

Draft Shop Front Design Guidance for Newcastle-under-Lyme

Purpose of the Report

To seek approval for a Shop Front Design Guidance document (see Appendix 1) as a Planning Practice Guidance Note so it can be used by Development Management officers and applicants to improve the quality of development that affects commercial premises.

Recommendations

1. That the submitted draft document is approved by the Committee for consultation purposes.
2. That a further report is brought to the Committee on the outcome of the public consultation, before the guidance is approved.

Reasons

The document seeks to provide additional information to owners and developers improve the visual quality of commercial premises especially when considering new or existing shop fronts and signage.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Saved Policies of the Local Plan (2011) include policies on shop fronts and commercial premises which seek to encourage the right balance between the need for businesses to advertise and protect their goods and retention of the character and attractiveness of Newcastle town centre and other commercial areas.
- 1.2 Regardless of how Newcastle Town Centre is defined a significant part of it lies within a Conservation Area. There is currently out of date supplementary planning guidance on security shutters for shops and business premises in Conservation Areas. This enhances the Saved Policies in the Local Plan and directs that the Council will refuse applications for solid external shutters and gives guidance on the best way to improve security within Conservation Areas.
- 1.3 The Joint Core Spatial Strategy (2006-2026) seeks to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the historic environment and all heritage assets, that development should meet high quality design standards, as well as providing for a vibrant town centre environment which is uncluttered, accessible and attractive.
- 1.4 The Conservation Area Management Plan for Newcastle Town Centre Conservation Area (Supplementary Planning Document 2008) highlighted a programme of tasks which the Council would deliver. One task was to publish guidance on shop fronts, security shutters and advertisement signs.

2.0 Content of the Guidance

- 2.1 A key purpose of the guidance (in Appendix 1) is to provide technical information to assist architects, developers and Development Management officers when designing and assessing schemes affecting shop fronts. Given the importance of Newcastle Town Centre as an attractive thriving shopping and business centre it was considered important to try and improve on the existing guidance by setting out principles and guidelines the Council will use when assessing applications for shop fronts, including advertisements and security measures in order to prevent further erosion of quality within the town centre.
- 2.2 Advertisements and incremental changes to shop fronts can erode the special character of historic town centres, especially if they are ill-thought out and insensitive, perhaps with poor quality materials. The aim of this guidance therefore is to help owners and developers make better design choices.
- 2.3 Given the Government's advice on ensuring that in all decisions heritage assets are conserved and enhanced in accordance to their significance, it is imperative that full understanding of the heritage assets is gained prior to submission of a scheme and schemes are informed and justified. For example the rhythm of plot widths is a characteristic feature of the town centre and contributes to its character. Any new frontages should respect and reinforce this.
- 2.4 The focus of the guidance is on Newcastle Town Centre which includes the Town Centre Conservation Area but it is intended that the guidance will all apply to shopfronts within the whole borough.
- 2.5 The guidance sets out the evolution of shop fronts including important design elements required when considering a new shop front or alterations to an existing one. The Guide uses visual images and diagrams to help aid understanding and explain further what helps to constitute a sympathetic and high quality shop front for both the daytime and night-time. There is a section on advertisements which explains how a well-chosen advert can help to enhance the business and retain an attractive and safer shopping environment. Finally there is a summary section on the best approach to be taken when considering changes to an existing frontage.
- 2.6 It is envisaged that the document would be a Planning Practice Guidance Note and that whilst it would not form part of the Local Development Framework, it would be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

3.0 Consultation Arrangements

- 3.1 The draft Guidance document will be shared with the business community of Newcastle-under-Lyme through the Chamber of Trade, the Town Centre Partnership, Audley Parish Council and Kidsgrove Town Council and the Locality Action Partnerships for Newcastle South, East and the Partnership of the Western Communities (covering Silverdale, Knutton and Cross Heath). Other groups like the Newcastle-under-Lyme Civic Society and the Council's Conservation Advisory Working Party (CAWP) will be consulted on the document and any views considered and reported formally to the Committee.

- 3.2 In line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (2015) the consultation will be publicised via a press release and social media and an online response form. The consultation will begin in August for six weeks.
- 3.3 The draft guidance will be publicised on the web and made available in Newcastle library, the Council offices and the Guildhall.

4.0 Next Steps

- 4.1 All representations received will be considered and a report submitted to the Committee with recommendations for changes, if appropriate, to the draft guidance. This can be adopted by the Council by the end of 2015 & used as a tool to encourage and promote better design of shop fronts and advertisements.
- 4.2 Whilst the Council are striving to improve both the quality of shop fronts and advertisements, some elements cannot be as carefully controlled or enforced against, for instance the majority of non-illuminated fascia signs have the benefit of deemed consent and applications for signs can only be considered on amenity and safety grounds. This needs to be noted as we do not wish to raise expectations in relation to the ability to refuse planning applications if the guidance is not complied with, particularly if an advert complies with the Advertisement Regulations.
- 4.2 If in the future developers appear to be disregarding the guidance, then consideration will be given to making the guidance into a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). This is not being proposed at this stage partly because the process would further delay the guide, but also this approach provides an opportunity to gather local evidence for the need of an SPD.

5.0 Background Papers

Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan 2011

Core Spatial Strategy 2006-2026

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Urban Design Guidance SPD 2010

Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans for Newcastle Town Centre and Audley

Date report prepared 6th August 2015