The purpose of exercising control is to achieve an even higher standard of design, and to ensure that shopfronts make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of conservation areas. Good design is often linked to commercial success.

New Buildings within a Shopping Area

The special character of shopfronts within the Borough's conservation areas is derived as much from the continuity of the original plot widths, as from the architectural styles of individual buildings. These plot widths help to make up the historic "grain" of a town or village and often determine building frontages. Many streets in the Borough's conservation areas have narrow fronted buildings and it is this character that sets the elevational rhythm of the street and gives buildings a strong vertical emphasis.

Elements of a traditional shopfront

Where the scale of adjoining buildings differs, or where they are at different levels, emphasis should also be placed on trying to create a variety of shop units with different fascia heights, stalliser heights and window designs, within each building. This contributes to the complexity and interest of the street scene.

Any change that proposes to ignore the separate identity of the glazing, doors and stall risers should be sympathetic with the scale, proportions and design of existing buildings in the street. The new shopfront should not be designed in isolation, but should incorporate elements from the upper floors of the building. In this way the traditional appearance is maintained.

Retention of Traditional Shopfronts

Many of the buildings within the Borough's conservation areas still retain attractive, original shopfronts. Before altering or replacing a shopfront, consideration must be given to the quality of the old shopfront and the possibility of restoring it. Repairs or a new colour scheme on these old shopfronts can often provide an effective "face-lift" at lower cost and with less disruption than a new shopfront, so older shopfronts should be preserved wherever possible.

In traditional style buildings the shopfront generally consists of a well-designed and proportioned framework and display window. The framework consists of classical elements which include pilasters, columns and a frieze. The frieze usually incorporates a cornice and fascia. It separates each shop from its neighbour and from the building above. The display window itself is often made up of moulded mullions (which subdivide the glazing vertically) a transom rail, half glazed doors and a solid panelled stallriser at the base.

As already mentioned, the Council will encourage the full restoration of all these elements and original features in conservation areas. Special details such as ornate pilasters, decorative ironwork, carved or moulded timber or plasterwork, terracotta tiling, stonework, and decorative glass should also be retained intact and repaired where necessary. These help to reinforce and preserve the special architectural / historic character of older shopfronts. Unsympathetic previous alterations ought to be removed and replaced by architectural features of a more appropriate style.

Architectural elements such as pilasters should continue through the shopfront to ground level to complete the framework. The new shopfront surround should be contained within the width of the building. It should be sympathetic with adjacent shopfronts in terms of scale, materials and fascia heights. The top of the frieze should be kept below the base of the first floor windows so that it does not obscure architectural details or overpower the building. Similarly cornices and fascias should run through at the same height, as these act as strong unifying features, particularly where there is more than one shopfront within the same building. This will allow for internal variety in the design of individual shopfronts, without upsetting the overall character of a street.

Church Street, Weybridge
Pilasters and cornices to differentiate individual shop units

Where a building occupies more than one original plot, or where a trader wishes to expand across two or more facades, it is important that both the building and the shopfront should be sub-divided to reflect the original plot width and retain a strong vertical emphasis. This will help to give the appearance of being several individual units. Vertical sub-divisions in the form of pilasters, columns and fenestration should be used to achieve this.

Any change that proposes to ignore the separate identity of two adjoining buildings, in an attempt to achieve a corporate identity and give the appearance of a single shopfront, will be strongly resisted. This principle applies especially to supermarkets and other large-fronted shops.

To avoid fascias merging with those of neighbouring premises, the width should be contained within the shopfront surround. The depth of fascias should also relate to others in the street. Oversized or deep fascias out-of-scale with the building are not suitable and should be avoided. They can break the continuity of the visual line, and obscure architectural details such as cornices or corbels, thereby destroying the architectural unity.

The Shopfront

The main elements that make up the traditional shopfront itself are contained within the "surround" and include the glazing, doors and stallrisers.

- The Display Window

The display window is the main visual element of a shopfront. It provides an attractive frame for the display of goods, but can present the most difficult design problem. Modern retailing methods demand large expanses of undivided glass, to allow the maximum display of goods. These are usually out-of-scale and proportion with the character of most buildings, and are historically incorrect. In addition, the horizontal emphasis visually divides the shopfront from the upper elevations of the premises and the adjoining properties. Even if the windows are sub-divided with glazing bars, an attractive display area can be created. Overall harmony and integration of the whole building can be maintained where the glazing proportions reflect those of the upper floors.
The design of doors should be in keeping with the other elements of the shopfront and be sensibly located. A glazed door, with a solid panel at the bottom should be used where possible. The top of the panel should line up with the top of the stall riser. Recessed entrances add visual interest and variation, and allow a larger display area as well as shelter for pedestrians.

Where there is a separate entrance to the upper floors this should be retained to allow independent access and continued use of these floors. Where separate flats or offices are created above shops, care should be taken to ensure that the new entrance doors are panelled and front onto the street. A glazed panel above the door will help to illuminate the entrance lobby.

All new shopfronts should be designed to allow easy access for disabled people wherever reasonably practicable to conform with the various Disabled Persons’ Acts and the Building Regulations, Part M, relating to access and facilities for disabled people. The entrance to the shop should be at pavement level, and/or ramped and wide enough for a wheelchair to enter. Entrance doors should give a clear opening width of at least 800mm.

Good design pays attention to detail. The choice of handles, letterboxes and other architectural ironmongery needs careful attention.

Stall risers
Stall risers consist of solid panels below shop windows. They form a base to the shopfront display, and prevent the glazing from being damaged or soiled. They should be retained where possible, and where they have been removed they should be replaced in any new shopfront design.

Ideally a stall riser should be of a consistent height, usually at least 600mm high or to the top of the pilaster base. The design should respect the shopfront frame and proportions. It should be constructed of timber paneling, stock brickwork or plain render. A cill should be provided beneath the glazing. Unfortunately the trend of introducing picture frame windows has often led to the absence of a stall riser. This will be strongly resisted within conservation areas.

Canopies and Blinds
Blinds can add colour and interest to the street scene if they are appropriate to the period and character of the conservation area. On entrances, correct detailing and traditional craftsmanship are also required.

Where blinds are considered necessary, they should form an integral part of the shopfront design and should be fully retractable. Traditional canvas roller blinds with a matt finish are usually better suited to older buildings. These have the advantage of being concealed from view when fully retracted within the blind box. This must be fitted above the glazing, preferably on the underside of the fascia, to avoid obscuring any architectural detail. “Continental” or rigid framed “Dutch blinds” often made of plastic and with a glossy or metallic finish are inappropriate and will be resisted.

To ensure safe ground clearance, all canopies and blinds should have a clearance of 2.14m. (7'). Planning permission is usually required for blinds that do not carry lettering or symbols, and advertisement consent may be required where lettering or symbols are incorporated.

Shopfront Security
Security shutters normally require planning permission and listed building consent if the building is listed. The Council is concerned to balance the security needs of shop owners with the effect on the appearance caused by certain types of shutters. Solid external metal roller shutters on shopfronts are inappropriate, particularly in conservation areas and will be resisted. They form a flat blank screen which detracts from the architectural integrity of a building. In addition they are vulnerable to graffiti. Collectively they create a deadening effect on the street scene at night and are detrimental to the appearance of shopping areas.

Further Information
In cases where alterations to shopfronts are not covered by this leaflet, applications will be judged on their own merits, and will depend on existing circumstances, such as surrounding buildings and shopfronts. Fully detailed plans should accompany applications to a suitable scale (i.e. 1:50 scale) and should include the elevation of the building concerned and adjoining buildings, together with materials and colours proposed.

If you are unsure if your property is within or adjacent to a Conservation Area please use the Council’s website or contact the Town Planning Division.

Thank you for taking the trouble to read this leaflet. Please keep it safe as you may wish to refer to it at a later date.