Your Town Audit: Hamilton

23 October 2017
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Report produced by:

Audit Date: 10/10/2017

Draft report: 19/10/2017

For: South Lanarkshire Council

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1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

This report presents a summary of the Your Town Audit (YTA) for Hamilton, 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 Hamilton 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 Hamilton and describes Hamilton in the following general terms:

Hamilton’s Inter-relationships: Hamilton is an interdependent town. Interdependent towns have a medium number of assets in relation to their population; average diversity of jobs; and residents travel a mix of short and long distances to travel to work and study. These towns are attractors of people from neighbouring towns who come to access some assets and jobs but they are also reliant on neighbouring towns for other assets and jobs.

Hamilton’s Typology: This type of city-sized town is extremely mixed in terms of demographics. There are particularly wide ranges of people, housing and activities. The number of older couples with no children is higher than average in this group. There is a mix of professional and non-professional jobs, and part-time and self-employment are both important for a significant proportion of residents. Socioeconomic status is higher than in other kinds of city-sized town and there is a mix of professionals and non-professionals, those with higher and lower educational attainment.

Combining inter-relationships and typology, the USP platform – www.usp.scot – groups Hamilton with only one other town with similar characteristics, Cumbernauld. These towns have similarities in terms of the number of charities, hospitals, children in primary/secondary schools, jobs, shops, GP/dentists, diversity of retail offer, and distance travelled to study.
Hamilton and Cumbernauld differ in terms of the diversity of jobs and the distance travelled to work. They differ most in terms of the number of public sector jobs in Hamilton, at least in part due to the presence of the Council’s HQ in Hamilton.

Building on the USP, this report presents the results of our detailed analysis of Hamilton 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.
2. Accessible Town Centre

Hamilton is a historic town located 15 miles south east of Glasgow with a large and somewhat dispersed town centre stretching almost one mile north to south. By population, it is one of the largest town in South Lanarkshire, and forms the administrative centre for the local authority area. Within a five mile radius the catchment (and competitor) towns include Larkhall, Wishaw, Motherwell, Bellshill, Uddingston and Bothwell.

The town is very well connected by bus and train to central Scotland and the wider South Lanarkshire area, and is around 20 miles from Glasgow International Airport. Hamilton Central train station and the bus station are both located within the town centre, just a short walk from the main retail areas. Trains to Glasgow city centre take around 30 minutes and run half hourly.

As well as Glasgow, bus and train services also connect the town with other settlements across South Lanarkshire including Uddingston (18 minutes by bus and 50 minutes by train) and Cambuslang (30 minutes by bus and 15 minutes by train), and towns in North Lanarkshire including Wishaw (30 minutes by bus and 20 minutes by train) and Motherwell (10 minutes by bus and 10 minutes by train).
These transport connections position Hamilton, especially the town centre, as an attractive commuter settlement – with a range of services and easy access to employment and education across a considerable part of west-central Scotland.

The core of the town centre along Quarry Street is pedestrianised which, in theory, should create a safe and attractive setting for users. In reality, however, there is vehicle access for business owners and delivery drivers and, with no obvious policing of access, there was a steady flow of vehicles within the pedestrianised zone during the day of the audit.

There is a good level of parking throughout the town centre area of Hamilton, with a number of on-street parking spaces in the town centre (on Quarry Street, Cadzow Street and Campbell Street), as well as off-street car parks including: the Palace Ground Retail Park and the Hamilton Palace Towers Retail Park Centre (100 and 300 spaces respectively), those at the ASDA supermarket (300 spaces) and a large multi-storey car park on Duke Street (700 spaces).

Although parking in some areas is free of charge (such as those located that the Palace Grounds Retail Park and Hamilton Palace Towers Retail Park), most make a relatively small charge, with costs ranging from 80p per hour to £5.80 per day for off-street car parks, and from 80p per hour to £2 for 3 hours for on-street parking where there is a maximum stay of 3 hours.

Accessing the town centre may be confusing for visitors that are not familiar with the area, as busy roads and dual carriageways encircle the central retail areas, thereby reducing visibility. For vehicular traffic travelling from the M74, the first road sign that provides directions to the town centre is less than 50 yards from a large and busy roundabout.
There is, however, good signage within the town centre for those travelling by foot or bike, and the pavements and roads in the centre appeared to be in relatively good condition with only minor damage found and a few cracks and pot-holes. There are also ample pedestrian crossings and traffic lights spread throughout the town centre.

The town centre provides access to local services which, alongside a mix of retailers and business services, includes a town hall, police station, New College Lanarkshire, bus and train stations. These are, however, almost exclusively located around the edges of the town centre, which is large and spread out.

There is 3G and 4G coverage throughout the town and town-wide free WiFi, as well as superfast broadband.
3. **Active Town Centre**

3.1 **Population and Housing**

According to the 2011 Census, Hamilton has a population of around 53,000 people, of which around 3,400 are within, or within walkable distance of, the town centre. Using the best fit area for the town centre zoned boundary identifies a total of 775 people, just 1% of Hamilton’s total population, living within the immediate town centre area. Over the past decade, the wider town centre population has increased by 20%, significantly higher than the 6% average from 31 other YTA audited towns.

The majority of housing within the town centre is in flatted accommodation (81%), with tenure split between private ownership (57%), private rented (27%) and social rented (14%). At 4%, the town centre has a higher housing vacancy rate than the 2% average across Hamilton as a whole, creating opportunities to further increase the population base. The 4% vacancy rate is slightly higher than the average found across 35 other YTA audited towns of 3.5%, and is similar to vacancy rates in Irvine and Dumbarton (both 4%) both of which are commuter settlements with good public transport connections.

Nearly half of the houses (27%) in Hamilton town centre are in council tax bands A, B and C. The streets surrounding the town centre shopping streets are almost solely residential – primarily flats – these provide a large catchment population for the retail and service businesses.

The average purchase price of a town centre dwelling in Hamilton (£127,835) is higher than that of the town as a whole (£90,500). Prices in the town centre have increased by 49% in the decade to 2013, and by 31% in the wider town. In comparison with other YTA audited towns, Hamilton has both a higher average purchase price (YTA average of £104k from 33 YTAs) and higher average ten year increase (YTA average of 44% from 30 YTAs).

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1 2011 Scottish Output Zones: S00131945, S00132773, S00132318, S00131943, S00131897, S00132328, S00131941, S00131859 and S00131896.
There is, however, significant variation across the audited towns (from £55k to £200k average price for town centre properties), but prices in Hamilton are closer to towns in East Renfrewshire, Fife and Lothian than the other large towns in the Glasgow City region including Barrhead, Clydebank and Dumbarton. This will be partly due to the type of housing within the town centre, but also suggests that Hamilton is regarded by purchasers as an attractive place to live.

![Pie chart showing property distribution]

3.2 Town Centre Employment and Business

The town centre plays an important role in the economy of Hamilton, with 26% of the town’s jobs located within it. This is due to a combination of:

- the large physical area that the town centre covers – measuring almost one mile in distance from Gateside Street to the furthest unit at Hamilton Palace Retail Park;
- the presence of a number of large format retailers including Marks & Spencer and Currys/ PC World; and
- the presence of a number of large office and other service providers including Police Scotland, Council, Skills Development Scotland and NHS Health/ Dental practices.
Across 35 YTAs the average is 232 town population per retail unit – at 330 Hamilton scores much higher than this. The higher the rate, the more the town’s retailers rely on spend from local residents – other YTAs with similar rates include Clydebank (330), and Dumbarton (307) – rather than drawing custom from elsewhere.

3.3 Town Centre Retail

The traditional town centre retail area is focused on Quarry Street, Cadzow Street and Gateside Street. Quarry Street runs through the town centre and gives access to the two shopping centres (the Regent Shopping Centre and New Cross Shopping Centre), both also connecting to adjacent streets.
However, Hamilton has a large number of shop units that most of the YTA audited towns, (average of 144 across 35 YTAs), and retailers are spread across a large town centre area. Areas to the south of the traditional town centre around Quarry Street are included within the zoned town centre boundary, taking in the Palace Grounds Retail Park and Hamilton Palace Towers Retail Park, both with large format chain retailers including Halfords, Next and Homebase.

Hamilton’s retail performance has been in decline over recent years. The 2015 YTA audit found that 13% of retail units in the town centre were vacant, now at 16% with this 2017 update. The average retail vacancy rate across 33 YTA towns is 9.3% – those with similar average rates to Hamilton include Ayr (16%), Kilmarnock (15%) and Dumbarton (16%).

The update audit also identified that two-thirds of all the retail units that were vacant in 2015 are still vacant (albeit that some may have been occupied in the intervening period), and that 89% of all vacant units in Hamilton town centre are retail properties (54 of 61 units).

Quarry Street has by far the highest number of vacant retail units but other areas within the town centre recorded very high vacancy rates:

- Quarry Street / Place – where 21 of 113 retail units are vacant, 19%;
- Townhead Street – where 7 of the 14 retail units are vacant, 50%;
- Gateside Street – where 6 of 20 retail units are vacant, 30%;
- Regent Shopping Centre – where 5 of 29 retail units are vacant, 17%; and
- Duke Street – where 3 of 11 retail units are vacant, 27%.

These five streets account for 42 of the 54 vacant retail units in Hamilton, 78% of the total; 29 of these 42 units (69%) were vacant in the 2015 audit.

The data suggests deep-rooted issues with retail vacancy in Hamilton that will require further analysis and consideration to identify and develop actions to address the underlying causes, which might include a combination of:

- there are simply too many retail units in Hamilton for the level of occupier demand – there might be a need to reduce/ rezone the town centre boundary and encourage redevelopment for alternative uses;
• some parts of the town centre might be particularly unattractive to occupiers and would benefit from improvements – lighting, streetscape, directional signage, etc may make these areas more attractive; and

• some properties may be particularly unattractive to occupiers and do not meet the needs of modern retailers – these might benefit from being upgraded or possibly demolished and redeveloped.

It is also important to note that while Hamilton has a high vacancy rate there has been some level of churn in the town centre – with 11% of all retail units changing occupier or changing from vacant to occupied status between the 2015 and 2017 audits. This shows that demand for retail units in Hamilton is active.

Shops located at the Palace Grounds Retail Park and Hamilton Palace Tower Retail Park, to the south of town centre area are typically open until 8pm Monday to Saturday and 6pm on Sundays. Of the ten units in this area only one is vacant – the former Chiquito restaurant.

Within the town centre, larger traders generally open 7 days a week until 5pm or 6pm, with some operating with slightly later closing on Thursdays or shorter hours on Sundays. This is comparable with trends in other large traditional town centres, but with a relatively large catchment from residents, workers and visitors there may be greater opportunity to extend town centre opening hours in Hamilton’s traditional town centre area if footfall can be increased.
The largest single use in Hamilton town centre is retail, which accounts for 44% of all activities (average 46%, 35 YTAs). This equates to a slight drop of three percentage points since 2015 when retail accounted for 47% of the mix of uses, but is in line with the findings from other YTA audited towns. The town has a variety of independent retailers, alongside a number of national chains. Key anchors include Marks and Spencer, Primark, New Look and Next.

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. – *16 convenience retailers were identified in Hamilton town centre*;
• **Comparison Retail**: all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *90 comparison retailers were identified in Hamilton 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. – *55 retail service operators were identified in Hamilton town centre, of which half are hair and beauty businesses.*

Just over half of retailers (57%) in Hamilton town centre are independently operated, with 43% part of a larger chain. Independent traders are spread throughout the town, although with particularly high concentrations on Cadzow Street and Quarry Street where 80% and 76% respectively of all occupied retail properties are independent. Multiples are, for the most part, clustered in the retail parks, and within the Regent/ New Cross Shopping Centres.
While the proportion of independent retailers is considerably lower in Hamilton than the average for YTA audited towns (71%, 35 YTAs), their dominance in some streets creates an opportunity to brand and market zones with a high proportion of independent traders, building on their unique characteristics and potential to adapt quickly to market changes. A number of town centres have introduced shared spaces for independent retailers – indoor markets or emporiums where small and new businesses can test market conditions and interest for their products and services.

Hamilton also has a higher than average proportion of comparison retailers at 56% of all retail traders (42%, 35 YTAs), also creating potential to attract shoppers that are interested in browsing for goods. Other towns with high proportions of comparison retail outlets tend to include smaller and destination towns (e.g. Moffat and West Kilbride) or larger towns with indoor shopping centres (e.g. Ayr and Kirkcaldy).

3.4 Hamilton Business Improvement District (BID)

The initial Hamilton BID was established in 2012 and has just had a successful renewal ballot for a second five-year term, which will come to an end in October 2022. The purpose of the BID is for businesses to work and invest collectively to improve their own business environment. Projects include planning and organising events to attract visitors to Hamilton supported by advertising campaigns.

One of the most recent BID projects was the Big Stampede, which took place from June to August 2017, and saw over 30 large safari sculpture animals placed throughout the town centre. The sculptures were decorated by local and national artists, small local companies and national corporations, community groups and individuals. After being on display for ten weeks, all sculptures were auctioned, with £90,000 raised at for the Glasgow Children’s Hospital Charity.

The Big Stampede created a public arts trail through the town centre. With many of the sculptures placed outside businesses it created footfall and spend opportunities from people following the trail on the day (using either the publically available map or downloadable app), particularly in retail, food and drink outlets. The trail also builds awareness of the range of retailers and other services in the town centre, helping to attract customers in the future.

4 http://www.hamiltonourtown.co.uk/
4. Attractive Town Centre

4.1 Leisure Mix

The leisure offering in Hamilton town centre is dominated by evening economy uses (62%). There is one cinema within the town centre, the Vue Cinema at Hamilton Palace Towers Retail Park and two gyms (at the Palace Grounds Retail Park and within the New Cross Shopping Centre), but only one hotel and no museum/gallery.

The Town House is a Category A listed building on the edge of the town centre which combines three linked structures individually constructed and separately opened in 1907 (Carnegie Library), 1914 (Town House) and 1928 (Town Hall). The Town House completed a £9m refurbishment in 2004 with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Arts Council, and Historic Scotland.

It was re-opened as a multi-purpose Arts venue with facilities for hosting performances, weddings and other social events, classes and courses, conferences and meetings as well as its varied arts and cultural events programme. The venue has hosted a range of performances, from West End productions, national companies through to local amateur groups.
Hamilton town centre has a strong night time economy offering – consistent with its profile as a town with a large catchment population across both the settlement and Lanarkshire. The evening economy comprises 42 operators made up of restaurants (40%), bars and pubs (31%) and hot food takeaways (26%). There is only one nightclub in Hamilton – the Palace on Keith Street.

The number of bars is relatively consistent with other YTA audited towns – Hamilton has a population of 4,100 residents per town centre outlet, compared with a 33 town YTA average of 3,900. It does, however, have more restaurants at 3,100 residents per unit compared to 4,700 from 29 town YTA average; and significantly less hot food takeaways at 4,800 residents per unit compared to 2,900 from 33 town YTA average. While Hamilton has only one nightclub for over 50,000 residents, the 10 town YTA average is 22,000 residents per outlet, dropping to 18,600 when Hamilton is excluded.

4.2 Events and Attractions

Hamilton Racecourse is a key attraction within the town, with 10 race days a year. The Racecourse is located to the north of the town centre and is largely surrounded by residential areas, so there are limited spin-off benefits for town centre businesses. The Racecourse largely provides for visitors through its own catering facilities located on-site. It opened in 1926, and since the early 1970’s has been owned by Hamilton Park Trust.

Photo via Flickr user Andrew Rendall, under terms of license.
Low Parks Museum is another tourist attraction in the settlement, located just outside the town centre. The museum traces the local history of South Lanarkshire, with exhibitions about early settlement; working life, including agriculture, weaving, and coalmining; and also the history of the local regiment, the Camerons (Scottish Rifles). The museum received a 5-star rating from the Visit Scotland grading scheme, and is located in the former Low Parks of the Duke of Hamilton's estates.

Strathclyde Country Park is located near to Hamilton, a 15 minute drive from the centre. The Park sits within 400 hectares of countryside and is one of the most popular family attractions in the central belt of Scotland, with visitors coming each year to enjoy the wide range of activities and events taking place.

Some of the events that take place within the Park include 5k and 10k races, rowing regattas, music events, triathlons and fireworks events.

Some of the facilities within the park include: outdoor playgrounds, bicycle hire, fitness gym, watersports centre with cafe, conference facilities, watersports activities, and family funboats. The Park is open year-round and daily from 9am-7:45pm from April to September, and from 9am-5pm between October and March.

Bordering Strathclyde Country Park is M&D's Theme Park, which has a number of rollercoasters, water rides, fairground rides, an arcade, theatre, ten-pin bowling and indoor reptile centre. The theme park is not open daily, and information about open days is via the website\(^5\). Prices for entry range from £10 to £16 depending on ticket type and purchase method. Other facilities within the theme park include: parking, bars, restaurants, picnic areas, toilets and cash machines.

The other key attractions within and around the town, including the Hamilton Mausoleum and Chattheraught Country Park, which are located on the outskirts of the town.

\(^5\) [M&D's Theme Park Website](#)
4.3 Historic Town Centre

There are two conservation areas within Hamilton, with most of the town centre being covered by one of these. The town centre conservation area includes 88 listed buildings, four of which are Category A listed buildings.

One of the Category A listed buildings has been placed on the Buildings At Risk Register. Keith’s Building, which was built in 1903, is vacant and is noted as being in a poor condition, needing substantial restoration and refurbishment works. Although the building was auctioned again in 2010, it remains vacant and undeveloped.

Another entry on the Buildings at Risk Register is the property which was once the Hamilton Town Hotel on Townhead Street, dating back to the mid-19th Century. This building has been on the register since 2010, and has continued to deteriorate. There are no known plans for restoration and redevelopment of this property, which is one of the largest on the street. Its’ obvious derelict condition is in clear contrast to other business premises in the area.

4.4 Place and Quality Impressions

With a recent programme of streetscape improvements coming to an end, it is not surprising that Hamilton town centre scored well against Place + Quality Impression KPIs, with clean streets, good pedestrian access, a good range of retailers alongside leisure uses, and ample seating spread throughout. Pedestrian signage in the town centre is also clear, with fingerpost signs.
There are a number of modern artworks and statues placed across the town centre area, which helps to bring character and a unique sense of place. These are mainly located on Castle Street and Quarry Street, both of which have very high proportions of independent retail operators.

Business confidence interviews found that more than half of the businesses (56%) reported that they were not confident about the future of their business. The overall confidence score for Hamilton is 4.3 / 10 which is much lower than the average of 5.8 / 10 from 28 YTAs.

During the in-street audit, the appearance of shop fronts and window displays in Hamilton was rated. This is a very subjective analysis – buildings were rated at 6.4 / 10 and window displays at 6.6 / 10 – but is consistent with the approach adopted for other YTA audited towns where the average from 31 YTAs is 7.0 / 10 for building fronts and 7.1 / 10 for window displays.
Scores were somewhat brought down by the relatively high vacancy rate – while these properties were well-maintained on some streets, it is not consistent and the condition of some detract from the overall appearance of the town. Areas where shopfronts were rated low include:

- 3.4 / 10 average for Townhead Street with individual scores ranging from 0 to 9, and where eight of the 14 retail units are vacant;
- 5.0 / 10 for Gateside St with individual scores ranging from 3 to 7, and where six of the 20 retail units are vacant; and
- Kemp St and Keith Street – scoring 5.0 and 5.4 respectively but with only a small number of units on each.

Of the 364 units in Hamilton, 88 or 24% scored between zero and five out of ten for the condition of shop fronts, raising concerns for the condition of the town’s retail and other business premises.
5. YTA Summary and Key Points

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

5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- Hamilton is well connected with excellent public transport links and services – while car ownership in the area is high, regular bus and train services connect across Lanarkshire, Glasgow and further afield creating good accessibility for people visiting Hamilton town centre and also for residents travelling to work/ study elsewhere;

- there is potential to exploit the excellent transport connections in the town centre and attract new residential development to strengthen Hamilton’s position as an attractive settlement for commuters travelling to work/ study across the central belt;

- there is growing recognition that pedestrianisation has not always been entirely successful in town centres – this, combined with the regular flow of traffic using Quarry Street, suggests a need to review traffic arrangements in Hamilton town centre, albeit with continued dominance for those on foot;

- there is a good level of car parking in Hamilton town centre – although on-street parking is limited, there are 11 off-street car parks providing almost 2,000 spaces;

- while there is a good level of car parking provision in and around Hamilton town centre, there appears to be a perception of distance and disconnect that could be addressed by enhancing visual connections and walking routes and also by improving parking signage for drivers;

- there is good access to financial and other personal/ business services with a number of registered banks and ATMs spread throughout the town, and a range of financial, legal and property services;

- there are a number of leisure and cultural facilities within Hamilton but these are located on the edge of the town centre or further afield and therefore do not support linked trips – while it would not be practicable to relocate these uses into the town centre, there is an opportunity to promote the town centre at these locations to raise its profile and give residents/ visitors a better understanding of the range of retail and other services that it offers; and
• Hamilton has good 3G/4G mobile phone coverage, superfast broadband and free WiFi connectivity for town centre visitors.

5.2 Active Town Centre

• Hamilton has a population of over 50,000 and a workforce of almost 30,000 people – of these almost 3,500 and 8,000 respectively are within, or within walking distance of, the town centre giving businesses a large potential catchment to draw custom from;

• of the 2,300 residential properties within the town centre catchment area just under 100 are recorded as vacant, equating to 4% which is in line with the overall YTA average of 3.5% from 35 towns – combined with the slightly higher than average house price in Hamilton and increasing trends toward town centre living there may be an opportunity to secure redevelopment of these empty homes and also attract new residential development in other parts of the town centre, possibly through zoning a residential quarter;

• in comparison with other YTA audited towns there is a high level of vacant units in Hamilton town centre equating to 17% of all properties and 16% of all retail units – this has increased since the 2015 audit (13% for both indicators) equating to an additional 13 vacant retail units (from 41 to 54) and two non-retail properties (from 5 to 7);

• as well an increase in the volume, the audit also found that two-thirds of all retail units that were vacant in 2015 remain vacant in 2017 – there is therefore a need to undertake further analysis to understand the underlying factors that are causing high retail vacancy overall in the town centre, and very high rates in particular streets, to identify appropriate mitigating actions;

• Hamilton has a very large town centre area stretching almost one mile from north to south and is effectively split into three core areas:
  o the central core around the pedestrianised Quarry Street is the traditional retail area with two indoor shopping malls and paid car parking around its outer edge
  o the northern core has a greater share of independent and service businesses with some paid on-street car parking
  o the southern core made up of Hamilton Palace Retail Park with large format stores, cinema, supermarket and substantial free car parking
• together with the topography of the town centre, this split makes it somewhat difficult to navigate Hamilton as a single entity. With pockets of high retail vacancy in parts of the centre, there may be benefit in reviewing the boundary to ensure a continued focus on a smaller core retail/service area and also potential to introduce a zoning or quarters based approach to future development;

• there is a relatively high proportion of national retail chains (43% compared with the YTA average of 29% from 35 towns) confirming Hamilton’s position as a major shopping centre, but with a number of high profile retail failures in recent years – and likely more to follow with ongoing economic pressures, increases in online shopping and competition from large dominant retail centres – there is a risk that the retail vacancy rate in Hamilton may increase in the future;

• there are, however, parts of the town centre where independent retailers dominate – this creates an opportunity to brand and market a zone that promotes a niche cluster of unique businesses;

• there is a need for SLC (and other stakeholders) to continue their active support for Hamilton town centre BID over the next five years – this should include efforts to deliver additional events and activities in the town centre that will attract new footfall and create activity across the calendar year; and

• there is a need to gain a better understanding of the customer base for Hamilton town centre, both those that are currently using the town centre but, more importantly, local people that do not use it, with a view to targeting future resources on activity that meets the needs of residents and visitors – this might include for example a teenage market, local craft emporium, history/heritage outlet, family friendly food & drink premises, live performance venue, etc.

5.3 Attractive Town Centre

• Hamilton has an attractive streetscape setting and an extensive improvement programme is nearing completion for the public realm, giving the town centre good quality street furniture, lighting and public art – this provides a strong base from which any future activity can build;
there are, however, a large number of vacant units (61 within the town centre), including heritage properties on the Buildings at Risk Register, which reduce the town’s attractiveness and create a sense of disrepair – the average YTA rating for quality of building fronts and window displays is fairly average but the audit found significant variation and clusters of properties in Townhead St and Gateside St that were rated with very low scores;

as with the 2015 audit results, business confidence in Hamilton town centre is low with an average rating of only 4.3/10, compared with the YTA average of 5.8/10 – it is good that businesses have supported the Hamilton BID for a second term but there is a need for action that will increase business turnover to ensure they are sustainable in the future – a programme of focused town centre business support may be beneficial;

can be benefits in adopting a zoning or quarters based approach to any future development in Hamilton town centre – this should respond to the apparent over-supply of retail units and help to re-shape the centre to meet the needs of modern business practices, shopper demands and leisure attractions;

there are a number of development opportunity sites within the town centre – where possible, there is a need to ensure that any new activity contributes to and complements the existing town centre offer rather than introduce additional competition for existing businesses; and

while funding is constrained at present there is potential to work up some bespoke shovel-ready projects for the future that could respond to any new funding opportunities that would further enhance the attractiveness of Hamilton town centre and help to grow/ diversify the business base.