

2022 Town Centre Health Checks

The Highland Council

Information and Research - Development plans Team
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 'Town Centre Health Checks' (TCHCs) are prepared by Local Authorities to monitor the strength and vitality of town centres across Scotland. Indicators such as accessibility, community, property, activities and the physical environment are recommended assessment measures; all of which contribute towards the 'health' of a town centre.
- 1.2 The last Town Centre Health Check undertaken by the Highland Council was published in 2018 and can be accessed [here](#) . Since then, there have been significant social, economic and political changes such as the COVID-19 Pandemic and the UK's exit from the European Union. It is important to monitor how town centres across the Highlands have been, and continue to be, affected by these events.
- 1.3 Data was collected throughout Summer 2022, via on-site assessments of Inverness City Centre, Retail Parks and 14 other town centres in Highland Council's Local Development Plans. Following on from the 2018 study, town centre health indicators such as Vacancy Rates and Use Classifications were assessed, alongside several measures which were not included last time such as Footfall and Public Perceptions. This data will be used by the Highland Council in their continued town centre monitoring efforts, local development and policy making.
- 1.4 The key deliverable for these health checks is in the form of a collection of StoryMaps which offer a much more interactive experience and interrogation and reporting of findings at detailed or aggregated levels.
- 1.5 This .pdf version of the audit contains key findings, analysis and content from the published StoryMaps. Readers are however are strongly encouraged to use the StoryMaps for which relevant links are provided throughout this document.
- 1.6 For full methodology and explanation of approach taken access through the introduction StoryMaps is recommended. The following link gives access.

[2022 Town Centre Health Checks](#)

- 1.7 Collective summaries have been produced to allow for a quick and easy overview of statistical results for each location; each of these highlight vacancy rates, qualitative ratings, public perceptions, use classifications and physical condition assessments.
- 1.8 The following links are to the summary dashboards:

[Inverness Summary](#)

[Highland Summary](#)

- 1.9 Detailed reports have been produced for the whole of Inverness City Centre, each sub-area of Inverness City Centre, Retail Parks and each of the other town centres included in this study. These explore the findings of the retail audit, qualitative ratings, public toilets facilities, footfall and public perceptions and make comparisons with the last audit carried out in 2018.
- 1.10 The following links are to “StoryMap Collections” giving access to individual area based reports.

[**Inverness Collection**](#)

[**Highland Collection**](#)

- 1.11 To go directly to a particular report – the following links are provided:

[**Inverness City Centre \(all sectors\)**](#)

[**Longman Sector**](#)

[**Transport Sector**](#)

[**Historic Old Town Sector**](#)

[**Retail Sector**](#)

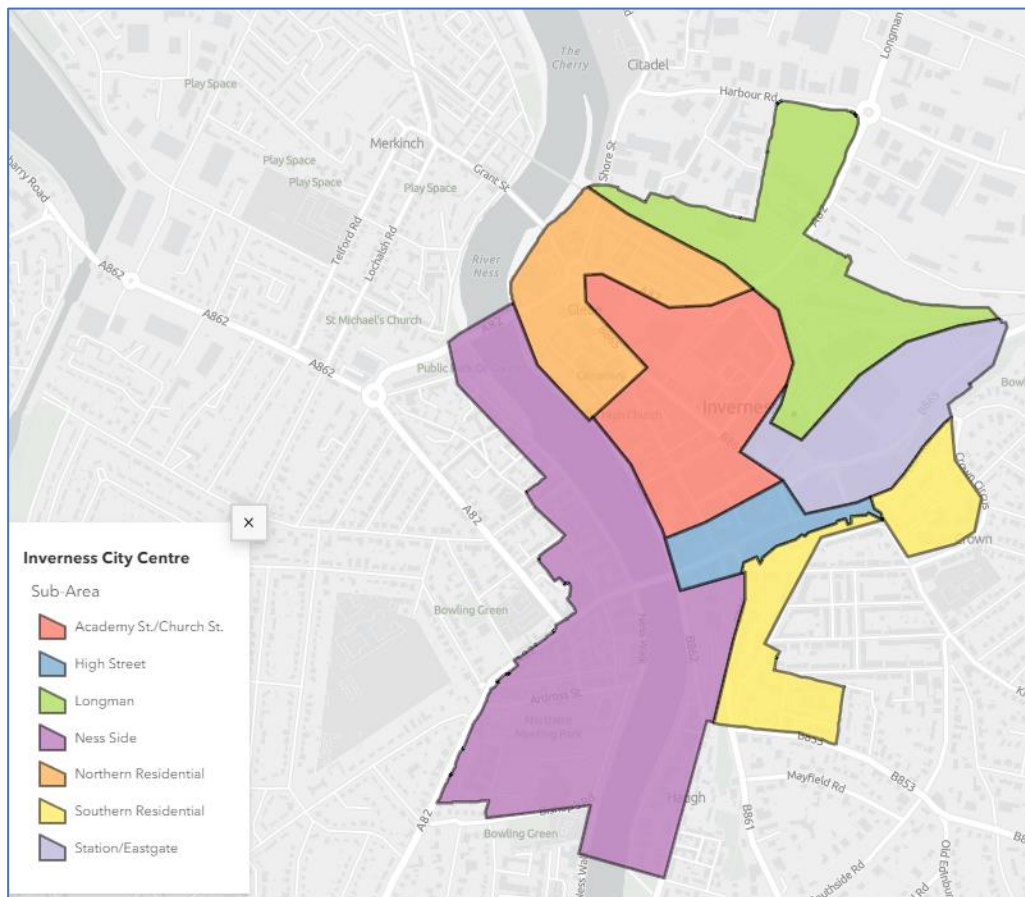
[**Tourism Sector**](#)

[**Inverness Retail Parks**](#)

2 Methodology

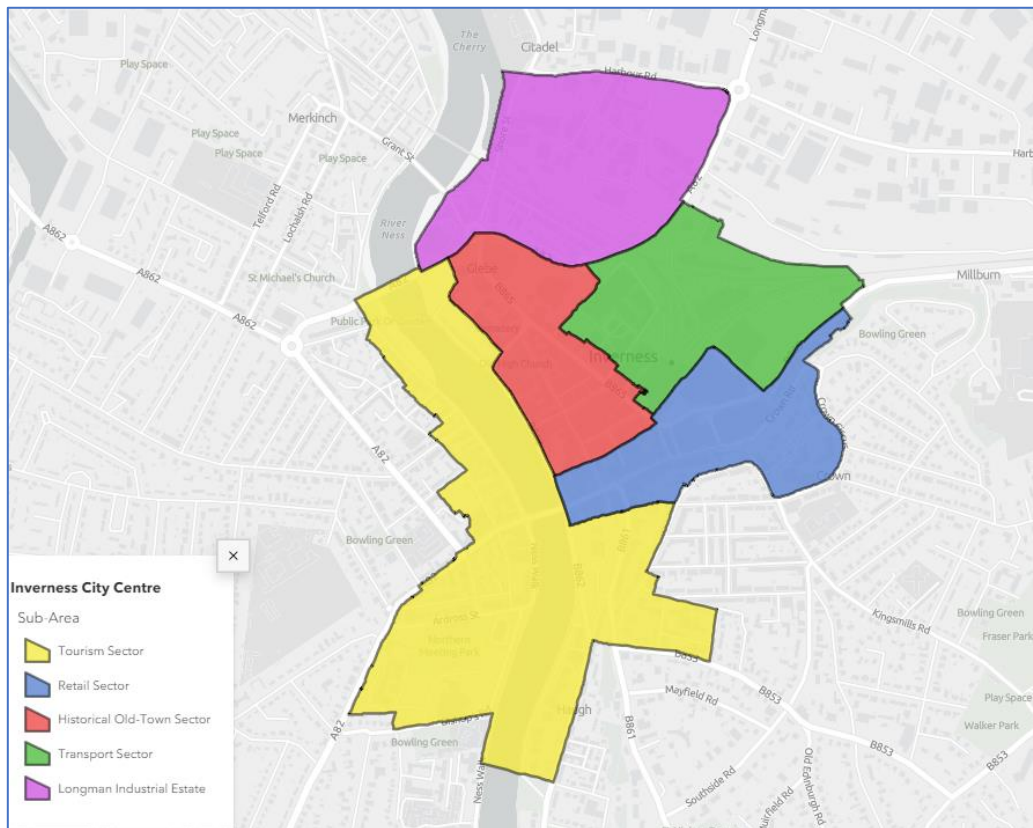
2.1 Study Extents - Inverness

2.1.1 In 2018, the Inverness City Centre study extent used the boundaries set out in the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (2015) . The 2018 boundary was divided into seven sub-divided areas, which can be seen below.



2018 Inverness City Centre Boundary and Sub-Areas

2.1.2 For the 2022 study, Inverness City Centre extent consists of updated boundaries, as set out in the Inverness City Centre Development Brief (2017) . The boundary has been sub-divided into five core areas, based on the varying character, primary functions and geography of the City Centre.



2022 Inverness City Centre Boundary and Sub-Areas

2.1.3 Retail Audit data capture was also carried out for the City's three main Retail Parks, namely:

- Inverness Shopping and Business Park
- Inshes Retail Park
- Telford Retail Park

2.1.4 These were not included in the quantitative analysis of Inverness City Centre (e.g. Vacancy Rates etc.).

2.1.5 A collective report for Inverness Retail Parks, detailing the results from the retail audit, can be found in the Inverness Collection

2.2 Other Highland Towns

- 2.2.1 14 other town centres, which are in the Highland Council's Local Development Plans, were selected for Health Checks on the basis of either having populations <3,000 or for their importance in a local context. These are: Alness, Beaully, Brora, Dingwall, Dornoch, Fort William, Golspie, Invergordon, Nairn. Portree, Tain, Thurso, Ullapool and Wick
- 2.2.2 Each town centre's boundary is as they have been defined in the Proposed Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2_(2022 Draft), the [Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan](#) (2018) and the [West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan](#) (2019).

2.3 Retail Audit.

- 2.3.1 GPS equipped mobile phones were used to capture data for all ground floor retail/business units in each town centre. The 2018 audit was used as a baseline for 2022, allowing surveyors to determine whether each unit had undergone change (e.g. different business name, occupant, use classification etc.), or remained the same since the last study. All new data points for 2022 were classified as having undergone 'change'; although these units may have existed in 2018, they had not been included in previous analysis. The 2022 audit can be considered an accurate representation of each town centre's retail offer, occupancy rate and spatial distribution of services and facilities.
- 2.3.2 Occupancy of each unit was determined based on a visual, on-site assessment of its appearance (i.e. whether it looked to be in use) and/or the present of 'For Sale' or 'To Let' signs. Each empty unit at the time of visit was classified as 'vacant', regardless of potential past or future use. Captured images were then examined 'in office' to establish a more specific occupancy typology. Retail units in the "Comparison Retail" category were assessed to determine whether they were Local/Independent (Highland) or National retailers (Scotland, UK and International).
- 2.3.3 Each unit's physical condition was also assessed on-site. Scores were produced using the following typology:
1. **Very Poor** (E.g., partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
 2. **Poor** (E.g., broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
 3. **Fair** (E.g., weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
 4. **Good** (E.g., some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
 5. **Very Good** (E.g., perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

2.3.4 It is recognised that some scores may have changed since 2018 due to instances of subjectivity and different surveyor perceptions. Every effort was made, however, to keep reasoning consistent and every unit was given a score based on the assessment typology, rather than personal opinions.

2.4 Qualitative Ratings

2.4.1 Following on from the 2018 study, surveyor ratings are given alongside updated qualitative commentary for the 2022 TCHC. The following 11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 to 5 and given ratings, based on observations and assessments made during on-site visits:

- Historic Environment (Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition)
- Pavements and Streets (Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.)
- Public Realm (Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture)
- Open Space and Green Infrastructure (Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Outdoor Play Areas; Trees; Flowers)
- Safety and Security (Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing)
- Cycling Facilities (Shared use paths; Signage; Storage etc.)
- Pedestrian Friendliness (Traffic Speeds; Crossing Points; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation)
- Public Transport (Available Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency; Infrastructure and Facilities)
- Parking (Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions; Electric Vehicle Charging Points; Disabled Spaces Access/Availability)
- Evening Economy (Sense of Nightlife; Number of Public Bars; Nightclubs; Restaurants etc.)
- Tourist Appeal (Number/Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Public Maps; Availability of Accommodation)

2.4.2 Qualitative scores were given based on the following typology:

1. Very Poor
2. Poor
3. Neutral
4. Good
5. Very Good

2.4.3 Written analysis and additional imagery are included to support, and justify, each assigned score. All captured images avoided Vehicles, Pedestrians, Residential/Business Interiors and/or CCTV cameras and other recording devices, as far as possible. All images were taken on-site, by the surveyors, unless stated otherwise.

2.4.4 It is recognised that some scores may have changed since 2018 due to instances of subjectivity and different researcher perceptions. Every effort was made, however, to keep reasoning consistent and all scores were given based on the assessment typology, rather than personal opinions.

2.5 Public Toilets

2.5.1 The availability, quality and condition of Public Toilets can be a vital indicator of town centre health. If facilities are not provided or are provided but are inaccessible, of poor condition, lack regular maintenance or lack sufficient signage, they can be deemed unsuitable, and incapable, of accommodating town centre users. A brief assessment of public toilet provision, within each town centre, is featured in this study. An on-site assessment of each facilities' location, proximity to the centre, available signage, accessibility, cleanliness and condition were noted.

2.6 Footfall

2.6.1 'Footfall' refers to the number of pedestrians walking past a central data collection point, regardless of their reasons for doing so. As an indicator of town centre vitality and viability, footfall counts were conducted, as part of this study, on each town's High Street for 30 minutes, starting between 12pm and 2pm. A central point on each High Street was assessed on-site. Points in towns which lacked a named 'High Street' were chosen based on typical High Street attributes, such as retail offer and/or being the main pedestrian thoroughfare. For Inverness, 6 points were chosen by surveyors on-site. These spots were seen to reflect the main pedestrian thoroughfares throughout the City Centre and are detailed below:

- High Street
- Church Street
- Academy Street
- Inglis Street
- Eastgate Shopping Centre
- Victorian Market

- 2.6.2 Clicker counters were used to tally the number of people travelling in either direction (e.g., North vs South or East vs West), by either foot, bicycle, wheelchair, mobility scooter etc. The proportion of people's mode of travel, in each case, was considered negligible however, and data concerning this is not reported.
- 2.6.3 External factors such as local climate, weather conditions, geographical location, time of year, day of the week and time of day are likely to influence total footfall figures within each town. It was important, therefore, that these were kept consistent, where possible, to ensure uniformity and fairness when comparing each town. Local factors such as population, retail offer, accessibility, pedestrianisation and local events are also likely to influence total footfall figures within each town.
- 2.6.4 We compared total footfall counts with each town's total population to identify any results which are higher/lower than would be expected, given the number of residents and likely users of the town centre. One might expect towns with higher populations to have higher footfall counts, than towns with lower populations. If a town has a lower footfall count than would be expected, given the population; it may indicate poor town centre health. If a town has a higher footfall count than would be expected given the population, then a town centre could be deemed reliant on tourism and visitors, rather than locals.

2.7 Public Perceptions

- 2.7.1 Scottish Planning Policy (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions to Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should “be prepared collaboratively with... the local community” with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.
- 2.7.2 During the on-site visit to each town centre, questionnaires were administered to 20 willing participants who were seen to be users of the town centre. Each of the 300 total respondents were asked a series of 6 questions related to indicators of town centre health. Every effort was made by researchers to engage with a range of respondents in terms of age and sex, as well as a fair balance between locals and visitors. It is stressed that all responses remained anonymous and no demographic data (i.e., age, sex, nationality) was recorded.
- 2.7.3 The questionnaire consisted of 5 questions where participants were asked to rate various qualitative indicators including Retail, Evening Economy, Accessibility, Pavements and Streets and Safety and Security, on a scale of 1 to 5. A score of 1 denotes “Very Poor”, a score of 5 denotes “Very Good” and a score of 3 denotes a “Neutral” response or middling score. An additional open-ended question gave an opportunity for participants to make further comments, elaborate on their given ratings or suggest town centre improvements.
- 2.7.4 A range of information can be extracted from the questionnaire data. Whilst closed questions allow for statistical analysis and data interpretation, open-ended questions provide qualitative reasoning. Quantitative findings are presented in graphs to highlight data patterns and collective findings. Qualitative data has been transcribed and processed to create word clouds which are used to highlight general perceptions of each town centre.
- 2.7.5 Aggregated questionnaire scores were calculated using the following formula:
Frequency of Response per Rating x Value of Each Rating
1 = Very Poor
2 = Poor
3 = Neutral
4 = Good
5 = Very Good

Worked example:

In Nairn, with respect to the town centre's 'Pavements and Streets', each of the 20 survey participants were asked:

"On a scale of 1 to 5, how clean do you think the pavements and streets in Nairn town centre are?"

- 7 participants responded 'Very Good'
- 5 responded 'Good'
- 4 responded 'Neutral'
- 3 responded 'Poor'
- 1 responded 'Very Poor'

An aggregated score for Nairn's pavements and streets can be calculated:

$$(1 \times 1) + (2 \times 3) + (3 \times 4) + (4 \times 5) + (5 \times 7) = \mathbf{74 \text{ out of a possible } 100}$$

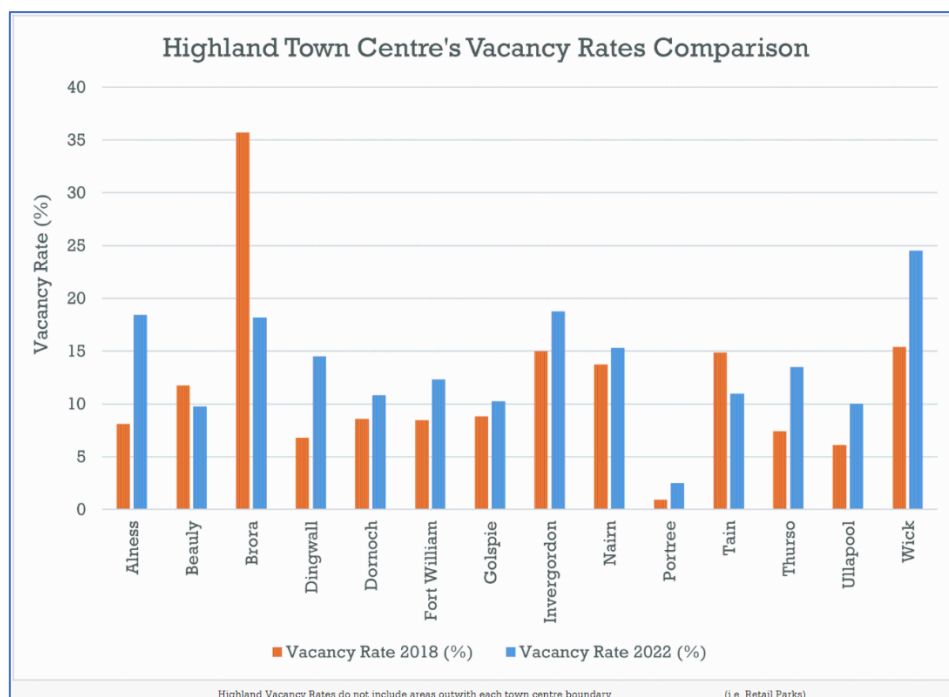
- 2.7.6 It is recognised that if this questionnaire was to be published online, as opposed to in-person, there is opportunity for additional data (such as age, sex etc.) to be collected. However, for this research, the value of a physical questionnaire persists. Through targeting visible users of each town centre, these results capture public perceptions from a snapshot in time. This methodology also allows for repeatability in future years, where results can be compared.

3 Town Comparisons – Key Findings

3.1.1 The following section outlines the key findings from the Highland Council's 2022 Town Centre Health Checks. The following results are presented through graphs which highlight comparisons between town centres.

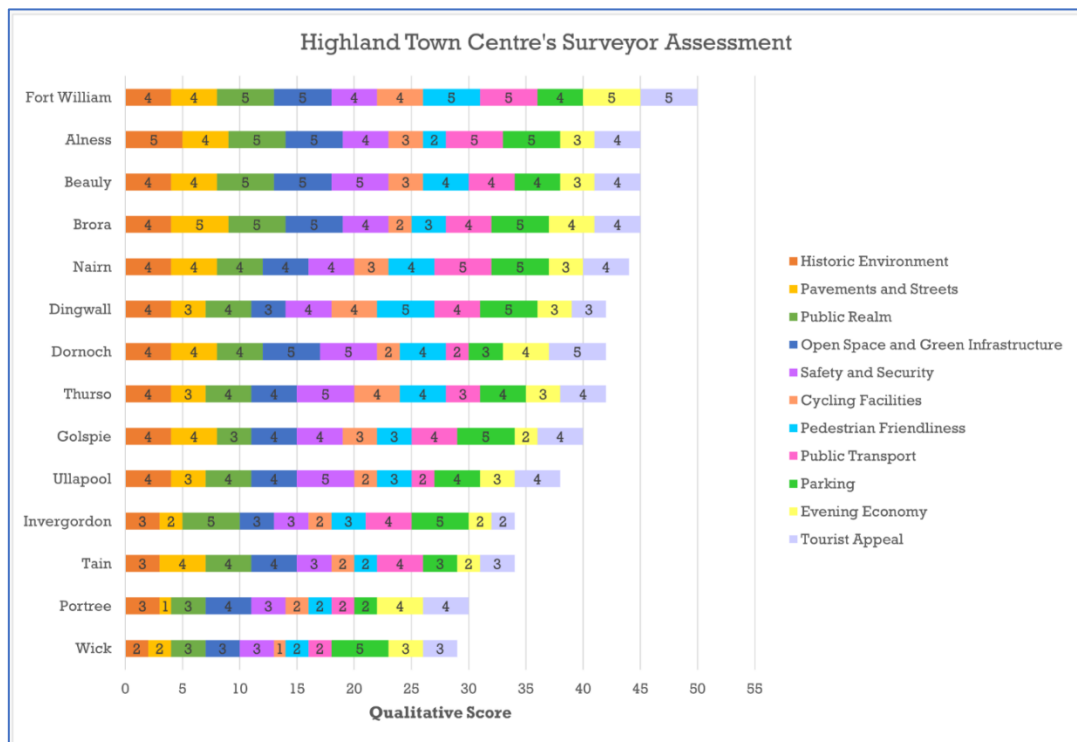
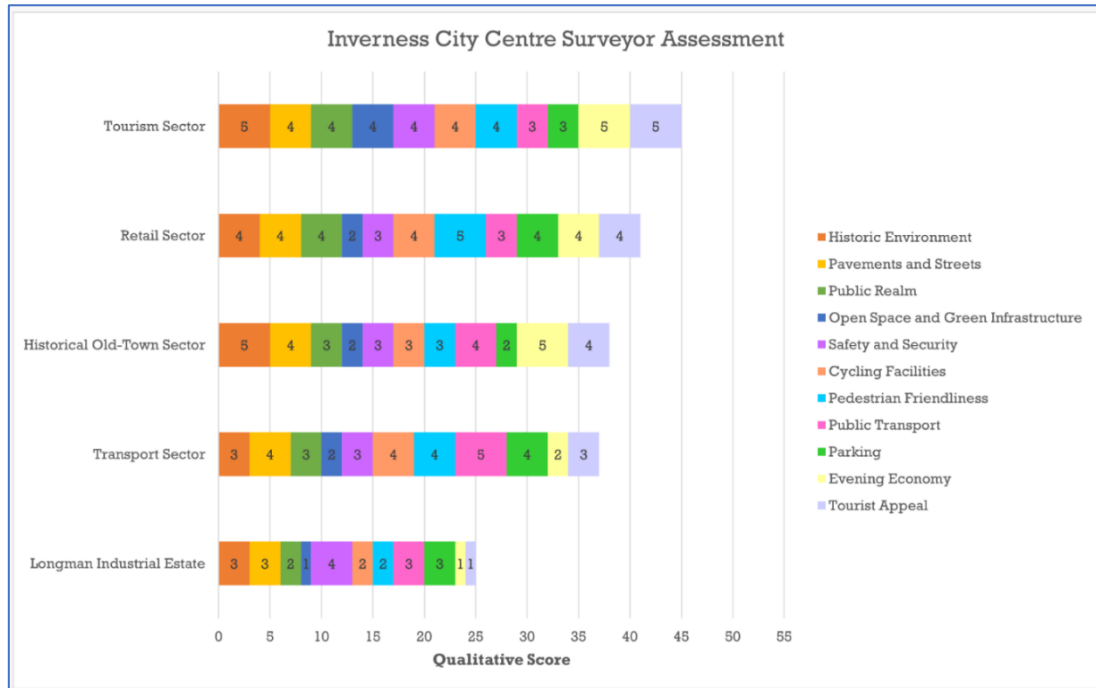
3.2 Vacancy Rates

3.2.1 Vacancy Rates have been calculated using the number of vacant units as a % of the total unit offer, regardless of use classification, in each area/town centre.



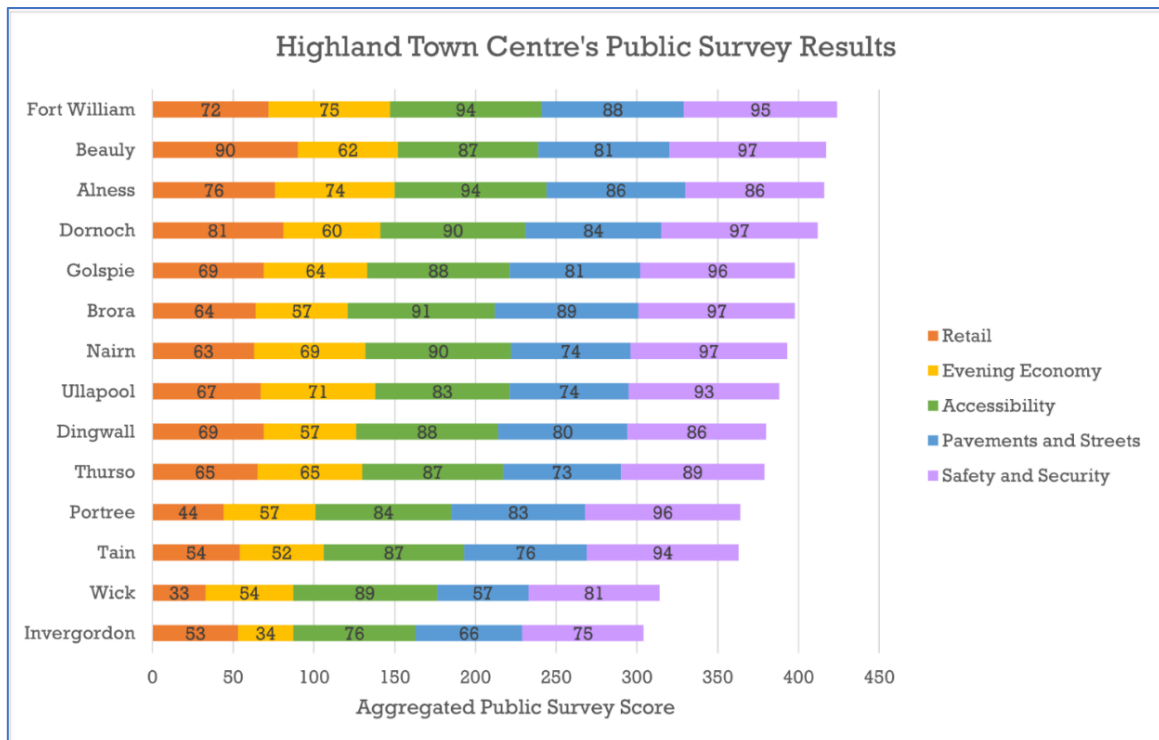
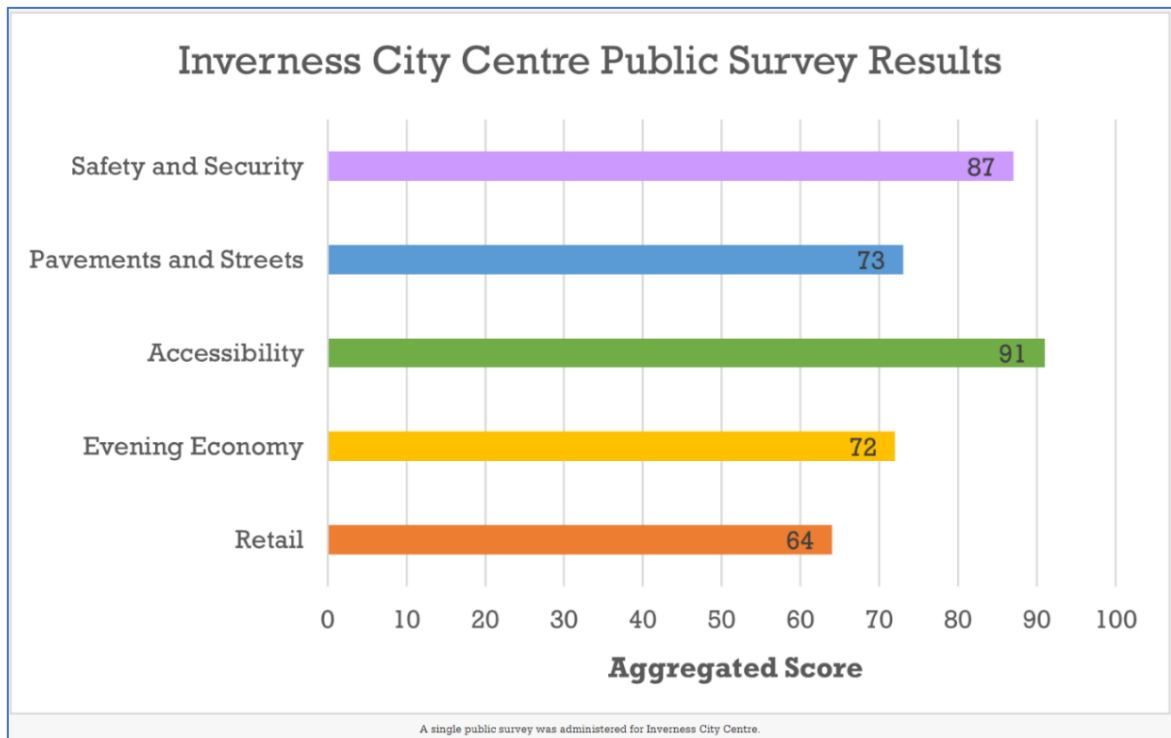
3.3 Qualitative Ratings

3.3.1 Qualitative Ratings were produced as part of an on-site surveyor assessment of each area/town centre.



3.4 Public Perceptions

3.4.1 Aggregated Scores were calculated using data collected via public surveys during each town centre's on-site visit.

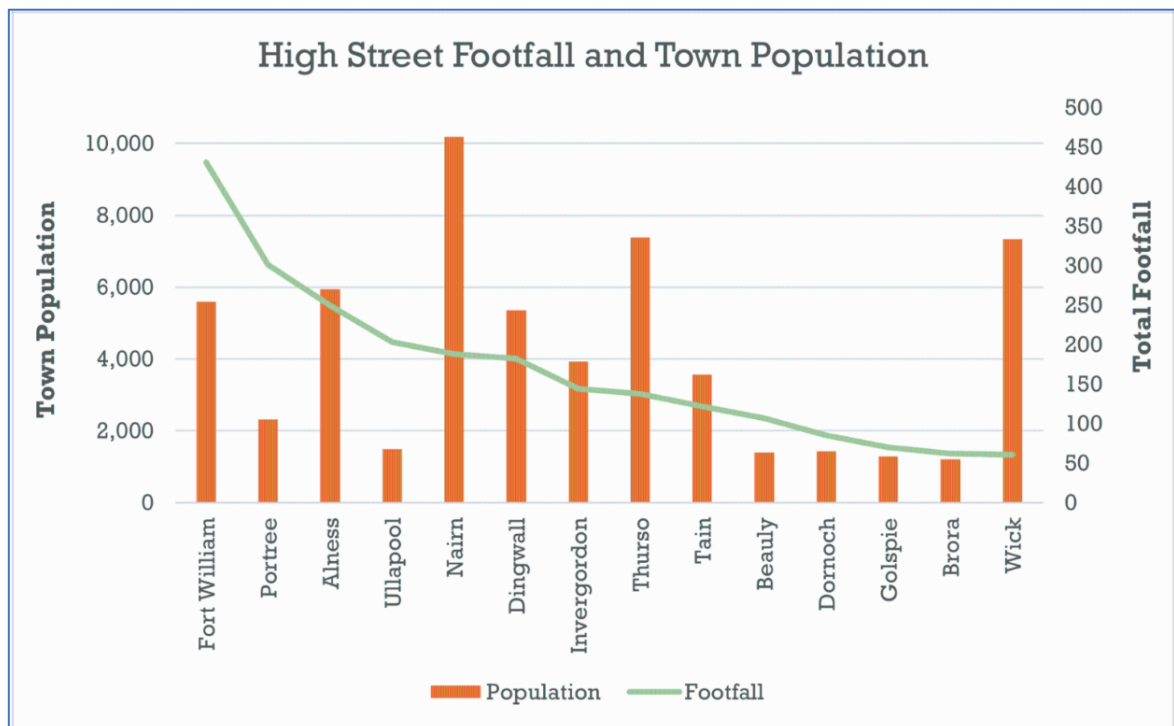


3.5 Footfall

3.5.1 Footfall counts were conducted at central points representing the main pedestrian thoroughfares for Inverness City Centre, and on the High Street in each of the other town centres. The total number of people passing surveyors was tallied over a 30 minute period, between 12 and 2pm.



Inverness City Centre Footfall



Other Highland Towns Footfall

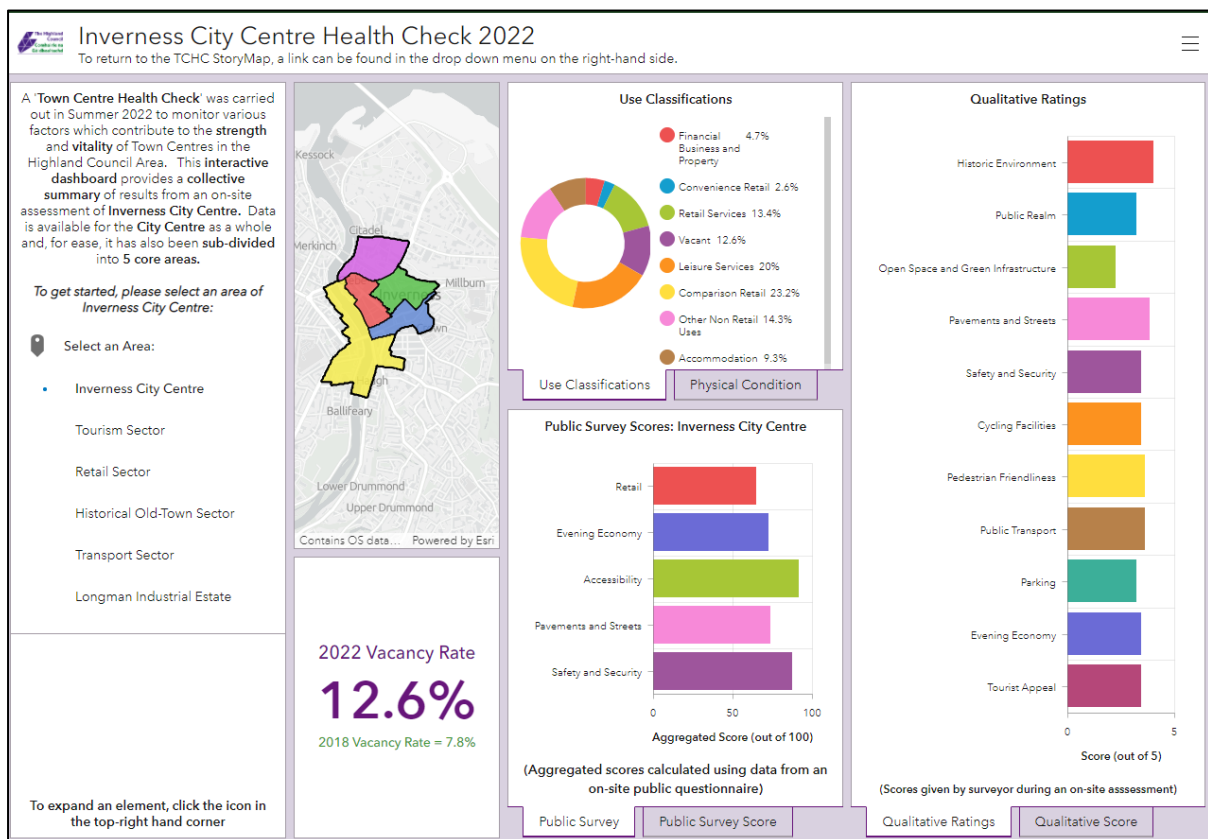
4 Inverness City Centre (all sectors)

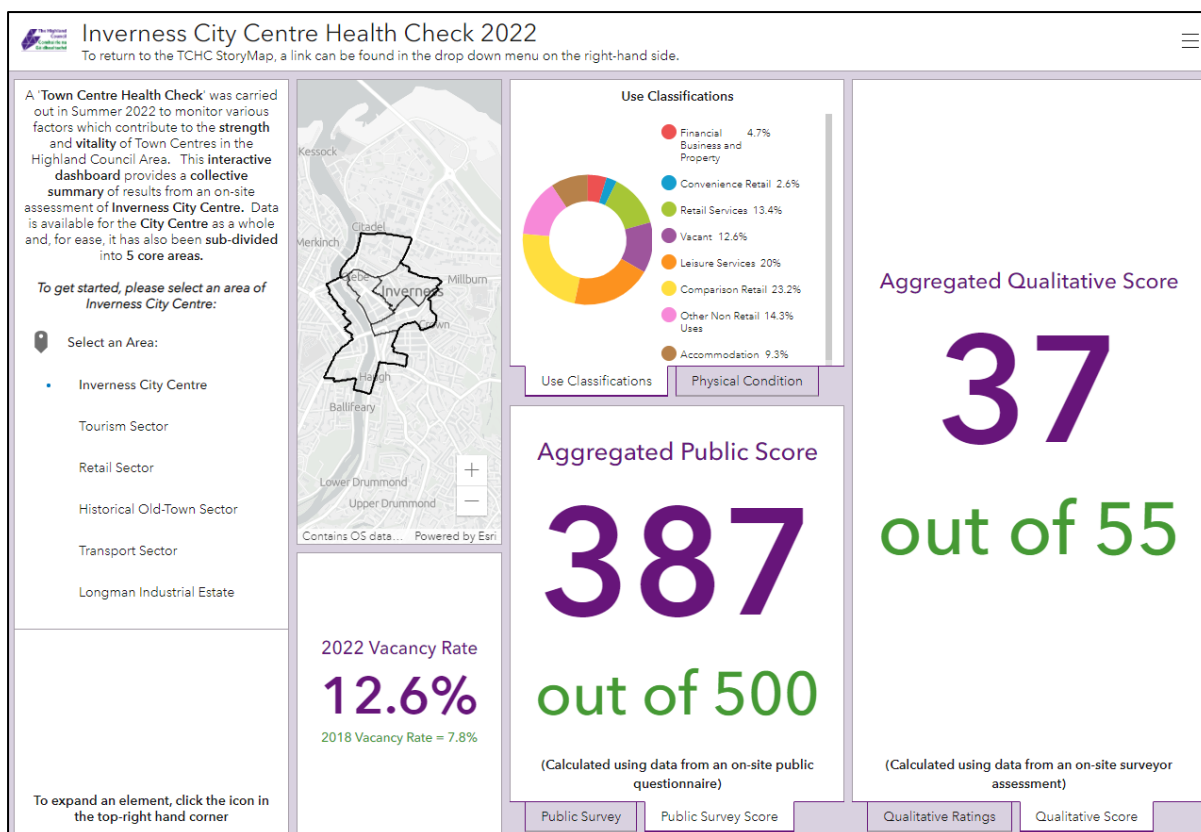
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/919acd79348a49b0951db00f8fde7d12?item=1>

4.1 Introduction

As the largest population centre in the Scottish Highlands, Inverness serves as the main retail, commercial and industrial hub in the Highland Council area. It is crucial that the city centre is regularly monitored to ensure its services and facilities remain accessible, attractive and of top priority in local development plans. The 2022 Inverness City Centre Health Check was carried out over Summer 2022 in an attempt to monitor the strength and vitality of various indicators such as retail offer, vacancy, public realm, green space, pedestrian activity and public perceptions. This exercise is the second health check published by the Highland Council and results are comparable with the last study which was published in 2018.

4.2 Dashboards





4.3 Review

- Inverness City Centre's health check assessment presented fairly mixed results
- City-wide vacancy rates have increased from 7.8% in 2018 to 12.6% in 2022
- 1,219 pedestrians were counted on Inverness High Street during a 30-minute period between 12 and 2pm
- 2 Public toilet facilities are provided by the Council in the City Centre
- In the public survey, 'Accessibility' scored the highest out of the five categories with an aggregated score of 91 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Safety and Security' scored 87, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 73, 'Evening Economy' scored 72 and 'Retail' scored 64
- The city centre scored 387 out of a possible total of 500, giving Inverness a 77.4% public satisfaction rating

4.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

4.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 128 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Inverness City Centre's 764 units, 325 (42.6%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 439 (57.4%) have not.

4.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 764 retail/business units in Inverness City Centre, of which:

- 177 were Comparison Retail
- 153 were Leisure Services
- 109 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 102 were Retail Services
- 96 were Vacant
- 71 were Accommodation
- 36 were Financial, Business and Property
- 20 were Convenience Retail

4.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

4.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Inverness town centre is detailed below:

- 160 units are independent and local retailers
- 102 units are national retailers

Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

4.9 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre

- Youth Club

4.10 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

4.11 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

4.12 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Inverness City Centre is 12.6% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 7.8%. This increased rate may be due to a declining retail market and/or lack of appeal for businesses to set up shop in the city centre.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

96 vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit. 19 units have remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is also important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 31 units which were vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

4.13 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

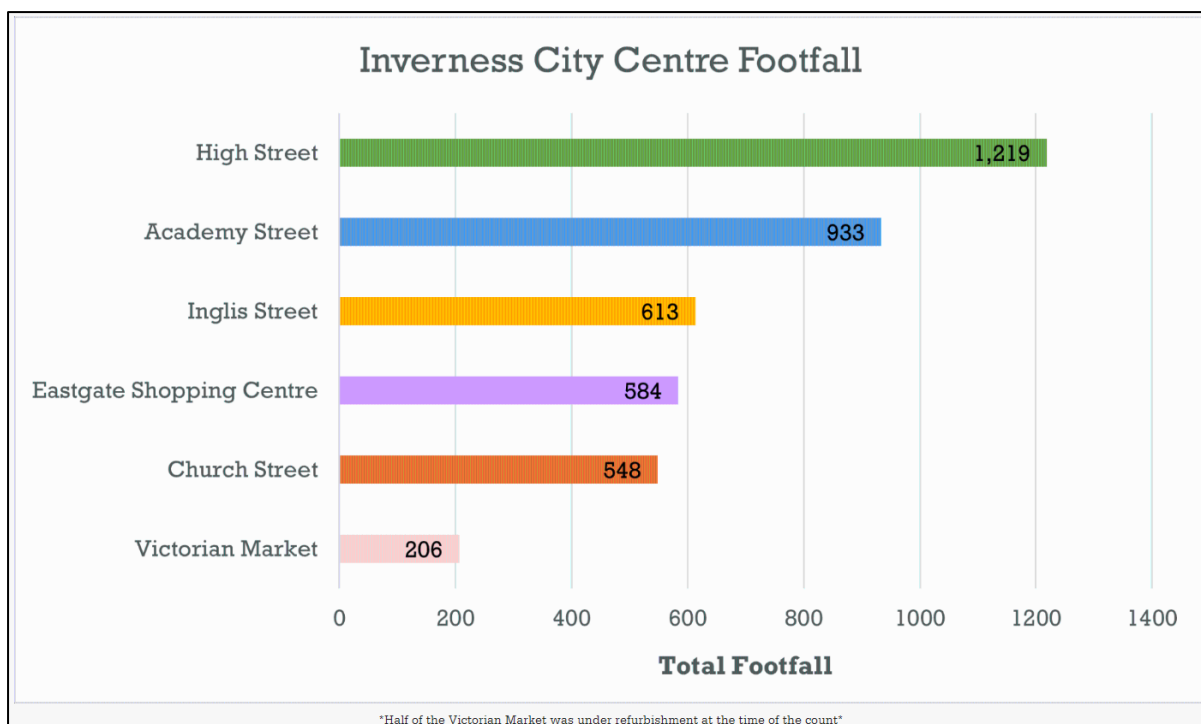
The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

Results show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Fair' (53.7%), 'Good' (26.9%), 'Excellent' (13.4%) or 'Poor' (6%) condition, which indicates that some units may detract from the surrounding streetscape in Inverness town centre due to neglect or a lack of maintenance, however, the majority are in good structural condition.

4.14 Footfall

As an indicator of town centre vitality and viability, footfall counts were conducted around Inverness City Centre for 30-minute periods, between 12 and 2pm, at points which were chosen by surveyors during an on-site visit. These spots were seen to reflect the main pedestrian thoroughfares throughout the City Centre. Clicker counters were used to tally the number of people travelling in either direction (e.g. North vs South or East vs West), by either foot, bicycle, wheelchair, mobility scooter etc. The proportion of people's mode of travel, in each case, was considered negligible however, and data concerning this is not reported.

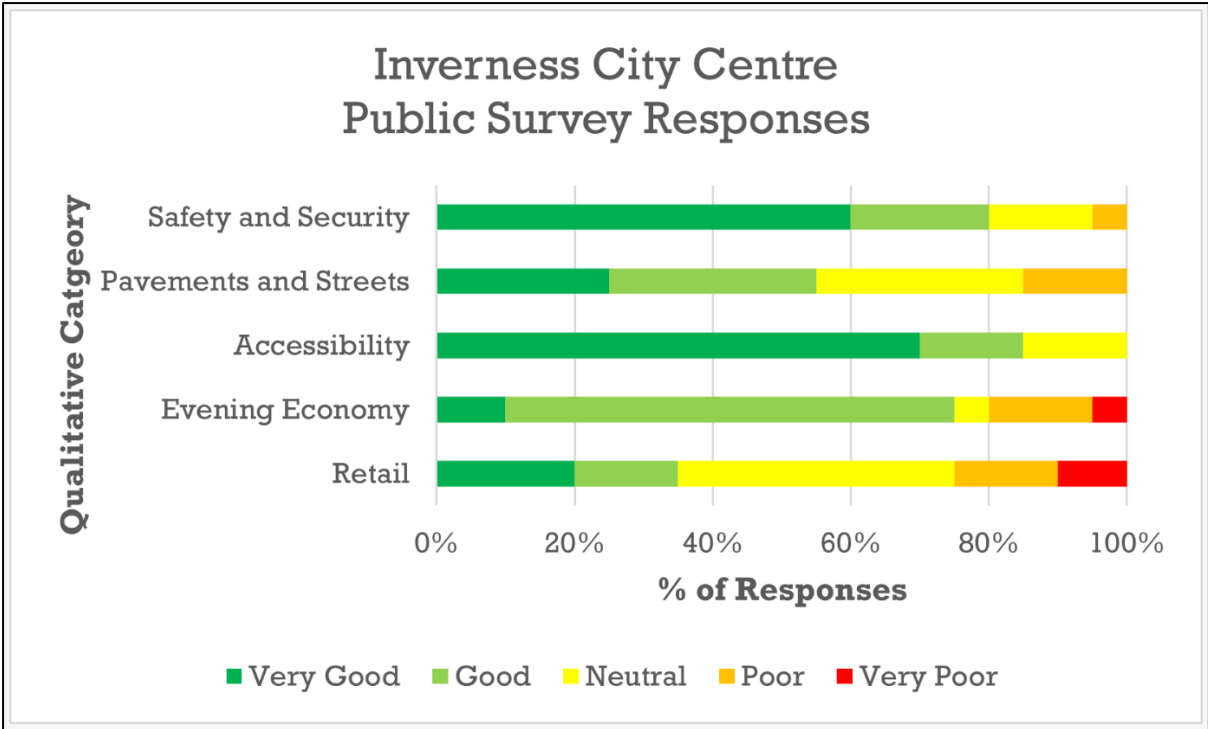
Results are detailed in the graph below:



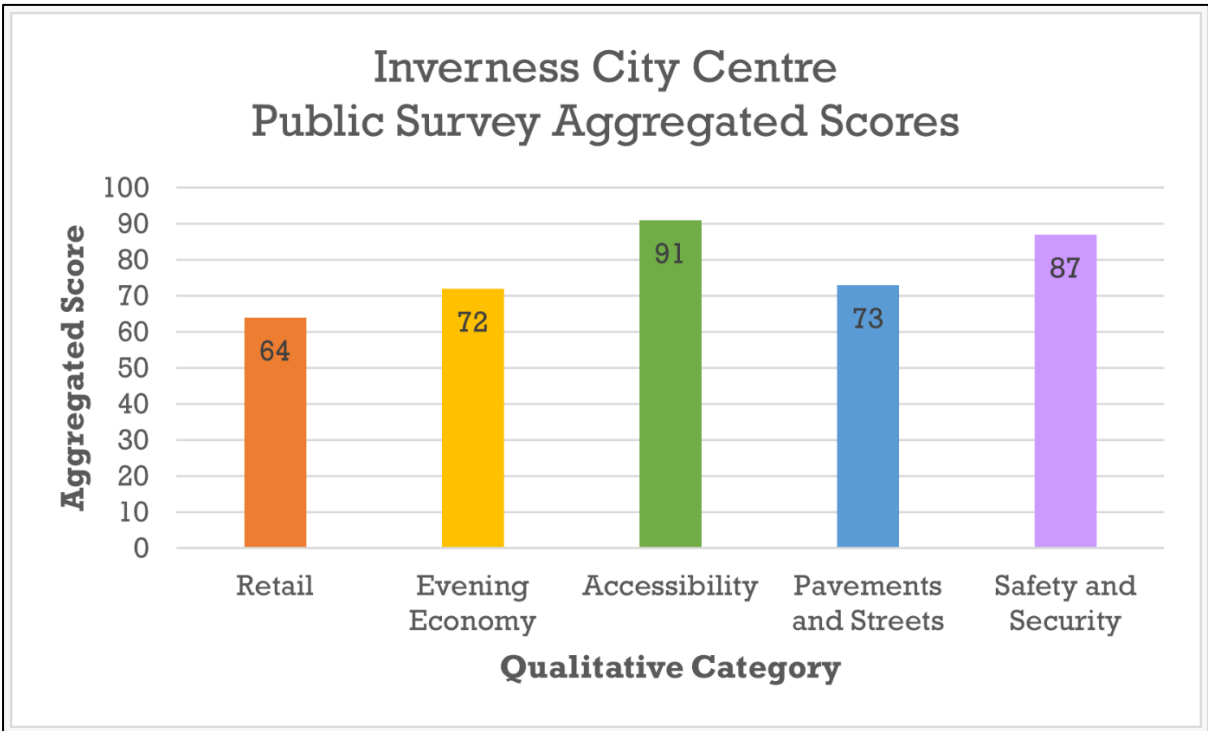
4.15 Public Perceptions

During an on-site visit to Inverness City Centre, a questionnaire was delivered to 20 participants who were seen to be active users of the city centre. The questionnaire consisted of 5 questions where participants were asked to rate various city centre health indicators including Retail, Evening Economy, Accessibility, Pavements and Streets and Safety and Security, on a scale of 1 to 5. A score of 1 denotes “Very Poor”, a score of 5 denotes “Very Good” and a score of 3 denotes a “Neutral” response or middling score. Aggregated scores for each category were calculated using the formula detailed in the 2022 Methodology.

The results of the public survey are summarised in the graph below. The majority of responses were fairly mixed for all qualitative categories. Most responses were 'Very Good' for Safety and Security and Accessibility, perceptions of the Evening Economy and Pavements and Streets were mixed but generally good, whilst Retail received a fairly divided response. With the majority of perceptions being 'Fair', it is clear that Inverness City Centre's retail offer is not the strongest, in the eyes of the public.



To further quantify these results, an overall score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap which can be accessed [here](#). When we look at these aggregated scores, we can see that in Inverness City Centre, 'Accessibility' scored the highest out of the five categories with 91 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Safety and Security' scored 87, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 73, 'Evening Economy' scored 72 and 'Retail' scored 64.



4.16 Public Toilets

The availability, quality and condition of Public Toilets can be a vital indicator of city centre health. As we can see on the map to the right, there are 2 public convenience facilities, provided and maintained by the Highland Council, located in Inverness City Centre. These are accessible, although lacking in sufficient signage, and are in close proximity to other services and facilities.

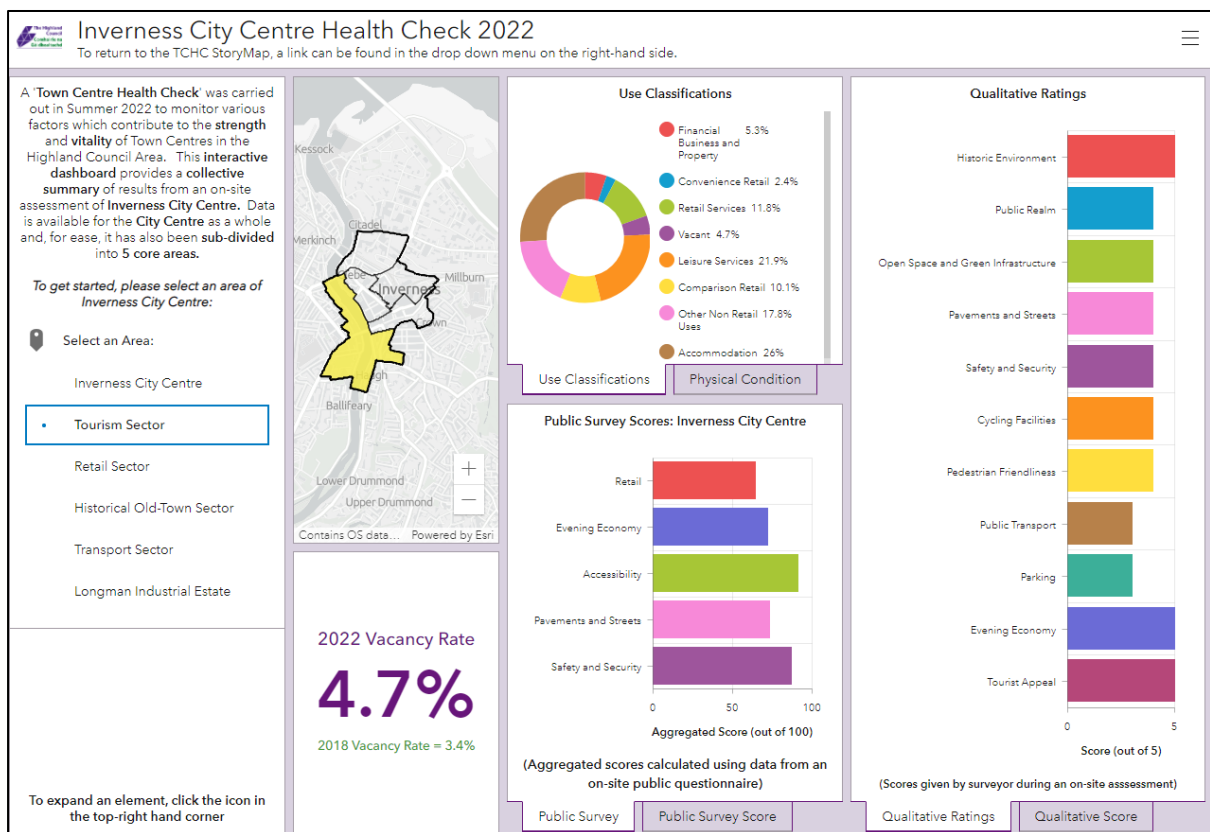
5 Inverness – Tourism Sector

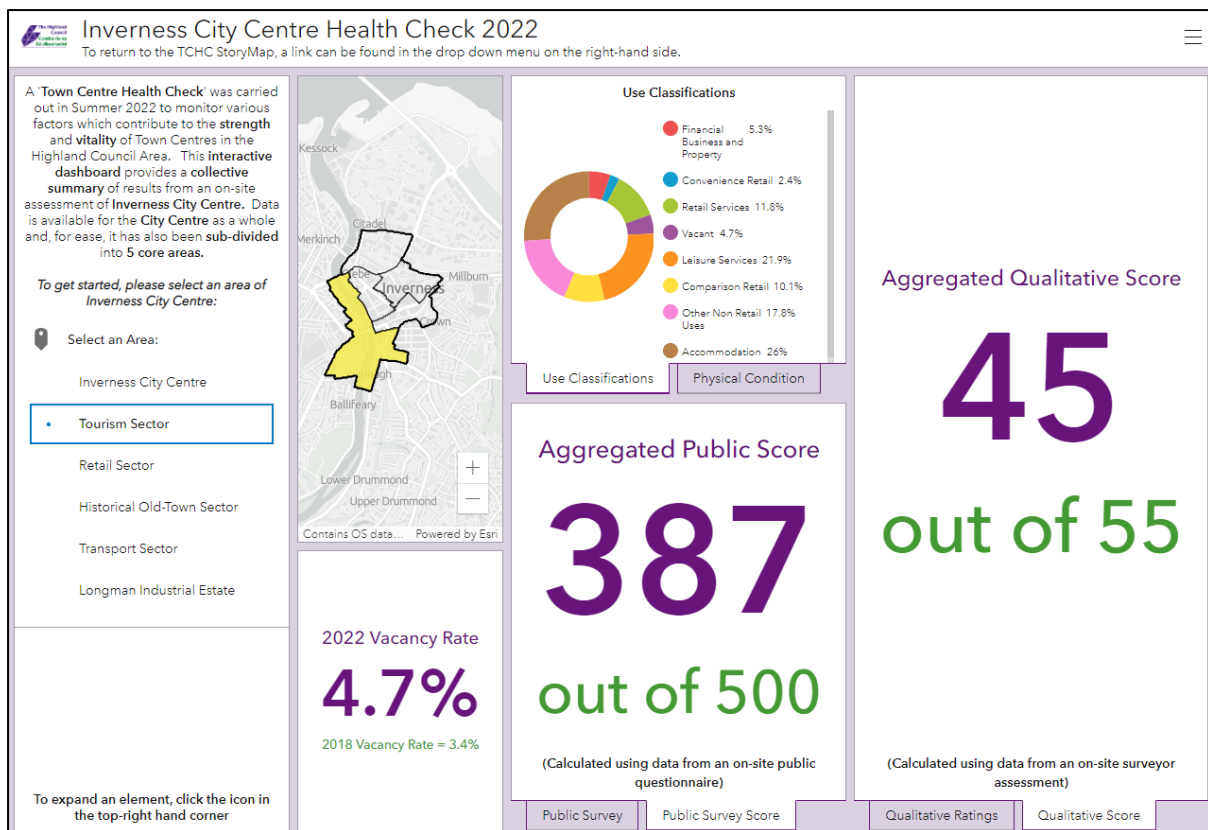
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5.1 Introduction

Inverness City Centre's Tourism Sector consists of the areas surrounding the River Ness, including Inverness Castle, Inverness Cathedral and Eden Court. It was named the 'Tourism Sector', by surveyors, due to its associations with the Tourism industry in the City Centre. The area tends to be bustling with visitors, particularly during the Summer months, and is the location of much of the City Centre's tourist attractions, hotels, as well as plentiful evening social offer.

5.2 Dashboard





5.3 Review

- Vacancy rates have increased from 3.4% in 2018 to 4.7% in 2022
- No potentially less desirable services/facilities, such as charity and betting shops, were highlighted in the retail audit
- Most units appeared to be in good physical condition
- The sub-area scored well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 45 out of 55
- 5/5 scores were given for Historic Environment, Tourist Appeal and Evening Economy
- It scored less well for Parking and Public Transport, most likely due to the density and physical layout of the area

5.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

5.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 30 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Inverness City Centre's Tourism Sector's 179 units, 63 (35.2%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 116 (64.8%) have not.

5.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 179 retail/business units in Inverness City Centre's Tourism Sector, of which:

- 44 were Accommodation
- 37 were Leisure Services
- 30 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 20 were Retail Services
- 17 were Comparison Retail
- 9 were Financial, Business and Property
- 8 were Vacant
- 4 were Convenience Retail

5.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

5.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Inverness City Centre's Tourism Sector is detailed below:

- 43 units are independent and local retailers
- 3 units are national retailers

5.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

5.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

5.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

5.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

5.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Inverness City Centre's Tourism Sector is 4.7% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 3.4%. This increased rate may be due to a declining retail market and/or lack of appeal for businesses to set up shop in the city centre.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

7 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 1 unit has remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is also important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 4 units which were vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

5.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

Results show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Fair' (87.5%) or 'Poor' (12.5%) condition, which indicates that some units may detract from the surrounding streetscape in Inverness City Centre's Tourism Sector due to neglect or a lack of maintenance.

5.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 5/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

Inverness Castle is a prominent feature in the Tourism Sector; with ongoing development and renovation, the historic building is clearly well maintained. The Cathedral and other buildings of historic value in the area are generally well kept, with only some weeds and moss noted on-site.

Pavements and Streets - 4/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

Pavements and streets appeared clean and free from litter. Only some weeds and few cracks were noted on site, particularly in side streets.

Public Realm - 4/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

Street furniture was distributed throughout, however, some were in a state of disrepair and needed paint/general maintenance. Some public art was noted, including the sculpture at Eden Court and statue by Ness Church. More public art could be introduced to the area; however, attractive views of the City Centre and overlooking Inverness Castle, particularly from the Greig Street footbridge, seem to offset the lacking availability.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 4/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

Multiple signposts were noted on-site; these were easy to read and well distributed throughout. There was a general ease of movement throughout with appropriate traffic speeds, light controlled crossings and wide footpaths; particularly those along the river. Tomnahurich Street, however, is less pedestrian friendly due to it being a busy, main road with fewer light controlled crossings.

Public Transport - 3/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

Although bus stops can be found along main roads, notably along Tomnahurich Street, infrastructure and routes are lacking in other areas.

Parking - 3/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

Parking restrictions are in place throughout the area, with double yellow lines noted on King Street and Greig Street. Although a car park exists to the rear of Eden Court, this is often busy and may be difficult to find spaces during peak times.

Cycling Facilities - 4/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

E-bikes are available for hire outside of Eden Court, with sufficient bike tying posts to accommodate demand. Traffic is slow round much of the area due to one-way streets and speed limits, making it feel safe for cyclists, despite the lack of a dedicated cycle lane on the majority of roads.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 4/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

Green, open space is distributed throughout with trees, planters and other foliage noted on-site. Although some side streets lack greenery, this is offset by their surroundings, particularly along the River Ness and around Eden Court.

Tourist Appeal - 5/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

As Inverness' 'Tourism Sector', this area scores highly against Tourist Appeal. With Inverness Castle, the Cathedral and River Ness as key highlights, there is plentiful tourist attractions, accommodation and tourist information boards/public maps distributed throughout.

Evening Economy - 5/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The Tourism Sector's evening social offer is plentiful, with restaurants, hot food takeaways and public bars throughout. There is a good sense of night-life and streets are likely to remain busy after dark.

Safety and Security - 4/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety felt throughout the area, with some passive policing from overlooking residential properties and street lighting throughout. In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

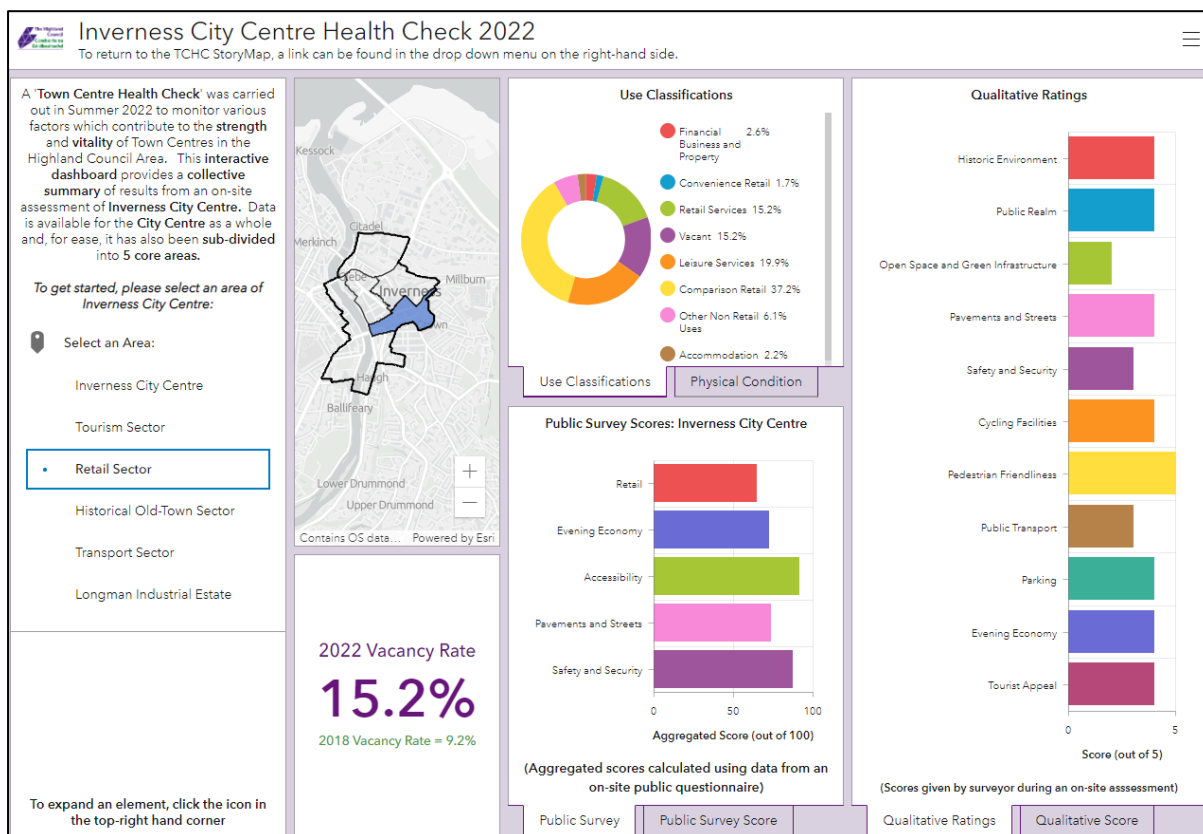
6 Inverness - Retail Sector

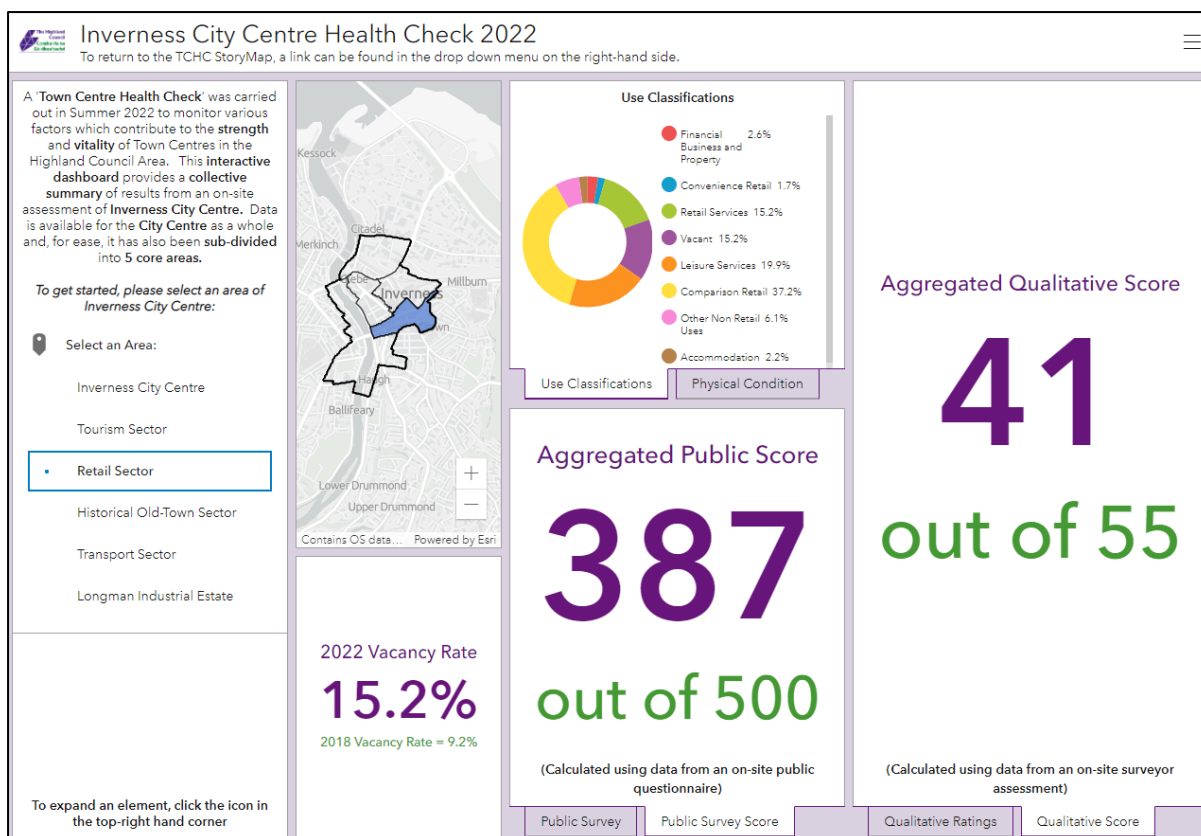
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/27604463487b4263b41d4d073b5c461a>

6.1 Introduction

Inverness City Centre's Retail Sector consists of the area surrounding the High Street, including Market Brae and the Eastgate Shopping Centre. It was named the 'Retail Sector', by surveyors, due to its associations with the Retail market in the City Centre. The area is the location of much of the city centre's retail offer, with shops lining the streets and shopping centre being a popular destination for locals and visitors alike.

6.2 Dashboard





6.3 Review

- Vacancy rates have increased from 9.2% in 2018 to 15.2% in 2022
- A good mix of independent and national retailers were highlighted in the retail audit
- Most units appeared to be in good physical condition
- The sub-area scored relatively well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 41 out of 55
- A 5/5 score was given for Pedestrian Friendliness
- It scored less well for Open Space and Green Infrastructure, most likely due to the density and physical layout of the area

6.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

6.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 12 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Inverness City Centre's Retail Sector's 229 units, 92 (40.2%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 137 (59.8%) have not.

6.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 231 retail/business units in Inverness City Centre's Retail Sector, of which:

- 86 were Comparison Retail
- 46 were Leisure Services
- 35 were Vacant
- 35 were Retail Services
- 14 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 6 were Financial, Business and Property
- 5 were Accommodation
- 4 were Convenience Retail

6.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

6.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Inverness City Centre's Retail Sector is detailed below:

- 51 units are independent and local retailers

- 73 units are national retailers

6.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

6.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

6.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

6.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

6.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Inverness City Centre's Retail Sector is 15.2% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 9.2%. The 2022 vacancy rate owes much of its increase to the number of vacant units in the Eastgate Shopping Centre. Part of the shopping centre was under refurbishment at the time of survey and so it is hoped that many of these vacant units will be occupied by the next city centre health check.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

26 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 10 units have remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is also important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 10 units which were vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

6.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

Results show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Fair' (41.4%), 'Excellent' (31%), 'Good' (24.1%) or 'Poor' (3.4%) condition, which indicates that some units may detract from the surrounding streetscape in Inverness City Centre's Retail Sector due to neglect or a lack of maintenance however, the majority are in good structural condition.

6.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 4/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

Inverness Castle is a prominent feature in the Tourism Sector; with ongoing development and renovation, the historic building is clearly well maintained. The Cathedral and other buildings of historic value in the area are generally well kept, with only some weeds and moss noted on-site.

Pavements and Streets - 4/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

Pavements and streets appeared clean and free from litter. Only some weeds and few cracks were noted on site, particularly in side streets.

Public Realm - 4/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

Street furniture is distributed throughout, most are in good condition. Public art is somewhat lacking, although street performers often provide some interest.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 5/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

The High Street is pedestrianised and a general ease of movement was felt throughout.

Public Transport - 3/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

Although bus services/routes can be found around the area, infrastructure and signage is somewhat lacking. The railway station is in close proximity, however, and a taxi rank is located a short walk away.

Parking - 3/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

Due to pedestrianisation measures, parking restrictions are in place throughout the High Street, with only loading possible. Spaces can be found in multi-storey car parks throughout the city, most of which are a short distance away.

Cycling Facilities - 4/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

Despite the pedestrianisation the High Street, the shared use space means it may be difficult to cycle through. National Route 1 does run along High Street but this route is somewhat constrained by a requirement for cyclists to disembark on Stephens Brae in the interests of safety. Bike tying posts were distributed throughout, although difficult to find space during peak times.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 2/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

There was a somewhat lack of green infrastructure at the time of visit. Some flower baskets line the High Street but, generally, the area lacks much greenery. However, the riverside is a short distance away.

Tourist Appeal - 4/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

The Town House offers some visual interest and many independent, traditionally tourist-oriented shops line the High Street. There is signage throughout, although accommodation and information boards are somewhat lacking.

Evening Economy - 5/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The Retail Sector's evening social offer is plentiful, with restaurants, hot food takeaways and public bars throughout. There is a good sense of night-life and streets are likely to remain busy after dark.

Safety and Security - 4/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety felt throughout the area, with some passive policing from overlooking residential properties and street lighting throughout.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

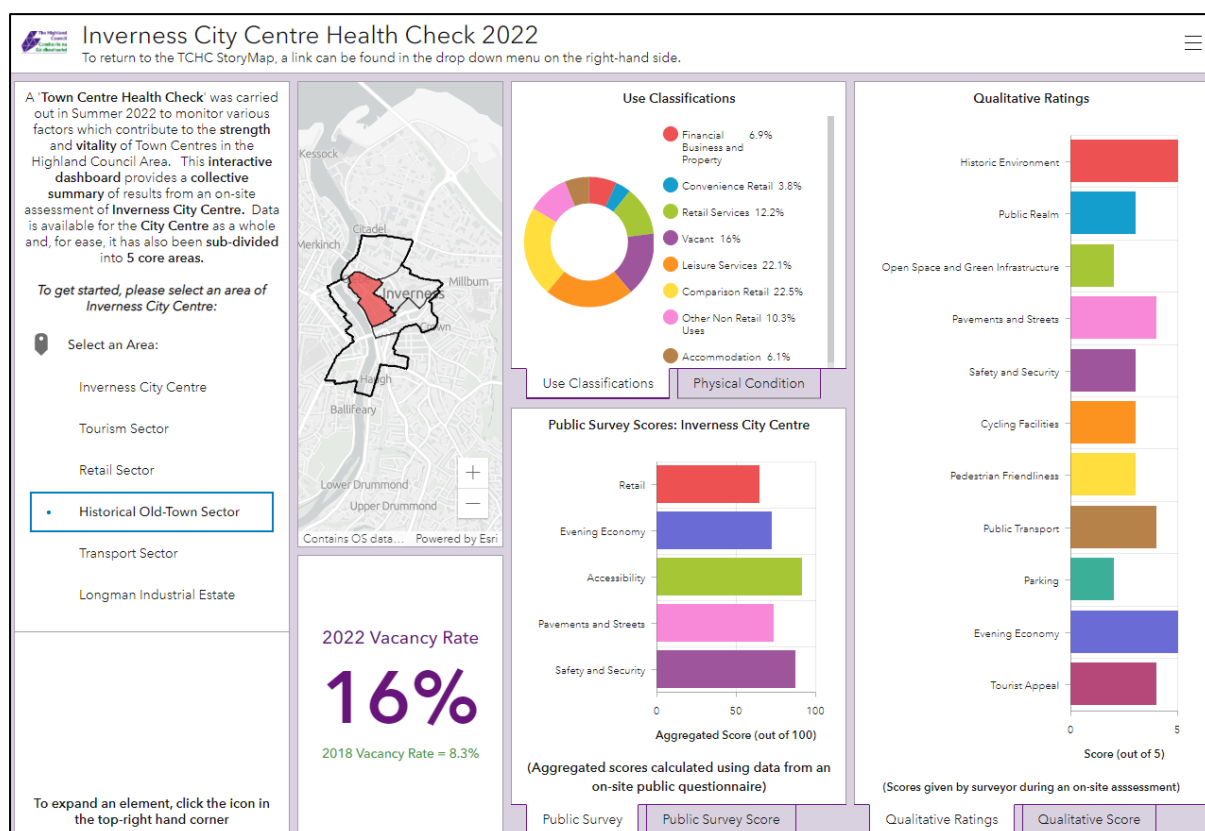
7 Inverness - Historic Old-Town Sector

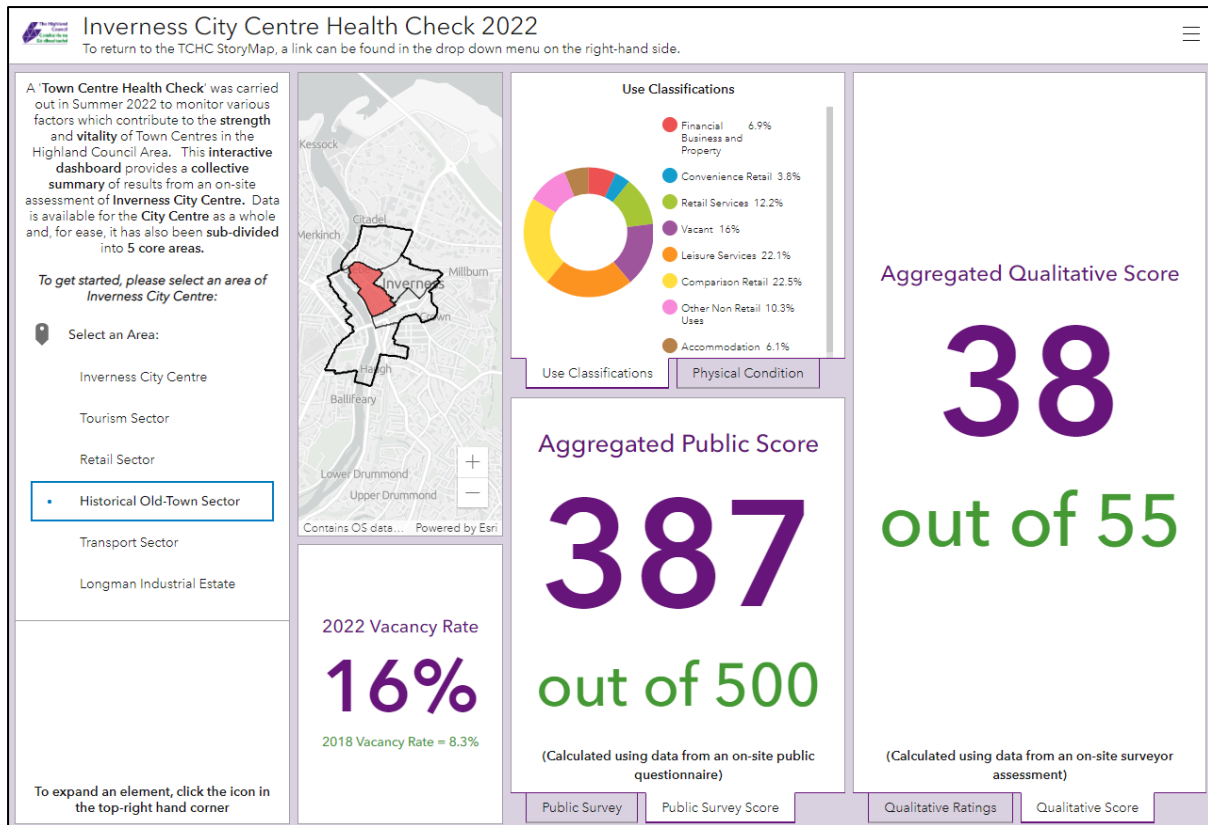
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/1aa280d7518a4c04a4cb6bd16bf89ca7>

7.1 Introduction

Inverness City Centre's Historical Old-Town Sector consists of the areas Church Street and Academy Street, including the Victorian Market and Old High Church. It was named the 'Historical Old-Town Sector', by surveyors, due to its associations with the Historical, Old-Town character in the City Centre. The area's architecture is reminiscent of the city's history and the Victorian Market offers a some socio-cultural interest for locals and visitors alike.

7.2 Dashboard





7.3 Review

- Vacancy rates have increased from 8.3% in 2018 to 16% in 2022
- Most units appeared to be in good physical condition
- The sub-area scored relatively well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 38 out of 55
- 5/5 scores were given for Historic Environment and Evening Economy
- It scored less well for Parking and Open Space and Green Infrastructure, most likely due to the density and physical layout of the area

7.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape.

7.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 20 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Inverness City Centre's Historical Old-Town Sector's 262 units, 112 (42.7%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 150 (57.3%) have not.

7.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 262 retail/business units in Inverness City Centre's Historical Old-Town Sector, of which:

- 58 were Comparison Retail
- 58 were Leisure Services
- 42 were Vacant
- 32 were Retail Services
- 27 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 18 were Financial, Business and Property
- 16 were Accommodation
- 10 were Convenience Retail

7.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

7.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Inverness City Centre's Historical Old-Town Sector, is detailed below:

- 58 units are independent and local retailers
- 21 units are national retailers

7.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

7.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

7.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

7.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

7.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Inverness City Centre's Historical Old-Town Sector is 16% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 8.3%. The 2022 vacancy rate owes much of its increase to the number of vacant units in the Victorian Market. Half of the market was under refurbishment at the time of survey and so it is hoped that many of these vacant units will be occupied by the next City Centre Health Check.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

38 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 4 units have remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is also important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 16 units which were vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

7.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

Results show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Fair' (55%) or 'Good' (45%) condition, which indicates that these units are unlikely to detract from the surrounding streetscape.

7.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 5/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

As the city's Historical Old-Town sector, this area's historic environment is generally good condition. The streets connecting Church Street and Academy Street offer some visual interest in particular with well-maintained architecture and historic character.

Pavements and Streets - 4/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

The area's pavements and streets were generally clean, well swept and free from litter and weeds. Some cracks and potholes were noted throughout, however.

Public Realm - 3/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

Although some public art was noted on Church Street, much of the area owes its visual attractiveness to the historic architecture. Street furniture is distributed throughout, although somewhat lacking along Academy Street.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 3/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

Church Street is pedestrianised and there was a general ease of movement throughout. Academy Street, however, is often subject to traffic congestion and presents some barriers to pedestrian movement due to narrow pavements, despite efforts to expand these onto the road using pillars.

Public Transport - 4/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

Bus routes can be found on a number of streets and an adequate service is available with connections throughout the city. Taxis can be hailed on main streets and the railway station and airport, although outside the area, are in close proximity.

Parking - 2/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

Restrictions are in place on many streets, making it difficult to find parking in the area. Rose Street multi-storey car park is located in close proximity, however, which offers a number of spaces.

Cycling Facilities - 3/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

National Route 1 runs along the riverside and Church Street is pedestrianised making it quiet enough to be passable by bike. Some posts have been provided on Church Street for tying up bikes. Academy Street and some of the side streets were congested, however, and could present problems due to a lack of dedicated cycle lane.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 2/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

Despite some plantings along Church Street, Academy Street is largely devoid of greenery and is dominated by hard surfaces. The riverside is a short walk away, however.

Tourist Appeal - 4/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

The historical architecture offers some visual interest and many independent, traditionally tourist-oriented shops are located in the Victorian Market. There is signage throughout, although accommodation and information boards are somewhat lacking.

Evening Economy - 5/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The Historical Old-Town Sector's evening social offer is plentiful, with restaurants, hot food takeaways and public bars throughout. There is a good sense of night-life and streets are likely to remain busy after dark.

Safety and Security - 3/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety felt throughout the area, with some passive policing from overlooking residential properties and street lighting throughout.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

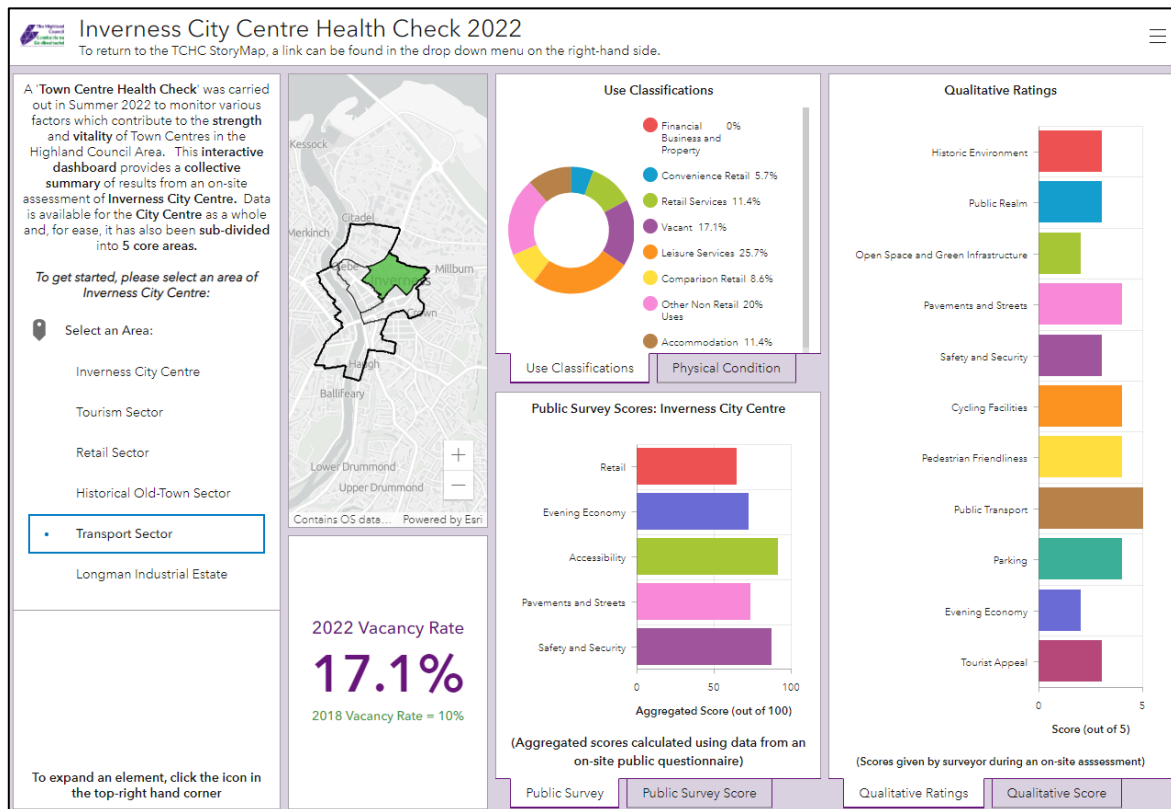
8 Inverness - Transport Sector

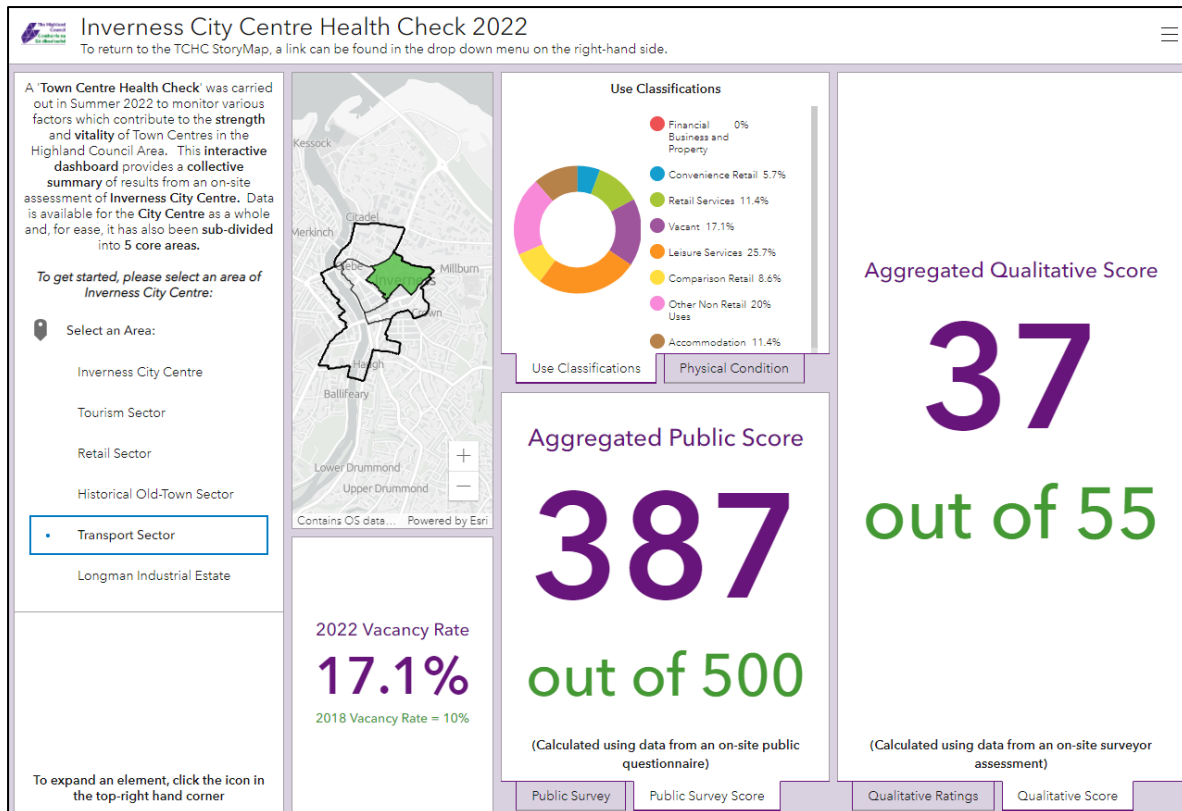
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/c0fae429348c418d92205e78a2d433d0>

8.1 Introduction

Inverness City Centre's Transport Sector consists of the area surrounding Inverness Railway Station and Inverness Bus Station, including Rose Street Retail Park and the Public Library. It was named the 'Transport Sector', by surveyors, due to its associations with Public Transport services and facilities in the City Centre. The area is the location of the city centre's main transport links, with bus and rail services connecting the capital with the rest of Scotland, and further afield.

8.2 Dashboard





8.3 Review

- Vacancy rates have increased from 10% in 2018 to 17.1% in 2022
- Most units appeared to be in good physical condition
- The sub-area scored less well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 37 out of 55
- A 5/5 score was given for Public Transport
- It scored less well for Open Space and Green Infrastructure and Evening Economy, as would be expected, given the primary purpose of the area

8.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

8.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 4 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Inverness City Centre's Transport Sector's 35 units, 10 (28.6%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 25 (71.4%) have not.

8.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 35 retail/business units in Inverness City Centre's Transport Sector, of which:

- 9 were Leisure Services
- 7 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 6 were Vacant
- 4 were Retail Services
- 3 were Comparison Retail
- 4 were Accommodation
- 2 were Convenience Retail
- 0 were Financial, Business and Property

8.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

8.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Inverness City Centre's Transport Sector, is detailed below:

- 1 units is an independent and local retailer
- 4 units are national retailers

8.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

8.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

8.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

8.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

8.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Inverness City Centre's Transport Sector is 17.1% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 10%. This increased rate may be due to a declining retail market and/or lack of appeal for businesses to set up shop in the city centre.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

3 newly vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 2 units have remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is also important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 1 unit which was vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

8.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

Results show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Fair' (50%), 'Good' (33.3%) or 'Poor' (16.7%) condition, which indicates that indicates that some units may detract from the surrounding streetscape in Inverness City Centre's Transport Sector due to neglect or a lack of maintenance, however, the majority are in good structural condition.

8.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 3/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

The railway station itself is a functional building but is flanked by substantial 19th century edifices of good quality. The building fronting onto the square is also of historical interest.

Pavements and Streets - 4/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

Surfaces are of a good quality, clean and free from litter/weeds for the most part throughout. Few cracks and potholes were noted on site, roadworks maintenance was ongoing outside the Bus Station at the time of visit.

Public Realm - 3/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

Some monuments are found throughout the area, with a statue noted outside the Railway Station entrance. Street furniture is somewhat lacking and some additional visual interest could be provided.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 4/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

Crossings, with frequent light changes, ensure that the area is easily accessible. In general, the area is highly permeable and walking is relatively easy. A lack of pedestrian crossings was noted by the Bus Station, however.

Public Transport - 5/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

As the city's Transport Sector, the area scores highly against the public transport indicator. The railway station has links to most major cities and a number bus routes offering acceptable services to other parts of the city pass through the area.

Parking - 4/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

The railway station, nearby superstore and the Eastgate Shopping Centre host a large number of parking spaces in substantial car parks, albeit time restricted.

Cycling Facilities - 4/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

Bike chaining posts and E-bikes are available to hire by the Railway Station, but no dedicated lanes were noted throughout the area. The nearby streets are often busy and tend to be car-dominated.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 2/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

In general the area has a hard feel and is dominated by grey paving surfaces.

Tourist Appeal - 3/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

Despite a lack of tourist attractions, there is signage and provision of information leaflets/ some maps throughout.

Evening Economy - 2/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The Transport Sector's evening social offer is somewhat lacking, as would be expected. There is a little sense of night-life and streets are unlikely to be busy after dark.

Safety and Security - 3/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety felt throughout the area, with CCTV, security and street lighting throughout.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

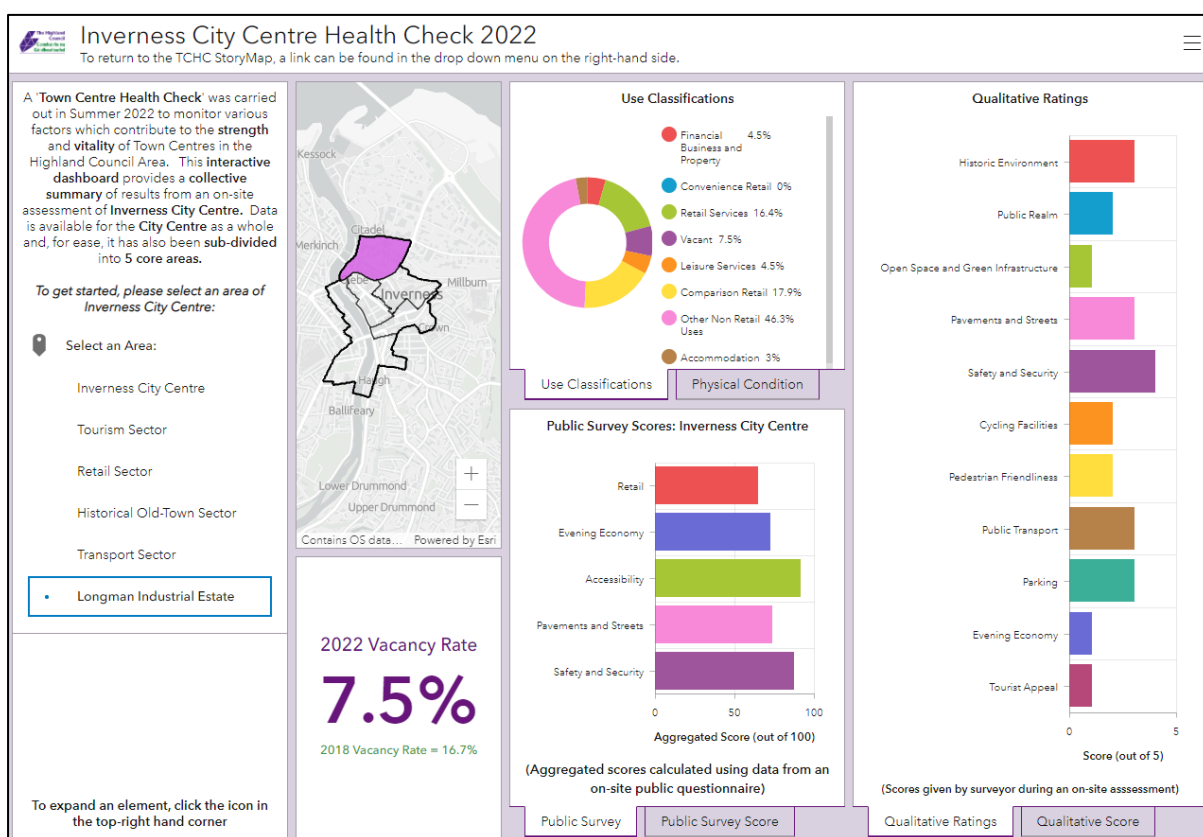
9 Inverness - Longman Industrial Estate

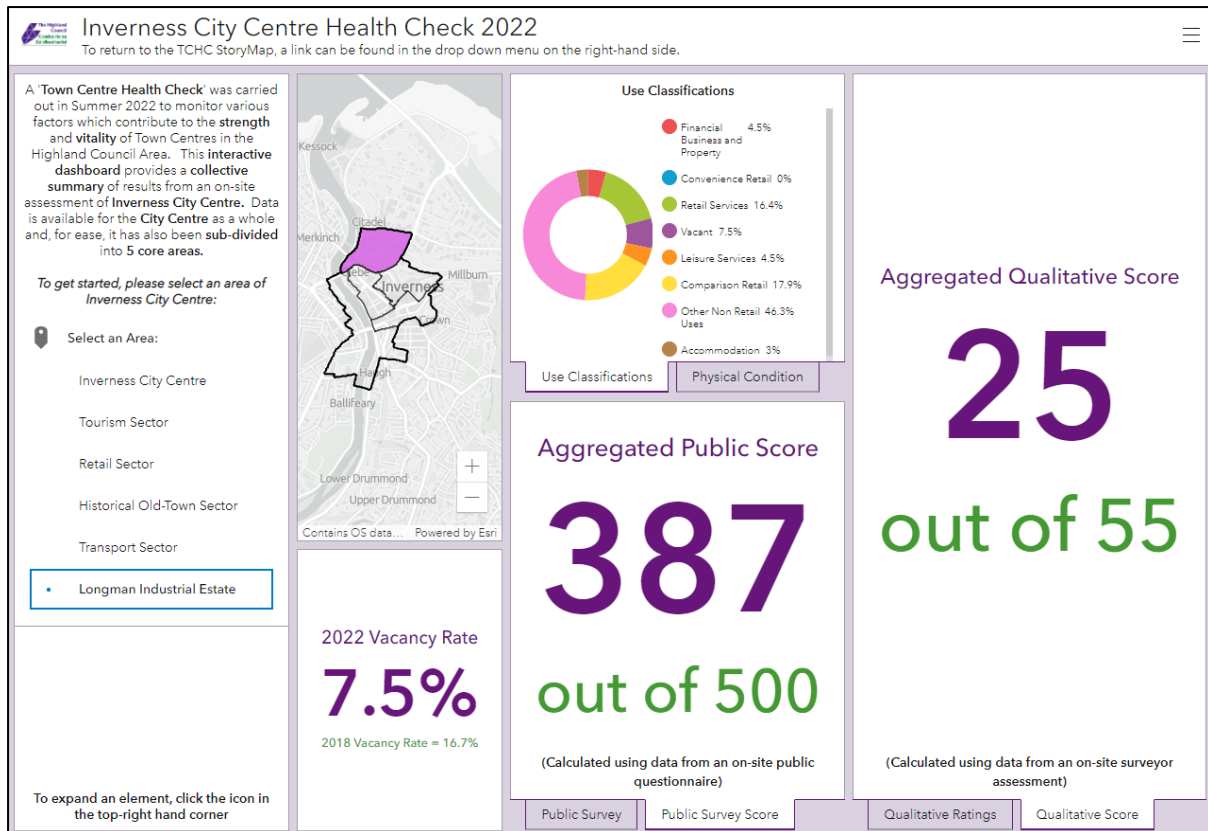
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/f8838090ea6d4210a4537bed7c921cfc>

9.1 Introduction

Inverness City Centre's Longman Industrial Estate consists of the primary industrial areas in the city centre boundary. The area is the location of much of the city's industrial sector as well as the Justice Court which opened in 2020.

9.2 Dashboard





9.3 Review

- Vacancy rates have decreased from 16.7% in 2018 to 7.5% in 2022
- Most units appeared to be in good physical condition
- The sub-area did not score as well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 25 out of 55
- 1/5 scores were given for Open Space and Green Infrastructure, Tourist Appeal and Evening Economy

9.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

9.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 55 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Inverness City Centre's Longman Sector's 67 units, 54 (80.1%) of which have changed (or are new - but note an extended geography in the 2022 audit) since 2018, whilst 13 (19.9%) have not.

9.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 67 retail/business units in Inverness City Centre's Transport Sector, of which:

- 14 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 12 were Comparison Retail
- 11 were Retail Services
- 5 were Vacant
- 3 were Leisure Services
- 3 were Financial, Business and Property
- 2 were Accommodation
- 0 were Convenience Retail

9.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

9.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Inverness City Centre's Transport Sector, is detailed below:

- 11 units is an independent and local retailer
- 1 unit are national retailers

9.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

9.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

9.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

9.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

9.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Inverness City Centre's Longman Industrial Estate is 7.5% as of 2022; a decrease from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 16.7%. These results are likely to be a reflection on the substantial increase in the number of units included in the 2022 analysis, due to the Inverness City Centre boundary change.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

3 newly vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 2 units have remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is also important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. No units which were vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

9.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

Results show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Fair' (75%) or 'Poor' (25%) condition, which indicates that indicates that some units may detract from the surrounding streetscape in Inverness City Centre's Longman Sector due to neglect or a lack of maintenance.

9.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 3/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

Buildings are generally in good condition, despite a lack of historical interest and character.

Pavements and Streets - 3/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

Surfaces are of a good quality, clean and free from litter/weeds for the most part throughout. Some cracks and potholes were noted on site.

Public Realm - 2/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

No public art was noted on-site and street furniture is somewhat lacking, as would be expected.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 2/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

In general, the area is largely dominated by cars, with few pedestrian crossings throughout.

Public Transport - 3/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

Bus routes run through the area with available with connections throughout the city. A lack of infrastructure and signage was noted on-site.

Parking - 3/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

Sufficient parking is available, considering likely demand. Rose Street car park is located in close proximity.

Cycling Facilities - 2/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

National Route 1 bypasses the area, roads are congested and lack dedicated cycle lanes. No cycling facilities were noted on site.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 1/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

In general the area has a hard feel and is dominated by grey paving surfaces.

Tourist Appeal - 1/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

As the city's industrial sector, the Longman lacks an touristic appeal.

Evening Economy - 1/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The industrial sector's evening social offer is significantly lacking, as would be expected. There is a little sense of night-life and streets are unlikely to be busy after dark.

Safety and Security - 3/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety felt throughout the area, with CCTV, security and street lighting throughout.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

10 Inverness Retail Parks

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/919acd79348a49b0951db00f8fde7d12?item=2>

In addition to an on-site assessment of Inverness City Centre, retail data capture was carried out for the city's main 3 retail parks; namely, **Inverness Shopping and Business Park, Inshes Retail Park and Telford Retail Park**. The following sections detail the results from an on-site assessment of Inverness' Retail Parks. This data highlights any changes since 2018, use classifications, physical condition, independent/national retail mix, leisure facilities and vacancy rates in the city's most notable retail outlets.

11 Inverness Shopping and Business Park

11.1 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Inverness City Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the city centre, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of Inverness Shopping and Business Park.

11.2 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 8 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Inverness Shopping and Business Park's 36 units, 15 (41.7%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 21 (58.3%) have not.

11.3 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 36 retail/business units in Inverness Shopping and Business Park, of which:

- 14 were Comparison Retail
- 7 were Leisure Services
- 5 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 4 were Accommodation
- 2 were Retail Services
- 2 were Convenience Retail
- 2 were Vacant
- 0 were Financial, Business and Property

11.4 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a retail park's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

11.5 Independent and National Retailer Mix

An indication of the mix of retail offer can provide a basis for assessing retail park health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Inverness Shopping and Business Park is detailed below:

- 0 units are independent and local retailers
- 15 units are national retailers

11.6 Daytime and Evening Leisure

Leisure services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' retail park health. We monitored the number, and spatial distribution, of these services in Inverness Shopping and Business Park as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of both daytime and evening leisure facilities that can be found in a retail park, is detailed below:

- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars
- Hot Food Takeaways

11.7 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can reflect poorly on a retail park. When assessing vacancies, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate for Inverness Shopping and Business Park is 5.5% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 3.6%. The map to the right highlights that 2 new

vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst **no units have remained vacant since 2018.**

It is important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable a retail park is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. **1 unit which was Vacant in 2018, is now occupied as of 2022.**

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a retail park unattractive to development, as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition and quality of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

12 Inshes Retail Park

12.1 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Inverness City Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the city centre, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of Inverness Retail Park.

12.2 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes no additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Inverness Retail Park's 15 units, 4 (26.6%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 11 (73.4%) have not.

12.3 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 15 retail/business units in Inverness Retail Park, of which:

- 5 were Comparison Retail
- 5 were Leisure Services
- 3 were Convenience Retail
- 2 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 0 were Accommodation
- 0 were Retail Services
- 0 were Financial, Business and Property
- 0 were Vacant

12.4 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a retail park's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

12.5 Independent and National Retailer Mix

An indication of the mix of retail offer can provide a basis for assessing retail park health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Inverness Retail Park is detailed below:

- 0 units are independent and local retailers
- 9 units are national retailers

12.6 Daytime and Evening Leisure

Leisure services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' retail park health. We monitored the number, and spatial distribution, of these services in Inverness Retail Park as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of both daytime and evening leisure facilities that can be found in a retail park, is detailed below:

- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars
- Hot Food Takeaways

12.7 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can reflect poorly on a retail park. When assessing vacancies, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate for Inverness Retail Park is 0% as of 2022; a decrease from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 6.6%. The map to the right highlights that no new vacant units

were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst **no units have remained vacant since 2018.**

It is important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable a retail park is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. **1 unit which was Vacant in 2018, is now occupied as of 2022.**

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a retail park unattractive to development, as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition and quality of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

13 Telford Retail Park

13.1 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Inverness City Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the city centre, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of Telford Retail Park.

13.2 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes no additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Telford Retail Park's 19 units, 45(26.3%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 14 (73.7%) have not.

13.3 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 19 retail/business units in Telford Retail Park, of which:

- 7 were Comparison Retail
- 4 were Leisure Services
- 4 were Convenience Retail
- 2 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 2 were Vacant
- 0 were Accommodation
- 0 were Retail Services
- 0 were Financial, Business and Property

13.4 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a retail park's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

13.5 Independent and National Retailer Mix

An indication of the mix of retail offer can provide a basis for assessing retail park health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Telford Retail Park is detailed below:

- 0 units are independent and local retailers
- 11 units are national retailers

13.6 Daytime and Evening Leisure

Leisure services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' retail park health. We monitored the number, and spatial distribution, of these services in Telford Retail Park as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of both daytime and evening leisure facilities that can be found in a retail park, is detailed below:

- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars
- Hot Food Takeaways

13.7 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can reflect poorly on a retail park. When assessing vacancies, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate for Telford Retail Park is 10.5% as of 2022; a decrease from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 5.2%. 1 new vacant unit was identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 1 unit has remained vacant since 2018.

It is important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable a retail park is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. **No units which were Vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.**

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a retail park unattractive to development, as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition and quality of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

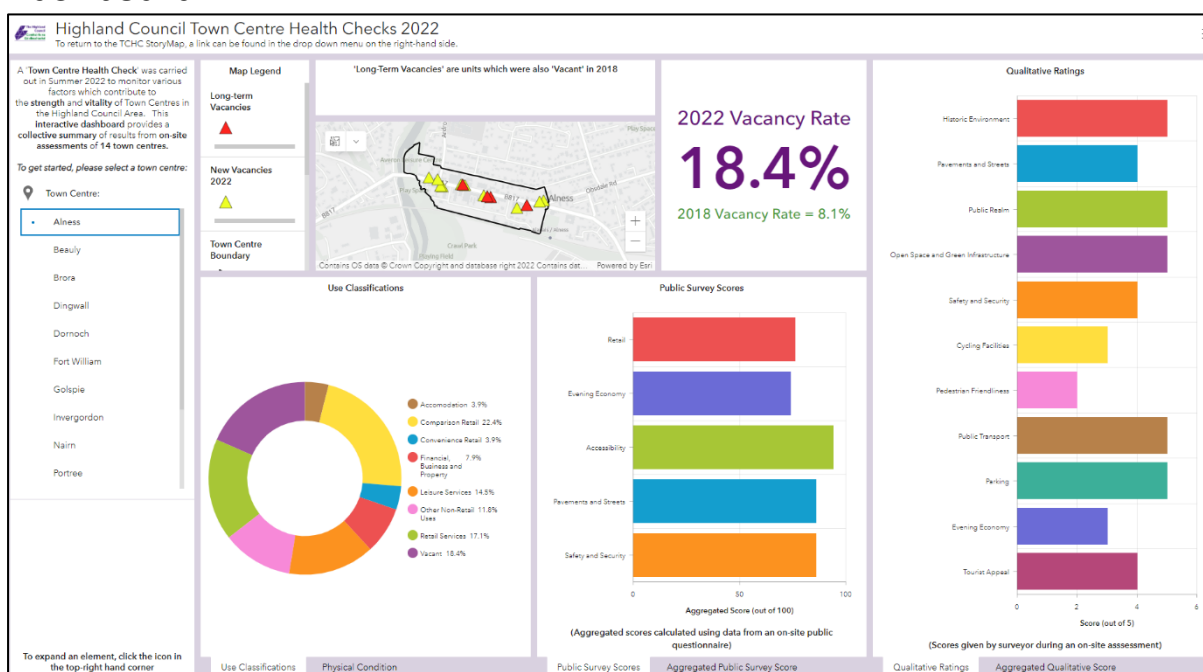
14 Alness

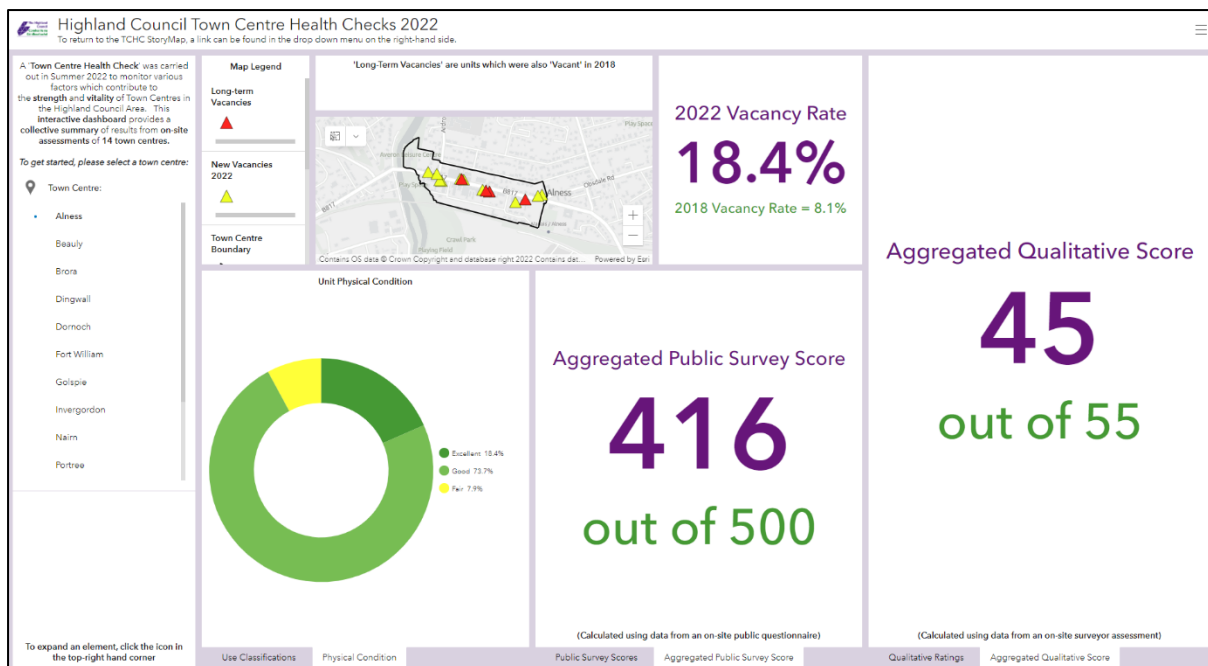
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f79e19975e084b18bdbff88bf757c67c?item=1>

14.1 Introduction

Located in Easter Ross, Alness sits alongside the A9 approximately 22 miles North of Inverness. The town has experienced significant expansion over the last half-century, particularly to the West of the River Averon, and now hosts a range of services and diverse retail offer. The town is well known for its flower displays and in recognition of this, Alness High Street has previously been named the Great British High Street Scottish Champion.

Dashboard





14.2 Review

- Alness can be considered one of the healthier town centres which have been assessed as part of this study
- Vacancy rates have increased from 8.1% in 2018 to 18.4% in 2022
- The town scores highly against most of the qualitative indicators with an aggregated score of 45 out of 55
- As it was in 2018, planting in the centre was excellent at the time of visit, parking and public transport were widely available and efforts had been made to introduce public art
- It scored less well in terms of cycling facilities and pedestrian friendliness, as it did in 2018, suggesting that no improvements have been introduced
- Public toilets are provided in Alness town centre
- 249 pedestrians were counted on Alness High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm
- In the public survey, 'Accessibility' scored the highest out of the five categories with an aggregated score of 94 out of a possible 100. Next, both 'Pavements and Streets' and 'Safety and Security' scored 86, 'Retail' scored 76 and 'Evening Economy' scored 74
- The town centre scored 416 out of a possible total of 500, giving Alness an 83.2% public satisfaction rating

14.3 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

14.4 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes **1 additional unit** as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Alness' 76 units, 27 (35.5%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 49 (64.5%) have not.

14.5 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 76 retail/business units in Alness town centre, of which:

- 17 were Comparison Retail
- 14 were Vacant
- 13 were Retail Services
- 11 were Leisure Services
- 9 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 6 were Financial, Business and Property
- 3 were Convenience Retail
- 3 were Accommodation

14.6 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

14.7 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Alness town centre is detailed below:

- 17 units are independent and local retailers
- 2 units are national retailers

14.8 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

14.9 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre

- Youth Club

14.10 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

14.11 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

14.12 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Alness town centre is 18.4% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 8.1%. This increased rate may be due to a declining retail market and/or lack of appeal for businesses to set up shop in the town centre.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

8 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, while 4 units have remained vacant since 2018. These long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is also important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 2 units which were vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

14.13 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

Results show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Fair' (21.4%), 'Good' (71.4%) or 'Excellent' (7.1%) condition, which indicates that they are unlikely to detract from the surrounding streetscape in Alness town centre.

14.14 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 5/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

The historic environment in Alness town centre was generally in very good condition. Most buildings were visible well-maintained and no structures, or units, stood out as having a negative impact on the surrounding townscape.

Pavements and Streets - 4/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

The pavements and streets in Alness town centre were visibly well-maintained and did not display any signs of litter when assessed on-site. However, some members of the public noted that some pavements were uneven and could be deemed hazardous as a result

Public Realm - 5/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

There was a number of street furniture noted in Alness town centre; these were in good condition and well distributed throughout. Public art was also noted in the form of the

propeller structure and the collection of plaques along one wall, which provided some visual interest.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 2/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

Due to the busyness of the main road, the town centre did not feel safe for pedestrians. Several members of the public noted that vehicles do not tend to follow speed limits, making it difficult to cross in areas where there are no light-controlled crossings. This was deemed particularly hazardous for young children and the elderly.

Public Transport - 5/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

Alness appears to be well connected to other Highland towns, with both railway and bus services available within close proximity of the town centre. Numerous bus stops were noted on-site; all of which appeared to be in good condition. However, it was highlighted in the public survey that rail services to Inverness could be more frequent in the afternoon.

Parking - 5/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

There was ample parking available in the town centre, with a large, well-signposted car park noted at the rear of the High Street. On-street parking is also available on the High Street itself and spaces appeared to be available, even during peak times.

Cycling Facilities - 3/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

There was not an overwhelming number of cycling facilities identified in Alness town centre, with only one bike tying post noted. The busy main road also lacked a cycle lane, despite National Cycle Route 1 running through the town.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 5/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

Flower beds were in bloom at the time of visit and distributed along Alness High Street. A play park was also noted by the River Averon at the Western extremity of the town centre and another area of green space was found by the Heritage Centre towards the Eastern end.

Tourist Appeal - 4/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

Alness town centre is bustling with a diverse retail offer and independent shops distributed throughout. The heritage centre towards the Eastern end of the High Street offers some socio-cultural interest and the presence of green, open space contributes towards the town's unique character, deeming it attractive to visitors.

Evening Economy - 3/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

Although some takeaways and hotels were noted on the High Street, there is little sense of Alness town centre being a night-time destination. A lack of evening social offer was also highlighted in the public survey.

Safety and Security - 4/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety felt throughout Alness town centre, with some passive policing from overlooking residential properties. There was also CCTV presence and plentiful street lighting noted during the on-site visit.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

14.15 Public Toilets

There are public toilets located to the Western end of Alness town centre. These appeared accessible and relatively well-signposted; yet were closed at the time of visit meaning researchers were unable to assess the facilities' internal condition.

14.16 Footfall

Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre.

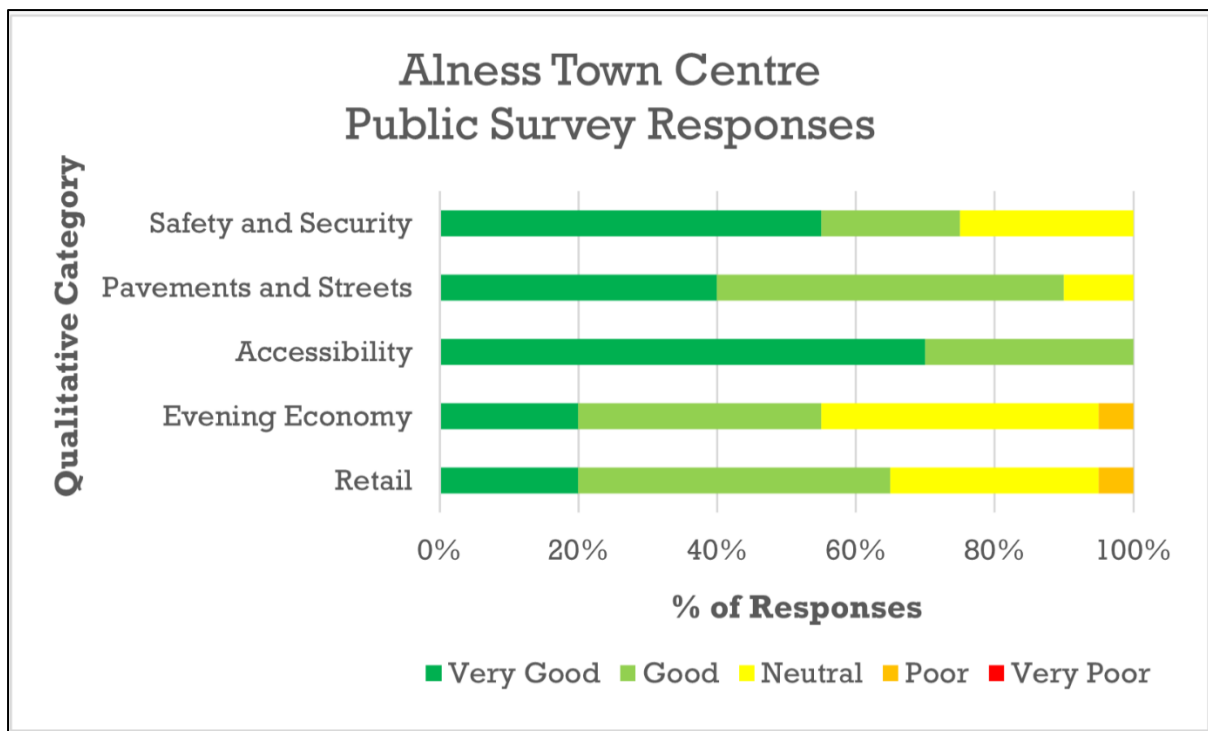
Alness footfall results highlight that a total of 249 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period between 12 and 2pm. As this figure is relatively high compared to other towns of a similar size and nature, it is an indicator of good town centre health.

In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town's population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

14.17 Public Perceptions

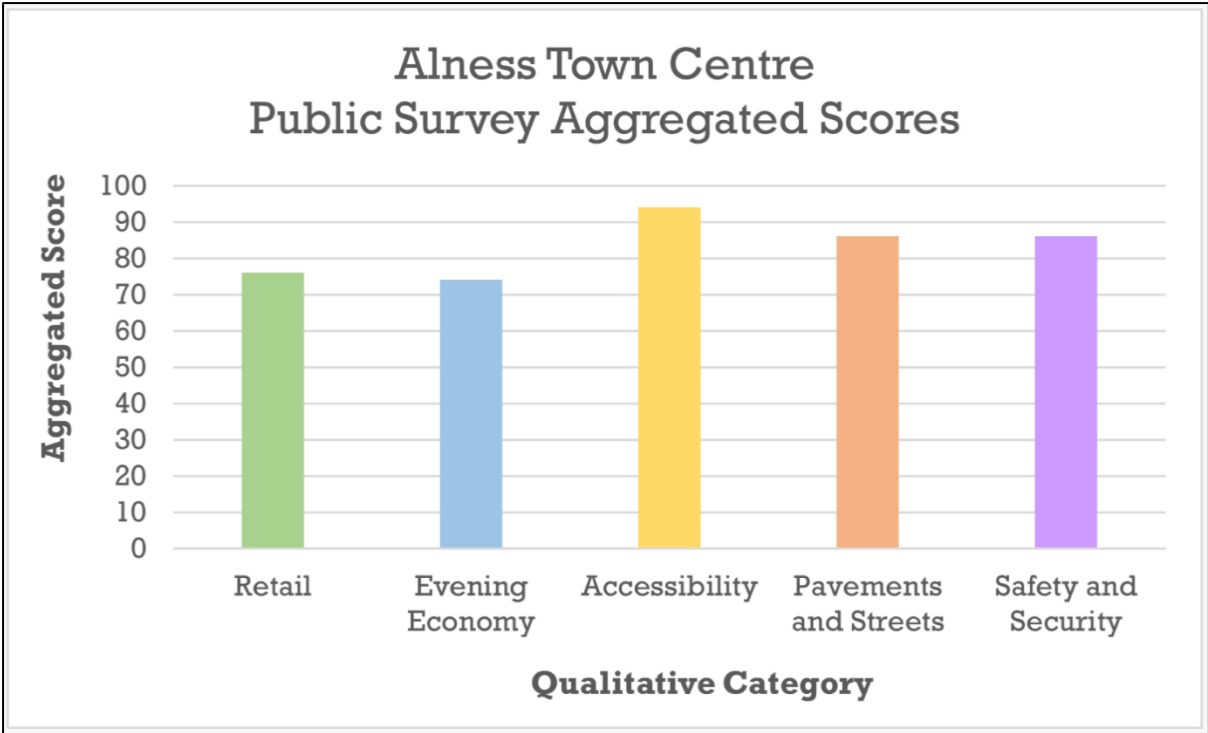
[Scottish Planning Policy](#) (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions in Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should “be prepared collaboratively with... the local community” with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.

The results of the public survey are displayed to the right. The majority of responses were either 'Very Good' or 'Good' for all qualitative categories. There were no 'Very Poor' responses and only a few 'Poor' scores were given for the categories 'Evening Economy' and 'Retail'.



An aggregated score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap which can be accessed [here](#).

In Alness town centre, 'Accessibility' scored the highest out of the five categories with 94 out of a possible 100. Next, both 'Pavements and Streets' and 'Safety and Security' scored 86, 'Retail' scored 76 and 'Evening Economy' scored 74.



Alness scored 416 out of a possible total of 500, giving the town centre an 83.2% public satisfaction rating. This total score was calculated to give an indication of the town’s overall performance and allows for a critical, comparative evaluation of these scores which have been given by active users of the town centre.

14.18 Word Cloud



An open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a ‘word cloud’. The diagram above highlights how Alness town centre is perceived by

the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general state of Alness town centre. Perceptions of the town centre are generally positive with the stand-out words being 'friendly', 'flowers' and 'community'. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre's appeal.

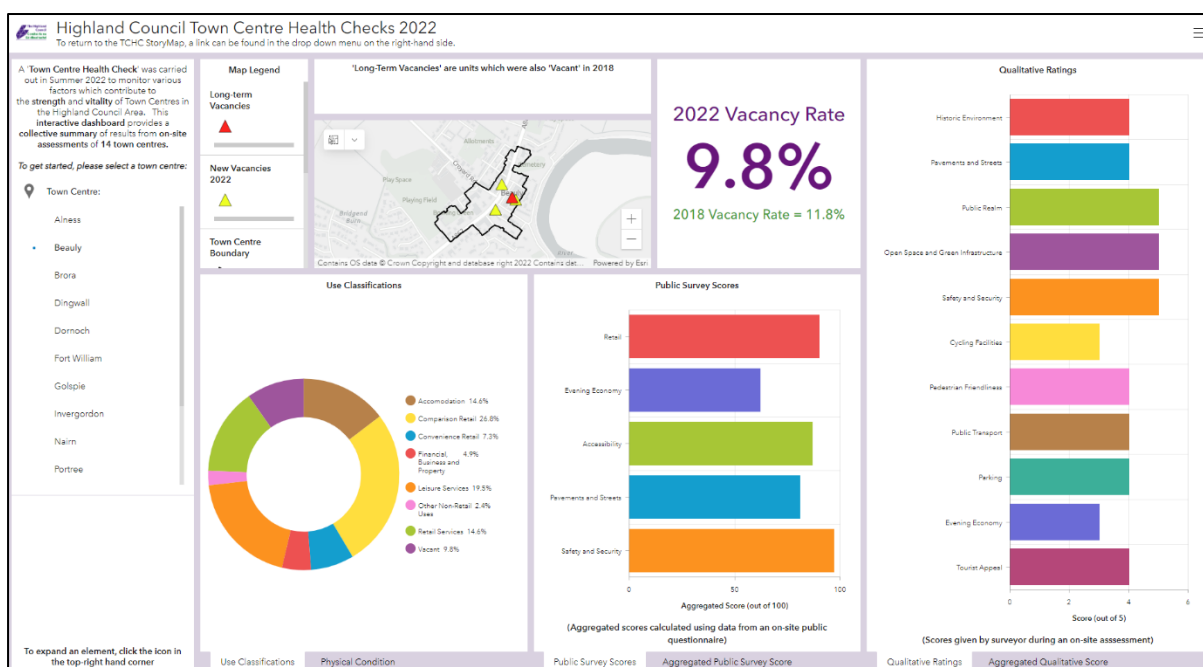
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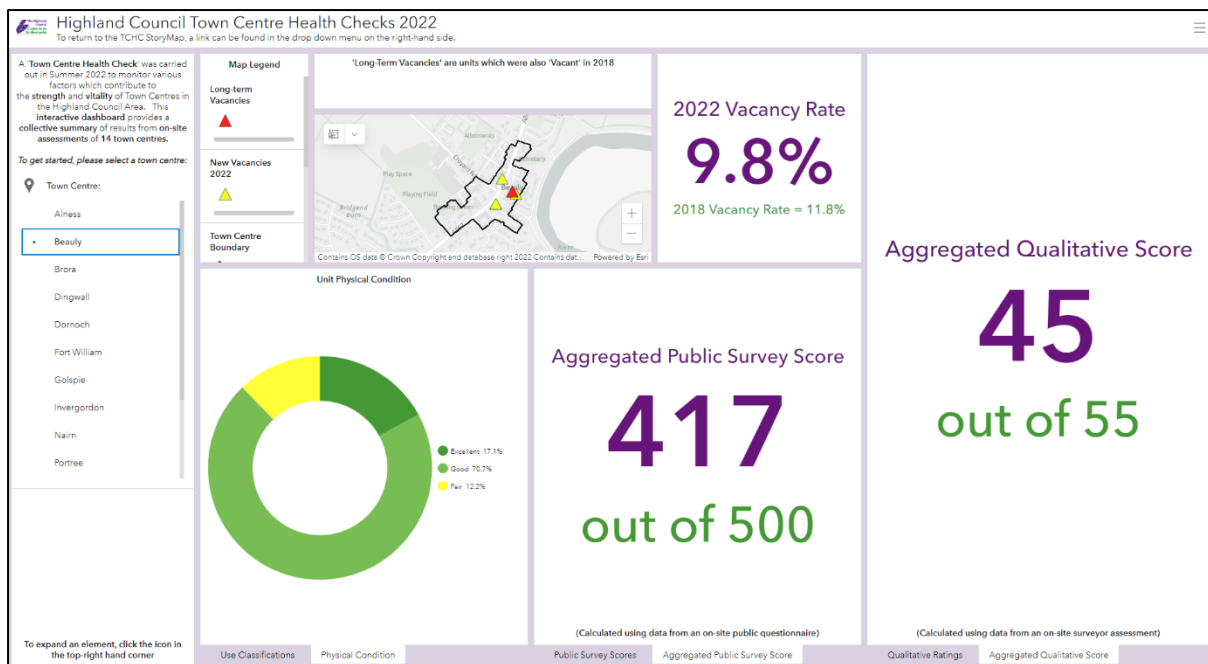
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f79e19975e084b18bdbff88bf757c67c?item=2>

15.1 Introduction

A winner of ‘Scotland in Bloom’, Beauly is a key Highland settlement located just a 20 minute drive West of Inverness. The village’s name is thought to originate from the French translation of ‘beau lieu’ which means ‘beautiful place’. Served by a railway station, Beauly is historically linked to the local Priory, an attraction which is free to visit and has become a popular tourist hot-spot in recent years, due to its associations with the ‘Outlander’ books/television series.

15.2 Dashboard





15.3 Review

- Beaully can be considered one of the healthier town centres which have been assessed as part of this study
- Vacancy rates have decreased from 11.8% in 2018 to 9.8% in 2022
- The town scores highly against most of the qualitative indicators with an aggregated score of 45 out of 55
- 5/5 scores were given for Public Realm, Public Transport, Open Space and Green Infrastructure and Safety and Security
- Public toilets are provided in Beaully town centre
- 107 pedestrians were counted on Beaully High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm
- In the public survey, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with an aggregated score of 97 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Retail' scored 90, 'Accessibility' scored 87, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 81 and 'Evening Economy' scored 62
- The town centre scored 417 out of a possible total of 500, giving Beaully an 83.4% public satisfaction rating

15.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

15.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes seven additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Beaulys's 41 units, 14 (34.1%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 27 (65.9%) have not.

15.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 41 retail/business units in Beaulys town centre, of which:

- 11 were Comparison Retail
- 8 were Leisure Services
- 6 were Retail Services
- 4 were Vacant
- 3 were Convenience Retail
- 6 were Accommodation
- 2 were Financial, Business and Property
- 1 was Other Non-Retail Uses

15.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

15.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Beaulys town centre is detailed below:

- 12 units are independent and local retailers
- 2 units are national retailers

15.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

15.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

15.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

15.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

15.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Beaulieu town centre is 9.8% as of 2022, a decrease from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 11.8%. Although the number of vacant units is the same, due to there being 7 additional units that were included in the 2022 audit, the vacancy rate in Beaulieu has decreased.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

3 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 1 unit has remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is also important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 3 units which were vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

15.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

Results show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Fair' (50%) or 'Good' (50%) condition, which indicates that they are unlikely to detract from the surrounding streetscape in Beaulieu town centre as they are, for the most part, of good structural quality.

15.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 4/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

Beaulieu's historic environment appeared to be, generally, in good condition. The Priory offers some historic interest, within the town centre; it is important that this structure is well-maintained due to its popularity with tourists and cultural significance with locals

Pavements and Streets - 4/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

Although the pavements were clean and free of litter at the time of visit, some cracks and uneven surfaces were noted. Uneven surfaces can be hazardous for pedestrians, particularly those who are disabled or elderly, hence why it is important for these to be maintained and up-kept to high standards. Overall, however, the pavements and streets in Beaulieu town centre were in good condition.

Public Realm - 5/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

Beaulieu town centre is home to a number of public art in the form of statues and memorial structures; including a fountain and the old market cross. Additionally, the centre has sufficient provision of street furniture, including benches and bins, which were in good condition and appeared to be well-maintained.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 4/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

Multiple signposts offering directions to various spots around the town were noted on-site; these were easy to read and well distributed throughout. Although there are no designated crossing points in the main car park, a traffic-controlled crossing could be found on the main road. There was also a general ease of movement throughout and this was reflected in the public responses to the question about accessibility in the survey.

Public Transport - 5/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

The town centre appears well connected with surrounding areas in the Highlands. The town is supported by a regular bus service and train station which is located a short distance from the town centre. There are a sufficient number of bus stops throughout the town centre, all of which were in relatively good condition.

Parking - 4/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

There seemed to be ample parking available throughout Beaulieu town centre. Free parking is available in the village square, with a couple of additional spaces located along the High Street. However, it was noted by locals can be difficult to park during peak times, and there should be more of an effort to encourage transport strategies, such as car sharing, to lessen these pressures.

Cycling Facilities - 3/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

No dedicated cycle lanes were noted on the main road going through the centre, nor the side roads. This could prove a hazard in terms of safety and does not accommodate active travel in the town centre. There was an abundance of cycling facilities located around the small centre however, which was positive to see. Additionally, the town is part of a local cycle route.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 5/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

There was an abundance of flower baskets and beds in bloom at the time of visit, as well as tree plantings which line the village square. The greenspace outside the Priory wall appeared well-maintained and the graveyard grounds were being tended to at the time of visit.

Tourist Appeal - 4/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

There is a selection of tourist-oriented retail offer available in Beaulieu. Additionally, the historic Priory offers some historical interest for visitors. There is ample accommodation available and a public map was found on the information board located in the central village square.

Evening Economy - 3/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The village is home to a couple of hotels with bars/restaurants and some additional restaurants can be found along the High Street; however, there appears to be a lack of any significant evening economy. This perception was reflected in the results of the public survey.

Safety and Security - 5/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety and security in Beaulieu town centre due to CCTV presence, well-lit streets, passive policing from upstairs residential properties and an evening economy which ensured that people were on the streets after 6pm. A sense of safety and security was also reflected in the public survey scores.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

15.16 Public Toilets

There are Public Toilets located in Beaulieu's town centre. These are accessible, relatively well-signposted and appeared to be generally well-maintained when assessed on-site. However, there were comments made in the public survey which stated that these needed to be improved.

15.17 Footfall

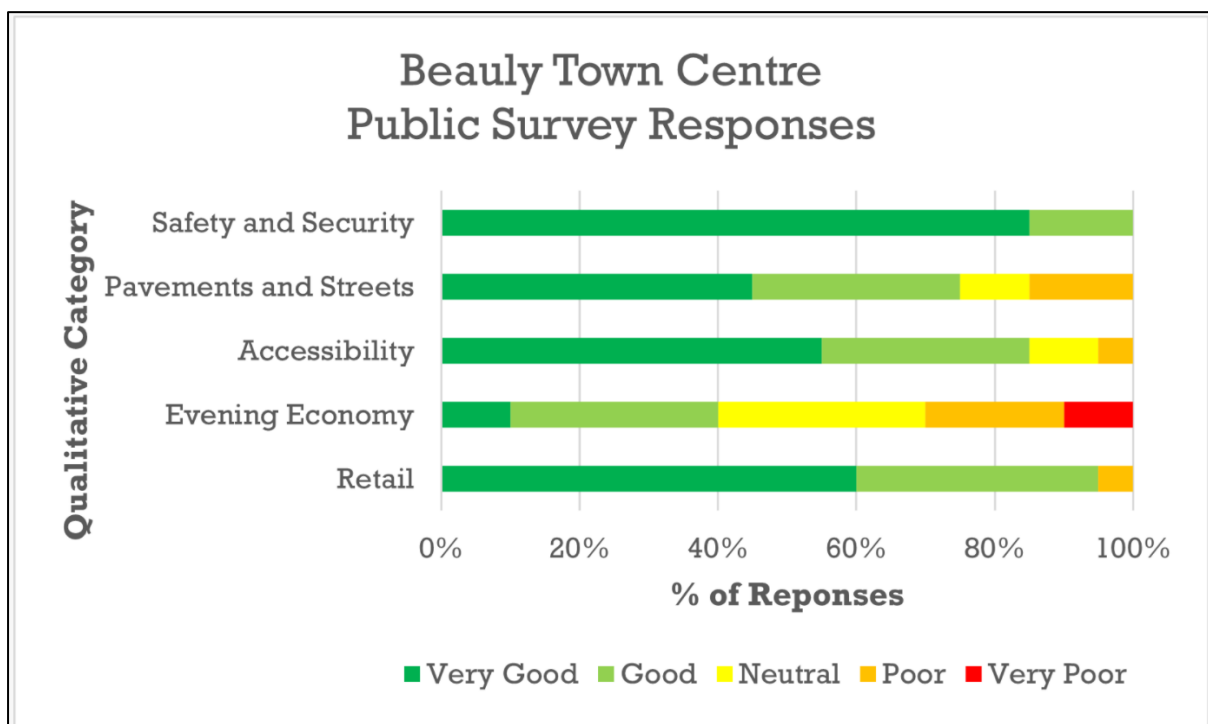
Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre. Beaulieu footfall results highlight that a total of 107 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period. As this figure is comparable to other towns of a similar size and nature, it is an indicator of good town centre health.

In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town’s population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

15.18 Public Perceptions

[Scottish Planning Policy](#) (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions in Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should “be prepared collaboratively with... the local community” with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.

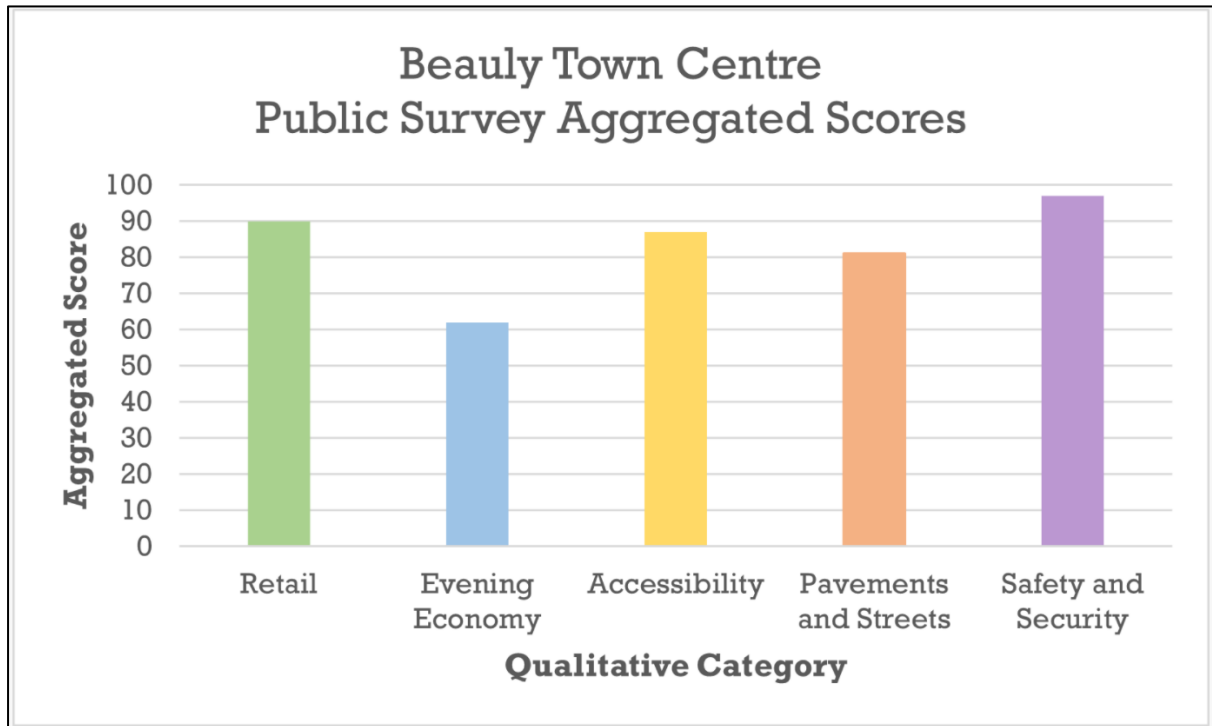
The results of the public survey are included below. As we can see, there are a mix of responses for all qualitative categories. Most responses were 'Very Good' for both Retail and Safety and Security; perceptions of the Pavements and Streets and Accessibility were mixed but generally good, whilst the Evening Economy received a fairly divided response. With only a few 'Very Good' and a couple 'Very Poor' responses, it is clear that Beaully's evening economy is not the strongest, in the eyes of the public.



To further quantify these results, an overall score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Executive Summary which can be accessed here. When we look at these aggregated scores, we can see that in Beaully town centre, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 97 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Retail' scored 90,

'Accessibility' scored 87, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 81 and 'Evening Economy' scored 62.

Beaulieu scored 417 out of a possible total of 500, giving the town centre an 83.4% public satisfaction rating. This total score was calculated to give an indication of the town's overall performance and allows for a critical, comparative evaluation of these scores which have been given by active users of the town centre.



15.19 Word Cloud



In addition to these quantitative measures, an open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a 'word cloud'. The diagram above highlights how Beauly town centre is perceived by the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general state of Beauly town centre. As we can see from this feedback, perceptions of the town centre are generally positive with the stand-out words being 'friendly', 'lovely' and 'welcoming'. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre's appeal.

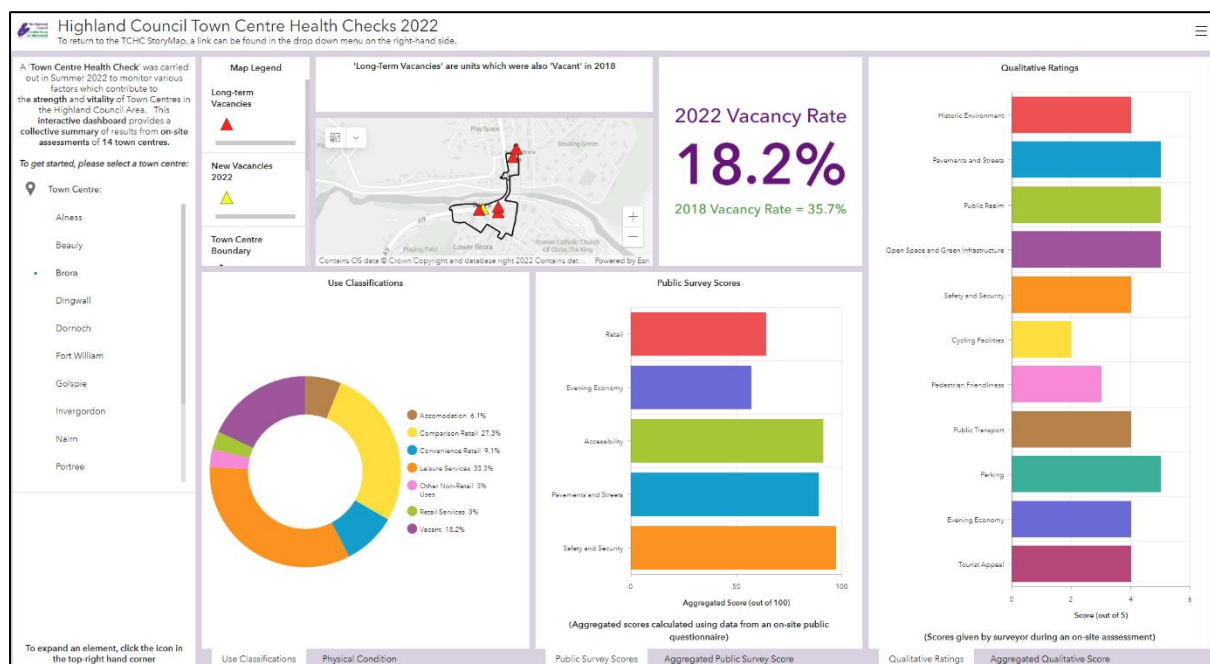
16 Brora

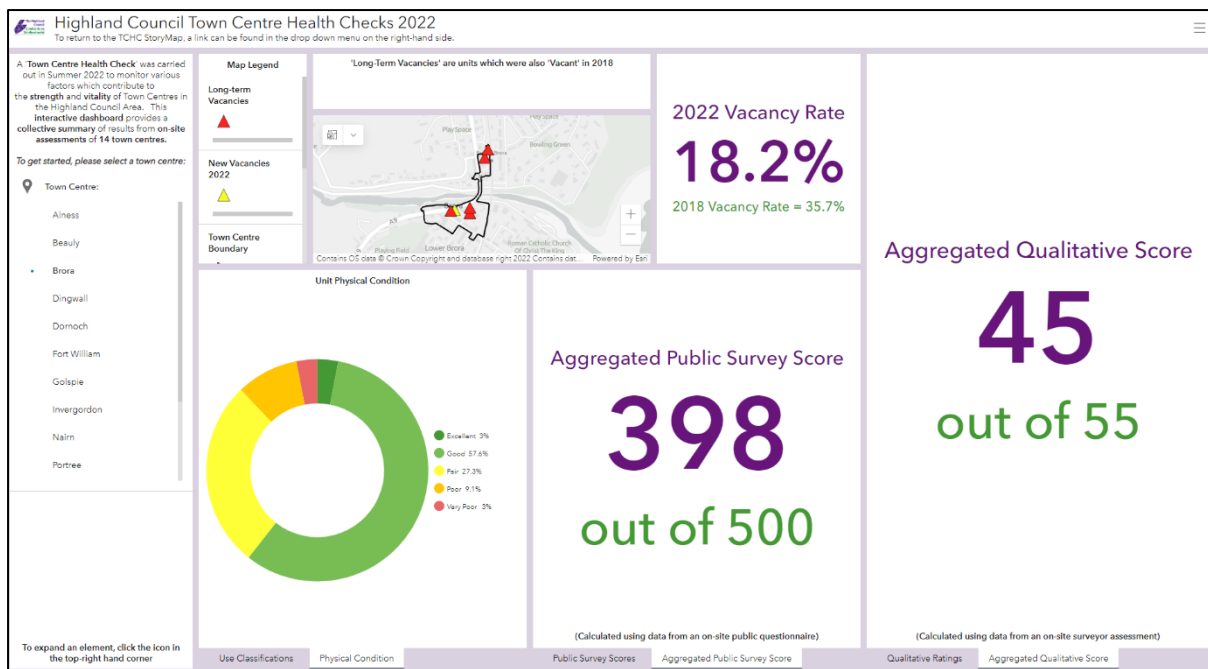
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f79e19975e084b18bdbff88bf757c67c?item=3>

16.1 Introduction

Brora is a small village located on the popular North Coast 500 route and can be accessed via the A9, or railway. It was once the home to the Northernmost colliery in Scotland and stone from the nearby Clynesh quarry was used in the construction of London Bridge and Dunrobin Castle. The village has a long industrial history and was once known as the 'Industrial Capital of the North'.

16.2 Dashboard





16.3 Review

- Brora's town centre health check assessment presented fairly mixed results
- Vacancy rates have decreased significantly from 35.7% in 2018 to 18.2% in 2022
- The town scored well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 45 out of 55
- 5/5 scores were given for Public Realm, Parking and Open Space and Green Infrastructure
- It scored less well for Cycling Facilities and Pedestrian Friendliness, as it did in 2018, suggesting no improvements have been made
- Public toilets are provided in Brora town centre
- 62 pedestrians were counted on Brora's High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm
- In the public survey, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 97 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 91, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 89, 'Retail' scored 64 and 'Evening Economy' scored 57
- The town centre scored 398 out of a possible total of 500, giving Brora a 79.6% public satisfaction rating

16.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

16.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 5 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Brora's 33 units, 16 (48.5%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 17 (51.5%) have not.

16.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 41 retail/business units in Beaully town centre, of which:

- 11 were Comparison Retail
- 9 were Leisure Services
- 6 were Vacant
- 3 were Convenience Retail
- 2 were Accommodation
- 1 were Retail Services
- 1 was Other Non-Retail Uses
- 0 were Financial, Business and Property

16.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

16.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Brora town centre is detailed below:

- 10 units are independent and local retailers
- 2 units are national retailers

16.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

16.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

16.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

16.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

16.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Brora town centre is 18.2% as of 2022; a decrease from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 35.7%. The map to the right highlights that 1 new vacant unit was identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 5 units have remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership.

As we can see, 5 units which were Vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

16.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

The recorded physical condition of all vacant units in Brora town centre show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Fair' (33.3%), 'Poor' (50%) or 'Very Poor' (16.7%) condition, which indicates that they may detract from the surrounding streetscape in Brora town centre due to neglect or a lack of maintenance.

16.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 4/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

Brora's town centre has a historic character which appeared to be well maintained. Few structures, or units, stood out as having a negative impact on the surrounding townscape.

Pavements and Streets - 5/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

Brora's pavements and streets were generally clean, with minimal litter and little/no cracks found on-site. Some weeds were noted, however, particularly in side streets, but these did not detract from the overall appearance.

Public Realm - 5/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

There was a number of benches, statues and number of bins noted on-site. Public art also featured at one end of the High St which was produced by local children in the community.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 3/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

There were no traffic-controlled pedestrian crossings across the main roads in the town centre, which may be hazardous for pedestrians. There were some signs distributed around the centre, however, which offered an ease of navigation for both locals and tourists.

Public Transport - 5/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

Brora is relatively well-connected to other Highland towns with both a rail service and bus routes throughout. However, due to its remote-ness, the town's location may have an impact on the frequency of services provided.

Parking - 5/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

There is plentiful free parking available in Brora town centre, electric vehicle charging stations were also noted on site.

Cycling Facilities - 2/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

Only one, very small bike storage facility was noted outside the Hotel. The main road also lacked a dedicated cycle lane, meaning cyclists have to share the A9 with motorised traffic, which may be hazardous.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 5/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

There were a number of flower baskets in bloom at time of visit. The river and woodland running through the town centre offered a sense of open, green space.

Tourist Appeal - 4/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

There was ample provision of town maps, historical information boards, tourist-oriented retail and a hotel, for accommodation, in the town centre. The local heritage centre is also located within close proximity to the town centre which is likely to be appealing for tourists.

Evening Economy - 4/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

For the size of the town, there is a decent selection of evening social offer. A hotel with a public bar, hot food takeaways and a restaurant was noted on-site.

Safety and Security - 4/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

Despite a lack of CCTV, there was a general sense of good safety and security throughout Brora town centre. Most streets appeared well-lit and some passive policing from overlooking residential properties was noted.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

16.16 Public Toilets

There are Public Toilets located to the Southern end of Brora's town centre. These are accessible, relatively well-signposted and appeared to be generally well-maintained when assessed on-site.

16.17 Footfall

Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre.

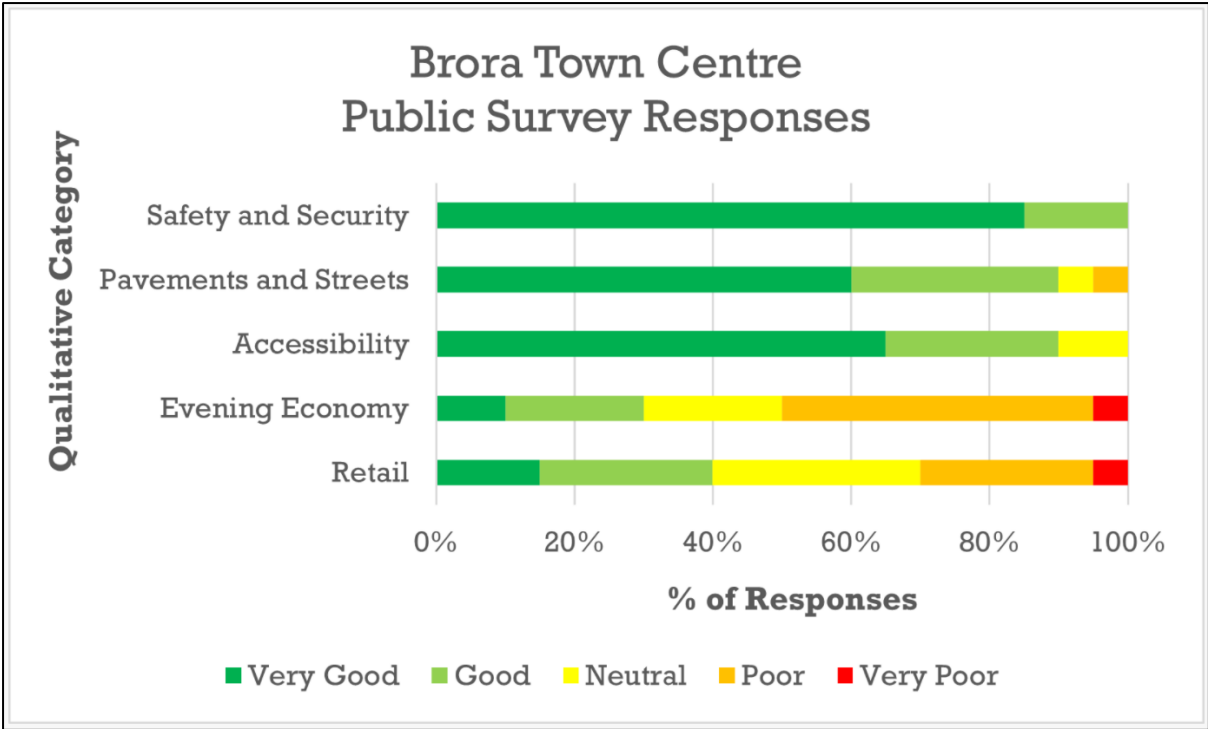
Brora footfall results highlight that a total of 62 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period. As this figure is as expected, although a little low given the size of the town, it is an indicator of good town centre health.

In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town's population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

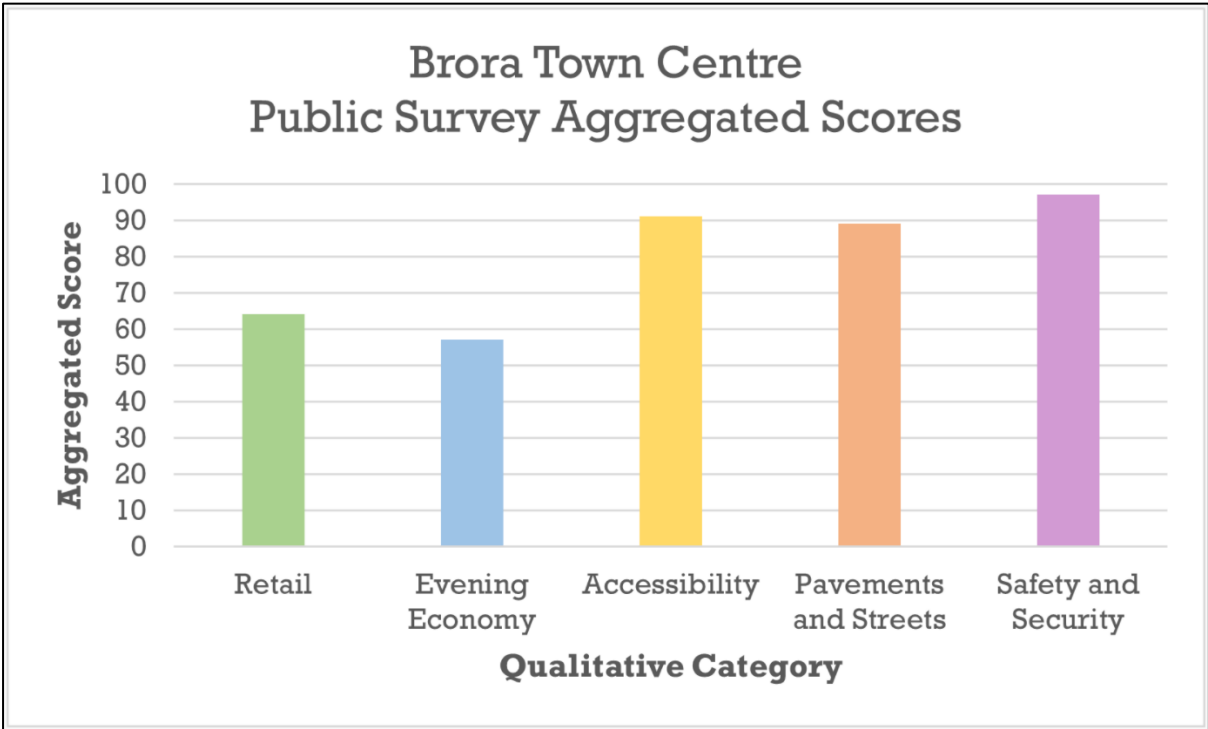
16.18 Public Perceptions

[Scottish Planning Policy](#) (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions in Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should "be prepared collaboratively with... the local community" with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.

The results of the public survey are included below. As we can see, there are a mix of responses for most of the qualitative categories. Most responses were 'Very Good' for Safety and Security, perceptions of the Pavements and Streets and Accessibility were mixed but generally good, whilst both Retail and the Evening Economy received a fairly divided response. With the majority of perceptions being 'Poor', it is clear that Brora's retail and evening economy offer is not the strongest, in the eyes of the public.



To further quantify these results, an overall score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap which can be accessed [here](#). When we look at these aggregated scores, we can see that in Brora town centre, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 97 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 91, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 89, 'Retail' scored 64 and 'Evening Economy' scored 57.



Brora scored 398 out of a possible total of 500, giving the town centre a 79.6% public satisfaction rating. This total score was calculated to give an indication of the town's overall

performance and allows for a critical, comparative evaluation of these scores which have been given by active users of the town centre.

16.19 Word Cloud

In addition to these quantitative measures, an open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a 'word cloud'. The diagram above highlights how Brora town centre is perceived by the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general state of Brora town centre. As we can see from this feedback, perceptions of the town centre are generally positive with the stand-out words being 'friendly', 'beautiful' and 'community'. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre's appeal.



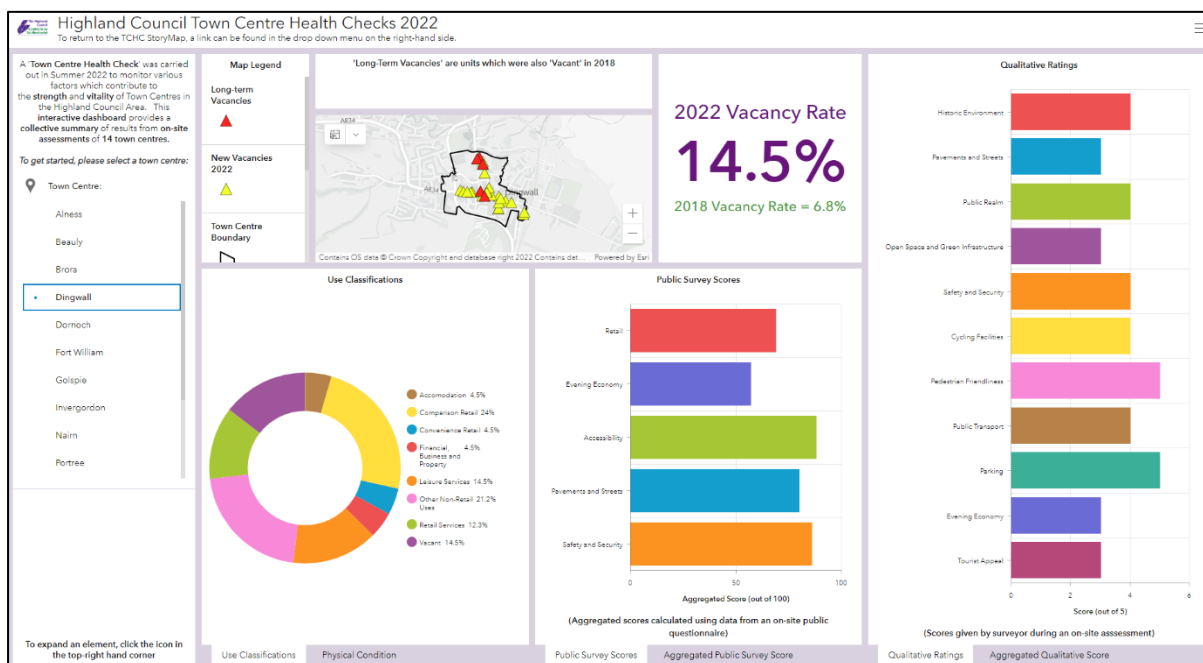
17 Dingwall

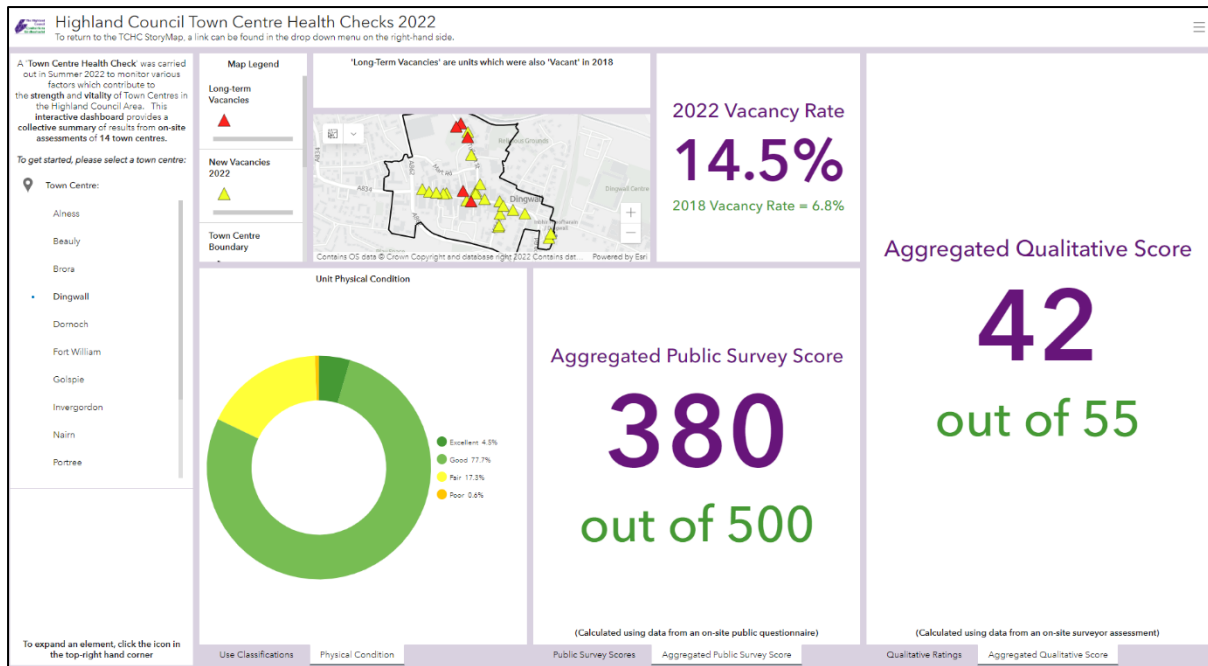
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f79e19975e084b18bdbff88bf757c67c?item=4>

17.1 Introduction

Dingwall is one of the larger towns in Ross-shire and serves as the administrative centre for the surrounding areas in terms of education, retail, essential services and leisure facilities. The town has a long history of commercial farming trade and has expanded significantly in recent years due to local development and investment. Dingwall is also home to several buildings of historical significance, such as the Town House and Museum; both of which are located in the town's centre and provide socio-cultural interest to both locals and visitors.

17.2 Dashboard





17.3 Review

- Dingwall's town centre health check assessment presented fairly mixed results
- Vacancy rates have increased from 6.8% in 2018 to 14.5% in 2022
- The town scored relatively well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 42 out of 55
- 5/5 scores were given for Pedestrian Friendliness and Parking
- Public toilets are provided in Dingwall town centre
- 182 pedestrians were counted on Dingwall's High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm
- In the public survey, 'Accessibility' scored the highest out of the five categories with 88 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Safety and Security' scored 86, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 80, 'Retail' scored 69 and 'Evening Economy' scored 57
- The town centre scored 380 out of a possible total of 500, giving Dingwall a 76% public satisfaction rating

17.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

17.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 17 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Dingwalls's 179 units, 60 (33.5%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 119 (66.5%) have not.

17.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 179 retail/business units in Dingwall town centre, of which:

- 43 were Comparison Retail
- 38 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 26 were Leisure Services
- 26 were Vacant
- 22 were Retail Services
- 8 were Convenience Retail
- 8 were Accommodation
- 8 were Financial, Business and Property

17.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

17.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Dingwall town centre is detailed below:

- 40 units are independent and local retailers
- 11 units are national retailers

17.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

17.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

17.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

17.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

17.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Dingwall town centre is 14.5% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 6.8%. This increased rate may be due to a declining retail market and/or lack of appeal for businesses to set up shop in the town centre.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

21 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 5 units have remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

6 units which were Vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

17.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

The recorded physical condition of all vacant units in Dingwall town centre show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Good (46.2%), 'Fair' (50%) or 'Poor' (3.8%) condition, which indicates that they may detract from the surrounding streetscape in Dingwall town centre due to neglect or a lack of maintenance.

17.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 4/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

Dingwall's historic environment is generally in good condition, with many buildings being well-maintained and only some being in a state of decay. The town house and museum in particular offer some historic appeal for both locals and tourists.

Pavements and Streets - 3/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

The pavements and streets in Dingwall's town centre were generally kept free from weeds and clutter, however some side streets were visibly neglected. There were some cracks and potholes noted on-site and some walls were overgrown with moss.

Public Realm - 4/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

Street furniture is distributed throughout Dingwall town centre and appears in generally good condition. Public art was noted in the form of statues and monuments which offered visual interest.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 5/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

The town centre was seen to be very accessible, with few barriers for pedestrians. There has been clear efforts to reduce traffic through pedestrianisation and signposts were distributed throughout.

Public Transport - 4/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

Dingwall is well connected in terms of public transport with regular rail and bus services; bus stops are relatively low in numbers, however. Designated taxi ranks were also noted on-site.

Parking - 5/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

Parking was generous in Dingwall town centre. Free parking was available and a large car park was noted at the superstore located just a short distance from the High Street. Although on-street parking was subject to some restrictions, other parking was available throughout.

Cycling Facilities - 4/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

Bike tying posts were distributed throughout the town centre, however no dedicated storage was noted. Despite the town being on National Route 1, this was poorly signposted and there were no dedicated cycle lanes.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 3/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

Despite there not being any open space in the central area of the town centre, flower baskets and greenery was still distributed throughout. There is also a playpark located a short distance from the centre.

Tourist Appeal - 3/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

There were maps of Dingwall town centre on an information board as well as multiple statues and monuments throughout which could offer some interest. Dingwall museum is also a visitor attraction; however, there was a lack of tourist-oriented retail.

Evening Economy - 3/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The presence of an evening economy appeared to be somewhat lacking in Dingwall's town centre. This was also reflected through the public perceptions of the evening economy in the questionnaire. However, there were some restaurants and public bars noted on site.

Safety and Security - 4/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety and security in Dingwall town centre; the High Street is comprehensively covered by CCTV and there is a significant residential population. However, some alleyways could be deemed unsafe at night due to a lack of street lighting and narrow walkways.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

17.16 Public Toilets

There are Public Toilets located to the Southern end of Dingwall's town centre. These are accessible, relatively well-signposted and appeared to be generally well-maintained when assessed on-site.

17.17 Footfall

Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre.

Dingwall footfall results highlight that a total of 182 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period. As this figure is as expected, although a little low given the size of the town, it is an indicator of good town centre health.

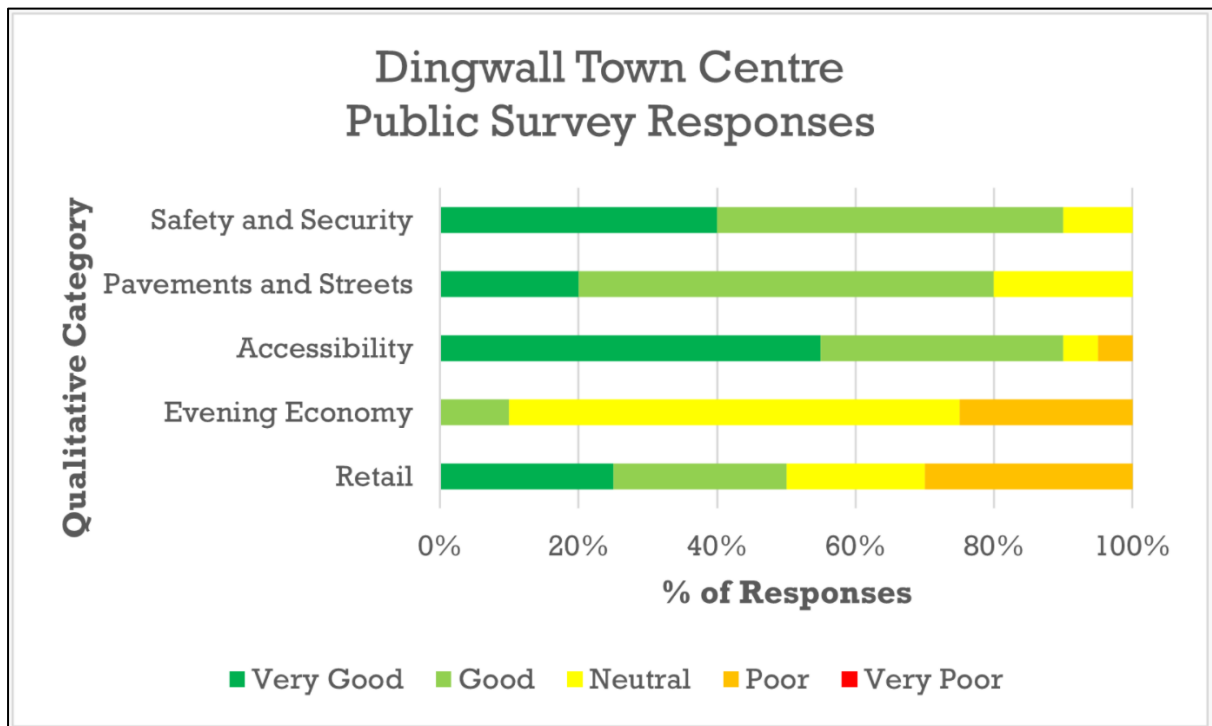
In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town's population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

17.18 Public Perceptions

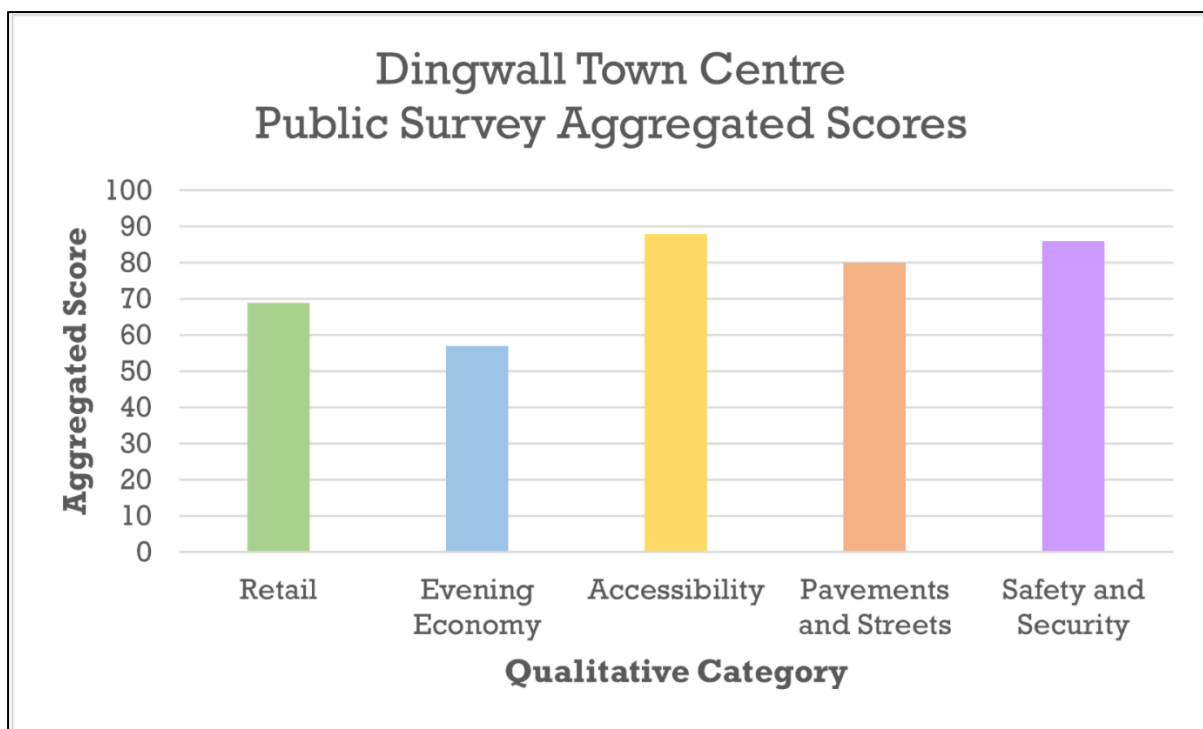
[Scottish Planning Policy](#) (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions in Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should "be prepared collaboratively with... the local community" with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of

engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.

The results of the public survey are displayed below. As we can see, there are a mix of responses for most of the qualitative categories. Most responses were 'Very Good' or 'Good' for Safety and Security, perceptions of the Pavements and Streets and Accessibility were mixed but generally good, whilst both Retail and the Evening Economy received a fairly divided response. With the majority of perceptions being 'Fair', it is clear that Dingwall's retail and evening economy offer is not the strongest, in the eyes of the public.



To further quantify these results, an overall score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap which can be accessed [here](#). When we look at these aggregated scores, we can see that in Dingwall town centre, 'Accessibility' scored the highest out of the five categories with 88 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Safety and Security' scored 86, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 80, 'Retail' scored 69 and 'Evening Economy' scored 57.



Dingwall scored 380 out of a possible total of 500, giving the town centre a 76% public satisfaction rating. This total score was calculated to give an indication of the town’s overall performance and allows for a critical, comparative evaluation of these scores which have been given by active users of the town centre.

17.19 Word Cloud

In addition to these quantitative measures, an open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a ‘word cloud’. The diagram above highlights how Dingwall town centre is perceived by the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general state of Dingwall town centre. As we can see from this feedback, perceptions of the town centre are fairly mixed with the stand-out words being ‘nice’ and ‘tired’. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre’s appeal.



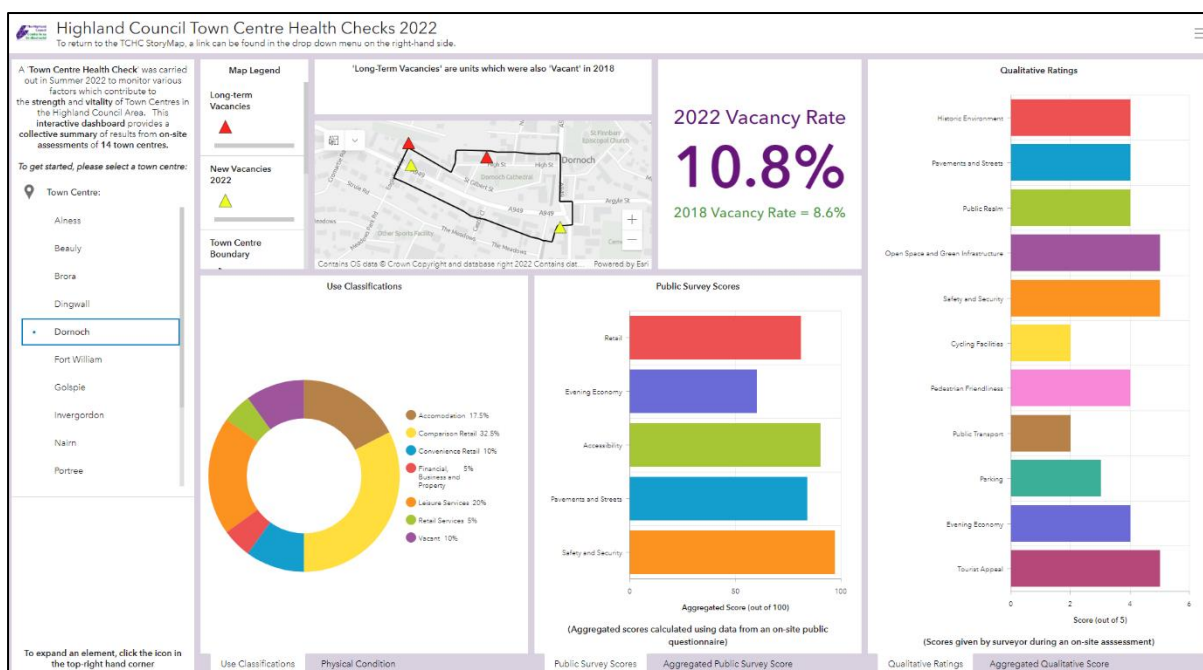
18 Dornoch

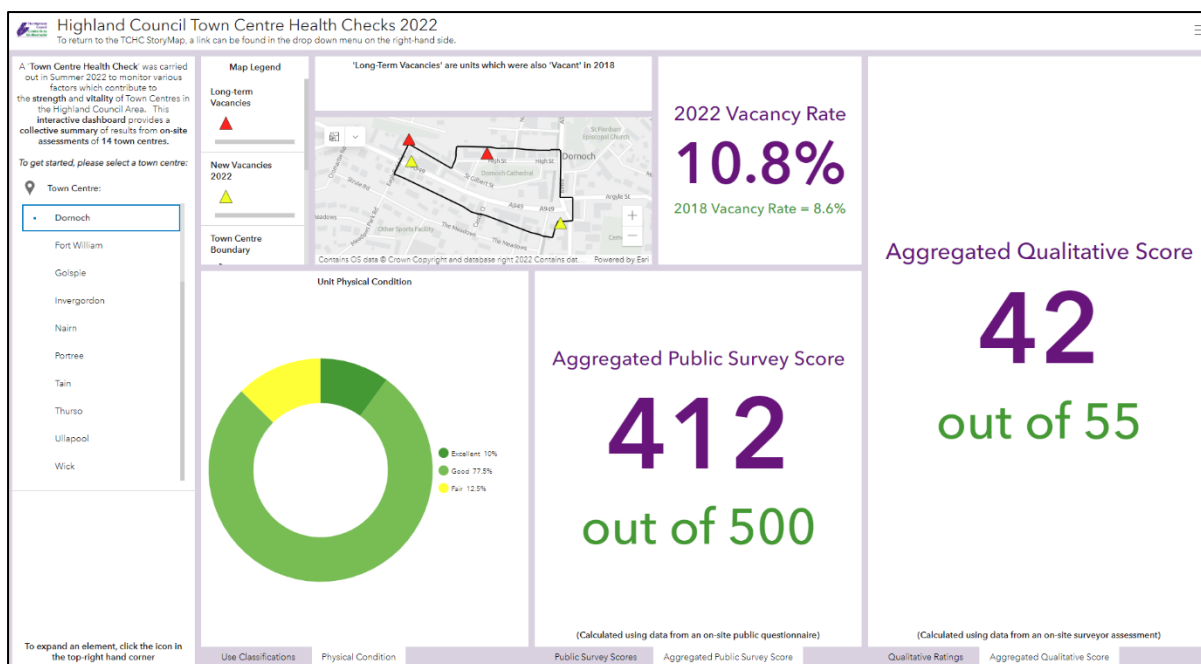
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f79e19975e084b18bdbff88bf757c67c?item=5>

18.1 Introduction

Dornoch’s name is derived from the Gaelic for ‘pebbly place’ and lies on the North-East Highland coast where it’s located just a short distance from award-winning sandy beaches and the Dornoch Firth. The town is reputable for its historic environment, namely Dornoch Cathedral and Dornoch Castle, which are popular tourist hotspots and important contributors to the local economy. Dornoch is also renowned for being where the last witch in Scotland was burnt in 1722; an act that is commemorated by the Witch’s Stone. The town was granted Fairtrade status in 2005 and has since continued to support the cause.

18.2 Dashboard





18.3 Review

- Dornoch can be considered one of the healthier town centres which have been assessed as part of this study
- Vacancy rates have increased from 8.6% in 2018 to 10.8% in 2022
- The town scored relatively well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 42 out of 55
- 5/5 scores were given for Open Space and Green Infrastructure, Tourist Appeal and Safety and Security
- Public toilets are provided in Dornoch town centre
- 87 pedestrians were counted on Dornoch's High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm
- In the public survey, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 97 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 90, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 84, 'Retail' scored 81 and 'Evening Economy' scored 60
- The town centre scored 412 out of a possible total of 500, giving Dornoch an 82.4% public satisfaction rating

18.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

18.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 2 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Dornoch's 37 units, 12 (32.4%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 25 (67.6%) have not.

18.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 37 retail/business units in Dornoch town centre, of which:

- 13 were Comparison Retail
- 6 were Leisure Services
- 6 were Accommodation
- 4 were Convenience Retail
- 4 were Vacant
- 2 were Retail Services
- 2 were Financial, Business and Property
- 0 were Other Non-Retail Uses

18.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

18.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Dornoch town centre is detailed below:

- 18 units are independent and local retailers

- 1 unit are national retailers

18.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

18.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

18.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

18.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

18.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Dornoch town centre is 10.8% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 8.6%. This increased rate may be due to a declining retail market and/or lack of appeal for businesses to set up shop in the town centre.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

2 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 2 units have remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

1 unit which was Vacant in 2018, is now occupied as of 2022.

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

18.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

The recorded physical condition of all vacant units in Dingwall town centre show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Good (50%) or 'Poor' (50%) condition which indicates that they may detract from the surrounding streetscape.

18.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 4/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

Dornoch town centre's historic environment appeared to be well-maintained when assessed on-site. The Cathedral, Castle and other historical buildings are significant tourist hotspots and are culturally important for locals and so it is essential that these remain of high standard.

Pavements and Streets - 4/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

The pavements and streets appeared well maintained and kept clean of litter and weeds. However, there were a few cracks in the pavement and potholes in the roads that were noted on site.

Public Realm - 4/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

Although public art was slightly lacking, with only one monument being present in the town centre, this was offset by the number and condition of street furniture which was distributed around. There appeared to be sufficient benches and bins which were in good condition.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 4/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

There was a number of signs distributed around the town centre, as well as public maps on information boards. Paths were generally a good width; however, there were a few points

(i.e. the junction of Castle Street and Church Street) which appeared to be difficult for pedestrians to cross across the busy roads.

Public Transport - 2/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

Apart from tourist coaches and bus tours, no bus stops nor buses were seen during the on-site visit. Additionally, the town lacks a railway link and, therefore, the town may be difficult for some to access due to a lack of public transport.

Parking - 3/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

There was a lack of designated parking in the town centre with many users having to park further afield; albeit these are still within close proximity to the town centre.

Cycling Facilities - 2/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

Bike hire was available in the town centre; yet no cycling facilities were found on-site. There was also a lack of a cycle lane on the main roads, which gave a heightened sense of risk.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 5/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

There was an abundance of flower baskets and beds in bloom at the time of visit. A large area of green space is also located right in the centre of the town, outside the Cathedral.

Tourist Appeal - 5/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

Dornoch was bustling with tourists at the time of the on-site visit which was an indicator of its popularity. There was a number of public maps, some accommodation and attractions, such as the nearby beach, that would appeal to tourists both within, and in close proximity of the town centre.

Evening Economy - 4/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The presence of an evening economy appeared to be lacking in Dornoch's town centre. This was also reflected through the public perceptions of the evening economy in the questionnaire. However, there did appear to be restaurants and the notable Castle Hotel located within the town centre.

Safety and Security - 5/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety throughout Dornoch's town centre with passive policing from overlooking residential properties and a slight evening economy, which ensured people were on the street until late evening. However, there did seem to be a lack of monitored CCTV in the town centre.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

18.16 Public Toilets

There are Public Toilets located to the Southern end of Dornoch's town centre. These are accessible, relatively well-signposted and appeared to be generally well-maintained when assessed on-site.

18.17 Footfall

Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre.

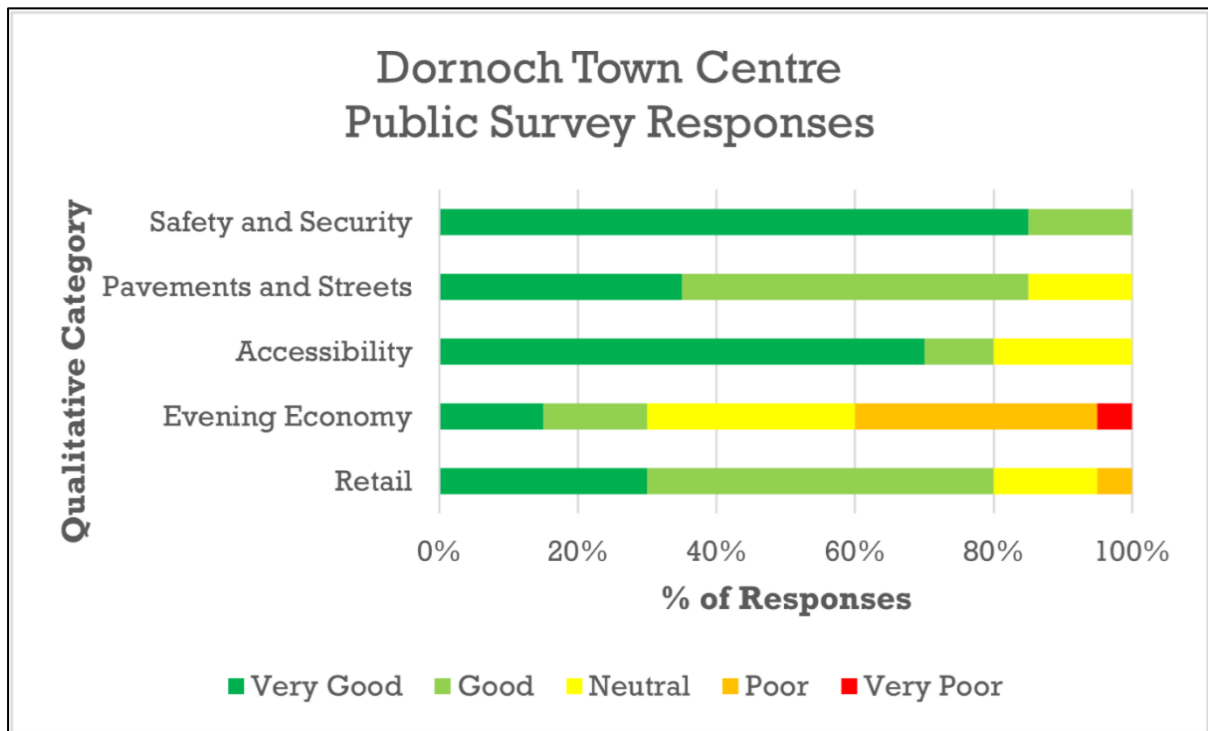
Dornoch footfall results highlight that a total of 87 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period. As this figure is as expected, compared to other towns of a similar size and nature, it is an indicator of good town centre health.

In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town's population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

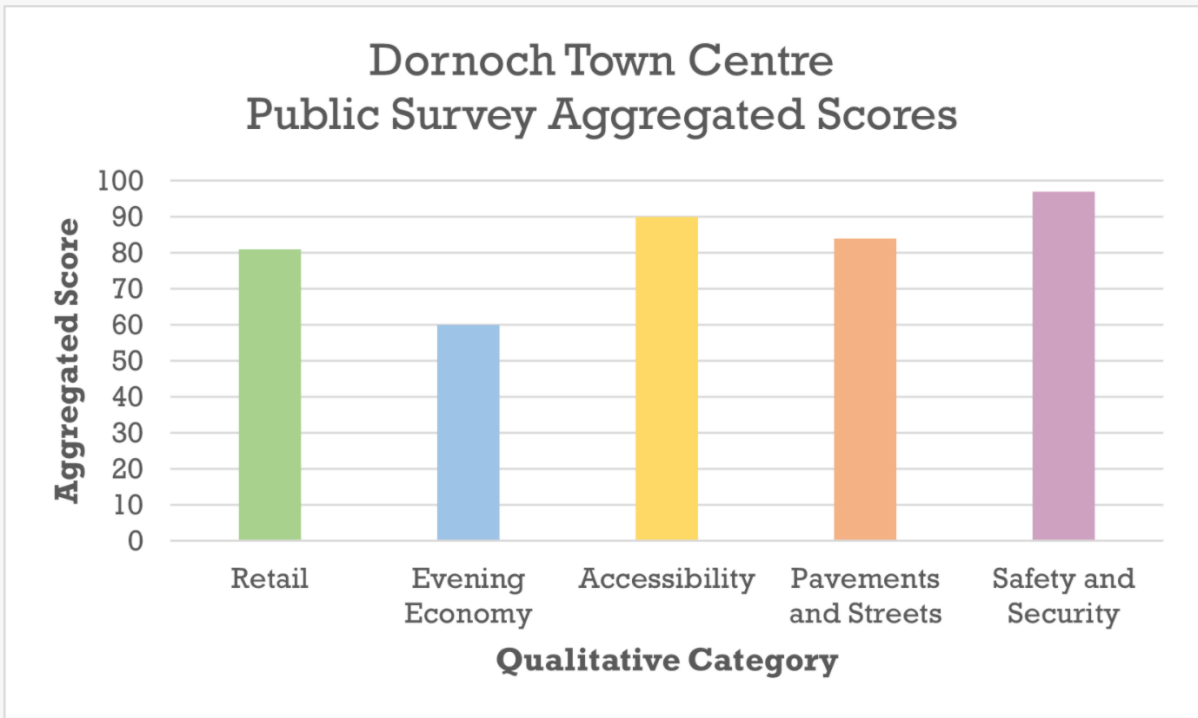
18.18 Public Perceptions

[Scottish Planning Policy](#) (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions in Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should "be prepared collaboratively with... the local community" with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.

The results of the public survey are displayed to the right. As we can see, there are a mix of responses for most of the qualitative categories. Most responses were 'Very Good' for both Safety and Security and Accessibility, perceptions of the Pavements and Streets and Retail were mixed but generally good, whilst the Evening Economy received a fairly divided response. With the majority of perceptions being 'Poor', it is clear that Dornoch's evening social offer is not the strongest, in the eyes of the public.



To further quantify these results, an overall score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap which can be accessed [here](#). When we look at these aggregated scores, we can see that in Dornoch town centre, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 97 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 90, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 84, 'Retail' scored 81 and 'Evening Economy' scored 60.



Dornoch scored 412 out of a possible total of 500, giving the town centre an 82.4% public satisfaction rating. This total score was calculated to give an indication of the town’s overall performance and allows for a critical, comparative evaluation of these scores which have been given by active users of the town centre.

18.19 Word Cloud



In addition to these quantitative measures, an open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a ‘word cloud’. The diagram above

highlights how Dornoch town centre is perceived by the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general state of Dornoch town centre. As we can see from this feedback, perceptions of the town centre are generally positive with the stand-out words being 'tourist', 'quiet' and 'nice'. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre's appeal.

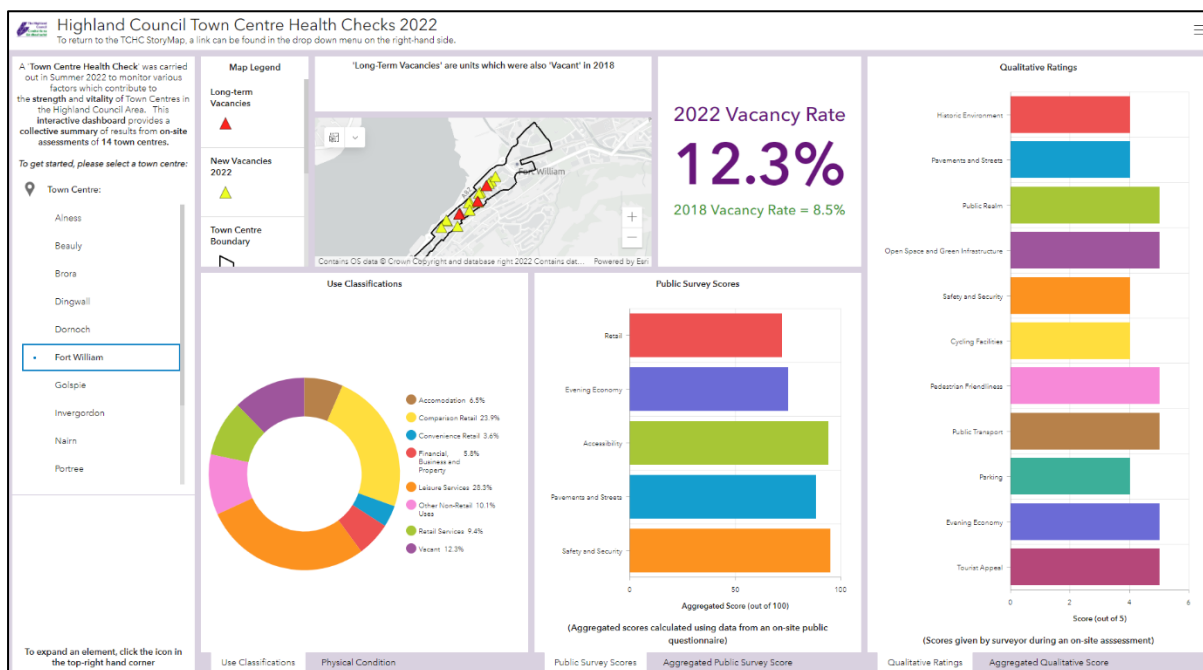
19 Fort William

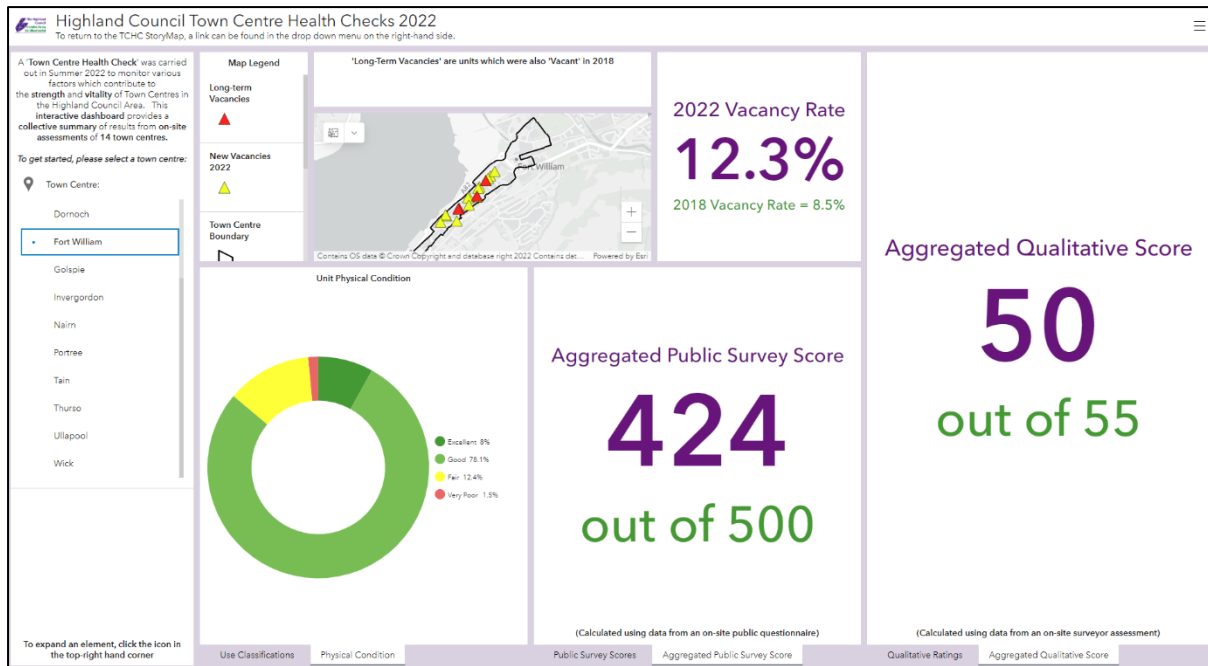
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19.1 Introduction

Fort William is known as the outdoor sports capital in the UK; an indicator of its popularity with locals and tourists alike. The town is home to a number of restaurants, pubs and retail units which contribute to the growing local economy. Although it is most busy in Summer, Fort William also caters to Winter sports which ensures an all-year-round tourist appeal. The town centre is also highly accessible as it is served by reliable and frequent bus and rail links which facilitate its connections with both the Central Belt and Scottish Highlands.

19.2 Dashboard





19.3 Review

- Fort William can be considered one of the healthier town centres which have been assessed as part of this study
- Vacancy rates have increased from 8.5% in 2018 to 12.3% in 2022
- The town scored the highest of all the town centres in the surveyor assessment, with an aggregated score of 50 out of 55
- 5/5 scores were given for Public Realm, Pedestrian Friendliness, Public Transport, Open Space and Green Infrastructure, Tourist Appeal and Evening Economy
- 2 Public toilet facilities are provided in Fort William town centre
- 431 pedestrians were counted on Fort William High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm; the highest footfall count of all the assessed town centres
- In the public survey, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 95 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 94, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 88, 'Evening Economy' scored 75 and 'Retail' scored 72
- The town centre scored 424 out of a possible total of 500, giving Fort William an 84.8% public satisfaction rating; the highest aggregated score of all the assessed town centres

19.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

19.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 8 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Fort William's 138 units, 49 (35.5%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 89 (64.5%) have not.

19.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 138 retail/business units in Fort William town centre, of which:

- 39 were Leisure Services
- 33 were Comparison Retail
- 17 were Vacant
- 14 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 13 were Retail Services
- 9 were Accommodation
- 8 were Financial, Business and Property
- 5 were Convenience Retail

19.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

19.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Fort William town centre is detailed below:

- 21 units are independent and local retailers

- 17 units are national retailers

19.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

19.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

19.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

19.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

19.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Fort William town centre is 12.3%, an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 8.5%. The map to the right highlights that 13 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 4 units have remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as Occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 7 units which were Vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

19.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

The recorded physical condition of all vacant units in Fort William town centre show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Good' (43.8%), Fair (43.8%) or 'Very Poor' (12.5%) condition which indicates that they may detract from the surrounding streetscape.

19.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 4/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

The historic environment was generally in good condition, with the church and green at the north-eastern end of the High Street being dominant features.

Pavements and Streets - 4/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

The pavements and streets in the town centre were relatively well maintained and kept clean from litter. Few potholes and cracks/uneven surfaces were observed on-site.

Public Realm - 5/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

There was a number of street furniture and public art/statues distributed throughout the town centre, all of which were in good condition. Notable statues included the Model T structure and 'sore feet' statue which are pictured.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 5/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

Most of the town centre is pedestrianised and in the areas where traffic passes through, it does so at a safe, reasonable speed. The town centre is easy to navigate with an appropriate amount of signage and the underpass which is located underneath the dual carriageway is in place to not disrupt the flow of pedestrian thoroughfare.

Public Transport - 5/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

The town appears to be well-connected, with multiple bus, rail and ferry services departing from the centre. Taxi stances were noted at the north-east end of the High Street and multiple bus stops were found on-site.

Parking - 4/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

Parking availability was plentiful in the town centre, although some was time-restricted and charges did apply. Some spaces were on offer in close proximity to the High Street, although some restrictions were in place.

Cycling Facilities - 4/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

There were plentiful signs indicating shared-use paths around the town centre. The town is on a National cycling route and plentiful cycling facilities were noted on-site. There was also electric bikes available for hire on the High Street which highlighted the town's efforts at promoting active travel.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 5/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

There is an extensive area of green space located in the town centre. This is accompanied by an abundance of flower beds which were in bloom at the time of visit; as well as Loch Eil being in close proximity to the centre.

Tourist Appeal - 5/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

The town was bursting with tourists at the time of visit. Fort William is renowned for being popular with tourists as it is the outdoor capital of the UK and the town centre appeared to accommodate for that with an abundance of tourist-oriented retail and socio-cultural appeal.

Evening Economy - 5/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

As the town is popular with both locals and visitors, it has a diverse selection of public bars, restaurants, cafés and takeaways which contribute to the lively evening economy. This was also reflected in the scores given by the public during the survey.

Safety and Security - 4/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety and security in Fort William town centre due to CCTV presence, well-lit streets, passive policing from upstairs residential properties and an evening economy which ensured that people were on the streets after 6pm. A general sense of safety was also reflected in the public survey scores.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

19.16 Public Toilets

There are two sets of Public Toilets facilities located in Fort William's town centre. Both are accessible, relatively well-signposted and appeared to be generally well-maintained when assessed on-site.

19.17 Footfall

Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre.

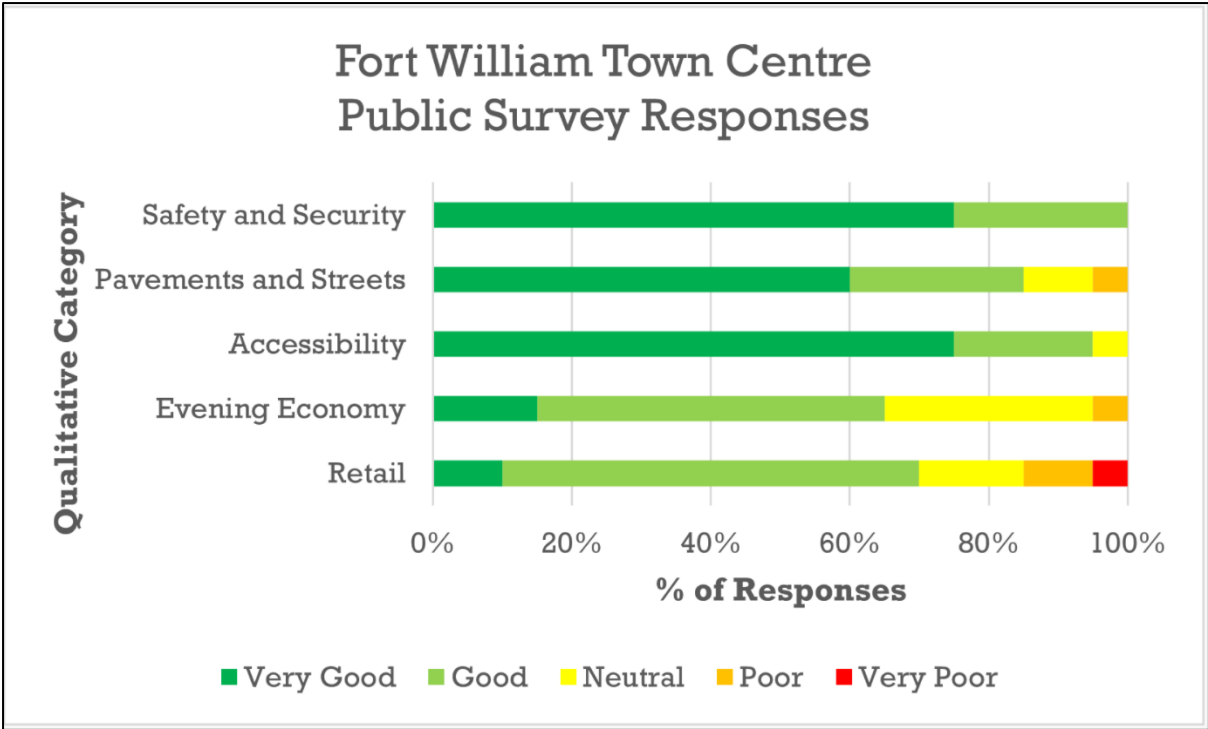
Dornoch footfall results highlight that a total of 431 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period. As this figure is significantly high compared to other town centres, it is an indicator of good town centre health.

In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town's population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

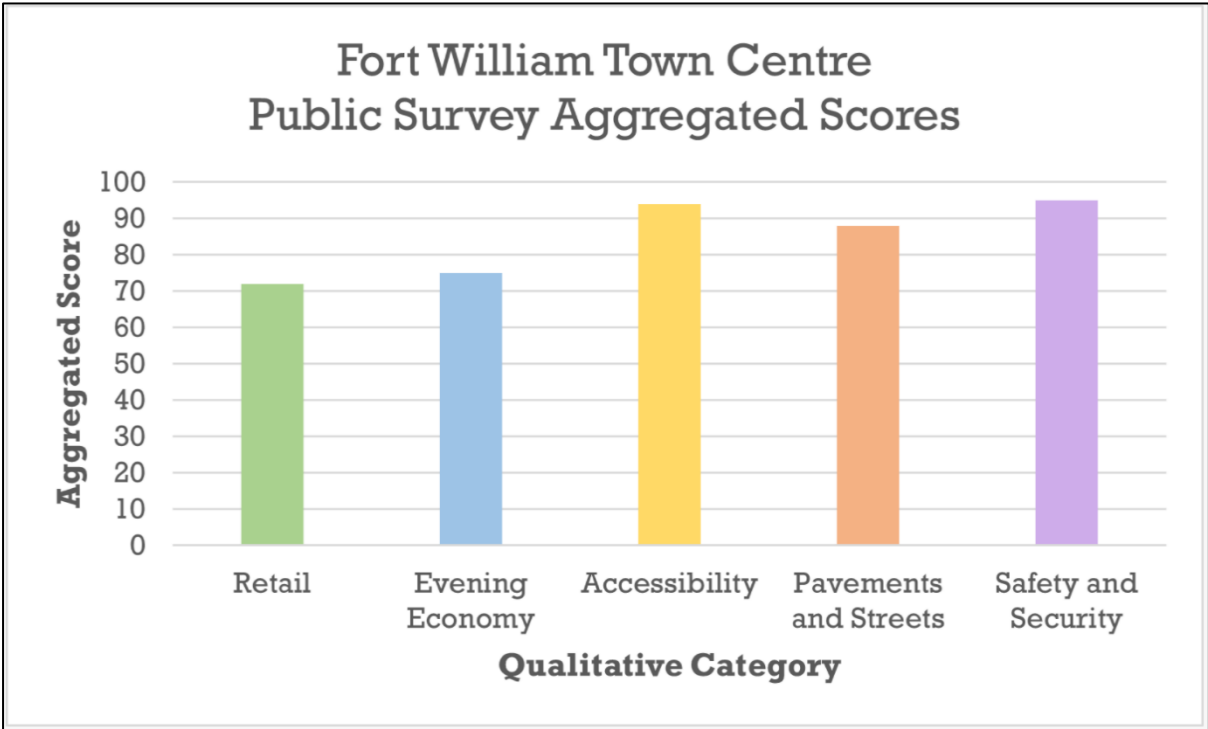
19.18 Public Perceptions

[Scottish Planning Policy](#) (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions in Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should “be prepared collaboratively with... the local community” with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.

The results of the public survey are displayed below. As we can see, there are a mix of responses for most of the qualitative categories. Most responses were 'Very Good' for Safety and Security and Accessibility, perceptions of the Pavements and Streets were mixed but generally good, whilst both Retail and the Evening Economy received a fairly divided response.



To further quantify these results, an overall score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap which can be accessed [here](#). When we look at these aggregated scores, we can see that in Fort William town centre, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 95 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 94, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 88, 'Evening Economy' scored 75 and 'Retail' scored 72.



Fort William scored 424 out of a possible total of 500, giving the town centre an 84.8% public satisfaction rating. This total score was calculated to give an indication of the town's overall performance and allows for a critical, comparative evaluation of these scores which have been given by active users of the town centre.

19.19 Word Cloud



In addition to these quantitative measures, an open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a 'word cloud'. The diagram above highlights how Fort William town centre is perceived by the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general state of Fort William town centre. As we can see from this feedback, perceptions of the town centre are generally positive with the stand-out words being 'nice' and 'clean'. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre's appeal.

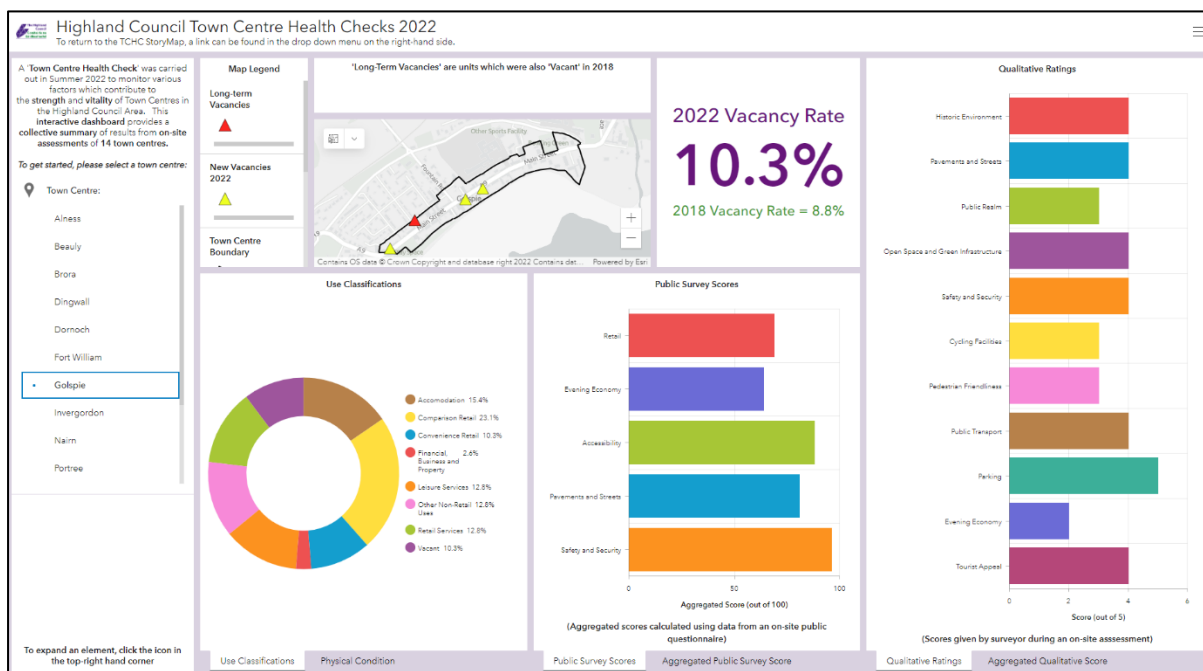
20 Golspie

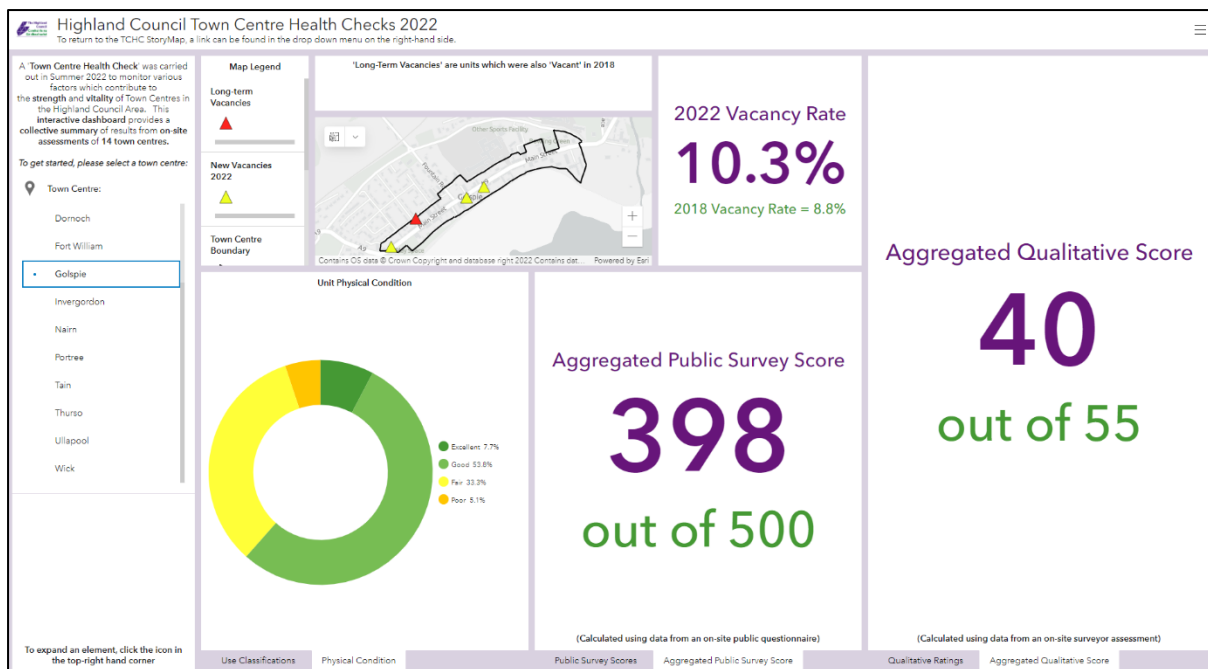
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f79e19975e084b18bdbff88bf757c67c?item=7>

20.1 Introduction

Golspie is located on the popular North Coast 500 route, around 52 miles from Inverness. It is home to award-winning sandy beaches and is popular amongst both tourists and locals for fossil-hunting, wildlife watching and golfing. Dunrobin Castle, a popular tourist hotspot, is located just North of the town and continues to fuel the local economy with influxes of visitors, especially during Summer. Golspie’s town centre is home to a mix of independent/national retailers, with a small selection of pubs and restaurants. The town is overlooked by the Duke of Sutherland statue which can be seen sitting atop Ben Bhraggie.

Dashboard





20.2 Review

- Golspie's town centre health check assessment presented fairly mixed results
- Vacancy rates have increased from 8.8% in 2018 to 10.3% in 2022
- The town scored relatively well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 40 out of 55
- A 5/5 score was given for Parking
- Public toilets are provided in Golspie town centre
- 70 pedestrians were counted on Golspie's High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm
- In the public survey, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 96 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 88, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 81, 'Retail' scored 69 and 'Evening Economy' scored 64
- The town centre scored 398 out of a possible total of 500, giving Golspie a 79.6% public satisfaction rating

20.3 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

20.4 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 5 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Golspie's 39 units, 16 (41.1%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 23 (58.9%) have not.

20.5 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 39 retail/business units in Golspie town centre, of which:

- 9 were Comparison Retail
- 6 were Accommodation
- 5 were Leisure Services
- 5 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 5 were Retail Services
- 4 were Convenience Retail
- 4 were Vacant
- 1 was Financial, Business and Property

20.6 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

20.7 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Golspie town centre is detailed below:

- 9 units are independent and local retailers
- 2 units are national retailers

20.8 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

20.9 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

20.10 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

20.11 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

20.12 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Golspie town centre is 10.3% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 8.8%. This increased rate may be due to a declining retail market and/or lack of appeal for businesses to set up shop in the town centre.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

3 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 1 unit has remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as Occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 2 units which were Vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

20.13 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

The chart to the right represents the recorded physical condition of all vacant units in Golspie town centre. Results show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Fair' (50%) or 'Poor' (50%) condition, which indicates that some of these units may detract from the surrounding streetscape due to neglect or lack of maintenance.

20.14 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 4/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

The quality of Golspie's historic environment did not appear to have deteriorated in the last 4 years. Buildings were still largely in good condition and any sign of decay did not detract from the general appearance of the town centre.

Pavements and Streets - 4/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

The pavements and streets in Golspie's town centre appeared to be generally well-maintained and kept clean from litter and weeds. Little cracks or potholes were found, however, there was some uneven surfaces which could prove hazardous for pedestrians.

Public Realm - 3/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

Although the quality and condition of street furniture was not the best, there was ample provision of such, with benches and bins distributed throughout. Public art/statues were present, particularly at the Western end of the centre, within an area of open space which provided some visual interest.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 3/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

There was a number of signs distributed around the town centre and pavements were generally a good width. There was only one light-controlled crossing point along the Main Street, despite the busy A9 road having constant traffic, making it difficult to cross in some places.

Public Transport - 4/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

Golspie is relatively well connected in terms of public transport. The town has a railway station and a main bus route runs along the Main Street. Service infrastructure appeared well maintained and in good condition throughout.

Parking - 5/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

The parking offer in Golspie town centre appeared sufficient for accommodating demand. Both dedicated car parks and on-street parking were available, well-signposted and distributed throughout the town centre.

Cycling Facilities - 3/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

There were not an overwhelming extent of cycle facilities noted on-site in Golspie town centre. The busy main road lacked a cycle lane and the town is not on any National Cycle route. However, bike storage was noted (pictured) towards the Western end of the town centre.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 4/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

Due to the town's coastal location and proximity to the beach, there feels to be a presence of open space in the centre. Although the Main Street lacks greenery, there were flower beds and baskets in bloom at the time of visit and a large park is located to the Western end of the centre.

Tourist Appeal - 4/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

Due to its coastal situation and being on the NC500 route, Golspie is a popular tourist destination in the Northern Highlands. There is a decent selection of independent retailers, although the number of classically tourist-oriented shops is lacking. Additionally, there is a good mix of activities to do in and around the town, including wildlife watching and hiking.

Evening Economy - 2/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The presence of an evening economy appeared to be lacking in Golspie's town centre, apart from the hotel at the Western end of the Main Street. This lack was also reflected in public perceptions of the evening economy in the questionnaire.

Safety and Security - 4/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety throughout Golspie's town centre with passive policing from overlooking residential properties. However, there did seem to be a lack of monitored CCTV in the town centre.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

20.15 Public Toilets

There are Public Toilets located in the centre of Golspie's town centre. These are accessible, relatively well-signposted and appeared to be generally well-maintained when assessed on-site.

20.16 Footfall

Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre.

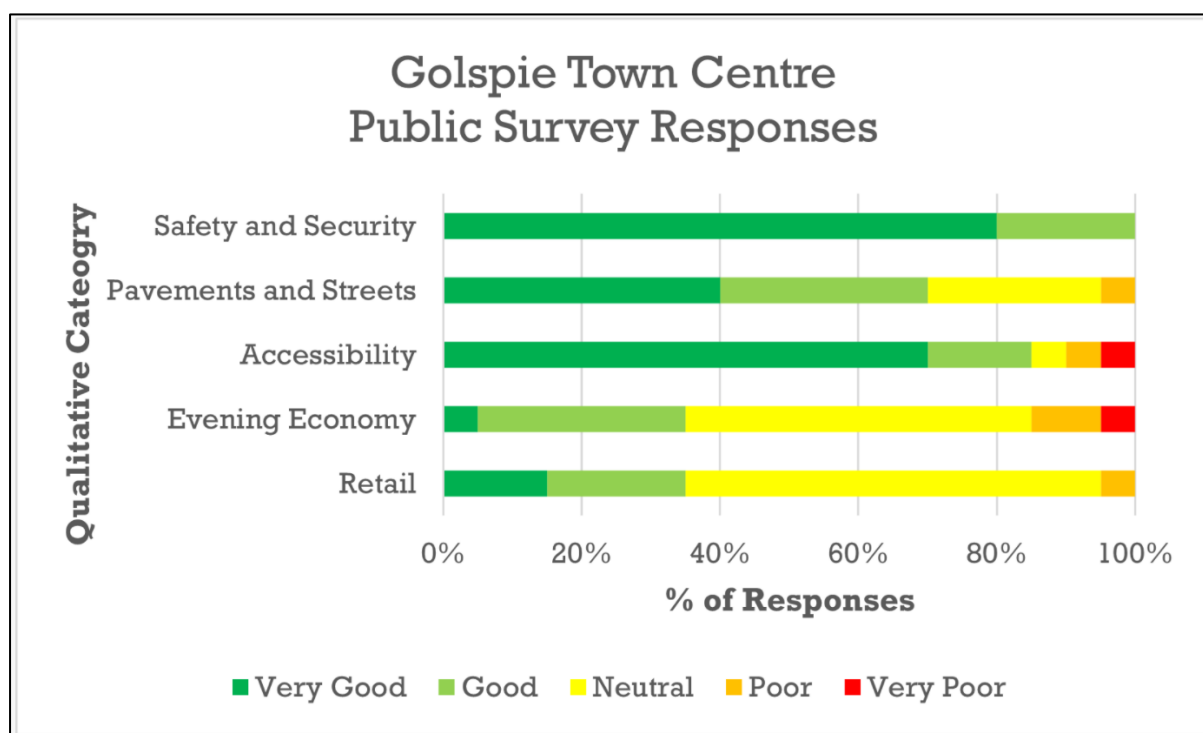
Golspie footfall results highlight that a total of 70 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period. As this figure is as expected, given the size of the town, it is an indicator of good town centre health.

In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town's population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

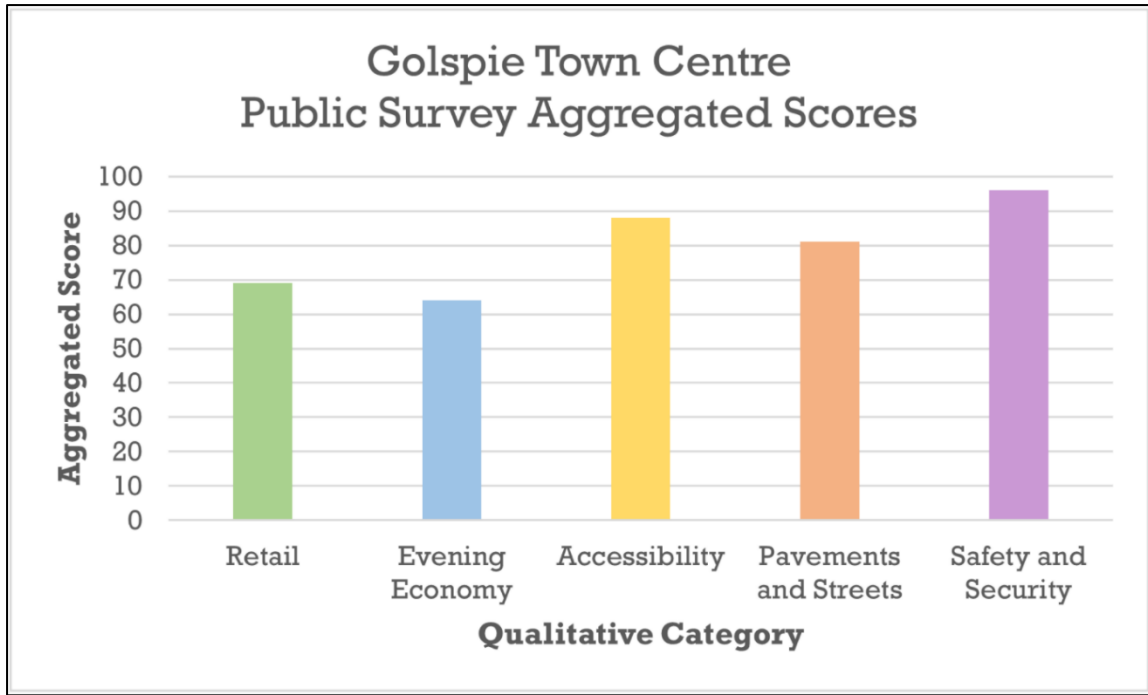
20.17 Public Perceptions

[Scottish Planning Policy](#) (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions in Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should “be prepared collaboratively with... the local community” with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.

The results of the public survey are displayed below. As we can see, there are a mix of responses for most of the qualitative categories. Most responses were 'Very Good' for Safety and Security, perceptions of the Pavements and Streets and Accessibility were mixed but generally good, whilst both Retail and the Evening Economy received a fairly divided response. With the majority of perceptions being 'Fair', it is clear that Golspie's retail and evening economy offer is not the strongest, in the eyes of the public.



To further quantify these results, an overall score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap which can be accessed [here](#). When we look at these aggregated scores, we can see that in Golspie town centre, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 96 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 88, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 81, 'Retail' scored 69 and 'Evening Economy' scored 64.



Golspie scored 398 out of a possible total of 500, giving the town centre a 79.6% public satisfaction rating. This total score was calculated to give an indication of the town’s overall performance and allows for a critical, comparative evaluation of these scores which have been given by active users of the town centre.

20.18 Word Cloud



In addition to these quantitative measures, an open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a ‘word cloud’. The diagram above highlights how Golspie town centre is perceived by the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general state of Golspie town centre. As we can see from this feedback, perceptions of the town centre

are generally positive with the stand-out words being 'busy' and 'lovely'. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre's appeal.

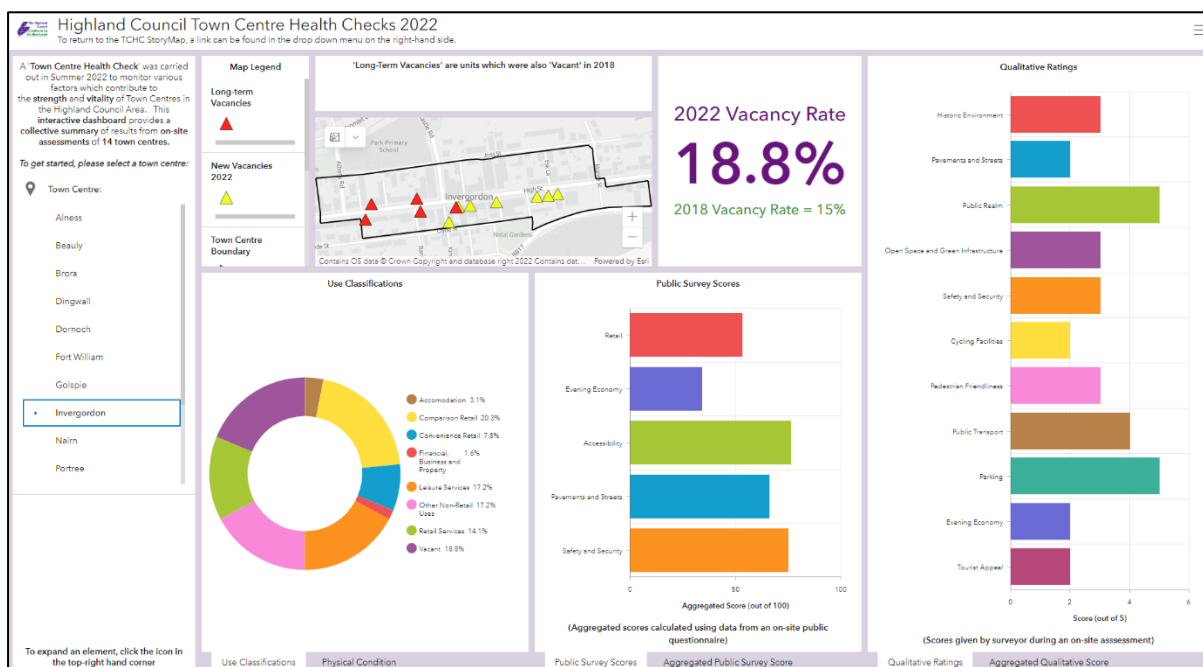
21 Invergordon

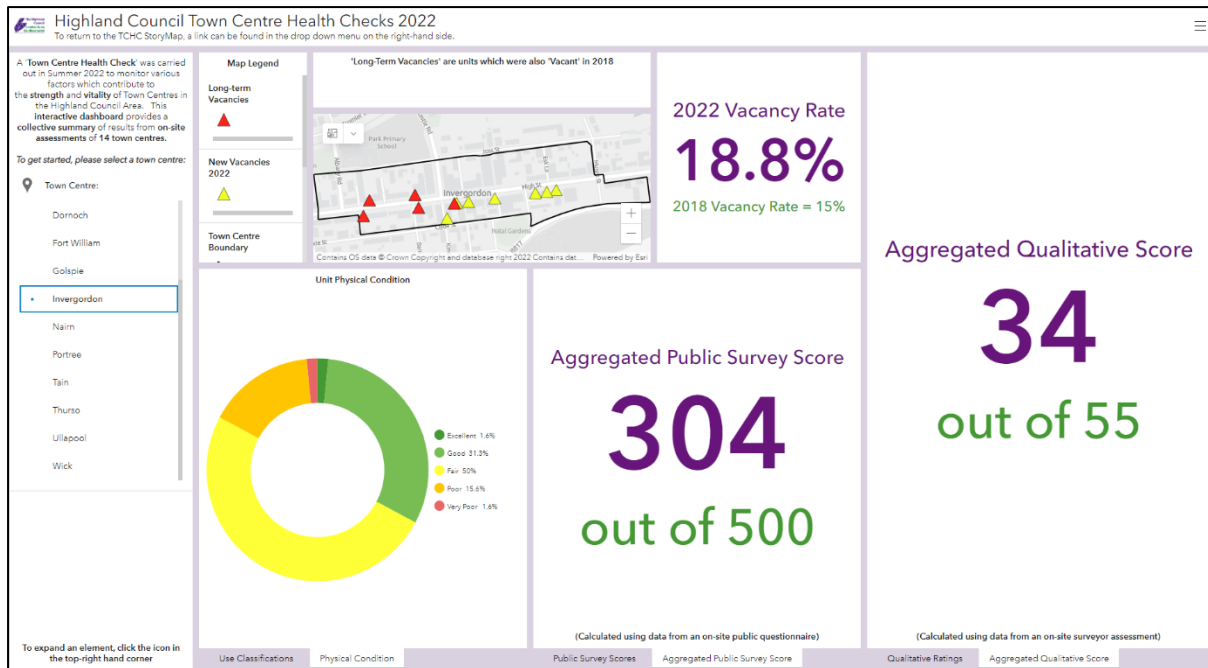
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f79e19975e084b18bdbff88bf757c67c?item=8>

21.1 Introduction

Invergordon is located on the banks of the Cromarty Firth, approximately 24 miles from Inverness. Once the site of a Royal Navy fleet base, the town's historic Port is now where thousands of tourists disembark every year, with the arrival of cruise ships. The town is also renowned for its public art throughout the town centre, in the form of 17 murals, which illustrate the town's history and offer socio-cultural interest to both locals and visitors.

21.2 Dashboard





21.3 Review

- Invergordon can be considered one of the less healthier town centres which have been assessed as part of this study
- Vacancy rates have increased from 15% in 2018 to 18.8% in 2022
- The town did not score that well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 34 out of 55
- 5/5 scores were given for Public Realm and Parking
- No public toilets facilities are provided in Invergordon town centre
- 144 pedestrians were counted on Invergordon's High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm
- In the public survey, 'Accessibility' scored the highest out of the five categories with 76 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Safety and Security' scored 75, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 66, 'Retail' scored 53 and 'Evening Economy' scored 34
- The town centre scored 304 out of a possible total of 500, giving Invergordon a 60.8% public satisfaction rating

21.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

21.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 4 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Invergordon's 64 units, 25 (39.1%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 39 (60.9%) have not.

21.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 64 retail/business units in Invergordon town centre, of which:

- 13 were Comparison Retail
- 12 were Vacant
- 11 were Leisure Services
- 11 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 9 were Retail Services
- 5 were Convenience Retail
- 2 were Accommodation
- 1 was Financial, Business and Property

21.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

21.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Invergordon town centre is detailed below:

- 14 units are independent and local retailers
- 4 units are national retailers

21.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

21.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

21.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

21.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

21.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Invergordon town centre is 18.8% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 15.5%. This increased rate may be due to a declining retail market and/or lack of appeal for businesses to set up shop in the town centre.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

7 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 5 units have remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as Occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 4 units which were Vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

21.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

Results show that all vacant units were either classed as being in 'Fair' (50%), 'Poor' (41.7%) or 'Very Poor' (8.3%) condition, which indicates that some of these units may detract from the surrounding streetscape due to neglect or lack of maintenance.

21.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 3/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

The historic environment in Invergordon's town centre was not in the best condition. Much of the centre had a run-down, derelict feel and the lacking maintenance of buildings was highly prominent.

Pavements and Streets - 2/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

Invergordon's pavements and streets were clearly lacking regular maintenance. Although generally free of litter and clutter, the condition was not the best and excessive weeds were noted on site, particularly on side streets.

Public Realm - 5/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

There was plentiful street furniture available throughout the town centre, although some benches were in need of maintenance. Public art, in the form of painted murals, was distributed throughout the centre, which offers socio-cultural interest for both locals and visitors.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 3/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

There was a lack of signage within the town centre and no light controlled crossing points were noted on site. However, traffic calming measures were in place in the form of speed bumps and varying road surfaces.

Public Transport - 4/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

The town has good railway links to Inverness and other Highland towns, with the station being located short distance away from town centre. Bus stops were located throughout and regular buses were seen at time of visit.

Parking - 5/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

Free parking was available throughout the town centre with on-street parking available which seemed sufficient for apparent demand.

Cycling Facilities - 2/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

There seemed to be a sufficient number of posts to chain bikes on throughout the town centre. The main road also lacks a designated cycle lane.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 3/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

There was an abundance of flower baskets and beds in bloom at time of visit. Trees had been planted along the High Street, although there was not a designated 'open space' area in the town centre.

Tourist Appeal - 2/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

There were no public maps or information boards in the town centre. However, there was some tourist-oriented retail on offer, as well as historical information distributed on signs throughout which may offer some touristic appeal.

Evening Economy - 2/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

Apart from hot food takeaways, there was no evidence of an evening economy in the town centre. This was reflected in public perceptions of the evening economy in the survey.

Safety and Security - 3/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

Although CCTV was in place and many residences overlook High Street, a lack of an evening economy and some poorly lit alleyways could make the town centre feel unsafe after dark. This was reflected in the public perceptions of safety and security in the public survey.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

21.16 Public Toilets

There are no Public Toilets located in Invergordon's town centre. As these facilities are deemed to be an indicator of town centre health, their lack leaves a negative imprint on Invergordon's townscape.

21.17 Footfall

Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre.

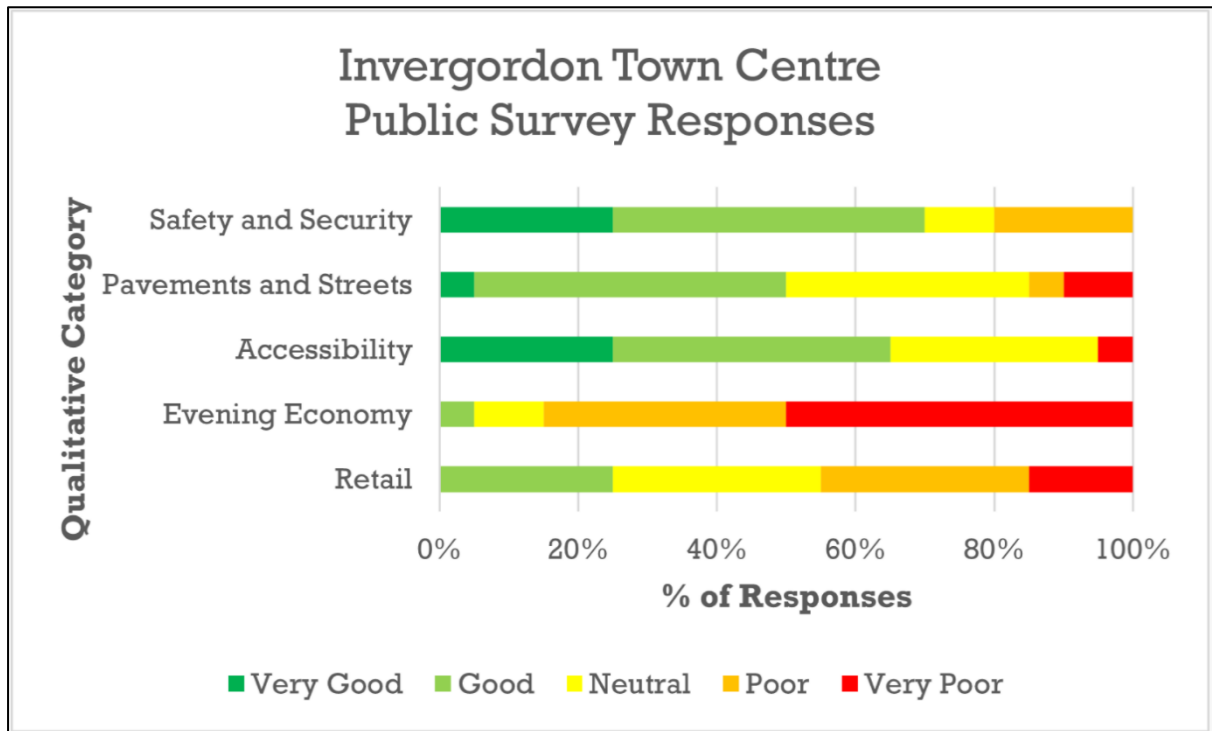
Invergordon footfall results highlight that a total of 144 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period. This figure is as expected, given the size of the town, and is an indicator of good town centre health.

In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town's population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

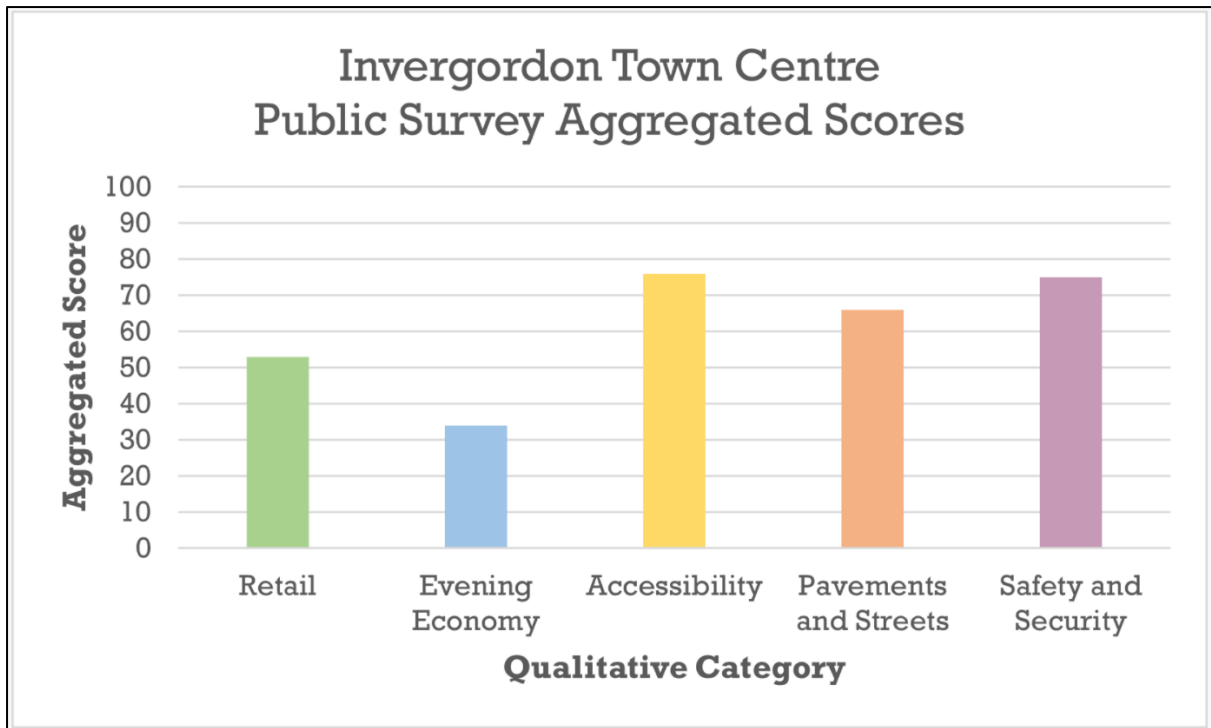
21.18 Public Perceptions

[Scottish Planning Policy](#) (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions in Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should "be prepared collaboratively with... the local community" with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.

The results of the public survey are displayed below. As we can see, there are a mix of responses for most of the qualitative categories. There are 'Poor' responses for all measures, and 'Very Poor' responses for all but Safety and Security. With the majority of perceptions being 'Very Poor', it is clear that Invergordon's evening economy offer is not the strongest, in the eyes of the public.

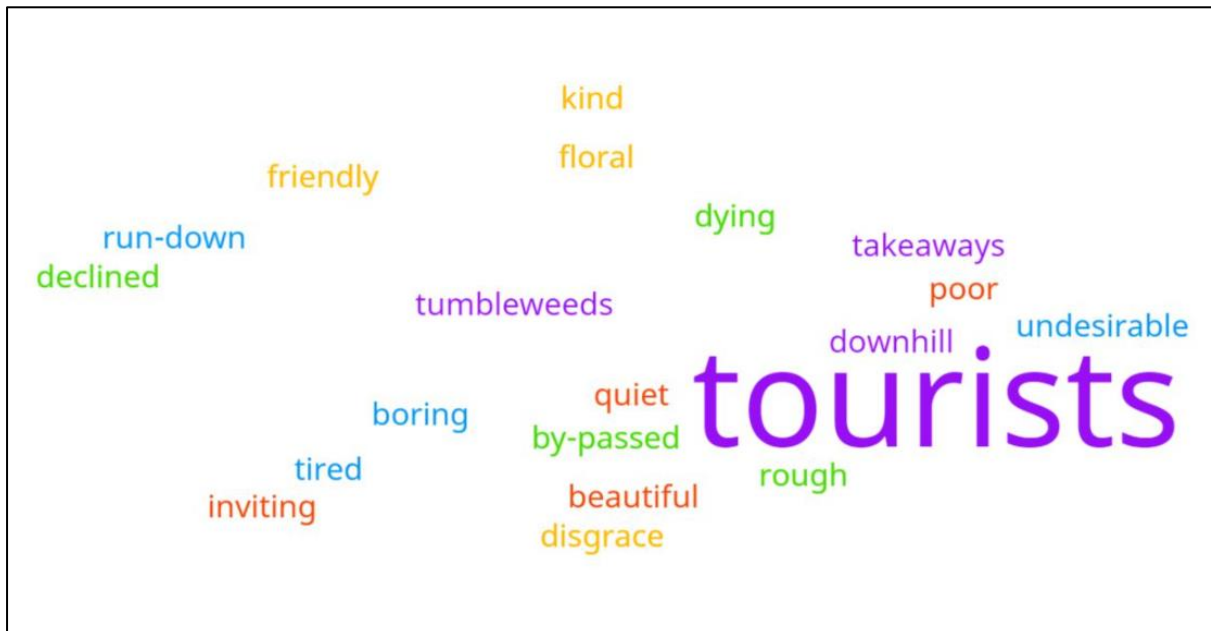


To further quantify these results, an overall score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap which can be accessed [here](#). When we look at these aggregated scores, we can see that in Invergordon town centre, 'Accessibility' scored the highest out of the five categories with 76 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Safety and Security' scored 75, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 66, 'Retail' scored 53 and 'Evening Economy' scored 34.



Invergordon scored 304 out of a possible total of 500, giving the town centre a 60.8% public satisfaction rating. This total score was calculated to give an indication of the town’s overall performance and allows for a critical, comparative evaluation of these scores which have been given by active users of the town centre.

21.19 Word Cloud



In addition to these quantitative measures, an open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a ‘word cloud’. The diagram above highlights how Invergordon town centre is perceived by the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general

state of Invergordon town centre. As we can see from this feedback, perceptions of the town centre are generally mixed with the stand-out word being 'tourists' - a likely ode to the cruise ships which dock at the local port during the Summer months. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre's appeal.

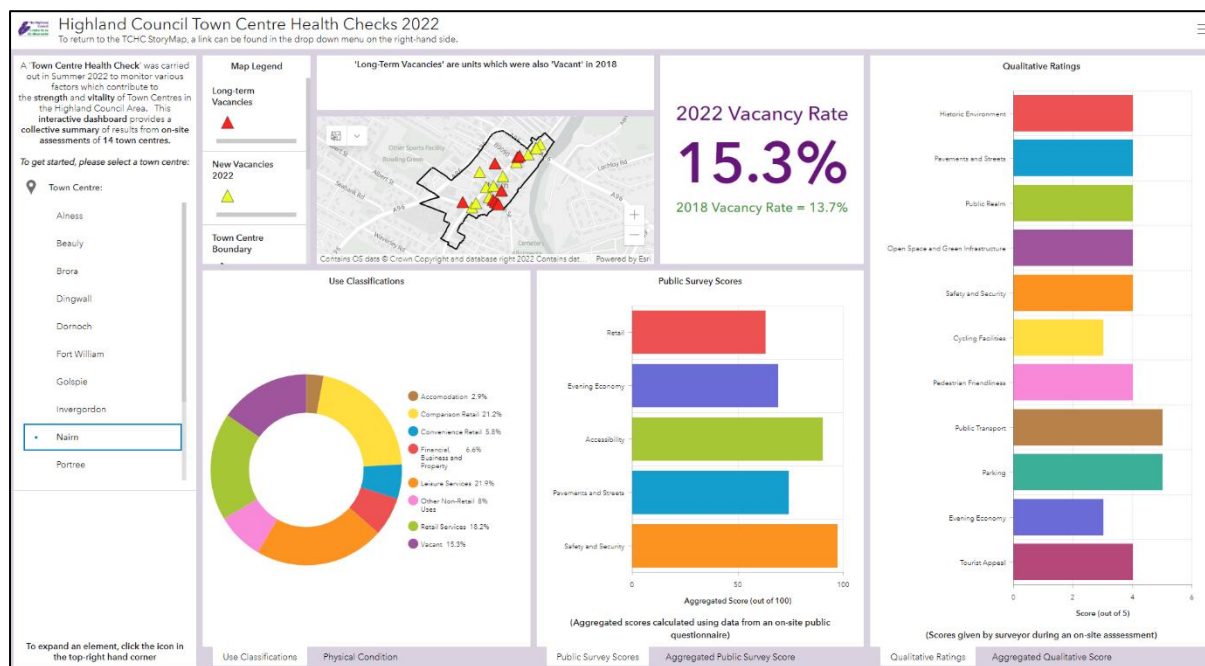
22 Nairn

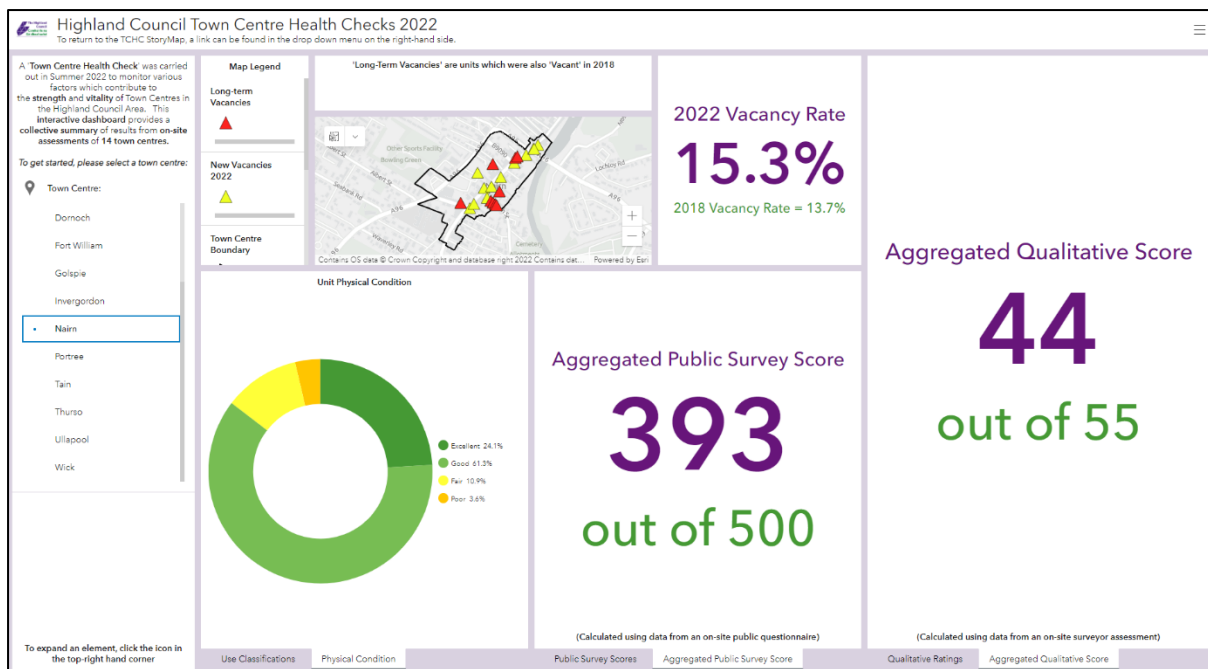
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f79e19975e084b18bdbff88bf757c67c?item=9>

22.1 Introduction

Nairn is a royal burgh located at the Eastern boundary of the Highland Council's local authority area. Deemed a popular seaside town with both locals and visitors, it is home to award winning beaches and a vibrant community. Just a short drive from Inverness airport, the town has a unique sense of character and is host to a number of attractions, eateries and retail offer; all of which fuel the local economy. Notable yearly events include the Nairn Highland Games, which attracts visitors from all over the country to participate in, and watch, a traditional sporting experience.

22.2 Dashboard





22.3 Review

- Nairn's town centre health check assessment presented fairly mixed results
- Vacancy rates have increased from 13.7% in 2018 to 15.3% in 2022
- The town scored relatively well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 44 out of 55
- 5/5 scores were given for Public Transport and Parking
- Public toilets are provided in Nairn town centre
- 188 pedestrians were counted on Nairn's High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm
- In the public survey, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 97 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 90, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 74, 'Evening Economy' scored 69 and 'Retail' scored 63
- The town centre scored 393 out of a possible total of 500, giving Nairn a 78.6% public satisfaction rating

22.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

22.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 34 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Nairn's 137 units, 63 (46%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 74 (54%) have not.

22.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 137 retail/business units in Nairn town centre, of which:

- 30 were Leisure Services
- 29 were Comparison Retail
- 25 were Retail Services
- 21 were Vacant
- 11 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 9 were Financial, Business and Property
- 8 were Convenience Retail
- 4 were Accommodation

22.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

22.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Invergordon town centre is detailed below:

- 29 units are independent and local retailers
- 8 units are national retailers

22.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

22.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

22.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

22.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

22.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Nairn town centre is 15.3% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 13.7%. This increased rate may be due to a declining retail market and/or lack of appeal for businesses to set up shop in the town centre.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

12 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 9 units have remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as Occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 5 units which were Vacant in 2018, are now occupied as of 2022.

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

22.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

Results show that all vacant units were either classed as being 'Good' (28.6%), 'Fair' (47.6%) or 'Poor' (47.6%) condition, which indicates that some of these units may detract from the surrounding streetscape due to neglect or lack of maintenance.

22.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 4/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

The historic environment in Nairn's town centre appeared generally well-maintained and of decent condition. Despite some vacant, derelict units, these did not detract from the quality or attractiveness of the townscape.

Pavements and Streets - 4/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

The pavements and streets in Nairn town centre were free from litter and appeared well-maintained, with few cracks or potholes. Some weeds and moss were noted, however, and numerous bins were seen on-site which blocked some pavements.

Public Realm - 4/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

Street furniture in the form of bins and benches could be seen throughout the town centre. Public art was also noted in the form of one mural and dolphin structure at one end of the High Street.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 4/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

There were plentiful navigational signs distributed throughout the town centre, as well as informative maps which could prove useful for both locals and visitors. With traffic calming measures and a one-way system in place, the High Street feels very pedestrian friendly.

Public Transport - 5/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

Nairn is well-connected to other Highland towns through both bus and rail services. The train station is located a short distance from the town centre and bus routes regularly operate both within the town and along the A96.

Parking - 5/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

The parking offer in Nairn town centre appeared sufficient for accommodating demand. Both dedicated car parks and on-street parking were available, well-signposted and distributed throughout the town centre.

Cycling Facilities - 3/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

There were a few bike tying posts throughout the town centre, although general cycling facilities were lacking. There were no dedicated cycle lanes noted on site, which could be seen as hazardous considering the amount of traffic.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 4/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

Numerous flower beds and baskets were in bloom at the time of visit. A square towards the Western end of the High Street provided some greenery with planted trees. The beach and local park are also located as short walk from the town centre.

Tourist Appeal - 4/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

Due to its coastal situation, Nairn is seen to be a popular tourist destination in the Highlands. There is a decent selection of independent retailers, although the number of classically tourist-oriented shops is lacking.

Evening Economy - 3/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The presence of an evening economy appeared to be sufficient in Nairn's town centre, with a selection of takeaways and public bars/nightclub.

Safety and Security - 4/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety throughout Nairn's town centre with passive policing from overlooking residential properties. CCTV was noted throughout and an evening economy ensures people are likely to be on the streets after 6pm.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

22.16 Public Toilets

There are Public Toilets located in Nairn's town centre. These are accessible, relatively well-signposted and appeared to be generally well-maintained when assessed on-site.

22.17 Footfall

Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre.

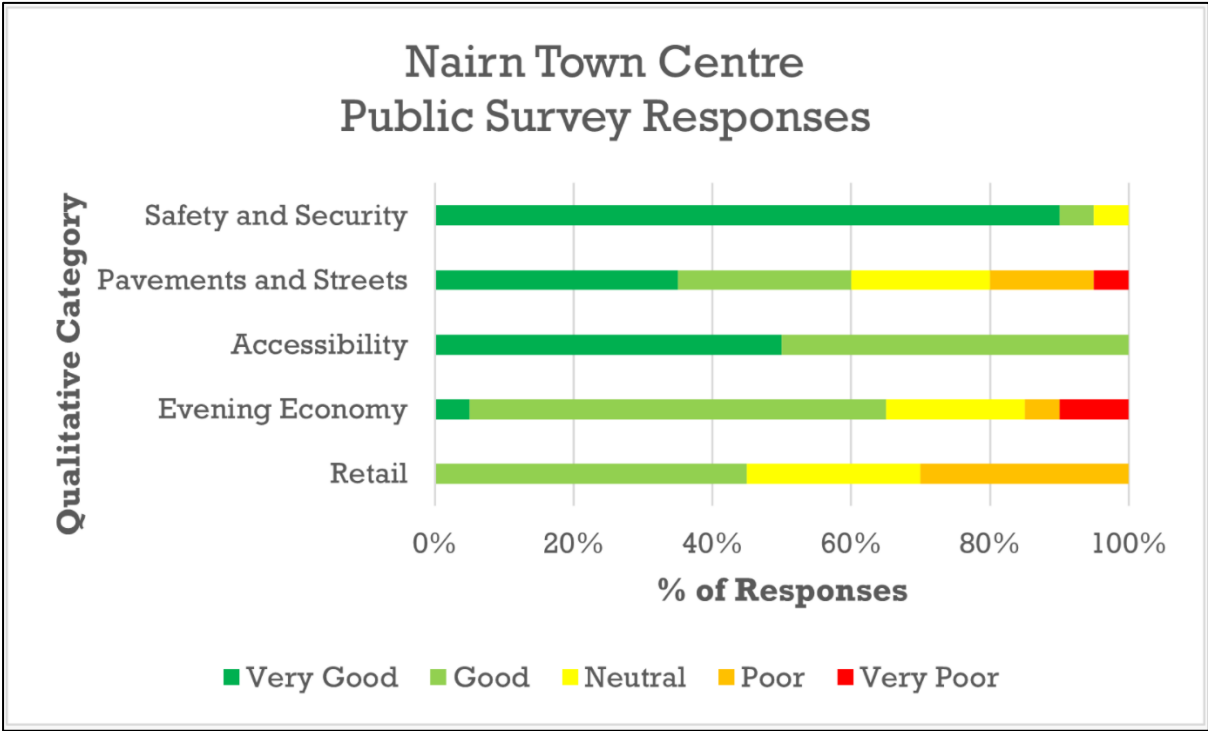
Nairn footfall results highlight that a total of 188 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period. This figure is as expected, given the size of the town, and is an indicator of good town centre health.

In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town's population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

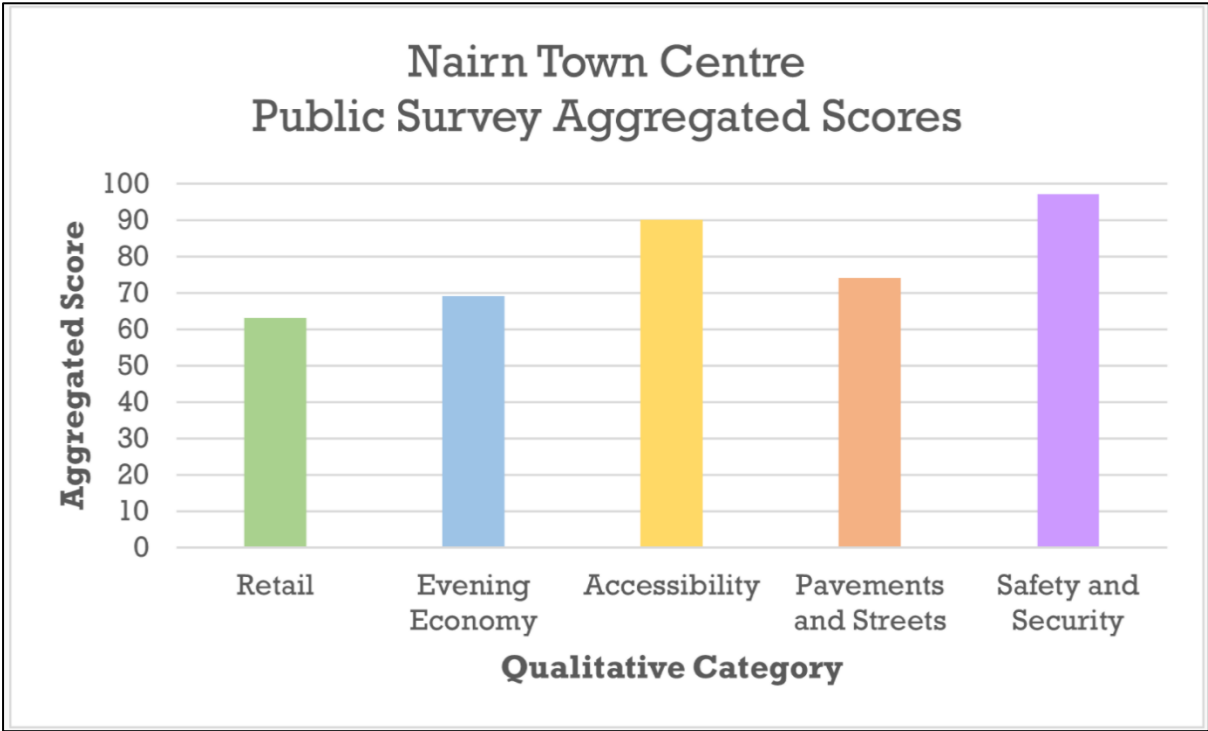
22.18 Public Perceptions

[Scottish Planning Policy](#) (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions in Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should "be prepared collaboratively with... the local community" with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.

The results of the public survey are displayed below. As we can see, there are a mix of responses for most of the qualitative categories. Most responses were 'Very Good' for Accessibility, perceptions of Safety and Security were mixed but generally good, whilst Pavements and Streets, Retail and the Evening Economy received a fairly divided response.

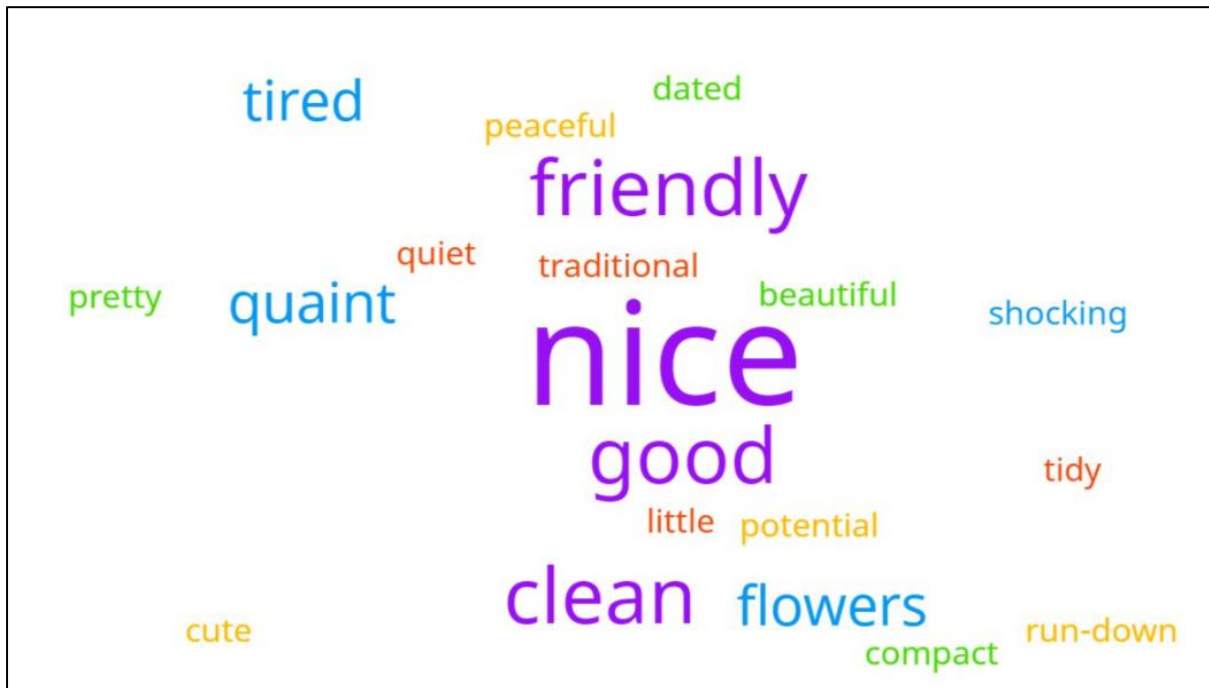


To further quantify these results, an overall score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap which can be accessed [here](#). When we look at these aggregated scores, we can see that in Nairn town centre, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 97 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 90, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 74, 'Evening Economy' scored 69 and 'Retail' scored 63.



Nairn scored 393 out of a possible total of 500, giving the town centre a 78.6% public satisfaction rating. This total score was calculated to give an indication of the town's overall performance and allows for a critical, comparative evaluation of these scores which have been given by active users of the town centre.

22.19 Word Cloud



In addition to these quantitative measures, an open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a 'word cloud'. The diagram above highlights how Nairn town centre is perceived by the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general state of Nairn town centre. As we can see from this feedback, perceptions of the town centre are generally positive with the stand-out words being 'nice', 'good', 'friendly' and 'clean'. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre's appeal.

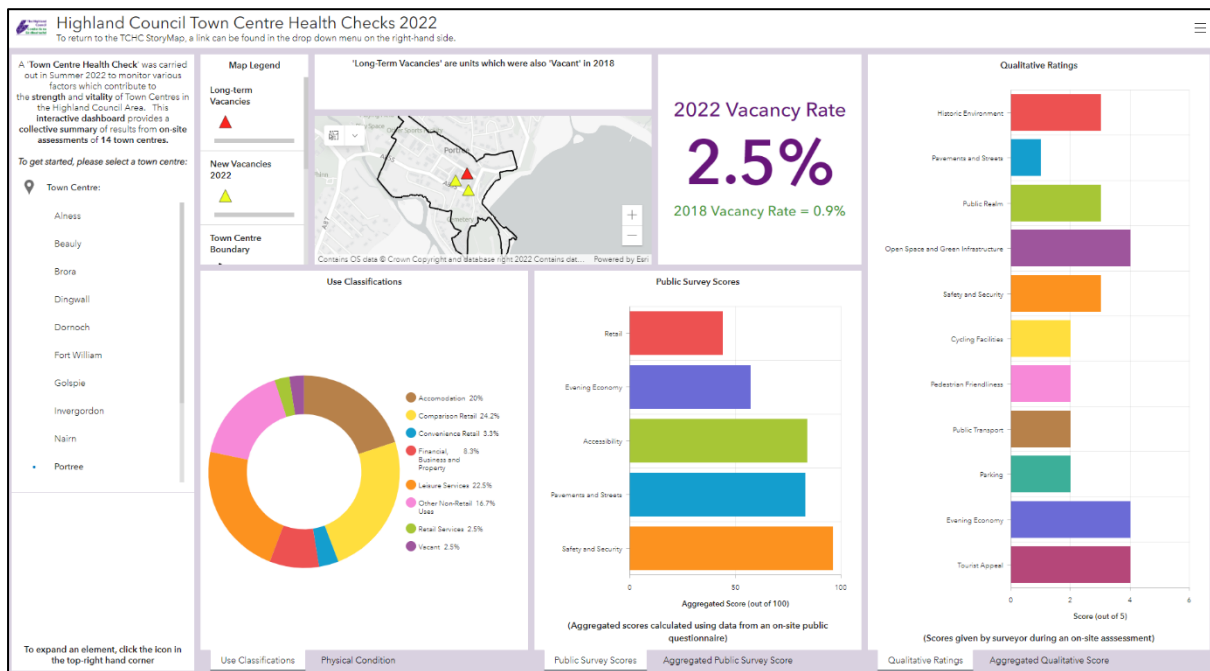
23 Portree

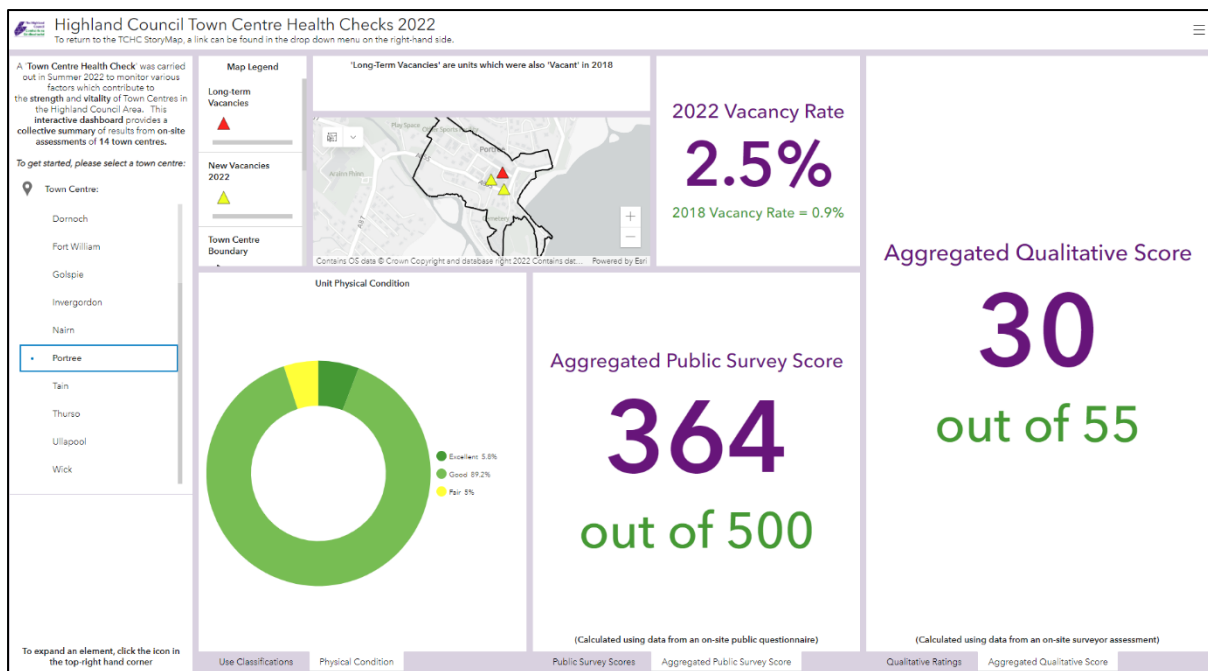
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f79e19975e084b18bdbff88bf757c67c?item=10>

23.1 Introduction

A popular tourist destination, surrounded by picturesque scenery, Portree is the largest town on the Isle of Skye. As the main hub on the island, the town hosts a range of services and facilities including a diverse range of retail, pubs, restaurants and cafés. Portree is highly reliant upon the tourist industry, with one report indicating that visitors contributed over £211 million to the local economy, pre-pandemic. It is important, therefore, that the town focuses on regulating this flow, through continuing to support local businesses and those who live there year round.

23.2 Dashboard





23.3 Review

- Portree can be considered one of the less healthier town centres which have been assessed as part of this study
- Vacancy rates have increased from 0.9% in 2018 to 2.5% in 2022
- The town did not score that well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 30 out of 55
- No 5/5 scores were given for any of the qualitative categories
- A 1/5 score was given for Pavements and Streets
- Public toilets are provided in Portree town centre
- 301 pedestrians were counted on Portree's High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm
- In the public survey, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 96 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 84, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 83, 'Evening Economy' scored 57 and 'Retail' scored 44
- The town centre scored 364 out of a possible total of 500, giving Portree a 72.8% public satisfaction rating

23.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

23.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 13 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Portree's 120 units, 35 (29.2%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 85 (70.8%) have not.

23.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 120 retail/business units in Portree town centre, of which:

- 29 were Comparison Retail
- 27 were Leisure Services
- 24 were Accommodation
- 20 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 10 were Financial, Business and Property
- 4 were Convenience Retail
- 3 were Vacant
- 3 were Retail Services

23.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

23.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Invergordon town centre is detailed below:

- 32 units are independent and local retailers
- 1 units are national retailers

23.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

23.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

23.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

23.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

23.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Portree town centre is 2.5% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 0.9%. This increased rate may be due to a declining retail market and/or lack of appeal for businesses to set up shop in the town centre.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

2 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 1 unit has remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as Occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. No units which were Vacant in 2018 are now occupied as of 2022 in Portree town centre.

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

23.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

Results show that all vacant units were classed as being in 'Good' (100%) condition, which indicates that these units are unlikely to detract from the surrounding streetscape.

23.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 3/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

Portree town centre's historic environment was generally in good condition, with some areas of vacancy and dereliction distributed throughout.

Pavements and Streets - 1/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

The poor quality and condition of the pavements and streets around Portree town centre was noted on-site. Potholes and cracks were prominent, uneven surfaces were highlighted throughout and clumps of weeds were also seen to be an issue.

Public Realm - 3/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

Street furniture was amply provided throughout the town centre, with an abundance of bins and benches available; some of which required some maintenance. Somerled Square offered some public art in the form of statues which offered visual interest.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 2/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

There were several signposts distributed throughout the town centre; however, there was a sense of pedestrian/traffic conflict throughout. Despite the centre being relatively easy to navigate, roads were extremely busy with vehicles and there was a lack of safe crossings available.

Public Transport - 2/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

There was a lack of transport links to Inverness and Central Belt. Locals noted that there was lack of late-night buses, meaning they cannot visit Portree in the evening without having to use the local taxi service. There is no railway service and buses are only able to stay in the station for 10 minutes at a time.

Parking - 2/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

Although parking was available in the town centre, spaces were filled quickly and would be especially busy during peak times. A lack of safely allocated disabled parking was also noted by locals.

Cycling Facilities - 2/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

There were no dedicated cycle lanes noted on-site and no signage was seen to highlight any cycle routes. Additionally, only one storage facility was seen in the form of bike-tying posts.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 4/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

There were trees planted in the town centre and some flower beds in bloom at the time of visit. Scenic views of surrounding mountains and the sea could be seen from various points throughout.

Tourist Appeal - 4/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

Portree's evening economy consists of a range of hotels, pubs, restaurants and takeaways. The town can be said to have a good evening social offer, particularly during peak tourist season in Summer.

Evening Economy - 4/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The presence of an evening economy appeared to be sufficient in Nairn's town centre, with a selection of takeaways and public bars/nightclub.

Safety and Security - 3/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety throughout Portree's town centre with some passive policing from overlooking residential properties and a slight evening economy, which ensured people were on the street until late evening. However, there did seem to be a lack of monitored CCTV in the town centre.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

23.16 Public Toilets

There are Public Toilets located in Portree's town centre. These are accessible, relatively well-signposted and appeared to be generally well-maintained when assessed on-site.

23.17 Footfall

Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre.

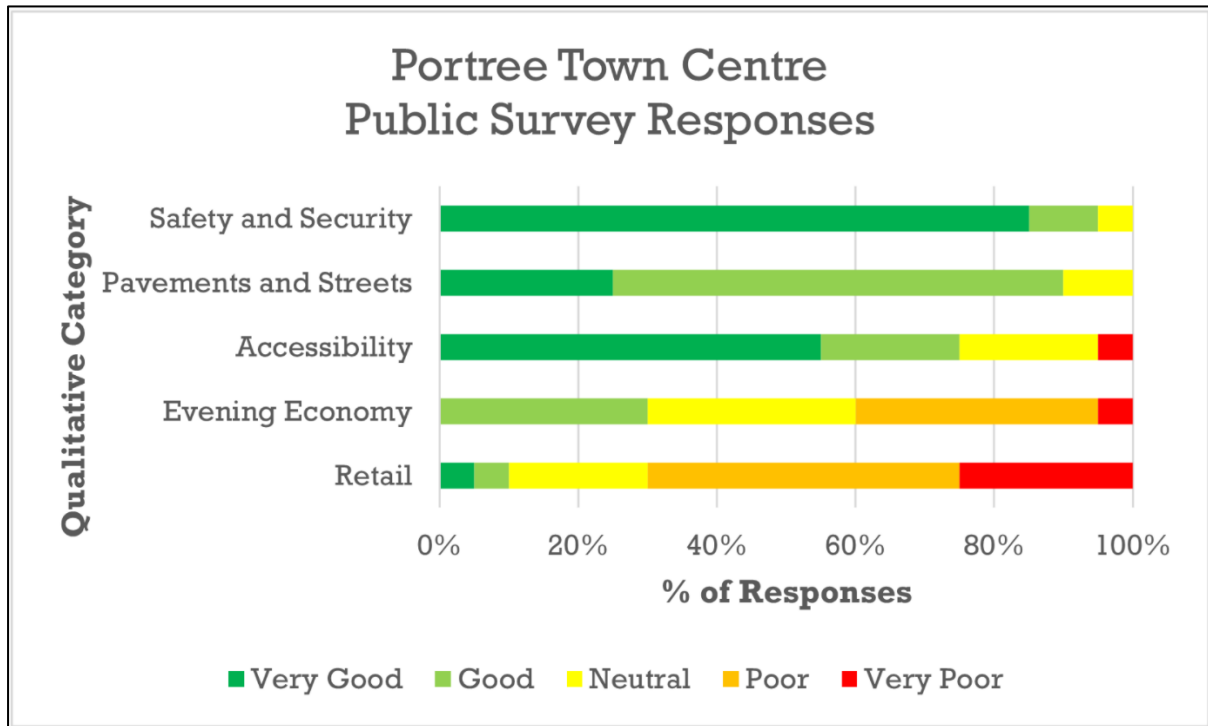
Portree footfall results highlight that a total of 301 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period between 12 and 2pm. As this figure is relatively high compared to other towns of a similar size and nature, it is an indicator of good town centre health.

In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town's population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

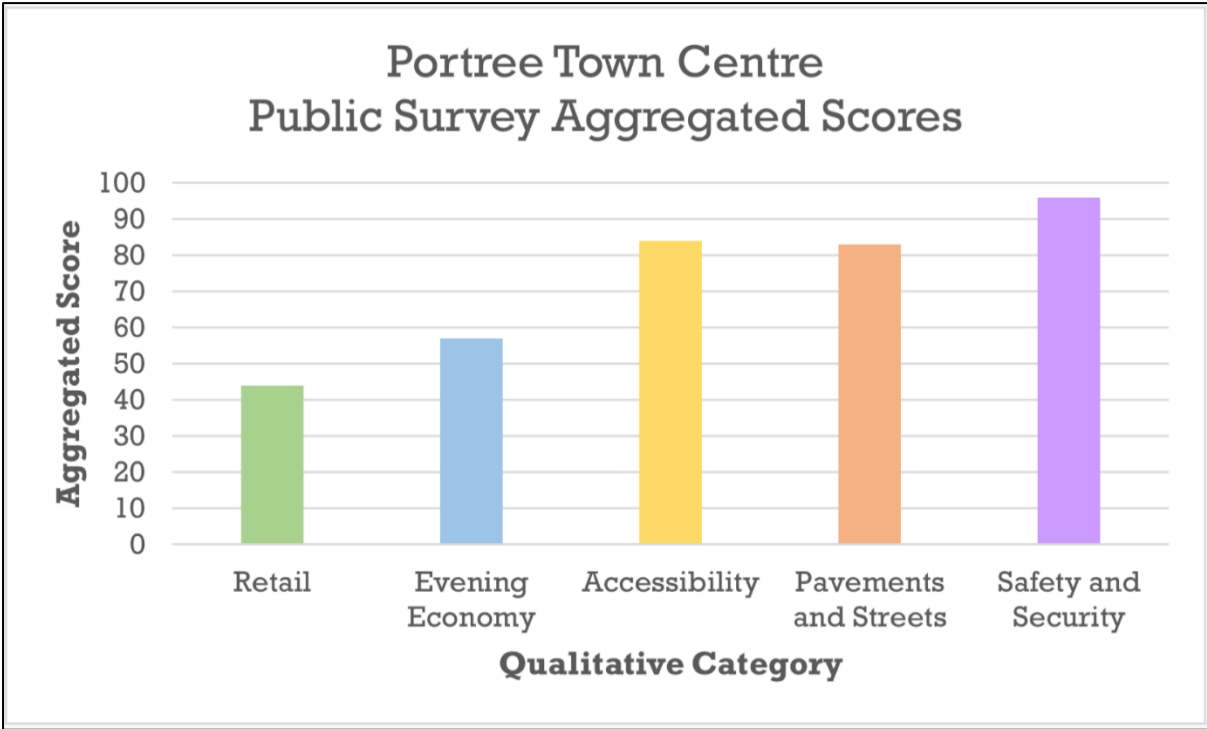
23.18 Public Perceptions

[Scottish Planning Policy](#) (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions in Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should "be prepared collaboratively with... the local community" with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.

The results of the public survey are displayed below. As we can see, there are a mix of responses for most of the qualitative categories. Most responses were 'Very Good' for Safety and Security, perceptions of the Pavements and Streets and Accessibility were mixed but generally good, whilst both Retail and the Evening Economy received a fairly divided response. With the majority of perceptions being 'Poor', it is clear that Portree's retail and evening economy offer is not the strongest, in the eyes of the public.



To further quantify these results, an overall score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap which can be accessed [here](#). When we look at these aggregated scores, we can see that in Portree town centre, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 96 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 84, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 83, 'Evening Economy' scored 57 and 'Retail' scored 44.



Portree scored 364 out of a possible total of 500, giving the town centre an 72.8% public satisfaction rating. This total score was calculated to give an indication of the town’s overall performance and allows for a critical, comparative evaluation of these scores which have been given by active users of the town centre.

23.19 Word Cloud



In addition to these quantitative measures, an open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a ‘word cloud’. The diagram above

highlights how Portree town centre is perceived by the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general state of Portree town centre. As we can see from this feedback, perceptions of the town centre are generally positive with the stand-out word being 'tourists'. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre's appeal.

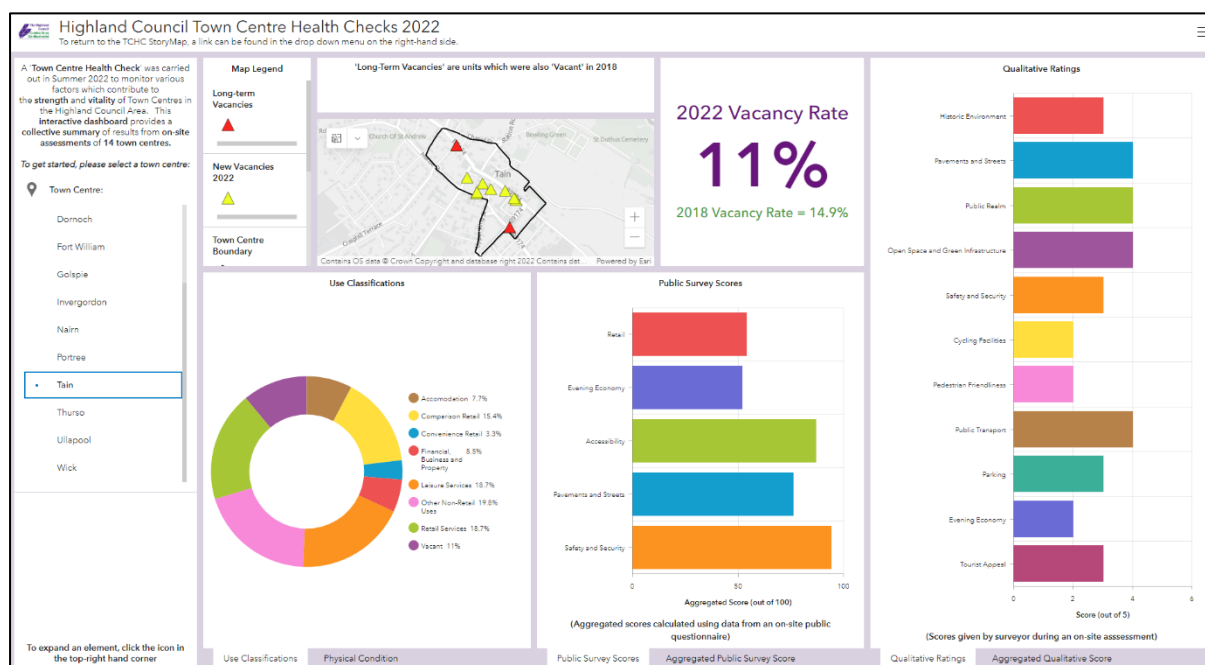
24 Tain

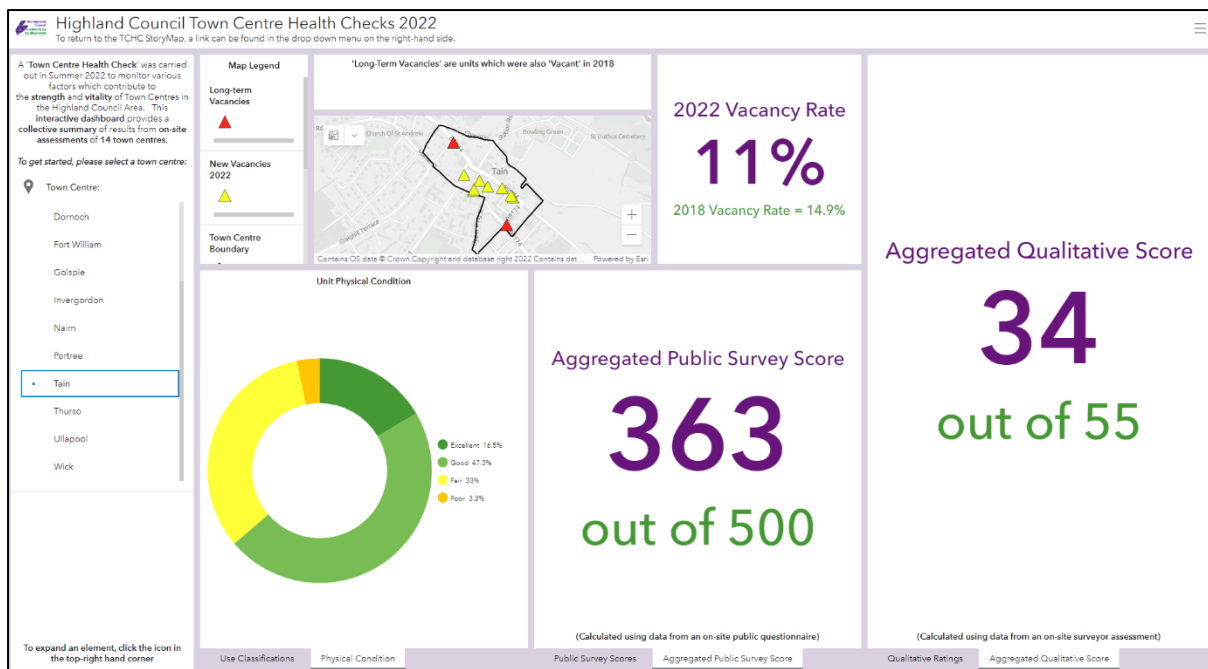
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f79e19975e084b18bdbff88bf757c67c?item=11>

24.1 Introduction

Renowned for being Scotland’s oldest Royal Burgh, Tain is located on the popular North Coast 500. The town has a distinctive, unique townscape due to its coastal location and distribution of historic buildings, particularly the ‘Tain Through Time’ museum which is located on the grounds of the Pilgrimage. Although many locals noted that the town has gone ‘downhill’ in the last few years, there remains to be a number of facilities and services in the town centre.

24.2 Dashboard





24.3 Review

- Tain's town centre health check assessment presented fairly mixed results
- Vacancy rates have decreased from 14.9% in 2018 to 11% in 2022
- The town scored did not score that well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 34 out of 55
- No 5/5 scores were given for any of the qualitative categories
- Public toilets are provided in Tain town centre, although these were closed due to vandalism at the time of visit
- 122 pedestrians were counted on Tain's High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm
- In the public survey, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 94 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 87, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 76, 'Retail' scored 54 and 'Evening Economy' scored 52
- The town centre scored 363 out of a possible total of 500, giving Tain a 72.6% public satisfaction rating

24.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

24.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 12 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Tain's 91 units, 52 (57.1%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 39 (42.9%) have not.

24.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 91 retail/business units in Portree town centre, of which:

- 18 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 17 were Leisure Services
- 17 were Retail Services
- 14 were Comparison Retail
- 10 were Vacant
- 7 were Accommodation
- 5 were Financial, Business and Property
- 3 were Convenience Retail

24.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

24.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Tain town centre is detailed below:

- 16 units are independent and local retailers
- 1 units are national retailers

24.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

24.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

24.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

24.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

24.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Portree town centre is 11% as of 2022; an decrease from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 14.9%.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

8 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 2 units has remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as Occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 9 units which were Vacant in 2018 are now occupied as of 2022 in Tain town centre.

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

24.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

Results show that all vacant units were classed as being in 'Good' (10%), 'Fair' (70%) or 'Poor' (20%) condition, which indicates that some of these units are likely to detract from the surrounding streetscape.

24.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 3/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

Tain town centre is abundant with historic charm, with many buildings retaining a distinctive character. Although some buildings were in need of maintenance, the overall quality and condition did not detract from the general streetscape.

Pavements and Streets - 4/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

Although some cracks and potholes were noted on-site, Tain's pavements and streets were generally well maintained and kept free from litter and weeds.

Public Realm - 4/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

There were benches and bins distributed throughout which appeared to be in good condition. These were particularly concentrated in the Gardens located towards the centre. Public art was featured in the form of a notable monument and 'animals' artwork towards the Eastern end of the High Street.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 2/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

Tain's town centre lacked a general sense of pedestrian friendliness. Although traffic was slow, it was relatively constant. With only one designated crossing point with controlled lights located towards the Eastern end, the Western end felt unsafe to cross. A lack of signage was also noted; however, one public map was available towards the centre.

Public Transport - 4/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

The railway station is in close proximity to the town centre. Several buses were seen throughout and appeared a popular mode of transport. However, one coach driver noted the lack of designated parking for larger vehicles. If there was any available, it was poorly signposted and streets were difficult to navigate, due to this.

Parking - 3/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

Although parking was plentiful in the town centre, it was noted to reach capacity during peak times. However, additional parking can be found nearer the shorefront, a short distance away. Coach parking was lacking and poorly signposted.

Cycling Facilities - 2/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

There were no dedicated cycle lanes noted on-site and no signage was seen to highlight any cycle routes. Additionally, only one storage facility was seen in the form of bike-tying posts.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 4/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

There were numerous flower beds in bloom at the time of visit. The public gardens near the centre offered ample open space and trees were distributed throughout

Tourist Appeal - 3/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

Although Tain may be deemed attractive for tourists, there are facilities and attractions lacking in the town centre. There was a lack of traditionally tourist-oriented retail and the only attraction is the Pilgrimage/museum. The museum was not open at the time of visit, however.

Evening Economy - 2/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

A hotel, some takeaways and restaurants were noted on site but the town gave no indication of having a lively evening social offer.

Safety and Security - 3/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety throughout Tain's town centre with passive policing from overlooking residential properties. However, there did seem to be a lack of an evening economy, meaning the streets may feel slightly unsafe at night. Further, although CCTV was located throughout, the public toilets were closed due to vandalism and locals noted unsociable behaviour was common between youths.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

24.16 Public Toilets

There are public toilets located in Tain town centre. These appeared accessible and relatively well-signposted; yet were closed at the time of visit due to vandalism, meaning surveyors were unable to assess the facilities' internal condition.

24.17 Footfall

Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre.

Portree footfall results highlight that a total of 122 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period between 12 and 2pm. As this figure is as expected, given the size of the town, it is an indicator of good town centre health.

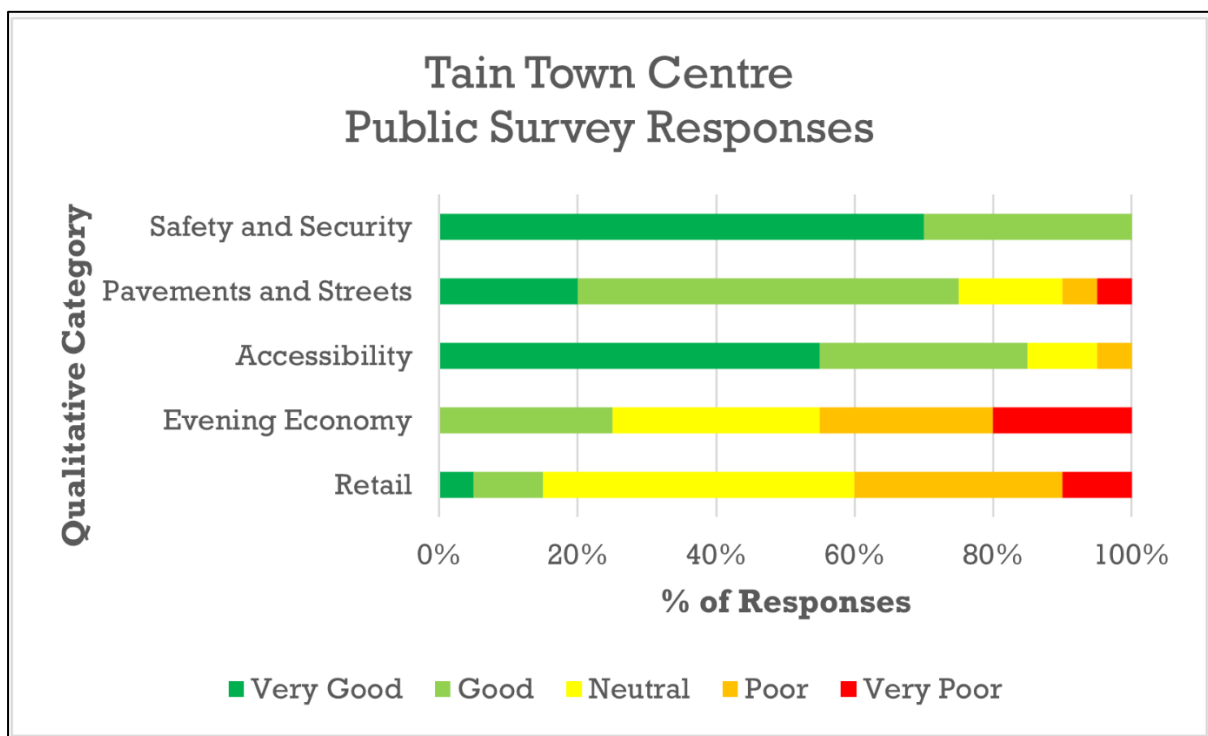
In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town's population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

24.18 Public Perceptions

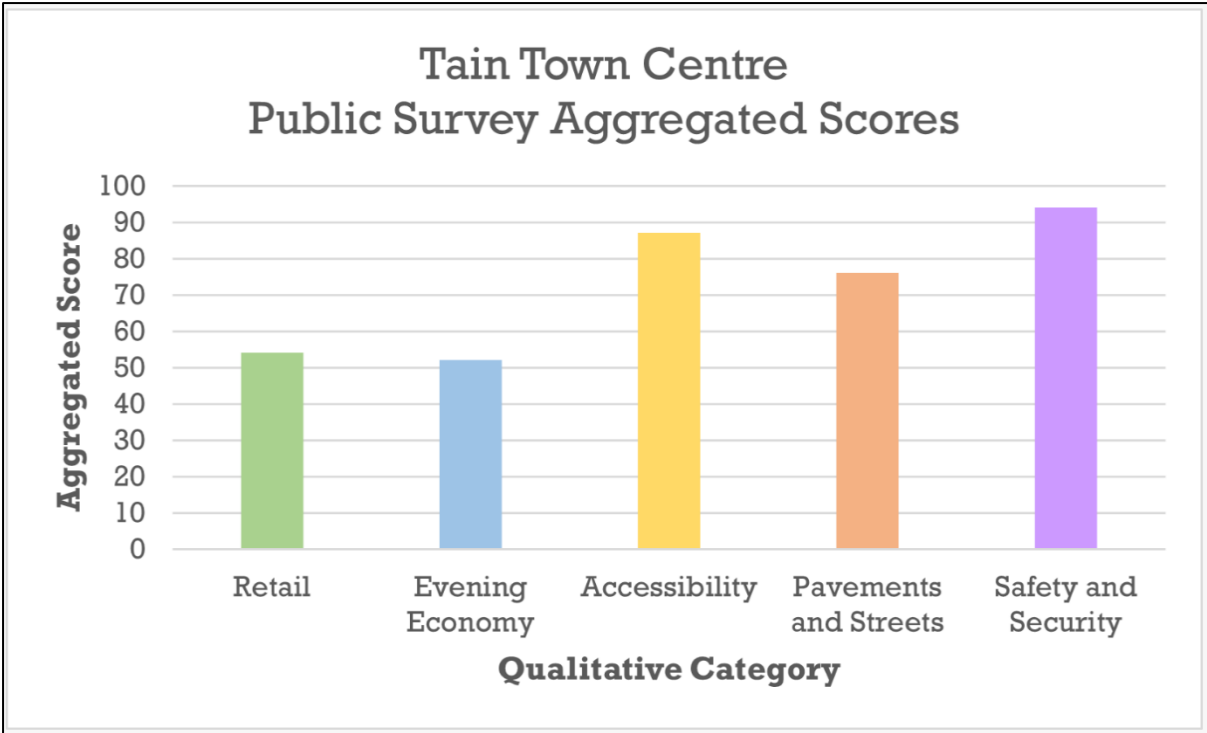
[Scottish Planning Policy](#) (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions in Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should "be

prepared collaboratively with... the local community” with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.

The results of the public survey are displayed to the right. As we can see, there are a mix of responses for most of the qualitative categories. Most responses were 'Very Good' for Safety and Security, perceptions of Accessibility and Pavements and Streets were mixed but generally good, whilst both Retail and the Evening Economy received a fairly divided response. With the majority of perceptions being 'Poor', it is clear that Tain's retail and evening economy offer is not the strongest, in the eyes of the public.



To further quantify these results, an overall score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap which can be accessed [here](#). When we look at these aggregated scores, we can see that in Tain town centre, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 94 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 87, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 76, 'Retail' scored 54 and 'Evening Economy' scored 52.



Portree scored 364 out of a possible total of 500, giving the town centre an 72.8% public satisfaction rating. This total score was calculated to give an indication of the town’s overall performance and allows for a critical, comparative evaluation of these scores which have been given by active users of the town centre.

24.19 Word Cloud



In addition to these quantitative measures, an open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a 'word cloud'. The diagram above highlights how Tain town centre is perceived by the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general state of Tain town centre. As we can see from this feedback, perceptions of the town centre are generally fairly negative with the stand-out words being 'vandalism' and 'run down'. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre's appeal.

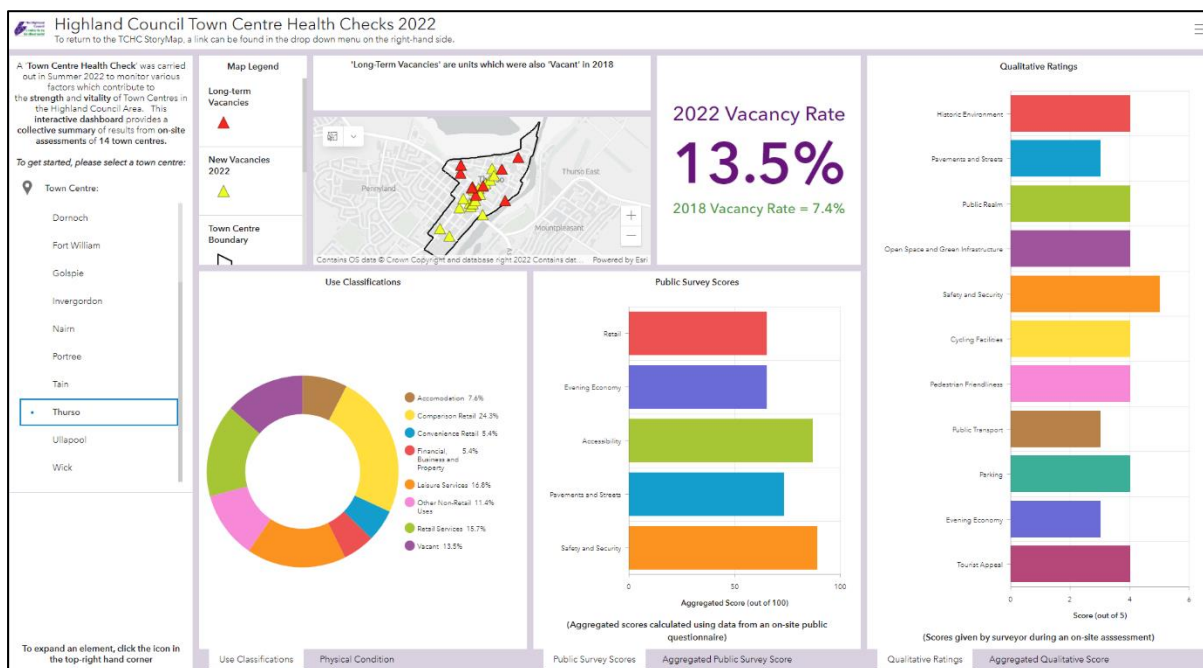
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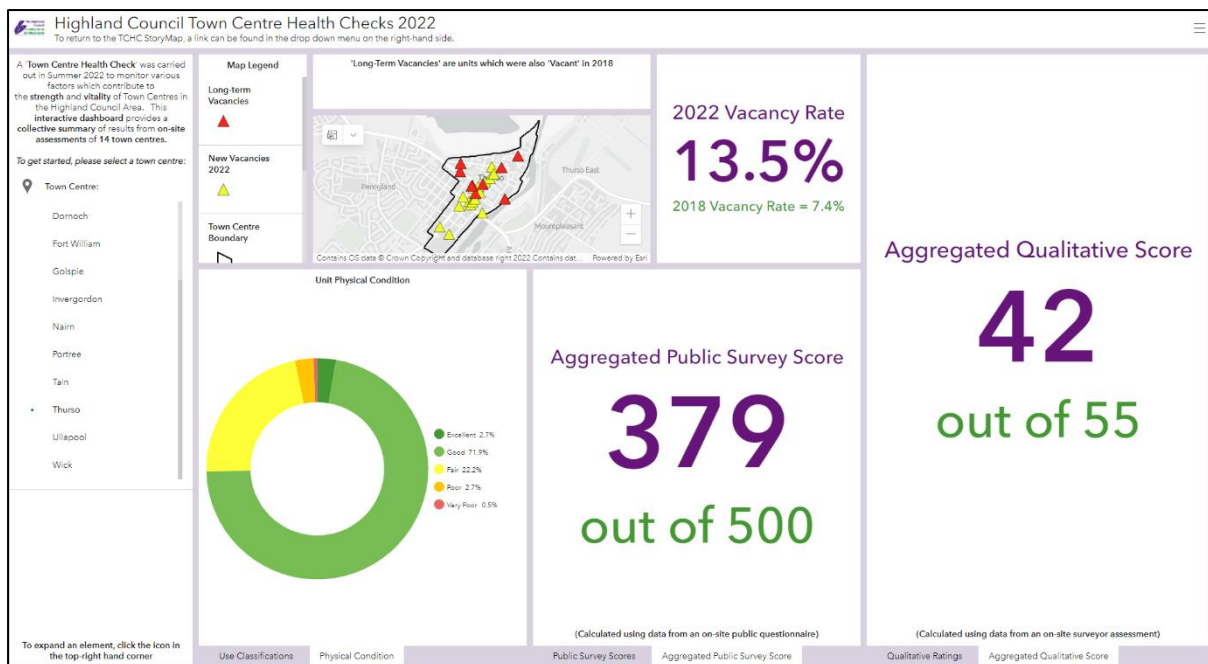
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f79e19975e084b18bdbff88bf757c67c?item=12>

25.1 Introduction

Thurso is the most Northern town on the Scottish mainland and hosts a range of facilities and services, acting as the administrative centre for the surrounding area. The town is home to the UK’s most northerly railway station which provides links to Inverness and other Highland towns such as Wick. In the town centre there are plentiful shops, cafés, restaurants etc. as well as a small museum and public library. To the Northern extent of the town centre, the coastal views are highly picturesque and serve as a hotspot for both locals and tourists.

25.2 Dashboard





25.3 Review

- Thurso's town centre health check assessment presented fairly mixed results
- Vacancy rates have increased from 7.4% in 2018 to 13.5% in 2022
- The town scored relatively well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 42 out of 55
- A 5/5 score was given for Safety and Security
- Public toilets are provided in Thurso town centre
- 138 pedestrians were counted on Thurso's High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm
- In the public survey, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 89 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 87, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 73 and both 'Retail' and 'Evening Economy' scored 65
- The town centre scored 379 out of a possible total of 500, giving Thurso a 75.8% public satisfaction rating

25.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

25.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 23 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Thurso's 185 units, 55 (29.7%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 130 (70.3%) have not.

25.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 185 retail/business units in Thurso town centre, of which:

- 31 were Leisure Services
- 45 were Comparison Retail
- 25 were Vacant
- 21 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 29 were Retail Services
- 14 were Accommodation
- 10 were Financial, Business and Property
- 10 were Convenience Retail

25.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

25.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Thurso town centre is detailed below:

- 47 units are independent and local retailers
- 8 units are national retailers

25.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

25.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

25.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

25.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

25.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Thurso town centre is 13.5% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 7.4%.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

16 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 9 units has remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as Occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of

attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 3 units which were Vacant in 2018 are now occupied as of 2022 in Thurso town centre.

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

25.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

Results show that all vacant units were classed as being in 'Good' (24%), 'Fair' (56%), 'Poor' (16%) or 'Very Poor' (4%) condition which indicates that some of these units are likely to detract from the surrounding streetscape.

25.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 4/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

Thurso's historic environment is in relatively good condition. Several buildings have retained a historic character due to maintenance, which contributes to the town centre's streetscape.

Pavements and Streets - 3/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

Although the pavements and streets were kept clean from litter, some were in visibly poor condition and some weeds were noted, particularly down side streets.

Public Realm - 4/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

Although public art was relatively lacking throughout, there was plentiful street furniture available; all of which were in generally good condition. Statues, particularly those outside the Church of Scotland, offered visual interest.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 4/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

Thurso town centre appeared relatively easy to navigate, although some more signposts would have been useful. The High Street was predominantly pedestrianised and light controlled crossings/tactile paving offered a sense of road safety.

Public Transport - 3/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

Although the town is served by a railway station, the frequency of services to other towns is lacking; particularly later in the day. Bus services are distributed throughout, however, and are more frequent.

Parking - 4/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

There was a substantial amount of parking in the town centre with some spaces being available at the rear end of the High Street. This appeared busy during peak times, however, and parking restrictions were in place throughout.

Cycling Facilities - 4/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

No cycling facilities or bike storage was noted in the town centre during the on-site visit and cycling was prohibited in some areas. National Route 1 runs through Thurso and is relatively well-signposted, however. Wide roads and light controlled crossings also gave a sense that it would be safe to cycle.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 4/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

There was an abundance of flower baskets and beds in bloom at the time of visit. Presence of a formal landscape in the centre offered green infrastructure and the town's coastal location offered open space in the dense town centre.

Tourist Appeal - 4/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

Due to Thurso's coastal location and situation along the North Coast 500, the town centre can be considered appealing for tourists. The North Coast Visitor Centre offered tourist information services and public maps were distributed throughout.

Evening Economy - 3/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The presence of an evening economy appeared to be somewhat lacking in Thurso's town centre despite some restaurants, hotels, public bars and hot food takeaways throughout.

Safety and Security - 5/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety throughout Thurso's town centre with passive policing from overlooking residential properties and presence of CCTV throughout. A lack of an evening economy was highlighted by locals however, meaning some streets may feel unsafe at night due to a lack of footfall.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

25.16 Public Toilets

There are Public Toilets located in Thurso's town centre. These are accessible, relatively well-signposted and appeared to be generally well-maintained when assessed on-site.

25.17 Footfall

Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre.

Thurso footfall results highlight that a total of 138 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period. As this figure is as expected, although a little low given the size of the town, it is an indicator of good town centre health.

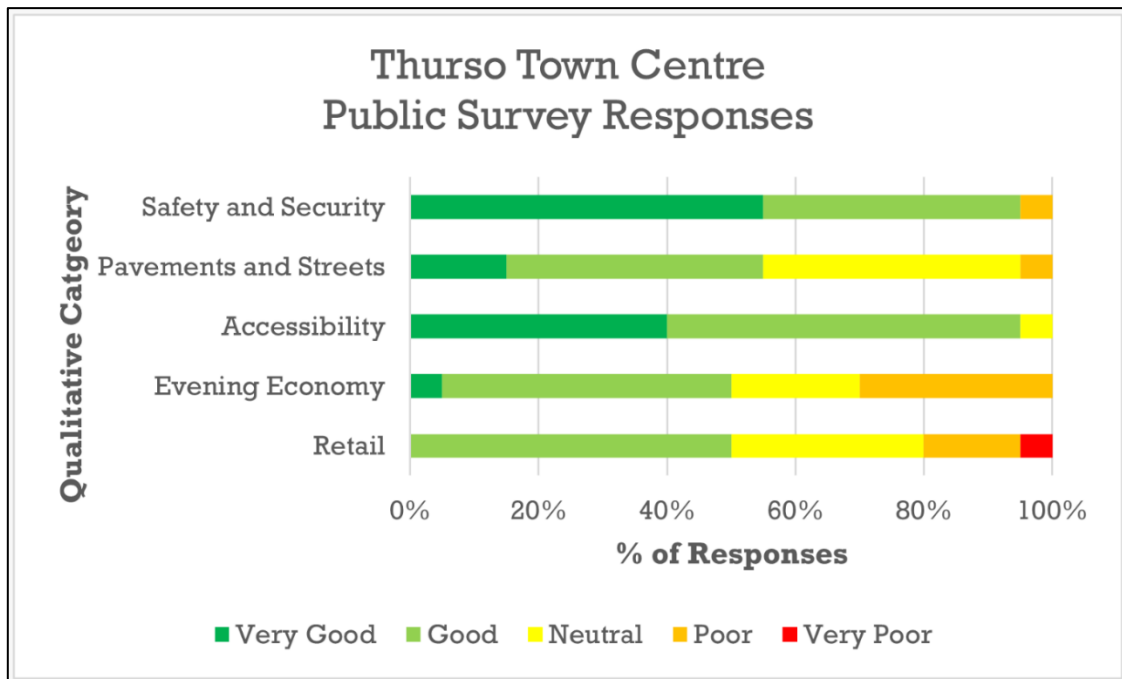
In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town's population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

25.18 Public Perceptions

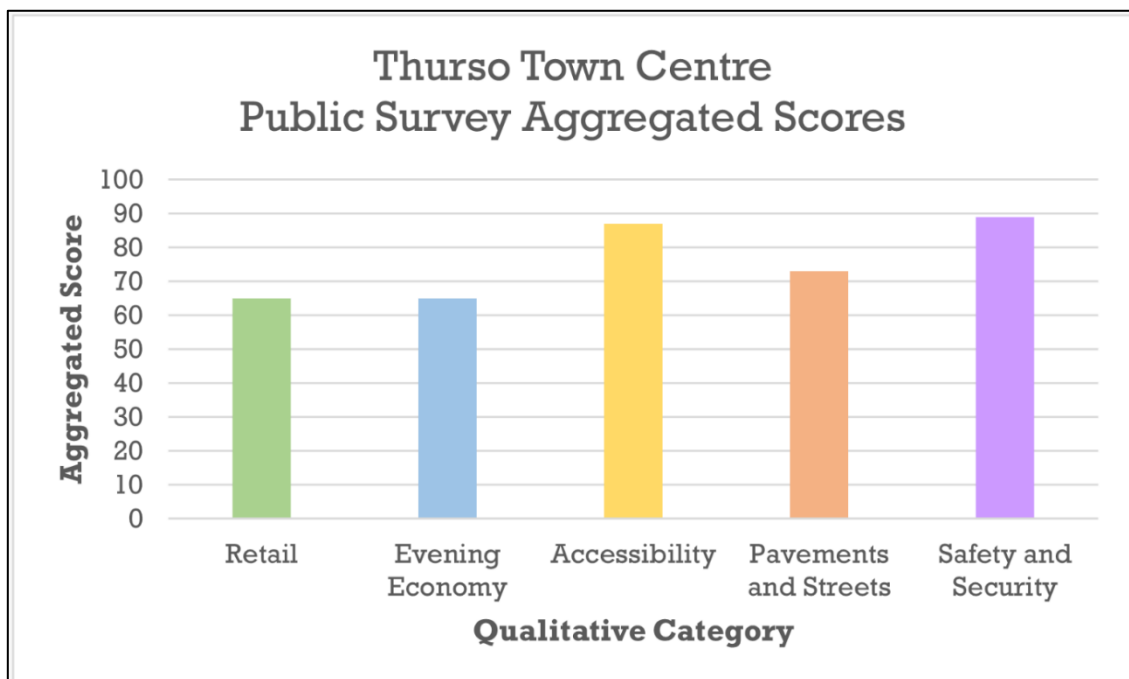
[Scottish Planning Policy](#) (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions in Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should "be prepared collaboratively with... the local community" with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.

The results of the public survey are displayed to the right. As we can see, there are a mix of responses for most of the qualitative categories. Most responses were 'Very Good' for Safety and Security, perceptions of the Pavements and Streets and Accessibility were mixed

but generally good, whilst both Retail and the Evening Economy received a fairly divided response. With the majority of perceptions being 'Poor', it is clear that Thurso's retail and evening economy offer is not the strongest, in the eyes of the public.

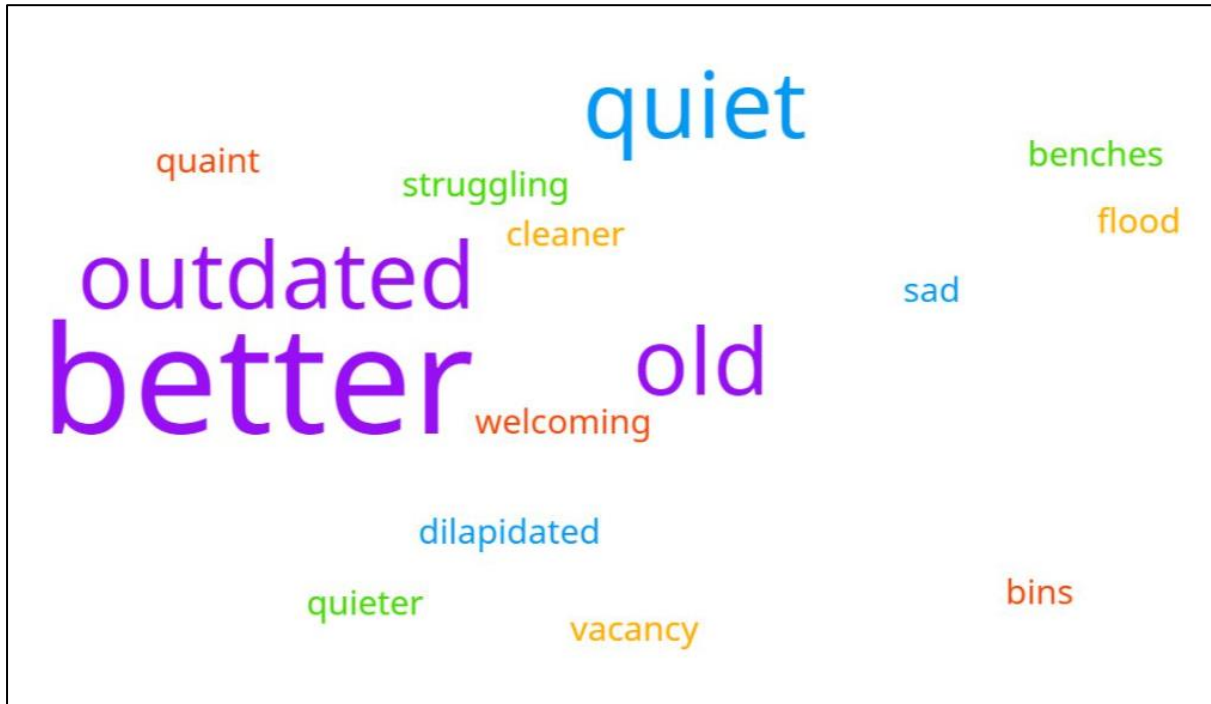


To further quantify these results, an overall score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap which can be accessed [here](#). When we look at these aggregated scores, we can see that in Thurso town centre, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 89 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 87, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 73 and both 'Retail' and 'Evening Economy' scored 65.



Thurso scored 379 out of a possible total of 500, giving the town centre an 75.8% public satisfaction rating. This total score was calculated to give an indication of the town's overall performance and allows for a critical, comparative evaluation of these scores which have been given by active users of the town centre.

25.19 Word Cloud



In addition to these quantitative measures, an open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a 'word cloud'. The diagram above highlights how Thurso town centre is perceived by the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general state of Thurso town centre. As we can see from this feedback, perceptions of the town centre are generally mixed with the stand-out words being 'better' and 'outdated'. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre's appeal.

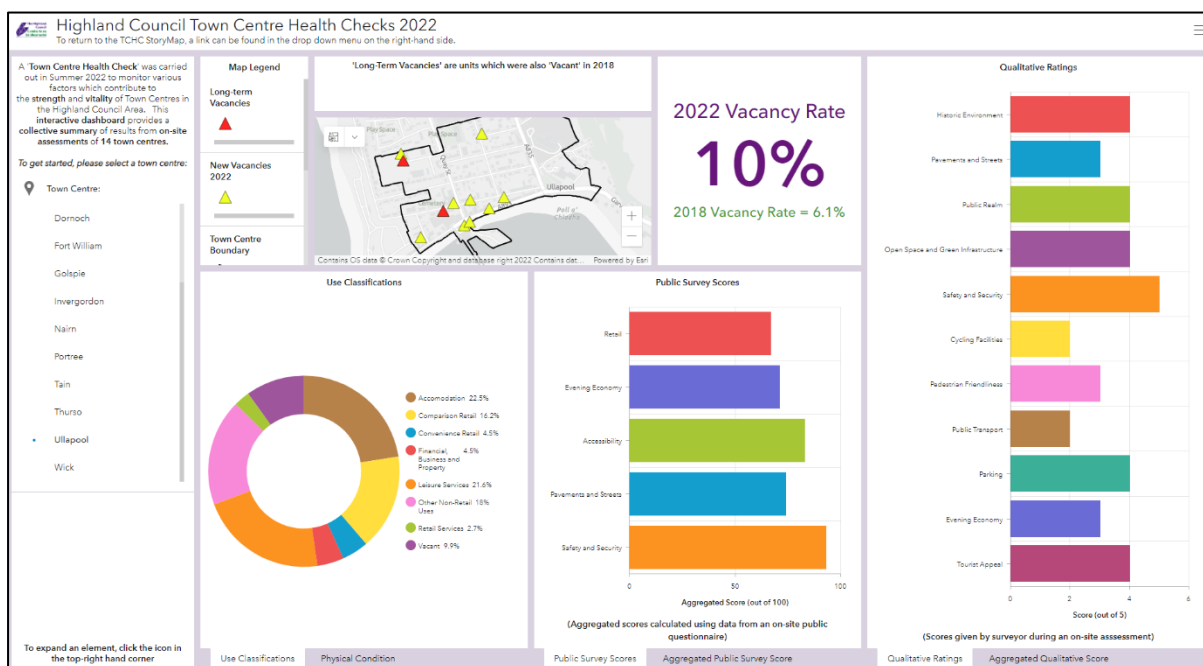
26 Ullapool

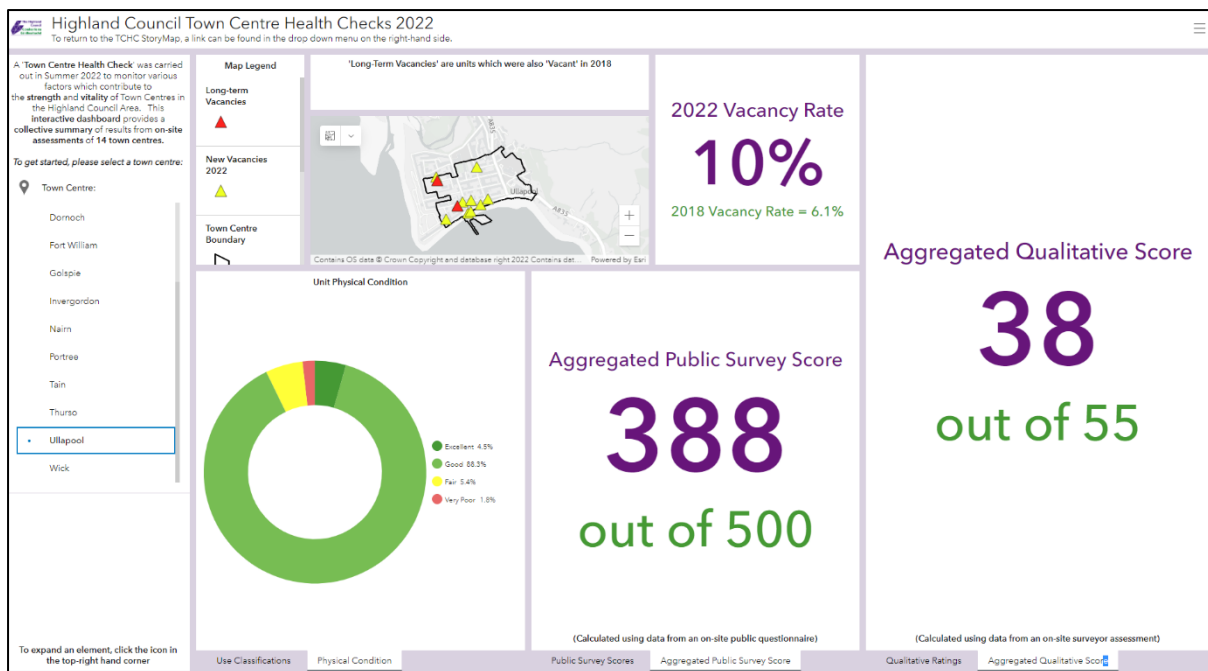
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f79e19975e084b18bdbff88bf757c67c?item=13>

26.1 Introduction

Ullapool is located on the banks of Loch Broom, surrounded by picturesque scenery. The town forms part of the popular North Coast 500 and is an important tourist centre due to its ferry services to the Western Isles. With a long history of fishing and sea trade, the communities in and around Ullapool continue to highly value sea life and marine environments. Home to a small museum, independent retailers and a range of restaurants and cafés, Ullapool is considered unique in character, with a distinctive townscape. Recent, ongoing developments along the shorefront are hoped to increase the town’s vitality and create a more attractive pier area for both locals and visitors.

26.2 Dashboard





26.3 Review

- Ullapool's town centre health check assessment presented fairly mixed results
- Vacancy rates have increased from 6.1% in 2018 to 10% in 2022
- The town scored relatively well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 38 out of 55
- A 5/5 score was given for Safety and Security
- Public toilets are provided in Ullapool town centre
- 203 pedestrians were counted on Ullapool's High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm
- In the public survey, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 93 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 83, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 74, 'Evening Economy' scored 71 and 'Retail' scored 67.
- The town centre scored 379 out of a possible total of 500, giving Ullapool a 75.8% public satisfaction rating

26.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

26.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 27 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Ullapool's 110 units, 49 (44.5%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 61 (55.5%) have not.

26.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 110 retail/business units in Ullapool town centre, of which:

- 25 were Accommodation
- 24 were Leisure Services
- 20 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 17 were Comparison Retail
- 11 were Vacant
- 5 were Financial, Business and Property
- 5 were Convenience Retail
- 3 were Retail Service

26.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

26.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Ullapool town centre is detailed below:

- 20 units are independent and local retailers
- 2 units are national retailers

26.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

26.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre
- Youth Club

26.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

26.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

26.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Ullapool town centre is 10% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 vacancy rate which was 6.1%.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

8 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 2 units has remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as Occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of

attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 3 units which were Vacant in 2018 are now occupied as of 2022 in Ullapool town centre.

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

26.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

Results show that all vacant units were classed as being in 'Good' (54.5%), Fair (27.3%) or 'Very Poor' (18.2%) condition which indicates that some of these units are likely to detract from the surrounding streetscape.

26.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 4/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

Although a number of the older style buildings around the town centre are in need of general maintenance due to poor condition, these did not detract from the overall streetscape, with the majority being in good condition.

Pavements and Streets - 3/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

Although the pavements and streets were kept generally clean from litter and weeds, crack and potholes in the roads were noted throughout. Additionally, locals highlighted that these can be prone to litter during the busy Summer months.

Public Realm - 4/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

Although public art was slightly lacking, with only a couple of monuments being present in the town centre, this was offset by the number and condition of street furniture which was distributed around. There appeared to be sufficient benches and bins, particularly concentrated in the area of green space, which were in good condition and offered seating to look over attractive loch views.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 4/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

Although there was plentiful signage and traffic was relatively slow moving, it was noted during the public survey that pavements and streets were seen to not be suitable for those with mobility scooters or push chairs due to a lack of dropped kerb crossings and tactile paving.

Public Transport - 2/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

Although the town's ferry port offers services to the Western Isles, public transport in the town centre was lacking. No bus stops were noted on-site and the town lacks a railway station.

Parking - 4/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

There was ample parking available noted on-site. A large car park is located at the superstore and other spaces were available throughout; albeit they reached capacity during peak times. Traffic wardens were also seen during the on-site visit.

Cycling Facilities - 2/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

Although roads are generally wide enough, there were no dedicated cycle lanes noted on-site; nor any bike storage or posts. The town is also not on any National cycle route.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 4/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

There was plentiful green, open space throughout the town centre. The park in particular was of high quality and offered views to the loch and surrounding mountains. It was noted by locals that flower displays were somewhat lacking, however, with only a couple being noted on-site.

Tourist Appeal - 4/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

Ullapool was host to a number of tourists at the time of the on-site visit which was an indicator of its popularity. There was an abundance of public maps, accommodation, retail and a small museum that would appeal to tourists.

Evening Economy - 3/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The presence of a small evening economy was noted in Ullapool's town centre with hotels, restaurants and hot food takeaways.

Safety and Security - 5/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

There was a general sense of safety throughout Ullapool's town centre with passive policing from overlooking residential properties and a slight evening economy, which ensured people were on the street until late evening.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

26.16 Public Toilets

There are Public Toilets located in Ullapool's town centre. These are accessible, relatively well-signposted and appeared to be generally well-maintained when assessed on-site.

26.17 Footfall

Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre.

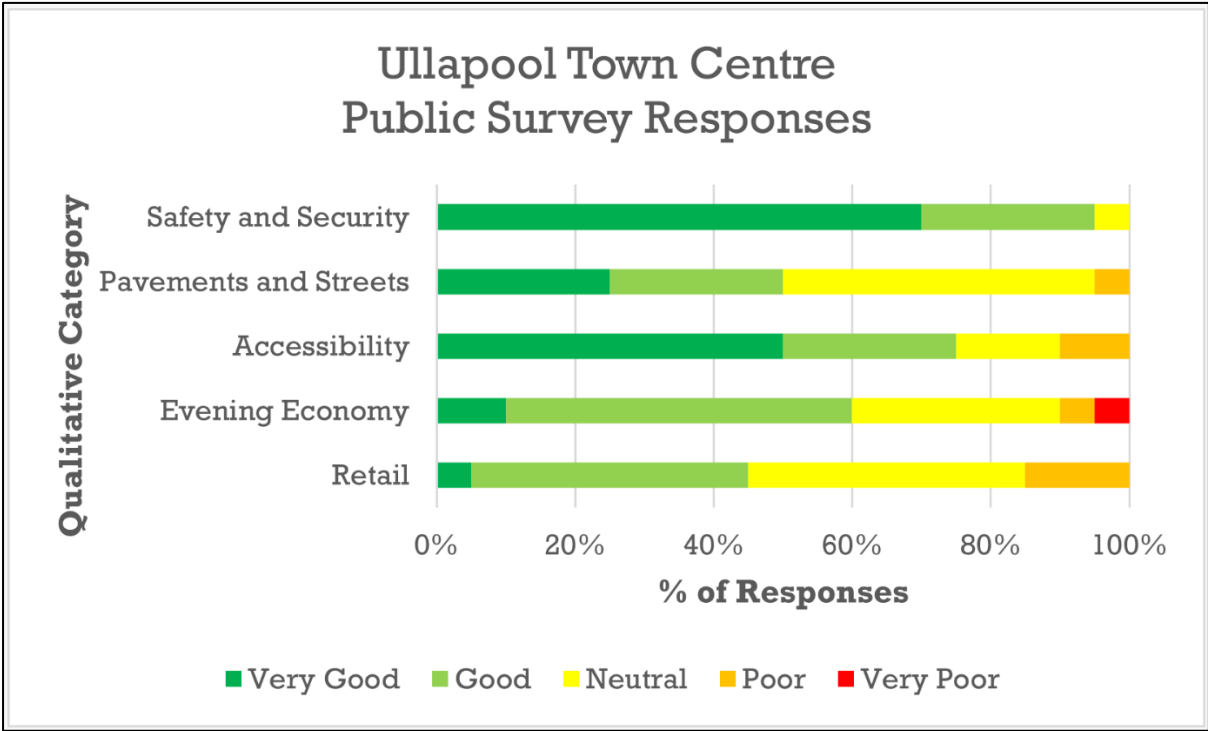
Ullapool footfall results highlight that a total of 203 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period. As this figure is as expected, although a little low given the size of the town, it is an indicator of good town centre health.

In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town's population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

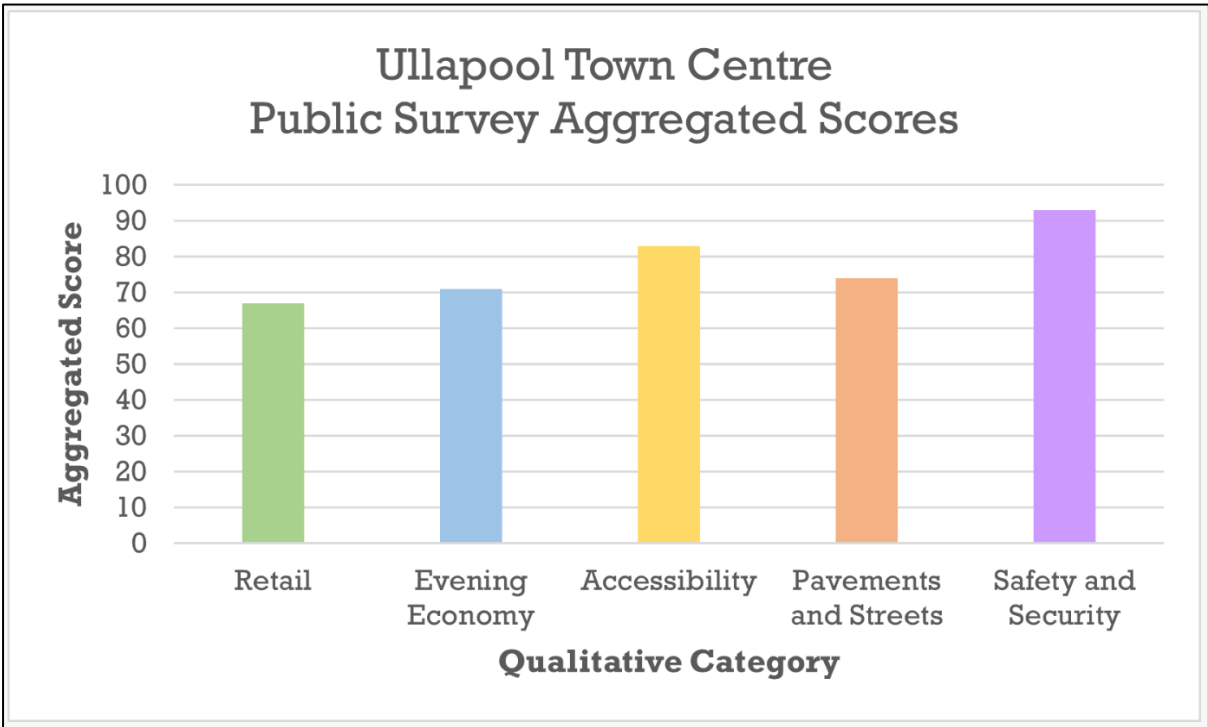
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The results of the public survey are displayed to the right. As we can see, there are a mix of responses for most of the qualitative categories. Most responses were 'Very Good' for Safety and Security, perceptions of Accessibility were mixed but generally good, whilst Pavements and Streets, Retail and the Evening Economy received a fairly divided response.

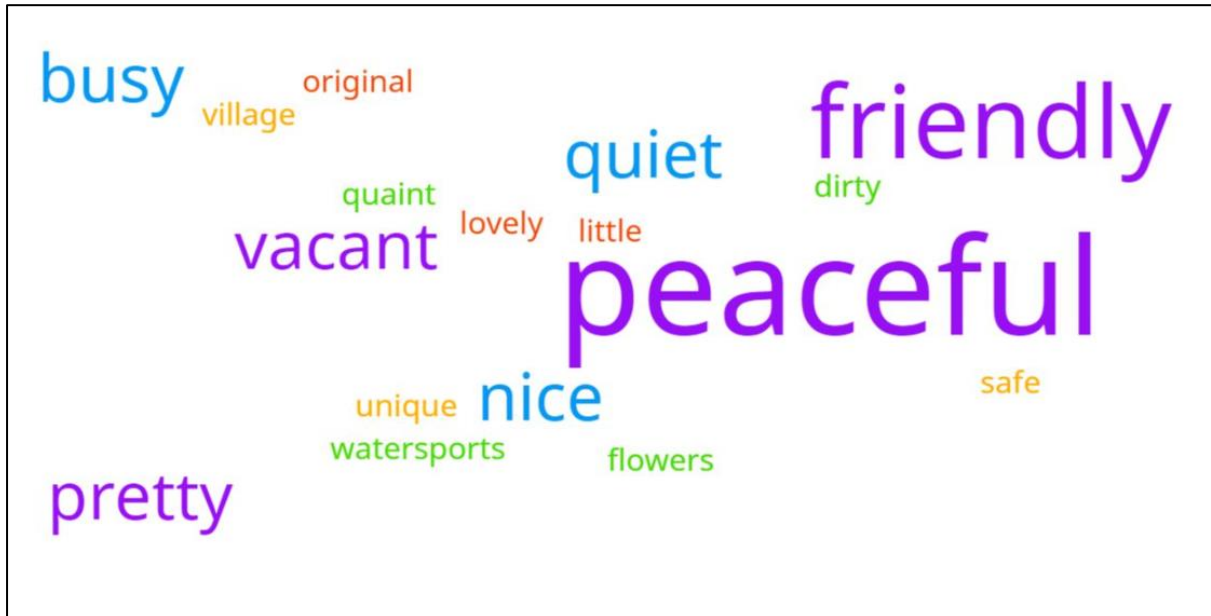


To further quantify these results, an overall score for each category was calculated using the formula outlined in the Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap which can be accessed [here](#). When we look at these aggregated scores, we can see that in Ullapool town centre, 'Safety and Security' scored the highest out of the five categories with 93 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Accessibility' scored 83, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 74, 'Evening Economy' scored 71 and 'Retail' scored 67.



Ullapool scored 388 out of a possible total of 500, giving the town centre an 77.6% public satisfaction rating. This total score was calculated to give an indication of the town’s overall performance and allows for a critical, comparative evaluation of these scores which have been given by active users of the town centre.

26.19 Word Cloud



In addition to these quantitative measures, an open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a ‘word cloud’. The diagram above highlights how Ullapool town centre is perceived by the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general state of Ullapool town centre. As we can see from this feedback, perceptions of the town centre are generally positive with the stand-out words being 'peaceful' and 'friendly'. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre’s appeal.

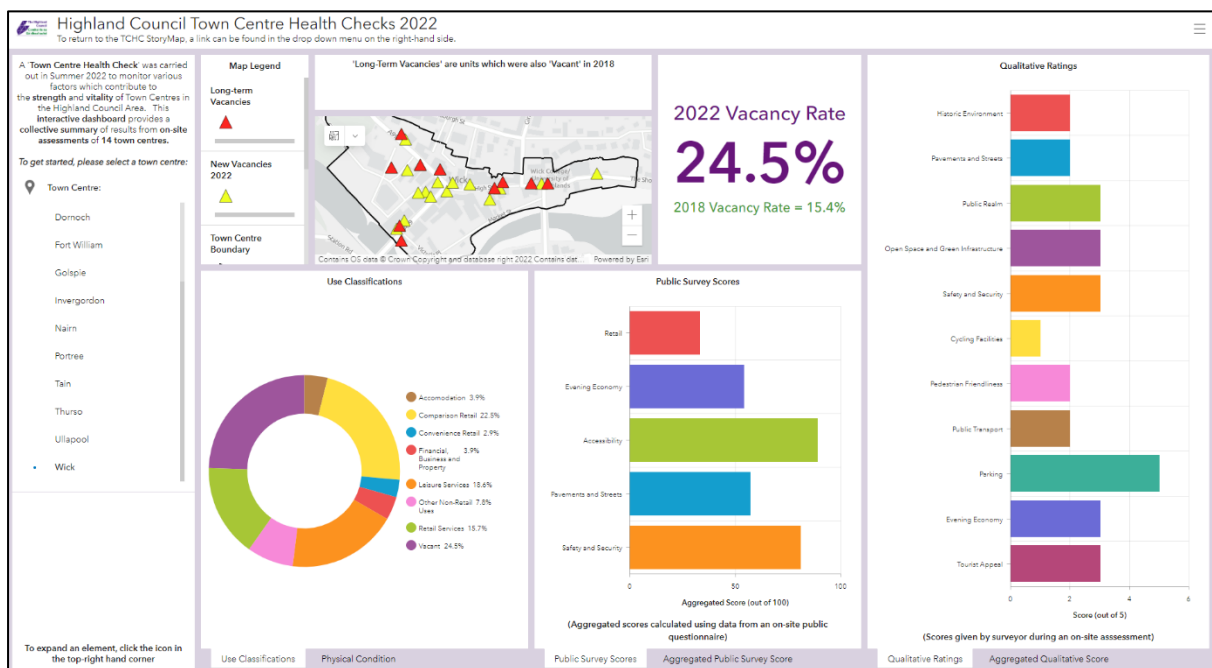
27 Wick

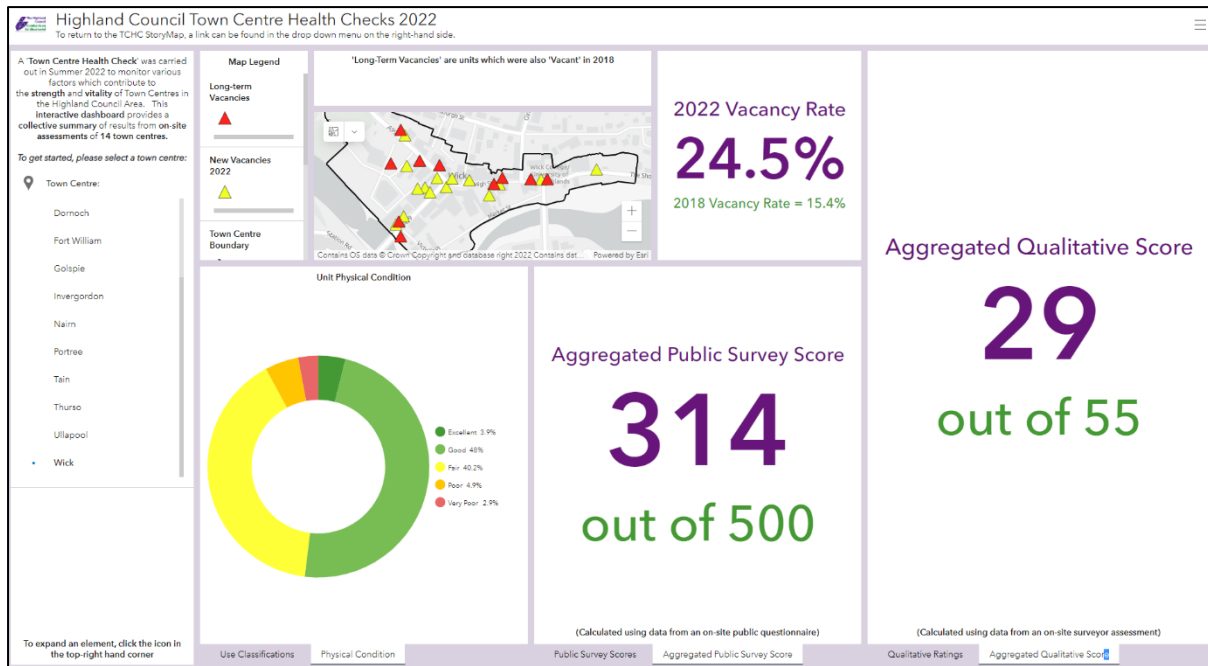
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f79e19975e084b18bdbff88bf757c67c?item=14>

27.1 Introduction

Wick is located approximately 103 miles North of Inverness on the popular North Coast 500 route. The town is royal burgh in Caithness which sits on the Wick river and is home to the World’s shortest street. History of the town is highlighted in the local heritage centre which emphasises the importance of the fishing port and the Pulteneytown. The High Street is pedestrianised and plans for local development can be seen on the outside of the Highland Council building on Market Place.

27.2 Dashboard





27.3 Review

- Wick can be considered one of the less healthier town centres which have been assessed as part of this study
- Vacancy rates have increased from 15.4% in 2018 to 24.5% in 2022
- The town did not score that well in the surveyor's on-site qualitative assessment, with an aggregated score of 29 out of 55; the lowest of all the town centres included in this study
- A 5/5 score was given for Parking
- A 1/5 score was given for Cycling Facilities
- Public toilets are not provided in Wick town centre, however, the town is part of the Highland Council's comfort scheme
- 61 pedestrians were counted on Wick's High Street during a 30 minute period between 12 and 2pm
- In the public survey, 'Accessibility' scored the highest out of the five categories with 89 out of a possible 100. Next, 'Safety and Security' scored 81, 'Pavements and Streets' scored 57, 'Evening Economy' scored 54 and 'Retail' scored 33
- The town centre scored 314 out of a possible total of 500, giving Wick a 62.8% public satisfaction rating

27.4 Retail Audit

Following on from the previous Town Centre Health Check, published in [2018](#), an updated Highland-wide retail audit was undertaken as part of the 2022 study. Through monitoring the occupancy, functional use, physical condition and number of units within the chosen town centres, this comparative research ensures that data reflects an up-to-date representation of each town's streetscape

27.5 Base Retail Audit

The 2022 audit includes 10 additional units as part of this year's study. This research also identified the number of units which have changed occupant or usage between 2018 and 2022 audits.

Of Wick's 102 units, 40 (39.2%) of which have changed since 2018, whilst 62 (60.8%) have not.

27.6 Use Classifications

The updated retail audit for 2022 identified 102 retail/business units in Wick town centre, of which:

- 25 were Vacant
- 23 were Comparison Retail
- 19 were Leisure Services
- 16 were Retail Services
- 8 were Other Non-Retail Uses
- 4 were Accommodation
- 4 were Financial, Business and Property
- 3 were Convenience Retail

27.7 Physical Condition

The visual quality and structural maintenance of the built environment can be an indicator of a town centre's health and vitality. As in 2018, an assessment of each unit's physical condition was recorded as part of the 2022 audit; spatial distributions of such can be seen on the map to the right.

The typology for classifying each unit's physical condition is detailed below:

1. Very Poor (i.e. partial or total collapse, boarded windows, premises used for dumping)
2. Poor (i.e. broken windows, broken tiles, water damage, blocked gutters)
3. Fair (i.e. weeds in gutters/paving, peeling or chipped paintwork)
4. Good (i.e. some weeds in gutters/paving, some faded/chipped paintwork)
5. Very Good (i.e. perfect condition, no noticeable flaws)

27.8 Independent and National Retailer Mix

The presence of more independent, local retailers is often considered a feature of good town centre health as profits from these shops tend to stay within the local economy. Alternatively, a high proportion of national retailers can suggest that a town centre is considered to be high in retail value and worthy of attracting businesses based further afield.

An indication of the mix of retail offer in each town can provide a basis for assessing town centre health. The proportion of independent vs. national retailers in Wick town centre is detailed below:

- 20 units are independent and local retailers
- 6 units are national retailers

27.9 Key Retail, Financial and Other Services

When assessing the health of a town centre, it is important to recognise which public facilities and retail services are key to the success of a town centre. Essential services such as food shops, financial hubs and post offices are just a selection of features which should be available in a town centre to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all potential users; particularly for those whose access to areas out-with the town centre may be restricted due to limited mobility or distance. As many towns in the Highlands tend to serve substantial geographic areas, it is crucial that town centres act as service hubs to ensure that these key services and facilities are widely accessible for locals, those who live in surrounding areas and potential visitors.

The full list of what we deemed to be the key services that make up a 'successful' town centre, is detailed below:

- Supermarket/General Convenience/Newsagents
- Bank/Post Office
- Pharmacy
- Clothing and Footwear
- Hair Salon/Barber
- Butcher
- Dentist
- Launderette
- Locksmith
- Job Centre
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Veterinary Practice

27.10 Leisure and Culture

Leisure and Cultural services and facilities are also considered to be indicators of 'good' town centre health. Day-time activities such as museums, public libraries and sports centres are often deemed to complement retail facilities, when located in close proximity. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of day-time leisure and cultural facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Museum
- Public Library
- Cinema/Theatre
- Sports/Leisure Centre
- Tourist Information Office
- Village Hall/Community Centre

- Youth Club

27.11 Evening Economy

Evening/night-time leisure services are crucial for sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of town centres. Facilities such as public bars, restaurants and hot food takeaways are essential for prolonging footfall activity and ensuring that the streets are kept busy after dark. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of evening/night-time leisure facilities that can be found in town centres, is detailed below:

- Restaurants/Café's
- Hotels/Public Bars/Nightclubs
- Hot Food Takeaways

27.12 Less Desirable Services and Facilities

Some features are commonly associated with 'poor' town centre health and can have a negative impact on the vitality and success of a town centre. An abundance of charity shops and/or betting shops is considered to have a negative imprint on a town centre's streetscape. We monitored the number and spatial distribution of these services in each town centre as part of the 2022 audit.

The full list of potentially less desirable services and facilities which tend to be in town centres, is detailed below:

- Charity Shops
- Betting/Gambling Shops
- Pawnbrokers/Second-hand Goods

27.13 Vacancies

The number of vacant units can also reflect poorly on a town centre. When assessing vacancy rates, it is important to not only monitor the proportion of occupied vs. vacant units, but also the spatial distribution of such. When found in clusters, vacant properties often reflect an area which is in a state of decay or neglect. It is important to monitor how these measures change over time.

The vacancy rate in Wick town centre is 24.5% as of 2022; an increase from the 2018 increase which was 15.4%.

It is important to recognise that this audit was undertaken in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and these vacancy/occupancy rates may simply be a reflection on the economic difficulties that have been faced, on a global scale, over the past few years. It will be interesting to see how the picture may change between the 2022 study and the next Town Centre Health Check.

14 new vacant units were identified in the updated retail audit, whilst 10 units has remained vacant since 2018. Any long-term vacancies are important to note as they flag units which have failed to attract new occupiers.

It is important to note which of the units that were classified as vacant in 2018, have been identified as Occupied in 2022. These units represent how capable each town centre is of attracting new businesses and unit ownership. 4 units which were Vacant in 2018 are now occupied as of 2022 in Wick town centre.

The presence of vacant or derelict land use can make a town centre unattractive to development as neglected buildings can often have a negative visual impact on their surroundings. An assessment of the physical condition of all vacant units is made, to ensure that any state of decline is reported and monitored.

27.14 Physical Condition of Vacant Units

Results show that all vacant units were classed as being in 'Good' (24%), 'Fair' (48%), 'Poor' (16%) or 'Very Poor' (12%) condition which indicates that some of these units are likely to detract from the surrounding streetscape.

27.15 Qualitative Ratings

11 indicators of town centre health were assessed on a scale of 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Very Good), based on observations made during on-site visits. Ratings are presented below, alongside qualitative commentary and supporting imagery.

Historic Environment - 2/5

Listed buildings by occupancy/condition; Other historic buildings by occupancy/condition

There were multiple vacant and derelict buildings throughout Wick town centre which detracted from the attractiveness of the streetscape. Many were lacking maintenance and some boarded up windows were noted on-site.

Pavements and Streets - 2/5

Clutter; Cracks and Potholes; Litter; Fly-Tipping; Weeds etc.

The pavements and streets were in relatively poor condition. Side streets in particular were overgrown with weeds and cracks/potholes were noted throughout.

Public Realm - 3/5

Number and Condition of Public Art/Statues/Street Furniture

Although public art was somewhat lacking, seat furniture was distributed throughout. However, many of these could do with maintenance.

Pedestrian Friendliness - 2/5

Traffic Speed; Appropriate Crossings; Signage; Ease of Movement/Navigation

Although the High Street was pedestrianised, more cars were noted to be going down it, than people, during the footfall count. Traffic speeds were not appropriate for such a built up area, making the street feel unsafe for pedestrians. However, signage was distributed throughout and the centre was easy to navigate.

Public Transport - 2/5

Infrastructure and Facilities; Modes; Routes; Main Connections and Frequency

Although a bus route runs through the town centre, one local noted the services are unreliable and infrequent. The town is served by a railway station with connections to Inverness and other Highland towns, however, services are also infrequent, particularly later in the day.

Parking - 5/5

Availability; Proximity to Facilities; Number of Spaces; Restrictions

There was ample designated parking throughout the town centre. These are relatively well signposted and did not seem to overflow, even during peak times.

Cycling Facilities - 1/5

Shared-use Paths; Signage; Storage and Infrastructure

Cycling facilities were notably lacking throughout with only one bike-tying post noted on-site. The town is also not part of any National route and no cycle lanes were seen.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure - 3/5

Parks; Gardens; Formal Landscapes; Play Parks; Trees

Some flower beds and baskets were in bloom at the time of visit and an area of green space is located to one end of the town centre. However, much of the town's open/green space is located out with the town centre.

Tourist Appeal - 3/5

Number & Quality of Attractions; Tourist Information Boards/Leaflets; Presence of Publicly Available Maps; Availability of Accommodation

Due to its situation along the popular NC500, Wick encounters many visitors each year. Attractions such as the World's shortest street and the heritage centre (although this is not within the town centre) are sites of interest. Public maps are widely available and distributed throughout.

Evening Economy - 3/5

Sense of Night-Life; Pubs; Clubs; Restaurants

The presence of an evening economy appeared to be lacking in Wick's town centre. However, there did appear to be some restaurants, bars and takeaways throughout; although several were closed at the time of visit.

Safety and Security - 3/5

Lighting; CCTV; Passive Policing

Although Police CCTV was noted on-site, some narrow streets and alleyways could feel unsafe - particularly in areas where derelict buildings are concentrated.

In addition to this qualitative score, crime level data for each town centre can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020) which can be viewed [here](#).

27.16 Public Toilets

There were no Public Toilet facilities located in Wick's town centre. However, the town is part of the Highland Council's comfort scheme. For more information, click [here](#).

27.17 Footfall

Footfall is a widely recognised indicator for assessing behavioural patterns, accessibility and pedestrian traffic in urban environments. This study uses the number of people walking past a central point as a quantitative measure of activity levels in each town centre.

Wick footfall results highlight that a total of 61 pedestrians passed a central point on the High Street within a 30-minute period. As this figure is a little low given the size of the town, it is an indicator of slightly poor town centre health.

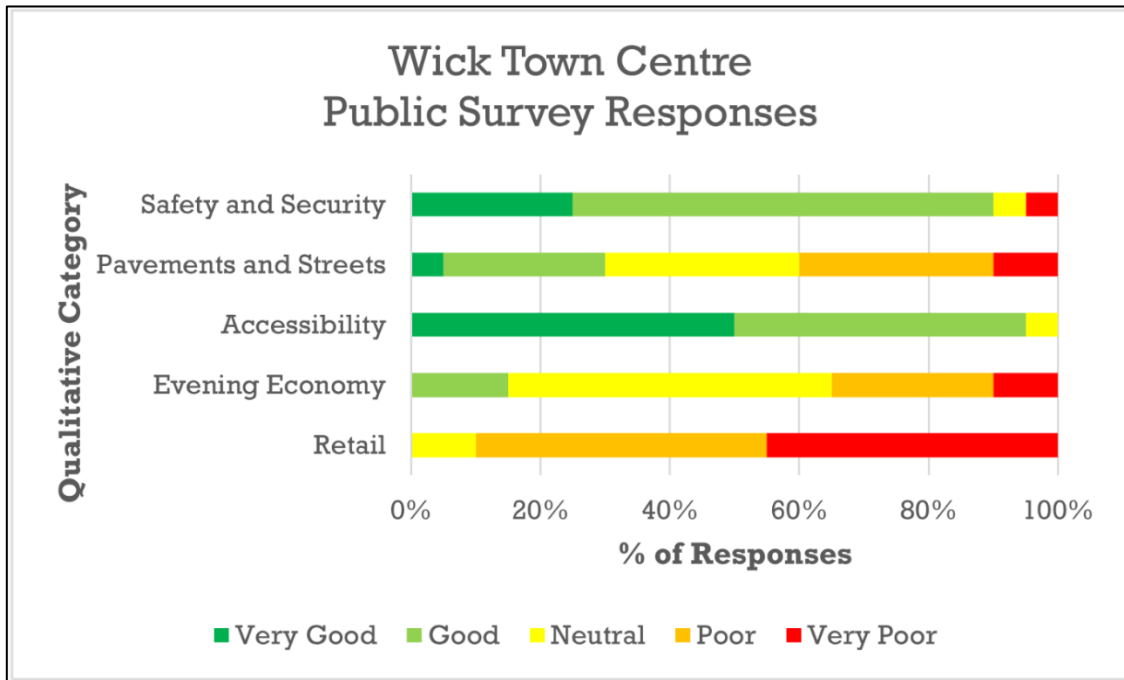
In order to provide some quantitative context, each footfall count has also been compared with each town's population in the [Town Centre Health Check 2022 Introductory StoryMap](#). Through comparing these two datasets, we can see where footfall may be higher/lower than would be expected, given the size of the population and likely users of the town centre.

27.18 Public Perceptions

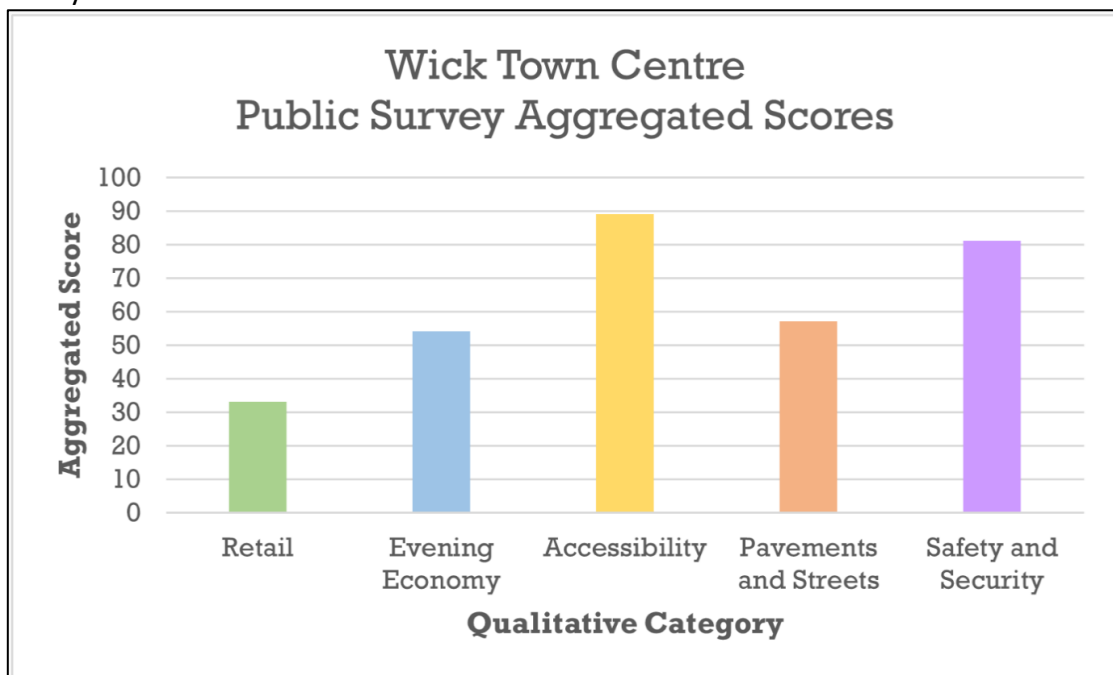
[Scottish Planning Policy](#) (2014) drew emphasis on the value of community contributions in Town Centre Health Check reports. The policy states that health checks should "be prepared collaboratively with... the local community" with particular emphasis on community aspirations for, and perspectives on, their town centres. A public questionnaire was delivered as part of the 2022 study to fulfil this recommendation, with the aim of engaging with 20 users of each town centre, to gain perspectives from both locals and visitors.

The results of the public survey are displayed to the right. As we can see, there are a mix of responses for most of the qualitative categories. Most responses were generally 'Good' for

Safety and Security and Accessibility, whilst perceptions of Pavements and Streets, Retail and the Evening Economy received a fairly divided response. With the majority of perceptions being 'Fair' or 'Poor', it is clear that Wick's retail and evening economy offer is not the strongest, in the eyes of the public.

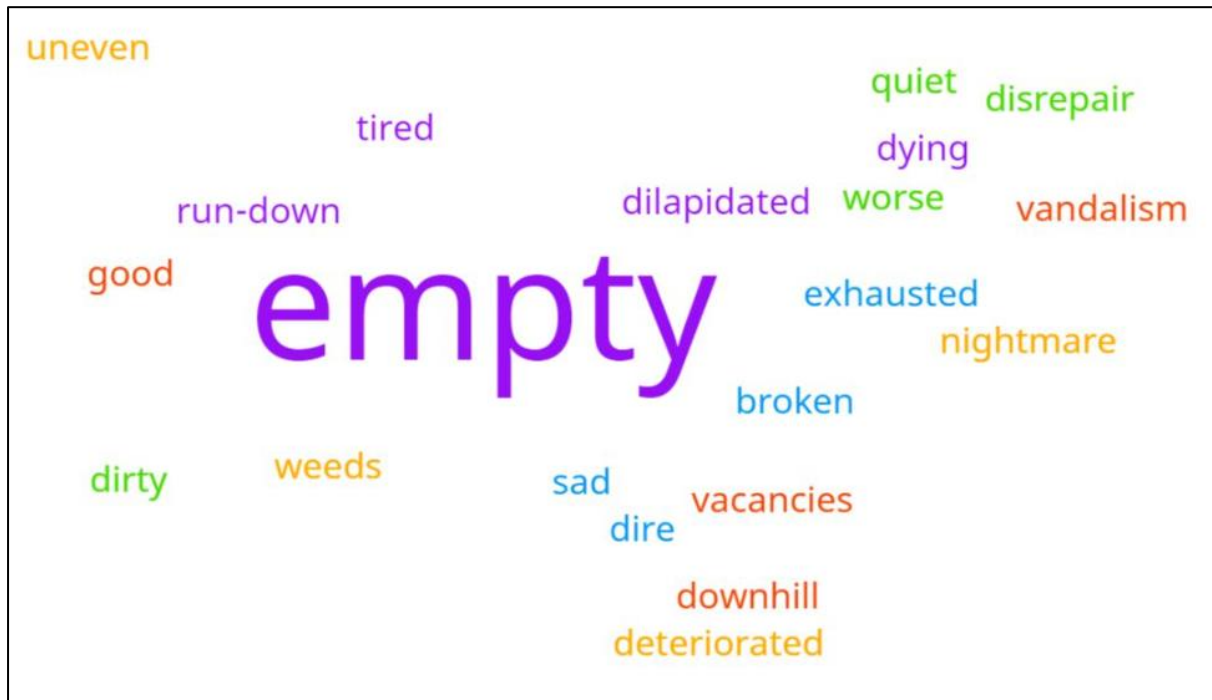


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27.19 Word Cloud



In addition to these quantitative measures, an open-ended question allowed for public perceptions to be transcribed and processed to create a 'word cloud'. The diagram above highlights how Wick town centre is perceived by the survey participants. The bigger a word appears on the diagram, the more frequently it was used to describe the general state of Wick town centre. As we can see from this feedback, perceptions of the town centre are fairly negative with the stand-out word being 'empty'. This qualitative measure complements the quantitative data and captures public perceptions in a way that is reflective of the town centre's appeal.

