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# GUIDE FOR CONVERTING SHOPS TO RESIDENTIAL SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT



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# Guide for Converting Shops to Residential Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page no.</b>
<b>1.0 Introduction</b>	1
1.1 Purpose of the guide	2
1.2 Status of the guide	2
<b>2.0 What permissions and consents are required?</b>	3
2.1 Planning – a. Prior Approval	3
b. Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings and Locally Listed Buildings	3
2.2 Building Regulations	3
2.3 Enforcement	4
<b>3.0 Would a conversion always be appropriate?</b>	5
<b>4.0 What detailed design issues should be considered?</b>	6
4.1 Consider retaining original shop front features	7
4.2 Materials	7
4.3 Relate ground floor features with the upper storeys	8
4.4 Treatment of corner shops	9
4.5 Access	10
4.6 Space standards	10
4.7 Refuse and recycling storage	11
4.8 Privacy, parking and treatment of forecourts	11
4.9 Paraphernalia	12
<b>5.0 Check List of Basic Conversion Principles</b>	13

<b>6.0</b>	<b>Contacts and further advice</b>	<b>14</b>
6.1	Planning	14
6.2	Conservation	14
6.3	Building Control	14

## 1.0 Introduction

The Council recognises the important role that town centres and retail areas can play in the life of the district. Healthy and vibrant shops and businesses are vital to Ashfield’s economy and also help to support related social and cultural activities.

The Council’s planning policies are designed to support and promote the role of town centres and local shopping centres, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation. The emphasis in these areas is on providing an appropriate mix of retail, commercial and leisure uses which provide a good choice of shops and services for shoppers and visitors. The map below shows the location of these areas within the district.



Residential uses are an important element of a diverse and vibrant centre, providing increased activity and customers to an area. However, the location of such uses must be appropriately sited and designed to not impact on the street scene or create conflict between users. The Council considers that retail should form the principle uses within all the District's town centres. Regard should be had to the Ashfield District Retail and Leisure Study (August 2016) or any subsequent update.

Where a retail property has been vacant for a significant period of time, no less than 12 months, there may be an opportunity for conversion to residential. However, a change of use should not adversely affect the local community, and local residents should still have a reasonable range of services within walking distance.

High quality design is important as the conversion will not only impact on the quality of the street scene but could also affect the value of the property.

## 1.1 Purpose of the guide

This guide is intended to provide practical advice for developers who are considering converting a shop (generally A1 to A5 Use Classes<sup>1</sup>) to a house or flat. It will help applicants understand where this change of use may be appropriate and where it will not. It will also give general and detailed design advice to help you achieve a quality conversion, and highlight the issues that the Planning and Building Control teams look for when considering the application.

## 1.2 Status of the guide

This document provides informal guidance that supports saved Policy ST1 – Development of the Ashfield Local Plan Review, 2002, which states that development must not adversely affect the character, quality, amenity and safety of the environment.

The guidance also supports the Governments clear direction to ensure that buildings and places are designed to a high quality. The NPPF sets out in para.130 that:

*“Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents”*

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<sup>1</sup> Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 as amended.

## 2.0 What permissions and consents are required?

### 2.1a Planning - Prior Approval

Subject to certain criteria, the conversion of a retail unit to residential is permitted development and therefore planning permission may not be required. However, there is a requirement to submit an application for Prior Approval, which only takes into account certain matters, such as design.

It is therefore important for all applicants to contact the Councils Duty Planner to see if their proposals meet the Permitted Development criteria. This service provides advice on the process of making an application and offers the applicant the opportunity to discuss their proposals before submitting. The Planning team's contact details can be found in section 5, or alternatively details are available on the [Council's web site](#).

### 2.1b Planning - Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings and Locally Listed Buildings

If the shop is in a Conservation Area, is a Listed Building or is a Locally Listed Building, an application can be made for the conversion under the normal planning process. However, there are additional controls in these circumstances and the Council will wish to ensure any alterations do not harm the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, or the special interest and significance of a Listed Building or Locally Listed Building, and will require alterations to be sympathetic to the original building and be of a high design standard. The Planning Team can advise whether a shop is in a Conservation Area or is a Listed Building or is Locally Listed and give advice on appropriate conversions along with the Council's Conservation Officer. See section 5 for contact details, or alternatively details are available on the [Council's web site](#).

## 2.2 Building Regulations

When the use of a building changes from non-residential to residential, Building Regulations Consent will always be required. The regulations are quite complex and it is prudent to seek advice in advance. The Council offers free pre-application advice service for Building Regulations and anyone thinking of changing the use of their building is encouraged to take advantage of this service.

Some issues to consider are the need to upgrade the fire resistance of the building, the requirement to have safe means of escape from all areas (plus an appropriate fire alarm system), providing sound insulation between separate living areas and upgrading the building so that it provides good standards of thermal insulation.

For further advice on the process please contact the Council's Building Control team. Contact details are in section 5, or alternatively details are available on the [Council's web site](#).

## 2.3 Enforcement

For both Planning and Building Regulations it is important that an application is made for any necessary permissions, as not doing so may result in enforcement action being by the Council. Any works carried out to a listed building without Consent is a criminal act and could result in prosecution.

### 3.0 Would a conversion always be appropriate?

Ashfield's town centres and local centres are economically and socially important to the district. In the town centres of Hucknall, Kirkby in Ashfield and Sutton in Ashfield, the Council will look to protect retail uses, and conversions of ground floor shops to residential accommodation will not normally be permitted. Outside town centres there may however, be opportunities to convert shops to homes providing the basic principles listed on page 13 are met.

Conversions may be appropriate dependant on the following criteria:-

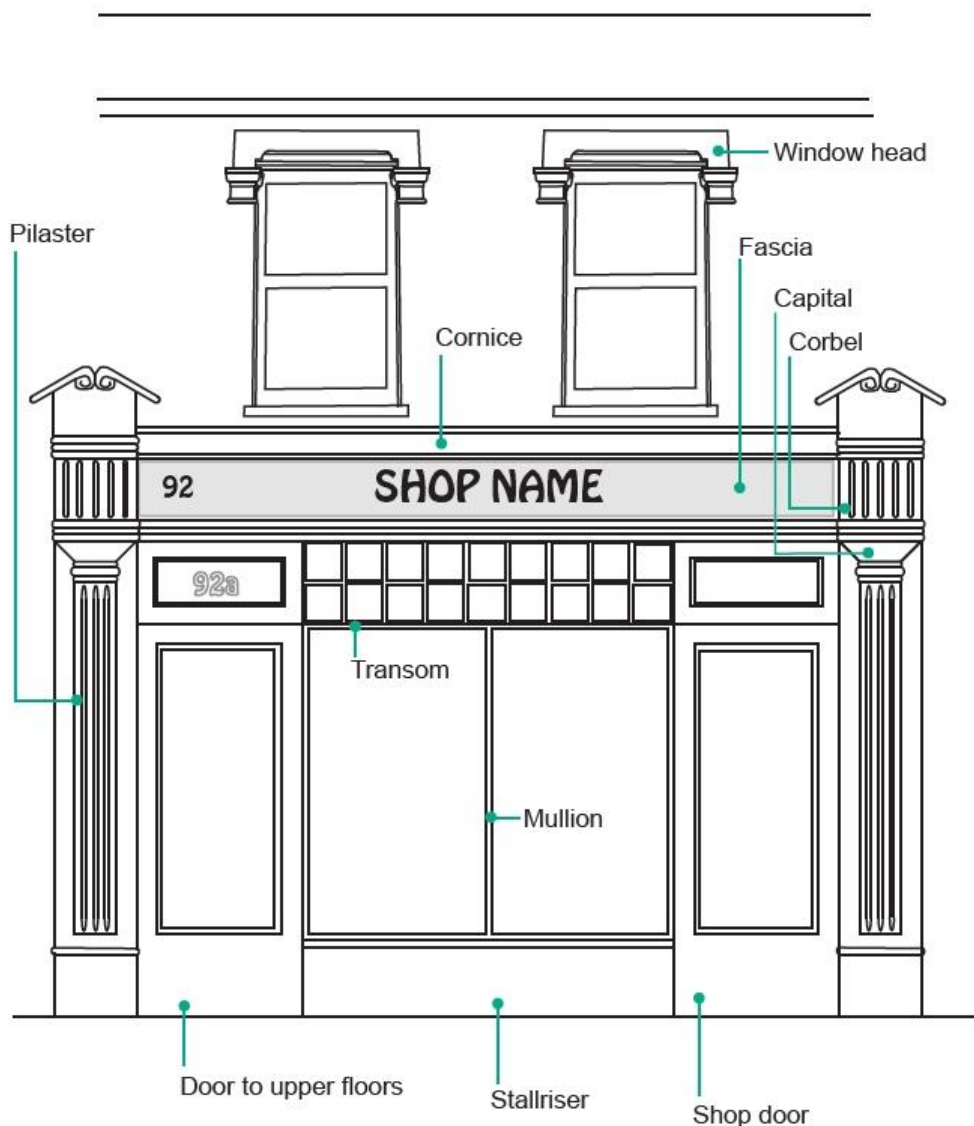
- **Character:** The level of retail activity (including concentration and clustering) and the general nature of an area would be considered, and conversions that harm the character of the area will not be permitted.
- **Community:** The conversion would need to leave a reasonable range of shops within walking distance for local residents.
- **Amenity:** The quality of the living environment will be considered. Issues such as the level of activity both during the day and evening; noise; traffic congestion; proximity to a bus stop; and width of footway in relation to residential privacy will be used to determine whether ground floor living accommodation would be appropriate.

## 4.0 What detailed design issues should be considered?

Once a conversion is considered acceptable in principle, the Planning team will then look at the design of the conversion. Elevation drawing will be required as part of any application, together with details of the materials to be used in the conversion.

Shops by their nature are usually in highly visible locations often on main routes, particularly corner shops. It is therefore essential that the design of the conversion is of the highest quality to ensure it makes a positive contribution to the street.

There are some key design principles that will lead to a visually successful conversion. The following diagram shows the location of the main features of a traditional shop front.



(Image taken from Waltham Forest Guide for Converting Shops to Homes)

## 4.1 Consider retaining the original shop front features

Where an original shop front that retains most, if not all, its original features exist, the Council may encourage its retention, in particular where it makes an important contribution to the character of the area. In these instances and where privacy is an issue, the lower section of the shop window could be covered by blinds, internal shutters, louvres or frosted/ etched glass.

In some cases only the cornice, fascia, corbels and pilasters of traditional shop fronts should be retained, particularly where the ground floor projects out from the upper floors. This will bring a natural divide between the old and the new, and reference the building's heritage.



Original features retained, including:

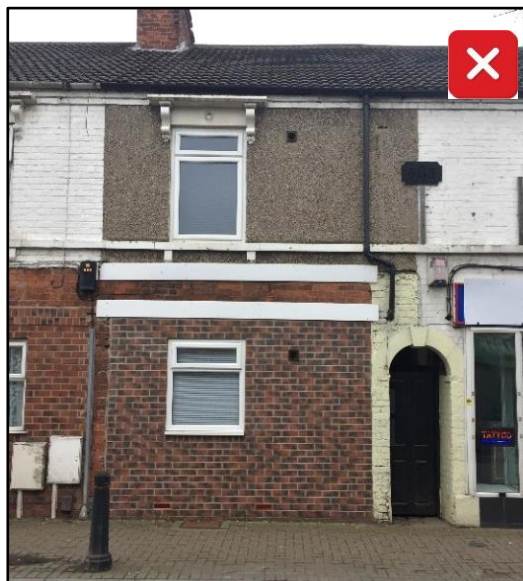
- Cornice
- Fascia
- Corbels
- Pilasters
- Stallriser.

Original windows are retained and frosted glass is used to provide privacy.

(Photograph taken from Waltham Forest Guide for Converting Shops to Homes)

## 4.2 Materials

The choice of materials is of vital importance to any design. Where the conversion forms part of an existing building, particular care should be taken to ensure that the materials chosen match or compliment the existing ones. Where materials cannot be matched, it may be necessary to re-treat the whole building frontage, for example through rendering, however this will only be considered favourable if this is typical of the area.



- Poor match of brick.
- Poor match of mortar.
- No consideration of how to treat fascia – UPVC cladding.
- No direct front access.
- Poor window alignment and proportions.
- Poor consideration of rainwater goods/services.

### 4.3 Relate ground floor features with the upper storeys

In order to achieve a balance in the building façade, it is important to relate the ground floor features with those above. The following images show how this can be achieved.



Existing arrangement



Preferred arrangement. Lower floor windows are aligned with the upper floor and window heads are replicated.



Existing arrangement



Preferred arrangement. Lower floor windows are aligned with the upper floor and window heads are replicated.

#### 4.4 Treatment of corner shops

Corner shops are by their nature in prominent locations. It is therefore essential that the conversion is of the highest quality.

Corner buildings also provide a good opportunity to bring natural surveillance to the street and therefore should have ground floor windows on both elevations where possible.



Existing arrangement

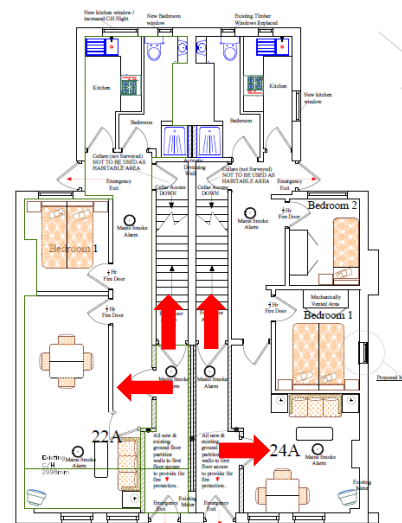


Preferred arrangement. Lower floor windows are aligned with the upper floor and window heads are replicated.

## 4.5 Access

To encourage street activity and give greater security for residents, doors should be provided at the front of the property (or side of the building in the case of corner shops) rather than from the rear.

Where there is more than one residential unit a decision may need to be made on whether to install one or two doors. Private entry for each unit is preferable however some facades are too narrow and will look out of balance with more than one door. Where this is the case, a single shared external door should be provided with internal private doors to each flat.



This conversion follows the basic principles, with 4 apartments accessed by 2 front doors.

Doors should open out to ensure easy exit in the case of fire. Thresholds should be level and doors should have a clear open width of no less than 900mm to enable easy access for wheelchair users and those pushing a pram or trolley.

## 4.6 Space standards

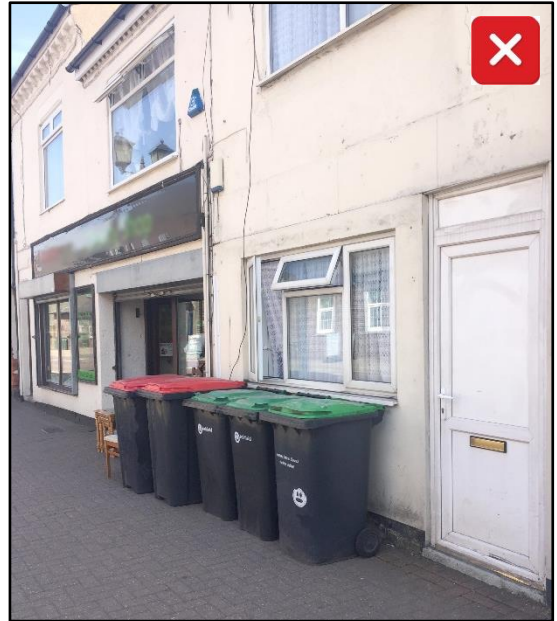
The Council will be keen to ensure your conversion provides adequate internal and external space for residents. Minimum standards have been set out in the Council's [Residential Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document \(SPD\), November 2014](#). Regard to the SPD, or any subsequent update, should be taken into account at an early stage of the design process.

## 4.7 Refuse and recycling storage

It is important to consider how new residents will store their rubbish. Poorly sited or designed recycling and refuse storage has the potential for considerable adverse impact on the visual appearance and general amenity of an area, for both residents and the passing public.

Bins standing permanently on the street can obstruct the footpath. This can be particularly problematic for wheelchair users and people with pushchairs.

Unpleasant odours emanating from bins and storage areas can blight the amenity of adjoining occupiers.



In some instances, forecourts can be converted to front gardens (see section 4.8 below) and designed to accommodate bins. However, where this is not feasible, consideration should be given to a store inset into the facade, or internal storage where appropriate.

The Council may refuse permission for conversions that have inappropriate refuse and recycling storage.

## 4.8 Privacy, parking and the treatment of forecourts

Privacy of residents should be considered when drawing up proposals for a conversion. Where the shop has a forecourt, the area should be separated from the pavement by a low wall or other appropriate boundary treatment and landscaped to create a front garden. This will bring greater privacy for the resident and enhance street quality.

The uses of rooms next to the pavement also have an impact. For example bedrooms and bathrooms require greater privacy than a lounge or kitchen, and so should not be positioned at the pavement edge of the building.

Some forecourts are used for parking. This can often spoil the appearance of the street and cause conflict between cars and pedestrians. Where this applies to a proposal, parking may not be appropriate.

## 4.9 Paraphernalia

Paraphernalia such as meter boxes, gases pipes, satellite dishes etc. can have an adverse effect on both the individual property and the street scene as a whole. Paraphernalia must not proliferate the front elevation and should be well considered at an early stage in the design and conversion process.

The colour of additional paraphernalia can be important. For example, white apparatus may blend in with a white background but may be more obvious against darker backgrounds, such as brick or stone.



Poorly sited and designed meter boxes can spoil the appearance of the street and the property its self.

## 5.0 Check List of Basic Conversion Principles



1. Retain as much of an original, tradition shopfront as possible, remembering the general rule of “cornices, corbels and pilasters should be retained”.
2. Ground floor windows and doors should normally be aligned with upper windows, using centre lines and window edges.
3. The shape and style of upper floor windows should be followed. This will include window heads which can be used above windows and doors. Window heads are particularly important as they are often dominant features of the façade.
4. Window reveals (how deep the window is sunken into the façade) should be the same at ground floor as they are at upper floors.
5. The door should be recessed at least as much as the window reveals.
6. Ground floor materials (such as brickwork) should be ‘matched’ to upper floors. Many brick suppliers provide a ‘matching’ service that can help with this. The builder should also be instructed to follow the brick arrangement (usually referred to as bonding pattern) and mortaring style of upper floors. Rendering will not be considered favourably unless this is typical of the area.
7. Limit the number of doors on the front elevation, a single door is usually the ideal.
8. Refuse and recycling storage should be integral to the design. Where there is a forecourt, this may be converted to a front garden and designed to accommodate bins. Where this is not possible, consideration should be given to a store inset into the façade, or internal storage where appropriate.
9. Resident privacy and parking should be considered at an early stage. Where a shop has a forecourt, the area should be separated from the pavement by a low wall or other appropriate boundary treatment and landscaped. Bedrooms and bathrooms should not be positioned at the pavement edge of a building as these rooms require greater privacy.
10. Paraphernalia such as meter boxes, gases pipes, satelite dishes etc. do not proliferate the font elevation and have been well considered.

## **6.0 Contacts for further advice**

### **6.1 Planning (Development Management Team)**

For pre-application advice and advice on the process on making an application.

Tel: 01623 457388

Email: [dutyplanner@ashfield.gov.uk](mailto:dutyplanner@ashfield.gov.uk)

Postal Address: Ashfield District Council,  
Urban Road,  
Kirkby In Ashfield,  
Nottinghamshire,  
NG17 8DA.

### **6.2 Conservation (Forward Planning Team)**

For advice on whether your shop is a Listed Building, Locally Listed or in a Conservation Area.

Tel: 01623 457383

Email: [planning.admin@ashfield.gov.uk](mailto:planning.admin@ashfield.gov.uk)

Postal Address: Forward Planning Team,  
Ashfield District Council,  
Urban Road,  
Kirkby In Ashfield,  
Nottinghamshire,  
NG17 8DA.

### **6.3 Building Control**

For advice on how to make a Building Regulations application.

Tel: 01623 457389

Email: [bcadmin@ashfield.gov.uk](mailto:bcadmin@ashfield.gov.uk)

Postal Address: Building Control Section,  
Ashfield District Council,  
Urban Road,  
Kirkby In Ashfield,  
Nottinghamshire,  
NG17 8DA.

ASHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL  
URBAN ROAD  
KIRKBY IN ASHFIELD  
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