



Shopfront design guide

January 2013



Urban Design Team





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1.0 Introduction

The Council recognises the important role that town centres and shopping areas can play in the life of the Borough. Centres that are attractive, well-designed and well-managed, with a good mix of shops will be attractive to shoppers, whilst also bringing opportunities for social and cultural interaction. In contrast, people will not want to visit town centres that are run-down and don't provide the services they want.

In 2011 the Council produced a document called '*High Street Life in Waltham Forest*'. It provides a strategy for the borough's shopping streets and includes character studies for each shopping area. This guidance is compatible with its principles providing advice relevant to all shops and shopping areas.

1.1 The benefits of having a high quality shop front

The Council appreciates that many retailers in Waltham Forest are facing difficult times. This is due to increased competition from nearby shopping areas such as Stratford Westfield, a rise in on-line shopping and the effects of the economic downturn. It is therefore more important than ever to attract shoppers and encourage them to return.

Shop fronts have an important role to play in this. They can promote the image of your business and should be designed to entice shoppers and visitors inside. It can also help to improve the appearance of the shopping street attracting shoppers to the area.

Some shopping parades in High Road Leyton received shop front improvements as part of the Council's Olympic programme. These have improved the image of the area and have been popular with the public.

“They look more inviting and I think I'd be more likely to go into a nice looking shop.”

Waltham Forest resident referring to the shop front improvements in Leyton.



1.2 Purpose of the guide

This guide is intended to provide practical advice for developers and retailers who are considering changes to the external appearance of a shop. It will help readers understand what work requires permission (such as planning permission), and give general and detailed design advice. This advice will highlight the issues that the planning team look for when considering an application and help to ensure the improvements proposed are of high quality.

1.3 Status of the guide

This document provides informal guidance that supports policy DM26 (I) of the Council's Local Plan Proposed Submission.

2.0 Permissions and consents

2.1 Planning permission

Most alterations to a shop front will require planning permission. Owners are therefore advised to check with the Council before carrying out any work, and where necessary confirm advice from your builder.

For advice on whether you require planning permission you can contact the planning team, known as Development Management, before (see section 6.1 below for contact details).

Most alterations to a shop front will require planning permission

Conservation Areas and Locally Listed buildings

If the shop is in a Conservation Area or Locally Listed you can also apply for alterations under the normal planning process. However, the Council will seek to ensure enhancements do not harm the character of the area, are sympathetic to the original building and are to a high design standard.

You can contact the Council's Conservation Officer to find out if your shop is in a Conservation Area or Locally Listed (see section 6.3 for contact details), and obtain advice on appropriate alterations.

2.2 Advertisement consent

Advertisement consent relates to fascia and hanging signs, or any other features that advertise the shop such as canopies with advertising on them. The rules on whether you need to obtain permission are complicated, so if you are adding or altering any of these

features it is advisable to contact the Development Management team (see section 6.1 for contact details).

As a general rule you **will** require consent if:

- The sign or advertisement is illuminated, though some illuminated signs with internally illuminated letters or lit by “halo” illumination do not require consent.
- It does not relate to the shop, for example the name or type of shop, the goods sold.
- There is not a shop window in the wall on which the advertisement is displayed.
- It is above the bottom of the first-floor windows.
- It is more than 4.6 metres off the ground.
- Any letter or feature is more than 0.75 metres high.

The procedures for applying for Advertisement Consent are broadly similar to those for applying for planning permission.

2.3 Building Regulations consent

The Building Regulations aim to ensure that your shop satisfies its functional requirements and the building provides reasonable health and safety for shoppers and staff. This is different to Planning Permission but the application process is similar.

Not all works will require Building Regulations approval. However, they will apply if:

- The changes are structural (for example where a structural support such as a lintel is required)
- The changes involve moving the entrance or altering its width.

If you would like further advice on the process, or help to decide whether you need approval or not, you can contact the Council’s Building Control team. See section 6.2 for contact details. Alternatively details are provided on the Council’s web site on the following link www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Pages/Category/Building-control.aspx?I1=100002.

2.4 Highway projection license

Where your alterations involve putting in a structure that overhangs the public footpath (such as a canopy or awning), you will need to obtain a Highway Projection License from the Council’s Public Realm department. This is to ensure people will be able to safely pass beneath it. Contact details for the Public Realm department can be found in section 6.4, and further detail on obtaining a license is available on the Council’s web site at www.walthamforest.gov.uk/pages/services/licenses-highway-projection.aspx.

2.5 Enforcement

It is important that you apply for any necessary permissions, as you may leave yourself at risk of enforcement action being taken against you by the Council.

3.0 Design checklist

The following provides a checklist of issues to consider when making alterations to your shop. You will need to check whether you require permissions before works start (see section 2.0 above).

Declutter

This can be a cheap and effective way of improving your shop without the need for planning permission or building regulations approval.

- **Minimise signage** and keep window displays simple (section 5.1)
- Avoid unsightly wiring and **sensitively locate features such as burglar alarms** (section 5.13)

Repair

Reusing existing features is also a cheap and sustainable way of improving your shop and is less likely to require planning permission or building regulations approval.

- **Reuse existing features** (section 5.2)
- Repair with usable **materials and colours** (section 5.4)
- Consider **access** (section 5.7)
- Relocate suitable roller **shutters or grilles** internally (section 5.11)

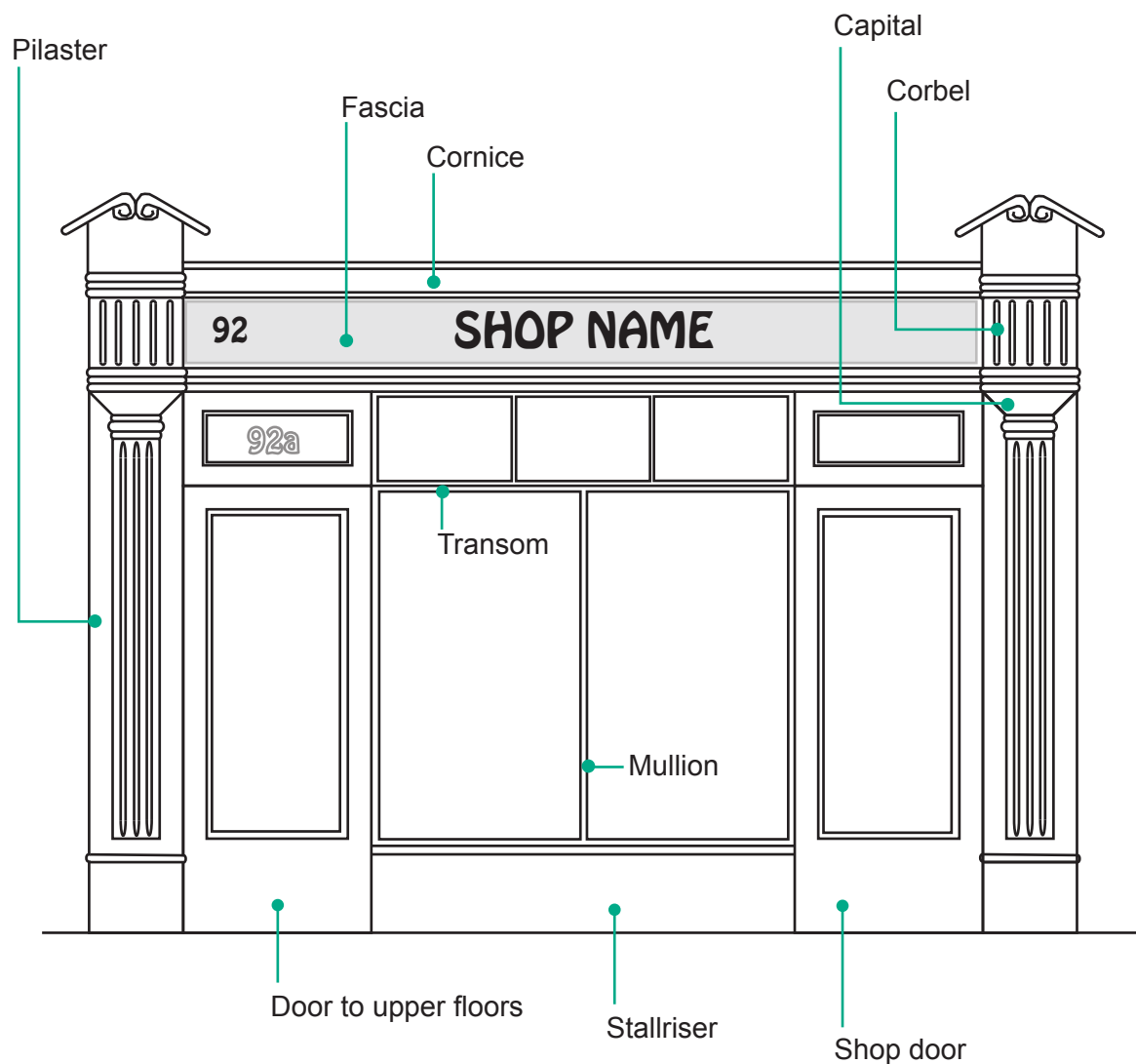
Renew

Renewing is more likely to require planning permission and building regulations approval.

- Design the **window** area to bring balance and proportion to the shop (section 5.3)
- Use appropriate **materials and colours** (section 5.4)
- Provide appropriately sized **fascias and lettering** (section 5.5)
- Ensure **projecting and hanging signs** are located in the right place and are not too large (section 5.6)
- Avoid bulky **illuminated box signs** (section 5.7)
- Design the **doorway and internal areas** to allow access for all including wheelchair users (section 5.8)
- **Subdividing a shop** will require Planning permission and Building Regulations approval. In most cases a new shop front is likely to be required (section 5.9)
- Incorporate **stallrisers** for a traditional look (section 5.10)
- Allow the shop window to be seen at night by installing open **security shutters and grilles** (section 5.11)
- Ensure **canopies and awnings** suit the character of the building (section 5.12)
- Ensure **wiring and other features** such as burglar alarms are appropriately sited (section 5.13)

4.0 Key design considerations

A shop front is based on a number of key architectural features that link together to form a framework. These features will be discussed in the design section below, and are identified in this key diagram for quick and easy reference.



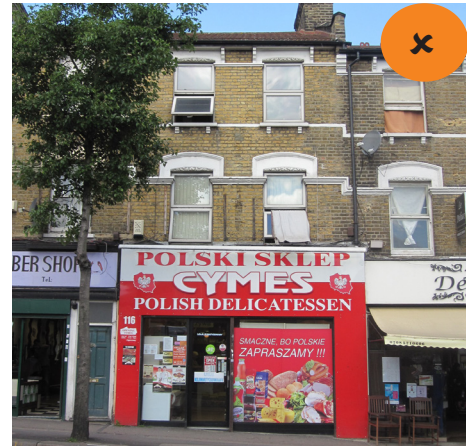
4.1 The street

The quality of a street has an impact on whether shoppers come to an area or not and also affects how long they stay.

The most successful shopping streets are generally those where shops have uniformity in their proportions, materials and details. It is therefore important to look for consistent patterns along the street, for example, the repeated arrangement of pilasters or windows, or the continuous line of cornices.

The quality of a street has an impact on whether shoppers come to an area and affects how long they stay

Individual shops should not seek undue attention or dominate their surroundings unnecessarily.



A shop front should not overly dominate.



Shops without a common framework can appear cluttered and chaotic



Shops with a common framework appear ordered

Street character

The Council produced a document in 2011 called *'High Street Life in Waltham Forest'*. It provides character studies of some of the borough's main shopping areas giving design recommendations on each. The areas included are Station Road in North Chingford; Hatch Lane Parade; Leytonstone and Highams Park; Wood Street; and High Road Leyton. If you are considering making alterations to your shop front in these areas you may find it useful to refer to this document (www.walthamforest.gov.uk/documents/ke63-high-street-life-strategy-part1-lr.pdf and www.walthamforest.gov.uk/documents/ke63-high-street-life-strategy-part2-lr.pdf)

***'High Street Life in Waltham Forest'* provides character studies of some of the borough's main shopping areas giving design recommendations on each**

Corner shops

Corner shops have a particular impact on the quality of the street because they are usually the most prominent. It is therefore particularly important that they are designed to a high standard and as a general rule should take advantage of their location by having a frontage on both sides.

Corner shops have a particular impact on the quality of the street



Corner shops should be high quality and double fronted

4.2 The building as a whole

Improvements to shop fronts should consider the building as a whole. Sensitive design can be either traditional or modern and should enhance the individuality and character of the building. The proportions of new elements (such as fascia signs) should relate to the proportions of the whole building and each other, and as a general rule, a restrained approach leads to a higher quality design.



A cohesive approach can be achieved along the street by following vertical lines set out by pilasters, and horizontal lines established by cornices and fascia

It is also useful to follow the lines of the original building as these will be designed to have the various elements in balance. This will ensure the general features of your shop remain in proportion and harmony with each other and the building as a whole.

Where a shop occupies more than one unit, it is better to repeat fascia signs and canopies rather than extend them across. This is because overlarge fascias and canopies affect the balance across the building and often results in the loss of original features such as corbels and capitals.



This shop extends across three units, but the fascia sign is broken into sections rather than extending across the whole shop front

5.0 Detailed design considerations

Shop front design encompasses a wide variety of styles and details but certain basic rules apply everywhere.

5.1 Minimise signage and clutter

The first impression of a shop is crucial and has the potential to attract passers by or turn them away. One of the most important things is not to confuse people with a crowded space. Uncluttered, clean and simple displays look more appealing than displays that are crowded with random items. It is also important to vary the display and don't try and promote everything at once.

Vary the window display and don't try and promote everything at once

De-cluttering the front of your shop can significantly improve its appearance and attractiveness to shoppers. Too many posters and notices can make your shop look tatty and weaken the message you are trying to make. Shoppers may also be reluctant to enter a shop when they cannot see in.



Too much signage can be confusing to shoppers and weaken your message



Avoid use of vinyls

It is therefore good practice to keep posters and notices to a minimum and avoid the use of vinyl's. A shop is most clearly identified if it only has one or two clear signs, which can be located in the zone below the shop sign and above the main window.

De-cluttering your shop can significantly improve its appearance

It is also important to minimise signage above the shop as this can make your shop and the parade look too busy and tatty. Therefore, as a general rule, signage above the shop fascia level should be avoided. However, where businesses occupy the upper floors, the display of advertisements should be limited to lettering applied to windows. A suitable size and style need not spoil the elevation.

5.2 Reuse existing features

If you are looking to upgrade your shop front it is worth considering the opportunities of what you already have. Re-using existing features can be a cost effective and sustainable way of improving your shop and is less likely to require planning permission.

Whilst there are some entirely original shop fronts in the borough the majority have been altered over time. Many, however, still retain some of their traditional elements such as pilasters, capitals, corbels and cornices. These original features can bring identity and character to your shop and should not be removed, damaged or obscured. Where necessary they should be repaired as part of alterations.

Re-using existing features can be a cost effective way of improving your shop and is less likely to require planning permission

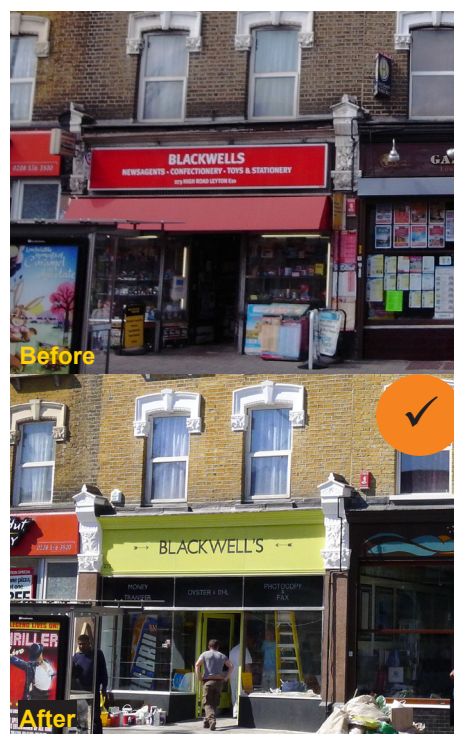
Where you have a wholly original shop front serious consideration should be given to refurbishment rather than replacement. The original shop front is likely to have been manufactured from quality



The zone above the shop window, below the fascia sign can be used for advertising



Overuse of signage makes the parade and shop look too busy and tatty



Blackwells in Leyton repaired and reused their existing shop front

materials (such as timber), and the proportions of the design are likely to balance across the shop and the building as a whole. Original features also, bring identity and character which many replacements lack. It is for this reason that the Council will seek their retention and recommend repair rather than replacement when planning applications come forward.

5.3 Window design and arrangement

Shop windows, particularly those of traditional design, are divided by mullions and transoms in a grid pattern that reflect the proportions of the shop and building. A transom (horizontal subdivision) should divide the window at the same level as the top of the door. Mullions (vertical subdivisions) should line up above and below the transom and may reflect the vertical alignment of windows on upper floors. It is these proportions that lead to a balanced design, therefore treatments such as bricking up part of a window, or removing the window entirely should be avoided.

Some retailers subdivide their shop and install kiosks. These need to be carefully considered and designed to ensure the shop front is still balanced. Further detail on subdividing the shop can be found in section 5.9 below.



Traditional windows are divided by mullions and transoms

5.4 Materials and colours

Materials should relate to the architectural style of the building. Traditional materials such as timber will generally be preferred over modern reflective materials such as plastics or metals. Timber is also easily repaintable, whereas plastics and metals are factory sprayed and therefore cannot be easily repainted in situ.

5.5 Fascias and lettering

Fascias are perhaps the most dominant feature of the shop front. The fascia should not be overly high or prominent and should respect the proportions of the overall building and adjoining shop fronts. As a general rule:

- The fascia should not extend below the top of the pilaster; obscure, damage or project forward of architectural features; or project above the sills of first floor windows.
- Where a shop occupies more than one unit, each should have a separate fascia, linked visually by a common design. One continuous fascia would be too dominant and cut across the pattern of the terrace.
- The fascia material should not be acrylic or shiny. A matt-painted fascia will usually be the most appropriate.
- Box fascias should generally be avoided as they are often too large and bulky and unsympathetic to the style of most buildings.
- Standard designs by national retail chains may not always be appropriate, and may need to be adapted to suit individual locations.

A fascia should not be overly prominent and should respect the proportions of the overall building

The size of lettering should be large enough to be seen by shoppers, but not too large to swamp the fascia or the shop front.

Each shop front should have the street number clearly displayed for example on the fascia, or on glazing above the door.

5.6 Projecting or hanging signs

Projecting or hanging signs should be simple and limited to the relevant information. They should also not be overly large in relation to the rest of the shop front and should be placed at fascia level. They should not obscure architectural details, and projecting box signs are generally considered inappropriate. Where signage overhangs the public footpath you may be required to obtain a Highway Projection License (see section 2.4 above).

5.7 Illuminated signs

A well lit window display or simply lit fascia sign is



This fascia sign is overly large and extends above the sill of the first floor window



This sign fits within the fascia area and does not overly dominate



This fascia and its lettering is too large



Pizza Hut's hanging sign is simple, appropriately sized and located so it does not obscure architectural details

an effective method of advertising and can make a positive contribution to the street at night. However, bulky illuminated box fascias or projecting signs are likely to over dominate a shop front and therefore should be avoided.

The intensity of the illumination should also be considered. Illumination should allow the sign to be easily read, but not cause a distracting glare or adversely affect homes above or near the shop. Flashing signs must not be used where they could be a distraction to traffic.

5.8 Doorways and access

It is important to ensure that alterations to the entrance of a shop enables access for all, including wheelchair users or for those pushing prams or shopping trolleys. This should be achieved by creating a level threshold and an easy to open door with an open width of 1000mm.

For further information see the Council's planning document on Inclusive Design for Non Residential Buildings (www.walthamforest.gov.uk/documents/inclusive-design-planning-non-residential.pdf).

Alterations to the entrance of a shop should allow access for all

Whilst these guidelines are mainly concerned with ground floor uses, in approving shop front proposals, the Council will ensure that the security and access of residential accommodation on upper floors are also protected and improved. Doors to upper floors should harmonise with any new shop front, and in order to improve safety and street activity they should be provided from the front of the premises.

5.9 Subdividing a shop

If you are considering subdividing your shop you will need to make a Planning application and seek Building Regulations approval.

Building Regulation officers will be keen to ensure your shop is accessible and provides reasonable health and safety for staff and shoppers. The Planning officer will consider the impact of your alteration on the streetscene.



The shop to the left provides a level threshold enabling access for all



Subdividing your shop will require Planning permission and Building Regulations approval

Planning permission and Building Regulations approval will be required when subdividing your shop

As a general rule, the addition of a kiosk or subdivision of the shop will require an entirely new shop front. This will enable the shop to read as a whole and maintain a balance across the street.

5.10 Stallrisers

A stallriser is a solid panel below the shop window. It provides protection against accidental knocks, and allows the window display to be raised to a readily viewable level. It also gives proportion and character to the shop front.

Some modern shop fronts do not have stallrisers but have large expanses of plate glass that go down to ground level. This can achieve a dramatic effect that can often work well. However in some instances, such as where parades are more traditional, stallrisers may be more appropriate.

Where stallrisers are to be incorporated within proposals they should relate to the height of the pilaster base, and should be robust as they will generally get the most wear.



Stallrisers give a traditional character to shops in the Walthamstow Village Conservation Area

5.11 Security shutters and grilles

Security measures should be chosen both for their effectiveness and their image on the shop and its surroundings.

Shop windows should be visible and lit at night

Consideration should be given to the impact on the street at night. It is generally best if shop windows are visible at night and a low voltage light bulb is left on. This enhances the look of your shopfront and enables out-of-hours window shopping. It also increases safety and security by acting as a deterrent to theft. Streets with solid shutters can feel hostile at night and often attract graffiti.

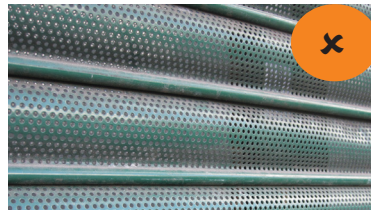


Windows should be visible at night and illuminated with a low energy light bulb

Roller shutters



Solid shutter



Perforated shutter



Brick bond or other open type shutter

Roller shutters are a common form of shop security in Waltham Forest, and can be successful if they are open in nature (for example punched-hole). Solid or perforated shutters should be avoided for the reasons mentioned above. The Council will therefore not grant planning permission for solid or perforated shutters unless in exceptional circumstances (for example shops that have an open frontage such as greengrocers or for shops that have special security needs such as jewellers).

Solid or perforated shutters can create hostile streets at night

Shutter boxes should be concealed behind the main fascia, or if this is not practicable their projection should be minimised. They should never project forward of the pilasters. Where shutter boxes are too bulky they often detract from the building's features and can harm the appearance of the shop and the street.



Bulky shutter housing should be avoided and where possible located behind the fascia

Security glass and internal shutters

Laminated and toughened glass may be used instead of plate glass. This is an ideal alternative to external shutters or grilles, and can give high levels of security. It also enables goods to remain on display encouraging window shopping outside hours, and gives the shop front a high quality appearance.

“Having a shutter inside means people can see in the window all the time which is like a 24/7 advert for us”

Owner of Princess in Leyton discussing recent installation of security glass



Security glass enables goods to remain on display outside shop opening hours

Internal shutters can be added for additional security, but should be of the open type. As they require no external additions they do not detract from the appearance of the building. Existing external shutters may be relocated internally for a cost effective improvement.

Removable external shutters

These can be acceptable if they are open in nature and designed to compliment the features of the original façade, and when the attachment brackets are designed sensitively. However, as they are removable, space is needed to store them when the shop is open.

5.12 Canopies and awnings

Canopies and awnings give some protection to shoppers and the shop window against rain and sun. They can also bring interest to the streetscene.

Care, however, should be taken to ensure they are sufficiently high to allow pedestrians to easily pass beneath them. Where the canopy or awning is expected to overhang the footpath, you will need to obtain a license from the Council's Public Realm department (see section 6.4 for contact details). Further detail on obtaining a license can be found on the Council's web site at www.walthamforest.gov.uk/pages/services/licenses-highway-projection.aspx.

Where the canopy or awning overhangs the footpath, you will need to obtain a license from the Council

It is also important to ensure their size, shape and position are compatible with the character of the building. This can be achieved by selecting a style of canopy that suits the style of the frontage.

The boxed housing should be integrated within the overall shop front design (preferably flush with the fascia) and located within the pilasters. Where a shop extends across more than one unit, more than one canopy should be provided, as one large



These awnings are compatible with the character of the building

canopy is likely to overwhelm the building. Also, it is important to choose a colour that compliments the colours of the shop, and for it to be made from a material that will withstand weathering.

5.13 Wiring and other features

Unsightly wiring and ill sited additions such as burglar alarms can detract from the quality of a shop front. Wherever possible, wiring should be internal, and if external should not be visible. Additions such as burglar alarms or surveillance systems should form an integral part of the design and be located in unobtrusive positions that avoid interference with any architectural detail.



Poorly sited wiring and other clutter can detract from the quality of the facade

6.0 Contacts for further advice

6.1 Planning (Development Management team)

For advice on whether you need to make a planning application or apply for advertising consent. Advice can also be given on the process on making an application.

020 8496 3000
dcmail@walthamforest.gov.uk
Sycamore House, Waltham Forest Town Hall
Complex, Walthamstow, E17 4JF

6.2 Building Control

For advice on whether you need to seek Building Regulations approval.

020 8496 6759/6760
building.control@walthamforest.gov.uk
Sycamore House, Waltham Forest Town Hall
Complex, Walthamstow, E17 4JF

6.3 Conservation

For advice on whether your shop is locally listed or in a Conservation Area.

Jacinta Fisher
020 8496 6737
Jacinta.fisher@walthamforest.gov.uk
Sycamore House, Waltham Forest Town Hall
Complex, Walthamstow, E17 4JF

6.4 Public Realm

For advice on obtaining a Highway Projection License.

020 8496 3000
wfdirect@walthamforest.gov.uk
Low Hall Argall Avenue, London, E10 7AS



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