



# Your Town Audit: Saltcoats

November 2016

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Report produced by:



Audit Date: October 2016

Draft report: 23/11/2016

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 Saltcoats, 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 Saltcoats 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 Saltcoats and identifies eight comparator towns that have similar characteristics, with the most similar being Alloa, Arbroath, Buckhaven, Methil, Methilhill and Leven, and Whitburn.<sup>1</sup> The USP platform – [www.usp.scot](http://www.usp.scot) – describes Saltcoats in the following general terms:

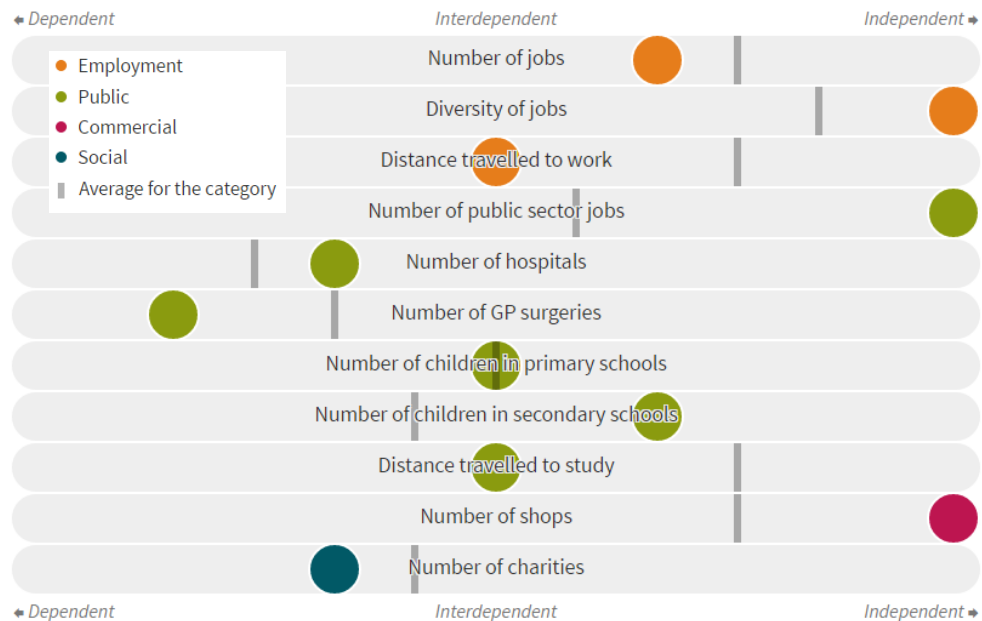
**Saltcoats' Interrelationships:** an '*interdependent to independent town*', which means it has a good number of assets in relation to its population. Towns of this kind have some diversity of jobs; and residents travel a mix of short and long distances to travel to work and study. These towns attract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

**Saltcoats' 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.

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

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<sup>1</sup> The others are Motherwell, Cowdenbeath, Greenock and Clydebank. The Fife settlements of "Buckhaven, Methil, Methilhill and Leven" are counted as one town on the USP website.



Building on the USP, this report presents the results of our detailed analysis of Saltcoats 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 Saltcoats. The audits and issues arising can be used to feed into the development process of a future LDP.

## 2. Accessible Town Centre

Saltcoats is a coastal town with a population of around 11,400 in North Ayrshire, situated 25 miles south west of Glasgow. The town is part of the same urban conurbation as Ardrossan and Stevenston, commonly referred to as the Three Towns. Combined, they have a population of over 30,000 residents.

Saltcoats town centre takes in the bulk of the town's retail offering and local services, extending to include two supermarkets on the seafront. It also includes the health centre, police station and railway station. The railway line cuts through the town centre, cutting it off from the bulk of the town's housing to its north, although there are a number of pedestrian and road bridges.

### 15 mile radius around Saltcoats



Saltcoats is well connected to central Scotland, being on the line between Glasgow and Ardrossan and Largs. Trains to Glasgow are half hourly, while connections with Irvine and South Ayrshire can be made via Kilwinning. Around 350,000 passenger journeys started or ended at Saltcoats station in 2014/15.

The ferry terminal and marina at Ardrossan harbour are a short distance away, with a regular CalMac service to the Isle of Arran and, during the summer, some sailings to Campbeltown. Loss of the ferry service could have a negative impact on the settlement of Saltcoats. This might include the frequency of train services from Glasgow, train/bus routes and frequency across Ayrshire, and reduced footfall levels in Saltcoats town centre due to loss of passing visitor traffic and loss of public transport connections.

Regular bus services connect Saltcoats with Ardrossan, Kilmaronock and Glasgow



with modern electronic display board info for passengers. The A78 dual carriageway by-passes Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston, following the completion of a new road in the mid-2000s. This helps avoid traffic congestion in the town centre and shortens journey times but also removes a high volume of passing traffic that might have generated spend opportunities for the town centre.



There are eight car parks around the town centre area, coming to just under 700 spaces, with the largest being The Braes (156 spaces), Aldi (133 spaces) and Vernon St North (106 spaces). Most car parks within the settlement are free, only one is pay and display. Although this is a high number of spaces, the largest car parks are on the seafront and the others are mostly hidden behind buildings, retaining the street grid pattern.



The council's parking strategy (2014) notes that on-street parking around the town centre is high and that there was evidence of cars being parked illegally. Despite clear signage on parking restrictions within the pedestrian zone there were a number of cars parked within the pedestrian zone during the street audit.



There are typically car parking spaces along most of the main streets in the town centre, although the one way system makes this less of a hazard to pedestrians than it might otherwise be. It may be appropriate to encourage those needing to access the town centre to park in outlying car parks that are a short walk away (e.g. along the seafront).

Within the town centre, some pavements are narrow, particularly those leading off of Dockhead St and Hamilton St (e.g. Quay St). While key assets within the town centre and the surrounding area (including the leisure centre and skate park, cinema, beach) are within walking distance, provision of clear routes/signage could be improved.

Mobile and online connectivity in Saltcoats is good – both 4G mobile and superfast broadband have been rolled out to the town. There is no up to date website or social media channels for the town – these could be run by volunteers (e.g. local traders or a community group) and are an inexpensive means of promoting the town and what it has to offer, both to visitors and residents.

### 3. Active Town Centre

#### 3.1 Population and Housing

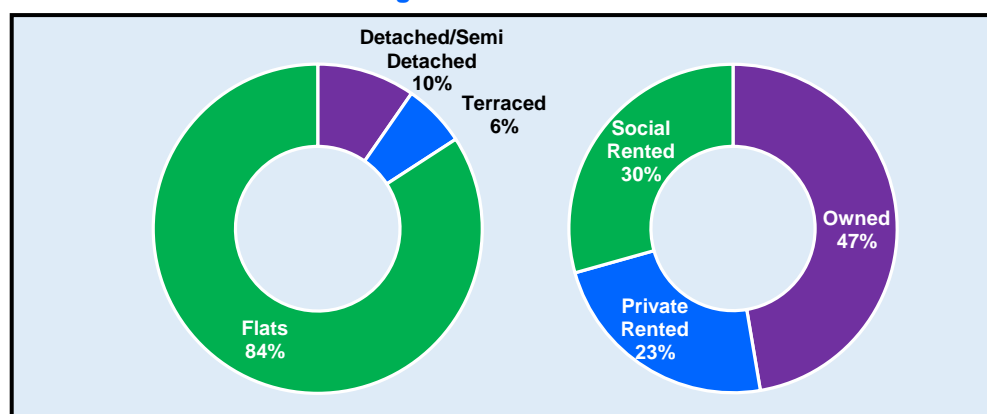
Around 1,750 people live within the town centre area in Saltcoats<sup>2</sup>, 15% of the total settlement population. Over the decade to 2015, the population of the town centre increased by 7%, compared to 4% growth in the town as a whole. This compares to a 0.7% decline in North Ayrshire over the same 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.

Housing in the town centre is dominated by flatted accommodation (84%), while the wider town is a mix of flats (39%) and detached/ semi-detached houses (38%).

House prices in Saltcoats increased by 56% in the decade to 2013, averaging at £92,100. However, more up to date data from Zoopla states that from 141 sales in Saltcoats over the past 12 months (to November 2016), the average price paid was £95,900. In the town centre, prices increased by 90% to £82,300. This is higher than the NAC average (£81k) for town centre housing, although below the national average for YTA towns (£108k).

The housing stock in the town centre is a mix of private ownership (47%), private rent (23%) and social rent (30%), broadly in line with the other North Ayrshire town centres. In the whole town, most houses are privately owned (57%) or social rented (31%).

#### Saltcoats Town Centre Housing Mix

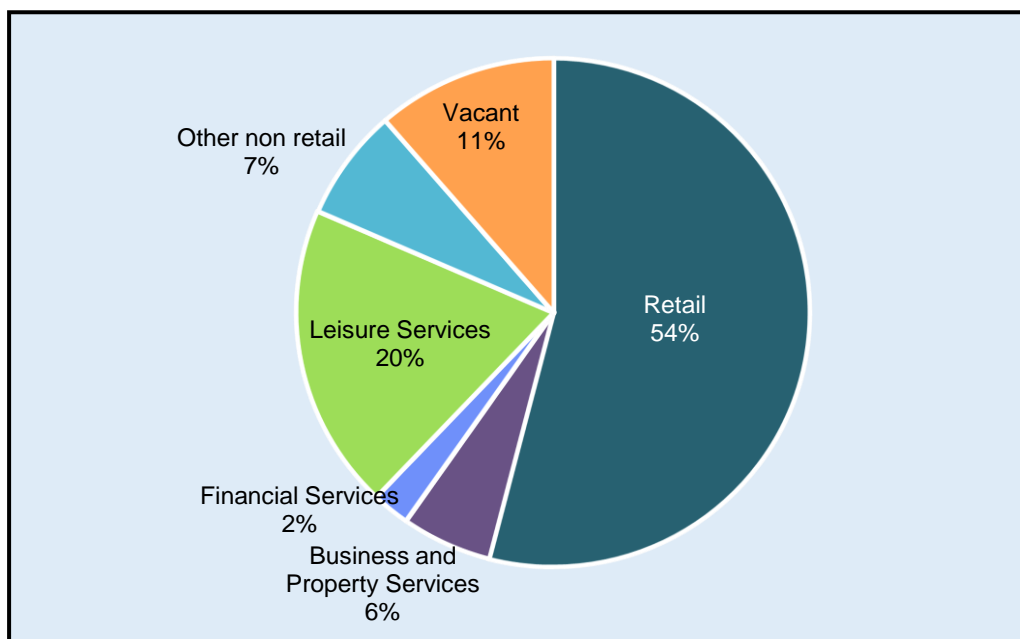


<sup>2</sup> 2001 datazones, S01004412 & S01004414

### 3.2 Businesses and Employment

Around two thirds (67%) of the 3,350 jobs in Saltcoats are located in the approximate town centre area<sup>3</sup>. National statistics recorded 355 businesses within Saltcoats, with 240 in the town centre and surrounding area. The YTA street audit located 187 business units in use within Saltcoats town centre and these are provided with the relevant UPRN codes in a separate document. Of these, 114 are retail businesses.

#### Town Centre Unit Mix



As well as retail, other services in the town centre include six estate agents, four banks, two dentists, a nursery and the town hall.

### 3.3 Retail

Saltcoats town centre is focused on Hamilton Street and Dockhead Street, which together form a long high street that stretches through the town. Most retailers and key services are located in this area.



<sup>3</sup> Employment data derived from ONS Business Register & Employment Survey



The rest of the town is largely residential – with the exception of the housing on the seafront, most of this is severed from the town centre by the railway line. The seafront promenade has Aldi and Iceland supermarkets at one end, and the Premier Leisure Cinema at the other.

The town centre includes a range of national chains and local retailers, particularly of the type geared towards day trippers and visitors. Saltcoats has a high number of shops for its population, at 100 residents per retail unit, a much lower number than Ardrossan (529) and Stevenston (672). This is likely because Saltcoats acts as the primary retail centre for these neighbouring settlements, and it is also comparable with another seaside visitor town, Largs (104).

The retail unit vacancy rate in Saltcoats town centre is 11%, just above the average for town centres in North Ayrshire (9.9%). It is slightly lower than Irvine and Kilwinning (12%), but higher than Largs (6%). This amounts to 24 vacant units in Saltcoats and about two thirds of these are located on Dockhead St/Hamilton St, the main shopping street.

**100 residents per town centre retail outlet**

**114 town centre retail units in use**

**24 vacant town centre units**

Saltcoats has a typical range of shops and services for a centre of its kind, with several national chains. As well as the chemists, banks and charity shops found in most towns, there is also a handful of clothing and footwear shops. There is also a good range of independent specialist shops, including two florists, a cycle shop, an arts and crafts shop, a fishing shop, and an antique shop, and onn Wednesdays and Saturdays, there is a local market within the town centre area. This mix of retailers is one of the town's key assets and crucial in ensuring its continued vibrancy, particularly as the town is unlikely to compete with other urban centres (Irvine, Ayr, Glasgow) in terms of attracting large comparison multiples.

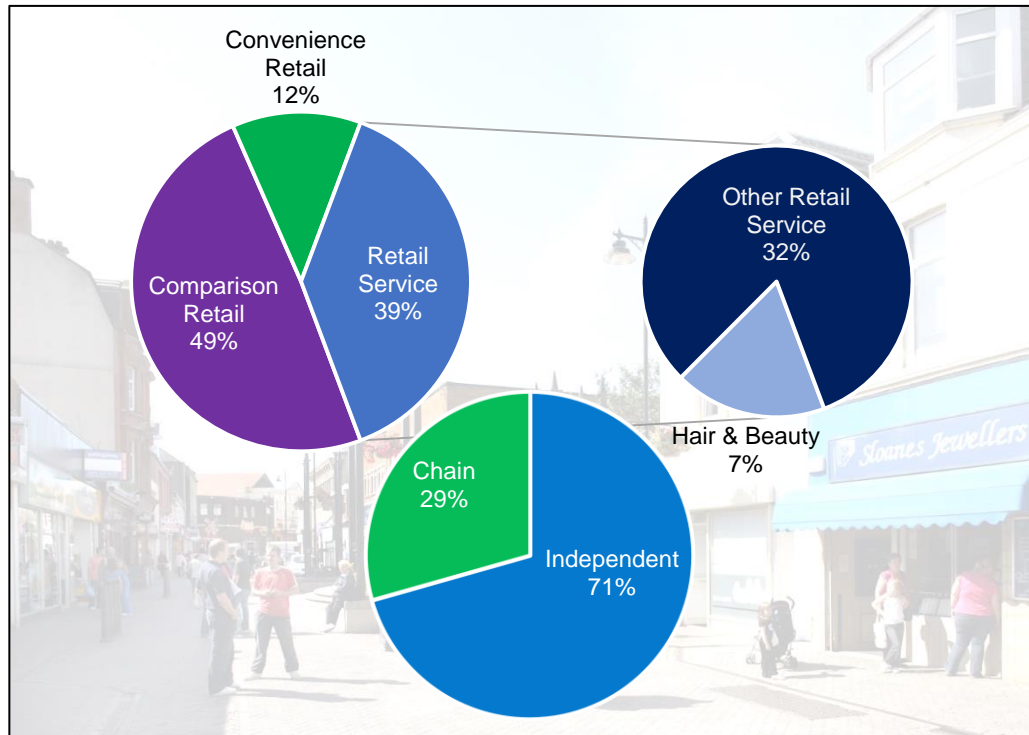
Shops in Saltcoats town centre operate fairly standard opening hours, typically 9am to 5.30pm. Both the Sainsbury's and Aldi supermarkets opens between 8am – 10pm Monday to Saturday, and 9am – 7pm on Sundays.

Retail forms the largest town centre unit use, amounting to 55% of all units. 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 – *56 comparison retailers identified in Saltcoats 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. – *14 convenience retailers identified in Saltcoats 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. – *44 retail service operators identified in Saltcoats town centre.*



More than two thirds (71%) of traders within Saltcoats town centre are independent, this is slightly lower than the 74.5% rate across all 11 of the North Ayrshire towns. Some of the national chain operators which can be found within the town centre area of Saltcoats includes Peacocks, New Look, M&Co and Shoezone.



## 4. Attractive Town Centre

Historically a day trip and holiday destination catering to visitors from central Scotland, Saltcoats has had to adjust to changing patterns of tourism over the last few decades.

However, the town still boasts a number of visitor attractions and

sandy beaches at either side of the town, which are some of the closest beaches to Glasgow. These are SEPA designated bathing waters and currently graded as 'sufficient' in quality. The beaches along the Ayrshire coast remain popular and tend to be busy during warm weather.



[Saltcoats Community Action Group](#) was formed in early 2015 to co-ordinate community events and activities, promote the town, and to bring together residents and traders. Since then, they have organised a number of one-off events and overseen Christmas lights switch-on in the town centre. These events are important, both encouraging visitors to the town centre and instilling a sense of community and civic pride.



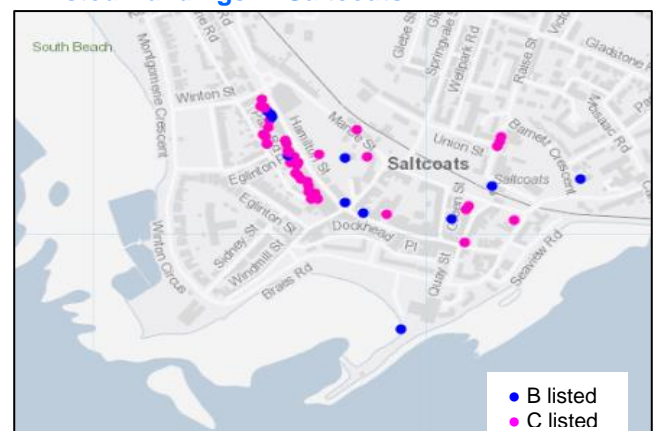
Work is due to be complete by spring 2017 on improvements to Countess Street, a key intersection connecting the railway terminal with the main retail area and seafront, as pictured above. With new seating, lighting and surfaces, this will act as a gateway to the town. The project is being overseen by Irvine Bay URC and North Ayrshire Council.

This will be a good improvement to the quality of street fabric within the town centre which, in parts, is showing substantial wear and dis-repair, and displays a general lack of care and maintenance.



Countess Street is home to Saltcoats Town Hall, which is under the ownership of the council. Dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the B-listed hall is one of Saltcoats' landmark features and the clock tower is visible across the town. In 2013, grant funding of around £1.3m was secured from Historic Environment Scotland and the Scottish Government to initially carry out essential building repairs, and then for a full overhaul (totalling £3.7m, with additional funding from Irvine Bay and NAC). The building is now available for civic functions, weddings and community events. Prior to this, in 2010, the Victorian sandstone Saltcoats station building was refurbished and units within it let for business/ commercial use, overseen by Irvine Bay.

#### Listed Buildings in Saltcoats

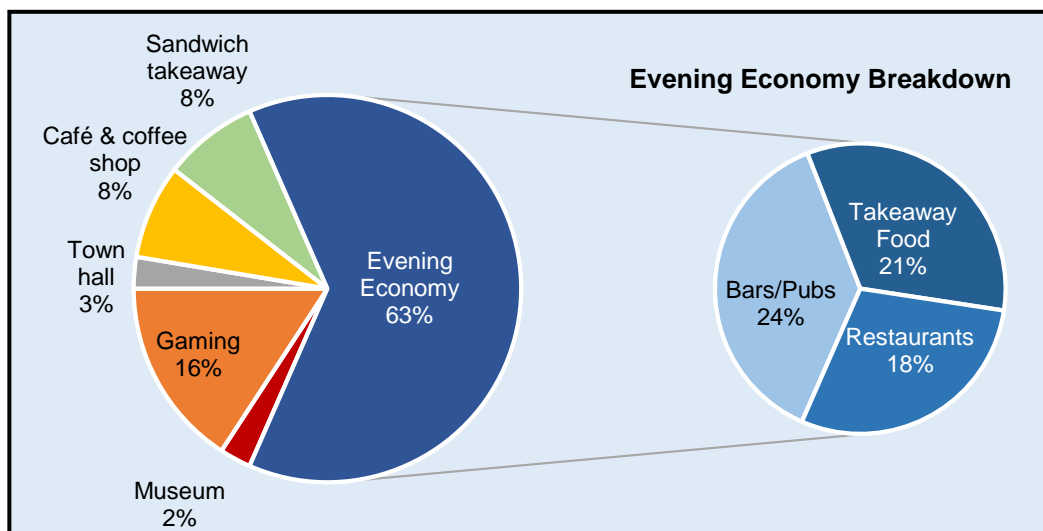


Further recognising the town's history, there are plaques around the town commemorating key people and places, and an accompanying heritage trail and mobile app. The trail is spread through the town



centre area, taking visitors through the main retail area and generating spend opportunities for nearby businesses.

#### 4.1 Leisure Mix

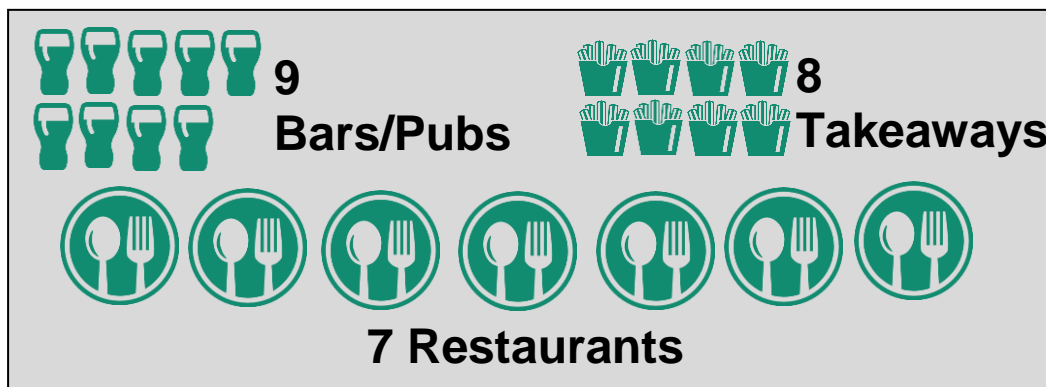


The leisure unit mix in Saltcoats town centre is dominated by the evening economy, with a good number of pubs and restaurants. This ratio is typical of other towns. Other key leisure facilities are located on the edge of the town, including the Premier Leisure Cinema, skatepark and leisure centre.

The town has one nightclub, the Metro, prominently located in a large art deco building – originally a picture house – on Hamilton Street. It has been closed since 2010 and put on the market on more than one occasion. In 2014, a provisional premises license was awarded for the building and this remains in place. It has since been used for occasional events; however, the building is showing signs of decay and finding a sustainable long term use that preserves the building exterior would be a boost for the town centre.

The Basebowl indoor bowling alley is another leisure facility located in Saltcoats on Hamilton Street. Along with the fully automated twelve lane bowling alley, other facilities within include: a café, lounge bar, and arcade games. Lanes at the facility are available for private hire and functions. The bowling alley is open from 10am-11pm Sunday to Thursday, and 10am-1am Friday and Saturday.

The Auchenharvie leisure centre – operated by KA Leisure – is located between Saltcoats and Stevenston, and includes an ice rink, swimming pool, gym and dance studio. The centre is open until 9pm on weekdays and until 5pm at weekends.



The Evolution Skate Park is located near the Auchenharvie centre and is one of the only fully supervised outdoor skate parks in the UK. The park has a particular focus on engaging local young people, but will also act to draw in visitors from further afield. The park attracted around 6,500 visits during 2015/16, and is run by a registered charity that is in the process of fundraising to expand the park to include an indoor facility, which will allow it to be used in all weather.

#### 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 5.1 / 10, in line with the North Ayrshire average, but slightly below the YTA average (27 towns) of 5.7 / 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 6.3 both for the condition of unit fronts and for quality of window displays. This is slightly below both the North Ayrshire town centre average (6.9 windows and 6.8 buildings) and even further behind the YTA average (30 YTAs = 7.1 windows and 7.0 buildings).





### 4.3 The Shop Front Improvement Scheme

Some retail businesses within the town centre area of Saltcoats have recently been taking part and benefitting from a Shop Front Improvement Scheme (SFIS). The scheme is funded by North Ayrshire Council and has been operating in the region since 2010.

The scheme helps businesses that are looking to improve their shop front, and business owners are involved and consulted throughout the process. An architect appointed by the council works to oversee the implementation of the decided upon refurbishments, and with the business owners approval the Council helps to fund the cost of the works.

This scheme will be beneficial to the retailers of Saltcoats, as many of their shop front and building fronts were found to be in need of some refurbishment. Any refurbishment works could help to boost turnover and footfall in to town as it could encourage and attract more people to come into the town centre area and shop.

## 5. YTA Summary and Key Points

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

### 5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- Saltcoats has good rail, bus and road links to surrounding towns and central Scotland, with the railway station located centrally within the town;
- while there are a number of car parks spread around the town centre area, those closest to the main retail streets appear to be in the highest demand, with on-street parking also prevalent (including on the pedestrianised section). The car parks appear well used;
- some pavements around the town centre, particularly on side streets off Hamilton St/Dockhead St, are very narrow; and
- key assets in the town are all within walking distance of each other e.g. the cinema, supermarkets, beach, skatepark and leisure centre – although there is potential to improve connections and encourage active travel, e.g. providing clear routes with additional signage, particularly on routes leading to the beach.



### 5.2 Active Town Centre

- the voluntary work being undertaken by Saltcoats Community Action Group is important both in maintaining a sense of civic pride and community, and in organising events that will draw people to the town centre and provide economic benefits for local traders, such as the Christmas lights switch on;
- no social media pages specific to Saltcoats – i.e. to promote community events/ businesses – were identified. While the local newspaper's Facebook page does play an active role in the life of the town, there may be space for a page that complements this function e.g. one operated by the Community Action Group, community council or a collective of local traders. This could also appeal to visitors from outside of the town; and

- Saltcoats is a destination for visitors, particularly during the summer when its beaches and coast bring in tourists. There are a number of facilities geared to support this market, such as amusement arcades. However, the resilience of this in the face of changing visitor patterns is a challenge – are there different markets the town can tap in to e.g. Largs now hosts a series of successful summer festivals that draw in resident and visitor spend from elsewhere.

### 5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- Saltcoats 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, particularly to more specialist comparison retailers;
- the Scottish Government is reviewing the Arran ferry service – potential that it might remain in Ardrossan or be moved to Troon. A decision to relocate the service would have a severe knock-on effect on Ardrossan that could extend to the wider area and neighbouring towns, particularly Saltcoats;
- for a small town centre area, Saltcoats has a high number of listed buildings (approx. 40) and also hosts North Ayrshire Council's principal museum collection, within the Heritage Centre, located in a restored 18<sup>th</sup> century church building. The recent refurbishment of the historic Town Hall and development of an interactive heritage trail show strong commitment to preserving the history of the town;

- the public realm on the pedestrianised section of Dockhead Street appears tired and some shopfronts are of poor quality – the availability of/ encouraging uptake of shop front



improvement grants (programmes have been targeted at the town in the past), and where funds permit, the extension of the realm improvements taking place at Countess Street would help refresh this important street. While there will be short-term disruption for traders, the longer term benefits will hopefully outweigh this by creating an attractive centre for residents and visitors to use.