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Shopfront Guidance for Brentwood Town Centre: Adopted Supplementary Planning Document

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Introduction

The majority of Conservation Areas in Essex have at least one shop, and many include sizeable shopping areas, Brentwood is no exception. The detailed design of shopfronts, whether for new or existing buildings, is a major factor influencing the overall character of the Town Centre.

The twin objectives of conservation are always to protect and enhance the existing environment, and shopfronts are no exception. Good historic shopfronts are deserving of protection and enhancement by means of sympathetic colouring and proper maintenance. New shopfronts should be regarded as an opportunity to enhance the street scene by providing something that respects the traditional concepts, forms a logical part of the overall elevation and emphasises the uniqueness of a particular village or town.

Too many old shopping streets, like Brentwood High Street, have been the subject of inappropriate and insensitive changes at the ground floor level, making a nonsense of the upper floor fenestration patterns and divided the elevation of the historic building into two horizontal slices. Where opportunities occur, it should be the long-term aim to achieve replacement shopfronts which re-emphasise the individual components of the frontage by being less obtrusive and better related to the overall proportions of the building.

The intention of this guidance is to suggest how these aims can be achieved by placing the problems within the relevant historical context. It should be emphasised that the suggestions included in this document are primarily aimed at improving shopfronts in Conservation Areas or on historic buildings, as other commercial areas are usually capable of assimilating a greater variety of designs.

Planning Context

This guidance is intended to help retailers and commercial operators occupying ground floor shop units, and their designers, improve the standard of design when altering or replacing shopfronts and associated signage within the town centre. By following the guidelines and advice contained within the guide operators should be able to achieve shopfront solutions appropriate to various settings and budgets. It is not intended to replace the need for skilled design or architectural advice.

The Essex Design Initiative has produced this 'Supplementary Planning Document' (SPD) on behalf of Brentwood Borough Council and Brentwood Renaissance as additional support of Local Plan Policies:

C20- Shop Fronts

C21- Illuminated Advertisements

C22- Signs within Conservation Areas & on Listed Buildings

C23- Externally Illuminated Hanging Signs

C24- Non-illuminated Advertisements

TC14- Advertisements and Shop Fronts

TC15- Shopfronts Facing William Hunter Way

TC16- Non-illuminated Advertisements Fronting William Hunter Way

Document Status

The document was adopted by Brentwood Borough Council as a Supplementary Planning Document on 10 March 2010, and forms part of the Brentwood Local Development Framework (LDF) and is a material consideration in the determining of relevant planning applications.

Design Approach

A planning application for a new or remodelled shopfront should be accompanied by a Design and Access Statement that makes a logical case for the submitted design. CABE's publication 'Design and Access Statements: how to write, read and use them' is a good starting point.

Step 1: Analysis

The constraints and opportunities of a site identify what might be acceptable in the established context and this forms a good basis from which to begin developing designs as set out in detail in section two.

Shopfronts as a streetscape

Any alterations or new shopfronts should be considered in the context of the wider streetscene. Elements should relate to one another in terms of scale and location. The relationship between individual properties can contribute to an overall character, which creates an environment attractive to shoppers.

The shopfront as part of an elevation

The shopfront should be considered as an intrinsic part of the overall appearance of a building. It should appear to be perfectly related to the upper floors in structural concept, proportion, scale and vertical alignment. All the elements of the elevation should be fused together to express an effect of logical visual inevitability.

Step 2: Design Principles

The design principles evolve from a response to site context and resolve some of the possible conflicts that might exist (for example between advertisement and clutter, access and a sloping site)

Shopfront repairs

Where a shopfront is to be replaced, an evaluation of the quality of the existing shopfront and the viability of repairs should be the first consideration. Where part or all of a shopfront is to be replaced or altered, the design of the new elements should take into account the principles set out in the following pages.

Step 3: Create Design Solutions

Having identified the relevant constraints and resolved any potential conflicts through the principles outlined above, appropriate design solutions should be established. Distinctive, original designs of high quality in terms of design, detailing and materials will be encouraged.

Detailed Design

Shopfronts generally have to bear very close inspection as a direct result of their function and purpose, any coarseness in detail design and construction workmanship will be immediately apparent. Although present day shopfronts usually have a fairly short life, they should be designed to be permanent solutions. A rapid sequence of alterations is often linked to business closures, branding changes and/or poor workmanship, getting the design right from the outset will undoubtedly save time and alteration costs.

Whatever the character, success of the design is usually dependant on the standard of craftsmanship and care. It is important that traditional, local skills are not sacrificed to cut corners or save money, resulting in a poor finished product. Sometimes the problem is side-stepped by utilising standard factory-made components, but these inevitably require the use of unsympathetic materials and present a mass-produced, one-size-fits-all appearance. To some extent the problem can be minimised by skilful design, making use of easily available materials without costly fabrication, but arranged to make interesting architectural effects.

A new shopfront for an attractive historic building will require a high standard of craftsmanship in order to realise a design of quality and originality. Where this utilises classical or historic elements these should be as authentic as possible. Once again, the use of traditional craftsmen and local skills would be preferable.

Display

For some kinds of shop, the window area has become simply a means of lighting and viewing into the shop interior, with the unfortunate result that the extent of the internal floorspace is greatly emphasised. In recent years the use of windows for display seems to be on the decline.

For most situations, the traditional English timber shopfront is appropriate, with the window designed as a showcase of limited depth with a glazed or shuttered back. This would provide space for a display of a typical selection of goods or for special items.

Additional details

An additional detailed design problem which should not be overlooked is the provision of sunblinds. If these are required they should be incorporated into the design of the shopfront, with the blind box itself as slim and unobtrusive as possible. 'Dutch blinds' should be avoided, as they require additional vertical housings and their sidings tend to obstruct the street view.

Materials

Materials should be chosen to emphasise the historic character of the area and to reinforce the visual unity of the street scene. Painted timber is the prevalent shopfront material of virtually all historic streets and should generally form the basis of new designs. The use of varnished, natural or stained hardwoods and softwood is almost always inappropriate, being alien to the existing pattern and also to the painted timber features of the upper floors. Materials such as rustic stonework, ceramic products and exotic materials like marble should be avoided as being too pretentious for most Conservation Area street scenes.

Plastic sheets and anodised or plastic-coated metals, in most cases, should not be used, as these are generally unsympathetic when viewed in combination with natural textures. Many of these materials also have glossy surfaces, and their reflective qualities emphasise every imperfection in the fitting and jointing of the panels.

The use of plastic fascias and projecting box signs associated with internally illuminated advertisements are generally an unattractive feature and will normally be out of place in historic shopping streets, and specifically on listed buildings. Painted timber fascias, therefore, will normally be required throughout the town centre Conservation Area.

Colour

The colouring of a shopfront should be determined by the need to harmonise with the rest of the building and street scene, and to emphasise the important design elements.

There are well-established procedures for the painting of classical designs, such as the gilding or picking out of mouldings, capitals and fluting. Care should be taken to emphasise the structural logic of such a design by using the same base colour for pilasters and fascia.

Where natural materials abound, earth colours are generally advisable and high intensity hues should be avoided, particularly on north facing or poorly illuminated frontages. It is useful to remember that 'cold' colours will normally give the effect of recession and 'warm' colours that of projection.

The shopfront should be painted to harmonise with the upper floors of the building and to reinforce the overall effect of unity throughout the façade. This, of course, can increase the 'impact' of the shop in the street scene.

Advertisement Material

Information, whether in the form of lettering, signs or symbols, must always be considered as an integral part of the total composition of a building. Therefore any application for a new shopfront should indicate details of such lettering and signs. See page 3.

In selecting forms of advertising, the character of the area, the building and the particular business should all be taken into account.

Other Advertisements

Advertising lettering and signs, used in excess of the name of the business and the service or goods supplied – must be carefully controlled within the Brentwood Town Centre Conservation Area. In the majority of cases it should be discouraged. Where it is incorporated, it must be designed with particular regard to the form and elevations of the building.

If window-area is not necessary for display of goods or lighting it is likely to be obscured with posters. Where display requirements are such that large windows are unnecessary, the opportunity should be taken to limit the glass area and adopt the 'showcase' approach.

Advertisement hoardings, except those around construction sites, are unacceptable in Conservation Areas as they are totally alien to the architectural and street scene. Signs should be kept to the essential minimum and integrated with the buildings.

Hanging Signs

There is a long tradition of hanging signs dating back through guild-signs to Roman times. They are a useful way of conveying information to the pedestrian, particularly in an enclosed situation such as an arcade. Where a fascia is undesirable, a hanging sign might be a useful alternative.

Lettering and Symbols

In general serif letters* are more appropriate than enlarged type-faces as they are more strongly defined, have better articulation. Individual letters should neither be too widely spaced nor cramped together, as legibility will be impaired.

Italic letters is generally unsympathetic to buildings, as the diagonal emphasis conflicts with the vertical and horizontal emphasis of the building.

Lettering, logos and symbols should be regarded as minor points of emphasis on a building and should not conflict with the major focal points of a façade, even though they are intended to attract business. Free-standing metal or cut-out wooden letters can be useful because their depth can give them apparent visual weight, although this type of letter should be used with care, as in sharp perspective it can become difficult to read. Painted lettering with shading can also provide visual intricacy.

Individual letters must be well-proportioned and compatible in visual weight one with the other. The actual size of the lettering should be determined by the need to be reasonably legible to pedestrians, not unduly obtrusive in relation to the building façade, and integrated with all the other elements making up the street scene.

* In typography, serifs are semi-structural details on the ends of some of the strokes that make up letters and symbols.

Appendix 1: Displays, colours and materials



Cascade Florist: Generally a good example of a shopfront and one of the best along the High Street. Points to still consider include the size of the fascia- it is too deep. This may be a consequence of a reduced ceiling height in the ground floor shop. There are ways of reducing the fascia without disturbing the internal ceiling height. Street displays add interest and colour to the High Street but they need to be carefully controlled and considerate to all High Street users.



Bakers Oven: Opportunities for the display of goods has gradually been reduced but a considered window display adds interest and vitality to the street scene.



Bury St. Edmunds. This Bistro/shopfront is well proportioned and detailed. The on-street cafe adds further interest and life to the street. The colour choice is subtle and in keeping with the immediate surroundings.



Currys Digital: Again the common problem of a too deep fascia designed to shout out for custom rather than compete with the more subtly designed shopfronts. There is nothing traditional about this shopfront and it has been designed for the maximum impact on the High Street. The deep entrance has been designed to increase window displays but distracts only further from the High Street.

Appendix 2: Fascias and elevations

The shopfronts below highlight some solutions, common problems and mistakes when integrating fascias onto building elevations.



La Tasca (now Nandos): This restaurant shopfront was well considered and proportioned to the building. This demonstrates how it is possible for large, nationwide companies to engage with the Local Authority to achieve an attractive



Italia Teriss: The two fascias on this shopfront have taken over the appearance of the building. Most likely the consequence of a lowered internal ceiling height, the bottom fascia is used to make up the height difference. Careful and skilled alterations could improve the design faults of this



The Taste of India and Peking Chef: These two restaurant shopfronts relate well and demonstrate how two shops/businesses can create coherent and correctly linked



The Sakura: This restaurant fascia fails to relate both to the building and adjacent shopfront. The fascia is too deep, and the relationship between The Sakura and The Artful Angel is poor and not thought through. This would be relatively simple to address and correct.

Appendix 3: Corporate shopfronts in Brentwood

The corporate image and branding of national and international companies can be found on all of our High Streets and Brentwood is no exception.

The design of corporate shopfronts follows a set criteria, colour and design. These can sometimes be poorly considered, adopting a 'one size fits all' approach.

The following examples show that by careful negotiation bespoke solutions can be achieved.

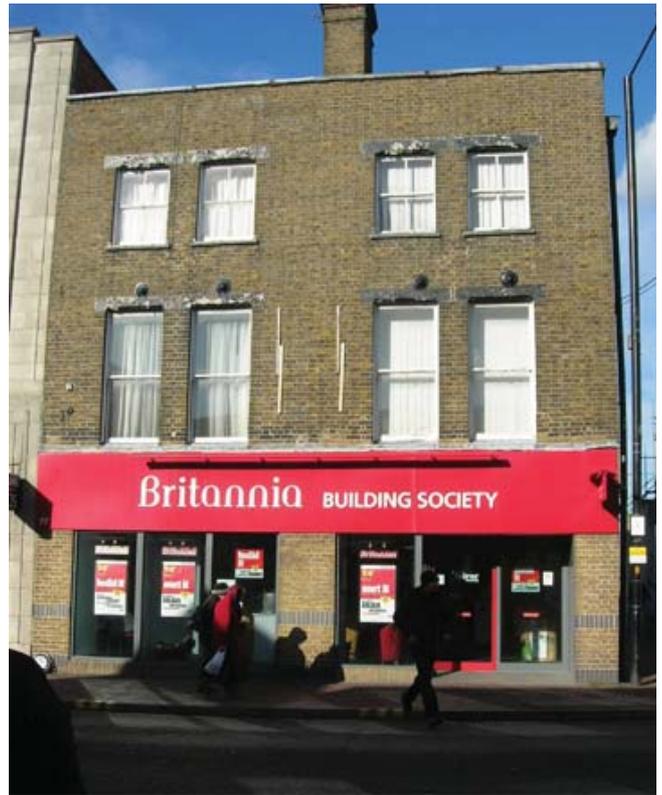


McDonald's has applied its updated standard approach to Brentwood with mixed results. The fascia is very deep with a large amount of lead work above, increasing the visual presence of the fascia even more. Some nice touches include the seating in the windows and the subtle lighting-used to avoid backlights.

When compared to a branch of McDonald's in Norwich, there is no apparent reason why this approach could not be adopted in places like Brentwood.



McDonald's Norwich: a bespoke solution.



Britannia Building Society: The Corporate image of banks and buildings societies must be challenged to avoid the standard approach being applied to buildings regardless of their character, size and scale.

It is possible to carefully design these types of signs to suit the buildings but it relies on a commitment from the Local Planning Authority to negotiate better solutions.



Barclays Bank, Bath. The design of bank is arranged around the building as opposed to the building being arranged by the bank.

Appendix 4: Planning Policy

Brentwood Borough Council Replacement Local Plan 2005

Advertisements and Shop Fronts

12.62 All proposals for advertisements and shop fronts will be judged against the Borough-wide policies set out in the Conservation and Protection of the Environment Chapter (Policies C20-C24). Policy C22, however, specifically excludes the Town Centre Conservation Area as the Council recognises that the commercial nature of this area requires a more flexible attitude to advertisements than should apply in other areas.

Conservation Areas

12.63 Generally, the policy for Brentwood Town Centre seeks to discourage the use of plastic fascias and box signs with internally illuminated advertisements. It is recognised that there are examples of existing internally illuminated signs within the High Street. The majority of these are within the prime shopping area in the central and eastern end of the High Street. Most of these advertisements are illuminated letters only on a non-illuminated background or freestanding letters, which are less harmful in their impact than a fully illuminated fascia. However, most of the shop units still have either external illumination or no illumination. It has also been evident that recent occupiers are choosing to install better quality shop front designs, with more traditional materials and no internal illumination of advertisements.

12.64 The use of plastic fascias and projecting box signs associated with internally illuminated advertisements are generally an unattractive feature and will normally be out of place in historic shopping streets, and specifically on listed buildings. Painted timber fascias, therefore, will normally be required throughout the town centre Conservation Area. However, the design and materials of some of the more modern buildings (post 1950s) would allow, in principle, for a fascia incorporating an internally illuminated advertisement but only where it would not be detrimental to the character of that building or its shop front design. In order to control their impact, in such cases the fascia should have a matt finish, lettering should be flush with the fascia background and internal illumination should be letters only. On pre-1950s buildings within the High Street any illumination should be external only.

12.65 Elsewhere in the town centre Conservation Area, outside the High Street, internally illuminated signs will not normally be allowed. These areas are of a different character to the High Street, being narrower, the scale of development is generally smaller and there are a greater variety of uses, including residential.

12.66 On more modern buildings within the town centre, the design and materials may make it more difficult to create a shop front in keeping both with the more traditional design and with the upper floor.

In such cases, a compromise may well be necessary to achieve an acceptable solution but, nevertheless, the design of such shop fronts should respect the design principles of scale, proportion etc., which would be sought elsewhere.

TC14 Advertisements and Shop Fronts

WITHIN THE BRENTWOOD TOWN CENTRE CONSERVATION AREA INTERNALLY ILLUMINATED ADVERTISEMENTS WILL ONLY BE ALLOWED ON MODERN BUILDINGS* WITHIN THE HIGH STREET IN CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE THE DESIGN AND MATERIALS OF SUCH ADVERTISEMENTS WOULD NOT BE UNACCEPTABLY DETRIMENTAL TO THE CHARACTER OF THAT BUILDING AND THE DESIGN OF THAT SHOP FRONT. IN SUCH CASES, FASCIAS SHOULD:

- (i) HAVE A MATT FINISH
- (ii) INCORPORATE LETTERING AND SYMBOLS WHICH ARE FLUSH WITH THE FASCIA BACKGROUND
- (iii) HAVE INTERNALLY ILLUMINATED LETTERS ONLY ON AN UNILLUMINATED NON-TRANSLUCENT BACKGROUND; AND
- (iv) COMPLY WITH THE RELEVANT CONDITIONS AND LIMITATIONS SET OUT IN CLASS 4B OF THE 1992 ADVERTISEMENT REGULATIONS.

ON ALL OTHER BUILDINGS IN THE HIGH STREET AND ON ALL BUILDINGS BEYOND THE HIGH STREET INTERNAL ILLUMINATION WILL NOT BE ALLOWED. ON THESE BUILDINGS SIGNS SHOULD BE PAINTED TIMBER AND OF A SIZE TO PRESERVE OR ENHANCE THE CHARACTER OF THAT BUILDING AND THAT OF THE CONSERVATION AREA AS A WHOLE. ALL PROPOSALS IN THE CONSERVATION AREA WILL BE EXPECTED TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE RELEVANT SECTIONS OF THE ADVERTISEMENT AND SHOP FRONT DESIGN GUIDANCE SET OUT IN APPENDIX 3 (SEE LOCAL PLAN).

WHERE EXPRESSED CONSENT IS REQUIRED, PROJECTING BOX SIGNS, WHETHER ILLUMINATED OR NOT, WILL NOT BE ALLOWED ANYWHERE WITHIN THE CONSERVATION AREA.

* Buildings generally post World War II

The 1992 Advertisement Regulations; part of The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992

Shop Fronts facing William Hunter Way

12.67 The Council is keen to attract users of the Sainsbury food store and the surface car parks on William Hunter Way into the High Street commercial area and to encourage pedestrian flows between them. This can be enhanced not only by improving the existing pedestrian links between the High Street and William Hunter Way, but also by encouraging the provision of double fronted units, subject to due regard to highway and pedestrian safety in William Hunter Way.

TC15 Shop Fronts facing William Hunter Way

ON PREMISES FRONTING THE NORTH SIDE OF THE HIGH STREET, THE PROVISION OF AN ADDITIONAL SHOP FRONT ON TO WILLIAM HUNTER WAY WILL BE ENCOURAGED, SUBJECT TO COMPLYING WITH POLICY C20. IN ANY REDEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS AFFECTING SUCH PREMISES, THE COUNCIL WILL SIMILARLY ENCOURAGE THE PROVISION OF DOUBLE FRONTED SHOP UNITS.

Appendix 4: Planning Policy (continued)

Brentwood Borough Council Replacement Local Plan 2005

Non-Illuminated Advertisements fronting William Hunter Way

12.68 Where a shop front is formed on to William Hunter Way, the property is able to take advantage of the deemed consent allowed under the Advertisement Regulations to display an illuminated sign. However, few shops have, to date, created a double frontage on to William Hunter Way and many units are constrained from achieving this due to the nature of the rear of the High Street, with many businesses having rear service yards/parking areas, untidy single storey outbuildings or rear projections or indeed, in some cases, no rear access at all. Many High Street properties, therefore, do not have the ability to take advantage of deemed consent, which restricts advertisements to no higher than 4.6 m above ground level (or the bottom of the first floor windows, whichever is the lower).

12.69 In order to attract users of the Sainsbury store and the adjoining surface car parks into the High Street, the Council will allow non-illuminated advertisements above 4.6 m on the rear elevation of properties fronting the north side of the High Street, where it is considered that it would not be detrimental to the amenities of the area or the character and appearance of the building.

TC16 Non-Illuminated Advertisements fronting William Hunter Way

A NON-ILLUMINATED ADVERTISEMENT WILL BE ALLOWED ON THE REAR ELEVATION OF HIGH STREET PROPERTIES FACING WILLIAM HUNTER WAY ABOVE 4.6 METRES FROM GROUND LEVEL, PROVIDED THAT IT WOULD COMPLY WITH THE CRITERIA IN POLICY CP1

C20 Shop Fronts

THE DESIGN OF NEW SHOP FRONTS, INCLUDING THE NEED FOR SECURITY MEASURES, WILL BE EXPECTED TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE GUIDANCE SET OUT IN APPENDIX 3.

C21 Illuminated Advertisements

OTHER THAN THOSE ADVERTISEMENTS WITH DEEMED CONSENT, ILLUMINATED ADVERTISEMENTS WILL NOT BE ALLOWED. THE DISPLAY OF ADDITIONAL ADVERTISEMENT MATERIAL ON A FASCIA OR BOX SIGN ALLOWED BY THE REGULATIONS WILL BE PERMITTED, PROVIDED THAT IT WOULD NOT BE UNACCEPTABLY DETRIMENTAL TO PUBLIC SAFETY, THE AMENITIES OF THE AREA OR THE CHARACTER OR APPEARANCE OF THE BUILDING ON WHICH IT IS TO BE DISPLAYED.

ALL PROPOSALS WILL BE EXPECTED TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE RELEVANT SECTIONS OF THE ADVERTISEMENT AND SHOP FRONT DESIGN GUIDANCE SET OUT IN APPENDIX 3.

C22 Signs within Conservation Areas and on Listed Buildings

WITHIN CONSERVATION AREAS (EXCEPT FOR BRENTWOOD TOWN CENTRE) AND ON LISTED BUILDINGS, INTERNALLY ILLUMINATED SIGNS WILL NOT BE ALLOWED.

SIGNS SHOULD BE PAINTED TIMBER AND OF A SIZE TO PRESERVE OR ENHANCE THE CHARACTER OF THAT BUILDING AND THAT OF THE CONSERVATION AREA AS A WHOLE. ALL PROPOSALS WILL BE EXPECTED TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE RELEVANT SECTIONS OF THE ADVERTISEMENT AND SHOP FRONT DESIGN GUIDANCE SET OUT IN APPENDIX 3. WHERE EXPRESSED CONSENT IS REQUIRED, PROJECTING BOX SIGNS, WHETHER ILLUMINATED OR NOT, WILL NOT BE ALLOWED ANYWHERE WITHIN A CONSERVATION AREA.

C23 Externally Illuminated Hanging Signs

EXTERNALLY ILLUMINATED HANGING SIGNS MAY BE ALLOWED IN PLACE OF FASCIA SIGNS OR PROJECTING BOX SIGNS ABOVE FASCIA LEVEL PROVIDED THEY ARE OF A SIZE, DESIGN AND MATERIALS TO COMPLEMENT THE CHARACTER OF THE BUILDING.

C24 Non-illuminated Advertisements

OTHER THAN THOSE ADVERTISEMENTS WITH DEEMED CONSENT, NON-ILLUMINATED ADVERTISEMENTS, INCLUDING FREE STANDING ADVERTISEMENTS AND ADVERTISEMENT HOARDINGS, WILL NOT BE ALLOWED.

Contacts and Reference Material

This document has had valuable input from Essex County Council Historic Buildings Team.

Useful contacts

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Reference Documents

Brentwood Replacement Local Plan 2005
Brentwood Borough Council

Outdoor Advertisements and Signs
Department for Communities and Local Government

Conservation in Essex No.5 Shopfronts
Essex County Council

Brentwood Replacement Local Plan 2005
Appendix 3: Advertisements and Shopfront Design: additional advice to applicants
Brentwood Borough Council

Design and Access Statements: how to write, read and use them
CABE 2006