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# Your Town Audit: Eyemouth

4<sup>th</sup> March 2016



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Report produced by:



Audit Date: 05/02/2016

Final Report: 14/04/2016

Report for: Eyemouth and District Community Trust

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## 1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

This report presents a summary of the Your Town Audit (YTA) for Eyemouth, 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 Eyemouth with KPI data 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 Eyemouth and identifies eight comparator towns that have similar characteristics – it's four most similar towns are Wick, Annan, Cambeltown and Invergordon; but it also has economic similarities with: Banff, Brechin, Girvan and Rothesay. The USP platform – [www.usp.scot](http://www.usp.scot) – describes Eyemouth in the following **general terms**:

**Eyemouth's Interrelationships:** Eyemouth is an '*independent to interdependent town*' which means it has a good number of assets in relation to its population. This type of town typically has a good diversity of jobs; and residents on the whole travel shorter distances to travel to work and study. Independent to interdependent towns typically attract people from neighbouring towns to access some of their assets and jobs.

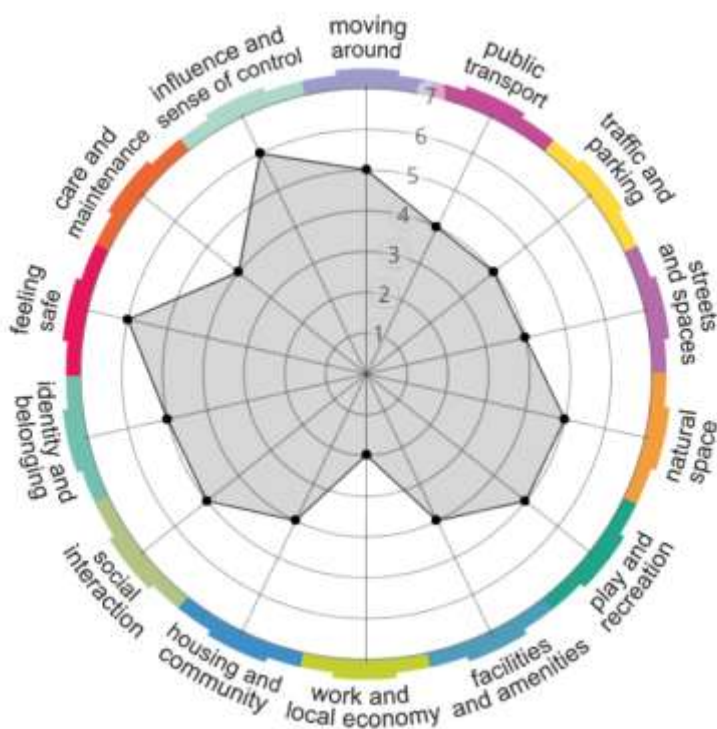
**Eyemouth's Typology:** Social and council housing are the norm in this type of medium-sized town. Manufacturing and construction are usually the dominant forms of employment. Health and social work services are particularly active. There is often a high level of unemployment. Educational attainment is low. Car ownership is low, meaning that many residents in these towns are reliant on public transport.

Comparing Eyemouth to other towns with similar USP typology and interrelationships shows it has similarities to these towns in terms of the number of charities, GP surgeries, hospitals, children in primary schools, children in secondary schools, jobs and shops. It also has similarities in the distance travelled to study. It differs from the comparator towns in terms of the number of public sector jobs, and the diversity of jobs. Eyemouth differs most from its comparator group in the distance travelled to work.

Building on the USP, this report presents the results of our detailed analysis of Eyemouth 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.

## 2. Place Standard Review

Alongside the YTA appraisal, Eyemouth & District Community Trust worked with local organisations and key individuals to complete the Place Standard review <http://www.placestandard.scot/#/home>. Input was provided by members of the Trust, the Housing Association and the High School – the combined results are presented in the diagram below, which is designed to show, at a glance, where places are doing well and where there is scope for improvement.



There is clearly a strong sense of place quality in Eyemouth with all but one of the 14 indicators scoring 4/7 or above. Work and local economy is the only indicator with a low score, largely reflecting the town’s small size and rural location meaning most residents have to travel for work.

Local stakeholders clearly believe that Eyemouth is doing particularly well in relation to safety and local influence/control; with strong scores also recorded for natural space, play/recreation, social interaction and identity/ belonging.

These results demonstrate strong resilience and a community that is embedded in its social fabric. There are some indicators where significant change would be difficult to achieve (work/ local economy) but others where minor improvements – as discussed in the YTA feedback presented later – could improve key scores (e.g. streets/ spaces and care/ maintenance).

### 3. Eyemouth – Accessible Town

Eyemouth is a small fishing and tourist town in Berwickshire in the rural eastern Borders close to the English border. It is geographically isolated with few other substantial towns nearby – the closest larger towns being Berwick-upon-Tweed eight miles to the South in England, and Dunbar, more than 20 miles to the north.

Eyemouth is connected with the rest of Berwickshire with numerous, but infrequent buses serving the network of towns and villages in the immediate area and also connecting with the larger regional towns including Hawick and Galashiels. It is poorly connected with major cities with an infrequent bus service linking Eyemouth to Berwick-upon-Tweed and Edinburgh, however the journey to Edinburgh takes almost two hours. There is no train station in Eyemouth, with the nearest located at Berwick-upon-Tweed, which sits on the East Coast Mainline and is a 40 minute train journey from Edinburgh.

15 Mile radius around Eyemouth



The narrow streets and one-way system ensure that traffic does not dominate the centre of the town, but this is not the case within the harbour area which will have high volumes of commercial traffic at peak times which will cause conflict with resident and visitor movements. Improving connections to Gunsgreen House on the east side of the harbour would also improve accessibility to this key asset.

As a seaside tourist town it is unsurprising that there is plentiful parking, with around 200 off-street spaces, most of which are free but time restricted<sup>1</sup>. There is limited on-street parking through much of the town due to the narrowness of the streets. Parking provision is likely to serve the needs of the local population most of the time but will reach capacity at the peak tourist times.

National Cycle Route 76, which runs between Berwick-upon-Tweed and Edinburgh, passes through Eyemouth. It passes through the major tourist and retail areas of the town, and is likely to generate additional spend for the town as it is the only service centre for some considerable distance.

<sup>1</sup> A small number of spaces at the harbour are charged – 50p per half-hour, up to £4 for maximum 9 hours.

Eyemouth has relatively poor 3G and 4G mobile reception compared to the rest of the UK, however superfast broadband has recently been rolled out to the town. There is good access to local services, with a day hospital, medical centre, dentist and a council contact centre. Eyemouth is relatively compact and easily walkable for most people – the leisure centre, job centre a number of parks and green spaces and the beach are also located in the town.

## 4. Eyemouth – Active Town

The Scottish Borders Local Development Plan (2011) identifies Eyemouth as a primary development location with small scale potential for retail redevelopment. The plan identifies a number of sites for development including:

- five sites allocated for residential development:
  - three sites in the eastern Gunsgreenhill area with indicative capacity for 198 units
  - two sites on the western edge (Acredale Farm and Barefoots) with indicative capacity for 264 units
- a residential development opportunity with indicative capacity for 90 housing units on the site of the old high school
- 6.1 ha of mixed use allocation near the town centre north of Gunsgreen House; and
- four sites allocated for employment use (21.4 hectares) to the south and west of the town – these could potentially accommodate relocation of some commercial and industrial uses from more prominent areas within the town.

There is therefore significant potential to increase activity within Eyemouth, although securing this will be dependent on developer interest.

In addition we identified three small house plots within the town centre that are being marketed for residential development – at North Street, Church Street and Albert Road.

A harbour use study<sup>2</sup> was prepared for Scottish Borders Council in 2013 that considered the potential long-term use of the triangular site to the south-east of the town centre – Harbour Road / Church Street / Manse Road block – which is identified

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<sup>2</sup> Eyemouth Harbourside Study, Bain Swann Architects, February 2013

as a key development location. Although no firm development plan was concluded, there was support for a vision sketch which outlined the general principles of redeveloping this area. Development proposals involve relocating commercial fishing activity and restoring the link between the quayside and the town centre, making it more attractive and expanding the offer for visitors to the town.

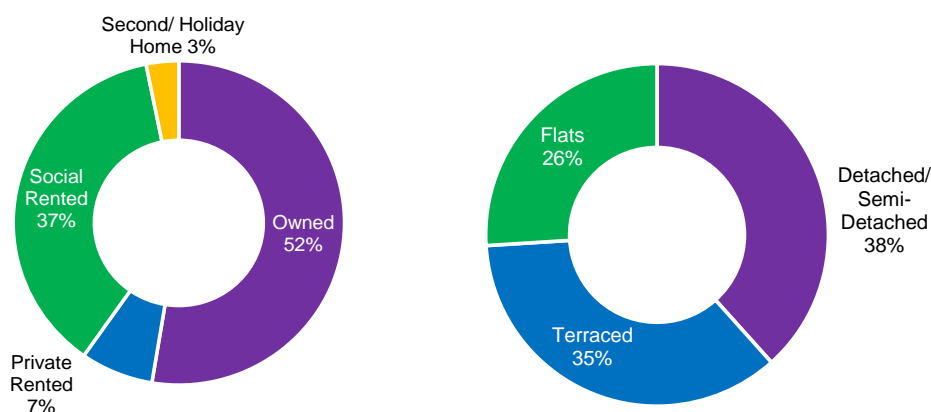
#### 4.1 Population and Housing

At the settlement level Eyemouth has a population of around 3,200, a fall of 6% since 2003 – this compares to a 5% increase for both the Scottish Borders and at the Scottish level over this ten year period. At the town centre level Eyemouth has a population of around 700<sup>3</sup>, a decline of 9% since 2003. This is in contrast to other towns where YTA audits have been completed where all have had some increase in town centre living, albeit with some seeing decline across the wider town settlement.

Around two fifths of housing in Eyemouth is detached or semi-detached (38%), with most of the remainder terraced (35%). Housing is typically one or two bedroom and within Council Tax bands A/B/C. There are some newer developments and older social housing stock, but the main stock is made up of older properties – terraces and flats, which set the historic context for the town.



#### Eyemouth Housing Mix



Tenure is split between owner-occupied (52%), social rented (37%) and private rented (7%), with a small number of vacant dwellings (2%) and holiday homes (3%).

<sup>3</sup> Based on the best-fit datazone ward – SO1005487

Compared to other towns that have been audited, Eyemouth has a low incidence of privately rented homes and of vacant homes. Given its attractive and traditional seaside setting, it also has a surprisingly low level of second / holiday homes at only 3% of the total stock –compared to 7% in Alloa and 4% in Kilmarnock and Kirkcaldy.

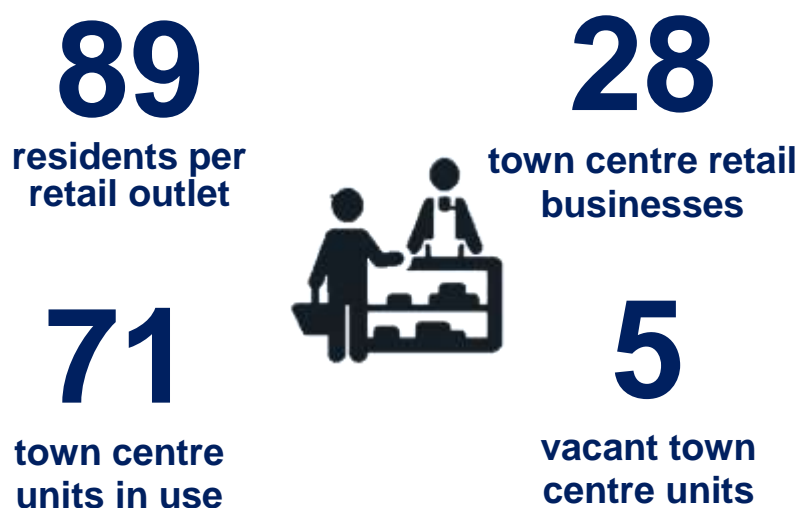
## 4.2 Employment

There are approximately 1,000 people employed in Eyemouth, indicating that a considerable portion of the working age population travel to work elsewhere.

There are 140 businesses in Eyemouth with an average of 7 employees per business – lower than other towns in which audits have been undertaken, including Alexandria (12), Kirkcaldy (17), Alloa (18.5), Clydebank (22) and Hamilton (27). This is likely due to the small size of most retail and service businesses.

## 4.3 Retail

From a total of 117 non-residential properties in Eyemouth (76 in the town centre) we identified 36 retail operators, predominantly located within the town centre (28). Shops in Eyemouth operate standard opening hours of around 9am to 5.30pm with few exceptions.

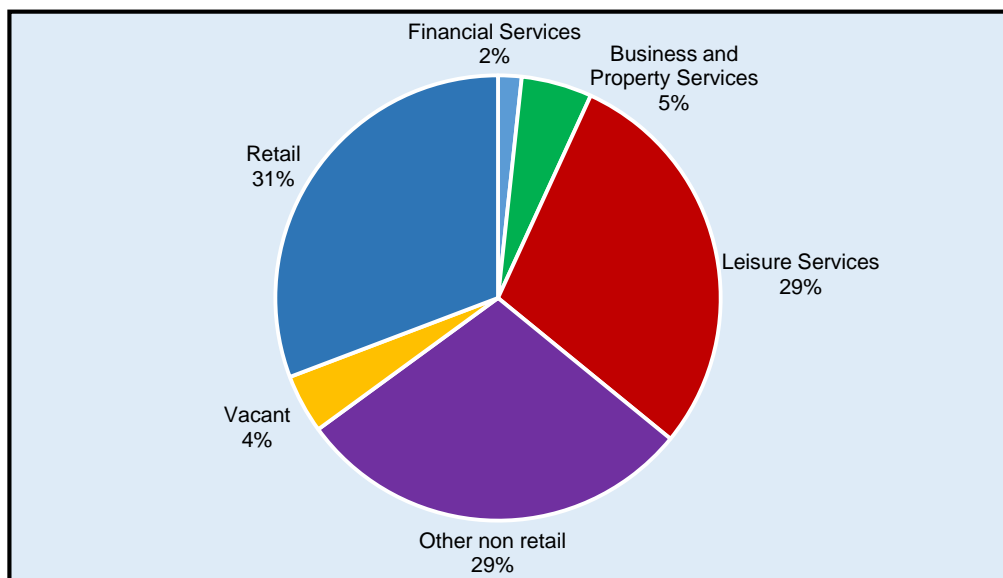


There is only one vacant retail unit, located on high street (formerly a bakers) and five other vacant units within the town centre (two large hotels, the former Town Hall and one small office unit, and one industrial unit (in the industrial estate on the outskirts of the town).



While the overall vacancy rate is 4% across all non-residential properties it equates to 8% of relevant units<sup>4</sup>. Overall vacancy in the town is fairly low, and would be significantly lower if the two vacant hotels and Town Hall building were discounted. The vacancy rate in other completed YTA audited town centres ranged from 3% to 17%, including Alloa (10%), Kilmarnock (15%), Ayr (16%) and Kirkcaldy (17%).

### Eyemouth Unit Mix



With a total of 117<sup>5</sup> units identified across Eyemouth, the town has a small proportion of retail units, amounting to just 31% of all properties. At the town centre level, there is a slightly larger proportion of units in retail use (37%) but this is still significantly lower than other towns where we have undertaken YTAs where the proportion of retail uses typically ranges from 45% to 55%. It is, however, comparable with the combined audit for Upper Nithsdale (Kirkconnel-Kelloholm, Sanquhar and Wanlockhead) where retail accounts for just 31% of all non-residential uses across all three towns.

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 – 9 convenience retailers identified in Eyemouth;

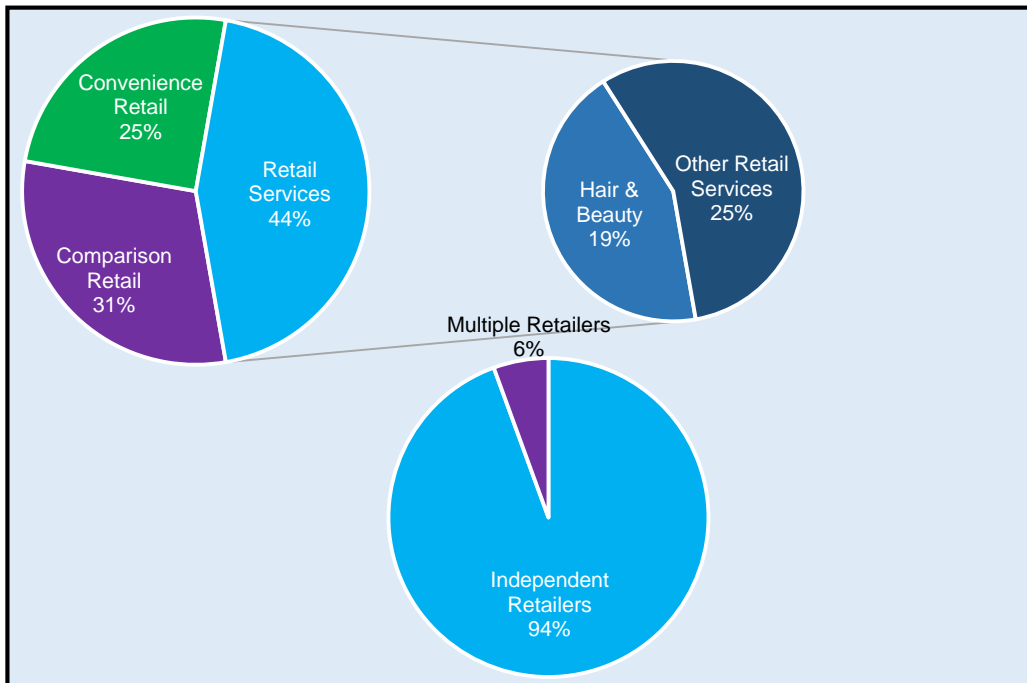
<sup>4</sup> Five vacant units (excludes the industrial unit) from a total of 63 relevant retail properties – note this excludes first floor and other properties e.g. places of worship, industrial and health centre. Not all relevant retail properties are occupied by retail businesses e.g. café, take-away food, estate agent, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Note – this is based on the visual audit undertaken on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2016 – it differs from the 140 businesses noted at Section 3.2 as some businesses will share premises, some business owners will work from home, but also a small number might have been missed from the visual audit as they work from premises that are not clearly branded as a business outlet e.g. first floor office that appears, from the outside, to be a residential unit. The approach is, however, consistent with other YTA audits that have been completed.

- **Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *11 comparison retailers identified in Eyemouth;* 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 – *16 retail service operators identified in Eyemouth.*



**Retail Mix**



Retail in Eyemouth is dominated by independent operators with only two national chains – the Co-op store within the town centre and Gulf petrol filling station (with McColls store) being the only two identified chain stores. This is the highest level of

independent trading identified across all of the towns that have been audited. This is indicative of its small size and partly its status as a visitor destination, with many tourism related businesses such as ice cream and gift shops. The town does, however, have a significant number of independent traders meeting the needs of residents including baker, butcher, fishmonger, florist and chemist.

## 5. Eyemouth – Attractive Town



Eyemouth town centre is concentrated around the waterfront and harbour, with the periphery of the town mainly residential. There are numerous retail and leisure facilities for both residents and tourists, the built environment is historic and attractive and there is ample signage and interpretation panels around the waterfront advertising the town's assets. The directional finger-post signage is, however, showing some wear – weathering due to the coastal location.

The town is clean and attractive, with floral hanging baskets (in season), good quality seating and litter bins provided. In general, the town is easily navigable, particularly along the waterfront which is of high quality. Some of the road and pavement surfaces require attention.



### 5.1 Eyemouth Conservation Area

The Conservation Area in Eyemouth includes the entire town centre, the harbour and a considerable part of the coast. There are 64 listed properties including two that are Category 'A'.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century harbour is typical of a Scottish coastal town, but there are remnants of fortifications from prehistoric times to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The harbour is an important feature, setting the character of the town, and the coast sets the context with a good quality promenade.

There is an attractive entrance into the town from Victoria Road with a number of villa-style properties and good examples of traditional architecture including Burgh Chambers, Gunsgreen House and properties along Paxton Terrace and Armitage Street, but the traditional layout

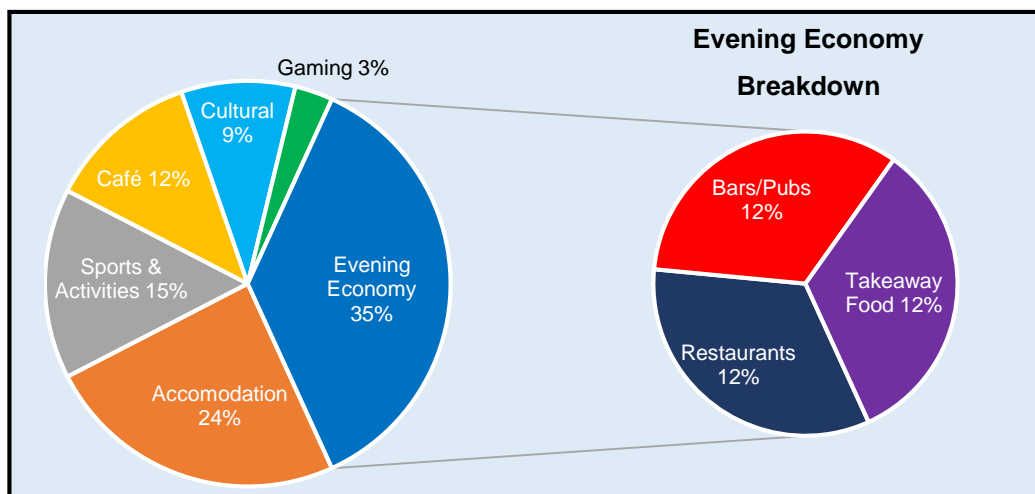


of Harbour Road and the High Street are important features in defining the place quality of Eyemouth.

In line with its Conservation Area status any new development should contribute to the existing character of the area. This includes alterations to properties within the town centre which must respect individual building characteristics.

## 5.2 Leisure Mix

In total 33 leisure businesses were identified in Eyemouth, of which 23 are located within the town centre – this is the highest proportion of leisure uses identified in the towns that have been audited.



The leisure offering in Eyemouth is plentiful given the small size of the town, with eight accommodation providers, five sports & activities providers, four restaurants and four bars/pubs.

The Eyemouth Leisure Centre is located in the town centre near the waterfront and has recently reopened after a £150,000 redevelopment. It provides a swimming pool and a range of gym equipment.

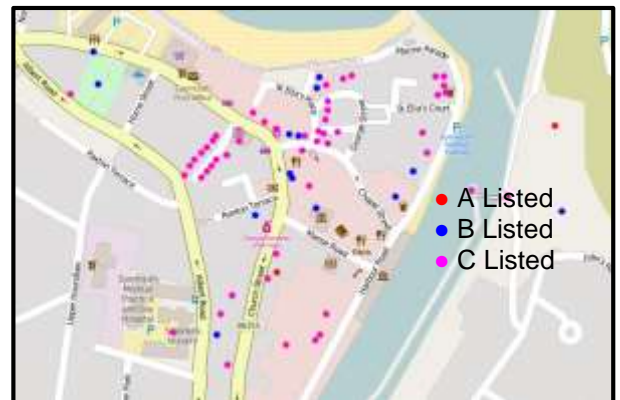
There is a wide range of visitor accommodation within the town, including hotels, B&Bs and the Eyemouth Holiday park which has over 200 static caravans for sale or rent along with onsite bar, restaurant and entertainment facilities.



## Attractions and Heritage

Eyemouth boasts a variety of heritage and leisure assets, primarily based around its historic harbour and waterfront. The most notable landmark is the Category A listed Gunsgreen House and Castle, overlooking the harbour, as well as a variety of other listed buildings, clustered close to the waterfront and harbour.

### Listed Buildings in Eyemouth



The waterfront and harbour are the main attractions of the town, with the sandy beach taking up the majority of the waterfront, and a variety of amenities just off the beach, including amusements, the leisure centre and swimming pool, ice cream shops, children's play parks, pubs, restaurants and cafes.



The current appeal raising funds for the Eyemouth Memorial at the Bantry – East Coast Fishing Disaster: Widows & Bairns Memorial – will further add to the strong sense of place quality in this key area and enhance connectivity with the nearby seaside settlements of St Abbs and Cove where memorials to the 'worst fishing disaster in Scotland's history' are already in place.





The harbour area is home to the more historical and cultural attractions, including Gunsgreen house, the Eyemouth Maritime Centre and Eyemouth Museum.

The town is promoted to locals and visitors through the [www.visiteyemouth.com](http://www.visiteyemouth.com) website which provides information on accommodation, attractions, events and services. The covered indoor-outdoor event space at Auld Market (adjacent to the Maritime Centre) is also a good recent addition and allows a range of specialist markets, events and activities that will help to draw resident and visitor footfall into the town centre.

The town also provides a range of water-based activities targeted primarily at visitors – including boat trips, diving and wildlife – promoted through websites and in-street information boards. While the beach is a designated bathing water, the quality is designated with a 'poor' rating (recent tighter water quality standards of the new Bathing Water Directive).



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In the event that these public conveniences are not accessible, you may use the facilities free of charge at either The Tavern Public House or the Contented Sole Public House, during their opening times.

For information please contact 0300 100 1800, and ask to speak to Neighbourhood services staff responsible for public conveniences.

There are two public toilets within the town centre – one at the northern end near the Co-op and the other at the south eastern end at the entrance to Eyemouth and adjacent to a large car park. Both are operated and maintained by Scottish Borders Council, open 7am to 6pm, but with clear signage that alternative provision is available in two public bars outwith these hours.

### 5.3 Attractiveness Review

The YTA includes an independent review on place and quality impressions, with Eyemouth scoring above average when compared to other towns. This is in a large part due to high occupancy rate and the generally well-maintained buildings and shopfronts around the town.

Business confidence in the town centre was gauged from a small sample of interviews undertaken with independent traders. Scores averaged at 6.9 / 10, which is higher than the average across other YTA audited towns which have ranged from 3.9 to 8.1.

Individual shop fronts and window displays were graded out of ten during the on-street audit, with a town centre average score of 7.6 for the condition of shop fronts and 7.7 for quality of window display. This is also higher than other YTA audited towns, which average 6.8 / 10.



## 6. YTA Summary and Key Points

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

### 6.1 Accessible Town Centre

- the town is located on the A1 – the main north/south route in the east – but improved signage could help attract passing spend from the A1 – brown heritage or visitor service signage (food, toilets, petrol, etc);
- there is good access by road to Eyemouth but bus services are infrequent, linking mainly with the local areas;
- there is ample off-street parking in Eyemouth, the vast majority of which is free but time restricted;
- there are good walking and cycling networks and routes through the town and its distance from other service and accommodation centres is an advantage – some towns (e.g. Moffat) specifically promote themselves as 'Walking Towns' where accommodation and food operators carry signage welcoming walkers; and

- walking routes to Gunsgreen House and the eastern harbour could be improved through the redevelopment (or reorganisation) of the harbour area.

## 6.2 Active Town Centre

- the town provides a wide range of services and activities that will meet the needs of both residents and visitors with a range of leisure activities;
- there is a good quality website promoting the town – [www.visiteyemouth.com](http://www.visiteyemouth.com) – which provides a range of information in an accessible format and that is regularly updated;
- while there is only one (relatively small) supermarket in Eyemouth and therefore likely to be a (relatively high) level of retail leakage outwith the town, it's location in the centre is helpful in drawing customers that will also use other town centre businesses. This is also likely to be a factor that helps to retain footfall and spend for the independent traders including specifically the butcher, baker, florist and chemist;
- installing the new office / training centre at the Auld Merkhet, and the use of this area for events and activities will generate footfall and spend for town centre businesses – additional options could be explored to ensure that maximum value is secured from this asset;
- the decline in the population within the town centre and across the town as a whole should be explored in more detail to identify and understand the issues that are driving this trend; and
- while the town offers a range of outdoor activities these are primarily water-based – given its attractive seafront promenade and visitor profile there may be potential to introduce cycle hire, potentially through a community initiative.

## 6.3 Attractive Town Centre

- there is a high proportion of independent retail traders in Eyemouth – this helps to create a distinctive offering and differentiates it from other places – it is important to protect these local businesses which could form the basis of a promotional campaign around an independent town image i.e. the opposite of the ubiquitous 'Anywhere Town';



- Eyemouth has a very attractive town setting – a historic core protected with Conservation Area status, active harbour and few vacant premises. Securing redevelopment and / or reuse of the two large vacant hotel properties would significantly strengthen the towns offering and remove the visual blight created by these prominent boarded-up premises;
- the presence of two publicly accessible toilet blocks within the town centre is a real asset, and the support of the two public houses in providing out of hours provision is a significant benefit – every effort should be made to retain and promote these facilities. It is important to note, however, that other towns (including seaside visitor towns) across Scotland are facing closure of Council run toilet provision and/or transfer into community ownership. It would be prudent therefore to consider options as to how this critically important provision can be retained;
- while the public realm is generally excellent, there are small pockets where targeted improvements to roads and pavements could yield significant benefit and improve the overall quality and attractiveness of the town;
- there would also be benefit in undertaking an audit and review of the existing finger-post signage which is showing signs of wear – this is unlikely to need replacement with new signage but some repair, re-setting and cleaning would create a marked improvement; and
- only one vacant retail property was identified during the audit, but anecdotal (and confidential) feedback from a small number of retailers suggests that some are considering their long-term position. It is therefore important that every effort is made to increase footfall and spend within the town centre – this could include a shop local campaign for residents, marketing to attract visitors, and delivery of more activities and events.