



# Your Town Audit: Beith

2<sup>nd</sup> November 2016



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## 1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

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

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

The [Understanding Scottish Places](#) (USP) data platform provides a summary analysis for Beith and identifies 14 comparator towns that have similar characteristics, with the most similar being Alva, Bannockburn, Burntisland and Loanhead<sup>1</sup>. The USP platform – [www.usp.scot](http://www.usp.scot) – describes Beith in the following general terms:

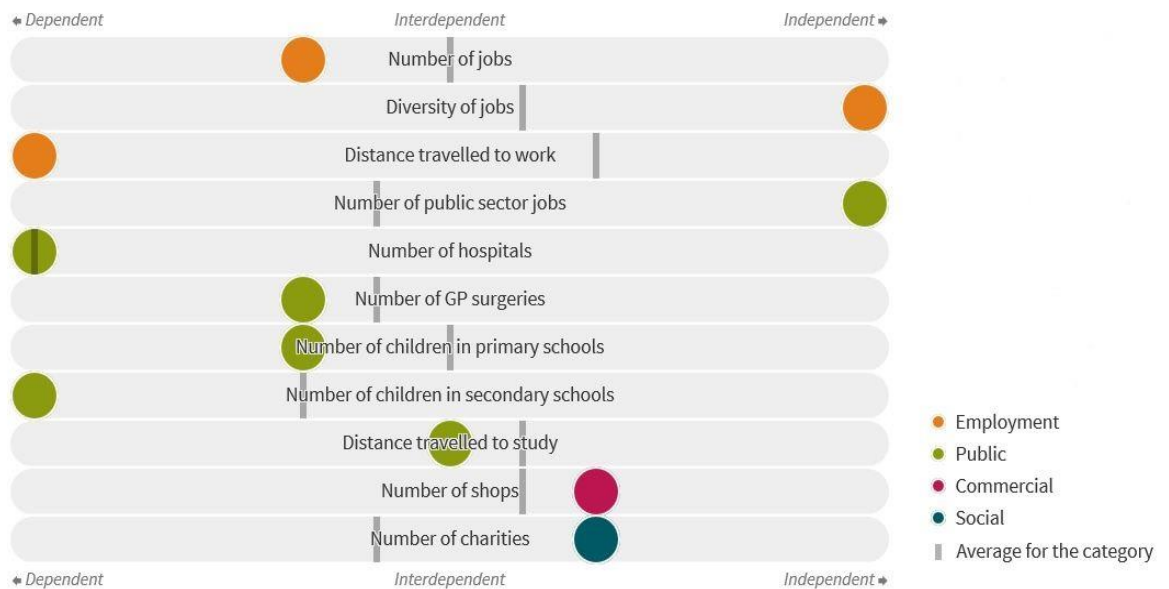
**Beith's Interrelationships:** Beith is an '*interdependent town*', which means it has a medium number of assets in relation to its population. Towns of this kind have some diversity of jobs; and residents largely travel a mix of long and short distances to work and study, although some travel longer distances. These towns attract people from neighbouring towns to access some of their assets and jobs, but they are also reliant on neighbouring towns for other assets and jobs.

**Beith's Typology:** This type of medium-sized town is extremely mixed in terms of demographics. There is a particularly wide range of people, housing and activities. The number of older couples with no children are higher than average. There is a mix of professional and non-professional jobs, and part-time and self-employment are both important for a significant proportion of residents. Socioeconomic status is higher than in other kinds of town and there is a mix of professionals and nonprofessionals, those with higher and lower educational attainment.

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<sup>1</sup> The other comparator towns are identified as Macduff, Bonnybridge, Galston, Aviemore, Lossiemouth, Culloden, Lesmahagow, Busby, Dyce and Holytown.

## Inter-relationships <sup>1</sup>



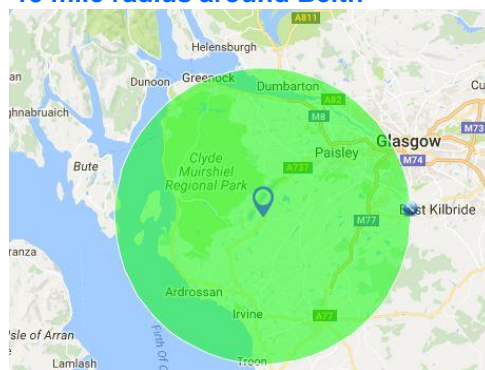
Comparing Beith to towns with similar USP typology and interrelationships shows it has a similar number of hospitals, and the distance resident's travel to study. It differs in its diversity of jobs (more independent) and distance travelled to work (more dependant).

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

## 2. Accessible Town Centre

Beith is a suburban town located in North Ayrshire, to the south west of Glasgow, with a population of around 7,000 people. The core retail area of Beith is focused on Main Street and Eglinton Street, a busy B-class road leading to Dalry in the south and connects to A-class roads leading to Glasgow.

### 15 mile radius around Beith



The town centre offers a good range of services and retail outlets, in what is otherwise a residential area.

There is no railway station located within the settlement of Beith, with the nearest being Glengarnock Station (3 miles away) and Lochwinnoch Station (4 miles away), both of which have park and ride facilities. Journeys from these stations into the centre of Glasgow take roughly 30 minutes. Services from these stations connect Beith to other settlements in North Ayrshire, with journey times from Glengarnock to Irvine, Largs and West Kilbride taking 12, 20 and 25 minutes respectively. Rail travel from Lochwinnoch to areas such as Kilwinning, Dalry and Kilbirnie takes 15, 20 and 30 minutes respectively. Bus services from Beith to these train stations take 10-15 minutes.

There are around 10 bus stops located throughout the town centre area of Beith, three of which are located on Eglinton Street. There are direct bus connections from Beith to the centre of Glasgow which take around 40 minutes. As well as this, there are direct bus journeys from Beith to other settlements in North Ayrshire, including: Largs, Kilwinning (both 30 minutes), Irvine (40 minutes), and Ardrossan (45 minutes)

The M8 motorway is around fifteen miles north east of the town and is easily accessible by the A737 road, which provides fast access into the centre of Glasgow and beyond.

There are a number of on-street parking spaces to be found in the town centre, including those on Main Street and Eglinton Street. Cars are also able to park in the surrounding residential streets, and there are a number of off-street car parks, such as those located on Bellmans Close, Medine Avenue (outside the Co-op supermarket) and Eglinton Street (outside the Day-Today Convenience Store).



The town centre provides access to local services which, alongside a mix of retailers and business services, includes the library, community centre, a vet, two doctor's surgeries and a fire station<sup>2</sup>. Residents and visitors have access to good quality outdoor environments with formal woodland walks and trails.

There is good 3G and 4G throughout the town, and although there is no town-wide free WiFi, superfast broadband is available.

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<sup>2</sup> The Community Centre and one of the doctor's surgeries are located just outwith the town centre boundary and not included in the statistics presented later in this report.



### 3. Active Town Centre

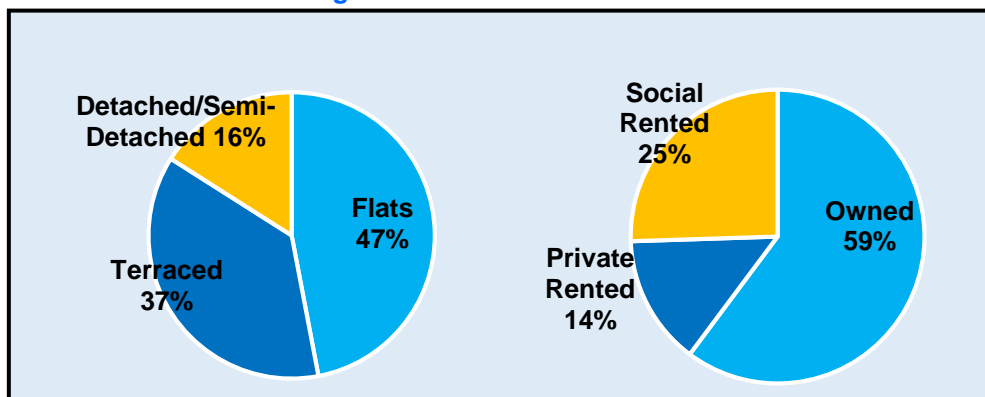
#### 3.1 Population and Housing

Just over 420 people live within the town centre area in Beith<sup>3</sup>, around 6% of the total settlement population. The population of the town centre increased in the decade to 2013 by 7%, with the population of the whole settlement decreasing by around 2% over this time. This compares with a 0.7% decline across North Ayrshire towns and 5% increase in Scotland over this ten year period. Most of the YTA audited towns have seen a marked increase in town centre living, averaging 4%; with Beith being above this average.

Housing in the town centre<sup>4</sup> is a mix of flats (47%) and terraced properties (37%), with 56% of properties having three or four bedrooms, which is somewhat unusual for a town centre area. The majority of properties (88%) are in council tax bands A, B and C. The streets surrounding the retail area in Beith are almost solely residential and, with a town population of just over 7,000 people, this provides a reasonable catchment population for the retail and service businesses that is typical of other YTA audited towns (221 residents per retailer).

House prices in Beith reflect its standing as an attractive settlement within North Ayrshire. The average purchase price of a town centre dwelling in Beith (£58,692) is considerably lower than that of the town as a whole (£202,104)<sup>5</sup>. Prices in the town centre increased 15% in the decade to 2013, and by 28% in wider Beith. The housing stock in the town is largely privately owned (59% in the town centre; 66% in the wider town), or socially rented (25% in the town centre; 28% in the wider town).

#### Beith Town Centre Housing Mix



<sup>3</sup> Scotland Census 2011 output zones S00122650, S00122653, S00123050, S00123047 and S0012261.

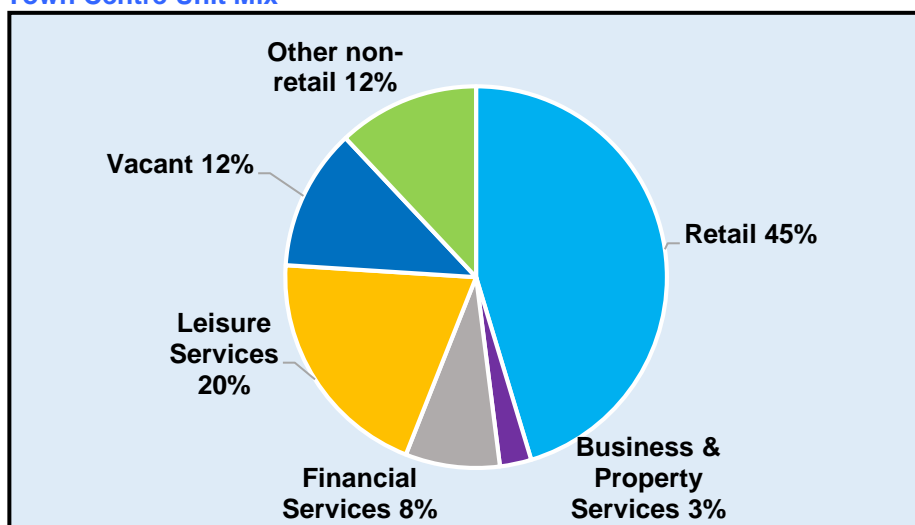
<sup>4</sup> For accessing the most up to date data, this is datazone (2001) S01004496.

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Statistics, 2013

### 3.2 Employment and Business

Just over one quarter (29%) of the 1,400 jobs in Beith are located in the town centre area. National statistics record 265 businesses within the settlement. The YTA street audit located 75 units in use within Beith town centre – this was in line with the UPRN data provided by North Ayrshire Council prior to the audit. Of these, 34 are retail businesses.

#### Town Centre Unit Mix



### 3.3 Retail

Retail units in Beith are clustered along Main Street, Eglinton Street, Wilson Street, The Strand and The Cross. For a small town centre, it has a good range of shops and retail services.

During the audit seven vacant retail units were recorded, producing a retail vacancy rate of 10.3%<sup>6</sup>, similar to the 9.9% average vacancy rate across other North Ayrshire towns (11 towns).

**208 residents per town centre retail outlet**

**34 town centre retail units in use**

**7 vacant town centre retail units**

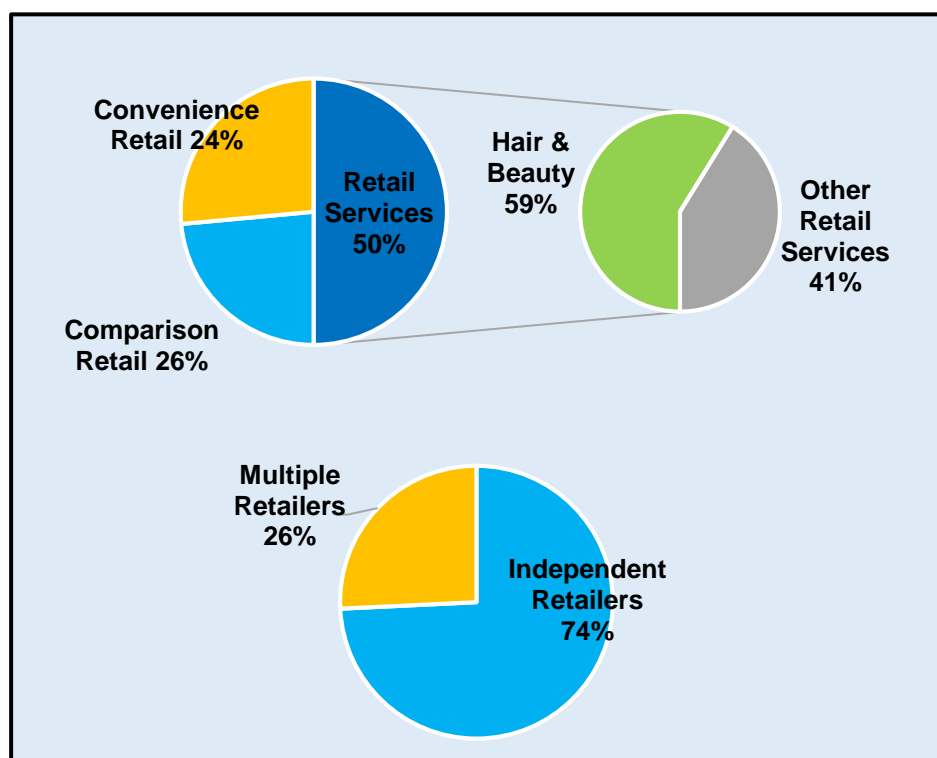
<sup>6</sup> Note: this is the retail vacancy rate (7 vacant of 68 retail units) and differs from the 12% vacancy rate in the chart above which relates to all commercial town centre properties (9 of 75 properties).

Most shops in Beith town centre operate standard opening hours of around 9am to 5.30pm. However, the Co-op Supermarket on Medine Avenue has longer hours – 7am to 11pm during the week, as do the pubs in the town for example the Eglinton Inn on Eglinton Street is open every day from 11/11:30am to 11pm.

Retail forms the largest single town centre unit use but, at 43%, is slightly lower than the 46% average across 34 YTAs. Beith's retail rate is similar to other audited towns such as Dumbarton (40%), Stornoway (41%), and Neilston (45%).

The YTA analysis is based on the following retail definitions:

- **Convenience Retail:** primarily low cost goods that are typically bought out of habit or on impulse i.e. food, drink (alcohol and non-alcohol), news, tobacco, etc. – *8 convenience retailers were identified in Beith town centre;*
- **Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *9 comparison retailers were identified in Beith town centre; and*
- **Retail Services:** services that consumers would expect to find in a town centre including hairdresser, beauty salon, repair of goods, hire of specialist clothing, health clinics, post office, travel agent, etc. – *17 retail service operators were identified in Beith town centre.*



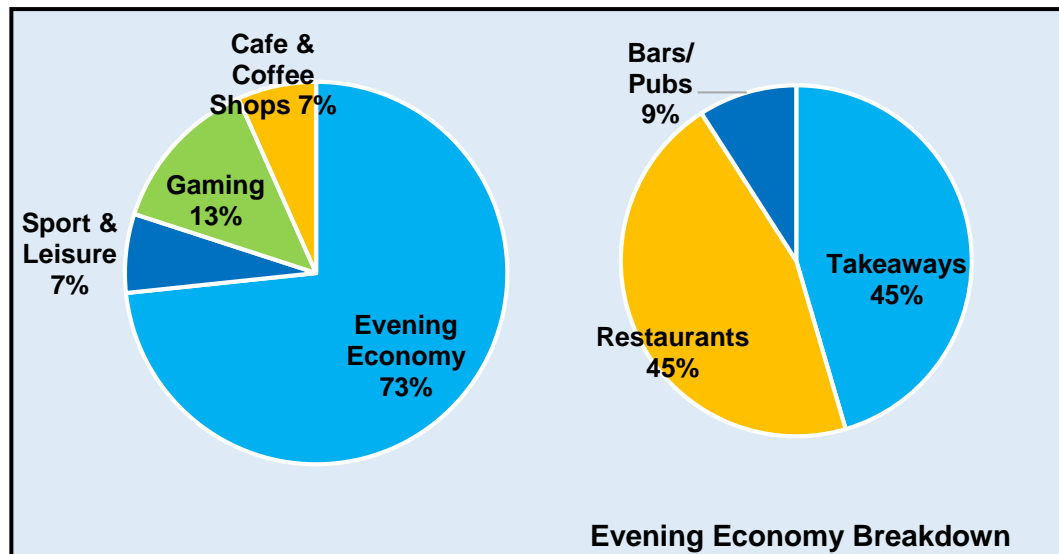


The majority of traders within Beith town centre are independent (74%) – this is above the 70% average for the other YTA audited towns (34 in total), but similar to Sanquhar (76%), Moffat (82%) and Stornoway (83%). Other towns with high levels of independent businesses are Busby and Neilston with 90% and 92% respectively.



## 4. Attractive Town Centre

### 4.1 Leisure Mix



The mix of leisure businesses in Beith town centre sees evening economy account for 73% of all leisure businesses. The evening economy in the town is comprised of five pubs/ bars, five hot food takeaways and one restaurant<sup>7</sup>. Some of the pubs/bars include the Saracen's Head on Eglinton Street and The Smugglers Inn on Main

<sup>7</sup> The Merchants Yarn restaurant on The Strand was open at the date of the town audit but is currently closed – this appears to be a temporary arrangement and the website states that it aims to reopen soon. It is therefore included in the town centre leisure mix.

Street. Takeaways in the town centre include Fryer Tuck's Chip Shop in Eglinton Street and Riverhills Chinese Takeaway on Main Street.

## 4.2 Leisure Facilities and Attractions



Inside the town centre area, is the Beith Community Centre, which is a community hall used for a variety of sports and fitness classes as well as social events. The centre has a range of facilities including: a main hall, café, kitchen, sports hall, activity room, lounge, snooker room and two meeting rooms. Halls can be hired out for private events and the community centre is open seven days a week.

Beith Library is also located within the town centre, on Main Street. The library is open every day apart from Wednesdays and Sundays, typically from 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm during the week and from 10am-12:30pm on Saturdays. There is also a Curves Fitness Centre on Kings Road, which is a ladies only centre that hosts a number of fitness classes, has a gym and offers members one-on-one coaching.



Another leisure facility is Beith Golf Club, which is located 1.5 miles outside of the town centre area. The club, which dates back to 1896 has an 18-hole golf course as well as a number of over facilities including a licensed bar, restaurant, and clubhouse. During the summer months this club is open Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays 10am-4pm, Saturdays and Sundays 10am-6pm and during the winter months Monday to Sunday, 10am to 6pm.

## 4.3 Beith Community Development Trust

Just outside of the town centre catchment area is the Beith Community Development Trust Centre (BCDT). The Trust aims to improve the community through the regeneration of social, environmental, financial and physical assets within Beith. The Trust was initially established by members of the community to regenerate the

AstroTurf pitch in the town centre. Since the completion of this project, the BCDT has gone on to support over 300 other community clubs/ groups and projects. The Trust has received funding and support from a number of organisations including the



National Lottery Fund, North Ayrshire Council, Project Scotland and Oxfam Scotland.

A more recently project of the BCDT was the Beith Community Garden (see below).

#### 4.4 Beith Cultural and Heritage Society

The Beith Cultural and Heritage Society was founded in 2006 with the aim of preserving historical artefacts from the town of Beith and its nearby villages and hamlets.

In 2010 the Society leased the Beith Townhouse (a building which dates back to 1817) from the local authority, with the aim to restore the building and use it as a heritage and local information centre. Restoration work is still ongoing, with a further £70,000 worth of work to be completed. However, since 2011, the bottom floor of the building has been open to the public, and has been used to host a number of the Society's events and exhibitions.



The Garnock Valley Family History Group, a subgroup of the Society, was formed in 2012. The group focuses on researching all the locals who served in the two world wars, and put on monthly talks to discuss their research.

#### 4.5 Other Community Projects

Another community group active within Beith is the Beith Orr Park Neighbourhood Watch. The Neighbourhood Watch meet bi-monthly in the Community Centre to discuss how best to address any issues in the local area. The group work alongside both members of the council and the police.

A key community project was the creation of the Beith Community Garden on the site of the Old Coach House, on Mitchell Street. The site had been vacant for over 15 years and had become an eyesore in the town centre. The owner of the site gave permission for it to be used as a community garden until they have plans to develop on the site. The community garden was created with the help of local volunteers and support from a number of local businesses. The



garden was opened to the public in May of 2016, and helps to brighten up an otherwise derelict area in the town centre.

Two other major projects to the south of the town centre have been identified – Spiers Old School Grounds, which provides community gardens, woodland area and walking paths, and the ongoing redevelopment of Geisland House for business units, training space and community events.

## 4.6 Community Events and Activities

A community event which has taken place for the past two years in the town centre is the Beith Trust Beer Festival. The event is organised by the Beith Community Development Trust and took place in 2016 on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August. The event this year was held in Beith Community Centre and saw six different breweries come together along with live music, games and food also on offer for attendees. The event runs from 1pm to 9pm and entry costs five pounds per person.

There are a number of one-off events held throughout the year in Beith, the majority of which are organised by the Beith Community Development Trust. However, more annual or reoccurring community events could be created, as these help create a greater sense of community and culture within a town centre area.

## 4.7 Attractiveness Review

The YTA includes an independent review of place and quality impressions, with Beith scoring slightly below average in comparison with other towns. It is, however, noted that there is an ongoing town centre improvement project, focused on Main Street, that will deliver improvements to the quality of building fronts and, hopefully, improvements to the shop window displays.

Individual unit fronts and shop window displays were graded out of ten during the on-street audit, with a town centre average score of 6.8 for the condition of unit fronts and 6.9 for quality of window display. This is below the average across other audited town centres, of 7.2 for window displays and 7.1 for building fronts.

At the time of the audit it was noted that the streets were relatively clear with little litter to be found, and few weeds present. Throughout the town centre area there are hanging baskets, boxes, and a flower display at The Cross which helps to brighten up the area. There are also plenty of bins and street lights throughout the town.



## 5. YTA Summary and Key Points

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

### 5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- although in a somewhat rural setting, Beith is reasonably well connected with transport links and a range of services. Although car ownership in the area is quite high, public transport links are good with regular bus services taking about 40 minutes into Glasgow;
- while there is no local train station in Beith, the town is connected by bus service to the nearest train stations in the neighbouring settlements of Glengarnock and Lochwinnoch;
- parking in Beith town centre appears – at least during the time when the audit was undertaken, a midweek daytime – to be adequate; and
- Beith has good 4G mobile coverage and access to superfast broadband.

## 5.2 Active Town Centre

- Beith has a good range of retail and services and high level of independent retail businesses – it is important that these are supported and protected to maintain the town's sense of uniqueness;
- nine vacant units were recorded during the audit of Beith town centre, of which seven are retail units and two are former licensed premises;
- of the nine vacant units there is one main cluster – four on Main Street (# 24, 25, 30 and 36), plus four spread along Eglinton Street (# 21, 23, 40 and 51) and one on Wilson Street (#4) – there is a need to understand whether there is an issue with the properties themselves and/ or with the areas to identify if any remedial actions could be taken to improve the area/ properties and thereby generate interest and attract businesses to these vacant units; and
- the town hosts a number of one-off and regular annual events, most prominent being the Beith Trust Beer Festival annually – there may, however, be scope to deliver more events over the course of the year to embed the sense of community and culture within the town centre. Where there is no Business Improvement District (BID) type group in place, this type of event is typically delivered by local community group(s) but often needs support from the local authority or other partner body to become established.

## 5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- Beith is an attractive, small town centre that manages to retain a distinctive village feel due to the majority of retail units being small and independent;
- the town centre improvement works – focused on Main Street – will enhance the visual appearance of the town centre and could help to reduce the vacancy rate on this street;
- the creation of the Beith Community Garden on Mitchell Street, in an otherwise derelict piece of land, helps to brighten up this area and may help to attract interest in the adjacent vacant retail unit (#4 Wilson Street) – while this is agreed as a temporary use of the land, there is scope to build on its success and identify other parts of the town centre that could also benefit from similar improvements by the community e.g. similar to Todmorden in Yorkshire which has gained fame through its 'Incredible Edible Todmorden' branding success; and



- the scores Beith received for the quality of the building fronts and quality of the window displays, were both below the average of all YTA audited towns, this suggests that town centre retail units would benefit from improvements.