

Larkhall

A vibrant community focussed town centre

A strategy for Larkhall town centre

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A vibrant community focussed town centre

1. Introduction

Town centres are a key part of successful places and have an increasingly important role in building stronger, more sustainable places and communities. Alongside towns across the UK, Larkhall has been challenged by changing patterns of use and shopper behaviour. In order to maintain their vitality, town centres must react to social and economic changes and consider their offer, purpose and value to communities.

The nature and use of town centres across the UK is in a transitional stage. Factors such as the economic downturn, internet shopping, the growth of edge of, and out of town shopping malls, changes in retailer's business models and consumer expectations have resulted in a decline in town centre footfall.

Local communities remain supportive of their town centres and have a desire to see them thrive. The way in which they use their town centres is, however, very different to that of a generation ago. It is broadly accepted that the traditional function of a retail town centre needs to change to meet the needs and expectations of modern communities.

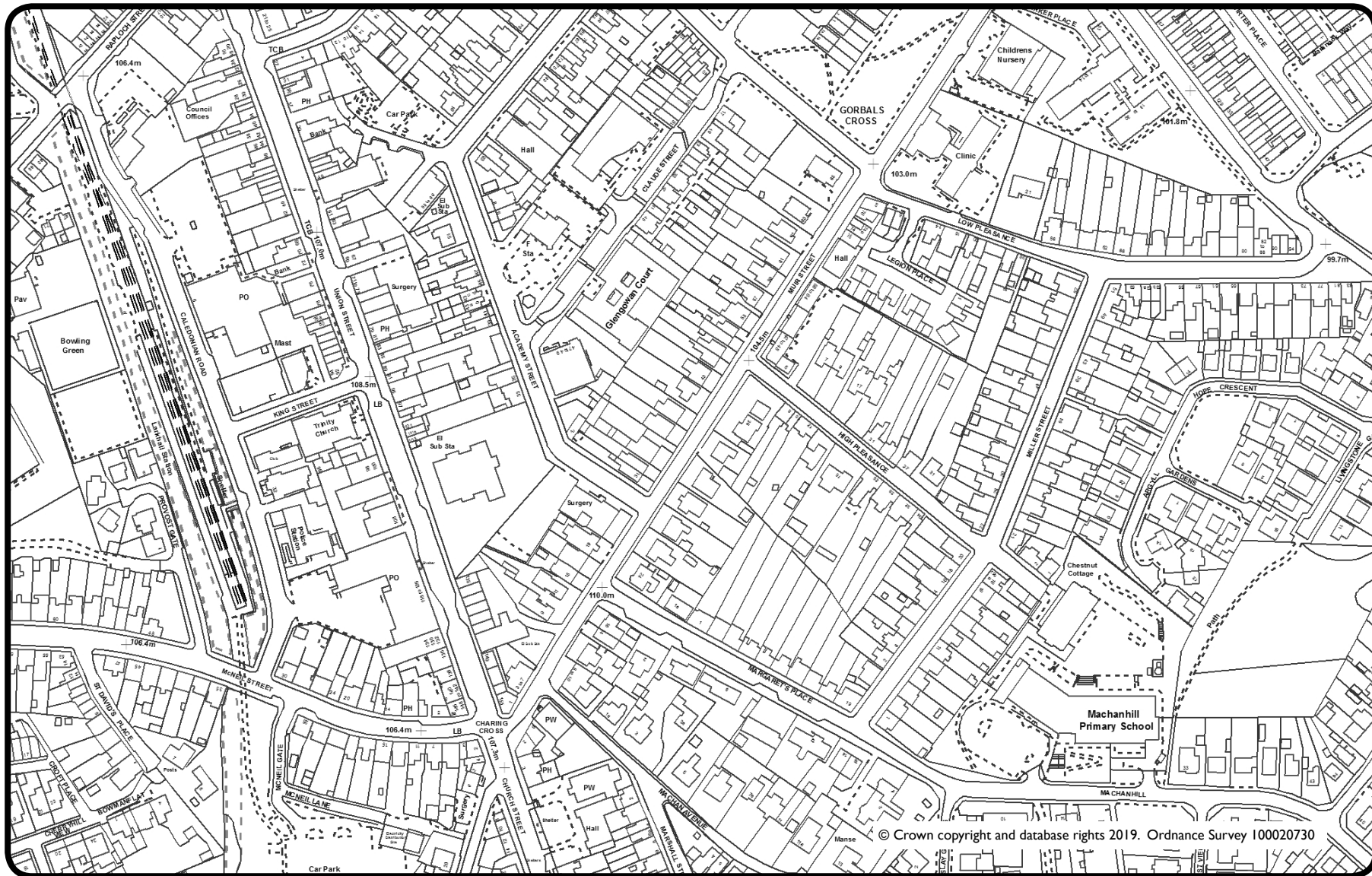
South Lanarkshire Council, working with our Larkhall town centre

partners including the Larkhall Community Council and Larkhall Community Growers, seek to support change that promotes additional vibrancy and vitality within the town centre and support its sustainable future.

This consultative draft strategy document sets out a range of initiatives which will contribute both in the short and long term to town centre activity by establishing a welcoming, safe and attractive centre to encourage footfall and generate additional spend. Critical to the success of the Strategy is partnership working. This will help to secure project goals and coordinate combined effort across public, private, third sectors and the local community for its successful delivery.



Larkhall town centre



2. Background context

Larkhall is a suburban town located approximately 18 miles south east of Glasgow. At settlement level the 2011 Census recorded a population of 14,951 people, however, by 2016 the mid-year population estimates record an increase to 18,319 people. In addition the Glasgow Region City Deal, Larkhall Community Growth Area on the north side of the town is creating 1,750 new homes over the next 10 years.



Larkhall's core retail area is focused on Union Street, a busy B-class road leading to Hamilton to the north-east and which connects to the M74 motorway onward to Glasgow and West Central Scotland. Using the best fit area for the town centre zoned boundary identifies a total of 387 people, just 2% of the town's total

population, living within the immediate town centre area. Over the past decade, the town centre population has decreased by 4%.

This local context has been supported by information from the Your Town Audit (YTA), by Larkhall Growers and partners through the completed

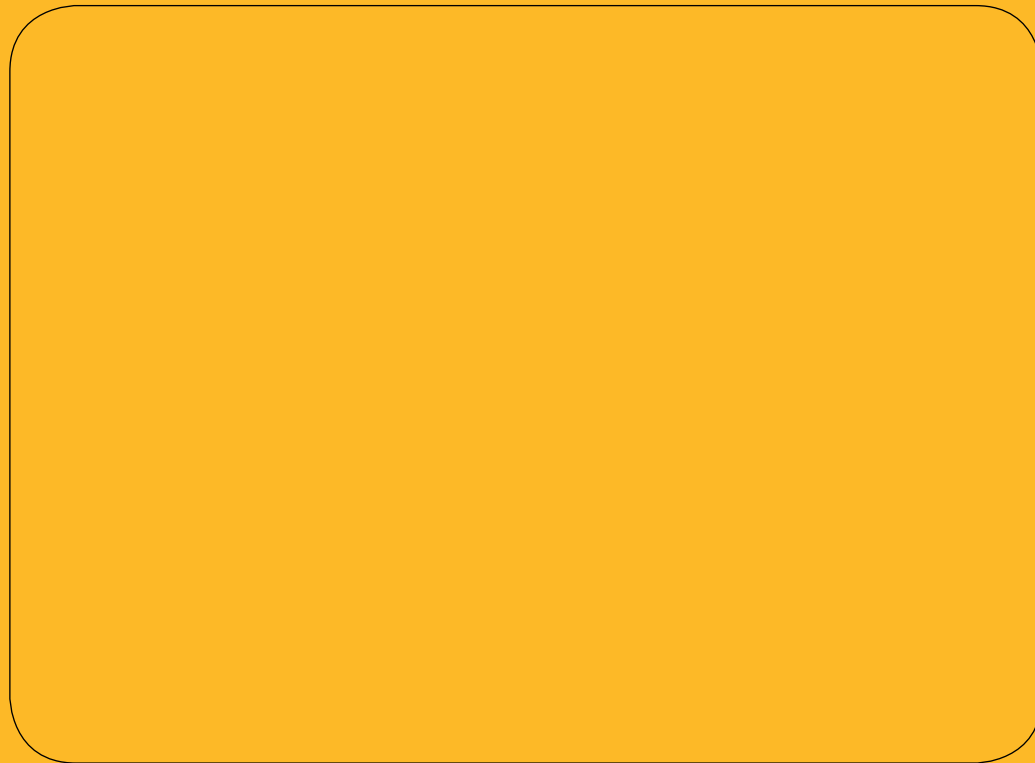
Larkhall Community Plan and Larkhall Community Council via the town centre business consultation. All of these bring the full local context and the immediate issues concerning these groups.

The largest single use in Larkhall town centre is retail, accounting for 54%, which is higher than the 38 YTA average of 46%. The town has a variety of independent retailers, alongside a number of national chains. Key national retailers include CO-OP, Costa, Specsavers, Boots and B&M. ASDA is located just outside the town centre and a new LIDL is planned for the outskirts of the town. The majority of retailers (85%) in Larkhall town centre are independently owned - substantially higher than 38 YTA average of 71% and giving the town centre a differentiated character. This rate is much higher than comparator towns such as - Alexandria 65%, Ardrossan 75%, Blantyre (68%), Dumbarton 52% and Irvine 48%.

At the time of the audit only 6% of Larkhall's retail units in the town centre were vacant, which is lower than the average retail vacancy rate across 36 YTA towns of 9.6%. This is significantly lower than the rates for the five towns identified as comparators: Alexandria (18.7%), Ardrossan (16.3%), Dumbarton (15.9%) and Irvine (7.2%).

There are two commercial banks and one post office operating in Larkhall, all of which are located on Union Street, and provide a number of ATM machines. Other non-retail occupants include five places of worship, two doctors/health centres, a council office and two funeral directors.

The town is very well connected by bus and train to central Scotland and the wider South Lanarkshire area, and is around 25 miles from Glasgow International Airport. There are two



train stations in Larkhall the main station being just a few minutes' walk from the main retail area. Trains to Glasgow city centre take around 40 minutes and run every 30 minutes or so throughout the day. There are Park and Ride facilities at Larkhall train station with 214 spaces.

Buses from Larkhall to Glasgow city centre run every 20 minutes or so during the day and every hour in the evening. These services take approximately an hour during the day and an hour and 15 minutes in

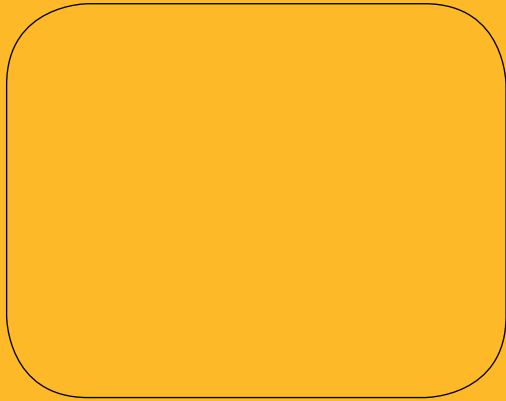
the evening, but all journeys involve a change of bus in Hamilton. However, a new direct bus route from Larkhall to the Glasgow Fort is now in operation. Free public car parking is available throughout the town centre area of Larkhall, along with free park and ride parking for 214 cars is available on the outskirts of the town centre and accessed via McNeil Street.

Based on 2011 Census data, commuters from Larkhall typically commute to other settlements within South Lanarkshire (i.e. Hamilton and

Blantyre) and to Glasgow.

Larkhall Leisure Centre is located just outside of the town centre area on Broomhill Road. The leisure centre has gym, health suite, swimming pool and soft play area and offers a range of programmed fitness classes on both pay-as-you-play and membership basis.

3. A vision for Larkhall



The Vision for Larkhall is of a vibrant, commercially successful, appealing local Town Centre celebrating its distinctiveness and diversity, supporting local needs for goods and services, whilst at the same time building a stronger more community focussed centre that is attractive, appealing, animated by people and activity with a strong independent retail offer

Larkhall has the opportunity to build on current initiatives and trends. These are associated with widening the appeal of place and the importance of connections to modern living.

A sense of place is what makes Larkhall distinctive and creates its appeal. Larkhall is a town with a scale, facilities, connections, and local amenities that are considered to be increasingly in demand.

Larkhall needs to ensure it can promote these advantages and present itself as a great place to live, shop, work and enjoy.

This vision for the town centre therefore seeks to make much more of its:

- role as a local hub within Lanarkshire focussed on providing a welcoming experience for its residents
- good transport/access links with wider South Lanarkshire and beyond
- has a good mix of retailing, retail leisure, across both national multiple stores and independent retailers
- attractiveness to business as reflected in its high occupancy rates
- level of enterprise and creative capacity across businesses, retailers, students and stakeholders
- established community spirit and strong local commitment

Larkhall Town Centre has the potential to build on its strengths, celebrate its heritage, town centre connectivity and facilities associated with its town centre core. The strategy looks to build more reasons to visit the centre, such as:

- Stronger retail offers
- Increased leisure activity
- Support for café culture
- Events
- Promoting town centre living
- Community Space

Whilst exploring means of addressing potential barriers to participation and visits, such as:

- Restricted access
- Town centre connections
- Parking arrangements
- Sense of welcome
- The lack of a cohesive program of events

Capturing investment, building confidence in the business community, engaging local residents, and strengthening enterprise activity can all be better supported through collective action with the Council, Larkhall Future, businesses and local community interests all committed to facilitating the delivery of the Strategy through further engagement.

4. Aims and objectives

The aim of the Larkhall Town Centre Strategy is to create a town centre that is an attractive, commercially successful, sustainable and vibrant place for people to live, work and socialise.

This strategy seeks to set out a range of outcomes for Larkhall Town Centre and a vision for the future. It also identifies where resources and activities should be focused to deliver these desired outcomes. There is no one solution or intervention which will address all of the issues facing the town centre. The issues and solutions are wide ranging, interrelated and complex. The approaches and actions adopted will need to be given time and progressed as a coordinated suite of measures in order to deliver the most effective impact. Regeneration requires long term sustained activity and initiatives and these actions need to be delivered flexibly. To this end review periods will be built in to assess the progress.

The Scottish Government have completed a wide range of work identifying good and best practice to support the quality of local and regional centres. Key initiatives include:

- Business Improvement Districts
- The Scottish Governments Town Centre Action Plan and Toolkit
- A policy framework based on Designing Places, Designing Streets
- Town Centre Audits

Scotland's Towns Partnership, who completed the Your Town Audit (YTA), also provide a useful resource at sharing best practice. South Lanarkshire Community Planning Partnership, Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2017-2022 and the Larkhall Community Plan both provide the local strategic context and support this document. South Lanarkshire Council, together with partners and stakeholders, believe that the Strategy and related actions should be framed through the following objectives. These objectives reflect national, regional and local policy and the commitment of the Council and town centre partners to supporting inclusive growth through the Local Outcome Improvement Plan.

Objective one: To support sustainable town centre growth, mixed-use development and investment opportunities through planning and economic development initiatives in line with the 'Town Centre First' policy initiative.

Objective two: To ensure that town centre accessibility and movement supports all modes of transport and meets the needs of users through measures to ensure convenient and safe access by foot, cycle, car and public transport.

Objective three: To ensure that the town centre has a welcoming, safe and attractive physical environment that supports the needs of both business and town centre users and provides a focus for community life and events.

Objective four: To improve the commercial viability of the town centre by supporting enterprise through business advice, training, events, marketing, finance and other support measures for existing and potential new businesses.

Objective five: To exploit the opportunities of digitalisation for business growth and usage of the town centre.

Objective six: To create the conditions for social regeneration and improve the health and wellbeing of the community - creating a town centre that is welcoming to all and safe with a strong sense of community.

5. Opportunities and challenges

In relation to Larkhall the specific opportunities and challenges are as follows:

Opportunities

Physical/Environmental

- Good access to local services
- Good road and rail links to Glasgow
- Local greenspace (parks, River Avon, Chatelherault)
- Close proximity to M74
- Good public transport links

Social/cultural

- Distinctive local urban/industrial heritage
- Strong community involvement
- Civic Pride
- Some established events

Challenges

Physical/Environmental

- Streetscape in varying conditions
- Some street furniture objects non-uniform
- Town centre and local parking used by commuters
- Parking times on main, and adjacent streets
- No loading bay areas for deliveries
- Some vacant units and some outdated shopfront
- Busy road junctions on the Main Street

Social/cultural

- Falling town centre population.
- Deprivation levels higher than Scottish average in areas of the wider town
- No coordination of marketing or year-round event program
- Ensuring that the town centre is accessible to all, especially the elderly
- Lack of a focused program of social and leisure events

Opportunities

Economic/Commercial

- Town Centre sites are in demand as vacancy rate is 6% against a Scottish average of 9.6%
- Strengthening the evening economy
- Technological advances in digital communications
- High proportion of independent traders - opportunity for distinctive offerings.
- Easy access to some of the public and private services
- Well established town centre
- Local banking provision

Policy

- Commitment of relevant partners
- SLC Business Support team
- SLC Community Planning Partnership
- Business Gateway Lanarkshire
- Opportunity to coordinate town centre activity through the strategy
- Identification of available funding e.g. Regeneration Capital Grant Fund, Sustrans, new Town Centre Fund, Participatory Budgeting of 1% of SLC expenditure
- Support for digital strategy

Challenges

Economic/Commercial

- Daytime economy and its interaction with the evening economy.
- Large Superstore, out with the Main Street (but within walking distance)
- Lack of investment by some retailers
- Competition from new edge-of-town supermarket with ample parking
- Lack of mix of use
- Online competition
- Traditional shopping hours (limited Sunday opening/no late night shopping/ 5-8pm gap in town centre activity)
- Attracting a more diverse range of offers to support both day and evening economies

Policy

- Limited or no local authority and central government funding available.
- Ensuring that all public and private investment in Larkhall directly benefits the town and its community.
- No town-centre WIFI

The above assessment indicates that the opportunities and challenges for Larkhall are broad and varied. The strategy seeks to exploit Larkhall's opportunities and build on the town centre's assets.

6. Addressing the challenges

Based on the findings of current Community and Business consultation information and extracting from this potential opportunities and challenges a focus is required on a number of key areas which include:

- Ensuring the town centre has an organised voice to represent them in future, able to put forward their case for change in a cohesive and structured way
- Strengthening the appeal and the experience of the centre and making it a more physically appealing place to visit and mix leisure/ retail experiences.
Reviewing traffic management including parking and loading arrangements that could address any perceived barriers to accessing and using the centre
A targeted program of events, marketing and softer regeneration initiatives. Focused on supporting the current businesses and helping support community spirit
- Developing new business and providing space for business to develop and flourish, providing potential future growth
- Widening the appeal of the town centre to a more varied group via enhanced signage and improved digital connectivity

Key opportunity areas to assist in this include:

Organised Voice

SLC, LCC and partners will jointly co-operate wherever possible to help deliver a series of initiatives set out in this plan that aim to make Larkhall a thriving, vibrant and attractive town centre. LCC and local businesses will seek to deliver projects which are additional and complementary to those provided by South Lanarkshire Council, they do not replace or substitute services. The establishment of this relationship provides SLC with a direct link to the collective voice of the businesses in Larkhall Town Centre. It allows us to pool resources to deliver projects which benefit the town centre.

Strengthening the appeal and the experience of the centre

With the continued growth of online shopping, the mobility of customers and the move towards 'click and collect' retailer's requirements have changed. This reduces the potential occupiers at the same time as several existing leases are coming to an end and business closures and relocations are taking effect. Independent retailing and retail models suitable to local centres and with strong customer loyalty continue to thrive.

The opportunity is to recognise the wider long-term change in certain aspects of retail and focus on new activity including leisure, culture, services including town centre living with a boost to residential development and housing within the centre. An example of this is the redevelopment of the former Union Street School into residential units.

Town centres can meet a wide range of residential needs are well suited to providing affordable housing, housing for young people and first-time buyers, housing for older age groups and those seeking housing locations with good public transport connections. Town centre living adds additional activity, supports town centre footfall and increases local spend in town centre businesses. Planning policy and the Council as planning authority can support positive change that supports the appeal and activity within the centre.

Reviewing traffic management

Accessibility and good connectivity across the centre is important. Accessibility, including support for travel choice involves all modes (walking/ cycling/public transport/ cars) and needs to be easy, direct, safe and legible.

Larkhall is a well-connected hub with excellent access to Glasgow and the metropolitan area. The proximity of the park and ride and rail station to the town centre has benefits for the businesses. Although there is no bus station the focus of all bus travel is along the main street with numerous stopping points and this works well.

Consideration is being given to limiting King St to traffic and short term parking as a mechanism to improve the awareness, access and function of the centre. Restricted access and pedestrianised areas in towns may not provide the optimum trading conditions for changing business needs. It is therefore proposed, subject to the outcome of this consultation process, to consider loading bay sites on Main Street to improve access and convenience to business deliveries at certain times of the day as an early action within the plan. In the first instance this may be progressed via an experimental traffic regulation order.

Parking is another area that is important to accessibility. There is a perception that parking in the town centre is a barrier to trade due to the charging structure, the lack of flexibility in payment methods, car park accessibility and legibility and their remoteness from the town centre. There may be opportunity to address some of these issues including options to:

- **increase the flexibility in payment methods making it more convenient for customers through use of technology/mobile phone applications and signage to encourage additional visits.**

Developing business

South Lanarkshire Council has a business support team in place which can support businesses wishing to move into the town centre, find property, access grants and funding, develop business cases and support enterprise activity. The Council also support Business Gateway Lanarkshire who work with individuals and businesses across Lanarkshire to support them to establish and grow your business. These services compliment diversification of the town centre and can make a real difference to businesses considering Hamilton as a location for business.

Town Centre diversification may offer opportunities to use vacant retail premises to deliver new events and trial initiatives e.g. craft maker emporium, teenage market, heritage centre pop-up, artist's co-op.

A targeted program of events, marketing and softer regeneration initiatives

SLC and LCC are continually looking for ways to enhance these events through a range of measures such as sponsorship and partnership working. Larkhall town centre should continue to identify ways to diversify the range of activity and uses within the centre and support stronger town centre activity and footfall. Planning policy can support these goals and, with this in mind, consideration needs to be given to what the definition of the town centre is (extent and Town Centre boundary and Town Centre uses) and how policy can support investment and facilitate building re-use and building conversion.

Digitally connected

Larkhall town centre could also embrace the digital age and offer free WiFi throughout the town centre. This could be complimented by a range of digital marketing communications

provided by LCC through a range of social media platforms. There are many opportunities to continue to use digital media to promote the town centre. It can also aid communications between SLC and town centre businesses – helping make them aware of the work being undertaken to help the town centre.

Larkhall has a mix of opportunities and constraints that impact on the appeal and functionality of the centre. The opportunities are around widening the appeal and involving the businesses in the development of the town centre. Many of the challenges result from a legacy of historic conditions and use that is now changing. The attached action plan addresses these opportunities and constraints.

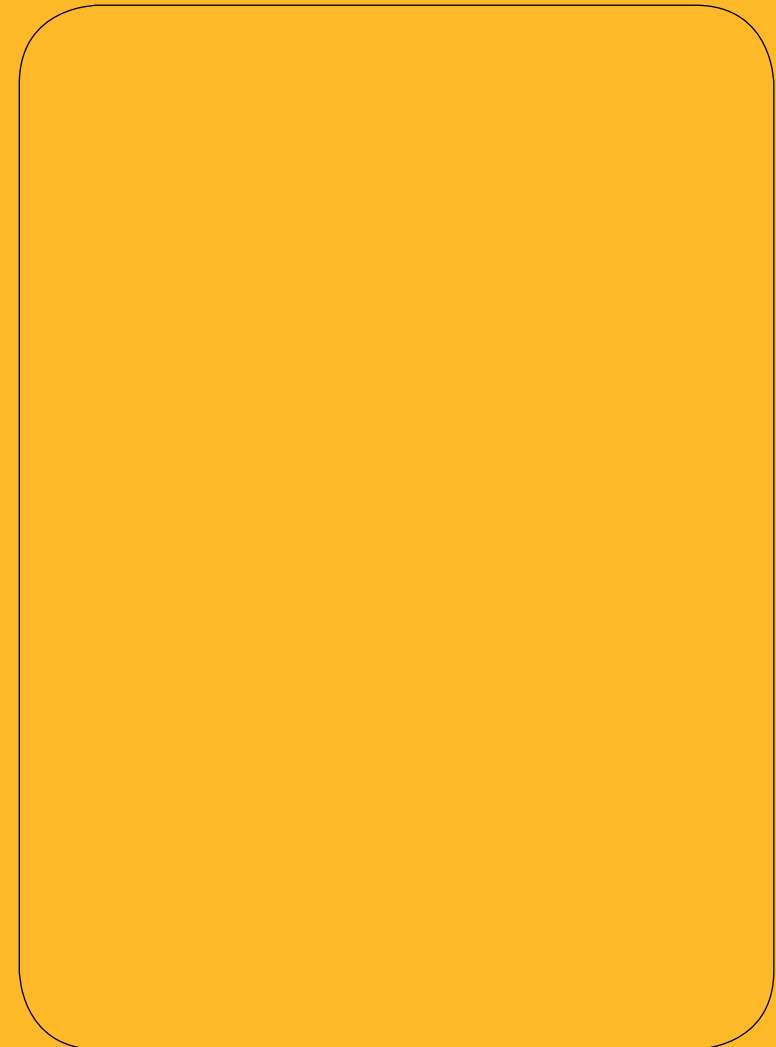
7. Town Centre stakeholders

As the local authority, SLC has powers and resources in key areas of planning, investment and business support that influence economic growth. Decision-making and resource allocation in these areas will support this strategy.

Importantly, there are other partners and stakeholders whose commitment is required to work towards a common goal of improving the physical, economic and social conditions of the town. These include:

- MP and MSPs (constituency and list)
- Locally elected members
- Scottish Government
- Scotland's Towns Partnership
- South Lanarkshire's Community Planning Partnership
- Business owners/managers
- Property owners
- Larkhall Community Council
- Community groups (e.g. Larkhall Growers, Machan Trust, LDVG, churches, residents' associations, sports clubs and other groups)
- Police Scotland (local community policing team)
- Local social media groups and networks

Successful delivery of the strategy will require commitment from all stakeholders.



8. Next steps

Coordinated and sustained activity is key to supporting Larkhall Town Centre. The delivery of the projects and initiatives will require agreement across the range of partners and stakeholders alongside a coordinated approach to delivery. This draft strategy provides a basis to consult with a range of partners and the local community. The consultation will have three main elements:

- **Partner and Community engagement - sharing the plan with partners for initial feedback on content**
- **Stakeholder engagement to be facilitated by SLC and partners**
- **Public engagement organised through a consultation event to allow the community to consider the proposals and feedback**

It is anticipated that this process will take around 8-12 weeks following which Economic Development Services will collate and review feedback. In turn a finalised plan for Larkhall Town Centre will be prepared and an implementation strategy established.

The finalised strategy will be used to engage key stakeholders and to support funding bids and submissions for specific projects. Engagement and sharing the town centre vision, objectives and strategy is important for building a broad base of support for action. The events and consultation will provide all parties with a clear understanding of the vision of the town over the next 5-10 years and allow all to take a collective approach to delivery.

Indicative timetable for the process of developing and approving the Action Plan is as follows:

Spring 2018	SLC commissioning of Your Town Audit from Scotland's Town Partnership
Spring 2018	SLC Community and Enterprise Resources Committee decision to draw up Larkhall Action Plan
June 2018	Larkhall "Your Town Audit" completed and published
March 2019- November 2019	Monthly meetings of SLC Economic Development Team with Larkhall Growers and subsequently Larkhall Community Council sub-group
December 2019	Completion of draft Larkhall Action Plan
March 2020	Approval of SLC Community and Enterprise Resources Committee for Action Plan to go to community consultation
March-May 2020	Community/stakeholder consultation
June 2020	Revision of Action Plan in response to consultation outcome
August 2020	Approval of Action Plan by SLC Community and Enterprise Resources Committee
October 2020+	Implementation of Action Plan begins

9. Town Centre Action Plan

The table below details the range of products and initiatives along with the potential timeframe for delivery, although this will be dependent on a number of factors such as availability of funding and market research. Physical projects are identified on the plan. There is also a link shown to the Scottish Government's Town Centre Action Plan (TCAP) objectives and the category under which they would fall i.e. [Town Centre Living \(TCL\)](#), [Vibrant Local Economies \(VLE\)](#) , [Enterprising Communities \(EC\)](#) and [Digital Towns \(DT\)](#)

Action Plan theme one: Physical Environment

Initiative	Project	Actions/progress - 2019	Lead partner	Town Centre Objective (TCO)	TCAP	Timescale
Streetscape	Review maintenance charter	Ensure public spaces are kept to an acceptable standard. SLC to cost replacements where needed and options identified	SLC	2	VLE	12 months
	Review Streetscape Design	Look at the design of streetscape to ensure access for all including disabled is adequate	SLC	2	VLE	12 months
		Review the design of streetscape to look at introducing a softer feel to the landscape	SLC	2	VLE	
	Greening	Through funding opportunities work with SLC to develop a greening plan for the town centre to soften the feel	LCC/ SLC	2	VLE	12 months
	Street use management	Finalise strategy and implement stricter controls on the co-ordination of the use of space in line with the agreed strategy	SLC	2	VLE	24 months
Town Centre Parking	Review the pilot traffic management project currently taking place in Hamilton Town Centre	The creation of additional short term parking and waiting only areas	SLC	3	VLE	12 months
	In consultation with both users and business look at the potential to reconfigure the town centre parking to accommodate loading.	To offset the current double parking for deliveries	SLC	3	VLE	12 months
	Review payment methods for town centre parking	Look at alternatives that involve the local businesses in payment for parking.	SLC	3	VLE	Ongoing

Action Plan theme two: Accessibility and Transportation

Initiative	Project	Actions/progress - 2019	Lead partner	Town Centre Objective (TCO)	TCAP	Timescale
Events and Marketing	Community focussed events	Support local community to establish an events programme	LCC and also other groups e.g. Gala	4	VLE	12- 8 months
	Full day and evening program	Develop both day and evening themes to ensure the benefits of the support are equally distributed between differing opening hours	LCC and Business partners	4	VLE	12-18 months
	Town Centre Marketing	The development of a marketing strategy for the town centre	LCC and Business partners	4	VLE	6 months
	Widening appeal	Consider initiatives to make the town centre attractive to young families, young people and sections of the community who do not use it.	LCC and SLC	4	VLE	12-18 months
	Community Space Review	Discuss the options of a community space either temporary or permanent in the town centre to allow small events to take place	SLC / LCC	4	VLE	6-12 months
Business Support	Business Micro Hub	Evaluate potential locations for the development of a micro hub	SLC	1 and 5	EC	12-18 months
		Work with funding team to devise a funding plan to support the potential development of the Business Micro Hub	LCC/SLC	1 and 5	EC	12-18 months
	Commercial Strategy	The development of a commercial strategy for the town centre to support the diversification of the town centre	LCC and Business Support	1 and 5	EC	24-36 months
	Business Support	Signposting from a central source of supports available such as Business Gateway SLC Business Team, Grants and funding for business cases.	SLC	1 and 5	EC	12-18 months

Action Plan theme three/four/five: Attractive Community and Business Environment

Initiative	Project	Actions/progress - 2019	Lead partner	Town Centre Objective (TCO)	TCAP	Timescale
Town Centre Voice	Creation and development of a town centre forum	Through the Community Council develop a forum for town centre organisations to have a voice	LCC and Business partners	1	VLE	12 months
	Providing an organised voice	Develop and organise a town centre business group, with representation from all types of business to support the ambitions of Larkhall Town Centre	LCC and Business partners	1	VLE	12-24 months
	Funding and support	The development of a funding package and options to support the town centre ambitions	SLC and LCC LCC/ Police Scotland	5	All	Ongoing
	Crime and antisocial behaviour	Regular meeting between community council and police Scotland (Local Problem Solving Team) to identify any specific actions needed.	SLC, LCC and Business partners	1	TLC	6 months
Accessibility and Connectivity	Digital Strategy	Look at feasibility of creating a town centre WI FI zone providing a free town centre network	SLC	6	DT	12 months
	Accessibility	Review access routes and signposting to support the use of the town centre		6	VLE	12-24 months

10. Monitoring and reporting

The main indicators for monitoring the outputs of the Action Plan, recorded and reviewed annually are as follows:

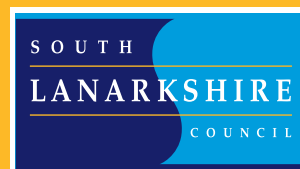
Objective	Indicator	Source of information
1	Capital investment (public/private) in Larkhall town centre	SLC
1	Planning decisions that benefit Larkhall town centre	SLC
1	Funding applications submitted to improve the town centre	SLC & LCC
1	Streetscape furniture upgraded/replaced	SLC & LCC
1	Progress with improvement in appearance of shopfronts	LCC
1	Engagement of business/residents in the Action Plan	LCC
2	Progress with improving parking demand management	SLC
2	Progress with implementation of signage review	SLC
2	Progress with long-term planning for town centre design	SLC & LCC
3	Engagement of businesses in Business Forum	LCC
3	Progress with Town Centre Marketing Plan	SLC & LCC
3	Progress with Events Strategy (e.g. events planned/held)	LCC
3	Progress with Residential unit construction	SLC
3	Progress with developing a micro business hub	SLC & LCC
4	Progress with developing commercial strategy	SLC & LCC
4	Business support provided for existing and new businesses	SLC
5	Progress with developing WiFi strategy and training	SLC
6	Progress with initiatives undertaken by Police Scotland	Police Scotland

The key indicators for assessing the results of the Action Plan, over a five-year period are as follows:

Indicator	Data source	Baseline
Town Centre profile - diversity/range of shops	Business survey	Larkhall Business Survey 2019
Business performance (change)	Business survey	Larkhall Business Survey 2019
Vacancy rate (trend relative to average)	SLC / SG data	Your Town Audit 2018
Employment in town centre	SLC /SG Data	Your Town audit 2018
Community perceptions of town centre	Community survey	Larkhall Community Survey 2015
Residents living in town centre	SLC /SG data	Your Town Audit 2018

Notes

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If you need this information in another language or format,
please contact us to discuss how we can best meet your needs.

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