



Your Town Audit: Girvan

March 2022



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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 Girvan, 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 Girvan 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 Girvan against the YTA town average¹.

The [Understanding Scottish Places](#) (USP) data platform provides a summary analysis for Girvan and identifies seven comparator towns that have similar characteristics, with the most similar being Banff, Campbeltown, Annan and Eyemouth². The USP platform - www.usp.scot – describes Girvan in the following general terms:

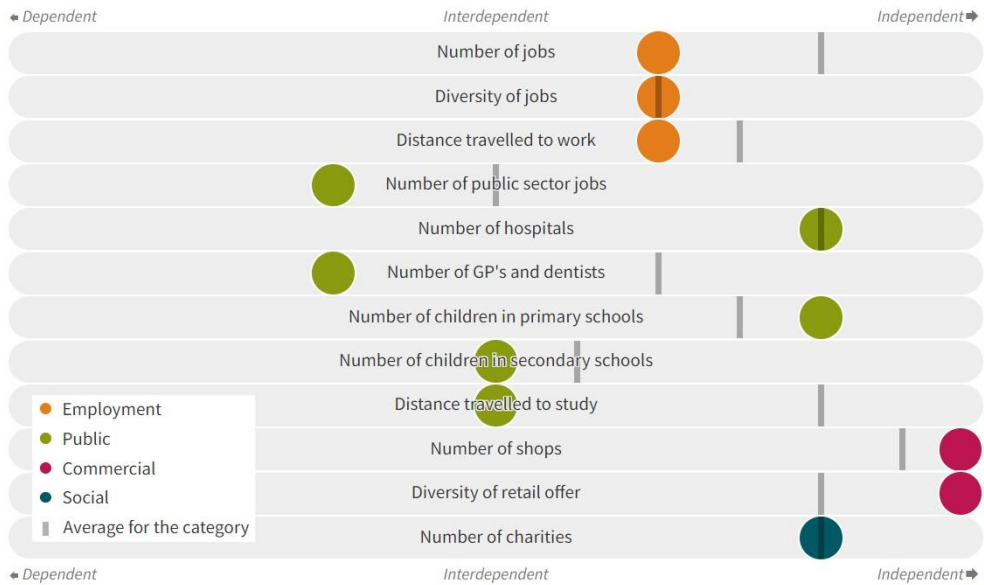
Girvan's Interrelationships: an '*independent to interdependent town*', which means it has a good number of assets in relation to its population. Towns of this kind have a good diversity of jobs; and residents on the whole travel shorter distances to work and study. These towns attract people from neighbouring towns to access some of their assets and jobs.

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

¹ 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 Invergordon, Rothesay and Wick.

Inter-relationships i



Comparing Girvan to towns with similar USP typology and interrelationships shows it has a similar number of charities, hospitals, school children, jobs, public sector jobs, shops and similar diversity of retail offer and distances travelled to work and study. With no local higher or further education provision and a relative lack of GPs and dentists, Girvan differs most from comparator towns in terms of distance travelled to study and number of GPs and dentists.

Building on the USP, this report presents the results of our detailed analysis of Girvan 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 Girvan. Although the report has been informed by the [Girvan Place Plan 2021](#) published by South Ayrshire Council, this report is not intended as a detailed strategy or action plan.

2. Accessible Town Centre

Girvan is a historic coastal and tourist town situated on the Ayrshire Coast in the south west of Scotland. The total population is around 6,300, a decline of 5% over the last decade³. Girvan is the fourth largest settlement in South Ayrshire local authority area and acts as a retail and service centre for the surrounding rural area in South Carrick.

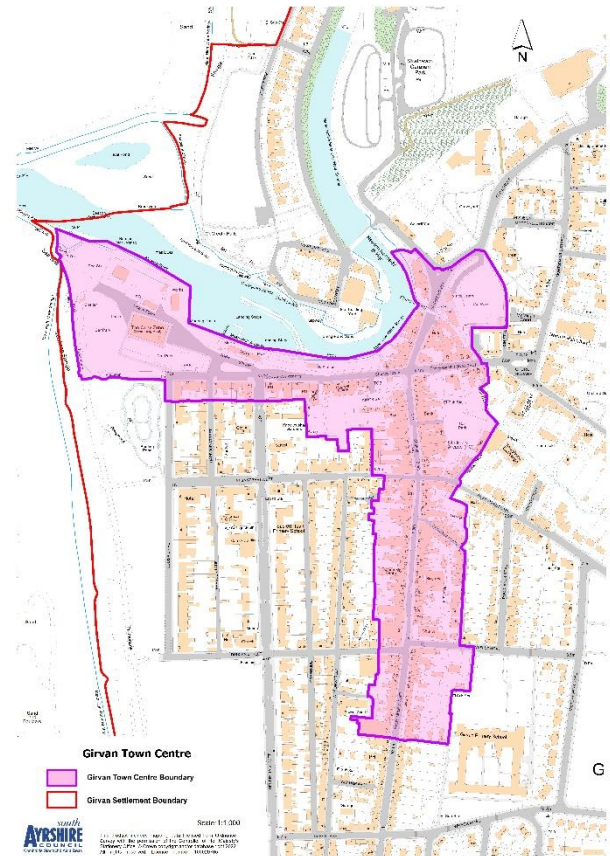
The town centre, as defined in the Local Development Plan, is relatively small being focused along the waterfront on Knockcushan Street and the main shopping street of Dalrymple Street – the landmark of the Stumpy Tower / Corner is on the junction between the two main streets. The west of the town centre is characterised by an active fishing

harbour with lighthouse and close proximity to Girvan Beach which outlooks onto the ancient volcanic plug of Ailsa Craig. Throughout the town centre, there are narrow streets, especially on Dalrymple Street, and a few historic buildings dating from the 19th century – these are important to sense of place in the town, but where underused and vacant present challenges.

Girvan beach and waterfront promenade sits just outside of the town centre area, with a large playpark, boating pond and grassy area. The population in Girvan therefore enjoys excellent access to good quality green and blue space.

Girvan railway station is located outside of the town centre to the north-eastern edge of the town adjacent to the A77 and Girvan Football Club. On the Glasgow South West Line, trains typically run every hour and a half to/from Glasgow Central via Ayr (where a change is required) during the day with much fewer evening services. The current

Girvan Town Centre



³ Defined using the two 'Girvan' intermediate zone areas

cost of an anytime day return to Glasgow Central is £22.50, and off-peak £15.60. To the south, there are currently four rail services a day to/from Stranraer.

There are hourly local buses around Girvan during the day, as well as services to other regional locations such as Ayr (relatively high frequency of services)⁴, Stranraer, Newton Stewart, Whithorn, Colmoneil, Barr and the ferry ports at Cairnryan. The main

way of reaching Girvan by road is the A77 which runs along the coast towards Ayr and Stranraer in both directions. This goes through the heart of the town centre along Knockcushan Street and turns southbound onto Henrietta Street. High volumes of HGVs travel through the town centre on the A77 which the local community has

expressed concerns about in terms of noise, vibration, air quality, safety impacts and driver frustration⁵. This was evident during the on-street audit – although pavements are generally wide on the main streets, pedestrian crossings can take a while to turn green.

Girvan is also noted as a popular stopping destination for truck drivers for a short break.

A recent appraisal of transport in the region, undertaken by Transport Scotland, made a series of long-term recommendations for improving transport across the South West of Scotland⁶. Specific references to Girvan included that:

- the proportion of households with no car is relatively high (34%) and above the national average (23%) which “highlights the need for good public transport connections” in Girvan;



⁴ Transport Scotland (2020) [South West Scotland Transport Study - Initial Appraisal: Case for Change](#)

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Transport Scotland (2020) [South West Scotland Transport Study - Initial Appraisal: Case for Change](#)

- although HGV congestion is an issue, there was a concern that developing a bypass similar to Maybole would be high cost and may reduce business in the town centre; and
- although still at an early stage, the development of a rail freight hub at Girvan is being explored which could provide an alternative to transporting freight by road.

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. Girvan is relatively compact and the entire town can be reached within a ten-minute cycle from the mid-point of the town centre, as shown on the map below.

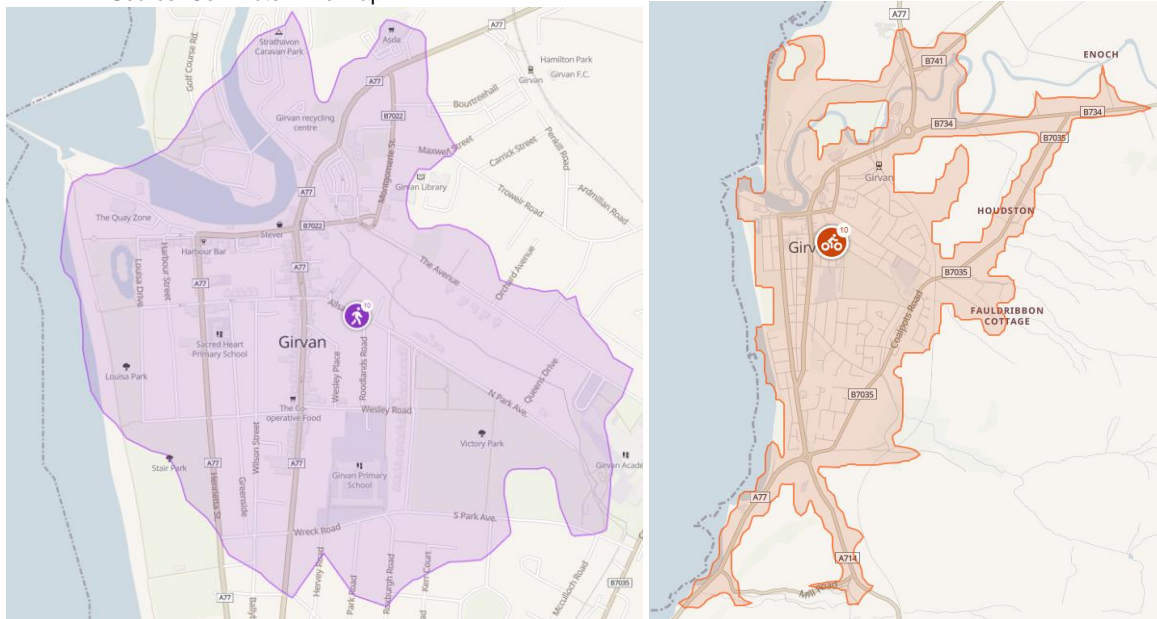
A considerable portion of housing in the town can also be reached within a ten-minute walk. The town is therefore well placed to build on this potential for growing active travel trips. Local groups and organisations are leading the way in this regard – for example, Biosphere Bikes are a not-for-profit Social Enterprise located next to the Quay Zone leisure centre and work with local groups to bring accessible and inclusive cycling activities to Girvan and surrounding communities.

This is also reflected in one of the actions in the [Girvan Place Plan 2021](#) which is to “*consider potential for new walking and cycling routes in and around the town including to key destinations such as the train station, hospital and Grangestone Industrial Estate*”.

Nonetheless, the volume of traffic on the A77 presents a challenge to encouraging higher uptake of active travel – routes which avoid this will have a higher chance of success, as well as being safer.

Girvan Town Centre – 10 Minute Walking and Cycling Distance

Source: Commute Time Map



There is parking throughout Girvan

town centre, with on-street parking on many streets (time restrictions are in place) and surface car parks on the edge of the centre and at the Quay Zone, the Chalmers Arcade off Hamilton Street (undergoing work at time of audit visit), the Flushes off Old Street, Girvan Beach and a car park behind the Post Office on Dalrymple Street. They are all fairly large and free of charge. The aim for parking outlined in Girvan Place Plan is to provide local, tourist, lorry and campervan facilities that are fit for purpose.

Girvan town centre has good mobile connectivity, with 4G coverage from all four networks. There are some problems reported at a small area of the harbour and along Henrietta Street outwith the town centre boundary. Superfast broadband (at least 30 Mbps) is available in the town.

In addition to the majority of Girvan's retail outlets, the town centre includes The Quay Zone leisure centre, museum/art gallery within the McKechnie Institute, churches, and various pubs, restaurants and cafes. The community hospital and the Girvan Football Club's ground at Hamilton Park are located outside of the town centre on the north-eastern edge of the town. Two of the three primary schools are located centrally just outside the town centre boundary with the other – Invergarven School – located beside Girvan Academy in the east of the town adjacent to the large greenspace of Victory Park.

3. Active Town Centre

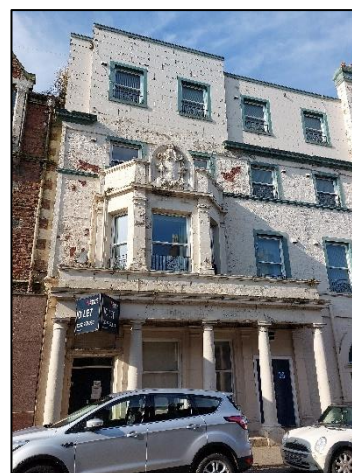
3.1 Population and Housing

Just over 1,400 people live within the town centre area of Girvan, 22% of the total settlement population⁷. This proportion is higher than the average of 18% in other YTA town centres. Over the decade to 2020, both the town centre and whole settlement populations have decreased by 5%, which equates to around 330 fewer people. Other audited town centres have generally experienced an increase in town centre living, with an average 10.5% increase across YTA towns.

In 2020, just over 800 houses were recorded within Girvan's town centre. Half of the housing in the town centre is terraced (51%) followed by a mix of flats (29%) and semi-detached/detached (20%) typically with three or more bedrooms. Almost three-quarters of the housing stock in the town is privately owned (72% in the town centre; 62% in the wider town) which is much higher than the YTA average of 56%.

As outlined in the [Local Housing Strategy 2017–2022](#), the housing supply target within the Girvan and South Carrick area was to build 80 affordable housing units and between 72 and 82 private sector units (Note: the Girvan and South Carrick defined housing area is much wider than the settlement boundary).

In 2020, the residential town centre vacancy rate was 7.2%, almost double the average vacancy rate of other YTA town centres (3.7%). Within Girvan as a whole, the residential vacancy rate was 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). That Girvan town centre and its surrounding streets already has a relatively high level of housing (for example, Ailsa

⁷ Based on the closest fitting datazones, S01012430 : Girvan Ailsa - 02; and S01012431 : Girvan Ailsa – 03.

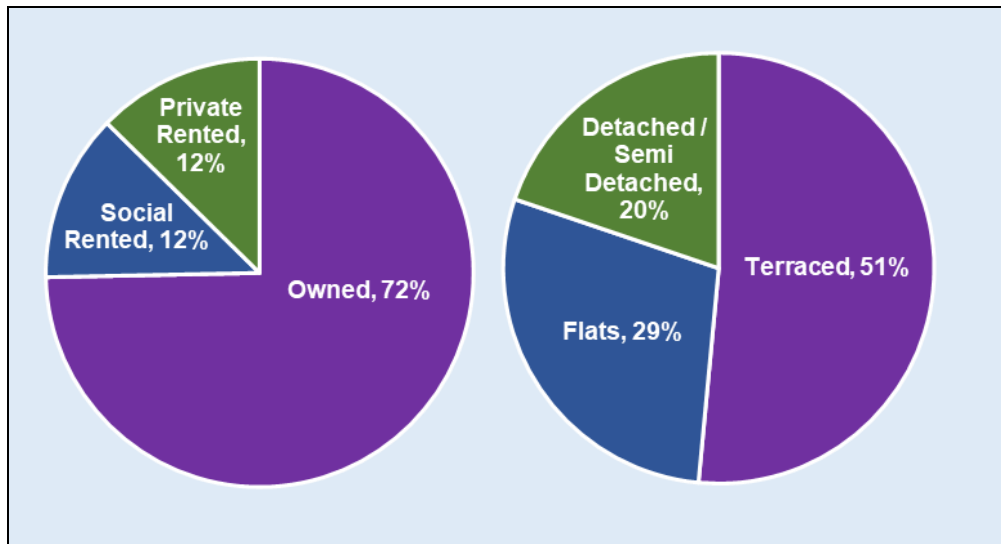
Street West and East, Harbour Street and Louisa Drive is mostly residential) puts it in a good position to grow this.

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, the council received funding from the Scottish Government’s Town Centre Living Fund to acquire the former Girvan Cinema on Dalrymple Street which has since been demolished and is available as a development site which “could be considered for affordable housing”⁸.

House prices within the town centre are much lower compared to average of other YTA towns (£86,700 compared to £113,200). This is considerably below the wider Girvan average of £128,500. Further, three in five properties within the town centre (60%) are in council tax bands A, B or C. This is a reflection of the size of houses in the town centre, which is largely semi-detached or terraced.

More up to date market information from property website Zoopla⁹ places the average selling price for residential properties across the whole of Girvan at £162,700 over the last year, with 144 sales recorded.

Girvan Town Centre Housing Mix



⁸ [South Ayrshire Council Report by Director - Place to Leadership Panel of 17 March 2020](#)

⁹ <https://www.zoopla.co.uk/house-prices/girvan/>

3.2 Businesses and Employment

In 2020, national statistics recorded 110 enterprises registered in the whole of Girvan, and 165 'local units'. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the 1,250 jobs in Girvan are located in the town centre area¹⁰.

The town centre audit located 151 units within the town

centre area, with 65 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 Girvan (45% compared to 46% across all towns).



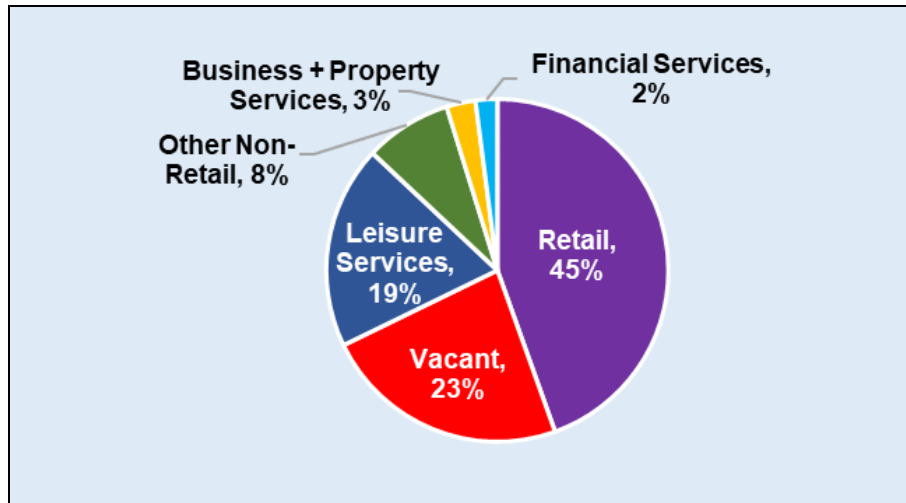
For all units (both retail and otherwise, excluding housing), the vacancy rate was 23%, the highest of all YTA towns and much higher than the YTA average of 10%. This equated to 34 vacant units which were largely comprised of retail units particularly along Dalrymple Street.

As noted in the [Girvan Place Plan 2021](#), the town centre has “suffered with the reduction of tourism in the town 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 second 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 Girvan (leisure: Girvan 19%, YTA average 22%; and other non-retail: Girvan 8%, YTA average 14%). This reflects that some of these services, while in Girvan, are located outside of the defined town centre e.g. churches around the Henrietta Street and Harbour Lane area.

¹⁰ Source: Business Register & Employment Survey

Girvan Town Centre Unit Mix



3.3 Retail

The retail offering in Girvan reflects its role as a local centre. It has a wide range of smaller independent shops although lacks much of a presence from larger, national comparison retailers – particularly given that Ayr, the regional centre, is just 30 minutes away. The retail offer is mainly concentrated in the perpendicular streets of Dalrymple Street and Knockcushan Street/ Hamilton Street. We identified 65 retailer operators in the town centre area from a total of 151 units.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the retail vacancy rate in Girvan town centre is 21%, equivalent to 29 units. This is more than double the average YTA retail vacancy rate of 10.5% across 39 towns (albeit mostly based on pre-COVID data).

With two-thirds of the vacant units, Dalrymple Street had the most vacant retail units (19) followed by Hamilton Street (four units). 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.

The high proportion of vacant units led to Girvan being deemed the “least healthy retail district in the UK” in a Vitality Index and Rankings published by retail real estate consultancy [Harper Dennis Hobbs](#). The index is published every two years and considers indicators such as shop vacancy rates; the proportion of upmarket shops in each area; the proportion of value-led shops; and the proportion of “low-quality” shops such as pawnbrokers and bookmakers. This measurement does, however, fail to

capture the positives of what Girvan has to offer, and both grassroots and local authority efforts which are going into improving the town.

With 97 residents per town centre retail outlet, Girvan town centre has an extremely high density of retail offering in relation to its population (YTA average: 227 residents per town centre retail outlet). Again, this reflects the fact that it serves a wider rural area.

97 residents per town centre retail outlet

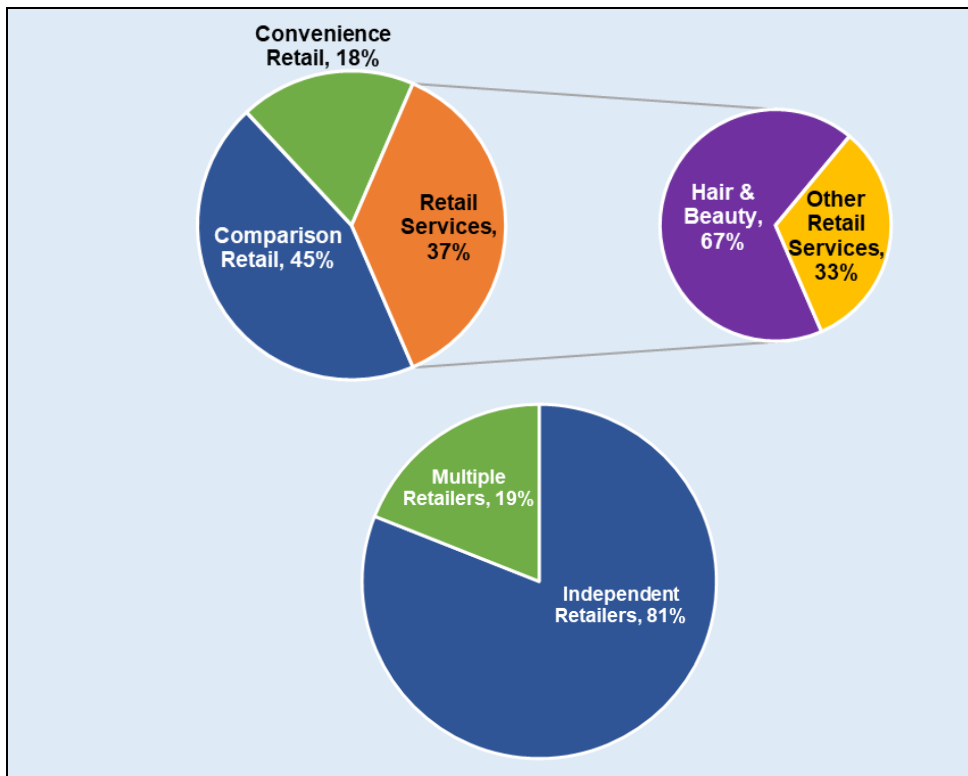
65 town centre retail units in use

29 vacant town centre retail units

Retail forms the largest town centre unit use, amounting to 45% of all units. This is similar to the YTA average of 46%.

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. – *12 convenience retailers identified in Girvan town centre;*
- **Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *29 comparison retailers identified in Girvan 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. – *24 retail service operators identified in Girvan town centre.*



Independent retailers comprise 81% of the total in Girvan, which ranks relatively highly (YTA average of 72%). The number of national comparison retailers with larger stores was fairly low – this included Boots, Bargain Buys, Direct Outdoors and Wright's Home Hardware.



In terms of supermarkets, there is a Nisa Local store and a number of smaller convenience stores within the town centre as well as an Asda a short distance outside of the town centre.

4. Attractive Town Centre

4.1 Overview

Within the town centre, the central focal point is Stumpy Tower / Corner, a B-listed former jail, which is situated at the junction between the harbour and waterfront of Knockcushan Street/Hamilton Street and the main shopping street of Dalrymple Street.

In the [Girvan Place Plan 2021](#), a number of regeneration opportunities and priorities have been identified by the community and its partners. For example, a steering group has been established to “*refurbish Stumpy Tower/ Corner into a town square suitable for markets and events*”. In a visible spot on the A77, this could help



to attract passing trade of both residents and visitors to stop and spend money on local produce as they pass to/from the waterfront and the shopping street. This would also strengthen the link between the waterfront and the main retail area in the town centre as people pass through Stumpy Tower / Corner in either direction.

There are a few older buildings dating from the 19th century in the town centre, such as The McKechnie Institute and Stumpy Tower, which add to the character and history of Girvan. More could be done to communicate the heritage and history of Girvan and these buildings through more interactive displays or trails beyond a few historic signs and/or direct people towards the McKechnie Institute. Maximising their use and improving the condition of the surrounding buildings presents a real opportunity to significantly improve the attractiveness and vibrancy of the town centre for both local residents and visitors.

With high vacancy rates especially over the longer term for some derelict and vacant buildings, South Ayrshire Council have explored ways to repurpose buildings to improve the vibrancy of the town centre. An example is the acquisition and

demolition of the former Girvan Cinema on Dalrymple Street which is now a gap site with potential of affordable housing development.

The building condition of town centre units in Girvan scored well below the YTA average and was second bottom out of all YTA audited towns (see section 4.5). This reflected the large proportion of vacant and derelict properties, particularly retail units along Dalrymple Street.

Many shopfronts had cracked paintwork or weeds growing from the gutter or exterior – a couple of retail units with cracked glass and graffiti. This was not confined to vacant and derelict units but also some units which were still in use. Some small renovation works targeted at “sprucing up” specific parts of the town centre or buildings would make a big difference, although identifying owners and then incentivising (or compelling) them to make repairs can be a challenge.

The area around the harbour on Knockcushan Street is attractive and has plenty of seating and, when in season, planters and flower beds, as well as a boating pond and play park, offering views of Ailsa Craig.

There are many bins throughout the town centre which appear to have kept litter to a minimum. However, a few of the bins appear weathered and covered in bird droppings therefore could be upgraded.

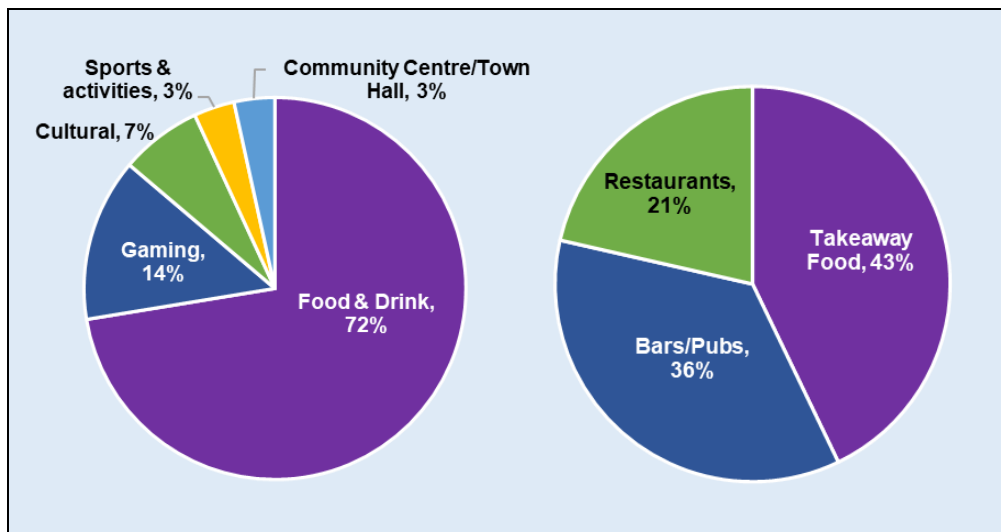
Compared to other town centres, there is little in the way of public art with the focus on the views offered by waterfront and close proximity to Girvan beach. However, during the audit visit, there were several knitted decorations which highlighted the work of the local RNLI and displayed solidarity with Ukraine in context of Russian invasion. Perhaps, this kind of participative community art is something which could be explored further to increase the attractiveness of the town centre,.



Whilst the audit visit was carried out in March 2022 and flower displays around Stumpy Tower were yet to blossom, there still appeared to be a lack of displays and hanging baskets – more of which would help to increase the attractiveness particularly along the main shopping street of Dalrymple Street.



4.2 Leisure Mix



Compared to other YTA towns, Girvan has a slightly lower proportion of town centre units that are used for leisure services (19% compared to 22% average). Of the mix of leisure businesses in Girvan town centre, the vast majority are food and drink outlets (21 of 29 leisure units).

The evening economy is comprised of six takeaways, five bars/pubs and three restaurants. Girvan has a relatively high proportion of evening economy outlets (451 residents per evening economy outlet) compared to the YTA average (953 residents per evening economy outlet).



Opened in 2017, The Quay Zone leisure centre on Knockcushan Street is an attractive and modern facility which has a swimming pool, gym, studio, café and soft play. It is managed by South Carrick Community Leisure and had building costs of £8 million.



In terms of greenspace, Girvan is well-served with several formal and informal gardens, parks and playing fields. Within the town centre, the Girvan Community Garden is an active and attractive hub for the community – both in terms of the garden itself with pond, wildlife area, and a summer soul kitchen and as an organisation which offers a range of regular and seasonal events (see section 4.3) and volunteering opportunities. The community garden has real potential in supporting a revitalised town centre.



Larger parks which lie just outside of the town centre boundary include Victory Park and Stair Park. The Girvan Place Plan 2021 noted that there are “opportunities to build on these resources to improve facilities for the local community and develop an attraction for visitors to the town”. This is particularly important in the context of reduction in tourists and footfall to Girvan.

Girvan Community Sport Hub brings together local sports clubs and other community partners to develop and grow the sporting offering in the community of Girvan. These local clubs and partners include: Adventure Centre for Education (outdoor adventure activities), archery, coastal rowing, Girvan Harriers (running club), volleyball, Girvan Wheelers (cycling), Biosphere Bikes, South Carrick Club

Diamonds (weekly exercise club) and Girvan Football Club. An organised parkrun (part of a national network of such events) takes place in Girvan every Saturday. While most clubs use Girvan Academy as a venue for their activities, Girvan Football Club has its own dedicated ground at Hamilton Park on the outskirts of the town, visible if entering from the north by the A77 and close to the train station.

As well as the famous Trump Turnberry Golf Course, around ten minute's drive from the town, Girvan Golf Course is located just to the north of the harbour. More than 4.5km in length, it is split into two distinct parts – the opening eight holes are links with the remaining ten holes as parkland. Adult fee is £19 with £9 for under 18s.

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:

- RNLI Girvan Lifeboat's Harbour Gala – annual fundraising event which is planning to return in August 2022 for first time since COVID-19 pandemic. Activities typically include rescue display, stalls, funfair, emergency services area and a raft race;
- Girvan Traditional Folk Festival – annual event on May Day weekend, having been held most years since 1975. Due to COVID-19, the festival was cancelled in 2020, returned online in 2021 and is scheduled to take place normally this year. Weekend tickets are priced at £60;
- Carrick Lowland Gathering – an annual event since 1982 which takes place at Victory Park on the first Sunday in June. Admission is free and there is variety of stalls, funfairs, food and drink with displays from Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway Pipe Band Association Competition, The Highland Heavy Weight Games, The Aileen Robertson School of Highland Dance Competitions as well as race and athletic events;
- Fireworks display at Louisa Drive on the Bonfire Night weekend; and
- Girvan Community Garden hosts events throughout the year which have included Easter Fayre, Tattie Fest (£5 ticket), Christmas Fayre, Queens Jubilee.

4.4 Attractions and Heritage

Girvan has a number of visitor attractions on offer. Built in the early 19th century, Stumpy Tower is a former jail which has five levels with an octagonal spire and belfry¹¹. Situated at the heart of the town centre, it is one of Girvan's most notable landmarks. It was surrounded by McMaster Hall until it was destroyed by fire in 1939 leaving only the Stumpy Tower. Seating and planters now surround the B-listed building in a relatively underutilised civic space with educational plaques detailing its history.

Also dating from 19th century, the McKechnie Institute on Dalrymple Street acts as a cultural hub for Girvan. There is a museum featuring a permanent display of artefacts highlighting the town's heritage including local geology and fossils, history of Ailsa Craig and its granite, maritime history and model ships, bronze age cinerary urns dating 2100-1500 BC¹². It also has an art gallery with a programme of changing exhibitions and is the venue for many local group meetings, councillor surgeries, and art classes.

Located 10 miles off the coast from Girvan, Ailsa Craig is an ancient volcanic plug of granite. The town centre offers some of the best views of the uninhabited island which, as well as being a notable regional landmark, is famous for its granite used to make curling



stones. Daily boat trips operate from Girvan Harbour to travel to and around Ailsa Craig to view the island itself and its colony of gannets and other seabirds.

Both Ailsa Craig and Isle of Arran can be viewed from the town centre as well as Girvan Beach which is one of Ayrshire's most popular sandy beaches. The beach offers traditional seaside activities such as amusements and a boating lake as well

¹¹ Gazetteer for Scotland – [Stumpy Tower](#) (accessed March 2022)

¹² Destination South Ayrshire - [The McKechnie Institute](#) (accessed March 2022)

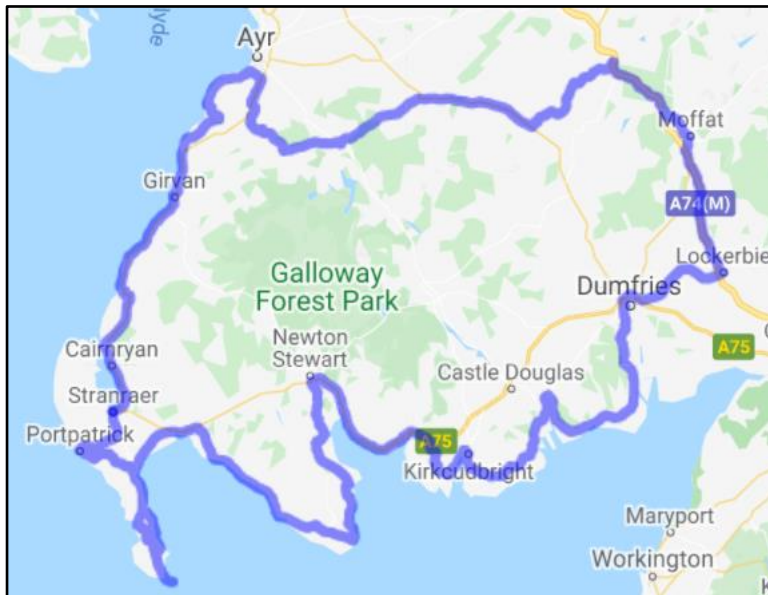
as opportunity ability to watch boats using the harbour and local wildlife including seals.

Visit cotland notes that there are 20 castles in the wider area. The most notable of these is [Culzean Castle and Country Park](#), which is a 15-minute drive away just north of Turnberry and has a 4-star Visit Scotland rating.

Girvan 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 Girvan at Stage 3 (6.5 mile path from Lendalfoot) and Stage 4 (8 mile path to Maidens). Other local walking paths and trails include Laggan Trail, Dow Hill, Whithorn Way and Byne Hill.

In addition to the walking paths and trails, the [South West Coastal 300](#) has been developed to promote Girvan 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 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.

South West Coastal 300 Route



Source: [Visit South West Scotland](#)

As noted in the [Girvan Place Plan 2021](#), a community steering group was established to prepare a community led tourism action plan for the town and this has

culminated in the recently launched Go Girvan promotional campaign with dedicated website. With [Go Girvan](#), [Destination South Ayrshire](#) and [Visit South West Scotland](#), it appears that considerable work is being undertaken to promote and market Girvan to a wide audience. With multiple campaigns, it is important to ensure that there is a clear and shared vision for Girvan and its promotion.

4.5 Attractiveness Review

The YTA includes an independent review of place and quality impressions, with Girvan 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 6.9 and 6.8 respectively. In particular, the quality of building fronts rating is the second lowest of all YTA towns.

As disused or derelict buildings tend to bring the average score down, the high number and proportion of vacant properties and buildings in

Girvan town centre will likely have had 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 5.8 / 10, similar to the 5.9 average of other YTA audited towns. This shows that Girvan independent traders remain relatively hopeful of new opportunities in the context of COVID-19 pandemic and challenges facing the town centre (e.g. decreasing footfall).



5. YTA Summary and Key Points

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

5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- Girvan is relatively compact and most of the town is within walking distance of the town centre. However, the railway station, ASDA supermarket and community hospital are all located outside of the town centre. Much of Girvan 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 Girvan's economy and population.
- Car ownership in the town is relatively low, with 34% of households in Girvan not having access to a car or van, compared to 23% of households across South West Scotland¹³. This shows the importance of having a town centre that is easy to access by public transport and that favours active travel when moving around. It was clear during the audit that there is a high volume of traffic, particularly HGVs, passing through the town centre on the A77. Although pavements are of a good width, pedestrian crossings and the main intersection by the Stumpy Tower are less friendly to pedestrians.
- 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 spread around the town at present, including at Hanover Square, the waterfront, Morrisons, and the hospital.
- 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, 34 vacant units were recorded in the town centre

¹³ Transport Scotland (2020) [South West Scotland Transport Study - Initial Appraisal: Case for Change](#)

which was equivalent to 23% of total units (10% YTA average) - 29 of these units were vacant retail units giving a retail vacancy rate of 21% (10.5% YTA average). This illustrates how Girvan town centre has been vulnerable to a general change in retail habits. The high proportion of vacant retail units resulted in Girvan being ranked as the least healthy retail district in the UK by a retail real estate consultancy which underlines the scale of the challenge. Although as this is the second audit completed since start of COVID-19 pandemic, comparisons with the YTA average should be treated with caution. While attracting new retailers is an obvious priority (and local entrepreneurial activity the ideal solution), consideration also needs to be given to finding new uses for vacant units, such as housing.

- Girvan's town centre is rooted in its independent stores, which make up 81% of the total and offer a wide range of goods and services – the importance of a quality local baker and butcher, for instance, cannot be underestimated. This is important in retaining a distinct identity for the town centre and supporting its appeal to visitors. Showcasing local produce at proposed market space at Stumpy Tower / Corner would help to promote this distinct identity.
- 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.
- A successful future for the town centre will require a mix of local authority investment, willing private investment, a positive vision and strong volunteer input and community buy-in. Girvan already has positive work going on in this area and assets that can be built on.

5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- Many of the retailers in the town are dependent on the tourist market, which is largely seasonal (such as the amusements arcade, ice cream parlours, and gift shops). Attracting day visitors to Girvan is therefore very important for the survival of these businesses – the [Go Girvan](#) community-led tourism project has an important role to play here.
- At the same time, the range of retailers in Girvan is a key asset, with two greengrocers, two bakers, and two butchers – quality local shops that will draw in regular custom to the town centre. Nonetheless, it is not immune to the challenges of a changing retail climate, with the rapid growth in online purchases over the last two years likely to become the norm. Maintaining a

vibrant mix of retailers, cafes and other services will be important in ensuring an attractive town centre in future years.

- The scale of the challenge presented by the high volume of vacant and derelict buildings of Girvan 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 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.
- The town centre contains an adequate volume of parking spaces, facilitating those stopping by at local shops and deliveries. Longer stay car parks are also nearby. However, active travel is not necessarily prioritised – there is a large volume of traffic, particularly HGVs which can detract from the attractiveness and accessibility of the town centre for walking/cycling. A redesign of key pedestrian crossing points could contribute to a more welcoming town centre. As the transition to net zero speeds up, the availability of electric charging points in the town centre will be increasingly important – there are currently two chargers at the Quay Zone leisure centre.
- Girvan has suffered from negative publicity over the last year, with its high street branded the “worst in Britain”. However, high street (the retail and commercial element) and town centre (all activity) are not interchangeable terms, and there is a risk that focusing too much on the former negates the positive aspects (and opportunities) in the town centre as a whole.