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**Front cover:**
Church Street in Falmouth with, on the left, “An extremely fine example of an early C19 shop front, of outstanding quality in a national context and comparable to the best examples of contemporary double shop fronts in London and other fashionable provincial towns” [Grade II* list description]
Using the guide

Introduction:

This Cornwall Shopfront Design guide will be endorsed in 2017 by Cornwall Council as a material consideration for land use planning purposes, to support the application of Policy 24: Historic Environment as the relevant policy in the adopted Cornwall Local Plan. It gives advice on the design of shopfronts which contribute so much to the special character of the County’s settlements. It has been produced by Cornwall Council with funding from the Heritage Lottery and St Austell Town Council. Special appendices will be produced over time for selected towns and villages to give information on local distinctiveness. These can be produced by local Councils or partnerships.

Owners:

Do your research and find out what is the best design approach to suit your business and the building you are in.

Is the building listed, in a conservation area or does it have surviving historical features? Are you keen to get a more creative design?

Use the guide to check your building and see a range of design options. Then choose the right designer for the job with proven experience in achieving the quality of work you need.

Designers:

Use this guide as a checklist. All the headings may not apply but they will help in working out the best options for the client.

Confirm what permissions are required.

Do your research into the historic context of the building and character of the street. Consider how to complement the building and the streetscape with the new design.

Investigate the remaining fabric, and look for evidence of previous designs which could be repaired and incorporated as a priority in the design.
Traditional or Contemporary design?

Why are historic shopfronts of value?
Traditional shopfronts can contribute much to the locally distinctive character of a town or village. Even small historic details that survive are worth retaining and incorporating into a new shopfront. They often have a higher degree of craftsmanship and tell you something of the story of the town and previous businesses. “Historic” is just a relative term and can include styles from Georgian through to the 1960’s all of which are valued and can be restored today.

When is it appropriate to produce a contemporary design?
A well designed contemporary shopfront can sit within a historic building, especially if it has a strong surround of fascia and pilasters. However, that does not mean using standard commercial glazing and plastic fascia signs!

A modern building may be more suitable for a bolder creative design which can equally enhance the local distinctiveness of the area.
**Origins of shopfront design**

Most shopfront designs can be traced back to their classical origins. Over the centuries, new styles have emerged that modified the details and materials but interestingly, the same key components have been retained: the column or pilaster, the bases to pilasters extended to the stallriser and the entablature which has become the fascia which looks incomplete without a cornice of some description.

1. The classical open colonnade with plinths, columns and entablature

2. The Georgian shopfront often infilled the colonnade with glazing and panelling keeping the classical appearance

3. A Victorian approach introduced many variations and embellishments of detail, for example ornate console brackets, dentilled cornices, decorative, transoms and mullions and panelled fadcia and pilasters

4. A contemporary shopfront can still be seen as a stylized version of the post and lintol supporting the facade above and works best with similar proportions and a version of the cornice.
Design to complement the building

Shops spanning two buildings
If your new shopfront occupies two or three adjoining buildings it is good to reflect the rhythm, height and scale of the buildings above. Don’t resort to one large overbearing fascia sign. This will help create a more attractive shopping street.

Left - a poor response
This is not designed. It simply uses a large flat fascia to try to link the shop units without any respect to the size of the buildings or heights of the windows.

Right - a good design
This shopfront design steps, to reflect the buildings heights. It does not hide window cills. It also positions pilasters to create a strong frame under each elevation. Two shopfronts are linked in terms of design style, detailing and colour.

Combining designs
Right: These two shops on Trelowarren St in Camborne were brought together in a unified design - bringing a great improvement to the streetscene. This was a joint project.

Above: after
Below: before
Historic shopfronts

COMPONENTS OF A SHOPFRONT

A highly decorative late Victorian shopfront in Bodmin with curved corners

Bow window shopfront in Falmouth dated 1812

Above: Early Victorian shop in Truro with narrow beaded pilasters and narrow projecting cornice

Commercial late Victorian shopwindows in St.Austell built as part of original design

Left: Edwardian shopfront in St.Day with sliding sash windows
Elements: Cornice and fascia

The traditional Victorian fascia is usually set in a frame and topped by a stepped projecting cornice. This was based on classical design sometimes with a curved cyma recta moulding and a dentil course below. The shadowing under the cornice gave a definite visual stop to the shopfront design. The example, below left, shows a curved Georgian shopfront with a narrow red fascia and deep flat cornice. Bottom left is a very contemporary interpretation using a projecting floating blade that gives the definitive shadow line.
Elements: Pilasters and Consoles

Pilasters (above) are the vertical columns that frame the shopfront and appear to support the fascia [or the entablature in a classical design].

Early shopfront designs stopped the pilaster just underneath the fascia without a console bracket 93, 4, 5, 7.

Pilasters can be plain (2, 3) half round (5) panelled, beaded (4) or fluted (1, 5). The pilaster sits on a base which can be varied in height to deal with a sloping site. Flat pilasters with an inscribed rectangular pattern are very distinctive in Cornwall. (6)

Console brackets are positioned on the top of the pilaster, originally devised to support the projecting cornice (8).

They became very ornate features often decorated with scrolls or leaves. Occasionally they may be fixed directly in the wall by the fascia (9).
Historic shop windows were often subdivided by vertical timber elements called mullions. Many profiles were used for mullions, typically rounded or oval shapes projecting about 40-70mm from the glass. Tall windows sometimes had Transom lights which could be opening lights and sometimes used leaded glass. Ultra slim double glazing can be used in standard framing for thermal insulation or laminated glass can be used for security.
**Elements: Fascia signage**

Fascia signage works best if it is painted with a highlight or shadow and the lettering is proportioned nicely within fascia depth - see images 1 and 2.

Alternatively thin built up letters, that are face-fixed to the fascia or structure are very effective - see images 3, 4 and 5.

The fascia itself works best if it is part of the structure of the shopfront design, framed and topped with a strong cornice.

Flat, reflective plastic or perspex signs can leave your business at a disadvantage if the sign is not readable. Setting letters off the fascia on deep spacers can also make them hard to read - see image 6.
Elements: Lighting

On most streets it will not be necessary to illuminate the shopfront or fascia. Internally illuminated signs are generally not preferred because they can look bulky and detract from the character of the shopping street.

Where it is needed the preferred solution would be to highlight a key feature with a very small focused LED light fitting which should be very unobtrusive in itself and more energy efficient.

Sometimes light fittings can distract from the business name or the shopfront design.
Hanging and projecting signs have become part of the local townscape character especially in Cornwall’s narrow streets and opeways. However, this interest can be lost when cheaper commercial projecting signs add to the clutter and advertising confusion. Internally illuminated box signs with poor graphic design can often be unnecessary and have a negative effect on the attractiveness of the shopping street. Good signs will demonstrate personalised creative artwork, local interest, humour or craft skills, often in metalwork which become features of the shopping street.
Contemporary design in historic buildings

Contemporary design can easily complement the character of historic buildings. They succeed where attention has been paid to reflecting the key components and proportions of traditional design such as the pilasters, fascia and projecting cornice, but these can be reinterpreted in a modern way.
Contemporary design based on historic patterns

These diagrams show how the contemporary shopfront design by Satish Jassal Architects is based on traditional elements and proportions of traditional shopfronts in its locality.

The success of the design is also down to the quality of detailing, materials and the recessing of the various planes to create shadows. The Triglyph in this example is a classical motif found on the frieze. A similar approach could be used to reflect traditional detailing in Cornwall.
Contemporary design in new buildings

A lot more flexibility can be applied in a newer building to enhance and enliven the local shopping environment. However, these only work well if there is a high degree of architectural or graphic design input into the scheme.
Accessibility

Key principles of good design

- Entrances should be level. [A high threshold strip can still be a barrier and trip hazard - choose a door without one.]
- Ramps can be located at entrances with maximum 1:20 fall or 1:12 for a short ramp.
- Ramps can be installed inside the shop.
- Modifications to the pavement could overcome a small step.
- Everyone should be able to use the same entrances.
- Doors should have a minimum clear opening width of 800mm [Can a double buggy get through the entrance?]
- Recessed doors should have a minimum 300mm space alongside the handle side of the door [to allow a wheelchair user to reach the handle]
- Push pad electronic door controls can be used
- Automatic doors are usable by all
- Do not clutter the shopfront with unprotected displays, seating or "A" boards. [These are a hazard to blind or partially sighted people and can narrow routes for wheelchair users and buggies.]

Disability Cornwall can offer a low cost walk, wheel and talk visit or a full Access Audit of your premises http://www.disabilitycornwall.org.uk/help-for-your-business/access-auditing-and-advice.

Remember: Listed buildings CAN be modified to allow inclusive access, with suitable detailing - it is not an excuse to do nothing.

Jericho’s at Liberty’s in Launceston has an automatic push pad, an assistive handrail on the ramped threshold. Wide door access and lift to the first floor restaurant.

This Pizza restaurant in Bristol incorporates a ramped access, 300mm panel by the side of the door, and a protected outdoor seating, or display area.
Security

Businesses who require a high degree of security may consider the installation of shutters. But please note potential negative effects.

Solid shutters or any external shutters and their boxes are often very detrimental to the appearance of the building and for the street. They can give the impression of a dead space when closed down and put off visitors to the area and affect the night-time economy. They can also become a target for graffiti and lead to further decline and anti social behaviour.

The police have produced technical advice for securing retail premises which is available here Secured by Design Retail

There are many other solutions that could work as well for instance installing laminated glass to a suitable thickness which can prevent break-ins and reduce breakages.

Alternatively installing a roller grille behind the glass [for instance in a brick bond metal link]. An open roller grille will also allow visibility and surveillance inside the shop when closed. Encouraging people into the shopping areas out of opening hours will improve surveillance.

A shopfront with a recessed doorway can potentially lead to anti social behaviour because the recess may be sheltered and out of view of the main street. Avoid including a recess in a new shopfront design for this reason.

However many historic shopfronts do retain recessed entrances, some very ornate and part of the special character. In these instances it may be preferable to include a collapsible gate or a short section of open mesh shutter to allow some visibility inside. Alternatively a bright floodlight with movement detector could act as a suitable deterrent.
Many town or village shops are closing down, but they can be converted to other uses such as residential or workspaces without losing the special character the original shopfront. These examples below left from St.Day keep the original shopfront and local distinctiveness.

Option 1 Below: A new glazed partition can be built internally, creating a conservatory or lobby behind the original shopfront.

Option 2 Above: In this adaptable new design by Satish Jassal architects, additional folding shutters are included behind the “shop window” which can be obscured by art glass or printed film. This can bring some privacy, sound and thermal insulation.

In the future, needs may change again. If some care is given to the design then these buildings can be converted back once more or adapted to another use. A new residential or business unit can also be built in a way that will be flexible enough to adapt in the future.
Colour in shopfronts

Shopfronts are a great way to incorporate colour into an environment. With some artistic direction and sensitivity to historic character our shopping streets could be made more attractive for visitors and shoppers. Paint scrapes can give evidence for historic colour schemes.
**Special features**

Special crafted signage such as timber carved signwriting, period lettering and painted glass are locally distinctive and worth retaining as a historic reference.

Recessed thresholds to shops were designed to create a welcome on narrow streets. They often incorporate valuable terrazzo or tiled floors.

Large hand painted signs directly on the upper walls of buildings are very traditional and returing in popularity. They demand a high degree of signwriting skill.

Curved glass is a wonderful feature of many shopfronts animating the streetscene.

Ceramics such as mosaic, glazed tiles, faience, are a traditional and colourful material for shopfronts but can be used in creative ways.

Quality ironmongery such as handles, letterboxes, hinges, gates, plaques, lettering, numbers are definitely worth retaining even incorporated into a new design.
Repair and maintenance

Timber shopfronts

Historic shopfronts can survive for over two hundred years. That shows that if you construct one with good details, high quality timber and undertake essential repairs it is a very good investment for a new shopfront. Timber has a flexibility in that it can be relatively easily repaired without replacing the whole construction.

A very important tip is to use softwoods that are suitable for external use and use hardwoods for the cill. It is good practice to ensure the timber is sustainably sourced and FSC certified. It will lengthen the life of your joinery if all the joint faces (especially the end grain) are primed before construction.

The use of modern microporous paints may help wood that gets damp to dry out, but also the more traditional linseed oil paints are more flexible and less likely to crack. A good paint system will mean less repainting over time.

Incorporating trickle vents or opening lights into a new shopfront is important to maintain some ventilation.

Maintenance

Maintaining a timber shopfront well, will require yearly checks and touching up of the paintwork especially around the cill and the joints in the framing.

For larger repairs, timber can be scarfed-in around the joints, and minor areas of repair could be undertaken using resins.

Rendered or timber-panelled stallrisers will be subject to a lot of damage, especially if they are carried down to the ground without any gap or damp proof course. Splashback from the road and pavement surface are a constant problem leaving them dirty and stained. Using stone or glazed brick, with a damp proof course, is a very good long term solution.

Clearing out gutters at the top of the building have a great benefit, avoiding spillages down the facade and onto the shop. The flashing over the cornice must be regularly checked to ensure it is not cracked and properly tucked in to the wall above. Also ensuring downpipes are kept clear means that they will discharge properly into a drain and don’t splashback onto the shopfront.”
Links

Click the pink headings to link to the webpages:

**Shopfront Appendices for local towns and villages**
To be added as produced by cornwall or local councils.

**Cornwall Design Guide**
Companion guide for all forms of development and external works

**Cornwall Local Plan**
Note Policy 12: Design and Policy 24 Historic Environment

**Secured by Design**
Police technical advice for securing retail premises which is available here

**Building Regulations: Access to and use of buildings**
Building Regulations Approved document M.

**Historic England: Easy Access to Historic Buildings**
Historic England advice and design solutions for historic buildings.

**Planning applications**
Guidance for making applications.

**Advertisement consent applications**
Guidance for making applications.

**Building Control applications**
Guidance for making applications.

**Historic shopfront details**
English Historic Towns Forum: Book of details and good practice.