



Contents

1.0 Introduction

1.1	The importance of shopfronts	3
1.2	Background to document	3
1.3	Permissions and consents	3

2.0 Shopfronts - design principles

2.1	Principle 1: Positive shopfront character	4
2.2	Principle 2: Attractive display windows	7
2.3	Principle 3: Uncluttered shop signage and advertisements	8
2.4	Principle 4: Relating to the building and streetscene	11
2.5	Principle 5: Equal access for all users	12
2.6	Principle 6: High quality materials	13
2.7	Principle 7: Integrating fixtures, services and entrances	14
2.8	Principle 8: Avoiding light pollution	16
2.9	Checklist: Shopfront design	17

3.0 Converting shops to residential - design principles

3.1	Principle 1: Positive shopfront character	18
3.2	Principle 2: Relating to scale, proportion and style	18
3.3	Principle 3: Ensuring privacy	19
3.4	Principle 4: Suitable access and servicing	20
3.5	Principle 5: High quality materials	20
3.6	Checklist: Converting shops to residential	21

Appendix

Examples of shopfronts that Brent would resist the loss of	22
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Useful guidance & contacts

- [Outdoor Advertisements and Signs, DCLG](#)
- Development Management Team - 020 8937 5210 or planandbuild@brent.gov.uk
- Licencing Team - 020 8937 5359 or business.licence@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The importance of shopfronts

Shopfronts play a key role in establishing and defining the character of Brent's town centres and neighbourhood shopping parades. Improvements to the physical appearance of individual shopfronts can have a cumulative benefit to a shopping area as a whole, contributing to vibrancy and attracting shoppers and visitors. Similarly, the design of residential units, converted from former shops, influences the quality of its surroundings.

1.2 Background to document

This document is a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to Brent Council's Local Plan, specifically policies DMP 2, DMP 4 and DMP 4A. Once adopted, this SPD will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Proposals to create, alter, replace or restore a shopfront or to convert a shop unit to residential use should conform to the relevant design principles in this SPD and any other material consideration including conservation design guides.

A *design statement* should be submitted alongside any application to demonstrate how the proposal accords with the guidance in this SPD. The design statement should include a plan, section and elevation and should include adjacent buildings and upper floors. Applications which aren't accompanied by a design statement are unlikely to be successful.

Policy DMP 4A: Shopfront design and forecourt trading

"Proposals for shopfronts and forecourts will be required to retain shopfronts of architectural or historic merit, demonstrate a high quality of design, complementing the building and adjoining properties."

Forecourt trading will be permitted where it does not cause an obstruction to pedestrians or nuisance to neighbouring residential occupiers."

1.3 Permissions and consents

Most alterations to a shop front will require planning permission. However, routine maintenance works generally do not. In the case of listed buildings, locally listed buildings and buildings within conservation areas there are further restrictions. This is to ensure that alterations and additions do not harm the appearance of the area and are sympathetic to the integrity of the original building. In addition, Advertisement Consent may also be required to display a shop sign. It is advisable to contact the Development Management Team before carrying out any alterations or displaying advertising. The Council's Planning Enforcement Team holds powers of enforcement to ensure compliance with legislation, policies and guidance.

A licence is required to undertake some activities, and is separate to planning permission. For example street trading from a forecourt and street cafés require a separate licence from the council's Licencing Team.

In some circumstances converting unviable shop units on the periphery of town centres to a residential unit may inject life into vacant buildings on underperforming streets. DMP 2 sets out where conversions through either a planning application or prior approval application will be acceptable in town centres, whilst policy DMP 4 sets out where this will be acceptable outside of town centres. The emerging new Brent Local Plan will also consider issues around shops and town centre uses.

Policy DMP 2: Supporting Strong Centres

"Unviable secondary frontage on the periphery of town centres will be acceptable for residential development"

Policy DMP 4: Neighbourhood Parades and Isolated Shop Units

"Loss of A1, A2, A3 uses or launderettes in neighbourhood parades or isolated shop units outside designated town centres will be permitted where the centre or unit is within 400 metres of equivalent alternative provision; and is unviable; or the proposal will provide a community facility for which there is a demonstrable need."

Where permitted sympathetic retention of any existing shop front will be required unless a high quality alternative more sympathetic to the building's qualities or street scene will be delivered"

2.0 Design Principles

2.1 Principle 1: Positive shopfront character

Before altering or replacing a shopfront, consider the quality of the existing shopfront. To help guide you information on typical shopfront elements and typologies in Brent is provided here. Shopfronts of architectural and historic merit must be retained and restored. Others should be restored to original designs wherever possible, especially on in streets with other traditional shopfronts. The age and type of the buildings will be a good indicator of the original shopfront type.

Traditional shopfronts: *Victorian*

The earliest shopfronts in the borough mainly date from the middle to late 19th Century and are predominately Victorian (c.1840-1900). Victorian shopping districts include: Cricklewood, Kensal Rise, Queen's Park and Willesden. They all follow the same overall format and are designed with classical details. Window details have a vertical emphasis with thicker mullions to support heavier glass.



Traditional shopfronts: *Edwardian*

The Edwardian period introduced taller shopfronts with vertical emphasis. As time went by stallrisers were lowered, fasciae were enlarged and doorways recessed. Harlesden High Street was rebuilt in the Edwardian period (c.1900-1915).



The main surrounding frame to the shop, consisting of pilasters, corbel and fascia, should be respected. If it was removed previously, it should be replaced. Identify a local example that retains original details. Keep the fascia narrow, repair the corbels which separate the fasciae, repair the pilaster and its mouldings, avoid cladding it and seek to paint it in a single unifying colour.

20th Century shopfronts

There are limited surviving examples of early 20th Century shopfronts within the borough, although there are countless such shopping parades. These used extensive glazing elements and extended to the height of their shop fronts and were without mullions. Changes in glass production allowed larger, stronger plates of glass. These shops sometimes used curved glass. Thinner pilasters were also used, and lighting was usually incorporated into the design. New and experimental ideas and methods were introduced in the 1920s and 1930s including the use of chrome and Vitrolite.



Contemporary shopfronts

Shops from this period will have modern shopfronts already integrated. Today, shopfronts tend to contain large expanses of glass that are undivided. Wider, level entrances have improved access to facilitate all shop users. Materials such as plastics, powder coated metal, stainless steel as well as branding are now common as contemporary retail construction lends itself to this type of design.



Architectural elements found in a traditional shopfront

Architrave A lintel or beam resting on the capitals of the columns.

Brickbond The style of laying bricks to create a pattern.

Capital Capitals top the pilaster. The height of the capitals will usually define the depth of the fascia sign.

Corbels (or console brackets) A decorative projecting feature marking the end of one shop and the beginning of another. Located above the capitals and at the end of the fascia.

Cornice Located above the fascia to serve as a separation and interface between the fascia and the rest of the building. It usually projects and may be decorated. It is often capped in lead to weather-proof the shopfront.

Fanlight A window directly above the doorway and of the same width. These are sometimes hinged for ventilation.

Fluting Shallow grooves running vertically along a surface. A pilaster shaft may have this detail but fluting is not restricted to pilasters alone.

Grille A ventilation grate usually decorated. In the labelled diagram the grille has been incorporated into the panelled stallriser.

Mullion A vertical glazing bar that subdivides the display window to reduce its scale.

Panelling A decorative feature usually found in shop doors and stallrisers.

Pilasters The vertical projecting elements that divide and frame the shopfront. They project slightly from the wall forming a half column and may be constructed in a different material or decorated. They usually have a plinth at the bottom and a capital at the top.

Plinth The base of the pilaster.

Sill The lowest part of the window frame. Window sills hold the mullions in place and slope outward to drain water.

Spandrels The triangular space between one side of the outer curve of an arch, and the ceiling or framework.

Stallriser A solid panel between the window sill and the ground. This reduces the size of the glazed surface and provides protection to the shopfront.

Transom A horizontal glazing bar or crossbar that subdivides the display window to reduce its scale.



Figure 1

2.2 Principle 2: Attractive display windows

Large expanses of undivided glass are usually inappropriate for shopfronts.

Vertical and horizontal subdivision of the building façade should be achieved by:

- Retaining or installing mullions (vertical glazing bars) and transoms (horizontal glazing bars).
- Retaining or installing a stallriser at the base of the shopfront display of at least 300mm in height. A stallriser can also be beneficial by preventing damage to the glazing and reducing dirt or staining.



Cluttered display windows, or closed panels within the shopfront, full of smaller advertising and posters should be avoided.



2.3 Principle 3: Uncluttered shop signage and advertisements

The display window is a shop's main visual link to the shopping street. Advertisements will need to be carefully considered and should not detract from the character and appearance of their setting, or impact on highway safety.

Fascia

A well designed fascia will give shopfronts individuality and will relate well to the scale, character and features of adjacent buildings. The fascia should complement rather than obscure or damage existing architectural features including windows.

As illustrated by the figure below the fascia should be located below the sills of the first floor windows (allowing 600mm where practicable) and not extend above the cornice. The fascia should be positioned between the corbels and above the highest part of the windows.

A shopfront should generally have only one fascia to avoid clutter. On double shopfronts, the dividing corbel and pilaster should be retained and the sign divided into two.

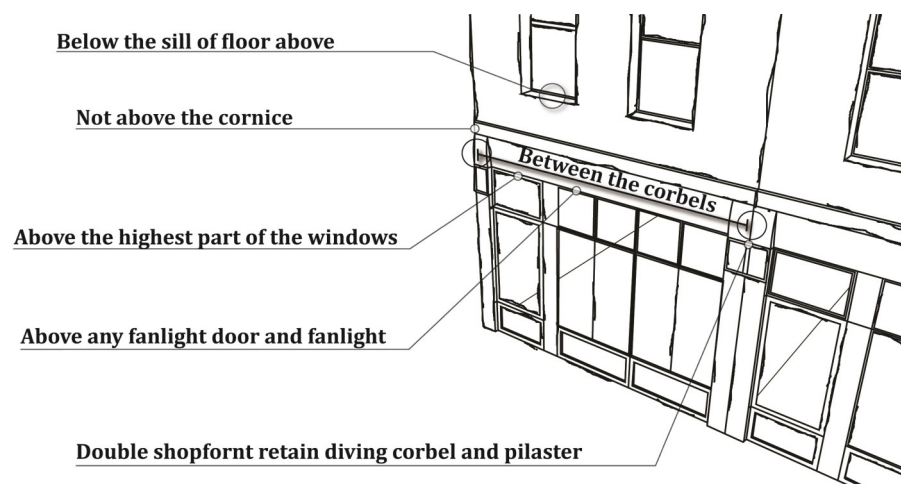


Figure 2



Modest fascia with limited text. The banners on the guard rails detract from the public realm and require advertisement consent



Fascia signage design

In order for the fascia signage to appear uncluttered, the text should take up only a modest part of the fascia. Generally text should cover no more than half the width and half the height of the fascia and the font should not be higher than 30cm (one foot).

Secondary text underneath the main text can be up to half the size of the main text and tertiary text, to the sides of the fascia can be up to a quarter of the main text. All text should be in English. A modest logo or small text can appear either side of the text. Figure 3 illustrates permissible options.

The fascia should be in a single colour. Pastel colours are preferred for fasciae. For traditional shopfronts and traditional buildings, bright coloured fasciae, signage and advertisements should be avoided. Extending fasciae with secondary fasciae/advertising underneath the fascia should be avoided.



Modest fascia with minimal text of limited size. The blank space around the text actually draws more attention to the shop name



Figure 3



A-boards

The use of A-boards and similar type of on-street advertising can create visual clutter and obstruction to movement and should be avoided.

It may only be acceptable within the private forecourt of the shop and where it does not hinder pedestrian movement. Modest designs, sizes and colours should be used, in keeping with the fascia designs.

Estate Agent boards

The installation of Estate Agent 'for sale/let' boards on or above shopfronts should be avoided over and above what is permitted as deemed consent in national regulations.



Positive shopfronts with modest fascia signage in pastel colours (and one poor exception)

High level signage

Signage or advertising displayed at a high level will rarely be acceptable, particularly if it is large, on flank walls, or visible from residential areas.

Projecting or hanging signs

Only one small, projecting sign will be allowed per frontage to avoid clutter. This will be modestly sized, slim-profile, non-illuminated and of a style that complements the fascia. Projecting signs should be positioned at fascia level and on the side that is commonly used by other shops on the street. Never fix projecting signs to corbels. The sign should not project too far from the fascia and be consistent with the dimensions shown in the figure below. Projecting signs should not be used on listed buildings and in conservation areas, unless it has been identified as an original characteristic of the building or the area.

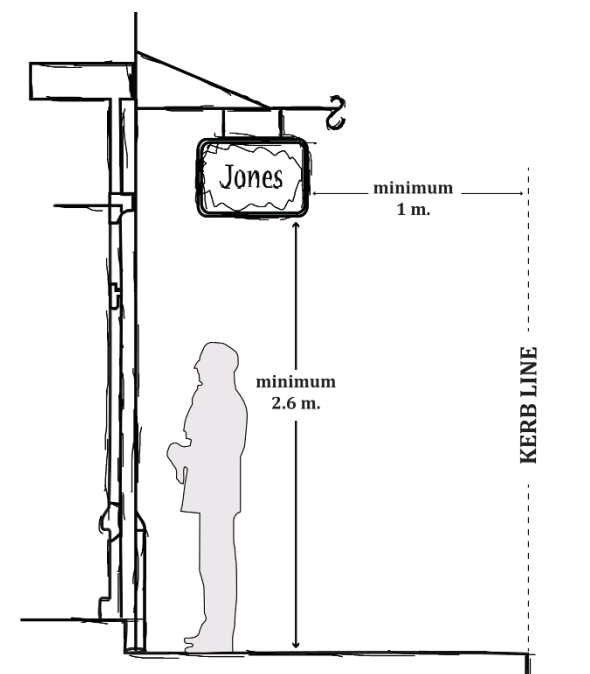


Figure 4

2.4 Principle 4: Relating to the building and streetscene

The shopfront should not be designed in isolation. The proposed design should relate in scale, proportion and architectural style to the host building and the wider streetscene.

A shopfront should continue the design language of the building and adjacent shops by acknowledging the common features that occur on the parade or terrace of shops.



2.5 Principle 5: Equal access for all users

New shopfronts should allow safe, easy and convenient access for all users of the building including disabled groups, elderly people and those with prams. A shopfront access point should be level and wide enough to allow entry for all users.

Forecourt trading and seating can enliven streets and is generally encouraged and will be permitted where it does not cause an obstruction to pedestrians or nuisance to neighbouring residential occupiers.

To prevent conflict, forecourts should be clearly delineated from the main pavement, allowing sufficient space for the free flow of pedestrians. This will require a clearance of:

- 3m for primary pedestrian routes, where there is heavy footfall (town centres, busy shopping areas and public transport nodes)
- 2m for all other pedestrian routes, where there is less footfall

The above clearance should be free of any obstructions, including lamp posts and street furniture. As mentioned in paragraph 2.3, the use of A-boards and similar type of on-street advertising should generally be avoided.



Positive seating area, fascia and canopy, but advertising obstructing the footways



2.6 Principle 6: High quality materials

In the case of original and traditional shopfronts, materials were usually wood, brick and stone and sometimes iron work. Restoration of these shopfronts should replicate the original materials of the host building and be as true to the original shop front as possible.

On modern shop fronts robust materials will be considered but plastics, bare metal and reflective materials should be avoided.



2.7 Principle 7: Integrating fixtures, services and entrances

Canopy

A canopy (blind or awning) should be at ground floor level only and should not span more than one structural bay. They should complement the design of the shopfront, and be in suitable colours and materials (i.e. canvas or rayon). Acrylic, glossy or plastic canopies will be discouraged, as will bright florescent colours.

The canopy should retract into a blind box that is integrated into the overall shopfront and it should be flush with the fascia level. Unretractable, bulky, curved, rigid framed or Dutch blinds should be avoided. Blinds and rigid canopies should project no more than 2 metres from the fascia and be consistent with the dimensions shown in the figure below.

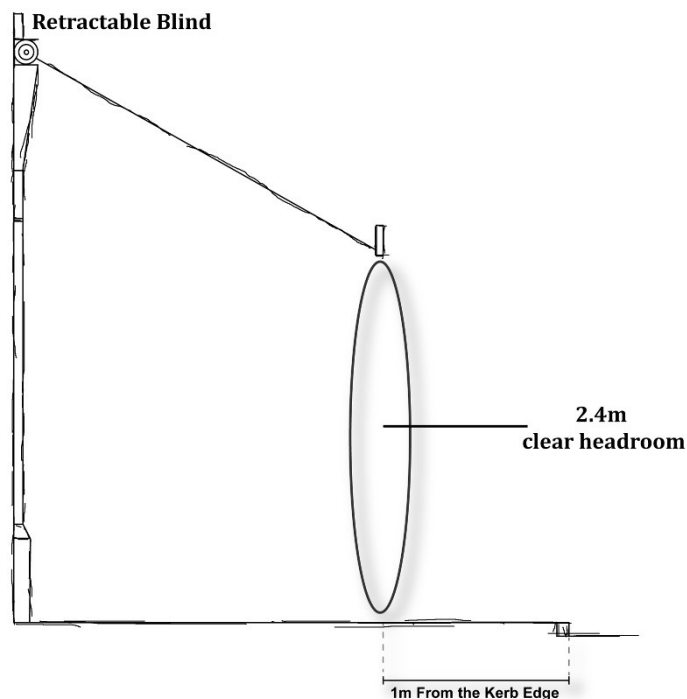


Figure 5

Shutters

Solid or pin-hole roller shutters fail to contribute positively to the character and appearance of the streetscene and can attract graffiti. The following alternative security measures should instead be used, in order of preference:

- 1) Laminated and toughened glass.
- 2) Internally fitted open type shutter, which can be retracted or stored out of sight during business hours. These do not require planning permission unless they are to be installed within a listed building, in which case Listed Building Consent will also be required.
- 3) Only where it can be demonstrated it is necessary for insurance purposes will external shutters be acceptable. In which cases they must be open type and powder coated to match the shop front.

The shutter box and guide rails are to be concealed, for example behind or incorporated with the fascia panel, to avoid obscuring architectural features.

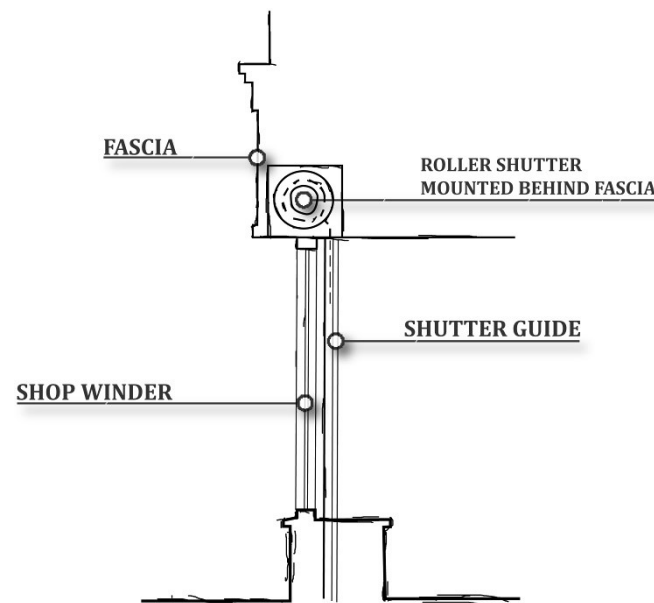


Figure 6



Secondary entrances

If a building has a secondary access door to serve upper floors, this should be considered with the design of the shopfront for uniformity.

Services

Careful consideration should be given to the siting of services, plant, machinery or equipment (including telecommunication equipment, satellites and food extractor fans). Services should be located at the rear of a building to remain out of view from the main street or screened from view.

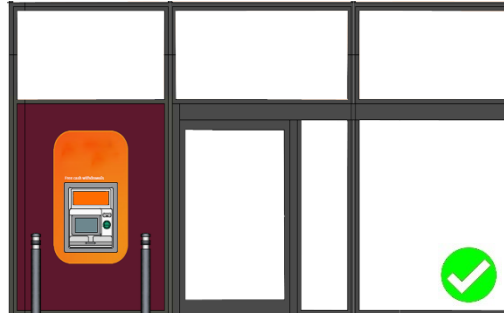


An external shutter of this style will only be acceptable where it can be demonstrated it is necessary for insurance purposes.

Cash machines

An acceptable cash machine will be installed in a recess or within a window bay on the busiest elevation of the building. Architectural features should not be removed to install the machine. The machine should:

- Be treated as an integral part of the building's design and in keeping with the building
- Be accessible to all users
- Have minimal display material
- Not be located so as to cause problematic queuing
- Not dominate the shop display frontage



2.8 Principle 8: Avoiding light pollution

Lighting should be integrated into the shop sign. External illuminated signs are preferable in all circumstances and internally illuminated signs will not normally be permitted.

Illumination levels should be in keeping with the area in which they are located. The fascia should only be illuminated in a subtle way and should not cause disturbance to others due to its intensity or direction. The effect on traffic should be considered when positioning lighting to avoid driver distraction or glare. Flashing or variably lit shop signs are not normally given consent. Illuminated projecting or hanging signs are not permitted.

Permission for illuminated shop signs adjacent to residential properties will have conditions attached which restrict illumination to the hours when the premises are open. In the case of premises with long opening hours, a reduction in the overall level of illumination will be considered.



Modest external lighting on a traditional fascia



2.9 Checklist: Shopfront design

This checklist should be used to ensure the design principles have been met.

Principle 1 - *Positive shopfront character*

- What are the positive architectural features of the shopfront?
- Has the existing shopfront be retained and restored or an original shopfront reinstated?

Principle 2 - *Attractive display windows*

- Is the shopfront broken up by vertical and horizontal elements to avoid a large dimensions of glass?
- Are closed panels or inactive panels filled with advertising avoided?

Principle 3 - *Uncluttered shop signage and advertisements*

- Is all signage kept to a minimum, to avoid a cluttered appearance, and integrated into the shopfront?
- Is the fascia signage designed well, in accordance with figure 3?
- Is the fascia located so as not to obscure architectural features?
- Is the fascia positioned to be consistent with adjoining buildings?
- Does the shopfront have no more than one small projecting sign positioned at fascia level (see figure 4)?

Principle 4 - *Relating to the building and streetscene*

- Does the shopfront relate in scale, proportion and architectural style to the wider building?
- Does the shopfront relate in scale, proportion and architectural style to the wider parade of shops?

Principle 5 - *Equal access for all users*

- Does the shopfront allow equal access to all, including wheelchair users?
- Is the forecourt clearly delineated from the main pavement, allowing sufficient space for the free flow of pedestrians?

Principle 6 - *High quality materials*

- Have robust, high quality materials been used?
- Are the materials compatible or complementary in colour and texture to the existing building?
- In case of traditional shopfronts, have the original materials been replicated?

Principle 7 - *Integrating fixtures, services and entrances*

- Are canopies (blind or awning) integrated into the shopfront and consistent with the proportions in figure 5?
- Are roller shutters internally fitted, powder coated and either brick bond or open in style?
- Is the roller shutter box and guide rail concealed as illustrated by figure 6?
- Do fixtures, security features, services and secondary entrances integrate with and complement the building and shopfront?
- Are services located to the rear of a building to remain out of view from the main street or screened from view?

Principle 8 - *Avoiding light pollution*

- Has any externally illuminated shopfront been sited and designed so as not to cause disturbance to others, including residents and passing traffic?
- Have internally illuminated fasciae and signs been avoided?
- Are lighting levels in keeping with the character of the area?

Principle 9 - *Other considerations*

- Are there any other material considerations to consider such as conservation design guides?

3.0 Converting shops to residential - Design principles

3.1 Principle 1: Positive shopfront character

There will be a strong preference for retaining the existing shopfront. In cases where the shopfront cannot be retained or there is an absence of character or quality that would justify its retention, the applicant may wish to reinterpret the shop front. Only where all other options have been considered, the applicant may remove the shopfront and infill the void. Retention or recreation of a decorative fascia is essential to create an attractive façade that recognises the previous use of the building.



3.2 Principle 2: Relating to scale, proportion and style

In exceptional circumstances where removal of the shopfront is justified, the infill area will need to be of a scale and proportion that is in keeping with the character and appearance of the rest of the host building. A proposal should follow the shape, style and detailing of the upper floors above the shop front.

New windows should be arranged to either line up with the corner or centre line of the window above and match the style, proportions and subdivision of the original windows. The height and width of the new openings should create a balanced elevation. Corner buildings should maintain a dual aspect to respect the original dual aspect windows and features which will maintain the natural light, amenity and surveillance.



3.3 Principle 3: Ensuring privacy

All residential conversions are required to provide suitable amenity, and will need to achieve relevant design standards in the London Plan and Local Plan. In the case of retail to residential conversions, creating a living environment with an acceptable level of privacy presents challenges.

Buildings originally designed as homes usually use gardens to set the residential units back from the street to afford more privacy for residents. In contrast, shopfronts tend to front public pavements and busy roads with large display windows designed to attract attention.

The temptation to infill the shopfront with as little glazing as possible could adversely impact the character and appearance of the host building and the wider area as a whole, especially if the proposal is set amongst shops or conversions which retain shopfront features.

The following options can be used to create privacy:

- Opaque glass
- Glazing bars to break large display windows down into smaller panes
- Internal louvers, venetian blinds or wooden shutters
- The reinstatement of front gardens and a low boundary wall or fence to enclose any forecourt
- Separation through a raised planting bed to the height of a stall riser
- Materials that clearly delineate semi-private space
- Locating quieter rooms to the rear of the property



Key policies applying to residential conversions:

- *Brent Local Plan*
 - policy DMP 1: Development Management General Policy
 - policy DMP 12: Parking
 - policy DMP 18: Dwelling Size & Residential Outbuildings
 - policy DMP 19: Residential Amenity Space
- *London Plan, GLA*
 - policy 3.5: Quality and Design of Housing Developments
- *Housing SPG, GLA*
- *Brent Waste Planning Guide*

3.4 Principle 4: Suitable access and servicing

If the proposal is to convert the building into separate flats, consideration should be given as to how flats on upper floors will be accessed. Access is best provided from the main street. If the host building is too narrow, an arrangement whereby a single external door leading to individual internal doors for each flat is recommended. Rear and side access should be avoided.

Existing private or shared alleys to the rear or side of properties may be closed off by means of a gate to increase safety and reduce anti-social behaviour. Where suitable active frontage can be achieved it is preferable to maintain the alley as public space to form attractive environments with entrances to residential units.

It must be ensured that car parking and servicing, such as appropriate storage for domestic waste, has been integrated into the design in accordance with the council's adopted standards. The storage of waste should not dominate the frontage of the building and satellite dishes should be avoided on building frontages where permission is required.



3.5 Principle 5: High quality materials

The choice and quality of materials will play a pivotal part in determining the success of a retail to residential conversion. Materials should match or at least complement the floors above and neighbouring buildings.

Brickwork can prove particularly challenging to replicate. The brick should match and follow the same brick bond, mortar style and colour. UPVC doors and windows are generally inappropriate.



3.6 Checklist: converting shops to residential

This checklist should be used to ensure the design principles have been met.

General Policy

- Does the proposal conform with relevant Local Plan and London Plan policies and the Mayor's Housing SPG?
- Are there any other material considerations to consider such as conservation design guides?

Principle 1 - *Positive shopfront character*

- Has the original shopfront been retained?
- Where it is not possible to retain the shopfront in its entirety, have original features been retained or reinstated?

Principle 2 - *Relating to scale, proportion and style*

- Have the design features of the upper floors guided the design of the proposal?
- Do windows align with those on upper floors?
- Does the design demonstrate a positive impact on the host building and compatibility with the character and appearance of the local area?

Principle 3 - *Ensuring privacy*

- Is an acceptable size and quality of functional living accommodation and adequate external space provided?
- Has adequate privacy been achieved without adverse impacts on the character and appearance of the host building and the street scene?
- Has the positioning of quiet rooms such as bedrooms been considered?

Principle 4 - *Suitable access and servicing*

- Does the design consider how upper floors are to be accessed if the proposal is to subdivide the building?
- Is car parking required and if so can it be appropriately accommodated?
- Is there appropriate storage for domestic waste to avoid placing bins on the pavement?

Principle 5 - *High quality materials*

- Have robust, high quality materials been used?
- Are the materials compatible or complementary in colour and texture to the existing and neighbouring buildings?

Appendix - Examples of shopfronts that Brent would resist the loss of





