



Your Town Audit: Newton Mearns

September 2016



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1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

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

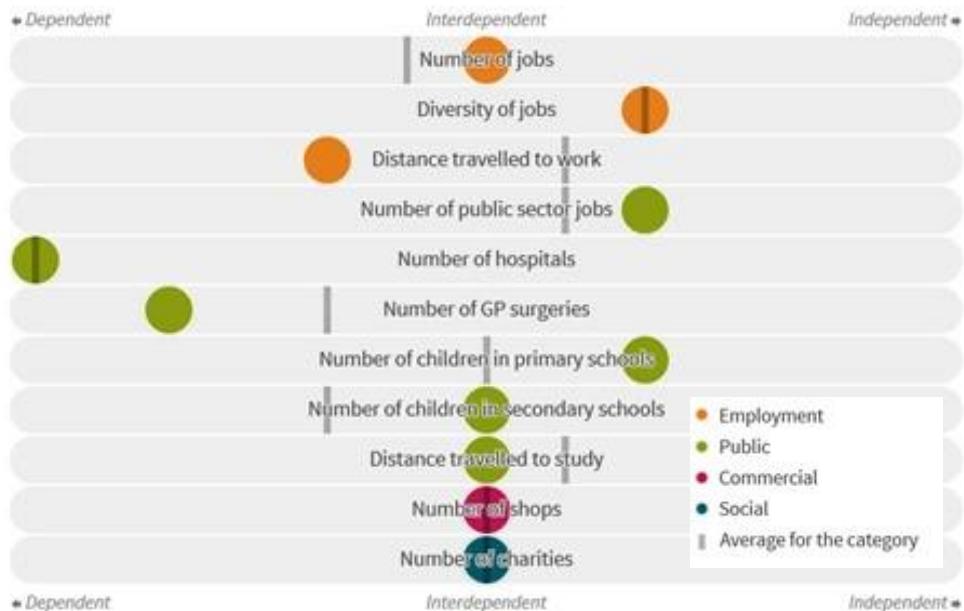
The [Understanding Scottish Places](#) (USP) data platform provides a summary analysis for Newton Mearns and identifies seven comparator towns that have similar characteristics, with the most similar being Erskine, Westhill (Aberdeenshire), Troon, and Bearsden¹. The USP platform - www.usp.scot – describes Newton Mearns in the following general terms:

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

Newton Mearns' Typology: This type of large town is a suburban or commuter locality with a prevalence of higher income and private housing. A large proportion of the population are over 45, and many are retired. Many people own their home. There is also a high proportion of people in professional employment and a high proportion of residents are educated to HNC level or above. Many residents own two or more cars.

¹ The other similar towns are: Milngavie, Bishopbriggs and Carnoustie

Inter-relationships



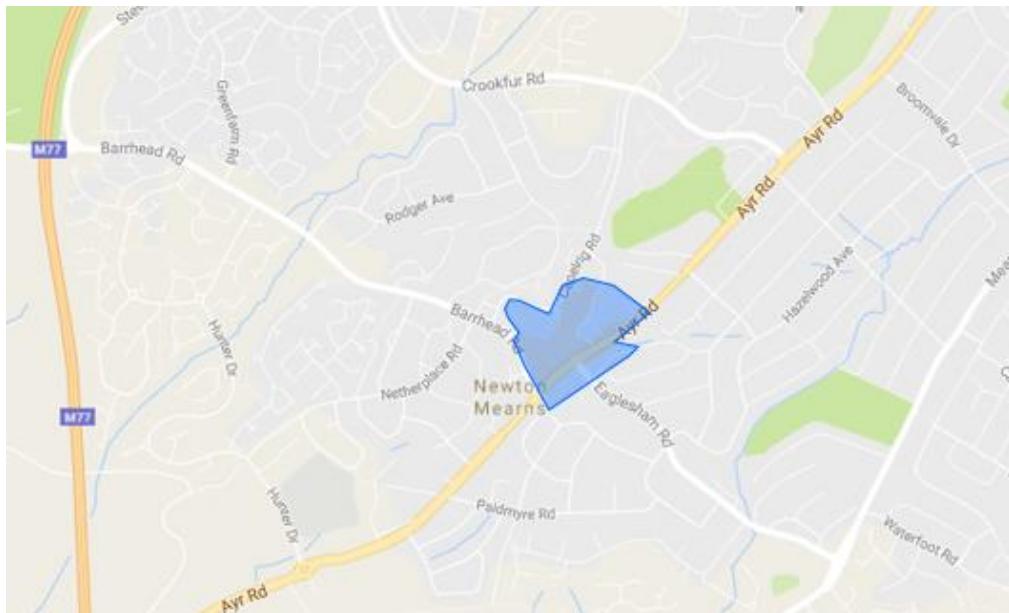
Comparing Newton Mearns to towns with similar USP typology and interrelationships shows it has a similar number of charities, GP surgeries, school children, jobs and shops. It differs most in the distance that residents travel to work (greater) and is more dependent on neighbouring towns for employment opportunities.

Building on the USP, this report presents the results of our detailed analysis of Newton Mearns 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 Newton Mearns. The report is not intended as a detailed strategy or action plan – although there has been discussion in ERC about the development of a town centre masterplan for Newton Mearns.

2. Accessible Town Centre

Newton Mearns Town Centre



Newton Mearns is a commuter town with a population of around 22,000, situated seven miles south of Glasgow. It is the largest settlement in East Renfrewshire. Its town centre is relatively compact, taking in the shopping centre and surrounding car parks, the adjacent ASDA supermarket, and a park. Newton Mearns is largely residential and some of its other key services, including transport links and schools, are located on the periphery of the town centre.

There are two railway stations serving Newton Mearns, Whitecraigs and Patterton, both located on its northern periphery. Each station has Park and Ride facilities and both are located on the Glasgow to Neilston railway line, with a journey time of c. 20 minutes to Glasgow and c. 5 minutes to Neilston.

Regular buses connect the centre of Newton Mearns to Glasgow. There are also bus connections from the town to Ayr and East Kilbride. The M77 motorway flanks the western edge of the town and offers the fastest route by car into the centre of Glasgow.

15 mile radius around Newton Mearns



A large car park, containing 1,000 spaces over two levels, is located next to the shopping centre. This is free of charge, although the maximum stay is four hours, and appears well used. A small number of parking spaces are found elsewhere in the town centre, including outside shops on Ayr Road.

Newton Mearns has excellent mobile connectivity and fibre optic broadband has been rolled out to the town in recent years. Free WiFi is available within The Avenue shopping centre.

In addition to the majority of Newton Mearns' retail outlets, the town centre include the library, medical centre, various religious facilities, community hall, bowling green and a large park.

3. Active Town Centre

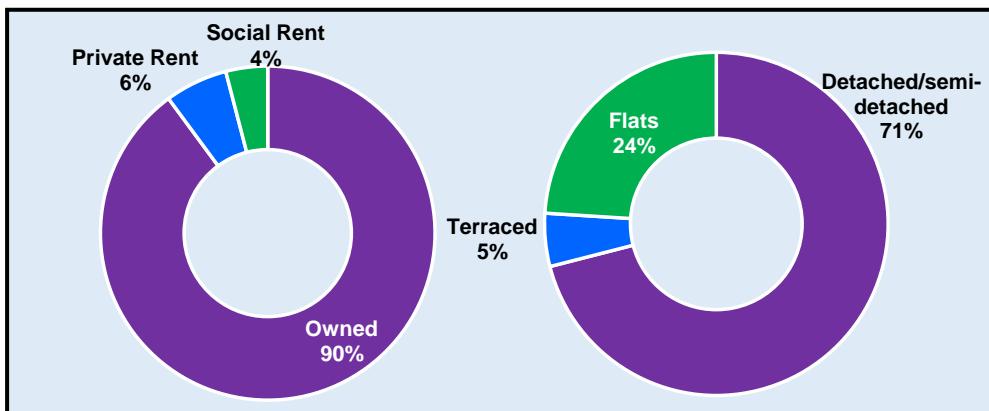
3.1 Population and Housing

Around 100 people live within the town centre area in Newton Mearns², 0.5% of the total settlement population. This is very low compared to other town centres, but unsurprising given that most of the area is taken up by shopping centre, car parks and park – any housing captured within the town centre boundary is incidental. Over the decade to 2013, the population of the whole settlement increased by 10%, compared to 1% for East Renfrewshire and a 5% increase in Scotland over this period. This is a result of extensive house building on the edge of the town.

The nature of the town centre in Newton Mearns makes analysis of its housing composition difficult. However, the wider town is dominated by detached/semi-detached properties (71%), which extend out from the town centre in a network of cul-de-sacs and residential streets. Newer housing developments have been built on the edge of Newton Mearns, notably at Greenlaw next to the M77, as well as to the east of the town.

House prices in Newton Mearns reflect its status as one of the more affluent areas of Greater Glasgow, coming in at around £284,000 in 2013³, an increase of 36% over ten years. More up to date data from Zoopla states that from 531 sales in Newton Mearns over the past 12 months (to September 2016), the average price paid was £301,000. The housing stock in the town is, for the most part, privately owned (89%).

Newton Mearns Housing Mix



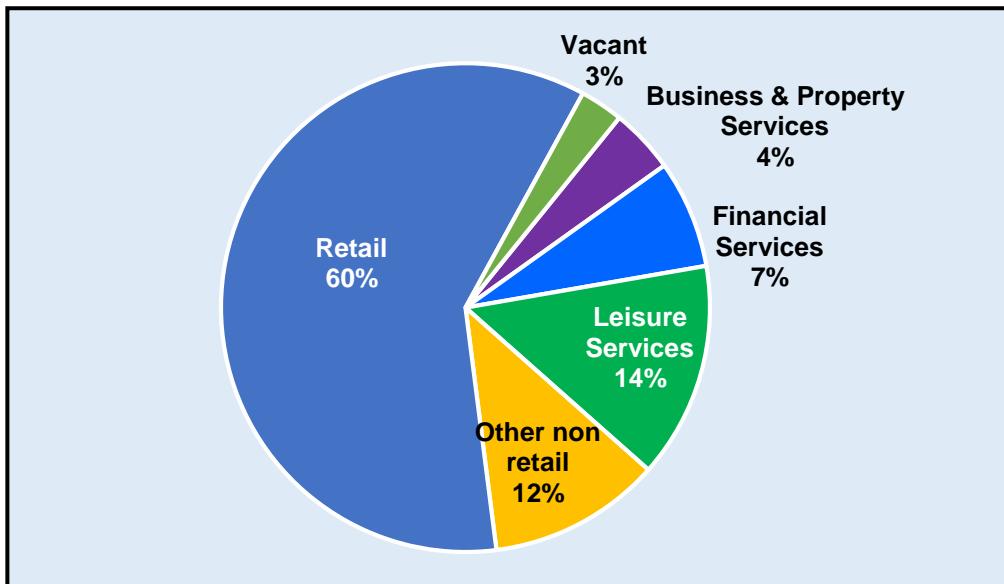
3.2 Businesses and Employment

Just under one quarter (23%) of the 4,400 jobs in Newton Mearns are located in the approximate town centre area⁴. National statistics record 750 businesses in the town. The YTA street audit located 63 business units in use within Newton Mearns town centre – this was in line with the UPRN data provided by East Renfrewshire Council prior to the audit. Of these, 42 are retail businesses.

³ Average across Newton Mearns' four intermediate zones, Scottish Statistics 2013

⁴ Employment data derived from ONS Business Register & Employment Survey, nearest fit town centre datazone S01001692

Town Centre Unit Mix



3.3 Retail

Retail provision in Newton Mearns town centre is mostly located within The Avenue shopping centre, built in the 1970s on the site of what was the village Main Street. This has a range of national chains and local retailers, anchored by large ASDA and M&S Food supermarkets at each end. A number of other retail units are located on a pedestrianised street leading from the shopping centre to Ayr Road.

At the date of the audit, two small units within the shopping centre were vacant. However, the overall vacancy rate in the town centre is low, at just 3% of relevant units i.e. excluding office premises, community and health facilities.

In comparison, the vacancy rate in Barrhead was 6% and in Clarkston 10%, with no vacancies recorded in Giffnock. Audited towns outside of East Renfrewshire have had much higher vacancy rates, including Alloa (10%), Dumbarton (15%), Kilmarnock (15%), Ayr (16%) and Kirkcaldy (17%). In Clydebank, which has a similarly condensed town centre, the vacancy rate was 5%.

The low unit vacancy demonstrates good resilience in the face of changing retail patterns and the opening of large retail/leisure complexes on the edge of Glasgow over the past 15 years. Nonetheless, the Silverburn Shopping Centre – one such example – is less than a 15 minute drive along the M77, placing comparison retailers in Newton Mearns under direct competition. In that respect, the continued presence of the two anchor food stores is important in drawing daily footfall to the centre of Newton Mearns.

The Avenue shopping centre opens between 9am and 6pm most days of the week, with a 7pm closing time on Thursdays and shorter hours on Sundays. Additionally, Marks and Spencer opens from 8am to 8pm on weekdays, while the ASDA opens 8am to 10pm every day.



532 residents per town centre retail outlet

42 town centre retail units in use

2 vacant town centre units

Retail forms the largest town centre unit use, amounting to 60% of all units. This is higher than average, with Giffnock coming in at 54%, Barrhead 46%, and Clarkston 40%. It is slightly lower than another town centre which is similarly dominated by a shopping centre, Clydebank, where 65% of all units are retail.

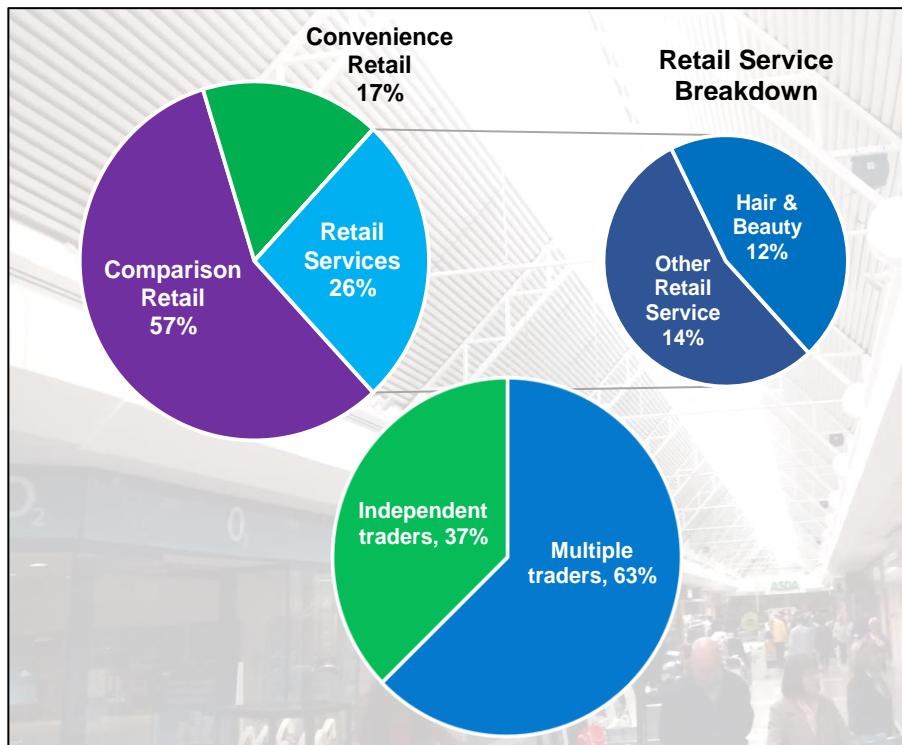
A number of new units have been constructed in recent years on the edge of the town, including one of only a handful of Waitrose stores in Scotland, Home Bargains and Pets at Home. While this has increased the attractiveness of the town's overall retail offering, it may draw some spend out of the town centre, particularly with Waitrose being a direct competitor to the town centre supermarkets.

Other local retail units are spread through the wider Newton Mearns area.

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 – *7 convenience retailers identified in Newton Mearns town centre*;
- **Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *24 comparison retailers identified in Newton Mearns 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 – *11 retail service operators identified in Newton Mearns town centre*.

Just 37% of traders within Newton Mearns town centre are independent – this is the lowest proportion of any town centre audited to date. In comparison, the figure for Clarkston is 68%, Barrhead 67% and Giffnock 51%. To compare with another town built around a shopping centre, 49% of traders in Clydebank are independent.





4. Attractive Town Centre

Front and Back Entrances to The Avenue shopping centre



As most of the retail/service offer in the town centre falls within The Avenue, it is the shopping centre that is responsible for much of the public space in Newton Mearns.

The Avenue organises different promotional activities aimed at boosting footfall in the town centre. This includes a regular 'Funday Sunday' event with children's' activities, as well as other seasonal events. The shopping centre maintains an email newsletter and social media channels, including Facebook (1,950 likes) and Twitter (1,434 followers).

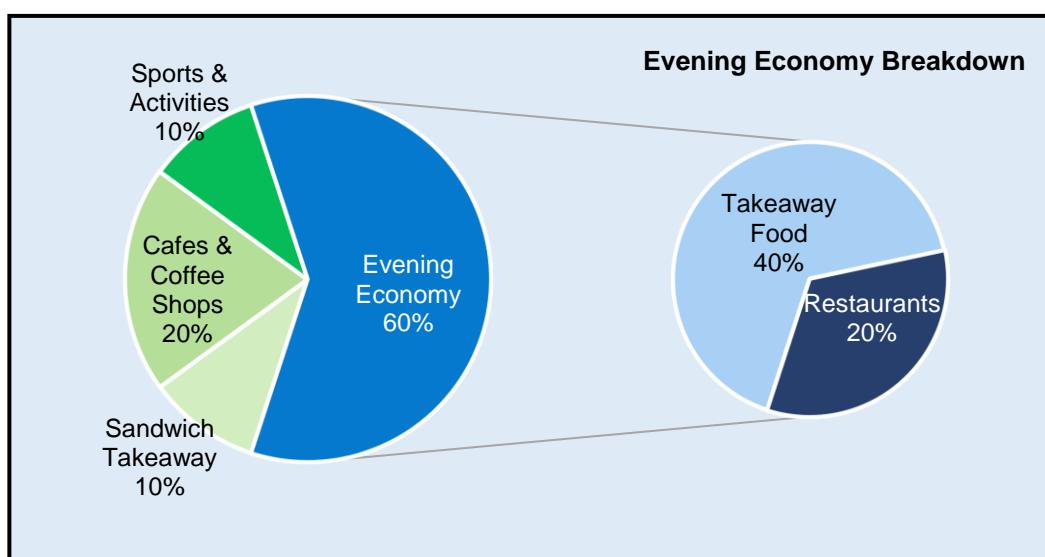
An area of public realm has recently been constructed in front of the shopping centre entrance on Ayr Road, with the potential to be used for public and commercial events and activities. The space is in excellent condition with benches and hanging baskets. This is used for the shopping centre's Christmas Fair each year. The other sides of the shopping centre are less attractive to those arriving on foot or bicycle, with large goods and vehicle entrances.

There is large amount of green space included within the town centre, which extends to cover Fairweather Park (pictured). This includes a children's playground.



While other town centres in East Renfrewshire have pursued town centre improvements and sought to increase commercial activity through the formation of Business Improvement Districts, this approach would be more difficult to replicate in Newton Mearns, with similar activity already co-ordinated by the shopping centre operator.

4.1 Leisure Mix



There is a relatively small number of leisure units in Newton Mearns town centre, with two restaurants facing Ayr Road and five hot food takeaway outlets. There is also a café and seating area inside the shopping centre.

Fairweather Hall, a council operated community hall, is also located inside the town centre area. Two full sized football pitches and the Crookfur Pavilion, another community hall, are



located just outside of the town centre. Nearby is the Parklands Hotel and Country Club, which includes a gym and swimming pool, open to its members. Whitecraigs

Rugby Club is found outside of the town, by the M77, while a bowling green is located on Ayr Road, opposite the shopping centre.

Leisure provision in Newton Mearns town centre is limited, although limitations on space may make it difficult to increase this without reducing retail space.



4.2 Attractiveness Review

The YTA includes an independent review of place and quality impressions, with Newton Mearns scoring above average in comparison to other towns.

Business confidence in the town centre was gauged from a small sample of interviews undertaken with independent traders. However, the dominance of chains within Newton Mearns means this score is not necessarily representative of most retailers in the town. Scores averaged at 6.1 / 10, higher than the average of 16 other YTA audited towns, at 5.8 / 10.

Individual unit fronts and shop window displays were graded out of ten during the on-street audit, with a town centre average score of 7.9 for the condition of unit fronts and 8.1 for quality of window display. This is also above the average across other YTA audited town centres, of 7.0 in each instance. However, this can be explained by the low number of vacancies (as disused or derelict units tend to bring the average score down) and most units being based within the shopping centre (which will be maintained by the centre owner).



5. YTA Summary and Key Points

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

5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- Newton Mearns town centre is within walking distance of a large residential catchment area, and although there has been retail/leisure development on the edge of the town, it remains the primary retail and service destination in the area;
- car ownership in the town is very high (90%), with a high number of free parking spaces (1,000) at The Avenue shopping centre, however, the town's proximity to the Silverburn shopping centre, in south west Glasgow, poses a challenge. The presence of two food stores and a range of good quality retailers will help retain important daily footfall in Newton Mearns;
- there is a large amount of green space in the town centre and footpaths through the park connect the shopping centre with other parts of the town for those travelling on foot/by bicycle. There are two cycle racks outside the front of The Avenue; and
- Newton Mearns has good 4G mobile coverage and access to superfast broadband, and free WiFi is also available.

5.2 Active Town Centre

- only two vacant units were recorded in the town centre, both small shop units within The Avenue centre. This is a positive sign and gives the impression of an active, well-used and well supported town centre;
- there is a limited amount of leisure activity in Newton Mearns town centre, particularly compared to similar sized settlements. With the exception of two restaurants, little else is open during the evening. Given the large catchment population nearby, there may be scope for expanding this – particularly in light of the bars/restaurants that have opened at Greenlaw. There is, however, limited space in the town centre and short of a major reconfiguration of its layout or extension it may be difficult to increase leisure provision without reducing retail provision;

- an area of public realm has been developed between The Avenue shopping centre and Ayr Road, with potential to be used for events, small markets etc, but is owned by the shopping centre and activity would require permission; and
- there is no farmers market or craft fayre in the town, which could be held in a public space or within The Avenue. However, it would be important to include the town's independent butcher and fishmonger and give them the opportunity to take a stall e.g. offer first month free to produce outlets to test?

5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- the range of retailers in Newton Mearns, with good representation from national chains, can draw in shoppers from a wider area, particularly with the ease of parking in the town and good road access. However, the number of residents in the town per town centre retail unit is far higher than the average of around 200. Retaining the retail mix, alongside the presence of the two anchor supermarkets, will be important in maintain the attractiveness of the town centre;
- the lack of retail frontages at street level can detract from the town centre's attractiveness to pedestrians. During hours when the shopping centre is closed, there is little activity in the town centre and although well lit, streets around The Avenue are unappealing to pedestrians and access to ASDA is through the car park. This is likely to discourage active travel around the town;
- while other towns have BID street dressing/promotional signs spread through the town centre, there is no such body in Newton Mearns able to co-ordinate this. It may be worth examining ways in which this can be funded/co-ordinated e.g. lamppost banners on Ayr Road.
- there is little cultural activity in Newton Mearns town centre, such as museums or galleries. There may be scope to increase this in innovative ways – e.g. the local history group or artists staging exhibitions in empty units or within the shopping centre concourse; and
- the Dams to Darnley Country Park aims to be a key recreational and leisure asset to the population south of Glasgow, situated between Newton Mearns and Barrhead. The town could benefit from emphasising its links to the park to draw in visitors.