

Galway City Council - Shopfront Enhancement Scheme 2026

Guidelines for Applicants

1. Introduction

Galway City Council is committed to enhancing the visual appeal and vitality of its commercial areas. This Shopfront Enhancement Scheme provides financial assistance to eligible businesses to undertake improvements to their premises' facades. By supporting high-quality design and respecting the unique character of Galway, we aim to create a more attractive environment for residents, visitors, and businesses alike.

Galway City Council has allocated €275,000 in the 2026 budget to support the Shopfront Enhancement Scheme. For the purposes of this scheme, eligible businesses must have a street facing premises and shopfronts are considered to include both the ground floor and any associated upper floors.

2. Objectives of the Scheme

This scheme aims to:

- Support sensitive restoration: Promote careful refurbishment / restoration of shopfronts in line with heritage and architectural guidelines.
- Enhance the streetscape: Encourage well presented, accessible and visually cohesive commercial areas.
- Complement public realm improvements: Align with broader urban renewal and public space enhancement strategies.
- Promote Creative Collaboration: Involve local artists, craft workers and designers in creating unique, visually engaging shopfronts.
- Foster Inclusivity: Ensure improvements serve all members of the community.
- Support Historic Character: Prioritise projects related to Protected Structures and within specific Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs).

By offering financial assistance, the scheme encourages eligible business owners, landlords, tenants and property managers of independent businesses¹ who contribute to the local environment to invest in the maintenance and improvement of their premises. This supports the

¹ an independent business is typically defined as a privately owned enterprise that operates without control or significant influence from larger corporations, franchises, or the government. It is usually a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) that is locally owned and managed.

local economy, enhances the customer experience, and aligns with broader public realm improvement initiatives. Additionally, the scheme encourages measures to improve access for shops and premises, fosters collaboration with local artists to promote Galway's creative and artistic heritage, improve the condition of Protected Structures, buildings within the specific Architectural Conservation Area (ACA), and the Salthill area, and support traditional building skills.

3. Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for funding this scheme, applicants must meet the following requirements:

- Only businesses with a street facing premises operating within the Retail or Hospitality sectors are eligible to apply. Applications from business outside these sectors will not be considered.
- Businesses must be physically located within the boundaries of the following three Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA), designated as ACAs in the Galway City Development Plan 2023 – 2029 as defined by the maps included at the end of this document (City Core ACA, Lower Dominick Street ACA, and Eyre Square ACA), and the Salthill area.
- The business must be an independent business, hospitality venue or service provider (excludes chain stores/franchise).
- Be the owner or leaseholder (with the landlord's written consent for the proposed works) of the premises.
- Have a good record of compliance with planning regulations and any other relevant local authority requirements.
- Business must be up to date on Commercial Rates or in an agreed payment plan.

4. Eligible Works

Grant funding is available for external shopfront enhancement works that are visible from the public realm. Eligible works include

- Shopfront Restoration & Improvement: Repair, painting or minor structural upgrades.
- Bi-Lingual Signage: Irish and English signage to promote cultural identity.
- Protected Structures & Conservation Areas: Enhancement of Protected Structures and buildings in Galway City's Architectural Conservation Areas.
- Accessibility Enhancements: Measures to improve universal accessibility.
- Collaboration with Local Artists / Craft Workers: Involvement with local artists, craft workers and designers to create unique shopfront design contributions.
- Utilisation of Traditional Building Skills: (Signwriters, lime plasterers, stone masons, carpenters)
- Decluttering & Green Enhancements: Removal of redundant signage and services, integration of planting and greening measures.

5. Ineligible Works

The following works are **not** eligible for funding under this scheme:

- Internal renovations or alterations.
- Routine maintenance or repairs that are considered standard upkeep.
- Purchase/Lease of stock, equipment, or loose furniture.
- Retrospective works (projects completed before the application approval date).
- Temporary signage, banners, or promotional materials.

6. Grant Levels and Match Funding

A tiered grant system will be implemented to support a range of projects, noting that every item below does not need to be undertaken in order to qualify for the applied strand:

Strand 1: General Shopfront Enhancement & Signage

Maximum grant: €10,000 per applicant which covers up to 50% of eligible costs for works such as:

- Repairs.
- Painting.
- Appropriate new signage.
- Minor structural upgrades.
- Bi-lingual signage.

Strand 2: Accessibility Enhancements / Decluttering

Maximum grant: €20,000 per applicant which covers up to 60% of eligible costs for works such as:

- Repairs.
- Painting.
- Appropriate new signage.
- Minor structural upgrades.
- Bi-lingual signage.
- Accessibility enhancements.
- Decluttering (removal of redundant services and signage).

Strand 3: Artistic Collaboration / Heritage Buildings and Areas (i.e. Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation areas)

Maximum grant: €20,000 per applicant which covers up to 75% of eligible costs for works such as:

- Repairs.
- Painting.
- Appropriate new signage.
- Minor structural upgrades.
- Bi-lingual signage.
- Accessibility enhancements.
- Decluttering (removal of redundant services and signage).
- Collaboration with local artists or creatives in designing unique shopfront elements.
- Utilisation of traditional building skills (signwriters, lime plasterers, stone masons, carpenters).
- Enhancement or repairs to Protected Structures, buildings within Architectural Conservation Areas, and buildings of heritage interest.

7. Joint Applications

Eligible businesses can apply individually or collaborate as a group. Groups may receive higher funding, priority consideration, or additional support. Joint applications encourage a uniform and visually appealing commercial area. For collaboration projects from two or more adjoining businesses, the maximum grant permitted is up to 75% of eligible costs (VAT exclusive) with a maximum grant payment of €20,000 per premises.

8. Application Process

Applications should be completed online. Please visit www.galwaycity.ie for the link. If unable to apply online an application form can be obtained on request from the Economic Development Unit, Galway City Council, College Road, Galway City or by phone to 091 536400 / email shopfront@galwaycity.ie The application form will require the following information:

- Applicant and business details.
- Detailed description of the proposed works.
- Drawings, colour photographs of the existing shopfront, and sketches of the proposed improvements.
- A minimum of two written quotations from qualified contractors for all proposed works.
- Schedule of proposed works and estimated completion date.

- If you are not the owner of the property, permission must be sought from the owner and submitted with the application form.
- Current Tax Clearance Certificate or Tax Clearance Certificate Number (TCCN).

All works must comply with planning regulations, Planning and Development Act (as amended) and accessibility standards where applicable.

Applicants must take due regard of *Shopfront Enhancement Scheme 2026 – Guidelines for Applicants*.

If your building is a Protected Structure or in an Architectural Conservation Area, there may be a need for the provision of an appropriate conservation methodology (targeted at the proposed enhancements only). This will be prepared by a conservation professional(s), who will inspect the completed works. The Galway City Council Architectural Conservation Officer will be available to advise on the content / scope of a methodology.

9. Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- The quality of the proposed enhancements to the shopfront or building facade.
- The impact of the proposed changes on the surrounding streetscape.
- Compliance with the objectives of the scheme.
- Compliance with design guidelines.
- Overall value for money.

Applications for funding will be evaluated by a selection panel put in place by Galway City Council. The decision to award funding rests with Galway City Council, whose decision shall be final.

10. Grant Drawdown

- Payment will only be made following completion of works.
- Upon completion of works, payments are conditional on expenditure being in accordance with the details in your application form and payments will only be authorised on the basis of vouched expenditure / receipts.
- All payments made by Galway City Council are by Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT). If you have not previously received a payment from Galway City Council in the last year, you will need to be set up as a supplier. No payment can take place until this process is completed.
- Please note that if total payments from Galway City Council reach the €10,000 threshold within a 12-month period, payments cannot be made until a valid Tax Clearance Certificate is forwarded to Galway City Council, Accounts Payable Section.

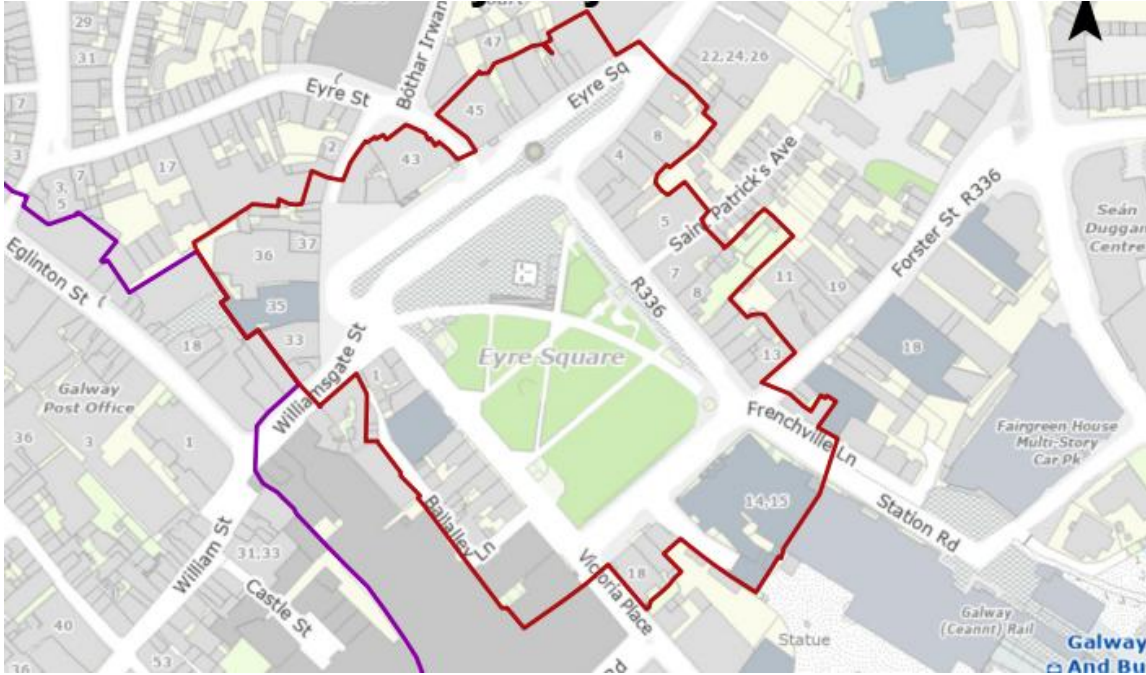
- An inspection may be undertaken to ensure compliance with the agreed work schedule.
- If the inspection/works are satisfactory, Galway City Council will then pay the applicant.
- If a grant is not drawn down within a period of 6 months from the date of issue of the Grant Offer letter, then funding will be withdrawn, unless a prior agreement has been made.
- Please note the grant offer will be made on the lowest quote submitted. The applicant may choose either supplier/contractor to complete the works. However, the grant payment will not exceed the amount specified in the grant letter offer.

11. Terms and Conditions

- Please note that payments under the above scheme are conditional on expenditure being in accordance with the details in your application form and payments will only be authorised on the basis of vouched expenditure / receipts.
- All grantees will be required to comply with the highest standard of transparency and accountability as documented in Department of Public Expenditure and Reform *Circular 13/2014 – Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds*.
- Applications must be received prior to the commencement of work. Grants will not be offered in respect of works commenced before the grant approval date.
- If you are not the owner of the property, permission must be sought from the owner and submitted with the application form.
- The majority of the actions allowed under the scheme may not need planning permission, however the applicant should contact the Council's Planning Department to clarify planning requirements before making an application under the Shopfront Enhancement Scheme. In the event that planning permission is required for the works proposed, please note that this is a separate process to this grant application scheme and the associated timelines in the processing of a planning application apply. Grant payment will be subject to the applicant having obtained planning permission if required.
- The grant will be payable after completion and final inspection by a relevant Council Official, when all documentation has been received and when terms and conditions are complied with.
- Galway City Council reserve the right to carry out an audit of expenditure or conduct inspections from time to time to verify compliance with the scheme terms and conditions.
- Galway City Council must be credited on all promotional materials related to the funded project. Any information, signage, or other publicity associated with this project should recognise Galway City Council's support through the use of logos or other written acknowledgments.
- The applicant must either have paid rates in full or be in compliance with a payment plan / agreement regarding rates.

- The Council reserves the right to publish photographs of improved shopfronts in promotional material associated with the scheme and its purpose.
- Queries should be sent to shopfront@galwaycity.ie.

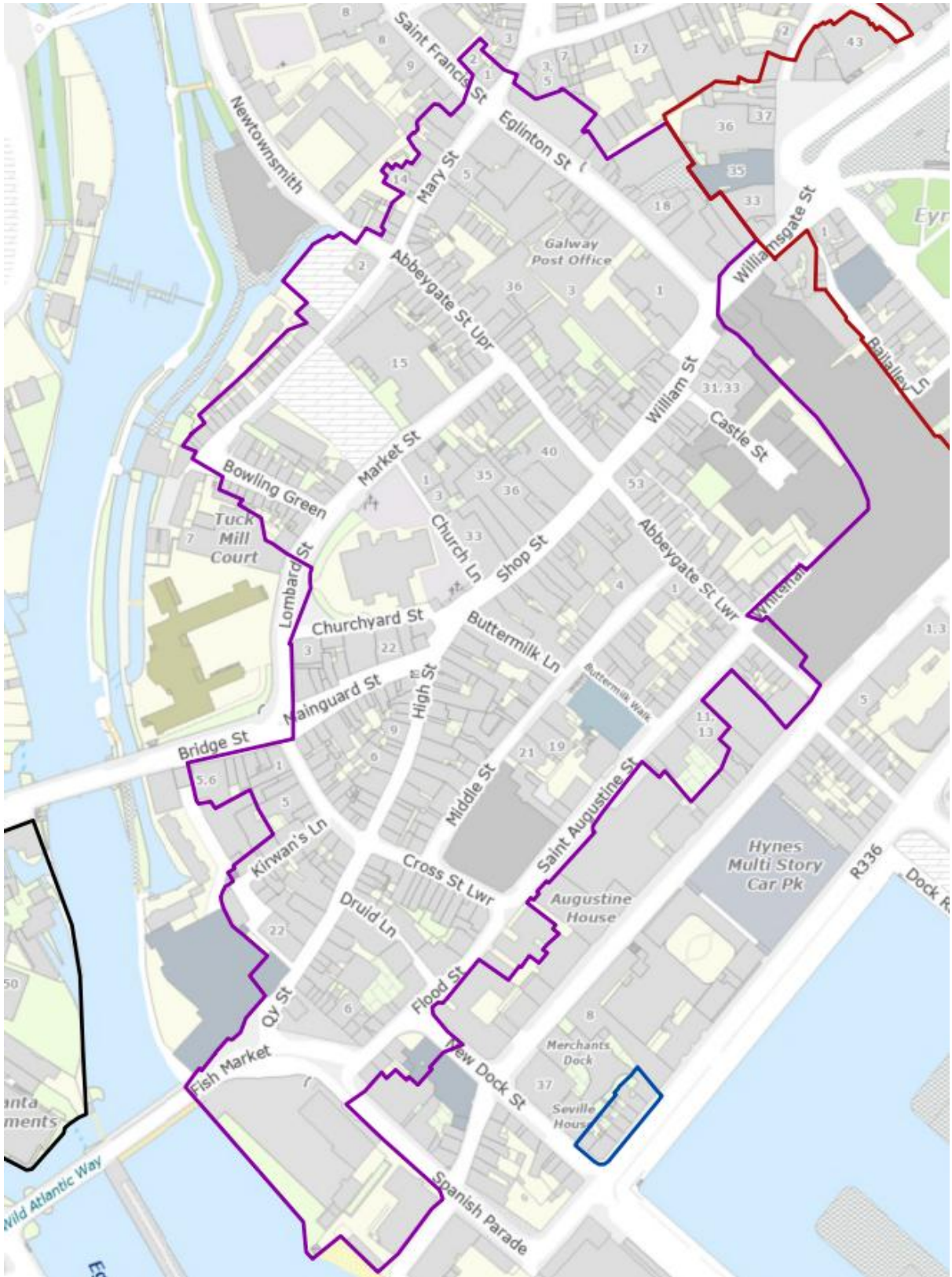
12. Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) Maps



Eyre Square Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)



Lower Dominick Street Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)



City Core Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)