



# Your Town Audit: Clarkston

March 2016



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## 1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

This report presents a summary of the Your Town Audit (YTA) for Clarkston, 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 Clarkston 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 Clarkston and identifies twelve comparator towns that have similar characteristics, with the most similar being Dunblane, North Berwick and Banchory. The USP platform – [www.usp.scot](http://www.usp.scot) – describes Clarkston in the following **general terms**:

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

**Clarkston's Typology:** This type of medium-sized 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.

Comparing Clarkston to towns with similar USP typology and interrelationships shows it has a similar number of charities, children in school, shops and in its diversity of jobs. It differs in its number of jobs and distance travelled to work.

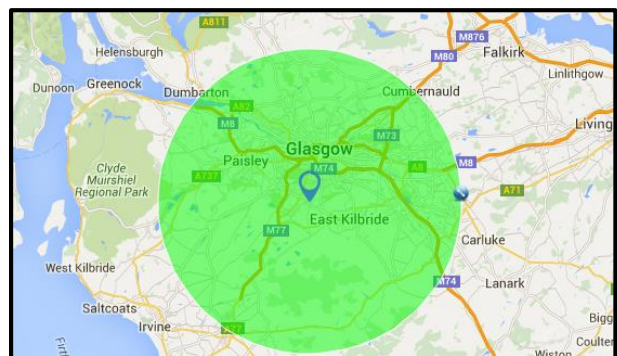
Building on the USP, this report presents the results of our detailed analysis of Clarkston using the Scottish Government's [Town Centre Toolkit](#) – an online resource available via the USP website which provides advice, guidance and case studies across three thematic areas: accessible, active and attractive.

## 2. Accessible Town Centre

Clarkston is a suburban commuter town in East Renfrewshire, located around six miles south of Glasgow and four miles north west of East Kilbride. It forms a continuous urban conurbation with surrounding communities in East Renfrewshire and the city of Glasgow. The current Local Development Plan defined town centre covers a fairly small area, including the core retail area of Busby Road, surrounding lanes, the town hall, library and adjacent car park and green spaces.

Clarkston sits on the East Kilbride to Glasgow railway line, with services running half hourly throughout the day. This provides a fast service into Glasgow and to some other settlements in East Renfrewshire, including Giffnock. However, there is no direct rail link with towns to the west of the local authority area, such as Neilston and Barrhead.

### 15 mile radius around Clarkston



Clarkston has bus connections to Glasgow, Clydebank, Eaglesham and East Kilbride. The M77 junction at Darnley (J3) is around 2.5 miles from the town, providing fast road access to Glasgow and Ayrshire.

There are a good number of parking space around the town, with around 100 spaces at the town hall and library (with footbridge access to Busby Road), and a privately operated, rooftop car park above the shops on Busby Road. This charges 50p for two hours parking, a very low charge in comparison with other towns. There are a limited number of parking spaces in other locations around the town centre including free time restricted on-street parking outside the main retail outlets.

Clarkston has good mobile connectivity and superfast broadband capability. The town centre provides access to local services which, alongside a mix of retailers and business services, includes the health centre, dentist, community hall and library. However, medical and social work services currently based on Busby Road will be transferring to a new health centre in Williamwood later in 2016.

Overall the town centre has a very good level of transport and digital connectivity.

### 3. Active Town Centre

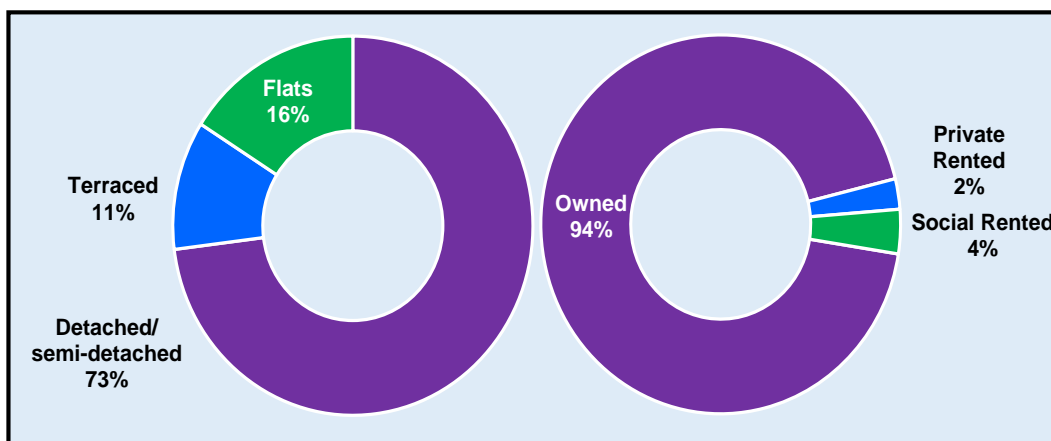
#### 3.1 Population and Housing

Clarkston and its immediate surrounding area has a population of around 13,000<sup>1</sup>, with around 2,100 people living within its town centre datazones<sup>2</sup>. At 16%, this is relatively high, although the datazone boundaries extend beyond a strict definition of the town centre. The town centre population increased by 4% from 2003 to 2013, compared with a 2% rise in the town as a whole. This compares with increases of 2% for East Renfrewshire and 5% for Scotland over this ten year period. Other audited town centres have generally seen a more marked increase in town centre living, although the imprecise layout of town centre datazones makes this more difficult to determine in Clarkston.

A high proportion of housing in the town centre is in detached or semi-detached dwellings (73%), typically with at least three bedrooms, and nearly all homes are owner-occupied. This is also reflected in the wider area. More than half of the dwellings in the town centre (54%) are in council tax bands F-H. There is a small number of vacant residential properties (1%).

The average purchase price of a town centre dwelling (£202,000) is higher than that of the town as a whole (£173,000) – both increased by around 10% between 2003 and 2013.

#### Clarkston Town Centre Housing Mix



<sup>1</sup> Includes Intermediate Zones S02000317 Clarkston and Sheddens, S02000320 Stamperland & S02000319 Williamwood

<sup>2</sup> 2001 Datazones S01001727, S01001731 & S01001735, which covers the defined town centre but also surrounding residential streets

### 3.2 Employment

Just over half (53%) of Clarkston’s 1,900 jobs are located in the town centre datazones. National statistics record 385 businesses in Clarkston, with around 130 in the BID area. The YTA street audit located 83 businesses within Clarkston town centre, confirming data provided by East Renfrewshire Council ahead of the audit. Clarkston has around 15 employees in the town for each business that is a member of the BID. This is lower than some other audited towns including Kirkcaldy (17), Alloa (18.5), Clydebank (22) and Hamilton (27), but higher than Dumbarton (13) and Alexandria (12). It is indicative of Clarkston’s high number of small businesses.

### 3.3 Retail



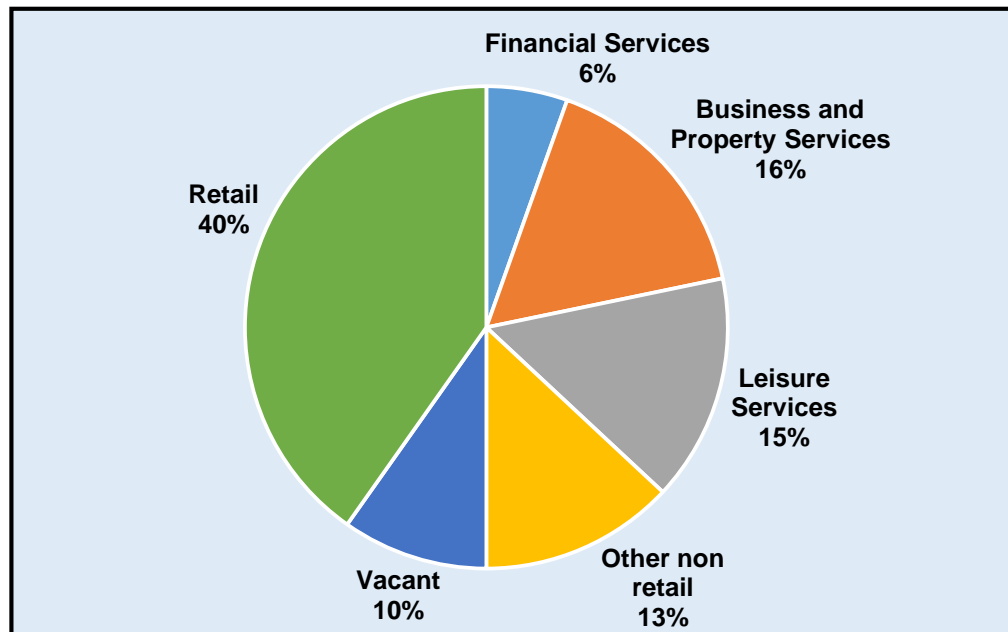
The retail offering in Clarkston is concentrated on the section of Busby Road between Clarkston Toll and Strawhill Road. We identified 37 retailer operators in the town centre area from a total of 92 units.

Overall commercial unit vacancy in the town centre is 10%. Encouragingly, this is lower than most other audited town centres, including Dumbarton (15%), Kilmarnock (15%), Ayr (16%) and Kirkcaldy (17%), and the same as Alloa (10%). Preliminary analysis of unit vacancy in Barrhead town centre places it at approximately 5%.

Clarkston’s retail core is very small and, consequently, the nine vacant units are clustered, giving visitors the impression that there is a high proportion of vacant units. It should be noted that efforts have been taken to improve the appearance of these units – most of the long term vacancies are covered by window vinyl – which helps moderate any negative visual impact. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the prominent vacant units on Busby Road have a negative impact on business confidence.

Shops in Clarkston town centre typically operate standard opening hours of around 9am to 5.30pm. The Tesco Express store (closed and undergoing maintenance at the time of the street audit but now reopened) opens between 6am and 11pm. Given the central location of the train station and number of commuters travelling to work in Glasgow there may be potential to explore slightly later opening hours.

### Town Centre Unit Mix



In common with other audited town centres, retail forms the largest single unit use, with 40% of all units. This is lower than most other audited towns where retail typically make up between 45-55% of all units, although as part of the wider Glasgow region this profile is perhaps not surprising.

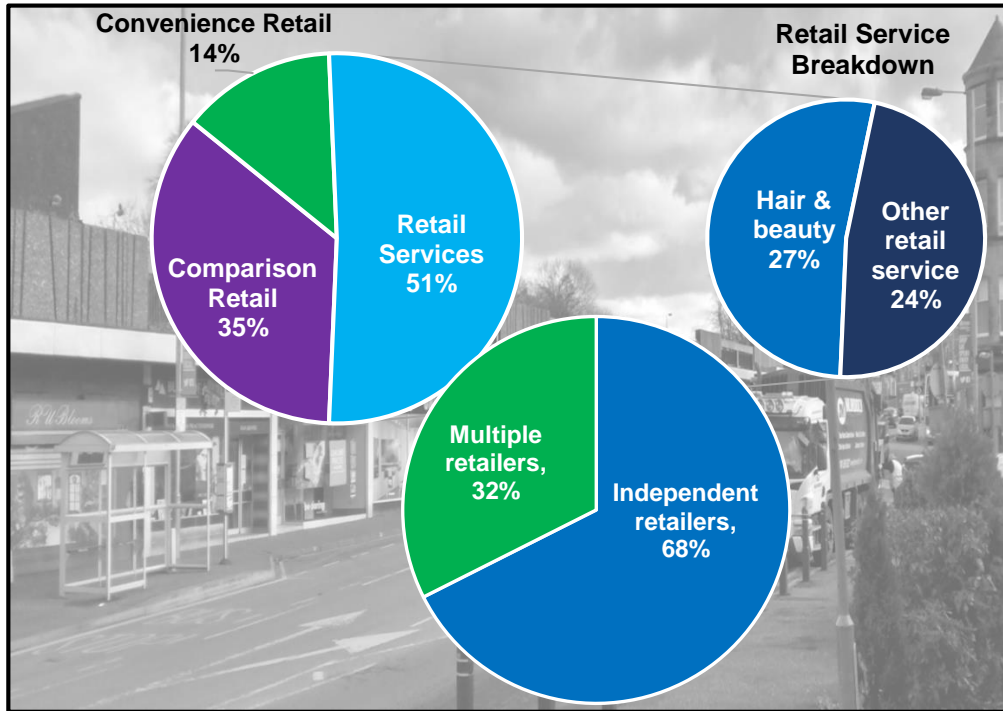
The YTA analysis is based on the following retail definitions:

- **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 – *5 convenience retailers identified in Clarkston town centre;*
- **Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *13 comparison retailers identified in Clarkston 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 – *19 retail service operators identified in Clarkston town centre.*

Clarkston has a high proportion of business and property service units, due to the defined town centre area including a number of light industrial units (e.g. building firms) around its edge. This is the highest profile of business uses of all towns that

have been audited, where this category typically accounts for between 4% and 7% of all uses.

**Retail Mix**



In comparison with others towns that have been audited Clarkston has a high proportion of retail service operators, making up just over half of all retail activity compared with an average of 37% and a low profile in the comparison retail sector at 35% compared to an average of 48%. However, with a small number of retail outlets (37) any small change in number would have a large proportionate change in the % profile, therefore caution is required in interpreting the results.



Clarkston has a good proportion of independent retailers – at just over two-thirds this is slightly higher than most of the other audited towns where the average is 66% but the range is 49% to 71% (excluding Eyemouth).



## 4. Attractive Town Centre

### 4.1 Overview

Clarkston has a compact and accessible town centre area, with the railway station at its centre. However, it is intersected by a dual carriageway that is generally busy with traffic. This, and the roundabout at Clarkston Toll, can be unfriendly to pedestrians and has an impact on its walkability for pedestrians. Additionally, pavements are very narrow on Stamperland Road where it crosses the railway.

The quality of public realm in the town centre is patchy – although many of the shops themselves are of a good standard, the buildings are inconsistent in their appearance and the concrete rendering of the rooftop car park on Busby Road appears dated. Many of the buildings around the town were constructed in the early 1970s and there is little of historical note.

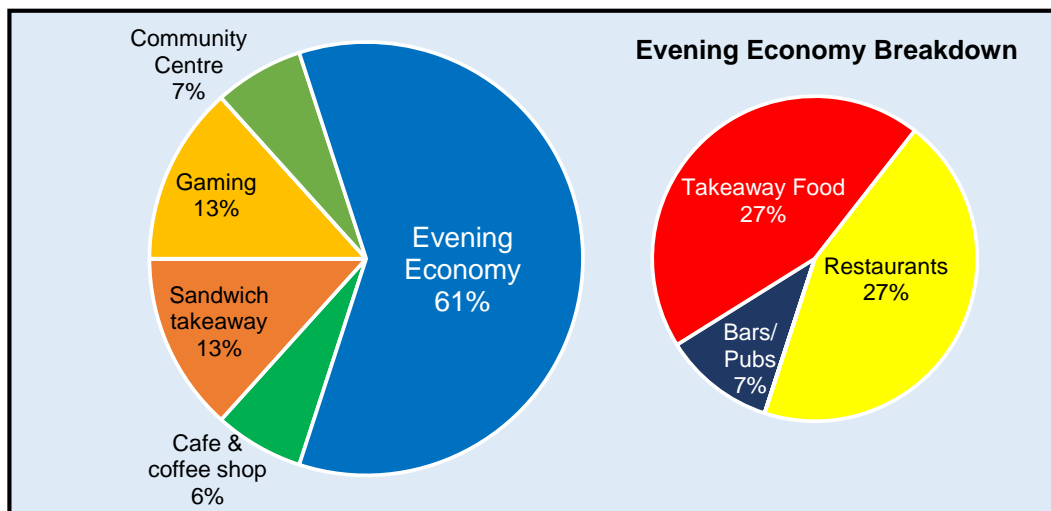
Clarkston was the tenth Scottish town to implement a Business Improvement District, in 2010. This was successfully renewed in mid-2015, meaning that the town will have a BID until at least the summer of 2020. The BID has pursued a range of projects to increase interest in the town centre over its six years, including special events, town centre improvements, and marketing campaigns. The current 'I Love Clarkston' campaign is on prominent display throughout the town centre and emphasises the importance of supporting local traders.



There are flower beds and hanging baskets throughout the town centre. There also appears to be an adequate amount of seating spread throughout the Busby Road area, including 'I Love Clarkston' branded benches.

Clarkston has a highly engaged community with a number of very active social media pages that foster debate about the town. There has been consternation recently over the departure and arrival of some businesses, notably the impending closure of the popular Busby Road café-restaurant 'Something' and the opening of a Costa coffee shop. This level of concern and care about the town centre is itself an impressive asset, although overcoming negative perceptions about its retail mix is a challenge.

## 4.2 Leisure Mix



The leisure offering in the town centre comprises a number of food outlets, one bar and two bookmakers.



For a town of its size, there is a good number of high quality eateries and these are likely play a role in attracting visitors to the town. However, at the time of the audit, one restaurant – Malt Bettys on Busby Road, which opened in late 2015 – had a sign in the window saying it was closed until further notice (the unit has since been advertised for lease). Further along Busby Road, the restaurant/café ‘Something’ announced in March 2016 that it would close at the end of the month, for personal reasons. These two closures suggest that there is a challenging climate for new restaurant offerings in Clarkston town centre.

There is a council operated leisure centre, which includes a swimming pool and gym, at Eastwood Park, south of Giffnock. Just outside of the town centre in Clarkston, there is a bowling and tennis club, with six floodlit tennis courts and a clubhouse. A number of golf courses are in the surrounding area. Overlee Park, just north of the town centre, has sports pitches and a pavilion building. There are no hotels in Clarkston, with the nearest being the 32-room Busby Hotel in Busby.

### 4.3 Attractions and Heritage

There are few stand-alone visitor attractions in Clarkston, with the main draw to the town being its eateries and shops. The National Trust for Scotland operate Greenbank Gardens, the landscaped gardens of a Georgian country house, on the edge of Clarkston. This is graded two stars by Visit Scotland, and opens all year round, with an entry fee for visitors.

The BID has delivered a range of events designed to draw footfall into the town centre. This has included an annual winter extravaganza held in late November, which culminates in a fireworks display.

### 4.4 Attractiveness Review

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

Business confidence in the town centre was gauged from a small sample of interviews undertaken with independent traders. Scores averaged at 5.7 / 10, which is slightly above the average across other YTA audited towns of 5.6 / 10 – by comparison, Alexandria scored 3.9, Musselburgh and Hamilton both 4.2, Dumbarton 5.3 and Kilmarnock 6.4.

Individual unit fronts and shop window displays were graded out of ten during the on-street audit, with a town centre average score of 7.2 for the condition of unit fronts and 7.9 for quality of window display. These scores are both higher than the averages from other audited towns – buildings 6.9 and windows 7.0.



## 5. YTA Summary and Key Points

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

### 5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- Clarkston is a commuter town with good rail, road and bus links to Glasgow and East Kilbride, and has a high level of digital connectivity;
- the town centre is compact and most facilities are easily within walking distance, however, its walkability could be improved although the busy dual carriageway and obtrusive roundabout in the town centre is a challenge that would be difficult to overcome; and
- there are two car parks in the town centre providing a good number of spaces – one of which is privately operated and charges a (relatively low) fee, and the other is the large council-owned car park (free parking) by Clarkston Hall on the edge of the centre.

### 5.2 Active Town Centre

- Clarkston BID are very active in organising activities in the town. Having been renewed in 2015, this is an important vehicle in representing the interests of its member businesses and delivering activities and services over the next four years;
- there may be an opportunity to broaden the mix of housing in the town centre, particularly creating small starter or affordable units, which would increase footfall in the area, particularly in the evenings. The soon to be vacated health centre site on Busby Road may be suitable for new housing;
- the BID-operated and other town-focused social media pages are useful in promoting activities and stirring up interest in the town centre, and it is clear that there is a lot of interest in the town centre among local residents.

### 5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- while Clarkston scores well against quality of shopfront and window display and the prominent I Love Clarkston branding gives the appearance of an active town centre, there may be benefits in making minor improvements to the appearance of key entrance points to the town centre, such as the station;
- the town has a relatively large catchment population with above average incomes, but many commute to work elsewhere (largely Glasgow city centre). One key issue is attracting spend for local businesses – while there will be a high level of retail spend leakage to shops elsewhere, particularly given the high level of car ownership, more could possibly be done to secure passing spend from commuters through later shop opening hours; and
- vacant units in prominent high street units detract from the overall appearance of vitality within the town centre. While this issue is beyond the control of ERC or local traders, anything that can be done to attract new retailers and ensure a healthy mix of businesses within the town centre should be encouraged – such as temporary / pop-up use of units.