

## Converting street-level commercial premises to residential use

In a constantly changing economic climate, shops, pubs and ground floor offices are often converted to homes, entailing the removal of former shopfronts and the construction of new ground floor frontages. Successful conversions are plentiful in Portsmouth, but some are less effective because they lack regard for the floors above, thereby losing an opportunity to improve the appearance of the building as a whole.

It is vital to think carefully about how best to replace the shopfront (a term that in this document also denotes a pub or office frontage), as the quality of the property's ultimate appearance will not only affect its contribution to the visual appeal of the street but also the value of the property itself. The purpose of this advice note is to provide some ideas about how best to proceed – and how pitfalls can be avoided.

The following points are the main issues that should be considered when planning a new frontage in place of a commercial frontage:

- How the conversion relates to the floors above
- How access to the flats above is incorporated
- Whether the shopfront itself should be kept.

This document also outlines common mistakes to avoid making, and includes examples of good practice in Portsmouth and Southsea.

The conversion of commercial premises to residential use will always require planning permission, so it's worth speaking to a planning officer about your ideas before applying for permission, in order to gauge the likelihood of approval. For example, if shop premises lie within a designated shopping centre this may have a bearing on the acceptability of the proposal.



## Relating the conversion to the floors above

By following the two simple guidelines below, many of the most commonplace errors that are made when converting commercial premises to residential use can be avoided:

- Use the windows above as a key reference point. Try and follow their shape and style.
- Use the same materials as the floor above, e.g. facing brick or render and match them as closely as possible.

In other words, don't just look at the ground floor in isolation; it's important to look up.



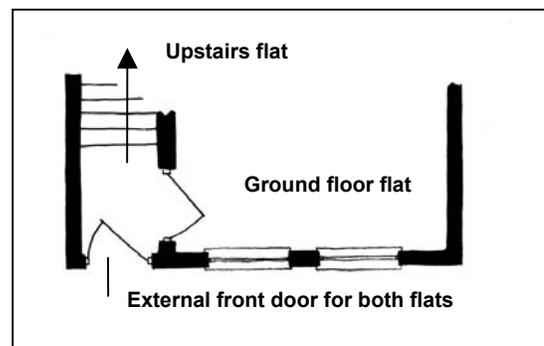
▲ The existing bay window has been continued at ground floor beneath the canopy of the projecting shopfront. A new boundary wall encloses the front forecourt and the dwelling now looks wholly residential.



▲ The shop surround has been retained but the new windows and door reflect the Victorian styling of the property.

## Incorporating access to the flats above

Access should always be provided to existing flats above to ensure they are usable and not left vacant. It is better to access all flats from the street rather than from the rear of the building, for security reasons. However, having two front doors on a narrow frontage is unlikely to be visually satisfactory. This can be prevented by having a single front door for the whole property with the individual flats accessible through their own internal front doors.



## Should the shopfront surround be retained?

When deciding whether a shopfront's surround should be retained, a general rule of thumb is: if the new ground floor frontage is on a different vertical plane to the floors above, elements of the shopfront should be retained in order to mark the break in the elevation.

But if the new ground floor frontage is on the same plane as the floors above, the shopfront could be removed and the ground floor frontage installed to closely match the floors above. The aim is to make the property look as if it has always been a residential property – if the exterior is already flush, one shouldn't be able to 'see the join' once the amendments have been carried out.

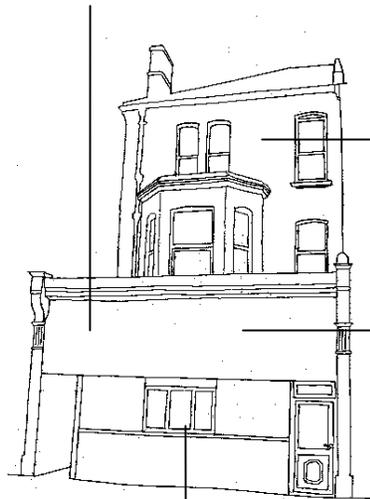
It is worth making an exception, though, if the shopfront surround is attractive and worth retaining in its own right because of what it will add to the property's visual appeal and character.

## Common mistakes to avoid making

Many conversions are implemented without consideration of the simple principles that form the basis of these guidelines, thereby forsaking the benefits of improving both the aesthetic and monetary value of the property, as well as the visual appearance of the whole street.

The two examples below highlight some of the most common pitfalls in the design of commercial-to-residential conversions.

This large former shopfront has almost become a vast blank façade, because the size of the window is so frugal, relative to the rest of the in-fill



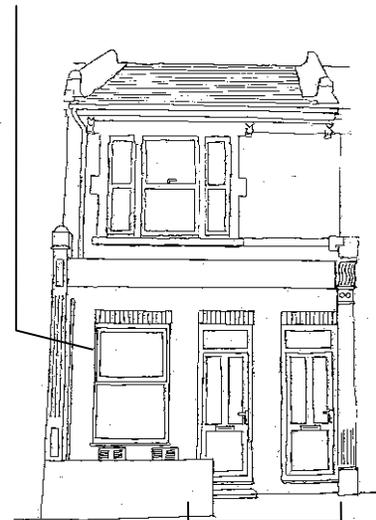
(Surface consisting of white painted brick)

The façade is divided into three panels, none of which match the material and treatment above. Instead, the surfaces consist of vertical tile-hanging (large top section), render (middle section), and standard unpainted brick (bottom section)

As well as being too small for the space provided, the window shape ('landscape') bears no relation to those above ('portrait')

UPVC door fails to add visual embellishment

In this instance, due regard has been given to ensuring the new window refers to that above...



...but the success of the conversion is jeopardised by allowing two adjacent front doors to occupy so much space on so narrow a frontage

## Examples of good practice in Portsmouth and Southsea

Before ▾



After ▾



It is always advisable to check with the Planning Service prior to carrying out alterations to shopfronts. For advice, please call **023 9283 4334**.

For information in large print, Braille or tape, call **023 9283 4334**.

For translated information, call **023 9284 1651** for Bengali, or **023 9284 1652** for Cantonese.

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樸茨茅斯市政府的一切資料，均備有翻譯本、大字書刊或映音帶，如有需要，請致電... **023 9284 1652**