



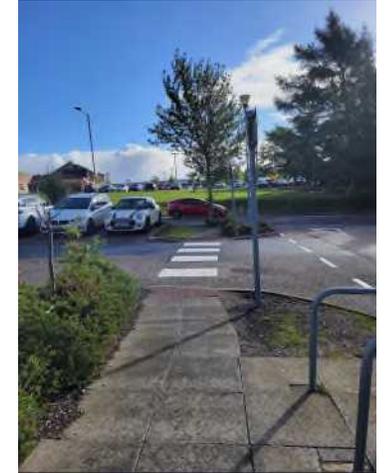
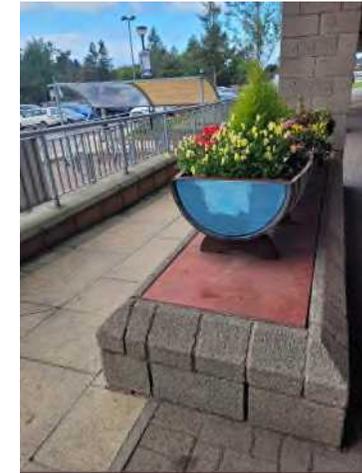
Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK
SEPTEMBER 2022
WESTHILL, ABERDEENSHIRE

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Town centre health checks are a way of analysing the factors that contribute to successful town centres and indicate good standards of vitality and viability. The vitality of a centre is a measure of how lively and busy it is, whilst viability is a measure of its centre's capacity to attract ongoing investment.

Town Centre Health Checks have been completed in Aberdeenshire since 2003. However, in 2021 a new methodology was introduced to showcase a fresh and updated approach for Aberdeenshire. From 2022 and then every second year, town centre health checks will be carried out on the remaining eight academy towns that are not classed as Principal Town Centres through the Local Development Plan.

Aberdeenshire is an extremely attractive area with a variety of coastal and rural environments, commuter towns, high levels of employment, and there is considerable new housing and employment land planned for the near future. Maintaining town centres' attractiveness, activeness, and accessibility is vital for the region to be able to continue to thrive.

BACKGROUND

The importance of town centres is widely acknowledged. Town centres are at the heart of communities, providing a sustainable focus for shopping, business, leisure, services and community life, and shaping their sense of place. The planning system has an important role to play in supporting successful town centres, through influencing the form and type of future development. In order to assess how a centre should be supported, evidence of its current performance is required.

NPF4 notes that policies should 'encourage, promote and facilitate development in our city and town centres, recognising they are a national asset' (NPF4, page 81).

Town centres with a vibrant retail scene, a wide variety of services, attractive buildings and open space create economic growth, attract more people to the region, and promote a sense of well-being and identity.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present the results of the Town Centre Health Check 2022 for Westhill. The results are presented to enable an understanding of the vitality and viability of the town centre. The results are not to be considered definitive of the well-being of a town centre, but rather they are intended to provide an evidence-based comparative perspective on this matter and assist in identifying actions that could be undertaken to improve and maintain their status.

WHY COMPLETE A HEALTH CHECK?

Health checks contribute to the planning system's efforts to support successful town centres through giving an overview of their current performance. They provide an analysis of the infrastructure and viability of the town centre which can be used to inform the Local Development Plan and decisions on planning applications. The findings are also utilised to create help a stronger "town centre first principle" policy.

METHODOLOGY

TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECKS SHOULD:

- Support implementation of the Local Development Plan
- Add value by collecting data on a wider set of indicators that provide insight into economic, social and environmental factors that play a part in the vitality of a town centre
- Have a clear, easy to follow and accessible format and methodology
- Work collaboratively both within the Council and externally with businesses and the community to collect and share baseline data
- Provide the foundation for other town strategies and plans and any subsequent funding applications

To achieve these results, the following methods of data collection and presentation were utilised:

DESK TOP RESEARCH

Desk top research was completed to provide the critical first step of gathering information for the town centre. Background information on the current situation of the town centre was then analysed further when out on site. Data was gathered from within the Council and from external partners.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

The surveys for the eight academy town centres are being conducted every second year in line with when the town centre health checks are being completed. It is considered this would reduce consultation fatigue and allow for monitoring of any changes within town centres which have occurred in that period. The community survey was designed to gain an understanding of the views of both the residents and visitors of the town centre. The survey was available on Engage HQ in 2022, shared via a press release, advertised on the Council's Social Media and emailed to relevant groups to advertise further. The survey asked questions on several different topics and provided respondents the opportunity to identify what improvements they would like to see to the town centre. The survey was open for three weeks and received 94 responses. A summary of the responses received can be seen on page 36.



Look out for: Quote Boxes. Comments were asked for in both the community and business surveys and a selection have been included in the report to give a flavour of the different responses received.

METHODOLOGY (CONTINUED)

BUSINESS SURVEY

The surveys for the eight academy town centres are being conducted every second year in line with when the town centre health checks are being completed. It is considered this would reduce the risk of consultation fatigue and allow for more effective monitoring of any changes within town centres which have occurred in that period. The survey was available on Engage HQ in 2022 and was shared via relevant groups for completion. The survey also gave an opportunity to comment on improvements that businesses would like to see to the town centre. The survey was open for three weeks and received 2 responses. A summary of the responses received can be seen on page 36.

FOOTFALL AND TRAFFIC COUNTS

The footfall count was completed at two locations within the town centre to gain information on the vitality at different times of the day. Three time slots were selected to gain information of the vibrancy in the morning and afternoon. The counts were completed for 15-minute periods on a weekday to try and gain an insight into the number of people moving around the town centre. As there were no counts conducted in the evening and weekend, questions were included in the community survey to gain an insight on how often, when and why people visit the town centre. These footfall counts were a collaborative effort and carried out by Aberdeenshire Council Officers and members of the community. Traffic counts were also included in the methodology for all towns. Where possible, traffic counts were carried out at the same location as the pedestrian counts and for the same length of time following completion of the footfall counts. Where traffic counts could not be carried at the same location at the footfall counts, these were done at the closest viable point in order to gain information on the number of vehicles using the town centre.

SITE SURVEY

This work was completed on a clear day and provided up to date information on the vitality and viability of the town centre. Several recording methods were used including maps, photographs and written analysis. The Place Standard themes were used to analyse the town centre and allowed for different themes to be analysed on an individual basis but also as a collective.

How a place looks, its history and what other people think of a place can affect how we feel. A strong local identity can help us feel pride in our place, our community and in ourselves as a result.

Observations: Generally, respondents who use the town centre felt positive towards it. This was reflected in the comments where it was considered there was a good variety of shops and the Westhill Shopping Centre itself is well maintained and has seen improvement recently. Others felt that the town centre does not feel like a traditional town centre with a high street of shops and is akin to an out-of-town shopping centre.

The growth of Westhill: Westhill is a recent development where large scale growth was seen from the late **1960s**, intended to provide housing for Aberdeen expanding during the oil boom. The town has a significant industrial base with oil related businesses, including engineering, construction, equipment and services. Previous to the development of the town, Westhill was a hamlet of Skene with fewer than 100 residents. A local solicitor, Ronald Fraser Dean, in **1963** proposed that surrounding agricultural land could support new development and the first new build homes were constructed by **1968**. By **1971**, the population had grown close to 500 residents, and ten years later it had grown close to 5,000. The influx of people to the settlement was accelerated by the expansion of the oil industry.

Source: Understanding Scottish Places and Westhill & Elrick CC

IDENTITY & BELONGING

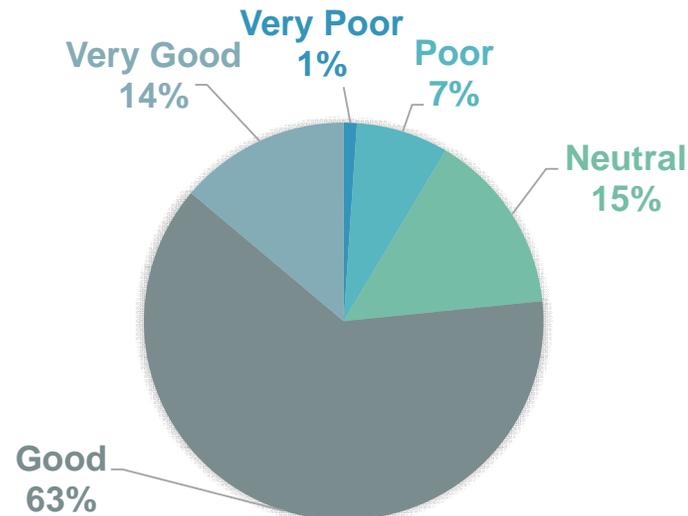


How Do You Feel About Westhill Town Centre?



82% Community 18% Community
100% Businesses 0% Businesses

IN YOUR OPINION, COMMUNITY SPIRIT IN THE TOWN CENTRE IS?



"The arrival of [the shopping centre manager] has made a huge and very positive improvement in terms of upkeep and usage, working in cooperation with local groups such as the WECC."

"It is not really a town centre, more an out-of-town shopping centre. The selection of shops (mainly takeaways is particularly poor)"

"There's a good variety of shops as well as the monthly local market. The current management of the shopping centre have a strong community focus."

"Much of it looks tired and dirty. Car park, lock block in centre itself."

"Good range of shops. Shopping centre manager is making an effort to improve the centre"

"Proud to live in Westhill."

"Having lived here a long time I've seen Westhill change, I think the shops and town centre are vibrant now."

Feeling safe in and around the places that we spend time in can have a significant impact on people's activities and on their health and wellbeing. Through their design and maintenance, good places should feel safe and secure for all, and help to minimise crime and antisocial behaviour.

FEELING SAFE

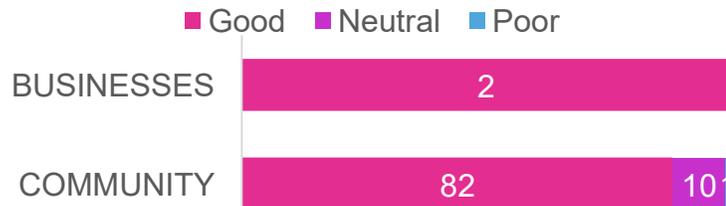


Observations: Safety during the day was the most positive rated category by visitors to the town in the surveys. Safety during the evening was less positive, with more negative responses received. There were also some neutral responses, perhaps indicating that people do not go into the town centre at night and this was reflected in the comments where it was highlighted that the shopping centre is not used much in the evening and a lack of lighting is a concern. Some comments given also seemed to relate this negative perception to antisocial behaviour. There are lighting columns on the surrounding streets, but there is more limited lighting within the shopping centre areas.

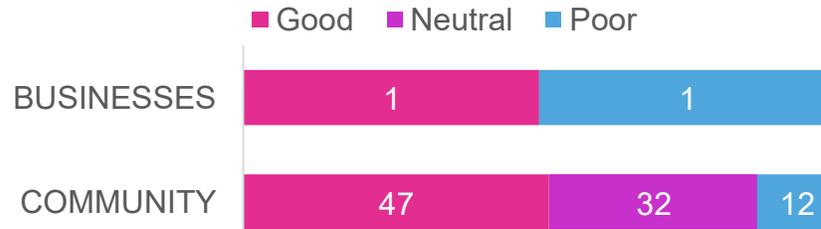
Key Safety Features:

- Lighting columns located on roads appear to be well maintained
- Central CCTV system in place at Westhill Shopping Centre

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: SAFETY DURING THE DAY?



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: SAFETY DURING THE EVENING?



“Clean and tidy. Friendly. Bright and colourful”

“Some antisocial behaviour in the evenings has been a concern, but [the shopping centre manager] is very proactive in reporting incidents.”

“Lack of lighting on dark evenings invites antisocial behaviour.”

“The shops are intimidating at night and no reason to go there”

“Only use centre during day and this shows in my answers”

“Well maintained and pleasant”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

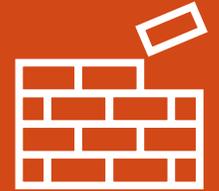


Images (Left to Right): CCTV and signage outside Centre Management Office; Rear entrance from Ashdale Drive to Westhill Shopping Centre; Lighting columns; Ashdale Drive; Lighting, Westhill Shopping Centre.

33 Incidences of crime reported
1st September 2021 – 31st July 2022
Police Scotland

Places that are well cared for can make us feel better about a place, while those that are neglected can have the opposite effect. Proper maintenance arrangements allow people to feel supported and more positive about where they live.

CARE & MAINTENANCE



Westhill Shopping Centre



Trinity Church



Ashdale Shopping Centre



Observations: The care and maintenance of buildings within Westhill town centre was noted as a strength when conducting the site visit as the buildings are all generally well cared for. This is reflected through the 2022 survey with the majority of respondents rating the topic as good or neutral. There is one vacant unit within the town centre that slightly detracts from the rest of the town and this should be monitored.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: CARE & MAINTENANCE OF BUILDINGS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor

BUSINESSES	1	1	
COMMUNITY	39	39	15

“Much of it looks tired and dirty.”

“Generally well maintained.”

People's views about their local area should be heard. Having a voice in decision making and feeling able to make changes can help to build stronger communities and better places. Having a sense of control can make people feel positive about their lives.

INFLUENCE & SENSE OF CONTROL



Observations: Westhill is represented by an active Community Council and other voluntary organisations working together to ensure the best outcomes for residents and businesses alike. The Westhill Shopping Centre Management is also proactive in enhancing and improving the shopping centre for its visitors.

Town Centre Groups	Westhill and Elrick Community Council (WECC)	Rotary in Westhill & District
Legal Status	Community Council	Registered Charity, No.1002059
Membership	The community; 17 members*	Volunteers
Responsibilities	Community Councils (CC) are the most local tier of statutory representation in Scotland, bridging the gap between local authorities and communities. Key tasks: Representing CCs on other organisations; Campaigning on local issues; Conducting local surveys; Organising public meetings on major development proposals or the Local Development Plan; Statutory Body for public consultation on Planning and Licensing; Representing and providing a platform for public views.	Rotary is a service organisation and through the Club's community service activities they try to improve the quality of life for all residents and businesses within our Westhill & District communities. Clubs' activities include promoting the welfare of people in the community by providing assistance and support to those in need, improving the community's environment, and showing leadership with regards to developments and growth within the community. Work includes attending to planting displays with the WECC, litter picking, community events and community transport.
Contact	Westhill and Elrick Community Council	Rotary in Westhill & District *Correct at time of survey

36% of community survey respondents are aware of groups that support the town centre.

"I know the community council is active along with some others whether they are town centre specific I don't know"
Business and Community Survey, September 2022

The word cloud (right) shows the survey responses, with WECC (12), Rotary (10) and Litter Picking Group (6) receiving the most mentions.

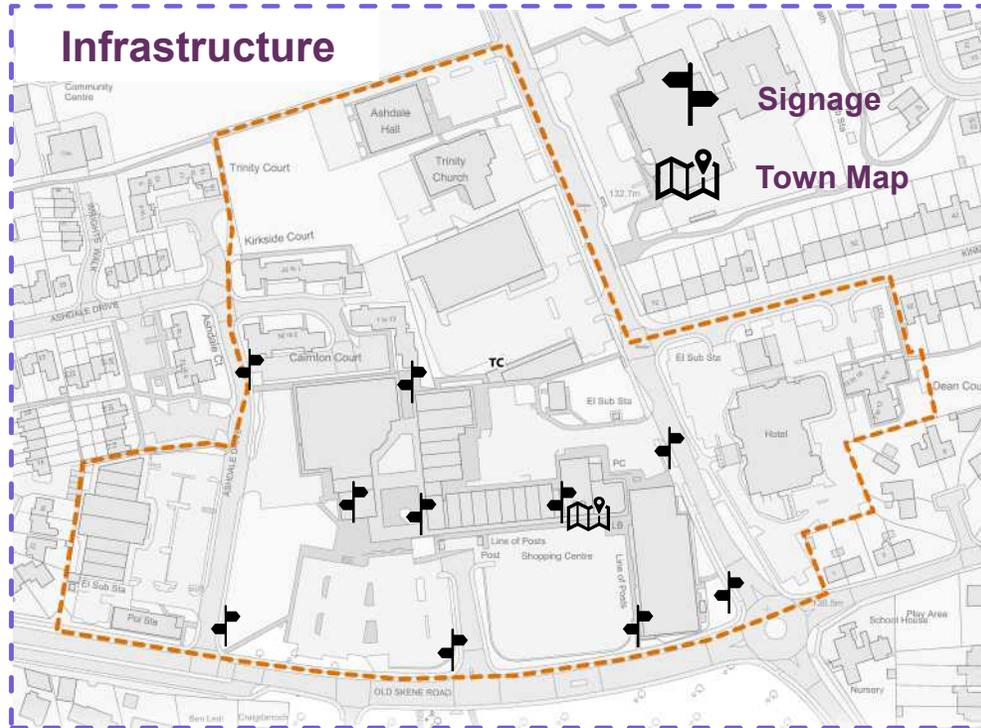


Walking and cycling are beneficial for both our health and the environment. Good places can support and encourage people to walk and cycle by providing quality routes and a pleasant and safe experience.

MOVING AROUND



Observations: The town centre, particularly the Westhill Shopping Centre car park, is often busy with vehicles. Survey respondents commented that the shops are scattered throughout Westhill and this may be indicative of the neutral or poor ratings received to moving around the town centre. A number of signs for the Westhill Shopping Centre, including lists of shops present, are distributed around all the buildings. There is limited signage to direct visitors to other shops within the town centre boundary, such as those on Ashdale Drive, from within the town centre. Few comments were received in relation to signage, perhaps indicating this is not an issue for town centre users.



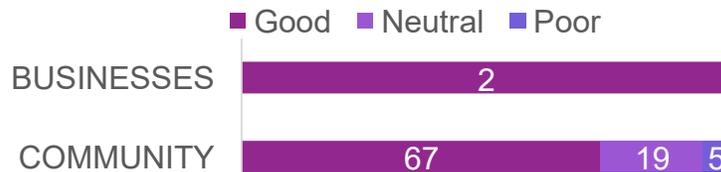
Images (Clockwise from Top Left): Shopping Centre shop list; Shopping Centre Signage, Westhill Drive; Town Map.

“Shops are scattered through out Westhill, there is no official high street and generally the centre feels dated.”

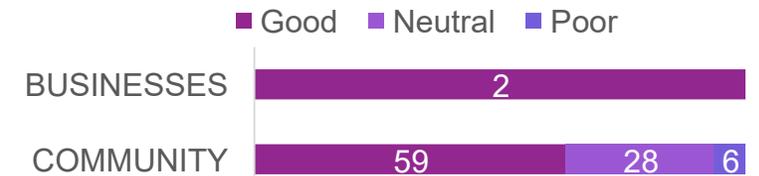
“Better outdoor socialising space and safer pedestrian access to the shopping centre car park.”

“It has everything I need and is an accessible and friendly place. Not too big or too busy.”
Business and Community Survey, September 2022

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: GETTING AROUND THE TOWN CENTRE?



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: SIGNAGE?

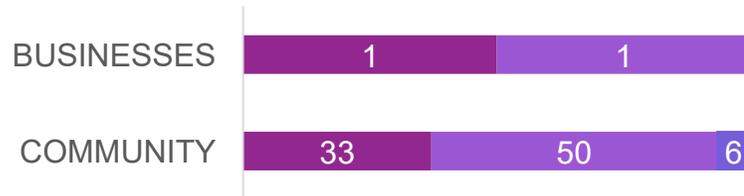


MOVING AROUND: CYCLING

Observations: There are cycle lanes along the southern and eastern boundaries of the designated town centre. Cycle racks are distributed over the area, with covered shelters provided in the car park of the Westhill Shopping Centre. Survey responses show a larger amount of neutral responses, possibly signifying that there are not as many people who cycle and park in the town centre. Comments received related to the cycle lanes and for them to be made safer.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: CYCLE PARKING?

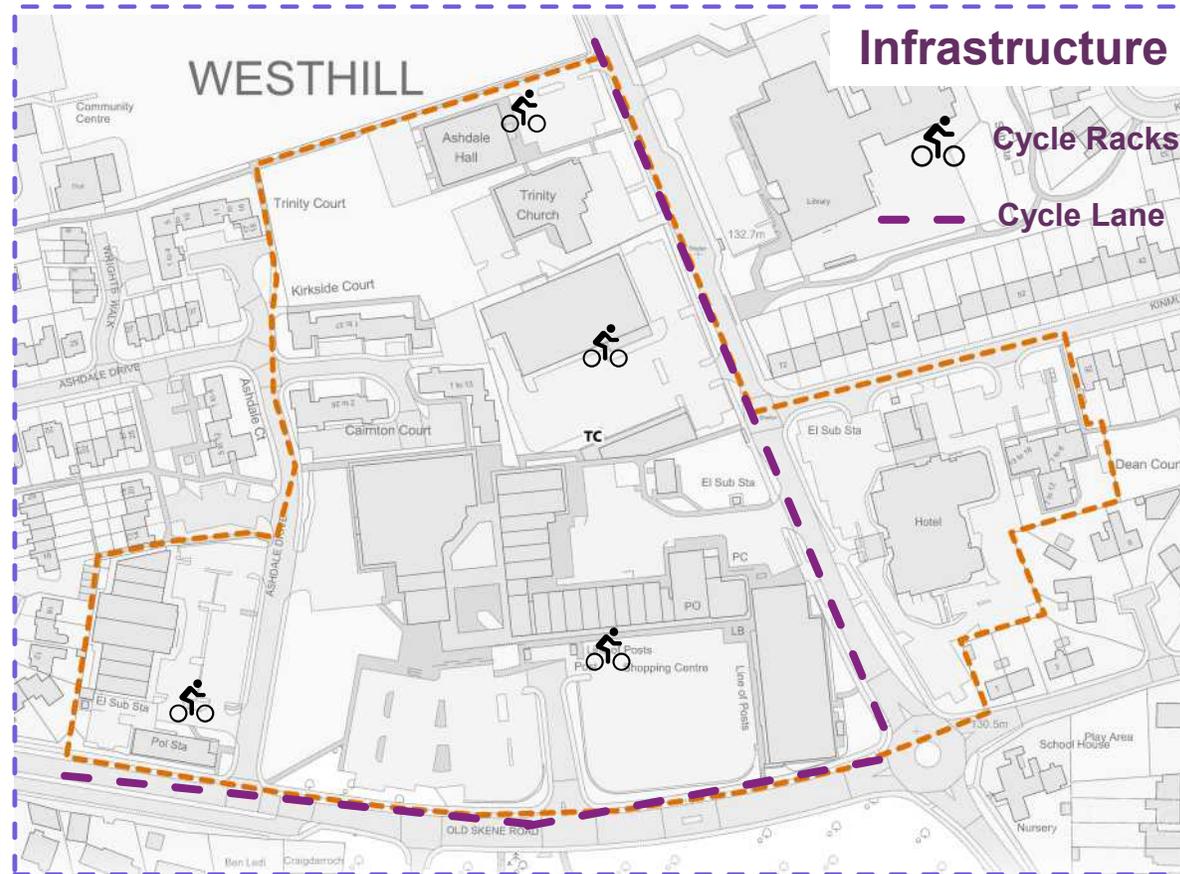
■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



“Better, safer cycle lanes.”

“Integrated cycle paths that don’t require road usage.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022



Infrastructure

Cycle Racks
 Cycle Lane



Images (Top to Bottom): Covered cycle racks at Westhill Shopping Centre; Cycle Lane on Old Skene Road; Freestanding racks at Ashdale Drive shops.

MOVING AROUND: VISITING THE TOWN CENTRE

Observations: The majority of survey respondents visited the town centre every few days, the main reason being for shopping. The most frequent time for visiting was during the week, however visits at the weekend were also a common occurrence for visitors. There were fewer visitors after 6pm both during the week and at the weekend which is consistent with comments received that there are fewer things to visit in the evening.

“There isn’t much vibrancy in the evenings with most shops shut and only takeaways and one restaurant in the shopping area.”

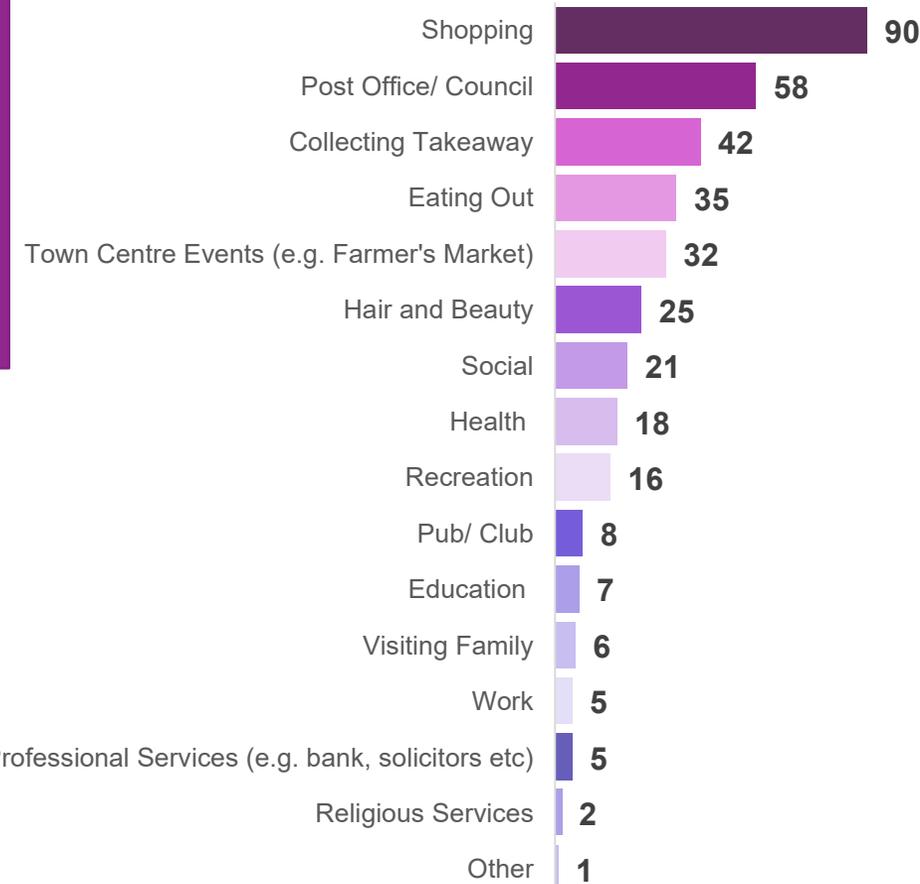
“Not much to do in the evenings for adults or kids.”

“Being able to access a variety of shops, cafes, and services enables me to source most of my shopping needs.”

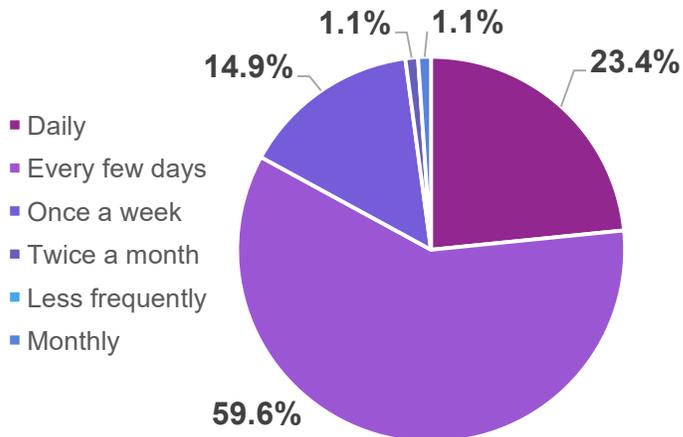
“Only use centre during day.”

Community Survey, September 2022

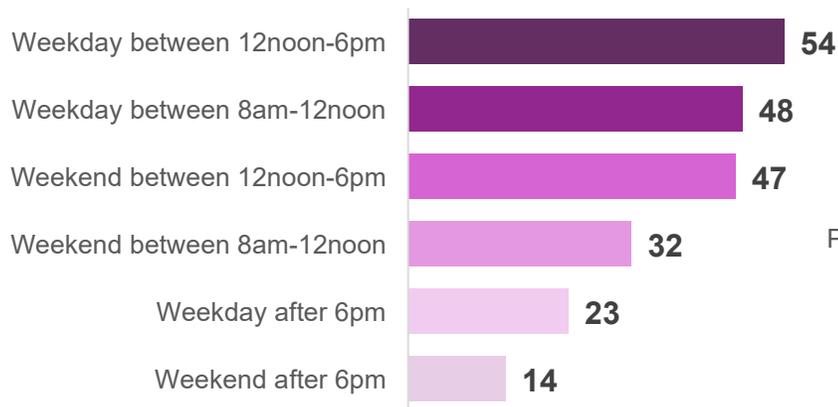
GENERALLY, WHY DO YOU VISIT WESTHILL TOWN CENTRE?*



HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT WESTHILL TOWN CENTRE?



WHEN WOULD YOU GENERALLY VISIT WESTHILL TOWN CENTRE?*



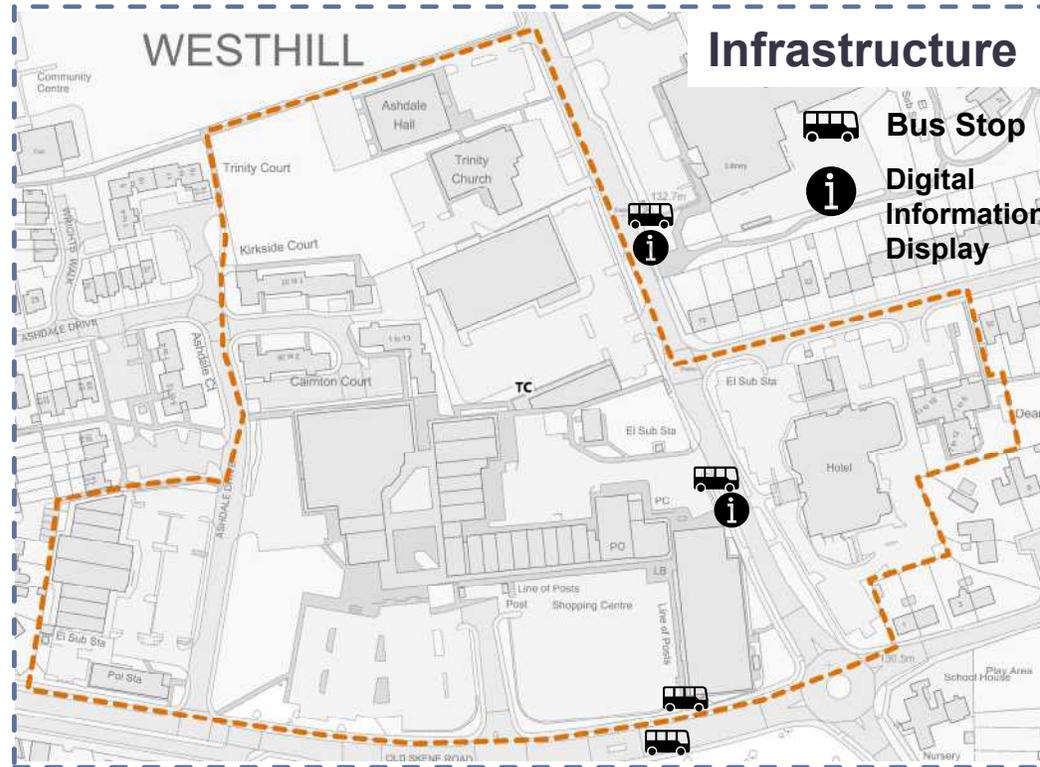
*Survey respondents were able to select multiple answers for these two questions

Access to an affordable, reliable and well-connected public transport service is important for all communities. Good public transport encourages people to get around in ways that are better for the environment.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT



Observations: Westhill Town Centre has a significant number of services to Aberdeen, however no services to more rural towns/villages, with the exception of Alford where there are some services. This is supplemented by an A2B Dial-a-Bus service which covers Westhill and surrounding villages (Echt, Dunect, Garlogie and Kirkton of Skene). Real time display is present at some of the stops within, or on the boundary of, the town centre. Around half of survey respondents found the public transport good. There were only a few comments about public transport, mainly seeking improvements to bus services from the town centre to other parts of Westhill and better links to settlements to the west.



“A vibrant community with good bus service and shops”

“Very poor transport links from surrounding areas”

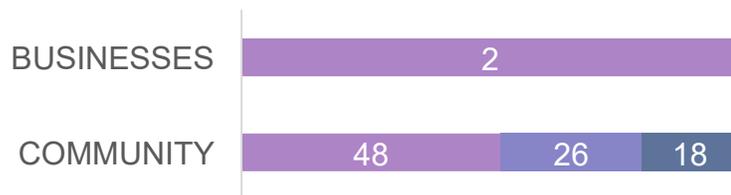
“Transport links from surrounding areas particularly those to the West.”

“Transport within Westhill could be improved- no buses go up towards the golf course which is least accessible and seems to have older residents”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PUBLIC TRANSPORT?

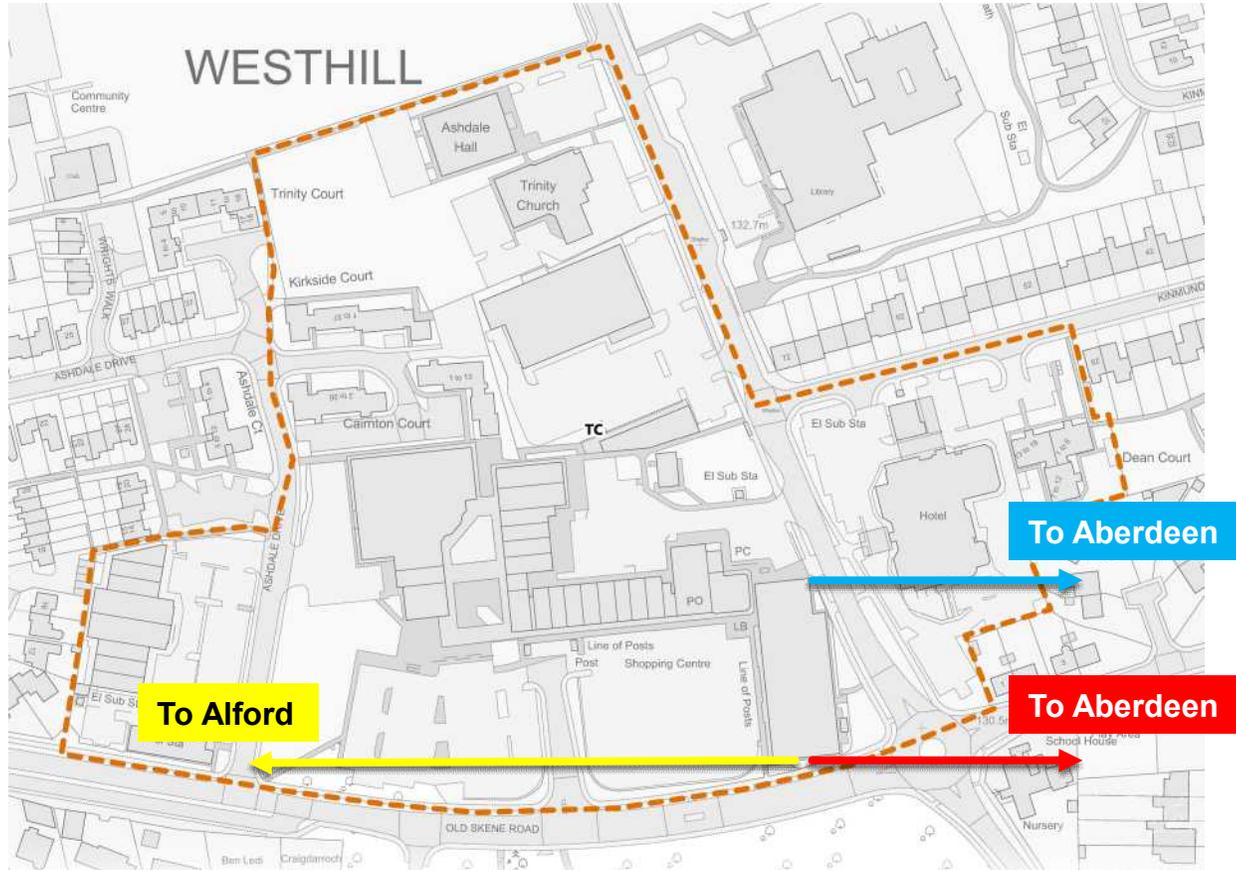
■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Images (Left to Right): Real time digital display and covered bus shelter, Westhill Drive; Covered bus shelter, Old Skene Road; Bus stop on boundary of town centre, Old Skene Road.



PUBLIC TRANSPORT ROUTES



Key:

-  Bus Route 5/6/A
-  Bus Route 218
-  Bus Route 218

An [A2B dial-a-bus](#), pre booked minibus service is available in Westhill. In most cases a door-to-door service is provided, operating during weekdays. The service is free to use.

Route*	Frequency (per week day)	Fastest Journey Time	Earliest Travel Time	Latest Travel Time	Cost (Single Standard Ticket)
Bus to Aberdeen (5/A/6/A)	59	22mins	05:53	00:00	£3.70
Bus to Aberdeen (218)	4	45mins	07:10	16:32	£3.70
Bus to Alford (218)	5	42mins	08:56	18:16	£9.00

* Correct at time of survey



Images (Left to Right): Real time digital display, Westhill Drive; Bus shelter seating, Westhill Drive.

TRAFFIC & PARKING

TRAFFIC



Too much traffic can cause problems for people who live and work in town centres as well as visitors. Traffic and parking arrangements that allow people to move around safely can help people to get the most out of a place.

Observations: The comments relating to traffic flow in general are all looking for some changes to improve the access into, around and out of the Westhill Shopping Centre.

There is a fairly even split of ratings through the 2022 community survey with a slight majority rating the topic poor. Traffic flow was also rating in the lowest five topics through the community survey.

It is also worth noting that the majority of the users of Westhill Town Centre travel less than 5 miles to use the facilities and services which highlights that the town serves the local population rather than the wider region.

“Better traffic flow in and out of the shopping centre.”

“There should be traffic lights at the shops.”

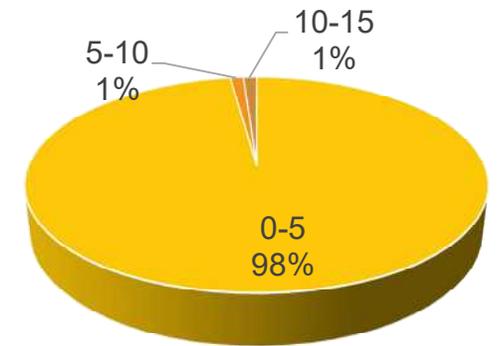
“Need to change the car park at the shops to improve traffic flow.”

“Mini roundabout at the entrance to the shops might help traffic flow.”

“The car park needs to flow better and have improved access.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

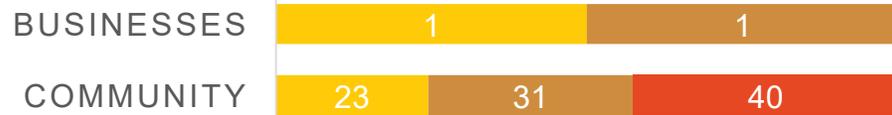
Distance Travelled to Use the Town Centre (Miles)



Source: Community Survey September 2022

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: TRAFFIC FLOW?

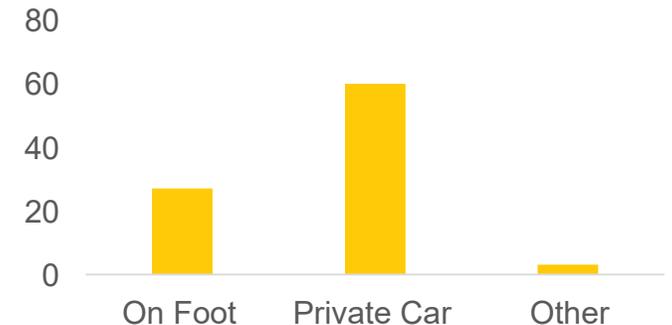
■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Images: Westhill Shopping Centre.



How would you generally travel to the town centre:



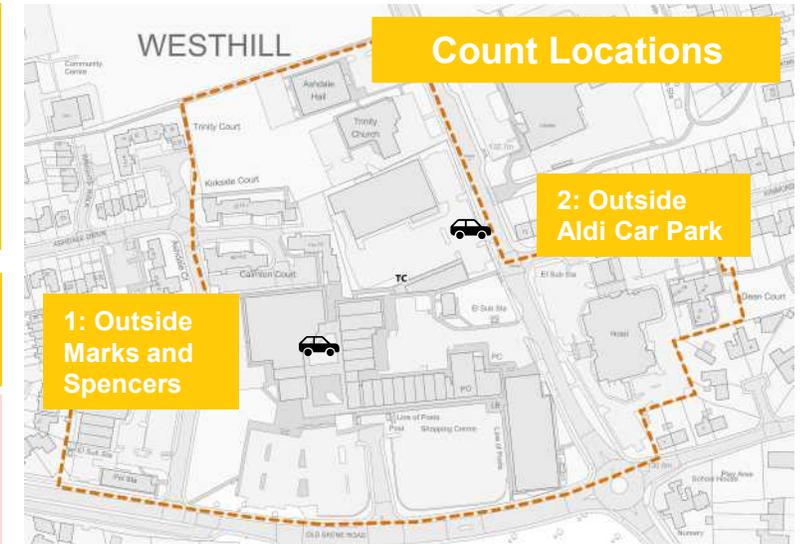
Source: Community Survey September 2022

MOVING AROUND: TRAFFIC SURVEY

Day		9:45am-10:00am		11:45am-12noon		2:15:2:30pm		Total number of Vehicles
Monday	Location 1	Car	63/61*	Car	73/62*	Car	87/73*	441
		Buses	0	Buses	0	Buses	0	
		Lorries	0	Lorries	0	Lorries	0	
		Vans	2/4*	Vans	4/6*	Vans	0/2*	
		Taxis	0	Taxis	0	Taxis	0	
		Bicycles	0	Bicycles	2	Bicycles	1	
		Other	0	Other	0	Other	1	
	Location 2	Car	156 (42)**	Car	168 (59)**	Car	181 (59)**	570
		Buses	6	Buses	3	Buses	3	
		Lorries	1	Lorries	2	Lorries	0	
		Vans	12	Vans	24	Vans	10	
		Taxis	0	Taxis	1	Taxis	0	
		Bicycles	0	Bicycles	0	Bicycles	1	
		Other	0	Other	0	Other	2	
Hourly Totals (all traffic):		305		345		361		1,011

* Represents the numbers in/out of the Westhill Shopping Centre Car Park.

** Represents the total number of cars which includes (number of cars going in/out of Aldi Car Park).



HEADLINES

Busiest Location: Outside Aldi Car Park
Busiest Time: 11:45
Busiest Day: Monday

Quietest Location: O/S Marks & Spencers
Quietest Time: 09:45
Quietest Day: Monday

Observations: Vehicle counts were undertaken on Monday 12th September for a duration of 15 minutes, three times a day, in two locations. These give information on the number of cars that are passing through the town centre - it cannot be confirmed whether these cars have all contributed to the local economy but were in the town centre at the time of the count.

TRAFFIC & PARKING

CAR PARKING AFFORDABILITY AND AVAILABILITY

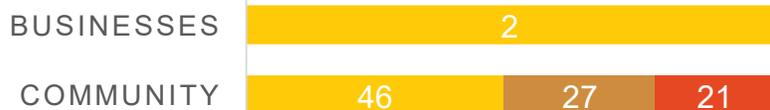
HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PARKING AFFORDABILITY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PARKING AVAILABILITY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HEADLINES

The topic of Parking Affordability was rated within the top five of all topics rated through the 2022 community survey.



Image: Entrance to Westhill Shopping Centre.

“Parking is an issue at peak times.”

“Car park layout could be improved.”

“Need better parking.”

“Wider parking areas would be an improvement as the parking areas are very narrow on both sides of the shopping centre.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2021

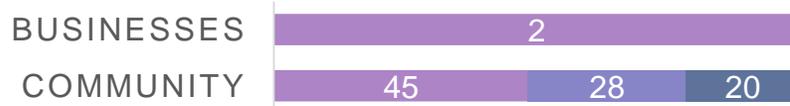
Observations: Within Westhill Town Centre there is no Council run car park. However, there are privately owned car parks at all of the shopping areas within the town centre.

Most of the comments received through the 2022 community survey noted that there was a community desire to see improved car parking within the town centre. This was specifically in relation to the parking at the Westhill Shopping Centre, where calls to improve the layout of the area were a very common request. Additionally, there were also comments received asking for the parking bays to be slightly wider. Although there were mostly negative comments received the topic ratings were fairly split with just under half rating the topic as good.

Buildings, landmarks, greenery, views and natural landscape can all help to create an attractive, distinctive place that people enjoy. These features can also help people to find their way around.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: ATTRACTIVENESS OF TOWN?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Observations: The topic of the attractiveness of the town has received a fairly positive response with a number of respondents noting that the planting within the shopping centre enhances the visual appearance of the town centre. However, a few respondents noted that the town centre looked tired and unattractive. The green wall provides an attractive approach to the shops within the town centre and may have contributed to the majority of respondents rating the topic as good or neutral.

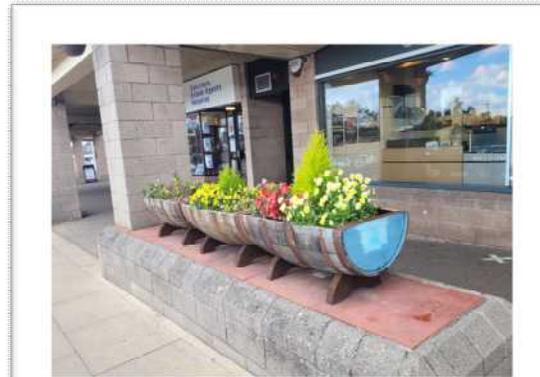
“The shopping centre looks tired and run down.”

“The planting and foliage displays look fantastic.”

“The area at the back of the shops spoils the look of the area.”

STREETS & SPACES

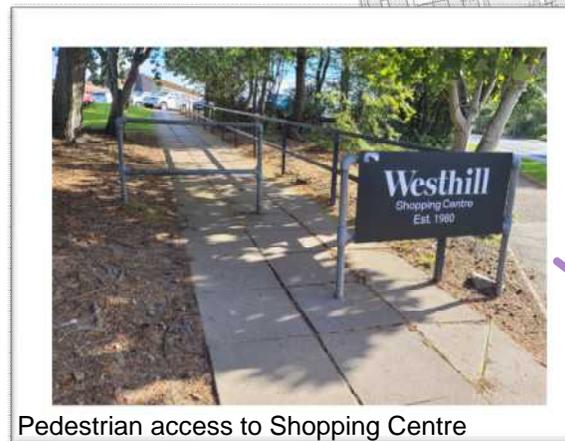
ATTRACTIVENESS OF TOWN CENTRE



Planters in Shopping Centre



Green Wall of Shopping Centre



Pedestrian access to Shopping Centre



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: SEATING/ AREAS TO CONGREGATE

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor

BUSINESSES	1	1	
COMMUNITY	10	37	47

“Town centre needs more seating.”

There are only two benches available for seating independent from those placed outside cafes and restaurants. There are quite a lot of elderly people who access this area who might appreciate more seating in other locations where they could rest for a short time or meet friends.“

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Observations: There are no listed buildings within the Westhill Town Centre boundary.

In terms of public art, there is one piece of metal work situated just north of the roundabout on Westhill Drive and provides a focal point at the back of the Westhill Shopping Centre.

There was a lack of seating observed within the town centre and this was reflected through the responses to the 2022 surveys with the majority either rating as poor or neutral.



Image: Public Art, Westhill Drive.

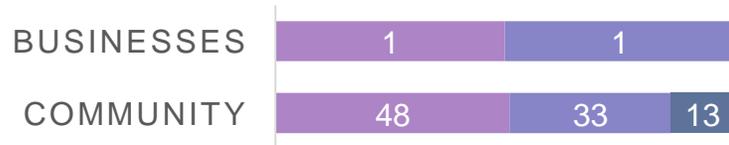
STREETS & SPACES: HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT, PUBLIC ART AND SEATING



STREETS & SPACES: PAVEMENTS

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PAVEMENT CLEANLINESS?

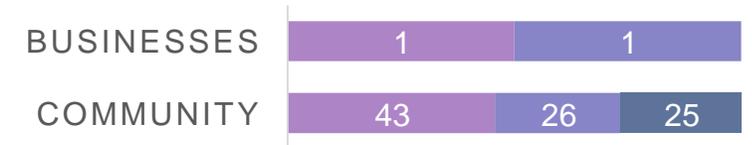
■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Observations: The cleanliness of pavements scored well through the surveys with the majority of people either noting them as good or neutral. However, the quality of pavements were rated in the bottom five of all topics in the survey. A number of comments were received noting the pavements needed to be upgraded and levelled. The images below show pavements throughout the town centre which are generally in good condition although cracks are evident in some areas.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PAVEMENT QUALITY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



“There should be more street cleaning.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022



“An improvement would be to resurface pavements on Westhill Drive.”

“Pavements are uneven.”

Pavements look tired.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2021

STREETS & SPACES: VACANT RETAIL UNITS

Observations: The number of vacant units within the town centre is very low with a 2.7% vacancy rate which is significantly lower than the Scottish average at the time of the survey, Q3 2022, which is 15% (Scottish Retail Consortium and Local Data Company).

There is currently only the one vacant unit within the town centre which is a stand alone unit on Westhill Drive. It is a large unit in good condition so does not detract from the overall appearance of the town centre but will require to be monitored.

Vacant Retail Units

1

Vacant Units in the town centre

2.7%

Vacancy Rate at time of survey

Image: Vacant Unit, Westhill Drive.



Natural space includes parks and woodlands, fields, streams and rivers, green space alongside paths and roads, and tree-lined streets. These can be good for wildlife, improve air quality and benefit our health and wellbeing.

Observations: Westhill Town Centre has pockets of green space distributed across the area but whilst welcomed, these areas could benefit from further planting to provide a more attractive visual quality. The proximity of Denman Park to the south of the town centre is an asset. There is well maintained planting on Westhill Drive, provided by the Westhill and District Community Council, which is an eye catching addition and was acknowledged by survey respondents. There is also a green wall with hanging baskets which runs along the eastern boundary of Westhill Shopping Centre. Greenery along the southern edge of the town centre softens the hard landscaping of the car park. Planters are present within the shopping centre, although there may be opportunities to provide more greenery, particularly within the central square area.

NATURAL SPACE



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PARKS & GREEN SPACES?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



"The buildings in the town centre are fairly dull, but there has been a great deal of effort put into the landscaping by the local community to make it a nicer place."

"Could do with more landscaping but it has improved."

Business and Community Survey, September 2022



Good public places and facilities encourage children to play and allow adults to enjoy leisure and sporting activities. Opportunities for play and recreation can improve the quality of our lives and our health.

PLAY & RECREATION



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: LEISURE AND PLAY FACILITIES?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Observations: Westhill has no play and recreation sites within the town centre itself, but the presence of Denman Park on the town centre boundary was reflected through the survey. Comments focused on the desire to see improvement within Denman Park including more play facilities, benches and lighting. Although, there are no play facilities within the town centre boundary there are a number of play and recreation facilities around 1 mile or less from Westhill Shopping Centre.

“A modern larger play park. Improved seating in Denman Park.”

“More play parks.”

“An improvement would be a wooden outdoor play area for kids.”

“Improvements should include a play park in and bike locking facilities in Denman park. Also lighting at outdoor gym.”

“Denman Park is lovely and greatly used but the gardens are not kept as they used to be.”

To Westhill Golf Club 1.3 mile



Looking to Denman Park from Westhill Shopping Centre

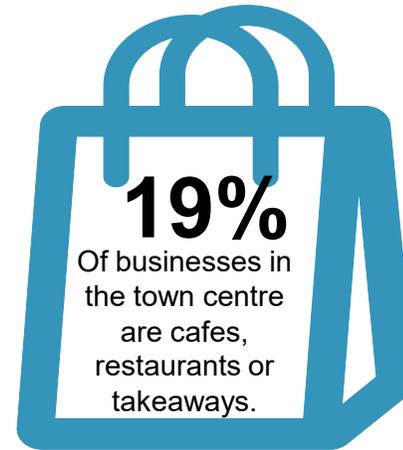
FACILITIES & AMENITIES: RETAILER REPRESENTATION

Retailer Representation

27% of businesses in the town centre are independent retailers

37% of businesses in the town centre are Class 1: Shops

21% of businesses in the town centre are Class 2: Financial, Professional and other services



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: VARIETY OF SHOPS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: QUALITY OF SHOPS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



“It would be nice to see more shops in the town centre than food outlets.”

“Would welcome more shops, particularly ones that are not just duplicates of what is already within the town centre.”

“There is a need for more smaller shops and a place for small traders to start up businesses.”

“Need more independent shops.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022



Observations: There is a good distribution of units within the town centre with a mix of independent and multiple retailers. However, the largest proportion of units are multiple retailers and this was commented on through the community survey where there was a real community desire to see more smaller/independent units opening up within the town centre. However, it should be noted that the quality of shops within the town centre was ranked within the top five topics in the community survey.

Image (Both): Westhill Shopping Centre.

FACILITIES & AMENITIES: CAFÉ AND RESTAURANTS AND EVENING ECONOMY

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: CAFÉ/ RESTAURANT CHOICE?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



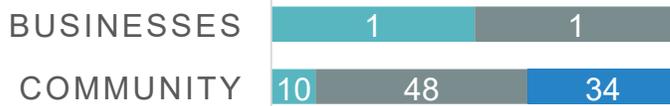
HOW WOULD YOU RATE: CAFÉ/ RESTAURANT QUALITY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: THE VIBRANCY IN THE EVENING :

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Observations: Within the town centre there are five cafés/ restaurants but there is a community desire to see more choice and also have cafés that open later into the evening.

It was noted by a number of people that there is little open to attract people in the evening and it would be an improvement if there was more to do in the evening to bring people into the town centre.

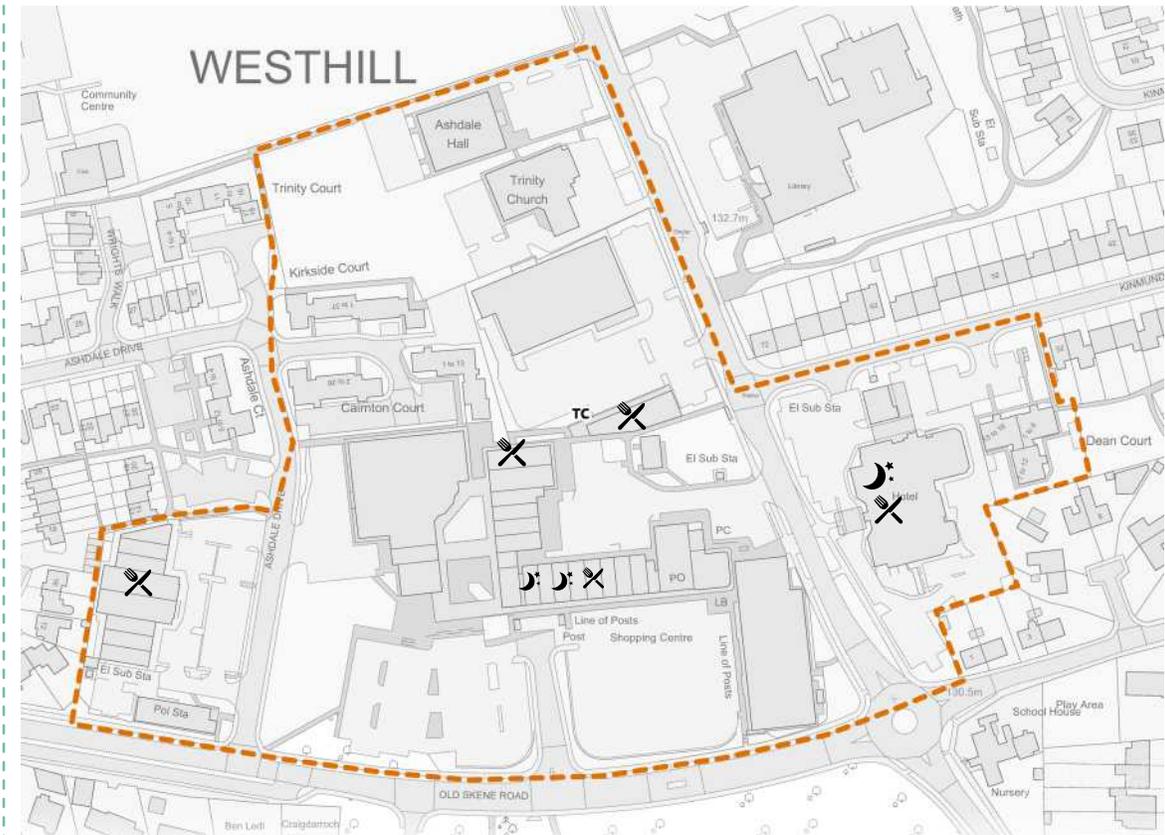
“The cafes should open into the evening.”

“The town centre needs more cafes.”

“More choices needed for cafes.”

“There isn’t much vibrancy in the evenings.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022



🍴 Café/ Restaurant 🌙* Units open in evening

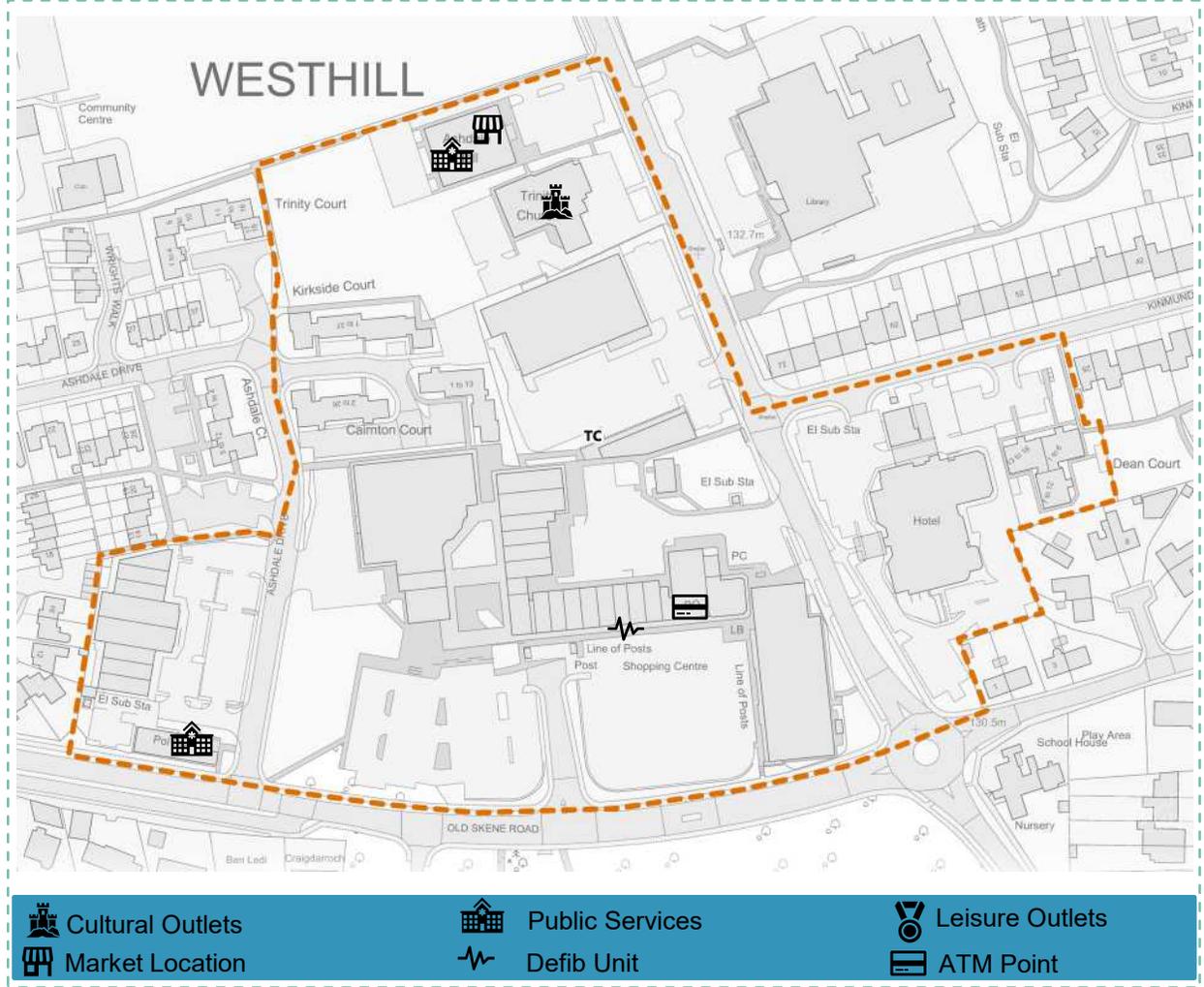
Images (Left to Right): Café, Tolbooth Wynd; Restaurant, Marischal Street.

FACILITIES & AMENITIES: CULTURAL AND LEISURE OUTLETS, PUBLIC AND OTHER SERVICES AND FARMERS MARKET

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: THE MARKET?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor

BUSINESSES	1	1	
COMMUNITY	42	39	11



Observations: The Farmer’s Market takes place on the first Saturday of each month in the Ashdale Hall between 09:00-13:00. The market has an active social media page on Facebook which highlights the producers that are attending the event.

In terms of other services within the town centre there is a good mix with the Ashdale Hall, Trinity Church and Police Station all within the boundary. In addition, there is also access to an ATM within one of the shop units (not 24Hr) and a defibrillator which is located on the wall of the main shopping centre should anyone need to use it.

Image: Westhill Police Station, Ashdale Hall, Trinity Church.

FACILITIES & AMENITIES: COMMUNITY AND VISITOR SATISFACTION

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: VALUE FOR MONEY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Town Centre Offer:

54%

of the community agree that it offers all services expected (retail, café, pubs etc)

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: VARIETY OF GOODS AVAILABLE?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: STANDARD OF SERVICE IN SHOPS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Observations: The standard of service within the shops was rated within the top five out of all the topics within the community survey.

Whereas, the topics of variety of goods and value for money received a more mix of views but generally they were both still rated towards the good and neutral ratings.

There were a number of comments received noting that the community would like to see additional shops opening within the town to provide more variety of goods and also to increase the value for money.



Images: Westhill Shopping Centre.

“Need more shops offering more variety of goods.”

“More variety is needed within the town centre.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022



Tourism: Data provided by VisitAberdeenshire shows the number of page views received for Westhill in the ‘Towns and Villages’ section of their website:

226

Jan-Dec 2021

FACILITIES & AMENITIES: ONLINE SHOPPING/ CONNECTIVITY

Online Offering

100% of businesses surveyed have online presence

100% of businesses surveyed that have online presence sell online

15% of the community surveyed said they are more likely to shop online rather than going into the town centre for the same item

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Observations: Within the survey there was a mix of responses to the questions about shopping online. A number of respondents noted that they shop locally rather than buying online. Several comments also noted that if more was available in the town centre they would purchase more locally.

Whilst others noted that availability, convenience, pricing and variety of goods were the main reasons for online shopping.

Mobile Coverage in Westhill Town Centre:

		Voice	3G	4G	5G
Three	Indoor	✓	✓	✓	✗
	Outdoor	✓	✓	✓	✗
Vodafone	Indoor	✓	✓	✓	✗
	Outdoor	✓	✓	✓	✗
O2	Indoor	✓	✓	✓	✗
	Outdoor	✓	✓	✓	✗
EE	Indoor	✓	✓	✓	5G
	Outdoor	✓	✓	✓	5G

✓ Good coverage
○ You may experience problems
✗ No coverage
5G Some 5G availability

Broadband Coverage in Westhill Town Centre:

FTTH/FTTP	✗
Ultrafast Broadband (>=100 Mbps)	✗
Superfast Broadband (>24 Mbps)	✓
Fibre (FTTC or FTTH or Cable or G.Fast)	✓
Wireless	✗
LLU	✓
A+ ADSL2+	✓
A ADSL	✓

Observations: Mobile coverage within Westhill Town Centre is very strong with all of the top networks being able to be connected at a 4G level. There is currently limited coverage of 5G within the town centre as this is only available on one network. Broadband coverage is strong with fibre and superfast broadband being available within the town. There is no free public WIFI available within the town centre.



Image: Westhill Shopping Centre.

“Would rather buy in town than online.”

“The things that I buy online are those I can’t buy locally.”

“There is greater availability online.”

“More choice, cheaper and less hassle to shop online.”

“If I can get it locally I will.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Good-quality work offers important benefits through income, activity, social contact, sense of identity and job satisfaction. A thriving local economy can provide work opportunities and help create lively places where people want to spend time.

Observations: The employment and income picture is as would be expected for a town centre of this size and location, with a relatively high proportion of retail and hospitality jobs. There is also an interesting mix across other sectors, with health accounting for a significant proportion of jobs in this data zone. The claimant count rate was not available for the town centre data zone in 2018 or 2019, however the rate remained below the average levels of Garioch and Aberdeenshire throughout 2020 and 2021. The rate in August 2022 increased slightly above the Garioch average. Very low levels of deprivation are reflected in the income levels and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation ranking.

Settlement Type:
Other Urban Area
 (Settlements of 10,000 to 124,999 people)
 Scottish Government's Urban Rural Classification, 8-fold

Median Household Income 2021
Town Centre Data Zone*

£41,509



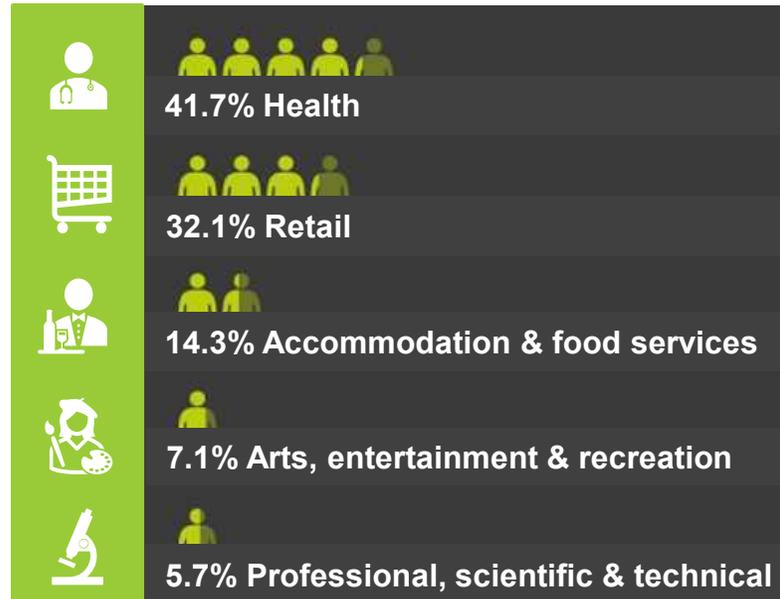
£44,962 Garioch; £36,889 Aberdeenshire

Source: © CACI Limited 1996 - 2021 This report shall be used solely for academic, personal and/or non-commercial purposes.

WORK & LOCAL ECONOMY



Top 5 Employment Sectors 2021 Westhill Town Centre Data Zone*



Source: Business Register and Employment Survey 2021

CLAIMANT COUNT RATE^ (%)



^Includes people claiming Universal Credit or Jobseekers Allowance

*Data not available for August 2018 and August 2019

Source: ONS Crown Copyright Reserved

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020

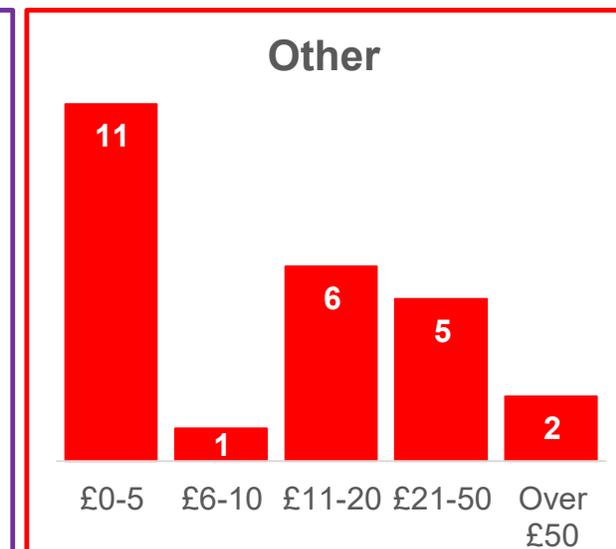
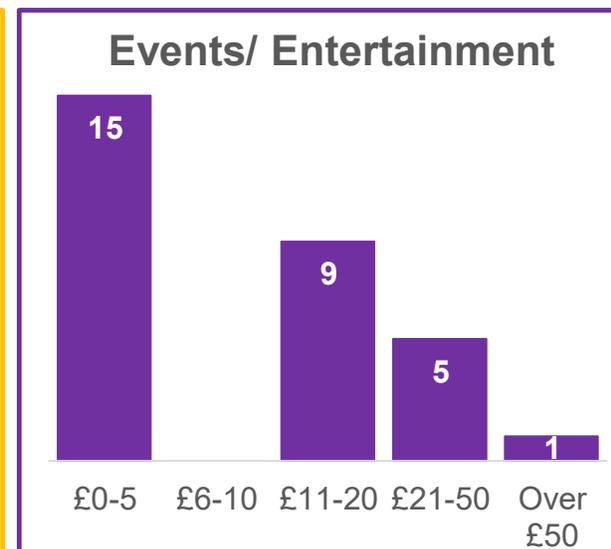
Town Centre Data Zone*:

5% least deprived in Scotland

* The data zone (S01006936) that makes up the majority of the town centre.

WORK & LOCAL ECONOMY: AVERAGE CONSUMER SPEND 2022

Observations: As expected, Food Shopping accounts for the biggest expenditure by visitors. Other Shopping was more spread out across the price brackets (below £50) indicating that people are also visiting for a wide variety of different items. The Hair and Beauty sector, although fewer people overall, show a higher value spend. Eating out and Takeaway spending appears to fall into the middle to higher end of the price range. There is very little spend on Events/ Entertainment highlighting the lack of opportunities in this area.



WORK & LOCAL ECONOMY: BUSINESS SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS 2022

Observations: Two businesses responded to the survey and provided a similar outlook for the town with a confidence in their future business performance in Westhill in the next year. There are no proposed changes to opening hours, reflective of the turnover for both businesses having increased in the past five years and showing a confidence in the future. Businesses are making good use of a variety online tools for marketing.

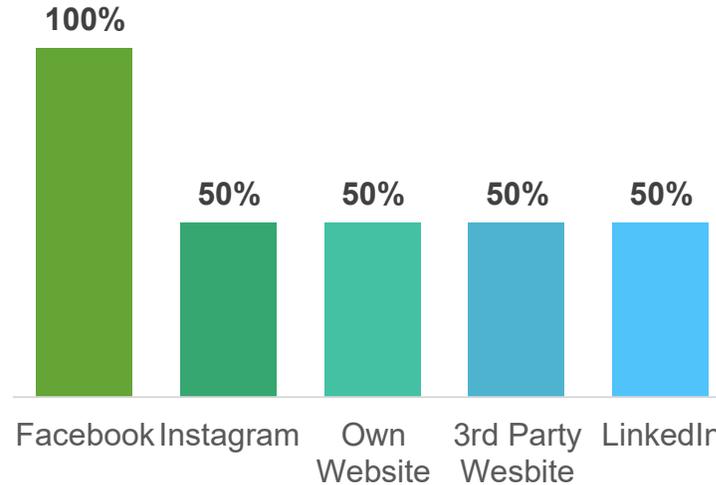
- 100%** of business owners surveyed were **established** businesses in the town centre
- 50%** of business owners surveyed were **Independent** businesses
- 50%** of business owners surveyed were **extremely confident** about future business performance in Westhill, with the other 50% **somewhat confident**
- 50%** of business owners surveyed are considering **growth** or **expansion** within the next five years.

“The Town pulled together through COVID-19 and has come out the other side stronger for it. The Shopping Centre looks amazing and is an excellent focal point.”

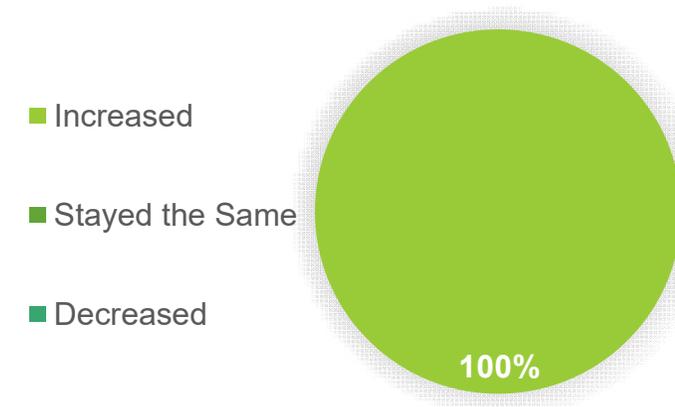
“Its always busy and bustling. Well looked after by a great community.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

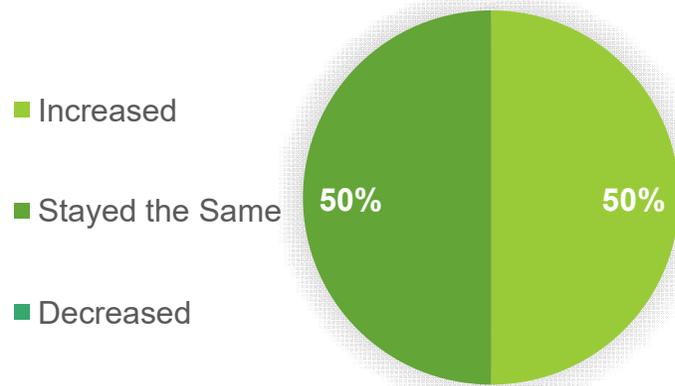
Online Marketing Tools Used



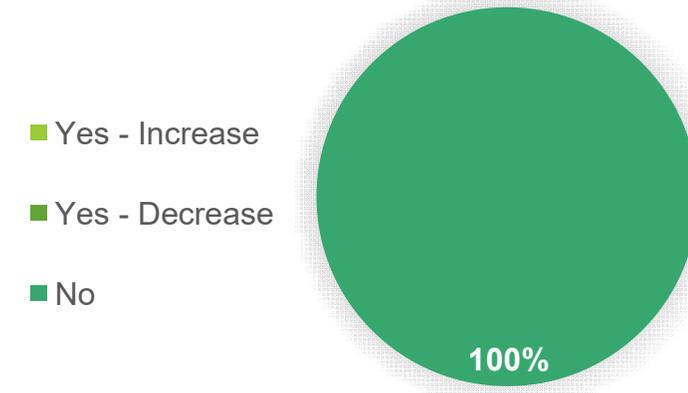
How has turnover at your premises changed in the past five years?



Has employment at your premises changed in the past five years?



Are you looking on making a change to your opening hours over the next year?



WORK & LOCAL ECONOMY: PROPERTY

Observations: The commercial property market seems stable in Westhill, with few vacant units present. The Westhill Shopping Centre appears to have seen recent improvements, as suggested through survey responses, which is promising. Feedback received in the surveys also suggested that supporting the town centre by further encouraging new businesses to the town would be welcomed and that this could be achieved through the provision of smaller retail space for start-ups or smaller businesses to encourage more variety and more independent shops.

There were a limited number of planning applications approved in the year 2021/2022, and only one change of use application was approved in the year before. The few change of use applications may be indicative of the small number of vacant units in the town centre and the present occupiers being established and in a stable business situation.

“More small shops and an opportunity for small traders to start a business.”

“Always keep a variety of shops so that people shop locally. I also shop in Inverurie on shops we don't have, like a shoe shop or clothes shop, but never in Aberdeen. I like to shop small and local.”

“I would like to see more local shops and move away from the corporate organisations.”

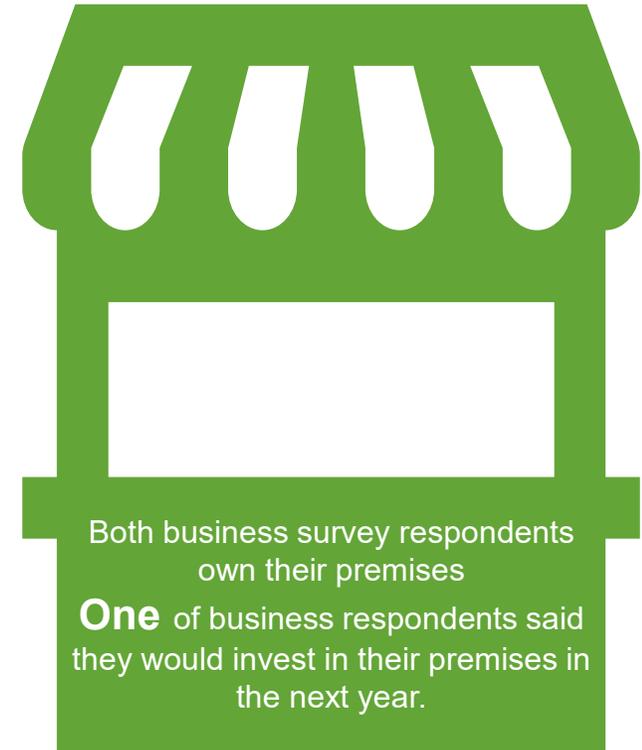
“More variety of shops other than food or home/diy.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Planning Applications:

Within the town centre nine planning applications were approved between August 2021 – August 2022. Of note were:

- Installation of Decking Area and Change of Use of Public Open Space to Use Class 3 (Food and Drink);
- Installation of illuminated signage.



Housing is central to people's lives and helps to shape the appearance and character of places. Good places provide a mix of housing that supports a socially balanced community and meets people's needs throughout life.

HOUSING & COMMUNITY



Housing Profile and Population

The overall population total for Westhill in 2020 was 12,110 and it is estimated that approximately 143 people live within the town centre.

The average house price for dwellings within the Westhill Central Datazone which includes the town centre boundary in 2018 was £182,454.

Although the datazone goes wider than the town centre, within the town centre all of the dwellings within the boundary are flats.

In terms of Council Tax Bands (2021), Westhill Town Centre has dwellings in Band B and Band C, with the majority in Band C.

Council Tax Band

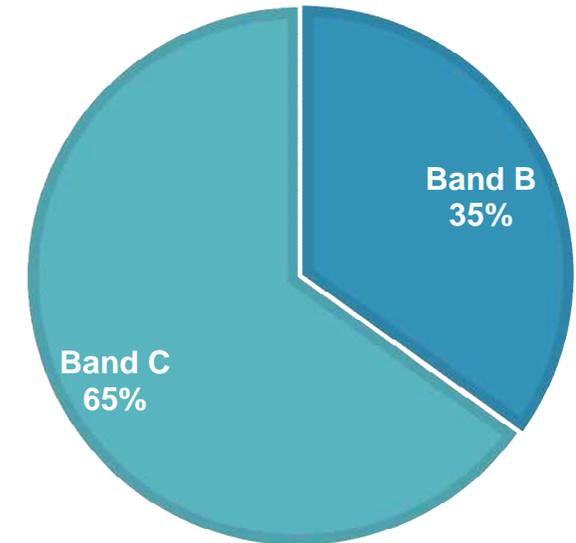


Image: Westhill Shopping Centre Sign.

Feeling isolated can be damaging to our health and wellbeing. Good places provide a variety of spaces to meet and spend time with others.

Observations: Range of Events received a mix of ratings from the community through the 2022 community survey. There are two venues that are available for social interaction in the town centre but there is a community desire to see more opportunities for socialising in an outdoor setting.



SOCIAL CONTACT



Venue	Indoor / Outdoor	Opening Times
Ashdale Hall	Indoor	Bookable for activities and events out with timetable: Mon-Thurs: 08:00-22:00 Fri: 08:00-16:00 Sat: from 16:00 Sun: from 13:00
Trinity Church – Westhill Catholic Church	Indoor	Mon: 17:30 Thurs: 10:00 Sun: 09:00

“Events are unimaginative and similar in nature.”

“Open areas for all to socialise could be better.”

“More events would be an improvement.”

“It’s great that we now have regular farmers markets, Christmas events and lighting. The Gala, Westhill Bike ride and many sports & social groups available for those that wish to join in.”

“An improvement would be better outdoor socialising space,”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Town Centre Events*^



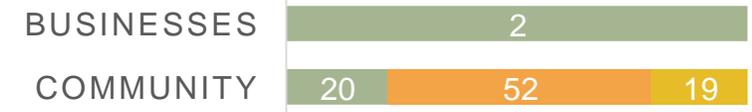
The following events are planned over the next year:

Farmers Market
1st Saturday of the Month

*Not an exhaustive list ^Correct at time of survey

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: RANGE OF EVENTS?

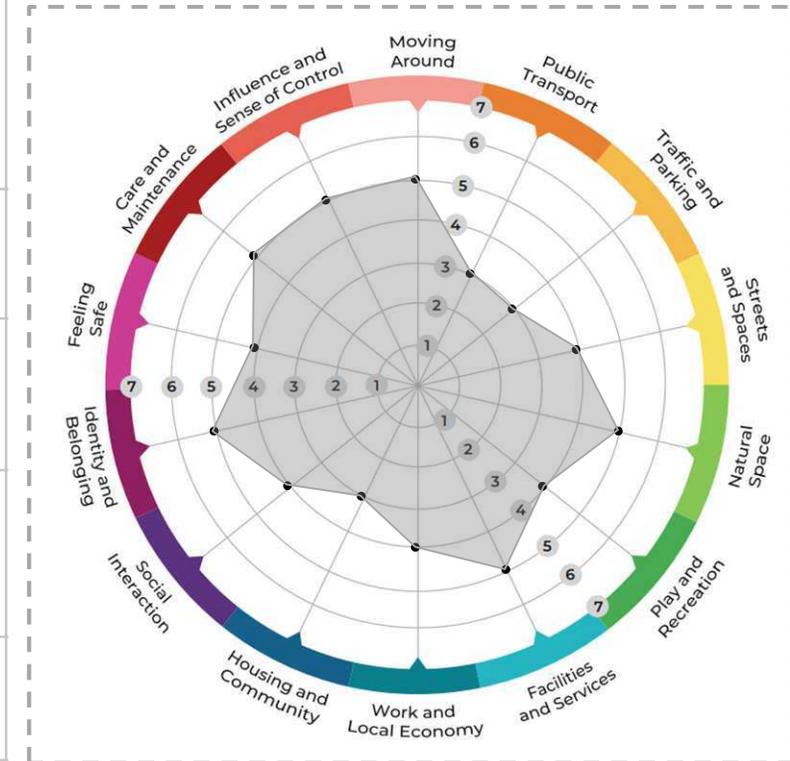
■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Images (Top to Bottom): Ashdale Hall and Trinity Church.

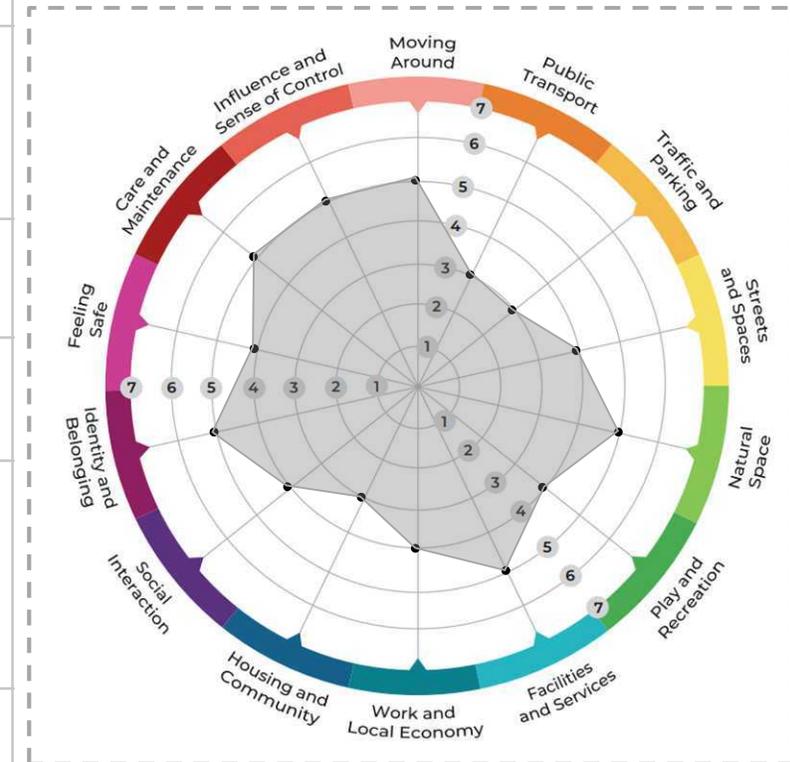
KEY CONSIDERATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

Theme	Key Improvements
Identity and Belonging Rating: 5	Westhill Town Centre has strong community spirit and the community felt overwhelmingly positive about the town centre. However, respondents recognised that the town centre lacks a 'High Street' feel and the shops are located within distinct shopping centre layouts.
Feeling Safe Rating: 4	Overall a very positive indicator for the town centre, particularly in relation to safety during the day. Safety during the evening was also rated positive but with more neutral ratings perhaps indicating the town centre is less visited in the evening. Lighting was highlighted as a concern by respondents and a link with antisocial behaviour, therefore potential opportunities to improve this could help to increase the overall score.
Care and Maintenance Rating: 5	This was a positive indicator for Westhill with the majority of comments recognising that the town is well maintained. Concerns were raised however, about parts of the town centre looking tired and the vacant unit so these two factors should be monitored to ensure they not detract from the town.
Influence and Sense of Control Rating: 5	Westhill has active volunteer groups that work to improve the town centre. A lack of awareness of some of the key groups was evident and increased marketing and promotion and visible projects could make a difference.
Moving Around Rating: 5	The pedestrian areas and footways around the shopping centre are good and there are links to the rest of the town centre. Signage was abundant in the Westhill Shopping Centre and more limited to the other shops on Ashdale Drive. This could be a improvement to made to indicate to other facilities within the town centre boundary.
Public Transport Rating: 3	Bus links to Aberdeen are good, but lacking to other surrounding areas, particularly to the west. Although, this is supplemented by a Dial-a-Bus service which could help to meet some of these community needs.
Traffic and Parking Rating: 3	The topic of traffic flow was something that was highly commented on with a number of respondents noting that improvements could be made to getting into and out of Westhill Shopping Centre.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES (CONTINUED)

Theme	Key Improvements
Streets and Spaces Rating: 4	Overall the topic of Streets ad Spaces was well received for Westhill Town Centre. The quality of pavements within the town centre attracted a number of comments noting that this could be improved. Additionally, a lack of seating areas was noted through the visitor survey so by increasing seating within the town centre would be beneficial.
Natural Space Rating: 5	There are green spaces within the town centre boundary, however these could be improved with the addition on planting displays to brighten up the area. Planters and flowers are evident at Westhill Shopping Centre and particularly on the corner at the roundabout and demonstrate the care that volunteers have put into them. Respondents acknowledge these efforts and how it has improved the area.
Play and Recreation Rating: 4	There are no play and recreation facilities within the town boundary. However, there is leisure facilities, a park and golf club within 1 mile of the town centre.
Facilities and Amenities Rating: 5	Overall this was a fairly positive topic for the town centre with 54% of respondents agreeing that the town centre has the services they would expect to see. Providing more variety of shops and increasing opening hours to provide more evening vibrancy would allow for an improvement to the town.
Work and Local Economy Rating: 4	The town centre has very low levels of deprivation which is reflected in the low claimant count and high income levels. Employment is fairly mixed, but with a large proportion taken up by Health and Retail sectors. Consumer spend is fairly spread out across the categories, apart from events/ entertainment as this was identified as an area to be lacking. Businesses were fairly confident in their future, however a low business survey rate is not necessarily reflective of the town centre and how it is doing. But with low vacancy rates, support for businesses in the town centre should be maintained.
Housing and Community Rating: 3	All of the dwellings within the town centre are flats, however there are a number of different types and tenures outwith the town centre boundary which ensure there is housing to meet all needs.
Social Contact Rating: 4	There are a two venues for people to meet within the town centre. However, there was a large desire to see additional events happening within the town centre.



BUSINESS & COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSES: How Would You Rate? Top 5 Highest and Lowest Scoring Categories

Community

Top Highest Scoring Categories:

- + 1. Feeling of Safety During the Day
- + 2. Standard of Service in Shops
- + 3. Parking Affordability: Car
- + 4. Ease of Getting Around
- + =5. Parks/ Green Spaces
- + =5. Quality of Shops

Top Lowest Scoring Categories:

- 1. Seating/ Areas to Congregate
- 2. Traffic Flow
- 3. Leisure and Play Facilities
- 4. Vibrancy in the Evening
- 5. Pavement Quality

Business

Top Highest Scoring Categories*:

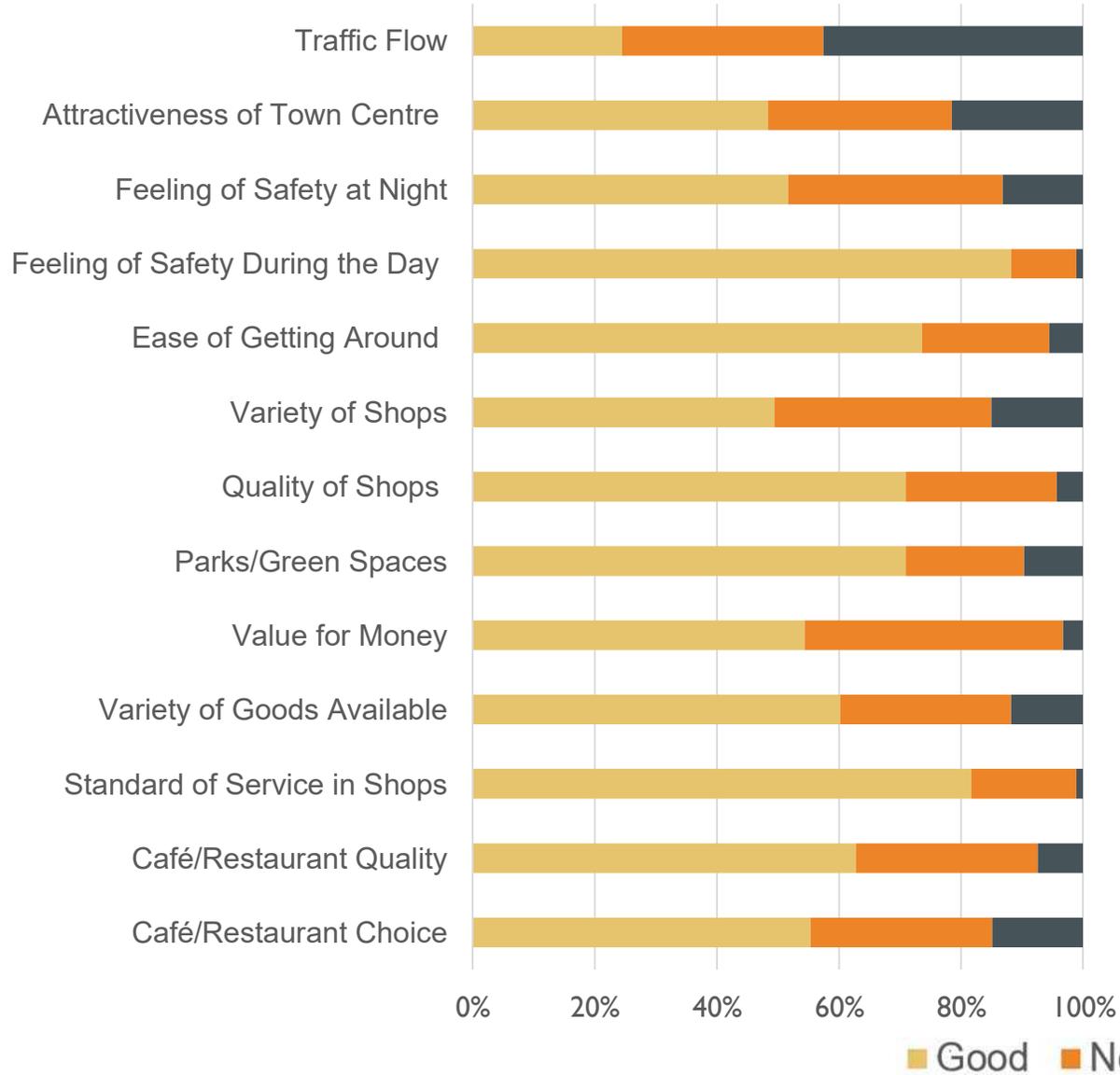
1. Standard of Service in Shops; Variety of Goods Available; Value for Money; Parks/ Green Spaces; Quality of Shops; Variety of Shops; Ease of Getting Around; Feeling of Safety During the Day; Attractiveness of Town Centre; Parking Space Availability: Car; Parking Affordability: Car; Public Transport Links; Signage; Vibrancy During the Day; Range of Events; Leisure and Play Facilities.
- *Please note: These categories all scored the same – Good (2)

Top Lowest Scoring Categories*:

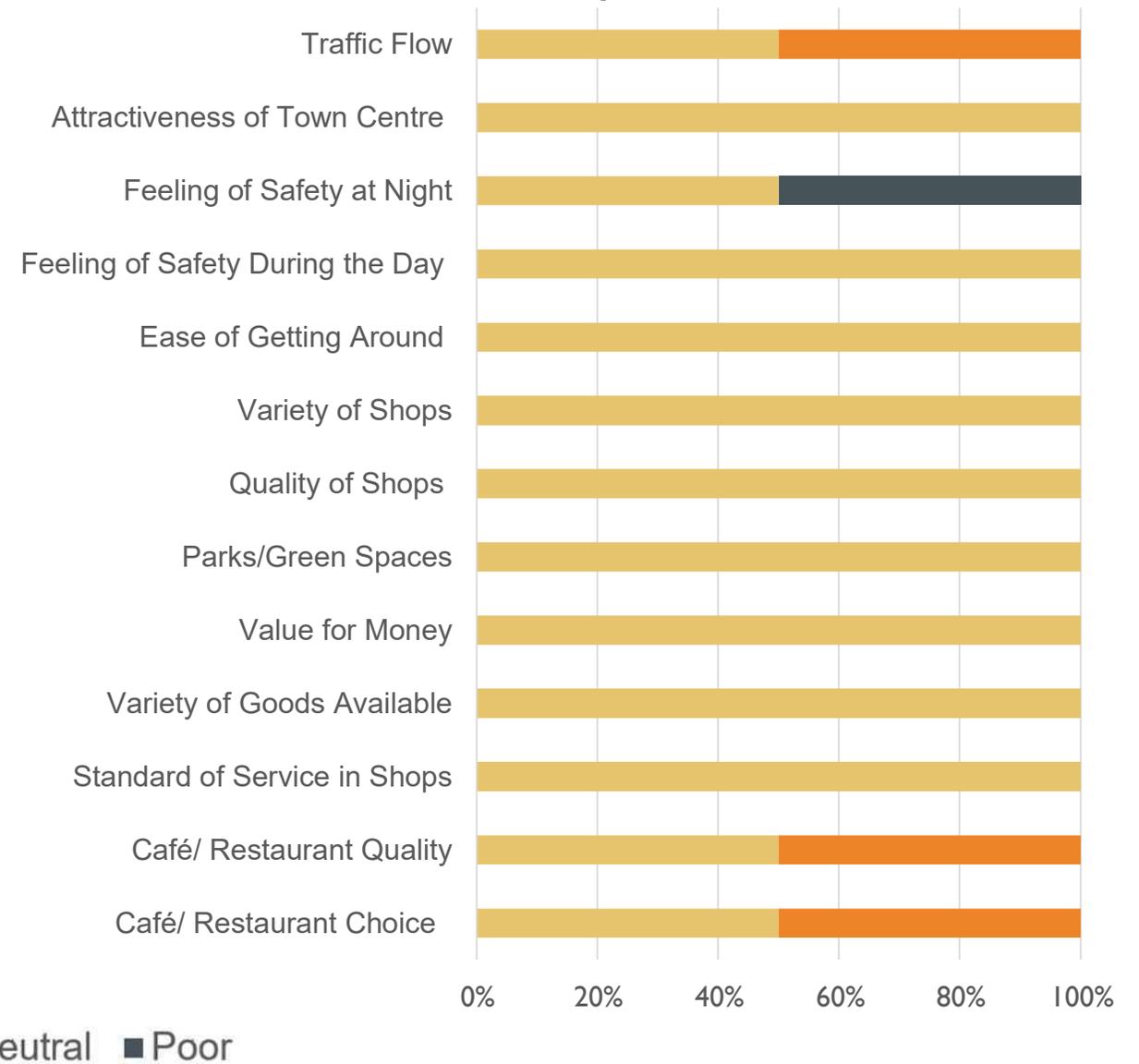
- =1. Feeling of Safety at Night
 - =1. Seating/ Areas to Congregate
 - =1. Pavement Cleanliness
 - =1. Pavement Quality
- *Please note: These categories all scored the same – Poor (1)

BUSINESS & COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSES: How Would You Rate?

Community Responses:

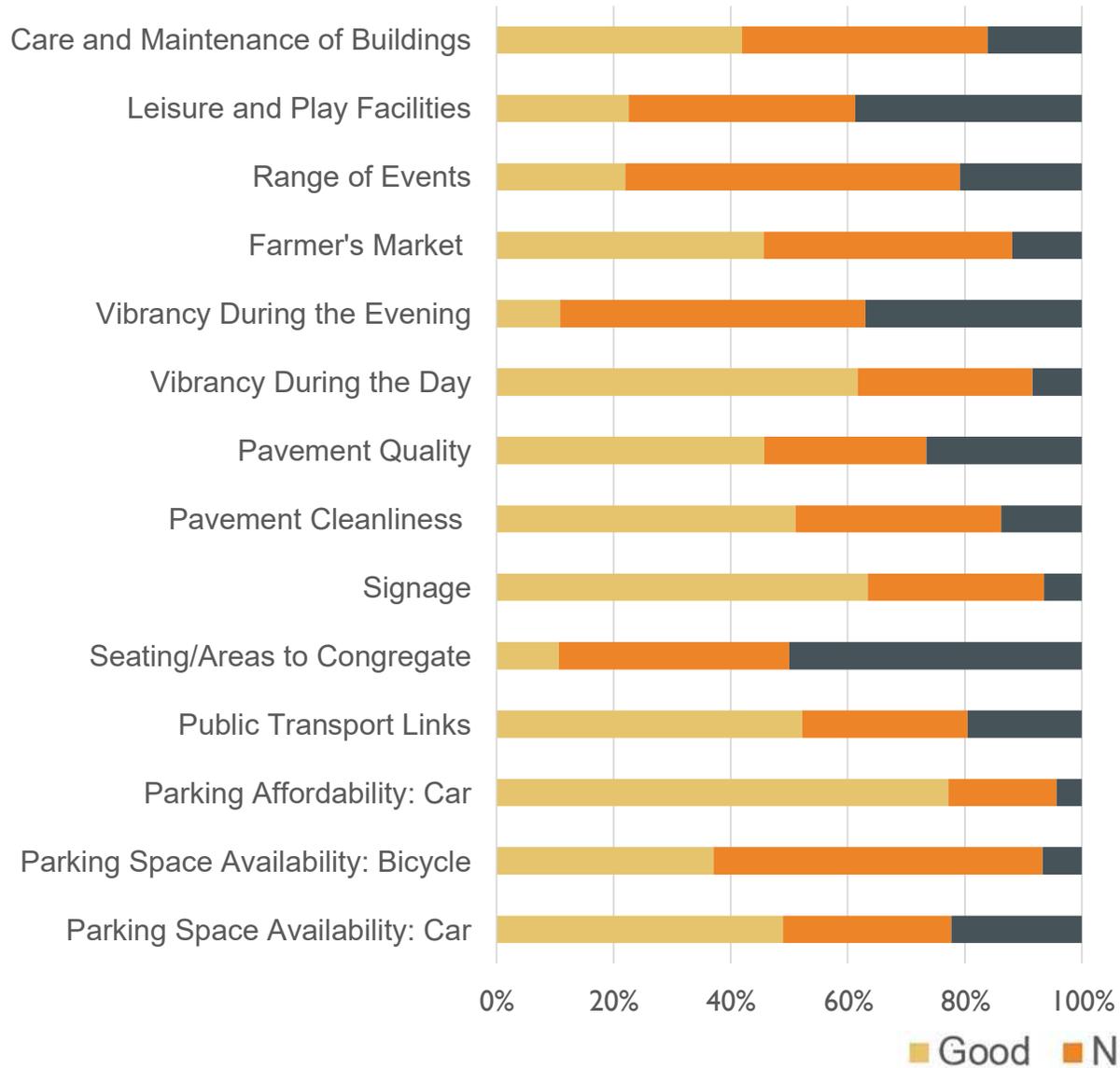


Business Responses:

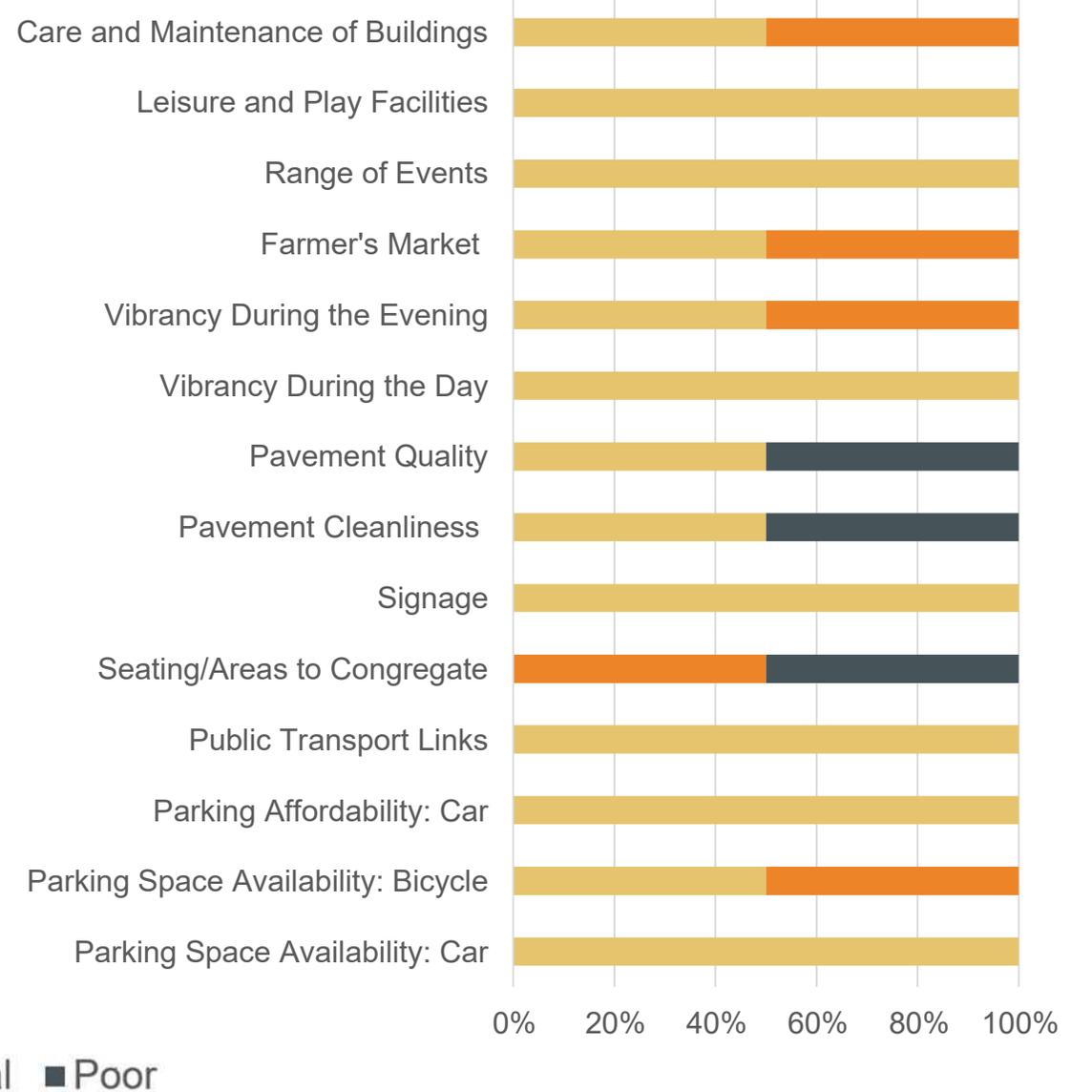


BUSINESS & COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSES: How Would You Rate? (Continued)

Community Responses:



Business Responses:



A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH: WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE BENEFIT OF OUR TOWNS

A key element of the new approach to undertaking Town Centre Health Checks in Aberdeenshire is to work in partnership with stakeholders with an interest in the success of our town centres to collect and share knowledge, information and opportunities. This has added an extra dimension to the health checks, providing a base from which future, plans, strategies, engagement and collaboration can be built upon. A big 'thank you' goes to the following teams, organisations and individuals in 2022 for their contributions to the project:

Business and Community:

Footfall Count Volunteers

Partner Organisations:

Sergeant Walker, Partnerships, Preventions and Interventions, Police Scotland

Elaine Bisset, VisitAberdeenshire



Council Teams:

Planning Information and Delivery

GIS Team

Community Learning and Development

Garioch Area Office

Community Payback Unpaid Hours Service

Community Engagement and Equalities

Economic Development

Transportation

Planning Policy

Customer and Digital Services

Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



Aberdeenshire

COUNCIL



TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK
SEPTEMBER 2022

REPORT PRODUCED BY THE PLANNING INFORMATION AND DELIVERY TEAM
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