

# **SHOPFRONT AND SIGNAGE GUIDANCE DOCUMENT**

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## 1.0 Shopfronts

The term 'shopfront' is used to refer to all ground floor commercial facades (i.e. restaurants, public houses, retail services, retail etc.).

Shopfronts provide the fundamental building block to our public realm and are one of the most important elements in determining the character, quality and perception of retail streets in the city, towns and villages. Shopfronts which are well designed and well maintained make for a more attractive street for the shopper and passer-by. It is important therefore that repair of existing and provision of new shopfronts is of a high quality in terms of design and finish.

There are many shopfronts of high quality vernacular and contemporary design along our various streets. Both vernacular and contemporary shopfronts can co-exist and complement each other. Every proposal to renovate or repair a vernacular shopfront or provide a new shopfront presents an opportunity to improve the appearance both of the buildings to which it relates and the streetscape in which it is situated.



**Figure 1 – Shopfront of high quality design**

When considering the design of a new shopfront the developer should firstly, consider the locational context and the special character of the building and broader area where relevant. In particular attention should be paid to the retail and commercial nature of the street, the extent of pedestrian activity (during and after general trading hours), the designation of the area in the relevant development plan i.e. Architectural Conservation Area/General Conservation Area, etc, and any designation relating to the property i.e. Record of Protected Structures.

Any material works carried out to new or vernacular shopfronts will require planning permission, e.g. full replacement of shopfront, provision of canopies, additional advertising signage. It is worth noting also that there are a number of exemptions for signage set out in Part 2, Article 6 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 as amended. The planning authority will offer advice to shop owners/developers proposing to carry out works to their business premises, having regard to the legislation in place at time of consultation.

## 1.2 The Shopfront Structure – Design Elements

The following is a brief outline on the important constituent elements which make up a shopfront and the relevant policies and rationale underpinning them.

### 1.2.1 Fascia

As the fascia is a dominant element of the vernacular shopfront its design must be appropriate and proportioned to the shopfront and to the overall character, scale, design and height of the building and adjoining buildings. It is the element of the shopfront on which advertising signage is most effective. The planning authority would have a preference for the use of individual mounted lettering and hand-painted signage and the avoidance of signage which is temporary and intrusive in character. The use of individual mounted lettering and hand-painted signage is cost effective and will enhance the appearance and attractiveness of the shopfront while respecting the architectural character of the building and streetscape as seen in



**Figure 2 – Fascia Signage: acceptable signage which is in proportion to the fascia depth which is either painted on or consist of individually mounted solid letter on the fascia board.**



Figure 2 above. Where new signage/fascia's is proposed over multiple units it must respect the plot size of said units.

### 1.2.2 Upper Floors

The use of the upper floors by active commercial uses is strongly encouraged by the planning authority. The active use of upper floors brings considerable vibrancy and vitality to the street. These uses are sometimes for purposes unrelated to the ground floor use and will require its own visibility to enable customers to identify and locate the premises. Many vernacular shopfronts include a separate entrance to the upper floors of the buildings as shown in Figure 3 and 5. In the repair or redesign of vernacular /contemporary shopfronts this is an important element to keep as it allows access to the upper floors from street level. See Figure 3A, 3B and 4 for examples of how upper floors use signage to attract business and footfall.



Figure 3 – Upper Floors: Image A depicts brass name plate at entrance door; Image B depicts shopfront which has retained access to upper floors.

It is worth noting that the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2018 (S.I. No. 30 of 2018) allow change of use of vacant commercial premises into residential use without planning permission. The exemption does not only target vacant buildings but also vacant or under-utilised spaces over ground-floor premises, including shops and offices. Currently this exemption can only be availed of during the life time of 'Rebuilding Ireland' Plan 8<sup>th</sup> February 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021.

The amended regulations facilitate the carrying out of limited works to the exterior of buildings which must be in keeping with the design of the building and neighbouring buildings (these works may include – alterations to ground floor shop units, provision of on-street access to upper floors i.e. above the shop units). Works which materially alter the character of a protected structure will require a Section.57 declaration in order to avail of the exemptions.



**Figure 4 – Upper Floors: Image depicts discrete signage on window blind on upper floor.**



**Figure 5 – Upper Floors: depicts a contemporary shopfront which has retained access to upper floors.**

### **1.2.3 Repair of Historic Shopfronts**

Repair of historic shopfronts should retain, as far as practicable, vernacular historic and significant shopfronts through sensible and practical repair, taking into consideration of the following:

- Application of best conservation practice, as appropriate and without incurring excessive cost;
- Ministerial Guidelines;
- Associated advice series; and
- Designations in the development plan relating to the property and the area.

### **1.2.4 Replacement or New Shopfronts**

New shopfronts which by way of their design and material finish should relate to the architecture of the building of which they form part, complement the scale and proportions of the adjoining building and streetscape, the plot sizes, the pattern of window fenestration and openings present on facades, maintain or reinstate access to upper floors and enhance the overall vibrancy and the built quality of the street.

### **1.2.5 Shopfront Signage**

Primary shopfront advertising signage should be located on the fascia board. Where the shopfront does not include a fascia the advertising signage should be mounted above the display window and/or main shop entrance. All such advertising signage should relate to the shopfront and fascia where present in terms of scale, design and material finish.

Additional signage including interior suspended advertising signage and adhesive film signage on the display window which relate to ancillary or other commercial activities taking place within the building will allow for views to be maintained from the street into the shop or business and will therefore not create a dead frontage.

Advertising signage should always enhance the visual amenity of the area and avoid the creation of visual clutter.

### 1.2.6 Illumination

The lighting of buildings and pedestrian spaces is a key element in creating a lively and safe night-time environment in urban centres. The lighting of shopfront window displays also facilitates after hour's window shopping which creates vibrancy and vitality on the street at night and studies have shown that shopfronts and streets which are well lit and bright at night positively enhance safety and security within properties and on public streets<sup>1</sup>.



**Figure 6 – Illumination: a simple and cost effective example of a good night time window display.**

Illumination of shopfronts must be treated as an integrated part of the overall design. The illumination should enhance the architectural features and be discreetly hidden on suitable parts of the building. This approach will enable illumination to be complementary and sensitive to the overall shopfront on which it is placed. The colouring and intensity of the illumination should be complementary to the overall shopfront design and architectural context of the street and surrounding area. Illumination of fascia signs, if considered necessary, should be low intensity, discrete and designed to avoid light spread.

In this regard illuminated box signage, internally illuminated letters, swan neck and projecting spotlights, fluorescent lighting on channels, neon tubular illumination, flashing signs and floodlighting are considered inappropriate. Sky signs, i.e. signs

<sup>1</sup> Welsh BP, Farrington DC. Effects of improved street lighting on crime. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2008: <http://campbellcollaboration.org/lib/download/223/>



which project in any part above the level of a building parapet or obtrude on the skyline, are considered inappropriate for general use.

### 1.2.7 Awnings and Canopies

Awnings and canopies serve a practical purpose in protecting goods and customers from the weather. The design should be in keeping with the façade and complement existing architectural details and should not impede pedestrian movement and should be designed to retract into the fascia when not in use.



**Figure 7 –Example of an awning/canopy positioned under the fascia board which retracts back into the fascia when not used.**

Curved or Dutch awnings/canopies will be discouraged as their structure tends to obscure the fascia, and introduces a dominant shape which is out of character with streetscapes around the County. The use of plastics, wet-look or stretch fabrics for blinds will be discouraged.

### 1.2.8 Projecting Signs

Projecting signs can be very useful particularly on narrow streets where fascia signs are not easily read. When simple and well designed they can add character to the streetscape as illustrated in Figure 8 below. Preferably they should be located above fascia level and allow for easy identification of commercial uses at or above ground floor. When designing a projecting sign it is important to ensure that its size, material finish and location on the building is in keeping with the external features of the building and its surrounding streetscape. The sign should embellish the appearance of the shopfront and not create unnecessary clutter or be internally lit. Plastic signs



should be avoided. The design of the bracket on which the sign is affixed to the building must also be carefully considered. A simple bracket will be appropriate in most cases.



**Figure 8 – Projecting Signs: two good examples of projecting signs fixed to simple brackets.**

In relation to projecting and other advertising signage the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 as amended facilitate certain signage which by reason of its size, nature or limited effect on its surroundings is considered exempt development and where such development would not offend against principles of proper planning and sustainable development.

The use of upper floors for active commercial uses is encouraged. In order to support this the following signage is considered acceptable:

- Door plaque or plate;
- One hanging/protruding sign per building, which may be externally lit/unlit;
- The sign may be lit by low intensity, discrete light fittings and suitably cowed; and;
- Non blackout window lettering/logo.

## **2.0 Shopfront Security**

The placing of shopfront security measures on the exterior of shop fronts and business premises is becoming more common. Security fixtures may materially alter the character of the structure and may detract from the amenity and quality of the streetscape. The challenge is to provide the appropriate security levels while maintaining a well lit, safe, vibrant and quality streetscape. For these reasons all security measures should be designed so as to:

- Prevent 'dead frontage';
- Enable window browsing outside normal trading hours;
- Maintain the vibrancy and vitality of the streetscape outside normal trading hours;
- Maintain passive surveillance of the interior of the shop;
- Avoid any visual intrusion on the special character or any significant architectural features of the property.

It is important therefore that retailers and all other ground floor users strike a balance between securing their premises and keeping an area attractive, particularly after normal shopping hours where window shopping can play an important role in generating night time pedestrian activity, associated passive surveillance and can contribute to next day shopping. In considering shopfront security for new shopfronts or for renovations of existing shopfronts the following design solutions should be incorporated:

- Security standard glazing such as anti-shatter, toughened or laminate glazing;
- Enhanced lighting of the interior, CCTV cameras, monitored alarms/security;
- Incorporating vernacular design features into a shopfront such as stall risers, glazing bars;
- Use of internal shutters/sliding grilles or internal/external demountable security screens or demountable mesh grills.

**Note: In general, the installation of external shutters alters the appearance of shopfronts and will require a grant of planning permission. The premises owner/occupier is encouraged to seek advice from the local planning officer at the earliest opportunity.**

### **2.1.1 Roller Shutters**

There are a number of different roller and security shutter design options and where additional security measures are required the planning authority will always favour the least intrusive design solution. Where external sliding; demountable or roller shutters are the only option these should be of light, transparent material which allow vibrancy to be maintained on the street outside normal trading hours. The appropriateness of each security option should be carefully considered and discussed fully with the local authority at project design stage, in order to identify the most appropriate design and cost option. Perforated or punched lathe type external shutters will not be permitted in core shopping areas/historic centres.

### **Shopfront Security**

The provision of security measures for ground floor commercial uses should contribute positively to the visual quality of the property and streetscape. When considering proposals for security measures on new and existing regard should be

given to the character of the broader area. The following sequential order of preference for the provision of roller shutters should be applied when considering security proposals:

1. Internal roller shutter setback behind the window display area;
2. Internal roller shutter located immediately behind the display window;
3. External demountable or folding steel mesh grilles or gates;