



Uttlesford Shopfront Design Guide

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

1.11 Central Government, in light of the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission, the NPPF (July 2021), and the National Model Design Code encourages Local Authorities to produce guidance on a range of issues, which includes design and advertising. This includes shopfront design.

1.12 This Shopfront Design Guidance expands on several policies in the Uttlesford Local Plan adopted 20 January 2005. The Guide supports the following policies: Policy GEN2– Design; Policy ENV1 – Design of Development within Conservation Areas; Policy ENV2 – Development Affecting Listed Buildings and Policy RS2– Town and Local Centres. Planning applications involving alterations to existing shopfronts, or the introduction of new shopfronts, will be considered against these policies.

1.13 This document should be read in conjunction with the above policies and aims to provide additional guidance on matters relating to the design of, and alterations to existing, shopfronts and commercial signage in Uttlesford.

1.14 Any future proposals should also take into account the guidance set out in the **Essex Design Guide**, available to view at www.essexdesignguide.co.uk and National Design Guide. Further advice is also available from the Historic Towns and Villages Forum and publications by English Heritage including '*Retail Development in Historic Areas*', '*Energy efficient and historic buildings*' and '*Traditional windows, care, repair and upgrading*'.

1.2 Intended Outcome

1.21 This Design Guide is intended to provide detailed advice on matters relating to shopfront design, including the repair or refurbishment of existing shop-frontages, the reinstatement of lost frontages and details, or the introduction of new shopfronts; to ensure a consistent and high level of design and quality across the district.

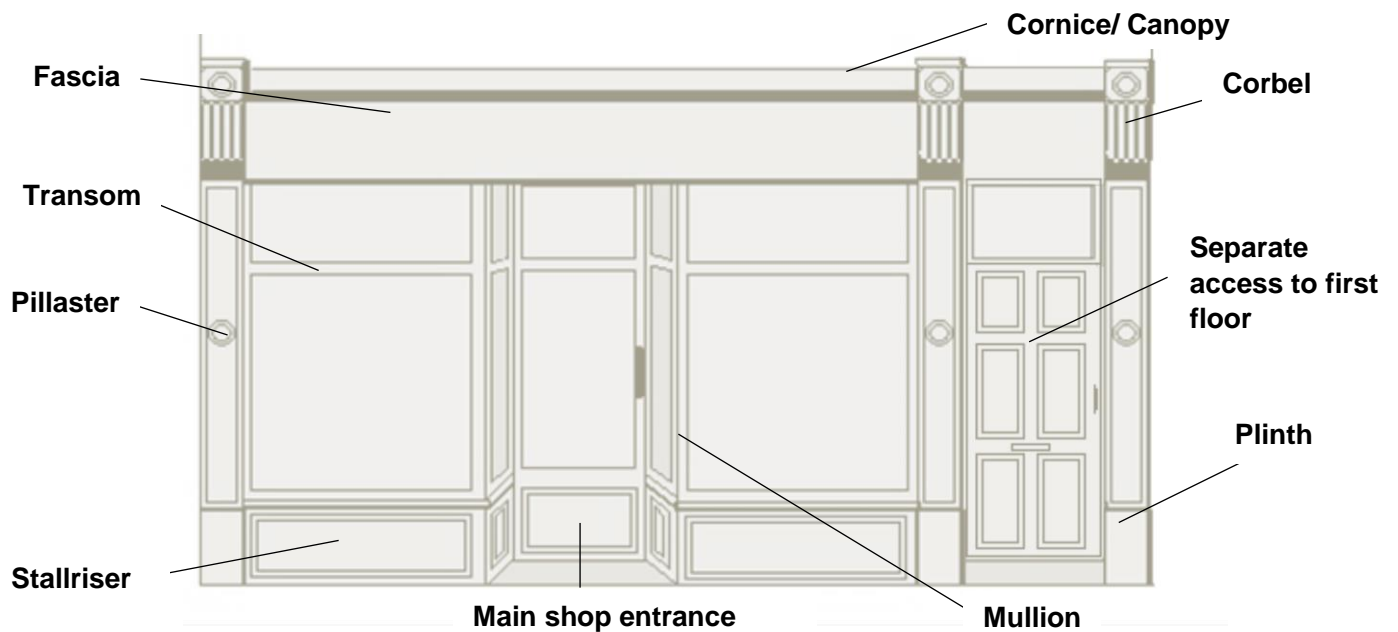
1.22 This guidance is intended to be beneficial to commercial building owners, agents and members of the public, who are considering making alterations to, or designing new, shop-frontages within the district.

1.23 It is also intended to be a tool for planning officers when considering applications relating to the refurbishment, alteration, introduction or even removal of existing shopfronts.

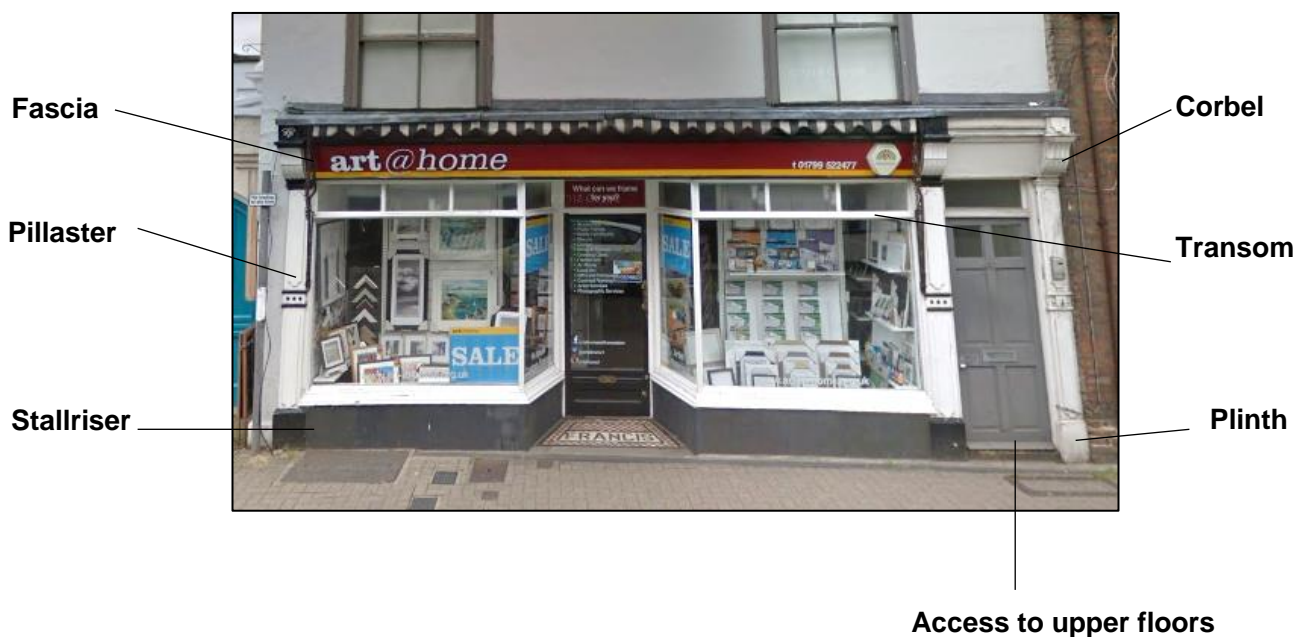
2.0 Shopfront Styles

2.1 Traditional Shopfronts

2.11 The key elements of the traditional shopfront are labelled below. They are based on the classical form of the temple front and represent the plinth (stallriser), columns (pilasters), capitols (consoles) and the frieze (fascia).



2.12 Traditional shopfronts will usually have a door to the side also, to provide access to the upper floors, as shown in this local example below:



3.0 The Importance of Good Shopfront Design

3.01 Shopping is an integral part of our everyday lives, and shopfronts contribute enormously to the character of our cities, towns and villages. They are fundamental to not only the distinctiveness and appearance of our built environment, but also to its economic prosperity.

3.02 In preserving the high quality of our shop frontages, and insisting upon appropriate and well thought out signage, this in turn:

- improves the quality of the environment in which we work, live and shop
- draws customers into our towns and villages to shop locally
- supports smaller, locally run businesses
- boosts the local economy, *and*
- promotes a strong sense of community

3.1 Retaining, re-using and restoring traditional shopfronts

3.11 Where a traditional shopfront exists, this should generally be retained and refurbished as necessary. This is an environmentally sustainable approach and preserves the historic character and appearance of the street-scene.

3.12 Where historic details have been lost or obscured, these should be reinstated or exposed to reveal the traditional character of the shopfront and enhance its overall appearance.

3.13 New signage should be carefully considered to minimise loss of historic fabric or traditional features, and to avoid obscuring or compromising the traditional details. A modest, well detailed painted fascia and proportionate hanging sign is usually sufficient for advertising purposes.

3.14 Repairs should usually be carried out in a like-for-like manner, and fabric replaced only where absolutely necessary and beyond repair.

3.15 Missing details and features should be replaced where there is sufficient evidence of their presence, to support reinstatement. Conjectural reinstatement, based on assumptions of what 'would' or 'should' have been there, should be avoided.

3.2 Replacing shopfronts

3.21 Though we might be more inclined to value traditional shopfronts from the late 18th through to the early 20th centuries, later examples should not be dismissed out of hand as having little or no value. Early to mid C20th examples, incorporating Art Deco, Art Nouveau or Modernist detailing can add interest and variety to the street-scene whilst an original post-war C20th example, in a planned post-war shopping development for example, can tell an important story about the development of shopfronts over the years, and is likely to be more in-keeping with its immediate context.

3.22 Where the shopfront is part of a planned development of its period and is in-keeping with the host, and neighbouring buildings, it would be desirable to retain it.

3.23 Where a shopfront is a later replacement and is out of context with the host building, or neighbouring buildings, due to scale, proportion or inappropriate detailing and materials, it may be desirable to replace this with a more sympathetic shopfront.

3.24 In deciding on a replacement shopfront style, the design should always take its cue from the character of the host building, and neighbouring properties where appropriate. The shopfront should not be designed in isolation, but should take into account existing character, style, detailing and proportions of the whole building.

3.25 The Council **will not support** the demolition or replacement of traditional or quality shopfronts within a conservation area, which positively contribute to its character and appearance.

3.3 New Shopfronts

3.31 As with replacement shopfronts, similar principles apply. The proposed design should always take its cue from the character of the host building, and neighbouring properties where appropriate. The shopfront should not be designed in isolation, but should take into account existing character, style, detailing and proportions of the whole building.

3.32 Despite the modern nature of the shopfront, materials should be of a high quality and in-keeping with the prevailing palette of materials in the locality. Similarly, details, scale, style and colour choice should respond positively to the wider context and preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the area.

3.33 Applications which fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the locality, in particular a conservation area, or actively detract from the significance or setting of a listed building, **will not be permitted**.

4.0 Key Shopfront Design Principles

4.1 Principles

4.11 In this document, the term ‘shop’ relates to all street-level commercial businesses with a formal shopfront, fascia sign or display window. This includes other commercial premises such as restaurants, cafés, estate agents, public houses, banks, information centres, take-aways and other commercial business.

4.12 Whilst this guidance is predominantly aimed at shopping areas in the main towns or large villages, the principles may apply equally to commercial businesses in smaller villages and rural communities.

4.13 There is a growing pressure on business premises to respond to modern practices and corporate identity, sometimes at the expense of traditional character and local distinctiveness. Examples of this might be:

- the use of standardised corporate signage, which may be out of context with the host building, or wider character, due to the choice of materials, lettering or colour palette
- removal of traditional details to achieve a more standardised, easily maintained, or secure frontage
- the introduction of large non-traditional fascia’s that are out of proportion with the building
- the conversion of several units into one, to increase floorspace, often with a continuous fascia or frontage
- the installation of inappropriate security blinds, security cameras or burglar alarms

4.14 All of the above can have a damaging effect in isolation, but the cumulative impact of these changes in a town or village context, can seriously impact on character, appearance and local distinctiveness.

4.15 Below is a list of general principles to consider when considering making alterations to, reinstating, or designating new shopfronts.

4.16 A well-designed contemporary shopfront can complement a historic building and give scope for a creative design that can add to local distinctiveness. It should reflect traditional proportions, dimensions, and elements such as pilasters, fascia, and projecting cornice. High quality materials and detailing must also be provided, and poor practice or inappropriate design will be discouraged as set out in the relevant sections of this guide.

4.17 Good quality shopfront design will:

A: **Seek to preserve or enhance existing traditional forms, details or materials** which contribute positively to the host building and wider street-scene

B: **Respect the existing character and proportions** of the host building and its neighbours, including first floor detailing

C: **Reinforce local identity and distinctiveness**

D: **Clearly convey the trade/ business use** to the public using appropriate and well-appointed imagery or signage that is in-keeping with the period and style of the host building

E: **Clearly denote the main entrance**, which should be independently accessible to all, where possible (See Section 2.4)

F: **Add visual interest** to the street-scene, without assuming an air of prominence which detracts from neighbouring properties

G: **Have a clear identity and style**, which is appropriate to the host building and responds positively to the wider street-scene

H: **Successfully integrate security measures and lighting** (where appropriate) within the design (For lighting, see Section 5.0)

I: **Visually differentiate historically independent and neighbouring units** of different use, particularly where two or more units have been converted to a single use.

J: **Avoid use of overpowering or out-of-keeping corporate signage**, and embrace a holistic approach to company branding, in the local context

4.2 Excessive signage

4.21 Excessive levels of signage results in street clutter. This can appear untidy and detracts from the appearance of the street-scene. In a Conservation Area, it can seriously compromise the area's special character and detract from the historic significance and quality of the built environment.

4.22 A modest and well-detailed fascia and proportionate hanging sign will usually be sufficient to advertise a business. Where non-commercial buildings have been converted for business use, the level of signage permitted will be guided by the character and details of the host building.

4.23 The use of A-Boards should be avoided, in all forms. They compromise pedestrian use of the pavement, add to street clutter and may cause injury if not adequately secured or weighted.

5. 0 Examples of Good Shopfront Design

5.1 Fascia

5.11 The fascia is a crucial part of the shopfront. It is important that its size and detailing is in-keeping with the wider shopfront and the proportions of the whole building. Predominantly made of timber, early examples (18th and 19th century) tended to be flat, but later on, they became angled, tilting downward to make the signage easier to read.

5.12 The Fascia should be proportionate in depth to the wider shopfront and host building. An excessively deep fascia appears unsightly and creates an imbalance of proportions.

5.13 Sufficient spacing should be retained between the top of the fascia and the bottom of the first-floor windows to avoid the shopfront encroaching on the first floor which creates a visual conflict.



Figure 2: Example of traditional shopfront. The lettering is sympathetic in its font and size and in proportion to the depth of the fascia.

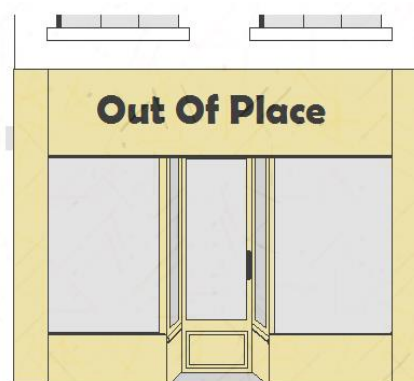


Figure 1: Example of inappropriate signage with an excessively deep fascia sign, and lack of adequate spacing between the shopfront and first floor windows.

5.14 The fascia should generally be natural timber and painted. Other materials may be considered where in-keeping with the wider shopfront, but synthetic or highly reflective finishes will not be supported.

5.15 The depth of the fascia should always be proportionate to the shopfront as a piece, and the host building. However, when designing replacement, or new shopfronts, the fascia should not exceed 450mm in depth. This reflects the typical depth of a traditional fascia (380mm) and allows for a reasonable margin for present day requirements.

5.16 Signwriting directly onto a timber fascia is often the most sympathetic treatment, as it can be changed easily with little harm to fabric. The use of gold leaf shading can also add interest and increase visibility in the evening/ night.

5.17 The application of a box fascia or applied panel onto a timber fascia will be resisted.



Figure 3: Example where signage has been extended over two units, and appears out of proportion with the host buildings, and obscuring the individual character of each unit.

5.2 Consoles/Corbels

5.21 Consoles, or corbels, are a strong visual element of the shopfront, and provide a formal stop to the shopfront, vertically and horizontally. Victorian examples are often highly decorated, but even modest, relatively plain consoles represent an important part of the overall frontage. As such they **should always be retained**.

5.22 Where consoles, or corbels are in need of repair or replacement, this should be done in a like-for-like manner, and replacements commissioned to match the detail and profile of the existing.

5.23 When designing corbels as part of a replacement or new shopfront, inspiration should be sought from the host building, and neighbouring examples. In general, new shopfronts should adopt a plainer, more modest design.

5.3 Cornice

5.31 The cornice is a both an aesthetic and functional element of the traditional shopfront. It marks the end of the shopfront, but also sheds water. Whilst new designs might not adopt this feature in its traditional form, its function should be considered as part of the design.

5.32 The cornice provides an opportunity to house lighting in a sympathetic and discreet manner.

5.4 Stallriser

5.41 The stallriser is a key component of the traditional shopfront and serves a purpose in new designs, in increasing security, and reducing the risk of ram-raiding. They are generally timber with panel detail, though later examples may be marble, tiled, rendered or exposed brick. The use of material will depend on the wider shopfront design and the style of the host building; however, **timber is nearly always most appropriate.**

5.42 The stallriser should be of sufficient height to preserve the proportions of the shopfront and will generally match the height of the base of the pilasters.

5.5 Pilasters

5.51 Pilasters are the slightly projecting vertical elements on either-side of the shopfront. They serve a visual and aesthetic purpose in defining the extent of the shopfront, horizontally, and differentiating neighbouring units. They also act as a visual support to the consoles, and fascia, creating a complete frame to the shopfront.

5.52 Original, or traditional pilasters should not be covered up, or boxed in. Where this has occurred previously, the opportunity should be taken to reinstate these features.

5.53 Original, or good quality pilasters should be repaired, in a like-for-like manner and retained rather than being replaced. This is a more sustainable approach, and better preserves the character and interest of the building.

5.6 Windows and Doors

5.61 Traditional windows often feature smaller panes of glass, mounted in timber glazing bars, in what is considered a typical 'Georgian' pattern. This is a traditional shopfront window detail and serves an additional functional purpose. The increased strength and limited glazing reduces the risk of crime or 'ram-raids'.

5.62 Later windows tend to feature larger panes of glass, with vertical timber rails (mullions) or horizontal timber rails (transoms) which provide structural stability and visually break up the expanse of glazing. This often adds interest to the glazing, with the smaller panes above the transoms, also known as 'transom lights', featuring additional detail.

5.63 Traditional windows should always be retained and repaired as necessary in a like-for-like manner. The original glazing pattern, including transoms and mullions should also be retained.

5.64 When designing a replacement shopfront, the choice of glazing detail or pattern should be influenced by the style of the host building, and neighbouring properties.

5.65 Applied, brightly coloured films should be avoided. Where absolutely necessary for privacy reasons or to obscure unsightly views of shelving or appliances, these should be opaque and neutral in colour. They should not extend over the full-height of the window and must be reversible.

5.66 Traditional doors should also be repaired and retained where possible, unless they actively detract from the character and appearance of the host building and neighbouring properties, in which case they will not be supported. New elements that are installed to improve the environmental performance of the building must be designed sympathetically. See also Historic England documentation: '*Energy efficiency and historic buildings*' and '*Traditional windows, care, repair and upgrading*'.

5.67 When designing a new shopfront, or replacing a modern door in a traditional shopfront, it will usually be necessary to include a solid panel to the bottom, to mirror the stallriser.

5.68 Traditional ironmongery should always be retained or replaced in a like-for-like manner where necessary. Modern ironmongery, for example door handles, onto a traditional door will appear incongruous and detract from the design and appearance of the shopfront.

5.7 Colour and Materials

5.71 It will almost always be most appropriate to reinstate, or install new, shopfronts using timber. It is less likely to age stylistically, is easily worked to a variety of profiles, is sustainable and generally more in-keeping with the locally distinctive character of towns and villages in Uttlesford.

5.72 When carrying out repairs to, or replacing elements of, existing traditional shopfronts, the new materials must match the existing and represent a good quality repair.

5.73 It might sometimes be appropriate to replace elements on a shopfront, which have been added, or replaced over time with unsympathetic materials. Where this is the case, like-for-like replacement is likely to be inappropriate, and a return to traditional original materials to compliment the wider shopfront, and host building, would be supported.

5.74 The importance of maintaining a harmonious street-scene cannot be underestimated, and whilst it is reasonable that individual units, and businesses, differentiate themselves from one another, the use of inappropriate paint colours for shopfronts, and signage in particular, can have a highly detrimental impact on the overall character and amenity of a town or village.



Figure 4: Example where middle shopfront is out of keeping with the wider terrace, and detracts from the character and appearance due to unsympathetic colour choice.

5.75 Overly bright or non-traditional colour combinations will be resisted, and a neutral or traditional colour palette reflecting historic pigments encouraged, to ensure that the overall quality of the area is not compromised. This applies in all areas, but designated conservation areas and listed buildings are most sensitive to the impacts of inappropriate use of colour.

5.76 When considering a colour choice for the shopfront, one should also consider the colour/ finish of the host building, to ensure that they complement each other.

6.0 Lighting

6.1 External illumination

6.11 Excessive external illumination of a shopfront will be resisted, as it is generally out-of-keeping with the historic, and locally distinctive character of the district. Illumination of the fascia is very rarely necessary, and only in cases where the business is regularly open into the evening.

6.12 A modest level of lighting might be permitted, provided this is housed appropriately, where possible in the cornice and occasionally via a small number of swan-neck lights. These should be of a warm-light rather than the harsher 'white' light of LED's.

6.13 Illumination may be provided for hanging signs. In this instance, modest fittings should be incorporated into the hanging bracket.

6.2 Internally illuminated signs

6.21 The use of internally illuminated signage, on the exterior of a building, will be resisted as it is likely to compromise the predominantly historic character and appearance of the district.

6.22 No internally illuminated signage, of any kind, will be supported in a Conservation Area, or on a Listed Building.

7.0 Other

7.1 Hanging Signs

7.11 The hanging sign, can be an effective method of enhancing street-presence whilst adding interest to the street-scene. Signs should usually be timber, suspended on a wrought-iron bracket. Occasionally, a metal sign might be appropriate, though this is dependent on the style and period of the shopfront, and host building.

7.12 Hanging signs of composite, or man-made materials, should be avoided and will be resisted in the Conservation Area, or on a listed building.

7.13 The size of a hanging sign will usually be determined by the depth of the fascia. Where the fascia is undesirably deep, the hanging sign should be more modest in its scale.

7.14 A proliferation of hanging signs in the Conservation Area should be avoided, as this results in street clutter and detracts from the character of the street-scape and distracts the eye from the quality and detail of the buildings themselves.

7.15 It is sometimes possible to include modest illumination within the bracket of the signs. This should be discreetly located, and not immediately visible when not in use.

7.2 Blinds and Canopies

7.21 The use of roller blinds on traditional shopfronts will be supported, and where existing, these should be retained as they are an aesthetically pleasing and functional element of the shopfront. They can add interest to the wider street scene, and can provide cover for patrons, inviting the public to browse the window.

7.22 Where blinds have been removed, but the mechanism remains, this should be retained in situ, and the opportunity taken to reinstate this feature in the future, if appropriate.

7.23 The installation of modern 'balloon' canopies, or alternatives which are not in-keeping with the style or period of the building, or which detract from the wider street scene will be resisted, as these often obscure the fascia signage and in turn dilute the impact of signage, respond poorly to the existing shopfront and can contribute to undesirable street clutter.

7.3 Security Shutters

7.31 The installation of security shutters should always be carefully considered to minimise harm to the character and appearance of the shop frontage, the host building and wider street-scene.

7.32 Roller blinds will generally be resisted, as they are harmful to the character of the shopfront and a target for graffiti and potential anti-social behaviour. In addition, a solid blind can provide effective cover for thieves who successfully manage to gain entry to the property, thereby disguising crime.

7.33 Brick pattern security grilles are best used and accommodated within the building. This reduces their visual impact, removes the risk of graffiti, and allows visibility.



Figure 5: The roller blind on the left, obscures visibility into the shop, which compromises security and is a target for graffiti. The security grille on the right is more sympathetic to the traditional character of the shopfront, and enables visibility into the premises

7.4 Security Alarms and cameras

7.41 The installation of security alarms or cameras should be avoided where possible, particularly on traditional shop frontages. Where they are genuinely necessary, they should be modest in scale and colour and be located in a discreet position to minimise harm to the character and appearance of the building.

7.42 Devices should be wireless where possible, to avoid unsightly cables and minimise impact to fabric during installation.

7.5 Upper Floors

7.51 Where separate commercial premises are operating at first floor, it will often not be possible to provide external signage. A surfeit of hinging signs would detract, and

installation of a separate fascia or fixed board would be harmful and detract from the proportions and traditions appearance of the ground floor shopfront.

7.52 Business may wish to consider the application of modest sign-written letters directly onto the window-glass to advertise their location. This should be restricted to letters only, depicting the company name, and of an appropriate scale to respect the detailing and proportions of the window.

7.6 Accessibility

A well-designed shopfront should provide separate access to the upper floor, unless safe and secure access is provided elsewhere, by the side or rear of the property.

The main entrance should be ramped where possible, to facilitate access for all. Where possible, this entrance should be independently accessible to those in wheelchairs or pushchairs. In some instances, however, with listed buildings for example, this might not always be possible. In these scenarios access will need to be considered further, with an access audit and reasonable adjustments made. See '*Easy Access to Historic Buildings*', by Historic England.

7.8 Non-commercial buildings

7.81 Where a non-commercial property has formally received a change of use, or is legitimately in use as business, traditional signage may not be possible. This relates primarily to cases where there is no formal shopfront, and no fascia. In such cases, a more pragmatic response is often needed in designing appropriate signage.

7.82 The installation of a hanging sign can often be supported, provided it is of a modest scale and appropriate materials and design.

7.83 Opportunities should also be sought to advertise through sign-written lettering on existing windows, subject to scale, colour and detail. This is often more sympathetic and effective than an affixed sign, which often harms the proportions and character of the elevation and detracts from the building as a whole.

7.84 Where a commercial building has undergone a change of use, to domestic use for example, some of the principles above will largely still apply, in that it would be preferable to retain any traditional shop frontage, to evidence the original form and function of the building.

8.0 Legislation

8.1 Local Plan

8.11 This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Uttlesford District Council Local Plan. It serves to elaborate on policies GEN2 Design, ENV1 Design within Conservation Areas, ENV2 Development Affecting Listed Buildings and RS2 Town and Local Centres, and should be used by planning officers when determining planning and/ or listed building consent applications in relation to alterations to shopfronts in the district.

8.2 Advertisement Consent

8.21 Some forms of advertising, such as signs, will require planning permission under the *Town and Country (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 2007*. This includes:

- the majority of illuminated signs,
- advertisements using specialised structures for their display, such as poster hoardings and most non-highway authority roadside advance warning or directional signs,
- signs positioned above 4.6 metres in relation to buildings above the level of the bottom part of first floor windows or on gable ends¹.

8.3 Planning Permission

8.31 Any Significant alterations to an existing shopfront, the erection of a new shopfront, change of use, or installation of a temporary hoarding **will require formal planning permission** under the *Town and Country Planning Act 1990*.

8.4 Listed Building Consent

8.41 Any alterations to a listed building **will require Listed Building Consent** under the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*. This includes minor alterations to signage, erection of new fascia's, applied lettering or hanging signs.

8.42 Listed Building Consent would be required irrespective of whether or not Planning Permission is required. If in any doubt, please contact the Conservation Officer to discuss your proposals, prior to the commencement of works.

¹ Information sourced from Planning Portal <www.planningportal.co.uk> (February 2018)

8.5 Conservation Areas and Article 4 Directions

8.51 The demolition, removal or alteration of a shopfront with a designated conservation area **will also require planning permission** under the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*. Applications will be considered against the guidance set out in the NPPF, 2012. There will be a presumption in favour of the preservation of the character and appearance of the conservation area.

8.52 Some conservation areas, or individual properties, may also benefit from an Article 4 Direction, which removes selected permitted development rights. Where an order applies to the building in question, you may be required to apply for planning permission, even if the works would normally be considered permitted development.

Further details regarding Article 4 Directions can be found on our website at <https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/4901/Article-4-Directions>

Further information, including applications forms, fee information and a list of validation requirements can be found at www.uttlesford.gov.uk/planning

If you have a query regarding the application process, please contact the Development Support Team on 01799 510510

If you are unsure whether you need planning permission, please contact Customer Services on 01799 510510 and ask for duty planning officer. Planning Duty Officer available 9am – 12pm (Mon – Friday)

Useful Links:

Planning Portal - www.planningportal.co.uk

Historic Towns and Villages Forum - <http://www.htvf.org/>

Essex Design Guide – www.essexdesignguide.co.uk