

Blantyre

A vibrant community focussed town centre

A strategy for Blantyre 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 communities. Alongside towns across the UK, Blantyre has been challenged by changing patterns of use and shopper behaviours and this, plus the current pandemic issues have all impacted on their ability to support their community. To maintain their vitality and relevance, town centres must now react to social and economic changes and consider their offer, purpose, and value to communities.

South Lanarkshire Council (SLC), working with Blantyre Community and town centre partners, seek to support change that promotes additional vibrancy and vitality within the town centre and support its sustainable future. To support this, SLC commissioned a 'Your Town Audit' (YTA), conducted by Scotland's Towns Partnership and EKOS, which was completed in June 2018 and provides a comprehensive audit of Blantyre. Although the YTA study was pre COVID-19 the underlying issues are still relevant and will continue to influence the town centre post pandemic, and as such is a relevant base point to use.

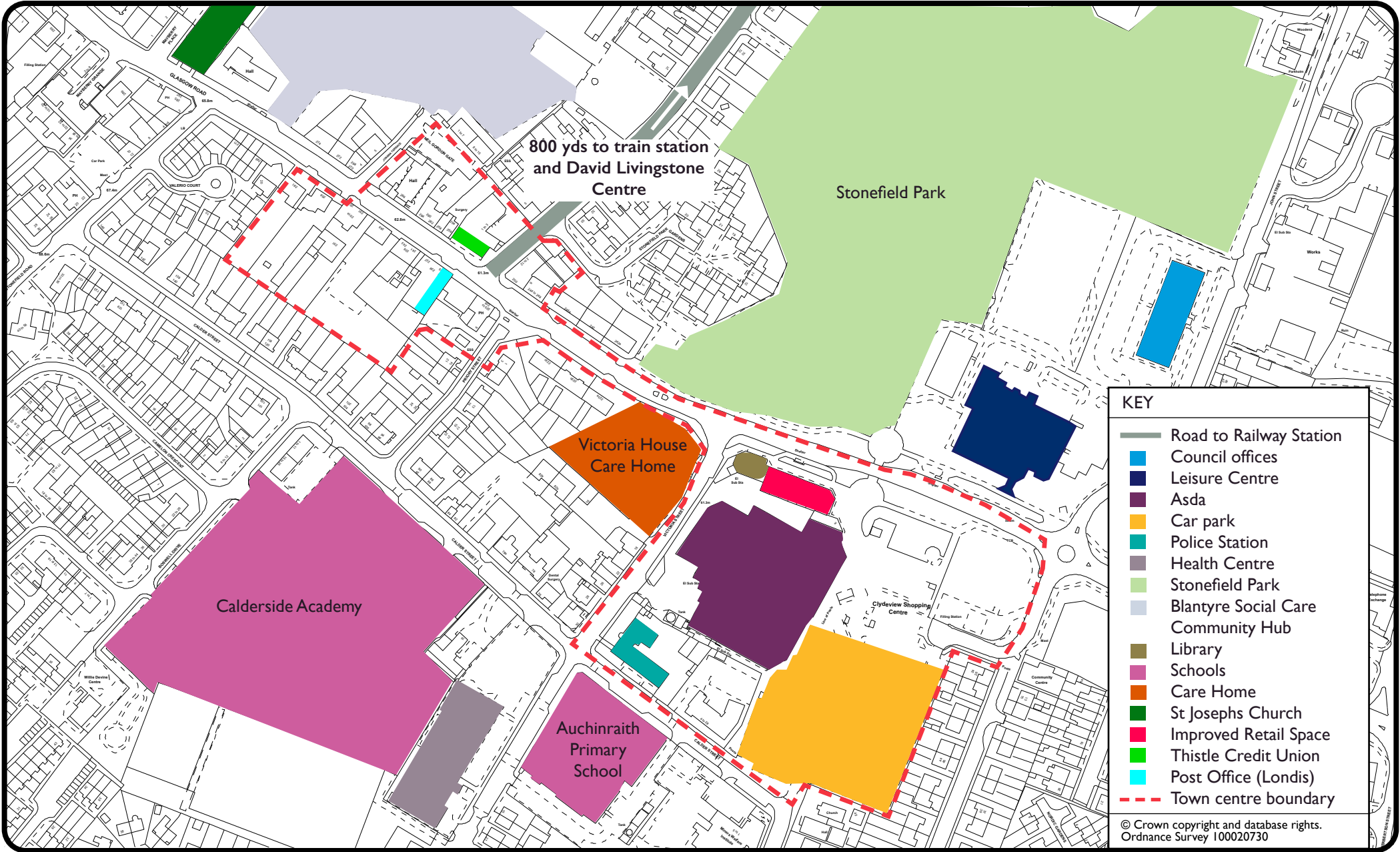
This is a five-year strategy from 2022 supporting actions to assist in the development of Blantyre town centre to respond to the current and future issues. The strategy seeks to

support and coordinate action aimed at revitalising Blantyre town centre, keeping relative to the community's needs whilst supporting local business to develop and grow. It is a partnership between public and private sector for mutual benefit, creating a range of supports that are relevant and enjoyed by local people.

This 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, create and support employment, 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.



Blantyre town centre



2. Background context

Blantyre is a suburban town approximately fifteen miles south-east of Glasgow. It is bounded by the River Clyde to the north, the Rotten Calder to the west, the Park Burn to the east (denoting the boundary with the larger adjoining town of Hamilton) and the Rotten Burn to the south. The town is very well connected by bus and rail to Hamilton, Glasgow, Central Scotland, and the wider South Lanarkshire.



Blantyre's core retail area is focused on Glasgow Road, a busy A-class road leading to Hamilton and Cambuslang in either direction which connects to the East Kilbride Expressway and M74 motorway onward to Glasgow and wider West Central Scotland.

The town centre area provides access to local services which, alongside a mix of retailers and business services, includes a library, police station, youth

centre, community centre, credit union and Post Office (within Londis convenience store).

The town centre provides a focus for local peoples and within walking distance of the town centre is the rail hub, with connections to Glasgow and wider central Scotland and the David Livingston Centre, a national heritage attraction. One of the highlights in town every summer is Blantyre Gala Day, providing a weekend of fun and entertainment. The popularity of this event shows the potential appetite for similar events to be scheduled throughout the year to encourage footfall in the town centre.

The redevelopment of the Clydeview Shopping Centre area in 2019 saw improvements and upgrades made to the ASDA store, adjoining car park and petrol station. The vacant retail and office units on Glasgow Road have been demolished and will be replaced

with proposed new modern units which will help encourage businesses back to this part of the town centre.

The current town centre has a mix of goods and services available to the consumers including convenience stores, charity shops, hairdresser, beauty salon, post office, health clinics, travel agent and a florist. There are also several leisure facilities located in and around the town centre including Blantyre Leisure Centre, Dance Central as well as a children's play area, skate park and football pitches located at a large public park known as Stonefield Park.

The YTA conducted in 2018 found that 70% of retailers are independently owned alongside several national chains including ASDA, Greggs, and Optical Express accounting for c.30% and of the total businesses in the town centre, 50% serve the evening rather than day-time economy.

In line with other town centre's across the UK, the Blantyre town centre has experienced challenges due to several factors such as previous economic downturns and austerity measures, the current coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, decreasing consumer confidence and disposable income, the rise of convenience culture and the progressive rise of internet sales and digital high street.

Although the Your Town Audit reported that 21% of the town centre retail units are vacant, this vacancy rate has reduced with the redevelopment of the Clyde-view Shopping Centre and ASDA store.

The findings of the 2019 Community Action Plan have also been considered as part of this strategy and the findings have been used to influence the findings and outcomes.



Blantyre has the potential to be a more thriving and successful centre.

The town's population has grown over the past decade and is projected to grow further. The YTA audit confirms that the population of the town has increased by 2% over the ten year period from 2006-2016 which contrasts with the average 5.7% increase recorded from other YTA audited towns. At 3%, the town centre has a slightly higher housing vacancy rate than the 2% average across Blantyre as a whole, meaning there is opportunity to increase the town centre population base and its customer base.

Although retail remains a fundamental part of a healthy town centre, leisure activity, café culture, evening

economy and local services for local communities have an increasing role and importance within the town centre. As highlighted in the previous section, Blantyre is well served with a range of goods and services it presents to its consumers. The opening of the Costa Coffee drive-thru, granted planning permission on the 6 June 2019 will add to the daytime provision of 'café culture'.

In addition, the re-opening of David Livingstone Centre in July 2021 will reinstate one of Blantyre's iconic attractions. Following a £9.1 million regeneration, the Centre now includes a new exhibition space in historic shuttle row tenements where the

explorer was born and raised, a newly refurbished shop and café, new children's play park and 11 hectares of free to access parkland.

This strategy and action plan will focus on a range of short and long term actions that will make the town centre more attractive to a local customer base by encouraging private sector involvement, enhancements to the physical environment and softer regeneration initiatives such as marketing and events.

South Lanarkshire Council, together with a range of partners and stakeholders have an interest and role in reacting to changing behaviours and recognising that Blantyre town centre must diversify its offer to give users the broadest range of reasons to visit and spend time there.

The private sector has a key role in providing a shopping, service and leisure offer that will attract and meet the needs of the local community.

The public sector has a role in ensuring that planning, investment, development, and other relevant policies maximise the attractiveness of the business environment. The wider community must be encouraged to support local business and safeguard the vitality of the town centre.

The regeneration of Blantyre town centre is a collective responsibility

3. A vision for Blantyre



The vision statement reflects the wider South Lanarkshire aspirations and the outcomes of the Community plan for Blantyre town centre providing a direct link from wider Scottish/South Lanarkshire strategy to the community aspirations for their local centre to be a focal point for social and community activity for their town.

The vision for Blantyre is of an attractive, commercially successful, community focused, welcoming town centre which generates a sense of civic pride in its citizens.

Blantyre town centre has the potential to develop the quality of its offer and the appeal of place. The town centre must build on its strengths, celebrate its heritage, town centre connectivity and facilities associated with its town centre core.

The town can build on a range of current initiatives and trends such as local shopping and more specialist markets, associated with the increasing appeal of place and the importance of connections to modern living. A sense of place is the collection of qualities and characteristics that define a location. Sense of place is what makes Blantyre distinctive and creates its appeal.

Blantyre has well developed social networks and an active community. It has excellent accessibility and good quality greenspace close at hand, including a current application for a local nature reserve on the outskirts of town. The town needs to ensure that it can promote these advantages and present itself as a great place to live, shop, work and play.

The vision for Blantyre town centre therefore seeks to build on these strengths to create:

- An attractive, safe, and welcoming town centre providing a focal point for all sectors and age groups of the community to connect.
- A successful town that meets the needs of the community it serves.
- A town that remembers and retains its heritage.

Capturing investment, building confidence in the business community, engaging residents, and strengthening enterprise activity can all be better supported through collective action with South Lanarkshire Council, 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 Blantyre 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 takes the theme from the 2019 Community Action Plan and wider strategic documents to detail actions to be considered for mutual benefit. This thread runs through all the hierarchy of plans below, taking the broad aspirations to a logical and achievable outcome.

Promoting inclusive growth (SL Community Partnership, Community Plan)	Support the local economy by providing the right conditions for inclusive growth (SLC Connect Plan 2017-2022)	South Lanarkshire Development Plan 2- Chapter 4 Economy - The support of Blantyre as a strategic centre and the policy to safeguard and support them in adapting to the changing needs of occupiers and technology.	Glasgow Road and shopping facilities (Blantyre Community Action Plan theme)	Blantyre Town Centre Strategy
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The strategy seeks to set out a range of objectives for Blantyre Town Centre and outlines in the Action Plan where resources and activities should be focused to deliver the desired outcomes. There is no one solution or intervention which will address all 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 to deliver the most effective impact. Regeneration requires long term sustained activity and initiatives and these actions need to be delivered flexibly.

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 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 the town centre accessibility and movement is inclusive and 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 conditions for social regeneration and improve the health and wellbeing of the community, particularly through the reduction of fear of crime and anti-social behaviour - creating a town centre that is welcoming to all and safe with strong sense of community.

The links to these objectives are shown in column five of the action plan in section eight.

5. Opportunities and challenges

On the 23 March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to high streets, town and city centres effectively close for business as a 'Stay at Home' order was announced by the Government. Most retailers, offices, restaurants, coffee shops, cultural and leisure destinations shut their doors, as only essential stores were allowed to stay open.

Following months of on and off coronavirus lockdown, non-essential retailers were able to re-open their doors. However, the evolving COVID-19 situation is complex with retailers having to adapt their operations and commercial decision making to rapidly to reflect the new day to day reality.

The impact of COVID-19 is still not known at this time and as such the Town Centre Strategy needs to encourage and support the development of new actions and flexible plans to respond to not only the challenges but the opportunities to out-perform their less agile competitors, increasing the focus on improving the experience at Blantyre Town Centre as an attractive place to dwell, shop, see friends and run errands.

The specific opportunities and challenges that relate to Blantyre Town Centre are as follows:

Opportunities

Physical/Environmental

- Good access to local services
- Good road and rail links to central Scotland and the wider South Lanarkshire area
- Local greenspace (Stonefield Park)
- Close proximity to M74
- Proximity to East Kilbride Expressway and M74 motorway onward to Glasgow and West Central Scotland

Social/cultural

- Growing population
- Distinctive local heritage (David Livingstone)
- Strong community involvement
- Sport and Leisure Facilities
- Civic Pride
- Gala Day Event
- Youth Centre (Terminal One)
- More working from home

Challenges

Physical/Environmental

- Use and control of town centre parking
- Perception of High Blantyre and Blantyre
- Attractiveness of Blantyre Town Centre
- Cycle parking facilities
- A safe environment
- COVID-19 issues

Social/cultural

- High levels of deprivation in small pockets of the town centre
- Communication strategy to market events
- Ensuring the town centre is accessible to all sectors and age groups of the community
- Lack of programme for social and leisure events
- COVID-19 issues

Opportunities

Economic/Commercial

- Vacancy rate is low at the time of writing
- Strong evening economy
- High proportion of independent traders - opportunity for distinctive offerings
- Local banking provision

Policy

- Commitment of relevant partners
- SLC Business Support team
- SLC Community Planning Partnership
- Opportunity to coordinate town centre activity through the strategy

The above assessment indicates that the challenges for Blantyre are broad and varied however there are a number of areas of opportunity which can be exploited to the benefit of the town centre.

Blantyre has a mix of opportunities and constraints that impact on the appeal and functionality of the centre. Many of the opportunities and challenges result from a legacy of historic conditions (shop closures, street patterns) and business practices (retail mix/shop opening hours) and changes in consumer buying behaviour (digital shopping). Key areas to review and address include:

Challenges

Economic/Commercial

- Daytime economy is not as strong as the evening economy
- Competition from within and edge of town supermarket and discount retailers
- Lack of mix of use
- Online competition
- Traditional shopping hours (no late-night shopping 5-8pm)
- No town centre wifi
- Vacant units and the ability to attract a diverse range of businesses to balance day and evening
- COVID-19 issues

Policy

- Limited local authority and central government funding available
- Ensuring that all public and private investment in Blantyre directly benefits the town and its community

- Strengthening the appeal and the experience of the centre and not only making it a more attractive but safe place to visit and mix leisure/retail experiences with the evolving COVID-19 pandemic situation.
- Reviewing town centre parking and sustainable modes of transport arrangements that could address any perceived barriers to accessing and using the centre.
- Building on Blantyre's heritage and community spirit with a targeted program of events, marketing, and softer regeneration initiatives.
- Adapting to the new day to day reality with the evolving COVID-19 pandemic.

6. Consultation with stakeholders

As the local authority South Lanarkshire Council 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 the strategy.

Importantly, there are 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, MSP's, and local Councillors
- Scottish Government
- Scotland's Towns Partnership
- South Lanarkshire's Community Planning Partnership
- Business owners/managers
- Property owners
- Blantyre Community
- Police Scotland (local community policing team)
- Local social media groups and networks

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

As part of the development of the strategy the following groups were involved in discussions; Blantyre Community Council, Blantyre Futures, Blantyre Community Committee, Blantyre Volunteer Group, Blantyre Miners Welfare, Blantyre Soccer Academy, Community Links, Hyper Cyber, Lanarkshire Credit Union, Liber8/Beacons and Terminal One. We would like to thank them and all who took part, for their assistance in completing this strategy.



7. Town Centre Action Plan

The tables below detail the range of projects and initiatives along with the potential framework of delivery, although this will be dependent on several factors such as COVID-19 restrictions, availability of funding and market research. The action plan is broken down into three main themes:

- Physical Environment
- Accessibility and Transport
- Attractive Community and Business Environment

Each project within the theme are listed relating to the initiative they support followed by project details, progress to date, partners links to council and government objectives and finally timescale. Column five relates to the objectives on page six, and the initials in column six shows the link to the Scottish Government's Town Centre Plan (TCAP) objectives and the category under which they would fall. These categories are: **Town Centre Living (TCL)**, **Vibrant Local Economies (VLE)**, **Enterprising Communities (EC)**, **Accessible Public Services (APS)**, **Digital Towns (DT)** and **Pro-active Planning (PaP)**.

Action Plan theme one: Physical Environment

Initiative	Project	Actions/progress - 2021	Lead partner	Town Centre Objective (TCO)	TCAP	Timescale
Shopfront improvement scheme	Refreshing of shopfronts (cleaning for cosmetic purposes)	Consultation with landlords and business owners	Business community	1/3	VLE	24 months
Funding plan	Development of funding package for the Action Plan	Identification of funding options and timetable for submitting bids	SLC and partners	All	All	6-12 months
Greenspace improvements	Improvement/upgrading of existing greenspace	Discuss the options for greenspace improvements	SLC and partners	3	VLE	6-12 months
Civic Space provision	Development or designation of Civic Space	Discuss the options of a community space in the town centre	SLC and partners	3	VLE	12-18 months
Skatepark maintenance programme	Maintain existing skatepark	Identify works required to bring skatepark up to standard and funding options	SLC and partners	3	VLE	24 months
Upgrade of leisure facility	Upgrading of Blantyre Leisure Centre	Based on the report presented at South Lanarkshire Council meeting 25 March 2020 assess options and funding issues	All	3	VLE	36 months

Action Plan theme two: Accessibility and Transportation

Initiative	Project	Actions/progress - 2021	Lead partner	Town Centre Objective (TCO)	TCAP	Timescale
Parking provision	Review of park and ride strategy across South Lanarkshire	Agreed at SLC Community and Enterprise Resource Committee 04/02/2020, further consideration will be given to expanding parking opportunity at nearby park and ride facilities at Newton Station	SLC	2	VLE	ongoing
	Parking demand management review	Agreed by SLC Community and Enterprise Resources Committee 22/01/19, Blantyre is included in Phase three of the review (timescale tbc)	SLC	2	VLE	12 months
	Residents Parking Permit Zones (RPPZs)	Agreed by SLC Community and Enterprise Resources Committee 04/02/2020, to bring forward localised restrictions in the short term	SLC	2	VLE	ongoing
Active travel	Provision of cycling parking. Promotion of walking/cycling routes to improve physical and mental health	<p>Agreed by SLC Community and Enterprise Resources Committee on 15/09/2020, Active Travel Projects 2020/2021 report outlining</p> <p>Cycling parking provision on Glasgow Road, Blantyre programmed for completion in the coming months</p> <p>Active Travel Studies to be commissioned and carried out for Blantyre</p> <p>Spaces for People initiative which provides support to town centre's, to enable the local community to make essential trips by active travel methods</p> <p>Further publicity campaigns, building on the first to again encourage local shopping is to be undertaken in the coming weeks/months</p>	SLC			24 months

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

Initiative	Project	Actions/progress - 2021	Lead partner	Town Centre Objective (TCO)	TCAP	Timescale
Business forum	Development of a Blantyre Business Forum	Identify lead for business forum. Possible development of a newsletter or business forum	Business group	4	VLE	6-18 months
Town centre marketing	Development of marketing strategy for Blantyre business sector	Creation of a town centre app	SLC	3	VLE	6-18 months
Town centre event programme	Development of events strategy - weekly, monthly and annual program of community events to attract visitors to the town centre throughout the year	Consult with businesses and residents on potential events and identify funding options	SLC and business group	3	VLE	6-18 months
Commercial Strategy	Development of commercial strategy	Identify lead for strategy development. Collation of ideas, innovation, business gaps, good practice from possibly other towns and resources	Business group	4	EC	12 months
Promotion of SLC service support (Business Gateway and Business Support Team)	Support for existing and potential businesses with advise on property, grants and funding, business cases	Provide an overview of SLC service support and access options available	SLC	4	EC	ongoing
Town centre hanging baskets, murals and street furniture	Brighten up the environment with town centre hanging baskets, murals and street furniture	Identify and review options	Community group	3/6	VLE	24 months
Creation of a wifi zone	Delivery of free wifi network	Look at feasibility of creating a town centre wifi zone providing a free town centre network	SLC and partners	5	EC	24 months

Initiative	Project	Actions/progress - 2019	Lead partner	Town Centre Objective (TCO)	TCAP	Timescale
Digital Skills Training	Provision of training for businesses and residents	Identify and review options	SLC and partners	5	DT	36 months
Networking/ Close to home working facility	Provision of community facilities suitable for hot desking	Identify suitable existing sites and review options	SLC and partners	4	VLE	36 months
Crime and antisocial behaviour	Reduction of fear and crime and anti-social behaviour	Regular meetings between the local community and Police Scotland	Blantyre Futures Group	6	TCL	ongoing
Blantyre 'Something for All'	Consider initiatives which will make the town centre more attractive to young families/young people and community in general	Identify and review options	SLC and partners	3	VLE	12-18 months

8. 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	Progress with improvement in appearance of shopfronts	SLC/C/BG
2	Progress with improving parking demand management	SLC
2	Progress with provision of cycling parking and promoting walking/cycling routes	SLC
3	Progress with improving/upgrading of existing greenspace	SLC/CG
3	Progress with the development/designation of Civic Space	SLC/C/BG
3	Progress with skatepark maintenance program	SLC/C/BG
3	Progress with Town Centre Marketing Plan	SLC/C/BG
3	Progress with Events Strategy	SLC/C/BG
3	Progress with town centre murals/Hanging baskets	CG
3	Progress with communication strategy	SLC/C/BG
3	Progress with initiatives to make the Town Centre more attractive to young families/young people and community in general	SLC/C/BG
4	Progress with developing commercial strategy	SLC/C/BG
4	Business support provided for existing and new businesses	SLC/C/BG
4	Progress with developing a business forum	SLC and Business Group
4	Progress with the provision of community facility for hot desking	SLC/C /BG
5	Progress with developing wifi strategy and training	SLC/C/BG
5	Progress with provision of digital skills training	SLC/C/BG
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
Retail profile - diversity/range of shops	SLC/SG data	Your Town Audit 2018
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	Blantyre Community Action Plan	Blantyre Community Action Plan
Residents living in town centre	SLC/SG data	Your Town Audit 2018



9. Next steps

Coordinated and sustained activity is key to supporting Blantyre Town Centre. The delivery of the range of projects and initiatives will require agreement across the range of partners and stakeholders but also a coordinated approach to delivery.

This needs to reflect the resources available across the partners, the alignment and deliverability of the various proposals and timescales. It is therefore proposed that the 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 Council engagement - sharing the plan with partners for initial feedback on the content.
- Stakeholder's engagement to be facilitated by SLC and partners.
- Public engagement organized through a consultation event to allow the community to consider the proposals and feedback.

These three elements will run concurrently. This combined approach will allow feedback from those in the town but also independent feedback from those in the town but also independent feedback from place-making professionals who can bring learning and best practice from across the country.

It is anticipated that the consultation process will take around 8-12 weeks following which Economic Development Services will collate and review feedback. In turn a finalized plan for Blantyre Town Centre will be prepared and implementation strategy established. In advance of this consultation the Council has engaged with Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP) to carry out a town centre audit of Blantyre which captures 250 key performance indicators across seven themes. The full findings of the audit are benchmarked against comparator towns and can be found attached to the strategy document. This

report, summarized within the format of the Town Toolkit - Active, Attractive and Accessible, will provide a strong baseline from which to benchmark the current performance of the town, measure the success of the plan going forward and give the ability to and knowledge to update/revisit when appropriate.

The strategy will be used to engage with key stakeholders and to support funding bids and submissions for specific projects. Funding may be available through a variety of sources including the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund, Town Centre Community Funds and funds associated with any developer contributions, grants and public and private sector programs.

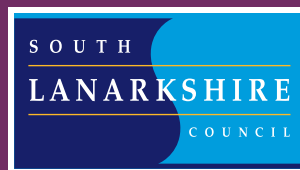
Engagement and sharing the Town Centre vision, objectives and strategy is important to building a broad base of support for action. The events, consultations and facilitated workshops, taken together, will provide all parties with a clear understanding of the vision of the town over the next 5-10 years and allow all to work in a collective approach to delivery.



Notes

Notes

A vibrant community focussed town centre



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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