



# Your Town Audit: Stevenston

November 2016



## Contents

1.	Understanding Scottish Places Summary	1
2.	Accessible Town Centre	3
3.	Active Town Centre	5
4.	Attractive Town Centre	11
5.	YTA Summary and Key Points	14

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## 1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

This report presents a summary of the Your Town Audit (YTA) for Stevenston, 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 Stevenston 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 eight comparator towns that have similar characteristics, with the most similar being Auchinleck, Denny, Maybole, and Alness.<sup>1</sup> The USP platform – [www.usp.scot](http://www.usp.scot) – describes Saltcoats in the following general terms:

**Stevenston's 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.

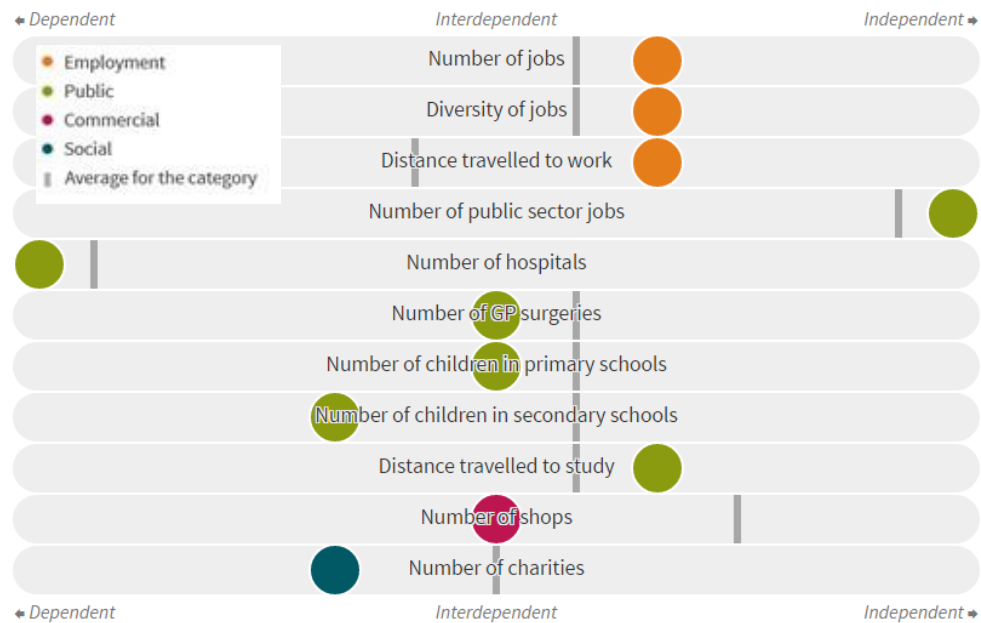
**Stevenston's Typology:** Social and council housing are the norm in this type of medium-sized town. Manufacturing and construction are the dominant forms of employment. Health and social work services are particularly active. There is a higher level of unemployment. Educational attainment is low. Car ownership is low, meaning that many residents in these towns are reliant on public transport.

Comparing Stevenston 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 also has similarities in the diversity of jobs, and the distance travelled to study. Stevenston differs most in its number of shops (more

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<sup>1</sup> The others are Jedburgh and Lochgelly and Lumphinnans

dependent), distance travelled to work (more independent), and number of children in secondary schools (more dependent, albeit on Saltcoats).



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

## 2. Accessible Town Centre

Stevenston is a town of around 10,100 in North Ayrshire, situated 24 miles south west of Glasgow. The town is part of the same urban conurbation as Ardrossan and Saltcoats, commonly referred to as the Three Towns. Combined, they have a population of over 30,000 people.

Although Stevenston has a similar population to Ardrossan and Saltcoats, the town is very spread out, with the secondary school at one side, retail park to at its northern edge, caravan park and beach to the south, and industrial estate and the sprawling former ICI Nobel site located on the Ardeer Peninsula to its east. Areas of greenspace, including a golf course, are dotted around the town.

**15 mile radius around Stevenston**



The town centre takes in a small high street area, with a number of shop units, as well as the health centre and library. Opposite these buildings is an area of greenspace, overlooked by the Stevenston High Kirk at the top of the hill. There is no bank in the town, although there are three ATMs offering free withdrawals as well as a Post Office. The town centre offers access to basic retail and services, although residents will likely rely on larger centres elsewhere for comparison shopping.

The railway station is located half a mile south of the town centre and does not therefore generate footfall for retail, service and other businesses. The railway station provides a regular service to Glasgow, Ardrossan and Largs. Trains to Glasgow are half hourly, while connections with Irvine and South Ayrshire can be made via Kilwinning. Around 138,000 journeys started or ended at Stevenston station in 2014/15. Signposts detailing key walking and cycling routes and the local heritage trail greet passengers arriving at the station.

Regular buses connect Stevenston with Ardrossan, Saltcoats, Kilmarnock, Irvine and Glasgow. The A78 dual carriageway by-passes Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston, following the completion of a new road in the mid-2000s. This entirely circumvents Stevenston until it reaches a roundabout beside the town's retail park.



There are four car parks in the town centre area, coming to around 100 spaces.

Double yellow lines are in force around the town centre meaning that on-street parking is limited. However, as in other towns, the in-street audit identified that some drivers choose to disregard this and park illegally.



Lighting around the town centre is adequate and is a mix of newer white lighting alongside traditional columns with sodium lighting. Pavements are also generally of appropriate width, including on routes into the town centre. This is important as there is a large number of houses around the town centre area.

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

### 3. Active Town Centre

#### 3.1 Population and Housing

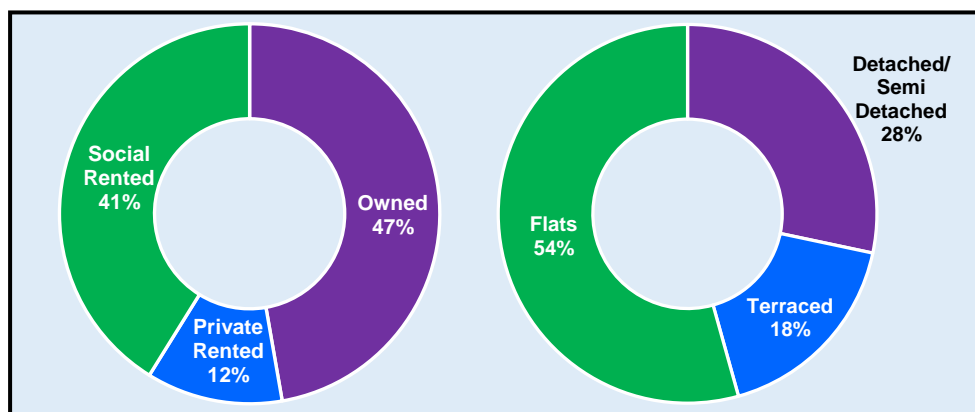
Around 140 people live within the immediate town centre area in Stevenston<sup>2</sup>, just over 1% of the total settlement population. In the nearest fit datazone<sup>3</sup>, the population is 570, an increase of 2% over the decade to 2013. This compares with the North Ayrshire town centre area average of 4% increase, and wider 31 YTA average of 6% increase over the past ten years.



The town as a whole declined by -1% over the same period, in line with the -0.7% decline in North Ayrshire, although the population of Scotland grew by 5% during this time.

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%).

#### Stevenston Town Centre Housing Mix



House prices in Stevenston increased by 59% in the decade to 2013, averaging at £89,700. However, more up to date data from Zoopla states that from 89 sales in Stevenston over the past 12 months (to November 2016), the average price paid was £85,500. In the town centre, prices increased by 21% to £93,300, compared

<sup>2</sup> Census output zones S00122871 & S00122870

<sup>3</sup> This is 2001 datazone S01004422. For redrawn 2011 datazones, three overlap the (small) town centre area (S01011268, S01011269 & S01011270).

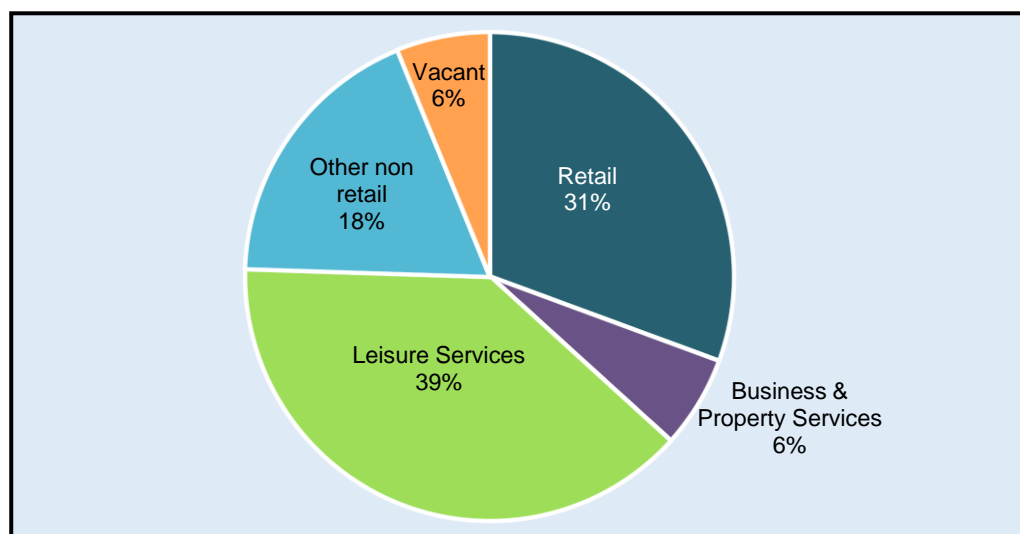
with North Ayrshire average of £81,800 and 43% increase, and wider average of £108,200 (33 YTAs) and 44% increase (30 YAs)

The housing stock in the town centre is a mix of private ownership (47%), social rent (30%) and private rent (23%). In the whole town, most houses are privately owned (54%) or social rented (36%).

### 3.2 Businesses and Employment

Just 6% of the 3,500 jobs in Stevenston are located in the approximate town centre area<sup>4</sup>. National statistics record 255 businesses within Stevenston and Ardeer, with 100 in the town centre and the area to its west. The YTA street audit located 49 business units in use within Stevenston town centre and these are provided with the relevant UPRN codes in a separate document.

#### Town Centre Unit Mix



Of the 49 commercial premises in the town centre:

- 15 are occupied by retail businesses;
- 19 are leisure services – 7 hot food takeaways, 5 bars, 2 cafés, masonic hall, bowling club, 2 bookmakers and an amusement arcade;
- 3 business and property services – plumber, building supplies and estate agent;

<sup>4</sup> Employment data derived from ONS Business Register & Employment Survey



- 9 other non-retail – 2 dentist, library, place of worship, health centre, care home, 2 industrial uses and a community charity; and
- 3 vacant premises – 2 retail units and 1 former bar;

## Retail

Stevenston town centre is comprised of two streets, Fullarton St/ Main St and New St. This forms a 'T' shape that takes in most of the high street units in the town. There is also a Lidl supermarket on the western edge of the town (leading to Saltcoats), and a retail park on the eastern periphery of



the town (leading to Kilwinning) – neither of these are included in our town centre audit. The retail park takes in large Morrisons and B&Q units, a B&M Home Store and a McDonalds. In 2016, this was extended to include a Marstons pub-restaurant and 27 room hotel, a KFC and Costa Coffee. A large number of car parking spaces are located at the retail park.

**672 residents per town centre retail outlet**

**15 town centre units in retail use**

**3 vacant town centre units**

Stevenston has a very high population to retail unit ratio at 672 residents per town centre retail unit. There are two main reasons for this: its proximity to the town centres of both Saltcoats (100 residents per retailer) and Kilwinning (300 residents per retailer), and the presence of the retail park, which is likely to draw shopping activity out of the town centre. The current average across 34 YTAs in Scotland is 226, and for North Ayrshire, 258.

However, the retail vacancy rate in Stevenston town centre is low, at 5%<sup>5</sup>, below the 9.9% average for North Ayrshire and the rate in nearby towns such as Saltcoats (11%) and Kilwinning (12%). This amounts to three vacant units in Stevenston, comprised of two shop units and a pub.



The range of retailers in Stevenston town centre is fairly limited, with the largest units occupied by DEBRA, a charity shop (formerly a Kwik Save supermarket) selling furniture alongside a wide range of other goods. Just outside of the town centre, another large unit that was formerly a Scotmid supermarket is occupied by Bargain B's, a discount off license. There is also a shoe shop, butchers, two chemists and, just outside the defined town centre, a florist.

The convenience stores within Stevenston town centre operate typical hours for shops of this kind (7am or 8am to 10pm) while the small range of comparison retailers are open approximately 9am to 5.30pm. The out of town units operate longer hours, with the B&Q and B&M shops open until 8pm during the week, and Morrisons until 10pm.

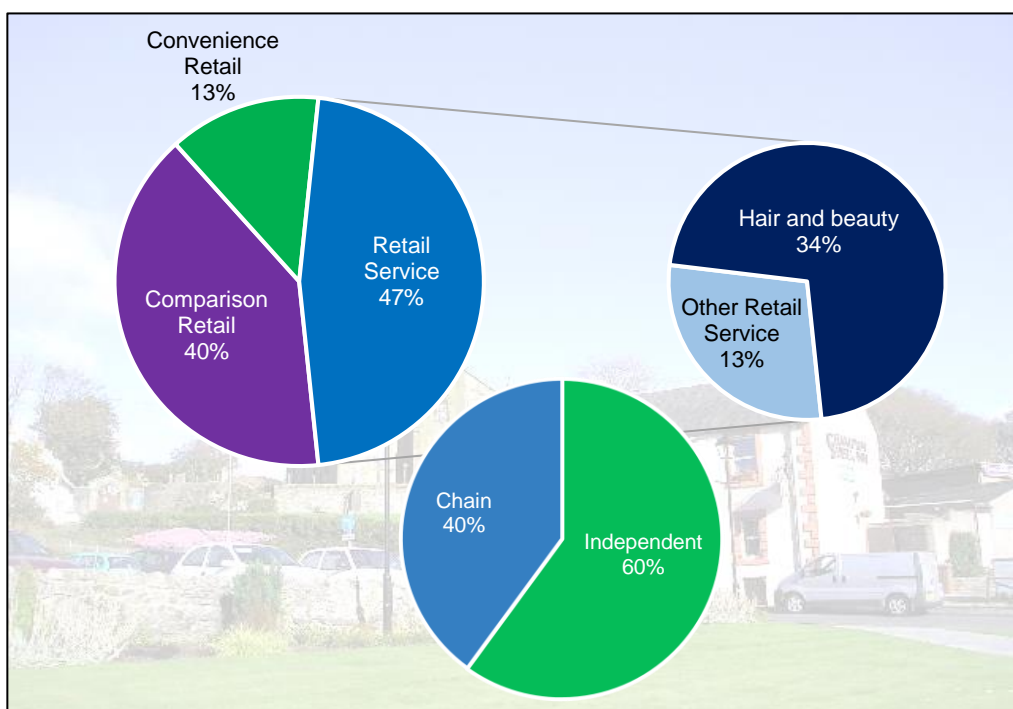
Unusually, retail does not form the largest town centre use in Stevenston, amounting to just 31% of all units. The YTA analysis is based on the following retail definitions:

- **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. – *2 convenience retailers identified in Stevenston town centre;*
- **Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *6 comparison retailers identified in Stevenston town centre; and*

<sup>5</sup> This is made up of 2 vacant premises from 39 retail units, and differs from the 6% rate on Page 6 which is made up of 3 vacant premises from 49 commercial units.

- **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. – *7 retail service operators identified in Stevenston town centre.*

Hair and beauty outlets make up just over one-third of all retail activity in Stevenston, and account for five of seven service outlets.



Three fifths (60%) of retailers within Stevenston town centre are independent. This is well below the North Ayrshire average of 74.5% and the 34 YTA average of 70.4% - the national retailers in Stevenston are a mix of national and regional chains, made up of two charities, two chemists and two convenience stores.

### 3.3 The Grange Business Centre

Although strictly just outside the defined town centre, recent public investment in Stevenston has taken the form of The Grange business centre. Formerly a vacant bingo hall, it was redeveloped in a project overseen by Irvine Bay URC with



Photo: Irvine Bay URC

retail space on the ground floor and offices on the first floor. The building offers a range of office spaces, pitched at small and start-up businesses. It is currently partially let, with Bargain B's occupying the ground floor retail space.

## 4. Attractive Town Centre

A small 'town square' is located centrally on the high street in Stevenston. This is an attractive area of grass and flowerbeds, with a large circular bench at its centre. It is overlooked by nearby houses and the impressive, 19<sup>th</sup> century Stevenston High Kirk, which is situated on a hilltop.

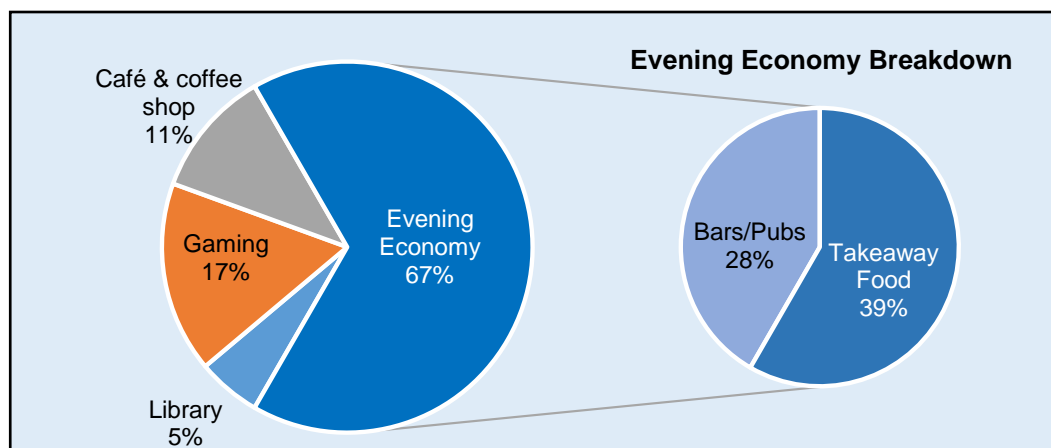


The Three Towns Regeneration Plan (2009), which was undertaken by Irvine Bar Regeneration Company, identified a number of aspirational projects for Stevenston, including the revitalisation of public space in the town centre. Noting that the town centre had 'lost its vibrancy and vitality', the plan envisaged a shared surface public realm in the area between Glebe Street and Afton Road, which would prioritise pedestrians/ cyclists, with paving stones running from building to building. This would take place alongside shopfront improvements and the redevelopment of key buildings. Although there has not yet been an opportunity to bring this forward, the proposals remain relevant in the current context of the town centre.

North Ayrshire Council have also scheduled for a charrette of the Three Towns to commence over 2016-2017. The implementation of which, hopes to identify regeneration priorities within the settlement for future focus.

### 4.1 Leisure Mix

Leisure comprises the largest single unit use in Stevenston town centre, and is itself then dominated by the evening economy, with five pubs (one is also a snooker hall) and seven takeaway food outlets.



There is a large proportion of takeaway outlets in Stevenston. With a settlement population of just over 10,000 and seven hot food takeaways, Stevenston has a ratio of 1,432 residents per outlet. This is marginally higher than the North Ayrshire average of 1,655 but is significantly higher than the 32 YTA average of 2,892 residents per outlet.

Stevenston Library is located centrally on Main St and has staggered opening hours across Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, as well as Saturday mornings. An NAC housing office and employability hub are also located in the library building, and the dentist and health centre are located on either side. These buildings provide one of the key reasons for people to come into the town centre and will draw in footfall to nearby businesses.



There is also scope for events to bring visitors into the town centre – the annual Christmas light switch-on is held at Stevenston Cross on Fullarton Road.



The Auchenharvie leisure centre – operated by KA Leisure – is located on the very edge of 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. There are two community centres in Stevenston, which are located outside of the town centre area. Haycocks Hall is located on Hyslop Road, and Ardeer Youth and Community Centre can be found on Shore Road. Both facilities are open during the week 8am-10:30pm Monday to Friday, and are available for private hire.

The nine hole Auchenharvie golf course is also found nearby, while the 18 hole Ardeer Golf Course is to the north of the town.



## 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, if slightly below the 27 YTA average of 5.9 / 10.



While street lighting is traditional sodium columns, there appears to be a sufficient number within the town centre, and there is at least one CCTV camera. Pavements appear to be in a reasonable condition and there is a pedestrian crossing point in the middle of the town centre adjacent to the library and the public square.

Individual unit fronts and shop window displays were graded out of ten during the on-street audit, with a town centre average score for Stevenston of 6.2 for the quality of window displays and 6.4 for the condition of unit fronts.

This is below both the North Ayrshire town centre average (6.9 windows and 6.8 buildings) and further behind the 30 YTA average (7.1 windows and 7.0 buildings).



## 5. YTA Summary and Key Points

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



### 5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- Stevenston has good rail, bus and road links to surrounding towns and central Scotland. The railway station is located around half a mile south of the town centre and will largely serve the needs of commuters travelling to work elsewhere, although buses do pass directly through the main shopping area and will help to generate footfall for town centre businesses;
- the town is spread out, with a number of key retail (including the supermarkets) and leisure services on its edge – this may act to discourage active travel around the town and linked trips to town centre businesses;
- car parking is located centrally in the town centre with both off-road car parks and on-street parking bays – there does, however, appear to be an issue with illegal parking; and
- there does not appear to be a Stevenston town centre or community website or social media pages that provides accessible and up-to-date information on activities, services and facilities in the town.

### 5.2 Active Town Centre

- in the Three Towns urban conurbation, Saltcoats has historically been the primary retail centre and continues in that role today. Stevenston's proximity to both Saltcoats and Kilwinning, alongside its out of town retail offering, all present challenges to its town centre;
- the heritage trail and information signs around the town, as well as plaques detailing key buildings and notable figures, are positive and will act to increase appreciation of the town's history among visitors and locals;
- a focus on meeting the needs of the community – such as the local library, medical centre, council services and so on – is appropriate for the town centre and will help to create footfall that will use town centre outlets; and

- there is a low proportion of vacant units in Stevenston town centre, which is encouraging. With five other licensed premises in the town centre, the vacant pub at 9-13 Townhead St (Rankins) may struggle to reopen for this purpose. As it is located on the very edge of the town centre, consideration could be given to an alternative use, possibly housing. The other two vacant units are small shopfronts and unlikely to be suitable for another purpose.

### 5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- a number of projects were identified in the Three Towns Regeneration Plan (2009) for Stevenston, including revitalising key buildings around the town centre and introducing a shared street surface. If delivered, these projects would improve the appearance of the town centre;
- Stevenston faces a unique challenge among North Ayrshire YTAs due to its proximity to other centres, out of town retail offering (located next to the bypass – people from other towns can come to do their shopping in Stevenston while never entering the town) and other key services, (including the railway station and leisure) being located some way out of the town centre. The town centre needs to find a role that reflect this situation and provides a sustainable future for its small independent retailers; and
- Stevenston has a good range of leisure assets – access to the sea, beach and sand dunes, nearby golf courses, a swimming pool and ice rink, a large park (Ardeer Park) close to the town centre and other open spaces. These are all an important part of making the wider town an attractive place to live.

