



# Your Town Audit: Neilston

January 2020



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## 1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

This report presents a summary of the Your Town Audit (YTA) for Neilston, conducted by Scotland's Towns Partnership and EKOS, and comprises an update on the previous Neilston YTA conducted in 2016<sup>1</sup>. 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 Neilston 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 Neilston and identifies 16 comparator towns that have similar characteristics, with the most similar being Innerleithen, Duntocher and Hardgate, Mauchline and Dreghorn<sup>2</sup>.

The USP platform – [www.usp.scot](http://www.usp.scot) – defines Neilston as an 'interdependent to dependent' town and describes it in the following general terms:

**Neilston's Interrelationships:** Neilston is an '*interdependent to dependent town*', which means it has a low number of assets in relation to its population. It also has some diversity of jobs; and residents largely travel longer distances to work and study, although some may travel shorter distances. These towns rely on neighbouring towns for some assets and jobs.

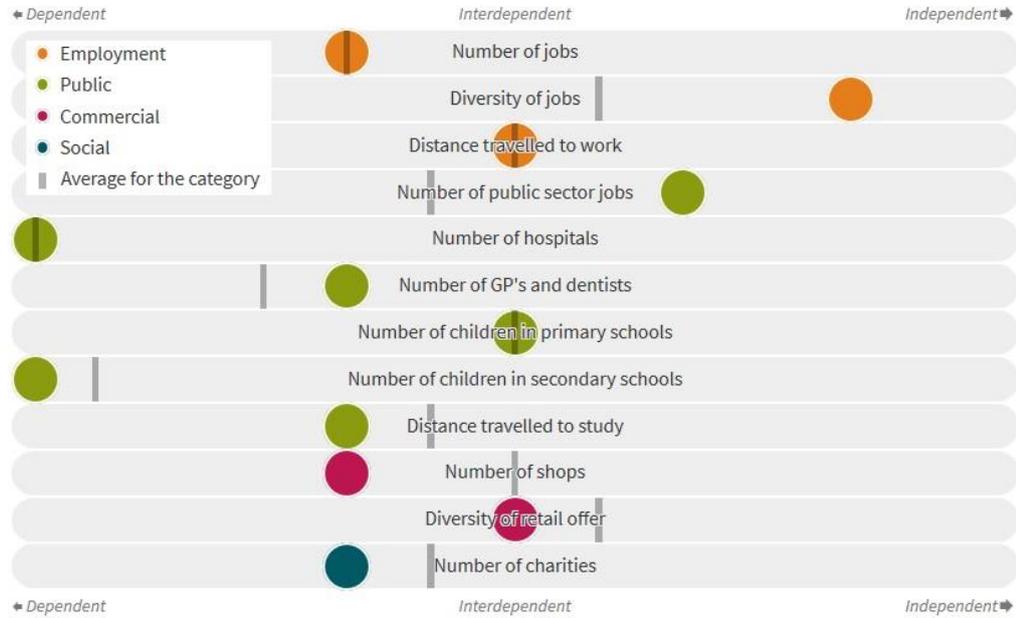
**Neilston's Typology:** This type of medium-sized town is extremely mixed in terms of demographics. There is a wide range of people, housing and activities, with the number of older couples with no children being higher than average. There is a mix of professional and non-professional jobs, and part-time and self-employment are both important for a significant proportion of residents. Socioeconomic status is higher here than in other kinds of town and there is a mix of professionals and non-professionals, and those with higher and lower educational attainment.

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<sup>1</sup> In order to better reflect the socio-economic profile of Neilston, the Data Zones (and Intermediate Zones) which comprise the town centre and wider settlement area have been redefined since the previous audit. As a result, any comparison with the previous audit should be treated with caution.

<sup>2</sup> The other comparator towns are identified as Busby, Kemnay, Cockenzie, Tillicoultry, East Calder, Holytown, Burntisland, Tullibody, Darvel, Locharbiggs, Gretna, and Clackmannan.

## Inter-relationships +



The coloured circles represent Neilston's relative position across key themes compared to 16 other similar towns (average marked by the grey line).

Comparing Neilston to towns with similar USP typology and interrelationships highlights similarities in terms of the number of charities, children in primary and secondary schools, jobs, shops, and diversity of retail offer. It has a greater number of public sector jobs.

### Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) measures relative levels of deprivation across Scottish communities (statistically referred to as Data Zones) based on seven indicators: income, employment, education, health, housing, crime and geographic access.

For all ranks (percentiles): 1(1<sup>st</sup>) is most deprived, 6,976 (100<sup>th</sup>) is least deprived.

**Table 1.1: Neilston SIMD Ranking by Data Zone**

2011 Intermediate Zone	2011 Data Zone	Overall SIMD20 Rank <sup>3</sup>	Percentile
Neilston and Uplawmoor	S01008295	5,991	86 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008296	2,202	32 <sup>nd</sup>
	S01008297	5,295	76 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008299	1,367	20 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008300	2,357	34 <sup>th</sup>

Source: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020)

The three most deprived areas in Neilston, ranked within the 20<sup>th</sup>, 32<sup>nd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> percentile respectively, form the core town centre area (SIMD map is provided in **Appendix B**). Although the relative levels of overall deprivation appear to be limited within Neilston, Data Zones within the core town centre area appear to experience considerably higher levels of deprivation in comparison to Data Zones at the edge of Neilston (86<sup>th</sup> and 76<sup>th</sup> percentile).

Whilst no Data Zones that comprise the town of Neilston fall within the top 15% most deprived areas of Scotland when considering all indicators in aggregate, looking at the individual indicators highlights particular challenges regarding higher levels of crime, housing and income deprivation within the core town centre, **Table 1.1**.

### YTA Reporting

Building on the USP and SIMD data, this report presents the results of our detailed analysis of Neilston 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.

In total, 40 YTA audits have been prepared for towns across Scotland providing consistent data across a range of KPIs. Where appropriate, this report provides comparisons for Neilston against the YTA town average<sup>4</sup>. In particular, YTAs have been prepared for two of the USP comparator towns defined earlier – Busby and Tullibody – and specific reference is made to this comparison where relevant.

<sup>3</sup> Rank out of 6,976 Scottish Data Zones.

<sup>4</sup> 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. Accessible Town Centre

Neilston is a small town in quite a rural setting, roughly 15 miles southwest of Glasgow, with a population of approximately 3,900 people<sup>5</sup>. The core retail area of Neilston is situated on Main Street, an A-class road leading into Neilston from the adjacent and substantially larger town of Barrhead.

The town centre offers a reasonable range of services and retail, in what is otherwise a residential area.

There is a railway station located within the settlement of Neilston, which has park and ride facilities<sup>6</sup>. Journeys from Neilston into the centre of Glasgow take roughly 30 minutes. Train services also connect Neilston to other settlements in East Renfrewshire, however journey times to Giffnock, Busby and Thornliebank take over an hour as a change of service at Glasgow Central Station is involved.

There are plans for a station and bus interchange facility at Barrhead South on the Neilston to Glasgow line delivered through city deal funding which will reintroduce a railway link with Barrhead<sup>7</sup>. Reconnecting the rail links with Barrhead could also reduce dependency on car usage within the town – see also travel to work map presented in Chapter 3.

The main commuter destination for workers from Neilston is Glasgow City Centre followed by Barrhead and Paisley<sup>8</sup>. **Map 3.1** shows the inbound and outbound flow of commuters from and to Neilston:

- coloured lines/pins show the main flows that exceed 2% of the town's population or 2,000 people;

**15 mile radius around Neilston**



<sup>5</sup> Selected geography includes Data Zones (2011) S01008295 to S01008297, S01008299 and S01008300.

<sup>6</sup> Park and Ride at Neilston Station provides 77 spaces.

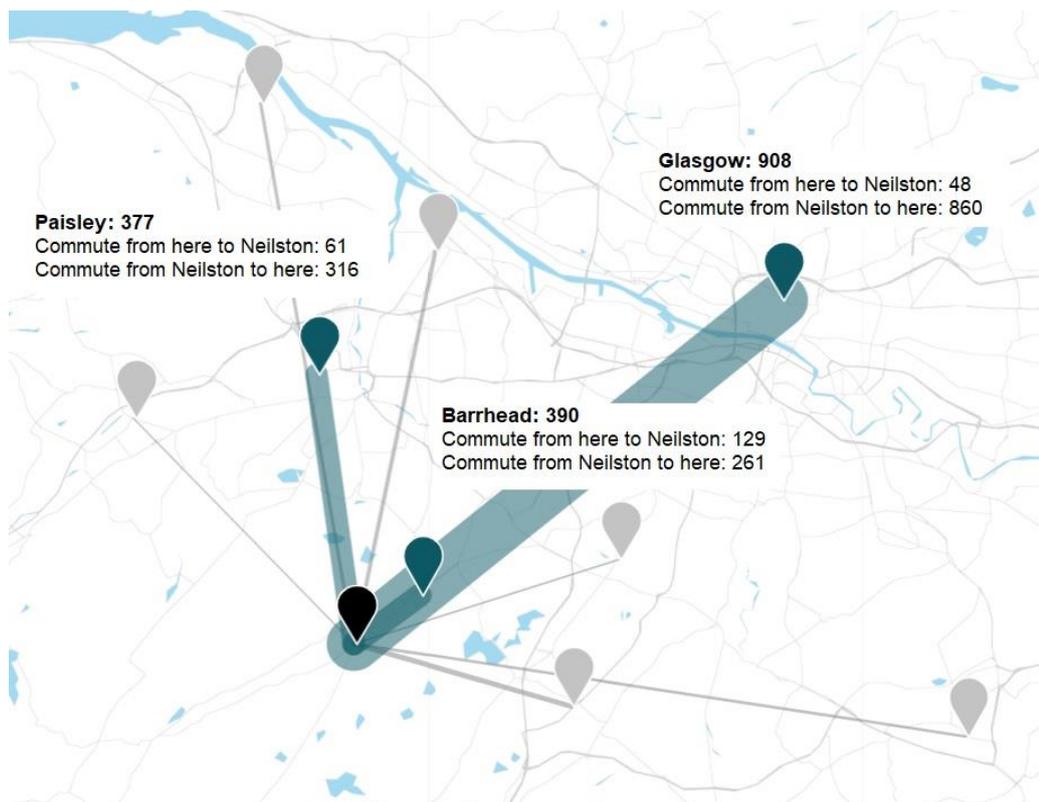
<sup>7</sup> Barrhead News (2018) [Plans for new train station gather pace](#)

<sup>8</sup> DataShine Scotland Commute data shows that Glasgow City Centre South is the second most common destination for commuters from West Neilston and Uplawmoor. [Accessed online](#)

- grey lines/pins show smaller flows that still exceed 0.5% of the town's population or 500 people;
- the thickness of each line is proportional to the size of the flow (both inbound and outbound); and
- flows representing less than 10 people in total are not shown.

As Neilston is a commuter town, there is a net outflow of commuters with residents travelling to larger settlements, such as Glasgow, Barrhead and Paisley, for work. The largest flow of commuters is between Neilston and Glasgow, with just under 900 people commuting into the city from Neilston. The only significant inflow is from Barrhead where under 130 people commute to Neilston for work.

**Map 3.1: Neilston Commuter Flows**



Source: [Understanding Scotland's Places](#), download March 2020

In terms of accessibility by bus, there are approximately sixteen bus stops located throughout the town centre of Neilston. Neilston has direct bus connections to Glasgow with a journey time of approximately one hour, **Table 2.1**. There are also bus connections to Paisley, Barrhead, Darnley, Newton Mearns and Eaglesham. As connections to Thornliebank, Giffnock, Clarkston and Busby involve a change of service, journey times can vary significantly. An accessibility study has been commissioned by the Council to look at the issues over movement east-west across the council area.

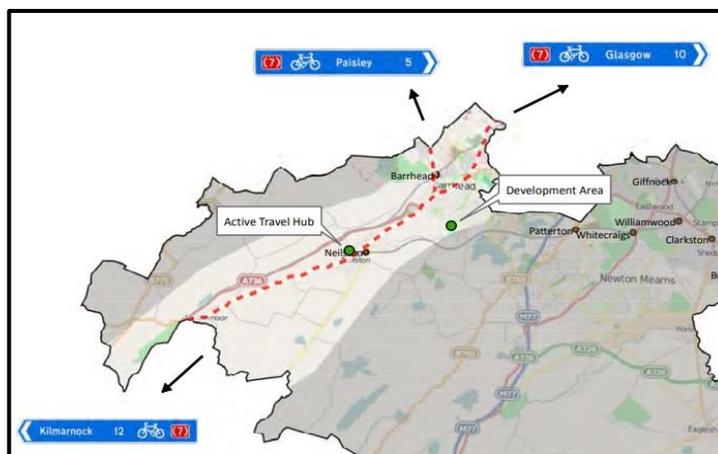


The M77 Motorway is around 6 miles east of the town and is easily accessible by road, providing fast access to Ayrshire as well as an alternative route into the centre of Glasgow.

Although there are no formal cycle routes within Neilston, the town was the first in Scotland to be awarded Cycle Friendly Community status<sup>9</sup>. Cycling is a key focus of activity for the local community.

Recognising the lack of national cycle networks within the local authority area, the Active Travel Action Plan, published by East Renfrewshire Council, proposes a series of strategic cycle corridors to encourage cycling. This includes a route from Barrhead to Uplawmoor via Neilston which also connects with the Dams to Darnley Country Park, **Figure 2.1**.

**Figure 2.1: Strategic Cycle Corridor 1 – Barrhead to Uplawmoor via Neilston**



Source: East Renfrewshire Council.

<sup>9</sup> Transport Scotland, [Cycling Action Plan for Scotland 2017-2020](#)

Within Neilston, there are a number of on-street parking spaces in the town centre, on Main Street, as well as further parking areas in the surrounding residential streets. There are off-street car parks located next to the leisure centre (around 60 spaces), behind Killoch Bar (20 spaces) and behind the commercial units, e.g. R. A. Dunbar & Son Butchers, at Market Square (20 spaces). Parking in all of these areas appears to be free of charge.

The town centre provides access to some local services which, alongside a small mix of retailers, include a medical centre, library, leisure centre, a primary school and two churches. There is also 3G and 4G throughout the town and, although there is no free town-wide WiFi, superfast broadband is available. Further, ultrafast broadband is available to some but not all premises within the town centre<sup>10</sup>.



With the closure of the Clydesdale Bank branch, there has been no registered bank in Neilston for almost fifteen years<sup>11</sup>, although there are branches of TSB and Bank of Scotland in nearby Barrhead. Free-to-use ATMs are situated outside of the Co-operative and Lifestyle Express convenience stores on Main Street.

<sup>10</sup> Ofcom (2020) [Mobile and broadband checker](#).

<sup>11</sup> BBC News (2005) [Union condemns closure of banks](#)

### 3. Active Town Centre

#### 3.1 Population and Housing

In 2019, approximately 3,050 people were recorded as living in or adjacent to Neilston town centre, **Table 3.1**. This is a relatively large town centre population in comparison with the YTA average of 1,732 (36 towns) but is due to the geographic make-up of Neilston’s datazone boundaries from which this data is based.

In comparison to 2009, the town centre population has decreased by 4% which is a loss of roughly 120 people. Over the same period, the population in the wider Neilston settlement decreased by 6% to around 3,900. In percentage terms, this wider settlement experienced the largest decrease in population of any YTA town (average 8% increase, 38 YTAs, Busby 2% increase) but equates to only 231 fewer people living within the area. However, an awareness of a declining population and its potential impacts on the vibrancy and activity within the town centre should be considered and addressed where possible.

The population decline in Neilston is set amidst the backdrop of increases of 6% for East Renfrewshire and 4% for Scotland over the same period. Other audited towns, including comparator town of Busby, have generally experienced an increase in town centre living (average 12% increase, 35 YTAs, Busby town centre 6% increase). Town centre living is one of the priorities for the Scottish Government’s Town Centre Action Plan<sup>12</sup> and an objective of the Local Development Plan 2, supported by various funding streams over recent years. A new housing development on the outskirts of Neilston is expected to help increase footfall to the town centre. The development is now fairly advanced and should be completed in 2024.

**Table 3.1. Population change in Neilston and Town Centre**

	2009	2019	Change	% Change
Neilston	4,130	3,899	-231	-6%
Town centre	3,170	3,051	-119	-4%

Source: National Records of Scotland (2019)

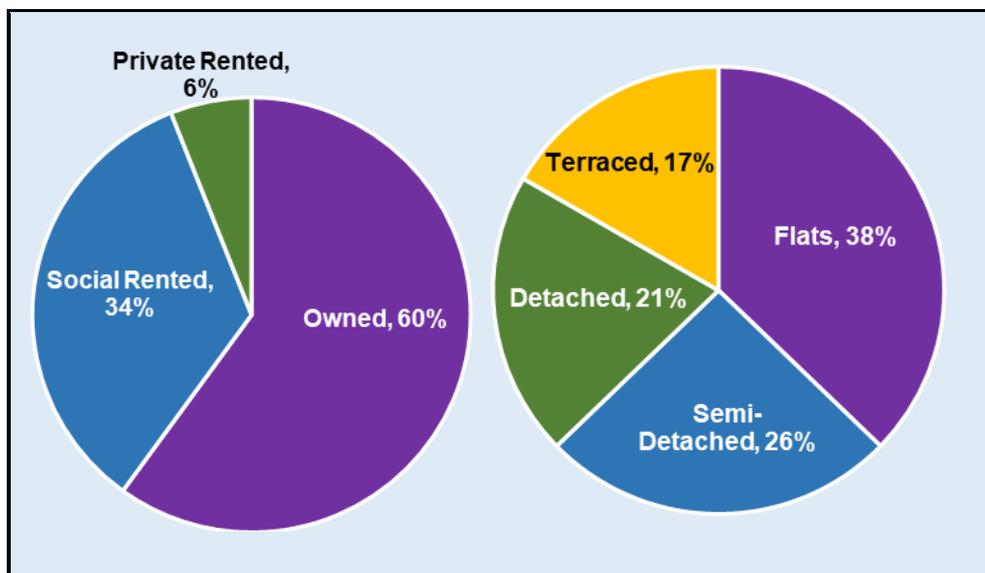
<sup>12</sup> Scottish Government (2013) [Town Centre Action Plan](#)



In 2018, just under 1,400 houses were recorded within the Data Zones of Neilston's town centre. Housing in the town centre is a mix of semi-detached/detached properties (47%), and flats (36%) typically with three/four bedrooms.

Just over two-thirds of homes (68%) are in council tax bands A, B or C. The streets surrounding Neilston town centre are almost entirely residential – a mix of detached and semi-detached properties and some flats – providing the town centre area with a relatively large catchment population within walking distance. Therefore, it is unsurprising that more than three-quarters of Neilston residents are located within or adjacent to the town centre – comprising 78% of total Neilston population compared to an average of 18% across 36 YTA audited towns.

**Neilston Town Centre Housing Mix**



The LDP promotes infill development compatible with local character and function within the rural settlements, including Neilston. This approach will help to maintain or enhance existing services and facilities so communities can continue to enjoy these benefits and reduce the need to travel. A range of house types and tenures will be encouraged to allow residents to age within their neighbourhoods rather than having to move away from their local community and support system.

In 2019, the residential vacancy rate was at 1.7% in the town centre and 1.6% in Neilston as a whole. This is slightly above the residential vacancy rate in the comparator town centre of Busby (1.7% compared to 1.1%) but remains lower than the average of 3.7% across 39 YTAs. Although the rate in Neilston has been steadily increasing in recent years, there was a decline in 2019 bucking the upward trend, **Figure 3.1.**

**Figure 3.1: Residential Vacancy Rate (2014-2019)**



Source: Scottish Government Statistics

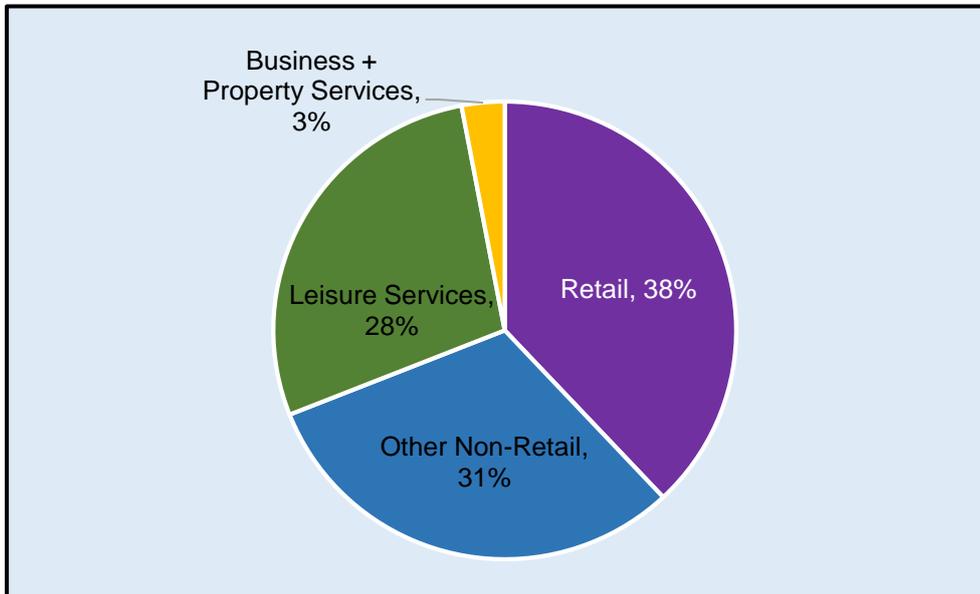
In 2018, the average purchase price of a town centre dwelling (£125,800) was slightly lower than that of the town as a whole (£128,600), although this gap has narrowed since the previous audit which used 2013 data (2013: gap of £4,994; 2018: gap of £2,788). The housing stock in the town is largely privately owned (60% in the town centre; 66% in the wider town), or socially rented (34% in the town centre; 28% in the wider town).

### 3.2 Employment and Business

Of the 370 jobs in Neilston, two-thirds (66%) are located within the town centre Data Zones. There are approximately 155 businesses located within the whole Neilston area. The town audit visit located 29 units within the town centre (all occupied) with 11 units being operated by retail businesses.



#### Neilston Town Centre Unit Mix



No town centre units were being used by businesses in the financial services sector (e.g. accountants, bank, building society).

Units classed as other non-retail, such as places of worship and community halls, and leisure services comprise much greater proportions of town centre unit use in Neilston (other non-retail: Neilston 31%, Busby 12%, Tullibody 19%; leisure: Neilston 28%, Busby 12%, Tullibody 15%).

**Table 3.1: Split in Uses of Neilston Town Centre Units (2016-2020)**

	2020	2016	Change
Retail	11	13	-2
Other non-retail	9	8	+1
Leisure services	8	7	+1
Business & property services	1	1	0
Financial services	0	0	0
Vacant	0	0	0
Total number of units	29	29	0

Source: YTA Audit Visits

### 3.3 Retail

With only one comparison retailer, which is a pharmacy, retail in the small town centre of Neilston serves a functional purpose with residents having to travel elsewhere for a more diverse shopping experience e.g. nearby Barrhead. The small proportion of comparison retailers is characteristic of interdependent to dependent towns, such as Neilston, and at 9% this is significantly below the average of 41% across 39 YTAs. Further, the lack of comparison retailers is more pronounced in Neilston town centre than in the other USP comparator town centres (Neilston 9%, Busby 18%, Tullibody 29%).

All of the shops within the defined town centre are located on Main Street, with the only exception being the service station which is located on High Street.

There were no vacant units – retail or otherwise – recorded during the audit of the town centre. Nevertheless, it should be noted that during the audit visit, renovation work was being carried out at the former A Cut Above shop as it changes use from hairdressers to a children’s cookery school (Totnosh).

**359 residents per town centre retail outlet**

**11 town centre retail units in use**

**0 vacant town centre retail units**

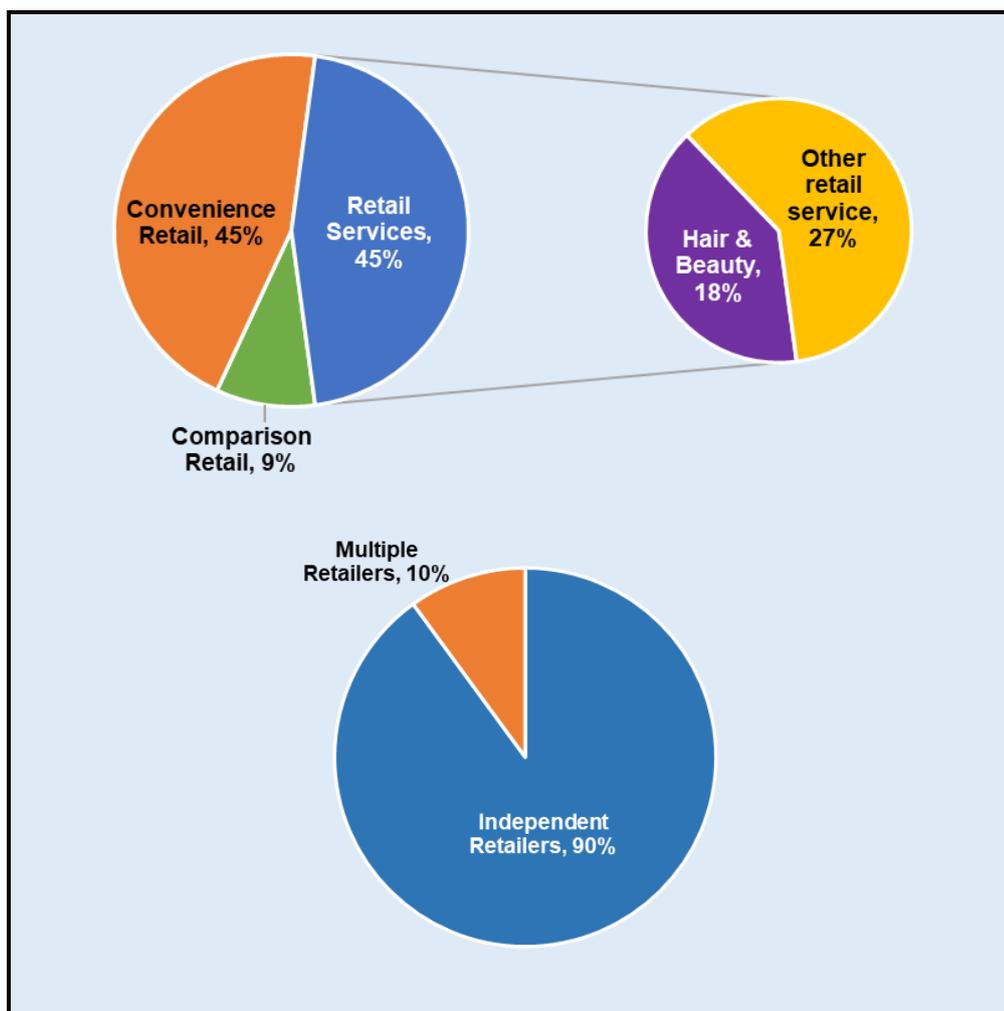
Opening hours of shops in Neilston typically vary with standard operating hours of around 8am to 5.30pm with some staying open slightly later until 7pm. The Co-operative convenience store is open from 7am until 10pm every day.

In line with other audited towns, retail forms the largest single town centre unit use (38%) although this has slightly decreased from the previous audit (45%) with two units changing from retail to other uses. This has resulted in Neilston having a lower proportion of retail units compared to the YTA average (46%, 39 YTAs).

In particular, retail forms a much lower proportion of town centre units in Neilston than in the USP comparator towns (38% compared to 65% Busby and 63% Tullibody).

Almost all of the traders within Neilston town centre are independent (91%) – this is above the average for YTA audited towns (71%, 39 YTAs), and is the joint third highest score. The USP comparator towns of Busby and Tullibody also share a relatively high proportion of independent traders (91% and 82% respectively). There is only one multiple retailer in Neilston: the Co-operative convenience store.

**Neilston Retail Mix**



The YTA analysis is based on the following retail definitions:

- Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *similar to previous audit, one comparison retailer was identified in Neilston town centre, the Neilston Pharmacy;*
- 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. – *five convenience retailers were identified in Neilston town centre comprising two convenience stores, two newsagents and one butcher (decrease of one retailer since previous 2016 audit as Village Bakery is now Cup N Saucer café); 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. – *five retail service operators were identified in Neilston town centre, comprising two hairdressers, optician, beauty clinic and petrol filling station (decrease of one retailer from previous audit as A Cut Above is changing use from hairdressers to a children’s cookery school, Totnosh).*



## 4. Attractive Town Centre

### 4.1 Overview

In 2009, the Neilston Town Charter set out a 20-year vision for the area adopting a “community-led approach to sustainable regeneration that builds from the village’s assets”<sup>13</sup>. The Charter includes a list of potential projects that could support this vision which vary in terms of nature, scale and timespan.

The intention of the Charter was for the vision to be flexible and adaptable rather than a static and rigid set of aims and objectives. To this end, the Neilston Charter Advisory Group was established to monitor progress of project delivery and activities which support the vision. In 2014, a community charrette, which involved extensive consultation with the community, produced a Going Places Report which was “designed to act as a bridge between the early vision of the Town Charter and the project delivery phase”<sup>14</sup>.

Innovative strategic vision at a local level, informed and guided by local knowledge and connections of groups such as Neilston Development Trust, has been recognised as an example of good practice<sup>15</sup>.

In October 2019, East Renfrewshire Council published the proposed Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2) which outlines policies and proposals for the use, development and protection of land within East Renfrewshire.

Of particular interest to Neilston, the LDP2 contains specific reference to the following proposals:

- preparation of a Neilston Neighbourhood Centre Strategy and Action Programme;



<sup>13</sup> East Renfrewshire Council (2009) [Neilston Renaissance Town Charter](#)

<sup>14</sup> Neilston Going Places (2014) [Charrette Report](#)

<sup>15</sup> The Scottish Government’s [Town Centre Toolkit](#) (2015) uses Neilston Town Charter as a case study to demonstrate how communities can get organised.

- Neilston Village Centre - Community Hub: Redevelopment of Library and Leisure Centre, improvements to health facilities and commercial development;
- joint education and leisure campus at Neilston Primary School involving Madras Family Centre, Neilston Primary and St. Thomas Primary;
- restoration of Crofthead Mill, with the potential for a mixed use development of housing, employment and community use;
- proposed active travel link along former rail corridor between Neilston and Uplawmoor; and
- a number of allocated housing sites: Holehouse Brae, Neilston Road (Under construction), and North Kirkton Road.

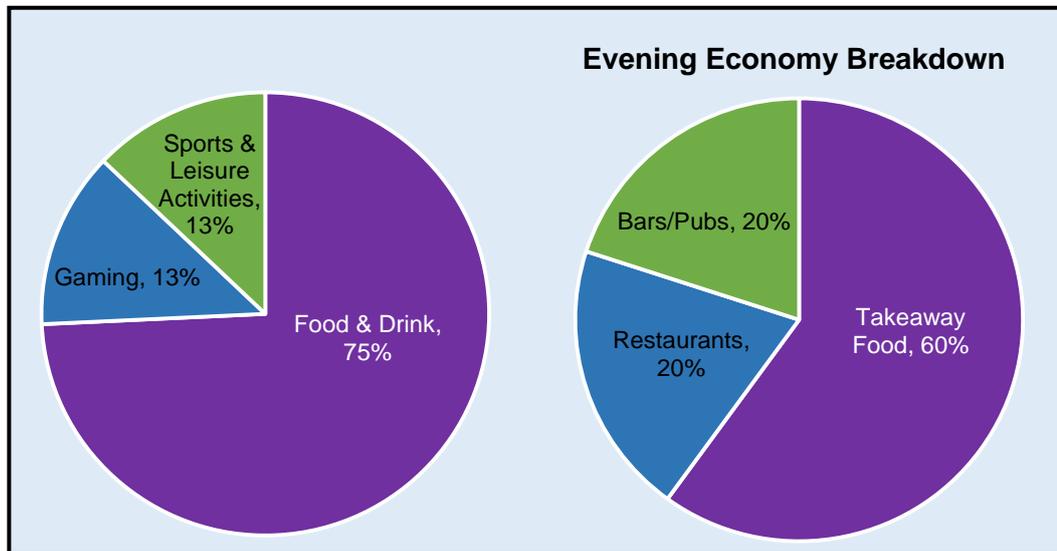
With over 50 voluntary groups including an active community council, Neilston has a highly engaged community<sup>16</sup>. The impact of this engagement can be seen in groups such as the Neilston Development Trust (NDT) which was formed in 2006 to provide a focal point for local residents, organisations and services within the community. The NDT are focused on the physical, cultural, social and economic regeneration and sustainability of Neilston.

NDT has made a positive impact to the local community, including environmental enhancements, community activities and more recently, having sold off the Neilston Community Windfarm it has created the Neilston Windfarm Legacy Trust to reinvest the profits back into the community.

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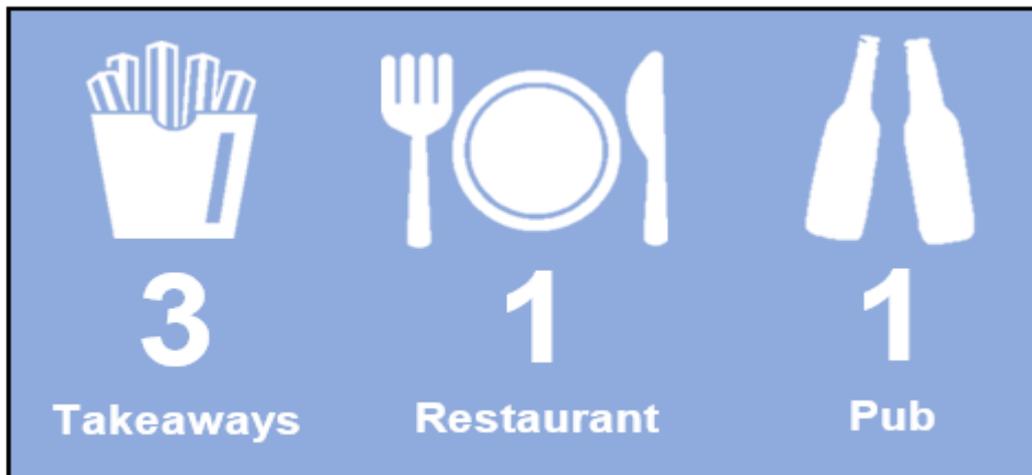
<sup>16</sup> Neilston Community Council reformed in 2019 with a new set of members.

## 4.2 Leisure Mix



Note: In Neilston, gaming refers to bookmakers.

Of the mix of leisure businesses in Neilston town centre, over half are part of the towns evening economy (5 of 8 leisure units). The evening economy is comprised of one pub (the Killoch Bar), one restaurant (The Pad), and three hot food takeaway outlets (Flames, Speed and the Crofthead Café).



### 4.3 Leisure Facilities

Located on Main Street, Neilston Leisure Centre has a 25-metre swimming pool, gym and a small hall available for hire. The swimming pool is open every day, apart from Saturdays, for public swimming at various times<sup>17</sup>.

On weekdays, the gym is open from 6am until 12pm and reopens in the evening from 4pm until 8:40pm. There is no evening access on weekends with the gym open from 9am until 3:30pm/4pm. Visitor numbers indicate that approximately 55,000 customer visits are made each year to Neilston Leisure Centre<sup>18</sup>.

The Leisure Centre is scheduled for redevelopment as part of a broader set of a masterplan for leisure provision being prepared for Neilston. This includes the development of a shared education and leisure campus at Neilston Primary School which has been identified by East Renfrewshire Culture & Leisure as an opportunity to launch new gym facilities in Neilston.



The proposed LDP2 outlines further development at Kingston Playing Fields with the development of a community/sports hub.

Neilston Library is operated by East Renfrewshire Culture & Leisure. It is open to the public four days per week with opening hours typically 10am until 1pm/2pm and until 5pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and reduced hours on a Saturday<sup>19</sup>.

The exterior of the library has become somewhat weathered – it is located on one of the main entrance routes into the town at Neilston Road. The redevelopment of the library, as outlined in the LDP2, will be important to give the building a “facelift” which will have a positive influence on initial impressions of the area.



<sup>17</sup> Standard admission prices for swimming: Adult - £3.30; 16 years and under - £2.30.

<sup>18</sup> East Renfrewshire Culture & Leisure: [2019-20 Business Plan](#)

<sup>19</sup> East Renfrewshire Culture & Leisure (2020) [Neilston Library](#)

Other leisure facilities near Neilston include Ferenze Golf Club (4 miles from town centre area), and Paisley Golf Club (6 miles from town centre area). Both of these clubs are 18-hole golf courses and accept visitors. Other facilities include: a practice green, and club houses where food and drinks are served.

Opened in May 2019, Neilston Skatepark is an outdoor concrete park located at Kingston Playing Fields..



Image Credit: Skateboard Scotland (2019) [Scottish Skatepark Directory](#)

#### 4.4 Attractions & Heritage

Neilston also offers a number of tourist attractions. Located only three miles from Neilston town centre, Dams to Darnley Country Park covers over 1,350 acres around the East Renfrewshire and Glasgow City boundary. It is comprised of a mixture of open water, wetland, woodland and grassland attracting visitors to use the park for a number of activities including walking, cycling, horse riding, angling and wildlife watching. The country park also contains the Barrhead Dams which cover over 220 acres, and are made up of a series of interconnected reservoirs which are owned and managed by Scottish Water.

With funding secured from the Glasgow City Region City Deal, significant investment has been earmarked for Dams to Darnley Country Park with the development of a wakeboard park, visitor centre and a boardwalk providing improved access for cars, pedestrians and cyclists.

Another popular nearby attraction is Gleniffer Braes Country Park, which is roughly six miles from the town centre area. This is a 480 acre park with a mixture of moorland, woodland and hills – it attracts visitors for walks, views, and bird-spotting, and the Renfrewshire Council Ranger Service also provide guided walks. Other facilities include a children's play park, picnic benches and a visitor centre.

Both country parks are open all year-round and are free of charge for visitors.

## 4.5 Community Events

For a small town, there are a good range of diverse community events held throughout the calendar year.

The Neilston Cattle Show is held on the first Saturday of May every year on the outskirts of Neilston at Holehouse. The event started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and celebrated its 194<sup>th</sup> show in 2019. Attractions include cattle shows, horse shows, dog competitions, a tug-o-war, and local craft stalls. The event also includes a parade through the village which is led by the Neilston Pipe Band. It lasts one day and runs from 8am until 4pm, with admission costs from £2 for children/elderly to £6 for adults or £15 for a family ticket.

Held in late August, Neilston Community Fun Day is a free family friendly community event with “*live music, games, crafts, face painting, inflatables and a beat-the-goalie contest*”<sup>20</sup>. It is held at Pig Square, on the grass opposite Neilston Parish Church Hall, and celebrated its fifth year in 2019.

In December, Neilston Christmas Lights Switch On is organised by the Neilston War Memorial Association and includes a parade with entertainment and stalls run by local community groups and vendors.

In its inaugural year, Window Wanderland was held in February 2020 and invited local residents and businesses within the town centre to decorate and light up the windows of their homes and shop fronts. The event is designed to create an attractive walking trail throughout the town centre. It is hoped that Window Wanderland becomes an annual tradition within Neilston<sup>21</sup>.

Participatory budgeting events give local residents a greater say in how public funds are directly invested into communities. Community organisations and groups put forward proposals with attendees voting and ultimately determining which groups receive funding. The Nicer Neilston event has an annual funding pot of £25,000 with awards of up to £5,000 available. In March 2019, there was a high level of participation in the first Nicer Neilston event with 327 voters casting a total of 1,638 votes<sup>22</sup>. A second Nicer Neilston event took place in March 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Barrhead News (2019) [Fun in the sun as families flock to Neilston's big event](#)

<sup>21</sup> Window Wanderland (2020) [Events](#)

<sup>22</sup> PB Scotland (2019) [Linking Communities runs £100k PB programme in East Renfrewshire](#)

## 4.6 Blooming Neilston

Neilston Development Trust has recently developed an environmental project, Blooming Neilston, to introduce more greenery and make improvements to the town centre. The aim of this environmental enhancement project is to help the town centre be more attractive, vibrant and sociable. Improving the vibrancy of the town centre will encourage people to enjoy and spend more time and money in the area which would benefit the local community and economy.

In November 2019, East Renfrewshire Council proposed that a number of projects would receive funding secured through the Scottish Government's Town Centre Capital Fund<sup>23</sup>. Given the nature of the project to support local improvements, it is proposed that Neilston will receive £40,000 with East Renfrewshire Council also recognising the potential for Neilston Development Trust and/or other community groups to source match funding<sup>24</sup>.

On behalf of Blooming Neilston, external consultants produced a document of site development briefs identifying 17 sites throughout the town centre which could be enhanced in a variety of ways (e.g. with wooden planters, kerb improvements, additional seating etc.)<sup>25</sup>. Following a community meeting, local groups and individuals agreed that the Blooming Neilston project should prioritise spend and improvements in the following three areas<sup>26</sup>:

- heart of the village (Market Square, Leisure Centre site, War Memorial);
- the station area; and
- entrance points to the village.

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<sup>23</sup> More information on the Scottish Government's Town Centre Capital Fund is available [here](#)

<sup>24</sup> East Renfrewshire Council Cabinet Report (2019) [Town Centre Capital Fund](#)

<sup>25</sup> Blooming Neilston (2019) [Site Development Briefs](#)

<sup>26</sup> Neilston Development Trust webpage (2020) [Blooming Neilston: launch, updates and how to get involved](#)

#### 4.7 Attractiveness Review

The YTA includes an independent (and subjective) review of place and quality impressions, with Neilston scoring broadly comparable average with 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 7.1 for the condition of unit fronts in Neilston and 7.0 for quality of window display. Although this represents a drop in comparison to 2016 audit, the quality of building fronts and shop window displays remains slightly above the average across other YTA audited town centres, of 6.9 in each instance (in 2016, Neilston scored 7.6 for shop windows and 7.8 for shop fronts).



Business confidence in the town centre was gauged from a small sample of interviews undertaken with independent traders. All business owners reported that they were unsure whether to be confident or not about their future in Neilston stating that they were hopeful rather than confident. With an average score of 5.5 / 10, business confidence was higher than at the previous audit (4.0 in 2016). However this remains slightly lower than the average of other audited towns (5.9 / 10, 32 YTAs). It should be noted that the sample reached by the audit remained limited as few businesses were available to respond to the survey and therefore this data should be treated with caution.

As the audit visit took place during winter, it was difficult to fully assess and appreciate all of the greenery within the town centre but it is clear that demonstrable efforts have been made, such as tree planters in Market Square. However it should be noted that a couple of these tree planters are bent and would benefit from repair or replacement.



Additional seating in Market Square, which would develop the town centre as a public space, has been suggested as part of the Blooming Neilston project. As there is currently only two benches in Market Square, an innovative approach to increasing seating capacity is encouraged.

The two war memorials within the town centre – John Robertson Memorial on High Street and War Memorial on Main Street – have colourful flower displays, which help to brighten up the area. This will be further aided by the proposed work to be undertaken by Blooming Neilston.



## 5. YTA Summary and Key Points

With projects such as the Town Charter and Community Windfarm, Neilston has been at the forefront of innovative community development within Scotland over recent years. In 2009, the Town Charter laid the foundations for a vision which has engaged and energised the community behind a common goal – *“a healthier, wealthier, fairer, safer, greener and smarter future for the village”*. The dedicated work of groups such as Neilston Development Trust and the Charter Advisory Group has helped to retain a strong commitment to achieving the vision.

In many ways, Neilston serves as an example of how communities can organise, maintain significant levels of community involvement, respond to the changing needs of its residents, and deliver projects that benefit the development and sustainability of places.

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

### 5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- Neilston has reasonable access to a range of services which include leisure and library facilities. With only one comparison retailer, which is a pharmacy, retail in the small town centre of Neilston serves a functional purpose with residents having to travel elsewhere for a more diverse shopping experience e.g. nearby Barrhead. This does not pose a significant barrier given the proximity and accessibility of Neilston to larger settlements such as Barrhead;
- although public transport connections to other settlements within East Renfrewshire could be improved, Neilston is well connected to its main commuter destinations of Glasgow, Barrhead and Paisley particularly when considering its rural setting;
- a proposed station at Barrhead South on the Neilston to Glasgow line would reintroduce a rail link with Barrhead albeit this is some distance from Barrhead town centre, c. 20-25 minute walk;
- with a bike hub and recognition as a Cycle Friendly Community, residents and community groups have successfully placed cycling and active travel at the heart of Neilston – this will be furthered with the development of a strategic cycle corridor between Barrhead and Uplawmoor via Neilston;

- parking in Neilston town centre appears – at least during the time when the audit was undertaken, a midweek daytime – to be adequate; and
- Neilston town centre has reasonably good digital connectivity with 4G mobile coverage and access to superfast broadband (some premises also able to access ultrafast broadband).

## 5.2 Active Town Centre

- the population of the wider Neilston area has experienced the largest percentage decrease over the last ten years of any YTA-audited town (-6%). If the trend continues it might impact on the activity and vibrancy of the town centre in the future, although it is noted there is a large new housing development on the outskirts of the town which should increase footfall to the town centre;
- as streets surrounding Neilston town centre are almost entirely residential, it is unsurprising that more than three-quarters of Neilston residents are located within the town centre catchment area (78% compared to 18% average across all YTA towns);
- Neilston has retained its high proportion of independent retail businesses in recent years – it is important that these are supported (and where possible protected);
- no vacant units were recorded during the audit of Neilston town centre, which is highly encouraging for its long-term survival, although businesses were unsure about their level of confidence about future trading conditions;
- Neilston has a highly active network of community organisations and groups, such as Neilston Development Trust and War Memorial Association, who deliver a diverse and developing programme of events and activities throughout the year including the Neilston Cattle Show, Community Fun Day and Window Wanderland;
- ensuring that the innovative strategic vision at community level, as set out in the Town Charter, translates into everyday action and change for local residents will be key; and
- Neilston continues to be an active and vibrant community with forward thinking projects that have supported the town over the past 10 years. The success of an innovative approach is evident in the construction, operation

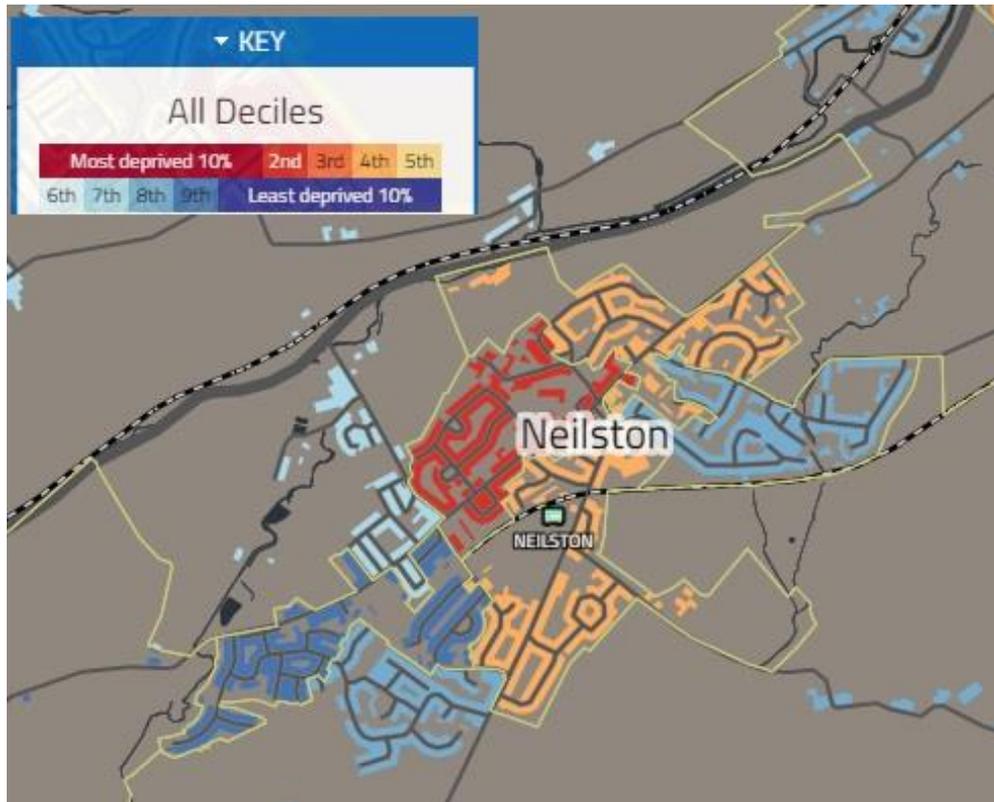
and sale of a community windfarm which has allowed the redistribution of funds to local projects.

### 5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- Neilston is an attractive, small town that manages to retain a village feel due to the majority of retail units being small and independent;
- public realm and streetscape improvements, led by the Blooming Neilston campaign, will further enhance the attractiveness of the town centre. Blooming Neilston, complemented by the publication of site development briefs, has identified areas within the town centre for environmental enhancement which were also highlighted during the audit visit. This includes, but is not limited to, additional seating and replacement of tree planters at Market Square;
- proposed developments, such as a shared education and leisure campus at Neilston Primary School and a community/sports hub at Kingston Playing Fields, are reimagining how leisure provision is delivered in Neilston; and
- redevelopment of the library, as noted in LDP2, should increase the attractiveness of the library both to residents as a place to use and enjoy and as an entrance point to Neilston.

## Appendix: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD 2020)

**Figure B1: 2011 Data Zones by SIMD 2020 Decile**



Source: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) [Accessed online](#)