritage Assets, EC05 Town Centre and Retail Strategy, EC08 Advertising and signs, COM 01 Design.

1.4 Listed Buildings

Designation (or listing) marks and celebrates a building's special architectural and historic interest and brings it under the consideration of the planning system so that it can be protected for future generations.

Historic buildings are a vital part of the diverse character and history of Breckland and its market towns, so are important to protect for future generations. The large number of listed buildings in the Thetford, Dereham, Swaffham, Attleborough and Watton Conservation Areas, many of which feature historic or modern shopfronts, demonstrates the richness of each town's individual heritage, as well as their collective importance as part of the history of the Breckland district.

Listed Building Consent (LBC) is required for all work to a listed building that involves alterations, extension or demolition that will affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest. If unsure, it is always advised to check with Breckland District Council, as unauthorised works can lead to fines and enforcement action.

1.5 Conservation Areas

A Conservation area is defined in the *Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* as an 'area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'.⁰¹

Conservation areas exist to manage and protect the special architectural and historic interest of a place – in other words, the features that make it unique. There are some extra planning controls and considerations in place to protect the historic and architectural elements which make the place special. They are most likely to affect owners who want to do work to the outside of their unlisted buildings or any trees on their property.

The town centres of Thetford, Dereham, Swaffham, Attleborough and Watton are all protected as Conservation Areas. In the larger towns such as Swaffham, Dereham and Thetford, these tend to be larger and cover a wider area beyond the town centre, in others such as Watton and Attleborough they are smaller and cover only the key historic core of the towns. If you are unsure whether your shopfront is in a Conservation Area please contact Breckland District Council who can provide clarification or refer to the 'Conservation Areas' page on the Council's website (<https://www.breckland.gov.uk/article/19893/Conservation-Areas>).



Shopfronts in Swaffham in 2021 prior to enhancement.



The shopfronts today with historic shopfronts re-produced and upper floor windows restored.

⁰¹ Section 69 (1), *Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*.

SECTION 2.0: SHOPFRONTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

2.1 Pre-1700

Medieval or earlier shopfronts very rarely survive and did not resemble shopfronts as we recognise them today. More commonly in this period, shopping would have been done at a market, with more informal stalls. In some cases, the outlines of medieval shopfronts can be identified in now-altered medieval buildings. As historic market towns, all five of the towns covered by this guide would have had medieval markets of a significant scale. Swaffham, for example, was prominent in the wool trade and its large Market Place reflects the successful trade in this period.

Elements of a medieval shopfront include:

- Shopfronts consisted of a simple door and windows, originally shuttered, sometimes open to the street.
- Almost all medieval shopfronts have been updated with glass windows.

The only medieval building within the five towns which retains a shopfront is The Ancient House, Thetford, a former merchant's house which dates from the fifteenth century. However, the bow window was installed in the early nineteenth century. The scarcity of surviving medieval buildings is often due to fires within the town, for example Dereham experienced severe fires in 1581 and again in 1679, Swaffham had 'The Great Fire of Swaffham' in 1775 and Watton experienced a great fire in 1674.



Ancient House Museum, a fifteenth century merchants house with an early nineteenth century shop window

SECTION 2.0: SHOPFRONTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

2.2 Georgian Period (c.1700–1840)

Shops and shopfronts in the format we know today developed during the Georgian period, when shopping emerged as a leisure pursuit. As thriving market towns, Dereham, Swaffham, Thetford, Attleborough and Watton are likely to have featured a number of Georgian shopfronts though few remain today. New glazing technology developed throughout the nineteenth century made larger panes of glass available and made the numerous glazing bars of the Georgian shopfronts look outdated. Prosperity in towns during the nineteenth century often permitted the replacement of earlier shopfronts with larger and more up to date Victorian shopfronts.

Elements of a Georgian shopfront include:

- Decorative pilasters and cornices which were used to harmonise the appearance of the shopfront with the rest of the building.
- Shop windows with numerous panes of glass divided by glazing bars, often with a bow-bay window to best display goods.



Example of multi-paned shopfronts characteristic of Georgian shopfronts though likely to be early nineteenth century in Attleborough



Example of a Georgian style (but modern) shopfront in Dereham



An example of a modest Georgian shopfront window in Thetford

SECTION 2.0: SHOPFRONTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

2.3 Victorian Period (c.1840-1900)

Many of the buildings and shopfronts in the five market towns date to the nineteenth century. Prosperity in towns during this period often led to replacement of earlier shopfronts as Victorian glazing technology improved and larger areas of glazing was preferred over smaller Georgian shopfront windows. During the Victorian period, shopfronts became more elaborate and detailed, with the use of cast iron often used for colonettes and new materials such as terracotta, faience and decorative tiles. Signage also became more flamboyant and there was an increasing use of projecting signage to advertise wares. Awnings started to become popular on some shopfronts and retractable awnings appeared in the later nineteenth century. These provided additional advertising through the names of the shops printed on the awning, provided a covered area for customers to view the shop windows and allowed for wares to be displayed on the street protected from rain.



Cullings Decorators in Swaffham, with its Victorian shopfront (Swaffham Museum)



Swaffham Co-operative Society shop with its Victorian shopfront, pictured in the 1930s. (Swaffham Museum)

SECTION 2.0: SHOPFRONTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

With the arrival of the railways in the Victorian period all five towns prospered and continued to thrive industrially and commercially into the Edwardian period. This led to an inevitable increase in commercial premises. Though not all of these survive, there are numerous good examples of Victorian shopfronts in Breckland.

Victorian shopfronts are usually more elaborate and typical features include:

- Larger panes of glass in shop windows.
- Larger display areas with cut-out letters, gilding and colourful signwriting.
- Recessed entrances to increase window display areas
- Sometimes, arches across the main panes of the shopfront window.
- Cast ironwork, often in the form of colonettes can also be incorporated into more ornate shopfronts.
- Retractable awnings.
- Uses of new materials such as terracotta, faience and decorative tiles.



An early twentieth century photograph of Norwich Street in Dereham recording large projecting signs above shopfronts and awnings over several shopfronts



Historic shopfronts in Swaffham showing many with awnings (Permission required from the Swaffham Museum)

SECTION 2.0: SHOPFRONTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

Examples of Victorian Shopfronts



A recently reinstated shopfront in the Victorian style



A recently reinstated shopfront in the Victorian style



Smaller scale Victorian shopfronts in Swaffham



Victorian shopfront in Dereham



Double height shopfront in Attleborough

SECTION 2.0: SHOPFRONTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

2.4 Edwardian Period (c.1900–First World War)

The Edwardian period was short but has its own distinct character as a result of technological advancements and the impact of the impending First World War. Many shopfronts in Thetford, Dereham, Swaffham, Attleborough and Watton were constructed during the late Victorian and Edwardian period.

Shopfronts from the Edwardian period are characterised by:

- Full-sized panes of glass.
- Low stallrisers.
- A continued richness of materials and proportions.
- Centrally located and recessed entrance doors, sometimes with a lamp above and/or mosaic design on the floor.



Good example of an Edwardian shopfront on Church Street, Attleborough

Examples of Edwardian Shopfronts:



Historic Photograph of T.R. Pett's shop in Thetford with an Edwardian shopfront. (Ancient House Museum Archive)



T.R. Pett's, Thetford today with a modernised shop front but retaining the pilasters either side



Historic photograph of King Street, Thetford, with Victorian and Edwardian shopfronts.

SECTION 2.0: SHOPFRONTS: A BRIEF HISTORY



Edwardian shopfront on the High Street of Dereham pictured in the 1970s



The same Edwardian shopfronts in Dereham today



Edwardian shopfronts in Dereham



Large Edwardian shopfront spanning multiple buildings

SECTION 2.0: SHOPFRONTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

2.5 Modernist Period (First World War–c.1980)

Following the First World War, modernism became the dominant typology, replacing the classicism that had characterised two centuries of shopfronts. During the early part of the twentieth century, architecture was dynamic and quickly evolving alongside new technologies. Shopping habits also began to evolve and change more rapidly from the beginning of the twentieth century, with the advent of technologies such as freezers and food preservatives hailing the dawn of supermarkets (replacing the previously dominant smaller-scale, local village shops, greengrocers and butchers).

Though this was the beginning of commercial activity moving away from high streets to larger scale premises, this was balanced out by the arrival of the department store, which became widespread in the early twentieth century. The impact of these changes translated into shopfront design as well as the visual townscape they were part of, as many shop premises became larger. Some of the architectural styles which were reflected in shop front design include:

- Art Deco and Art Nouveau in the 1920s and 1930s.
- Streamlined Moderne in the 1930s and 1940s.
- Brutalism in the 1960s and 1970s.
- The development of distinctive house styles for national companies such as Marks and Spencer and Burtons.

It should be noted that these distinctive styles were often not prevalent in smaller towns and more general stylistic developments are notable in Breckland towns. Many post-war buildings were not of good architectural quality and are now most noticeable by uninspiring first floors above later, modern shopfronts. General stylistic developments in twentieth century shopfronts include:

- The amalgamation of one or more building plots to form large individual properties.

- Larger new shops occupying the full extent of their plots, such as Woolworths.
- The introduction of new materials such as Vitrolite, chrome and float glass (from 1959).

Some positive examples of post-modern buildings are found in Breckland, for example a post-modern building with Art Moderne details survives on Lynn Street in Swaffham.



The former Woolworths premises in Dereham, an example of purpose-built and large-scale commercial premises which developed in the twentieth century.

SECTION 2.0: SHOPFRONTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

2.6 Commercial Streets Today

2.6.1 Shopfronts

Today, the dominance of national retail companies in our town centres means there is a risk of bland corporate identities being applied to shopfronts nationally without consideration of local character or context, often resulting in the removal of historic shopfronts. Contemporary shopfronts are often characterised by large areas of glazing, bold, clear graphics and flat areas of aluminium cladding. These are often out of proportion to the historic buildings with which they are associated and do not contribute to the historic character of the streets they are in.



Art Moderne style buildings in Swaffham



Large modern shopfront out of scale with surrounding historic buildings in Dereham



Though none of the five market towns have any surviving modernist shopfronts, there are examples of modern shopfronts on infill buildings, for example this 1960s example in Dereham's Market Place.

SECTION 2.0: SHOPFRONTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

2.7 Public Houses

Alehouses have existed in Britain since the Roman occupation and form a distinctive element of town centres. By 1577 it was estimated that there were around 17,000 alehouses, 2,000 inns and 400 taverns throughout England and Wales. By the seventeenth century coaching inns had developed, providing food, drink and accommodation to those travelling by coach. During this century the term 'public house' emerged. These were characterised by large entranceways adjacent to the building, often with a first floor above, providing access to a rear courtyard and stabling. The Bell Inn, Thetford is a good example of a medieval coaching inn dating to the mid-fifteenth century which stood on the historic London to Norwich route.

Alongside larger Inns, smaller alehouses in the eighteenth and nineteenth century often simply resembled polite private residential properties and this continues to be the case for many pubs in Breckland. Pubs from these periods often have polite symmetrical facades with timber framed sash windows or canted bay windows, central doorways and decorative timber door surrounds.

The mid-nineteenth century saw a high number of pubs constructed, built to serve the growing populations in the thriving industrial towns. The majority of public houses in Breckland date to the nineteenth century. Later nineteenth century public houses started to more closely resemble shopfronts rather than residential houses with larger windows, fascias and decorative pilasters.

Pub building declined in the early twentieth century with the temperance movement encouraging Magistrates to enforce harsher restrictions on pub licences. The later twentieth and twenty first century witnessed a steep decline in pub numbers. This dramatic drop resulted in the conversion of many pubs for other uses across the country, many residential, as well as demolitions. Those which survive continue to play a prominent role in the street scene.



The Red Lion occupies a prominent location on the corner of Thetford's Market Place



The Bell Inn, Thetford



The Bull, Dereham



The Cherry Tree Inn, Dereham, a good example of a later nineteenth century public house

SECTION 2.0: SHOPFRONTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

2.8 Banks

During the nineteenth century Banks took on a form which we recognise today. They were built in huge quantities in an effort to fuel the economy. Many of the purpose built bank buildings dating to this century are built in a Neo-Classical style and are therefore a form of 'polite' architecture. This contrast with vernacular styles was intended to elevate the status of banks and associate them with government buildings to give an authoritative quality. They are usually prominent buildings in a town centre and therefore contribute significantly to the streetscape, alongside shopfronts and pubs.

Larger towns in Breckland have examples of purpose-built banks though some are highly altered. Early twentieth century maps of Dereham, for example, record three banks on the map. These buildings are still in use as banks today, occupied by Barclays, Lloyds and HSBC. They are distinguishable from other buildings on the street by their higher level of architectural detail than the surrounding buildings, often incorporating stone details such as banded rustication, architraves and capitals to columns and arched windows compared to the surrounding square sash windows. The use of stone distinguishes them from the smaller, more vernacular buildings in the area. They are also distinguishable from the surrounding shopfronts for their smaller windows resembling a private residence. The bank on the corner of High Street and Church Street in Dereham is a good example of a purpose-built bank in a prominent corner location.

In recent years, many banks have been repurposed or are vacant, however many retain strong elements of their original form as most banks were purpose built, with many having inscriptions in the stone with the company name or simply the word 'Bank.'

Where banks have been inserted into earlier shopfronts which were not intended as banks they are less easily distinguished in the streetscape. These often have larger

areas of glazing than traditional banks and more closely resemble a shopfront. Necessary privacy and security measures such as frosting along the window can detract from the appearance of the shopfront. Modern cash machines often disrupt the historic frontages when not inserted considerately.



An early twentieth century bank in Dereham on a prominent street corner at the junction of Church Street, Market Place and High Street

SECTION 3.0: SHOPFRONT DESIGN PRINCIPLES

This section provides guidance on shopfront design principles, starting with an overview of the shopfront as a whole and then providing advice on how each element of a shopfront should be treated. Some examples of good shopfronts in each of the five towns are provided below.



SECTION 3.0: SHOPFRONT DESIGN PRINCIPLES

3.1 The Building as a Whole

The starting point when considering a new or replacement shopfront should be a study of the whole building façade, ensuring that the shopfront is read as part of the building as a whole, rather than as a separate entity. This can be achieved by reflecting the style, period, proportion, vertical or horizontal emphasis and detailing of the rest of the building, particularly the principal elevation, in the shopfront. Depending on the nature, design and proportions of the existing property, some frontages may need to be simple in their detailing whilst others will be able to incorporate a more ornate style.

Common errors include introducing large expanses of glass that break up the vertical rhythm of the building. This can give the impression that the ground floor is unsupported or ‘floating’, disrupting the relationship between the two elements. Reducing the size of the glazing by incorporating architectural details like mullions or pilasters which take note of the position of windows in the above building can help avoid this.

It is important that the height of the building, including internal floor-to-ceiling heights, is taken into account when considering the scale of a new shopfront. A shopfront needs to sit within the original building framework set by structural and decorative features within the elevation. As a general rule, the shopfront should not rise above the floor level of the first floor as this can obscure part of the upper elevation and result in an unbalanced façade.

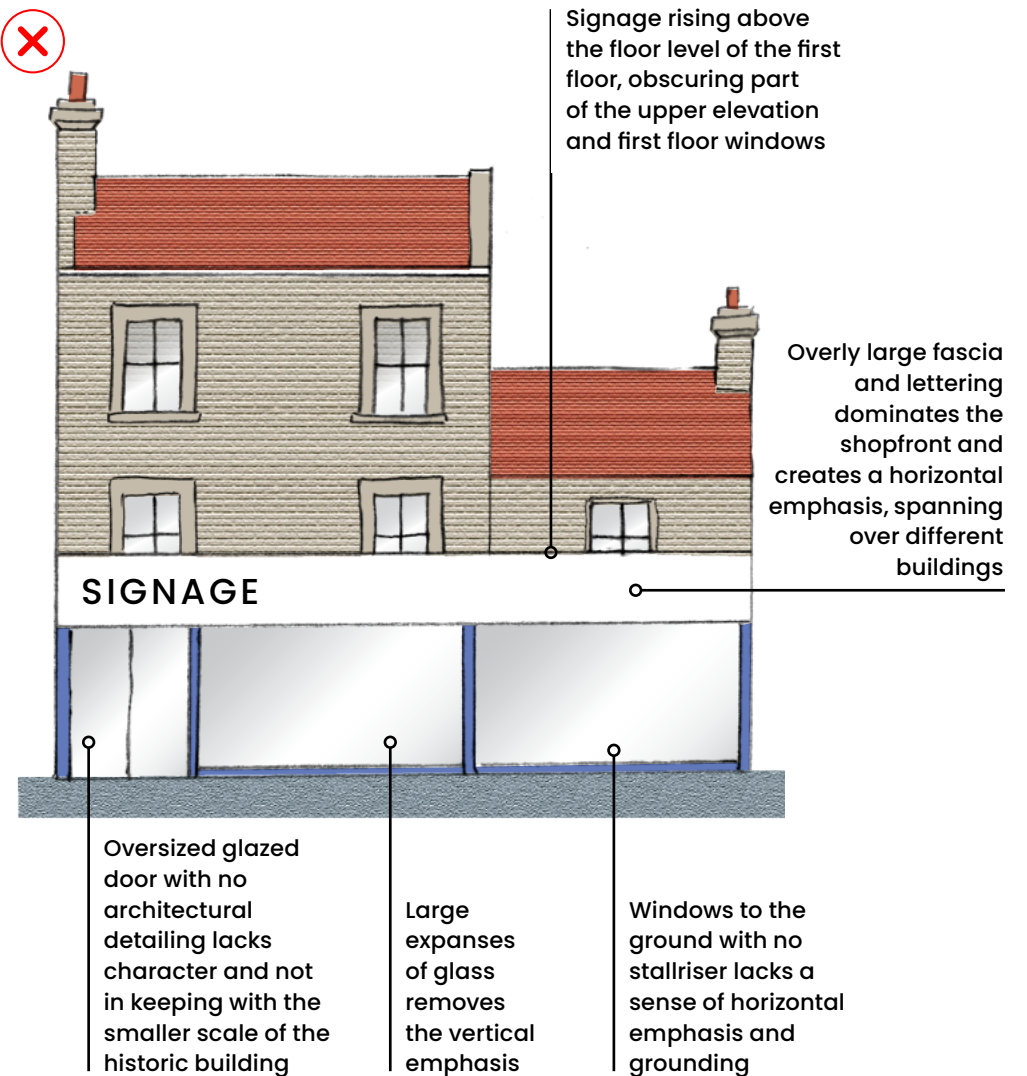
Where unsympathetic later shopfronts have covered older, more traditional shopfront elements it is highly desirable to refurbish older elements as part of a new, more appropriate scheme. Where an entirely new shopfront is required and there is good historical evidence of an appropriate earlier design, such as old photographs, then replicating the earlier design is often the best option. Where there is no historic precedent, it is vital that the composition of a modern shopfront responds meaningfully to the elevation of which it is a part. The basic horizontal elements of the traditional shopfront (the fascia-plus-cornice and stallriser) should be included to create a strong and meaningful top and base to the shopfront and the display glazing. The components themselves may be handled in a simplified, cleaner manner. This may involve less conspicuous framing of glazed areas, the simplification of pilasters, consoles and capitals and the use of modern typography or lighting within the parameters of design considered appropriate for the Conservation Areas.

In the case of modern shopfronts on modern buildings, it is not necessary to follow the guidance on historically appropriate design. However, it is still necessary to adhere to guidance on signage and display in order to maintain a consistent street scene and an inviting commercial centre for customers.

- Consider the relationship between the shopfront and the building above. A new shopfront should respect the period, style, proportions and vertical or horizontal emphasis of the building.
- Break up large areas of glass with pilasters, mullions and transoms. This is especially important where shopfronts extend across one or more units. Ensure vertical divisions are incorporated and break up the fascia in two or more parts in response.
- A shopfront should be in proportion to the original building, sitting within the framework set by structural and decorative features within the elevation.
- Retain and refurbish existing traditional features of a shopfront as part of a new scheme. Replicating an earlier design based on good historical evidence is often the best option.
- Modern shopfronts should respond meaningfully to the elevation of which it is part and include basic horizontal and vertical components of a traditional shopfront.

- Do not introduce large, uninterrupted areas of glass which disrupts the relationship between the shopfront and the building above.
- The shopfront should not rise above the floor level of the first floor.

SECTION 3.0: SHOPFRONT DESIGN PRINCIPLES



SECTION 3.0: SHOPFRONT DESIGN PRINCIPLES

3.2 The Building in the Context of The Street

Consideration should also be given to the potential impact of a new shopfront on the existing streetscape. A poor quality, overbearing design would likely have a negative impact on the appearance of the street as a whole, reducing the appeal to shoppers.

Neighbouring shops can inspire a shopfront design. Taking note of the character of the street and whether it possesses a uniformity of style or a variety of styles will also inform the design. The proportions, materiality, colour and detailing should not seek to dominate neighbouring buildings or the streetscape.

Where a unit extends, or is proposed to extend, across more than one building (i.e. across two or more buildings in a terraced row), it is important that the vertical division between the buildings is retained or reinstated. This may also require the use of signage which is divided into two or more parts.

- The design of a shopfront needs to consider the building on which it is to be installed and the surrounding context.
- A traditional shopfront which incorporates classical elements is likely to be appropriate on a historic building, though the most important thing is context (i.e. on a modern building it may well be most appropriate to use a modern shopfront).
- Where a new shopfront spans more than one building, the vertical division between buildings must be retained.

- A new shopfront spanning across more than one building must not lose the distinction between the separate buildings.
- The design must not dominate neighbouring buildings and the streetscape in proportion, materiality, colour and detailing.

SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

Traditional shopfronts generally rely on classical proportions and have a series of identifiable features. The diagrams below detail common features of traditional nineteenth century and early twentieth century shopfronts, which are the dominant type across Thetford, Dereham, Swaffham, Attleborough and Watton, and those of smaller eighteenth and nineteenth century shopfronts. Shopfronts usually consist of an entablature (the long, horizontal element) supported at either side by pilasters (the vertical uprights). These in turn comprise individual elements which are shown in the diagrams on this page.

Components of a Traditional Shopfront



Single Shopfront



Double Shopfront

SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

4.1 The Shopfront

Most traditional shopfronts are based on classical proportions with a series of identifiable features. A traditional nineteenth century and early twentieth century shopfront generally consisted of an entablature (the long, horizontal element) supported at either side by pilasters (the vertical uprights or columns). These in turn comprise individual elements which are shown in the diagram on the previous page.

4.1.1 Entablature

As in classical architecture, the entablature comprises the cornice, fascia (or frieze) and architrave. A number of historic shopfronts with historic entablatures survive in the five market towns, though many have been altered or covered up by overly large fascias.

Cornice

The cornice serves both a practical and aesthetic purpose. It was often elaborate and decorative in traditional shopfronts and projects out above the fascia to throw rainwater away from the shop. It also provides a visual break between the shopfront and the upper floors. Traditionally it may also house a retractable canvas awning.

Fascia

Fascias (or frieze in classical language) are often the dominant element of a shopfront, utilised to promote the name of the shop. The size of the fascia should be in proportion to the rest of the shopfront and the whole building, so that it is not too dominant. The top of a fascia should be positioned below the sill of the first floor windows and should not obscure any existing architectural features or decoration. As a basic rule of thumb, when considering a new or replacement shopfront, the entablature should not exceed 20% of the overall shopfront height.

The fascia should form an integral part of the design of the shopfront surround, rather than be a separate board superimposed on the building. They should not extend across two or more individual shops or beyond the shopfront surround (demarcated by the pilaster or uprights at the outer edges of the shopfront). This applies even where a single retail store extends across two or more shopfronts. Signs should be timber, with a frame around them and lettering should preferably be hand-painted. Paints should usually be low sheen to avoid any unnecessary plastic appearance.

Architrave

The architrave is the moulding below the fascia, separating the fascia from the shop window. In classical architecture it is the lowest part of the entablature.

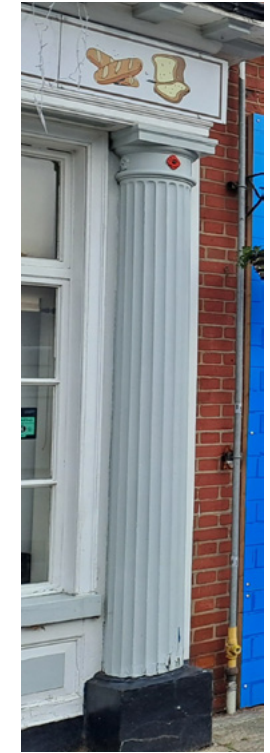
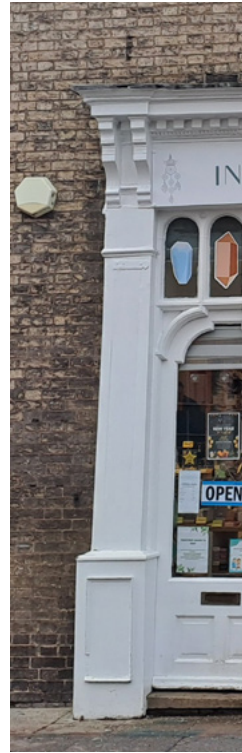


SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

4.1.2 Pilasters

The entablature is supported on pilasters, usually one at the end of each fascia. They represent the columns found in classical architecture, framing the shop window and covering the sides of the structural opening. Pilasters may be simple undecorated strips of wood, or more decoratively panelled or fluted. Georgian pilasters were simpler in design, referencing classical proportions, and often terminated beneath the entablature. Victorian pilasters were often more elaborate with fluted columns and decorative corbel brackets.

At the base of the pilaster is the plinth, representing the base of the column, whilst a corbel (sometimes called a bracket) is found at the head of the pilaster, sometimes separated from it by the capital. In all five of the towns covered by this guide most shopfronts are less ornate in their design and do not terminate in a corbel or capital. Most pilasters are timber, although there are also examples of stone or brick pilasters which are integral to the building's elevation and frame the shopfront.



SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

4.1.3 The Window

Windows, glazing bars, mullion bars and transoms should be designed to be in proportion with the shopfront and rest of the building. They should reflect the design and architectural style of the building. The number of windows and divisions of the shopfront should relate to the upper floors of the property. Large plate glass windows are rarely appropriate and should usually be subdivided with mullions. Above the main window there may be a further horizontal division creating a top-light window below the architrave. These may sometimes be decorative, containing coloured leaded glass. Additionally, top-lights sometimes included a hopper mechanism to provide ventilation.

4.1.4 Stallrisers

Below the window is the stallriser which provides a robust base to protect the shopfront from damage and gives proportion and character. The stallrisers are often timber and may incorporate panelling or may be in stone, painted brick or render. Tiling may also be found on frontage, particular in the case of public houses or butchers, as they are more easily cleaned. When considering new or replacement design, the stallriser should not exceed 20% of the overall shopfront height.



A Victorian shopfront with a high painted brick stallriser. Transoms divide up the shop window and horizontal divisions create top-lights. The stallriser and fascia are of a reasonable height, giving an overall balance and weight to the shopfront.



Traditional shopfront with a glazed brick stallriser and transoms and horizontal divisions breaking up the expanse of plate glass.



A traditional Victorian shopfront with large plate glass and delicate arches over delicate cast iron column transom divisions on the left. The stallrisers is in proportion with the shopfront.

SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

4.1.5 The Doorway

Doorways to shops were commonly recessed within the historic shopfronts as they allowed for an increased window area and a larger display. They were often with a solid lower panel usually the same size height as the stallriser. The location, size and style of the door and doorway should reflect the proportion and character of a building. More ornate buildings may require appropriate doorways and entrances that may need to include additional features such as recessed doorways, transom windows and fanlights. These may incorporate signage, may include a hopper to allow it to be opened for ventilation or may be plain glazed. Traditionally, recessed doors have been decorated with mosaic patterns as a mark of status, often featuring the shop name.

Second doorways may also be provided in a shopfront. However, this is not usually glazed as it was originally intended to provide independent access to the above floors. There is a very wide variety of door styles within the Breckland market towns, some of which are historically sensitive and others with are modern replacements with large areas of uninterrupted glazing.



Replacement glazing within a historic timber shop door.



Historic timber door of public house with glazed panels in corner doorway.



Historic shop doorcase containing door with large glazed panels.

- Shopfronts should respect and retain the traditional elements of the entablature, pilasters and doors described above, taking into consideration the level of architectural detail on the building above when re-introducing historically accurate features.

- Alterations to shopfronts should not obscure or negatively impact the elements discussed above.
- New Shopfront design should not omit the key identifiable features of a shopfront outlined above.

SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

4.1.6 Signage and Advertising

The Window Display

The most effective and appropriate way for a retailer to advertise their wares is through the window display. These can enhance the street scene through contributing interest, activity and variety. An internally lit display can render a shop particularly attractive and can brighten a drab or dark street scene.

Although vinyl on glass is an effective way for businesses to attract customers, offering a changeable and cheap temporary display, excessive use of vinyl should be avoided within Conservation Areas. Visibility through shop windows is important for the character of the street and too much vinyl signage can 'deaden' a streetscape by preventing views into the shop interiors and therefore undermining the purpose of a shopfront.

This also applies to the use of third party advertising or other posters displayed in the shop window. Too many notices can create a messy appearance for both the shop and the street scene and be confusing to customers. Notices and posters also cut out on daylight, making the interior of the shop harder to see into and less inviting. It is advisable to keep any third party advertising, posters, or vinyl stickers on windows to a minimum, and where they are used it is preferable to keep them within a designated area in order to maintain an uncluttered appearance.

The use of upper floors is important to keep buildings in use and in broadening the commercial base in the town centre. Where buildings contain more than one business, advertising opportunities may be limited; signage for upper floors should be restricted to lettering applied to the inside of windows (traditional painted letters are preferable to applied transfers) and a nameplate by the ground floor door.



- Shopfronts should aspire to be interesting with minimal signage on windows in order for the window display to be visible.



- Full coverage of windows by a sticker or stickers prevents views into the shop and should be avoided.
- Multiple small and disconnected stickers or posters in windows creates a cluttered street scene, prevents views into the shop and should be avoided.



SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

Fascia Signage

Fascia signage is the most notable element of the shopfront and care should be taken to ensure it complements the design of the shopfront and building, conveying a sense of permanence and quality, rather than brashness. Colour palettes, lettering style and illumination need to be considered in the design of a complementary fascia. Lettering should be painted directly onto the fascia or be individually cut letters. New fascias should reflect any existing historic fascia and should not extend above the shopfront or below, which would obscure the display window.

Some smaller historic shopfronts do not always contain a fascia. In these cases individual letters fixed directly to the wall without causing damage, or to window glass, may be appropriate.

Box signage, both illuminated and non-illuminated, is not appropriate to historic shopfronts. These mask architectural features and project further than the historic building line, creating a cluttered and blocky appearance.

Advertising consent may be required for changes to signage and care should be taken to avoid causing permanent damage to an historic fascia when attaching and removing individual cut lettering.

- Freestanding letters should be made from metal or timber and the aim should be for as slim a profile as possible. They should be carefully considered and installed to avoid permanent damage to a historic fascia.
- Hand-painted lettering should be suitably coloured to contrast with the fascia, preferably a light colour against a dark background.
- In both instances the height of the lettering should

be no more than two-thirds the heights of the fascia and normally centred about its horizontal and vertical axis, leaving reasonable space at each end of the fascia.

- Fascias should be a suitably muted colour.
- Where a store occupies several units, each should have a separate fascia, linked visually by a common design.

- Box signage both illuminated and unilluminated is not acceptable. It appears bulky and masks architectural features.
- The use of plastic, Perspex or similar materials applied to or incorporated into fascia signs is not acceptable.

- Fascias should not cover up or extend below or above the architrave and cornice of the entablature.
- The use of neon or other bright garish colours is not acceptable.
- Oversized lettering can create a cluttered and ill-proportioned appearance.



SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

Hanging, Projecting and Additional Signage

Traditional style projecting or hanging signs on a decorative metal bracket can increase the visual appeal of a shop and a street when used correctly and are common features of a historic streetscape. However, their overuse should be avoided to reduce clutter and they are therefore only acceptable as part of a cohesive scheme to reflect the uniformity of the group in terms of siting and size. A hanging sign is best installed at fascia level. The exception to this is where there is evidence of existing historic signs such as brackets or fixings in other locations such as above the fascia. There are numerous historic examples in the five market towns of brackets fixed above the fascia.

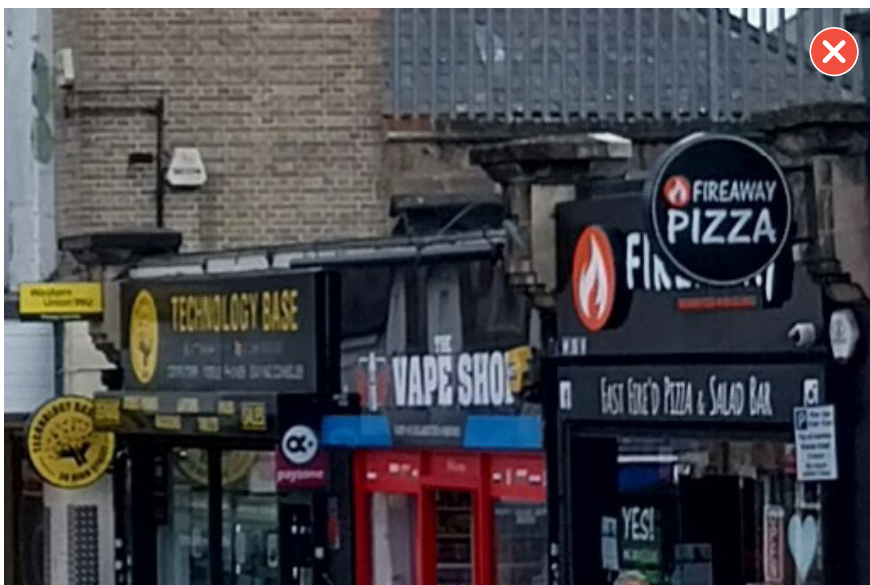
Projecting signs should be high quality and relate to the size and scale of the façade. Appropriate materials are painted timber or case metal and they should hang from suitably designed metal brackets fixed into mortar joints. There should only be one hanging sign for each shopfront.

There are a number of surviving historic brackets for hanging signs in the five market towns, though the signage has often been replaced and unsympathetic lighting has partly covered the brackets. On occasion, public houses have historic or historically appropriate hanging signs. Historic images record that hanging signs were more common than they are today. Solid and garish modern projecting signs are also present in all five towns.

The installation of a hanging sign on a listed building will require Listed Building Consent. If there are plans to alter or add any signage on a building it is best to check with the Breckland District Council as to whether advertisement consent is required.

Printed metal or plastic sign panels on areas of buildings where there is not a shopfront, such as on the first floor above the shopfront or on the gable end of row of shops, can be intrusive and are generally less successful than

a painted timber sign or individually applied lettering. Where attached to a Listed Building, additional consents may also be required. Modest lettering in windows is the preferred option.



SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

Temporary Banners

Temporary advertisement banners should only be used temporarily and not become permanent fixtures on a building as they are of lesser quality and visual appearance than superior quality painted timber signs and fade rapidly. Temporary banners attached to fences and railings also detract from the character of the historic street through creating a cluttered streetscape.



Large temporary signage detracts from shopfronts by covering up the display and creating a cluttered appearance. Poor condition of shopfronts also detracts.

SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

A-boards

The use of freestanding signs, or A-boards, placed on the public highway can create a cluttered and unattractive appearance as well as cause obstructions, creating issues for accessibility. They require consent from Norfolk County Council Highways if they are on a public highway. This is often the case in commercial areas which have narrow pavements and/or heavy traffic, such as on the High Street in Dereham and Whitehart Street in Thetford. A-boards are only permitted without consent on forecourts. A forecourt includes the area in front of a newsagents or tobacconist's shop or a terrace in front of a restaurant or cafe, it does not include the area of pavement in front of business premises which form part of a highway.

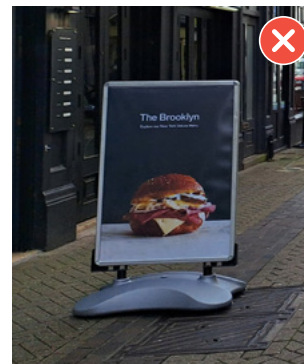
Within a Conservation Area they should be of a design appropriate to the character and appearance of the historic street which they are in. Timber A-boards with signage in accordance with the signage advice in the guidance above is more likely to be appropriate than modern plastic and metal A-boards with printed posters in bright colours and cluttered designs.

Chalkboard style A-boards can be a good solution for shops with regularly changing offers or other advertising needs, such as cafes or independent shops such as greengrocers. They provide a good alternative to excessive posters or other signage on windows and can be frequently changed. The chalkboard sign is also generally in keeping with a historic street scene.

Guidelines for design of A-boards where they are considered appropriate include:

- Boards should be of a reasonable size, for example they not exceed 0.6m.sq with a maximum base of 0.6m.

- Boards should be two sided and be of sufficient weight or design to prevent it being blown over in the wind.
- The position on the pavement should allow a minimum of 1.8m free passage on the pavement.



- Hanging signs should aim for a coherent style and size across a group or row of buildings.
- Only one hanging sign per shopfront.
- Hanging signs should be no higher than fascia level unless the historic/original sign was located higher.
- Signs should be painted timber or metal.

- No part of the sign should be less than 2.4m above pavement level.
- Brackets should be metal, simple and solid – flat section 'garden gate' ironwork is unlikely to be appropriate.
- Where A-boards are permitted they must be in materials and of a design appropriate to the historic street.

- Plastic signs, overly cheap or shiny materials or internally illuminated signs are not appropriate.
- Hanging banners are not appropriate, they can be visually intrusive, are difficult to maintain and can easily become damaged or dirty.

- A-boards of modern plastic or metal design with visually cluttered and bright printed posters are not appropriate.
- A-boards on public highways required consent from Norfolk County Council Highways.

SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

4.1.7 Lighting

Shopfronts

Well-designed lighting can enhance a shopfront and the streetscape, as well as make streets more welcoming and safer in the evenings. Internally lit window displays can be effective and attractive, encouraging out-of-hours window shopping. However, when poorly implemented they can also overly commercialise areas and appear garish.

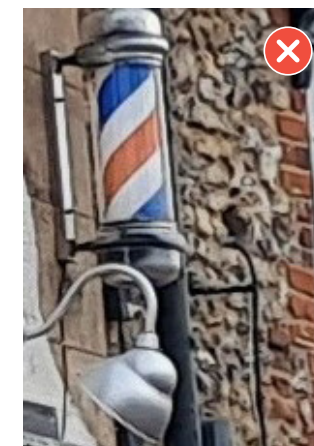
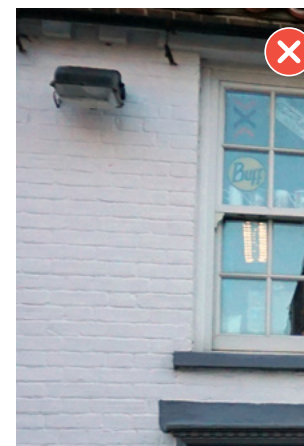
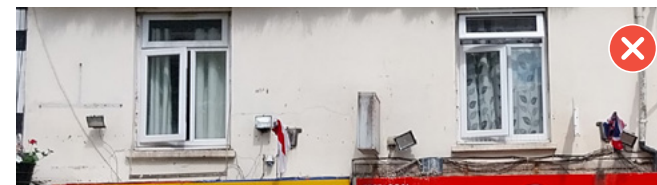
Existing street lighting should be considered as the primary method of illumination and the need for other lighting should be justified. Lighting will be judged on a case by case basis, for example, illumination in a commercial area will be seen as more acceptable than in a predominantly residential area or on a listed building. Where lighting is proposed, full details of the fitting, method of fixing and luminance will be required in support of the planning application. Where lighting a fascia is considered necessary this should take the form of discreet LED trough lights in a cornice or a small number of spotlights or halo lighting behind individual letters where they are projecting. Overly large and projecting trough lights can cast shadows over the fascia in daytime and clutter the fascia.

Internally illuminated fascias are not appropriate in historic areas and will be resisted. Large swan-neck lights were popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but they are easily damaged and overbearing. An excess of fittings such as long stemmed or swan-neck projecting lamps can also be disfiguring to a shopfront. Modern lighting technology allows for smaller lights to give the same effect and are preferable over larger types.

Where lighting is required on hanging signs, these should be in the form of discreet, slimline LED lighting attached a short distance off the bracket arm and should not obscure the historic bracket.

Whilst signage highlighting traditional professions is encouraged, plastic illuminated barber poles are low quality and are not appropriate. A timber painted barber's pole is more appropriate to the character of a historic street due to its use of traditional materials.

Neon signage when too large in scale or when multiple small neon signs are in a shop display can clutter the streetscape and be out of character with the historic streetscape. Well placed individual small neon signs within shop front displays are acceptable.



SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

Pubs and restaurants

Venues such as pubs and restaurants may require some form of illumination at night. Where it is installed, it should not be distracting or issue glare. Subtle external lighting, preferably LED fittings discreetly placed to illuminate key features on the shopfront is more appropriate than large projecting light fittings.



Historic lantern in the corner of facade appropriately subtle and in keeping with character of facade.



Large historic lantern appropriate. Swan lights over signage, Projecting spotlights on side and front of pub not appropriate.



Positive use of historic lighting flanking the doorway



Large historic street lantern over the pub doorway appropriate. The spotlights attached below cornice level not appropriate

- It must be demonstrated that any proposed lighting will enhance or maintain the character of the area and the frontage. Some areas may not be appropriate for additional lighting.
- Ensure fixtures and fittings, such as cabling, are suitably concealed within any design proposals.
- A slim LED strip light above the fascia to illuminate the signage is likely to be the most discrete approach.
- Halo lighting behind individual letters, internally illuminated lettering or a small quantity of appropriately sited spotlights or trough lighting along the fascia may be acceptable.
- A warmer yellow or orange light will be preferred over a colder white light.
- Internally illuminated box signs are not acceptable.

- Exposed or hanging cabling is not acceptable.
- Lighting should illuminate key features of signs on the building and not flood the pavement or wider area.
- Neon signage should be sensitively placed and of an appropriate scale.
- Hanging sign illumination should be discreet and not obscure the historic bracket.
- LED trough lighting should not be overly prominent and project out from the fascia.

SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

4.1.8 Canopies and Awnings

Awnings

Awnings and canopies can add interest to the street scene and in the past were a common feature of Breckland's towns, although few of these remain today. The restoration of these historic awnings would be appropriate if well designed and maintained. Canopies should avoid obscuring historic features, should be retractable and made of canvas. Dutch-style canopies, which are visible when retracted, are not appropriate. Canopies would have traditionally been positioned above fascia signage and this is therefore the most appropriate position for replacement or new canopies. Projecting hanging signage will allow the shop name and advertising to remain visible when the canopy is down. Plastic materials for canopies are not appropriate, canvas should always be used.

Within new shopfronts, awnings should be sensitively designed as an integral part of the shopfront, be retractable and should not obscure architectural features. Retractable awnings were traditionally positioned within the cornice above the fascia, but an alternative location is below the fascia, the suitability depending on the overall shopfront dimensions.

Awnings seem to be most commonly surviving in Attleborough, though archive images show that they were historically prominent in all the towns. Dereham has examples of Victorian retractable awnings in the fascia, though it is not clear if these are still in use. In some cases original awnings may have been replaced by less appropriate Dutch Canopies.



A good example of a retractable canopy



Positive example of a retractable awning



Example of a negative protruding box canopy

Gazebos

Gazebos are not appropriate within a historic shopping street as they block views down the streetscape and towards historic buildings, creating a cluttered appearance to the street. Where extra shelter is required, they should be to the rear of the property wherever possible.

- Canopies are acceptable where there is evidence of past canopies, or a strong justification demonstrates their requirement.
- All canopies should be retractable and should be retracted during closing hours.
- When open, canopies must be no less than 2.4m above the pavement and at least 1m in from the curb, in the interests of highway and pedestrian safety.
- The canopy should be the width of the shopfront's fascia and the accompanying blind box should be fitted flush with or behind the fascia.
- The size, shape and colour of canopies (and any accompanying blind box) should be compatible with the character of the shopfront, the building and the street scene.
- Some minimal text or signage may be incorporated into the canopy.

- The Dutch style canopy (a rigid or fixed canopy) is not appropriate
- Shiny and plastic canopies are not appropriate.
- Permanent and non-retractable canopies are not appropriate.
- Canopies should not be dominated by text or images. Lettering on canopies is likely to require advertising consent.
- Blind boxes protruding from the shopfront are not appropriate.
- Gazebos are not appropriate. Additional shelter should be located to the rear wherever possible.

SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

4.1.9 Security

Security after closing time is of obvious importance for businesses of any type. Good security of any shop should be integrated into the design and ad-hoc additions are rarely well-implemented. Historically, some shopfronts may have had timber shutters and where these survive or there is evidence of their existence they are an important feature to be retained and utilised.

External metal roller shutters have a detrimental effect on the appearance of the Conservation Areas within Breckland's market towns as they obscure historic features and window displays and have the effect of deadening the streetscape during closing hours. The latest police guidance also suggests that external shutters are counter-productive, as they can give the impression of an area being of a high-crime risk which encourages anti-social behaviour.

Modern external grilles or shutters are not desirable but, where there is a need for additional security, internally mounted shutters may be incorporated behind the glass frontage. These should be of a lattice design to allow pedestrians to see inside the shopfront. They should be galvanised or painted an appropriate colour depending on their host building. Specialist glass such as toughened or shatterproof glass may be installed where no historic glass exists and where the window frame allows for thicker glass panels.

Decorative external grilles and gates, for example ornate cast iron gates, may be an option in some circumstances if they are either historic or well-designed and in-keeping with the architectural style of the building and shopfront.

Additionally, CCTV and alarm boxes should be carefully sited to be as unobtrusive as possible and consideration should be given for the installation of cameras internally. They should be incorporated sensitively into the overall design of a new shopfront.



- Good security should be integrated into the overall design of a new shopfront.
- Internal lattice shutters are acceptable in most instances, including on listed buildings if sensitively designed.
- Internal shutters should be galvanised or painted depending on their host building with the aim of minimising their appearance.
- Toughened glass may be appropriate in some instances. However, where this requires the removal of historic glass it will not be acceptable.
- Decorative external grilles and gates may be an option in some circumstances if they are well-designed and in-keeping with the architectural style of the building and shopfront.



- External roller shutters are discouraged but sensitively designed external perforated shutters may be acceptable in some cases on non-listed buildings.

SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

4.1.10 Materials and Colour

As shopfronts have traditionally been of timber construction this continues to be the most appropriate material when a new shopfront following tradition design principles is proposed. Timber is a versatile material and can be finely detailed and moulded to many different profiles. It is therefore easily adapted to suit the needs of the majority of buildings. It is also durable and can be maintained or altered by repainting without detrimental effect to the overall character of the building.

Alternative materials may be acceptable for shopfronts on non-traditional buildings providing they are used sensitively to produce a well-designed shopfront appropriate to both the building and locality. The appropriate materials should be selected depending on the host building and may consist of stone, ceramic, stucco or metalwork. Inappropriate materials include modern glossy materials such as acrylic, Perspex and uPVC. These have a poor-quality appearance compared to the traditional materials of older buildings and do not age or weather well. High quality design and attention to detail will still be expected where non-traditional materials are used, especially within the Conservation Areas of Breckland.

Glazing is a traditional feature of shopfronts and is fundamental to the advertising and display function. Where original glass remains in a shopfront it should be retained. Modern float glass is a poor replacement for historic glazing as it lacks the texture and surface interest of the older glass.

Colour schemes should complement the character and appearance of the building and the street scene and should avoid garishness, preferably blending in with other subtle tones established elsewhere in good shopfront examples within their town centre. The use of traditional colours with a matt finish is generally recommended; heritage and more muted colours

are usually the most appropriate in a conservation environment, white varnished or exposed wood finish should be avoided.



- Shopfronts should use traditional materials that respond to the host building, typically timber and glazing is the most common treatment for shop frontages. Stone, ceramic, stucco or metalwork may be appropriate depending on the host building.
 - Historic glass should be retained where it survives.
 - Some high-quality contemporary materials can be used. However, their use will require justification.
 - The colour scheme should complement the building and the street scene. Traditional colours with a matt finish are generally recommended.
-
- Modern materials such as plastics, acrylic, Perspex or uPVC are not appropriate.
 - Garish colours are not appropriate.

SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

4.1.11 Conservation, Conversion and Reversal

Maintenance and of shopfronts and their buildings is key to ensuring the long-term condition and that small issues do not escalate to become problems that are costly to fix and cause excessive damage to built fabric. It is important to ensure buildings and sites are maintained in good condition and cleaned regularly to ensure their preservation and visual contribution to the streetscape.

Changes to the planning system have made it easier to transform retail premises into residential properties. These changes can have a major impact on the character of historic places. Many shops in our town centres were originally built as houses; shopfronts have been added throughout the centuries, frequently making use of a town centre building's prime location for passing trade. Good quality historic shopfronts that have been added later demonstrate the history of the building and add character to a streetscape and must therefore be retained during a conversion. Internal blinds or curtains are the preferred method for ensuring privacy over opaque glazing or film. In addition, the shop door should become the front door of the property so that no new doors need to be inserted into the shopfront.

Across the five Breckland market towns there are a number of historic shops converted for residential use. In addition, there are numerous vacant shops throughout the towns which may require alternative use in the future.



Former shopfront converted to residential use with curtains for privacy in Dereham. This shopfront was undergoing repair at the time of survey.



Example of a historic shopfront poorly converted into a house with solid walls and windows

- Shopfronts should not be left dirty or in poor condition.
- The replacement of historic shopfronts with solid walls and windows is not acceptable.
- The insertion of additional doors into the shopfront is not acceptable.

- Shopfronts should be maintained in good condition to ensure their preservation and positive contribution to the streetscape.
- Where good quality historic shopfronts survive, even if a later addition, the shopfront must be retained in any application for conversion.
- Internal blinds or curtains are appropriate to ensure privacy. In some cases it may be appropriate to insert a light-weight but reversible partition at an appropriate distance behind the shop window.

- The shop door should be retained as the front door. Any additional doors, for instance if the building is being converted into flats, should be located beyond the front door rather than inserting new doors into the shopfront.
- Where poor-quality modern shopfronts exist, conversion to residential use may be appropriate, done through reinsertion of the ground floor walls, windows and door. The design should consider the materiality, period and style of the building above.

SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

4.1.12 Access for All

All buildings open to the public should be fully accessible to everyone wherever possible, including those with mobility or sight difficulties. Careful consideration should be given to the shop entrance which should be made level with the pavement, wide enough for wheelchair access with sufficient manoeuvring space, and doors that are easy to open. Ramped access can be achieved by creating a ramp either internally or externally. Traditional recessed doorways are ideal in this aspect because the recess itself will often incorporate a slope. All new work should conform to current standards as set out in part M of the building regulations where applicable, although there are concessions regarding Listed Buildings. Highlighting entrance steps and overhanging edges assist where entrance steps are unavoidable.

For historic buildings a pragmatic approach should be taken to ensuring both accessibility and retention of historic interest. There will be some historic shops where level access would not be feasible, such as those with several narrow steps up to the door. However, historic interest must never be an excuse for avoidance of accessibility improvement. Historic England provides detailed guidance to help improve access to historic buildings: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/easy-access-to-historic-buildings/>. This guide is not specific to historic shopfronts but contains many helpful images of appropriate elements, such as ramps and railings.

4.1.13 Additional Services

Modern requirements of shops, restaurants and banks can result in a proliferation of ad-hoc additions which can clutter the appearance of the shopfront and detract from the overall appearance of the street which they are on.

Services such as burglar alarm boxes, wiring, piping, conduit pipes, junction boxes and similar fixtures and fittings should be carefully managed and rationalised. Care should be taken when installing these elements to place them in sensitive locations, avoiding the fascia and central locations on the first floor of the façade. Wiring and piping should be neatly attached with external wiring kept to a minimum. Loose and hanging wiring can create a cluttered and run-down appearance. When services fall out of use they should be removed to avoid unnecessary clutter on the façade.

On banks, cash machines can severely detract from the original design of the façade through being overly prominent and unsympathetic to the historic materials of the façade. Where necessary, cash machines should be minimal in design, in keeping with the building's

character and should avoid dominating the shopfront.

The high numbers of fast food restaurants in towns has resulted in the necessary additions of ventilation systems which, when poorly placed, can detract from the appearance of shopfronts through interrupting the original design of the shopfront and building above. Where possible the ventilation system should be installed within the building with a small, considerately placed extract point on the exterior of the building. If necessary to install outside the building, extraction systems should be located to the rear of the property, out of view of the main street. Where the rear of the shop is visible from the road, ventilation systems should be placed in a sensitive location to minimise visual impact on the street. The extraction system should be of a colour, finish and design to blend in with the buildings to which it is attached.

Bird prevention spikes above fascias can contribute to a cluttered and unattractive facade. The use of subtler bird prevention methods which are not visible from the street, such as bird free fire gell repellent, are preferable.

- All external services should be sensitively placed, well maintained and removed when they become redundant.
- Fast food premises should consider installing ventilation systems inside the building. When an external system is the only option these should be placed in a sensitive location and be of a design in terms of material and colour which is appropriate to the historic building.
- Bird prevention methods should be subtle and not be visible from the street.

- Modern external services in prominent locations on historic shopfronts or the building above are not acceptable
- Prominent ventilation systems which detract from the historic shopfront are not acceptable.
- Loose wiring and visible wiring across historic shopfronts is not acceptable.
- Bird prevention spikes above the fascia of a shopfront are not acceptable.

SECTION 4.0: PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS OF A SHOPFRONT



Side alleyway cluttered by extractor fans



Overly prominent security alarm on facade



Redundant services, security alarms and wires create a cluttered appearance



Black wires and bird prevention spikes running above the fascia unattractive

SECTION 5.0: ADVICE

5.1 Design Process

The diagram below outlines the steps required to ensure a new or altered shopfront has appropriate consent and is of appropriate design for its setting within a conservation area.

I want to alter an existing shopfront
or install a new shopfront

Is the building listed or in a Conservation Area?

Find out what permissions will be required

Carry out an inspection of the current shopfront and host building

Are there any surviving historic features that can be incorporated into the proposed scheme?

Is there any historical information on the building to inform your proposal?

Discuss initial ideas with Breckland Council

Use the guidance in this document prepare the design

Make necessary applications and other consents

Once consent received, instruct builders and install the shopfront

SECTION 5.0: ADVICE

5.2 What Permission Do I Require?

Do I Need Planning Permission?

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended), requires planning permission for:

- proposals which involve the insertion or creation of a new shopfront;
- any alteration to an existing shopfront including the size or position of the door, changing the size of the shop window, cladding the exterior, altering the frontage line, or removing a recessed door;
- the installation or replacement of glazing, blinds, security grill or shutters on a shopfront;
- installing of steps or a ramp;
- the development is within the curtilage of a listed building;
- is within a conservation area; or
- any part of the development would extend beyond an existing shopfront;

Like-for-like changes or painting a shopfront do not normally require permission, unless the building is listed. Pre-application is recommended and further details are available on The Breckland website here: <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/article/19041/Pre-application-advice>

It is suggested that you contact Breckland Council to determine the approach and extent of the works to your shopfront. It is also advisable to employ an experienced design professional when undertaking work on your shopfront. Architects and shopfront fabricators

usually have the correct experience to ensure the most successful outcome for the shopfront design. This can save time in the application process though preventing a lengthy back and forth discussion on appropriate designs with the Council.

A shopfront planning application often includes:

- A location map at a scale of 1:1250.
- A plan of the shopfront showing the structural elements within which it fits, for example the pilasters and the dimensions of the opening widths of the doors.
- An existing elevation drawing of the proposed shopfront.
- An elevation drawing of the proposed shopfront signs showing part of the adjoining shop units and upper floor.
- Drawings of specific proposed details such as joinery or mosaics.
- At least one cross section from the first floor window cill pavement level, including the fascia.
- Drawings should be at a scale of 1:50 or 1:20 and all materials and colours should be annotated.
- Design and Access Statement.
- A Heritage Statement may also be required. When a Heritage Statement is required it can be combined as one document with the above as a Design, Access and Heritage Statement. See Section 6.2 to view the factors which determine if a Heritage Statement is also required.

Be aware that if you carry out any work without gaining the necessary planning consent, enforcement action will be taken against you. Breckland Council can insist that all work carried out without consent is reversed and in more serious instances individuals may be taken to court.

SECTION 5.0: ADVICE

Do I Need Listed Building Consent?

In order to alter or extend a listed building (including an attached shopfront) in a way that affects its character or appearance as a building of special architectural or historic interest, or demolish it, listed building consent (LBC) from the local planning authority is needed.

The need for LBC is set out by the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990*. LBC is generally required for:

- Extensions, for example porches, dormer windows and conservatories
- Demolition of any part of a listed building, including chimneys or structures within the grounds of a listed building
- Fixtures, for example satellite dishes, shutters, burglar alarms, soil and ventilation pipes, rainwater pipes and gutters
- External alterations, for example rendering, cladding or painting any part of the building
- Internal alterations, for example the subdivision of rooms or removal of walls and the insertion, alteration, or removal of historic features such as shop fittings, doors, fireplaces, panelling, staircases and decorative mouldings; changing internal decoration may also require consent
- Alterations to 'curtilage' structures such as outbuildings, garden walls and statues
- Substantial repairs where the character of the listed building is changed, such as a major or complete roof replacement
- Any repair which is not like-for-like

LBC is not generally needed for:

- Repairs, particularly if they are on a like-for-like basis (identical in every respect of design, techniques, materials)

However, it is advisable to discuss with the conservation officer as to whether LBC is required as, for example, the replacement of a substantial section of timber shopfront with matching new timber might be considered to affect the character of the listed building, therefore requiring LBC.

Unauthorised work is a criminal offence and individuals can be prosecuted. The planning authority can insist that all work carried out without consent is reversed and in more serious instances individuals can be fined or even imprisoned.

Planning permission may be needed alongside Listed Building Consent and pre-application advice is recommended ahead of most applications. A Heritage Statement or Heritage Impact Assessment will likely be required as part of your application (see information box).

For further guidance on Listed building consent, see Historic England, [Advice Note 16, Listed Building Consent](#)

What is a Heritage Statement or Heritage Impact Assessment?

Heritage Statement or Heritage Impact Assessment is a process used when proposals are put forward for change to the historic environment. It is usually a requirement of listed building consent or planning consent for proposals within a Conservation Area. It identifies what is historically and architecturally important about a heritage asset, in order to be able to assess whether proposed changes will have a positive, negative or no impact on the heritage values of the place. Advice is usually given by a specialist heritage consultant and the resulting conclusions presented in a report, which should include:

- Identification and description of the proposals site and its setting;
- Identification of any designations, such as listing, which the site is subject to or which are within the setting of the site;
- Description of the history of the site and its setting;
- Identification of the 'significance' of the site, i.e. its historic and architectural interest; and
- An assessment of the impact the proposals will have on the significance of the site, as well as recommendations for any changes to the scheme that will reduce any negative impacts that are identified.

SECTION 5.0: ADVICE

Do I Need Advertising Consent?

The display of advertisements is controlled through Advertisement Consent and separate planning permission is not required in addition to the consent. Generally, consent is required for most illuminated and non-illuminated signs, and there are tighter controls within conservation areas. Detailed guidance is available in the Government publication 'Outdoor Advertisements and Signs: A Guide of Advertisers' available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/outdoor-advertisements-and-signs-a-guide-for-advertisers>

Do I Need to Apply for Building Regulation Approval?

Building Regulation approval is required for new shopfronts when any alterations affect the building's structural stability, means of escape or the position of the entrance approach and or doorway.

Researching the History of a Building

Before proposing any change to a shopfront, it is important to understand the history of the building or street in which it is located. This will require some research into its historical development. It may offer compelling evidence for the previous form of a building and its shopfront.

Building Control plans can assist in development an appropriate design and potentially override generic guidance within this guide. Some useful places to start your research are detailed below:

The National Heritage List for England, to find out whether your building is listed and now gives detailed histories on many of the historic buildings in the Conservation Area: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

The Norfolk Record Office are available to visit by appointment and hold historic photographs. Their catalogue can be searched online here: <https://www.archives.norfolk.gov.uk/>

The Norfolk Heritage Centre in the Forum, Norwich also holds historic images. They are open daily and information about visiting can be found here: <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/article/40303/Visit-Norfolk-Heritage-Centre>

Picture Norfolk is also an excellent place to search for historic images of Norfolk's commercial streets: <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/article/40305/Picture-Norfolk>

England's Places has a digital collection of online images which occasionally contain photographs of historic shopfronts within Breckland towns. This can be searched here: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/photos/englands-places/>

The National Archives. These are located at Kew, London and the catalogue can be searched online at: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

British Newspaper Archive Online, which can often be a useful source of local history information: <https://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

National Library of Scotland, which allows you to view numerous historic maps online: <https://maps.nls.uk/>

Britain from Above. This allows you to view historic aerial images from the early twentieth century and can occasionally include details of building frontages: <https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en>

All rights in this work are reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means (including without limitation by photocopying or placing on a website) without the prior permission in writing of Purcell except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. Applications for permission to reproduce any part of this work should be addressed to Purcell at info@purcelluk.com.

Undertaking any unauthorised act in relation to this work may result in a civil claim for damages and/or criminal prosecution. Any materials used in this work which are subject to third party copyright have been reproduced under licence from the copyright owner except in the case of works of unknown authorship as defined by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. Any person wishing to assert rights in relation to works which have been reproduced as works of unknown authorship should contact Purcell at info@purcelluk.com.

Purcell asserts its moral rights to be identified as the author of this work under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Purcell® is the trading name of Purcell Architecture Ltd.

© Purcell 2025