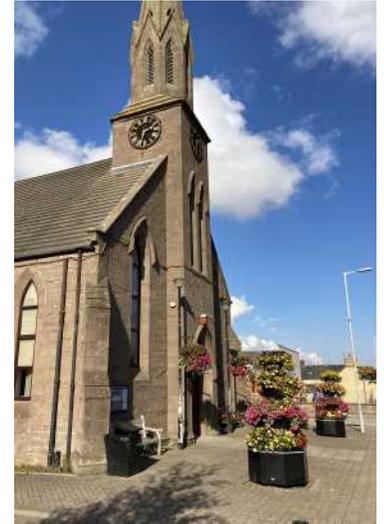




Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



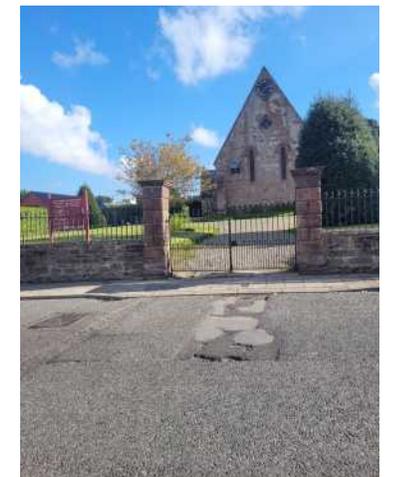
TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK SEPTEMBER 2022

LAURENCEKIRK, 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 Laurencekirk. 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 104 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 11 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: Those who use the town centre felt largely negative towards it. This was reflected in the comments that were received, with the quotes shown here giving a flavour of the community and business perceptions. Respondents felt that parking and traffic were major issues, and there were a lot of vacant units and a lack of shops/ amenities to support the growing town. Others felt that the town provided for the needs of residents to an extent but this was overshadowed by the negative points. Community spirit was generally rated as good.

The growth of Laurencekirk: Laurencekirk began as a small Kirkton (church town) and was then rebuilt as a planned village, becoming a burgh in the late 18th century. One of its early industries was the manufacture of snuff boxes. The railway station re-opened in 2009 attracting commuters to Aberdeen. Today, Laurencekirk remains a local market town with a cattle market and agricultural support services.

Source: Understanding Scottish Places

IDENTITY & BELONGING



How Do You Feel About Laurencekirk Town Centre?



29% Community

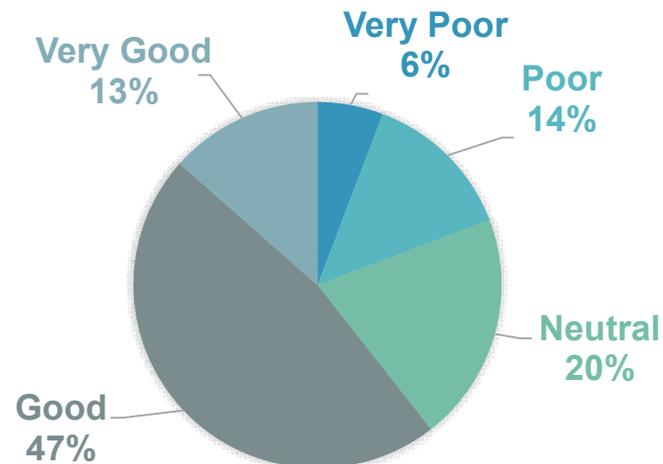
36% Businesses



71% Community

64% Businesses

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



"It is a very friendly town but there are a lot of empty shops and it lacks amenities."

"New to the town, but some good businesses there, but there are also too many empty premises."

"Great town but sadly being overwhelmed by new houses and insufficient facility to accommodate this."

"Most of our day to day needs are met within a 10 minute walk."

"Shops closing, terrible congestion on High Street. Little to encourage visitors."

"Town centre is well maintained but there are a growing number of empty commercial units which is sad to see, especially amidst a growing population due to new houses being built."

"Poor traffic management, lots of shops empty and no effort to encourage local trade. Lack of facilities/amenities/restaurants despite the increase in houses in the village."

"I feel that there is a range of facilities in Laurencekirk which supports the town and local smaller villages."

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

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.

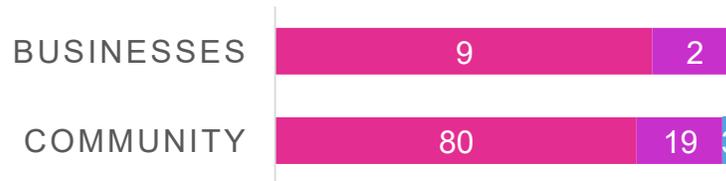
Observations: Safety during the day was the most positive rated category by both businesses and visitors to the town in the surveys. Safety during the evening was also positive but more neutral responses were received, perhaps indicating that the town centre is less used in the evening. There were limited comments provided on this topic, and of those received the focus was on the lack of crossings on the High Street and the danger to pedestrians and motorists from parked cars. Street lighting styles were fairly uniform throughout the town centre, with the exception of a different style outside the Masonic Hall and at the access to a supermarket to the north of the town centre. The lighting columns outside the Masonic Hall are in need of some maintenance to improve their appearance.

FEELING SAFE



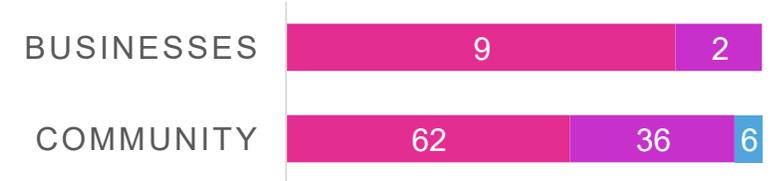
HOW WOULD YOU RATE: SAFETY DURING THE DAY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: SAFETY DURING THE EVENING?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Images (Clockwise from Top Left): Parking on both sides of the High Street; Lamppost requiring painting, Masonic Hall; Modern lighting style, access road to supermarket; Uniform lighting style along High Street.

"It's a friendly welcoming town."

"The high street has cars parked either side of the street making it dangerous for pedestrians & motorists."

"Complete lack of community police."

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

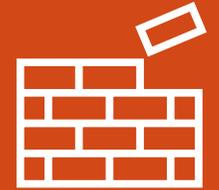
Key Safety Features:

- ✓ Lighting along High Street to be well maintained
- ✗ No central CCTV system in place

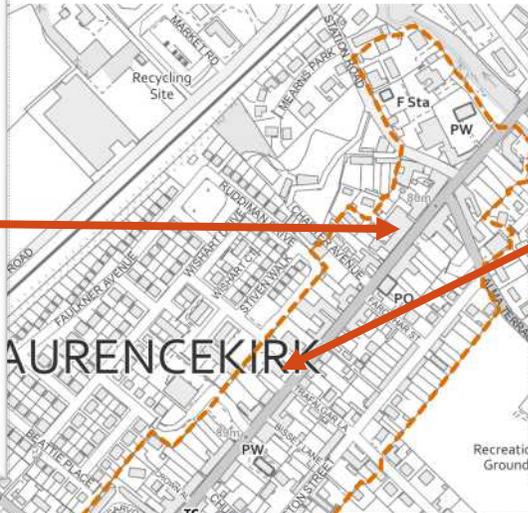
21 Incidences of crime reported
1st September 2021 – 31st July 2022
Police Scotland

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



Vacant Unit, High Street



Masonic Hall, High Street



Former Mearns Community Centre, High Street

Observations: There is a mix of upkeep of buildings within the town centre. There are a number of vacant units which if no improvements are made, or are not brought back into use will start to have an impact on the overall appearance and vibrancy of the town centre.

This was also evident through the survey with only twelve respondents from both the community and business surveys noting that the care and maintenance of buildings was good. A number of respondents also commented looking for the vacant units to be brought back into use or smartened up.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: CARE & MAINTENANCE OF BUILDINGS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor

BUSINESSES	1	6	4
COMMUNITY	11	49	41

“The local authority buildings are in a shocking state. Maintenance is important.”

“The shop fronts of the empty buildings should be tidied up as this would be an improvement to the town centre.”

“Need to smarten up the High Street, in particular the vacant units.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

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: Laurencekirk has several community organisations which carry out various activities and events, such as Laurencekirk Gala and planting of the hanging baskets and Christmas lights. Interestingly, there was no mention of Mearns Community Council in the survey responses. There could be opportunities for various groups to improve their presence and awareness to the public.

Town Centre Groups	Mearns Community Council	Laurencekirk Hanging Baskets
Legal Status	Community Council	Community Group
Membership	The community; 16 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.	Group of volunteers, with the help of local businesses and the community, fundraise, plant and maintain the hanging baskets throughout the town.
Contact	Mearns Community Council	

*Correct at time of survey

29% of community survey respondents are aware of groups that support the town centre.

“The High St is made more attractive by the hanging baskets and floral displays/Christmas lights and decorations again mainly community driven projects.”

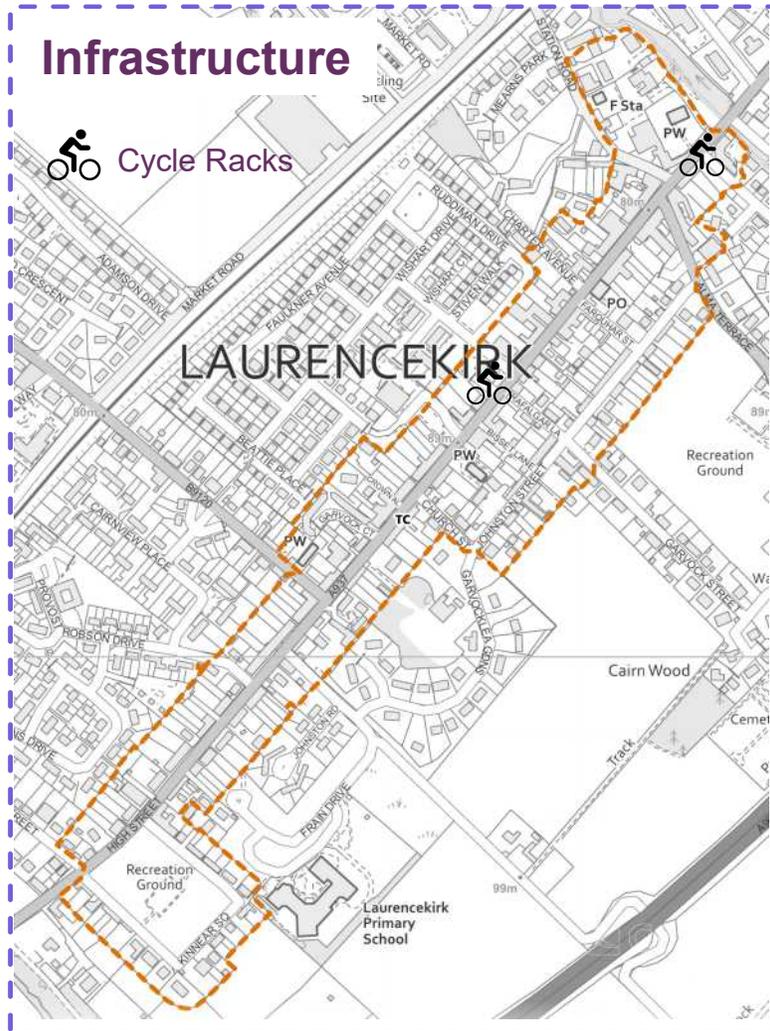
Business and Community Survey, September 2022

The word cloud (right) shows the survey responses, with Laurencekirk Hanging Baskets (20) and Christmas Lights Group (10) receiving the most mentions.

Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network Gardening Group
 Friends of Dunlethen Woods
Laurencekirk Gala Committee
 Laurencekirk Hanging Baskets
 Laurencekirk Memorial Park Group
 Laurencekirk Christmas Lights
 Laurencekirk Development Trust
 Laurencekirk Improvement Forum

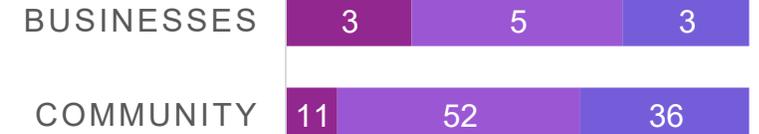
MOVING AROUND: CYCLING

Observations: There are two sets of freestanding cycle racks within the town centre and no covered shelters for bike storage. The lack of facilities was noted by survey respondents. There are no cycle lanes in the settlement. The survey results suggested that the majority of the community respondents had a neutral perception of cycling facilities, although there were more poor responses than good. Comments provided by respondents suggested enhancement of cycling infrastructure within the town as well as highlighting the danger to cyclists on High Street as a result of parked cars.



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: CYCLE PARKING?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



“High Street dangerous for cyclists.”

“People need to take the car to get to Laurencekirk from the surrounding villages, even though the distances are okay for cycling. This is due to the lack of bike infrastructure.”

“There should be bike racks.”

“Parking on both sides of road makes cycling very difficult.”



Images (Left to Right): Freestanding racks beside the Masonic Hall, High Street; Freestanding racks at High Street (North End) Car Park.

MOVING AROUND: VISITING THE TOWN CENTRE

Observations: The majority of survey respondents visit Laurencekirk Town Centre on a daily basis and the main reason for their visit was Post Office/ Council services, closely followed by Shopping. Respondents generally visited the town centre during week, between 8am-6pm. There were less visits to the town centre during the evenings which could be indicative of the comments received in relation to the desire for more restaurants and places to eat.

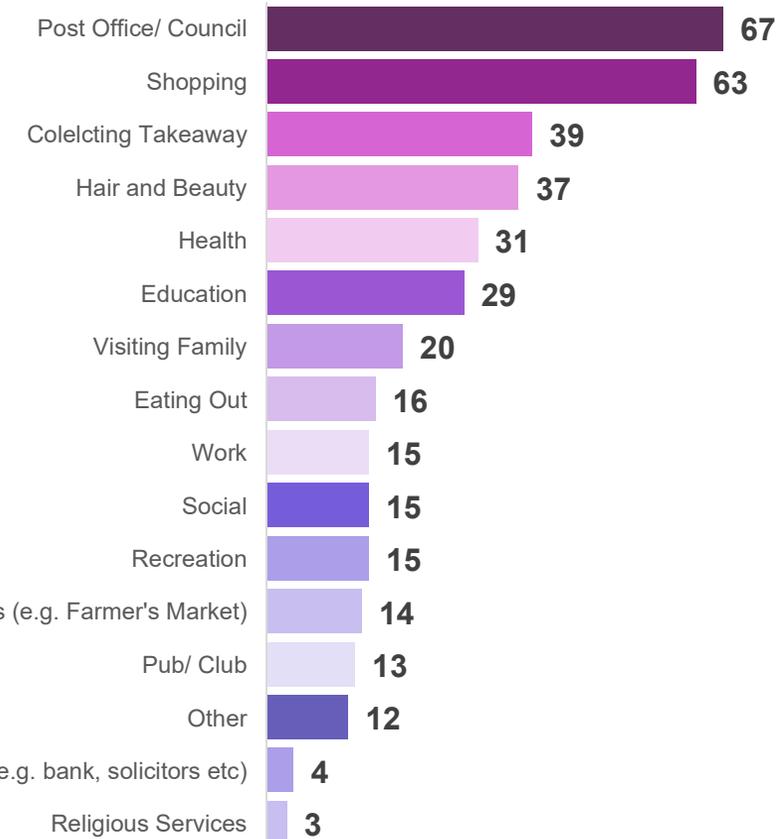
“It is not very vibrant during the day, and it is especially not at night.”

“Most of our day to day needs are met within a 10 minute walk.”

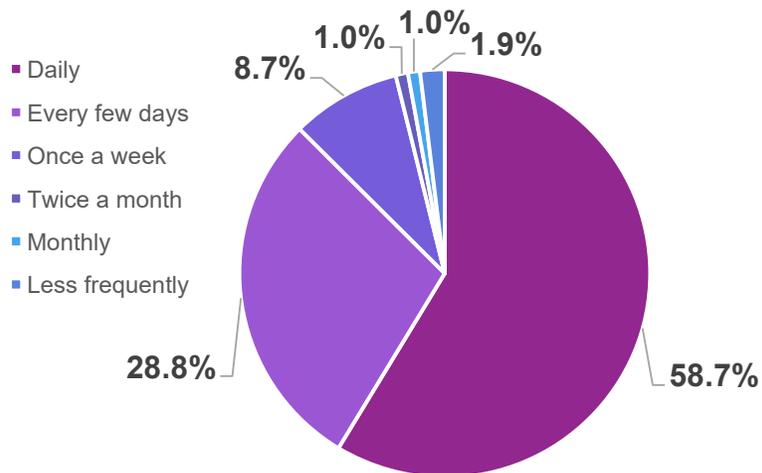
“Better choice of cafes/restaurants.”

Community Survey, September 2022

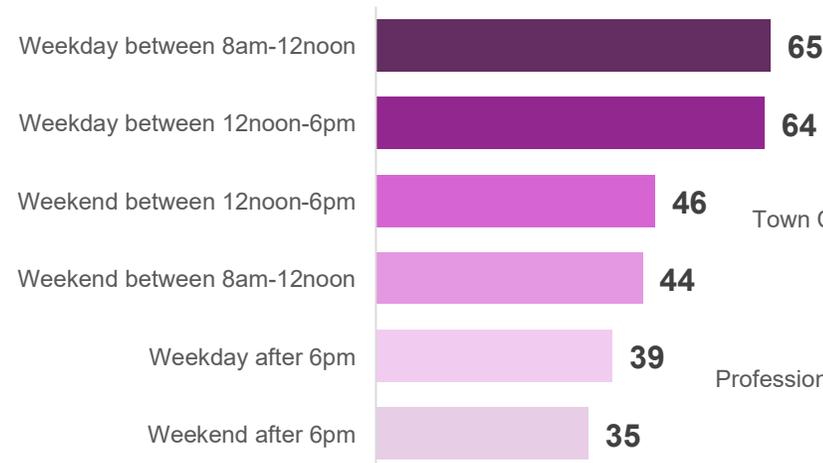
GENERALLY, WHY DO YOU VISIT LAURENCEKIRK TOWN CENTRE?*



HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT LAURENCEKIRK TOWN CENTRE?



WHEN WOULD YOU GENERALLY VISIT LAURENCEKIRK TOWN CENTRE?*



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

MOVING AROUND: FOOTFALL SURVEY

Day	Time	Location 1	Location 2	Hourly Total	Overall Total
Thursday 	09:30	15	6	21	59
	11:30	15	2	17	
	14:30	14	7	21	
Totals		44	15	59	

Footfall is a measure of the vitality of the town centre and can be directly linked to economic activity.

Pedestrian counts were undertaken on Thursday 29th September 2022 for a duration of 15 minutes, three times a day, in two locations.

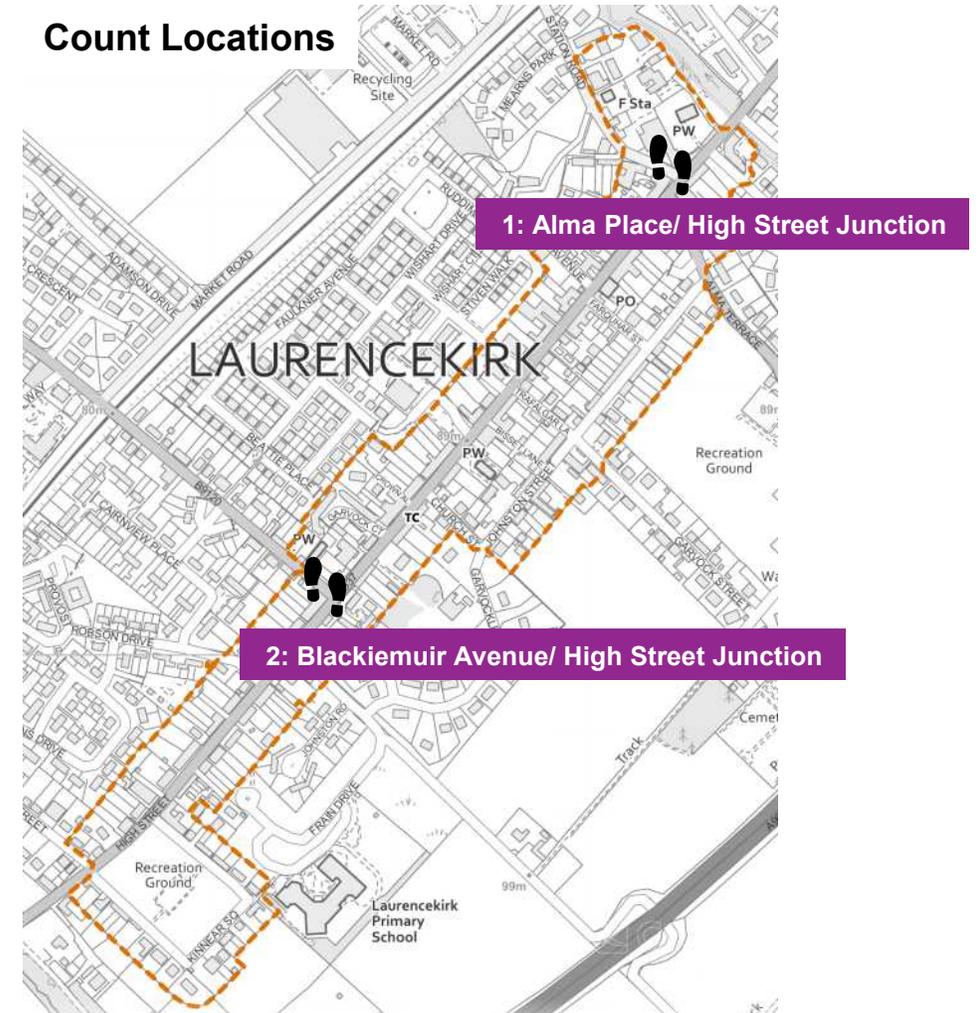
The pedestrian count findings showed the highest footfall count was recorded at Alma Place/ High Street junction in the morning (15 people). It was also the busiest count point in general over the course of the surveys.

HEADLINES

Busiest Location: Alma Place/ High Street Junction
Busiest Time: 09:30/ 11:30

Quietest Location: Blackiemuir Ave/ High Street Junction
Quietest Time: 11:30

Count Locations

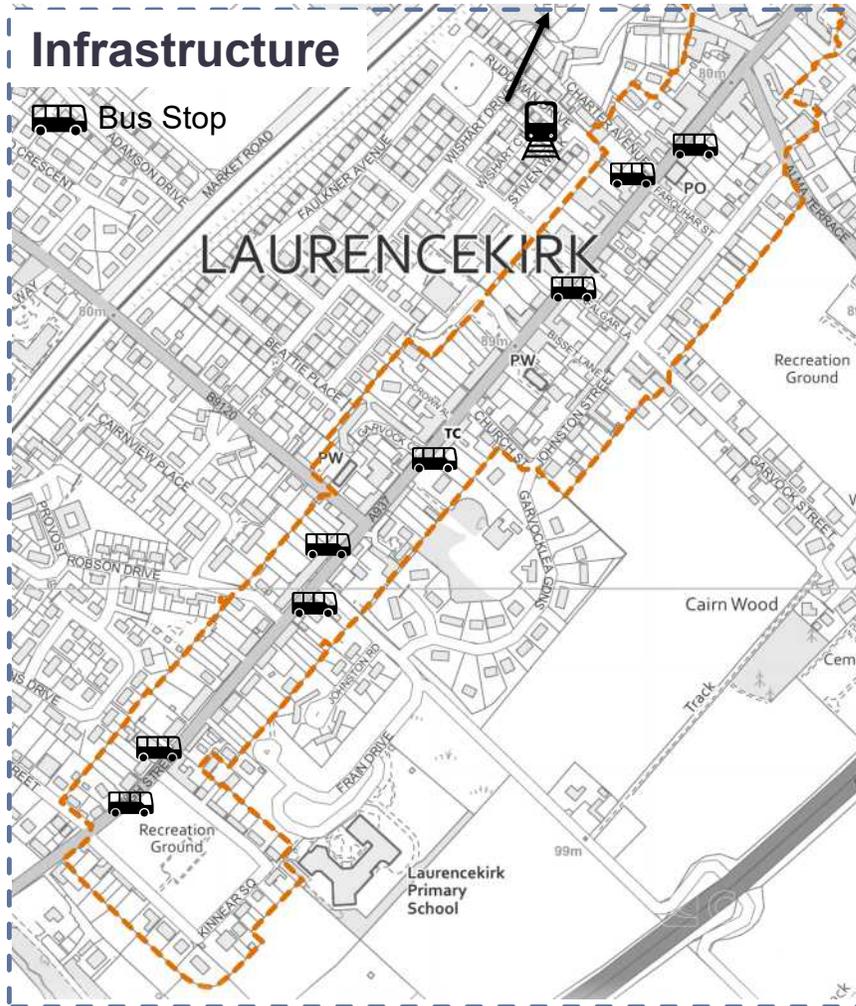


Access to an affordable, reliable and well-connected public transport service is important for all communities. Good public transport encourages people to get around in ways that are better for the environment.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT



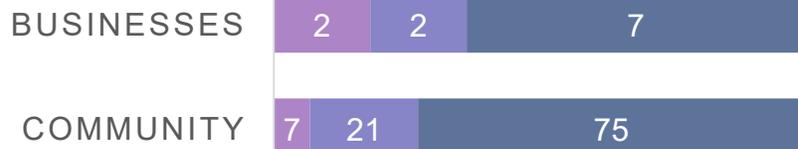
Observations: Laurencekirk Town Centre has reasonable bus links to Stonehaven and Montrose, which then allows for further travel beyond to Aberdeen and Dundee. There are limited services to Luthermuir. This is supplemented by an A2B Dial-a-Bus service which covers the Kincardine and Mearns areas. There is also a train station a short distance outwith the town centre boundary which provides regular services to the north and south. There are several bus stops distributed along the length of the town centre, two of which are covered and provide seating. This topic was rated as one of the lowest by both businesses and the community with the comments indicating the desire for more regular services.



Images (Left to Right): Bus stop, High Street; Covered bus shelter adjoining public toilets, High Street.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PUBLIC TRANSPORT?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



“Need better and more regular transport links.”

“I wish I could get there by bus, but the bus route was stopped a few years ago.”

“Poor public transport and train much more expensive than Montrose And Stonehaven.”

“There is only a train station with trains that are not regular enough, and there are bus stops, but there are not enough buses or routes.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

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.

TRAFFIC & PARKING

TRAFFIC



Image: High Street.

“An improvement to the town centre would be to reduce through traffic.”

“Less parking of cars on the high street to provide better traffic flow.”

“Great need for improved traffic flow.”

“Better traffic management on the High Street.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: TRAFFIC FLOW?

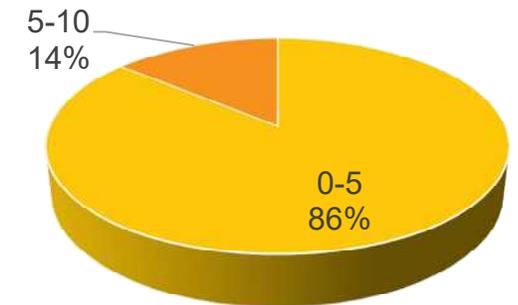
■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Observations: A large proportion of comments received to the community survey related to the topic of traffic flow with a number of different views expressed but generally respondents were looking for improvements to be made to the traffic flow through the town centre.

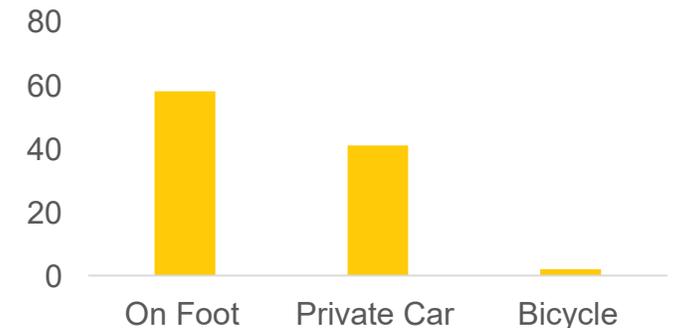
This is reflected in the responses to the survey as traffic flow was ranked within the bottom five of all topics rated within both the community and business survey.

Distance Travelled to Use the Town Centre (Miles)



Source: Community Survey September 2022

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	
Thursday	Location 1	Car	37	Car	47	Car	49	176	
		Buses	0	Buses	0	Buses	1		
		Lorries	0	Lorries	0	Lorries	1		
		Vans	15	Vans	11	Vans	12		
		Taxis	0	Taxis	0	Taxis	3		
		Bicycles	0	Bicycles	0	Bicycles	0		
		Other	1	Other	0	Other	0		
	Location 2	Car	75	Car	77	Car	86		295
		Buses	0	Buses	0	Buses	0		
		Lorries	5	Lorries	1	Lorries	0		
		Vans	12	Vans	14	Vans	14		
		Taxis	0	Taxis	0	Taxis	3		
		Bicycles	0	Bicycles	2	Bicycles	1		
		Other	1	Other	1	Other	2		
Hourly Totals (all traffic):		146		153		172		471	

HEADLINES

Busiest Location: Alma Place and High St Junction

Busiest Time: 14:15

Busiest Day: Thursday

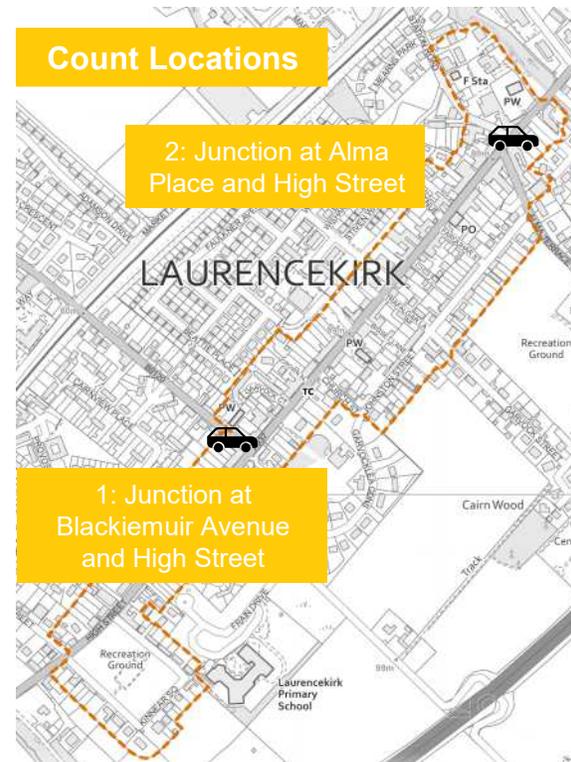
Quietest Location: Blackiemuir Ave & High St Junction

Quietest Time: 09:45

Quietest Day: Thursday



Image: Robson Car Park, High Street.



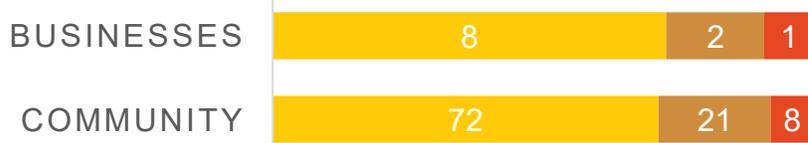
Observations: Vehicle counts were undertaken on Thursday 29th September 2022 for a duration of 15 minutes, three times a day, in two locations. These give information on the number of cars that are passing through the town centre, it can't be confirmed whether these cars have all contributed to the local economy but were in the town centre at the time of the count. The vehicle count findings showed the highest vehicle count was recorded at Alma Place and High Street junction on Thursday afternoon.

TRAFFIC & PARKING

CAR PARKING AFFORDABILITY AND AVAILABILITY

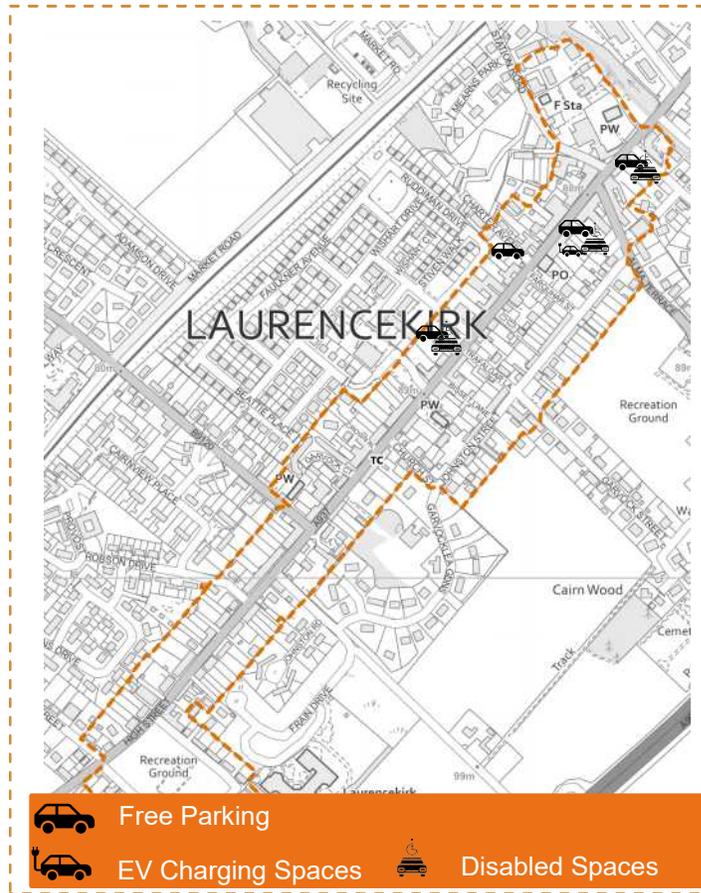
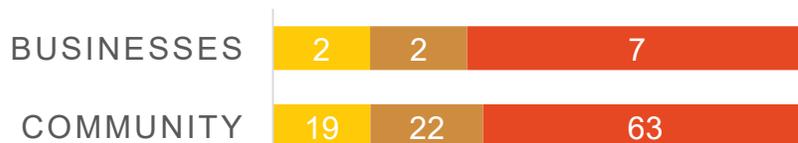
HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PARKING AFFORDABILITY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PARKING AVAILABILITY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



“Need better parking.”

“The car parks could be improved.”

“The town is in great need of improved parking.”

“The car parks are always full.”

“Car parks are too small and really need to be improved.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

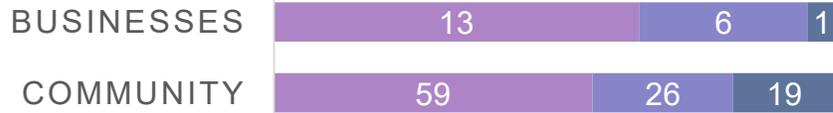
Observations: A large number of comments were received through the surveys supporting additional and improved parking within the town centre. A number of reasons were given for wanting additional parking including to encourage new shops into the town and the availability of parking spaces being poor.

However, the topic of parking affordability was ranked within the top five of all topics surveyed by the community.

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: Overall the town centre of Laurencekirk is attractive with a number of different factors contributing to this, such as the colourful planters that are located throughout the town centre which help to brighten up the area. Respondents to the survey noted that it would be nice to see additional colour being brought into the town centre. There are also a number of key buildings through the town centre that help to provide an attractive town centre setting. However, there are a number of vacant units that slightly detract from the town centre but are generally in good condition.

“It would be nice to see more colours (maybe paint the bus stop/public toilets as part of a community project with local artists young and old).”

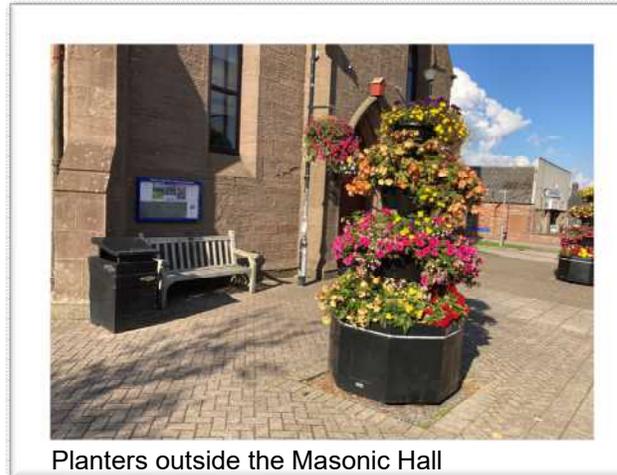
“Would be nice to have a more inviting High Street.”

“Hanging baskets are a nice touch in the town centre.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

STREETS & SPACES

ATTRACTIVENESS OF TOWN CENTRE



Planters outside the Masonic Hall



Vacant unit, High Street

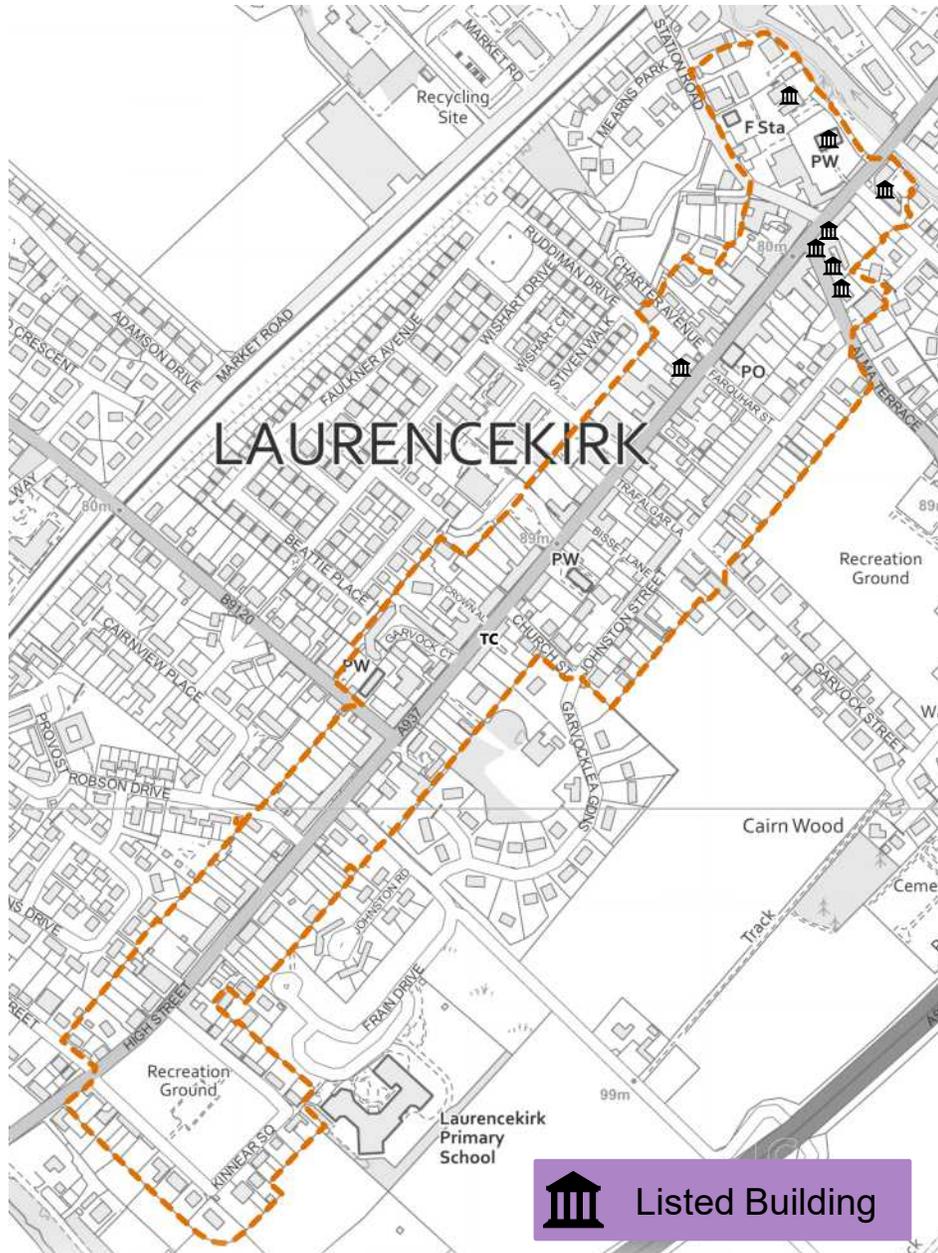


Green space within the town centre



St Laurence Church, High Street





STREETS & SPACES: HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC ART



Images (Left to Right): Aberluthnot and Laurencekirk Parish Church, High Street; Listed buildings, Alma Place.

Observations: There are 8 listed buildings within Laurencekirk Town Centre of which 2 are Category B listed and 6 are Category C listed. The two Category B listed buildings are Laurencekirk Parish Church and Alma Hotel. In general, all of the listed buildings are in good condition and add to the attractiveness of the town centre.

Within the town centre, there is no formal public art but the planters really help to brighten up the town centre and provide some colour.

"More vibrant I would say find a local artist and make a spray paint mural or something to brighten up the town a bit."

Observations: In terms of seating there are a number of seats around the recreation area at the southern end of the town centre and around the Masonic Hall. There are a number of areas within the town centre where there is no provision of seating where people may welcome a resting space. However, if more seating was to be added it could potentially make areas of the pavement difficult to navigate for some users.

The pavements within the town centre also attracted a number of comments to note that they need to be cleaned and repaired. Although during the site visit there were a number of areas where there were cracked/ uneven areas, overall the pavements were generally in a good condition.

“There is a need for better pavements.”

“Pavements should be repaired.”

“The pavements should be swept and cleared of weeds.”

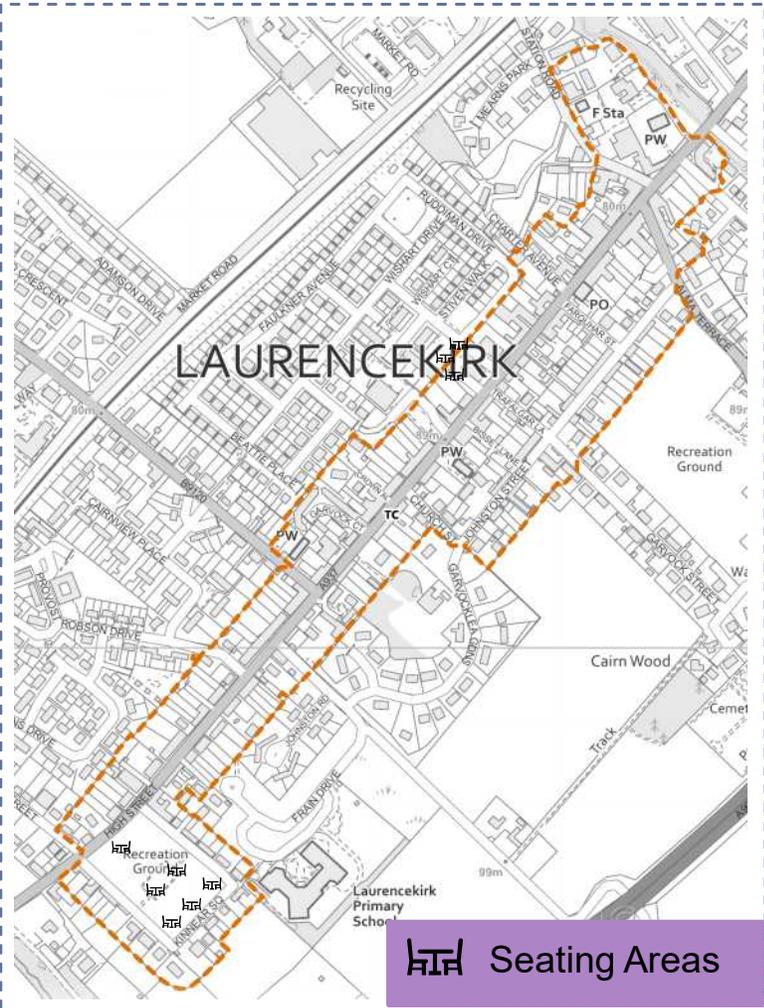
“The pavements should be cleaner.”

“Need to improve the street furniture.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022



STREETS & SPACES: PAVEMENTS AND SEATING



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: SEATING/ AREAS TO CONGREGATE

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor

BUSINESSES	11	10	22
COMMUNITY	30	83	142

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PAVEMENT QUALITY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor

BUSINESSES	15	12	16
COMMUNITY	96	94	64

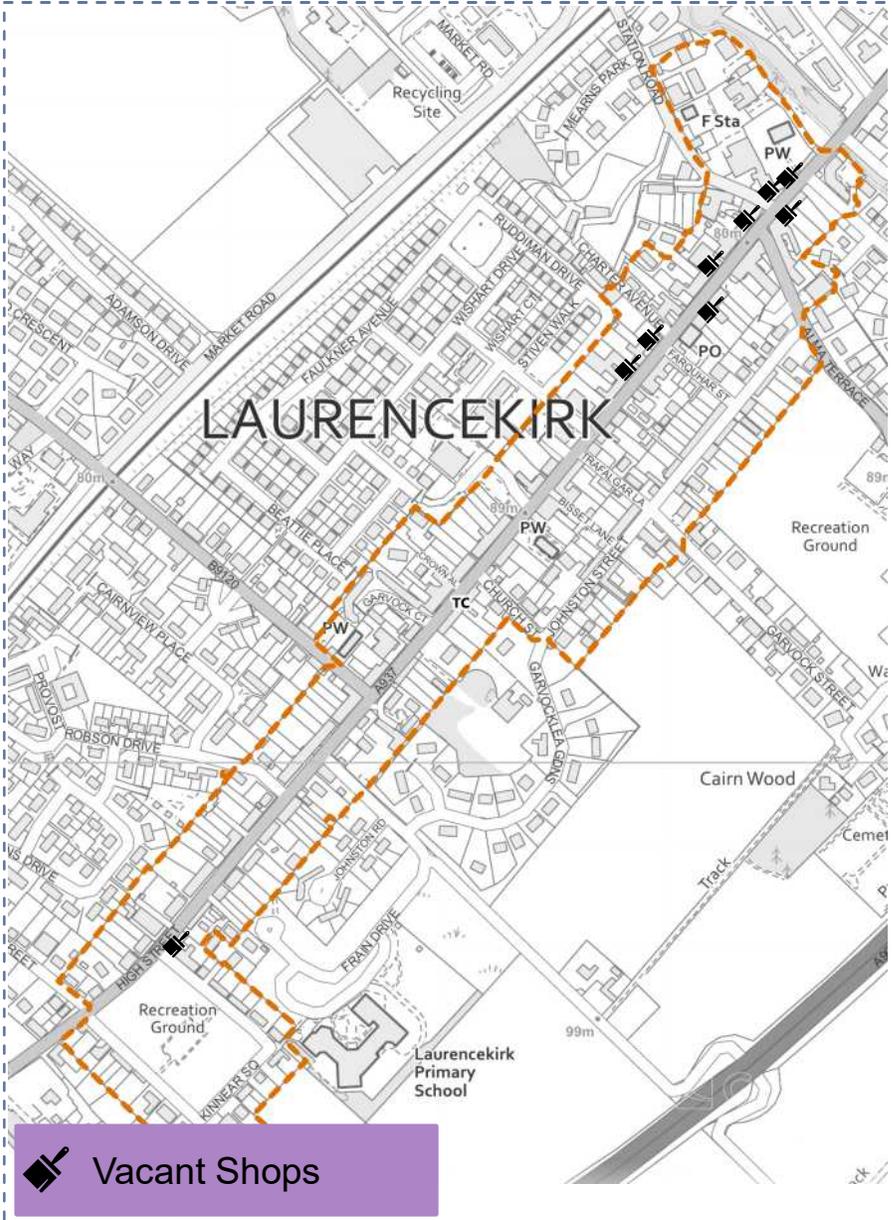
HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PAVEMENT CLEANLINESS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor

BUSINESSES	23	14	6
COMMUNITY	139	79	38

Seating Areas

STREETS & SPACES: VACANT RETAIL UNITS



Observations: The vacancy rate within the town centre is 23% which is higher than the Scottish average at the time of the survey of 15% (Scottish Retail Consortium and Local Data Company).

The level of vacancy was a comment that was noted strongly through the community survey with most noting that it would be nice to see less vacant units within the town centre. The vacant units are mostly in good condition however, some of the buildings could be improved to help with the overall appearance of the area. It also should be noted that at the time of the survey three of the vacant units were being renovated which will hopefully be reflected in the next TCHC.

- “Would be nice to businesses going into the empty shops.”*
- “Should try to encourage uses into the vacant units.”*
- “Potential for conversion of empty shops into residential properties.”*
- “Would be nice to see less empty properties/shops within the town centre.”*



Images (Both): High Street.

Vacant Retail Units

9 Vacant Units in the town centre

23% Vacancy Rate at time of survey

NATURAL SPACE

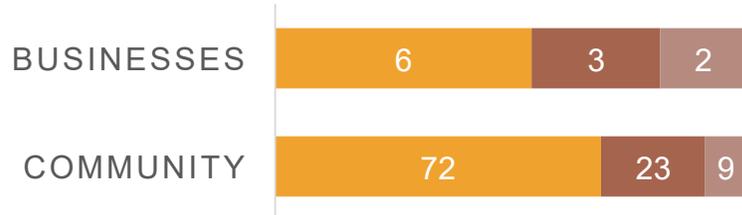


Natural space includes parks and woodlands, fields, streams and rivers, green space alongside paths and roads, and tree-lined streets. These can be good for wildlife, improve air quality and benefit our health and wellbeing.

Observations: There is a large park within the town centre and another which borders the boundary. These spaces may have contributed to the overall positive score for parks and green spaces in the surveys by both businesses and the community. The hanging baskets provided by volunteers were also highly regarded in the comments section. Further opportunities for baskets or displays to be located on shop fronts could enhance the visual appearance of the High Street, although pavement widths and road safety would be a key consideration.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PARKS & GREEN SPACES?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



"It's cheered up with the hanging baskets and flowers outside the Masonic hall."

"Nice flowers along High Street."

"Community driven projects are the reason for good parks and recreation."

"Hanging baskets are a nice touch in the village."

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Hanging baskets along the length of High Street

Park within town centre boundary

Planters at entrance to Robson car park

Planters and trees around the Masonic Hall and car park

Shrubs and planting at entrance to supermarket on the boundary

PLAY & RECREATION



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.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: LEISURE AND PLAY FACILITIES?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Observations: Laurencekirk has the Recreation Ground within the town centre itself, and a number of other facilities on the town centre boundary including the playpark area beside the Scotmid on the High Street. A number of comments were received from respondents noting that they would like to see further facilities available for all within the town. In addition to the facilities within the town centre and on the boundary there are also a number of play/recreation facilities less than 1 mile from the town centre.

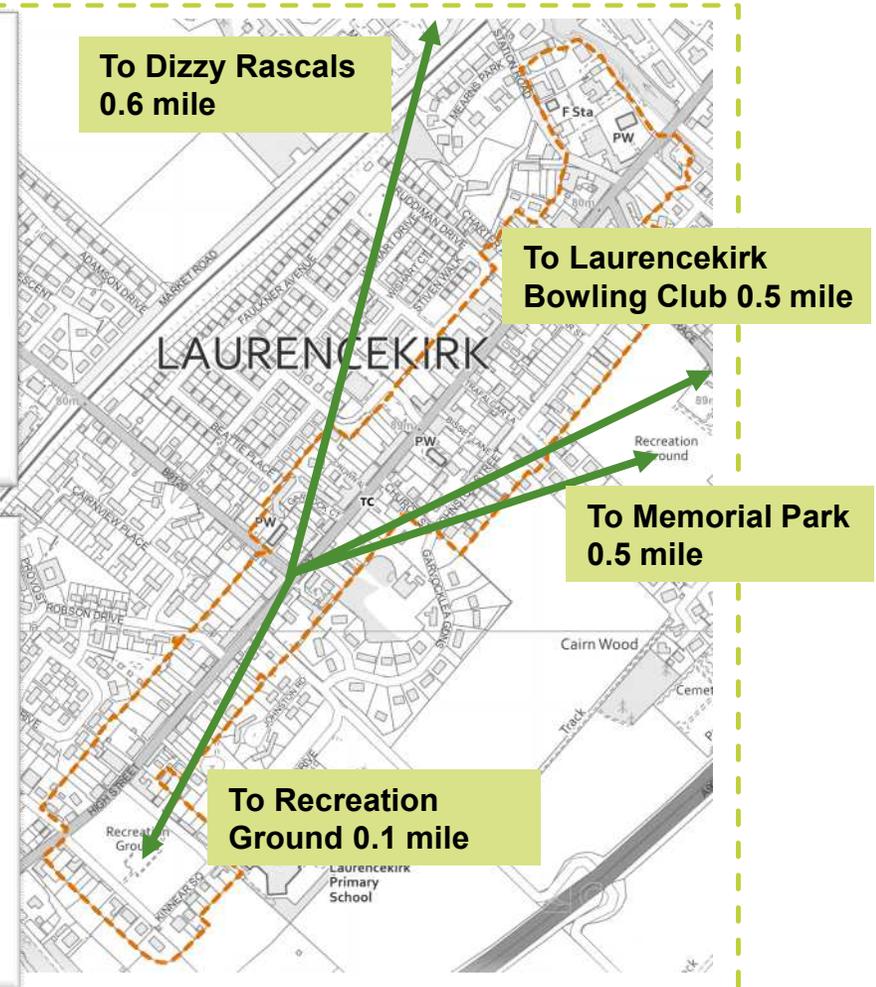
“There should be more leisure facilities.”

“Would be nice to see a swimming pool in the town centre.”

“Be great to have more access to have more access to sport/ activities at the weekends/ on Sundays.”

“There is stuff for younger children but there isn’t much for older children/ teenagers.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022



FACILITIES & AMENITIES: RETAILER REPRESENTATION

Retailer Representation

65% of businesses in the town centre are independent retailers

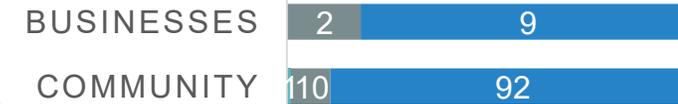
39% of businesses in the town centre are Class 1: Shops

24% of businesses in the town centre are Class 2: Financial, Professional and other services



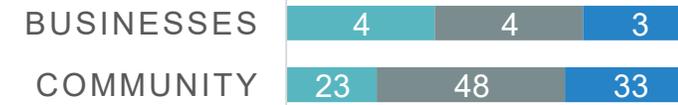
HOW WOULD YOU RATE: VARIETY OF SHOPS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: QUALITY OF SHOPS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



“Should try to encourage more shops.”

“Need a bigger variety of shops.”

“There are no shops selling clothes, shoes, diy etc.”

“Need to encourage more businesses to the High Street.”

“Need to have more food choices within the town centre.”

“Need a supermarket.”



Observations: The majority of shop units within the town centre are independent retailers. A large proportion of the comments received through the community survey related to the lack of variety of shops within the town centre, and the topic actually ranked within the 5 lowest ranked topics through the survey. There is a strong community desire to see a supermarket within the town.

Image (Top to Bottom: Low Street and Bridge Street

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

Observations: There are a number of different services/ facilities within the town centre, including the fire station, halls, churches and a defibrillator should the need be required. It should be noted that in addition to the services that are within the town centre, there are more services beyond the boundary of the town centre.

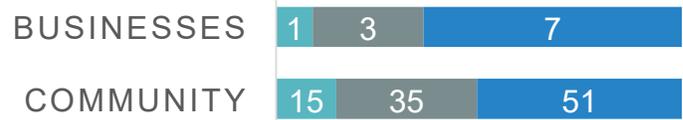
A number of comments were received through the community survey to note that there is currently not a Farmer's Market within the town centre which is reflected through the scoring for the topic.



Images (Left to Right): Laurencekirk Fire Station and Masonic Hall.

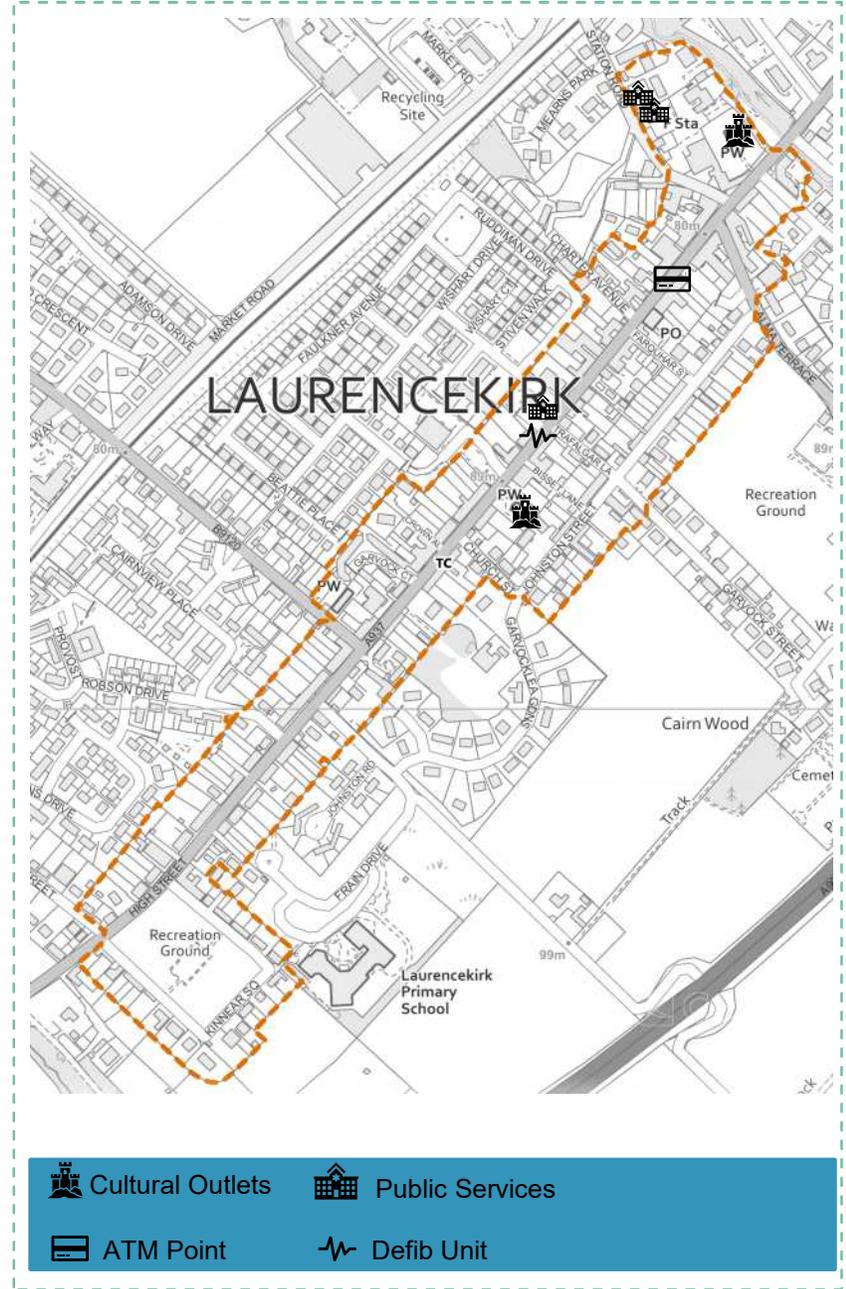
HOW WOULD YOU RATE: THE MARKET?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



"There is no farmers market."

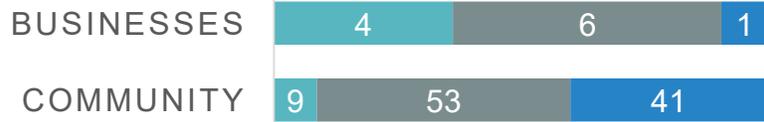
Business and Community Survey, September 2022



FACILITIES & AMENITIES: COMMUNITY AND VISITOR SATISFACTION

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: VALUE FOR MONEY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Town Centre Offer:

10%

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

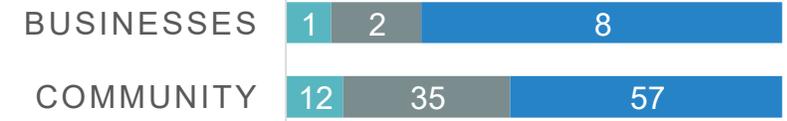
Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Observations: The standard of service within the shops was rated within the top five out of all the topics within the community survey, with 66 respondents rating this as good.

Whereas, the topics of variety of goods and value for money received more of a mix of ratings and comments. 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, as only nine respondents through the community survey rated the topic as good.

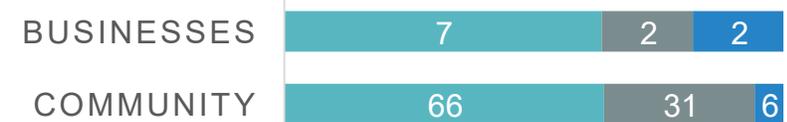
HOW WOULD YOU RATE: VARIETY OF GOODS AVAILABLE?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: STANDARD OF SERVICE IN SHOPS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



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

1,711

Jan-Dec 2021

FACILITIES & AMENITIES: ONLINE SHOPPING/ CONNECTIVITY

Online Offering

90% of businesses surveyed have online presence

11% of businesses surveyed sell online

56% 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 would rather shop local than buy online.

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



Image: High Street.

Mobile Coverage in Laurencekirk Town Centre:

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

✓ Good coverage ⚠ You may experience problems ✗ No coverage

Broadband Coverage in Laurencekirk 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 Laurencekirk Town Centre is very strong with all of the top networks being able to be connected to at a 4G level. There is currently no coverage of 5G within the town centre.

Broadband coverage is also strong with fibre and superfast broadband being available within the town. There is no free public WIFI available within the town centre.

“It is cheaper to shop online.”

“Would rather shop local, but often due to choice I have no other option but to go further afield or buy online.”

“I would rather shop in town but the variety is limited.”

“More convenient to shop online.”

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 picture shows a mix of different sectors offering a variety of jobs over a range skill levels. The claimant count rose as expected in 2020, partly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and has decreased back down to similar levels as before the pandemic. However, the claimant count is higher than the Kincardine and Mearns and Aberdeenshire average. The median household income is below that of the Aberdeenshire and Kincardine and Mearns average.

Settlement Type:
Accessible Small Town
 (Settlements of 3,000 to 9,999 people, and within a 30 minute drive time of a Settlement of 10,000 or more.)
 Scottish Government's Urban Rural Classification, 8-fold

Median Household Income 2021
Town Centre Data Zone*
£32,676

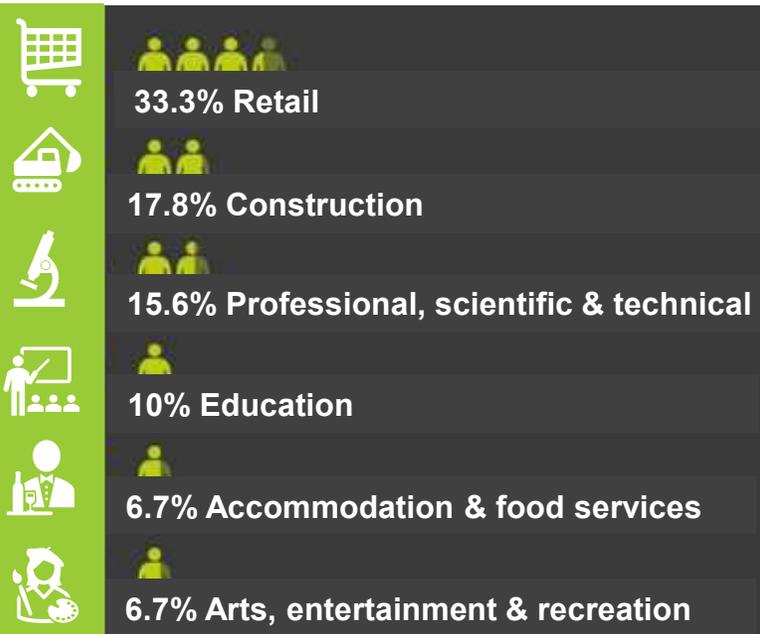
£42,819 Kincardine and Mearns;
 £36,889 Aberdeenshire

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

WORK & LOCAL ECONOMY

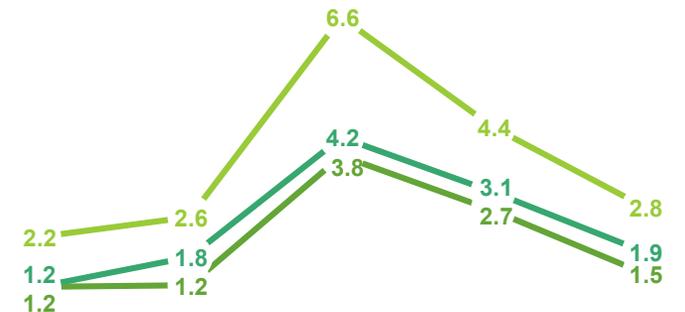


Top 6 Employment Sectors 2021 Laurencekirk Town Centre Data Zone*



Source: Business Register and Employment Survey 2021

CLAIMANT COUNT RATE^ (%)



August 2018 August 2019 August 2020 August 2021 August 2022

— Mearns and Laurencekirk - 05 — Kincardine and Mearns
 — Aberdeenshire

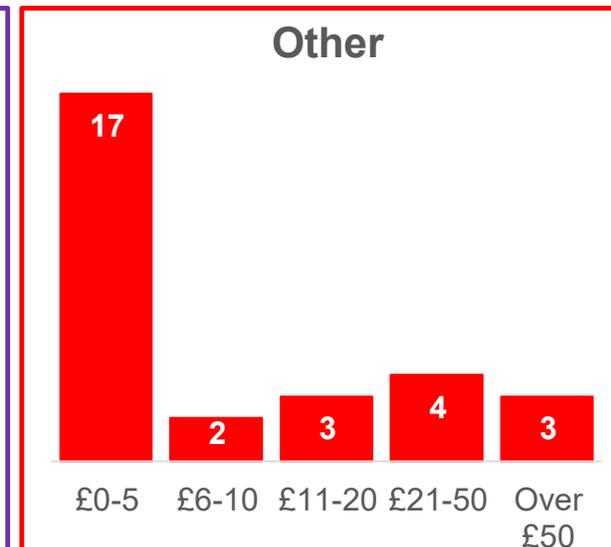
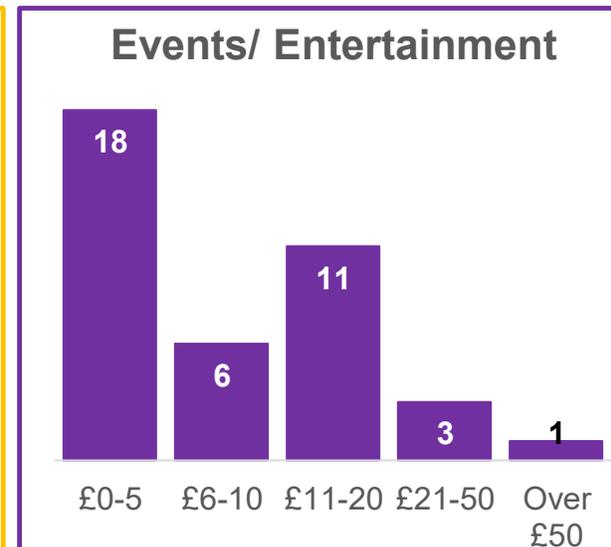
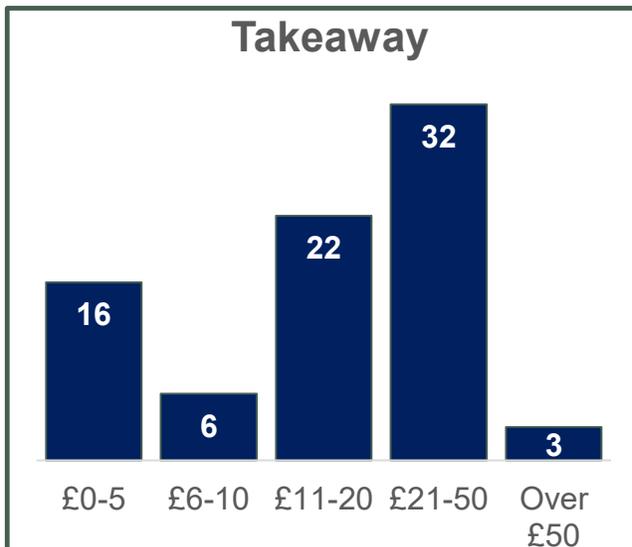
^Includes people claiming Universal Credit or Jobseekers Allowance
 Source: ONS Crown Copyright Reserved

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020
Town Centre Data Zone*:
35-40% least deprived in Scotland

* The data zone (S01006805) that makes up the majority of the town centre.

WORK & LOCAL ECONOMY: AVERAGE CONSUMER SPEND 2022

Observations: As would be expected, food shopping accounts for the biggest expenditure by visitors. Takeaways and Hair and Beauty also account for a larger spend, however less people overall. Café/ restaurant spend was mainly in the centre of the price spectrum. There is very little spend on Events/ Entertainment highlighting the lack of opportunities in this area, picked up elsewhere in the health check.



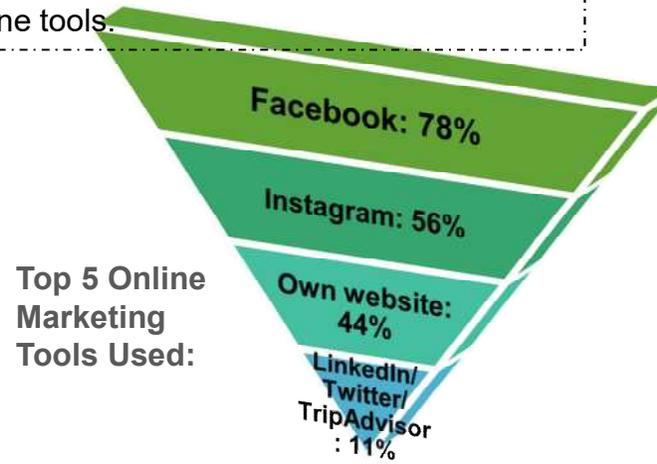
WORK & LOCAL ECONOMY: BUSINESS SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS 2022

Observations: 11 businesses responded to the survey and provided a mixed outlook for the town. Increases and decreases in turnover and employment appear to be similar, however a larger proportion of business responses showed that these have stayed the same over the past five years. The future also looks relatively bright with 30% of businesses being extremely confident, and 30% somewhat confident, in future business performance and there are those looking to grow or expand in the future. However, some comments received were less positive. Businesses are making good use of online tools.

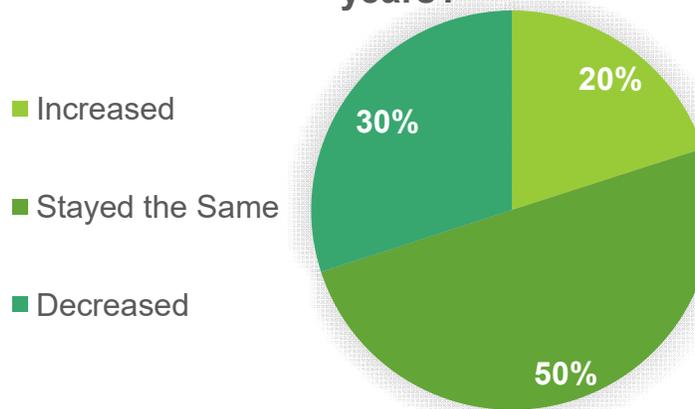
- 70%** of business owners surveyed were established businesses in the town centre and 30% start-ups/ early stage
- 100%** of business owners surveyed were independent businesses
- 60%** of business owners surveyed were either confident or extremely confident about future business performance in Laurencekirk
- 30%** of business owners surveyed are looking to grow or expand in the next year, with a further 20% in the next five years. 20% are not currently considering growth or expansion, with 30% unsure at this time

“There are lots of empty shops and no incentives or schemes to encourage new start ups. Change of use is lengthy and costly as are building warrants. Without schemes to support new businesses I can’t see the empty shops being used and current businesses struggling or closing due to increased costs, particularly energy.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

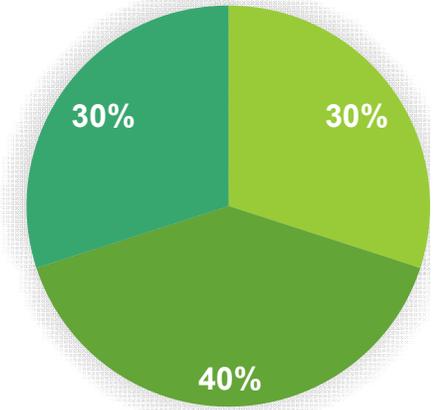


Has employment at your premises changed in the past five years?



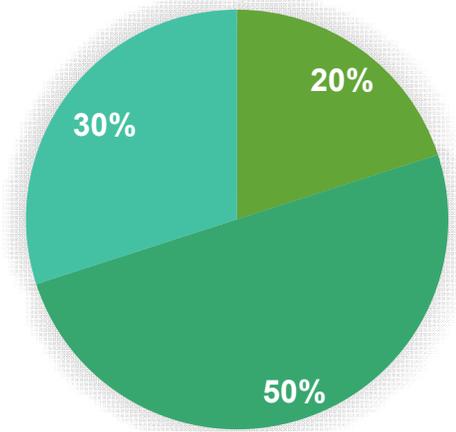
How has turnover at your premises changed in the past five years?

- Increased
- Stayed the Same
- Decreased



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

- Yes - Decrease
- Unsure
- No
- Yes - Increase



WORK & LOCAL ECONOMY: PROPERTY

Observations: There are various established businesses in the town centre, perhaps indicating a stable market. However, there are several vacant units some of which appear not be advertised for sale/ rent as highlighted in the comments which could indicate long term vacancies and little interest in these units. The majority of businesses rent their premises, but it is encouraging that 40% of businesses are looking to invest in their premises in the next 1-5 years. There were a limited number of planning applications approved in the year August 2021 – August 2022, but one application for a change of use of a retail unit to a food drink (class 3) use is encouraging. Survey comments highlighted the need for businesses to work together and concern at the number of empty units. There are larger vacant units within the town centre which are in need of redevelopment or refurbishment to bring them back into a viable use to contribute to the town.

“Need more business development opportunities.”

“Businesses need to seriously work together.”

“Small local businesses seem to be struggling against the supermarkets.”

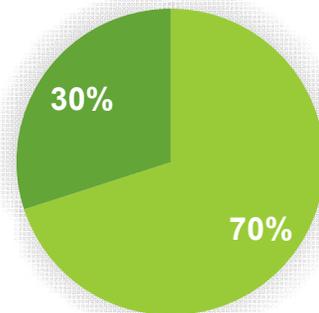
“Too many empty shops some look derelict.”

“The town always appears clean and tidy but empty business properties should be made to be the same as they are not being looked after.”

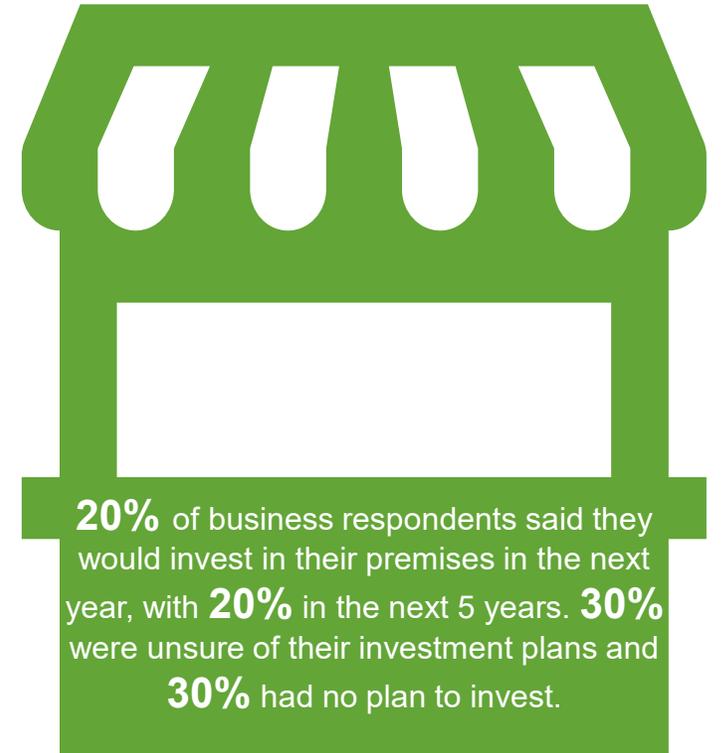
“There is hardly anything left in centre. Numerous shops have closed due to covid and rising costs.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Do you rent or own your premises?



■ Rent ■ Own



Planning Applications:

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

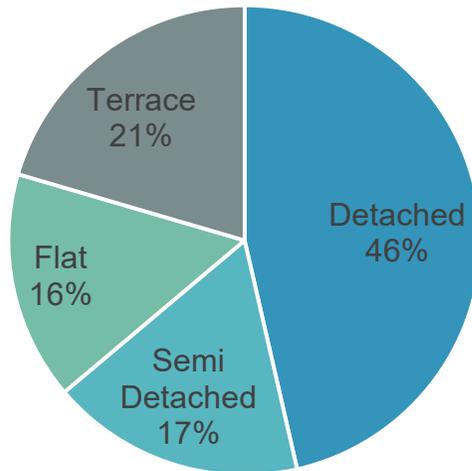
- Convert Former Shop to Dwellinghouse;
- Installation of Container (For Bike Repairs);
- Change of Use from Shop (Class 1) to Food and Drink (Class 3) and Installation of Kitchen Extract and Inlet.

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



Dwelling Type



The mix of dwelling types within the town centre is shown above. The largest proportion of dwellings in the town centre are detached properties.

Of these dwelling types within the town centre the main tenure is properties which are either owned outright or owned with a mortgage as these make up 70% of the total.

Housing Profile and Population

The overall population total for Laurencekirk in 2020 was 3,140 and it is estimated that approximately 724 people live within the town centre in 2022.

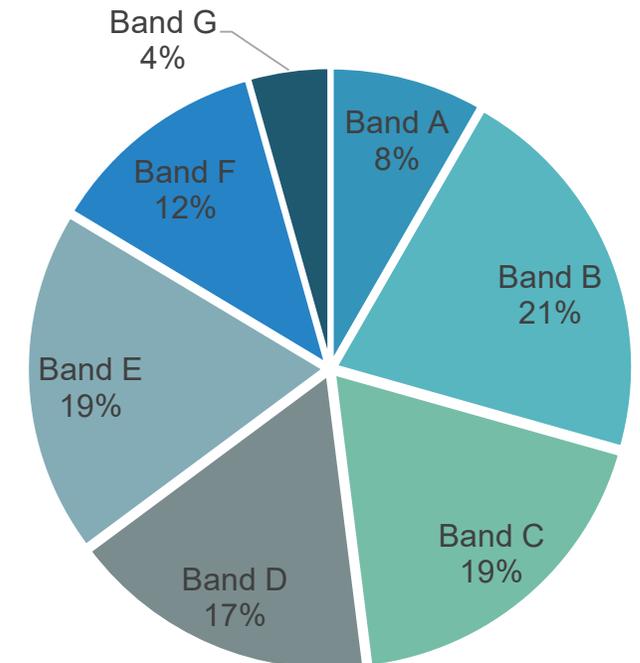
The average house price for dwellings within the town centre boundary in 2018 was £234,344.



Image: High Street.

In terms of Council Tax Bands (2021), Laurencekirk Town Centre has a mix of dwellings in Bands A-G on the scale of the Council Tax Bands.

Council Tax Band



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: There are a number of venues that are available for social interaction within the town centre. There is a strong community desire coming through the responses to the survey for more spaces and social areas for children and young people. Additionally having more events in the town centre was also welcomed through the responses.



Images (Left to Right): Aberluthnot and Laurencekirk Parish Church and Dickson Memorial Hall.

SOCIAL CONTACT



Venue	Indoor / Outdoor	Opening Times
Aberluthnot and Laurencekirk Parish Church	Indoor	Sun: 11:00
Dickson Memorial Hall	Indoor	Bookable for private functions and varying opening hours
Masonic Hall	Indoor	Bookable for private functions and varying opening hours
St Laurence Church	Indoor	Sun: 11:00

“Be nice to see more of a social area for children.”

“A dedicated Youth Club building where young people can go to meet up, learn new skills, gain employment and have fun with friends and peers. It could also be a space during the day which other people can use such as coffee mornings, mother and toddlers, playgroup meetings, etc. so it could function as a multi hub as well.”

“Would be great to see a youth club.”

“There should be more events than just two a year.”

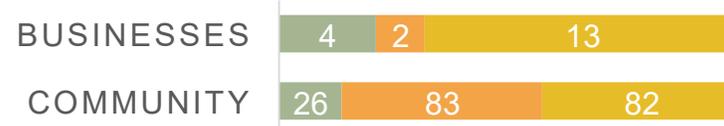
“There should be more community space within the town centre.”

“There is nothing for young people to do at nights. It would be nice to have a youth group or a space for them to go”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

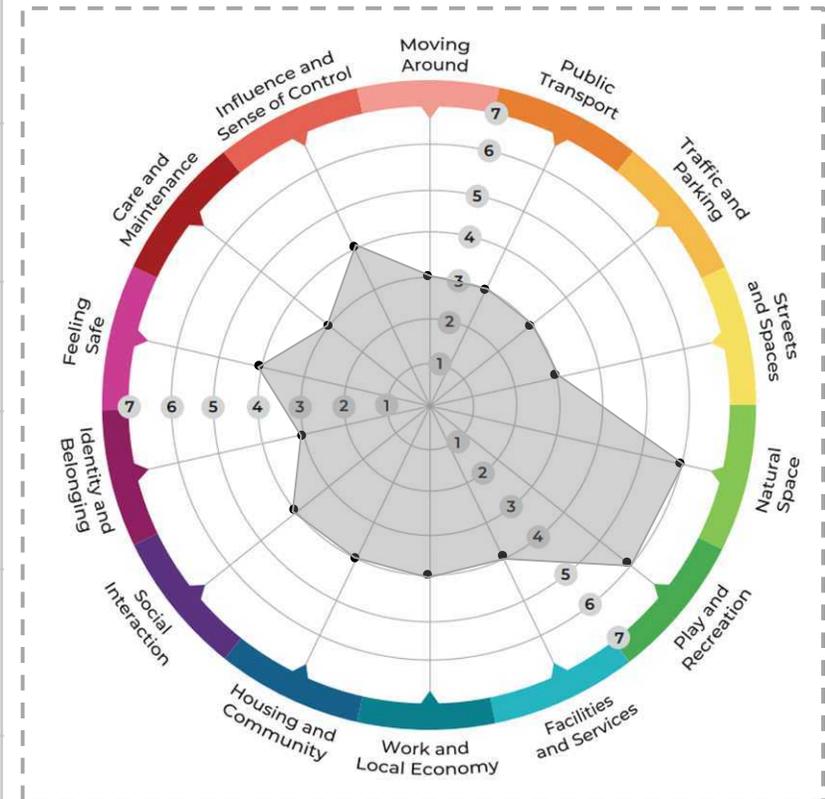
HOW WOULD YOU RATE: RANGE OF EVENTS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



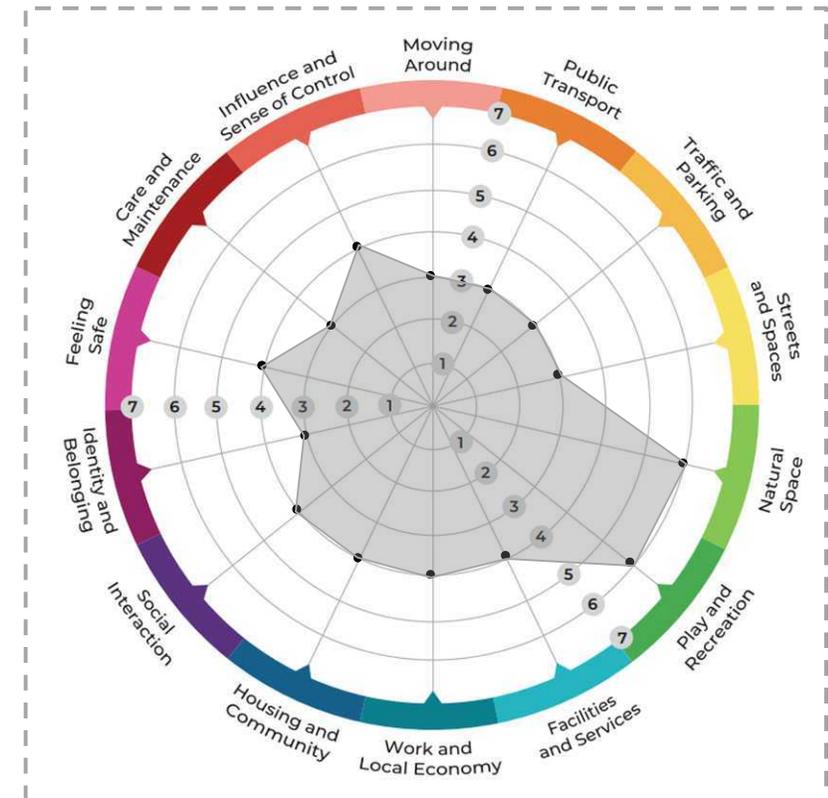
KEY CONSIDERATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

Theme	Key Improvements
Identity and Belonging Rating: 3	A large proportion of both businesses and the community felt negative towards the town centre and was reflected in the comments received. But there is still relatively good community spirit. For those that felt negative, there were a large number of vacant units and a lack of provision for the growing town. Increasing the offering available in the town centre would make a difference to the overall scoring.
Feeling Safe Rating: 4	Overall this was a positive indicator for the town centre, particularly in relation to safety during the day. Safety during the evening however was less well scored perhaps indicating that the town centre is less used in the evenings. If evening usage increased this would need to be monitored.
Care and Maintenance Rating: 3	The overall perception by the respondents of the care and maintenance of buildings within Laurencekirk Town centre was poor. Interventions looking at improvement works to buildings would be welcomed by the local community.
Influence and Sense of Control Rating: 4	There is low awareness of groups that support the town centre but the group that maintain the hanging baskets and planters are well regarded. Of the groups within the town centre, working together is encouraged and increased promotion of the work they do could make a difference.
Moving Around Rating: 3	Generally this topic was not well rated by businesses and the community. Crossing the High Street was considered dangerous with parked cars on both sides of the road. Any interventions in this regard could partly address some of these concerns.
Public Transport Rating: 3	There are some bus links from the town centre to the north and south, but more regular services and to the wider area would improve the overall rating by respondents.
Traffic and Parking Rating: 3	The topic of availability of parking within the town centre received a large number of comments and there is community desire to see additional parking within the town centre.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES (CONTINUED)

Theme	Key Improvements
Streets and Spaces Rating: 3	The number of vacant units within the town centre was noted as a negative for this particular topic and the community would like to see these filled. Something that could be done to address community aspirations is have a deep clean of the pavements.
Natural Space Rating: 6	The town centre has a park within its boundary which provides a large green space. This area is well maintained and provides an attractive area for residents and visitors. There are also several planters and hanging baskets with attractive displays through the town centre. Opportunities to provide further baskets/ displays could also be encouraged.
Play and Recreation Rating: 6	There are play and leisure facilities within the town centre boundary and additionally there are a number of facilities within 0.5 miles of the town centre.
Facilities and Amenities Rating: 4	The variety of shops within the town centre was rated poorly through the survey and a strong community aspiration for a supermarket was apparent. Additionally, there is a community aspiration to see additional cafés/restaurants within the town centre to help improve the evening vibrancy.
Work and Local Economy Rating: 4	A variety of employment sectors are present in the town centre boundary, covering a range of skill levels, but the claimant count is higher than other areas. Businesses were relatively confident about their future business performance with some considering growth or expansion within the next five years. Collaborative working with businesses to improve their prospects and contribute towards the viability of the town centre is encouraged.
Housing and Community Rating: 4	There are a mix of house types within the town centre and this should continue to be monitored to ensure there are types and tenures of housing that would provide for all of the community.
Social Contact Rating: 4	There are a number of venues for people to meet within the town centre. However, there was a large desire to see additional events happening within the town centre, particularly for young people.



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. Parking Affordability: Car
- + =2. Parks/ Green Spaces
- + 3. Standard of Service in Shops
- + 4. Café/ Restaurant Quality
- + 5. Feeling of Safety at Night

Top Lowest Scoring Categories:

- 1. Variety of Shops
- 2. Traffic Flow
- 3. Public Transport Links
- 4. Café/ Restaurant Choice
- 5. Vibrancy in the Evening

Business

Top Highest Scoring Categories:

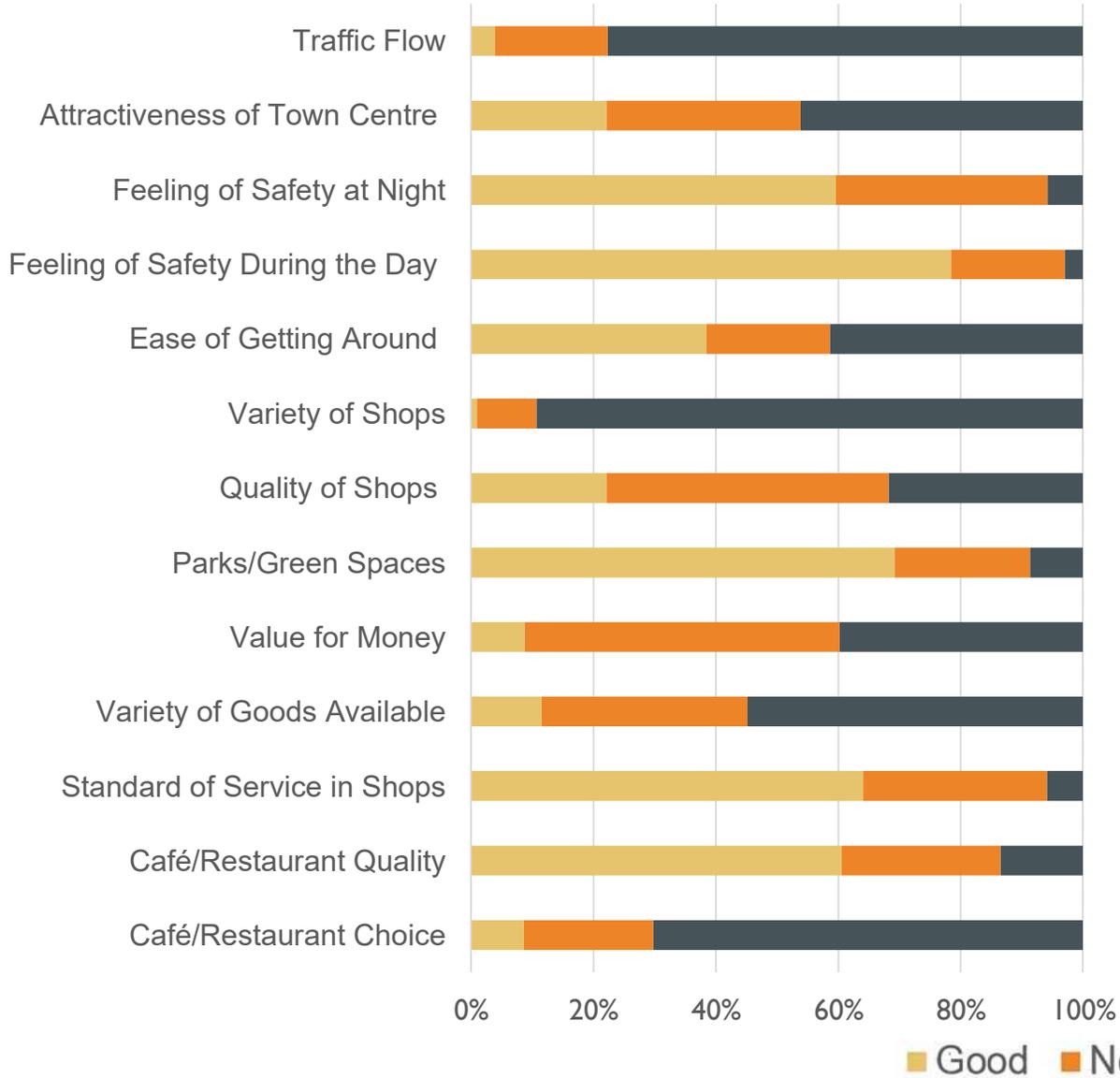
- + 1. Feeling of Safety During the Day
- + =1. Feeling of Safety at Night
- + 2. Parking Affordability: Car
- + =3. Standard of Service in Shops
- + =3. Café/ Restaurant Quality
- + 4. Parks/ Green Spaces

Top Lowest Scoring Categories:

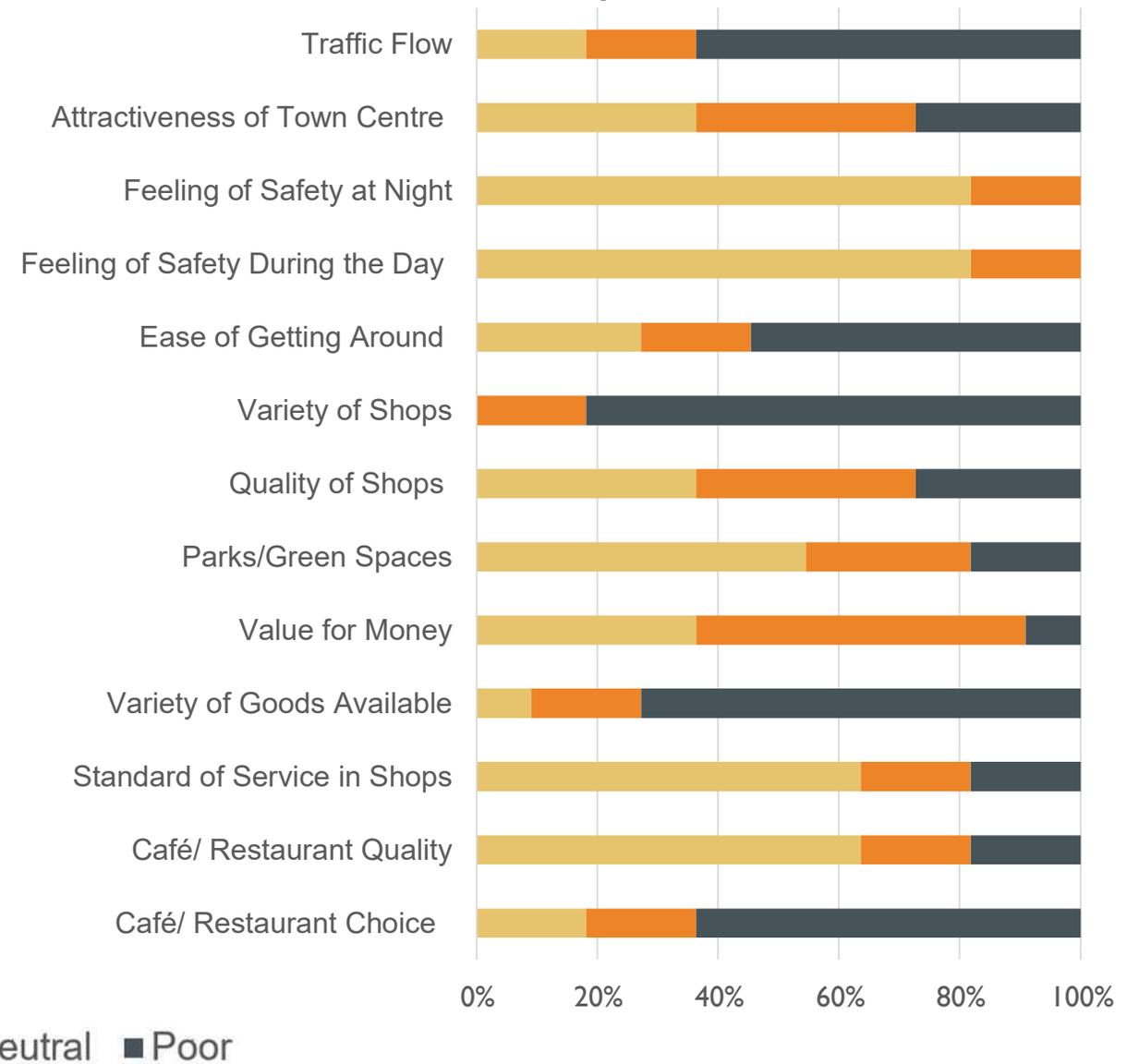
- 1. Variety of Shops
- =2. Vibrancy in the Evening; Variety of Goods
- =3. Café/ Restaurant Choice; Traffic Flow; Parking Space Availability: Car; Public Transport Links; Seating/ Areas to Congregate; Farmer's Market
- 4. Range of Events; Ease of Getting Around

BUSINESS & COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSES: How Would You Rate?

Community Responses:

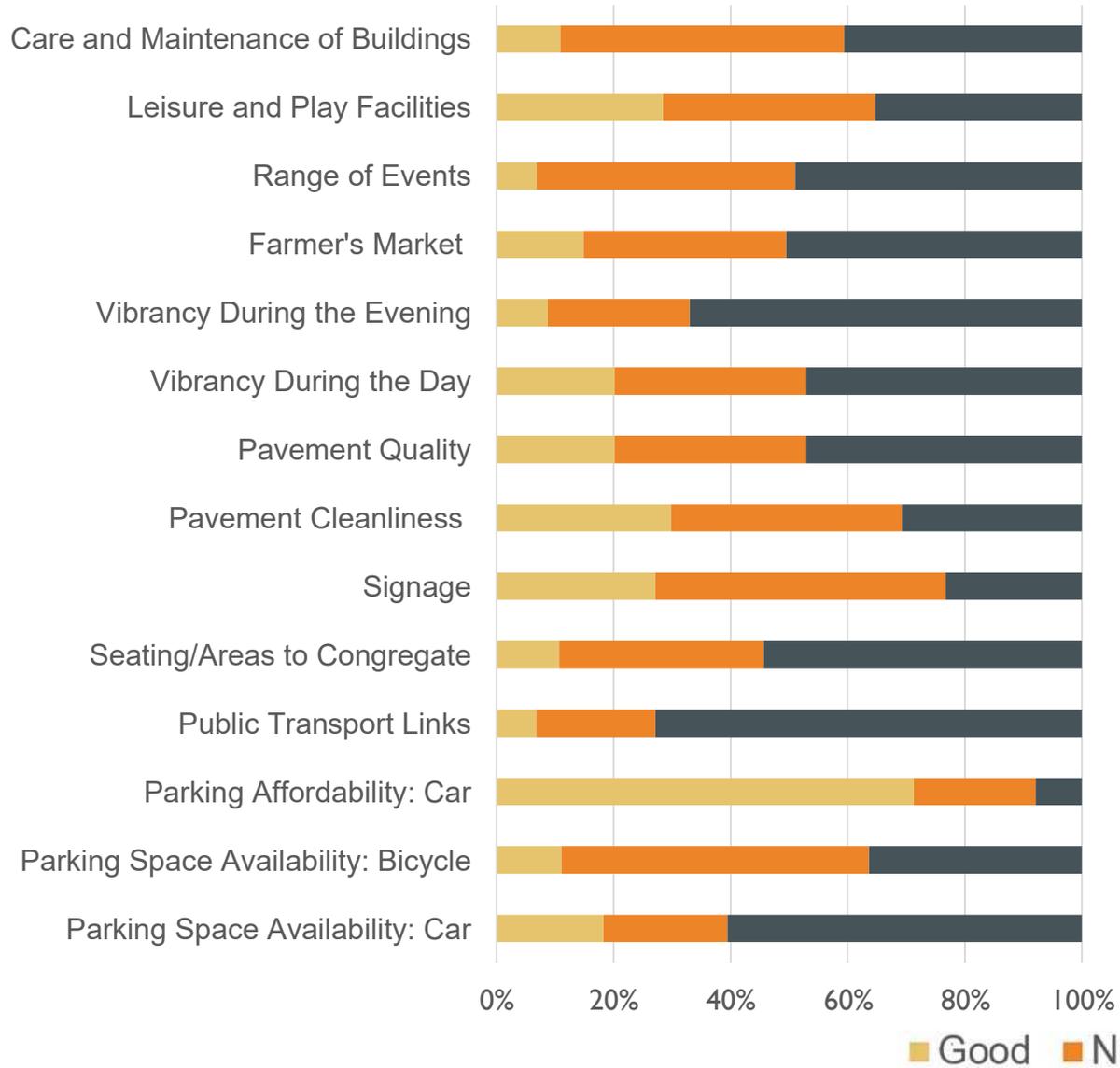


Business Responses:

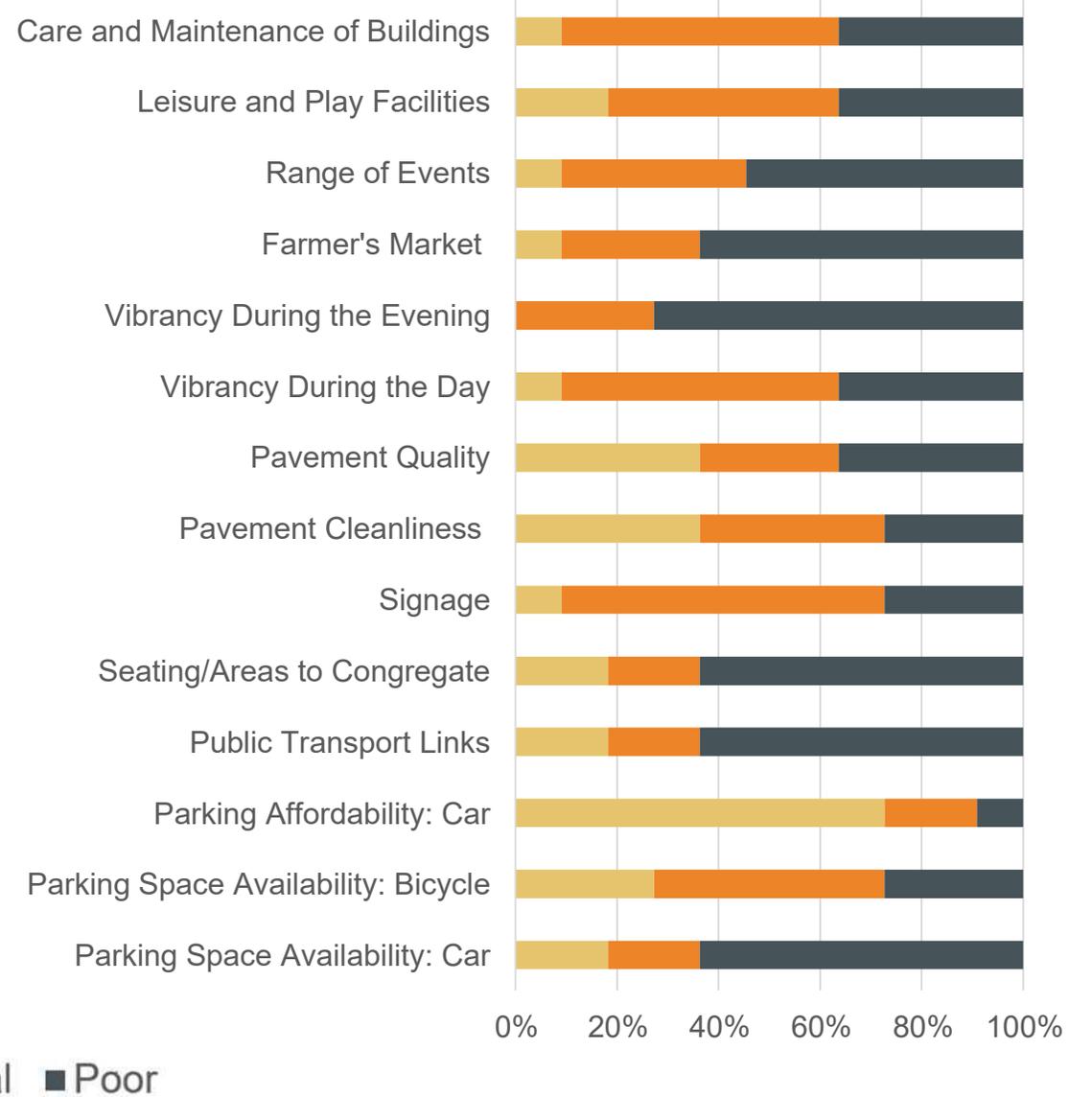


BUSINESS & COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSES: How Would You Rate? (Continued)

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

Kincardine and Mearns 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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