



design guide

## Shop Fronts, Frontages and Advertisements Good Practice Guidelines

This leaflet contains advice for anyone who is considering making changes to shop fronts in the Vale of Glamorgan's commercial centres, whether in Barry, Penarth, Llantwit Major, Cowbridge, Dinas Powys or in one of the villages.

The Design Guide is intended to encourage the process of improving the image of the Vale's commercial centres by providing advice and illustrations to show good practice.

Everybody has a contribution to make towards improving the quality of the environment within the commercial centres – owners, shopkeepers, architects and other designers, the users and not least, the Council. It will require co-operation and a willingness to take part in the improvements and everyone involved will need to help in caring for a particular commercial centre.

### Shop fronts

The Council is keen to see well-designed shop fronts and signs because they play a vital role in attracting customers. Good design makes commercial sense and strengthens the character of shopping areas. People come into close contact with shop fronts and their quality helps to create a favourable impression.

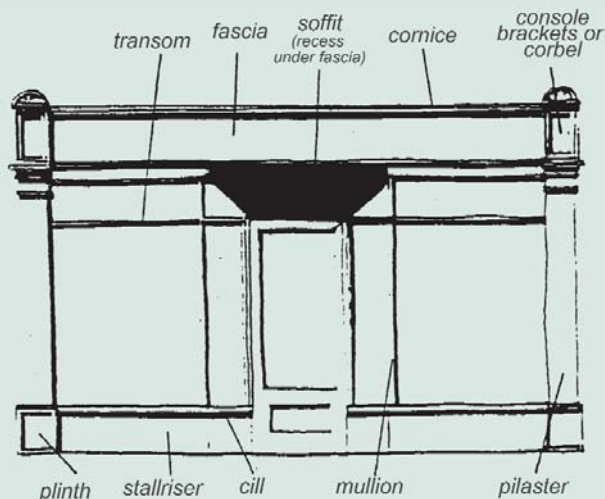
High quality materials will keep their looks and weather better than cheaper solutions, although modern materials such as uPVC or aluminium are usually visually unsuitable when inserted in traditional surroundings. Good design will also avoid delays in obtaining planning permission. The Council's Officers will be glad to provide you with further advice and guidance. Contact details are given at the end of this leaflet.

A new shop front, whether a traditional or contemporary style, should not be designed in isolation from the rest of the building – it should relate to the entire façade. Vertical elements should continue through the front of the building to the ground, framing the sides of the shop front.

The insertion of poorly proportioned windows to upper floors usually affects the facade as a whole. Traditional designs such as sash windows, which are usually harmoniously proportional, are successful in this respect and do not detract from the overall appearance of the frontage.

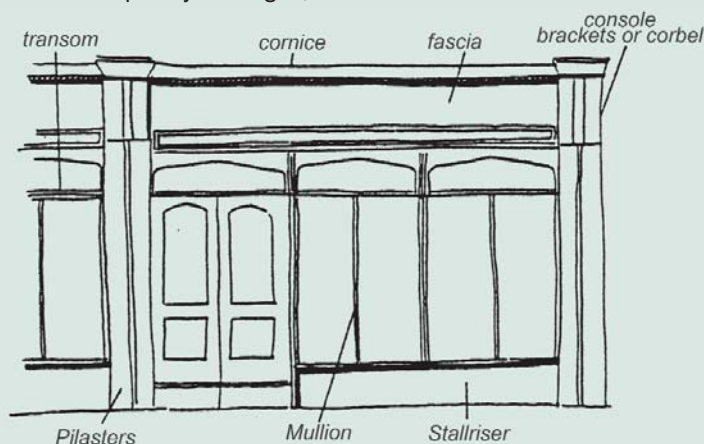
## The Traditional Approach

The standard form for shop fronts is based on classical precedents and has remained essentially unchanged since the 1700's. The shop front acts like a picture frame which contains the signage, detailing and displays and relates closely to the whole building frontage. Its elements are shown below.



*The elements of the traditional shopfront*

The Vale of Glamorgan still has some good examples of traditional shop fronts. The principles behind the traditional approach can also be applied to create good modern contemporary frontages, as below.



*Sensitive, contemporary design retaining traditional scale*

On a shop front building where the original shop front has survived or the shop front has historic interest, the simple advice is to repair or restore rather than replace it. An historic shop front will usually have details and decorative features which are much more elaborate and interesting than modern examples.

Many of the buildings within the Vale's commercial centres provide a surround for the shop front with decorative stone pilasters between the shop units. These create a strong framework for each shop unit and relate the shops to the upper floors of the building, often by the pilasters continuing up through to the eaves.



*The strong rhythm of shopfront surrounds in Holton Road, Barry*

Where the building form creates a surround, shop fronts should preferably be designed to sit within it and not to extend over it. The surround should not be renovated when a shop occupies several buildings. If parts of the surround are removed, the shop front will no longer relate to the building above.

New retail development should create frames for shop fronts. The shop fascia should either sit within the frame or alternatively its position should be indicated possibly by a recessed panel.

Stone pilasters and other important architectural details should be maintained and enhanced. The temptation to save money by removing decoration rather than restoring it should be resisted – it is often these 'extras' which makes an ordinary building attractive and interesting.

Often stone detail surrounding a shop front has been painted. In such cases avoid redecorating in the same colour as the shop front. A neutral colour is preferred. When the property boundary runs through the centre of each pilaster, forethought is necessary as to co-ordination between adjacent properties.



*Decorative stone pilaster*

Drainpipes from the roofs should be positioned to one side of the stone surrounds so as not to obscure the decorative detail. Where rainwater pipes are sleeved through projecting stone or timber details (eg. cornices, brackets) and are set behind pilasters, attempt to respect this feature. Plan rainwater pipework, carefully without damaging stone or timber details, and avoid unsightly changes in direction.

A stallriser is an important element of a shop front which protects the shop window. It should be carefully proportioned in relation to the shop front as a whole and should be constructed in good quality, hardwearing materials.

Corner shop units often have windows on to each street. Where this is the case, the side window should not be blocked in. A single aspect shop may have an inverse impact on secondary shopping streets because the shopping frontage is broken.

A large area of plate glass window sometimes has a poor proportional relationship to the rest of the building especially if it has a strong horizontal emphasis. A vertical emphasis may appear more elegant and better proportioned and should relate to the proportions of the upper floors of the building.



*The scale of the fascia disrupts the rhythm of the street*

Recessed doors provide a sheltered space for window shopping and preferably should be retained.

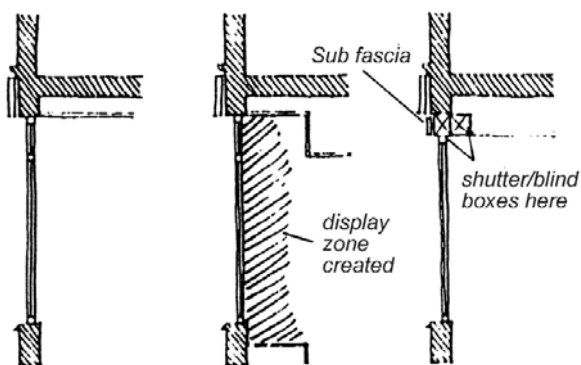
## Fascia signs

The fascia is a visual break between the shop window and the upper floors of a building. Fascias need to be well-designed elements of the shop front because their function

is to advertise. An ugly fascia which is eye catching can give a bad impression of the entire shopping street.

Fascias should be set within the shop front and its frame rather than give the impression that they have been placed on top of it as a later addition. It is important that the fascia has the correct scale relative to the other elements of the streetscape.

The highest point of the fascia should be restricted to the floor level of the first storey. It should reach but not obscure any details which define the shop front surround. On buildings with stone surrounds, the pilasters and cornice will define the appropriate location and depth for a fascia (it is usually roughly one quarter of the height of the shop front). If, for some reason, this is too high – the shop may require a lower suspended ceiling, then there are two approaches – stepping the ceiling or introducing a sub fascia.



*Display zones or sub-fascias may help to keep the fascia in proportion*

The growth of national retail multiples since World War 2 has led to the introduction of corporate fascia signs. This has caused the erosion of the unique identity of individual commercial centres. To redress this problem, fascia signs should be more imaginative, using high quality materials and designs that relate to the historical and architectural context of the particular shop and commercial centre.

The fascia signs should not include too much information. A simple and clear message is needed to advertise the shop.

Fascia signs that advertise products are to be avoided. They give an impression of poor quality, clutter and anonymity.

Hand painted signs are the oldest form of fascia lettering and are associated with traditional shop fronts. The effect is tailored to be the individual shop and can be both imaginative

and attractive. Individual letters in metal or matt finished plastic applied to a fascia board are a suitable alternative to sign writing.



*The left hand building has a better proportioned fascia*

Plastic signs are less personalised but provided they are well designed and fitted to the shop front, may still be acceptable if they can be fitted so that they do not project out of the shop front. These colours should be chosen with care and respect for the building as a whole.

Where the building has no obvious position for a fascia board, individual lettering should be applied either direct to the brick or stone of the elevation, or lettering may be applied direct to the window. Large fascias should not be added to buildings which were not designed for commercial use.

## **Illuminated fascia signs**

It is preferable to illuminate fascia signs 'externally' rather than use internally illuminated plastic boxes which often detract from the appearance of a shop due to their depth and materials.

In general, internally illuminated box signs create an anonymous 'city centre', chain-store atmosphere inappropriate for the Vale's commercial centres. In this respect, it is clear that the Vale's commercial centres should try to promote a distinct image which reflects a local, more personal character, relating to the particular town or village.

Front-lit fascias are a popular and attractive method of lighting using spotlights, swan neck lights or concealed neon tubes. Other attractive alternatives are 'halo lit' individual letters where the letters stand proud and are illuminated from behind and neon 'line lettering' either on the fascia or inside the shop window. For the latter a plain dark background should be used for a fascia level sign and care should be taken to conceal fittings within the shop window.

## **Projecting and hanging signs**

Well-designed projecting signs can enliven the street scene at the same time as providing additional advertising. They should be positioned at or below fascia level allowing at least 2.1 metres in between the pavement and the lowest edge. They are usually best used close to pilasters emphasising the division of shop units.

Generally projecting box signs are inappropriate to the image of the Vale's commercial centres as places of individual, locally owned shops. Hanging bracket signs and projecting plates provide a far more attractive and elegant form of advertising. If necessary, they can be illuminated by spotlights. The fixtures and fittings for external illumination must be carefully integrated or concealed in the shop front. The work of local crafts people and artists could contribute significantly to the creation of distinctive signage.

Projecting signs should be limited to one per shop. Planning permission may not be required depending on the precise nature of the sign but the Council's Officers will be happy to discuss any proposals and advise as to whether a planning application is necessary.

## **Blinds and Canopies**

Canopies and blinds introduce colour to the street scene and give shelter to pedestrians. The rhythm of blinds



along a street adds to its character and business provided they are attractively designed.

Canvas flat blinds are traditional and are the preferred type of canopy. In general, 'Quadrant' or 'Dutch' blinds are not appropriate and should be avoided. The visual impact, poor weathering and, often, the advertising on 'wet look' plastic blinds makes them a poor alternative to traditional blinds.

Blinds should retract into a blind box projecting no further forward than the fascia. Canopies should not be fitted across pilasters or shop front surrounds. Blinds to windows to upper floors are not considered to be appropriate.

### Roller Security Shutters

Where shutter blinds are introduced for nighttime security the shutter box should be integrated into the shop front. The blinds should be 'open weave', and polyester powder coated in a colour that complements the shop front and general façade. Solid or perforated blinds will not be acceptable.



*Example of a brick bond grille*

External roller shutters introduced on a shop front represent a 'material change' and therefore need planning permission. To achieve a high quality design, blinds should wherever possible be integral to the shop premises. Alternatively, where internal blinds are not possible they should be integrated within the shop front, either behind the sign fascia or the sub-fascia/clerestory. Avoid introducing an unsightly shutter box on the outside of the shop front. Within Conservation Areas there is a strong presumption against external shutter boxes and external shutter blinds, where in all cases blinds and boxes should be internal to the shop.



*Attractive blinds provide shade and shelter in the street*

### Materials and Details

The number of materials used to finish the shop front should be kept to a minimum. Materials should be able to withstand the Vale's coastal climate and should be easy to maintain and clean.

Timber is the traditional material for shop fronts. If it is regularly maintained it can have a long life, and avoids the rapidly dating look of many (supposedly more modern) finishes. On modern buildings aluminium is a good low maintenance alternative. A bronze, black or similar anodised finish generally looks much better in use than standard satin aluminium.

Plastics are generally not appropriate on older buildings. They are best used in limited areas (such as for individual letter signs) and with a matt finish.

Although burglar and fire alarms are necessary, they are usually unattractive and should be inconspicuous. The soffit or door return may be a suitable position.

Good design pays attention to detail – the choice of handles, letterboxes and other architectural ironmongery needs careful consideration. The quality of these elements will be evident to every user who comes into contact with them.

### Access

New shop fronts and alterations to shops should provide a level entrance from the street. Steps, upstands or seals make access difficult for elderly or disabled people and anyone with a pushchair.

### Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas

A number of buildings within the commercial centres are listed as being of architectural/historic importance and the preserved or restored detail of a shop front or façade is of paramount importance. Conservation areas are designated places of special architectural and historic importance applying to parts of Barry, Cowbridge, Llantwit Major, Penarth and many rural villages. Within these areas the design of a shop front in sympathy with the wider context is crucial. In most cases, careful design control is exercised over the appearance of shop fronts and you are therefore advised to obtain the Council's guidance before seeking consent or carrying out alterations.

### Planning Applications

Most alterations to shop fronts and advertisements will require planning permission and approval under the Building Regulations. You are advised to contact Council Officers as early as possible for advice on the design and materials before you submit an application to make sure that your proposals are likely to be acceptable.

### Contact Details

The Vale of Glamorgan Planning Officers can be contacted at the:

Planning and Transportation Department  
Docks Office  
Barry Docks  
Barry  
CF63 4RT  
Tel: 01446 704600

