

Beckenham High Street Shop Fronts Design Guide



Acknowledgements

The Design Guide was initiated by the Beckenham Town Centre Team and has been produced in collaboration between the Beckenham Business Association, Copers Cope Area Residents' Association, Park Langley Residents' Association, West Beckenham Residents' Association, and The Beckenham Society. It has been adapted from the Guide jointly produced in 2014 by the Chislehurst Town Team and Bromley Council.

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The Guide will eventually become a statutory part of the London Borough of Bromley Local Plan 2019.

BECKENHAM HIGH STREET



Fig. 1

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Beckenham Town Centre lies in a Conservation Area, and has a vibrancy which, combined with an historical setting, has the potential to become one of suburban London's most outstanding High Streets. Essential to that aim is the need for well-designed and executed shop fronts and storeys above, that complement the existing visual amenity of the High Street. The intention is to encourage good shop front design that responds to the immediate architecture and the High Street as a whole, while supporting the commercial needs of businesses. Beckenham High Street was designated as a Conservation Area in 2015. In 2020 pedestrian, traffic and environmental improvement works were completed. This included the creation of a High Street Heritage Trail.
- 1.2. The Design Guide provides a framework and guidelines for delivering a sensitive approach to shop front design and signage and protecting buildings from insensitive change over time.

This document is intended as guidance for those:

- wishing to alter, or install a new, shop front;
 - seeking to replace or erect signs, canopies or security features on a shop;
 - whose current shop fronts fall short of the standards in this document;
 - wishing to display goods in front of their shop.
- 1.3. These guidelines apply to all commercial and retail uses on the High Street. Using this Guide and engaging in early discussion with the London Borough of Bromley (the Council) will help to ensure the most successful shop front outcomes.
 - 1.4. The Beckenham Town Centre Team and the Council encourage the retention of historic and original shop fronts. They require a high standard of appearance of all shop fronts and associated awnings, roller shutters, grilles, signs and lighting. Shop fronts must always respect the upper part of the building and relate well to adjoining frontages (where these are well designed). The design can be either traditional or modern but basic principles of scale, details, and quality of materials should be used.

2. Planning Applications

- 2.1. Planning applications are required for all new shop fronts, or alterations to existing shop fronts that materially affect the external appearance of a building.
- 2.2. New shop fronts, projecting signs, lighting or external shutters will require Planning Permission and new lettering may require Advertisement Consent. If the shop is a Statutory Listed Building it may also require Listed Building Consent. It is advisable to contact the Heritage Team at the Council when considering carrying out work. Telephone 020 8461 7532.
- 2.3. All illuminated signs or fascias and many other non-illuminated signs and advertisements, require Advertisement Consent.
- 2.4. The Planning Department can give advice to applicants on what needs permission.
- 2.5. Applicants are strongly recommended to use the Council's pre-application service.
- 2.6. All designs should adhere to Building Regulations to ensure they are in line with safety, space, design and accessibility standards, and should seek required permission to be authorised.
- 2.7. It is important to remember that where the proposed alteration or addition contravenes policy, guidance or regulations, the Council may refuse the application and the work to the shop front will not be allowed. No work should be started before written permission has been granted. **Any work done without permission is liable to enforcement action to have it removed at the applicant's expense.**

3. Shop Front Features

3.1. This diagram (Fig. 2) illustrates the key components of a traditional shop front:

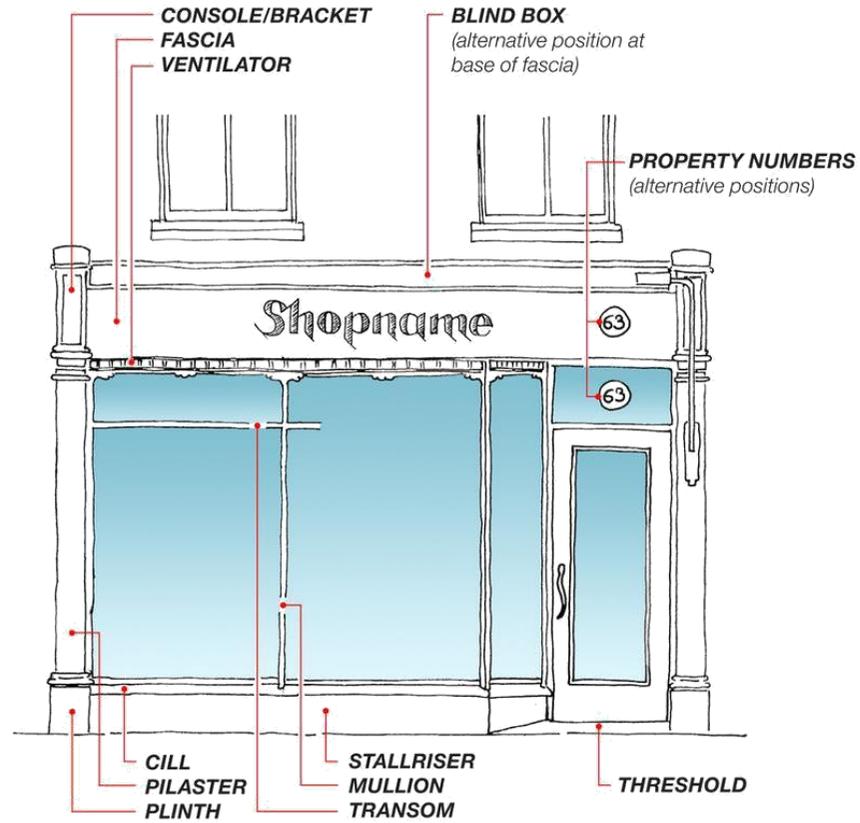


Fig. 2

4. Benefits of Good Design

- 4.1. The principle purpose of a shop front is the advertisement and display of the goods and services provided inside the building. However, good design promotes not only the individual business but contributes to its location, raising the quality of the High Street, or lowering it if good design is ignored.
- 4.2. Key issues for good design in Beckenham High Street are:
- the design should not be considered in isolation but as a part of the overall composition of the building and the wider appearance and street scene of the High Street;
 - the design should reflect and respect the history of the surroundings and the local area;
 - the materials should respect the host building;
 - the proportions of the shop front should harmonise with the main and adjoining buildings;
 - standard 'house design' should be integrated sensitively and adapted to reflect the characteristics of the street scene and building;
 - there should be good and safe accessibility for clients, customers and passing pedestrians.

5. Retention of Original Features

5.1. The retention of architectural features of merit can help integrate a new shop front into a building. (Fig. 3). The shop front should not be considered as merely an insertion into the building.



Fig. 3

5.2. Where a traditional or historic shop front exists, the Council will insist on its retention by means of appropriate repair or restyling. Where traditional features remain, their retention and restoration will be encouraged (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

5.3. Traditional features may have been removed from many shops, whilst others are concealed by more recent alterations. Where original features no longer exist, it may be desirable to reinstate or replace them with similar features. Any disfiguring later additions should be removed, damage repaired and features reinstated with materials that are the same as, or match, the original.

5.4. Existing Victorian or Edwardian pilasters, consoles and fascias should remain undisturbed, or be restored where altered (Fig. 5).

6. Creating well-proportioned frontages

- 6.1. Elements such as doors, fascias and windows should be in proportion with both the building it belongs to and the general street scene. It then forms an integral part of the elevation rather than an isolated element on the ground floor. This can be achieved by taking into account design, scale and architectural style of the building, and also by echoing the arrangement of the windows, columns and areas of walling on the upper floors and neighbouring buildings (Fig. 6).
- 6.2. In small scale buildings the shop front should also be small. The depth, height and lettering etc of the fascia, the size of the display windows, and the proportions of the various detailing, should all be modest.
- 6.3. In larger buildings the shop front can be correspondingly larger, but should still be in proportion to the building. If large windows are necessary but otherwise out of scale, their impact can be reduced by subdivision. This can be achieved with mullions and transoms. These can also be used to help relate the shop front to architectural features on the upper floor, as described in paragraph 6.1 above.



Fig. 6

7. Maintaining Rhythm

- 7.1. A shop front extending across several buildings, especially where the fascia is continuous, often spoils the vertical rhythm of narrow frontages. This can be avoided by subdividing it into separate shop fronts - one to each building.

Where buildings are similar in size or architecture, complimentary designs will enhance the frontages of all the individual shop fronts. Variations in the height of fascias may lessen the vertical rhythm of the buildings. In Fig. 7, if the shop fascias were of similar height the vertical rhythm of the buildings would be enhanced.

Where the buildings are more or less the same size and architectural style, then it is much more acceptable for each shop front to be of similar design, and shop front design principles should be applied to ensure the line of shops looks attractive.



Fig. 7

8. Shop Front Modelling

- 8.1. Unrelieved flat-fronted shop fronts can deaden streetscapes. In contrast, inset doors, bold architectural features and intricate detailing, as shown in Fig. 8, can provide depth and visual interest to the shop and the street as a whole.



Fig. 8

9. Fascias and Signage

9.1. Fascias often form the dominant feature of the shop front and are usually the first feature which a customer will notice. The design of the fascia is a critically important element of the overall shop front design. The choice of material for fascias will often be crucial in gaining approval. An attractive window display is, of course, also a vital feature to a business! Figs. 9 & 10 illustrate well proportioned and attractive fascias that complement the building.

9.2. The fascia should:

- be of a scale proportionate to the rest of the building. As a general rule fascias look well-proportioned if they are no deeper than about a fifth of the shop front's overall height;
- protrude from the building no further than a depth of 0.15m to 0.25m;
- respect adjoining shop fronts;
- not extend below the corbel or uninterrupted across a number of buildings;
- not obscure windows and architectural detailing;
- align with other fascias in the parade.

9.3. Projecting box fascias should be avoided as they are unsympathetic to their surroundings in terms of bulk, size, materials and lighting.

9.4. Externally illuminated fascia create a subtle effect, rather than the glare associated with internal illumination, and are more sympathetic to buildings in a conservation area. Internally illuminated box signs are not considered appropriate in the Beckenham High Street Conservation Area. Over time it is hoped all internally illuminated signs will be phased out.

9.5. Business owners should consider traditional approaches such as hand painted or applied lettering to signage. Such approaches are more attractive and often more cost effective than factory-made signage.



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

- 9.6. Wording should be succinct; too much lettering can create confusion and appear untidy.
- 9.7. Relevant regulations must be checked on whether advertisement consent is required for new signage or changes to existing signage.

10. Using appropriate materials

- 10.1. The type of material used in a shop front is an important element of the overall design and should take into account the character and materials of the host building.
- 10.2. Designs should not employ a large number of different materials or use materials that could clash with adjoining premises or the general street scene.
- 10.3. Natural aluminium, acrylics and other shiny artificial materials, are generally out of place on older buildings and inappropriate in the Beckenham High Street Conservation Area. Preference should be given to materials that have an affinity with existing buildings and the local area. Traditional materials of good quality, such as wood, stone, brick, tiles and metalwork can offer a wide variety of profiles, textures and finishes, which maintain their appearance better than many modern materials. Timber gives greater scope for interesting moulding than aluminium.

11. Cornices, Corbels, Pilasters and Stall Risers

- 11.1. These should always form part of a traditional shop front design. Existing ones should always be retained and where an historic one is missing it should be reinstated. Examples are shown in Figs. 11 & 12.
- 11.2. A cornice may incorporate a trough light where the projection is sufficient but this should be sited well below any upper floor window sills.
- 11.3. Where pilasters form part of a new design they should incorporate a base plinth and a corbel/console bracket.
- 11.4. Stall risers are normally required instead of sheet glass to floor level and should provide a solid visual base to the shop front and visually balance the fascia and cornice.



Fig. 12



Fig. 11

12. Using appropriate colours

- 12.1. Painting should aim to unify a shop front, not split it up into disparate elements, and is best achieved with a single colour or a limited palette of complementary colours. In determining the colour palette, business owners are encouraged to look at the whole parade to determine which colours would enhance it, and to avoid any that would not.

If the consoles and pilasters are painted, they should all be the same colour scheme if possible, to maintain the continuity of the parade. (Figs. 13 and 14).



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

13. Canopies and Blinds

- 13.1. Victorian-style retractable canvas canopies have been enjoying a revival and can give shelter to shoppers in addition to enlivening the street scene. Care should be taken, however, to avoid obscuring architectural details, excessive amount of advertising, unflattering colours or reflective materials such as acrylic. Solid canopies and Dutch canopies are best avoided. Victorian style canopies are fitted above the fascia and have side supporting brackets. Roller blinds should always be retractable, and the blind box should be an integral part of the shop front rather than an added-on extra.
- 13.2. All canopies should be at least 2.4m above the footpath once fully extended, but should not be fixed to the building any higher than ground floor level. Non-retractable canopies are not permitted.
- 13.3. Planning Permission is required for some canopies and blinds. The Planning Department must be consulted before installation.
- 13.4. Highway regulations require the outer edge of lowered blinds to be set back at least 1m from the kerb, and the outer and inner ends of the supporting arms respectively not less than 2.14m and 2.3m above the pavement. Side flaps should be avoided as they can obstruct pedestrians (Fig.15).



Fig. 15

14. Projecting and Hanging Signs

- 14.1. Hanging signs are a traditional feature of shops which can add vitality to the streetscape. On traditional shop fronts and old buildings, timber or cast metal signs are particularly appropriate, but individually crafted elegant modern designs, using other materials, are not precluded. (Fig. 16)
- 14.2. Projecting signs should not be overly large in relation to the rest of the shop front and should be placed ideally at fascia level. As a general rule only one sign will be allowed per shop and its area should be no more than 0.75m squared. The position of the bottom of the sign must be at least 2.6m above the pavement, and the outer edge at least 1m in from the kerb.
- 14.3. Heavy box type signs with internal illumination are not suitable for Beckenham High Street due to its Conservation Area status. Hanging signs should be light with minimal lettering.
- 14.4. Large-scale detailed drawings of proposed signs at a scale of 1:5 clearly showing the construction, lettering and graphic design will be required with Advertisement Applications.



Fig. 16

15. Lighting

- 15.1. Too often, illuminated signs are bulky or poorly designed or sited, adding unwelcome clutter to shop fronts. The choice and location of fittings should be considered from the outset so that they form an integral part of the design. Over illumination must also be avoided so as not to upset the balance of light with other premises and with street lighting. (Fig 17)
- 15.2. Given Beckenham High Street's Conservation Area status, early consultation with the Planning Department is strongly advised.
- 15.3. Fascia illumination should be subtle. External lighting, backlit lettering, individual halo letters and cold cathode tubes can all be considered, although warm lighting is preferable. Nonetheless, the type and design of lighting need to be appropriate to the shop front, the building and the location. External fascia light sources should be concealed as much as possible and should be carefully directed at the signs, to avoid glare onto the pavement below or into the windows of upper floor residences.



Fig. 17

16. Illuminated Display Windows

- 16.1. The impact that attractively lit window displays can have on trade and the vitality and sense of security of shopping streets at night should not be forgotten. Traders are encouraged to keep their premises lit well into the evenings. Carefully illuminated displays, using spotlights rather than bare fluorescent tubes, generally have the most impact.
- 16.2. Although internal display lighting is not subject to planning control, it should be noted that illuminated signs within a metre of a shop window do require Advertisement Consent from the Planning Authority.

17. Corporate Identities

- 17.1. Chain stores and restaurants need to respect existing buildings and streetscapes so that local distinctiveness is maintained. Consequently, the use of standardised corporate shop fronts in Beckenham Conservation Area (such as shown in Fig. 18) are no longer acceptable, and companies may need to substantially moderate these. Compromises are often possible, enabling a corporate image to be maintained without being at the expense of local character.



Fig. 18

18. Street Numbering

- 18.1. The street number is a legal requirement for shops and ought to be clearly displayed somewhere on the shop front. It could be included on the fascia but fanlights, pilasters and consoles are common alternative positions. A variety of sizes (Fig. 19) are acceptable provided they are in scale with other lettering on the shop front.



Fig. 19

19. Security features

19.1. Whilst it is recognised that security is an important consideration, security features, if not well designed can give a very negative appearance of the High Street as per solid/perforated shutters. Security measures should therefore have a minimal impact on the street scene.

19.2. Planning Permission will not normally be granted for solid roller shutters, including the evasive perforated shutters.

Toughened security glass is recommended as the most appropriate material for window security. Internally fitted grilles or mesh shutters are more suitable where toughened glass is not appropriate. Grilles shutters (Fig. 20) are recommended where security precautions are vital.

19.3. Burglar alarms and telecom junction boxes should not conceal architectural features or be located in over-conspicuous positions, and the associated wiring should be neatly fixed, or better still, hidden (Fig 21). They may need consent when they are to be located on a listed building.



Fig. 20



Fig. 21

20. Accessibility

- 20.1. Shops should be welcoming and accessible for all customers, including people with disabilities, the elderly and less agile, and those with prams and buggies. The following features should therefore be considered:
- entrances should comply with Part M of the Buildings Regulations which sets out statutory access requirements;
 - steps and raised thresholds should be avoided and changes in level accessible by wheelchair users;
 - ramps should have gentle gradients - shallower than 1:20 if possible but no steeper than 1:12;
 - if possible, there should also be a level area immediately in front of entrance doors and a space of 300mm alongside the leading edge of the door to make it easier for a person in a wheelchair to get close to the door handle;
 - surfaces should be free of irregularities and be non-slip;
 - the use of mat wells should be avoided as they can be barriers to the less ambulant and are potential trip hazards. Flush fitting barrier matting is preferable.
- 20.2. In listed and other old buildings these standards should be taken into account as far as practical, but they should be commensurate with preserving the building's character and setting. However, Beckenham High Street should have step-free access to all shops. Premises undertaking a full shop front redesign should ensure there is step-free access, and those without should have the use of portable ramps.

21. Display of goods and advertising boards

- 21.1. The display of goods outside a shop must be well arranged and appropriate. A licence is required from the Council's Licencing Team to display goods on the public highway in front of a shop.
- 21.2. Free-standing advertisement signs (Fig. 22) on the public footway in front of a shop are only acceptable when at least a clear 2m footpath is still available to pedestrians.



Fig. 22

22. Hanging Baskets, Window Boxes and Tubs

- 22.1 These should be carefully designed and sited to avoid obscuring or damaging architectural features or causing an obstruction or hazard to passers-by (Fig. 23). Owners are encouraged to take opportunities to co-ordinate planting schemes with other businesses and Beckenham Together (the Beckenham Business Improvement District body - BID).



Fig. 23

23. Appendix - Bromley Local Plan 2019 and London Plan 2016 Policies

When submitting a planning application for a new shop front several policies may apply regarding the design of shop fronts. This includes security shutters, advertisements, hoardings, signs, licensing of tables and chairs on pavements, and pedestrians in the Bromley Local Plan 2019:

Chapter 5. Valued Environments – Built and Historic Environments.

Chapter 6. Working in Bromley – Various supporting documents.

Supplementary Planning Guidance – Documents (such as this) will eventually be adopted.

Other vital information:

Shop fronts, entrances and accessibility should be fully compliant with the Equality Act 2010. Special attention must be given to RNIB advice on building works and other obstructions to adequate and safe pedestrian movement.

National Guidance: pavement licences will apply, with regulations varied according to the circumstances pertaining at the time.

The Beckenham Society has also produced a Beckenham Heritage Trail. Twelve plaques are installed in pavements from Beckenham Junction Station to the War Memorial and can give business owners ideas to link their premises with the wider community and local history. Details of the plaques can be found at