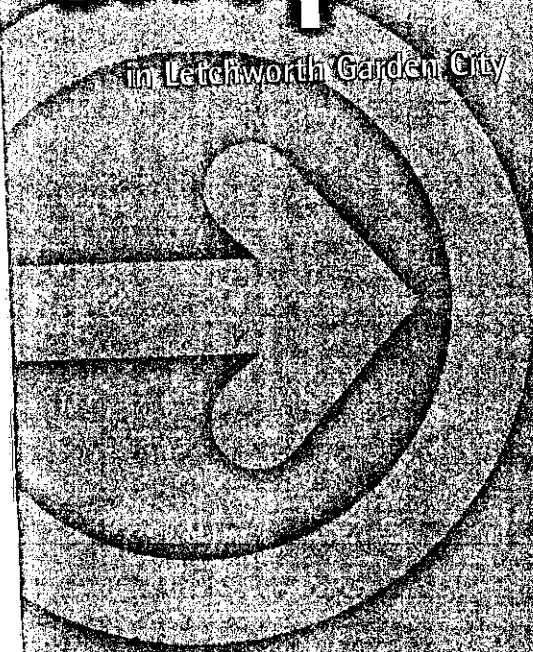


design guide

for

shopfront

in Letchworth Garden City



introduction

Letchworth has a distinctive character as the world's first Garden City. This design guide seeks to encourage shopfronts and signs that enhance the town centre for the benefit of traders and shoppers.

The unique quality of its environment has been recognised by the designation of most of the area developed before 1918, based upon the original Master Plan prepared by Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, as a Conservation Area.

This area includes the town centre, where it was originally contemplated that the development company, First Garden City Ltd, would provide shopping facilities, as later happened at Welwyn Garden City. In the event, development was piecemeal, spreading along Leys Avenue, Station Road and Eastcheap, the latter largely built in the interwar period. Comparatively few buildings in the town centre have been listed as of special architectural or historic interest – the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation office is one. However, the importance of the town centre lies in the group value of the buildings which produce a varied and attractive street scene. The shopping parade, originally comprising six or more small shops, is a typical building form, and the upper floors often have eye-catching features such as gables or cornices which add greatly to the group effect. Regrettably, some shopfronts have been insensitively renewed at ground floor level. However, many new ones, through the advice of these guidelines, have been well designed.

Purpose

The purpose of this Design Guide is to provide design advice to tenants, prospective lessees and developers, on the importance of compatibility and enhancement of the Letchworth townscape, through appropriate designs and materials. Further information is given on the Letchworth Conservation Area Brochure, published by North Hertfordshire District Council.

The advice given applies to all commercial premises which have a display window and/or a fascia sign. It therefore includes non-retail uses such as building societies, banks and restaurants.

This guide will be used by the Heritage Foundation in exercising its powers as the major freeholder in the town centre. Planning Permission and, possibly, Advertisement and Listed Building consent will also be required from North Hertfordshire District Council, who are the local planning authority. Regard must be paid to Planning Policy Guidance PPG15 and in particular Annex C. The advice in this Design Guide is consistent with the standards that the District Council will apply through the statutory planning process. It has been adopted by the District Council.

design of shopfronts

a) Keep the best shopfronts

If a property already contains an original shopfront of quality, preference should be given to refurbishment rather than replacement.

b) Shopfronts should not be designed in total isolation

The design and materials used should be compatible with the character of the area as a whole. A shopfront should be in sympathy with adjacent shopfronts, with particular regard to fascia lines, stallriser heights, bay widths, materials and colours. Also, care must be taken to respect the design of the building into which the shopfront is fitted.

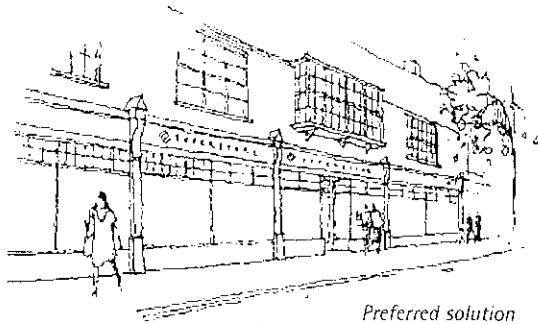
Where possible, shopfronts in buildings designed as a group should be treated similarly and shared features retained or restored. A parade should be considered as a whole to achieve harmonious detail and lettering.

c) Large shops

Where a long frontage extends across several traditional shop premises, vertical subdivisions should be preserved to retain the appearance of a series of



Inappropriate solution



Preferred solution

individual units. This can be done by retaining dividing piers or pilasters, and stallrisers. Individual fascia boards should be retained. Conformity and linkage can be satisfactorily obtained by continuity of lettering style, design and colour.

d) Retain existing features

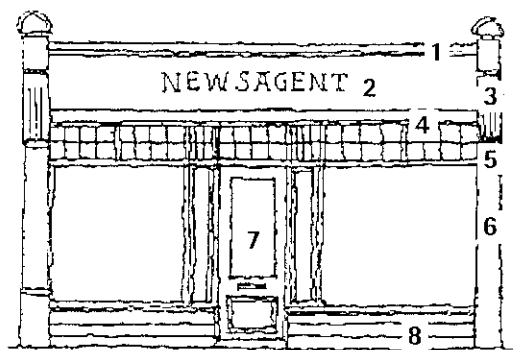
Original features such as pilasters should be retained where possible, especially where they are uncovered as a result of alterations or the removal of a more recent shopfront. Where a new shopfront scheme is being designed, it may be possible to reintroduce other traditional features such as a cornice above the fascia, mullions or a panelled stallriser.

Stallrisers at the base of display windows complete the overall form of the shopfront surround and provide visual support for the window frame. They should be constructed in a substantial material.

e) Doorways

The position and form of the doorway can have a significant impact on the appearance of the shopfront and the street scene in general. Partially recessed doorways will be encouraged, to provide extra display space for the retailer and visual interest for the shopper. See also the section on "Access".

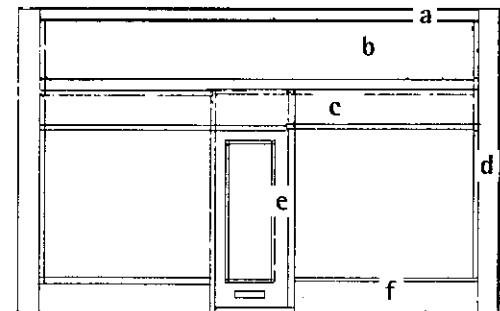
f) The classic components



Common elements of a shopfront

- 1 Cornice
- 2 Fascia
- 3 Corbel
- 4 Architrave (blind box)
- 5 Fanlight
- 6 Pilaster
- 7 Panelled door
- 8 Stallriser

- a Framing fascia
- b Well proportioned lettering on unit fascia
- c Upper windows related to door height
- d Strong containing feature to denote shop position
- e Well proportioned door
- f Strong skirting feature to 'support' glass above



Shopfront designers should aim to include at least some of those features illustrated in the sketch on the previous page.

It should be remembered, however, that period style shopfronts may be inappropriate in the context of some modern buildings. In such cases the classic components can be successfully interpreted in a contemporary scheme.

Where possible, even new shopfronts should adopt a traditional framing element.

g) Materials

Materials should be compatible with the rest of the building and the immediate locality. Traditional materials such as natural stone, tiling or hardwood should be used wherever possible to maintain the established character of the town centre. The use of modern reflective materials is rarely appropriate in Letchworth. In locations where aluminium is selected, bronze or brown surface finishes are preferred.

h) Colour

As a general guide, colour schemes should be of natural tones. Bright colours should be used with care and discretion.

i) Attention to detail

The choice of door handles, letter boxes and other architectural ironmongery should be considered carefully to suit the style of shopfront design.

Security

Where there is a need to increase the security of a shop in the Conversation Area or on a Listed Building, security measures may be permitted. On Listed Buildings, external steel roller shutters are generally unsuitable and traditional timber shuttered, laminated glass and internal chain-link screens are modern alternatives. Traditional stallrisers are an effective deterrent to "ram raiders", as are small shop windows between masonry piers. For buildings not of historic importance consideration could be given

to external security shutters provided they are sensitively designed in relation to the street scene.

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance, introduced into the town centre in May 1997, should reduce the need for high security measures.

Signs and advertisements

a) Fascias

The fascia is an important focal point of the shopfront and its style and proportion should relate to the rest of the building and adjoining shops.

Original fascia boards, surrounds, associated mouldings and beadings should be retained wherever possible.



Good Fascia

Poor Fascia

Careful attention should be paid to achieving the correct proportions for fascias and signs relative to other elements in the street scene. Fascias should line up with adjacent traditional or well designed fascias. A gap should be left between the top of the sign and lowest part of first floor window sill. Generally, a fascia depth of approximately $\frac{1}{5}$ of the total shopfront height provides a good guideline to follow

Fascia signs should not carry extraneous advertisements, that is, they should state only the name of the premises in addition to its street number. A proliferation of advertisements results in untidy and cluttered fascias, and is counter-productive in arresting the eye of shoppers.

b) Lettering

The style and size of lettering should be tailored to the shop. On traditional shopfronts, simple hand painted lettering usually produces the best effect and incised lettering in bronze or wood can add dignity. Lettering should be in proportion with the fascia itself and the shopfront in general. As a rough guide, lettering should not occupy more than 60% of the fascia depth.

c) Materials and colour

Materials and colour for the fascia should be carefully selected and should be compatible with the rest of the building. Where light coloured lettering is used, a dark background is essential. Painted wood remains the most suitable material for frames and fascias. Plastics are frequently inappropriate and where aluminium is used, brown, bronze or matt black finishes are generally more appropriate than silver and high metal finishes.

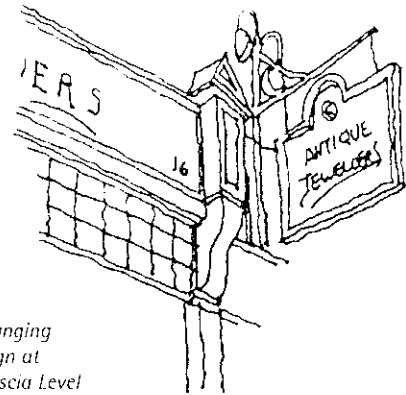
d) Illuminated signs

Illuminated signs should be designed with care. Individual illuminated letters are preferable to a single illuminated box.

Front lit fascias are particularly welcome, illuminated by either swan neck lamps or concealed neon tubes. They need to be carefully designed so that their level of illumination and spread of light is controlled.

e) Projecting and hanging signs

Projecting or hanging signs are desirable if neat and compact in design and sited at fascia level. Usually, only one projecting sign per shop is appropriate. Brackets should be of a simple design, in keeping with the overall street scene. The style of the projecting sign should complement the fascia.



Hanging Sign at Fascia Level

Projecting box signs are generally unsuitable in Letchworth, especially if internally illuminated.

canopies

Canopies are a long established characteristic in Letchworth, and can add a lively feature to a shopfront if fully retractable and carefully designed. The traditional shop canopy is the straight canvas type, mounted on a roller and with a straight edge. Non retractable canopies and pvc covering are not considered appropriate. Varieties of pattern and colour are encouraged. The retention or replacement of canopies from either above or below the fascias is generally encouraged.



Preferred Canopy design

planting

Well tended planting features such as window boxes, hanging baskets or boxes consisting of dwarf trees or hardy shrubs, can make attractive street features. It is important that they are well kept and do not cause inconvenience to pedestrians. They must not obstruct the public footpath.

corner sites

Shops on corner sites have great visual impact in a shopping street. The double aspect should be retained wherever possible.

access

When designing new units or installing new shopfronts, the design should take account of special access requirements for people with restricted mobility. Entrances to the shops should avoid steps. If it is impossible to reconcile floor levels with the pavement level, then a suitable ramp should be provided. Consideration must be given to the surface material.

You are advised to contact the Access Officer at NHDC on 01462 474 508 to discuss access requirements. Under the Disabilities Discrimination Act it is the responsibility of individual shopkeepers to ensure that their building is accessible to all users.

chain stores

Where national chain stores wish to present a house style or corporate image, common to all their retail outlets in other parts of the country, some modification taking account of local styles and designs may be required. A standard sign can be adapted to conform to the building and street character whilst still retaining the corporate image.

LGCHF grants

LGCHF has agreed to make available a grant to individual shopkeepers towards the total cost of the installation of a good quality shopfront that meets the criteria of this guide. Funds are limited, and grants will be treated on a first come first served basis. Retailers should contact the Heritage Foundation before commissioning shop fitters and designers. A separate leaflet on LGCHF grants is available from the Heritage Foundation.

planning permission

Any material alteration to shopfronts and the installation of signs are likely to require both Planning Permission and Advertisement Consent from the local planning authority, which is North Hertfordshire District Council. If the building is Listed then Listed Building Consent may be required. Applications should be submitted to:

Head of Planning Services
North Hertfordshire District Council
Council Offices,
Gernon Road
Letchworth,
Hertfordshire SG6 3JF

Discussions with appropriate officers before submission of planning applications is encouraged.

For an informal discussion prior to submission please contact one of the Letchworth Planning Officers on 01462 474268 or 01462 474244.

