

Dublin
Cookie

REVIEW OF SHOPFRONT IMPROVEMENT SCHEME 2016 (THE LIBERTIES)

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& LIBERTIES BUSINESS AREA
IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE

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Comhairle Cathrach
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Dublin City Council

1. INTRODUCTION

This report provides a short overview of the Shopfront Improvement Scheme in place in the commercial streets of The Liberties in South Central Area in 2016. The 2016 scheme followed on from a pilot project in 2015 which applied to Thomas Street and Cornmarket only. The second year saw the scheme eligibility extended to properties on all the main commercial streets in The Liberties Business Improvement Initiative area.

2. BACKGROUND

In 2015, the South Central Local Area Office put in place a pilot Shopfront Improvement Scheme to incentivise the improvement of building frontages and shopfronts along Cornmarket and Thomas Street in The Liberties, Dublin 8. In 2016, the scheme was continued and applied to a wider area, generally encompassing the various commercial streets and shopping areas of The Liberties. The main focus of the scheme remains to support renewal of properties on Thomas Street, Francis Street and Meath Street - comprising the main commercial and retail core.



The shopfront initiative in The Liberties is supported by policy, including the Liberties Local Area Plan 2009 (under its Development Strategy), and the Dublin City Public Realm Strategy 2012 ('Thomas Street Charter' Action), which seeks to coordinate the management of the public and private realms along Thomas Street. The scheme also forms part of an overall proactive approach by the South Central Area Office to support local businesses and enterprise in the area under The Liberties Business Area Improvement Initiative.

Cornmarket and Thomas Street also forms part of The Dublin – the primary tourism route through the city extending from Parnell Square to Kilmainham – and the local area team has been working proactively in recent years to stimulate development, improvements and investment along this important visitor route between some of the city's main attractions.

The South Central Area Office made a **budget allocation of €40,000** available for the scheme in 2016, reflecting the successful uptake of the pilot programme the previous year and objective to widen the application area.

Cover Image: Dublin Cookie Company 29 Thomas Street - a new business to the street assisted under the scheme

Opposite: Arthur's 28 Thomas Street which undertook work under the scheme in both 2015 and 2016.

3. AREA COVERED BY THE SCHEME

The improvement scheme was applicable to premises on the following streets:

High Street Thomas Street James Street Bridgefoot Street Cork Street (north side junction The Coombe to Marrowbone Lane) Pimlico	Francis Street Meath Street Patrick Street (west side junction Back Lane to Dean Street) The Coombe
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The application of the scheme was supported by the local Area Planning team (Rhona Naughton and Una Bagnall) and the City Conservation Officer (Nicola Matthews). A process to encourage adherence to shopfront standards and ACA policy in the area is also supported by the Area Planning Enforcement Officer (John O'Hara).

The scheme was advertised to businesses in the area from February 2016. An initial closing date for applications of 15th April was advised to encourage early take-up, however applications continued to be accepted throughout 2016 as budget allowed.

The scheme was advertised:

- Door to door including discussion of the scheme and general improvements with business holders and, where possible, building owners;
- Via the Liberties Business Area Improvement Initiative newsletter, website and social media;
- Online: Dublin City Council website and SCAO social media.



Aerial view of The Liberties

4. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The scheme provides for up to 50% of the cost of a shopfront refurbishment, depending on the work proposed, with **a maximum allowable grant of €3,000 per applicant**. Assistance is not offered in retrospect to costs already incurred for the improvement of shopfronts.

Given the challenge of stimulating renewal of upper floors (often not under the control of ground floor shop tenants), the scheme could also be used for specific works to upper floors that contribute to the maintenance of the historic built environment, namely:

- i. repaint and repair of traditional timber windows;
- ii. repaint and repair of **existing** painted masonry and rainwater goods;
- iii. removal of high level signage, redundant utilities, etc.

The scheme includes some basic eligibility criteria including establishing ability to undertake works (ownership or permission under lease) and compliance with commercial rates.

The Description of the Scheme included some basic design principles which were distilled from the Thomas Street & Environs ACA policy. A sample of the scheme is attached as Appendix I

5. CHANGES TO THE 2016 SCHEME

Based on the experience with the pilot scheme, changes were made to the 2016 scheme to more clearly set out the types of work that could be undertaken under the scheme. The maximum grants available were also adjusted to provide a larger grant for more significant work. The categories were as follows:

6. TAKEUP OF THE SCHEME

In total 16 applications were received under the scheme, all of which were approved. The situation at time of writing is as follows

Type of Work	Up to a max of:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Paint and redecorate shopfront ii. Declutter and repair of shopfront iii. Measures to 'green' shopfront and enhance outdoor seating areas 	€2,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Replace shopfront and/or signage ii. Material changes to shopfront such as new entrances, changes to windows, etc iii. Specified works to upper floors iv. Removal of high level signage within the ACA 	€3,000

7. SELECTION AND ASSESSMENT

The 2016 scheme assessment panel included Stephen Coyne (SCAO - Liberties Business Area Improvement Initiative) Rhona Naughton and Una Bagnall (SCA Development Management), and Nicola Matthews (City Conservation Officer). Design support for two projects was offered by Philip James of City Architects Division.

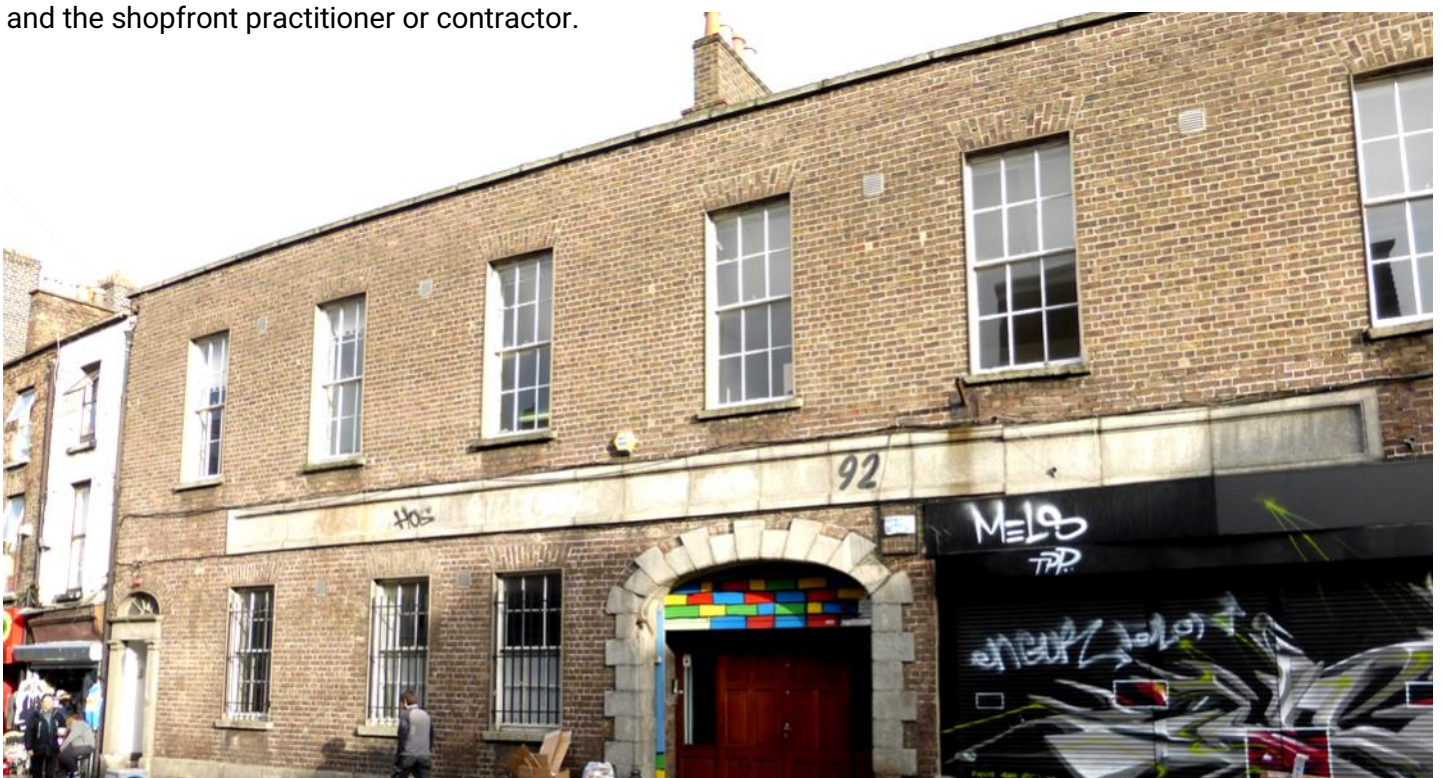
Applications for straightforward decorative works such as repainting of existing shopfronts were approved without site visits – this included App Nos. 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16. App No 2 was approved on foot of a grant of planning permission.

Site visits were arranged to App Nos. 1, 3, 6, 8, 12, 13. In each instance the site visit included the planning and conservation officers, the applicant, and the shopfront practitioner or contractor.

The value of providing clear design advice and, in some instances, prescribing work which could be (to a modest degree) incentivised for the property owner was demonstrated by the Shopfront Improvement Scheme. In the instances of App Nos 1, 5, 6 and 12 the site visits allowed for either refinement of the originally-proposed design, or in the case of No 1 and 6, completely revised designs.

All works to modify existing shopfronts were undertaken with the agreement of planning officers and the conservation officer, and with oversight as appropriate.

No 92 Meath Street in advance of approached work



Before and after image of No 46 Thomas Street with removal of redundant high level signage



Before and after images of a landmark project , Chadwick's arch on Thomas Street, supported by a grant under the 2015 pilot scheme as well as support from the Built Heritage Investment Scheme.





John Laurence, 54 Thomas Street

No 54 Thomas Street was the most high-profile achievement of the 2016 scheme. The project included replacing a dated 1970s shopfront with a new timber front based on more traditional design principles and decluttering and redecorating the upper floors.

The original proposal was substantially redesigned with assistance from City Architects Division and under the guidance of the Conservation Officer.

The potential to undertake further work on the property, which is a protected structure and historically significant, is being considered by the owner.



Before and after images of shopfront and upper floor improvements to No 54 Thomas Street. The design details of the shopfront was provided by Dublin City Architects for the applicant.



Joanne's Hair Salon, 37 Thomas Street

This case involved remodelling an existing shopfront to create a more attractive contemporary look to the shop. The originally-offered proposal was refined with the assistance of Damien Culligan Architects and under the guidance of the Conservation Officer.

The constraint of a central supporting column behind the shopfront as well as the applicant's preference to retain the existing doors and windows and the external shutter meant that the new shopfront elements were set over the existing shutter roller.



Before and after images of No 37 Thomas Street with work undertaken with the support of the Shopfront Improvement Scheme. Design detail by Damien Culligan Architect for the applicant.



9. OUTCOMES

Level of Funding Against Works to be Undertaken

The level of support funding provided for under the scheme offered sufficient incentive and was in line with that offered under the pilot scheme.

The grading of grants (see 5 above) was helpful to clarify to applicants the type of work that could be undertaken as non-material (i.e. exempted development) or material works (i.e. permission of the planning authority may be required).

Grants awarded ranged from €300 to the maximum of €3,000.

Take-up

The scheme attracted 16 applications. Grants totalling €35,550 were approved against a total value of work estimated at €127,100. As of the end of December 2016, €29,550 in grants has been paid, with 10 projects completed.

A number of projects are outstanding and are likely to be undertaken in spring 2017 when weather improves:

- **Applicant No 8 (Dublin Steiner School)** is now considering a wider programme of conservation work in addition to improvements to the shopfront.
- **Applicant No 5 (Dublin Simon Community)** is a significant project for the street involving a new decorative scheme for an historic stone shopfront. The project delivery has been affected by a separate planning application to renew the upper floors of the building. When completed the combined projects will benefit the street.
- **Applicant No 2** yet to commence development. The grant has not been drawn down.
- **Applicant Nos 3 and 14** – works deferred to spring.

Applicant No 12 (78 Thomas Street) is still considered a design and whether to undertake work. This grant has not been drawn down.

Additional Work Undertaken

In addition to projects approved under the 2016 scheme, projects were completed or progressed in 2016 which has received support under the pilot scheme the previous year. These included:

- **Chadwick's Builders Provider, 66 Thomas Street** – restoration of historic arch completed in October 2016
- **Massey Bros, 128-129 Thomas Street** – remodelling of façade and shopfront, planning permission granted, work to commence in 2017
- **Massey Bros, 141 Thomas Street** – works carried over to 2016 and assisted with a grant under the 2016 scheme.
- **Gilna, 31 Thomas Street** – shopfront refurbishment undertaken without drawdown of grant.
- **No 130 Thomas Street** – shopfront to be installed in Feb 2017, grant paid in 2015.

Signage

In instances where signage was proposed, applicants were advised to use either hand painted lettering or individually mounted lettering on the fascia so that signage could form part of decorative works. This specified signage is in keeping with the Thomas Street & Environs ACA policy (6.2.6 Advertising Structures).

This pragmatic approach allowed for improvement work to premises, including approved signage, to be considered as decorative work and therefore not requiring planning permission. The approach allowed us to steer applicants away from internally illuminated and projecting signage not in compliance with the ACA policy.

Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Projects

The incentive highlighted the valuable role of architectural advice to the success of the grant scheme – in this instance the Conservation Officer and an assisting Architect. Most applicants appreciated the advice and insight of the Conservation Officer and in some instances it helped to develop a wider scope of works and thus gain added value from the incentive.

The success of other architect-assisted shopfront schemes – such as in Westport under the direction of the Town Architect – has also delivered very impressive results. Similarly, the schemes in Limerick and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown engaged architectural expertise. There also good examples from the UK of schemes that combine a strong design ethos with practical funding and assistance from the local authority.

Ultimately, unless an applicant is engaging an architect for a wider programme of works, they are unlikely to be able to afford this service for small changes to signage, shopfronts, colour, branding etc. They may not even use good quality practitioners for shopfront design and repair. This is often why the quality of shopfronts in the city is so inconsistent.

The scheme is also an opportunity for the City Council to learn how to improve its approach to shopfront design and the process to facilitate smaller changes to properties.

The South Central Area Office is now interested to expand shopfront initiatives to other commercial areas such as Inchicore village, Dolphin's Barn and Ballyfermot, perhaps tailoring the approach to reflect local circumstances.

Interest

There was a marked increase in interest in the scheme from 2015 to 2016. Applicants were better prepared to take up the incentive. The feedback on the scheme was very positive. A recent survey of businesses found that almost 100% of businesses felt that good quality, well maintained shopfronts were 'very important' or 'important' to the success of a business area. Almost 50% of respondents suggested they would be undertaking improvement work in 2017.

Timeframes

Again, in 2016, one of the more difficult aspects of the scheme was the differing timescale which applicants worked to. This suggests flexibility on the 4 months rule is required. For the most part shopfront projects were undertaken in spring/summer months. In some instances, planning permissions for adjoining premises have complicated original timelines.

Costs of the Scheme

A budget of €40,000 was allotted to the scheme in 2016. As of December 2016 the following costs are associated with the scheme:

Grants Approved and Paid:	€ 29,550
Grants Approved but Yet to be Drawn Down:	€ 6,000
Total:	€ 35,550
Value of Work Undertaken:	€127,100



Looking to the future: terrace on Thomas Street undergoing renewal