

# SHOPFRONT SECURITY IN CONSERVATION AREAS

## CONSERVATION ADVICE NOTE 3

**This planning guidance note aims to explain Lancaster City Council’s local planning policies on shopfront security in a clear and concise format with the objective of improving design standards.**

The purpose of this document is to guide shop owners and shop fitters towards effective security measures for individual premises which also respect the character of the existing building and the street scene.

Lancaster City Council and its partners are committed to tackling crime, enhancing community safety and protecting and enhancing the vitality and viability of district shopping centres. Ill-designed security measures work against the creation of a vital, vibrant and attractive shopping environment and can be counterproductive to the area’s economic viability. Potential investors may be dissuaded from investing and shoppers may be reluctant to visit an environment which is, or appears to be, vulnerable to crime.

This guide is, therefore, designed to assist shopkeepers and property owners by helping them where necessary to make their premises secure but without damaging the ‘safe, inviting and attractive’ atmosphere the Council wants for the District’s centres. It outlines the basic design principles which are encouraged to consider and adopt when planning new shopfronts. It does not intend to remove the need for skilled architectural advice but rather offers a framework within which creative designs can be developed.



Shopfronts in Lancaster’s conservation area, contribute to the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre.

## PLANNING POLICY

### **Policy DM2: Retail Frontages**

Serves to protect and preserve existing retail uses along street frontages from inappropriate or insensitive development, to help regenerate and reinforce the vitality and viability of existing centres.

### **Policy DM5: The Evening & Night-time Economy**

Evening activities contribute to a strong and successful town centre as they extend the area's vitality beyond normal working hours, making town centres attractive places to both live and work. These uses should be appropriately balanced to ensure there is no cumulative negative impact on the character and function of the town centre, crime and local amenity.

### **Policy DM31: Development affecting Conservation Areas**

Development proposals within conservation areas will only be permitted where these preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the area. Proposals will not result in the loss or alteration of features which contribute to the special character of the building and area or result in a detrimental impact on the visual amenity of the conservation area. Where historic shopfronts and windows survive, there will be a presumption in favour of their retention.

### **Policy DM32: The Setting of Designated Heritage Assets**

Development proposals that make a positive contribution to or better reveals the significance of the asset and its setting will be favourably considered.

### **Policy DM35: Key Design Principles**

New development proposals should make a positive contribution to the character and identity of the surrounding townscape, through good design. There should be a regard for local distinctiveness, appropriate siting, layout, palate of materials and scale. Proposals should ensure safety and security are fully considered through the design process.

**In light of the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012, these policies are consistent with the approach taken in many other towns and cities nationally.**

## WHEN IS PLANNING PERMISSION REQUIRED?

Any changes to a commercial property that materially affects its external appearance, including the erection of external shutters or grilles, require planning permission. **There will be a general presumption *against* granting planning permission for external metal roller shutters in Conservation Areas.**

Internal grilles and shutters, films and toughened glass do not generally need consent. **However, installations on a listed building of special architectural or historic importance is likely to require listed building consent, whether external or internal.**

In accordance with the Council's planning policy framework, the following subsections explain the main principles and options that should be considered for improving shopfront security.

## SECURITY BY DESIGN

Security should be viewed as a fundamental part of the design process and not as a last minute add on. Good design can improve shop front security in a variety of ways.

## SECURITY GLAZING

Glass is an integral part of almost all shop front designs, but its qualities and security performance is often overlooked. It is possible to combine both aesthetic and functional requirements through the use of security glass. The installation of security glass does not require planning permission.

- **Toughened Glass**

Toughened glass is five times stronger than ordinary glass of the same thickness and is, therefore, very difficult to break. When it does break, however, it collapses in small and blunt fragments which is safer than sharp shards of glass. In certain situations shatter-proof adhesive may be applied to the surface of glazing to help prevent damage from vandalism.

- **Laminated Glass**

Laminated glass is an alternative to toughened glass as it can be produced in a variety of sizes and thicknesses. It will not shatter on impact due to the manner in which it was constructed. Instead, if attacked with sufficient force it will crack at the point of impact but the remainder of the window will stay intact, preventing illegal entry. Normal trading can also resume relatively unaffected until the damaged glass is replaced.

Where laminated glass is used, the window mullions may need to be strengthened to hold the glass and withstand attack as they are potentially the weakest part of the shop front. The use of security glass does not require planning permission and it has the added benefit of ensuring natural surveillance of the shop interior.

*N.B. The outer pane of glass on double glazed units should be toughened and the inner pane laminated.*

- **Sub-Divided Glazing**

Traditional shopfronts often have much smaller areas of glass divided by reinforced mullions and stallrisers. This is not only visually attractive but helps to reduce the risk and area of breakage.

## PHYSICAL BARRIERS

- **Internal Grilles**

If a higher level of security is desired, one solution would be to install a form of lattice screen behind reinforced glazing. These are installed entirely behind the glass of shop windows and doors and unusually consist of light mesh grilles or lattice roller shutters. Internal screens of this kind are preferred to external screens, due to the minimal effect on the external appearance of the building and the street scene.

The advantage of internal grilles or shutters is that they can be sensitively designed in a variety of styles that respect the size and shape of the window. Internal grilles can also be carefully concealed when not in use during the day by way of an opaque glass transom detail, which in itself can be an attractive feature of the shop front.



A good example of decorative internal grille

Internal shutters are easy to keep clean and in good working order because they are not exposed to the weather. Open lattice shutters and grilles enable a high degree of security whilst also enabling goods to be seen by window-shoppers. If the window itself is made of toughened glass and/or fitted with an intruder alarm system, this can result in a very high degree of security. If the window is broken, the alarm is triggered before the grilles can be penetrated. Another advantage of internal shutters is that they do not require planning permission.

- **Externally Mounted Removable Grilles**

Externally mounted grilles can be fixed to the outside of windows and doors in runners or on hooks and padlocked to the window frame to protect the window once the shop is closed. Grilles should be removed during the hours of business and adequate space for their storage must be provided to prevent clutter to the front of the building.



An example of externally mounted removable grilles that have been designed to complement rather than detract from the shop frontage

Wire mesh grilles allow goods in the window to be seen, provide security to the shop window itself, and are light and easy to handle in fixing and removal. Removable grilles have the advantage of doing away with the box housing, side rails ect, of permanently fixed systems. Traditional recessed shop doorways can be protected and maintained by the addition of a removable 'gate' or grille of a suitable design. Planning permission may be required.

- **External Roller Shutters**

These are a very undesirable solution to security in a Conservation Area as it is important to create an attractive and welcoming street scene. As they are positioned in front of the shop window, external roller shutters are particularly prominent and often require permanent bulky shutter boxes and side runners. If badly designed or located, attractive architectural features can be covered over or damaged. Subsequently, the shop front can become unsightly.

Solid and partly slotted roller shutters dominate the shop front and bring a much harsher, unwelcoming appearance to the street-scene, especially if repeated at several premises. As well as creating a fortress-like appearance, such shutters are liable to attract graffiti and spontaneous damage, prevent window shopping and reduce casual surveillance by the public. The installation of roller shutters can even exacerbate the problem of anti-social behaviour by creating such a hostile looking environment.

In **exceptional circumstances** where there have been regular instances of vandalism and alternative means of security have not alleviated the problems, and the shop is not under surveillance by existing CCTV, then the provision of polycarbonate, perforated (preferably lit from behind) or punched lath shutters, **may** be considered.

In such circumstances the design of the security system should:

- Be integrated into the design of the shopfront;
- Be minimised in scale to protect glazed areas but not the whole shopfront;
- Not stand proud of the fascia nor hide any architectural feature and,
- If possible, utilise any original fascia housing;
- Be free of additional signage;
- And not use plain metal finishes which usually contrast too sharply with traditional shop fronts; anodised or powder coated finishes are preferred.



An example of a well-integrated external roller shutter into the overall design of the shopfront:



## OTHER SECURITY MEASURES

- **Internal Lighting**

Internal lighting can be an effective way to deter criminals at the same time enhancing the appearance of the street scene at night. During closing hours, subtle lighting illuminates the shop interior and encourages people to 'window shop', improving the natural surveillance of the street and reducing the likelihood of anti-social behaviour.

- **Alarm Boxes and CCTV Cameras**

Intruder alarms and closed circuit TV cameras can form part of a successful security package but, again, must be incorporated sensitively into the overall design of the shop front. While they should be visible to act as a deterrent, these security measures should be as unobtrusive as possible. For example, alarm boxes could be fixed to the fascia and painted in a suitable colour. CCTV cameras should be small and can often be site internally. The installation of CCTV cameras will require planning permission.

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