

Shopfront Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

Appendix A



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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Purpose

- 1.1.1 This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been produced to provide further design guidance on shopfronts within Harlow, both historic and modern frontages. It is primarily aimed at developers and planning agents involved in submitting a planning application and planning professionals involved in the determination and enforcement of planning applications. The SPD will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and will also inform pre-application discussions on relevant applications.
- 1.1.2 This SPD is for shopfronts located in Harlow Town Centre as well as Neighbourhood Centres and Hatches which may be newly-built or existing as well as future shopfronts at East of Harlow and other development sites and those shopfronts on existing or future employment land. This includes shops as well as other uses such as cafes, restaurants, banks, travel agents, bookmakers and launderettes.
- 1.1.3 The aim of this SPD is to set out principles to be followed when designing or altering shopfronts, ensuring they contribute to the public realm and character of the area. The 2011 Design Guide refers to Neighbourhood Centres and Hatches and is not applicable to the town centre, so there is currently a 'gap' in the guidance. This, as well as the need to consider changes in planning policy and national guidance, is the reason for the need for a specific Shopfronts Design SPD, ensuring consistency with incorporating the important elements of the Design Guide into the SPD. The SPD will be beneficial to supporting place making and legibility as developments come forward, for example Strawberry Star and any developments within Westgate, Broad Walk and Market Square, and investments made by landowners.

2 Policy Context

2.1 National Policy

- 2.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.
- 2.1.2 Chapter 7 'Ensuring the vitality of town centres', states that 'planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation' (paragraph 90). It also recognises that planning policies should 'promote their long-term vitality and viability by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters' (paragraph 90(a)).

- 2.1.3 Chapter 8 'Promoting healthy and safe communities' states that 'planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places and beautiful buildings' (paragraph 96). Providing social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs through policies and decisions.
- 2.1.4 Chapter 12 'Achieving well-designed and beautiful places' states that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments add to the overall quality of the area, are visually attractive, are sympathetic to local character and history, establish or maintain a strong sense of place, optimise the potential of the site and create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible (paragraph 135).
- 2.1.5 Chapter 16 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' states the requirements for applicants and local authorities when considering applications that affect heritage assets.
- 2.1.6 This SPD intends to comply with these national requirements, especially around good design, town centre vitality and conserving heritage through the application of the principles set out.

2.2 Local Policy

- 2.2.1 The Harlow Local Development Plan (HLDP), which was adopted in December 2020, sets out the long-term planning vision for the district and guides future development across Harlow to 2033. The HLDP notes that it may be necessary to provide future clarity and guidance through the preparation of SPDs.
- 2.2.2 The importance of the protection and enhancement of the retail centres in Harlow is reflected in policies throughout the HLDP, namely Policy RS2 Future Retail Floorspace which identifies a need to provide more comparison and convenience floorspace and Policy RS3 Protecting and Enhancing Retail Centres. Policy PL13 Advertisements is important in managing advertisements within shopfronts taking into consideration any impact on the amenity value of the area. Development within the town centre and neighbourhood centres is considered in policies PR6 Primary and Secondary Frontages in the Town Centre, PR7 Sub-division and Internal Alteration of Town Centre Units, PR8 Frontages in neighbourhood Centres, PR9 Development in Hatches, PR10 Development in Retail Parks and PR11 Evening and Night Time Economy.
- 2.2.3 Promoting good design is fundamental to achieving high-quality, inclusive development and is reflected in Policy PL1 Design Principles for Development. The protection of the significance of heritage assets is reflected in Policy PL12 Heritage Assets and their Settings.

2.3 Harlow Design Guide SPD and Addendum

- 2.3.1 The [Harlow Design Guide SPD](#) was adopted in 2011 and the [Harlow Design Guide Addendum SPD](#) was adopted in 2021. These documents provide guidance to ensure development incorporates the best design possible..

2.3.2 Principle DG14 Shop Frontages in the Design Guide sets out design principles for individual shopfronts within Neighbourhood Centres:

- Shopfronts should respond to the grain of individual buildings. The proportions of the shopfront should harmonise with the main building and its neighbours.
- Within new build development the shopfront should not be treated separately from the upper levels but considered as a coherent design.
- Materials should reflect the existing range within Neighbourhood Centres or a palette agreed with the Council
- Shopfronts should not incorporate external security measures that negatively impact on the streetscene.
- Shopfronts should not display over dominant or incongruous advertising
- Shopfronts should avoid standardisation, reflecting the diversity of a street scene.

2.3.3 The Harlow Design Guide Addendum SPD contains additional design guidance on tall buildings, privacy and overlooking, amenity space and gardens and climate change which have addressed recently updated national planning policy and guidance.

2.4 Essex County Council Design Guide

2.4.1 The [Essex County Council Design Guide](#) was originally published in 1973 to pioneer local design, creating space for innovation and encouraging high-quality development. In 2018, the Design Guide was digitally revamped and now receives ongoing updates to ensure the content remains contemporary and effectively responds to the challenges and opportunities for Essex. The update included new integrated social-economic themes, new highway standards, references to SuDS, Essex Green Infrastructure (GI) Standards and new case studies. As set out in Policy PL1 of the HLDP, the chapters which refer to access and services are specifically a material consideration in the determination of planning applications in Harlow.

2.5 Harlow and Gilston Garden Town

2.5.1 Harlow forms part of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT), which comprises new and existing communities in and around Harlow. The partnership authorities of Harlow, East Hertfordshire and Epping Forest District Councils and Hertfordshire and Essex County Councils are working together to deliver the vision for HGGT.

2.5.2 The [HGGT Vision](#) helps support the delivery of the locally-led Garden Town. The principles which will inform the Garden Town's growth and management are centred on four areas; Economy and Regeneration, Placemaking and Homes, Sustainable Movement and Landscapes and Green Infrastructure. The Vision was endorsed by Harlow Council as a material consideration.

- 2.5.3 The [HGGT Design Guide](#) supports the HGGT Vision and sets out the expectations and aspirations for the delivery of high quality and sustainable developments in the Garden Town. The Design Guide was endorsed by Harlow Council as a material consideration. The HGGT has also developed a [Sustainability Guidance and Checklist](#). The guidance provides practical and technical guidance on how to apply sustainability indicators and policies into new major developments in the Garden Town.
- 2.5.4 Supporting documents to support growth, delivery, sustainability and long-term stewardship across HGGT include the [‘How To’ Guide for Planning Obligations, Land Value Capture and Development Viability](#) as well as the [Infrastructure Delivery Plan \(IDP\)](#).

2.6 Town Centre Masterplan Framework SPD

- 2.6.1 The Town Centre Masterplan Framework Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was adopted March 2022. The objectives of the SPD includes the delivery of a strong retail and leisure offer whilst celebrating and reflecting design heritage. The SPD identifies eight opportunity areas which reflect contextual themes and highlights the importance of the town centre as a retail destination, but allows flexibility for the introduction of alternative uses.
- 2.6.2 The Wych Elm Development Brief and the Town Centre North Development Brief were both produced following the Town Centre Masterplan Framework SPD to help guide regeneration and redevelopment in the particular areas.

2.7 Corporate Plan

- 2.7.1 The Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028 sets out five key priorities which includes ‘rebuilding our town’. This highlights the regeneration of the town centre, which is currently underway, in line with the Masterplan Framework.

2.8 Permissions and Consents

- 2.8.1 Planning permission may be required for works to existing shopfronts that materially affect the building frontage. It is advisable to consult with the Council’s Development Management team before commencing any work.
- 2.8.2 Many forms of advertising require consent under Control of Advertisement Regulations. It is advisable to consult with the Development Management team before commencing any work.

3 Historic Context

- 3.1.1 The masterplan for the town was drawn up by Sir Frederick Gibberd in 1947 which designed the first pedestrian precinct in Britain.
- 3.1.2 The town centre has undergone several stages of expansion since 1952 to today:

- 1952-1960 - the first buildings were built within the town centre around the Market Square
- 1960-1966 - Wych Elm, the Town Hall and the Library were built along with car parks around the perimeter of the town centre and the original Water Gardens to the south of the area
- 1960-1975 multi-storey car parks were built along with the Playhouse and further development within Wych Elm
- 1975-1980 – the Harvey Centre was extended to include a multi-storey car park
- 1980-1995 – the Harvey Centre was further extended
- 1995-2017 – the relocation of the Water Gardens and demolition of the Town Hall followed the south of the town centre to be developed to include new retail and leisure uses, alongside residential and the Harlow Leisurezone



Figure 1 Market Square 1957



Figure 2 Broad Walk 1987

3.1.3 The Neighbourhood Centres were opened at various times across the 1950s and 60s. The Stow opened in 1952, Bush Fair in 1958 and Staple Tye in 1965.



Figure 3 The Stow 1955



Figure 4 Staple Tye 2002



Figure 5 Old Harlow 1970

4 Design Principles for Shopfronts

4.1 General Design

- 4.1.1 Harlow Town Centre is positioned first in the retail hierarchy as set out in the HLDP, providing retail facilities for the district and the sub-region. The Neighbourhood Centres are identified as being secondary to the town centre as they provide for local retail facilities for individual settlements. Hatches are third in the hierarchy and serve specific local needs and provide for a range of community services.
- 4.1.2 As highlighted in Section 3, the town centre has undergone expansion over a long period of time and as such has different characteristics.
- 4.1.3 The north of the town centre includes important historical features including the interconnecting bridges at The Rows, the Market Clock and tiles on Adams House and the distinctive placement of windows, balconies and colours at Market House. There are several redevelopment and public realm schemes set to begin in the north of the town centre including at the bus station, East Gate, Wych Elm and Kitson Way.
- 4.1.4 The core of the town centre includes Broad Walk, the Harvey Centre and the Playhouse Quarter. Broad Walk and the connecting retail streets are set to be improved to provide high-quality public spaces. The Playhouse Quarter is also set to be redeveloped to provide a cultural hub, leisure and hospitality.
- 4.1.5 The Water Gardens consists of large well-known high street retail units and restaurants alongside a large car park and is considered well maintained and modern in design.



Figure 4 Water Gardens

- 4.1.6 There are five Neighbourhood Centres within Harlow providing local retail and other facilities for residents and can help reduce car travel and increase sustainability which relates to Gibberd's principles for Harlow. They include Bush Fair and The Stow, both original 1950s centres which have seen little redevelopment or change; Old Harlow, which comprises the historic streets of the old market town; Church Langley, a modern hub serving the newer urban extension; and Staple Tye which saw major redevelopment in the 1980s to provide larger, more modern retail units.
- 4.1.7 Bush Fair and The Stow both follow a similar design with retail at ground level and flats above. The centres are pedestrianised with shopfronts that are protected from rain with either a canopy or are recessed and a continuous shopfront display. The Stow SPD was adopted in July 2016 which has helped guide redevelopment opportunities.
- 4.1.8 Old Harlow is located within the Old Harlow Conservation area and follows the pedestrianised high street of the old market town. The Old Harlow Conservation Area Management Plan highlighted the impact that unsympathetic modern shopfronts has had on the historic character of the area. There are a number of historic shopfronts and buildings that are adjacent to modern shopfronts.



4.1.9 Church Langley is a modern centre consisting of a large supermarket and community centre serving Church Langley and surrounding areas.

4.1.10 Staple Tye underwent redevelopment in the 1980s due to structural issues and was replaced with a single-level centre providing larger modern retail units. The Staple Tye SPD was adopted in December 2022 which has helped guide redevelopment opportunities for residential focused developments.

4.1.11 The Hatches provide a similar service to Neighbourhood Centres, albeit smaller in size, and provide retail and services for local residents.

4.1.12 There is a need for cohesiveness which is highlighted in the principles referring to the prevailing existing and historic style of shop fronts.

4.2 Elements of a Shopfront

4.2.1 Traditional shopfronts feature architectural features which are shown in Figure 8. Modern shopfronts generally have less ornamental detailing than traditional shopfronts, however they do feature similar architectural features shown in Figure 9.

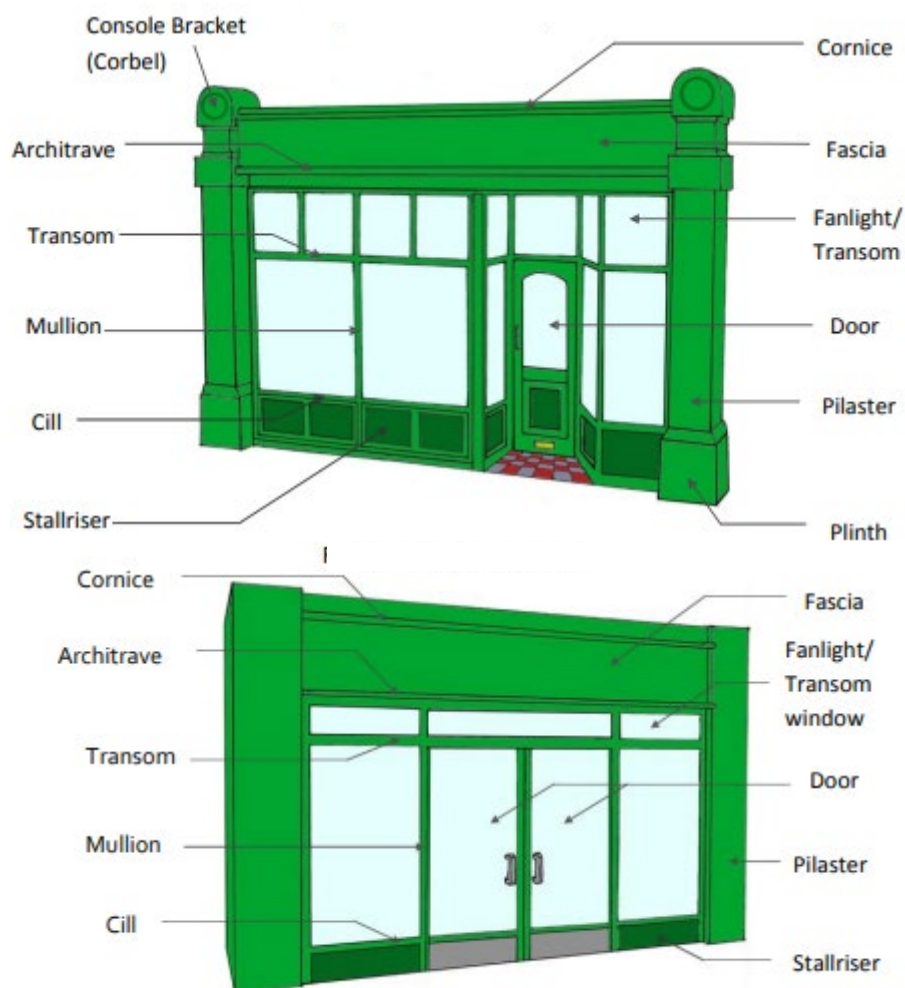


Figure 8 (above) traditional shopfront features

Figure 9 (below) modern shopfront features

Shop Front Design Principles

Pilasters, Plinths and Consoles

4.2.2 Pilasters separate each shop and act as a frame to the shopfront. Traditionally, they are often decorative and project slightly to form a column with a console at the top and plinth at the bottom.

Principle 1: Modern Pilasters

- a) Pilasters should:
 - i. be placed in line with the solid wall;
 - ii. be of the same colour of neighbouring shopfronts where the pilaster covers the boundary line;
 - iii. be of a simple and clean appearance.

Principle 2: Traditional Pilasters, Plinths and Consoles

- a) Pilasters should stand proud of the shopfront face.
- b) Traditional decorative moulding of the pilaster, plinth and console should be retained or reinstated.
- c) Original pilasters, plinths and consoles should be repaired to preserve the character of the shopfront.
- d) Pilasters, plinths and consoles should be of the same colour of neighbouring shopfronts where they cover the boundary line.
- e) The material should be sustainably-sourced and correspond to the overall character of the building.



Figure 10 Peter James Flooring (Old Harlow)

Fascias and Cornices

4.2.3 The purpose of a fascia is to display logos and signage showing the name of the shop and are often the most prominent element of the shopfront found above the entrance. The cornice defines the top of the shopfront and provides a break between the shopfront and the rest of the building.

Principle 3: Fascias and Cornices

a) Fascias should:

- i. be located beneath the cornice and above the architrave of the shopfront;
- ii. be of an appropriate scale and character with the rest of the shopfront and building as well as neighbouring shops;
- iii. not be applied over an existing fascia or obstruct other elements of the shopfront;
- iv. span the entire width of the shopfront (where the shop occupies adjacent units, the fascia should be divided with the use of pilasters on boundary lines);
- v. avoid a combination of fixtures such as wiring, satellite dishes, CCTV or alarms.

b) Cornices should be retained or reinstated to visually support the rest of the building.

c) The material should be sustainably-sourced and correspond to the overall character of the building.

Stallrisers

- 4.2.4 A stallriser is used as a base for the window and protects the base of the shop from damage and reduces cleaning and maintenance of the windows. Traditionally, they are a solid panel below the window compared to modern shopfronts which may have the windows that go down to floor level.

Principle 4: Modern Stallriser

- a) Where the window meets the ground, the stallriser height should balance with the rest of the shopfront .

Principle 5: Traditional Stallriser

- a) Decorative stallrisers should be retained or reinstated to preserve the character of the shopfront.
- b) The height of the stallriser should be determined by the height of the plinth on the pilaster.
- c) The material should be sustainably-sourced and correspond to the overall character of the building.



Figure 11 Dorrington (Old Town)

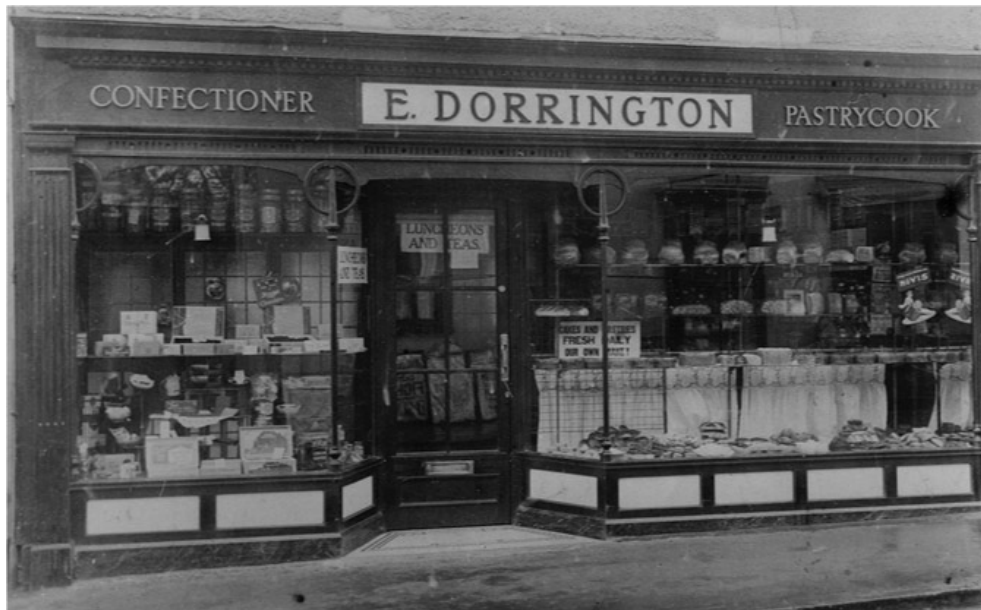


Figure 12 Dorrington (Old Town) circa 1920s

Windows

- 4.2.5 Windows allow the display of goods for sale. Traditionally, windows are divided by mullions and transoms with smaller panes of glass which is still seen in modern shopfronts to provide structural stability and visually breaks up the expanse of glass.

Principle 6: Windows

- a) Shopfronts should be largely glazed to maintain a window display and solid frontages will be discouraged.
- b) The layout and subdivision of windows should correspond to the overall character of the building and neighbouring shopfronts and be original designs retained if possible.
- c) Installation of elements to improve the environmental performance of the building must be designed sympathetically.



Doors and Entrances

4.2.6 The door and entrance gives an important first impression of the shop. Traditional shopfronts usually have a recessed doorway but this can also be found in modern shopfronts.

Principle 7: Doors and Entrances

a) Entrances should:

- i. be of a design which corresponds to the character of the building
- ii. be fully accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities, older people and people with pushchairs, incorporating ramped access if a change in level is present
- iii. have doors that are visually distinguishable from the rest of the shopfront
- iv. retain decorative tiling, if present, and reinstate where original tiling has been lost

b) Traditional detailing on doors should be retained or reinstated where original detailing has been lost.

c) The material should sustainably-sourced and should correspond to the overall character of the building and be in keeping with the window frame.

d) Installation of elements to improve the environmental performance of the building must be designed sympathetically.



Figure 14 we.are.ninetyone (Town Centre)

4.3 Advertisements and Signage

- 4.3.1 Advertisements and signs can be located on shopfronts hanging from the main fascia, in windows, on canopies and blinds and in front of the shop. The design, lettering style and level of illumination contribute to the image of the shop as well as an impact on the appearance of the street scene.

Principle 8: Advertising and Signage

- a) Signage should:
 - i. respect the building on which it is set and contribute positively to the streetscene
 - ii. generally not extend beyond the fascia;
 - iii. avoid excessive use of bright, reflective or fluorescent colours and materials;
 - iv. minimise obtrusive light, where projecting illuminated signs and flashing or neon signs should be avoided;
 - v. have well-proportioned text, occupying no more than half the width and half the height of the fascia;
 - vi. include an emblem which is modestly-sized where one is required
 - vii. have no more than one fascia sign or one projecting hanging sign, although two may be appropriate where shopfronts sit across two or more shop units
- b) Where adjacent shopfronts are of similar scale and appearance, a consistent height and scale of signage should be established across adjacent shopfronts where possible.
- c) The design of A-board advertisements should match the design of the shop and not detract from the appearance of the area.
- d) Any signage proposed at higher levels is likely to be particularly prominent and should be carefully designed to avoid detrimental effects on visual amenity and the streetscene in line with Policy PL2 of the HLDP.
- e) Projecting and hanging signs should be level with the fascia and positioned to the side if appropriate to the location and character.
- f) When it is necessary to obscure the internal shop, opaque and neutral in colour film can be applied, ensuring the whole window is not obscured. Opaque film should not occupy more than 30% of the total window area.

4.4 Canopies

- 4.4.1 Canopies extending from the shopfront provide shelter and protect the shop display from damage due to direct sunlight. These may be in the form as permanent canopies attached to the building.

Principle 9: Canopies

- a) Canopies, in particular fixed ones, should:
 - i. be of a size proportionate to the shopfront;
 - ii. respect the character of the building which it is set on as well as the overall streetscene;
 - iii. be similar to existing canopies in the immediate vicinity;

- iv. retain the shopfront's open character to avoid wholly enclosing the space;
- v. avoid obscuring or detracting from important design elements of the shopfront;
- vi. be made of similar materials to the shopfront;
- vii. avoid use of bright, reflective or fluorescent colours and materials.

4.5 Security

- 4.5.1 Shopfront security should be carefully considered to ensure that units are safe and secure while considering their impact of the streetscene.

Principle 10: Security

- a) Shopfronts should incorporate security measures which:
 - i. do not negatively impact the streetscene;
 - ii. are limited to the measures required;
 - iii. are integral to the shopfront itself.
- b) External and internal solid shutter use is discouraged as they can create an unwelcoming, hostile environment and harm the streetscene. Security glass or latticed or perforated shutters are preferred unless it can be demonstrated that other shutters are necessary.



4.6 Outdoor Seating, Structures and Goods

- 4.6.1 Many shops, particularly cafes, restaurants, greengrocers or hardware shops use an area in front of the shop for tables, eating areas or to exhibit goods for sale. Introduced in 2020, a relaxation of permitted development rights for pubs, cafes and restaurants was introduced to help the leisure industry recover. This includes the ability to erect a moveable structure for an unlimited number of days without the need for a planning application. Listed pubs, cafes and restaurants have slightly restricted rights which are subject to prior approval.

Principle 11: Outdoor Seating, Structures and Goods

- a) Waste and recycling must be managed properly to avoid it causing street litter.
- b) Continued access for emergency vehicles must be ensured when installing outdoor seating and the display of goods outdoors.
- c) Avoidance of obstructions to allow access for all users must be ensured.

4.7 Other Considerations

Principle 12: Other Considerations

- a) Burglar alarm devices must be sited so that they are both adequately visible as a deterrent but do not detract from the visual character of the shopfront
- b) Cash machines should be located within well-lit, busy areas and be in keeping with the building's character and should avoid dominating the shopfront
- c) If additional external lighting is necessary it should be discreet and minimal
- d) Regular maintenance is encouraged to ensure the shopfront remains in good condition