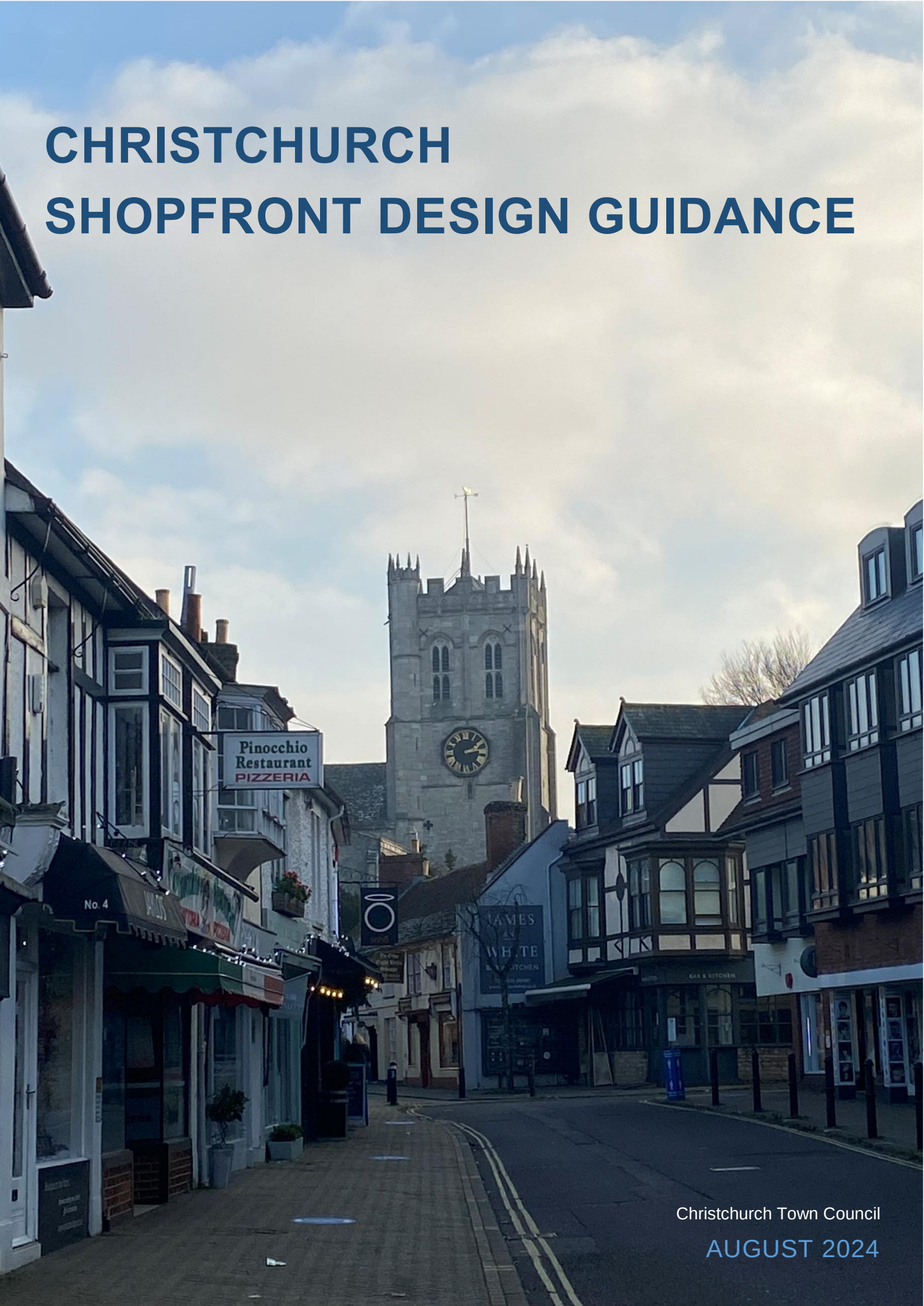
CHRISTCHURCH SHOPFRONT DESIGN GUIDANCE



Christchurch Town Council

AUGUST 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Shopfronts are designed to display goods for sale, or as a means of attracting customers in to activities, as in the case of cafes and restaurants. The method of construction, choice of materials and colours are key to the success of the business that operates from the premises, and will in turn influence the attractiveness of the wider area.

1.2 Planning permission (and where appropriate, listed building consent approval) is likely to be required for all material changes to shopfronts, including changes of paint colour, mechanical extract fans, security alarms or the installation of an illuminated fascia or hanging sign. This also includes advertising at first floor level – such as can be seen on the Regent Cinema and on the Castle Street/ Church Street junction. Such changes can have a significant impact on the character of a centre.

1.3 This Shopfront Guidance was produced in 2024 in order to refresh the previous guidance on shopfront design. The work was commissioned by Christchurch Town Council, and carried out by Kim Sankey BA(Hons),DipArch,AADipCons,RIBA, a chartered Architect with more than 30 years' experience spent in the heritage sector. The aim was to refresh the previous guidance and supplement the wording in the emerging BCP Local Plan of Policy BE5 Shopfronts, that stated:

Proposals involving new shopfronts and alterations to existing shopfronts must:

a) sensitively integrate with and have a sensitively impact on the appearance and character of the host building and the streetscene.

b) reinstate, retain and repair period and traditional shopfronts details, architectural features, plaques or signage that contribute to local character and distinctiveness.

c) avoid solid roller shutters and ensure views into the shop at all times; and

d) ensure signage is sensitively designed and appropriate for the location in terms of size, positioning, illumination and colour, and does not adversely impact highway safety.

1.4 An assessment of the different parts of the town centre; its building uses and types, typical architectural details, signage and colour was carried out in early 2024. The description of the four distinct character areas is contained as an Appendix to this report. From this assessment, detailed guidance was produced to help guide changes to existing shopfronts, as well as the creation of new shopfronts. This includes information about the materials, proportions of glass panes, size of stallrisers, fascias and lettering. considered aspects such as the proportion of window openings, their subdivision, and relation to, and the design of the shop door, fascia for advertising and stall-riser as the base for the glazing, all of which require careful consideration. From the assessment it was clear that the architectural style of the building should govern the detailing of the shop front, in order to produce a harmonious whole and because the character and appearance of the buildings above shop front level significantly contribute to the historic character of the town. Poorly designed shopfronts and the application of ubiquitous branding has devalued the character of many of Christchurch's traditional shopping streets[1].

1.5 The following sections on: the shopfront window and its component parts, doorways, the fascia and lettering, additional signage, lighting, canopies and awnings, materials and colour palette, establish key design principles which should be followed. An 'easy guide' is also included as a clear and simple guide for retailers, building owners, developers and contractors.

Proposals involving new shopfronts and alterations to existing shopfronts within Christchurch Town Centre are expected to follow the design guidance as set out in this Plan relating to the shopfront window and its component parts; doorways; the fascia and lettering; additional signage; lighting; canopies and awnings; materials and colour palette.

[1] This includes shops which have C18 and C19 shopfronts but were evidently built as residences over or behind commercial frontages.

2. KEY DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS – Easy Guide

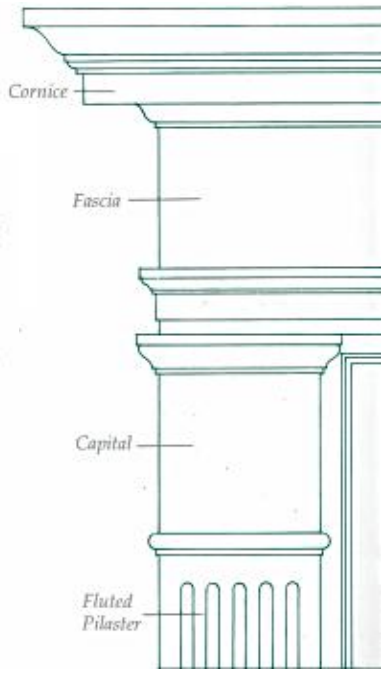
2.1 The following is intended to provide a simple guide for retailers, building owners, developers and contractors, to ensure that the design guidance in the following pages is likely to be met:

- *Include fanlights over doors – these can be plain or with radial or intersecting bar patterns.*
- *Include finely moulded dividers (mullions) to break up large areas of glazing, as a guide any single pane of glass should not exceed 2.0 x 2.5m in size.*
- *Ensure stall risers are at least 50cm high. These need to be durable, so avoid using plywood.*
- *Fascias should be no deeper than 40cm top to bottom. The business name / branding should not exceed 75% of the width of the building and not come closer to the sides of any facade than 50cm. The font size should not be too large to be intrusive/inelegant nor too small to be illegible. As a guide, the maximum capital letter height should be 18cm. Where additional information is required this can be painted directly onto the glass, and may be considered on external walls where space allows.*
- *Hanging signs are encouraged, in the same colours and with the same style of text to the fascia, and fixed to first floor height by wrought iron brackets. Signs should not be greater than 75cm x 75cm, sit between 2.4m to 3.3m from the ground and not project out by more than 75cm from the building.*
- *Signage should not be illuminated unless it relates to a pub, restaurant or late opening premises.*
- *The use of timber for shopfronts is likely to be acceptable. Other materials that may be used include chrome or bronze, glazed ceramic tile, granite and marble.*
- *Use of historic paint colours (see suggested colour palette). Light coloured lettering on a dark background the most effective. Avoid non-historic colours (orange, purple, black and white) and very dark grey, blue and black painted joinery.*

3. SHOPFRONT TERMINOLOGY

3.1 The Shopfront Guidance is intended for use by 'stakeholders', building owners, shopkeepers, local businesses and the wider community, who have an interest in the maintenance and enhancement of the shopfronts in Christchurch.

3.2 The diagrams here label the typical component parts of traditional shopfront based on classical details.



4. DESIGN GUIDANCE ON THE SHOPFRONT WINDOW AND ITS COMPONENT PARTS

4.1 The display window is generally integrated with the door and the fascia and decorated in a gloss paint finish. This includes the signage or advertising between the console brackets below the cornice, with the pilasters and stallrisers providing the framework below, and a recessed entrance usually below a transom.

4.2 Uncharacteristically large, uninterrupted panes of toughened glass should be avoided. As a guide, the maximum area for any single pane of glass should be 2.0 x 2.5m. Pilasters and mullions, usually finely moulded, are used to divide and support large areas of toughened glass, in vertical proportions.

4.3 The stallrisers act as a solid base to the shopfronts and in Christchurch typically range from glazed ceramic tile to granite, marble, timber and render with moulded skirtings or rendered plinths. A minimum height of 50cm is normally required. The use of plywood is to be avoided.

Ceramic stallrisers at The Snug & Priory Restaurant. The seating area and A-boards in front of the restaurant unfortunately block the pavement

Ornate transom detailing at Castles Home Hardware.

4.4 Solid roller and other external shutters and associated box housings and locking devices are not appropriate, as these not only detract from the visual interest of the shop front but also can create 'dead' spaces and heighten public safety concerns about the town centre outside opening hours. Where added security measures are required, other solutions such as security glass, alarm systems, and suitable internal lighting should be considered. If a shutter / grille is required, then internal chain link shutters using a light

coloured, open mesh (that allows the window display to remain visible), with guide tracks and housing located out of sight, is preferred.

5. DESIGN GUIDANCE ON DOORWAYS

5.1 Doorways are generally recessed, or otherwise should be designed to be more sheltered and easy to identify. Fanlights are common over the doors, these can be plain or with radial or intersecting bar patterns.

5.2 Equal access for disabled people to all buildings is essential and should be incorporated from the outset in respect of changes in level and the width of entrance doors. The minimum opening width for a wheelchair is 900mm (including the door frame). The use of glass in doors should be restricted to the two thirds above the lower panel and wherever possible handrails should be fixed alongside ramps and steps.

The Prama is accessible at pavement level on the High Street, the Conservative Club on Bargates has a ramp.

6. DESIGN GUIDANCE ON THE FASCIA AND LETTERING

6.1 The fascia is where the business name or brand normally appears, at the top of the shopfront. These boards should be in proportion to the total height of the shopfront, as a guide a proportion of 1:8 works well. Overly deep fascias should be avoided as these appear incongruous, and should not normally be more than 40cm deep.

The Hatch Gallery provides a good example of appropriate lettering, and Studio Lindy Stuart has a well-proportioned fascia.

6.2 The lettering on the fascia should be in proportion to the scale of the whole building. The font should be of high quality design and neither too large (becoming intrusive/inelegant) nor too small (becoming illegible). The lettering should not normally exceed 75% of the width of the building or come closer to the sides of any facade than 50cm, and the letter height should not exceed 18cm. The principle being the minimum amount of text to convey the unique selling point – the name of the shop and/or its logo. Where additional information is required this can be painted directly onto the glass.

6.3 The fascia and signage are generally in two colours, with light coloured lettering on a dark background the most effective.

6.4 Whilst sign writing on painted facias are traditional, individually applied letters are also acceptable providing the letters are simple and modest in appearance, of a single colour and height, consistent across all external signage.

7. DESIGN GUIDANCE ON ADDITIONAL SIGNAGE

7.1 Painted signage appears on a number of premises, such as Robinson's on the High Street, on the Castle Street / Church Street junction, and on the side of Ye Olde Eight Bells on Church Street and the front of Ye Olde George Inn. This follows the traditional method of advertising, is a positive element of the shopfront's influence over the wider building, and should be actively encouraged provided there is sufficient space and the signage is sympathetically designed.

7.2 Where signage is mounted directly onto stonework as in the case of banks and other commercial premises, the signage should be contrasting without the use of illuminated signs.

7.3 Signage should not be illuminated unless it relates to a pub, restaurant or late opening premises, i.e. Regent Cinema (Art Deco).

7.4 Hanging (projecting) signs are a traditional means of identification for business premises which also add to the richness of the townscape. This has the added benefit of reducing the need for free standing A frames which can block the pavement. Such signs should be in the same colours and with the same style of text to the fascia and hung above the canopy or fascia. It is common for these to be attached to the building by wrought iron brackets at first floor level. As a guide these should not be hung higher than 3.3m from the ground (measured to the top edge of sign) and the bottom of the sign should be not less than 2.4m from the ground surface. The sign should not be overly large (a maximum of 75cm either in width or height) or extend more than 75cm from the wall to the front edge.

Hanging Soho sign on iron bracket

8. DESIGN GUIDANCE ON LIGHTING

8.1 Lighting of signs, shopfronts and business premises brings life to a town at night but should not harm the architectural quality of the buildings or cause significant disturbance to nearby residential occupants. Carefully designed and sited external illuminations, from flood and spotlights, can enhance the architectural qualities of buildings and 'borrowed light' falling on footpaths or entrances can supplement that from public lighting fittings and lamp posts, potentially deterring crime. All light fittings should be simply designed, fixed internally preferably in the soffit above the shopfront window or be in proportion to the building, and painted black.

Illuminated sign at Arcado Lounge on the High Street

9. DESIGN GUIDANCE ON CANOPIES AND AWNINGS

9.1 Where canopies survive, they are on a retractable frame with a blind box fitted as an integral part of the shop front design providing shade / shelter to outside seating and window displays these are often on south or west facing streets. Existing canopies may only need to be overhauled. For replacement or new canopies and awnings, good quality canvas canopies should be used, and plastic should be avoided. The colours should complement that of the overall shopfront design, garish colours are to be avoided.

Example of canopies, in use on the west side of Church Street at Ye Olde Eight Bells Shoppe and not in use at the Hatch Gallery (see lettering example above).

10. DESIGN GUIDANCE ON MATERIALS

10.1 Shop fronts have traditionally been built predominantly of timber. The plinths are generally timber with a moulded skirting, or may be rendered. Other complementary materials include chrome or bronze, glazed ceramic tile, granite and marble, which can be used where in keeping with the overall building.

10.2 There are good examples of the use of bronze and chrome at Kelly's Kitchen and Coast Coffee in the High Street, and ornate transom detailing can be seen in Castle Home Hardware in Bargates.

10.3 Painted sustainable hardwood is preferable to softwood since it is more durable and of superior quality, and is therefore also more cost effective.

11. DESIGN GUIDANCE ON COLOUR PALETTE

11.1 The sensitive use of colour can positively enhance the street scene and rich dark colours with contrasting signage is to be encouraged. Decor of buildings dated 1800-1830 were inspired by strong but subdued colours used in contrast to conventional pastel coloured render or stucco. Buildings from the 1830-1840's onwards are noticeably rich and vibrant, drawn from the mediaeval period.

11.2 It is important to introduce variety both in colour and design where shopfronts appear in a terrace of buildings or under one continuous roof for example in the modern development between Bargates and the town centre. The fascias may be at a constant height but should be treated differently within an established colour palette and selected font types and sizes, producing a pleasing overall effect of homogeneity and sensitivity.

11.3 Non-historic colours (orange, purple, black and white) are to be avoided. The very dark grey, blue and black painted joinery and masonry is dominant on ground floor shops, cafés, bars and restaurants along Castle Street and on the corner of Church Street and Wick Lane detracts from the variety and interest of historic details. More appropriate hues of sage green, Pompeian red, chocolate brown, bright blue and the use of marbling, graining and gilding, contrasting with the colour of the surrounding brick, stone or render.

Houses in Silver Street of delightfully authentic colours, yellow ochre, pink and bright blue with contrasting joinery.

Below: appropriate historic paint colours, from the Victorian Eclectic range reproduced by Crown Trade's Historic & Classic Colours.
https://www.crownpaintsprofessional.com/colour/find-a-colour/?collection=ct-historic

Z4531U - Victorian Eclectic 1

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
Z4	53	1U	53

Y7332C - Victorian Eclectic 2

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
Y7	33	2C	33

A1412E - Victorian Eclectic 3

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
A1	41	2E	41

B0543G - Victorian Eclectic 4

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
B0	54	3G	54

Z8232Z - Victorian Eclectic 5

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
Z8	23	2Z	23

X6183H - Victorian Eclectic 6

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
X6	18	3H	18

V6182C - Victorian Eclectic 7

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
V6	18	2C	18

X3192V - Victorian Eclectic 8

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
X3	19	2V	19

X9092M - Victorian Eclectic 9

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
X9	09	2M	09

R5120L - Victorian Eclectic 10

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
R5	12	0L	12

L7302B - Victorian Eclectic 11

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
L7	30	2B	30

J0341L - Victorian Eclectic 12

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
J0	34	1L	34

P6182S - Victorian Eclectic 13

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
P6	18	2S	18

N0381Y - Victorian Eclectic 14

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
N0	38	1Y	38

M0181R - Victorian Eclectic 15

Hue:	Lightness:	Saturation:	LRV:
M0	18	1R	18

APPENDIX - SHOP FRONT ASSESSMENT – CHARACTER AREAS

The following assessment describes the main attricbutes of the shopfronts across the town centre area, based on the assessment of four sub-areas:

- Area 1: Bargates
- Area 2: Saxon Square
- Area 3: High Street
- Area 4: Church Street, Church Lane, Castle Street, Wick Lane

The assessment and related advice was provided by Kim Sankey BA(Hons),DipArch,AADipCons,RIBA for Christchurch Town Council and was finalised in August 2024.

Shopfronts referred to in photographs represent typical examples of good design.

Area 1: Bargates

Bargates is the point of arrival from the station through which visitors and residents pass on foot and by car/ public transport and along Christchurch Road into the town centre and the first impression is of 3 storey buildings interspersed with shops and businesses at ground floor level. There are several examples of decorative fanlights, with radial or intersecting bar patterns. There are also several examples of late C19 shopfronts, simply corniced and divided by delicate mullions, at Castles Home Houseware and Hot Bowls Café Bistro, virtually unchanged from historic images.

Miller Bros & F P Butler Ltd & Barber Shop are two harmonious new & old shopfronts on the east side of Bargates. Contrasting lettering on dark shopfronts, one glossy and reflective.

Studio Lindy Stuart and Castles Home Hardwares both good examples of new timber and original cast iron components used in shopfonts, one with a retractable canopy.

The former Post Office at 86 Bargates in 1936 now Hot Bowls Café Bistro with the same shopfront but missing the two large areas of signage on Bargates and Twynham Avenue.

Area 2: Saxon Square

Saxon Square is a 1980s shopping precinct that is approached from several directions, including from the High Street (where the main square sits behind the historic town hall), from the underpass of busy The Fountain roundabout, and from the large multi-storey carpark to the east. It is the main fully pedestrianised area of the town centre. The point of arrival is at the domestic scale of shops which occupy the beginning of the pedestrianised area.

The approach into Saxon Square from the north and west via the paved pedestrianised area fronting Fountains roundabout and behind the Old Town Hall.

The Saxon Square units comprising chain stores and empty units, all within identical excessively deep fascias, but with none of the subtle detail that exists in the historic core.

The deep modern uninterrupted fascias on the units in Saxon Square are wholly out of proportion with the shopfronts below. These shopfronts do not belong to Christchurch, are bare, bland and disregard the traditional subdivision of display windows. Pilasters and stallrisers are of brick and are of mean proportions. These contrast to those in the approach from the north and west (albeit these still have overly large fascias). The bespoke shopfronts which pre-date the construction of the shopping centre do not feature large expanses of toughened glass.

To create better public spaces and provide interest it would be desirable to soften the hard surfaces with outdoor seating around street trees in an area otherwise devoid of character. The main square can be used for music and performance events.

Area 3: High Street

The High Street can be viewed from end to end. The buildings retain an historic sense of scale, but many large frontages occur on the west side. The Old Town Hall is a landmark building and the vacant HSBC bank a key building. The Library and Learning Centre is large and similarly dominant, but has a rather bland frontage – more could be done to add interest. The Regent Centre is also notable, and adds variety to the shopping frontage which is otherwise almost continuous along the length of High Street. Number 27 on the High Street is a heritage building which has gone to seed, but could be renovated to make a positive contribution to the High Street.

Photomontage of High Street from the Mayor's Parlour.

The Regent Centre is iconic for its Art Deco design still evident at street level. The Library and Learning Centre occupy a prominent position in High Street also in local brickwork without a shopfront.

The half-timbered Fountain Hotel in the 1970's and today shops and offices with new projecting gable fronting onto Sopers Lane.

Chrome shopfront at Coast Coffee and bronze at Kelly's Kitchen.

it is unfortunate that the upper levels of some of the shops have been allowed to deteriorate, in structure and decorative effects. The junction where High Street turns into Sopers Lane is also unfortunate. Too much modern and inappropriate signage detracts from the street scene. There are no surviving architectural details, but these could be selectively restored based on research in the Red House Museum photograph archive.

Mix of 1960's shops and offices.

Liberty on Bargates and Jason Marks Estates on High Street, both providing professional services

The A35 and Fountain roundabout separate Bargates from the High Street and Saxon Square. The underpass links the two and arrives at smaller and more varied shopfronts including professional offices.

The HSBC bank Grade II listed with Edwardian Baroque detailing. Ornate stone and brick public buildings include the Old Town Hall which dates from 1745 and is also Grade II listed.

Area 4: Church Street, Church Lane, Castle Street, Wick Lane

A mix of shops, café/ bars and restaurants provides for an interesting and vibrant mix of day and evening uses and maintains an important active frontage to this more intimate streetscape than the High Street. Buildings are generally only 2 or 2.5 storeys. Refurbished shops/restaurants in Church Street have restored tiled shop fronts and are some of the only surviving historic shopfronts in the town. Signage is generally modest, sympathetic and traditional in design and detailing. The pedestrianised section of Church Street features some refronted houses. Windows, doors, door canopies, porticos, decorative brickwork, cast and wrought iron railings together with attached lamps, all significantly contribute to the historic and architectural quality of this group.

The arcade, which is currently a bland and uninspiring, has the potential to offer much more inviting space.

Castle Street is a commercial street with a consistent scale, secondary to the High Street functions with services and restaurants defining the character in use terms.

Finally, Wick Lane features a mix of shops, public houses including the Thomas Tripp, Bodega and offices which create a diverse but interesting townscape.

Church Street with shopfronts viewed from Church Lane.

Above - the west side of Castle Street, including The Raft, Studio, The Beauty Bar and Castle Sounds.
Below - Nusara, the Grade II listed Kings Arms Hotel and professional offices in Castle Street.

Wick Lane Bodega and Thomas Tripp pubs.

Ceramic stallrisers at The Snug & The Tea Shop.