



# Your Town Audit: Blantyre

June 2018



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## 1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

This report presents a summary of the Your Town Audit (YTA) for Blantyre, conducted by Scotland's Towns Partnership and EKOS. The detailed YTA Framework and Data Workbook are provided under separate cover.

YTA was developed to provide a framework to measure and monitor the performance of Scotland's towns and town centres using a series of Key Performance Indicators. It provides a comprehensive audit of Blantyre with data on up to 180 KPIs across seven themes – Locality, Accessibility, Local Services, Activities + Events, Development Capacity, Tourism, and Place + Quality Impressions.

The [Understanding Scottish Places](#) (USP) data platform provides a summary analysis for Blantyre and describes Blantyre in the following general terms:

**Blantyre's Inter-relationships:** Blantyre is an interdependent town. Interdependent towns have a medium number of assets in relation to their population; average diversity of jobs; and residents travel a mix of short and long distances to work and study. These towns are attractors of people from neighbouring towns who come to access some assets and jobs but they are also reliant on neighbouring towns for other assets and jobs.

**Blantyre's Typology:** Social and council housing are the norm in these large towns. Manufacturing and construction are the dominant forms of employment. Health and social work services are particularly active. There is a relatively high level of unemployment. Educational attainment is low. Car ownership is low, meaning that many residents in these towns are reliant on public transport.

Combining inter-relationships and typology, the USP data platform – [www.usp.scot](http://www.usp.scot) – provides a summary analysis for Blantyre and identifies 11 comparator towns that have similar characteristics, with the most similar being Ardrossan, Airdrie, Grangemouth and Bellshill<sup>1</sup>.

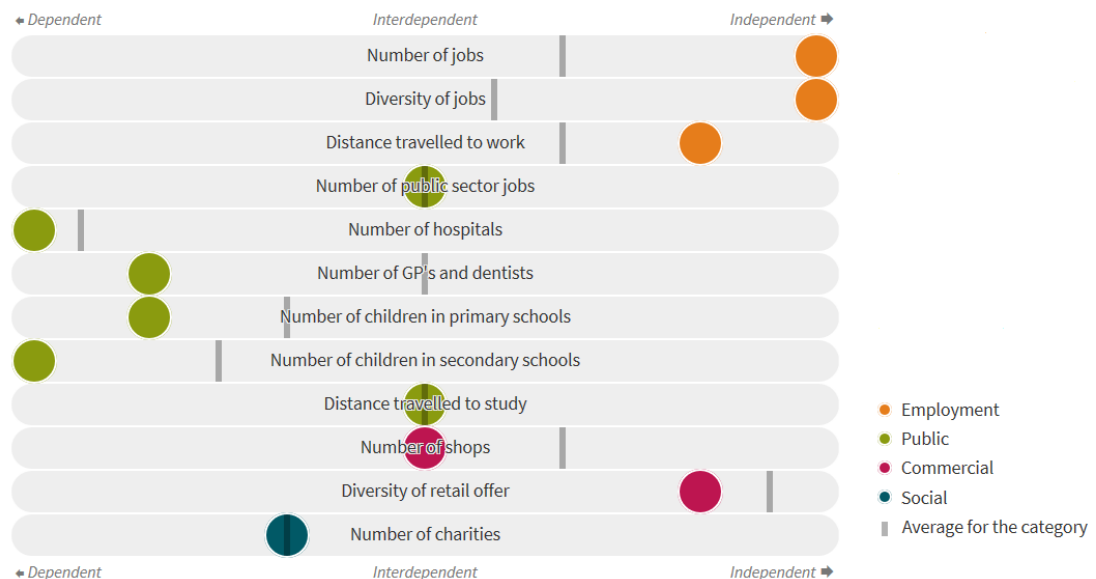
These towns have similarities in terms of the number of charities, shops, public sector jobs, and distance travelled to study.

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<sup>1</sup> The other comparator towns are identified as Irvine, Larkhall, Rutherglen, Wishaw, Port Glasgow, Alexandria and Dumbarton.

Blantyre differs in terms of the number of GP's and dentists, number of jobs, diversity of jobs, distance travelled to work, number of children in secondary schools and the number of children in secondary schools.

## Inter-relationships



Building on the USP, this report presents the results of our detailed analysis of Blantyre based around the Scottish Government's [Town Centre Toolkit](#) – an online resource available via the USP website which provides advice, guidance and case studies across three thematic areas: Accessible, Active and Attractive.

Our analysis of Blantyre is based on analysis of data collated from a range of sources including official government statistics (Census, SIMD, BRES, etc.), the USP data and bespoke data collected during an audit of Blantyre town centre.

In total 38 YTA audits have been prepared for towns across Scotland providing consistent data across a range of KPIs<sup>2</sup>. Where appropriate, this report provides comparisons for Blantyre against the YTA town average. In particular, YTAs have been prepared for four of the USP Comparator towns defined earlier – Ardrossan, Alexandria, Dumbarton and Irvine – and specific reference is made to these towns where relevant.

<sup>2</sup> It has not been possible to collect full KPI data for all towns – the number of YTA comparator towns therefore differs across this report.

## 2. Accessible Town Centre

Blantyre is a suburban town located approximately 15 miles south east of Glasgow. At settlement level the 2011 Census recorded a population of 17,240 people, however, by 2016 the mid-year population estimates record a decrease to 16,923 people. 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 West Central Scotland.



The town is very well connected by bus and train to central Scotland and the wider South Lanarkshire area, and is around 20 miles from Glasgow International Airport. While the town centre is well-served by bus routes, the train station is located around one-third of a mile north of the town centre, c. ten minute walk from the main retail area. Trains to Glasgow city centre take around 35 minutes and run every 15 minutes or so throughout the day. There is a Park & Ride facility at Blantyre train station with c. 50 spaces, and a taxi rank at the ASDA supermarket.

Although there is no allocated bus station within Blantyre, there are a number of bus stops spread throughout both the town centre area and wider settlement. Buses from Blantyre to Glasgow city centre, also run every ten minutes during the day and every 30 minutes in the evening. These services take approximately 45 minutes.

Bus and train services also connect the town with other settlements across South Lanarkshire including Hamilton (20 minutes by bus and 5 minutes by train) and Cambuslang (20 minutes by bus and 7 minutes by train). Despite the proximity, public transport connections to towns in North Lanarkshire require changes and have lengthy journey times – Airdrie (1 hour 25 minutes by bus and 1 hour 15 minutes by train) and Motherwell (35 minutes by bus and 15 minutes by train).

Parking is available throughout the town centre area of Blantyre, with a number of free on-street parking spaces (approximately 40 on Glasgow Road). There is a large off-street car park located at the ASDA supermarket on Glasgow Road at the



eastern end of the town centre (approximately 400 spaces), however the spaces at ASDA are time restricted to two hours.

There is also a smaller off-street car park on Stonefield Road with 20 free spaces at the eastern end of the town centre, off Stonefield Road. This car park does not, however, appear to have been well maintained and is in need of improvement.

There is good signage within the town centre for those travelling by foot, car or bike, with the National Cycle Route 74 running through the town to the north of the centre. Despite this, the audit did not identify any cycle parking facilities that would encourage passing cyclists to stop in the town.

There can be a great deal of traffic travelling through the town centre area, especially on Glasgow Road, however, there are four sets of pedestrian crossing points from Stonefield Road at the western end through to ASDA at the eastern end. These provide safe crossings for those on foot, particularly older and less physically able people. The roads and pavements throughout the town centre area are generally in a good condition and have been well maintained, with no major trip/ fall hazards identified from uneven or cracked surfaces.



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, and community centre. There is, however, no commercial bank operating in Blantyre, albeit the Blantyre Credit Union and Post Office (within Londis convenience store) will provide some financial services.

There are a number of primary school and one secondary located on the edges of the town centre, medical/ dental/ facilities, police station, places of worship, sports/ leisure centre, petrol filling station and a small retail park. These are all located within walkable distance of the town centre and will help to drive an element of footfall that will sustain Blantyre's retail and service outlets.

There is 4G coverage available throughout the town, but there is no town-wide free WiFi. We did not identify any cultural facilities through the audit (museum, gallery,

cinema, theatre, historic property open to public, etc.) but the website for the Parkville Hotel notes that it hosts regular live music sessions.

### 3. Active Town Centre

Blantyre has a relatively small and compact town centre. The town's performance is affected by the ongoing proposals to redevelop the ASDA supermarket and adjacent retail parade where ten retail units are currently vacant, awaiting redevelopment.

#### 3.1 Population and Housing

According to the 2016 Scottish Statistics, Blantyre has a population of around 16,920 people, of which around 1,820 live in, or are within walkable distance of, the town centre. Using the best fit area for the town centre zoned boundary identifies a total of 303 people, just 2% of the town's total population, living within the immediate town centre area<sup>3</sup>. Over the past decade, the wider town centre population has increased by 2% – this is in contrast to the average 5.7% increase recorded from 34 other YTA audited towns.

The majority of housing within the town centre<sup>4</sup> is flatted accommodation (40%), or terraced housing (33%), with tenure split between private ownership (56%), social rented (31%) and private rented (12%). At 3%, the town centre has a slightly higher housing vacancy rate than the 2% average across Blantyre as a whole, creating opportunities to increase the TC population base. The 3% vacancy rate is slightly lower than the average found across 38 other YTA audited towns of 3.5%, and is similar to vacancy rates in Musselburgh and Newton Mearns (both 3%) both of which are commuter settlements with good public transport connections.



Over four-fifths (83%) of the housing in Blantyre town centre are in council tax bands A, B and C<sup>5</sup>. The streets surrounding the town centre shopping streets are almost

<sup>3</sup> 2011 Scottish Output Zones: S00132315, S00132759 and S00131810.

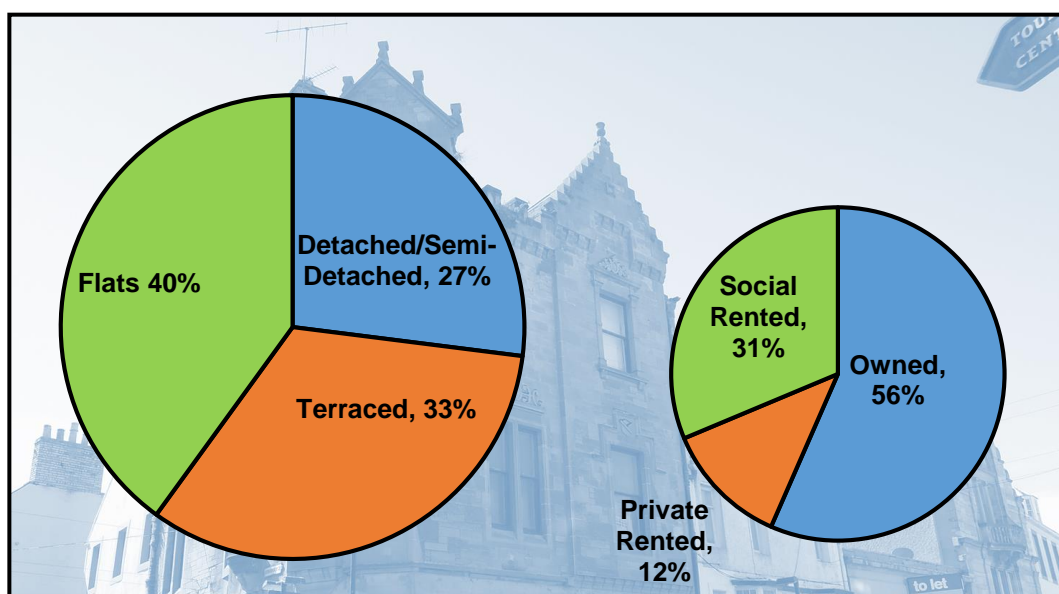
<sup>4</sup> Scottish Statistics, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Statistics, 2016.



solely residential – primarily flats and detached/ semi-detached houses – these provide a large catchment population for the town's retail and service businesses.

The average purchase price of a town centre dwelling in Blantyre (£76,350) is lower than that of the town as a whole (£81,869)<sup>6</sup>. Prices in the town centre have increased by 35% in the decade to 2013, and by 14% in the wider town. In comparison with other YTA audited towns, Blantyre has a much lower average purchase price (YTA average of £103k from 36 YTAs) and lower average ten year increase (YTA average of 42% from 33 YTAs).



There is, however, significant variation across the audited towns, from £55k to £200k average price for town centre properties. Of the four towns identified as USP comparators, Blantyre has mixed results:

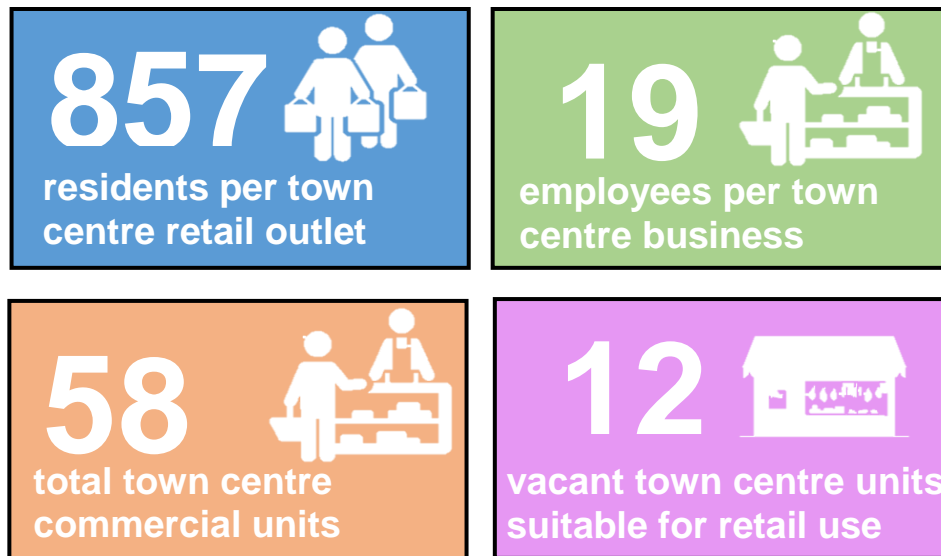
- Alexandria had a lower vacancy rate but higher average purchase price;
- Ardrossan had a lower vacancy rate and lower average purchase price;
- Dumbarton had a higher vacancy rate but lower average purchase price;
- and
- Irvine had a higher vacancy rate and higher average purchase price.

All four towns recorded significantly higher ten year average price increases, ranging from 52% to 76%, an average of 65% compared with 35% in Blantyre.

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Statistics, 2013.

### 3.2 Town Centre Employment and Business

Just 9% of the 11,950 jobs in Blantyre are located in the town centre area. National statistics recorded 610 businesses within the settlement. The YTA street audit located 56 commercial/ service units within Blantyre town centre, of which, 19 are retail businesses – comparison/ convenience/ retail service.



Across 38 YTAs the average is one retail unit per 238 town population – at 857 Blantyre has a much higher ratio, and is the highest score recorded across all YTAs. Typically, the higher the rate, the more the town's retailers depend on custom from local residents – those towns with very low rates tend to be destination towns that rely on visitor spending.

Other YTAs with similar rates include Neilston (822), and Stevenston (672), both of which have a small retail base with 13 and 15 retailers respectively. The data for Blantyre will, however, be affected by the redevelopment proposals at the ASDA supermarket where 10 of the town's 12 vacant retail units are located. If retail occupiers are secured for some or all of these units, the average population/ retail outlet in Blantyre would reduce significantly but would remain more than double the 38 YTA average of 238/ retail outlet. This suggests that the town centre does not have an oversupply of retail units and that there should be demand for the redeveloped units at Asda without creating vacancies elsewhere in Blantyre.

There is a large business and industrial area to the east of the town centre and SLC Area Office, David Dale House, to the north of the town centre. These will accommodate a substantial workforce and ready footfall for the town's businesses.

### 3.3 Town Centre Retail

The traditional town centre retail area is focused on Glasgow Road which runs through the town centre and connects to adjacent streets, such as Station Road and Priory Street where other retail units can be found.



Beyond the ASDA store, there is also a retail park on the eastern outskirts of the town with three large outlets – B&M Bargains, Farmfoods and Lidl. As this is a stand-alone retail park, outwith the town centre, with its own access and large car park, these units have not been included in the YTA analysis.

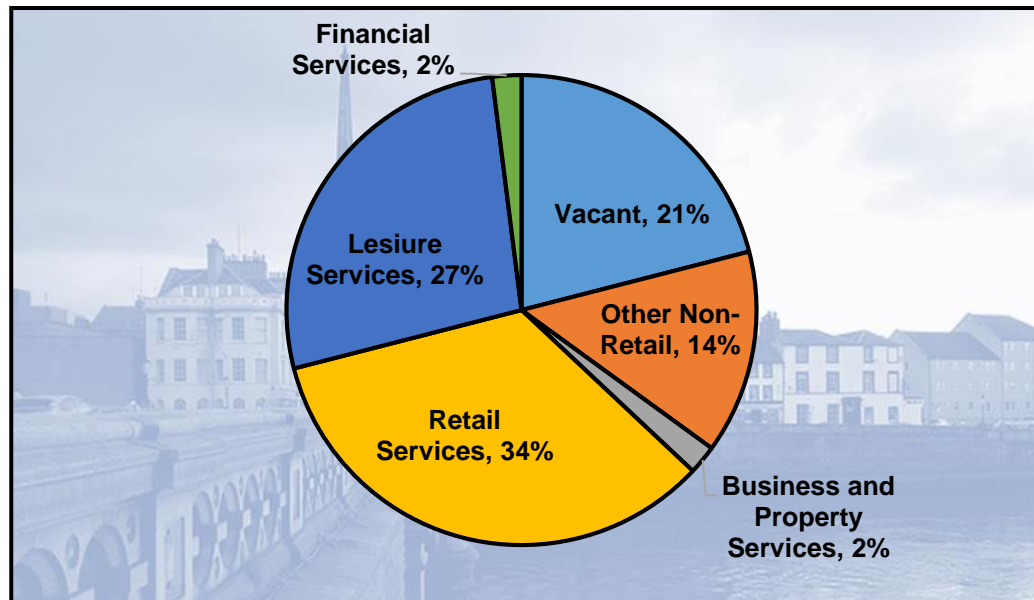
This audit found that 21% of Blantyre's retail units in the town centre were vacant, which is the highest recorded vacancy rate across all YTAs, with the average retail vacancy rate across 36 YTA towns being 9.3%. However, it should be noted that 10 of the 12 vacant units in Blantyre are located in a single row on Glasgow Road. These units are part of the Clydeview Shopping Centre, which is currently undergoing an extensive redevelopment along with the ASDA store.

The redevelopment of ASDA and the Clydeview Shopping Centre will see improvements and upgrades made to the ASDA store, adjoining car park and petrol station. The vacant units on Glasgow Road will be demolished and replaced with new modern units which will encourage businesses back to this part of the town centre. Securing occupiers for these premises, once redevelopment is complete, will obviously have a positive impact on the town's vacancy rate.



Shops located within the town centre are typically open from around 9am until 5/6pm Monday to Sundays, with some shops closed all of Sunday.

#### Town Centre Unit Mix



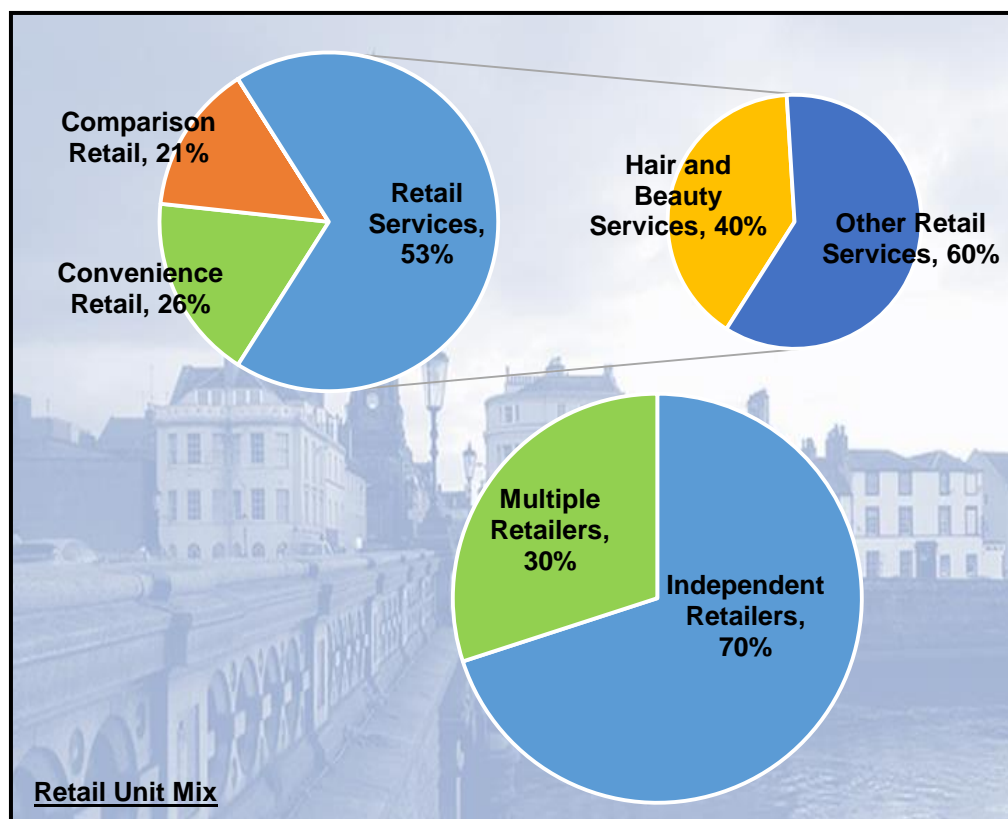
While the largest single use in Blantyre town centre is retail, accounting for 34% of all activities, it is significantly lower than the 38 YTA average of 46%. Securing retail



operators for the redeveloped units at Clydeview Shopping Centre will help bring scores into line with the YTA average.

The YTA analysis is based on the following retail definitions:

- **Convenience Retail:** primarily low cost goods that are typically bought out of habit or on impulse i.e. food, drink (alcohol and non-alcohol), news, tobacco, etc. – *five convenience retailers were identified in Blantyre town centre including ASDA and Londis;*
- **Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *four comparison retailers were identified in Blantyre town centre made up of three charity shops and a florist; and*
- **Retail Services:** services that consumers would expect to find in a town centre including hairdresser, beauty salon, repair of goods, hire of specialist clothing, health clinics, post office, travel agent, etc. – *ten retail service operators were identified in Blantyre town centre, of which four are hair and beauty businesses.*





The town has a variety of independent retailers, alongside a number of national chains. Key national retailers include ASDA, Greggs and, Optical Express.

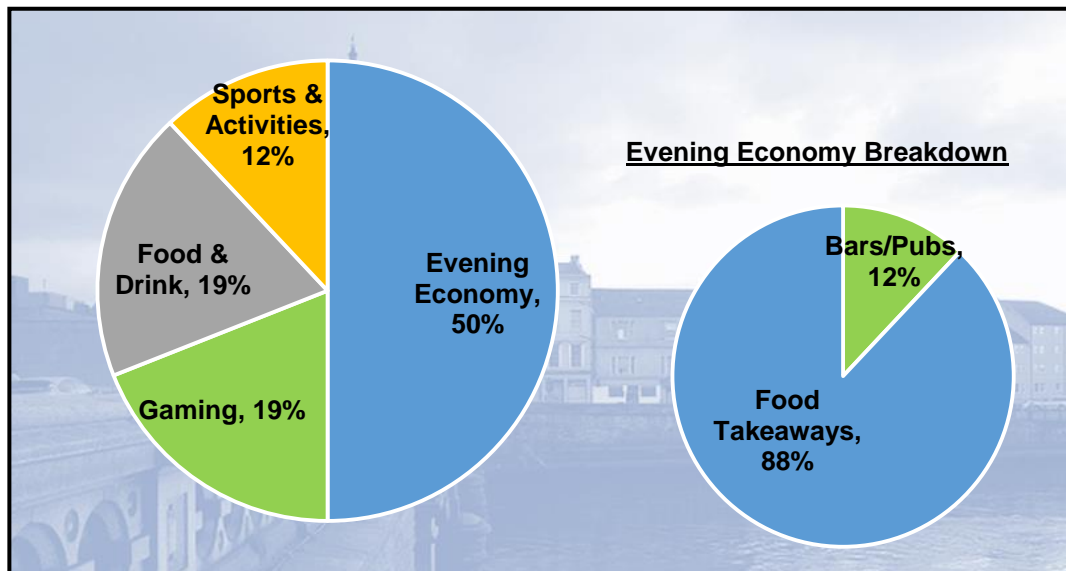
The majority of retailers (70%) in Blantyre town centre are independently owned – only slightly lower than 38 YTA average of 71%. This rate is broadly comparable with the two smaller comparator towns – Alexandria 65% and Ardrossan 75% - but substantially higher than the larger two comparator towns – Dumbarton 52% and Irvine 48%. Typically, independent businesses tend to be locally owned and, with a local vested interest in the town's wellbeing, tend to get more involved in efforts to sustain and improve the town centre.

The majority of retail in Blantyre is spread along Glasgow Road – independent traders include a florist, butcher, optician and travel agent. Of the 12 national multiples three are charity shops (Marie Curie, Salvation Army and St Andrews Hospice) and three are betting shops (Betfred, Ladbrokes and William Hill).

While there is no commercial bank operating in Blantyre, the Credit Union and Post Office will provide some financial services and there are a number of ATM machines in units across the town centre. Other non-retail businesses – all 15 of which are independently owned and 10 of which are food & drink related businesses – include seven hot food take-away outlets, two cafés and one bar, two funeral directors, one nursery and one lawyer.

## 4. Attractive Town Centre

### 4.1 Leisure Mix



Half of leisure offering in Blantyre town centre is made up of evening economy uses. The evening economy comprises seven hot food takeaways and one pub/ bar. The evening economy outlets are all located on Glasgow Road, apart from one takeaway on Station Road. Takeaways in the town centre includes the Spice of Life Indian Takeaway and Graham's Fish and Chip Shop. The pub /bar is the Stonefield Tavern – two other pubs are located to the west and south of the town centre.



The Parkville Hotel is located on the western edge of the town centre, a small five bedroom boutique hotel with public bar/ restaurant and large function suite.

## 4.2 Leisure Facilities

Blantyre Library is located within the town centre area on Glasgow Road at the Clydevue Shopping Centre. The library is open every day apart from Sundays, typically from 9:15am-5pm everyday apart from 1:15pm-8pm on Thursdays.

The Blantyre Leisure Centre is located just outside of the town centre area on Glasgow Road, and opened in 1982. The centre is open from 6:15am until 10pm Monday to Friday, from 7am until 7pm on Saturdays and from 9am until 9:30pm on Sundays. The leisure centre has gym, health suite, swimming pool and sports hall, and offers a range of programmed fitness classes on both pay-as-you-play and membership basis.

Another leisure outlet in the town centre of Blantyre is Dance Central on Station Road. Dance Central offers kids classes at a variety of different levels to suit all age groups, in many different dance styles including disco, jazz, ballet, contemporary, hip-hop, street dance, commercial musical theatre, stretch classes and gymnastics, technique. Classes are on from 4:30pm until 8:30pm on Thursdays and from 10am until 2pm on Saturdays.

## 4.3 Attractions



Stonefield Park is a large public park in Blantyre to the rear of the Leisure Centre with a children's play area, skate park, football pitches and pathways. The main access point is off Glasgow Road, opposite ASDA, where new public realm and seating has been created. To the east of Stonefield Park is the Blantyre Victoria FC Stadium and Members Club. Established in 1890, the team play in the Scottish Junior FA.

One attraction in Blantyre is the David Livingstone Centre, a biographical museum in dedicated to the life and work of the explorer and missionary David Livingstone. The centre is operated by the David Livingstone Trust and is housed in a category A listed building, less than one mile (c. ten minute walk), outside of the town centre area. The Centre and surrounding parklands are typically open seven days a week, year-round from 11am until 4pm.

Another attraction near Blantyre is Bothwell Castle, located 5 miles (c. 10 minute drive) from Blantyre. The Castle is a large 13<sup>th</sup> century stone castle overlooking the River Clyde, based around medieval Scotland with its 13th century prison tower and the 14th century great hall and chapel. The Castle and surrounding grounds are open from 9:30am until 5:30pm between April and September, and from 10am until 4pm between October and March.

#### 4.4 Historic Town Centre

There are no conservation areas or listed buildings within Blantyre town centre area, however, there are a number of listed buildings nearby.

St. Joseph's Catholic Church on Mayberry Place, is a Category B listed building, built in 1905 – it is described on the National Churches website as being designed by the Pugin & Pugin family firm in 1905, and being of rectangular Gothic-style with marble altar. The building is in very good condition having undergone full fabric restoration in recent years including installation of stained glass windows commemorating the Blantyre Colliery mining disaster of 1877 which killed 215 miners. The Church continues to be used as an active place of worship.

Adjacent to St Joseph's is the Category B listed Livingstone Memorial Church. The building dates back to 1880, and was named after the famous Blantyre missionary and explorer David Livingstone. The Church website records that it was built in 1894 and is a traditional sandstone building with a wooden arched ceiling that depicts African flowers. The Church also continues to be used as an active place of worship.

## Blantyre Community Council

Blantyre Community Council meets in the Priestfield Hall in High Blantyre each month at 7.15pm. Meetings are open to the public and involve discussions about issues and topics regarding the local area<sup>7</sup>.

### 4.5 Place and Quality Impressions

The YTA includes an independent review of place and quality impressions, with Blantyre scoring below average in comparison with other towns. Individual unit fronts and shop window displays were graded out of ten during the on-street audit, with a town centre average score of 6.0 for the condition of unit fronts and 5.8 for quality of window display. This is below the average across other audited town centres, of 6.9 for window displays and 6.9 for building fronts.

However, it should be noted that the vacant units on Glasgow Road which are associated with the redevelopments at this end of the town centre will be impacting on the overall rates for the condition of the unit front and window displays. It would then be expected that as works are completed and these units replaced with modern units and new retailers that these scores will experience a positive change.

At the time of the audit it was noted that the streets were relatively clear with little litter to be found, and few weeds present. Benches are not spread throughout the town centre, with many of them being found within the Clydeview Shopping Centre and at the new public realm area across from the Centre. No flower boxes/ basket displays were identified in the town centre area, which would be a welcomed addition that would help to brighten up the area.

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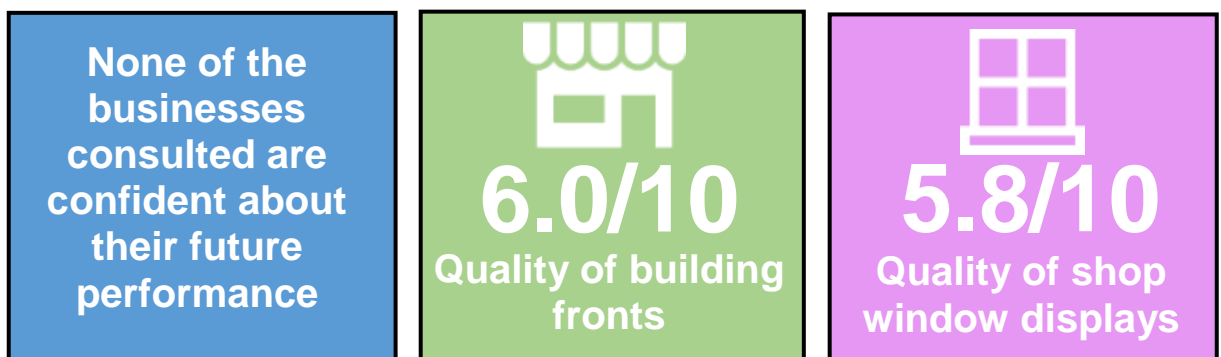
<sup>7</sup>Blantyre Community Council Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BlantyreCommunityCouncil/>





As part of the YTA audit a sample of businesses are asked to comment on their past performance and future confidence. Being a small centre with a number of vacant units at present, it proved difficult to obtain feedback in Blantyre and only four responses were achieved. Results therefore need to be treated with caution, and are reported to provide comparison with other centres.

Of the four businesses, turnover and employment has either declined or remained static over the past five years and none are optimistic about the future performance of their business in Blantyre town centre. The overall confidence score for Blantyre is 3.8 / 10 which is substantially lower than the average of 5.7 / 10 from 31 YTAs, and the second lowest score gathered across all YTAs behind Cambuslang with 2.3 / 10.



During the in-street audit, the appearance of shop fronts and window displays in Blantyre were rated. This is a very subjective analysis – buildings were rated at 6.0 / 10 and window displays at 5.8 / 10 – but is consistent with the approach adopted for other YTA audited towns where the average from 34 YTAs is 6.9 / 10 for building fronts and 6.9 / 10 for window displays.



## 5. YTA Summary and Key Points

The following are offered as final comments on the Your Town Audit of Blantyre within the framework of the Scottish Government's Town Centre Toolkit.

### 5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- Blantyre is well connected with good public transport links and services – while car ownership in the area is high, regular bus and train services connect across South Lanarkshire, Glasgow and further afield creating good access for people visiting Blantyre town centre and also for residents travelling to work/ study elsewhere;
- the majority of off-street parking in Blantyre town centre is provided at the Asda car park – it is important that there is a good visual connection and pavement/ lighting connecting the traditional retailers at the eastern end;
- the off-street car park at Stonefield Road is in need of improvement;
- there are no bicycle parking facilities within the town centre, this could help to increase uptake of cycling by residents, and with additional signage/ promotion could encourage those on the nearby National Cycle Route 74 to stop and use the town's food and drink traders; and
- Blantyre has good 3G/4G mobile phone coverage, but no free WiFi connectivity for town centre visitors.

### 5.2 Active Town Centre

- Blantyre has a population of 16,923<sup>8</sup> and a workplace based population of 11,950 people – of these almost 1,820 and 1,125 respectively are within, or within walking distance of, the town centre giving businesses a large potential catchment to draw custom from;
- of the 865 residential properties within the town centre catchment area just 25 are recorded as vacant, equating to 3% which is in line with the overall YTA average of 3.5% from 38 towns – combined with the lower than average house price in Blantyre and increasing trends toward town centre living there may be an opportunity to secure redevelopment of these empty

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Statistics Mid-Year Population Estimate 2016.

homes and also attract new residential development in other parts of the town centre;

- at present Blantyre records the highest level of vacant units of all YTA audits – 21% of all properties and 23% of retail units, compared with 10% for 36/38 YTA average – this is, however temporary and should be significantly reduced once the redevelopment of the Clydevie Centre is complete;
- there is a high proportion of independent retailers chains (68% compared with the YTA average of 71% from 38 towns), which could create an opportunity for the town to promote its unique and independent business base. These independent businesses are likely to be strong allies in supporting future events/ activities in the town centre to increase footfall;
- a more varied retail offering would help to increase visitor numbers to the town centre area, as retail currently is dominated by service businesses (e.g. hairdressers) and by convenience stores. However, with much shopping being moved online it is hard to predict the retail requirements of residents and visitor to the town centre area;
- there are currently no community events which take place annually in the town centre, which is something that could be addressed moving forward. Events such as Christmas fairs and summer festivals are useful in creating a sense of community which can help to engage and attract residents both within and outwith the immediate town centre to the area, thus increasing footfall and possibly spend; and
- although the David Livingstone Centre celebrates an element of the town's historic past, the addition of cultural and leisure activities (i.e. cinema, theatre, events venue etc.) would broaden the offer for residents. A number of towns have used vacant retail or other business premises on both short-term and permanent basis to expand the cultural and leisure offer.

### 5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- the leisure offering in Blantyre relates solely to food & drink, with no cultural offering i.e. no cinema, museum, theatre or nightclub and no hotel accommodation;
- the evening economy in Blantyre is very much dominated by takeaways in the mix of uses – 88% of all leisure businesses and 12% of the make-up of all town centre commercial premises. As there are no restaurants,

nightclubs and only one bar in the town centre, this suggests there may be an opportunity to expand the leisure offering and better meet the needs of local residents;

- while drawing from a very small base (four) none of the businesses consulted were optimistic about the future performance of their business in Blantyre town centre. The overall confidence score for Blantyre is 3.8 / 10 which is significantly lower than the average of 5.7 / 10 from 31 YTAs, and the lowest score gathered across all YTAs;
- the appearance of shop fronts and window displays in Blantyre were rated as 6.0 / 10 for building fronts and window displays at 5.8 / 10 – these scores are lower than the averages from 34 YTAs is 6.9 / 10 for building fronts and 6.9 / 10 for window displays, but will be affected by the current vacant units at the Clydevue Centre; and
- although the redevelopment of the ASDA unit and adjoining shop units will improve the sense of vacancy felt at that end of the town centre and will make the town centre more attractive once completed, more could be done in the meantime to improve the appearance of shop fronts and displays to the remaining units.