



# Your Town Audit: Newton Mearns

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**SITIP** | SCOTLAND'S  
TOWNS  
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**ekos**  
Economic and Social Development

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Direct enquiries regarding this report should be submitted to:

Dr Johanna Jokio, EKOS, 0141 353 8322, [johanna.jokio@ekos.co.uk](mailto:johanna.jokio@ekos.co.uk)

## 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 Bearsden<sup>1</sup>.

The USP platform - [www.usp.scot](http://www.usp.scot) – describes Newton Mearns in the following general terms:

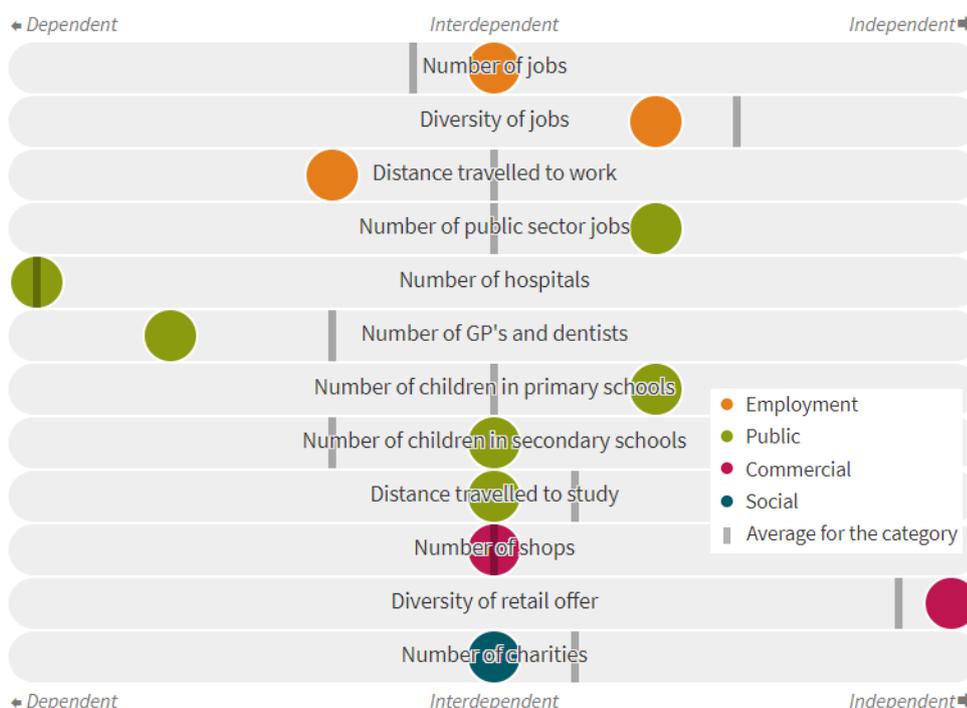
**Newton Mearns' Interrelationships:** an 'interdependent town', which means it has a medium number of assets in relation to its population. Towns of this kind have an average diversity of jobs, and residents travel a mix of short and long distances to travel to work and study. These towns attract people 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.

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<sup>1</sup> The other similar towns are Milngavie, Bishopbriggs and Carnoustie.

## Inter-relationships i



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

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

### Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) measures relative levels of deprivation across Scottish communities (statistically referred to as datazones) 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.

Newton Mearns experiences very limited levels of deprivation with none of its datazones ranked within the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland and a number of datazones in the least deprived 10%, **Table 1.1**.

**Table 1.1: Newton Mearns SIMD Ranking by Data Zone**

2011 Intermediate Zone	2011 Data Zone	Overall SIMD20 Rank <sup>2</sup>	Percentile
Mearns Village, Westacres and Greenfarm	S01008335	2894	41 <sup>st</sup>
	S01008336	2542	36 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008337	4778	68 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008338	6331	91 <sup>st</sup>
	S01008339	6599	95 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008340	5966	86 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008341	6752	97 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008342	3352	48 <sup>th</sup>
Whitecraigs and Broom	S01008343	6961	100 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008344	6857	98 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008345	6876	99 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008346	6920	99 <sup>th</sup>
Mearnskirk and South Kirkhill	S01008347	6145	88 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008348	5920	85 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008349	6482	93 <sup>rd</sup>
	S01008350	6765	97 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008351	6496	93 <sup>rd</sup>
	S01008352	6776	97 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008353	6802	98 <sup>th</sup>
	S01008354	4344	62 <sup>nd</sup>

Source: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020

## YTA Summary

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

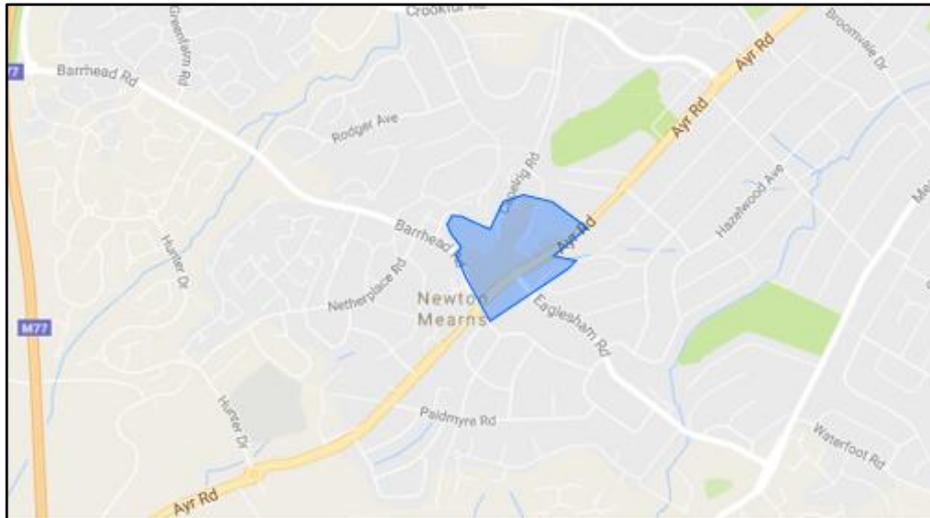
In total 40 YTA audits have been prepared for towns across Scotland providing data across a range of KPIs. Where appropriate, this report provides comparisons for Newton Mearns against other YTAs and the YTA town average, although it is important to note that data for some audits has been collected in previous years, and not all data is available for all towns.

<sup>2</sup> Rank out of 6976 Scottish Data Zones.

The audit for this report was carried out during a world health pandemic as a result of the Covid-19 virus. It is acknowledged that this may have had an impact on the results of the audit and the subsequent report.

## 2. Accessible Town Centre

### Newton Mearns Town Centre



Newton Mearns is a commuter town situated seven miles south of Glasgow. With a population of around 25,000, it is the largest settlement in East Renfrewshire.

The town centre is, however, relatively compact, taking in The Avenue 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.

The map over shows the inbound and outbound flow of commuters from and to Newton Mearns:

- coloured lines/pins show the main flows that exceed 2% of the town's population or 2,000 people;
- 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 Newton Mearns is a commuter town, there is a net outflow of commuters with residents travelling to larger settlements, such as Glasgow, Paisley and East Kilbride, for work. The largest flow of commuters is between Newton Mearns and Glasgow, where almost 5,000 people from Newton Mearns commute to for work. However, almost 800 Glasgow residents travel into Newton Means for work.

**Map 3.1: Newton Mearns Commuter Flows**



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

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

**15-mile radius around Newton Mearns**



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.



A large car park, containing 1,000 spaces over two levels, is located next to the Avenue shopping centre. This area also includes an electric charging point.

The majority of parking is free under a certain number of hours. The longer stay staff car park is chargeable at £1.50 per day. 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 and the library.

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



### 3. Active Town Centre

#### 3.1 Population and Housing

Around 655 people live within the town centre area in Newton Mearns<sup>3</sup>, 3% 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. In the past decade to 2019, the population of the whole settlement increased by 18%, compared to 6% for East Renfrewshire and a 4% increase in Scotland over this period. This is a result of extensive house building on the edge of the town.

**Table 3.1. Population change in Newton Mearns and Town Centre**

	2009	2019	Change	% Change
Newton Mearns	21,293	25,021	3,728	18%
Town centre	675	655	-20	-3%

Source: National Records of Scotland (2019)

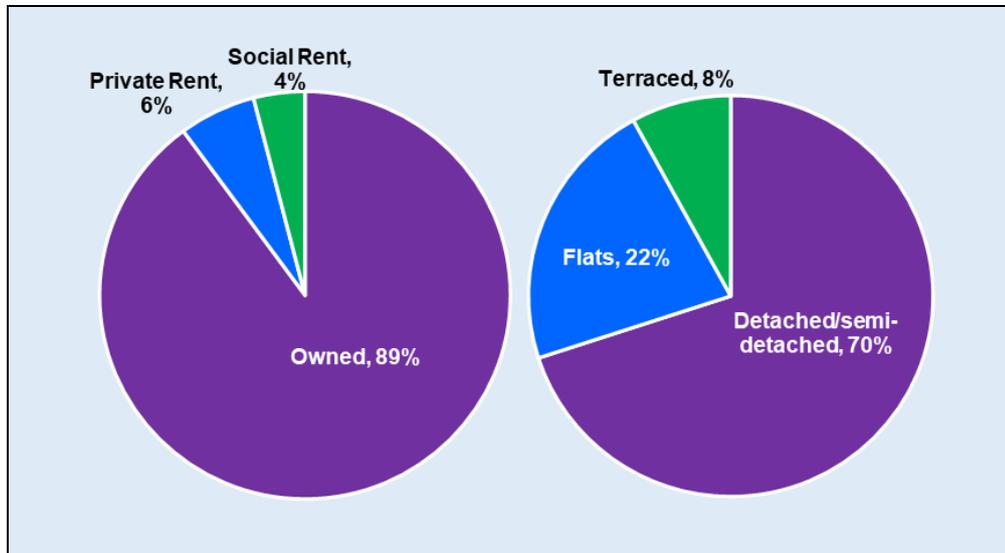
The nature of the town centre in Newton Mearns makes analysis of its housing composition difficult. However, the wider town is dominated by detached/semi-detached properties (70%), which extend out from the town centre in a network of cul-de-sacs and residential streets. Newer housing developments have 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 £327,300 in 2018<sup>4</sup>. This represents an increase of 20% since 2014, while prices in the town centre have gone up by around 78%. The housing stock in the town is, for the most part, privately owned (89%).

<sup>3</sup> Census 2011 datazone S01008336

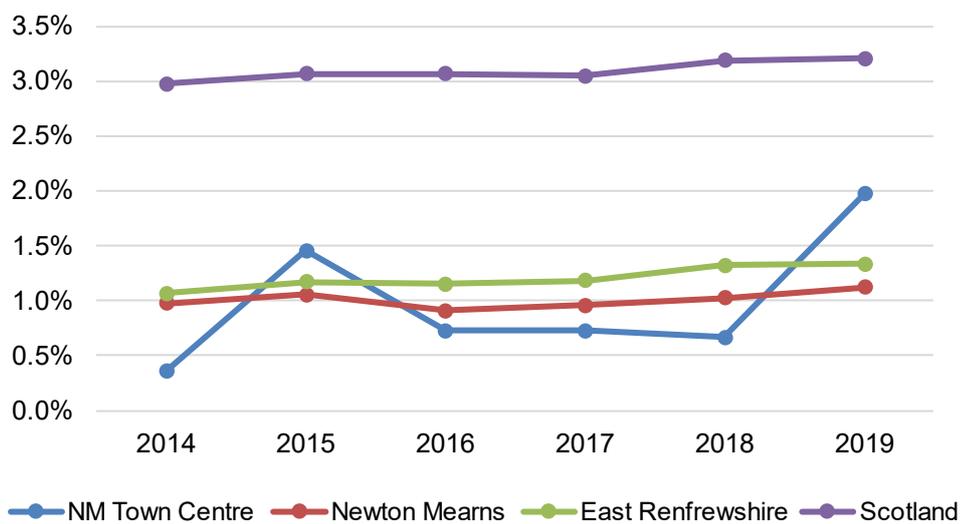
<sup>4</sup> Average across Newton Mearns' datazones, Scottish Statistics 2018

**Newton Mearns Housing Mix**



In 2019, the residential vacancy rate was 2.0% in the town centre and 1.1% in Newton Mearns as a whole, compared with 1.3% for East Renfrewshire and 3.2% for Scottish averages. While the town centre rate is marginally higher and has fluctuated since 2014, it represents a very small number (6 vacant houses in 2019).

**Residential Vacancy Rate (2014-2019)**



### 3.2 Businesses and Employment

National statistics recorded 740 businesses in the settlement in 2019, which represents a slight 2% decrease since the last audit. The YTA street audit located 67 business units within Newton Mearns town centre, of which 41 are in retail use.

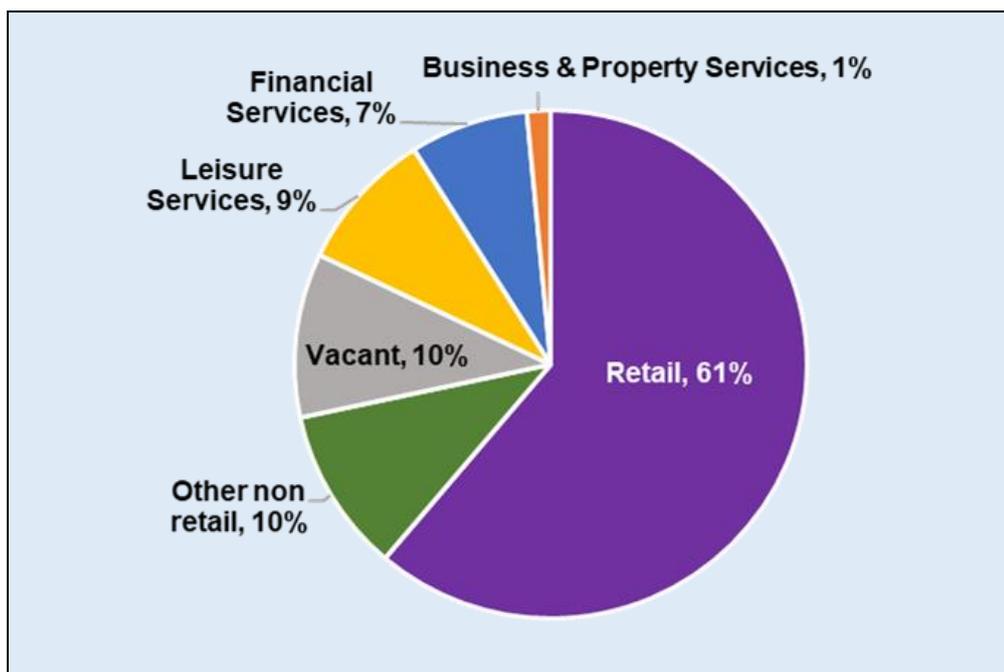
Just under a fifth (18%) of the 4,500 jobs in Newton Mearns are located in the approximate town centre area. Employment figures since 2016 show a potential shift from jobs being concentrated in the town centre where there was a decrease of c. 200 jobs whereas employment in the whole settlement increased by around 200.

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

	2020	2016	Change
Retail	41	42	-1
Other non-retail	7	8	-1
Leisure services	6	10	-4
Business & property services	1	3	-2
Financial services	5	5	0
Vacant	7	2	+5
Total number of units	67	70	+3

Source: YTA Audit Visits

#### 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.

Retail forms the largest town centre unit use, amounting to 61% of all units. This is higher than average, with Barrhead coming in at 50%, Giffnock 43%, and Clarkston 39%. It is slightly lower than another town centre which is similarly dominated by a shopping centre, Clydebank, where 65% of all units are retail.

Other local retail units are spread through the wider Newton Mearns area, including Ayr Road, Mearns Road and Harvie Avenue.

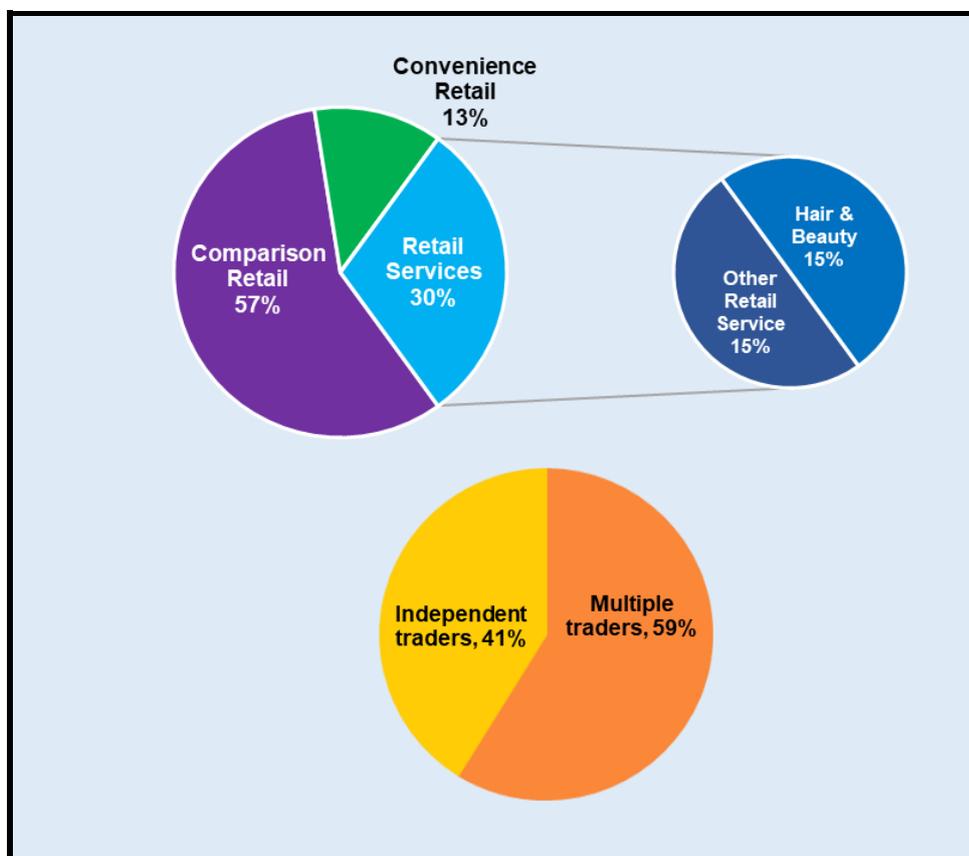
A number of new units have been constructed in recent years on the edge of the town at what is known as Greenlaw, including one of only a handful of Waitrose stores in Scotland, Home Bargains, Aldi, and Pets at Home. While this has increased the attractiveness of the town's overall retail offering, it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

**373 residents per town centre retail outlet**

**41 town centre retail units in use**

**7 vacant town centre units**

## 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 – *23 comparison retailers identified in Newton Mearns town centre, two less than in the previous audit;*
- **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. – *5 convenience retailers identified in Newton Mearns town centre, whereas the 2016 audit identified 7; 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. – *13 retail service operators identified in Newton Mearns town centre, an increase from 11 previously.*

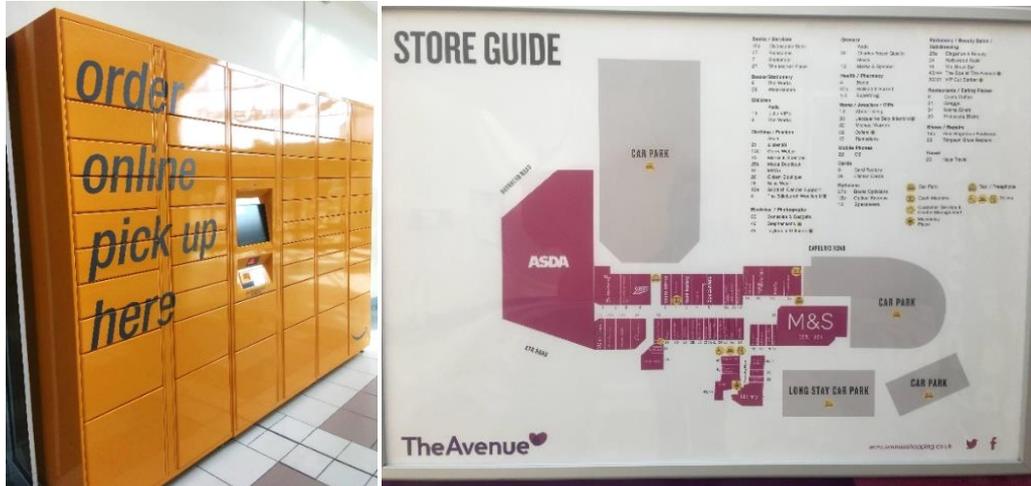


Just 41% of traders within Newton Mearns town centre are independent – this is the lowest proportion of any town centre audited to date. In comparison, the figure for Clarkston is 57%, Barrhead 67% and Giffnock 55%. To compare with another town built around a shopping centre, 49% of traders in Clydebank are independent.

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, M&S opens from 8am to 8pm on weekdays, while the ASDA opens 8am to 10pm every day. The continued presence of the two anchor food stores continues to be important in drawing daily footfall to the centre of Newton Mearns.

The audit was conducted during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and this was seen to have had implications for the retail environment. The audit observed a higher retail vacancy rate compared to the previous audit, at 10% of retail spaces. A total of seven units including one within the shopping centre and a retail/office building on Ayr Road appeared to be permanently closed. One previously vacant unit in the Avenue was under development at the time of the visit, which is an indication of the attractiveness of the centre for retailers.

An Amazon parcel pick-up store has been introduced into the centre, which accommodates the increasing popularity of online retail.



It should be noted that despite the recent circumstances, Newton Mearns has a relatively low vacancy rate which 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.

Some previously audited towns outside of East Renfrewshire have had similar or higher vacancy rates, including Alloa (10%), Dumbarton (15%), Kilmarnock (15%), Ayr (16%) and Kirkcaldy (17%).

## 4. Attractive Town Centre

### 4.1 Overview

As most of the retail/services offered in the town centre fall 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 for both adults and children. The shopping centre also supports the local community and has set up a Community Fund, distributing financial aid to local clubs and community groups. It also supports charitable activities and events within Newton Mearns, having for example a Trussell Trust food bank deposit. The Avenue maintains an email newsletter and social media channels, including Facebook (3,600 likes) and Twitter (1,800 followers).



An area of public realm is located 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 handrails for accessibility. This



is used for the shopping centre's annual Christmas Fair. The other sides of the shopping centre are less attractive to those arriving on foot or bicycle, with large goods and vehicle entrances.

The public space is decorated with trees, and an impressive flower display was found across the street at the Bowling club.

The streets are clear of litter, and recycling bins are provided in the shopping centre and the bus stop on Ayr Road. The audit would however point out that the large bins

placed on Ayr Road may obstruct some of the pavement, particularly for those with mobility issues.

Defibrillators have been installed around the shopping centre, one being at the library entrance.

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.



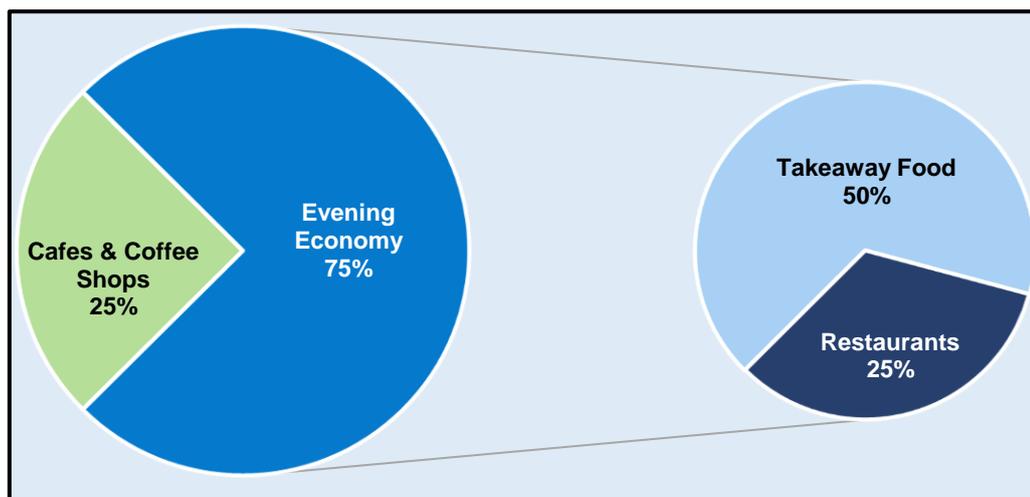
Additionally, the Dams to Darnley Country Park, located between Newton Mearns and Barrhead, provides a



recreational and leisure asset to the population south of Glasgow. Other greenspaces and play parks can be found dotted around the wider residential areas of Newton Mearns.

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.

#### 4.2 Leisure Mix



There is a relatively small number of leisure units in Newton Mearns town centre mainly comprised by the evening economy (75%) with two restaurants and four hot food takeaway outlets. There is also a café and seating area inside the shopping centre.



Limitations on space may make it difficult to increase leisure provision in the town centre without reducing retail space, although other shopping centre destinations have adapted to include a leisure offering, notably Silverburn in Pollock and Almondvale in Livingston.

Fairweather Hall, a council operated community hall, is 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, and a sports hall which is open to the public. 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. War memorial benches have been installed in the past couple of years at the bowling club and Fairweather Hall.

Newton Mearns Parish Church and the Mearns Library, located on McKinley Place, and the Synagogue on Ayr Road are also important venues in terms of culture and community events.

### 4.3 Attractiveness Review

The YTA includes an independent (and subjective) review on place and quality impressions, with scores in Newton Mearns comparable with other towns which have been audited.



Individual unit fronts and shop window displays were graded out of ten during the on-street audit, with a town centre average score of 8.4 for quality of window displays and 8.0 for the condition of unit fronts. These scores have remained largely similar to the previous audit and are higher than the average from other audited towns which is 6.9 for both quality of shop fronts and window displays. A key factor contributing to the high scores is that most units are based within the shopping centre and are therefore maintained by the centre owner.

Business confidence in the town centre was gauged from a small sample of interviews undertaken with independent traders, although the dominance of chains within Newton Mearns means this score is not necessarily representative of most retailers in the town. It should also be noted that the achieved sample was limited due to ongoing restrictions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The retailers were asked to assess their confidence in future business performance, and some answers may have been affected by the current situation. Still, business confidence was estimated at an average of 7.2 / 10, higher than the average of 16 other YTA audited towns, at 5.9 / 10.

## 5. YTA Summary and Key Points

The following are offered as final comments on the Your Town Audit 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. A cycle lane extends nearly all the way to the town coming from the southside of Glasgow, but only on one side. There are 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

- seven retail unit vacancies were recorded in the town centre, both in and outside The Avenue centre. The increase has likely been affected by the ongoing public health situation, otherwise the town appears well-used and well supported;
- 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 the evening economy offer – 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; and

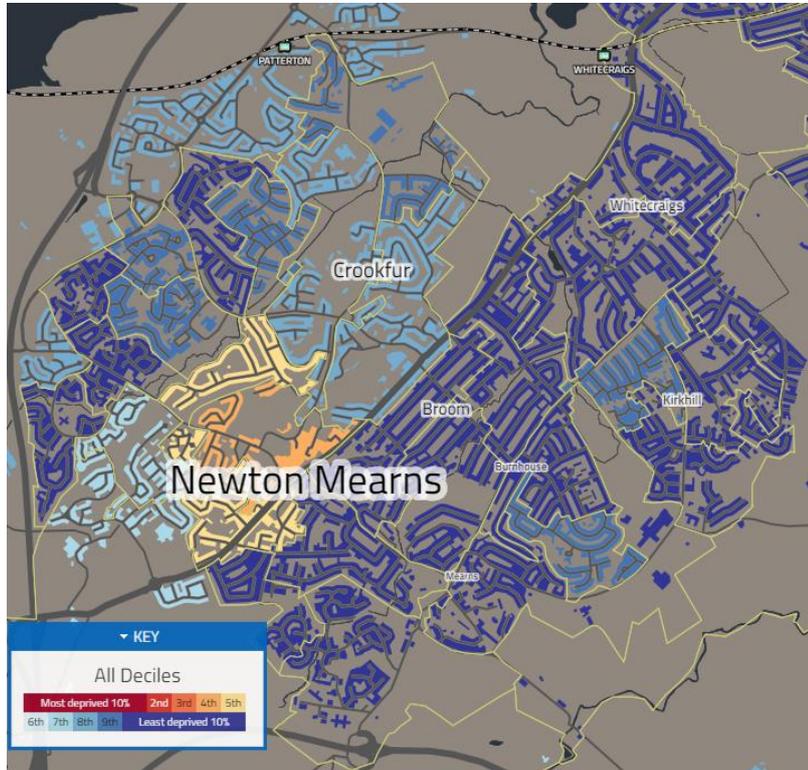
- an area of public realm has been developed between The Avenue shopping centre and Ayr Road, with potential to be used for events, small markets etc, but is owned by the shopping centre and activity would require permission.

### 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 (373 residents per town centre retail unit). 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;
- 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.

## Appendix

### Appendix A1: Newton Mearns by SIMD 2020 classification



Source: [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation \(SIMD\) 2020](#)