

Aberdeen Planning Guidance 2023: Shops and Signs (DRAFT)

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1. Introduction

1.1 Status of Aberdeen Planning Guidance

This Aberdeen Planning Guidance (APG) supports the Development Plan and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

This APG expands upon the following Aberdeen Local Development Plan policies:

- Policy D1 – Quality Placemaking
- Policy D9 – Shopfronts

1.2 Introduction to Topic / Background

The repair and replacement of shops and signs is a prevalent topic. Historic and original features add to the overall pleasant experience of buildings, streetscape and their wider surroundings. Inappropriate design, proportions or materials can detract from a building and the wider streetscape and setting.

The APG acknowledges a principle of retaining and repairing historic materials, with replacement requiring thorough consideration. New shops and signs need to be designed for their location to ensure they contribute to a positive experience of the streetscene.

The guidance applies to existing and new shopfronts and signs. The guidance is to be used on a citywide basis for retail and commercial premises including banks, betting offices, restaurants, estate agents and beyond. The signage guidance should be considered in all instances.

1.3 Climate Change

This guidance has been drafted in accordance with concerns raised through the Climate Emergency. The guidance which supports Policy D9 sits alongside strategies produced by Aberdeen City Council (ACC) such as Net Zero Vision for Aberdeen, Strategic Infrastructure Plan (Energy Transition), Aberdeen Adapts: Climate Adaptation Framework and the Council's Climate Change Plan, Net Zero Aberdeen

RouteMap. Both the Policy and the guidance aim to reflect the values and objectives highlighted within these strategies moving forward to prepare Aberdeen City for the Climate Emergency.

The documents aligns with Net Zero Aberdeen RouteMap theme 3 'Circular Economy Strategy'. The retention and conservation of historic fabric, as opposed to its removal and/or replacement, is a sustainable approach. The reuse of existing good quality materials and the replacement of single use material that can be used multiple times is better for the environment.

2. Aberdeen Planning Guidance

2.1 Guiding Principles

The following table sets the basic principles which need to be addressed when considered altering an existing shopfront, designing a shopfront for a new build, and signage for all developments.

Issue	Question	What to do
Understand the existing shopfront	<ul style="list-style-type: none">What period is the shopfront from?Is it a rare example?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Understand the age and period of the shopfront.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Does the shopfront contain traditional features and/or important architectural features?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">These need to be retained.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Are there inappropriate additions?Has the shopfront been altered unsympathetically?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Large deep fascias, sub fascia boards, cladding, unsympathetic signage and clutter will be removed.

Design for the context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is there an established historical pattern for the height of the fascia, stallriser, and general proportions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure the shopfront follows the historic established pattern. ▪ Alterations should preserve and strengthen the unity of the streetscene.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What design principle is being considered? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It may be possible to restore elements of the original or historic design on the basis of sound evidence; ▪ New shop fronts offer an opportunity to reinstate traditional design and materials. Where appropriate, this will be encouraged. Please see figures below which demonstrate all elements within a traditional shop front design.

Issue	Question	What to do
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a corporate identity? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> House styles and corporate branding will be modified and their design should be as a result of a careful analysis of the context.
Signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the sign add to the appearance of the building? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signs should complement the character, height and period of the building and be in proportion with the building on which is it proposed. Innovative designs will be encouraged. The sign should not have a detrimental impact to the original fabric of the building for example, damage to the surrounding stone walls.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the sign impact on the surrounding area? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is required to be a positive impact to the building and surrounding area.

▪ Is the sign adaptable?

- Reuse existing high quality and appropriate materials.
- Ensure the materials used are sustainable, adaptable and fulfil the City's Net Zero requirement. The use of Good quality timber is encouraged as it can be reused, repainted and reworked and, offers a long lasting solution for stallrisers
- In circumstances where the design and materials of the shop front will not have an adverse impact on the local surrounding context, composite materials such as Tricoya wood may be acceptable.
- Due consideration should be given to maintenance when selecting a design and materials for a sign. Materials that are likely to offer a short lifespan may not be appropriate. Good quality materials that are well maintained offer the most sustainable solution and will have the least impact on the environment.

Figure 1. Traditional shopfront details

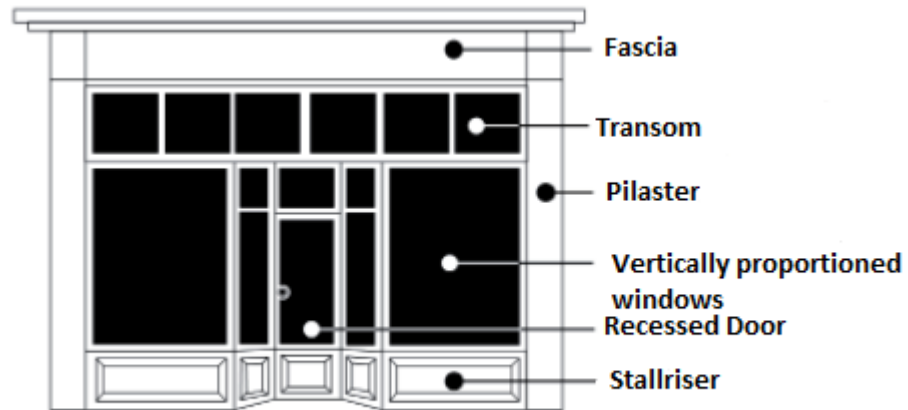
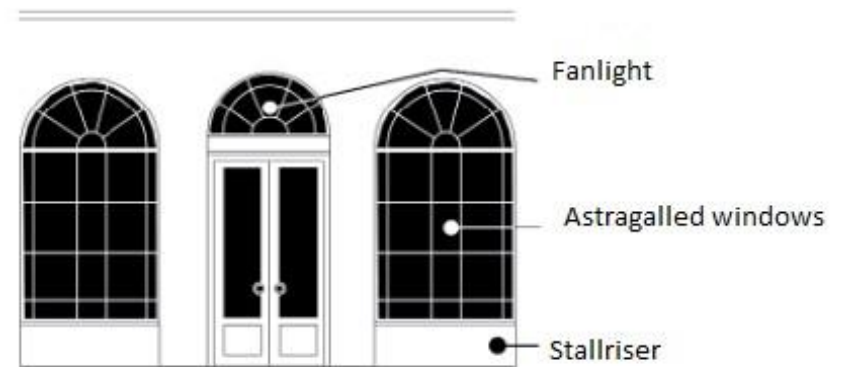
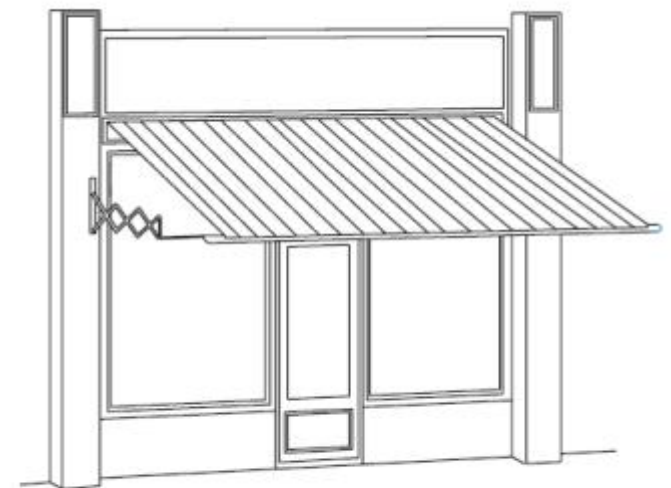
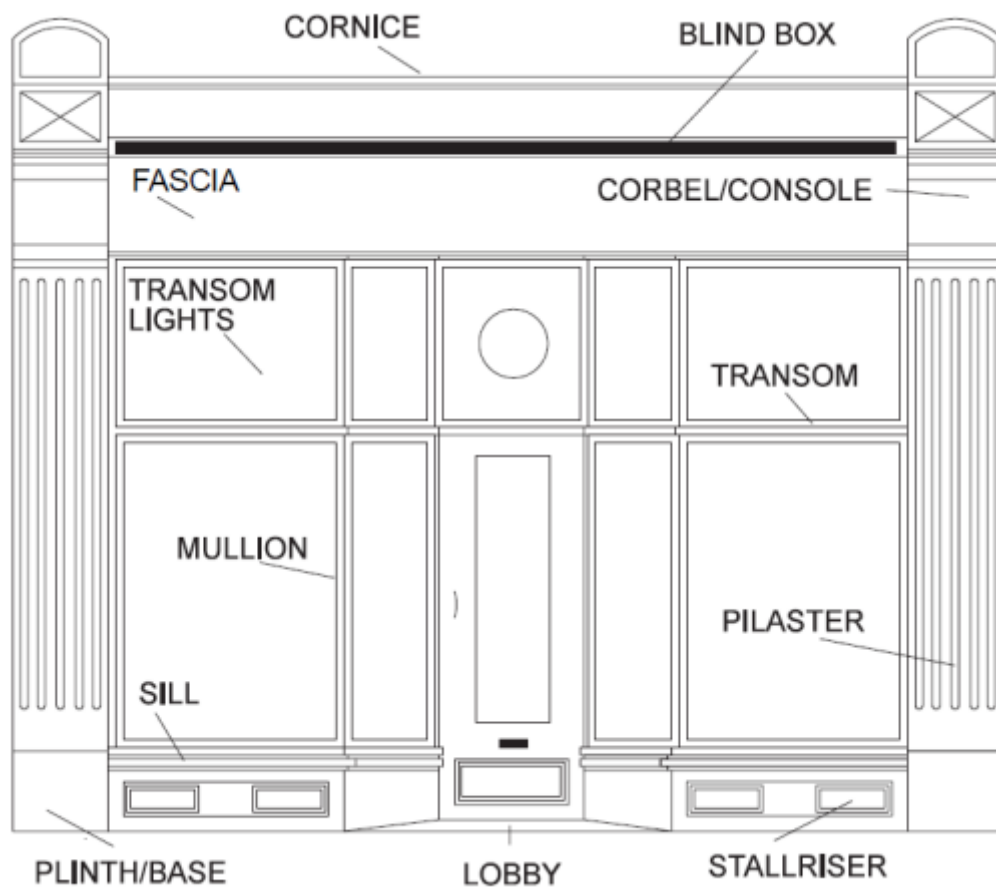


Figure 2. Traditional arched shopfront details





Traditional canvas blind



Traditional hanging sign



Modern, poorly-designed shopfront with excessive fascia

Well-designed, balanced shopfront with modest fascia



Modern Interpretation of Traditional Shop Front



2.2. Principles for New and Replacement Shopfronts

The below sets out general principles which should be considered in all instances, as well as specific principles which should be considered depending on whether the proposal is for a replacement shopfront or a new shopfront.

Shopfront Component:	General Principles:	Specific Guidance:
Fascias:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Fascias must be correctly proportioned in relation to the height of the shopfront, the building and the streetscene▪ Fascias will generally be timber. The finished appearance, jointing and framing detail are important considerations to the overall aesthetic of the shopfront.▪ As a general guide, the depth of the fascia should be no greater than 20% of the height of the entire shop frontage, and a more slender fascia allows for larger window openings.▪ The fascia must not extend above any string course or other architectural feature that defines the top of the shop front, and must not obscure first floor windows.▪ The linking of two (or more) adjacent buildings by a common fascia is inappropriate, and they must be read as individual units with distinct design characteristics.	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The fascia remains an integral element in traditional shop front design and if an existing fascia exists, then its retention or replacement in line with the general principles will be expected.▪ Within Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings discreetly jointed timber sheeting is likely to be the only acceptable base for painted or other forms of applied signage. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Increasingly the importance of the fascia is diminishing on shopfronts in new buildings due to other forms of signage. Where it is present, the general principles will be applied.▪ Materials other than timber may be considered where these complement the overall design intention.

Shopfront Component:	General Principles:	Specific Guidance:
Sub Fascias:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sub-fascia will not be permitted and the removal of existing sub-fascias is expected. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per general principles. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per general principles.
Architectural Details: (Pilasters, cornice, console, brackets/corbels)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditionally the ends of the fascia have presented an opportunity for architectural expression, with corbels, framing and hanging signs. Contemporary versions of these elements are encouraged where it contributes to the overall design and context of the shopfront. Features such as cornices and trims add definition, detailing and, relief to a fascia and, aid water shedding from the fascias which contributes to the longevity of the materials. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where original elements survive, these will be retained or, where they have been covered over or removed, they will generally be re-instated. Details such as pilasters, corbels, string-courses and moulding etc. should be restored, particularly when those details are an integral part of an historic façade design. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per general principles.
Windows:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shopfront windows must be proportioned in relation to the entire building and generally set in the same plane as the front of the building. Windows with a vertical emphasis are often more visually attractive. Where suspended ceilings have been introduced care must be taken to integrate the new internal ceiling level to the shopfront window. There are various ways in which 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where original elements survive, these will be retained wherever practical. Subject to the surrounding context, large expanses of glass will generally not be suitable within or alongside traditional shopfronts. In circumstances where a large window is required, it should be appropriately designed and proportioned for example, the use of mullions to section the glazing . <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large sheet glazing is encouraged in contemporary

Shopfront Component:	General Principles:	Specific Guidance:
	<p>full-height windows can still be used within the shop front opening, e.g. by raking it back from the window or, if a transom light is present, using opaque glass. Other examples include using the suspended ceiling for the application of discreet internal signage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Frontages to the street should be transparent, active and lively. 	<p>designs however may not be suitable alongside traditional shopfronts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The use of clear glass is appropriate and forms of opaque glass or decals may not be acceptable.
Framing, mullions, transoms:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Traditional shopfronts in Aberdeen are typically timber; however there are examples of other materials such as brass and tile. ▪ Timber is expected as it is the most versatile material; however other traditional materials will also be acceptable. ▪ The finished appearance, jointing and framing detail are important considerations to the overall aesthetic of the shopfront. ▪ Where window design includes the use of mullions and transoms, these elements must have slender proportions and suitably profiled to avoid flatness in the elevation. ▪ As a guide, transom lights should occupy the top 15-20% of the window area, however, the proportions may vary depending on the shopfront. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Where original elements survive, these should be retained wherever practical. ▪ Other materials such as powder coated aluminium may be considered within modern designs. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Other materials such as powder coated aluminium may be considered within modern designs.
Stallrisers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The height of a stallriser will vary according to the overall proportions and style of the shopfront. ▪ Stallrisers will be constructed of timber, or be faced with tile, granite or other hardwearing material. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Where timber stallrisers exist within original or historic shopfront design, they must be retained and restored.

Shopfront Component:	General Principles:	Specific Guidance:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stallrisers typically form no more than 20% of the overall height of the shop front though the proportion will vary depending on the shopfront, and design approach taken. 	<p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If a modern design is proposed, modern interpretations of stallrisers will be expected.
Doors, entrances and thresholds:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Doors must be of a style and material which match the rest of the shop front. ▪ Well-proportioned doors are encouraged. ▪ Consideration of the positioning of the door, and the context of the building and street. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Where recessed doorways, tiles and threshold details, traditional ironmongery and door furniture exist within original or historic shopfront, they must be retained and restored. ▪ Traditional doors, though predominantly glazed, should incorporate a solid panel in the lower part corresponding in height to that of the stallriser. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles. ▪ Door furniture and ironmongery such as kick-plates, handles, letter boxes and finger plates give practical and aesthetic detail
Awnings and blinds:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Where new awnings are proposed they must form an integral part of the shopfront design. ▪ Careful consideration must be given as to how the canopy box is integrated into the façade. The awnings should be fully retractable and made of a robust woven canvas. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Where original awning frames, boxes and rollers exist, they will be repaired and retained. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles.

Shopfront Component:	General Principles:	Specific Guidance:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Traditional canvas roller blinds with a matt finish are encouraged. The use of non-traditional awnings, such as fixed or dutch blinds, is not acceptable. ▪ Awnings must be positioned a minimum height of 2.3m from the level of the footway and stop 0.5m short from the kerb line and must not obstruct any road signage. ▪ Internal roller blinds can be used to provide solar screening and opportunity for additional signage, if awnings are not proposed or not acceptable. 	
Security:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a presumption against the use of externally mounted security roller shutters. An internal grille system, which is demountable or retractable, should remove the need for external shutters. ▪ Security measures for windows and doors can be different from one another, and individual well detailed security gates, particularly for recessed doorways, are encouraged where the layout allows. ▪ Consideration should be given to laminated security glass which will not change the visual appearance of the window 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles.

Shopfront Component:	General Principles:	Specific Guidance:
Colour:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whilst there is no prescription on actual colours to be used, careful consideration should be given to their use and extent, balanced against all other elements of shop front design. ▪ The most successful designs are likely to be those with careful consideration of where colour is used, a limited colour palette and where large extents of solid colour are avoided. Colour can be used to highlight features. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles.

Note: This guide had emphasised that shopfronts should not be considered in isolation from the building in which they are installed. For this reason, drawings that accompany the application should include an elevation, not only of the shopfront itself, but also of the floors above and the shopfronts on either side.

2.3 Principles for New and Replacement Signage and Advertisements

The below sets out general principles which should be considered in all instances, as well as specific principles which should be considered depending on whether the proposal is for a replacement or a new sign or advertisement.

Signage / Component:	General Principles:	Specific Guidance:
Fascia signage / Signage lettering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The size and depth of signage lettering should be proportionate to the fascia, shopfront and/or building, and mindful to its impact on wider context. ▪ Traditional hand painted signs/signwriting will be encouraged. ▪ For signage on a fascia, individual lettering should not exceed more than two thirds the depth of the fascia. ▪ When no fascia is present, individual cut out non-ferrous metal, powder coated metal or acrylic letters may be appropriate if fixed to a rail and applied to the face of a granite/stone building. To limit damage to the structure as few as possible rail attachment points should be used. If the building is not of stone construction the individual letters can be directly applied to the building. ▪ Rails should be kept to the minimum size necessary to support the lettering and colouring should match the surrounding fabric of the building. ▪ Signage can be positioned internally or applied to display windows. This form of signage may be more appropriate in non-traditional shopfronts and conversions of traditional buildings to commercial premises. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On a listed building, or within a conservation area, where a fascia exists the preferred lettering method is painted or applied lettering of wood, metal or porcelain onto a timber fascia. ▪ Care must be taken to re-use existing holes, fixtures and fittings. Redundant fixtures and fittings must be removed and the resultant holes repaired and made good. ▪ Box fascias will not generally be permitted within conservation areas or on listed buildings. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles. ▪ Box signage which is streamlined, within the depth of the fascia (where one exists) and has slender projection may be acceptable depending on its context.

Signage / Component:	General Principles:	Specific Guidance:
Hanging and projecting signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signs must be of a size to complement the scale of the frontage. Bespoke well-crafted, generally top hung hanging signs, supported from brackets are preferred. The use of symbols to represent commercial premises will be encouraged e.g. a chemist's mortar and pestle, a boot maker's boot etc. Signs of this nature may project more than 800 millimetres Hanging or projecting signs will generally have a maximum area no greater than 0.5 square metres, although this is relative to the frontage. Hanging signs with a bracket will project no more than 800 millimetres from the face of the building (including fixings). Only one hanging or projecting sign will be permitted per commercial frontage, and should be minimum of 2.3 metres off the level of the footway and stop 0.5 metres short of the kerb line and must not obstruct any road signage, pedestrian or vehicle movements. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per the general guidance. Care must be taken to reuse existing fixings. All redundant fixings and their holes appropriately filled to match existing building <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per general principles. Box projection signs may be used outwith conservation areas and on non-listed buildings, if the maximum overall projection (including fixings) from the face of the building is 700mm or less.
Other signage opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signage on blinds and hand painted or applied lettering in windows, as well as internally hung signage is encouraged, whilst maintaining an open frontage. An internal suspended ceiling stepped up or raked back to meet the window provides an opportunity for internal signage. External banners, that are not integral to the original 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per general principles. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per general principles.

Signage / Component:	General Principles:	Specific Guidance:
	<p>commercial frontage design, will not dominate the elevation. These will be acceptable where they do not detract from the appearance of the building.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where stonework exists drilling into the stonework is discouraged, however discreet fixings may be achievable and banners that are fixed from a pole or weighted may not require more than 1 fixed position. 	
Upper floor or high-level signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where signage is applied to the window panes, it must take the form of lettering directly applied and must not cover the entire window. Signage must relate to the context and consider the impact on the amenity of neighboring uses. Signage must be of scale, proportion, material and colour to have a positive impact on the local surrounding context. High level signs and individual cut out lettering is most appropriate for modern commercial, standalone buildings and will not be suitable of traditional shop fronts. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where first floor hanging signboards previously existed their reinstatement with high quality bespoke signage is encouraged however, new locations for signs on upper floors are discouraged. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New projecting signs on upper floors are discouraged. High level signs with individual cut out lettering will be preferred to flat panel signage on modern commercial, standalone buildings.
Name plates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name plates at ground floor are acceptable means of advertising uses on upper floors so long as the plate is located beside the door and is no larger than one block of masonry on the wall to which it is fixed. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing fixings and/or existing holes must be used wherever possible. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per general principles.

Signage / Component:	General Principles:	Specific Guidance:
Illumination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Non-illuminated signage is preferred to ensure good sustainability, to help achieve Net Zero Carbon targets, and to ensure good amenity for neighbouring uses. ▪ External illumination should be sympathetic and appropriate to the commercial frontage, and discreet, and use low energy bulbs, e.g. LED lights. ▪ External lighting fixings must not interfere with architectural features of the frontage. ▪ Signage cabling must be routed from the back of the sign directly into the building, or minimum amount of external cabling necessary. Cabling must be fixed in a discreet manner (cabling must be coloured to match stonework). ▪ Details of wires and cabling must be included on proposals for listed buildings. ▪ On fascia signs, individual cut out letters can be internally, or halo lit. Discreet spotlights painted out to match the backing material or fibre optic lighting may also be acceptable. Trough lighting should generally be avoided. ▪ On hanging sign boards, if illumination is required, these should have discreet purpose built internal lighting. On box fascias only the individual letters may be illuminated. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles. ▪ Box projecting signs are generally acceptable. Illumination, when required, will be internal.
Vinyls/Patterned glazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Should not dominate the window space. ▪ Patterned or etched glass/vinyl can ensure an open frontage is maintained while still allowing a degree of privacy 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles.

Signage / Component:	General Principles:	Specific Guidance:
Fixings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Non-ferrous fixings must be used where signage is applied to stonework in order to avoid staining. ▪ To limit damage to the structure as few as possible attachment points should be used. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles.
Totem poles/Freestanding signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Signage must relate to the context and considered the impact on amenity of neighboring uses. ▪ Signage will be minimal to reduce cluttering of a site / area, and adaptable ▪ Within conservation areas the use of bespoke signage is expected and encouraged over other methods, e.g, granite slabs ▪ Signage must be of a scale, proportion, material and colour to have a positive impact on the surrounding area. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles. <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As per general principles.

<p>Digital Billboards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The design, location, size and brightness of a digital sign or display should not have a detrimental impact to the character or visual amenity of the surrounding area and should respect its local surrounding context both aesthetically and operationally. ▪ <u>Digital</u> signage that may compromise public safety and amenity, will not be acceptable. Therefore, in general digital signs should only operate with the use static images only with smooth transition between images. Video or sound capabilities will generally not be acceptable. 	<p><u>Replacement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>As per general principles.</u> <p><u>New:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>As per general principles.</u> ▪ Free standing signs and billboards may only be acceptable in circumstances where digital signs can be integrated as part of existing street furniture for example, within a bus stop or a street telephone facility (i.e. BT in-links stand). ▪ Externally mounted signs may only be acceptable where the content on the sign relates to a commercial use to the ground floor of the building. Early discussions with the Planning Authority are encouraged. ▪ Display signs and screens within a shop front may be acceptable subject to appropriate sizing and location. Consideration should be given to signage as a whole within the shop front and should not have a detrimental impact to the local surrounding context or public safety and amenity. ▪ Internally mounted signs above ground floor level will generally not be acceptable.
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3. Definitions

Architrave: the lowest part of an entablature, the lower framing edge of a fascia or frieze.

Cill: the lowest horizontal member of a window frame.

Console bracket: bracket supporting the upper members of a cornice.

Corbel: a block of masonry or material such as brick or wood which projects from a wall and supports a beam or a feature. A corbel may be carved or moulded.

Cornice: the upper projecting portion of an entablature.

Entablature: the upper part of a Classical architectural order, which rests upon the columns. Consists of an architrave, frieze (or fascia) and cornice.

Fanlight: the window above a door.

Fascia: the flat surface above a shop window, on which the name of the shop or other sign may be displayed.

Frieze: the band or flat strip of an entablature, between the cornice and architrave.

Mullion: a vertical member or rail dividing the lights of a window.

Pilaster: a rectangular column, projecting only slightly from a wall, usually forming a division between bays of a building or a stop to a shopfront or bay.

Plinth: the projecting base or moulding to any structure, pilaster or column.

Shopfront: a street-level frontage with a display window, usually serving a retail outlet but also restaurants, banks, building societies and other businesses.

Stall riser: the area beneath the cill on a shopfront, providing protection to the structure as well as decoration. Clad in stone, tiles panelled timber or other finish.

Transom: a main horizontal member dividing a window opening, or the upper part of a shop window

4. Further Reading

Further information is available on the Council's Traditional Building Care Hub webpage:

<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/planning-and-building/building-conservation-and-heritage/listed-buildings/traditional-and-historic-buildings-conservation-advice>