Shopfront Design

Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance

February 2024





Fermanagh & Omagh
District Council
Comhairle Ceantair
Fhear Manach agus na hÓmaí

1. Introduction

1.1 This Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) provides additional advice and design guidance for Shop Front Design with a view to ensuring that the highest standards of design are achieved throughout Fermanagh and Omagh District.

1.2 This SPG offers advice for developers, the public and planning officers in relation to the design, alteration and installation and repair of shop-fronts. It applies to all commercial premises including retail shops, and uses such as offices, pubs, banks, building societies, estate agents, restaurants, pubs and betting offices located within the District. Additional guidance is provided in each of our Conservation Area Design Guides available for proposals located within any of our three Conservation Areas in Enniskillen, Lisnaskea or Omagh.

1.3 SPG represents non-statutory planning guidance which supports, clarifies and/or illustrates by example policies included within the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council Local Development Plan –Plan Strategy. The information set out in this SPG should therefore be read in conjunction with the LDP, copies of which are available online or from the Planning Department.

1.4 The Pre-application Discussion (PAD) stage is the appropriate time for developers/applicants to discuss queries relating to shop front design. This should act to front-load the planning application and result in a speedier planning decision. This SPG should be read in conjunction with the Council's Validation Checklist and Applicant/Agent Protocol – A Good Practice Guide.

2. Planning Policy Context

Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035

2.1 The RDS provides an overarching strategic planning framework to facilitate and guide the public and private sectors. It seeks to promote balanced economic growth across Northern Ireland whilst protecting and enhancing the environment. Whilst shop front design is not specially referred to in the RDS, as part of our built environment, it contributes to the health of town centres and other shopping areas, making them attractive places to work, visit and invest in.

Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) for Northern Ireland

2.2 The SPPS supports good design and positive place-making which can further sustainable development and encourage healthier living; promote accessibility and inclusivity; and contribute to how safe places are and

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feel. Design is an important material consideration in the assessment of all proposals and particular weight should be given to the impact of development on existing buildings, especially listed buildings and on the character of areas recognised for their townscape values such as Conservation Areas and ATCs.

2.3 The policy approach is also to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness and this should be supported by clear LDP policies and/or supplementary design guidance that seeks to address connections between people and places and the integration of new development.

Local Development Plan Policy Context

2.4 All shop front development will require to comply with the relevant policies of the Local Development Plan 2030 - Plan Strategy. In particular, Policy DE02 - Design Quality, requires development proposals to demonstrate a high-quality built environment. Additionally, shop front development within Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings and Areas of Townscape or Village Character must comply with:

- HE02: Listed Buildings and their Settings;
- HE03: Conservation Areas and
- HE04; Areas of Townscape Character (ATCs) and Areas of Village Character (AVC).

Other policies including DE07 Advertisements and DE08 Advertisements and the Historic Environment and Appendix 1: Guidance for different Categories of Outdoor Advertisements, of the LDP may also be relevant to a specific proposal.

3. Principles of Shop Front Design

3.1 The Streetscape

It is important to consider the effect of the shopfront design on the rest of the street and the immediate area. The proposal should respect the character of the existing building and its neighbours. New designs should not draw attention away from or dominate the streetscape and surrounding buildings. Proportions, materials and details should maintain the rhythm, character and hierarchy along the street.

3.2 The Building in Entirety

The design of any individual part of a building should complement the building as a whole. Shopfronts should enhance the individuality and character of the entire building, not just the ground floor. It is important to understand the architectural character of the whole building when designing the shopfront.

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3.3 The Shopfront

Shopfronts should have an individual style while respecting the form and scale of the whole building and adjoining buildings and shopfronts. Individual shopfronts should be consistent with the rhythm and harmony of the street whilst providing visual interest.

3.4 The Details

Details should not be designed in isolation but should respect the details of the host building as well as the architectural detail of adjacent buildings and the streetscape. Particular attention to detail should be given to windows, doors and signage.

3.5 Accessibility

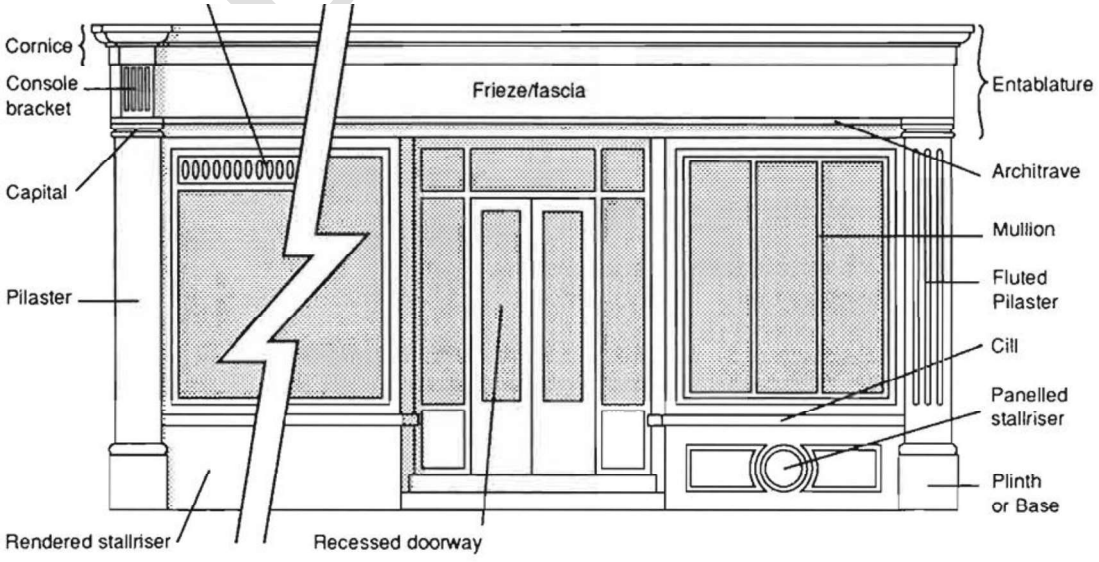
People of diverse abilities should be able to use buildings and places comfortably and safely, as far as possible without assistance. Where existing shopfronts do not provide acceptable access, improvements should be explored to resolve such problems. New shopfronts should always where practicable, provide direct and straightforward access for all to the shop.

3.6 Architectural features of a Shop front

3.6.1 Figure 1 illustrates the architectural features of a Traditional Shop Front. Figure 2 provides an example of a contemporary Shop front. The architectural terms annotated on Figure 1 are explained at 3.6.3 below.

3.6.2 The principles of shop front design apply to both traditional and contemporary shopfronts.

Figure 1: Architectural features of a Traditional Shop front [1]



[1] Omagh Conservation Area Guide

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Figure 2: A minimalist contemporary shopfront design inspired by the principles of the traditional shopfront [2]



3.6.3 The architectural terms illustrated in figure 1 above are described below:

- **Capital -** The moulded or carved top of a column or pilster which concentrates (or appears to concentrate) the load onto the shaft of the column. Often richly ornamented.

- **Corbole/Console Bracket -** These provide support to the cornice and are found at the top of the pilasters located at either end of the shop front.

- **Cornice -** The cornice provides a horizontal divide between the shop front and the upper floors.

- **Entrance** - The design and positioning of the door should reflect the character of the whole building. Any doorways providing independent access to upper floors should be positioned carefully within the design.

- **Fascia -** A fascia board is the horizontal board below the cornice used to display the name of the shop.

- **Fanlight** The fanlight is often incorporated into the entrance design and can be used to display the property number.

- **Glazing** (Transoms and Mullions) Transoms and Mullions are the horizontal and vertical divisions used to divide large expanses of glass.

[2] Galway County Council - Shopfront design guide 2023

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Any vertical divisions should reflect the vertical division on the upper floor.

- **Plinth -** The lower square slab at the base of a column.
- **Pilaster -** Pilasters are a rectangular feature in the shape of a pillar projecting from the face of a building, but having no structural function.
- **Stallriser -** The panel below the cill located in a shopfront.

4. Design Criteria for Quality Shop Fronts

4.1 General principles

4.1.1 The Streetscape

Ensuring quality design outcomes requires a good understanding of your existing or future shopfront, its context and unique characteristics. Consideration should be given to the effect of the shopfront design on the wider streetscape. When designing a shop front you should look to neighbouring buildings for inspiration and identify the character of the shopping street so that the proposal blends with the streetscape.

4.1.2 The building in Entirety

The design of the shopfront should reflect and enhance the historic fabric and nature of the entire building within which it will be located.

4.1.3 Within conservation areas any new commercial fronts should be traditional in design. Within the conservation areas within our council area there are a number of traditionally designed shop and pub fronts remaining, and it is important these are retained and new designs are sympathetic to these. Any renovation or alterations should try to retain the traditional shop or pub front.

4.2 Scale, height and proportion

4.2.1 Scale refers to the size of a particular building or its components when considered in relation to its surroundings, or in reference to human form.

4.2.2 Proportion refers to relationship, in terms of size and arrangement, of the various elements in a façade.

4.2.3 The scale and height of a shop front should be in proportion with the rest of the building.

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4.2.4 If a shopfront encompasses more than one building, vertical subdivisions should be used to retain the individual appearance of each. This can be done by retaining dividing piers or pilasters whilst respecting the fascia and stall risers on neighbouring buildings.

4.2.5 Within conservation areas any new commercial fronts or alterations to existing fronts should not over dominate the street scene and follow the above principles in terms of scale, height and proportion.

4.3 Access for all

4.3.1 People of diverse abilities should be able to use buildings and places comfortably and safely, as far as possible without special assistance. Level entry (Step-free) entrances facilitate not just wheelchair users but also people with buggies; people with suitcases or shopping trolleys; people using walking or mobility aids; and people with visual difficulties.

4.4 Doors and entrances

4.4.1 Doors should be centrally located unless it was originally located in another position. They can be recessed to reinforce visual interest, provide shelter and a non-slip access ramp into the shop. Doors should be easily opened and designed to reflect the design and layout of the whole shop and windows and painted the same colour. The door should generally have a kick plate or bottom panel of a height to match the stall riser. It is also important to retain existing original doors or panelled doors.

4.5 Fascias and detailing

4.5.1 Fascias are the most noticeable feature of a shopfront and distinguish the shop from the upper floors of the building. The general rules for fascia areas are as follows:

- The depth of the fascia should be in proportion to the rest of the shopfront and relate to the entire building. Generally, a fascia depth of no more than 600mm is acceptable.
- It should not obscure, damage, project forward or hide any architectural feature of the building.
- It should be made of a material that is neither shiny or acrylic, and of a colour that matches or compliments the design and colour of the shopfront.
- It should align with those on neighbouring properties as far as possible.
- Two different buildings should not be linked with a single fascia.
- Box fascia signs should be avoided as they are often too large and bulky and unsympathetic to the design of most buildings.

4.5.2 Within Conservation Areas the above rules in relation to fascias and detailing also apply.

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4.6 Stall risers

4.6.1 The stall riser provides a solid visual base to the shopfront, forming a plinth at ground level. The stall riser completes the shopfront by providing balanced proportions and providing some protection against accidental knocks.

4.6.2 New and replacement shopfronts in traditional buildings should incorporate a stallriser. Stallrisers should not exceed the base of the pilasters or the depth of the fascia, whichever is less in order to provide balance to the shopfront. The proportion of the stallriser to the overall shopfront should be that it does not over dominate the building. As with fascias, stall risers that are no more than 600mm in depth will generally be acceptable.

4.6.3 Existing stallrisers should be retained and restored where possible.

4.7 Windows and Glazing

4.7.1 Large expanses of glass are usually out of scale with their context. Windows should ideally be framed and subdivided vertically if appropriate, as most buildings will have a vertical emphasis. Any method of subdivision should be in keeping with the character of the building and the shop front.

4.7.2 For example, in a traditional shop front in a conservation area, a transom should divide the window at the same level as the line between the door and fanlight. Mullions should line up above and below the transom and may reflect the vertical alignment of windows on the upper floors.

4.8 Materials

4.8.1 Materials should complement the character of the buildings and the street. The type and number of materials used should be kept to a minimum and should be durable and easy to maintain. Shiny, highly reflective materials such as plastics and acrylics should be avoided. Instead, use high quality materials such as timber which is an attractive and cost-effective material to use on traditional and contemporary shop fronts.

4.8.2 Aluminium is a modern material that comes in a variety of coated finishes which may be acceptable as an alternative to steel where a contemporary design is appropriate.

4.8.3 The widespread use of synthetic materials such as vinyl, perspex or fibreglass which is also known as glass reinforced plastic, is not appropriate.

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4.8.4 Within Conservation Areas the use of modern material should not be used. Timber doors and windows should be painted rather than stained or varnished.

4.9 Colour

4.9.1 Care should be taken when considering colours and an appropriate colour and tone should be chosen which respects the street and enhances the streetscape. Using uniform colours in a streetscape identifies and groups buildings with a shared purpose. It is important that colour schemes relate to and harmonise with surrounding buildings and shopfronts. Muted pastel colours are the most appropriate background colours for shopfronts on listed buildings and within Conservation Areas.

4.10 Examples of Good Shop Fronts

4.10.1 Within FODC there are a number of good examples of shopfront design. Some of the examples below are located within our Conservation Areas, and others are located elsewhere within settlement limits.

Photograph 1: Traditional Shopfront
(John Street, Omagh)



Photograph 2 : Modern Interpretation of a traditional shopfront within a Conservation Area
(Church Street, Enniskillen)



Photograph 3: Modern interpretation of a traditional shopfront within Conservation Area (Lisnaskea)

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Photograph 4: Modern interpretation of Traditional shop front design, Omagh



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5. Other Key Elements of Shop Front Design

5.1 Signs and advertising – General Principles

5.1.1 Shop signs are an important part of the shop front design. Attractive well maintained shop signs grab the attention of passers-by, contributing to the streetscape and attract custom. If shopfront signage is poorly positioned or oversized, they can create visual clutter and destroy architectural features. Consent may be required for the erection of shopfront advertising.

5.1.2 The main function of a shop front sign is to attract the attention of consumers and advertise essential information, for example the shop name, type of business and street number.

5.1.3 Signage is to be designed as an integral part of the building on which it is displayed. Signs will not be considered acceptable above fascia level. The location, size, design and materials of the sign are to relate to the architectural detailing, scale and character of the building.

5.2 Fascia signs

5.2.1 Fascia signs should be of an appropriate size, and sited and designed to harmonise with the shop front and the façade of the building on which it is located. It should also respect the alignment of neighbouring buildings. If a shop occupies more than one building the fascia should be sub divided emphasising the individual character of each building. As the fascia dominates the entire design of the shop front, it should be in proportion to others nearby as well as the building on which it is located.

5.2.2 Where there is an original fascia, the sign should make use of this with generally no advertising at sub-fascia level or on pilasters or columns.

5.2.3 On older and more traditionally styled buildings, painted signs or non-illuminated letters are preferable to panels or other types of display.

5.2.4 Where a new commercial building is proposed, the location of fascia signage should be integrated into the overall design.

5.2.5 Traditionally fascia signs were constructed of wood with hand painted lettering, this should be the case when designing or restoring a traditional shop front. The use of plastic will rarely be acceptable, especially on Listed Buildings or significant buildings within Conservation Areas. Modern factory produced box signs will rarely be supported unless sited on modern buildings, provided they can be appropriately integrated.

5.2.6 If there is no fascia on the shopfront, lettering should be individually mounted directly onto the building and backlit to avoid visual clutter.

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5.2.7 The lettering style used for a fascia sign is important in achieving an attractive and inviting shop front. Often the lettering style will dictate the nature of the business. Lettering on a fascia sign should be in scale with the rest of the shopfront.

5.3 Projecting Signs

Examples of projecting signs



5.3.1 Projecting signs should be sympathetic to the design of the building where they are to be displayed and respect fascia signage. Projecting signs include both hanging sign and box signs.

5.3.2 To reduce clutter a projecting sign will generally only be acceptable where there is no other projecting advertisement such as a canopy, awning, flag or horizontal banner.

5.3.3 Projecting signs should generally project no more than 1 metre including fixings, with a maximum end width of no more than 0.1m in the case of a box sign. Projecting signs should be a minimum of 2.25m above ground level in the interests of public safety.

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5.4 Hanging Signs

Examples of hanging signs





5.4.1 Hanging signs can add interest to the frontage of the shop as well as help identify a shop from a distance. Hanging signs and their supporting brackets should be carefully thought out to ensure the size, materials and detailing are appropriate in terms of scale and design.

5.4.2 No more than one hanging sign on each elevation within a shop front will be considered acceptable and they should be located at fascia level at one end of the fascia. In some instances, it may be appropriate to site a hanging sign above the fascia level, however this will normally only be supported if it is to avoid damage to or covering up important architectural features.

5.4.3 Where brackets already exist for hanging signs, these should be reused if they are of an appropriate design and suitable position. The design of new brackets should be appropriate to the shop front and kept relatively simple.

5.5 Box Signs

5.5.1 Box signs should be located at fascia level and are generally best situated at the end of the fascia.

5.5.2 Box signs, whether illuminated or not often detract from the overall appearance of shop fronts and can be over dominant in the street scene. They can also damage or cover up significant architectural detailing on buildings.

5.5.3 Box signs will not be considered acceptable in Conservation Areas or on Listed Buildings.

5.5.4 If a box sign is to be used on a modern building, it should attempt to have a minimum impact on the design of the overall shop front, ways of achieving this

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can include, being fully recessed behind the fascia, any lettering should be flush with the background panel or project only slightly and a matt finish can help improve aesthetic and visual appearance.

5.6 Advertisements on Upper Floors

5.6.1 Commercial premises on upper floor of buildings need to advertise their location. This should be done without the exterior of the building appearing cluttered.

5.6.2 Advertising on upper floors should be printed or etched onto the glass or onto the internal window blinds. Individual letters rather than an advertisement panel may be suspended behind the glass.

5.6.3 External Signage located above the first-floor level will not normally be considered acceptable.

5.7 Nameplates

5.7.1 Often where the upper floor of a shop is in use by a separate business, there is a need for business nameplate located at the street entrance. The size of such plates should be of modest proportion and should not be illuminated.

5.8 Lighting

5.8.1 It is possible to successfully incorporate lighting into a shop front design. Deciding on the most appropriate method, design and type of lighting will be key to ensuring it is not detrimental to the character or appearance of the building or area.

5.8.2 Back-lit Illuminated individual letters can be used. Illuminated box signs, strip lighting or multiple swan neck lights will not be acceptable. The proliferation of multiple lights on a shopfront can clutter it so the number of lights should be kept to a minimum.

5.8.3 The intensity of the illumination should allow the sign to be easily read without causing a distracting glare.

5.9 Canopies and Awnings

5.9.1 Originally canopies and awnings were used to protect goods from sun light. They are now used as a means of providing additional advertising. Any awning with advertisement or lettering will require advertisement consent. Awnings should not act as a permanent and prominent substitute for fascia or projecting signs. Their size, shape and position should be compatible with the character and scale of the building. The colour and material should be

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constant with, or complementary to, the materials of the shopfront and building. They should be made of non-reflective material and should preferably spring from lower edge of fascia.

5.9.2 Canopies and Awnings should be a minimum of 2.25m above ground level in the interests of public safety and architectural details should not be obscured with the installation of the canopy.

5.9.3 The colour and material should be constant with or complementary to the materials of the shopfront and building. They should not interfere with the visibility of traffic signals and signs and care must be taken to ensure that the safety of drivers, cyclists and pedestrians is not jeopardised. Consultation with DfI Roads maybe required. They should be made of non-reflective material.

5.9.4 Whilst we do not encourage canopies and awnings within Conservation Areas, where they are proposed they should be the traditional and retractable type. Rigid canopies are inappropriate and will not be accepted with the Conservation Areas.

5.10 Security

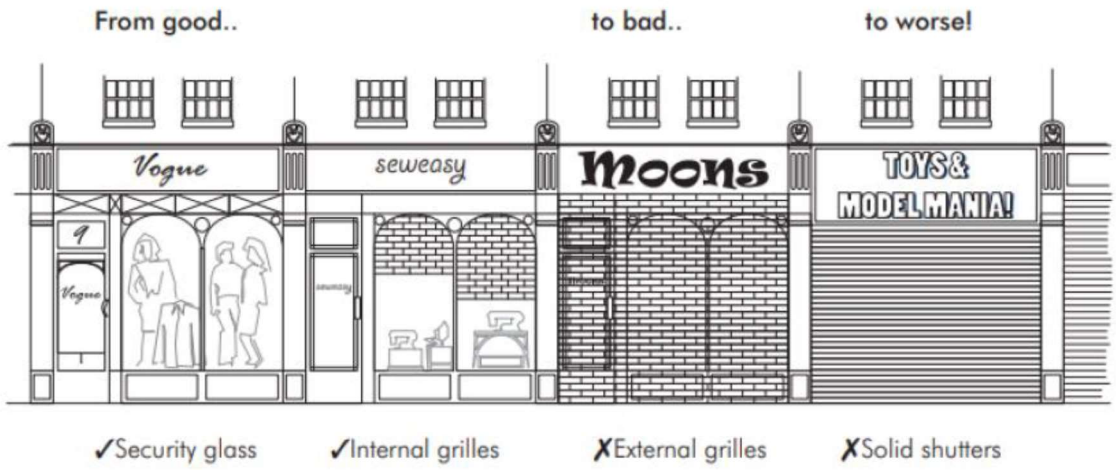
5.10.1 Any security measures should be an integral part of the shop front design and should try to provide the least visually intrusive measures. External solid roller shutters will not be considered acceptable. Solid roller shutters give an appearance of a ‘dead’ and uninviting streetscape at night as the shopfront display is hidden from view.

5.10.2 The recommended alternatives include Security Glass and internal security grilles/lattice shutters (see Fig 3 below). These measures enable the shopkeeper to display their shop front displays at night for the night-time economy and help the town centre retain its sense of place.

5.10.3 Security Glass that has the capacity to remain intact even when broken is an acceptable alternative to roller shutters. Toughened Glass is considered alternative. Internal security grilles that can be fitted discreetly behind the shop window should be perforated and designed to be in keeping with the design of the shop front. Security shutters should not obscure window displays. Outer storm doors, window shutters and demountable mesh grilles are encouraged and can be incorporated into the design of the shopfront.

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Figure 3: Examples of acceptable and unacceptable shutters [3]



6.0 Key elements to good shopfront design

- Respect the character of the existing building and its neighbours
- Reinforce the local identity of the area and/or create a sense of place
- Add visual interest to the street without detracting from other buildings
- Use special features, finishes and details to draw people's attention
- Have a clear identity not a mixture of styles
- Avoid blank frontages and deep fascias
- Conserve historic buildings and features as these give the town character
- Visually separate shopfronts on adjacent buildings of differing types
- Follow the existing pattern of appropriate adjoining shopfronts on buildings of similar style
- Follow the proportions of the rest of the building and provide a visual support for upper floors

[3] Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council – Shop fronts and signage in conversation areas – Design guidance leaflet. June 2022

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- Keep designs simple, even if elements within the shopfronts are elaborate
- Emphasise the form of the shopfront by using different planes to create areas of shadow
- Clearly define the entrance
- Create independent access to upper floors if in different use
- Provide easy access for people with disabilities, the elderly and parents with pushchairs
- Integrate signs, lighting and security measures within the design of the Shopfront
- Employ a competent designer and use high quality materials

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