

SHOPFRONTS IN WHITEHAVEN

DESIGN GUIDELINES



Copeland Borough Council



**S H O P F R O N T S
I N
W H I T E H A V E N**

D E S I G N G U I D E L I N E S

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I N T R O D U C T I O N



Whitehaven has in recent years seen significant investment in its built environment. The 'whither Whitehaven' situation of the late sixties has been addressed to a considerable extent, initially by the designation of virtually the whole of the town centre as a conservation area in 1969, followed by a comprehensive restoration programme which continues into the nineties.

The restoration experience has been an enlightening one for Whitehaven, producing as it has, an appreciation of the uniqueness of the place, and a natural instinct for what is good and worthy of conservation.

The town centre in particular has benefitted from this experience. People have returned to restored town housing and in so doing have brought a new spirit and vitality to the place. Living alongside, close to, or above the shops in the town centre, they have emphasised the special character of Whitehaven as a town to live in, and not just a place of work, shopping and recreation.

The latter activities are of course important in their own right and the enhancement of the housing stock within the conservation

area has tended to highlight the somewhat haphazard way in which the shopping areas of the town have developed over the same period.

What has become clear in this context is the diversity of shops and other commercial outlets which exist as part of the built environment within the conservation area - and it is towards the shops, and shop fronts in particular, that this publication is directed.

Whilst a number of undistinguished modern shop fronts have been installed over the years, there still exist many examples of good original shop fronts, some partially covered over, but nevertheless in place.

It is to these that we look, and from which we can draw inspiration, when planning new shopfronts or renewing existing.

In a sense then, this is not so much a 'design guide' as a series of observations on what exists, which may be helpful in maintaining and improving the quality of the shop fronts, together with the associated design features such as advertising and signage within the Conservation area.

EXISTING SHOP FRONTS



Whitehaven has, within the town centre, a considerable variety of different styles of shop front. In judging their quality, we are looking to those which contribute to the character of the building and streetscape to which they relate. Sadly, many of the modern shop fronts do not meet this criteria and we generally find the older ones to be those worth retaining.



Many modern shopfronts do not relate well to the building which they occupy, often due to corporate image requirements.



In contrast a traditional shopfront in harmony with the upper floors can make a positive contribution to the townscape.



Whitehaven has a wealth of published material about its past, which can often be of great benefit in determining whether an existing shopfront is indeed original and worthy of retention or restoration. Old photographs can sometimes help - as was the case in the above example where a corner doorway was reinstated, together with various other details gleaned from photographic research.

RETENTION OF EXISTING SHOP FRONTS



Many good quality original shop fronts in Whitehaven are virtually intact, and often only minimal repairs are required to restore them fully. If features or details are missing, then it is important that they be replaced as accurately as possible.

It should be noted however that the shopfront does not have to be of intricate or complicated detailing to be good quality - often it is the simple fronts which, along with their neighbours, make up the good streetscapes.

Good shopfronts seldom need anything adding to them. There are a number of examples in Whitehaven of original shopfronts having been altered in recent years, often by fitting a modern fascia over the original. This was no doubt seen as an 'improvement', but in almost all instances it is a clear case of 'cover up', and is to be discouraged. Indeed most of the shops on which this has been done would be considerably improved by the removal of the covering material and reinstatement of the original.



Quality shopfront complete with original blind, individual fanlight design, curved display windows, security gates and tiled floor to door inset. Also note simple approach to signage.



Two examples of traditional shopfronts, both with some good original details, which have lost much of their character through insensitive alterations, particularly to fascias.

Retention/repair of good shopfronts then, is to be encouraged, this approach having the advantage of not only restoring the original, but is usually by far the cheapest option, certainly as compared to total replacement. The essence of good shop front design, is that it should be respectful of, and should relate to, both the building of which it is an element, and the street scape within which that building is located.

REPLACEMENT SHOP FRONTS



Sometimes, the original shopfront will have deteriorated to such an extent that it is beyond effective repair and requires to be replaced.

If replacement as original is generally accepted as the correct style for the building, then it should be an accurate replica in every respect, particularly in the detailing. It is all too easy for replacement shopfronts to have the general proportions of the original, but to ignore the finer details, thus losing much of their character.



On replacement shopfronts ... good detailing is critical



Careful observation of existing shopfronts can be helpful in establishing good design principles and detailing.

Choice of materials and finishes for replacement shopfronts is important. Painted timber is traditional to Whitehaven, and is preferable to staining. The use of plastics and other reflective materials is generally to be avoided.

There will also be situations where although a shopfront is in place, it is of poor modern style and quite unsympathetic to the building to which it belongs. In such cases, replacement with a more appropriate design of shopfront will be encouraged. In trying to establish the design, the first recourse should be to local sources of archival photographs in which an early photograph of the building in question may be traced. This is always a good basis for the replacement, but again the quality of the detailing is critical to the successful outcome. This can be helped by careful observation of existing shopfronts of similar style, and noting the detailed features. These can then, with care, be incorporated into the new shopfront design.

DESIGN DETAIL PRINCIPLES TO CONSIDER



Traditional detailing of cornices, fascias, capitals and pilasters should be noted and respected. Modern imitations often lack depth and authenticity of detail.



Decorative stucco features are often irreplaceable and are well worthy of retention and restoration where necessary. Specialist expertise is essential in work of this nature.

Whitehaven shopfronts are well endowed with unique features. Attention to keeping these intact and in good repair will contribute significantly to the overall character of the buildings to which they relate.



Where shops require protection from sunlight this should be achieved by traditional blinds, which retract into the fascia when not in use. This example is on a rather more recent Whitehaven shopfront, where the use of black and chrome materials has resulted in an interesting facade of some historic interest, even though it is not 'traditional' in the accepted sense.



Window mullions are an important feature of many shopfronts and traditional detailing was often quite delicate and ornate.



Stallisers are an important element of traditional shopfronts and vary from simple render, to more ornate timber or stonework. Care must be taken in choice of finish for new shopfronts.

DESIGN DETAIL PRINCIPLES TO CONSIDER



The current trend for canopies or dutch blinds, often fitted to increase advertising space, is alien to the Whitehaven streetscape, introducing as it does a feature quite untraditional to the buildings. The installation of such additions to buildings within the Conservation Area, will, in normal circumstances, be actively discouraged.



Signage and lettering on shopfronts requires careful consideration. Traditionally lettering was painted on the fairly narrow fascia, which gave a correct sense of proportion within the total frontage. The modern trend towards excessively deep fascias, with large plastic lettering, does nothing for the overall design, and is quite unnecessary in practical terms.



Security of shops is an increasing problem in today's society. Traditionally, removable timber shutters were sometimes used to protect glazing. The modern equivalent, fitting of metal external shutters, has a considerable detrimental effect on the character of the traditional shopfront, and the use of internal grilles, together with laminated glass windows, is a much preferred option. This can be achieved without any obtrusive external shutter boxes, and still allows window displays to be seen out of normal shopping hours.

External lighting to shopfronts requires careful consideration. Illuminated box signage is to be discouraged, and the more traditional hanging or projecting sign with an external source of lighting will be preferred.



Excessive advertising is generally out of place on shop fronts, and the practice of filling windows with strongly coloured posters only leads to confusion and has a detrimental impact on the streetscape.



Traditional shopfronts are an important element in the Whitehaven townscape, and are to be valued and retained in their original state where possible.

Careful restoration of traditional shopfronts, with specific attention to existing detailing,

painted signage and attractive interiors, is possible in this day and age and successful schemes can contribute much to the enhancement of the Conservation Area and to the general well being of Whitehaven.

This publication has been designed to encourage careful observation of the rich heritage which exists within the built environment of Whitehaven, and particularly in regard to shop properties. Much remains to be done in the repair and restoration process, and before embarking on any project, property owners are strongly advised to discuss proposals with the local planning authority and, where appropriate, seek professional advice.

Planning officers can be contacted at Copeland Borough Council,
Catherine Street, Whitehaven, Cumbria CA28 7NY. Telephone 0946 693111



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