



Shopfronts Design Guide

Supplementary Planning Document



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Introduction

Rugby is a historic market town, with a market centre established in the 13th century due to its strategically beneficial location near important roads leading to Leicester, Coventry and Oxford. It continued to be an important location and saw expansion through the Victorian and Edwardian periods. The 19th century saw the development of the railway and station, with the town developing into a major rail junction soon after and its nature becoming that of an industrial centre as well as a market town.

The commercial centre of the town retains much of its dense historic fabric, with the historic street pattern and development from the Victorian and Edwardian eras making up much of its character.

While the wider Rugby area continues to be commercially important, the town centre along with many others faces an ongoing challenge to remain an attractive destination for residents and visitors. With continued competition from out of town and online retail alternatives it is important for it to offer a different experience, promoting a range of uses while enhancing and capitalising on its historic assets.

Shopfronts form an important part of a place's perception by both residents and visitors, forming a large part of the street scene at ground level. Shopfronts in Rugby currently make both positive and negative contributions, and it is important to ensure going forward that future development enhances its setting and the town centre overall.

1.1 Purpose of the guide

The purpose of this guide is to establish principles for the design of both historic and contemporary shopfronts in Rugby, to ensure that they contribute to, rather than detract from, its character. It takes into account the nature of the town centre as existing and provides recommendations for the restoration of historic shopfronts and implementation of new ones.

It is intended to support the aims in both the Local Plan and the Rugby Regeneration Strategy.

1.2 Status of the guide

This guide will take the status of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which means it will be a material consideration in decision making.

Policy

2.1 National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in 2012 and most recently updated in December 2023, sets out a framework for local development policy. It makes recommendations regarding the historic built environment and heritage assets in *Chapter 12: Achieving Well-designed and Beautiful Spaces* and *Chapter 16: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*. These recommend the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets and historic settings to make a positive contribution to the character of an area.

2.2 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act introduced further controls on development relating to heritage assets and settings of note. A statutory duty is placed on the local planning authority for the conservation of areas and buildings that are of historic and architectural significance.

There are 19 conservation areas in Rugby and much of the town centre falls within the Town Centre Conservation Area. This is thought of in three broad areas; the current commercial centre and the largely Victorian area around High Street and Sheep Street; the residential and commercial area around Albert Street and Castle Street and the mostly commercial Edwardian areas around Regent Street and Regent Place. More information can be found in the [Rugby Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal](#).

2.3 Rugby Borough Council policies

The Rugby Borough Local Plan 2011 – 2031, seeks enhancement of Rugby’s local character and built environment, including implementation of high quality design and enhancement of historic assets. Relevant policies include those below, refer directly to the Local Plan for more information:

Policy TC1: Development in Rugby Town Centre

“Proposals for the redevelopment and refurbishment of the existing natural and built environment and public space, including new development proposals, within the town centre (as defined on the Town Centre Policies Map) will demonstrate high quality design that complements and enhances the existing environment and townscape in a manner which contributes to local distinctiveness and a sense of place.”

“In assessing proposals for town centre schemes, the Council will seek to ensure that such proposals are compatible with the scale, nature and character of the town centre. This is important given the historic nature of the town centre and proposals will have to be of an appropriate scale and design quality in order to be successfully integrated.” (Local Plan, Para 7.7)

Policy SDC1: Development in Rugby Town Centre

“All development will demonstrate high quality, inclusive and sustainable design and new development will only be supported where the proposals are of a scale, density and design that responds to the character of the areas in which they are situated. All developments should aim to add to the overall quality of the areas in which they are situated.

Factors including the massing, height, landscape, layout, materials and access should also be a key consideration in the determination of planning applications.”

Policy SDC2: Protecting and Enhancing the Historic Environment

“Development will be supported that sustains and enhances the significance of the Borough’s heritage assets including listed buildings, conservation areas, historic parks and gardens, archaeology, historic landscapes and townscapes.

Development affecting the significance of a designated or non-designated heritage asset and its setting will be expected to preserve or enhance its significance.”

2.4 Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007

These regulations provide advertisement control regarding their impact on public safety and amenity. The regulations contain 3 categories of advertisement that relate to the type of consent they do or do not require. Each category contains a further breakdown of advertisements into advertisement classes.

2.5 Process & consents

The consent required for changes to shopfronts will depend on the status of the premises as existing and the nature of the proposed works. Multiple consents may be required for different purposes. Applicants are encouraged to engage in early conversation with the Development Management team to ensure the correct process and receive any necessary advice.

Planning permission

Planning permission is required for projects that will cause material changes to the external appearance of a building, so will be required for most works to shopfronts.

Much of the town centre also falls within the Rugby Town Centre Conservation Area, in which there is stricter control on development. In this scenario additional weight is placed on design and the impact of development within its setting.

Article 4 directions can be used by the local authority to remove specified permitted development rights within a defined area; the existence of Article 4 directions should be checked in advance.

Pre-application engagement with Rugby Borough Council is encouraged for proposed works in a conservation area. Development proposals will require the submission of detailed drawings as part of planning applications in the conservation area.

Advertisement consent

The process required to achieve advertisement consent depends on the characteristics of the advertisement and the related building. There are 3 categories of advertisement that relate to the type of consent they do or do not require; those that do not require any consent, those that have 'deemed consent' and those that require 'express consent' from the local authority.

Advertisement consent applications are decided by the local authority in relation to amenity and public safety.

Listed Building consent

All alterations that affect the internal or external historic fabric of a listed building, excluding maintenance and 'like-for-like' repairs, require Listed Building consent. Planning permission may also be required for works to a listed building, sometimes in relation to works for which it wouldn't ordinarily be required.

Pre-application engagement with Rugby Borough Council is encouraged for proposed works to listed buildings. A register of Rugby's listed buildings can be found at the Historic England website.

Building regulations

The Building Regulations 2010 (out of the Building Act 1984) address issues including health, safety, welfare, accessibility and use of resources. They apply to most building work in and around a building, to new buildings and to existing buildings that are subject to alteration, extension or changes of use.

There is a Manual to the Building Regulations, which offers guidance on the building control process. There are also approved documents that cover each topic of the building regulations and offer non-exhaustive guidance on how to achieve building regulations approval.

Approval can be sought through the local authority building control service or an approved inspector. For clarity on the correct route for a certain project it is recommended to make contact with the local authority building control service or an approved inspector.

Context

The below provides the context within which design proposals will be assessed and which should constitute key considerations during the design process. There will be overlap between the criteria on most projects.



The street: Shopfronts forming part of the streetscene, showing both similarities and differences between building and shopfront types, along with overall contribution to character of the street.

3.1 The street

A shopfront is an important part of the street at ground level, making a significant contribution to the overall character of an area. The aim should always be for it to make a positive contribution to and enhance the area.

The nature of the street as existing can form a starting point from which to develop a design approach. A terraced street made up of the same or similar repeated buildings may require an approach that is more in keeping with the whole, while streets containing of a variety of buildings with independent characters may warrant a more individual or building-based approach.



The building: Shopfronts which are an integral part of the building (or buildings) as a whole, with direct relationships between features on the ground floor and floors above, and between each building in the pair.

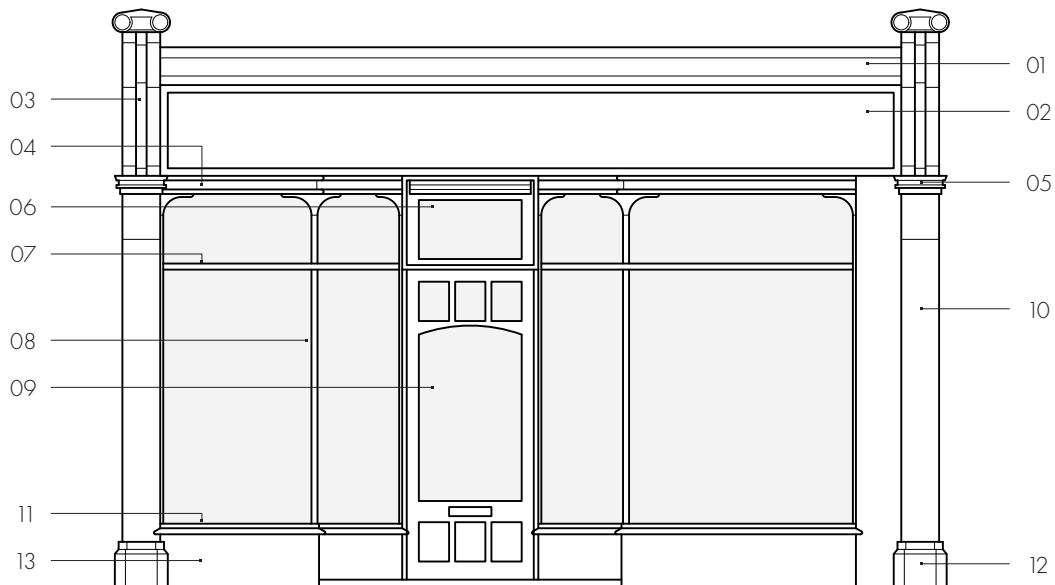
3.2 The building

A shopfront should also respond positively to the building it sits within, including existing characteristics such as age, scale, proportions and the hierarchy of built elements.

The relationship of the ground floor with any floors above will be a key consideration in ensuring the building reads as a whole. Design features which are carried between floors should be preserved.

Further to this a building's relationship with its immediate neighbours is an important consideration and architectural features relating to these should also be maintained. Double or triple fronted units (where previously separate units have been joined) should respect the character of both (or more) buildings.

Proposals that disrupt the façade of the existing building as intended will generally not be supported.



The shopfront: Example of a shopfront demonstrating typical features, which contribute to the character of the shopfront as a whole.

3.3 The shopfront

The built elements often found in historical shopfronts are shown above. The particular arrangement of and relationships between these may differ depending on the era of the building and any previous works, but they can usually form the basis of understanding what is existing and developing design proposals. They can and should also be used as a basis in the development of contemporary designs.

For further information, references to the original detailing of historical shopfronts may be found in historical drawings, photographs and neighbouring buildings.

Projects that propose to remove or alter existing features will generally not be supported.

- 01 **Blind box:** An often timber piece of structure, often timber, historically used to contain a roller blind.
- 02 **Fascia:** A usually flat area near the top of a shopfront that is the main location for displaying the shop's name and other details.
- 03 **Console/corbel:** A usually ornamental stone or timber bracket that might provide support to a lintel or fascia.
- 04 **Cornice:** A usually ornamental moulding providing horizontal separation between the windows and fascia or shopfront and upper floors.
- 05 **Capital:** The head of a column or pilaster.
- 06 **Fanlight:** The window over the top of a door.
- 07 **Transom:** A horizontal piece of structure usually used to separate and support pieces of glazing.
- 08 **Mullion:** A vertical piece of structure usually used to separate and support pieces of glazing.
- 09 **Entrance:** Often recessed between curved or angled flanking windows.
- 10 **Pilaster:** A vertical element partially projected from a wall to indicate structure and provide vertical separation.
- 11 **Sill:** A horizontal piece at the base of a window used to direct rain away from the building fabric.
- 12 **Plinth:** An often decorative or moulded base to a column or pilaster.
- 13 **Stallriser:** The horizontal element sitting below the window and sill.

Design

4.1 Design principles

These principles are applicable to the design of shopfronts throughout Rugby Borough. They do not only apply to shops, but also to other types of uses which have a 'shopfront' such as cafes, restaurants and some offices.

In general proposals to maintain, restore or reinstate historical shopfronts will be supported and proposals to remove or alter historical shopfronts will not be supported. It will generally be appropriate for shopfront design to be of a traditional nature relevant to the building and its surroundings. Carefully considered contemporary proposals may be accepted in certain situations. Refer to *4.2 Contemporary shopfronts* for further information.

Improvements to the sustainability and energy efficiency of a shopfront or building are to be encouraged. In this context considerations might include (but are not limited to) performance of the built fabric, building services and the sourcing of materials. These do not negate the importance of other principles regarding design and quality, but should be considered as part of a whole in achieving higher quality development.

Accessibility should form a fundamental part of design proposals, both within and outside of the shopfront itself.

The principles set out are not intended to stifle creativity, but to encourage quality. It is important to note that past development will not be considered as a precedent for future projects.

Materials

The use of traditional materials is one of the key characteristics of historical shopfronts. In Rugby materials include (but are not limited to) brick, stone, render, timber and brass. These are used in different ways depending on the age, location and style of the building. Some notable, more modern buildings have tiled areas and steel windows.

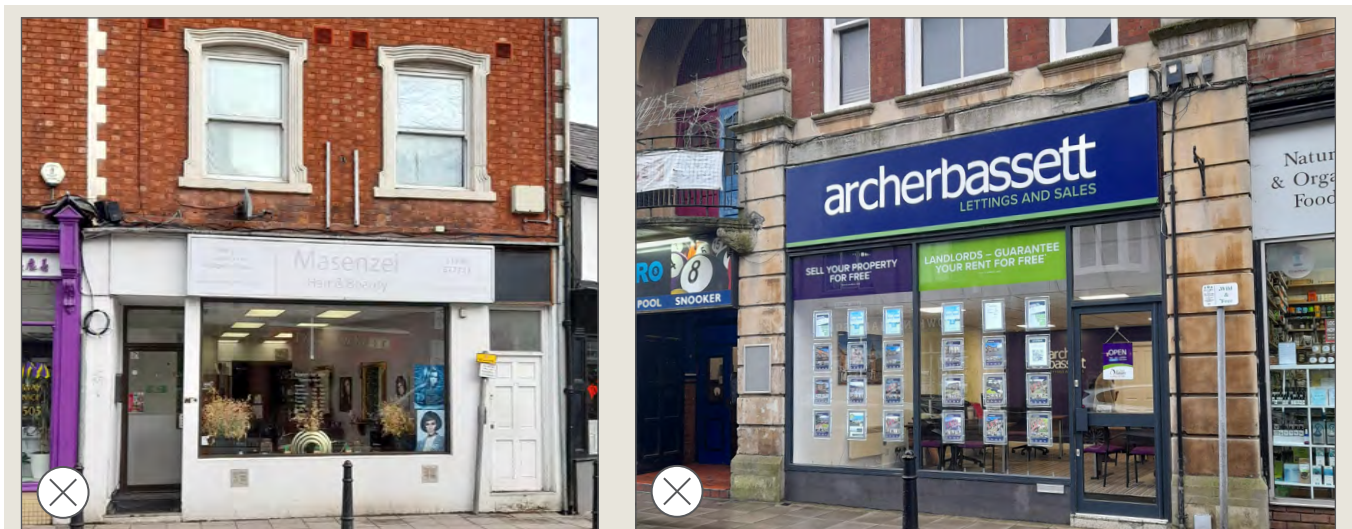
It is expected that high quality, traditional materials will be used on historical buildings and that the use of these will be appropriate to the characteristics of the building. Where more contemporary approaches are deemed

acceptable it is still expected that shopfronts will use the same high quality of material. The use of plastics generally will not be supported in either case.

The application of contemporary renders and paints to historical walls can both cause damage and significantly alter their appearance. It will therefore not be supported. Expert advice should be sought regarding the condition of walls that have already been subject to this treatment and whether remediation is necessary.

The use of high quality materials extends to elements that might be considered small details of a building, including but not limited to fixings, trims, ironmongery and flooring materials.

It is important for materials to be detailed in a way that minimises their susceptibility to weathering, which can have a detrimental impact on their appearance and integrity. Materials should further be responsibly sourced.



Left and right: These shopfronts both use contemporary materials to the building fabric, signage and windows that are likely inappropriate in the context of the rest of the building. These detract from the overall character and impressions of the shopfronts to the street.



Left and right: These shopfronts use high quality materials that contribute to their overall character and impression on the street.

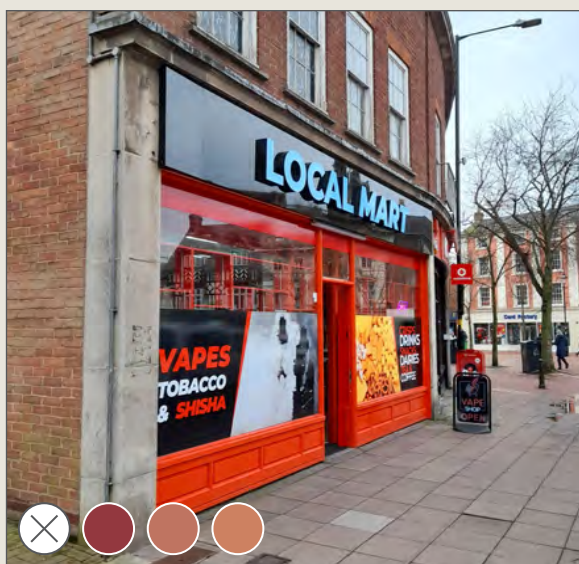
Colours

Original colours used on historical buildings tend to be of a subdued tone and limited palette, due to the absence of modern, synthetic pigments. These colours, often used for the painting of signage, doors, windows and stallrisers, are therefore characteristic of historical shopping streets.

Colours proposed for shopfronts to historical buildings should be accurate or sympathetic to their time period. Many paint companies have heritage or conservation ranges that can be used or referenced. The use of lighter colours should be carefully considered, as they will likely require more frequent maintenance than darker colours.

Shades of alternative colours may be accepted if considered appropriate. Very bright, non-traditional colours are likely to be considered inappropriate, especially in the conservation area and to listed buildings.

In certain cases it may be appropriate for corporate identity to be adjusted to suit the characteristics of the building or area.



Left and right: The colours to these shopfronts are highly saturated and very bright, likely inaccurate to the age of the building and inappropriate in a conservation area. Alongside are related colours that might be considered more appropriate.



Left and right: These shopfronts use more subdued, heritage-appropriate colours.

Entrances and doorways

Historical shopfront entrances often feature recessed doorways, curved or angled flanking windows and decorative flooring, which make significant contributions to the street scene and the shop's entrance sequence.

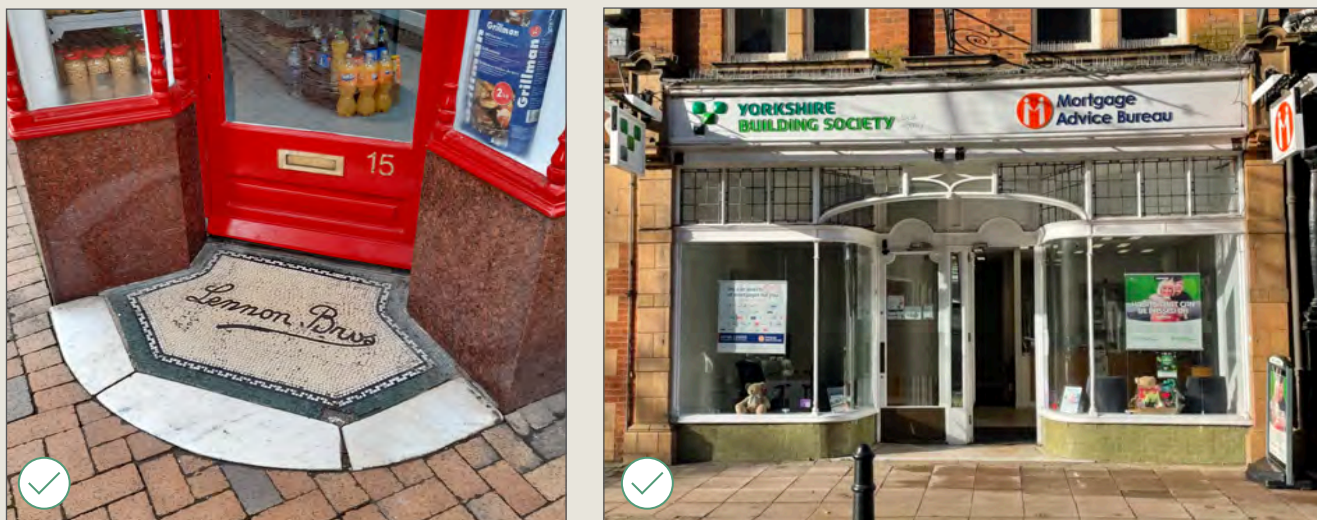
Removal of existing recessed entrances will not be accepted and they should be restored or reinstated where possible. All decorative flooring is to be retained or sympathetically restored. Proposals to install new decorative flooring where it has already been removed will be supported, provided it is suited to the age and character of the existing building.

All shop entrances should cater to the needs of people with a range of abilities, alongside those with prams or trolleys. Proposals may need to address aspects including level access, grab handles/handrails and technologies that can aid entry and exit. Solutions should be developed in a way as sympathetic to the building as possible. In the case of a level difference between the street and the floor of the shop, a solution might be utilising the space in a recessed entrance or a space inside the shop.

Addressing accessibility in the historic setting of a conservation area or listed building can be challenging and in some cases limiting. It is important for accessibility requirements to be incorporated in proposals from the beginning of the design process, to avoid unsatisfactory retrofitting at a later point.



Left and right: These shopfronts appear to have lost their historic entrances and present a flat presence to the street with no depth to the entrance sequence. They have also likely lost original materials or details as a result.



Left and right: These shops have retained their recessed entrances and flanking windows, with the shop to the left also retaining its decorative tiled flooring.

The Building Regulations should be consulted for accessibility requirements and design parameters. It is encouraged for the applicant to engage with the local authority and a building control body on these matters.

Windows

The appearance of the glazing to historical shopfronts is often a result of the available material sizes and styles at the time of construction. This has usually resulted in glazed areas that are divided by vertical timber mullions and pilasters, giving a vertical proportion to building facades. There are also sometimes decorative areas of glazing in the form of stained glass or patterns made of smaller panes, often at the top of the window.

Proposals to remove existing vertical features will not be accepted as this can introduce a horizontal visual emphasis that is incongruous within the rest of the building and street scene. Proposals to remove or alter other features of traditional glazing will also not be supported. Proposals to maintain, restore or reinstate original features will generally be supported.

Details are also an important part of the overall impression of the glazed façade. Different building eras may have used different details, such as profiles for mullions and transoms. Awareness of the building's age and original character should be reflected in proposals.

Larger panes of glass may be accepted in contemporary scenarios, but the proposal will need to demonstrate suitability to the building it sits in and the surrounding area.



Left: It seems likely that the proportions and features of this shopfront have been altered at some point. It looks at odds with the rest of the building which retains many other historical characteristics.

Top right and above right: These shopfronts retain historical proportions and features such as pilasters, transoms, mullions and decorative glazing.

Fascia signage

The fascia is often the primary location for displaying a business' name, details and sometimes building number, making it an integral part of both traditional and contemporary shopfronts.

Historical fascias should be maintained and restored where possible. New fascias should reflect the character and features of the building. Contemporary designs, where subtle and reflective of the character of the building, may be acceptable.

Fascia signage should be in proportion to the rest of the building and its existing features. It should not dominate and should not extend past or obscure any architectural features such as corbels, cornicing or the shop window itself.

Signs should be made from high quality and usually traditional materials, most likely painted timber.

The use of traditional signwriting is encouraged, as it represents a high level of skilled craftsmanship which is usually reflected in the quality of the finish. Signs could use traditional fonts or more contemporary fonts if considered suitable. This will be dependent on the shop, building and wider area. Lettering mounted to the fascia may be acceptable, where the lettering materials are of high quality finish and the design is appropriate to the context. Written text and logos should not clutter the fascia, but should be proportionate to the total area available and allow for space around them.

Modern 'box' style fascias that protrude from the facade can undermine the appearance of historical buildings and will generally not be supported. Glossy vinyl fascia signs will not be permitted.

In certain cases it may be appropriate for corporate identity to be adjusted to suit the characteristics of the building or area.



Left and right: Fasia signage made from inappropriate, glossy materials. The sign on the right is also box-type signage which are not acceptable.



Left: Hand painted signage.

Centre: Individually mounted lettering.

Right: This building lacks a fascia that would be expected with other building types and the corporate signage has been adjusted accordingly.

Projecting signage

Projecting or hanging signs can be a characteristic part of historical shopping streets and were often symbolic of the trade inside the shop.

Projecting signs need to be reflective of the building, the street and the business they advertise. They should be proportionate in scale and appropriately positioned, usually within or above the fascia zone, but below the bottom of first floor windows. Their placement should not lead to the obscuring of signage on neighbouring buildings.

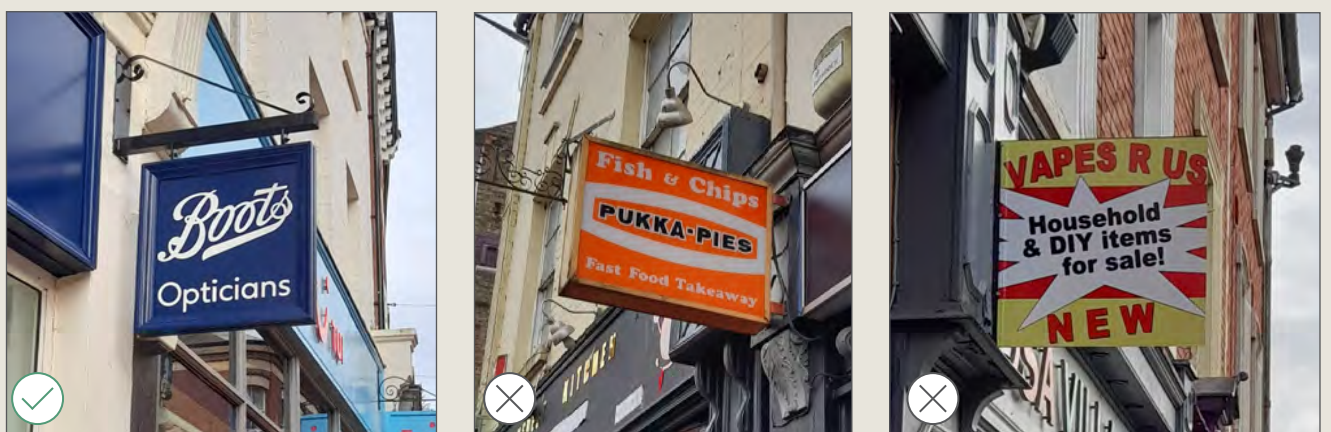
More than one projecting or hanging sign can create a cluttered appearance so will not usually be supported. The exception to this may be shops with more than one frontage and a sign on each, this will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Signs should be made from high quality and usually traditional materials, historically these would have been timber or metal. Hanging and projecting signs were also sometimes shaped to a profile representative of the trade of the shop. Creative approaches to this will be supported where considered appropriate to the shop, building and street.

The same approach to quality regarding signwriting and fonts apply to projecting signs as well as fascia signs. Contemporary designs that are an appropriate response to the character of the building may be acceptable.

Signs should be hung using brackets that are either traditional or sympathetic to the characteristics of the building.

Modern 'box' style projecting signs and glossy vinyl signs will not be accepted.



Left: Projecting signage made from high quality materials and hung using a traditional style bracket.

Centre and right: Projecting signs made using inappropriate materials. The sign in the centre is also a box-type sign, which is not acceptable.

Window signage

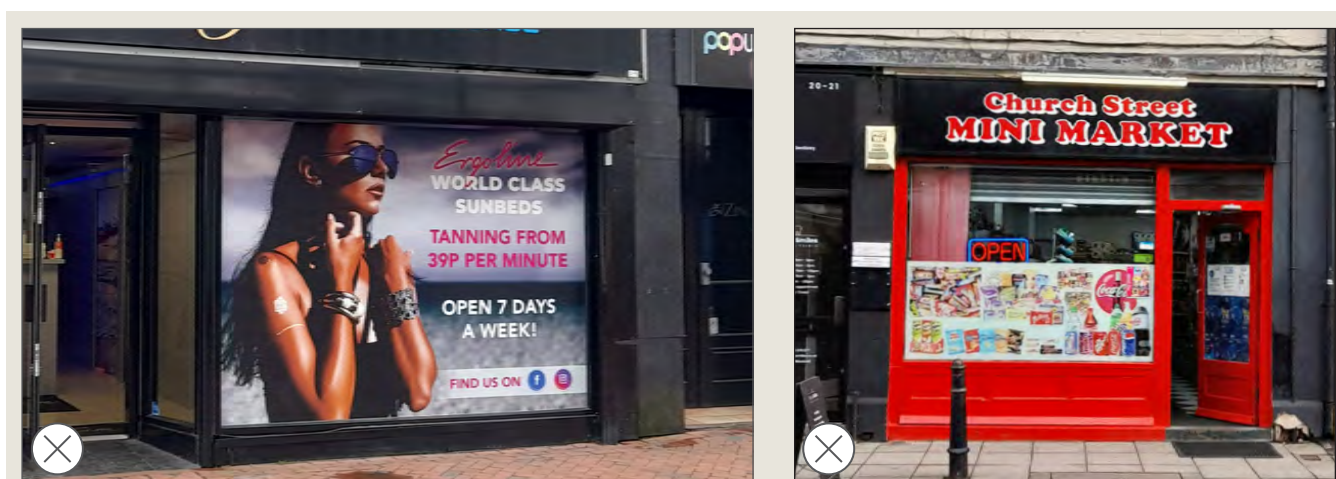
Signage to windows can allow for advertising of a premises where other space is limited, but can also have a significant impact on the impression of the shop from the street and the street itself.

It is important that windows graphics do not become an overbearing feature of the window. Proposals should aim to avoid visual clutter, maintain views of the interior and retain natural surveillance to the outside. In order to achieve this signs should be carefully designed and appropriately placed.

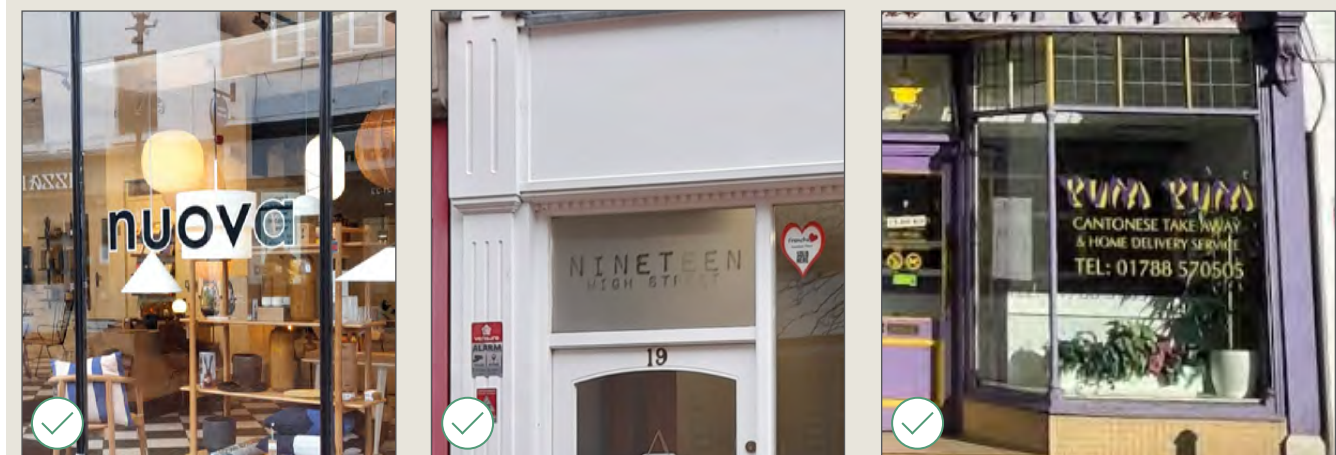
It is again recommended for a professional to apply window signage, to encourage a considered design and a high quality finish.

Proposals for signage that covers the whole window area will generally not be supported as this can look cluttered and block views in and out of the shop frontage.

Exceptions may be made where a unit has been vacant and the vinyl is part of a specific, temporary decorative scheme. In these cases justifications must be made to the local planning authority.



Left and right: These shopfronts feature window signage that covers a large part or all of the shop window, which have a detrimental impact to both the shop and the street.



Left, centre and right: These shopfronts utilise carefully designed window signage that relates to the rest of the shop to advertise additional information.

Lighting

Lighting can have a significant impact on the impression of an area, with the potential to extend advertisement hours, bring security benefits and contribute to a generally more appealing area at night.

Unsuitable types and levels of lighting can however have a detrimental impact, especially in historical settings. Lighting design therefore needs to be considered within the characteristics of the building as a whole and within the street.

Lighting should be subtly integrated within the shopfront structure where possible, for example recessed into the blind box. Other concealed fittings may be considered, such as concealed spotlight or trough fittings. Subtle 'halo' backlighting to individually mounted letters and numbers may be acceptable, depending on the other characteristics of the proposed shopfront.

Lighting that illuminates displays inside a window or shop can be an attractive way of extending advertisement hours and contributing to light levels on the street.

Internally illuminated signage, especially box-type, is generally not considered acceptable. This includes fascia signs, projecting signs and signs behind windows. Lighting that interrupts the architectural features of historical buildings or clutters the façade will also not be accepted.

Due to their potential impact on a wider area, lighting proposals will need to demonstrate a positive contribution to the building and street.



Top left, top right and above: Internally illuminated signage, exposed trough lights and exposed spotlight fittings will not be supported.



Above left: Subtly illuminated halo lighting around individual letters may be acceptable.
 Above right: Illumination of interior shop displays can contribute positively to the street.

Blinds and canopies

Blinds and canopies can be a traditional feature in traditional shopfronts and therefore characteristic of historical shopping streets. Their purpose is to shelter goods, people, the shop frontage and interior from weather conditions.

Existing traditional blinds and canopies should be retained and restored.

New blinds and canopies need to respond to the characteristics of the building and shopfront they are part of. They should further enhance the street and will not be supported if thought to have a detrimental impact or are considered to be inappropriate in their setting.

Canopies should utilise the existing blind box where present or use an alternative concealed fitting. They should not obscure any of the building's architectural features. They should further be made from traditional materials, likely to be a type of canvas, rather than anything plastic-based or glossy. The colours should relate to the other colours of the shopfront and signage should be kept to a minimum if present at all.



Above left: Retention of original blinds and canopies is encouraged.
 Above right: Installation of new blinds and canopies in non-traditional materials with bulky, exposed fittings will not be accepted.

Security

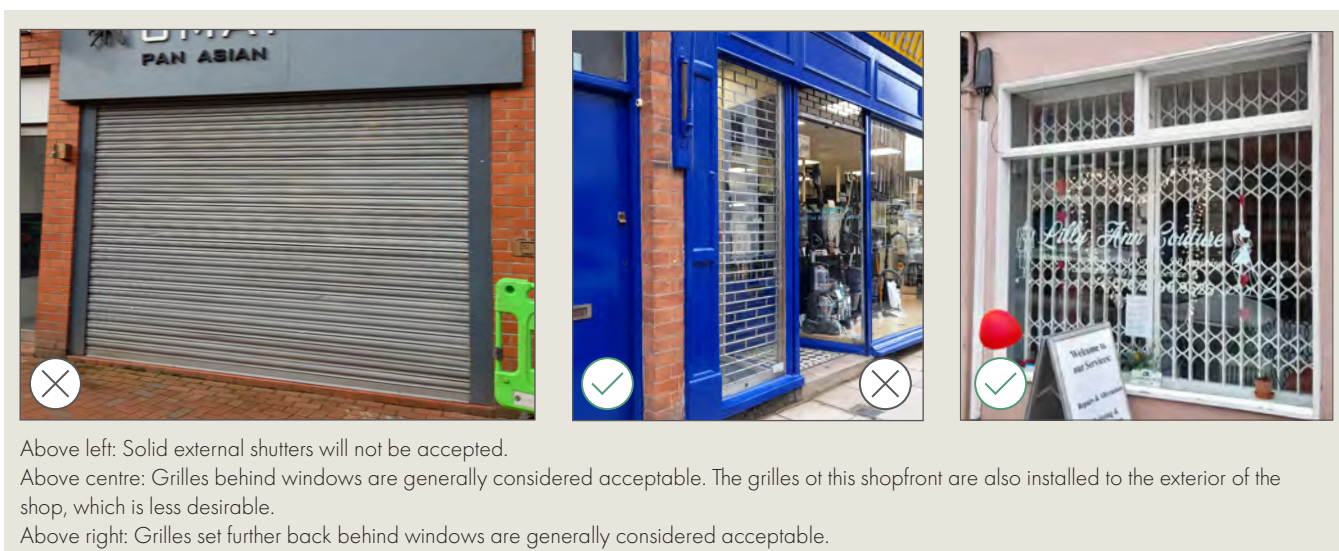
Security features are an important consideration for business premises but can also drastically alter the appearance a shopfront, so need to be carefully considered.

Laminated glass is considered as the least intrusive security measure and is the preferred option. Internal grilles, that sit behind windows panes or further back into the shop, are also considered generally acceptable.

External grilles are not acceptable unless in extreme circumstances where other measures cannot be implemented. Justification must be provided and in these cases grilles will need to be carefully designed to contribute to the street scene and their shopfront. They should also be subservient to the other architectural features of the building such as the fascia, columns and pilasters.

Solid external shutters are not acceptable in a Conservation Area.

Materials of all security features should be of high quality and appropriate finish to the building, likely a high quality metal or a powder-coated colour finish.



CCTV cameras and alarm boxes

Security features are another especially important consideration for commercial premises, where they act as a deterrent against crime. Their position and the choice of fitting is especially important for historical settings as they can be visually intrusive.

The locations of CCTV cameras and alarm boxes should be carefully considered – they will need to be visible enough to act as a deterrent but should not detract from or clutter the building elevation.

‘Dome’ style cameras are considered more appropriate than bracket mounted CCTV cameras. CCTV cameras should be an appropriate colour to prevent them detracting from the wider building.

4.2 Contemporary shopfronts

Contemporary shopfront design proposals may be accepted where suitable, usually to more modern buildings. The degree to which it is appropriate will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

The most important design consideration in these cases is for the proposal to be appropriate to the building's age and character. It would be inappropriate to install a Victorian-style shopfront to a building constructed in the post-war period.

Contemporary design proposals may need more extensive justification and will be required to demonstrate that they align with an equally high quality of design and finish.

This guide often refers to 'historical buildings', many of which in Rugby are likely to be from the Edwardian and Victorian eras. There are however several significant buildings from later eras, such as 30 High Street and The Napier building. Buildings such as these have a more contemporary façade with different features and materials.

These buildings should be treated with as much consideration as older buildings and it is expected that proposals will follow the principles in this guide regarding design quality, standard of finish, consideration of shopfront elements and their relationships to each other.



Left and right: Both of these buildings are contemporary in comparison to the majority of shop buildings referenced in this document. They have a horizontal emphasis relevant to their time period and require a different approach rooted in their own characteristics.

4.3 Conversion of shopfronts to residential uses

Some changes of use from commercial to residential fall under permitted development, however some physical alterations may require planning permission.

Where a residential conversion of a shop is proposed features, especially historic ones, are expected to be retained. The introduction of blank walls to the primary shopping area not acceptable as it has a detrimental impact on the aspect of the building itself and the character of the street as a whole. The introduction of new doors and windows are expected to match the design, proportions and positioning of adjacent units. Creative approaches to achieving a satisfactory outcome that both maintains the character of the building and meets the needs of residents are encouraged.



Above and above right: The Islington Residential Shopfront by Satish Jassal Architects uses elements and proportions of a traditional shopfront in this residential conversion. It utilises a retractable printed shutter to maintain privacy levels appropriate for a dwelling while maintaining a large shopfront-type window. ¹



Above and above right: These examples do not represent high quality proposals for the residential conversion of shopfronts. They do not retain an active relationship to the street, no shopfront features have been retained and the placement and proportions of new windows and doors do not appear to have been considered within the building as a whole.

¹ Images used with permission from Satish Jassal Architects.