



Your Town Audit: Neilston

September 2016



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1. Understanding Scottish Places Summary

This report presents a summary of the Your Town Audit (YTA) for Neilston, conducted by Scotland's Towns Partnership and EKOS. The detailed YTA Framework and Data Workbook are provided under separate cover.

The YTA was developed to provide a framework to measure and monitor the performance of Scotland's towns and town centres using a series of Key Performance Indicators. It provides a comprehensive audit of Neilston with data on up to 180 KPIs across seven themes – Locality, Accessibility, Local Services, Activities + Events, Development Capacity, Tourism, and Place + Quality Impressions.

The [Understanding Scottish Places](#) (USP) data platform provides a summary analysis for Neilston and identifies 19 comparator towns that have similar characteristics, with the most similar being Innerleithen, Kirkmuirhill and Blackwood, Mauchline and Dreghorn¹.

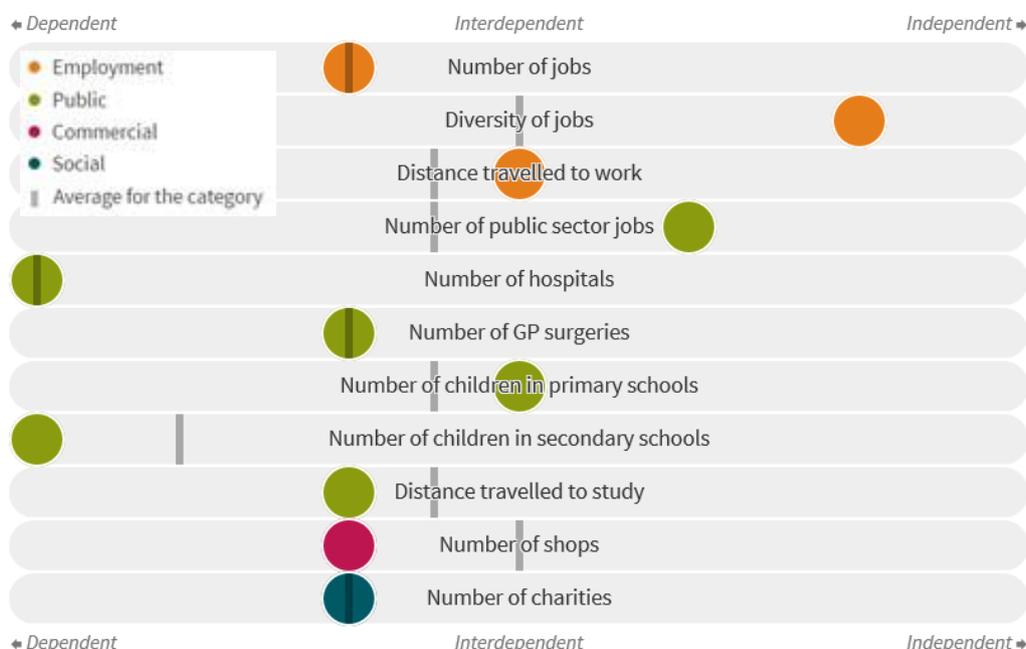
The USP platform – www.usp.scot – describes Neilston in the following general terms:

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

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

¹ The other comparator towns are identified as Kemnay, Stewarton, Duntocher and Hardgate, Tullibody, Cockenzie, Darvel, Clackmannan, Kennoway and Windygates, Lennoxton, East Calder, Locharbriggs, Gretna, Chapelhall, Tillicoultry and Elderslie.

Inter-relationships i



Comparing Neilston to towns with similar USP typology and interrelationships shows it has a similar number GP surgeries and of children in primary schools. It has a greater number of public sector jobs, and a lower number of shops.

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

2. Accessible Town Centre

Neilston is a small town in quite a rural setting, roughly 15 miles southwest of Glasgow, with a population of around 10,600 people. The core retail area of Neilston is situated on Main Street, an A-class road leading into Neilston from Barrhead.

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

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

15 mile radius around Neilston



There are approximately sixteen bus stops located throughout the town centre of Neilston. Neilston has direct bus connections to Glasgow, which take approximately one hour. Bus services also connect the town with other settlements across East Renfrewshire including Newton Mearns and Eaglesham, with journey times of approximately 30 and 50 minutes respectively. However, journeys by bus to other settlements in East Renfrewshire such as Thornliebank and Giffnock involve a change of service in Pollokshaws to get to Thornliebank and Shawlands for those travelling to Giffnock.

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

There are a number of on-street parking spaces in the town centre, on Main Street, as well as further parking areas in the surrounding residential streets. There is an off-street car park located next to the leisure centre which provides around sixty spaces, and there is also a public car park behind the Kinloch Bar with twenty spaces. Parking in both of these areas seems to be free of charge.

The town centre provides access to some local services which, alongside a small mix of retailers, including a medical centre, library, leisure centre, a primary school and two churches. There is also 3G and 4G throughout the town and, although there is no town-wide WiFi, superfast broadband is available. There is no registered bank in Neilston, however there are ATMs situated outside of the Co-operative and Shop-smart convenience stores.

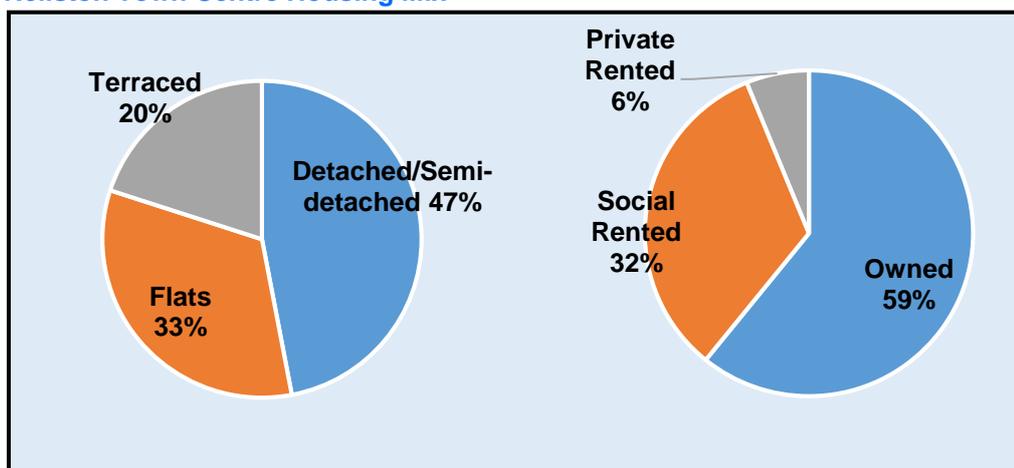
3. Active Town Centre

3.1 Population and Housing

Just under 300 people live within the defined town centre area in Neilston², around 3% of the total settlement population. Taking a slightly wider area (i.e. walkable distance) there are around 3,400 people living in or adjacent to the town centre – this has increased by 6% in the decade to 2011, however, the population of the whole settlement decreased by around 5% over this time. This contrasts with the average increases of 1% for East Renfrewshire and 5% in Scotland over this ten year period. The population increase in the town centre (within and adjacent) is more in line with most of the YTA audited towns which have seen an average increase of around 7% in town centre living (20 YTA towns).

Housing in the town centre³ is a mix of semi-detached/detached properties (47%), and flats (33%) typically with three / four bedrooms. Just under two-thirds of properties (64%) are in council tax bands A, B and C. The streets surrounding Neilston town centre are almost entirely residential – a mix of detached and semi-detached properties and some flats – this provides the town centre area with a relatively large catchment population within walking distance.

Neilston Town Centre Housing Mix



² Scottish Census 2011 output zones S00102707, S00102706 and S00102720.

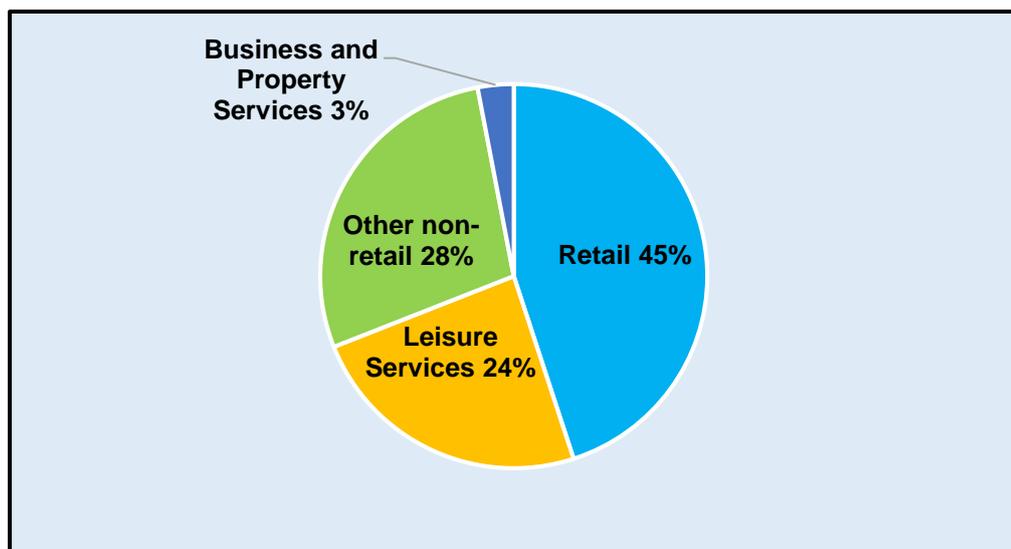
³ For ease of accessing the most up to date data, this is datazones (2001) S01001725, S01001724, S01001733 and S01001716.

In Neilston, the average purchase price of a town centre dwelling (£118,789) is lower than that of the town as a whole (£123,783)⁴. Prices in the town centre increased by 62% in the decade to 2013, and by 38% in the wider settlement. The housing stock in the town is largely privately owned (59% in the town centre; 72% in the wider town), or socially rented (32% in the town centre; 22% in the wider town).

3.2 Employment and Business

Of the 1,426 jobs in Neilston 28% are located in the town centre datazones. National statistics recorded 255 businesses in the settlement. The YTA street audit located 29 units in use within Neilston town centre – this was in line with the UPRN data provided by East Renfrewshire Council prior to the audit. Of these, 13 are retail businesses.

Town Centre Unit Mix



3.3 Retail

For a small town centre, there is a good range of shops and retail services available. All of the shops are located on Main Street, with the only exception being the service which is located on High Street.

⁴ Scottish Statistics, 2013

There were no vacant units – retail or otherwise – recorded during the audit of the town centre.

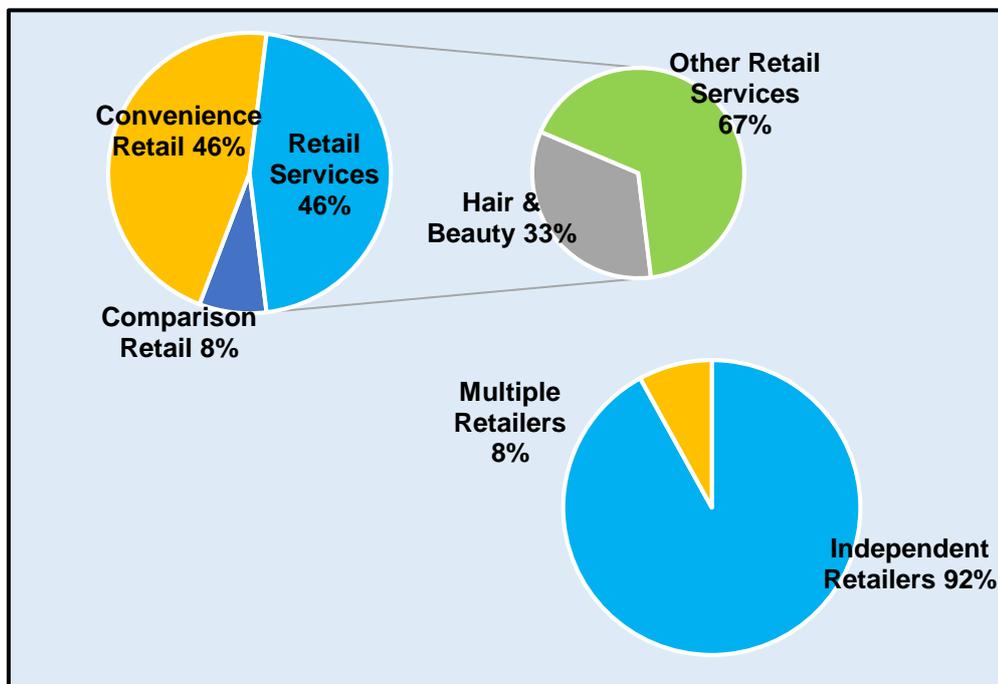
822 residents per town centre retail outlet

13 town centre retail units in use

0 vacant town centre retail units

Most shops in Neilston town centre operate standard opening hours of around 9am to 5.30pm/6pm. However there are some exceptions to this, for example the Kinloch Bar is open Monday to Thursday 11am-Midnight, Friday and Saturday 11a-1am and from 12:30pm-Midnight on Sundays. The Coral bookmakers also operates out with these times from 9am until 9pm, and the Co-operative convenience store is open from 7am until 10pm every day.

In line with other audited towns, retail forms the largest single town centre unit use and, at 45%, is similar to Alexandria (45%) and Barrhead (46%).



The YTA analysis is based on the following retail definitions:

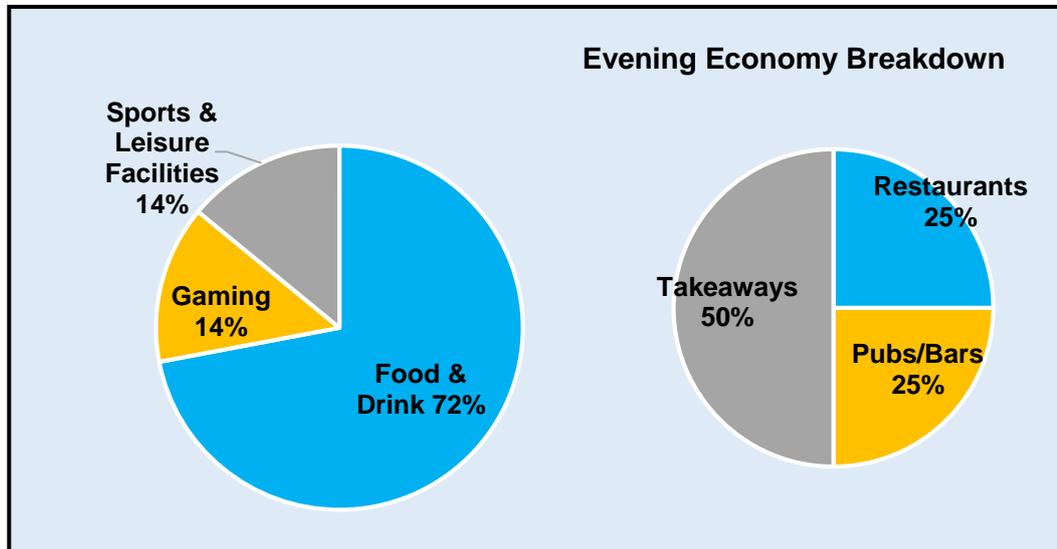
- **Convenience Retail:** primarily low cost goods that are typically bought out of habit or on impulse i.e. food, drink (alcohol and non-alcohol), news, tobacco, etc. – *6 convenience retailers were identified in Neilston town centre;*
- **Comparison Retail:** all other retail purchases comprising goods bought at infrequent intervals where consumers will compare and contrast products and prices – *1 comparison retailer was identified in Neilston town centre (the Neilston Pharmacy);* 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. – *6 retail service operators were identified in Neilston town centre.*



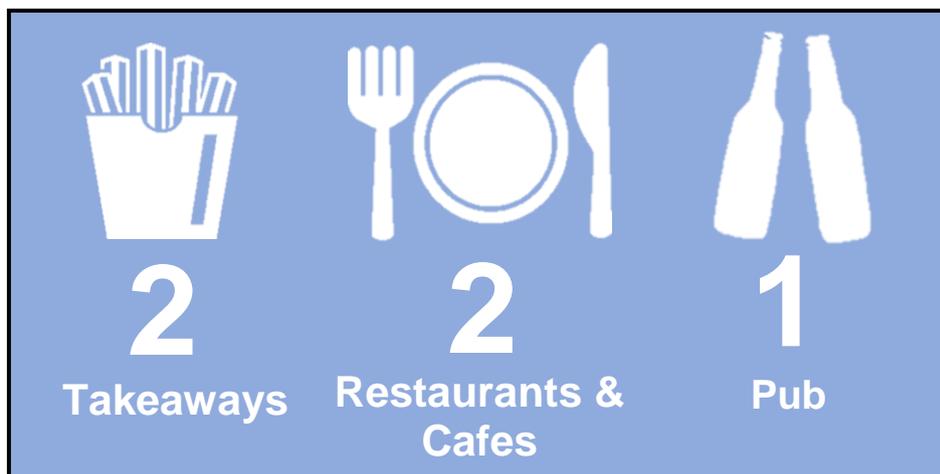
Almost all of the traders within Neilston town centre are independent (92%) – this is above the 68% average for other YTA audited towns (23), and is the second highest score behind Eyemouth (94%). Other towns with high levels of independent businesses are Eaglesham and Busby with 87% and 90% respectively. There is only one multiple retailer in Neilston: the Co-operative convenience store/ supermarket.

4. Attractive Town Centre

4.1 Leisure Mix



Of the mix of leisure businesses in Neilston town centre, over half are part of the towns evening economy. The evening economy is comprised of one pub (the Killoch Bar), one restaurant (The Pad), and two takeaways (Flames and Speed).



4.2 Leisure Facilities and Attractions

The Neilston Leisure Centre which is located on Main Street has a 25-metre swimming pool and a gym. The swimming pool is open every day apart from Saturdays for public swimming at various times. The gym is open from 7:30/9:30am until 12pm/3pm and then again from 4pm-8:40pm Monday to Friday. The gym, however, does not reopen in the evening on the weekends.

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

Neilston also offers a number tourist attractions. A popular nearby attraction is Gleniffer Braes Country Park, which is roughly 6 miles from the town centre area. This is a 480 acre park with a mixture of moorland, woodland and hills – it attracts visitors for walks, views, and bird-spotting, and the Renfrewshire Council Ranger Service also provide guided walks. Other facilities include a children's play park, picnic benches and a visitors centre.

Another nearby tourist attraction is Dams to Darnley Country Park, which is only three miles from the town centre of Neilston. The country park covers over 1,350 acres around the East Renfrewshire and Glasgow City boundary, and is made up of mixture of open water, wetland, woodland, and grassland. Visitors use the park for a number of activities including walking, cycling, horse riding, angling and wildlife watching. The country park also includes the Barrhead Dams which cover over 220 acres, and are made up of a series of interconnected reservoirs which are owned and managed by Scottish Water. Both of these attractions are open year-round and are free of charge for visitors.

4.3 Community Events

The Neilston Cattle Show is held on the first Saturday of May every year, just outside the village of Neilston. The event started in the 19th century and celebrated its 191st show in 2016. Attractions include cattle shows, horse shows, dog competitions, a tug-o-war, and local craft stalls.

The event also includes a parade through the village which is led by the Neilston Pipe Band. The event is well supported by community members, and is held just outside of Neilston town centre. It lasts one day and runs from 8am until 4pm, with admission costs from £2 for children/elderly to £6 for adults or £15 for a family ticket.

4.4 Neilston Development Trust

The Neilston Development Trust (NDT) was formed in 2006 and is a charity and social enterprise which serves the village and residents of Neilston. The NDT is part of a nation-wide movement which sees communities working to create a sustainable future for where they live. The NDT are focused on the physical, cultural, social and economic regeneration and sustainability of Neilston.

Some of the recent projects that the Trust has completed, or is currently undertaking include:

- after the closure of the only bank in Neilston was announced (Nov 2005), the community decided to invoke the Community Right to Buy provision of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and purchased the building which is used as a home for the NDT and community activities. The building was closed in 2010 for refurbishment and reopened in 2011 – it now has facilities which include: a café, meeting rooms, office space and some gardens;
- as part of their GO Neilston! Project in 2012 the NDT partnered with Carbon Free Developments to secure a deal with the Co-Op Bank and a number of private investors to build the Neilston Community Windfarm – this helps to show the community's commitment to renewable energy and also generates income for NDT which is reinvested in the settlement; and
- the Neilston Town Charter, (which was launched in 2009) works to address the physical redevelopment of the town – projects outlined in the charter are being developed with partners in East Renfrewshire Council and a timetabled plan is being devised for project delivery.

4.5 Neilston Community Council

The Neilston Community Council meets on the last Tuesday of each month in Glen Halls at 7pm. Meetings are open to the public, and there are approximately thirteen members. Meetings are open to the public and involve discussions about issues and topics regarding the local area. The main purpose of the community council is to learn and express the views of the people in their local communities.

4.6 Attractiveness Review

The YTA includes an independent review of place and quality impressions, with Neilston scoring above average in comparison with other towns.

Individual unit fronts and shop window displays were graded out of ten during the on-street audit, with a town centre average score of 7.8 for the condition of unit fronts in Neilston and 7.6 for quality of window display. This is above the average across other YTA audited town centres (20), of 7.1 in each instance.

Business confidence in the town centre was gauged from a small sample of interviews undertaken with three independent traders. While representing only three businesses, all reported that are not confident about their future in Neilston and that there has been a decline in trade in recent years.

At the time of the audit it was noted that the streets were relatively clear with little litter to be found, and few weeds present, and streets/pavements were in relatively good condition. There are conveniently places pedestrian crossing points which help to improve the overall safety of the town centre.

Throughout the town centre area there are hanging baskets with colourful flower displays, which help to brighten up the area, and next to the Leisure Centre, there is a small grassy area which is used for walking dogs, with a dog waste bin next to it. There are plenty of general waste bins along Main Street for litter and lighting columns.



5. YTA Summary and Key Points

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

5.1 Accessible Town Centre

- although in a rural setting, Neilston is reasonably well connected with transport links and a range of services. While car ownership in the area is high, public transport links are good with regular bus services taking about 45 minutes into Glasgow;
- there is a local train station in Neilston, which means the town is connected to other settlements in East Renfrewshire and to Glasgow;
- parking in Neilston town centre appears – at least during the time when the audit was undertaken, a midweek daytime – to be adequate; and
- Neilston has good 4G mobile coverage and access to superfast broadband.

5.2 Active Town Centre

- Neilston has a high number of independent retail businesses – it is important that these are supported (and where possible protected); and
- no vacant units were recorded during the audit of Neilston town centre, which is highly encouraging for its long-term survival, however, businesses reported past decline in performance and very low levels of confidence about future trading conditions; and
- the town hosts the Neilston Cattle Show annually, this shows that the community is active in creating and maintaining a sense of local culture.

5.3 Attractive Town Centre

- Neilston is an attractive, small town that manages to retain a village feel due to the majority of retail units being small and independent; and
- although there is no registered bank in Neilston there are two ATMs located in the village; one of which can be found outside of the Co-operation Convenience store and the other outside of the Shopsmart Convenience store.