

# Exmouth Shop Front Guide





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# 1 Executive summary

1.1 This guide has been produced by Exmouth Town Management. Its content has been agreed with Exmouth Town Council (ETC) and Planning Officers in East Devon District Council (EDDC). It is intended as guidance on best practice and in the interpretation of EDDC's policy in relation to shop fronts.

1.2 Shop fronts are an important element of the street scene. They should be of a high standard of design, and reflect the architecture of the original building and of the surrounding area. Whilst EDDC recognises the value of the non-retail uses, they can result in dead frontages which detract from the vitality of shopping streets. Where shop windows exist in ground floor retail and non-retail premises in shopping centres, adverts placed inside, but within one metre of the window, remain under the control of the Advertisement Regulations<sup>1</sup>.

1.3 The policy controlling shop front design is set out in the EDDC Local Plan and requires consideration of the following criteria:

- Traditional style shop fronts, which have remained unaltered and are worthy of conservation, should be retained.
- Where traditional features, such as stallrisers, columns, pilasters or cornices exist these should be retained, and further alterations should seek to upgrade the shop front in a manner sympathetic to any of the existing features.
- All parts of a new shop front and fascia should be kept below the first storey level.
- Shop fronts, including signs and fascias, should be designed to complement the character and individuality of the building in which they are set. Signs should advertise only the name and the nature of the business, and avoid advertising a range of branded goods.
- Materials used should be sensitive to the character and appearance of the building and the surrounding properties. In Conservation Areas, only materials which are in keeping with the character and appearance of the area will be permitted.
- Large expanses of undivided glass will not be permitted where they are alien to the character of the building in which they are set.
- Where two or more adjoining buildings form part of the same premises they should be treated as individual shop fronts linked by a theme e.g. lettering and colour of paintwork.
- Where stallrisers make a significant contribution to the character of an area or individual buildings, new shop fronts should provide stallrisers in order to maintain such character.

1.4 Planning permission is required for any material change in the external appearance of a shop, for example altering the glazing, changing materials, installing blinds or enlarging the fascia.

1.5 Many signs require planning approval from EDDC. The Advertisement Regulations<sup>1</sup> are complex, but the Planning Department is always willing to give advice.

1.6 It is very important to remember that any proposed alteration that affects the historic or architectural character of a listed building will also require Listed Building Consent as well as planning permission. Details of the listed buildings in the town centre are contained in Appendix 1. The need for permission/consent includes installing security systems, shutters, and blinds.

1.7 Similarly proposals for development within a Conservation Area will only be permitted where it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area. Details of Exmouth's Conservation Areas are contained in Appendix 2.

# 2 Introduction and background

2.1 The design of a shop front, and its associated signing and advertising, has an effect on the surroundings. This effect can be positive or negative, depending upon the appearance of the shop. Each frontage has an important role in attracting customers, particularly in town centres.

2.2 The main purpose of the shop front is for the display of goods, but it also has a secondary function – projecting the image of the business. Poor design, workmanship, material, lighting and signing can discourage customers from crossing the threshold. There is also a knock-on effect – these elements can affect an entire street, undermining both the quality and character of the area and reducing trade and business.

2.3 Exmouth Town Council wants to encourage good practice. This can be achieved through clear advice for developers and an effective development control policy. Together these two strategies will reduce time and money spent on trying to correct poor design.

2.4 Our town centre has retained much of its heritage by the survival of Victorian and Edwardian buildings. They provide a rich array of building styles that we enjoy and seek to retain. Shopkeepers and tenants can make a major contribution to their environment by retaining and repairing existing shop fronts, and through careful design of new frontages. This is particularly important when a shop is a Listed Building or when it is in a Conservation Area.

# 3 History of the town centre



3.1 Developing from a centuries-old fishing village, the waves lapped today's pedestrian Magnolia Centre, the Parade and the Strand, where stood a collection of fishermen's cottages with the Church on the summit of Chapel Hill.



3.2 In the 1760s the higher side of the Parade was embanked to keep back the estuary waters, allowing further development to take place. The Strand (meaning 'a place by the water'), evolving at about the same time, still took its chance, however, with inundation. The silting of the river gradually protected the Strand and the 'square' that we know today was developed, firstly on the land side to the east and later on the western side.

3.3 This central area housed the market and gardens of the Globe Inn, which were done away with in 1871 when the gardens or enclosure we see today was created. Just a few years before, in 1866, the creation of Rolle Street commenced, driving its way through a maze of alleys and courts. Over a couple of decades it formed the street we see today.

3.4 At about the same time the grand houses on the Parade embankment started to change their use and shops appeared in the front gardens. Chapel Street (the main thoroughfare of the Magnolia Centre) being now protected from the waters, developed from a one-sided street to double-sided and the land between it and the Strand filled in. Chapel Street ran all the way to the top of Chapel Hill, but was bisected by the Rolle Street construction, giving rise to part being renamed High Street, which then was almost completely rebuilt in 1875.

3.5 Exeter Road, which runs onto the Parade, was likewise the sandy shore, but received some protection from the new Parade and the general silting of the estuary. Buildings began appearing here as far as North Street in early Victorian times. Albion Hill began its life in the 1840s.

3.6 From this brief description it can be seen that many of the shops and shop fronts have their origins in the mid Victorian period and we are lucky that we still have many examples, especially on The Strand, Albion Street, Rolle Street, High Street and Chapel Hill. Many of the Exeter Road shop fronts are Victorian but we still have good examples of Edwardian shop fronts too. Much of the character and other sympathetic features found in the streetscape remain from these original frontages, all of which need to be preserved.

3.7 In High Street we have a fine example of curved glass windows at No.16/17 and Nos. 9 and 9A exhibit stained glass windows. The Ship Inn pre-dates the rest of the street. There is sufficient character remaining to warrant a sensitive approach to conservation in this street.

3.8 Likewise many buildings of great character remain around the Strand, several of which are Listed Buildings. The most noticeable is Thomas Tucker which has been trading since 1801 as an outfitters.

Several other buildings add character to the area including some relatively recently developed business frontages. By the same token there are others that could benefit greatly from improved signage. Opposite Thomas Tucker the three properties formerly known as Gwydir Place are also of significant interest. Diagonally opposite stands the impressive Lloyds Bank.



3.9 Albion Street, with its little shop fronts has a good percentage of frontages that deserve preservation and enhancement. Rolle Street, which has been little altered except through war damage, has several imposing buildings like the former Public Hall (the cinema), and likewise deserves encouragement and enhancement, as it contains sufficient original frontages or sympathetically altered shop fronts to be candidate for sensitive traditional treatment.



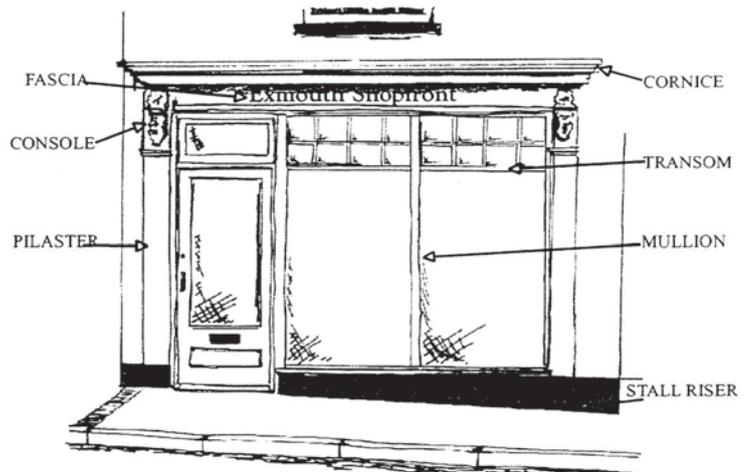
3.10 Much local heritage has been lost, but there is more than enough character and history left in our town centre streets to warrant the aims and objectives of this document.

# 4 Principles of good design

4.1 Traditional shop front design was based on successful principles that still hold well today. A satisfactory relationship between the shop front and the building as a whole was achieved by using various elements to enclose the shop window and entrance like a picture frame round a painting. Features such as pilasters, cornices and stallrisers were common in construction. These features contributed to the well-proportioned frontage which was sympathetic to the building on which it was set. The diagram below shows a typical shop front and identifies the various components.

## 4.1 Materials

Timber has been widely used because it is easily machined and can be worked into any profile. Properly maintained timber will have a long life and will not age as quickly as more modern materials. The tradition is for painted finishes; stained hardwoods seem inappropriate. (In this context the use of materials from non-sustainable sources is discouraged.) Glazing materials should not be mirror glass or glass with highly reflective coating as such materials can visually impair the traditional townscape.



## 4.2 Colour schemes

The sensitive use of colour offers enormous scope for improving the street scene. The choice of colour must take account of the building and its setting. Rich dark colours are often most suitable as they do not distract from the window display. There is a general presumption for schemes that use matt finished materials in keeping with the majority of the town's buildings.

Many national businesses have corporate colour schemes which can appear inappropriate in the historic street scene. These companies should consider moderating their corporate design to enhance and complement the surroundings.

Some buildings have had paint applied to stucco or brickwork. Repainting, using subdued colours, will not be resisted; painting bare brickwork is generally inappropriate.

## 4.3 Canopies and blinds

Canopies and blinds can be an enlivening element if designed correctly. Many traditional shops have retractable roller blinds, which provide shade for the shop and shelter for the shoppers.

In the past roller blinds have not been used for advertising purposes. Dutch blinds, fan blinds and balloon canopies are increasingly being fitted with the added purpose of providing increased advertising space. In some cases blinds can obscure the fascia and introduce a dominant element which is out-of-keeping in a traditional setting.

The use of non-traditional blinds, or plastic, wet look or stretchy fabrics will be discouraged. Where blinds and canopies are required a traditional roller is preferred.

## 4.4 Cornices

The cornice is the projecting feature which runs along the top of the fascia. It provides a high-level visual stop to the top of the shop front. Originally the cornice shielded the fascia from weather. In new buildings, this feature may not appear in a traditional form but some account needs to be taken of its role. Cornices can also be adapted or designed to successfully house fascia lighting systems.



## 4.5 Consoles

Consoles are a form of bracket, of uniform width, with the sides carved in the form of an upright S with the lower curve smaller than the upper. They provide a strong visual stop to both the horizontal and vertical elements of the shop front. Late Victorian shop fronts used consoles with elaborate carving to contain the fascia ends. Where found, these features give a good indication of the history of the shop front – they should always be preserved.

## 4.6 Fascia

The fascia is the wide board over the shop front carrying the shop name. The design of the fascia should be appropriate to the character and period of the building as it is the link between the ground and upper floors.

Georgian and Victorian shop fronts had upright fascias, contained by consoles, which had either plain or decorated ends. Later styles were often inclined outward so that they could be read more easily.

Fascia depth was generally less than 370 mm. Excessive fascia depth can damage the balance of proportion that should produce the attractive frontage. Small shops or those with a lower storey height should consider a shallower height of fascia; taller shops should consider sub-dividing the zone between the door head and the underside of the fascia, rather than increase the fascia depth. A badly-designed fascia can have an adverse impact on an entire run of buildings. The introduction or retention of box fascias of unsuitable materials, such as plastic, will be discouraged.

## 4.7 Mullions and transoms

Mullions are the vertical features that subdivide panes of glass. Transoms are the horizontal elements that subdivide panes of glass and are typically found at, or over, door height. Together they increase the apparent structural strength of the shop front in supporting the building above. By breaking up large areas of glass they increase the complexity and interest of reflections whilst helping to preserve the rhythm of the street scene. Breaking up large areas of glass also helps to improve security.

Mullions and transoms are common features of the traditional shop front, and their continued use will be supported in favour of large areas of glass. As with other components of the shop front they should be retained, repaired or, if necessary, replaced to the original design.

## 4.8 Doors, doorways and ironmongery

Traditional timber doors were usually set back from the shop front, and designed to complement the overall design. Recessed doors will therefore be encouraged as they have practical and visual advantages.

Door furniture, such as handles and letter plates, are important details in good design. Their retention or introduction will be encouraged.

## 4.9 Pilasters

Pilasters are shallow piers or rectangular columns projecting only slightly from the wall. They frame the side of the shop front and emphasise the subdivision of the frontage into separate units of plot width. Visually they provide the means to support the fascia. Original pilasters should always be retained or repaired if necessary. They should never be covered as such action destroys the character of the original design. Encouragement will be given to reinstate, uncover, repair or renew pilasters when any new shop front design is proposed.



## 4.10 Stallrisers

The stallriser is the vertical surface of polished granite, tile, marble or wood from the pavement to the sill of the glazed portion of the window. It provides the building with a visual anchor to the ground as well as giving protection to the shop front. It also offers some protection from ram raiders. The height of

each stallriser will vary according to the overall proportions of the building. In the case of replacement, the material chosen must relate to the building and its context. Plastic laminates should always be avoided.

## 4.11 Other features

Some shops in Exmouth have other features that are an important part of their history. An example of this is the use of ceramic tiles and mosaics to give details of a one-time occupier of the premises. These should be preserved long after the use of the premises has changed. The photograph opposite shows the quality of such work on the external wall of a local shop.

## 4.12 Shops occupying two or more buildings

There are a number of shops in the town that occupy the ground floor of two or more buildings. It is desirable, in design terms, that the fascia relates to each individual building in which it is set, rather than running continuously across the full extent of two or more shop fronts. The cheerful irregularity of an old established shopping street is preferable to an over-zealous uniformity.



#### **4.13 Townscape considerations**

The photograph below illustrates a typical street scene. Each building has its own shop front, with clearly defined vertical proportions. It is important to ensure that the frontages do not breach these divisions by moving into adjacent buildings. Where the shop front fills the whole width of the building it is necessary to use the pilasters and mullions to vertically subdivide the panes of glass to preserve the underlying rhythm of the street.

Most traditional streets contain a number of building styles. In such situations a series of identical shop fronts could be inappropriate. The only exception is where there is a row of shops within a terraced building where similar frontages may be appropriate.



# 5 Signs and advertising



Signs and advertisements can make a significant contribution to the character of any shopping area. Poorly-designed or incongruous material can detract from the character of the area. It is preferable that all signs and advertisements are designed to complement the shop front and the building. While some signs and advertisements, including illuminated signs, do not require consent, control of all advertisements is managed under the Advertisement Regulations<sup>1</sup>. This often results in separate consent being required to any planning permission issued in respect of shop fronts.

## 5.1 Fascia signs

The traditional way of identifying a shop is by the use of sign-written letters on the fascia. Gold leaf shading, together with a careful

mixture of colour tones, can improve the visibility of the sign, minimising the need for illumination.

Fixing individual letters on the fascia can be appropriate if a suitable material, such as wood or metal, is used. (In contrast, plastic can look out of place.) The size of lettering should be in proportion to the fascias. If lettering is judged to be too large it will be resisted. Where there is no fascia, letters can be attached to the wall of the building.

## 5.2 Window displays and advertising

The overuse of stickers, posters or internal illuminated signs can detract from the appearance of the shop front creating a cluttered appearance from the street.

In cases where a building has no display space, tasteful murals, photographs or other techniques could be considered so that the value of the shop front is not lost.

Businesses on upper floors sometimes have difficulty in providing a presence and advertising their function. In these cases there would usually be a preference for advertisements on the ground floor, such as plaques by the entrance doors or small and appropriately scaled hanging signs. Only where these options are not available will consideration be given to first floor advertisements. Where these are considered, they should only comprise painted letters on their windows. These should be of a size and scale that will not dominate the appearance of the window or the building and can be usually be controlled by the Advertisement Regulations<sup>1</sup>

## 5.3 Hanging and projecting signs

In appropriate locations, for example narrow streets, hanging signs can provide an element of individual detail which will enrich the area. Hanging signs are ideally made from timber and suspended from wrought iron brackets. A proliferation of hanging signs should, however, be avoided, particularly in conservation areas.

## **5.4 Illuminated signs**

Internally-illuminated signs that are incongruous to the street scene will be resisted within conservation areas and on listed buildings. Where a business is open regularly in the evening, and a degree of illumination is reasonable, the preference is for externally-mounted lighting fixtures rather than internal lighting. Carefully chosen internal lighting will enhance or highlight the detail and intricacy of window displays and shop interiors.

<sup>1</sup>The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007  
[http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/pdf/uksi\\_20070783\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/pdf/uksi_20070783_en.pdf)

# 6 Social design issues

## 6.1 Disability Discrimination Act

From 1 October 2004, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) required service providers to make 'reasonable adjustments' to their premises to tackle any physical features that prevent disabled people from using their services.

As a general principle, steps should be avoided and doors should be capable of being opened by people in wheelchairs. Handrails are helpful where changes in level occur. Frameless glass doors should be avoided because they can be dangerous to the partially sighted. In the case of listed buildings, the needs of the disabled should be taken into account, as far as possible, commensurate with the need to preserve the character of the building.

## 6.2 Shop Front Security

Security shutters can be very damaging to the appearance of a shop front, unless they are designed sympathetically.

The use of external burglar alarm boxes will normally be discouraged, but where they are considered essential they should be fitted within the fascia depth. (Location just above the cornice may be preferable.) External alarm boxes will not normally be permitted on listed buildings.

# Appendix 1

## Listed Buildings in Exmouth town centre

Number 17 Chapel Hill (South side)

Chapel Hill (South side) Premises occupied by the Fountain Cafe

Number 2 The Parade (East side)

Number 2 Queen's Court (North-east side)

Number 21 The Strand (North-west side)

Number 35 The Strand (South-west side)

Number 36 The Strand (South-west side)

Number 40 The Strand (South-east side)

Number 42 and 43 The Strand (South-east side)

Number 44 The Strand (South-west side)

Number 45 The Strand (South-west Side)

Number 46 The Strand (South-west Side)

# Appendix 2

## Statutory approvals and consents

### Planning Permission

New shopfronts, or alterations to existing ones, and changes in the external appearance of a building require planning permission.

### Listed Building Consent

Listed Building Consent is required for alteration (however minor) which affects the character of a listed building.

### Building Regulation Approval

Building Regulation Approval is required where a new shopfront, or changes to a shopfront, involve a material alteration.

### Advertisement Consent

Certain types of non-illuminated advertisements are regarded as having deemed consent depending on the type of premises and subject to restrictions of size, position and height above ground level. These may be displayed without reference to the Local Planning. Information on the classes of deemed consent can be obtained from the District Council Environment Directorate.

### Food Hygiene Regulations

Where proposals affect any food premises, applicants may wish to consult with the Local Environmental Health Officer in the District Council Communities Directorate, who will advise on the appropriate food hygiene regulations.

### Offices and Shops Act

Standards are laid down under this Act for natural lighting and ventilation. The Local Environmental Health Officer in the District Council Communities Directorate will advise on these requirements.