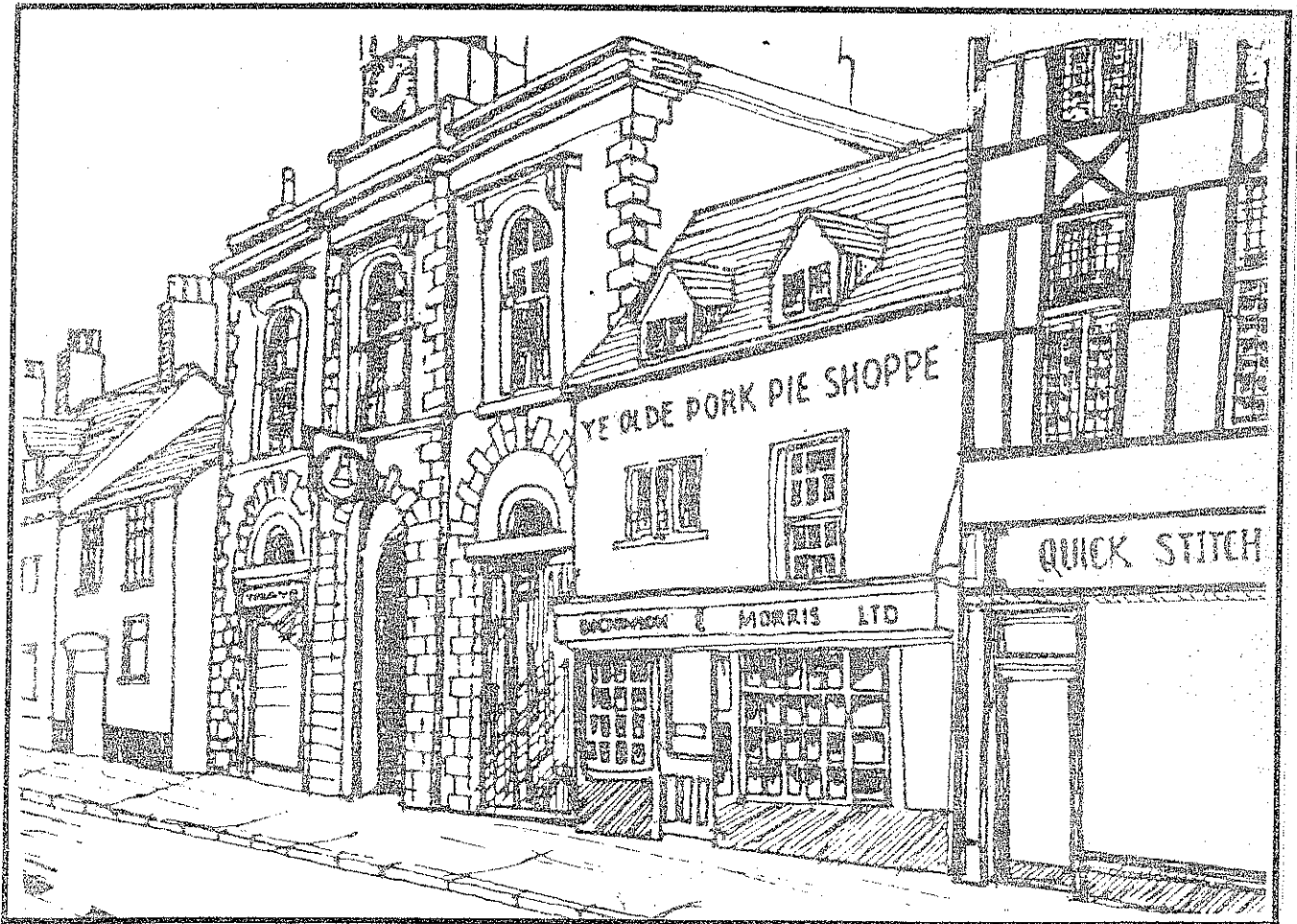


DAVID  
2001

# Shopfront Design Guide



Melton Borough Council  
Conservation Advice Leaflet - 11

## INTRODUCTION

The character of Melton Mowbray as a small market town is expressed in the pattern of streets which have evolved from medieval times and the many attractive buildings that front onto them. The main shopping area focuses on the Market Place where there are a variety of small shops and other commercial premises. The majority are listed buildings of which date from the Georgian or early Victorian period. The entire shopping area is also within the Melton Mowbray Conservation Area.

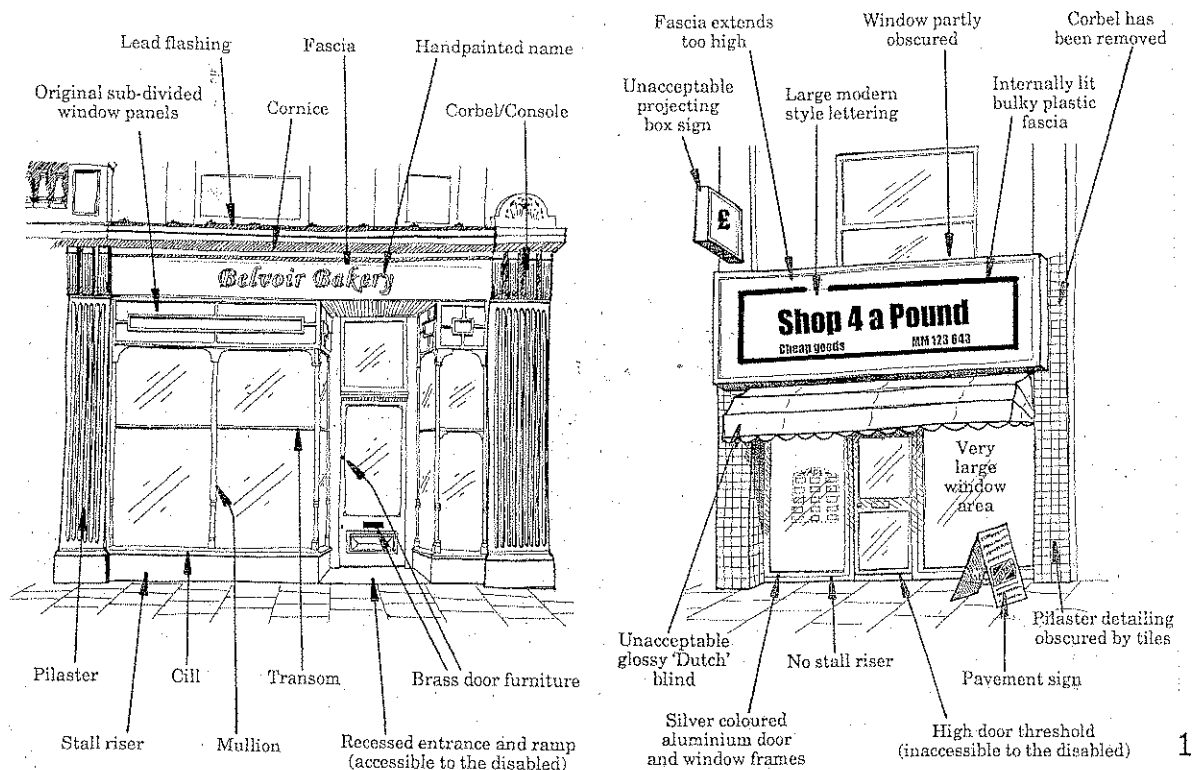
Throughout the years shopfronts have been added to these buildings in various styles and contribute in a unique way to the town centre's character. Some of these are worthy of preservation in their own right. In some instances however inappropriate shop fronts have resulted in the disfigurement of buildings.

The Council wishes to safeguard the conservation area and promote its enhancement by ensuring that new and replacement shopfronts are designed to contribute to the visual qualities and attractiveness of the street scene.

Whilst there has been concern that the insertion of inappropriate shopfronts, the proliferation of garish signs and the use of non-traditional materials is leading to the gradual but steady erosion of the physical and visual qualities that make Melton Mowbray special, efforts are being made to address this problem. Inappropriate alterations invariably have a dramatic impact on ground floor street frontages. Whilst changes to shopfronts will inevitably occur as uses and ownerships change, the overall effect of these alterations will have an adverse effect on the character of our town centre streets.

It is therefore important that changes which do occur are handled in a sensitive and sympathetic manner as they may have an effect not only on an individual building but also on its immediate neighbours and upon the character and quality of spaces around it.

This document is intended as a useful reference on the elements of traditional shop front design, as illustrated below, to guide all developers whose schemes include shopfrontages. The guidance seeks to encourage designers to consider the individuality of each shop front within the streetscene moving away from standardised mass-produced designs and corporate imagery and should be referred to even in cases where consent is not required, in the interest of protecting and enhancing the quality of the shopping environment.



The imposition of corporate colour schemes, corporate styles and logos within historic streets will often have obtrusive and overbearing results which fail to give sufficient attention to the qualities of the location. Whilst Melton Borough Council accept the importance of corporate image, it is considered that in many instances standard designs can be modified to respect the character of the building and its location.

## **DESIGN POLICY**

Shopfronts and signs that are designed with respect for the architecture and character of an area can add to the charm and vitality of a Conservation Area, making it attractive to visitors and shoppers.

Good design should be the aim of all those involved in shopfront developments. Just because a shop is not within a Conservation Area or attached to a Listed Building or not even an historic building is no excuse for poor design or inappropriate materials. The Council therefore intends that this guidance will broadly apply to all shopfronts, old and new, in all areas.

Within shopping areas there are many businesses – restaurants, public houses and financial services which occupy street level frontages, many of which have formerly been shopping premises. Because many of these uses lead to frontages which lack visual interest, this guidance document applies to all business premises occupying street-level frontages.

### **Policy AD5 of the Adopted Melton Local Plan (June 1999) states:**

**"Consent will not be granted for any shop front proposal which is not in keeping with the character of the building to which it would be applied or in visual harmony with adjacent shop fronts and the general street scene".**

## **SHOPFRONT DEVELOPMENT**

The idea of the shopping street with its recognisable shopfronts developed as recently as the late seventeenth century. Typically, these early shops operated from open stalls on the ground floor of town houses. These stalls were later enclosed to protect the seller's goods from the elements and enabled them to be stored in the shop from one day to the next. From this time, shopfront design has undergone a continual process of change influenced by differing architectural styles and adaptation to changing needs. This has produced the rich variety of shopfronts we see throughout the town.

Traditional shopfronts developed around a series of common elements. These comprise:- *the stallriser* which provides a solid base, *pilasters* to either side defining the width, and a *fascia* carrying the trader's name. A *cornice* defines the upper edge and gives a degree of protection from the weather.

Early shopfronts followed classical rules and were generally high quality and well proportioned with some decoration. Later developments remained sympathetic to the classical tradition but proportions were less strictly observed and elements became more decorative than structural.

Recent developments in modern shopfront design have seen the introduction of new materials – anodised aluminium, frameless plate glass, ceramic tiles and sheet plastic. Whilst early shopfronts of the period were often creative, later mass-produced designs completely abandoned the traditional approach and poor designs and inaccurate replicas usually resulted.

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Traditionally, most shopfronts are small, each frontage being separate and with its own individual style, yet respecting the form of the building above and frontages to each side. This gives the shopping street rhythm and harmony without monotony.

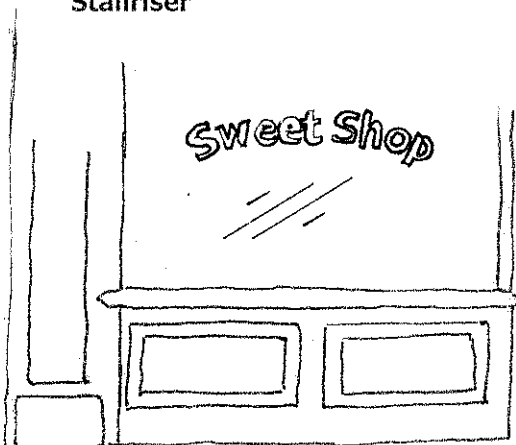
A traditional shopfront is made up of a number of main elements, which give it form and style. These are identified below. The opportunity should be taken to reinstate these features, where missing, in any scheme for a new shopfront.

When designing shop fronts the following are important considerations:

- The character, scale, proportions and detailing of the building above and properties adjacent must be respected.
- The corporate designs of multiple shops should be restrained to respect the individuality of buildings.
- Where a retail unit is proposed which includes more than one individual building or façade, shopfronts should be individually designed for each façade with some form of separation between fascia boards etc. The identity of multiple units can be retained through a unified approach to colour and lettering etc.
- Thoughtfully designed 'modern' shopfronts may be acceptable as long as they respect the architecture and materials of the surrounding building.
- The shopfront provides a physical barrier to protect the seller's goods and also allows the display of these goods to their best advantage. The shopfront also has an important role to play in projecting the image of the shop and encouraging people to enter.

The following detailed design issues are based on traditional shopfront design as this requires particular care, although the guidance applies equally to more modern designs.

### Stallriser



The stallriser is a common feature of 19<sup>th</sup> Century designs and sits below the shopfront to form a solid base, protecting it from knocks and scrapes and improves the proportions of the shopfront. The stallriser also allows the display of goods at waist rather than floor level.

In most cases shopfronts should have a stallriser, the height of which should normally reflect the original design of the shopfront or the general height of risers in the street. They should, however, never be less than 45cm in height. Stallrisers should normally have a moulded projecting sill providing a solid junction with the glass.

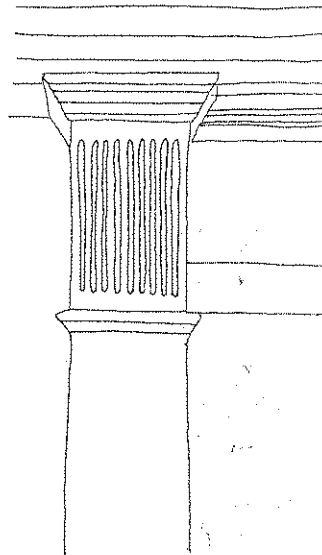
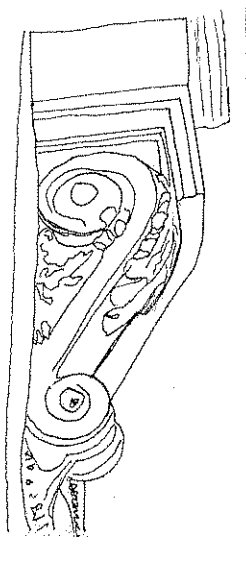
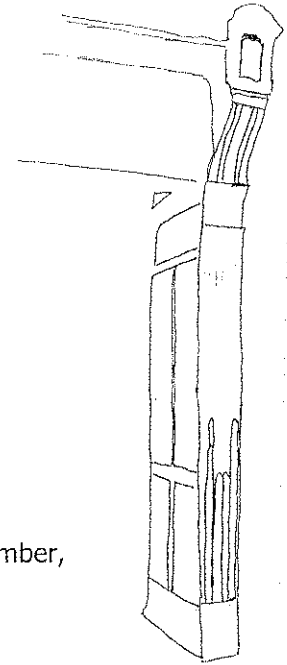
Materials used should reflect those used on the building façade, typically these should be painted timber panelling, tiling, brickwork or render.

## Pilaster and Console Bracket

On a traditional shopfront to either side of the stallriser are the pilasters, narrow columns which define the shopfront width and enclose the window frame. The pilasters also provide visual and physical support to the fascia and building above. At the base, the pilaster normally terminates with a plinth block, whilst at the head, the pilaster has a plain or decorated capital. Often this capital projects as a console bracket (or corbel) to allow the fascia to be inclined at an angle if necessary.

On traditional shopfronts, pilasters should always be retained or reinstated and any concealed detailing exposed but all shopfronts should have columns, piers or pilasters to define and frame the shopfront.

Materials should be in keeping with the rest of the building, usually painted timber, painted stucco, brickwork or render.



## Windows

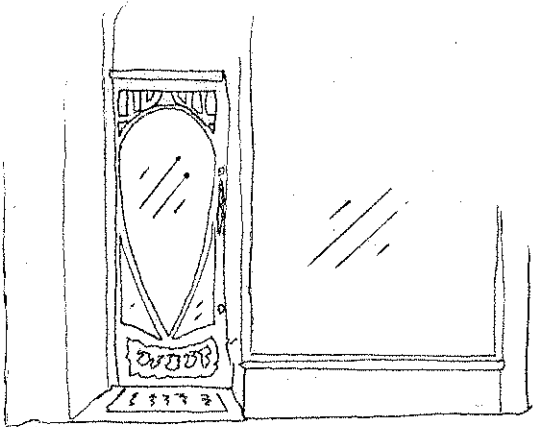
By far the largest proportion of the shopfront is the window area, and its detailing is crucial to the appearance of the shopfront. Extensive areas of glass are not appropriate on Listed Buildings or within the Conservation Area.

The earliest shop windows were characterised by small window panes sub-divided by mullions (vertical glazing bars) and transoms (horizontal glazing bars). This subdivision generally reflected that of the building above. With advances in technology and the removal of excise duty on windows, shopfronts began to incorporate larger panes. Whilst larger panes created greater visual separation between the lower and upper storeys, the proportions of the building as a whole were generally left intact.

The Council will discourage the removal of traditionally detailed window frames and others of architectural quality. Window subdivisions should reflect the character and vertical divisions of the building façade. Timber glazing bars should normally be used to subdivide large expanses of glass, with smaller paned designs more appropriate for earlier shopfronts.

## Doors

Door design typically reflects that of the shopfront. Generally on traditional shopfronts, the door is part-glazed with a lower kick plate of a height around that of the stallriser or window sill. Recessed doorways are a characteristic feature of Victorian and Edwardian buildings which provide a visual break in the shopfront and increase the area of display space. Within the recess, floors are often decoratively tiled.



Shop doors should be designed as an integral part of the shopfront. On traditional shopfronts glazed, panelled, timber doors with kick plate or lower panel, of a style appropriate to the shopfront, are recommended. The colour and materials used should complement those of the window frame.

Recessed doorways which contribute towards the character of the shopfront should be retained. On new designs recessed doorways can add to the attractiveness of a shopfront and can assist disabled access.

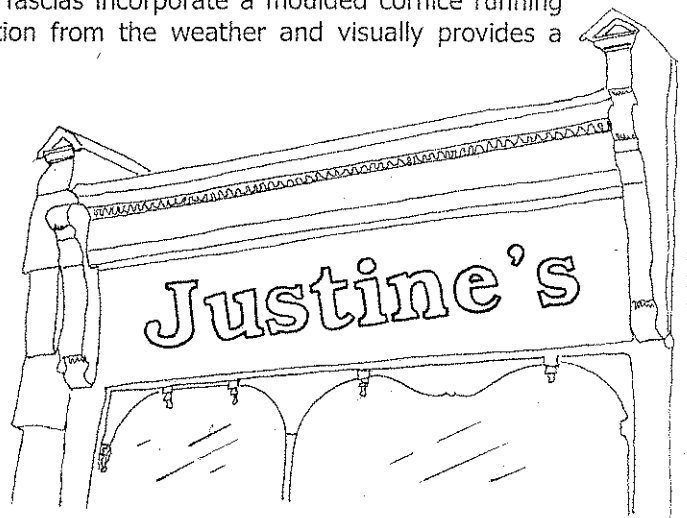
The street elevation often contains a separate doorway providing independent access to the upper floors. To encourage the use of these floors, doorways should be retained and restored to match the adjacent shopfront.

Melton Borough Council will normally resist the removal of an independent access to upper floors as part of refurbishment or new design schemes.

## Fascia Board

The fascia, carrying the name of the proprietor, is often the most prominent element of the shopfront and has to be carefully designed as an integral element of the shopfront and building. Typically in Georgian and early Victorian shopfronts, an upright fascia rests on top of the pilasters, which have either plain or decorated capitals. In later designs, fascias were often canted forwards and contained within the console brackets. Most fascias incorporate a moulded cornice running along the top which gives an element of protection from the weather and visually provides a strong upper edge to the shopfront.

Fascias should generally occupy no more than 10% of the shopfront area and not exceed 45cm in depth. Their maximum height from ground level should not normally exceed 3.5 metres. Many fascias, however, are added to shopfronts which are excessively deep or run continuously over several building frontages. Fascias out of proportion to the shopfront severely disrupt their appearance and should be avoided. In shops with suspended ceilings, methods should be sought to keep the fascia depth to a minimum whilst concealing the ceiling from outside view.



Melton Borough Council will encourage the use of timber fascias on all traditional shopfronts. On other shopfronts within Conservation Areas and on Listed Buildings modern box fascias and materials such as reflective acrylic and other glossy or fluorescent materials should be avoided and their use will be discouraged elsewhere.

## **SHOPFRONT MATERIALS AND COLOURS**

Over the years a range of materials have been used in shopfront construction and decoration and the selection of appropriate materials and colour schemes is very important. The designer must ensure historical accuracy on each shopfront, whilst also ensuring that the result harmonises with its surroundings.

A shopfront should be considered first and foremost as part of the physical fabric of the building. It should not be treated as a total advertisement. In that regard colours should complement the building and harmonise with adjacent shop fronts. Likewise, traditional materials are most appropriate.

In most traditional shopfronts the window frame and glazing bars are constructed in softwood which is both versatile, allowing attractive detailing, and durable. Hardwood was also occasionally used for some high quality Victorian shopfronts, although the recent use of tropical hardwoods is discouraged by the Council for environmental reasons. On more recent shopfronts materials such as black glass, chrome and anodised aluminium have been introduced.

In addition to careful detailing, the appearance of many shopfronts is enhanced by period ironmongery and brassware such as decorative iron panels, door knobs and knockers, door handles and letter flaps. Features such as these should be retained, whilst on new shopfronts, designers should remember to include these features in a contemporary or traditional style, depending on circumstances.

Most traditional shopfronts, with the exception of a few hardwood examples (left unpainted and treated with oils or stains) were designed to be painted. Historically, early shopfronts are found in a limited range of colours with more variety displayed from the nineteenth century. Typically colours such as olive green, terracotta, brown, off-white, dark blue and black were popular, often with the principal elements highlighted in different colours. Faced with so many options, the selection of a suitable colour scheme should be guided by the original scheme or by colours appropriate to the period and styling of the shopfront. The appearance of adjacent properties and the range of colours found close by must also be borne in mind.

## **CANOPIES AND BLINDS**

Retractable sunblinds can contribute to the character of the shopping environment and good examples can be found in the town centre. Plastic 'wetlook' Dutch blinds, balloon canopies and similar are inappropriate. Likewise those which display advertisements, and both will be discouraged.

Canopy side panels should not be used as they can cause obstruction and difficulty for the visually impaired. Any blind, canopy or projecting sign should be no less than 2.3 m above ground level and there should be a minimum of 45cm between the edge of the overhang and the nearest kerbline.

## **ACCESS FOR ALL**

Applications for new shop fronts will be expected to indicate provisions for disabled persons and special user groups. In particular, it will be important to indicate how provision is to be made for wheelchair users, parents with prams/pushchairs, and persons with visual disabilities. Such groups have difficulties negotiating steps and opening doors. This should be given very careful consideration at the design stage and there may be a necessity to try to provide entrance ramps and/or handrails.

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To be safe and efficient entrance ramps should be no steeper than a gradient of 1 in 12. This can have considerable implications on the immediate internal layout and an alternative solution may be to agree minor alterations to the external pavement levels in association with the local highway and planning authority.

Where neither of these is appropriate, eg. a particularly sensitive listed building, then an alternative means of access for wheelchairs/prams should be sought eg. to the side or rear of the building.

## GRANTS

The Borough Council is aware that the cost of maintaining historic buildings can be excessive, therefore, discretionary Historic Building Grants are available towards the cost of repair and maintenance to help retain their traditional character and appearance.

Grants may be available from the Leicestershire Market Towns Retail Development Scheme; details from Kevin Butcher, Rural Community Council, Community House, 133 Loughborough Rd. Leicester – Tel 01162 689703 Email [kbutcher@ruralcc.org.uk](mailto:kbutcher@ruralcc.org.uk)

Shop Front Improvement Grants are available through the Leicestershire Competitive Market Towns Initiative. These grants aim to improve the appearance and utility of the frontages of shops and commercial premises. The Grant can provide funding for repairs to shop windows and doors and for new shop windows and doors. Up to 50% of the costs are available, but not exceeding £2,000 per commercial scheme or £3,000 per voluntary/community organisation. For an application form please contact Melton Town Centre Manager. Tel: 01664 502335/07717 866251 Email: [lhammond@melton.gov.uk](mailto:lhammond@melton.gov.uk)

## ADVICE

Further information may be obtained from Richard Spooner (Conservation Officer), Melton Borough Council, Nottingham Road, Melton Mowbray, Leics. LE3 0UL Tel: 01664 502387

Fax: 01664 410283

Email: [rspooneer@melton.gov.uk](mailto:rspooneer@melton.gov.uk)

## FURTHER READING

The Council has also produced Guides to Shop Front Security and shopfront signage which advise on all aspects of protection for retail properties within the Melton Mowbray Conservation Area.

