



Your Town Audit: Kilbirnie

November 2016



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1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

This report presents a summary of the Your Town Audit (YTA) for Kilbirnie, 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 Kilbirnie with data on up to 180 KPIs across seven themes – Locality, Accessibility, Local Services, Activities + Events, Development Capacity, Tourism, and Place + Quality Impressions.

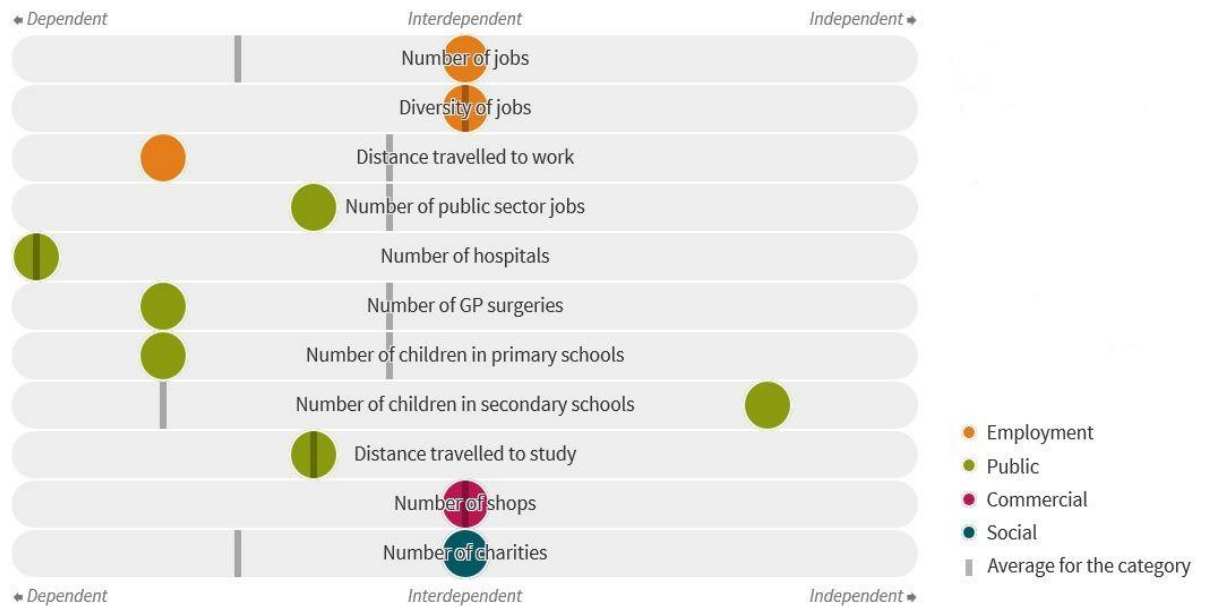
The [Understanding Scottish Places](#) (USP) data platform provides a summary analysis for Kilbirnie and identifies 12 comparator towns that have similar characteristics, with the most similar being Hulford and Crookedholm, Newmains, Fauldhouse and Dalry¹. The USP platform – www.usp.scot – describes Kilbirnie in the following general terms:

Kilbirnie's Interrelationships: Kilbirnie is an '*interdependent to dependent town*', which means it has a low number of assets in relation to its population. Towns of this kind have some diversity of jobs; and residents largely travel a mix of longer distances to work and study, although some travel shorter distances. These towns are reliant on neighbouring towns for some assets and jobs.

Kilbirnie's Typology: social and council housing are the norm in this type of medium-sized town. Manufacturing and construction are the dominant forms of employment. Health and social work services are particularly active. There is a higher 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 other comparator towns are identified as Kelty, Harthill, Cleland, Drongan, Gorebridge, Prestonpans, Blackburn (West Lothian), and Ballingry, Lochore and Crosshill.

Inter-relationships 1



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

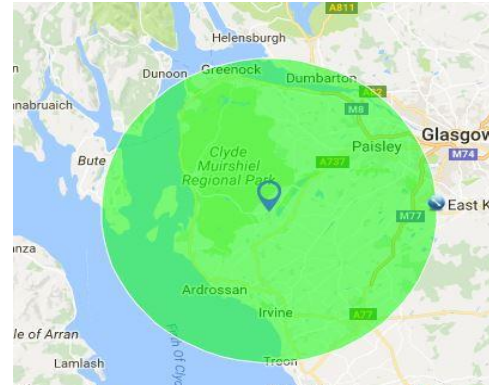
Building on the USP, this report presents the results of our detailed analysis of Kilbirnie based around the Scottish Government's [Town Centre Toolkit](#) – an online resource available via the USP website which provides advice, guidance and case studies across three thematic areas: accessible, active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

2. Accessible Town Centre

Kilbirnie is a small town located in North Ayrshire, to the south west of Glasgow, with a population of around 7,200 people.

The core retail area of Kilbirnie is focused on Main Street, a busy B-class road leading to Dalry Glengarnock in the south. The town centre offers a good range of services and retail outlets, in what is otherwise a residential area.

15 mile radius around Kilbirnie



There is no railway station located within the settlement of Kilbirnie, with the nearest being Glengarnock Station, which is 1.5 miles away from the town centre area, and has park and ride facilities. Journeys from Glengarnock into the centre of Glasgow take roughly 30 minutes. Services from this station connect Kilbirnie to other settlements in North Ayrshire, with journey times from Glengarnock to Irvine, Largs and West Kilbride taking 12, 20 and 25 minutes respectively. Bus services from Kilbirnie to Glengarnock Station takes 10-15 minutes.

There are around eight bus stops located throughout the town centre area of Kilbirnie, three of which are located on Main Street. There are direct bus connections from Kilbirnie to the centre of Glasgow which take around 55 minutes. As well as this, there are direct bus journeys from Kilbirnie to other settlements in North Ayrshire, including: Largs, Beith (both 20 minutes), Kilwinning (40 minutes), and Dalry (15 minutes).

The M8 motorway is around twenty-two 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.

On-street parking spaces are limited within the town centre, with only three found on Main Street, however, drivers are able to park in the surrounding residential streets. There are also a number of off-street car parks which include: the car park outside the Tesco supermarket (300 spaces), one on Bank Street (20 spaces), one on Main Street (16 spaces), and one on Townhead (25 spaces).

The town centre provides access to local services which, alongside a mix of retailers and business services, includes a police station, dentists, and a community centre.

There is good 3G and 4G throughout the town, and although there is no town-wide free WiFi, superfast broadband is available. There is a website for Kilbirnie (www.Kilbirnie.uk.net), which gives information on the town, transport links, and what shops and services can be found. However, it should be noted that the website is not up-to-date and so it is unclear how reliable it is.

The town centre area is accessible to pedestrians with pavements and walking routes being clear and in relatively good condition. Walking routes into the town centre from nearby houses are safe, with ample street lighting and pedestrian crossings within the town centre. However, access for cyclists is poorer, as there are no cycle lanes on the roads and no cycle racks within the town centre. This is surprising considering that the National Cycle Route 7 passes by the east edge of the settlement, although it doesn't go through it.

3. Active Town Centre

3.1 Population and Housing

Just over 300 people live within the immediate town centre area of Kilbirnie², around 4% of the total settlement population. Taking a slightly wider datazone level for comparison purposes, the population of the town centre increased in the decade to 2013 by 16%, with the population of the whole settlement decreasing by around 1% over this time. This compares with an average 0.7% decline across North Ayrshire overall 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 over the past ten years, averaging 4% for North Ayrshire and 6% for our wider town average (31 YTAs); with Kilbirnie being significantly higher than these averages.

Housing in the town centre³ is a mix of detached/ semi-detached properties (42%) and flats (39%), with just over half of all properties having three or four bedrooms, which is somewhat unusual for a town centre area. The majority of properties (73%) are in council tax bands A, B and C.

The streets surrounding the retail area in Kilbirnie are almost solely residential and, with a town population of just over 7,200 people, this provides a reasonable catchment population for the retail and service businesses that is broadly in line with other YTA audited towns (346 residents per retailer, compared to a 34 YTA average of 226⁴).

The average purchase price of a town centre dwelling in Kilbirnie (£72,777) is higher than that of the town as a whole (£68,540)⁵, which is unusual compared with other YTA towns. Prices in the town centre increased 57% in the decade to 2013, and by 45% across the town as a whole. The housing stock is largely privately owned (61% in the town centre; 53% in the wider town), or socially rented (25% in the town centre; 39% in the wider town).

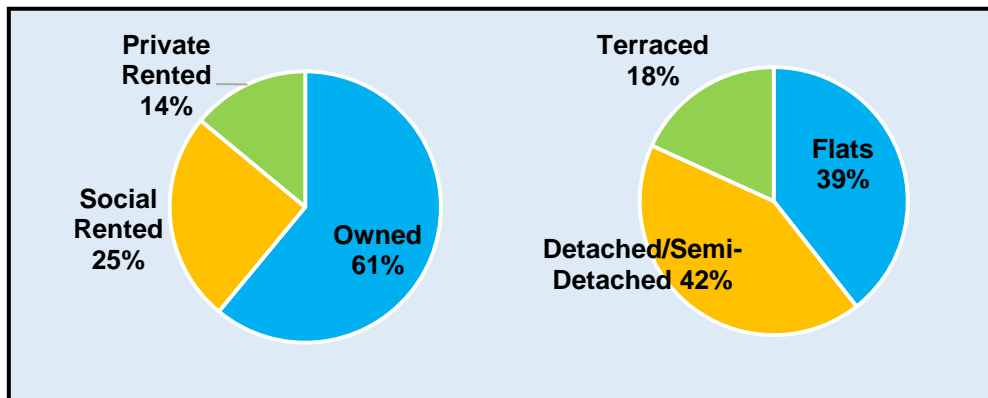
² Scotland Census 2011 output zones S00122612, S00122614, and S0122613.

³ For accessing the most up to date data, this is datazones (2001) S01004501 and S01004498.

⁴ Kilbirnie is fairly typical when some very high and very low outliers are removed.

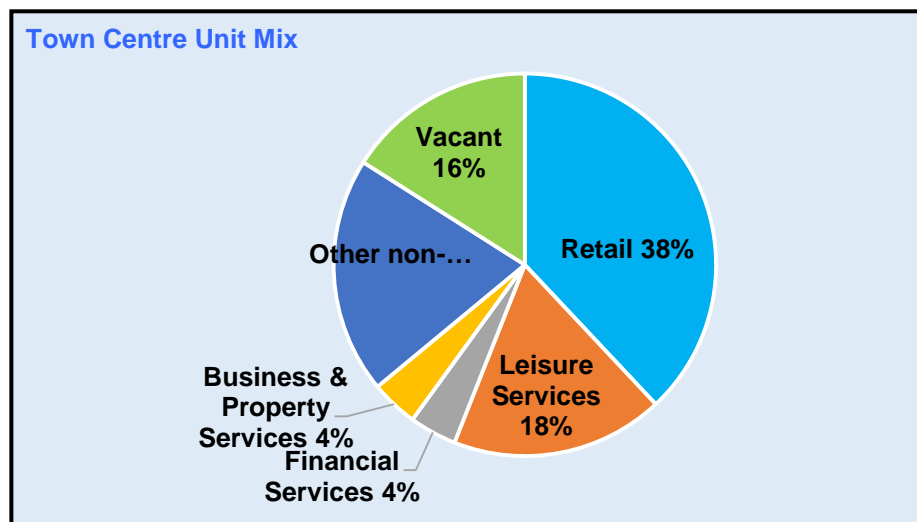
⁵ Scottish Statistics, 2013

Kilbirnie Town Centre Housing Mix



3.2 Employment and Business

Just under half (46%) of the 1,400 jobs in Kilbirnie are located in the town centre area. National statistics record 165 businesses within the settlement. The YTA street audit located 55 commercial units within Kilbirnie town centre – this was in line with the UPRN data provided by North Ayrshire Council prior to the audit.



Of the 55 units:

- 21 are occupied by retail businesses;
- 11 are other non-retail – dentist, town hall, police station, council office, community facility, funeral directors, architect;
- 10 are leisure uses – 9 food and drink, one bookmaker; and
- 9 units are vacant, of which six are retail units.

3.3 Retail

Retail units in Kilbirnie are clustered along Main Street, Bridge Street, Bridgend, Craighouse Square and School Wynd. For a small town centre, there is a reasonable range of shops and services.

During the audit nine vacant units were recorded, six of which were retail units, producing a retail vacancy rate of 13%⁶, higher than the 9.9% average retail vacancy rate across other North Ayrshire audited towns, and the 9.3% average from 33 YTAs.

346 residents per town centre retail outlet

21 town centre units in retail use

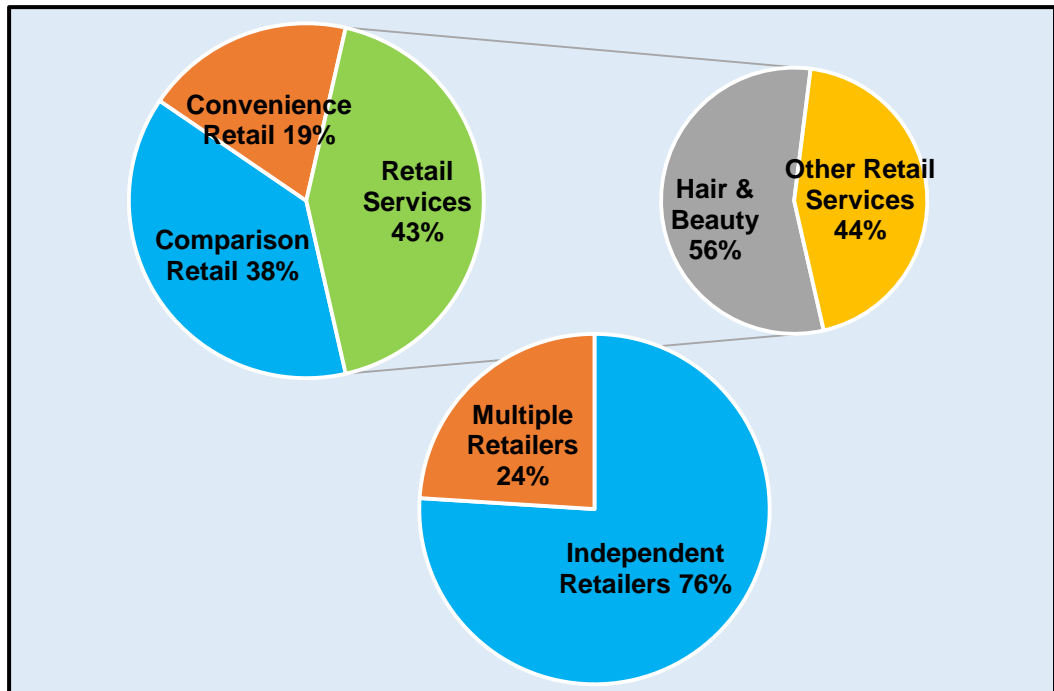
9 vacant town centre units

Most shops in Kilbirnie town centre operate standard opening hours of around 9am to 5.30pm. However, the Tesco Supermarket has longer hours – 7am to 11pm during the week, as does the Commercial Bar and Lounge on Main Street which is open every day from 11/11:30am to 11pm.

Retail forms the largest single town centre unit use but, at 38%, is lower than the 46% average across the other North Ayrshire audited towns (46% at 34 YTA average). 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. – *4 convenience retailers were identified in Kilbirnie town centre;*
- **Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *8 comparison retailers were identified in Kilbirnie 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. – *9 retail service operators were identified in Kilbirnie town centre.*

⁶ Note: this is the retail vacancy rate (6 vacant of 44 units) and differs from the 16% vacancy rate in the chart above which relates to all commercial town centre properties (9 of 55 properties).

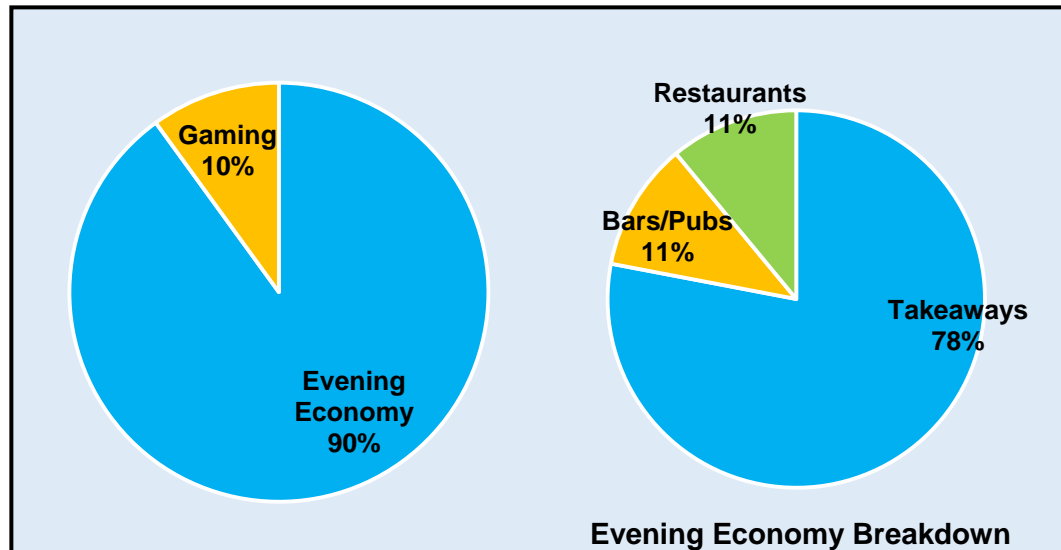


The majority of traders within Kilbirnie town centre are independent (76%) – this is slightly above the 74.5% average for the other North Ayrshire towns, and the 70% average for 34 YTAs; similar to Ardrossan (75%), Beith (74%) and Largs (76%).



4. Attractive Town Centre

4.1 Leisure Mix



The mix of leisure businesses in Kilbirnie town centre sees evening economy dominate, accounting for 90% of all leisure business activity. With a town population of just over 7,000 people Kilbirnie has a very high proportion of evening economy business activity at 808 residents per outlet (34 YTA average of 1,088) but slightly lower than the NAC average of 741.

The evening economy in the town centre is comprised of seven hot food takeaways, one restaurant, and one bar. The bar in the town centre is The Commercial Bar & Lounge on Main Street and the restaurant is Anayas Indian Restaurant on Bridgend. Takeaways in the town centre include the Barbeque Hut on Bridge Street and New Jasmine House Chinese Takeaway on Main Street.

The proportion of hot food outlets in Kilbirnie is also very high at 1,035 residents per outlet – this compares with NAC average of 1,655, and a 32 YTA average of 2,892.

4.2 Leisure Facilities

Inside the town centre area, is the Brigend Community Centre, which is used for a variety of sports classes as well as social events and community group meetings. The centre has a range of facilities including: a main hall, small hall, lounge and kitchen. Halls can be hired for private events and the community centre is open seven days a week. Some of the clubs which currently use the centre include: yoga classes, bridge club, Garnock Valley Disability Forum, and the Kilbirnie Town Centre Management Team (see below).



Another leisure facility located within the town centre area of Kilbirnie is the Walker Hall, which is used for a number of community events and leisure group meetings. The exterior of the hall has been refurbished in recent years (see 4.8 below), and halls within the building are available for hire through North Ayrshire Council.



Kilbirnie Library is also located just outside of the town centre area, on Avils Place. The library is open every day apart from Wednesdays and Sundays, from 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm during the week and from 10am-12:30pm on Saturdays. The Kilbirnie Employability Hub is located within (see below) the library.

Garnock Swimming Pool, again located just out with the town centre area, not far from the library, is open seven days a week. There are two pools in the building, which helps to accommodate the thirty odd swimming lesson classes and aqua fitness classes which take place over the course of a week.

Another leisure facility is Galaxy Leisure, which is located within the Radio City Building of the town centre. The members-only club, offers a number of fitness classes as well as a gym area, and other facilities such as a café/restaurant. The facilities are open Monday-Thursday 6:30am-10pm, Fridays 6:30am-9pm, Saturdays 8am-5pm, and Sundays 8am-4pm.

4.3 Kilbirnie Town Centre Management Team

The Kilbirnie Town Centre Management Team (KTCMT) was formed in 2000, with the aim of improving the town centre area as a place to both live and do business

from. The KTCMT's first success was in securing a Christmas evening in 2000 in the town centre. The event was well supported, and as a results the event was held again most years since.

The KTCMT worked with North Ayrshire Council to help regenerate the town centre area through the addition of improved planters and new benches, as well as regeneration at a war memorial in the town. The KTCMT are still active within the settlement of Kilbirnie, and held another successful Christmas event in 2016.

4.4 Kilbirnie Employability Hub

In September of 2016, an employability hub was opened within Kilbirnie Library on Avils Place. This is the third hub to open in the North Ayrshire region following the success of those located in Stevenston and Ardrossan. The hub offers a range of services to help residents find work, some of which include:

- employability workshops;
- personal development training; and
- support to access online services.

4.5 Community Events and Activities

As previously mentioned, one annual community event taking place in Kilbirnie is the Christmas Festival, which is organised by the Kilbirnie Town Centre Management Team. Some of the attractions at the event include: a Santa's Grotto, a fun fair in the street, a craft fayre, children's competitions, and the switching on of the Christmas Lights.

There have also been a number of one-off events take place in the town centre in the past, information on which is available on the town website. These events included a craft fair held at Radio City and a summer fete held at a local primary school. However, these were help back in 2013, and there is no newer information available on community events and festivals.

The development and delivery of community activities and events is a primary focus for most towns to celebrate local culture, build community spirit and support local businesses. Events are typically quite reliant on either a small group of local volunteers and activists and/or a BID type structure.

4.6 Kilbirnie and Glengarnock Community Council

Kilbirnie and Glengarnock Community Council meets in the Bridgend Community Centre on the 3rd Monday of each month at 7.30pm. Meetings are open to the public and involve discussions about issues and topics regarding the local area. There are currently nine community councillors and three office bearers involved in the community council. However, no recent minutes have been recorded, and so it is unclear whether the council have disbanded.

4.7 Attractiveness Review

The YTA includes an independent review of place and quality impressions, with Kilbirnie scoring slightly above average in comparison with other towns.

Individual unit fronts and shop window displays were graded out of ten during the on-street audit, with a town centre average score of 6.9 for the quality of window display and 6.9 for condition of unit fronts. While slightly higher than the North Ayrshire average (6.9 for windows and 6.8 for buildings), these scores are slightly below the YTA average (30 towns = 7.1 windows and 7.0 buildings).



At the time of the audit it was noted that the streets were relatively clear with not much litter present. While the street audit was undertaken in October and therefore we would not expect to find much planting, there was little evidence of the infrastructure needed for flower displays i.e. few planting beds, tubs or hanging basket poles. There appears to be plenty of bins and street lighting spread throughout the town.



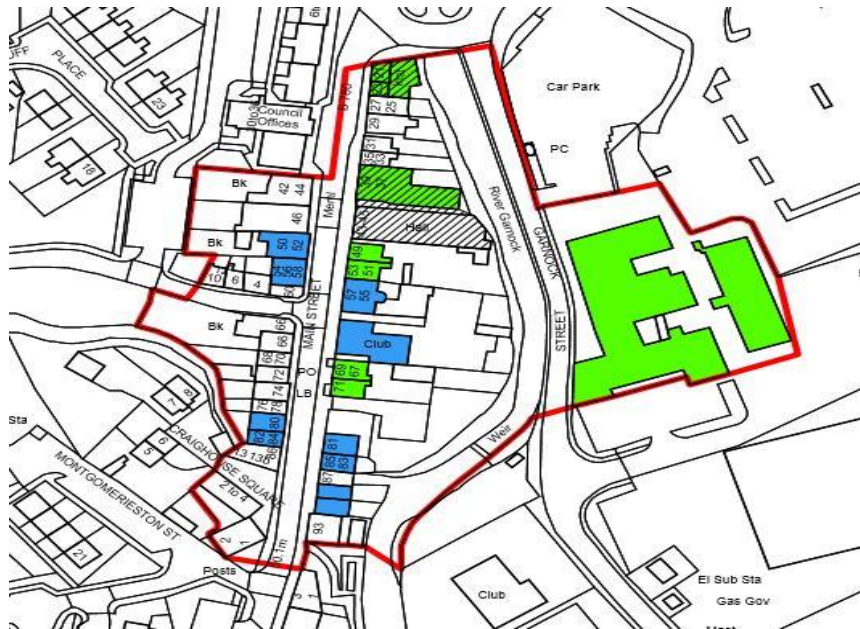
Some of the buildings and retail units in the town centre are in need of repair and regeneration. In particular, there is one former retail units which is in a central and highly visible location that has no roof or windows and gives a sense of dereliction. If these were restored, it may help to attract more business activity to the town centre, however, there is a need to review all vacant

stock within Kilbirnie to understand why units are not occupied.

Restoration of the town centre area is already under way through the Kilbirnie Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (see over).

4.8 Kilbirnie Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS)

The Kilbirnie CARS started in April of 2013 and will run until March 2018, and is funded by North Ayrshire Council and Historic Environment Scotland. The scheme aims to improve and restore the historic buildings within the Kilbirnie Conservation Area. The conservation area of Kilbirnie lies within the town centre area, with the majority of the units involved being located on Main Street.



Source: North Ayrshire Council

Kilbirnie CARS aims to encourage more investment in the town centre by:

- repairing and promoting the occupation of the historic buildings in the town centre;
- re-establishing historic architectural details to the buildings; and

- improving people's knowledge about the historic area and buildings within Kilbirnie town centre.

The scheme offers smaller grants to private property owners and tenants to carry out their own restoration works to buildings within the conservation area.

A priority project of the Kilbirnie CARS (completed) was to repair the exterior of the Walker Hall on Main Street. Works included: stonework repairs, roof repairs, and parapet improvements.



Fourteen properties have been involved in the small grant scheme to date. The Knox Institute is another priority building that has still to be complete under the scheme.

5. YTA Summary and Key Points

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

5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- Kilbirnie is reasonably well connected with transport links and a range of services. Public transport links are good with regular bus services taking about 55 minutes into Glasgow;
- while there is no local train station in Kilbirnie, the town is connected by bus service to the nearest train station in the neighbouring settlement of Glengarnock;
- parking in Kilbirnie town centre appears – at least during the time when the audit was undertaken, a midweek daytime – to be adequate;
- Kilbirnie has good 4G mobile coverage and access to superfast broadband;
- there is not much accessible information available for residents or visitors as to events and activities in Kilbirnie – the town website does not seem to be up to date; and
- cycling infrastructure into (directional signage) and within (cycle racks) the town centre could be improved – this could help to attract cyclists from the nearby Nation Cycle Route 7 which would generate more spend and turnover for the town centre businesses.

5.2 Active Town Centre

- Kilbirnie has a reasonable range of retail and services and high level of independent retail businesses – it is important that these are supported and protected (where possible) to maintain the town's sense of uniqueness;
- nine vacant units were recorded during the audit of Kilbirnie town centre, of which six are retail units;
- of the nine vacant units there is one main cluster – six on Main Street (# 2, 21-23, 43, 51, 80 and 87) – one on School Wynd (# 2a), one on Craighouse Square (#2a), and one on Bridge Street (#11-13). 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

- there are is an annual Christmas Festival help within the settlement of Kilbirnie, and in the past there has also been a number of one-off events. However, there may be an opportunity for the Community Council (or other local groups) to deliver more annual events to bring the community together.

5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- Kilbirnie manages to retain a village feel due to the majority of retail units being small and independent;
- the Kilbirnie Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme is currently working to restore some of the historic buildings within the town centre area, this will benefit the wider town as one of the aims is to promote these buildings to possible business occupants, which could help address the vacancy rate; and
- the scores Kilbirnie received for the quality of the building fronts was slightly below the average of all YTA audited towns, this suggests that town centre retail units would benefit from improvements, and adds importance to the ongoing work of the Kilbirnie CARS.