

LEITRIM COUNTY  
COUNCIL

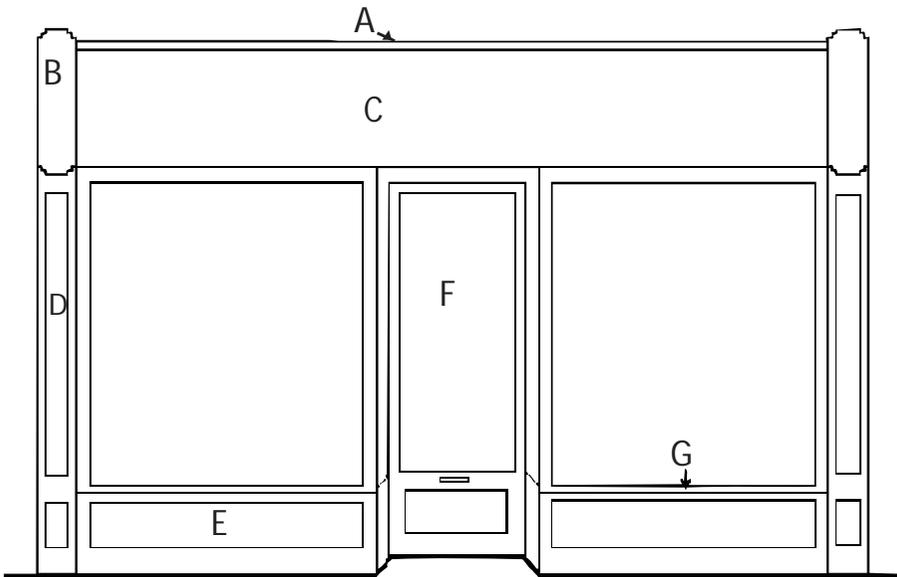


GUIDELINES ON  
SHOPFRONT DESIGN

OCTOBER 2003

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## General Considerations

*A - Cornice      B - Capital      C - Fascia      D - Pillaster*  
*E - Stall riser      F - Recessed doorway      G - Window cill*

## Traditional Shopfronts

Traditional shopfronts are frequently based on classical architectural features, adapted to the practical needs of shops and by changing fashion. A typical shopfront would comprise a display window (often divided with decorative glazing bars or mullions and transoms) surrounded by a stall-riser below, pilasters on each side, and a fascia (for signage) above. The door was often recessed beside the window. Decorative corbels or consoles were used at each end of the fascia. Good proportions



and attractive designs were achieved by following these principles. The style of decoration has varied over the years, and at different periods classical, gothic, art nouveau and other styles have been used.

### **Original Shopfronts**

In general original shopfronts that display good design characteristics and add to the streetscape should be retained and renovated. In some cases an original shopfront may be hidden behind a modern version. Where appropriate, any surviving elements of an original shopfront should be retained and incorporated into the design of the new shopfront. Reproduction of missing period features is to be encouraged

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*Original Shop Front*



*Existing Shop Front*

## **Modern Shopfronts**

In the case of modern shopfronts, creative interpretation of traditional design principles can create innovative designs, so generating visual interest whilst not detracting from the property or area generally. While it is accepted that some retailers wish to trade on the basis of a retailer's corporate identity, this should be balanced against the need to enhance the quality of an individual property or shopping area.

## **General**

The following is a set of guidelines to ensure that all shop fronts are of a high-quality design and that they can make a positive contribution to the street scene. It is not intended to stifle original design, but aims to establish general principles, which, if followed, should result in an attractive, well-designed frontage.



Particular attention to design is required in the treatment of shop fronts on listed buildings and within conservation areas. The design of the Shopfront should be derived from, reflect and harmonise with the character age and materials of the building as a whole as well as seen in the wider context of the area within which it is located.

## **Key Design Considerations**

### **1. Access**

Provision should be made at the design stage to ensure a safe, independent access for all persons. Particular cognisance should be taken of the requirements of persons who may have mobility or visual impairments. In this regard, shopfronts should comply with the requirements of Part M of the Building Regulations. The Council would advise that whilst the requirements of Part M are the minimum legal requirements that must be achieved, it is considered desirable that designers would aim to exceed these requirements wherever practicable. The Council has adopted the Barcelona Agreement and in this regard all developments should be so designed so as to ensure compliance with the spirit of the Agreement, and thus allow safe, independent and equitable access to all public facilities and areas, regardless of a persons physical abilities.

### **2. Relationship of Shopfront to Building Overhead**

The design of a new shopfront should relate to the architectural characteristics of the building of which it forms part. It should relate sympathetically to the upper floors in structural concept, proportion, scale and vertical alignment. Existing features of the building such as string courses, arches, plaster detailing or existing fascias and pilasters provide an opportunity to pick up and identify elements to be reflected in the design of the shopfront. Texture and colour of materials are important considerations in integrating new shopfronts with older buildings.



### **3. Relationship of Adjoining Buildings**

New shopfront design must respect the scale and proportions of the streetscape by maintaining the existing grain of development along the street and respecting the appropriate plot width. Large expanses of undivided glass should be avoided. Long runs of horizontal façades should be broken up by elevational modelling and vertical division or features. It is important to relate to the fascia heights of adjacent shops.

### **4. Shopfront Framework**

It is important to create a good visual frame for the shopfront. This will generally be formed by the pilasters, fascia and stall riser. A successful framing helps to contain the shopfront, and provides a context for composing the shopfront elements within.

### **5. Materials**

The choice of materials should complement the architectural character of the building and integrate with the overall visual unity of the street scene. The decision to build a traditional shopfront or a modern one will, to a large extent, dictate the type of materials used. Timber is the most appropriate material in historical buildings, but a high level of attention to detail and standard of craftsmanship is required. The Council seeks to encourage more examples of well-designed, imaginative, shopfronts.

Some materials, including plastics, reconstituted stone, and aluminium, can look visually bland especially when used in a single plane. They can be improved with the introduction of effective modelling, detailing, and the use of appropriate

features. Modern-style shopfronts tend to use a severe framing combined frequently with a simple glass screen or butt-jointed glass planes. Existing stone fascias and pilasters provide excellent framings, within which a modern treatment can be inserted, the older traditional materials providing a good foil for modern display and lighting.

## **6. Stall-Risers**

It is desirable to provide a stall-riser on shopfronts of at least 600 mm in height for visual reasons and to provide security, protection from fouling by dogs and splashing from the feet of passers-by. This should be carried out in a durable material. The use of the public footpath for security stanchions or roller shutter fittings/fixtures is not acceptable. The stall-riser frequently aligns with the plinths of the pilaster. A stall-riser also increases security, reducing the likelihood of the shopfront being rammed by vehicles in order to gain access to the goods on display. Timbers should never run directly to the ground. If timber stall-risers or pilasters are preferred, a small, stone, recessed plinth should be provided between the timber and the ground.

## **7. Fascia**

The design of the fascia is a key element in shopfront design. In traditional shopfronts the depth of the fascia, i.e. from the cornice to the top of the window, is always quite small. In the main streets of the town centre, the overall height of the shopfront is frequently between 4 and 5 metres. The potential for elegance and verticality can be exploited by running the window high up to the underside of a narrow fascia band.



The existence of an over-deep fascia area can completely spoil shopfront proportion. Overall fascia panels should be provided as an integral part of the shopfront, and should be of a depth appropriate to the size of the building and the proportion and the length of the shopfront. The construction of fascias extending above the level of first-floor window sills, and the obscuring and defacing of windows or other architectural details, such as string courses, friezes, cornices, is unacceptable.

## 8. Fascia Lettering

The fascia contains the main shop name, and the design of the lettering should be an integral part of the shopfront design. The use of Irish in shop names is encouraged by the Council. Generally, individually mounted lettering or hand-painted lettering is required. Letters of more than 400 mm in height will not normally be acceptable. Letter design should be simple and legible. If spotlights are used, the arms should

be short and the hoods of the lights treated to match with the background. The advertisement of brand products on the fascia is not encouraged. Any other corporate advertising signage will be strictly controlled and where permitted must be discreetly integrated into the overall design of the building.

## **9. Security**

Shutters should be provided in such a way that no part of the shutter or its casing extends beyond the face of the building. The ideal location for the shutter is behind the window display area. In cases where this is not possible, provision should be made for roller shutters behind the line of the glazing, where open-grille shuttering or a see-through screen should be used. Recent developments include the design of a lightweight see-through screen which can be fitted to most existing shutter housings. In the case of external shutters, they should be treated with a colour to match the colour of the main shopfront materials, prior to erection. No security fittings should be visible during opening hours. The use of traditional timber shutters which are much more sympathetic to the character of the shopping area after closing time will be encouraged. As the image of a street is often reinforced by after-hours window shopping, the use of shutters should be delayed as late as possible.

Alarm boxes should be sensitively designed and located on the building. Wiring should be integrated and redundant wiring removed. Wiring ducts should not be planted onto the face of the building.

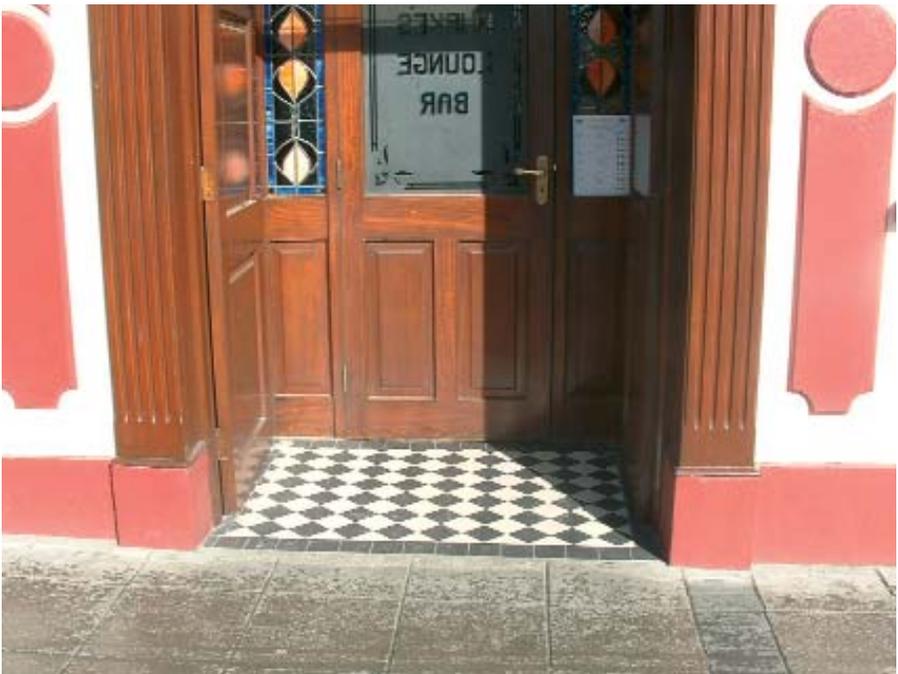


## 10. Flooring Material

The flooring material at the entrance to the shop has an important visual impact. The pattern, colour and texture should complement the overall shopfront, and provide an attractive link with the interior treatment. The light-coloured, small-scale ceramic tiles used extensively are not the most appropriate. Stone materials are preferable. Flooring should be non-slip and steps should be avoided.

## 11. Window Frames, Doors and Entrances

Timber window frames are appropriate in a traditional context, and also work well when combined with stone. Modern materials may be acceptable, depending on the situation and the finish used. In a modern shopfront, door handles can be



creatively used to introduce a feature. The size of door opening in a shopfront depends on the relationship of the opening to the width of the shopfront. Doors should be sufficiently wide to facilitate access for all.

## **12. Colour**

Strong colours are a feature of traditional shopfronts. The colouring of a shop should be determined by the need to harmonise with the rest of the building and the streetscape. Generally, timber work should be painted, with detailing picked out in a contrasting colour.

## **13. Canopies**

If sun canopies are required, they should be incorporated into the design of the shopfront with the blind box recessed. Traditional-style, canvas, open-ended blinds are acceptable. Perambulator-style, closed-end canopies, which seriously reduce the view to adjacent shopfronts, are also out of character with the Irish-style shopfront. Advertising on the blind is not permitted.

## **14. Projecting Signs**

When projecting signs become over-used in a locality they become counter-productive, and, in the process, destroy the streetscape. In general, they must be severely limited to protect the environmental quality of the streetscape and the character of individual buildings. Where they are appropriate, they should be of high-quality materials and design. Hand-painted timber (or stove enamelled metal) signs are superior to the general run of plastic-style signs. Internally lit neon



signs, flashing, reflectorised or glitter type signs located on or visible from the exterior are unacceptable. Signs and advertising of excessive size or number, or projecting above the parapet/eaves height or outside the bulk of the building are unacceptable. Obsolete signs should be removed.

### **15. Corporate Images**

Commercial interests which have adopted a corporate image will not necessarily be allowed to use their standardised shopfront design, 'corporate colours' and materials. Compatibility with individual buildings and with the street scene will be considered more important than uniformity between the branches of one company.

### **16. Planning Permission.**

Planning Permission is required for any works that materially affect the external appearance of a shop. For example: altering the size of the window, installing a new shopfront or an external shutter. The display of flags, bunting, banners, coloured lights, neon strips and similar devices is considered development and is subject of a requirement of obtain permission from the Planning Authority.

### **17. The Day-to-Day Retail Operations of Shop Units**

The following considerations are relevant to the operation of shop units and the design of the shopfront:

- (i) Designs consisting of the permanent removal of the shopfront and the creation of an opening uncharacteristic of the street are not acceptable.

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- (ii) Direct trading onto the pavement from a shopfront left open, as above, or through openings is not permitted.
  
- (iii) Use of the public footpath for casual advertising (e.g. free-standing sandwich boards) or goods display have the potential to cause obstruction and tend to cause clutter and will be the subject of strict control.
  
- (iv) The broadcasting of music and/or speech and the emission of noxious fumes from premises is unacceptable.
  
- (v) In newsagents, etc., provision should be made internally for the delivery of newspapers to avoid the need to erect bulky security boxes on the outside of the shopfront.



## Glossary of Terms

- Cornice** The projection ornamental moulding along the top of the shop front.
- Fascia** The plain horizontal band located below the cornice, which normally contains the shop nameplate.
- Glazing bars** The horizontal and vertical members that divides the window and hold the glazing – normal they are narrow moulded members.
- Mullions** A vertical member that divides the window – normally it is a visually strong member, unlike the glazing bar.
- Transom** A horizontal member that divides the window - normally it is a visually strong member, unlike the glazing bar.
- Pilasters** The vertical rectangular frame to either side of the shop front – usually moulded and projecting slightly.

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