



Your Town Audit: Irvine

December 2016

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Report produced by:



Audit Date: November 2016

Draft report: 13/12/2016

For: North Ayrshire Council

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1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

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

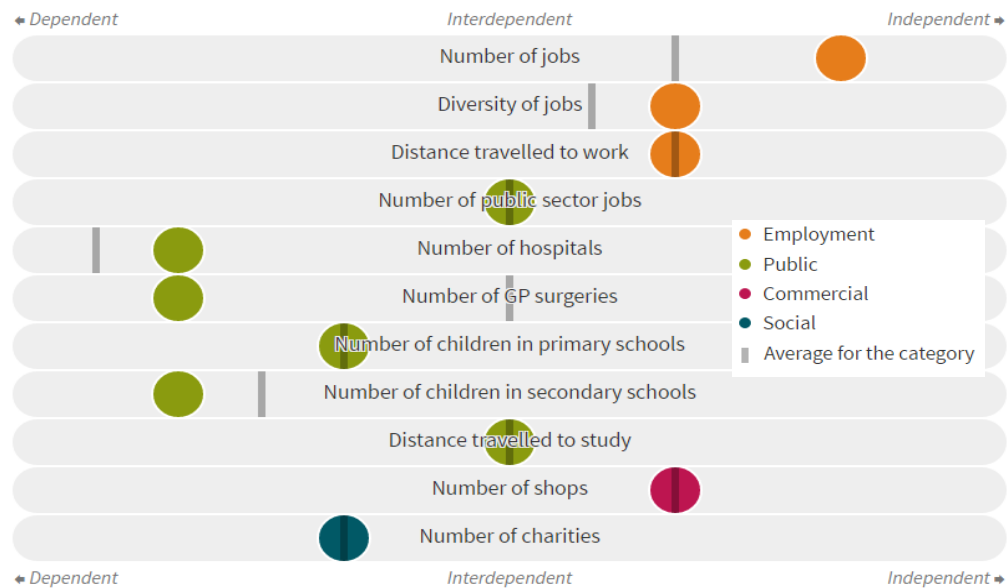
The YTA was developed to provide a framework to measure and monitor the performance of Scotland's towns and town centres using a series of Key Performance Indicators. It provides a comprehensive audit of Irvine with data on up to 180 KPIs across seven themes – Locality, Accessibility, Local Services,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

The [Understanding Scottish Places](#) (USP) data platform provides a summary analysis for Irvine and identifies 12 comparator towns that have similar characteristics, with the most similar being Wishaw, Bellshill, Ardrossan and Blantyre.¹ The USP platform – www.usp.scot – describes Irvine in the following general terms:

Irvine's Interrelationships: an '*interdependent town*', which means it has a medium number of assets in relation to its population; average diversity of jobs; and residents travel a mix of short and long distances to work and study. These towns are attractors of people from neighbouring towns who come to access some assets and jobs but they are also reliant on neighbouring towns for other assets and jobs.

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

¹ The others are Rutherglen, Grangemouth, Larkhall, Johnstone, Port Glasgow, Airdrie, Alexandria and Dumbarton.



Comparing Irvine to towns with similar USP typology and interrelationships shows it has a similar number of charities, hospitals, children in schools, jobs, public sector jobs, and shops. Irvine differs most from its group in the number of GP surgeries.

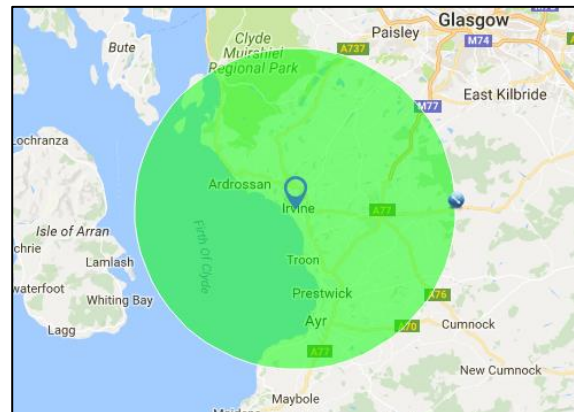
Building on the USP, this report presents the results of our detailed analysis of Irvine based around the Scottish Government's [Town Centre Toolkit](#) – an online resource available via the USP website which provides advice, guidance and case studies across three thematic areas: accessible, active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

The report is designed as an audit of existing assets – physical and social – and concludes with a set of key findings and issues that could improve the future performance of Irvine. The audits and issues arising can be used to feed into the development process of a future LDP.

2. Accessible Town Centre

As the regional capital, Irvine is the largest town in North Ayrshire, with a population of around 33,000, and the administrative centre of the local authority area. It is located 22 miles south west of Glasgow, seven miles west of Kilmarnock and ten miles north of Ayr.

15 mile radius around Irvine



The River Irvine cuts through the town, with the Rivergate shopping centre built over it. The town centre area takes in the shopping centre, which includes a large supermarket, as well as the traditional high street area to its east. A new leisure centre is due to open within the town centre in 2017, replacing the previous

facility located in the harbour area. This will help consolidate the town centre as the location of most of Irvine's retail and service offering.

Irvine's railway station is on the western edge of the town centre, positioned between the Rivergate centre and the harbour area. The town is well connected to central Scotland, being on the line between Glasgow (30 mins away) and Ayr (20 mins away). There are four to five trains an hour in each direction, with connections to Ardrossan and Largs available by changing at Kilwinning. Around 955,000 passenger journeys started or ended at Irvine station in 2014/15.

Irvine is 12 minutes by train from Prestwick Airport and approx. one hour by public transport from Glasgow Airport. Regular bus services connect the town with Kilmarnock (including Crosshouse Hospital), Glasgow, Ardrossan and Ayr.

The town has good road connectivity with dual carriageways leading out of the town to the north, south and east, providing a connection with the M77 motorway north of Kilmarnock.

There are approx. 20 car parks in the town centre area, coming to 2,500 spaces, with the vast majority of these on the western side of the river, surrounding the Rivergate centre. There are also 500 spaces at the retail park, just outside of the

town centre. Parking is free, although a stay of longer than four hours at the Rivergate multi-storey car park incurs a charge of £2.00.

The council's parking strategy (2014) notes that on-street parking is most in demand nearest to the



core area of the town centre. Some concerns have been raised that the relocation of the leisure centre to the town centre could bring parking spaces under pressure, although new three hour time limits have been put in place during peak times in the Bridgegate (113 space) and Kirkgate (106 space) car parks – these are the two car parks closest to this part of the town centre.

Mobile and online connectivity in Irvine is good – both 4G mobile and superfast broadband have been rolled out to the town.

There is no single social media outlet for Irvine although various pages promote different aspects of the town e.g. the Rivergate shopping centre and the annual Marymass festival.

3. Active Town Centre

3.1 Population and Housing

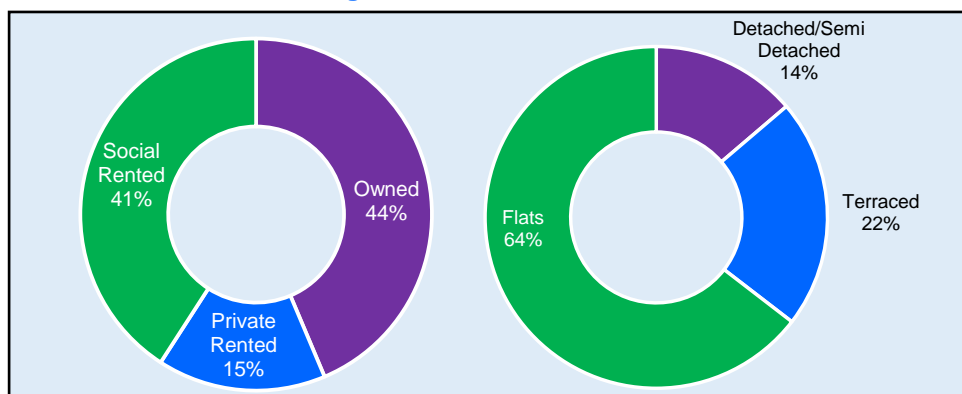
Around 3,000 people live within or around the town centre area in Irvine², 9% of the total settlement population. Of these around 1,000 live within the immediate town centre area. Over the last decade, the population of the town centre has increased by 14%, compared to a 4% decline in the town as a whole. This compares to a 0.7% decline in North Ayrshire over the same period, and a 5% increase in Scotland. The average ten year change across the 11 NAC towns has been 4% increase in town centre living, and 6% increase across 31 YTA towns.

Housing in the town centre is dominated by flatted accommodation (64%) and terraced housing (22%), while the wider town is a mix of terraced housing (48%) and detached/ semi-detached houses (30%).

House prices in Irvine increased by 44% in the decade to 2013, averaging at £83,500. However, more up to date data from Zoopla states that from 488 sales in Irvine over the past 12 months (to December 2016), the average price paid was £109,000. In the town centre datazones, prices increased by 61% to £91,598. This is lower than the NAC average (£81k) for town centre housing, and lower than the national average for YTA towns (£108k).

The housing stock in the town centre is largely a mix of private ownership (44%) and social rent (41%). In the whole town, most houses are privately owned (57%) or social rented (34%), a mix similar to other North Ayrshire towns.

Irvine Town Centre Housing Mix

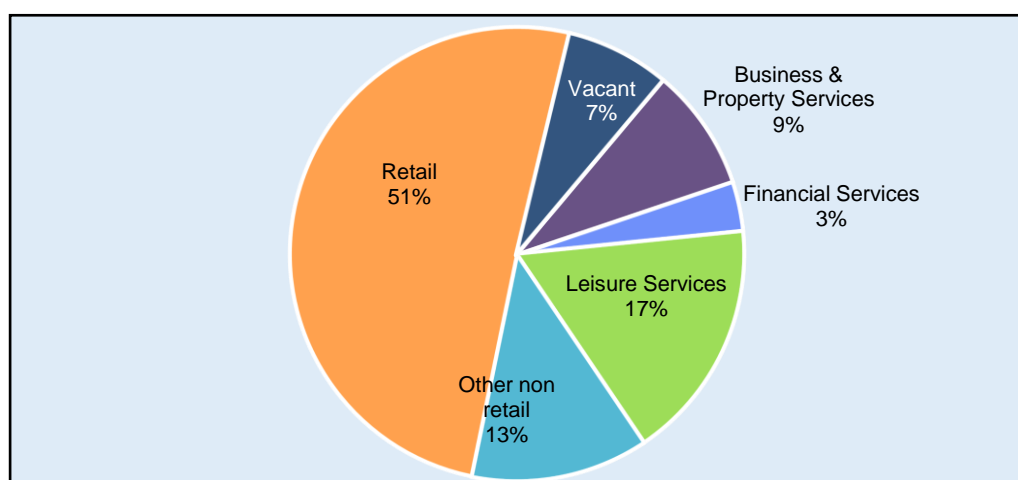


² 2001 datazones, S01004364, S01004368, S01004374 and S01004377

3.2 Businesses and Employment

Just under half (47%) of the 12,000 jobs in Irvine are located in the approximate town centre area³. National statistics record 1,065 businesses in Irvine although the boundaries of the available data make it difficult to determine how many are located in the town centre. The YTA street audit located 286 units within Irvine town centre and these are provided with the relevant UPRN codes in a separate document. Of these, 144 are retail businesses, forming the largest single use at 51%.

Town Centre Unit Mix



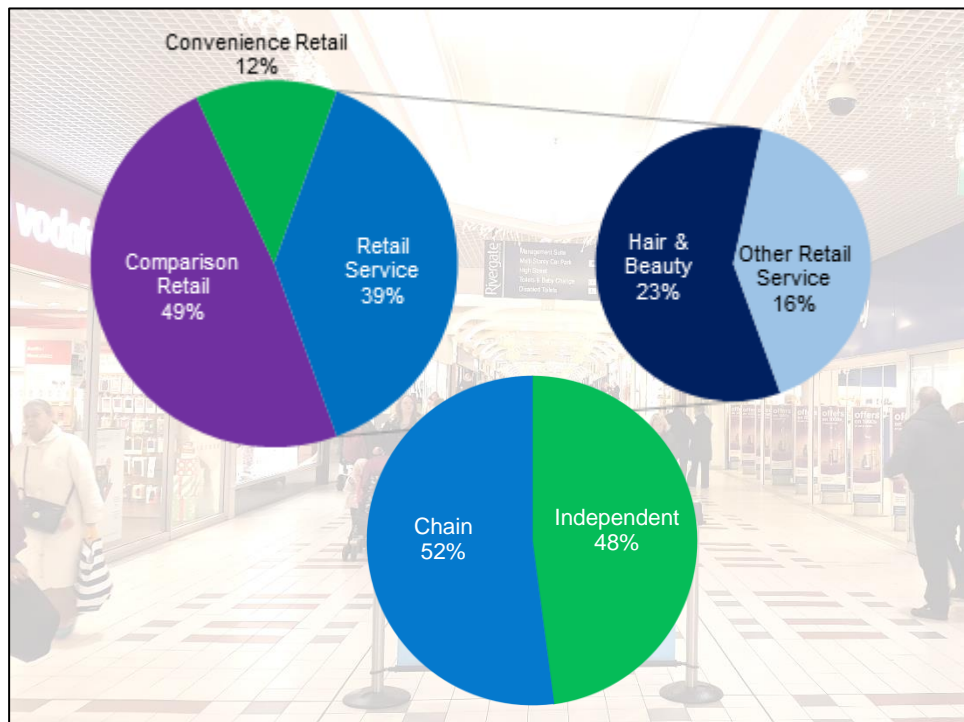
As well as retail and leisure, other services in the town centre include a health centre, dentists, Job Centre Plus, library and the council headquarters.

³ Employment data derived from ONS Business Register & Employment Survey

3.3 Retail

Retail within the town centre is focused on the Rivergate shopping centre, which straddles the river that cuts through the town. The centre has large car parks to its west, and a more traditional street grid to its east, including the pedestrianised Bridgegate, which has recently been improved with new public realm. Beside the Rivergate, there is also The Forum, a shopping centre with small market-type units occupied by independent traders.

Most of the town's retailers are found within the town centre area, although there is a sizeable retail park to the south of the Rivergate centre, with a high number of parking spaces. The rest of the town is a mix of residential and industrial uses, with the large Ayrshire Central Hospital campus and Eglinton Country Park on the northern edge of the town.



The town centre has a fairly wide range of national chains alongside local retailers. There are 225 residents per town centre retail unit in Irvine, higher than Largs (104) and Saltcoats (100), but lower than Kilwinning (300). This ratio is in line with the 34 YTA average but is somewhat surprising given Irvine's position as the regional capital and largest retail centre. It is higher than other audited towns that are regional centres (Ayr 156, Musselburgh 173 and Alloa 186) but lower than those with town centres built around indoor shopping centres (Clydebank 320 and Newton Mearns 524).

The retail unit vacancy rate in Irvine town centre is 7%⁴, lower than the averages for town centres in North Ayrshire and the 33 YTA to date, (9.9% and 9.3% respectively). This amounts to 19 units – although it should be noted that this excludes the Forum centre, comprised of 17 small market stall type units. This centre is facing an uncertain future and was closed at the time of the audit, and therefore counted as one vacant unit. The recorded vacant units are spread along High St, Eglinton St and Bank St, while there is also one vacant unit within the Rivergate centre.

Shops in Irvine town centre operate standard opening hours, typically 9am to 5.30pm or 6.00pm, although the comparison multiples typically open until 7pm on Thursdays. The Rivergate ASDA opens 8am to 10pm daily, while the Tesco Extra in the Riverway retail park operates on a 24 hour basis.

225 residents per town centre retail outlet

144 town centre units in retail use

19 vacant town centre retail units

Retail forms the largest town centre unit use, amounting to 51% of all units. This is higher than the 34 YTA average of 45%, but similar to Ayr (53%), Kirkcaldy (54%) and Saltcoats (54%), but lower than other towns with large shopping centres including Clydebank (63%) and Newton Mearns (60%) and likely reflects the town's split between indoor shopping centre and traditional outdoor high street.

⁴ Note: this is the retail vacancy rate (19 vacant of 263 shopfront units) rather than the vacancy rate in the chart above which relates to all commercial town centre properties (21 of 286 properties).

The YTA analysis is based on the following retail definitions:

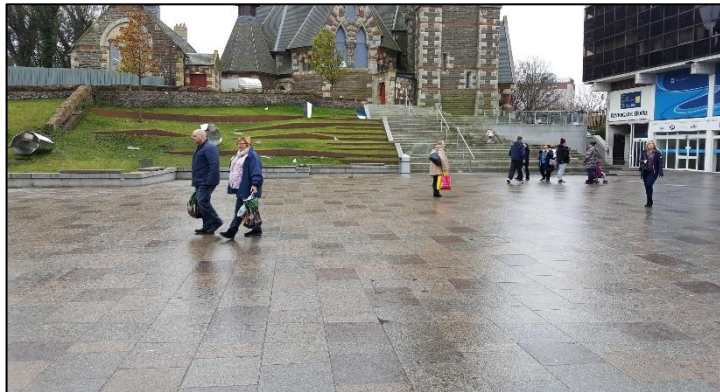
- **Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *70 comparison retailers identified in Irvine town centre;*
- **Convenience Retail:** primarily low cost goods that are typically bought out of habit or on impulse i.e. food, drink (alcohol and non-alcohol), news, tobacco, etc. – *18 convenience retailers identified in Irvine 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. – *57 retail service operators identified in Irvine town centre.*



With a concentration of national multiples within the Rivergate, overall just over half of retailers in Irvine are chains, with 48% independent. No other North Ayrshire town centre comes close to Irvine in this respect – across other towns on average 74% of retailers are independent. Across the wider 34 YTA towns, 70% of retailers are independent but in those centres that are regional capitals and/ or have large shopping centres there is a much lower proportion of independents, Ayr 63%, Clydebank 49%, Dumbarton 52%, Hamilton 62%, Kirkcaldy 61% and Newton Mearns 37%.

National operators in Irvine include Primark, Game, Dorothy Perkins, Boots, Burtons and New Look.

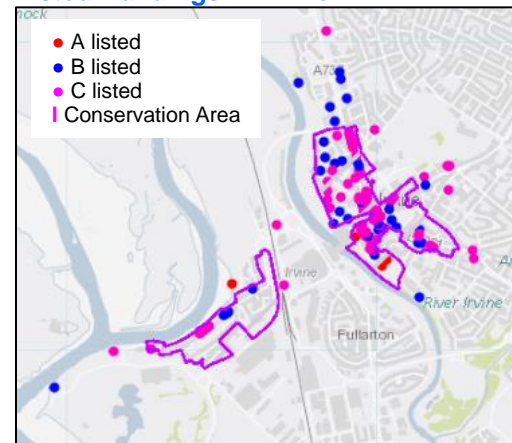
4. Attractive Town Centre



Irvine town centre blends a historic core alongside developments built in the 1960s/70s as part of the New Town project, which included the Rivergate centre and Bridgegate House. Major investment over recent years has improved the appearance of the town centre, with key projects including the installation of new public realm on Bridgegate and a refurbishment for Bridgegate House, both completed in 2013 at a combined cost of over £10 million. The award winning new public realm includes new surfaces, lighting, street furniture, and the landscaping of the area around the prominent Trinity Church. In 2015, Irvine was runner-up for the STP-sponsored Scotland's Most Improved Town accolade at the annual SURF awards.

The Category A-listed Trinity Church had fallen into a state of disrepair and, since 2009, has undergone restoration, with repairs to the building fabric and new stained glass windows. The building will be partially occupied in 2017/2018. The church sits among a large number of listed buildings in Irvine, with two Conservation Areas covering the historic part of the town centre and the harbour. As with other NAC town centres, there is also a heritage trail through the town with an accompanying mobile app.

Listed Buildings in Irvine



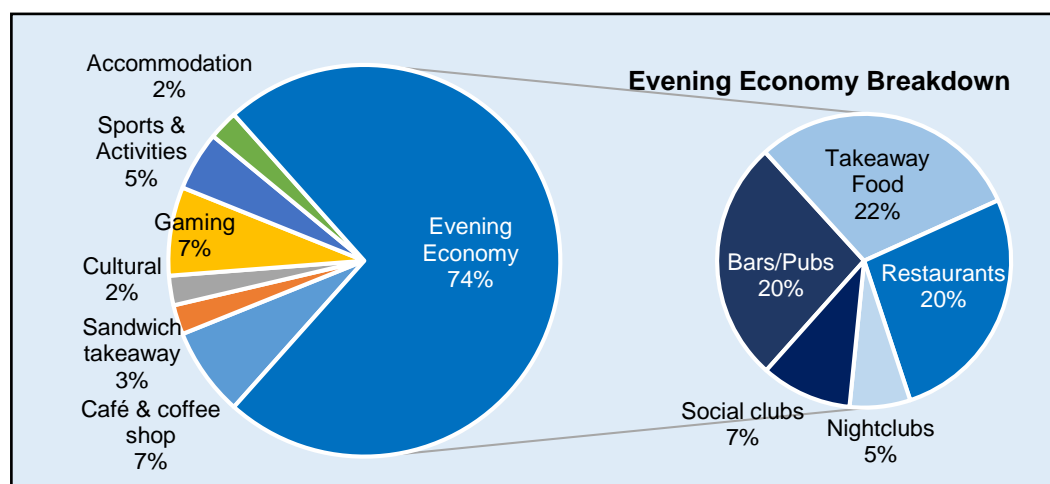
Engraved paving stones on Bridgegate show key moments in Irvine's past

The investment in the town centre over the last decade, spearheaded by Irvine Bay URC and North Ayrshire Council, has substantially improved the area's appearance and the square outside the Rivergate and Trinity Church provides an attractive setting for outdoor events, markets etc.

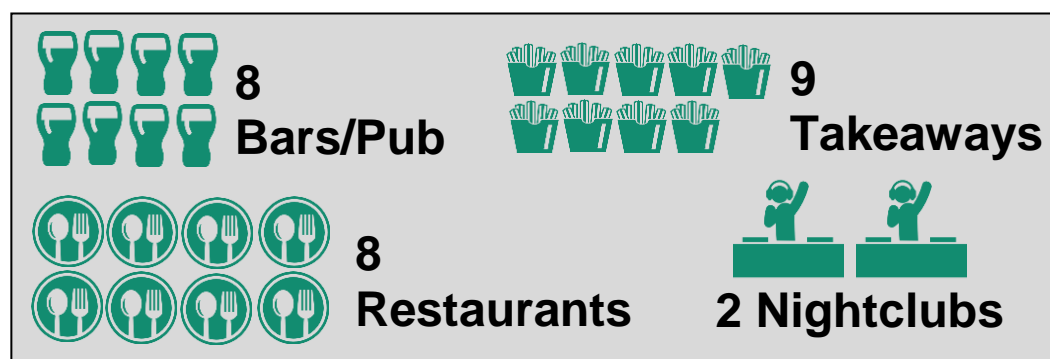
North Ayrshire Council are also currently progressing with other public realm improvements within the historic core of the town centre area, with major investments due to be on-site in 2018-2019.

4.1 Leisure Mix

The leisure unit mix in Irvine town centre is dominated by the evening economy, amounting to nearly three quarters (74%) of leisure units.



A good range of pubs, restaurants and takeaway food outlets are found in the town centre, alongside two night clubs.



The Magnum leisure centre, located in the harbour area, opened in 1976 and was one of the leading facilities of its kind in Scotland, with an ice rink, swimming pools, sports halls, theatre and cinema. The Magnum will close in early 2017, ahead of the opening of a £20 million replacement facility The Portal within the town centre.

The Portal leisure centre will open next to the Irvine Town House on High Street. with the war memorial that previously occupied part of the site subject to relocation and an upgrade. The Town House has undergone refurbishment as part of the Portal project and will provide an adjoining space for cultural and community events. Facilities in the new leisure centre include swimming pools, multi-use sports halls and a fitness suite.

The development of the new facility on previously underutilised land in the heart of the town centre shows strong commitment to the 'Town Centre First' principle. As well as providing a new leisure facility for the community, the centre will generate footfall activity throughout the day and into the evening, bringing benefits to traders in the area.

The town has various other leisure and sports facilities, with a number of golf links within easy reach of the town and large parks, notably Beach Park and Eglinton Country Park. There are two junior football clubs, Irvine Meadow and Irvine Victoria, while Irvine Community Sports Club operate a number of pitches at a riverside site – this being the home of the town's running, cricket, hockey and rugby clubs.

The Harbour Arts Centre, which is located by the Irvine Harbourside and hosts a number of events and activities throughout the year including: live music, comedy, theatre and exhibitions. Some of the facilities inside the centre include two studio spaces with a gallery and a café area.

A plan for a new £5 million sports centre and business development facility at Quarry Road (on the edge of the town centre) is also being progressed, having secured £965,000 from the Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Grant Fund in 2016. This will include a 3G pitch alongside office space for new businesses.

The Scottish Maritime Museum is located just outside of the town centre, close to the railway station, and opens daily. The museum reopened in 2013 after undergoing a £1.25 million refurbishment and is one of the key attractions in Irvine. The museum also plays host to events, including Illumination: Harbour Festival of Light, held over four days in November/December 2016.

The harbour is subject to a long term investment plan, with proposals for a mix of residential, business and leisure uses in the area. Part of this will involve determining the future of the Big Idea museum, which opened as a



millennium project on the Ardeer peninsula, connected by a footbridge, but closed in 2003. Ideas mooted for the building include a concert venue or micro-brewery.

4.2 Community Events

A key fixture on the calendar in Irvine each year is the Marymass festival, held over 11 days each August. This is a major celebration dating back to medieval times, and takes in all parts of the town, with the main event held on Irvine Moor.

4.3 Attractiveness Review

The YTA includes an independent review of place and quality impressions. Business confidence in the town centre was gauged from a small sample of interviews undertaken with independent traders. Scores averaged at 3.8 / 10, well below the North Ayrshire average of 5.1 and wider YTA average (27 towns) of 5.7 / 10, and should be a cause of some concern for the future viability of Irvine town centre.





Individual unit fronts and shop window displays were graded out of ten during the on-street audit, with a town centre average score of 7.2 both for the condition of unit fronts and for quality of window displays. This is above both the North Ayrshire town centre average (6.9 windows and 6.8 buildings) and YTA average (30 YTAs = 7.1 windows and 7.0 buildings). This rating is likely due to the higher proportion of national chains found in Irvine.

5. YTA Summary and Key Points

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

Irvine is the primary town in North Ayrshire and core investment anchor, and its sustainability and growth are key to the future success of the region's economy. This recognises its size, location and potential to drive growth across North Ayrshire, as well as providing employment, education, leisure, tourism and services at a scale and in a location that is accessible to residents from across the region.

In comparison with the other two Ayrshire regional capitals – Ayr and Kilmarnock – Irvine has:

- a comparable town centre population to Ayr but double that of Kilmarnock, with a smaller overall settlement population than both, albeit the settlement population has grown at a faster rate over the past 10 years – Irvine 9%, Ayr 6% and Kilmarnock 3% increases;
- a smaller number of town centre units overall and a lower vacancy rate – Irvine 300 units/ 7% vacant, Ayr 600 units/ 15% vacant, and Kilmarnock 450 units/ 15% vacant;
- less comparison retailers, more retail services and more national chain retailers;
- a broadly comparable split in uses (retail, leisure, business/property, and financial) but with more non-retail uses;
- a broadly comparable housing market to Ayr (price/ vacancy rate) but higher price growth in the past ten years; higher price, greater price increase and lower vacancy than Kilmarnock; and
- a smaller number of evening economy outlets than both, and with a lower percentage of bars and higher percentage of hot food takeaways.

5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- Irvine has good rail, bus and road links to surrounding towns and central Scotland, and is accessible to residents from other North Ayrshire towns;
- the railway station in Irvine is severed from much of the town – there are large surface car parks between the station and the Rivergate centre and Cunningham House, the council HQ. The rest of the town centre (over the river) is accessed by going through the shopping centre, which remains open at all hours;
- Irvine has a high number of car parking spaces in and around its town centre, most of which are offered free with no time restriction. A large proportion of these spaces are located in the harbour/ retail park area, rather than the High St side of the town centre. With the new leisure centre opening on High St, parking there will likely come under increased pressure. However, a new daytime three hour limit on two car parks within this part of the town centre (Bridgegate and Kirkgate) may help to ease this. Encouraging active travel and use of public transport will also play a role;
- Irvine is on two routes on the National Cycle Network and cycling is a popular activity in the area. A new cycle path connecting the town with Ayrshire Central Hospital opened in 2016, while funds have recently been set aside to develop Irvine as a 'Cycle Friendly Town';
- the walkability of the town centre is inhibited by its layout with the river and railway line cutting off parts of the town from one another. Nonetheless, the relocation of the leisure centre into the High St area will help consolidate the town centre as the core area for accessing retail and leisure in Irvine, and the new surfaces and public realm on Bridgegate provide an attractive environment for pedestrians.



5.2 Active Town Centre

- Irvine is the largest centre in North Ayrshire and is the regional capital – it is important that future investment and activity are prioritised for Irvine, being the most accessible to residents from across the whole District and thereby creating the highest footfall potential;
- it is somewhat surprising that Irvine does not have a broader mix of activity and uses within the town centre e.g. the town does not have a cinema. However, some other key facilities are located on the edge of the town centre (museum, arts centre);
- increasing the number of houses in and around Irvine, and therefore the resident population, will help to draw more people to the town centre and help sustain its business base – ensuring connectivity between any new housing developments and the town centre will be important;
- it is likely the case that those driving to the town centre for shopping will park to the west of the Rivergate, accessing both the shopping centre and retail park, particularly with the presence of the town's major supermarkets in this area. There is then a risk that these customers do not exit the shopping centre to its east and this footfall/ spend does not reach the High St or Bridgegate, where most of the independent traders are located. However, the relocation of the leisure centre to the latter area may help offset this;
- there are several active social media pages for Irvine, including the Rivergate shopping centre, and other trader or event-specific pages. A combined approach to town centre promotion could help traders outside of the shopping centre reap the benefits of this activity;
- Irvine has a range of events each year and various venues and locations suitable for hosting them, in the town centre and elsewhere. The Marymass festival, held over 11 days each August, is of key importance; and
- there is a cluster of vacant units on Bank St (i.e. at the edge of the town centre), as well as small number on High St/ Eglinton St. If the Forum shopping centre is treated as one unit, the Irvine average is low at 7%.

5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- Irvine has a good range of shops and services within its town centre, acting as the regional centre and serving a wide catchment population. Sustaining its retail mix and anchor stores is important;
- the town has seen large scale public investment in recent years, including in its town centre. This has refreshed its appearance and by encouraging footfall and longer stays will provide economic benefits to traders operating in the town centre, as well as improving its image and reputation; and
- the town centre merges a historic core with newer developments. Work undertaken over the last few years has restored the prominent Trinity Church on Bridgegate and the Town House on High St, showing strong commitment to preserving the town's heritage.