



# Your Town Audit: Stranraer

September 2021

**SITIP** | SCOTLAND'S  
TOWNS  
PARTNERSHIP

**ekos**  
Economic and Social Development

## Contents

1.	Understanding Scottish Places Summary	1
2.	Accessible Town Centre	3
3.	Active Town Centre	5
4.	Attractive Town Centre	11
5.	YTA Summary and Key Points	19

Report produced by:



Audit Date: Thursday 16 September 2021

Report: Wednesday 13 October 2021

For: Dumfries & Galloway Council

## 1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

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

The 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 Stranraer with data on up to 180 KPIs across seven themes – Locality, Accessibility, Local Services, Activities + Events, Development Capacity, Tourism, and Place + Quality Impressions.

In total, 42 YTA audits have been prepared for towns across Scotland providing consistent data across the range of KPIs. Where appropriate, this report provides comparisons for Stranraer against the YTA town average<sup>1</sup>.

The [Understanding Scottish Places](#) (USP) data platform provides a summary analysis for Stranraer and identifies two comparator towns that have similar characteristics: Hawick and Montrose. The USP platform - [www.usp.scot](http://www.usp.scot) – describes Stranraer in the following general terms:

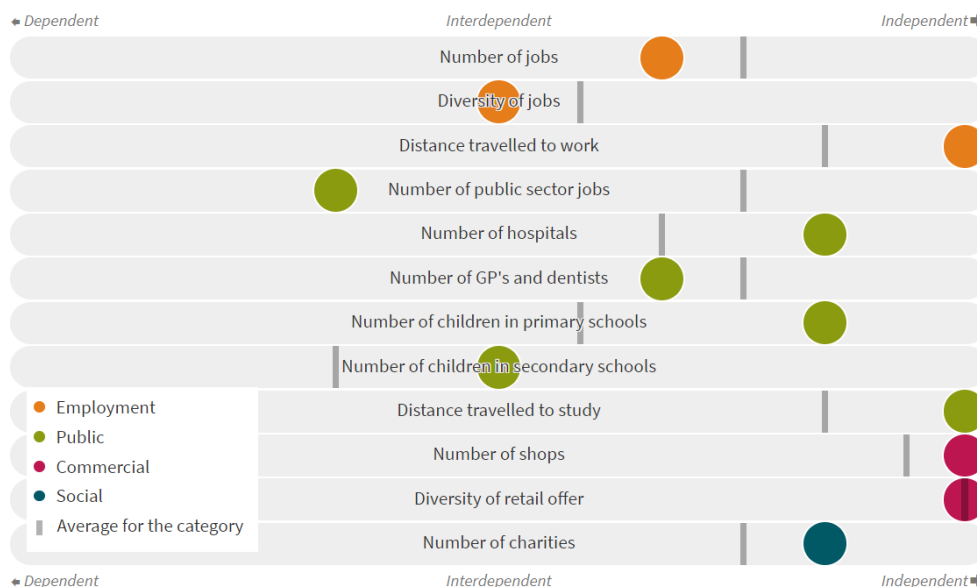
**Stranraer's Interrelationships:** an '*independent to interdependent town*', which means it has a good number of assets in relation to its population. Towns of this kind have a good diversity of jobs; and residents on the whole travel shorter distances to work and study. These towns attract people from neighbouring towns to access some of their assets and jobs.

**Stranraer'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.

---

<sup>1</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.

## Inter-relationships



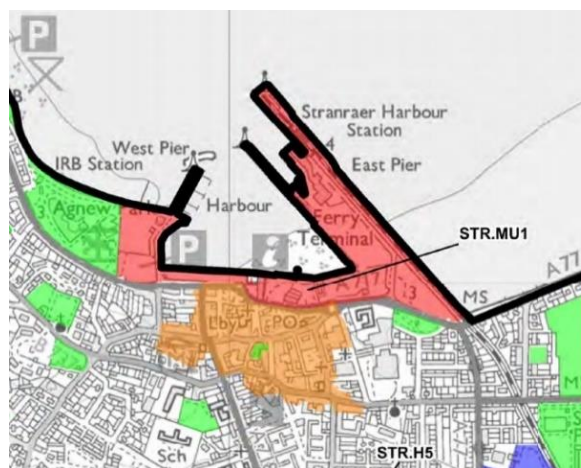
Comparing Stranraer to towns with similar USP typology and interrelationships shows it has a similar number of charities, GP surgeries, school children, jobs and shops and similar diversity of retail offer and distances travelled to work and study. It differs most in the number of public sector jobs with fewer employment opportunities in the public sector in Stranraer.

Building on the USP, this report presents the results of our detailed analysis of Stranraer based around STP and the Scottish Government's Town Toolkit – an online resource which provides advice and inspiration across five thematic areas: arts and culture; buildings and property; clean and green; enterprise and business; and streets and spaces. [The Town Toolkit](#) was revised and relaunched in 2021.

The report is designed as an audit of existing assets – physical and social – and concludes with a set of key findings and issues that will be important to the future performance of Stranraer. The report is not intended as a detailed strategy or action plan – although there are plans within Dumfries and Galloway Council to develop a regeneration action plan for Stranraer town centre.

## 2. Accessible Town Centre

### Stranraer Town Centre



#### Key

-  Settlement Boundary
-  Allocated Housing Site
-  Protected Area of Open Space
-  Town Centre Boundary
-  Established Business and Industry Site
-  Allocated Business and Industry Site
-  Allocated Mixed Use Site

Source: LDP2 (Adopted 2019)

Stranraer is a historic coastal town situated at the foot of Loch Ryan in the south west of Scotland. The total population is around 9,600, a decline of 4% over the last decade<sup>2</sup>. Stranraer is the second largest settlement in Dumfries and Galloway and acts as a retail and service centre for the surrounding rural area.

The town centre, as defined in the Local Development Plan, is relatively compact and densely built, being centred on the main shopping street of George Street / Hanover Street. It is characterised by its narrow streets and historic buildings – both of which add real value and charm to the town centre, as well as presenting challenges.



As the map above shows, the waterfront is not currently included within the defined town centre area. Regeneration of the former harbour area is a key strategic priority for the town. The vision of [Local Development Plan 2](#), adopted in 2019, is that “Stranraer waterfront will have been transformed into a sustainable extension of the town centre” within 20 years.

The LDP supports the “repositioning of Stranraer and Loch Ryan as a distinctive and successful marine leisure destination”. Developing better links between the town

<sup>2</sup> Defined using the 13 'Stranraer' data zone areas

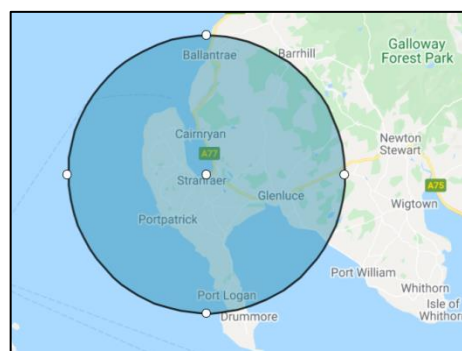


centre and the regenerated waterfront will be a crucial factor in the success of the proposed new development(s), and the future health of the existing town centre.

Stranraer railway station is located outside of the town centre, on the East Pier, which was used by Stena Line for ferry services to Northern Ireland until 2011. However, after Stena Line moved this service to a new facility around seven miles north, near Cairnryan, the East Pier has fallen out of use.

There are currently four rail services a day in each direction, running to/from either Glasgow Central or Ayr (with onward connections to Glasgow). There are hourly local buses around Stranraer during the day, as well as services to other locations in the Rhins of Galloway, including the ferry ports at Cairnryan.

15 mile radius around Stranraer



There are also bus or coach connections to Dumfries, Ayr, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Buses to Dumfries take around 2 hrs 20 mins, considerably longer than by car. There are two main ways of reaching Stranraer by road – the A77 which runs along the coast towards Ayr, or the A75 to Dumfries, via Newton Stewart and Castle Douglas.

A recent appraisal of transport in the region, undertaken by Transport Scotland, has made a series of long term recommendations for improving transport to and from Stranraer<sup>3</sup>. This includes restoring the rail link between Stranraer and Dumfries, a new rail link to Cairnryan, and enhancing (but not dualling) road capacity on the A75 and A77, which have well recognised constraints. High profile plans for a fixed link to Northern Ireland now appear unlikely to proceed.

There is parking throughout Stranraer town centre, with on-street parking on many streets (time restrictions are in place through a disc system, although this is not enforced), and surface car



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/south-west-scotland-transport-study-initial-appraisal-case-for-change/>

parks on the edge of the centre and on the waterfront. This includes a large, free of charge car park adjacent to the marina and West Pier.

Stranraer town centre has excellent mobile connectivity, with 4G coverage from all four networks. Superfast broadband (at least 30 Mbps) is available in the town. It was announced in 2021 that Stranraer is in line to benefit from a rural rollout of fibre broadband<sup>4</sup>.

In addition to the majority of Stranraer's retail outlets, the town centre includes the library, museum, churches, and various pubs, restaurants and cafes. The community hospital, college campus, sheriff court and sports centre are located outside of the town centre, and the secondary school and football stadium are on the edge of the town.

### 3. Active Town Centre

#### 3.1 Population and Housing

Just over 1,700 people live within the town centre area of Stranraer, 18% of the total settlement population<sup>5</sup>. This proportion matches the average of other YTA town centres. Over the decade to 2020, the town centre population decreased by 13% compared to a 4% decline in the wider settlement area, which equates to around 440 fewer people. Other audited town centres have generally experienced an increase in town centre living, with an average 11% increase across YTA towns.

In 2020, just under 1,100 houses were recorded within Stranraer's town centre. Housing in the town centre is a mix of semi-detached/detached (46%) and terraced (30%) properties and flats (25%) typically with three/four bedrooms. Almost half of the housing stock in the town is privately owned (49% in the town centre; 56% in the wider town).

As set out in the LDP2, the housing supply target within Stranraer is to build over 500 new homes between 2017 and 2029 (Note: the Stranraer defined housing area is much wider than the settlement boundary). Almost 180 of this target is affordable housing.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.insider.co.uk/news/openreach-extends-fibre-broadband-300000-24203881>

<sup>5</sup> Defined using two data zone areas that cover the town centre and edge of town centre.

In 2020, the residential town centre vacancy rate was 8.1%, more than double the average vacancy rate of other YTA town centres (3.7%). Within Stranraer as a whole, the residential vacancy rate was 4.4%. There can be a number of factors influencing high vacancy rates for residential properties in the town centre. Often, this can relate to the type and quality of available properties, as well as local economic conditions.

As town and city centres adjust to a changing retail climate, increasing town centre living is recognised as important throughout Scotland and is one of the key priorities for the Scottish Government's original [Town Centre Action Plan](#) (2013) and its more recent [refresh](#) (2020). The council have recently received funding from the Scottish Government's Town Centre Living Fund to convert two homes on Glebe Street, just outside of the town centre area.

That Stranraer town centre already has a relatively high level of housing (for example, Princes Street is entirely residential) puts it in a good position to grow this. Housing – whether renovations or new developments – may present a sustainable (if initially expensive) solution to some of the prominent vacant properties in the town centre.

House prices within the town centre are also much lower compared to average of other YTA towns (£71,300 compared to £113,900). This is slightly below the wider Stranraer average of £77,400. Further, the majority of properties (87%) are in council tax bands A, B or C. This is a reflection of the size of houses in the town centre, much of which was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

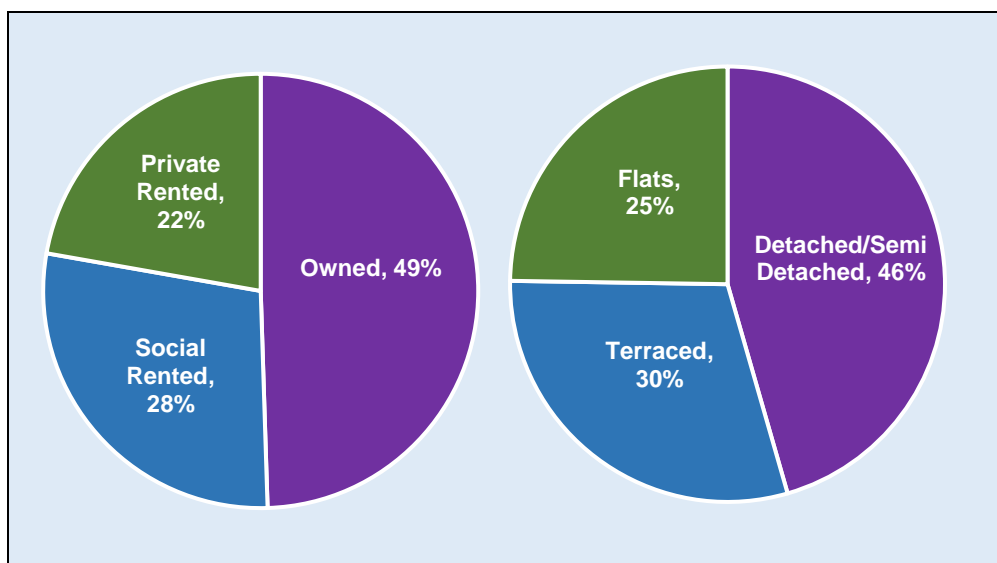
More up to date market information from property website Zoopla<sup>6</sup> places the average selling price for residential properties across the whole of Stranraer at £141,000 over the last year, with 236 sales recorded and a 4% rise in value from one year ago.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.zoopla.co.uk/house-prices/stranraer/>



### Stranraer Town Centre Housing Mix



## 3.2 Businesses and Employment

In 2020, national statistics recorded 215 enterprises registered in the whole of Stranraer, and 340 'local units'. Almost one-half (46%) of the 4,100 jobs in Stranraer are located in the town centre area<sup>7</sup>.

The town centre audit located 215 units within the town centre area, with 104 units of these being retail or retail service units. Compared to the YTA average, retail makes up a similar proportion of town centre use in Stranraer (48% in Stranraer compared to 46% across all towns).

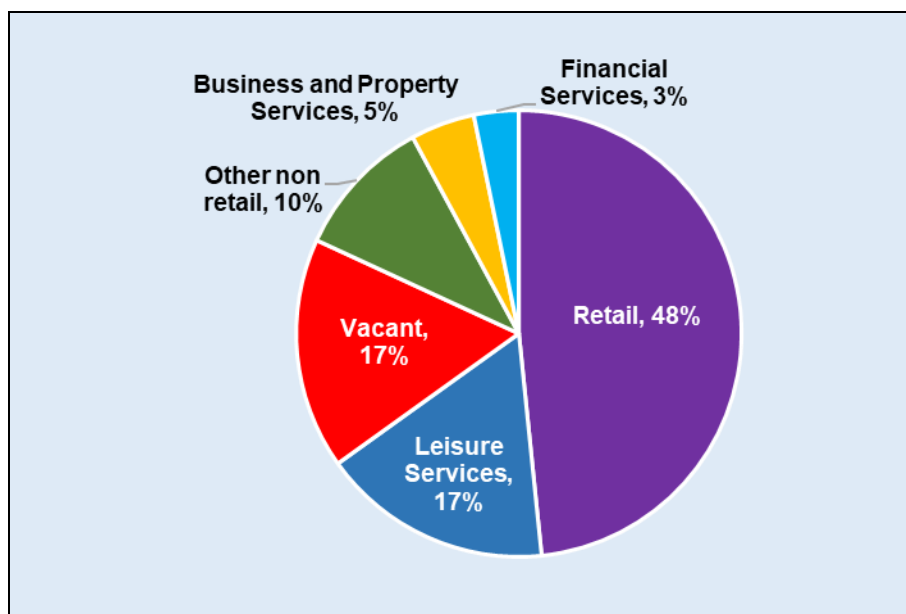
For all units (both retail and otherwise, excluding housing), the vacancy rate was 17%, much higher than the YTA average of 10%. This reflects the high proportion of both retail units and prominent non-retail buildings that are vacant (e.g. George Hotel, Dunbae House). This also reflects the economic impact of Covid-19 – it is important to note that this is the first audit taken out since the pandemic hit. During the walk around, it was clear that some business units had been vacated relatively recently.

Leisure services and units classed as other non-retail, such as places of worship and community halls, comprised relatively lower proportions of town centre unit use in Stranraer (leisure: Stranraer 17%, YTA average 22%; and other non-retail: Stranraer

<sup>7</sup> Source: Business Register & Employment Survey

10%, YTA average 14%). This reflects that some of these services, while in Stranraer, are located outside of the defined town centre.

### Stranraer Town Centre Unit Mix



### 3.3 Retail

The retail offering in Stranraer is fairly wide, reflecting the town's role as a regional centre. It is mainly concentrated in the parallel streets of George Street/Charlotte Street and Bridge Street/Hanover Street. We identified 104 retailer operators in the town centre area from a total of 215 units.



In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the retail vacancy rate in Stranraer town centre is 12.2%, equivalent to 24 units. This is slightly above the average YTA retail vacancy rate of 10.3% across 38 towns. With half of the vacant units, Hanover Street had the most vacant retail units (12) followed by George Street (four units). Judging by the condition of the vacant retail units, there seemed to be a mixture of properties which have been vacant for a significant period of time and those which have been made newly vacant.

With 93 residents per town centre retail outlet, Stranraer town centre has an extremely high density of retail offering in relation to its population (YTA average: 230 residents per town centre retail outlet). Again, this reflects the fact that it serves a wider rural area.

**93 residents per town centre retail outlet**

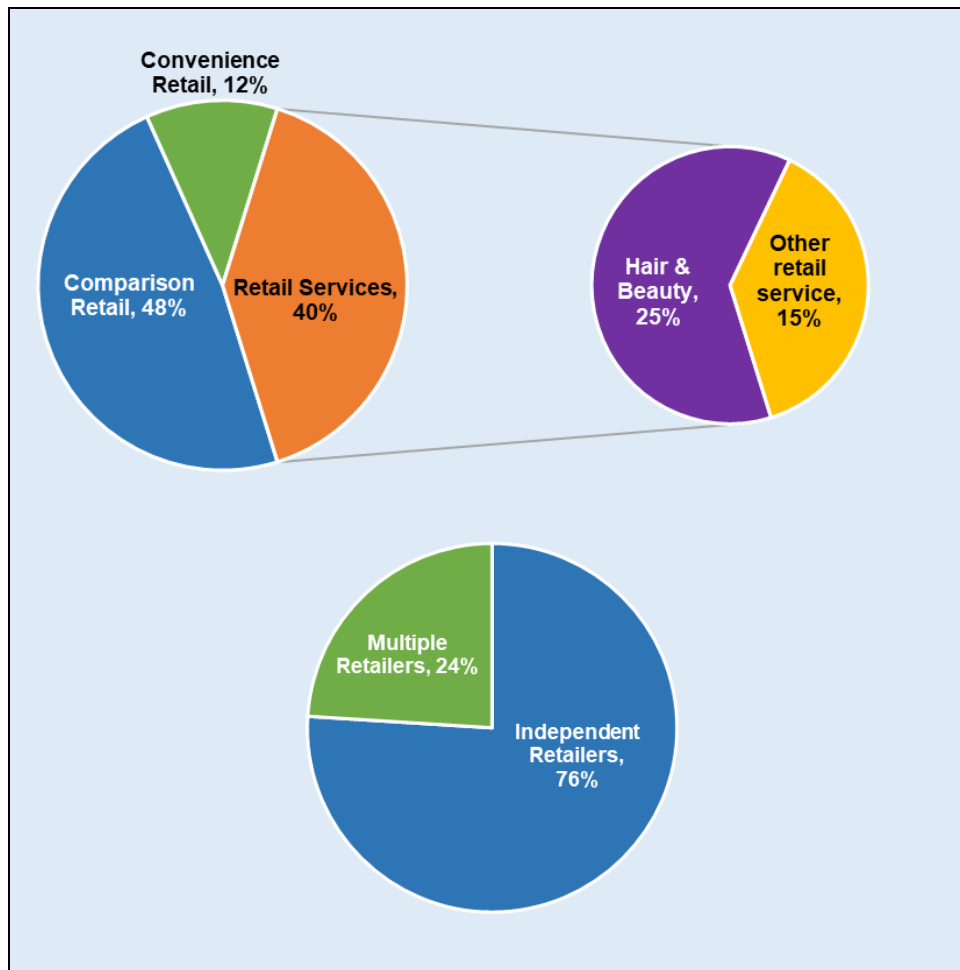
**104 town centre retail units in use**

**24 vacant town centre retail units**

Retail forms the largest town centre unit use, amounting to 48% of all units. This is slightly higher than the YTA average of 46%.

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. – *12 convenience retailers identified in Stranraer town centre;*
- **Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *50 comparison retailers identified in Stranraer town centre;* 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. – *42 retail service operators identified in Stranraer town centre.*



Independent retailers comprise 76% of the total in Stranraer, which ranks relatively highly. The number of national comparison retailers with larger stores was fairly low – this included New Look, Peacocks, WH Smith and Argos.

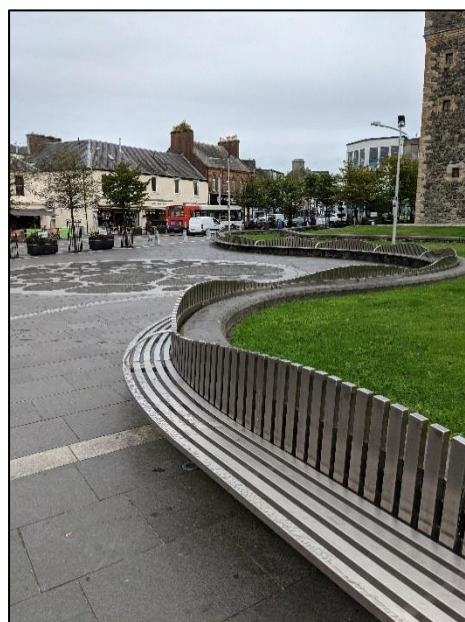


In terms of supermarkets, there are Tesco and Farmfoods stores within the town centre, and a Morrisons a short distance outside of the town centre. A Lidl supermarket is located on Stoneykirk Road towards the south of the town.

## 4. Attractive Town Centre

### 4.1 Overview

Within the town centre, the central focal point is Castle Square. This has been one of the main focuses of regeneration in recent years. With the Castle of St John as the backdrop, this has created an attractive and large civic space in the heart of the town centre with high-quality flower displays and seating as well public art/points of interest. The square is in excellent condition and was busy, with nearby cafes offering outdoor seating.



There are opportunities to improve other parts of the town centre to build on the existing regeneration of Castle Square. For example, whilst in decent condition, the narrow pavements throughout the town centre could be upgraded to the high standard of the newer granite pavements found within Castle Square. Extending the quality of pavements along Charlotte Street will be a natural step in strengthening and encouraging connections between the waterfront and the town centre, which is one of the planning objectives for Stranraer in the LDP2.



The building condition of town centre units in Stranraer scored slightly below the YTA average (see section 4.3). This reflected the large proportion of vacant and derelict properties, such as The George Hotel (pictured, right) which is listed on the [Buildings at Risk Register](#). This is widely recognised as one of the main issues to be resolved in the town centre, and is the subject of ongoing work and discussion within the council.



A Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) for Stranraer was launched in 2018, with investment of nearly £1.5m pledged from Dumfries and Galloway Council and Historic Environment Scotland for repairing and improving the appearance of buildings around the town centre. The main project to date has been the refurbishment of the former Harbourmaster's Office, which opened in 2021 as a visitor information centre (pictured above), run by the Stranraer Development Trust.



Some works under CARS, including improvements to the Stranraer Museum, have still to commence. There remains an ongoing need for this funding – some shopfronts had cracked paintwork or large weeds growing from the gutter or exterior (e.g. first floor windows). Some small renovation works targeted at “sprucing up” specific parts of the town centre or buildings, such as Hanover and Bridge Street, would make a big difference.

Whilst there is plenty of high quality available seating in Castle Square, seating options in other parts of the town centre (perhaps due to the narrow streets) are limited.



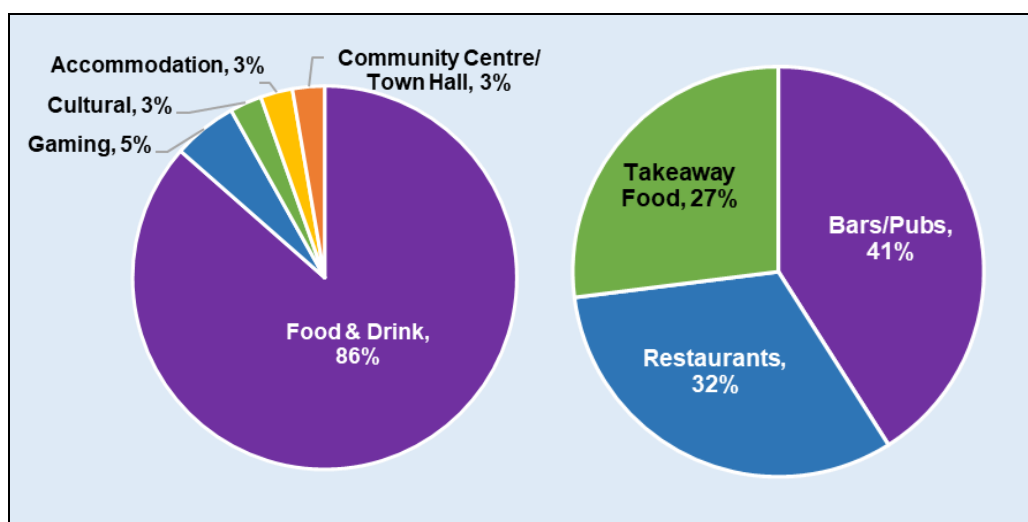
Next to the Bridge Street roundabout, there is a seating area with four benches and attractive flower displays. Despite its attractive appearance, this area appears to be underused with lower footfall. Perhaps, a piece of public art or point of interest alongside the flower displays would attract more people to use and interact with the space.

One of the key visual strengths of the town centre are the flower planters and hanging baskets which are vibrant and abundant throughout. This is part of [Stranraer in Bloom](#), an environmental



project overseen by Stranraer Development Trust and funded by the Tesco Bags for Help Scheme. Some planters also contain fruits, vegetables and herbs which people can help themselves to – these are maintained by volunteers from [Incredible Edible Stranraer](#).

## 4.2 Leisure Mix



Compared to other YTA towns, Stranraer has a lower proportion of town centre units that are used for leisure services (17% compared to 22% average). Of the mix of leisure businesses in Stranraer town centre, the vast majority are food and drink outlets (32 of 37 leisure units).

The evening economy is comprised of nine bars/pubs, seven restaurants and six takeaways. Stranraer has a relatively high proportion of evening economy outlets (438 residents per evening economy outlet) compared to the YTA average (964 residents per evening economy outlet).



Located on George Street, Stranraer Millennium Centre is a charity-run community centre with estimated 3,000 visits each month. The centre offers a number of services and activities including concerts and performances (e.g. music, wrestling, panto), café, bingo nights, Zumba sessions, youth and leisure clubs (e.g. archery). It can also be used as a wedding venue. Later this year, it will host a Christmas Market.

Near to the town centre, there is the Ryan Centre and Theatre which has a gym, swimming pool, games hall (e.g. football, badminton, basketball) and a cinema/theatre with over 260 seats.

Uniquely, the North West Castle Hotel has a curling rink, a continuation of the region's historical links with the sport (e.g. curling stones made from granite sourced from Ailsa Craig). It was the first hotel in the world to have its own curling rink. From curling season (October to April), the hotel hosts a range of curling activities and competitions almost every weekend.

There are a variety of sports and leisure clubs in Stranraer including, but not limited to: Loch Ryan Pipe Band, Stranraer Golf Club at Creachmore, Wigtownshire Rugby Club, Stranraer Tennis Club, Stranraer Bowling Club, Millennium Amateur Boxing Club, and Loch Ryan Sailing Club. The local football club, Stranraer FC, who play at Stair Park in the east end, are also embedded in the community, as reflected by The Fitba Bar on North Strand Street.

In Stranraer, there are a few playing fields, such as London Road Playing Fields, King George V Park and Ochtreilure Playing Fields (two full-sized football pitches and changing pavilion). The latter two are protected by Fields in Trust.

### 4.3 Community Events and Festivals

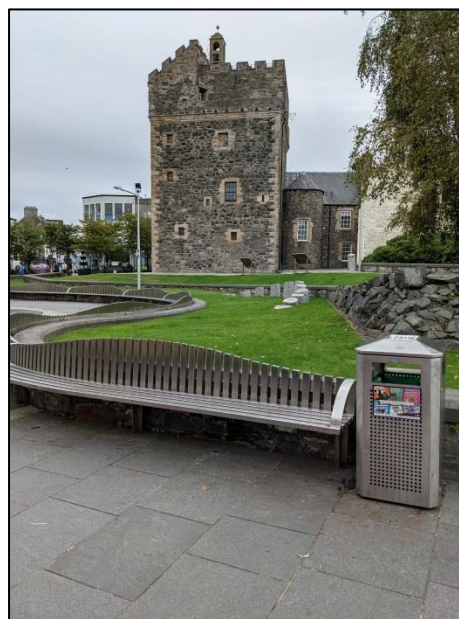
Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic has restricted the number of festivals in the last couple of years, large events which typically take place in the town include:

- Stranraer Oyster Festival – first organised in 2017 and now one of Scotland's largest seafood festivals. It is scheduled to return in 2022;
- Stranraer Scottish Week – a week-long programme of activities in July. The 2021 event began with a float parade, then included a fun run, arts and craft sessions, sports tournaments, and family events. Venues included the Millennium Centre, rugby playing field, Agnew Park, and Castle Square;

- Stranraer Park Fest – a live music event which takes place each year in Agnew Park, most recently in September 2021;
- Stranraer Jazz Extravaganza – scheduled to take place this October at North West Castle Hotel;
- Stranraer Millennium Centre Christmas Market – scheduled to take place December 2021; and
- Gin Fayre, last took place in 2019 at North West Castle Hotel; and
- Stranraer and Rhins of Galloway Agricultural Show: the last Wednesday of each July. This was cancelled in 2020 and 2021.

#### 4.4 Attractions and Heritage

Stranraer has a number of visitor attractions on offer. With a medieval tower house from the 1500s in its centre, the [Castle of St John](#) provides a spectacular backdrop to the main public realm of Stranraer's town centre. With a 4-star rating by Visit Scotland, there is free admission to the Castle which has exhibitions telling the history of the castle and its inhabitants. The castle is managed by the council and generally opens seasonally, although has been closed through the Covid-19 pandemic due to social distancing challenges within the building.



Located on George Street, Stranraer's Old Town Hall is home to [Stranraer Museum](#). As well as exploring local and regional history, there are "displays on archaeology, farming and dairying".

Situated to the west of the harbour and marina, [Agnew Park](#) is a popular attraction and offers a range of leisure activities. As well as large greenspace and garden areas, there is a large boating lake, a miniature railway, mini car racing circuit, 18-hole putting green, Driftwood Café/Bistro and public toilets. It also listed on Visit Scotland. With future regeneration development to focus on the waterfront,

strengthening connections between the town centre, waterfront and Agnew Park should be encouraged.

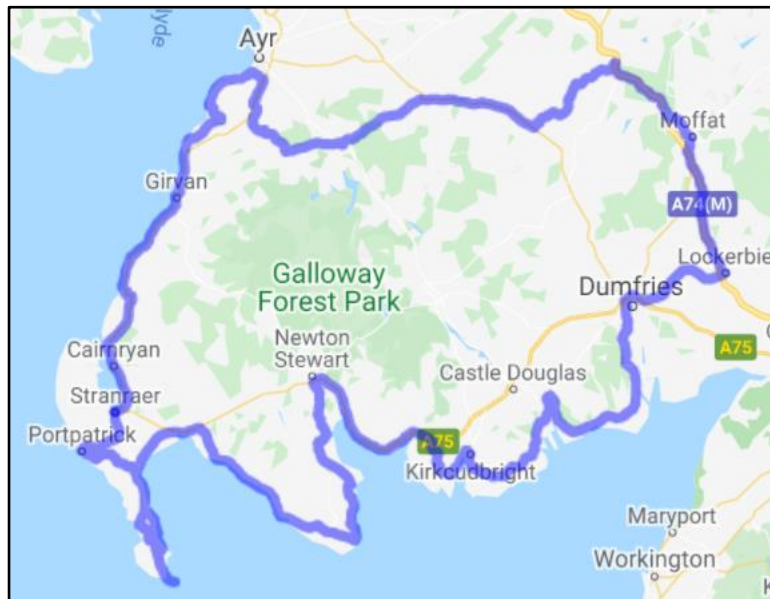
Just outside of Stranraer (8-minute driving time), [Castle Kennedy Gardens](#) is one of the Dumfries and Galloway's main attractions. With 75-acres of sculptured landscape and gardens to explore, the Gardens also offers a range of seasonal activities (e.g. pumpkin trail). An adult day ticket is priced at £6.

Several significant projects have been undertaken to market Stranraer and the wider region as an active travel and outdoors destination for visitors. For example, walking attractions include the [Loch Ryan Coastal Path](#), which is a 12-miles stretch along the coast from Stranraer to Cairnryan before an ascent to Glenapp Church. The path links to the [Mull of Galloway Trail](#) which connects Stranraer to the most southerly point of Scotland and is 24-miles long. Both paths were created by the Stranraer Rotary Club, which is testament to the work being undertaken by local volunteers to improve and develop the experience of staying in and visiting Stranraer. Dumfries and Galloway Council have also been overseeing the development of the [Rhins of Galloway Coastal Path](#), an 83-mile circular walking route that will join up and improve existing paths, as well as filling in gaps. The route starts and finishes in Stranraer.

In addition to the walking paths and trails, the [South West Coastal 300](#) has been developed to promote Stranraer and the South West region as a destination for road trips. It is a 300-mile scenic loop around the region from the coasts as well as towns as Dumfries and Moffat. It is the third route in the series of other driving routes in Scotland which have been developed over recent years, most famously the North Coast 500 and the North East 250.



### South West Coastal 300 Route



Source: [Visit South West Scotland](#)

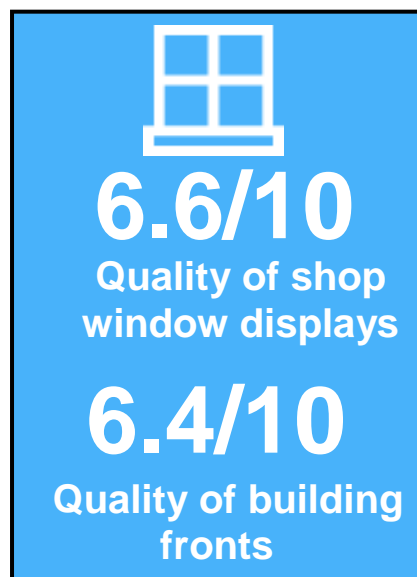
With both [Visit Stranraer](#) and [Visit South West Scotland](#) promoting Stranraer as a visitor destination, it appears that considerable work is being undertaken to promote and market Stranraer to a wide audience. This will be important in the future to ensure the vision of LDP2 can be achieved to “*reposition Stranraer and Loch Ryan as a distinctive and successful marine leisure destination*”.

## 4.5 Attractiveness Review

The YTA includes an independent review of place and quality impressions, with Stranraer scoring slightly below average in comparison to 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 6.6 for quality of window display and 6.4 for the condition of unit fronts. This is slightly below the average across other YTA audited town centres, of 7.0 in each instance.

As disused or derelict buildings tend to bring the average score down, the high number and proportion of vacant properties and buildings in Stranraer town centre will likely have had an impact on these scores.



Business confidence in the town centre was gauged from a small sample of interviews undertaken with independent traders. On a scale of 0 (not at all confident) to 10 (very confident), scores averaged at 7.8 / 10, higher than the 5.9 average of other YTA audited towns. This is particularly encouraging for Stranraer given the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting economic challenges.

## 5. YTA Summary and Key Points

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

### 5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- Stranraer town centre is within approx. one mile of the whole of Stranraer, and with the exception of a Lidl supermarket around 0.5 miles south of the centre, and a Morrisons supermarket just to its east, contains all of the key retail provision for a large catchment area. It therefore does not suffer from competing 'out of town' provision.
- Car ownership in the town is relatively low, with 34% of households in Stranraer not having access to a car or van, compared to 22% of households across Dumfries and Galloway<sup>8</sup>. This shows the importance of having a town centre that is easy to access by public transport and that favours active travel when moving around. It was clear during the audit that cars take priority in much of the town centre, with pavements often very narrow, including on main shopping streets, and cars on some streets travelling in excess of the 20mph speed limit. The clear exception to this is the area around Castle Square – the most attractive part of the town centre and, with its cafes and outdoor seating, a focal point for social interaction.
- The railway station's current location on the harbour is poor, being cut off from the town by a large area of vacant land - the proposed regeneration of the waterfront and its integration with the town centre will be important in helping to overcome this.
- Much of Stranraer is already a '20 minute neighbourhood' – which promotes the idea of people being able to reach all of their day to day needs within a 20 minute public transport trip or walk/cycle from home – benefitting the local economy, health outcomes and the environment. This is set to be a key national priority for planning and regeneration in future years, and finding ways to facilitate and encourage it will bring benefits for Stranraer's economy and population.
- In the decades to come, Stranraer will continue to act as a key service centre for the surrounding rural area, and it will remain the case that many

<sup>8</sup> Based on the most recent available data, from Census 2011

people travel into the town by car. There are well recognised constraints with the two main roads to the town (the A77 and A75), particularly with the level of HGV traffic travelling to the Cairnryan ports – an issue that requires addressing at the regional/national level. As the transition to net zero speeds up, the availability of electric charging points in the town centre will be increasingly important. There are a number of chargers spread around the town at present, including at Hanover Square, the waterfront, Morrisons, and the hospital.

- The town has good 4G mobile coverage and access to superfast broadband, and is set to benefit from the continued national rollout of fibre soon.

## 5.2 Active Town Centre

- Both total vacancy rate and retail vacancy rates were above the YTA average. In total, 36 vacant units were recorded in the town centre which was equivalent to 17% of total units (10% YTA average) - 24 of these units were vacant retail units giving a retail vacancy rate of 12.2% (10.3% YTA average). Although, as this is the first audit completed since start of Covid-19 pandemic, comparisons with the YTA average should be treated with caution.
- Stranraer's town centre is rooted in its independent stores, which make up 76% of the total and offer a wide range of goods and services – the importance of a quality local baker and butcher, for instance, can't be underestimated. This is important in retaining a distinct identity for the town centre, and supporting its appeal to visitors.
- There is a relatively high proportion of evening economy units in the town centre, likely reflecting the town's role as a regional centre for the south west of Scotland and destination for visitors.
- The town has a good range of events and festivals, particularly during the summer months, which will appeal to locals and visitors alike. Much of this has been led by volunteers and developed recently – sustaining and growing this is an important priority for the continued health and vibrancy of the town centre (and wider town).
- The Town Toolkit highlights an approach to town centre development of ['doing lots of small things well'](#), with everyone working towards an agreed vision and with strong volunteer input and community buy-in (and, in the case of businesses, a levy to support tourism promotion and activities). The

[Stranraer Development Trust](#) are already doing positive work in this area, with the annual Stranraer Oyster Festival an excellent example of picking a local asset and developing it as a themed tourism draw and identity.

### 5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- The range of retailers in Stranraer, with its supermarkets, national chains and a wide range of independent shops, draws in shoppers from a wide area, particularly with the ease of parking in the town. Nonetheless, it is not immune to the challenges of a changing retail climate, with the rapid growth in online purchases over the last 18 months likely to become the norm. Maintaining a vibrant mix of retailers, cafes and other services will be important in ensuring an attractive town centre in future years.
- The challenge presented by the prominent (and in some cases listed) vacant and derelict buildings in Stranraer town centre is well recognised and finding – and funding – sustainable solutions is far from easy. Nonetheless, it can be done: the [Town Toolkit](#) presents a number of case studies from successes elsewhere and signposts to a range of resources. There is also an ongoing need for targeted improvements to shopfronts and the general appearance of buildings around the town centre.
- The town centre is densely built and compact, and this – alongside its historic character – is one of its key assets. However, active travel is not necessarily prioritised – there is a high level of on-street parking, which can detract from the attractiveness and accessibility of the town centre for walking/cycling.
- There is a range of cultural and heritage activity in the town centre, notably the Stranraer Museum and the Castle of St John. Stranraer has ambitions to reinvent itself as a major leisure destination with a focus on water sports. Ensuring the regenerated waterfront is connected to the rest of the town will be vitally important to the long term health of the town centre.
- While there are some challenges in Stranraer town centre, there are also many positives, and these successes should be celebrated – whether this is its many independent businesses, its high level of community activity, or recent/ongoing investment (e.g. CARS). The council has a role to play here, alongside organisations like the Stranraer Development Trust. External validation, e.g. various national [award schemes](#), is one way of creating more of a focus on what has been achieved and a sense of pride in the town.