



Your Town Audit: Largs

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1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

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

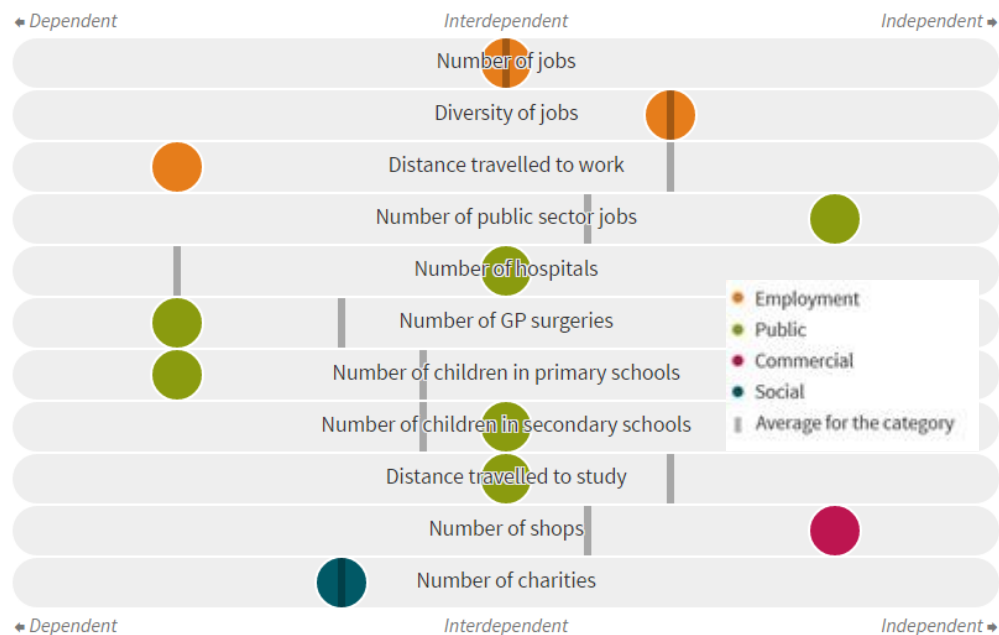
The [Understanding Scottish Places](#) (USP) data platform provides a summary analysis for Largs and identifies 14 comparator towns that have similar characteristics, with the most similar being Gourrock, Armadale, Renfrew, and Barrhead¹. The USP platform – www.usp.scot – describes Largs in the following general terms:

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

Largs' Typology: This type of large 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 is 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 non-professionals, those with higher and lower educational attainment.

Comparing Largs to towns with similar USP typology and interrelationships shows it has a similar number of charities, GP surgeries, children in secondary schools, and number and diversity of jobs. It differs most in the number of children in primary schools (lower) and distance travelled to work (greater).

¹ The others are Carluke, Bonnyrigg, Broxburn, Stenhousemuir, Glenrothes, Cambuslang, Musselburgh, Tranent, Penicuik and Rosyth.



Building on the USP, this report presents the results of our detailed analysis of Largs 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 Largs. The audit and issues arising can be used to feed into the development process for the new Local Development Plan currently under development by North Ayrshire Council.

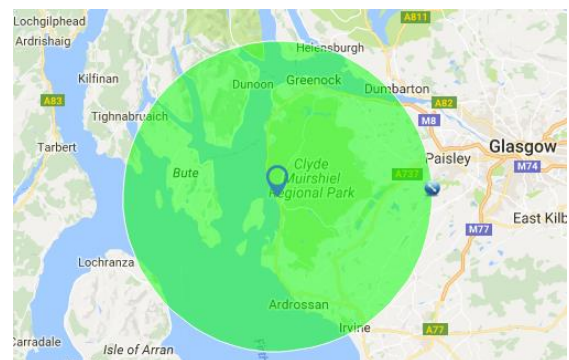
2. Accessible Town Centre

Largs Town Centre

Largs is a coastal town with a population of around 11,300 in North Ayrshire, situated 23 miles west of Glasgow. Its town centre takes in the bulk of the town's retail offering and local services, part of the seafront promenade, and extends to include both the railway station and Morrisons supermarket. The area which falls within the [Largs Business Improvement District](#) is considerably larger, covering the whole town and key nearby attractions.

Largs is well connected to central Scotland by public transport, with trains to Glasgow taking one hour and leaving hourly in each direction, with stops including Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Paisley. Additionally, Irvine and destinations in South Ayrshire, including Prestwick Airport, can be reached by changing trains at Kilwinning. Around 450,000 passenger entries and exits were made at Largs station in 2014/15.

15 mile radius around Largs



Regular buses connect Largs with Greenock, the Three Towns and Glasgow. A-class roads link into the town from the north, south and east, providing a fast connection to surrounding settlements.

The Caledonian MacBrayne ferry terminal, located centrally in Largs, has a regular crossing to the Isle of Cumbrae throughout the day, taking 10 minutes. A bus service then provides a connection to Millport.

Several mid-sized car parks are located around Largs town centre, including at the shorefront (138 spaces), Main St (48 spaces) and Gateside St (68 spaces), as well as a large car park at the Morrisons supermarket. These are all free, with the exception of the shorefront car park. Previously £3 for all day parking, a new tariff was introduced in November 2016 to encourage shorter stays, at £1 for one hour, £3 for up to three hours, and £4 all day. It is the only council pay and display car park in North Ayrshire, with revenue going into the town's Common Good fund and used for local improvements.

The council's parking strategy (2014) notes that on-street parking around the town centre is high and many cars are parked illegally. However, it states that during the period in which the strategy was being developed, demand for parking spaces in Largs did not exceed capacity at any time. Anecdotally, some small businesses spoken to during the audit commented that occasional opening of the shorefront car park without charge – e.g. in the run up to Christmas or on Sundays – could be beneficial to local businesses. However, any such concessions would need to be balanced with the car park's important role in generating income for local projects.



The main road through the town centre tends to be busy with traffic, with some sections also having on-street parking on both sides of the road. However, there are very few pedestrian crossings, which can make crossing the road difficult, particularly for elderly and less physically able people. This is particularly the case at the corner of Main Street and Gallowgate Street, where a combination of a blind corner, guard rails and parked cars present challenges to crossing the road safely. Although there is a pelican crossing on Gallowgate Street, this presents a diversion for pedestrians, being far from the most direct route and taking them to the other side of the ferry terminal.

Pavements in some parts of the town centre are extremely narrow, particularly at the upper part of the Main Street, and the quality of them is not consistent. This presents a particular hazard for those with mobility issues.

Largs has excellent mobile connectivity and fibre optic broadband has been rolled out to the town in recent years.

3. Active Town Centre

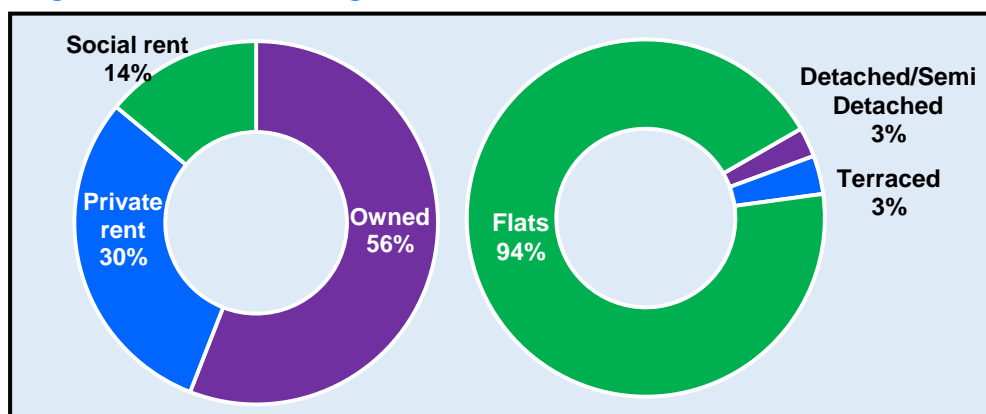
3.1 Population and Housing

Around 1,450 people live within the town centre area in Largs², 13% of the total settlement population. Over the decade to 2015, the population of the town centre decreased by 19%, compared to a 1% 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 decline in town centre population is at considerable variance from other YTA audited towns (including other NAC towns) where there has typically been an increase in town centre population (6% over 31 towns). The only other YTA audited towns that have had a decline in town centre population over the past ten years are Millport, Kilwinning, Eyemouth and Stornoway. The average ten year change across the 11 NAC towns has been 4% increase in town centre living.

Housing in Largs town centre is dominated by flatted accommodation (94%), while the wider town comprises a mix of flats (51%) and detached/ semi-detached houses (35%). There is a substantial number of second or holiday homes in Largs, coming to 11% of the housing stock in the town centre datazones. Excluding Millport (as an outlier) the average across 33 other YTA towns for holiday homes is 2%.

Largs Town Centre Housing Mix



House prices in Largs increased by 12% in the decade to 2013, averaging at £104,000. However, more up to date data from Zoopla states that from 291 sales in Largs over the past 12 months (to October 2016), the average price paid was £157,000. In the town centre, prices increased by 14% over the past ten years to

² Datazones (2011) S01011325 and S01011326. For 2001 datazones, use S01004515 & S01004517.

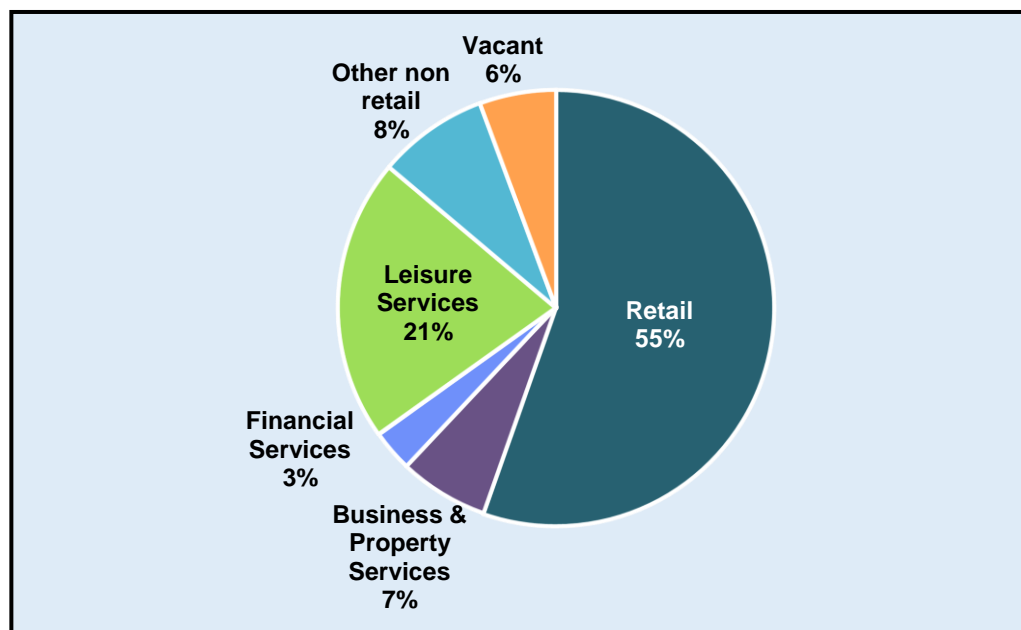
£62,600. Both the price and the uplift are considerably lower than other YTA audited towns where the average sales price (33 YTAs) is £108k and uplift is 44%. The average across the 11 NAC towns is £81k and 43% increase.

The housing stock in the town centre is a mix of private ownership (56%), private rent (30%) and social rent (14%). In the whole town, most houses (78%) are privately owned.

3.2 Businesses and Employment

Around 37% of the 2,770 jobs in Largs are located in the approximate town centre area³. National statistics record businesses within Largs town centre and the Isle of Cumbrae together and it is not possible to break this down further. The YTA street audit located 184 business units in use within Largs town centre and these are provided with the relevant UPRN codes in a separate document. Of these, 108 are retail businesses.

Town Centre Unit Mix



³ Employment data derived from ONS Business Register & Employment Survey, nearest fit town centre datazones S01011325 & S01011326

Retail

Retail provision in Largs is concentrated around Main Street, in the area around the two transport terminals. There are a range of national chains and local retailers, particularly of the type geared towards day trippers and visitors. Largs has a high number of shops for its population, reflective of its role as a visitor destination, at 105 residents per retail unit, compared to a 33 YTA average of 226. Other towns with high retail representation are Millport (49), Moffat (50), Sanquhar (81) and Stornoway (88) – all tourist towns.



The retail unit vacancy rate in Largs town centre is 4.3%, comparing favourably with other audited towns (9.3% average, 32 YTAs) including Eyemouth (8%), Moffat (10%), Stornoway (14%), Kilmarnock (15%) and Ayr (16%). In North Ayrshire, Largs has the lowest vacancy rate along with Millport (4.3% also) and compares to NAC retail unit vacancy rate average of 9.9% across 11 towns.

Largs town centre has a good range of shops, with a number of specialist retailers and a wide variety of goods for sale. The relatively low unit vacancy is an encouraging sign and, anecdotally, some shop owners stated that empty units tend to be filled fairly quickly, particularly during the busier summer months.

Shops in Largs town centre operate fairly standard opening hours, typically 9am to 5.30pm. The Tesco Express (6am – 11pm) and Co-operative Food (6am – 10pm) have extended opening hours, while the larger Morrisons supermarket opens between 7am and 10pm.

104 residents per town centre retail outlet

109 town centre retail units in use

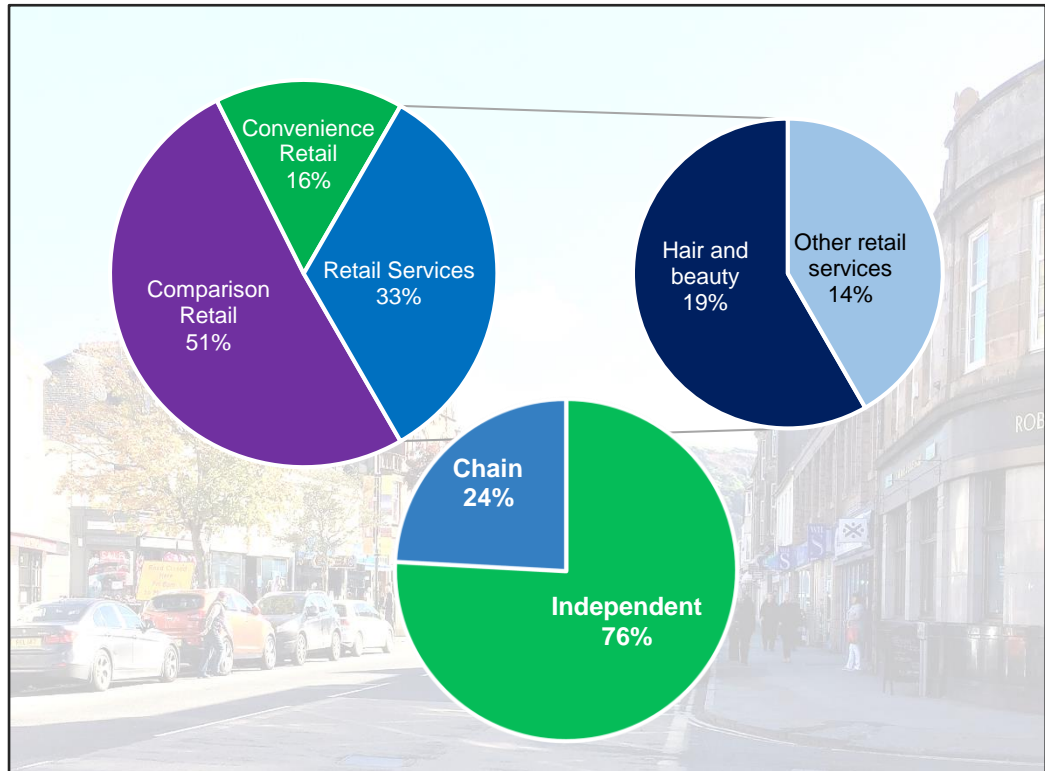
11 vacant town centre units

Retail forms the largest town centre unit use, amounting to 55% of all units. 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. – *17 convenience retailers identified in Largs town centre;*
- **Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *55 comparison retailers identified in Largs 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. – *36 retail service operators identified in Largs town centre.*



More than three quarters (76%) of traders within Largs town centre are independent, slightly higher than the North Ayrshire town centre average (74.5%).



Footfall data gathered by Largs BID indicates an upturn in town centre footfall during 2016 – the rolling total for the 12 months to November 2016 represents a 6.4% rise on the rolling total to January 2016.

4. Attractive Town Centre

Largs BID

Largs Business Improvement District commenced activity in early 2013, following a successful ballot in late 2012. The BID's five year term will come up for renewal in late 2017.

Initially operating under the name Largs Matters, the BID subsequently developed the more visitor-focused brand Explore Largs with a tourist website and associated social media channels. Additional funding was received from VisitScotland for this purpose.

The BID aims to create a more vibrant, viable and sustainable town centre for Largs, and co-ordinates marketing activity, training opportunities and advice for local businesses, and events aimed at drawing in footfall. Branded banners are on display throughout the town centre and make a positive impression. The BID has also produced television adverts, which have been broadcast on STV as well as distributed online. Match funding has also been made available to businesses, up to a maximum of £500, for equipment and improvements.



Events and Attractions

Largs BID manages three main events – Largs Food Festival (May), Largs Live Music Festival (June) and, launched in 2016, Largs Classic Cars (July). These events brought in combined 26,000 visitors over 2015-16 and net additional expenditure of £641,000 to the local economy. These events complement the well-established Viking Festival which runs over eight days in late August/early September, drawing in 70,000 visitors.



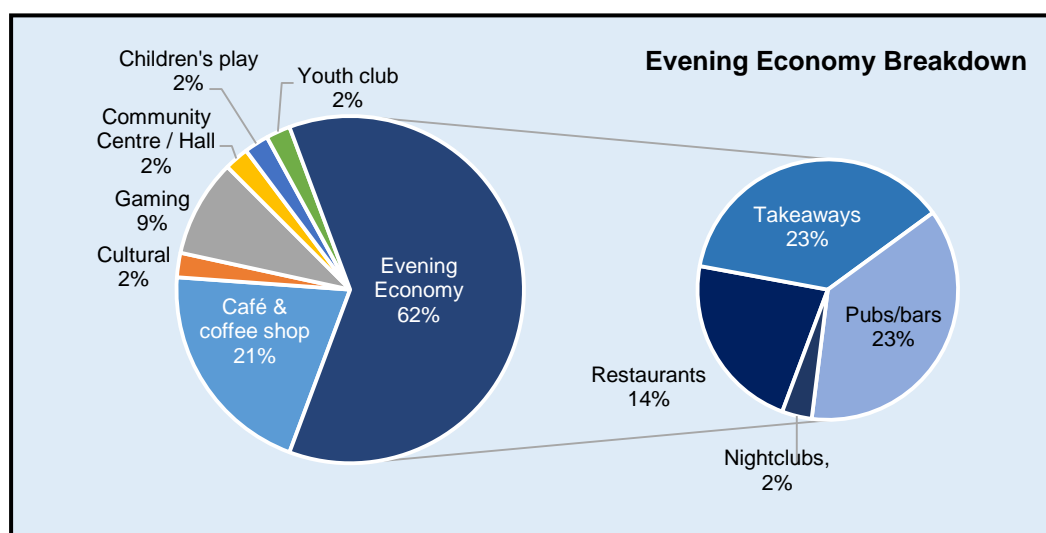
The events have a strong level of additionality – just over 40% of visitors at each BID-organised festival in 2015 travelled from outside of North Ayrshire, and high numbers reported that the festivals was their sole reason for visiting.

Another event managed by Largs BID and a number of other community groups is the Largs Yuletide Festival, which is held annually within the settlement in early December. The event takes place over an evening, and involves a number of attractions including: a yuletide parade lead by Santa, treasure hunts, a craft fair and a fireworks show.

Key attractions in Largs and the immediate surrounding area include the Vikingar museum, Kelburn Castle and Estate, the heritage centre at St. Columba's Parish Church, historic church Skelmorlie Aisle, Largs Yacht Haven, and SportsScotland's national training centre, currently being redeveloped and due to reopen in 2017. The Kelburn site has established itself as a site for popular boutique music festivals. Located on the edge of the town centre, Nardini's ice cream parlour and restaurant is a famous attraction and draws in visitors from across Scotland.



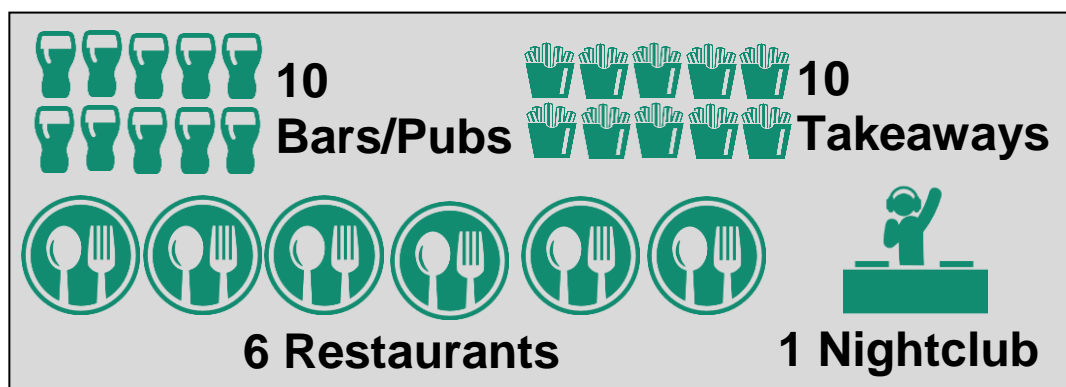
4.1 Leisure Mix



Leisure units in Largs town centre are largely comprised of food and drink and evening economy uses, with a number of pubs, restaurants and takeaways. There is also one nightclub, although it is currently on the market, and two arcades.

During the summer a number of additional units open along the Promenade, including a children's play centre, takeaway food/ ice cream kiosks and funfair rides. These have not been included in our analysis.

A council owned swimming pool is located within the Vikingar complex, which also includes a gym, museum and 470 capacity theatre. Barrfield Football Park, home of local junior football side Largs Thistle, is located behind the Vikingar. Although this means key leisure facilities are located just outwith the town centre, they are within walking distance.



4.2 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 4.4 / 10, lower than the average of 27 other YTA audited towns, at 5.7 / 10, and the NAC average of 5.1 / 10.

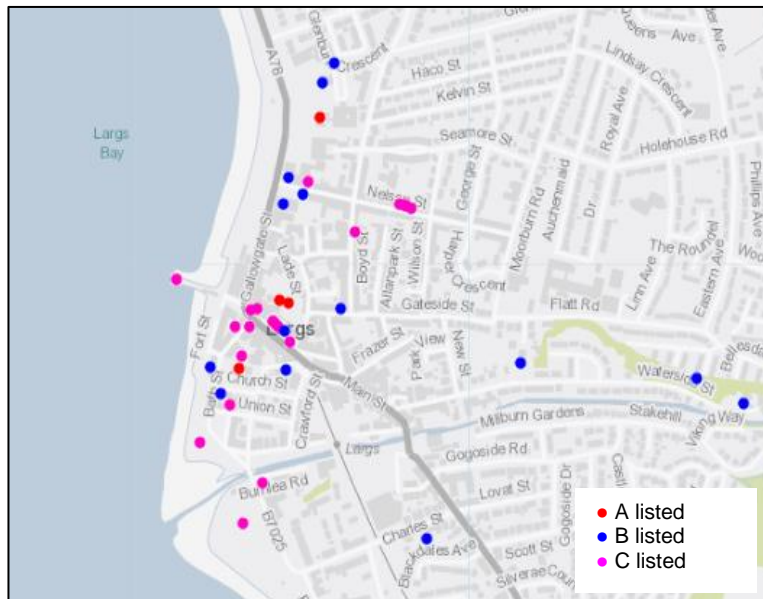
Individual unit fronts and shop window displays were graded out of ten during the on-street audit, with a town centre average score of 7.3 for the condition of unit fronts and 7.6 for quality of window display. This is also above the average across other YTA audited town centres, of 7.1 (windows) and 7.0 (buildings). The lowest scoring units were generally those which are vacant, including some prominent shops on Main Street and the former hotel on Gallowgate Street.



A Largs Masterplan has been the subject of discussion over the last few years, and is expected to see public realm improvements in Gallowgate Square and parts of the Promenade. At present, the square appears cluttered and wheelie bins from nearby businesses/ residences are prominently located – this could be reconsidered, as it detracts from the overall appearance of the public space. The redevelopment of the square will complement the new Wetherspoons and Costa Coffee which opened in

the former arcade/ bowling unit opposite in 2016. There are also proposals from Cunningham Housing Association to redevelop the semi-derelict Victoria Hotel site on Gallowgate St as flats – this could be a key impetus for regeneration of the seafront, with the twin benefits of being a sustainable solution to a prominent eyesore and increasing housing in the heart of the town centre.

Listed Buildings in Largs



Around 20 listed buildings are spread through the town centre, including four A listed buildings: the ruins of the Skelmorlie Aisle of Largs Old Kirk (2), Clark Memorial Church, and Brooksby Convalescent Home, now a medical centre.

5. YTA Summary and Key Points

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

5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- Largs has good connectivity with central Scotland, with regular buses and trains to nearby towns and Glasgow;
- there is no town centre WiFi, although 3G and 4G coverage is good;
- the CalMac terminal is an important asset and means that there is activity in the harbour throughout the day. This helps give the town centre a sense of vibrancy, as well as a regular stream of through traffic;
- parking is frequently raised as an issue in towns across Scotland, and Largs appears to be no different in this respect. Demand for car parking spaces appears highest on the streets around the core retail area of the town centre – encouraging more active travel and public transport use for travelling to the town centre and the use of more outlying car parks, and then walking in to access services/retail, will play a role in helping to overcome this. The new parking tariff at the seafront carpark will also hopefully encourage shorter stays and ease access to parking;
- some of the pavements in the town centre are very narrow, even on otherwise wide streets such as the upper section of Main Street, Gateside Street and Nelson Street, likely causing issues for those with wheelchairs, mobility issues or pushchairs. The raised kerb at this section of Main Street also presents a hazard;
- the main road through the town centre is wide – particularly at the painted-on roundabout at Aitken St – yet there are very few formal pedestrian crossings. Although this helps the flow of traffic through the town (particularly around the pier, where ferry-loads of vehicles will offload at once), it is unappealing to those travelling on foot and is likely to cause difficulties for people with physical/ visual



impairments, for elderly and for people with young children. There are no pedestrian crossings for a large stretch of Main Street, including at what is effectively a blind corner at Main Street/Gallowgate Street. The introduction of an additional zebra or pelican crossing may be appropriate; and

- Sustrans do not record any formal cycle paths within Largs. With Millport being a popular destination for cycling (particularly casual cyclists), there may be opportunities to make Largs more cycle friendly and encourage visitors to the town, particularly with the recent introduction of Scotrail hire bicycles to Largs station.

5.2 Active Town Centre

- a programme of events throughout the summer – notably the well-established Viking Festival, but also the newer BID-organised events – are key in drawing visitors into Largs and maintaining its status as an attractive destination. This helps



Source: Largs Food Fest

maintain a sense of local identity and civic pride as well as important economic benefits for the town. As trade tends to be quiet during the January to Easter period, it is important for businesses to do well in the summer;

- the relatively low vacancy rate in Largs is an encouraging sign – although there are several prominent vacant units, including on Main St and Gallowgate St;
- the data indicates that there has been a sharp decline in those living in the town centre datazone over the last decade – this is in contrast to other YTA audited towns. However, there are now proposals to build new social housing on the seafront, taking over the site of the semi-derelict Victoria Hotel. There may be opportunities for other residential development within the town centre, including vacant space above ground floor commercial units; and
- data provided by Largs BID indicates that the footfall trend in Largs is positive for this year – with the 12 months to November 2016 up 6.6% on the 12 months to January 2016.

5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- Largs has a good range of shops and services within its town centre, catering to both residents and visitors. Like other towns, changing retail patterns – particularly online shopping – present a challenge to Largs;
- the presence of several high quality attractions can be used to draw footfall into Largs town centre, including Nardinis, the SportsScotland National Training Centre, which reopens in 2017, Kelburn Castle and its related special events/festivals, and the yachting marina to the south of the town;
- the Explore Largs branding is a leading example of BID marketing in Scotland and has a clear focus on bringing visitors to the area; and
- the proposed Largs Masterplan, including the redeveloped Gallowgate Square, is promising and the square could be utilised for events, markets and so on. More immediately, the square could be decluttered, with the number of bins stored/ placed there reduced.