



Your Town Audit: Ayr

October 2022

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TOWNS
PARTNERSHIP



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Report produced by:



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For: South Ayrshire Council

1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

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

In total, 43 YTA audits have been prepared for towns across Scotland providing consistent data across the range of KPIs. Where appropriate, this report provides comparisons for Ayr against the YTA town average¹.

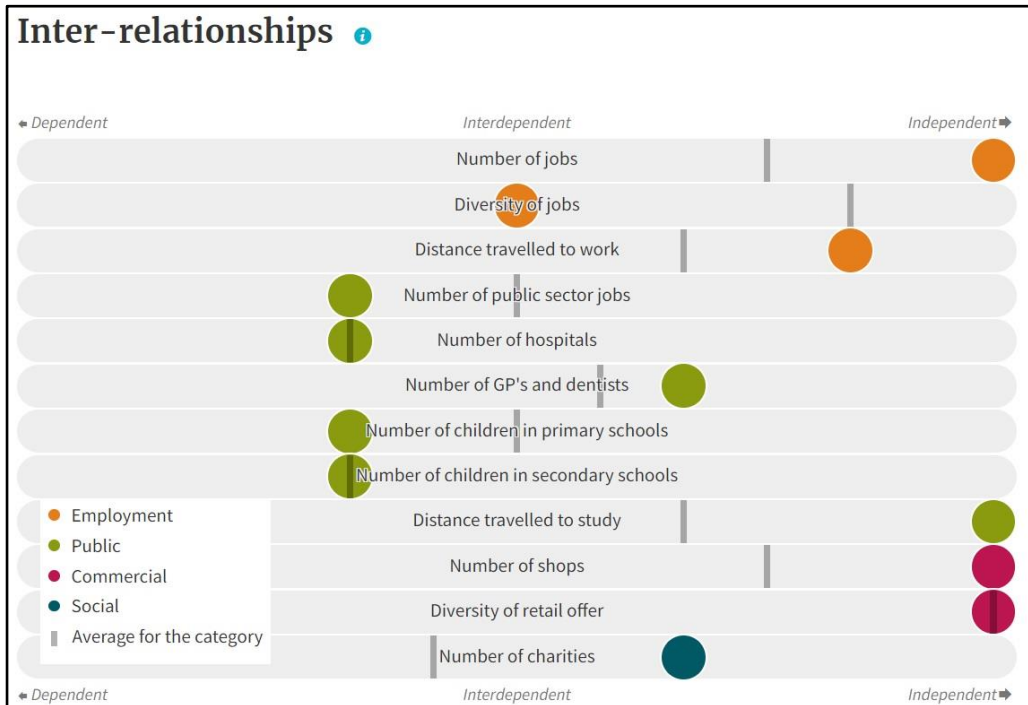
The [Understanding Scottish Places](#) (USP) data platform provides a summary analysis for Ayr and identifies seven comparator towns that have similar characteristics, with the most similar being Kilmarnock, Renfrew, Kirkintilloch, and Broxburn². The USP platform - www.usp.scot – describes Ayr in the following general terms:

Ayr'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 a some diversity of jobs; and residents largely travel shorter distances to work and study, although some travel longer distances. These towns attract people from neighbouring towns to access some of their assets and jobs.

Ayr's 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.

¹ It has not been possible to collect full KPI data for all towns – the number of YTA comparator towns therefore differs across this report.

² Other comparator towns include Bathgate, Carluke, and Dalkeith.



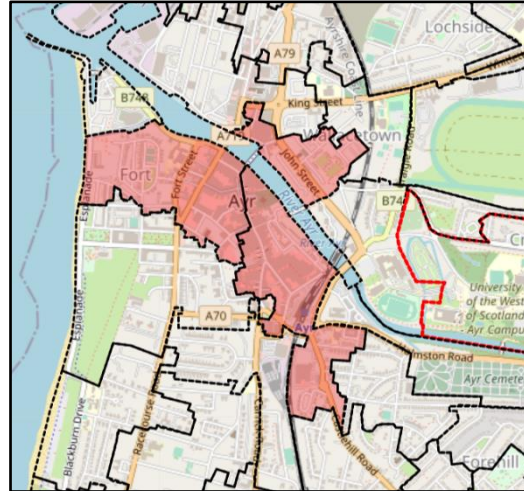
Comparing Ayr to towns with similar USP typology and interrelationships shows it has a similar number of hospitals, school children, public sector jobs, GPs and dentist, and a similar diversity of retail offer. Being a large town, it differs most from the comparator towns in its diversity of jobs as well as having a much greater proportion of jobs and shops. With various higher and further education facilities including Ayrshire College, University of West of Scotland and SRUC campuses, the distance to travel to study is much lower in Ayr compared to other comparator towns.

Building on the USP, this report presents the results of our detailed analysis of Ayr based around STP and the Scottish Government’s Town Toolkit – an online resource which provides advice and inspiration across five thematic areas: arts and culture; buildings and property; clean and green; enterprise and business; and streets and spaces. [The Town Toolkit](#) was revised and relaunched in 2021.

The report is designed as an audit of existing assets – physical and social – and concludes with a set of key findings and issues that will be important to the future performance of Ayr. Although it should be noted that, whilst there are other placemaking reports undertaken in the town such as [Ayr North Place Plan 2021](#), this report is not intended as a detailed strategy or action plan.

2. Accessible Town Centre

Ayr is an historic coastal town located 37 miles south west of Glasgow. The total population is around 44,700, a decline of 2% over the last decade³. It is the largest town in Ayrshire and the south of Scotland, and forms the administrative centre of the South Ayrshire local authority area. The town acts as a retail and service hub for a wide catchment population and, along with the surrounding area, is popular with visitors.



The town centre, as defined in the Local Development Plan, is relatively widespread across both sides of the River Ayr which are connected by four bridges – two road bridges (New Bridge) and two footbridges (most prominent is Auld Brig of Ayr).

Throughout the town centre, there are wide pavements, especially on High Street, restricted car access along High Street. There are several historic buildings dating from as early as the 15th century throughout Ayr – these are important to sense of place in the town, but where underused and vacant present challenges.

Ayr Beach (predominantly sandy) and esplanade are easily accessible from the town centre being located just outside of the town centre area to the west. In 2017, Ayr Beach received an award from environmental charity Keep Scotland Beautiful for being the busiest beach in Scotland – it also has received Blue Flag status each year since 2012. Therefore, the population in Ayr, as well as visitors to the area, enjoys excellent access to good quality green and blue space.

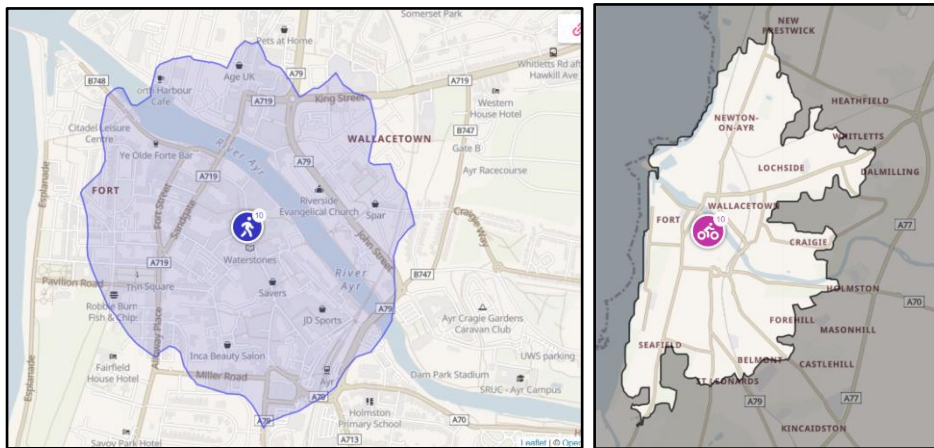
The town is well connected by bus and train to central Scotland and the wider Ayrshire area and is around 4 miles south of Prestwick International Airport. The train station is located on the eastern edge of the town centre, and the bus station more centrally; both are a short walk from the main retail area. Trains to Glasgow take around 50 minutes and run half hourly (during peak hours). The current cost of an anytime day return to Glasgow Central is £17.70, and off-peak £11.70.

³ Defined using the 11 'Ayr' intermediate zone areas

During the audit visit, modernisation works at Ayr Station were ongoing as the old Victorian building was declared unsafe. There is also significant scaffolding covering the adjacent Ayr Station Hotel amid its long-term future being a key subject for the town centre.

The concept of '20-minute neighbourhoods' has grown in prominence over recent years and is now a key priority for Scottish place and planning policy. This promotes the idea of people being able to reach all of their day-to-day needs within a 20-minute public transport trip or walk/cycle from home – i.e. a ten minute journey each way. By cutting down on unnecessary car travel, this has benefits for health outcomes, wellbeing and the environment, as well as supporting the local economy. Although Ayr is a large town, the town centre is relatively compact and much of the entire town's services can be reached within a ten-minute cycle from the mid-point of the town centre, as shown on the map below.

Ayr Town Centre – 10 Minute Walking and Cycling Distance



Source: [Commute Time Map](#)

With the exception of the university and college campus which lies to the east just outwith the town centre, a considerable portion of housing in the town can also be reached within a ten-minute walk. The town is therefore well placed to build on this potential for growing active travel trips.

This will be the focus of a significant accessibility and active travel project in the town centre called [Accessible Ayr](#) which is being led by South Ayrshire Council, Ayrshire Roads Alliance and Sustrans. The plan of the project is to “*significantly invest in the town centre, making it a vibrant and more attractive place for people to visit and enjoy, as well as make it easier to access by pedestrians and cyclists... by upgrading the key town centre streets of High Street, Sandgate, Kyle Street, Alloway*

Street and Newmarket Street and also making changes to Fort Street, Carrick St, John St, Station Rd, Smith St, Burns Statue Square, River St, Main St, King St, Allison St, Barns Crescent, Wellington Sq, Pavilion Road and Miller Rd.”

Following a recent consultation process, initial proposals will be shared with local businesses and communities in November 2022.

Another further opportunity for improved accessibility is at the site of the now-demolished Burns House at Burns Statue Square. Whilst no plans are currently in place, it is suggested that this could be a “*significant opportunity to maximise the potential of the public realm, including road layout at this key entrance to the town centre*”⁴. This could also link into ongoing discussion around the future of the Ayr Station (and Hotel).

A recent appraisal of transport in the region, undertaken by Transport Scotland, made a series of long-term recommendations for improving transport across the Ayrshire and Arran region⁵. For example, it was reported that there are missing links in the National Cycle Network and Scottish Government Cycle route networks including Kilmarnock to Ayr, and Mauchline to Ayr therefore “*there are opportunities to promote greater uptake of cycling and improve health and well-being should the network be improved*”.

There are a number of on-street parking spaces found in the town centre, as well as a number of offstreet car parks which include those located at: the Kyle Centre (360 spaces), Ayr Central (450 spaces), TK Maxx car park (300 spaces) and Boswell Park (210 spaces). Parking, both on-street and off-street, must be paid for, with the costs ranging from 50p per hour to £1 per hour for off-street car parks, and from 30p for 30 minutes to £1.80 for 3 hours for those parking on-street, with a maximum stay length of 3 hours. There are 12 EV charging stations throughout Ayr – three of which are located within town centre (Burns Statue Square, Barns Crescent Car Park and SEPA office therefore are mostly in the south).

The town centre provides access to local services which, alongside a mix of retailers and business services, includes a library, five town/community halls, the local primary and secondary schools (including newly developed Ayr Grammar), two churches (Holy Trinity Episcopal Church and Free Church of Scotland), and the

⁴ South Ayrshire Council (2017) [Town Centre and Retail Development Plan](#)

⁵ Transport Scotland (2021) [Initial Appraisal: Case for Change – Ayrshire & Arran Region](#)

nearby train station. There is 4G coverage throughout the town, and although there is no town-wide free WiFi, superfast broadband is available.



3. Active Town Centre

3.1 Population and Housing

Just under 2,500 people live within the town centre area of Ayr, 5% of the total settlement population⁶. This proportion is much lower than the average of 18% in other YTA town centres which reflects the relative size of Ayr. Over the decade to 2020, both the town centre and whole settlement populations have decreased by 3% and 2% respectively, which equates to around 80 fewer people in the town centre and 850 fewer people in the whole settlement. Other audited town centres have generally experienced an increase in town centre living, with an average 9.4% increase across YTA towns.



⁶ Based on the closest fitting datazones, S01012481 - Ayr South Harbour and Town Centre - 02; S01012482 - Ayr South Harbour and Town Centre - 03; and S01012483 - Ayr South Harbour and Town Centre - 04.

In 2020, there were 1,750 houses recorded within Ayr's town centre. Flats comprise the majority of the housing stock (83%) followed by semi-detached/detached (10%) and terraced housing (7%). Over half of the housing stock in the town centre is privately owned which is in line with the YTA average (both 56%). However, there is almost double the proportion of privately rented housing in Ayr town centre compared to other YTA audited towns (28% compared to 15% YTA average).

As outlined in the [Local Housing Strategy 2017–2022](#), the housing supply target within the Ayr area was to build 595 affordable housing units and between 696 and 756 private sector units (Note: the Ayr Urban defined housing area is much wider than the settlement boundary and also encompasses Prestwick, Troon, Maybole and the rural north villages within the local authority area).

In 2020, the residential town centre vacancy rate was 8.1%, more than double the average vacancy rate of other YTA town centres (3.8%). Within Ayr as a whole, the residential vacancy rate was 3.4%. There can be a number of factors influencing high vacancy rates for residential properties in the town centre. Often, this can relate to the type and quality of available properties, ownership issues and local economic conditions.

As town and city centres adjust to a changing retail climate, increasing town centre living is recognised as important throughout Scotland and is one of the key priorities for the Scottish Government's original [Town Centre Action Plan](#) (2013) and its more recent [refresh](#) (2020).

Housing – whether renovations or new developments – may present a sustainable (if initially expensive) solution to some of the prominent vacant properties in the town centre. For example, adjacent to the Kyle Centre redevelopment into a cinema and leisure hub, there is a development underway to build over 30 flats (mostly one-bedroom) which is due for completion by Spring 2023⁷.

Outwith the town centre and to the north-east of Ayr, 160 new affordable homes (ranging from one to six bedroom properties) are to be built on the site of the former Mainholm Academy and is due for completion by 2025 – this is South Ayrshire Council's largest housing project in recent years⁸.

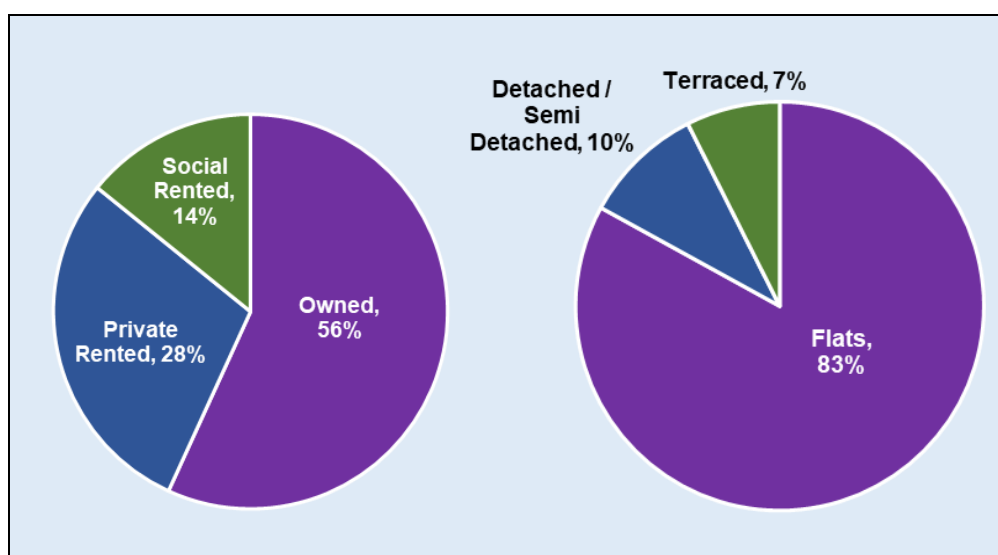
⁷ Scottish Housing News (2021) [JR Group to deliver new homes for Ayrshire Housing](#)

⁸ South Ayrshire Council (2022) [160 new affordable homes coming to Ayr](#)

House prices within the town centre are considerably higher compared to average of other YTA towns (£141,800 compared to £114,800). This is below the wider Ayr average of £176,600. Further, almost three in five properties within the town centre (57%) are in council tax bands A, B or C.

More up-to-date market information from property website Zoopla⁹ places the average selling price for residential properties across the whole of Ayr at £193,700 over the last year, with 924 sales recorded.

Ayr Town Centre Housing Mix



3.2 Businesses and Employment

In 2021, national statistics recorded 1,470 enterprises registered in the whole of Ayr, and 1,990 'local units'. Around one-third (34%) of the 20,600 jobs in Ayr are located in the town centre area, equivalent to 7,000 jobs¹⁰.

The town centre audit located 636 units within the town centre area (676 if including vacant shopping centres of Arran Mall and the Kyle Centre), with 280 units of these being retail or retail service units. Compared to the YTA average, retail makes up a similar proportion of town centre use in Ayr (42% compared to 45% across all towns).

⁹ [Zoopla - House prices in Ayr, South Ayrshire](#)

¹⁰ Source: Business Register & Employment Survey

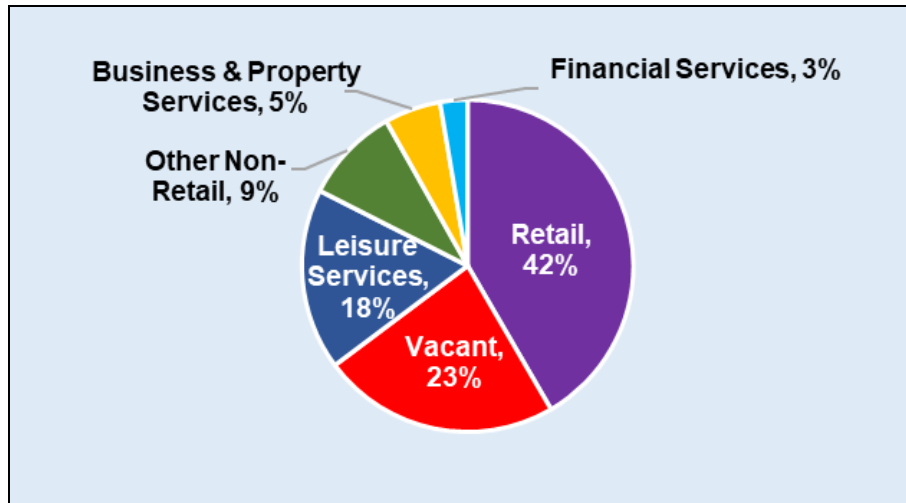
For all units (both retail and otherwise, excluding housing), the vacancy rate was 23%, the joint highest of all YTA towns (with Girvan) and much higher than the YTA average of 11%. This equated to 116 vacant units which were largely comprised of retail units particularly along High Street.

Like many town centres throughout Scotland and beyond, the town centre has faced the challenges of a reduction of tourism and the increasing prevalence of online shopping which has been exacerbated with the economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic – it is important to note that this is the only third Your Town Audit conducted since the start of COVID-19 pandemic. During the walk around, it was clear that some business units had been vacated relatively recently.



Leisure services and units classed as other non-retail, such as places of worship and community halls, comprised relatively lower proportions of town centre unit use in Ayr (leisure: Ayr 18%, YTA average 22%; and other non-retail: Ayr 9%, YTA average 14%). This reflects the high number of retail units within the town centre as well as that some of these services, including Citadel Leisure Centre, are located outside of the defined town centre.

Ayr Town Centre Unit Mix



3.3 Retail

The core retail area is focused on the High Street, which runs through the town centre, as well as the modern shopping centre of [Ayr Central](#). However, Ayr has a particularly high number of shop units for a town of its size (280 retailers which is significantly higher than any of the other audited towns, average = 69 retailers from 41 YTAs) – this is also larger than the cities of Stirling and Inverness.

Retailers are scattered through a large town centre boundary area including a small area to the north of the river taking in an Aldi supermarket, a number of independent traders and a large TK Maxx outlet with its own 300-space car park.



While still a large commercial centre, Ayr's retail performance has been in decline over recent years. For example, the recent closures (and redevelopments) of the Kyle Centre and Arran Mall and loss of some key anchor businesses (e.g. Hourstons) have impacted footfall and business confidence, particularly for traders along Alloway Street. These high-profile vacant retail units and areas have impacted the vibrancy of the town centre.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the retail vacancy rate in Ayr town centre is 17.8%, equivalent to 105 units. This is much higher than the average YTA retail vacancy rate of 10.6% across 39 towns (albeit mostly based on pre-COVID data). If

the two vacant shopping centres of Arran Mall and Kyle Centre are included, the retail vacancy rate is 23%.

Although there are significant numbers of vacant units located across the town, areas within Ayr that have high levels of vacancy rates include High Street (32), and Carrick Street (7). Some of the vacant retail units were in clusters which highlighted the scale of the challenge to attract new owners and/or repurpose vacant units. Judging by the condition of the vacant retail units, there seemed to be a mixture of properties which have been vacant for a significant period of time and those which have been made newly vacant.

Acquired by South Ayrshire Council in 2020, initial plans for the Arran Mall were to redevelop it into a new leisure centre which would have closed the existing Citadel Leisure Centre. However, following the election of the new council administration in 2022, these plans have now been scrapped and it appears the focus will be on redeveloping the Citadel Leisure Centre. Therefore, the future of the vacant Arran Mall at the heart of the town centre, which has been described as 'eerie' and a 'ghost town', will need resolved as an urgent priority.



Likewise, the Kyle Shopping Centre closed in 2021 and will be home to a new cinema and entertainment quarter with an *“eight-screen cinema complex with a host of complementary leisure activities such as virtual reality, soft play, indoor golf*

*experience and a refurbished car park*¹¹. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2023.

In addition to the Kyle Centre and Arran Mall redevelopments, it is important to note that site of a demolished block of the High Street near to the New Bridge is being redeveloped into a public realm event space and a community pavilion.

These significant redevelopments in Ayr highlight the wider shift in town centres which are experiencing retail decline to explore innovative spaces, uses and ways to attract people back into the town centres to spend their time and money.

With 160 residents per town centre retail outlet, Ayr town centre has a high density of retail offering in relation to its population (YTA average: 229 residents per town centre retail outlet). Again, this reflects the fact that it also serves the wider region.

Retail forms the largest town centre unit use, amounting to 42% of all units. This is slightly below the YTA average of 45%.

The YTA analysis is based on the following retail definitions:

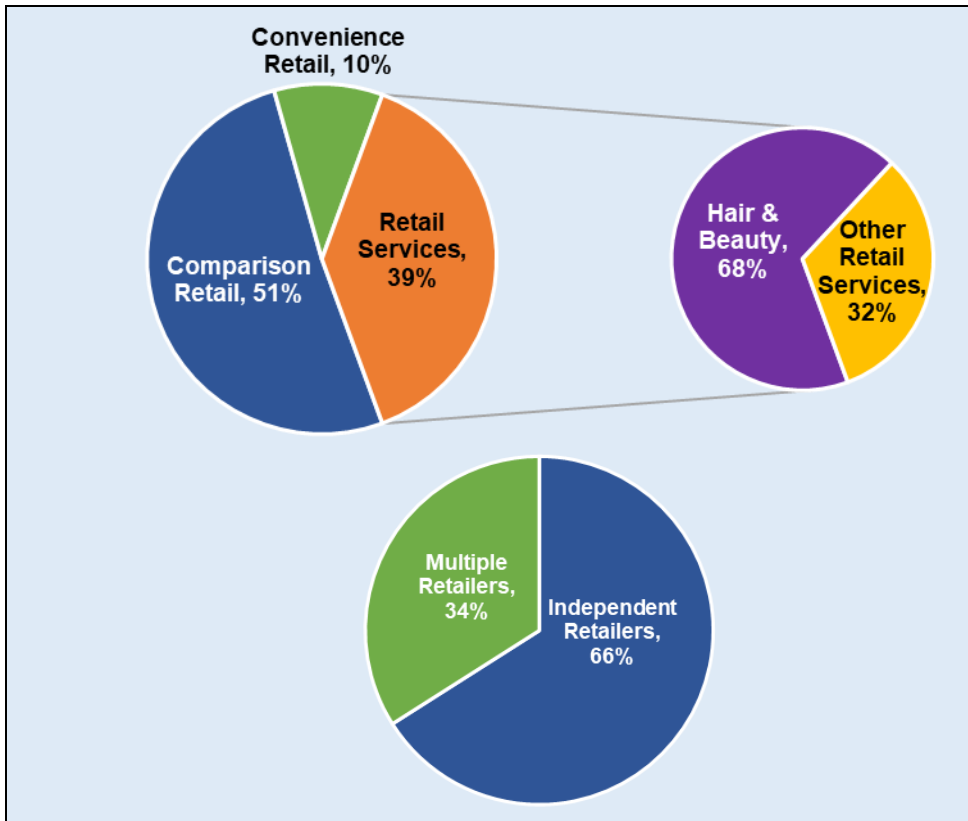
- **Convenience Retail:** primarily low cost goods that are typically bought out of habit or on impulse i.e. food, drink (alcohol and non-alcohol), news, tobacco, etc. – *28 convenience retailers identified in Ayr town centre;*
- **Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *144 comparison retailers identified in Ayr 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. – *108 retail service operators identified in Ayr town centre.*

160 residents per town centre retail

280 town centre retail units in use

105 vacant town centre retail units

¹¹ Daily Record (2021) [First look at multi-million pound boutique cinema planned for Ayr](#)



Given Ayr's prominence as a regional centre, national and multiple retailers comprise a higher proportion of retail units compared to the YTA average (34% compared to YTA average of 28%) - this is unsurprising with the modern shopping centre of Ayr Central which includes Primark, New Look, Next and River Island.

The audit did not find a large provision of fresh food available from independent traders in the town's retail outlets – no fishmonger, no deli, two butchers (although there are seven bakeries). Although it should be noted that the Ayrshire Farmers Market, showcasing the region's best local produce, is typically located outside of the Grain Exchange on High Street on the first Saturday of every month.

Also, the attractive Newmarket Street was busy during the audit visit with lots of outdoor seating at the various eateries. This contributes well to the Scottish Government's vision for revitalising town centres which is based on creating a European café culture¹².



¹² STP (2022) [Funding Boost In Battle To Revive Run-Down Town Centres](#)

4. Attractive Town Centre

4.1 Overview

Ayr has been an important market and trading town for 800 years and boasts an impressive historic realm, including Loudoun Hall (c. 1513) and the Auld Kirk building (c. 1654). Despite the town's heritage, however, there are no historic properties operating as visitor attractions in their own right within the town centre.

Currently, the town centre is in a transitional period which presents both opportunities and challenges. For example, there are several large redevelopments underway and significant questions hanging over the future of other large town centre sites, including:

- Riverside Project: construction of a public event realm space and a community pavilion overlooking River Ayr at site of a demolished retail block of High Street. The area will host to an array of local events including markets, concerts and events as well as providing a space for walking and enjoying the riverside surroundings. The project is scheduled for completion in early 2023¹³.
- Kyle Centre: construction of a cultural and leisure quarter at site of former shopping centre. This will include Arc Cinema as key anchor tenant with an *“eight-screen cinema complex with a host of complementary leisure activities such as virtual reality, soft play, indoor golf experience and a refurbished car park”*¹⁴.
- Ayr Station Hotel: Category B-listed Victorian-era (c.1885) and French Renaissance-style hotel adjacent to the Ayr Station which has been vacant since 2013 and was added to the Buildings at Risk register in 2014 due to the building being of a very low condition in some areas. In 2016, repair works began with the erection of scaffolding to the front of the building to allow for repair works and have since remained in place. Council seeking discussions with absentee foreign owner to resolve its future.

¹³ The Construction Index (2022) [Work gets under way on Ayr Riverside project](#)

¹⁴ Daily Record (2021) [First look at multi-million pound boutique cinema planned for Ayr](#)

- Arran Mall: vacant shopping centre was earmarked to be a new leisure centre. However, following election of new council administration in 2022, these plans have been scrapped leaving uncertain future for Arran Mall.
- Mecca Bingo Hall (the category-B listed Old Playhouse): recent press coverage notes that Mecca are in discussions with landlord about their future in Ayr despite having lease on the building until 2026 – they have been located at the Old Playhouse for the past 40 years¹⁵.

Resolving these long-standing issues are fundamental to the success and vibrancy of the town centre. It is important to note that time is a critical factor (as well as securing significant investment) and these issues should be addressed as a matter of urgency. However, as seen with Riverside project and the Kyle Centre, these issues present an opportunity to redesign the town centre to suit the current and future needs of its residents in innovative ways.

With high vacancy rates especially over the longer term for some derelict and vacant buildings, the building condition of town centre units in Ayr scored well below the YTA average and was joint second lowest out of all YTA audited towns (see section 4.5). For example, the former Eurocopy building on Dalblair Road and the former General Accident building on Beresford Terrace are long-standing eyesores.

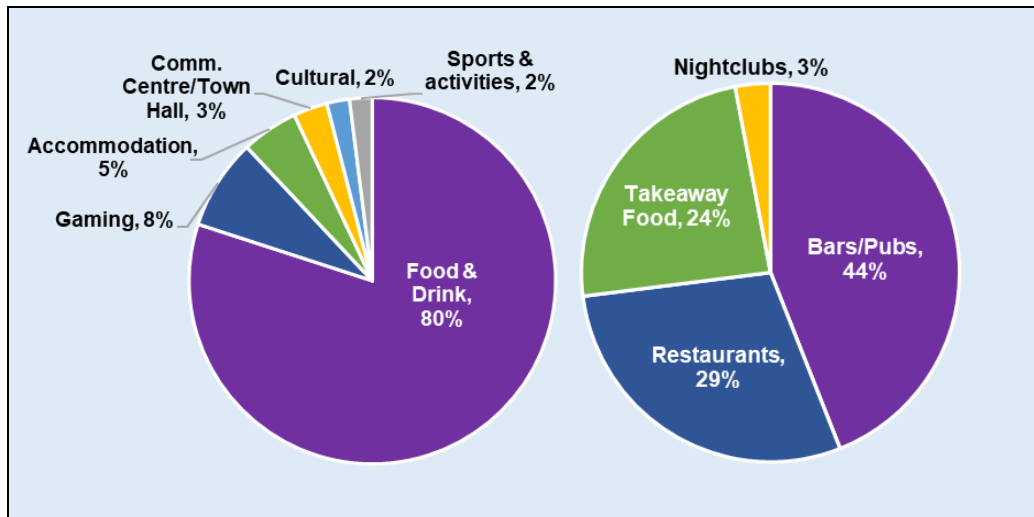


¹⁵ Daily Record (2022) [Mecca Bingo: Mystery surrounds future of popular Ayr Hall](#)

More encouragingly, there are attractive large-scale flower displays and planters particularly around the main statues (including Burns Statue Square and Wellington Square) and at key sites of the Ayr Through the Ages walking trail (see section 4.4). Some benches and signage appear weathered and could be upgraded.



4.2 Leisure Mix



Compared to other YTA towns, Ayr has a slightly lower proportion of town centre units that are used for leisure services (18% compared to 22% average). Of the mix of leisure businesses in Ayr town centre, the vast majority are food and drink outlets (98 of 123 leisure units).

The evening economy is comprised of 29 five bars/pubs, nineteen restaurants, sixteen fast food takeaways, and two nightclubs. Ayr has a relatively high proportion of evening economy outlets (678 residents per evening economy outlet) compared to the YTA average (950 residents per evening economy outlet).



Opened in 1997 and located just outside the defined town centre area, the Citadel Leisure Centre on South Harbour Street is the main sports and leisure centre in Ayr. Facilities include: three swimming pools, gym and dance studio, and a multi-purpose sports hall often used for badminton, basketball, football, hockey and netball. There were plans to build a new leisure centre at the vacant Arran Mall and close the Citadel. However, this move appears to have been scrapped by the new council administration, and the focus will be on refurbishing the existing leisure centre at the Citadel.

Other main cultural and leisure venues in the town centre include: Gaiety Theatre, Ayr Town Hall, the Grain Exchange, the Odeon Cinema, Mecca Bingo Hall.

During the audit visit, it was noted that the Gaiety Theatre, Odeon Cinema and Mecca Bingo Hall appeared to be weathered with cracked paintwork. Amidst the anticipated changes to the town centre over the next ten years, it will be important to ensure that these buildings are well-maintained whilst keeping their distinct character and unique charm. Therefore, it is encouraging that the B-listed Gaiety Theatre has secured £100,000 of funding from the



new Town Centre Community Capital Fund as part of a restoration project with a funding target of £2.4m¹⁶.

Located on High Street, the Grain Exchange is an impressive and modern multi-purpose market, cultural and creative space while Ayr Town Hall is also a regular venue for events and shows.

Ayr Racecourse is a key attraction, with 30 race days a year, including the Scottish Grand National. The racecourse is located to the north-east of the town and, with the exception of a large Tesco supermarket, is largely surrounded by residential units, so there are limited spin-off benefits for town centre businesses. This is also the case with Somerset Park, the Ayr United football ground, and Northfield Bowling Green, the headquarters of Bowls Scotland and where national events are held.

The quickest route from the main railway station to the stadium, bowling green and racecourse – along Station Road – avoids the town centre entirely. Those travelling by coach or car, particularly from the central belt, do not need to travel into the town centre to reach these venues.

With access to some famous golf courses along the Ayrshire Coast, there is also local access to three public golf courses at Belleisle, Seafield and Dalmilling courses.

4.3 Community Events and Festivals

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has restricted the number of festivals and events in the last couple of years, large events which typically take place in the town include:

- Ayrshire Farmers Market – Established in 1999, Ayrshire Farmers' Market was one of the first in Scotland, and the same group of suppliers have now expanded their operations, with the market held in a different town in the west / south of Scotland each weekend. In Ayr, the market is held on the first Saturday of each month and typically has around ten stalls offering a range of high quality local produce. Its usual location is on High Street in front of the Grain Exchange.

¹⁶ STP (2022) [Town Centres Across Scotland To Benefit From New Urban Regeneration Grants](#)

- TamFest – returning in physical form for first time since COVID-19 pandemic. It is a month-long family Hallowe'en festival of events (e.g. ghost hunts) celebrating Ayrshire's historic and highly individual take on a Halloween theme inspired by Burns' poem 'Tam o' Shanter'. In 2019, the festival increased footfall in Ayr town centre by 90%.
- Ayr Country Show – annual agricultural show held in May each year at Ayr Racecourse. In 2022, it was the 178th show in its 187th year. Prices of an adult ticket are £15 while kids go free.
- Fireworks display at Ayr Rugby Club on Bonfire Night weekend.
- Ayrshire Hospice Winter Fair – held on 12th November 2022 at Ayr Racecourse with over 100 stalls, live entertainment, fundraising and children activities including a Santa's Grotto and reindeer. Admission is £3 while children under 5 years old go free.
- Little Stars Light Up Ayr (Ayr's Christmas Lights Switch On) – range of activities in the town centre, particularly along High Street and Newmarket Street as well as a Christmas market at Grain Exchange, 20th November 2022.
- Ayrshire Music Festival – the 96th Ayrshire Music Festival was held in March 2022 for first time since COVID-19 pandemic. It offers music tuition and a range of awards for Ayrshire's talented young musicians.

4.4 Attractions and Heritage

As one of Scotland's main tourist destinations, Ayr has a number of visitor attractions on offer including Burns Birthplace Museum, Maclaurin Gallery and Heads of Ayr Farm Park – these are all located on the southern outskirts of the town.

Being marketed as Burns Country, the most notable of which is the NTS Roberts Burns Birthplace Museum (rated five stars by Visit Scotland) which attracted over 260,000 visitors in 2019. It is located in the village of Alloway on the southern outskirts of the town and was winner of the Scottish Thistle Awards' Best Heritage Tourism Experience for 2019/20.

Set within Rozelle Park, the Maclaurin Art Gallery is a contemporary art gallery which is free-to-access and attracted over 40,000 visitors in 2019. Rated four stars by Visit Scotland, Heads of Ayr Farm Park has a wide range of animals (e.g. lemurs,

wallabies, otters, camels) as well as other activities including playpark, trampolines and quad biking (four stars) - adult prices £14 and children £12.

Both Ailsa Craig and Isle of Arran can be viewed from Ayr Beach which is one of Scotland's most popular sandy beaches. As stated above, in 2017, Ayr Beach received an award from environmental charity Keep Scotland Beautiful for being the busiest beach in Scotland – it also has received Blue Flag status each year since 2012. The beach offers traditional seaside activities such as amusements including putting green, crazy golf and children's play area (Pirate Pete's Family Entertainment Centre).

Ayr is increasingly being promoted as an outdoor destination for visitors with a range of walks, trails and paths. For example, the 100-mile long [Ayrshire Coastal Path](#) which is designated as one of Scotland's Great Trails passes through Ayr at Stage 6 (8.9 miles from Dunure) and Stage 7 (7.8 miles to Troon).

There is a family walking trail/tour around the town centre called '[Ayr Through the Ages](#)' which guides people to key locations and points of interest in the town which date from 13th century to the modern day. At the sites, there are silhouettes, information boards with historical facts about key figures in the town's past and present – QR codes can be scanned which take users to an accompanying app.

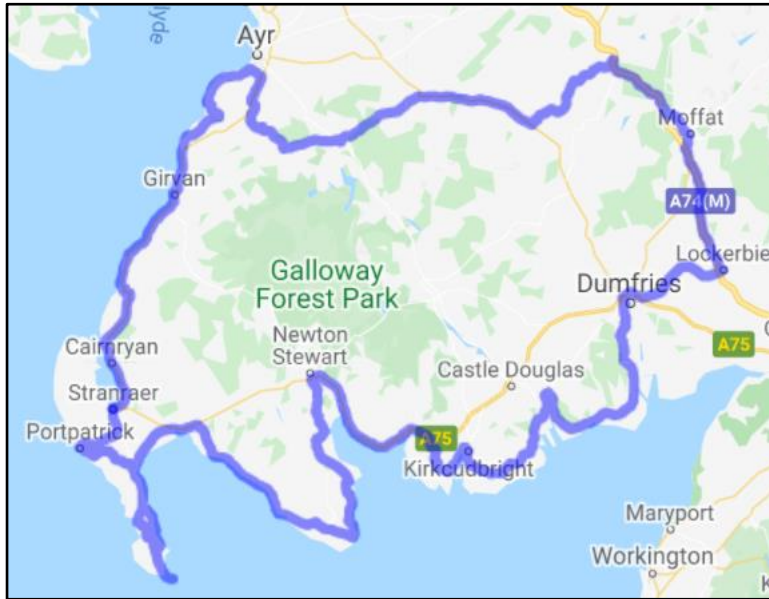


There is also the '[the Ayrshire Alps](#)', "Scotland's first road cycle park which comprises the hill roads of South Carrick and is popular with recreational cyclists due to its scenery, cycle friendly roads and challenging terrain"¹⁷.

In addition to the walking paths and trails, the [South West Coastal 300](#) has been developed to promote Ayr and the South West region as a destination for road trips. It is a 300-mile scenic loop around the region from the coasts as well as towns as Dumfries and Moffat. It reaches just to the south of the wider Ayr settlement. It is the third route in the series of other driving routes in Scotland which have been developed over recent years, most famously the North Coast 500 and the North East 250.

¹⁷ Transport Scotland (2021) [Initial Appraisal: Case for Change – Ayrshire & Arran Region](#)

South West Coastal 300 Route



Source: [Visit South West Scotland](#)

Being one of Scotland’s key historic tourist towns, there is considerable work to promote and market Ayr to a wide audience (including international visitors) by key partners such as [Destination South Ayrshire](#) and [Visit South West Scotland](#).

4.5 Attractiveness Review

The YTA includes an independent review of place and quality impressions, with Ayr scoring below average in comparison to 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 6.3 for quality of window display and 5.9 for the condition of unit fronts. This is below the average across other YTA audited town centres of 6.8 for both indicators. In particular, the quality of building fronts rating is the joint second lowest of all YTA towns (same score as Girvan).

As disused or derelict buildings tend to bring the average score down, the high number and proportion of vacant properties and buildings in Ayr town centre will likely have had

6.4/10
Quality of shop window displays

5.9/10
Quality of building fronts

an impact on these scores. Some of the buildings in use were in a poor condition which is also reflected in the scores.

Business confidence in the town centre was gauged from a small sample of interviews undertaken with independent traders. On a scale of 0 (not at all confident) to 10 (very confident), scores averaged at 5.1 out of 10, below the 5.9 average of other YTA audited towns.

Views were extremely mixed – although most retailers pointed to the short-medium term uncertainty of global economic shocks such as cost of living crisis and COVID-19 recovery as well as the uncertainty of significant (re)developments within town centre which will affect the vibrancy of the town centre (e.g. long-term plans for leisure centre redevelopment of Arran Mall have been shelved).

Of the retailers who reported higher business confidence, it was stated that they had traded in the town centre for decades.

5. YTA Summary and Key Points

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

5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- Ayr is well connected with transport links and a range of services. There is scope for further improved accessibility at Ayr Railway Station (once uncertain future of Station Hotel is resolved) and former Burns House (road layout).
- Although Ayr is a relatively large town centre with many units, most of the town is within walking or cycling distance of the town centre. Therefore, much of Ayr is already a '20 minute neighbourhood' – which promotes the idea of people being able to reach all of their day to day needs within a 20 minute public transport trip or walk/cycle from home – benefitting the local economy, health outcomes and the environment. This is set to be a key national priority for planning and regeneration in future years and finding ways to facilitate and encourage it will bring benefits for Ayr's economy and population. This is likely to be a key focus of the Accessible Ayr project.
- As found in recent transport appraisal, there are missing links in cycling network including Ayr to Kilmarnock, and Ayr to Mauchline.
- As the transition to net zero speeds up, the availability of electric charging points in the town centre will be increasingly important. There are a number of chargers in the town at present, although these tend to be located in the south of the town centre.
- The town has good 4G mobile coverage and access to superfast broadband and is set to benefit from the continued national rollout of ultrafast fibre soon.

5.2 Active Town Centre

- Both total vacancy rate and retail vacancy rates were amongst the highest of all YTA towns. In total, 116 vacant units were recorded in the town centre which was equivalent to 23% of total units (11% YTA average) – 105 of these units were vacant retail units giving a retail vacancy rate of 17.8% (10.6% YTA average). This illustrates how Ayr town centre has been vulnerable to a general change in retail habits. However, as this is only the

third audit completed since start of COVID-19 pandemic, comparisons with the YTA average should be treated with caution.

- While still a large commercial centre, Ayr's retail performance has been in decline over recent years highlighted by the large-scale recent closures (and redevelopments) of the Kyle Centre and Arran Mall, loss of key anchor businesses (e.g. Hourstons), and demolition of a block in High Street. All the proposed developments at these sites typify the shift to broaden town centre use away from being predominantly retail-focused to attract people back into the town centre to spend time and money.
- It should be explored how to encourage more independent fresh food traders into the town centre on a permanent, fixed basis building on the success of Ayrshire Farmers Market.
- With busy footfall and outdoor seating, Newmarket Street can be an example within Ayr to establish a European café culture as envisioned by Scottish Government.
- There is a relatively high proportion of evening economy units in the town centre, likely reflecting the town's role as a destination for visitors.

5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- With uncertain futures of key sites such as Arran Mall, Station Hotel and Mecca Bingo Hall as well as large redevelopments still in construction phase, the town centre is in transitional state. This is impacting the current attractiveness and vibrancy of the town centre. All this combined with wider economic factors and crises such as cost-of-living crisis has impacted business confidence of local traders.
- These large-scale sites also present an opportunity to reshape, revitalise and futureproof Ayr town centre to meet the current and future needs of residents and visitors. However, time is a critical factor and these should be addressed as a matter of priority.
- The scale of the challenge presented by the high volume of vacant and derelict buildings of Ayr town centre, which are clustered together, is well recognised and finding – and funding – sustainable solutions is far from easy. Nonetheless, it can be done: the [Town Toolkit](#) presents a number of case studies from successes elsewhere and signposts to a range of resources. With the joint second lowest building quality rating of all YTA



towns, there is also an ongoing and significant need for targeted improvements to shopfronts and the general appearance of buildings around the town centre.