

Maintaining Local Shop Identity



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There are three main strands to my talk:

- **Our Legacy**
- **Planning Policies**
 - Retention of Retail frontages
 - Consents
 - Supplementary Planning Guidance
 - Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas
- **Planning in Action**
 - Research and understanding
 - Local vs. national retailers
 - Too many shops?
 - The carrot (or grants)
 - The stick (or enforcement)

The Legacy of shops in the Borders

There is a huge range of shop types within the Borders and it is important to understand the different types which survive. Before the arrival of the railways communities were self-sufficient and had many different shops such as hatters, cobblers and grocers. There were also department stores, even in smaller centres such as St Boswells.

The twentieth century legacy includes a Woolworths with its house style, inter-war vitrolite shops and small scale 1960's supermarkets. These perhaps appear inappropriate in their setting but many are part of a house style. However, smaller vernacular buildings can sometimes be engulfed by chain stores. Overall, the legacy from the Borders is an interesting one.



19th century shopfront with original shutters



Twentieth century shops

One of the reasons traditional signage survives is because of the survival of local skills and traditions. For example, in St Boswells there is a local painter and decorator who trained as a sign writer and still does this work. This local connection is important where pockets of surviving skills still survive although he must get the chance to use this skill or it will disappear.



Fascia by a local signwriter in St Boswells

Local Plan Policies

Local Plan Policy Ed4 – Prime Retail Frontage

“The council will resist the loss of shop uses (Use Class 1) within prime retail frontages identified on the Local Plan Proposals Maps. Proposals for uses other than shop use at ground floor level on prime frontages will be refused unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the development would not result in an unacceptable adverse impact on the viability or vitality of the town centre or village.”

This is linked to national policy: SPP8 – Town Centres and Retailing.

One of the challenges is that strategists say that we do not want to lose shops but is it better to have an empty shop or should it be used for something else such as an architect’s office? Some of these policies may be almost written in a vacuum and rigorous application of the standards in SPP8, for example, may not work. This may sterilise a building and means that you cannot do anything else with it. Another use may not necessarily change how the building looks but it is a different use class so involves a change of use which this policy prevents.

For example, in Galashiels, Tesco and Asda are now located on edge of town centre sites and shops are becoming vacant in the main streets so the question is what do we do with these empty units? We need to be pragmatic and responsive and we may need adjust and review policies as we go along.

Planning

Most work requires planning permission because shops do not enjoy “permitted development” rights, but there is discretion about “de minimis” works. In the Borders there are 40 conservation areas soon to be 43- the most of any council in Scotland other than Fife. Works within a Conservation Area are likely to receive closer scrutiny and likely to require full planning permission. Listed building consent would also normally be needed for any alterations to a shopfront on a listed building.

Advertisement consent can be ‘fiendishly complicated’. “Deemed consent” may be given for modest alterations to fascias etc, subject to limits on letter heights, but illuminated fascias would normally need consent.

Framing of regulations may mean that people just ignore the process because they know it needs consent. There is also the strange situation where a shop is painted an inappropriate colour but the owner still needs to pay a fee and obtain consent in order to change it to something better.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Most councils have shopfront design guidance. This type of advice is useful although it may become out of date and therefore not take account of certain changes but it does give people a clue of what to look for. However, it must be carefully handled as it is not prescriptive, it is only guidance.

The Historic Scotland Memorandum of Guidance gives guidance on listed buildings. It puts things in context but it is vital to understand the significance. The mere fact that a shop building is listed is not enough, you need to know more than just the fact that it is listed or located in a conservation area.

Research and Understanding

It is important to understand buildings. An example of this is Bridge Street in Kelso. Shops on one side of the street are of stone and there are matching cast iron pilasters on the other side but it is not clear which came first. This is a case where we need to do more research to understand which came first. Conservation work may then follow through potentially supported by proposed Kelso THI CARS scheme.



Bridge St, Kelso

Historic photographs are useful but unfortunately there are no Dean of Guild Court plans in the Borders available although some architects firms do have plans. However, without research misunderstandings can lead to, for example, the placing of a Victorian replica shopfront on a post-war building. There is no substitute for proper research although it can be difficult to find the time for this and in some cases there may be no professional involved where the alteration is small scale.

National Chains- House Styles

There are lots of independent shops in the Borders although there are some national chains too. Most of these companies have at least two standards of shop front treatment ; they usually have a standard design and also a conservation version. It is useful to gather evidence and look at what is done in another local authority area as there may be more subtle examples elsewhere.

A challenge on this is where there are, as in the Borders, 5 different area planning offices so achieving consistency can be difficult. A particular design may be approved in one area within the council area but not in others, so we try to screen out multiple applications / proposed changes at an early stage so that there is a consistent view taken.



Boots, Kelso

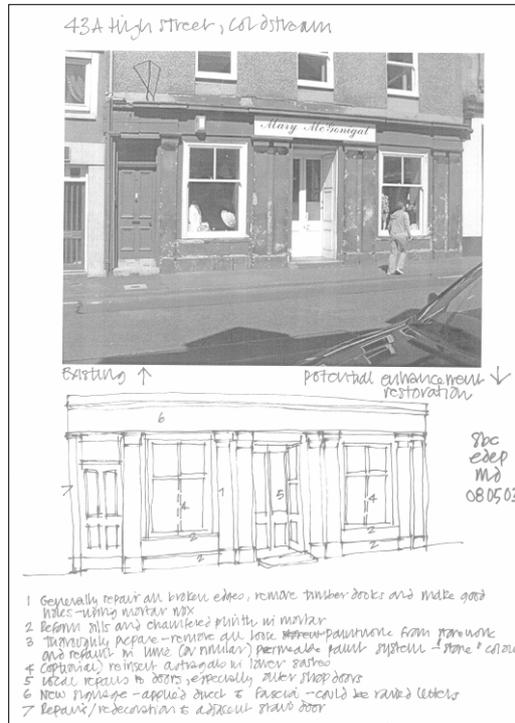


Different Scotbet signs depending on location

Carrots: Grant support scheme for shopfronts

Within the Scottish Borders, there are small scale grant schemes to help owners to do something with their shopfronts but these are deliberately not conservation grants. Some are given to empty shops to paint the front and improve signage. This makes the shop look better so prospective tenants could start trading with the outside reasonably tidy and not have to invest so much money initially.

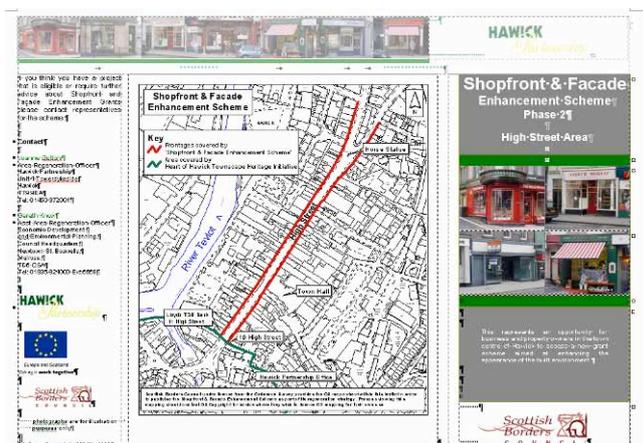
Town schemes (funded jointly by historic Scotland and the council) have also been used to improve shopfronts such as in Coldstream. Here a Vitrolite shopfront was removed which revealed a double pilastered shopfront beneath. We worked with the owner to improve the shopfront but this throws up questions of how you communicate where there is no architect or other building professional involved. There needs to be some literacy about how we communicate between parties.



Using drawings and photos to communicate design ideas to shop owners

Kelso THI and CARS

There is currently an application underway for a THI for Kelso. Shopfronts are a theme within the application for the reinstatement of original details.



Too many shops?

Shopping patterns have changed in the Borders and the population has changed from 145,000 in 1891 to 109,000 currently. There are too many shops. Do we need try to keep them all as shops? On the main streets maybe we do as no-one wants to live in a shopfront especially on

a main street. However, in secondary streets some subtle filling in of windows has been done to allow a different use.



Examples of shops converted to residential, in Lauder and Hawick

Stick: Enforcement

An example of enforcement action being necessary was a Charity which had a prominent shop front in Jedburgh; which is a listed building and within a conservation area; standard “house colours” which were used without consent were inappropriate. Following discussions the charity agreed to repaint it in a more appropriate colour. Formal Enforcement is sometimes required but sometimes this may be through dialogue with a retailer before true enforcement is undertaken.



Shops with inappropriate colour schemes

Maintaining local shop identity

As a final point, we need to remember the past but also to look to the future.