

Planning Guidance Note 4

Shop signs and advertisements

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1.0 Introduction

Signs and advertisements invariably seek to be eye catching, but their size, design and siting should not be such that they harm the appearance of an area or adversely affect public safety. It is natural that businesses will compete to attract customers. However, unbridled competition can be counter-productive to all, as visual chaos and unnecessary clutter is likely to result.

The advertisement control system seeks to ensure that signs meet satisfactory standards and criteria. The aims and expectations of this control are reflected in the Council's Local Plan policies. These notes seek to expand and clarify these policies. The central aim is to encourage the provision of signs which as well as being informative enhance the character and appearance of the City.

These notes are divided into two parts. The first gives guidance on design. The second contains additional information sheets which outline policies, procedures and wider environmental issues. It is important to read carefully through the entire contents of this guidance note.

2.0 The need to apply for consent

A large variety of advertisements and signs can be displayed without the need to apply to the City Council for Advertisement Consent. A Department of the Environment booklet entitled "Outdoor Advertisements and signs - A guide for Advertisers" contains information on which advertisements require specific permission and is available from the Civic Centre. This can serve as useful guidance, however, the regulations which govern the display of advertisements are complex and it is strongly recommended that people contact the Planning and Transportation Service for advice before erecting any sign or advertisement. The display of signs or advertisements without the necessary consents is a criminal offence and the Council has widespread powers under the regulations to seek their removal and to prosecute offenders.

Advertisements displayed on Listed Buildings will require Listed Building Consent irrespective of whether Advertisement Consent is required. The granting of Advertisement Consent by the City Council does not remove the need to apply for other consents from the City Council including landlord consent when it is the landlord.

3.0 Guidance on signs and advertisements

3.1 General guidance

All signs and advertisements should relate to the building and environment where they are erected in respect to materials, design and scale. If a building is constructed of traditional materials such as stone, render, timber or brick, it follows that signs should be made of materials that harmonise. A sign made of modern materials such as plastic or aluminium is likely to be unacceptable on an older property or within an historic area.

The colouring of signs is important. Over bright colours and garish combinations should be avoided. Older buildings usually have a mellow and subtle colouring and new signs or advertisements should respect this. Attention should be paid to detail. Most buildings have a distinct character and this should be the starting point when designing a sign. For example, if a building is quite decorative, the introduction of a flat fascia board with no edge mouldings is likely to appear 'mean' and inappropriate. This attention to detail is important and should be considered down to the size and style of lettering on a sign, for example, small relatively intricate lettering is often most appropriate for older properties, whilst modern buildings can sometimes accommodate bolder designs.

3.2 Fascia signs

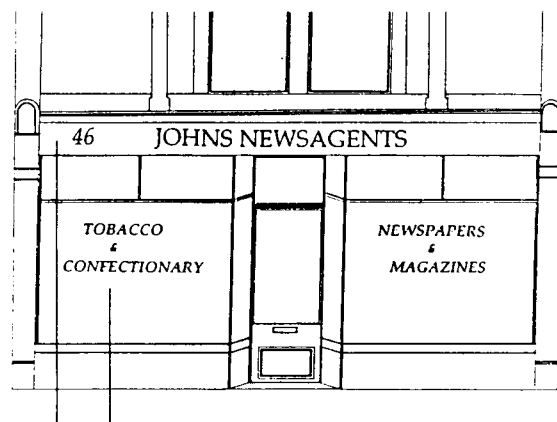
Fascia signs, the principal form of advertisement on retail premises, have a major impact on the quality of the street scene.

The importance of fascia size



The length and depth of the signs should be appropriate to the scale of the building. Fascia boards that are too small or too large can make a frontage appear shoddy and unbalanced. As a general rule the depth of the fascia should not be greater than quarter the height from pavement level to the underside of the fascia. Signs should respect the symmetry of a building and should not appear 'squashed' in an inadequate space, over dominant, or cover

Attractive signage in harmony with the shopfront



Adverts neatly painted on the glass

Hand painted fascia sign appropriately located

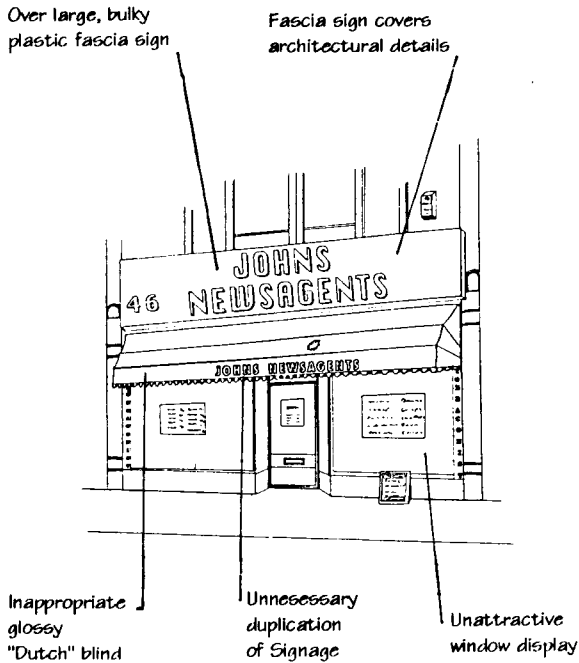
The signs and adverts provide considerable information to the consumer without detracting from the appearance of the shopfront

architectural features. Most properties have an established or logical position for the fascia sign and this should be adhered to.

Lettering can be three-dimensional and individually attached to the fascia board or it can be hand painted. Too much information should not be included on a single fascia sign. A premises name, function and number are sufficient. An excessive amount of lettering can lead to a fascia having a confused untidy appearance.

Where attached buildings of a different style are occupied by a single use it is often preferable to erect more than one fascia sign. If a fascia sign of a uniform appearance crosses frontages of a different scale and design the result is likely to appear unsatisfactory.

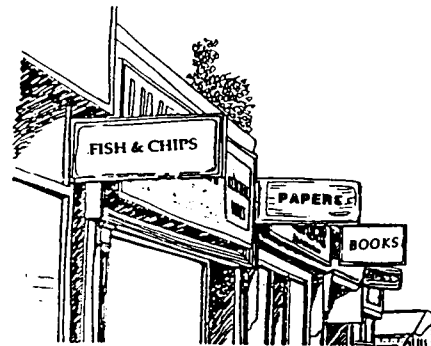
An attractive shopfront spoilt by inappropriate and excessive signage.



3.3 Projecting and hanging signs

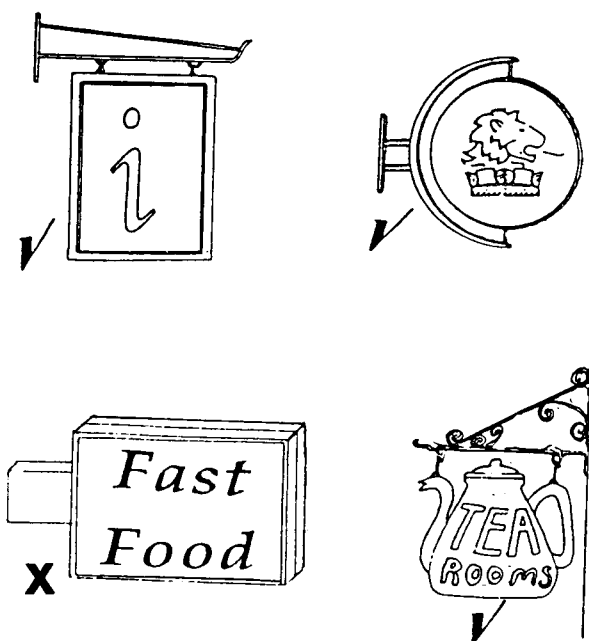
Projecting signs can sometimes provide valuable advertising for premises. However, where they are located on a property which already has a fascia sign they can contribute to advertising clutter. Projecting signs are unnecessary and unacceptable in Plymouth's modern city centre. A succession of such signs would be detrimental to the crisp integrally developed environment.

Clutter and confusion caused by excessive signage



In some instances it might be more appropriate to display an advertisement by applying lettering directly onto a wall. This should be considered as an option on both old and modern properties.

Examples of hanging and projecting signs



Outside of the modern city centre projecting advertisements are often an alternative to other forms of signage. This is particularly the case on premises occupied by such uses as public houses and galleries. As with other signs, their design should relate to their surroundings. Modern plastic box signs, because of their bright colours, bland appearance and unsympathetic materials often relate poorly to many buildings. This is most true of older properties. In these circumstances traditional hanging signs constructed of an appropriate metal and painted timber are preferable. Particular attention should be given to the bracketing which should generally be constructed of wrought iron.

Where projecting signs are proposed, it must be ensured that they are not located in a position which could hazard the safety of either pedestrians or road users. Standards concerning highway clearance levels can be obtained from the Planning and Transportation Service. In addition they should not be located where they can cause disturbance to occupants of upper floors.

3.4 Signs on flank walls

Advertisements located on flank walls might be acceptable at ground floor level providing they are not overly prominent, relate to the uses in the building, enhance the character and do not detract from its surroundings, otherwise they will not normally be permitted

3.5 Advanced shop signs

Signs located in advance of a shop publicising its location, or the goods on sale will not normally be acceptable. The City Council is particularly anxious in respect to the distraction and confusion that can be caused to highway users. In addition, concerns exist in respect to the clutter which can be caused by advanced signs and the resultant decline in the visual quality of an area.

3.6 Signs located above first floor level

Advertisements located above the level of first floor windows are sometimes acceptable where they relate to a use which is not found on the ground floor of a property. In these instances advertising should be restrained and relate well to the building and any existing signs. The painting of lettering or signs on window glass is often the most visually attractive way of achieving this.

3.7 Illumination

It should be considered whether illumination is really needed to make a sign visible to the public. Where illumination is necessary, brightness and style of illumination should be compatible to the area where the sign is located.

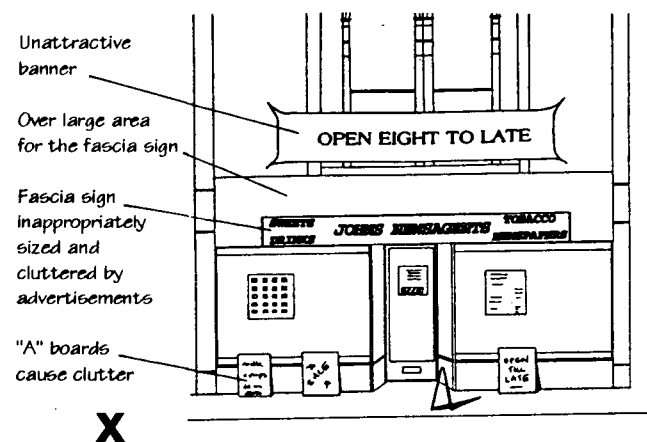
Advertisements can be illuminated either internally or externally. The most appropriate method will largely depend upon the nature and location of the building on which the sign is to be erected. Internally illuminated box signs constructed of plastic and aluminium are usually bulky and only suitable for some modern properties. They are certainly unacceptable on listed buildings, in Conservation Areas and on other historic buildings such as those buildings of local importance. External illumination is often preferable (particularly where the means of illumination is discreet). It is usually softer in nature and allows greater scope to design a sign of materials, scale and colour in keeping with a particular property.

Flashing lights, animated signs or neon adverts with visible runner bars will not normally be permitted, nor will those signs that cause a traffic hazard. Illuminated adverts can potentially dazzle, or distract people, or be mistaken for traffic lights.

3.8 Signs and advertisements in Conservation Areas

The principles of good design are generally the same irrespective of the age, style or location of a building. For example, it should always be ensured that proposals are in harmony with their surroundings in respect to factors such as scale, colour and use of materials. Where a building is located within one of the City's Conservation Areas, controls will be particularly strict to ensure that all signs and adverts preserve or enhance the character or appearance of an area.

An attractive shopfront spoilt by inappropriate and excessive signage



4.0 Summary

The central aim of these guidelines is to promote a high quality, attractive, well functioning environment. The key points are as follows :-

- (i) Always check with the City Council what consents are needed to erect a sign or advertisement.
- (ii) Take consideration of Local Plan policies (see page 8) and guidance in this note.
- (iii) Attention to detail is important.
- (iv) Ensure that each sign relates fully to its surroundings - each site is different. Factors to consider include scale, positioning, style, materials and colour.
- (v) The provision of signage which is over prominent by means of size, quantity, colour or lighting can lead to ultimately futile competition for attention and a decline in environmental standards.
- (vi) Ensure that signs, or advertisements do not form a hazard, or harm residents amenity.
- (vii) If you propose to alter other parts of the shopfront refer to Guidance Note 3 - Shopfront Design.
- (viii) If you have any questions or difficulties do not hesitate to contact the Council's Planning officers.

5.0 Additional Information Sheets

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5.1 City Council planning policies relating to signs and advertisements.

City of Plymouth Local Plan First Alteration.

The Council's Statutory policies in respect to signs and advertisements are set out in the City of Plymouth Local Plan First Alteration 1996. The policies contained in this document are an important consideration when assessing the acceptability of any proposals.

POLICY AEV34. Proposals for the display of advertisements will be considered on their merits and in the interests of amenity and/or public safety, with due regard to the following criteria:-

1. Signs should be designed and positioned to relate well in scale and form to the land or buildings upon which they are proposed to be displayed.
2. Whilst serving their basic purpose, signs should not be unduly prominent, add to advertisement "clutter" or be detrimental to the character of an area.
3. Sign treatments within predominantly residential locations merit particular care and attention as do those within Conservation Areas and, on or near Listed Buildings (see also Policy AEV37)
4. Advertisements should not create hazards to traffic safety (whether vehicular or pedestrian), or marine safety.

The following types of advertisement are unlikely to be acceptable in the interests of amenity :-

5. Advertisement hoardings in the locations referred to in criterion 3 or as features on any of the City's principal approach roads.
6. 'Sky' signs, neon signs with visible runner-bars, and signs with intermittent illumination.
7. Advertising above fascia level, especially where upper floors are in residential use.
8. Advertisements on flank walls.
9. Flashing or animated advertisements.

The following are likely to be acceptable in the interests of amenity:-

10. Signs which allow an associated reduction in existing advertisement clutter.
11. Appropriately designed and located ground level displays in shopping precincts.

POLICY AEV35. Where, appropriate discontinuance action will be taken against existing advertisement hoardings; and advertisements, signs and shop front canopies in Conservation Areas and on Listed Buildings; that are considered to be detrimental to the visual amenity of the area and/or building.

POLICY AEV37. Internally illuminated fascia, wall, projecting or box signs in Conservation Areas and on/near Listed Buildings, are unlikely to be acceptable in the interests of amenity, except where they are not detrimental to the building or the surrounding area. In particular, all advertising should respect the character of the area or the building.

POLICY AEV39. The environmental and visual quality of the main access corridors will be improved wherever possible. In particular through the implementation of landscaping schemes required by policy AEV38.

5.2 Procedure involved in applying for advertisement consent

1. How do I go about making an advertisement consent application?

Advertisement Consent applications are made on standard forms supplied by the Council. A location plan and illustrative drawings of the proposed signs must be included with the application. Planning officers can help you fill in the application form and offer guidance on the information required. This advice is free.

2. Is there a charge?

There is a charge for Advertisement Consent applications. The charge is made per site or building and is not dependent on the number of advertisements erected. A list of charges is available from Planning Officers.

If you make an Advertisement Consent application and it is decided, on closer examination, that you do not require express consent, your fee will be refunded.

3. How is my proposal considered ?

All applications are carefully considered with reference to the relevant Local Plan policies and any further guidance, such as this note. The City Council is duty bound to make all decisions solely in the interests of :-

- (i) Amenity (which means the visual amenity of the neighbourhood where the advertisements are to be displayed); and/or
- (ii) Public safety (which means the safety of people using any form of travel likely to be affected by the advertisement).

Each application is treated on its merits. The land use and environmental characteristics of an area are important in determining the acceptability of proposed advertisements, however, the nature of nearby signage is not essentially a factor in any decision. This enables the City Council, where necessary, to gradually improve the quality of advertisements in an area without being unnecessarily constrained by the quality and nature of other signs.

The Head of Planning and Transportation Service has, where appropriate, delegated authority to determine Advertisement Consent applications. Those applications which are major, unusual or attract controversy will be considered by a Planning committee comprised of elected Councillors.

4. How long before I receive a decision ?

The Council is required by law to deal with Advertisement Consent applications within a set period (usually 8 weeks). Plymouth City Council seeks to reach a decision before this time period expires, though occasionally this is not possible. Typically, this is the result of the Council needing additional information before being able to determine an application. Discussion with Planning Officers prior to applications being submitted can often speed the process and help overcome potential future problems.

How am I notified on the decision made on my application ?

You (or if relevant your agent) will receive a formal decision notice. If Advertisement Consent is granted it may be subject to certain conditions. Provided you comply with these conditions you can erect your sign or advertisement. The reasons for any conditions will be set out on the notice.

IMPORTANT -you will be expected to carry out the development entirely in accordance with the approved drawings. Should you wish to depart from these at any stage and for any reason it is important that you seek approval for these changes from a planning officer however small these changes may appear.

Unauthorised changes can, if considered harmful result in planning enforcement action being taken against you.

If Advertisement Consent is refused the reasons are also set out on the notice along with your rights of appeal.

If the Council grant consent for the display of an advertisement, the consent usually lasts for five years. After the period of consent expires the advertisement can be retained without submitting a further application. However, if necessary, the Council can take action to have it removed via a Discontinuance Notice. This could be necessary for example, if a street's character changes to such an extent that the continued display of a sign would seriously affect visual amenity.

5.3 Sustainability issues

Introduction

At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, nation states across the world entered into a series of agreements intended to promote "sustainable development". The Summit was held in response to major environmental problems that are facing the planet. "Sustainable development" is concerned with making sure that future generations enjoy opportunities and an environment at least as good as we have, and with providing an environmental quality that, for example, supports clean air and water, safeguards wildlife and enables a good quality of life for all.

One of the main outcomes of the Earth Summit is an action plan for the twenty-first century, known as Agenda 21. This recognises that the sustainability of the planet depends on action taken locally, and Local Authorities are asked to lead a process of producing Local "Agenda 21s". It doesn't matter how small a development is - if designed and implemented in a way which is environmentally sensitive it will contribute to the goal of sustainable development.

The provisions of this planning guidance note have been developed so as to be consistent

with the need for environmentally sensitive development. Some brief guidance on ways in which the developments covered in this Note can be of high environmental standard is given below:

Use of natural resources

Careful consideration of the materials used for your development can help to conserve some of the earth's important natural resources:

1. Rain forests are the richest source of life on earth. They are an important habitat for thousands of plant and animal species. In addition they play a crucial role in regulating the climate and helping to absorb harmful greenhouse gasses. Forestry practices are leading to the destruction of vast areas of the world's rain forest with potentially catastrophic results.

Avoid using tropical hardwoods from unsustainable sources, there are plenty of alternatives - see Friends of the Earth "Good Wood Guide" for further advice.

2. Quarrying and mining for stone, clay and other building materials has a harmful impact on the environment. For example, large parts of the countryside are destroyed, much energy used and ground water polluted.

Consider whether second-hand materials such as bricks or stone can be used in your development. In addition, examine the possibilities of using recycled aggregate for concrete. Wherever possible try to use materials from a local source, thereby reducing the need for transportation and the harm this can cause such as pollution, accidents and congestion.

Energy

Few human activities affect the environment as much as our use of energy. In Britain the generation of energy to meet our needs emits harmful pollutants into the atmosphere. This affects the air which we breathe and contributes to the greenhouse effect and acid rain.

- Ensure that shopfronts are well insulated.
- Consider the use of energy efficient lighting.
- Advice is available from the Plymouth Energy Advice Centre.

Pollution and health

Pollution and health risks can be affected by such factors as the method of design, the building materials used and the nature of construction.

- Avoid asbestos, and materials containing chlorofluorocarbons (CFC's - a greenhouse gas layer, most notably leading to increased instances of skin cancers).
- Use lead free and water based paint.
- Always dispose of oils, solvents and other harmful non-biogradable substances in a safe way-not down drains which leads to the pollution of rivers and the sea.
- Safety glass should be used in risk situations.

Contacts on Environmental Issues

Some useful contacts if you want more information on how to make your development environmentally sensitive are identified below. You can also promote sustainable development by asking potential builders about their environmental policy, and by intergrating environmental requirements into the contract specification.

Plymouth City Council
Civic Centre, Royal Parade, Plymouth PL1 2EW
(tel.01752-668000)
Environmental Planning and Design Section; extn. 4353;
Environmental Services; extn. 4150

Plymouth Environmental Forum
Jaqueline Young, Secretary, Floor 6, Civic Centre,
Royal Parade, Plymouth PL1 2EW
(tel.01725-668000 extn. 4220)

Plymouth Energy Advice Centre
115 Armada Way, City Centre, Plymouth, PL1 1HP
(tel. 0800-512012 freephone)

Friends of the Earth
Heather Wheeler, Co-ordinator,
Plymouth Friends of the Earth,
14 South Hill, Stoke, Plymouth PL1 5RR
(tel. 01752-561568)

National Radiological Protection Board
Radon Survey, National Radiological Protection Board,
Chilton, Didcot, Oxfordshire, OX11 0RQ (for free survey of
house for Radon)

Association for Environmental
Conscious Building
Windlake House, The Pump Field,
Gloucestershire,
GL11 5DX (tel. 01453-890757)

5.4 Further Information and useful contacts

For informal pre-application advice on signs and advertisements, telephone 668000 and ask for :

Extension 4349 (West Plymouth)
Extension 4348 or 4207
(East Plymouth and City Centre)

For advice on proposals in Conservation Areas, or on historic or Listed Buildings, ask for :
Extension 4350

Planning Officers will be happy to help you with any queries you might have.

If you would like to write, address correspondence to :

Planning and Transportation Service,
Plymouth City Council,
Civic Centre,
Plymouth,
PL1 2EW

For information concerning the Planning Guidance Note series contact the Development Plan and Information Section on 668000 (Extension 4573 / 4575)

If you intend to erect a sign or advertisement on a building where the City Council is ground landlord, you should contact the Council's Land and Property Section (Extension 4899)

5.5 The status of guidance notes within the planning system.

City of Plymouth Local Plan.

On 13 May 1996 Plymouth City Council's Planning Committee adopted the City of Plymouth Local Plan First Alteration. The plan sets out the Council's policies and proposals for the development and conservation of land and buildings within the city into the twenty first century.

Chapter 12 (paragraphs 12.6 - 12.7) of the Local Plan states that :

"Only the policies and proposals in the development plan can have a special status in deciding planning applications. However supplementary planning guidance may be taken into account as a material consideration.

All development proposals should, where relevant, take account of supplementary planning guidance (including planning guidance notes and planning briefs) which will be prepared from time to time to amplify and illustrate the statutory policies of the plan".

Guidance note 4 - Shop signs and advertisements

The contents of this guidance note have been subject to widespread public consultation. It was approved by the City Council's Planning committee on the 15th December 1995.

The advice within the guidance note provides amplification to the policies of the Local Plan and is prepared with reference to the content of Central Government Circulars and Planning Policy Guidance Notes.

5.6 Planning Guidance Note Series

On 28 July 1994, the City Council's Planning Committee resolved to prepare a series of guidance notes:-

Phase 1

1. House Extensions
2. House and Roof Alterations
3. Shopfront Design
4. Signs and Advertisements
5. Food and Drink Uses

Phase 3

- Sheltered Housing
- Affordable Housing
- Planning for Access
- Accessible Housing
- Wheelchair Housing
- Planning Out Crime
- Community Benefit and the Impact of New Development

Phase 2

6. Shopfront Securities
7. New Residential Development
8. Conversions into Self-Contained Flats
9. Homes and Hostels
10. Houses in Multiple Occupation
11. Amusement Centres
12. Street Cafes
13. Childcare Facilities
14. Children's Play Areas
15. Public Art in New Developments
16. Energy and Recycling
17. Wildlife and Ecology
18. Car Parking Policies and Standards
19. Archaeology

Phase 4

- Development involving the Loss of Housing
- Working from Home
- Planning and Noise
- Doctor and Dentist Surgeries
- Community Facilities
- Trees and Landscaping
- New Residential Development
- Listed Buildings
- Buildings of Local Interest
- Hotels and Guest Houses
- Industry and Warehousing
- Mini Cab Offices
- Amenity Open Space on Residential Estates

This series of Planning Guidance Notes has and will be will be revised, updated and extended as appropriate, taking into account any changes to the City of Plymouth Local Plan, Government Policy Guidance and changes in Planning Legislation.