

Shopfront Design Guide



Adopted - February 2013



Planning for a Better Watford

Shopfront Design Guide

Contents

1.0	Introduction.....	page 3
2.0	Planning Policy Background.....	page 3
3.0	Designation	page 3
4.0	Local Consultation.....	page 3
5.0	The Importance of Good Design	page 3
6.0	Appraising the Shopfront.....	page 5
7.0	Design Approach	page 6
8.0	Fascia.....	page 7
9.0	Cornice.....	page 8
10.0	Pilasters.....	page 8
11.0	Stallriser	page 9
12.0	Windows.....	page 10
13.0	Doors.....	page 10
14.0	Signage	page 10
15.0	Lighting.....	page 11
16.0	Security	page 12
17.0	Blinds and Canopies	page 13
18.0	Fixtures and Fittings.....	page 14
19.0	Change of Use	page 15
20.0	Controls on Development.....	page 16
	Glossary of Terms.....	page 16
Appendix 1	Planning Controls	page 18

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Shops in the Borough of Watford are housed in a range of buildings – both old and modern, which reflect the development of the local area. This variety of architecture contributes to local character, but is vulnerable to insensitive change over time. To ensure that shop units continue to contribute positively to their local townscape, their detailed design should be considered before development takes place. This Design Guide will provide a framework for delivering a sensitive approach to shopfront design in Watford.
- 1.2 This document provides one component of a set of design documents for the Borough. These other documents include two Residential Design Guides (2008) and a Streetscape Design Guide (2013).

2.0 Planning Policy Background

- 2.1 This document replaces the existing guide, Supplementary Planning Guidance 16 – Shopfront Design Guide (2001). That document related to the Watford District Plan 2000 (2003). This updated Shopfront Design Guide provides additional guidance in support of Policy U24 (Shopfronts), which is included in the Watford District Plan 2000 (2003). Policy U24 is a saved policy and still applies. It states:

The Council will require a high standard of appearance of all shopfronts and associated awnings, roller shutter grilles and signs. New shopfronts should be in keeping with the character of the upper part of the building and relate well to adjoining frontages. Traditional signs and fascias should be preserved wherever possible.

- 2.2 In addition, many of the shop units in the Borough are located within one of the nine designated conservation areas and/or are housed within Locally/Nationally Listed Buildings. Where development occurs to one of these heritage assets, the works should be in accordance with saved policies U10 – U18 in the Watford District Plan 2000 (2003). If a shop unit is located within a conservation area then reference should be made to the relevant conservation area character appraisal document.
- 2.3 Watford Borough Council are currently working on a new policy document on Development Management. This development plan document will include policy on shopfront design that will replace the aforementioned policies U10 - U18 and U24 in due course.

3.0 Designation

- 3.1 This document was adopted by Watford Borough Council Cabinet as a Supplementary Planning Document on the 18th February 2013. It provides detail to support policy in higher level Development Plan Documents (District Plan, Core Strategy and Development Management Policies).

4.0 Local Consultation

- 4.1 An earlier draft of this document was published for public consultation from 17 September to 29 October 2012. This final version has been produced with the benefit of the comments received during that consultation.

5.0 The benefits of good design

- 5.1 Whilst the principle purpose of a shopfront is the advertisement and display of those goods and services provided inside the building, good design promotes not only the individual shop but contributes to its location – raising the quality of the street. By reflecting the style of the whole building and that of its neighbours, a good design treats the shopfront as an integral part of the street frontage as well as focussing on the particular retail outlet.

5.2 Key issues to consider are:

- the proportions of the shopfront should harmonise with the main building;
- materials should reflect the existing range on the original building;
- the shopfront should not be treated separately from the upper levels;
- it should add interest and attract custom;
- standard “house” design should be integrated sensitively to reflect the characteristics of the street scene or building.



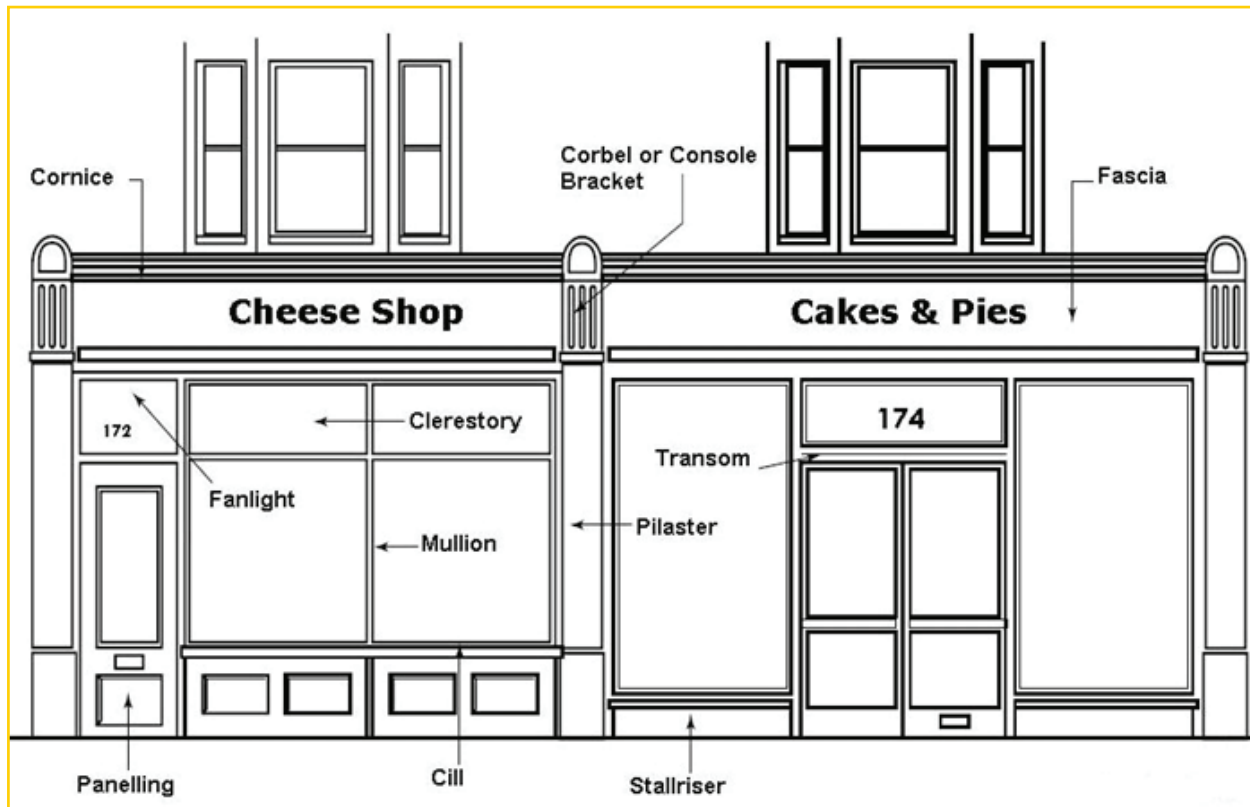
Poor quality shopfronts that harm the character of the area and provide an unattractive environment for potential visitors. Negatives include the loss of original features, inconsistent proportions of shopfronts, poorly integrated additions and visual clutter.



High quality shopfronts that enhance the character of the area and provide an attractive environment for potential visitors.

6.0 Appraising the shopfront

6.1 The first step in designing a shopfront on an existing building is to make a careful appraisal of the premises. This should include understanding the existing shopfront, the rest of the building to which it is attached, and the surroundings. The design of a shopfront should not be considered in isolation but as a key part of the overall composition of the building itself and the wider rhythm of the street. In order to understand how to design a shopfront, it is important to understand the key features of a high quality shopfront (see diagram below).



Components of a traditional shopfront

6.2 When altering the shopfront on an established building, it is worth considering how the design of the elevation has been treated historically. The Council has produced a number of documents which may be helpful in providing character analysis – particularly the various conservation area character appraisal documents and the Watford Character of Area Study. Further historical information and photographs may be available from the Watford Museum or in local historical literature.

Design Principle 1: Appraising the context

Before formulating design proposals for shopfronts, developers should consider the architectural style of the shopfront, as well as adjoining buildings/shopfronts and the wider street scene. Historical evidence should be used to inspire designs that are in keeping with the character of the area. Research and analysis that has helped guide shopfront designs should be detailed by applicants in planning applications.

7.0 Design Approach

- 7.1 Once a proper appraisal of the shopfront has been made, it is important to assess the design approach to be taken. In all cases, where a traditional or historic shopfront exists, the council will insist on its retention. This is especially important in conservation areas and/or on locally/nationally listed buildings. Many traditional shopfronts only need repair to give them a stable future. Even where the original shopfront has been removed, much of the architectural framework often survives, sometimes covered up by modern fascia and signs.
- 7.2 There are a variety of approaches which can be adopted to shopfront design. The Council will generally encourage shop owners first to repair original shopfronts, second to repair or re-establish the traditional architectural frame of the shopfront, and third to propose carefully proportioned, well resolved high quality modern design. Two common approaches to shopfront design are:

• Traditional Design

A traditionally designed shopfront often has the entrance door set back from the back edge of the pavement. It will normally consist of pilasters, with architectural details such as capital and plinth, a corbel or console bracket, cornice and frieze or fascia – which generally has a hand painted sign. The shop window will typically include two vertical mullions and a transom rail at door head level with clerestory or transom lights above. It will be made of timber and sit within the traditional architectural framework around the opening.



Traditional design of shopfront In Oxhey



Traditional design of shopfront in West Watford

• Modern Shopfront

Where appropriate to the architectural context, a modern shopfront may be appropriate. This could be developed either within the traditional surround or within a carefully articulated new shopframe that reinterprets the proportions and form of the adjacent shopfronts in a contemporary manner. The design of modern replacement shopfronts should be of a high standard in order to bring diversity and vitality to the street.



Modern design of shopfront on a contemporary building in the town centre.



Modern design of shopfront on a building in a retail park. Traditional design would not be appropriate in this context.

Design Principle 2:

Appropriate development approach

When considering the appropriate approach to altering a shopfront, developers should first consider the appropriateness of sensitive repair work. If the shopfront is to be replaced, the design approach should be in keeping with the architectural character of the whole property and wider streetscape.

Opportunities to enhance existing shopfronts should be made, especially where previous alterations have degraded the overall quality.

8.0 Fascia

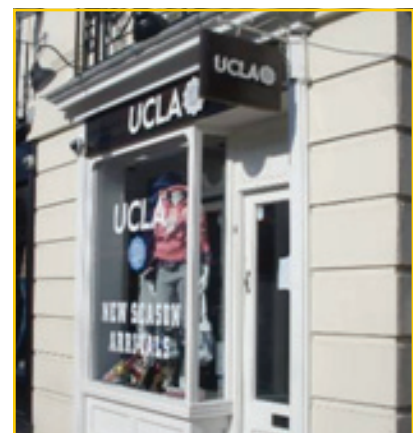
8.1 Fascias form the dominant feature of the shopfront. The fascia is key to advertising a business' service and is usually the first feature a customer will take notice of. Therefore it is critical that acceptable materials for fascias are used and subsequently incorporated into the wider design of the shopfront. This will ensure that it remains an attraction without harming the character of the shopfront as a whole.



Bad example of a fascia



Bad example of a fascia



Good example of a fascia

Design Principle 3:

Fascia

The fascia should:

- be of a scale proportionate to the rest of the building;
- not extend below the bottom of the corbel;
- not obscure windows and architectural detailing;
- not extend above the ground floor level; and
- align with other fascias in the parade.
- where a store occupies several units, each should have a separate fascia, linked visually by a common design;
- any existing fascias of historic and/or architectural merit on shopfronts should be incorporated into design proposals and not be covered by a new fascia or sign;
- the use of box fascias should be avoided as they are often unsympathetic to their surroundings in terms of bulk, size, materials and the lighting within the box fascia; and
- non acrylic and matt finish materials should be used in fascia design on heritage assets.

9.0 Cornice

9.1 The cornice defines the top of the shopfront and is often a highly decorative feature. It gives protection to the lower elements of the shopfront from rain, which helps to protect timber shopfronts from rotting. It also provides a horizontal division between the top of the shopfront and the upper floors and completes the overall shopfront frame.

Design Principle 4:

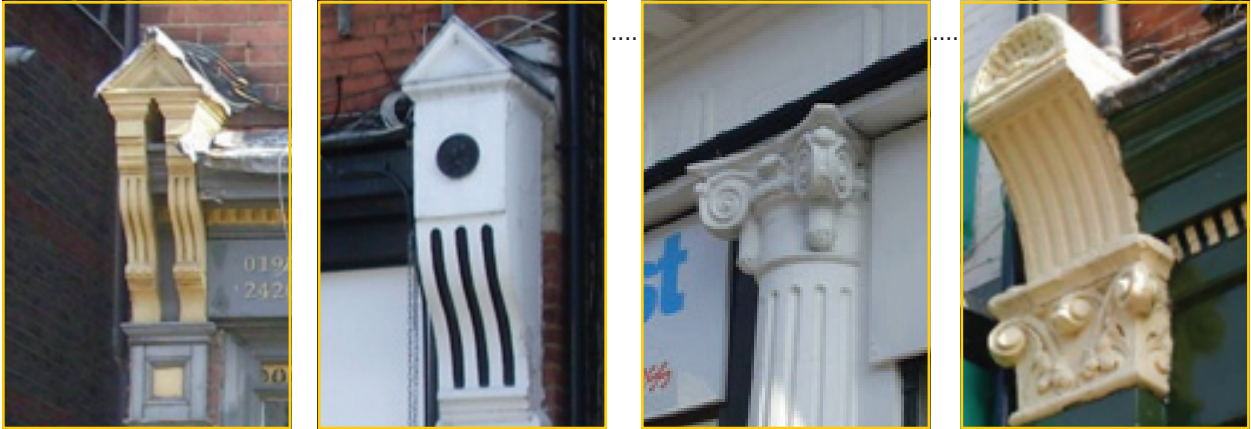
Cornice

- A cornice should always form part of a traditional shopfront design and is a desirable element on all shopfronts;
- Existing historic cornice details should be retained or reinstated where missing;
- If the fascia does not have enclosing console brackets, the cornice should have returns back to the wall;
- If the projection is sufficient, the cornice may incorporate a trough light; however, it should be sited well below any upper floor window cills.

10.0 Pilasters

10.1 The pilaster is a vertical column which frames the shopfront and provides visual support to the fascia and the upper floors of the building. Pilasters usually project out from the rest of the shopfront and incorporate a plinth at the base and a corbel or console bracket at the apex.

10.2 Within traditional shopfronts, when a single shopfront extends across two or more buildings, the use / retention of pilasters provides the ideal design solution when shopfront design is seeking to respect the character and identity of an individual building.



Local examples of pilasters & corbels/console brackets

Design Principle 5:

Pilasters

- Pilasters are an integral part of shopfront design and should always be incorporated into shopfront design in some capacity;
- Existing historic or traditional pilasters should be retained or reinstated where missing;
- Where pilasters form part of a new shopfront design they should always incorporate a base plinth and a corbel/console bracket;
- Modern shopfront designs should use pilaster detailing to maintain a clear means of separation between adjacent shops, buildings or distinct architectural units.

11.0 Stallriser

11.1 Stallrisers are a common feature of traditional shopfronts. They provide a robust base to protect the shopfront from damage and give proportion and character to the shopfront. Where appropriate colours and materials are used, stallrisers add positively to the appearance of the shopfront. Common materials include: timber, stone, brick and ceramics.

Design Principle 6:

Stallriser

- A stallriser should form part of the design for a new or replacement shopfront on a heritage asset. They may also be desirable on a modern shopfront;
- Existing historic stallrisers should be retained;
- Stallrisers should provide a solid visual base to the shop front and help to visually balance the fascia and cornice above;
- Timber, brick and stone are generally suitable materials for stallrisers as long as they are in character with the architectural style and historical context of the host building;
- Good quality anodised or colour-coated aluminium will be considered where a modern shopfront design is deemed appropriate.

12.0 Windows

- 12.1 Shop windows have traditionally had window panes subdivided by vertical timber uprights, known as mullions, and horizontal timber members, known as transoms. These provide structural support for the glass.
- 12.2 As technology has advanced, it has become possible to manufacture larger panes of glass requiring minimal support. This approach can be successful in modern shopfronts, but is inappropriate on traditional shopfronts.

Design Principle 7:

Windows

- The method of subdivision and proportions of the windows should relate to the character of the building. Smaller subdivisions will be appropriate on historic buildings, while larger subdivisions will be more suitable on more modern buildings.

13.0 Doors

- 13.1 The entrance to the shop gives the first impression of the premises. Providing a design that is in keeping with the character of the wider shopfront is important, but so is ensuring that access points are safe and secure for all visitors.
- 13.2 Of equal importance is the design of any entrances to accommodation in the upper floors of properties. These may form part of the overall shopfront façade and their design should be in keeping with the materials and proportions of the wider shopfront.
- 13.3 Doors need to accommodate the requirements of Part B and Part M of the Building Regulations. This documents set out the recommendations for the opening size and configuration of approach for the disabled that need to be accommodated in any new shopfront design.

Design Principle 8:

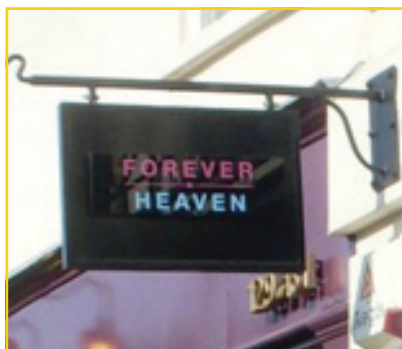
Doors

- Recessed entrance doors should be retained where they currently exist or be incorporated into a traditional shopfront design where this is to be reinstated.
- Doors to all entrances should be designed to harmonise with the overall shopfront design.
- Treatment of the threshold in the form of decorative tiles is encouraged to contribute originality and interest to the design. Where existing historic or traditional decorative thresholds exist already, these should be retained.

14.0 Signage

- 14.1 Signage is used to advertise a shop's product or service and may be incorporated into various elements of the shopfront. The design of signs, including the use of lettering and colour, needs to respect the character of the individual building and wider streetscape in order to harmonise the shopfront with its surroundings. Whilst working within these parameters, designing signs also provides businesses with the opportunity to be creative and innovative in order to capture the interests of passers by and develop an interesting streetscape.
- 14.2 Many businesses have a corporate style which they wish to utilise in individual business premises. In particularly sensitive locations, such as conservation areas or on listed buildings, there will be a need to adapt standard signs and lettering so that they are proportionate to the fascia and the rest of the shopfront, without

compromising the overall legibility of the signs. The use of colour in signs can enhance or intrude upon the streetscape, so it may be necessary to tone down corporate branding in order to harmonise with both the shopfront and the streetscape.



Good local examples of signage

Design Principle 9:

Signage

Signs should respect the character of the individual building and adjoining properties. Businesses located within a heritage asset or conservation area should adapt their corporate style to preserve and enhance the integrity of the shopfront and the wider streetscape.

Projecting or hanging signs should:

- not obscure architectural detailing;
- not be located above fascia level;
- clear the highway by a minimum height of 2.14m; and
- allow for a minimum distance of 1m between its furthest projecting edge and the vehicular highway.

Projecting box signs are not suitable in conservation areas or on heritage assets. External illumination can be achieved by subtle trough lighting. In addition, there should only be one box or hanging sign per shopfront.

Lettering on signs and fascias should:

- enhance the appearance and attraction of the shopfront whilst respecting the character of the shopfront and streetscape; and
- be spaced and sized appropriately.

15.0 Lighting

15.1 Modest and subtle lighting can be the key to a lively and safe night time environment. The principle of lighting a shopfront is usually positive as it can improve the vibrancy of the streetscene at night and improve the quality of the local environment for users. Lighting and illumination also play an important role in shop security and making pedestrians feel safer.

15.2 There are three basic ways of illuminating fascias; either internally through box signs or backlit with halo

lighting or externally by means of spotlighting or strip-lighting. Full internal illumination of signs is often inappropriate on traditional shopfronts and historic buildings because it is out of character.



Bad examples of lighting (internally illuminated)



Good examples of lighting (externally illuminated)

Design Principle 10:

Lighting

Lighting on buildings will be acceptable where:

- it can be demonstrated that the visual appearance of the shopfront can be improved without having a negative impact on neighbouring shopfronts; and
- fixtures and fittings such as cabling are suitably concealed within any design proposals.

Signage lighting will be acceptable where:

- the lighting used comprises halo lighting behind individual letters or internally illuminated lettering or a small quantity of appropriately sited spotlights/trough lighting;

Within conservation areas or on listed buildings, full internal illumination of signs will not be acceptable. All illuminations should be aesthetically sympathetic to the individual building and the streetscape.

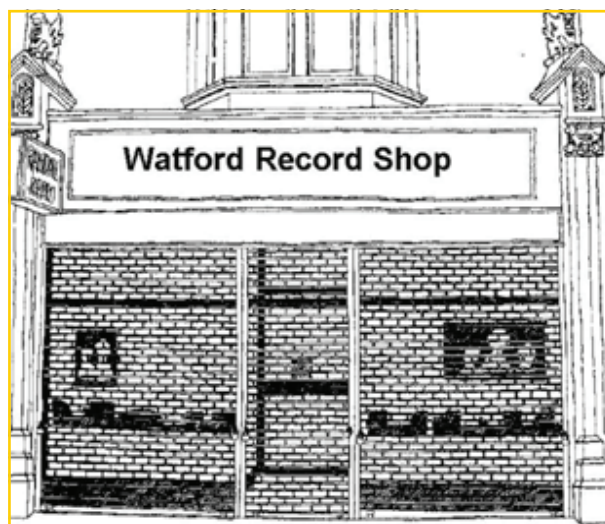
16.0 Security

16.1 Retail centres and shopping parades should be places where people feel safe to visit. This should remain the case even outside normal shopping hours. Shopfront security should be included as a complementary part of any design from the outset and should not dominate the shopfront when the premises are closed. Solid metal shutters create a dull and unwelcoming atmosphere. Solid shutters reduce the surveillance of the street and provide a surface that can easily be used for graffiti.

16.2 To ensure that adequate levels of security are provided, all externally facing doors and shutters should conform to at least standard rating 2 of the guidance document: LPS 1175 (available online).



Solid shutters are not acceptable



If shutters have to be included, they should be of the lattice type

Design Principle 11: Security

The following security measures may be acceptable:

- laminated glazing;
- lattice grill or perforated shutters which offer a level of transparency to and from the street (shutter boxes should be located within the shopfront or recessed level with the fascia); and
- expandable gates and lockable metal gates on recessed doors.

The use of solid shutters on shopfronts is unacceptable. The use of external security shutters is unlikely to be acceptable on heritage assets and on buildings located within conservation areas.

17.0 Blinds and Canopies

17.1 Blinds and canopies are primarily used to provide protection from the weather for shoppers and goods inside or outside a shop. They can be an attractive addition to a shopfront and the wider street scene when included in the overall shopfront design.

17.2 To ensure that there is adequate clearance for mechanised street sweepers, all blinds and canopies should clear the pavement by a minimum height of 2.40 metres, while the distance between the far edge of the canopy/ blind and the kerb should be at least 1 metre – to avoid conflict with vehicles travelling on the carriageway.

17.3 If a new canopy has lettering on it advertisement consent will be required, while if it is blank it will require planning permission.



Oversized canopies harm the setting of a shopfront



Smart and simple roller blinds are likely to be acceptable

Design Principle 12: Blinds and Canopies

The most suitable type of canopy/blind is a straight canvas retractable canopy/blind. The blind/canopy should be the width of the shopfront's fascia and the accompanying blind box should be fitted flush with or behind the fascia.

Proposals will be required to meet the following criteria:

- the blind box should be successfully incorporated into shopfront design;
- the size, shape, colour and materials of blinds/canopies (and any accompanying blind box) should be compatible with the character of the shopfront, the building and the street scene;
- blinds and canopies should be positioned appropriately in the context of the shop and not to obscure any architectural detailing;
- the use of non retractable canopies will not be permitted in conservation areas and on heritage assets;
- the outer edge of the blind/canopy needs to be a minimum of 1m from the kerb line;
- the height of the blind/canopy must be no less than 2.40m from pavement level; and
- if the blind/canopy covers all or part of an area where smoking occurs then it must not contravene the requirements of the relevant smoking legislation.

18.0 Fixtures and Fittings

- 18.1 The attachment of additional external fixtures to shops and upper floors, in addition to the normal shop signage, can result in building frontages becoming visually cluttered and unsightly. External fixtures are often added incrementally, but gradually result in an accumulation of extraneous items. They are often positioned in a visually arbitrary and ill-thought out fashion.
- 18.2 The visual appeal of a building's frontage, particularly on heritage assets, can be enhanced by rationalising/removing/relocating fixtures and fittings, such as redundant security alarms, external cable runs, lamps and pigeon deterrents.
- 18.3 If any external part of the building is to be used for a smoking area then an external ashtray will need to be provided.

- 18.4 If an ATM is installed on the exterior of a building then an external bin will need to be provided. Development of new ATMs should be in accordance with the ATM Best Practice Guide document prepared by the ATM Security Working Group (available online).

Design Principle 13:

Fixtures and Fittings

Redundant fixtures and fittings should be removed as part of any planning application, with the exception of those which add to the character of a heritage asset. Any holes or marks left on the building following removal should be sympathetically repaired with materials that will not have a detrimental impact upon the fabric of the building.

If new fixtures and fittings are required, these need to be discreetly positioned within the building and should not cover any existing architectural detailing. If required a rod and wire deterrent system should be used to deter pigeons.

Where any external part of the building is to be used for a smoking area an external ashtray will need to be provided.

Where a new ATM (cash machine) is to be installed it should be:

- sited in a well lit area where the machine can be well surveyed by passing pedestrians;
- sensitively sited;
- installed flush with the wall and not positioned in a recess; and
- be accompanied by an external bin.

19.0 Change of Use

- 19.1 Over time, properties in Watford that have historically housed commercial uses have been converted into other uses, such as residential accommodation. When this has occurred, the original shopfront has often become redundant and the façade has been vulnerable to insensitive alterations.
- 19.2 Where properties are converted away from commercial uses, it is important that the design of the shopfront is considered, so as to avoid uncomfortable relationships on the elevations. Where former commercial properties have already been subject to a change of use, opportunities should be taken for sensitive repairs and enhancements to preserve and enhance historic detailing.



Poorly designed conversion



Well designed conversion

**Design Principle 14:
Change of Use**

When a property housing a shopfront is the subject of proposals to change its use consideration should be made of any physical changes to the building. Any proposed physical changes should have regard to the design of external elevations. Where an existing shopfront is of good quality and is historically and/or architecturally important it should be retained in order to protect the character of the building and street. Privacy can be achieved through use of frosted glass or internal blinds.

20.0 Controls on development

20.1 For all building work, the owner of the property is ultimately responsible for complying with the relevant planning laws and building regulations. Failure to comply with the relevant laws could result in the owner being liable for enforcement action from the Council. The general advice is to always discuss proposals with planning officers and building control surveyors from Watford Borough Council before starting work. Details of the relevant controls are given in Appendix 1.

Glossary of Terms

Capital – an ornamental feature at the top of a pilaster.

Cill – a horizontal bar at the bottom of a window.

Clerestory – a raised element of fenestration.

Console/Corbel – an ornamental bracket used to support a horizontal feature.

Console bracket – a bracket with an outward curving scroll, located at the top of a pilaster.

Conservation area character appraisal – a published document defining the special architectural or historic interest which warranted the area being designated.

Cornice – a projecting, decorative moulding found along the top of a building.

Façade – the exterior face of a building.

Fascia – the surface between the fenestration and the cornice on a shopfront, which often displays the principal signage.

Halo lighting – typically used for back-lit letters to create a glow of light around the letters by illuminating the wall surface from within the letterform.

Heritage asset – a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest.

Moulding – a continuous projection or groove used decoratively to throw shadow or rain water off a wall.

Mullion – a vertical element (glazing bar) that divides a window into two or more lights.

Pilaster – a vertical structural part of a building that projects partway from a wall.

Plinth – Moulded projecting base at the foot of a pilaster.

Stallriser – the panel below the window on a shopfront which raises the window up from ground level.

Transom – a horizontal bar across a window.

Trough lighting – an enclosed lighting unit that is supported on brackets and shines light externally – typically onto a fascia board below.

Appendix 1

Planning Controls

A shop here is defined as any street-level premises with a fascia sign and/or a display window, and includes non-retail premises such as betting offices, restaurants, takeaways, amusement centres, estate agents, building societies and other businesses in a shopping area.

- If a property is not subject to additional planning controls, (see below), a shopfront may be redecorated or the signage (un-illuminated) may be changed without the need for planning permission.
- Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, significant alterations, new shopfronts, or illuminated signage require planning permission.
- Signs may also require a separate application for consent under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992.

Additional Controls

• Listed Buildings

It is a criminal offence under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to alter, extend or demolish any part of a listed building without first obtaining Listed Building Consent. This will be required for any changes affecting the appearance of a shopfront, including alterations, a replacement door, security measures or signs.

• Locally Listed Buildings

Locally Listed Buildings may be subject to Article 4 Directions, which restrict permitted development rights. Planning permission may therefore be required for works to shopfronts that materially affect their appearance.

• Conservation Areas

It is also a criminal offence under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to demolish an unlisted building in a conservation area. Commercial properties do not enjoy permitted development rights under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995, and as such any alterations within conservation areas will require planning permission.



This document can be made available in alternative formats including large print. The council also has staff who can verbally translate the document into a range of other languages. Please contact us on tel: 01923 226400 for more information.

Development Management,

Watford Borough Council,
Town Hall,
Watford,
WD17 3EX.

Telephone: 01923 278293

Email: developmentcontrol@watford.gov.uk

Planning Policy Team,

Watford Borough Council,
Town Hall,
Watford,
WD17 3EX.

01923 278970

strategy@watford.gov.uk

www.watford.gov.uk/planning