



WESTMEATH COUNTY COUNCIL SHOPFRONT ENHANCEMENT



*Please read the Terms and Conditions attached to this scheme
prior to completing the application form via
www.localenterprise.ie/Westmeath*

All questions must be answered

2024 Scheme open for applications

**WORKS MUST NOT COMMENCE PRIOR TO RECEIPT OF WRITTEN
APPROVAL FROM WESTMEATH COUNTY COUNCIL**

Purpose

Westmeath County Council has made funding available for business owners to improve the building facades of their properties. The aim of the scheme is to enhance the streetscape environment of towns and villages throughout County Westmeath by encouraging and supporting owners of local retail and commercial premises to improve their individual shopfronts. It is intended that the scheme will result in a more attractive environment that residents, visitors, shoppers and businesses can enjoy. It is also envisaged that this scheme will assist in promoting our towns and villages as attractive places for social and business interaction, thereby increasing the vitality and viability of our settlements with positive benefits for all.

Overview

Shopfronts are an integral part of our streetscapes and well maintained shopfronts of suitable design are essential in providing an attractive and vibrant place in which to do business, work, shop and carry out leisure and entertainment activities.

In recognition and promotion of this, Westmeath County Council has developed a **Shopfront Enhancement Grant Scheme for 2024** aimed at:

- Supporting the vitality and viability of town and village centres thereby contributing to a high standard of urban design.
- Supporting competitiveness and choice in the retail sector commensurate with promoting the vitality and viability of city and town and village centres.
- Contributing to the enhancement of the aesthetics and character for the overall betterment of each individual town and villages through a collective and coherent approach.
- Encouraging best practice approaches to shopfront maintenance and presentation throughout the County;

This scheme will provide financial supports in 2024 on a first come first served basis, subject to the availability of funding and compliance of applications submitted with the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme.

Qualifying Areas

This scheme is open for applications from all local indigenous businesses/retail premises within the development envelope of all towns and villages contained within County Westmeath's settlement hierarchy, as per below:

Eligible Towns and Villages under this scheme

Mullingar, Athlone, Castlepollard, Kilbeggan, Kinnegad, Moate, Ballinagore, Ballinalack, Ballykeeran, Ballymore, Ballynacarrigy, Castletown-Geoghegan, Clonmellon, Collinstown, Coole, Delvin, Finnea, Glasson, Killucan/Rathwire, Milltownpass, Multyfarnham, Raharney, Rathowen, Rochfortbridge, Tyrrellspass

Applications from businesses located outside of the above settlement hierarchy will be considered on a case-by-case basis, in the spirit of the scheme, where the proposed works would result in a more attractive environment for residents, visitors and customers.

Guidance Documents on Policy and Standards

Shopfront Guidance is contained within Section 16.2.2, Chapter 16 Development Management Standards of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027. The plan provides that new shopfront designs are in keeping with the existing character and traditional form of the streetscape. Traditional shopfront designs and nameplates over shop windows are favoured, however contemporary designs where appropriate are also open for consideration.

Additional Guidance is also available by way of the Retail Design Manual -

<https://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/media/RetailDesignManual.pdf>

which is a companion document to the Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities April 2012, available at:

<https://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/media/RetailPlanningGuidelines.pdf>

In the case of prospective applications within Athlone and Mullingar, applicants are advised to refer to the above standards contained within the County Plan and also to the provisions contained within the Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020 and Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014-2020.



When considering changes to the shopfront please refer to (where appropriate):

- Retail Design Manual associated with Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities April 2012
- Architectural Heritage Protection - Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2011
- Record of Protected Structures (Volume 5 Westmeath County Development Plan)
- Shopfront guidance provided in Section 16.2.2 of the Westmeath County Development Plan 2021 – 2027
- Mullingar Local Area Plan 2014 -2020 (where applicable)
- Athlone Town Development Plan 2014 – 2020 (where applicable)

All of the above documents are available on www.westmeathcoco.ie

Terms & Conditions

1. For solo projects the maximum grant permitted is 75% of costs (vat exclusive) with a maximum grant payment of €4,500.
2. For collaboration projects from three or more adjoining businesses, the maximum grant permitted is 75% of costs (vat exclusive), with a maximum grant payment of €6,000 per premises.
3. Where a business undertakes works to improve accessibility for the elderly or people with disabilities, the maximum grant permitted is 75% of costs (vat exclusive), for that particular initiative, with a maximum grant payment of €6,000.
4. The Budget for this scheme in 2024 is limited and applications will be assessed on a 'first come-first served basis'.
5. Grants will not be offered in respect of works commenced before the grant approval date.
6. Properties must be commercially rated for solo projects. For collaboration projects, one unrated property will be allowed, provided at least two out of three properties (66%) are rated.
7. Businesses can avail of second grant within 5 year period provided it is not for the same works as the first grant and the proposed works enhance the streetscape.
8. Applications may not be considered where there are local taxes or charges due to the Council. However, consideration will be given in such instance where there is an agreed payment plan in place that is being adhered to.
9. Grant payment will be subject to the applicant having obtained planning permission if required.
10. Priority will be given to smaller independent businesses within the town/village centre.
11. Applications will be accepted from either the landlord or lessee, whichever is appropriate.

Eligible Works

Eligible works under the scheme include:

1. Repair and reinstatement of all or any part of a shopfront fixture that is visible from the street, including the first and upper floors of premises (subject to the associated ground floor unit being in commercial use).
2. Reinstatement of architectural or historic features that have formed part of the buildings' design and character but may have been lost or damaged over time.
3. Repainting of shopfronts. Colour schemes should co-ordinate with adjoining shopfronts (as per the agreement of the Planning Authority) and upper floors of buildings should be painted to blend in appropriately with the shopfronts.
4. Repair and reinstatement of guttering and down-pipes (to match historic materials where appropriate).
5. Repainting and/or re-rendering of prominent elevations.
6. Repair of external stonework and brickwork and replacement of stonework or brickwork which forms part of the stall riser of the shopfront.

Eligible Works (continued)

7. Removal of neon signs, banners or other inappropriate signage affixed to front elevations (or side elevations visible from the street) and replacement with signage in line with the Westmeath County Development Plan standards.
8. Permanent removal of external security shutters and installation of suitable replacements.
9. Repair, replacement or new awnings or canopies.
10. Repair or replacement of windows or doors.
11. Changes to entrance of shopfront to provide ease of access to all. Level entrances (free of steps) and wider entrances facilitate wheelchair users; people using mobility aids; people who are blind; and people with prams or shopping trolleys.
12. Planters, window boxes, hanging baskets and plants added to the shopfront or approved seating areas at front of premises without causing obstructing to footpaths or entrances.
13. Bicycle racks for customer use added to the shopfront or approved area of the business premises.
14. Third party costs only will be considered. Should applicants wish to undertake work themselves a grant will be paid towards material costs only.

Will I require Planning Permission?

- Where planning consent is not in place and a proposal involves a material alteration to the structure, planning permission will be required at payment stage. The onus is on the applicant to ensure that their project proposal has the necessary planning consents in advance of drawing down grant assistance from this scheme.
- Please note that additional provisions may apply in the case of Protected Structures.
- Applicants are advised to contact Westmeath County Council in advance of the making of any application for funding to discuss individual proposals. Guidance will be provided by a Planning Officer in respect of whether the proposed works put forward by prospective applicants for funding require the making of a planning application or whether the works proposed are exempt from planning permission. Contact details are as follows:
 - **Athlone Municipal District, Civic Offices, Church St, Athlone.**
Phone: **0906 44 42139** or
 - **Mullingar Municipal District Office, County Buildings, Mount St, Mullingar.**
Phone: **044 933 2036**
 - Email: **planning@westmeathcoco.ie**

Timeline

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.

How to Apply for a Grant

1. Applications should be completed online please visit www.localenterprise.ie/Westmeath for the link.
2. If unable to apply online an application form can be obtained on requested from:
Local Enterprise Office, Westmeath County Council, Áras an Chontae, Mount Street, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath.
Tel: 044 9338945.
Email: localenterprise@westmeathcoco.ie
3. Applications may be made by the owner of premises or by the lessee with the owner's written consent.
4. Applications should clearly identify each element of the works proposed.
5. The completed Application Form must be accompanied by a description of the proposed works to include:
 - Photographs of existing shopfront (prior to work being carried out);
 - Sketch of proposed changes (eg Drawings of new Shopfront or new Signage);
 - Indication of material type and colour scheme to be used;
 - Two written quotations for the proposed works from registered builder(s)/contractor(s); A single quote for items costing less than €1000. 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.

Note:

A site visit may be arranged with the applicant to discuss the application and if necessary facilitate the submission of further information in support of the application.

Assessment Criteria

The following will be considered in the assessment of applications:

- The quality of the proposed changes to the shop front / building facade
- Impact on the immediate area of the street
- Preference will be given to applications for clusters, where a number of adjacent properties make a joint application. **(A cluster application is a set of business owners where shops are located in close proximity to each other).**

Applications for funding will be considered by an Adjudication Panel appointed by the Council. The decision to award a grant rests with Westmeath County Council, whose decision shall be final.

If you require further information or have any enquiries please contact: **Local Enterprise Office, Westmeath County Council**; Tel: **044 9338945** or by email **localenterprise@westmeathcoco.ie**.

The scheme may be the subject of review and amendment at any time by the Council.

The Council reserves the right to publish photographs of improved shop fronts in promotional material associated with the scheme and its purpose.

Grant Drawdown

1. Payment will only be made following completion of works.
2. Upon completion of works, the applicant must submit evidence of paid contractor invoices, together with photos of the completed shopfront to Westmeath County Council.
3. All payments must be made through the applicant's bank account. Cash payments will not be eligible for grant aid. Bank Statements will be required as evidence of payment.
4. An inspection may be undertaken to ensure compliance with the agreed work schedule.
5. If the inspection/works are satisfactory, Westmeath County Council will then pay the applicant.
6. 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.
7. Tax Reference Number & Access Number of the proposed builder/contractor.

Note:

Nothing in the agreement or negotiation of the grant will affect the Council's decision with regard to planning permission. The Council accepts **no responsibility** should a business receive a Grant Offer letter or subsequent grant payment, which become subject to Planning Enforcement proceedings relating to improvements for which monies are issued. In such circumstances any offer of funding will be withdrawn and applicants will be required to reimburse any grant claimed and to comply fully with statutory planning requirements.

Grants are awarded entirely at the discretion of the Council. If the application is successful, Westmeath County Council will send a Grant Offer letter, confirming the grant offered in accordance with the guidelines.

Any alterations to design and/or materials must be agreed in advance and recorded on the work schedule.

No grant will be paid to any project where changes are made that have not been agreed with Westmeath County Council.

APPLICATIONS SHOULD BE COMPLETED ONLINE

For further information please contact:

Tel: 044 9338945; Email: localenterprise@westmeathcoco.ie

✓ CHECKLIST - Please read carefully

- Fully completed application form via www.localenterprise.ie/Westmeath.
- Letter of Consent from Property Owner (if property is rented or leased).
- Copy of relevant plans, designs and specifications for proposed works.

ADVISORY NOTE: Planning permission may be required for some works and it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure the requirements for planning permission have been met. Such requirements will not be dealt with through the application process for this scheme.

- Colour photographs of the existing unit.
- Two quotations required for the works proposed unless items cost less than €1000 then only one quote is required.
- Copy of current tax clearance cert.
- Rates Customer Account Number.

Westmeath County Council is committed to protecting your personal data.

The privacy notice for Westmeath County Council can be found at
<https://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/privacy/>