

Paint Colours and Finishes for Historic and Traditional Shopfronts

Paint colours and finishes in historic towns, and shopfronts in particular, make a significant and important contribution to the character, appearance and special aesthetic qualities of buildings and areas. Inappropriate paint colours can be visually detracting and discordant. **This short guidance note provides some general advice on why colour is important, what should be avoided and what is appropriate.** Please read it together with our [Commercial Signage design and conservation guidance and Bath Shopfronts design and conservation guidance](#).

Shopfronts are highly visible, prominent and important elements of a town's streetscape because they are located at ground floor level, usually spanning the entire width of the building, often projecting into the street. They are commonly painted in contrasting colours to the main elevation of the building. Bath in particular has a highly significant and important shopfront heritage, with outstanding examples dating from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Colour plays an intrinsic and critical role in their appropriate presentation. Therefore it is critical that the choice of paint colour and finish (and style of signage) is appropriate, and takes account of and responds to the special qualities and sensitivities of a traditional historic area.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the choice of paint colours was very limited compared to the vast choice now available. Whilst choosing authentic and historically correct colours is a worthy aim when considering paint colours, we do not insist on this purist approach, and there is flexibility to allow some individual choice and to be consistent, where possible, with a corporate or 'house' style. However, this would need to be on the basis of the approach advocated by this advice note. Paint suppliers usually have what is often termed as a 'heritage' or 'vintage' range and as a rule of thumb these often provide a good basis for choosing a colour.

The general approach should be to choose a colour or colours that are not so bright, strident or garish, that they would visually detract from the traditional character of the shopfront, host building and the traditional street scene. For instance pink, modern brilliant white, bright versions of orange, green and yellow and so on should be avoided and so should the use of a modern gloss finish. The use of modern brilliant white, for instance, is regarded as too clinical, stark and detracting and at odds with the character of traditional and historic shopfronts, buildings and town centres. However, alternatively, in order to address the needs and requirements of a chain retailer where white is the chosen corporate colour, could be the use of a more traditional white, of which there are many now available. In any event, subtle and more muted tones and darker and richer colours using a flat finish, for instance satin or eggshell, is the correct and desired approach.

This approach has been adopted in many instances in Bath and other historic town centres and there are many examples of good practice and appropriate choice of colours such as those shown in the images. Where possible, the chosen paint colour of neighbouring shopfronts should also be taken into consideration in order to integrate and achieve a harmonious appearance.

Formal Approvals

Listed building consent is required to change the colour of a shopfront on a listed building, where there is a material change affecting its character and appearance. For instance, where there is a fundamental change of colour. However, where there is merely a variation within the same colour range, this would not normally require consent. If you are unsure, please [contact us](#).

Planning permission is required in cases where external painting is for the purposes of advertisement, announcement or direction. When considering any of the above, each case will be assessed on its own merits. However, generally we will aim to gain both an understanding of the commercial needs of the retailer/occupier and how they wish to present their business and also to consider the needs of the shopfront, building and street scene within the conservation area. We will exercise flexibility and not be prescriptive; however the expectation will be that the choice of colour and finish will be appropriate and mindful of the traditional historic context and will be enhancing. To save yourself time and costly errors, we recommend consulting our [Pre-application Advice Service](#).