



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK SEPTEMBER 2022

ALFORD, ABERDEENSHIRE



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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Town centre health checks are a way of analysing the factors that contribute to successful town centres and indicate good standards of vitality and viability. The vitality of a centre is a measure of how lively and busy it is, whilst viability is a measure of its centre's capacity to attract ongoing investment.

Town Centre Health Checks have been completed in Aberdeenshire since 2003. However, in 2021 a new methodology was introduced to showcase a fresh and updated approach for Aberdeenshire. From 2022 and then every second year, town centre health checks will be carried out on the remaining eight academy towns that are not classed as Principal Town Centres through the Local Development Plan.

Aberdeenshire is an extremely attractive area with a variety of coastal and rural environments, commuter towns, high levels of employment, and there is considerable new housing and employment land planned for the near future. Maintaining town centres' attractiveness, activeness, and accessibility is vital for the region to be able to continue to thrive.

BACKGROUND

The importance of town centres is widely acknowledged. Town centres are at the heart of communities, providing a sustainable focus for shopping, business, leisure, services and community life, and shaping their sense of place. The planning system has an important role to play in supporting successful town centres, through influencing the form and type of future development. In order to assess how a centre should be supported, evidence of its current performance is required.

NPF4 notes that policies should 'encourage, promote and facilitate development in our city and town centres, recognising they are a national asset' (NPF4, page 81).

Town centres with a vibrant retail scene, a wide variety of services, attractive buildings and open space create economic growth, attract more people to the region, and promote a sense of well-being and identity.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present the results of the Town Centre Health Check 2022 for Alford. The results are presented to enable an understanding of the vitality and viability of the town centre. The results are not to be considered definitive of the well-being of a town centre, but rather they are intended to provide an evidence-based comparative perspective on this matter and assist in identifying actions that could be undertaken to improve and maintain their status.

WHY COMPLETE A HEALTH CHECK?

Health checks contribute to the planning system's efforts to support successful town centres through giving an overview of their current performance. They provide an analysis of the infrastructure and viability of the town centre which can be used to inform the Local Development Plan and decisions on planning applications. The findings are also utilised to create help a stronger "town centre first principle" policy.

METHODOLOGY

TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECKS SHOULD:

- Support implementation of the Local Development Plan
- Add value by collecting data on a wider set of indicators that provide insight into economic, social and environmental factors that play a part in the vitality of a town centre
- Have a clear, easy to follow and accessible format and methodology
- Work collaboratively both within the Council and externally with businesses and the community to collect and share baseline data
- Provide the foundation for other town strategies and plans and any subsequent funding applications

To achieve these results, the following methods of data collection and presentation were utilised:

DESK TOP RESEARCH

Desk top research was completed to provide the critical first step of gathering information for the town centre. Background information on the current situation of the town centre was then analysed further when out on site. Data was gathered from within the Council and from external partners.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

The surveys for the eight academy town centres are being conducted every second year in line with when the town centre health checks are being completed. It is considered this would reduce consultation fatigue and allow for monitoring of any changes within town centres which have occurred in that period. The community survey was designed to gain an understanding of the views of both the residents and visitors of the town centre. The survey was available on Engage HQ in 2022, shared via a press release, advertised on the Council's Social Media and emailed to relevant groups to advertise further. The survey asked questions on several different topics and provided respondents the opportunity to identify what improvements they would like to see to the town centre. The survey was open for three weeks and received 165 responses. A summary of the responses received can be seen on page 35.



Look out for: Quote Boxes. Comments were asked for in both the community and business surveys and a selection have been included in the report to give a flavour of the different responses received.

METHODOLOGY (CONTINUED)

BUSINESS SURVEY

The surveys for the eight academy town centres are being conducted every second year in line with when the town centre health checks are being completed. It is considered this would reduce the risk of consultation fatigue and allow for more effective monitoring of any changes within town centres which have occurred in that period. The survey was available on Engage HQ in 2022 and was shared via relevant groups for completion. The survey also gave an opportunity to comment on improvements that businesses would like to see to the town centre. The survey was open for three weeks and received 2 responses. A summary of the responses received can be seen on page 35.

FOOTFALL AND TRAFFIC COUNTS

The footfall count was completed at two locations within the town centre to gain information on the vitality at different times of the day. Three time slots were selected to gain information of the vibrancy in the morning and afternoon. The counts were completed for 15-minute periods on a weekday to try and gain an insight into the number of people moving around the town centre. As there were no counts conducted in the evening and weekend, questions were included in the community survey to gain an insight on how often, when and why people visit the town centre. These footfall counts were a collaborative effort and carried out by Aberdeenshire Council Officers and members of the community. Traffic counts were also included in the methodology for all towns. Where possible, traffic counts were carried out at the same location as the pedestrian counts and for the same length of time following completion of the footfall counts. Where traffic counts could not be carried at the same location at the footfall counts, these were done at the closest viable point in order to gain information on the number of vehicles using the town centre.

SITE SURVEY

This work was completed on a clear, sunny day and provided up to date information on the vitality and viability of the town centre. Several recording methods were used including maps, photographs and written analysis. The Place Standard themes were used to analyse the town centre and allowed for different themes to be analysed on an individual basis but also as a collective.

How a place looks, its history and what other people think of a place can affect how we feel. A strong local identity can help us feel pride in our place, our community and in ourselves as a result.

Observations: The majority of those who use the town centre felt positive towards it. For the respondents that felt positively, it has a good community feel, is well supported by local shops and has improved over the years. For others, the town lacks a variety of shops for everyday needs and the appearance of the town centre is not appealing. Community spirit was generally regarded as good.

The growth of Alford: Alford lies on rising ground to the south of the River Don and it was the bridge built over the river in the early **1800s** that started Alford's growth. The Haughton Arms Hotel was built in **1850** and in **1859**, Alford also became the terminus of the Alford Valley Railway which connected the village to the main network through Aberdeen. The railway was lost in **1966**. In **1983** the village became the location of the Grampian Transport Museum and in **1985**, the Alford Valley Railway Museum. Alford is the centre of an agricultural area and formerly held cattle markets and fairs. Today, the town still supports the local agricultural community but is also popular with oil workers and this has led to a steady growth in services, amenities and population. The built environment is characterised mainly by grey stone.

Source: Understanding Scottish Places and Undiscovered Scotland

IDENTITY & BELONGING



How Do You Feel About Alford Town Centre?



79% Community

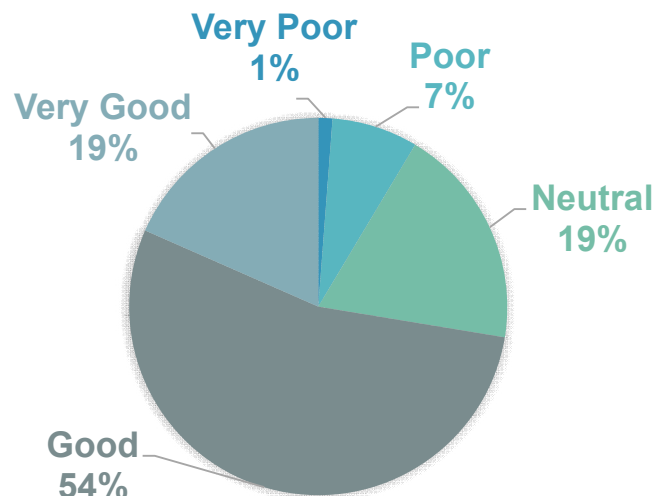


21% Community

50% Businesses

50% Businesses

IN YOUR OPINION, COMMUNITY SPIRIT IN THE TOWN CENTRE IS?



"The town centre has improved over the last couple of years and there is no longer empty shops."

"I like Alford as a place it's a lovely friendly town to live in."

"Lovely village, although would benefit from more food shops, clothing shops & family restaurants."

"It was quite sad a few years ago with lots of empty shops but this has turned around and it is a good place to visit with plenty of places to visit, shop and eat"

"It has a lovely community feel."

"Buzzing with activity and well supported by shops and businesses."

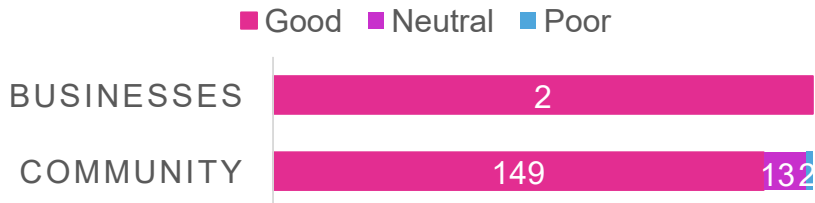
"I feel it's a mixture of both. Alford had lots to offer people but could also do much more."

"It has everything you need for being a small community."

Feeling safe in and around the places that we spend time in can have a significant impact on people’s activities and on their health and wellbeing. Through their design and maintenance, good places should feel safe and secure for all, and help to minimise crime and antisocial behaviour.

Observations: Safety during the day and night were both rated within the top five categories in both the visitor and business surveys. Safety during the evening was less positive, with more neutral and negative responses received which could be linked to a lack of things to do and places to go in the evenings and therefore the town centre is less used by people. There were many comments on the safety of the road through the town centre and concerns about the location of the crossing. Street lighting is located on the main roads, however is more limited off these, such as alleys. There were few comments received in relation to lighting.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: SAFETY DURING THE DAY?



Key Safety Features:



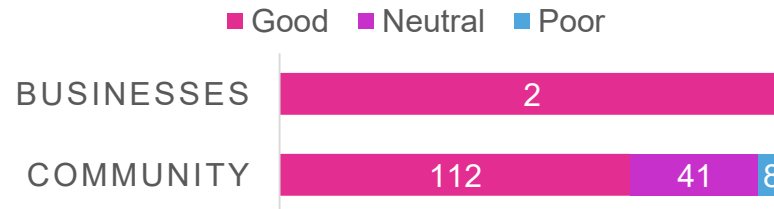
Well maintained modern style lighting on main roads

FEELING SAFE



16 Incidences of crime reported
1st September 2021 – 31st July 2022
Police Scotland

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: SAFETY DURING THE EVENING?



Images (Left to Right): Modern lighting on Main Street; Limited lighting off Main Street.

“Police presence in evening.”

“The people are polite, shops welcoming. Pretty little village.”

“I like Alford as a place it’s a lovely friendly town to live in.”

“Would be great to see more activity sessions for young people available and places that teens can go to hang out.”

“Personally, I wish there were regular active police patrols in the evenings and at nights, especially in the former railway area and both parks.”

“Stop cars parking on the zigzag lines at the zebra crossing as they can obscure pedestrians waiting to cross.”

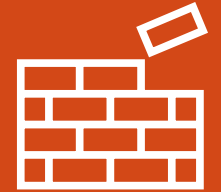
“Some policing of driving standards and behaviour. Very aggressive driving on the 944 and in the village.”

“Friendly and safe.”

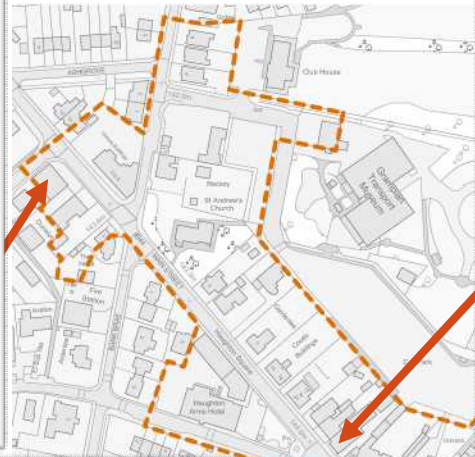
Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Places that are well cared for can make us feel better about a place, while those that are neglected can have the opposite effect. Proper maintenance arrangements allow people to feel supported and more positive about where they live.

CARE & MAINTENANCE



Vacant Unit



Cracked Façade on shop



Well maintained area of town

Observations: Care and maintenance of buildings was a topic that received a number of comments in relation to a couple of buildings, namely the old village store and the frontage of the current post office, that the community want to see being upgraded.

However, although there were a number of negative comments received the topic scored to the higher end of the scale with the majority of respondents rating either good or neutral.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: CARE & MAINTENANCE OF BUILDINGS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor

COMMUNITY

77	66	20
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“Some old buildings including Murray’s old garage needs taking down, eyesore.”

“It is just rather dull to look at.”

“The ex Village Store opposite the new gym is a terrible eyesore and spoils the village centre.”

“Post Office frontage is tired.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

People's views about their local area should be heard. Having a voice in decision making and feeling able to make changes can help to build stronger communities and better places. Having a sense of control can make people feel positive about their lives.

INFLUENCE & SENSE OF CONTROL



Observations: Alford has some groups and organisations which help improve with matters related to the town centre, but the majority of groups identified in the surveys were those which also serve the wider town area, such as Friends of Haughton Park and Alford Valley Railway. It is evident that these groups do make an effort with the town centre as well as their specific areas, such as parks, and the Donside Community Council is a key group for smaller towns such as Alford.

Town Centre Groups	Donside Community Council
Legal Status	Community Council
Membership	The community; 11 members*
Responsibilities	Community Councils (CC) are the most local tier of statutory representation in Scotland, bridging the gap between local authorities and communities. Key tasks: Representing CCs on other organisations; Campaigning on local issues; Conducting local surveys; Organising public meetings on major development proposals or the Local Development Plan; Statutory Body for public consultation on Planning and Licensing; Representing and providing a platform for public views.
Contact	Donside Community Council

*Correct at time of survey

30% of community survey respondents are aware of groups that support the town centre.

"So many groups set up to try and help the village."

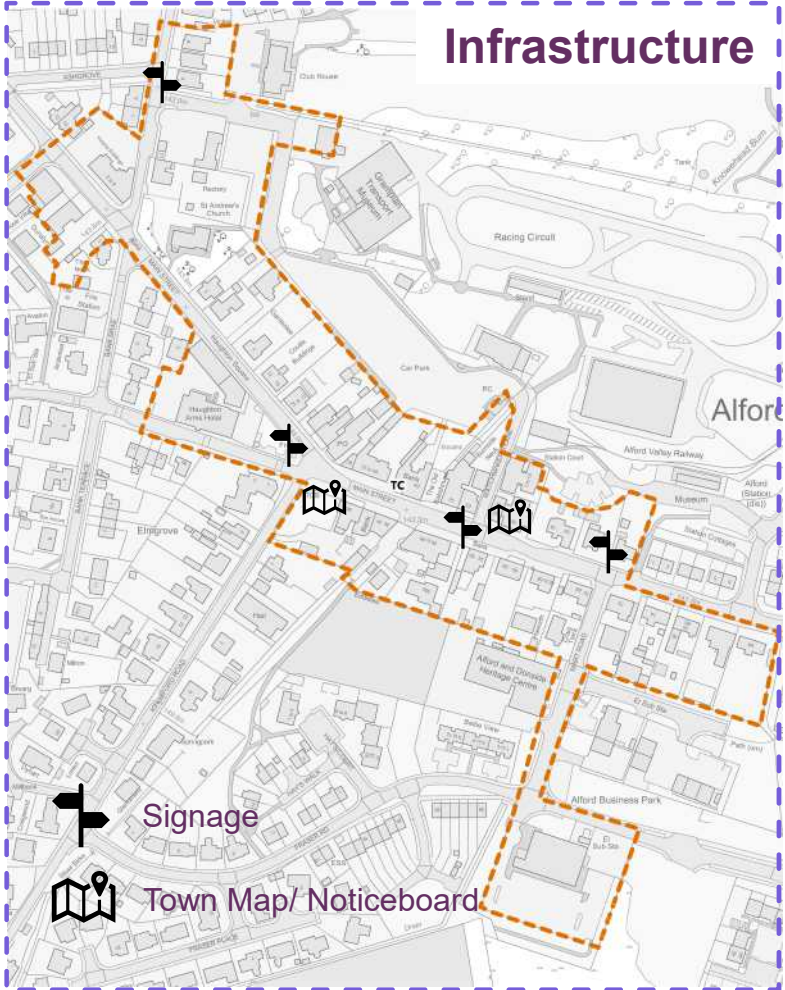
Business and Community Survey, September 2022

The word cloud (right) shows the survey responses, with Alford Valley Railway (17), Friends of Haughton Park (8) and Donside Community Council (5).



Walking and cycling are beneficial for both our health and the environment. Good places can support and encourage people to walk and cycle by providing quality routes and a pleasant and safe experience.

MOVING AROUND

Observations: The town centre is shared by vehicles and pedestrians. The community gave getting around town a majority good rating, with respondents from the community noting that everything they need is within walking distance. Signage received almost as many neutral responses as good and several comments requesting better signage for facilities and tidying up temporary signs. Temporary signs were evident at the water fountain during the site visit.

“Better signage (brown signs) to tourist attractions e.g. Heritage Museum.”

“More timely removal of temporary signs.”

“Feel it needs more like an information board.”

“It’s clean, easy walking distance from my home.”
Business and Community Survey, September 2022

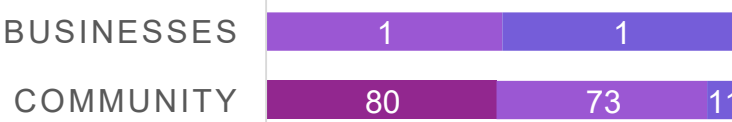
HOW WOULD YOU RATE: GETTING AROUND THE TOWN CENTRE?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: SIGNAGE?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Images (Left to Right): Signage on Main Street; Proliferation of signage at the Water Fountain; Community Noticeboard, Main Street; Town Map, Main Street.



MOVING AROUND: CYCLING

Observations: There are two freestanding cycle racks located within the designated town centre, and a covered cycle rack in the car park outwith the town centre boundary, beside the Transport Museum. There were more neutral responses for cycle parking, perhaps indicating that there are not as many people who cycle in the town centre, but there were more poor ratings received for this topic than others in this theme. There are no cycle lanes in Alford and comments received suggested the need for them to improve safety for cyclists.

“Cycle paths & footpaths round village.”

“New footpaths/cycleways to allow easy and safe access to the village centre from the nearby surrounding settlements within walking/cycling distance.”

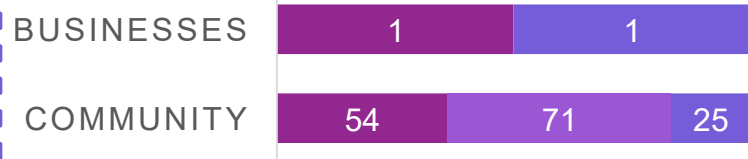
“Unsafe for cyclists too many HGVs tearing through it.”

“More cycle parking.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2021

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: CYCLE PARKING?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Images (Clockwise from Top Left): Freestanding racks at Co-op, Mart Road; Freestanding racks, Main Street; Covered cycle racks outwith town centre boundary, Car park to north of town centre.



MOVING AROUND: VISITING THE TOWN CENTRE

Observations: The majority of survey respondents visit Alford town centre every few days, with Shopping being the main reason for their visit. This was followed by Post Office/ Council services and Collecting Takeaway. The most frequent time for visiting was during the week between 12pm-6pm. There were fewer trips to the town centre after 6pm during the week and weekend, which is reflective of comments noting the lack of facilities in the evenings and also highlighted elsewhere in the town centre health check.

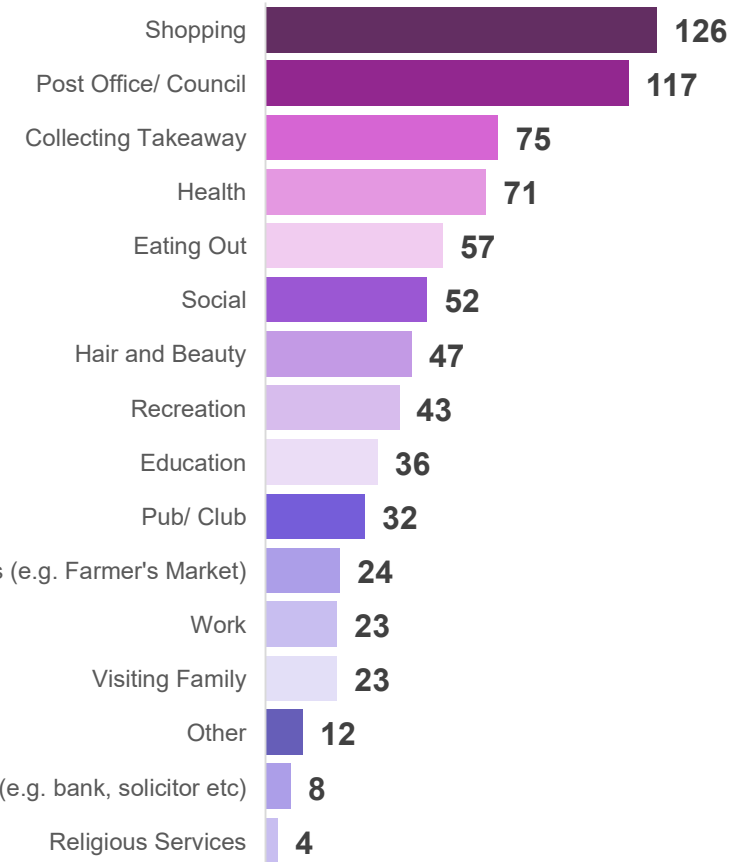
“Rarely go into town in the evening.”

“It would be nice to have more restaurants including some which open in the evening.”

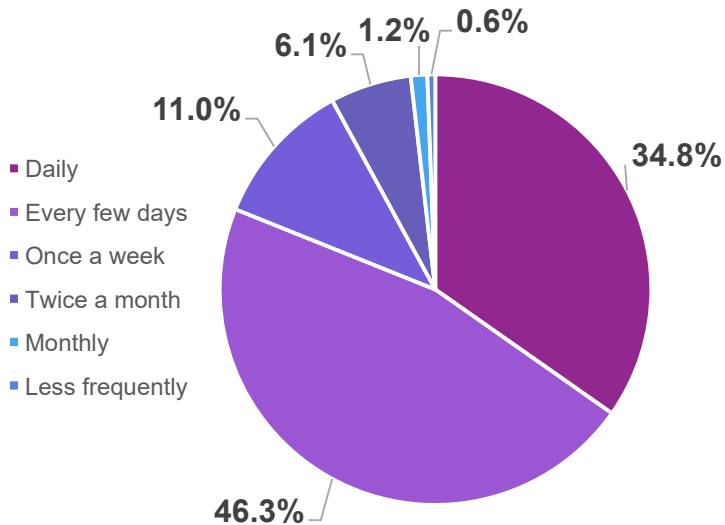
“Small town has small amenities but still delivers way above its weight. Night time is pretty dead though.”

Community Survey, September 2022

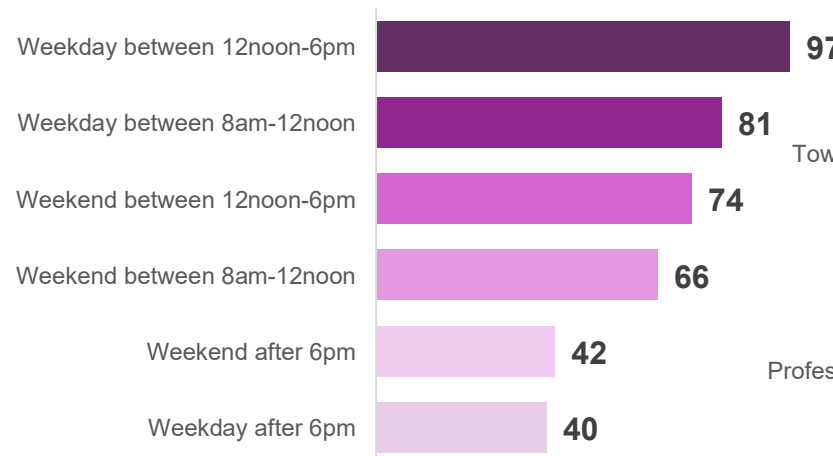
GENERALLY, WHY DO YOU VISIT ALFORD TOWN CENTRE?*



HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT ALFORD TOWN CENTRE?




WHEN WOULD YOU GENERALLY VISIT ALFORD TOWN CENTRE?*



*Survey respondents were able to select multiple answers for these questions

MOVING AROUND: FOOTFALL SURVEY

Day	Time	Location 1	Location 2	Hourly Total	Overall Total
Wednesday 	09:30	37	32	69	173
	11:30	25	30	55	
	14:30	18	31	49	
Totals		80	93	173	

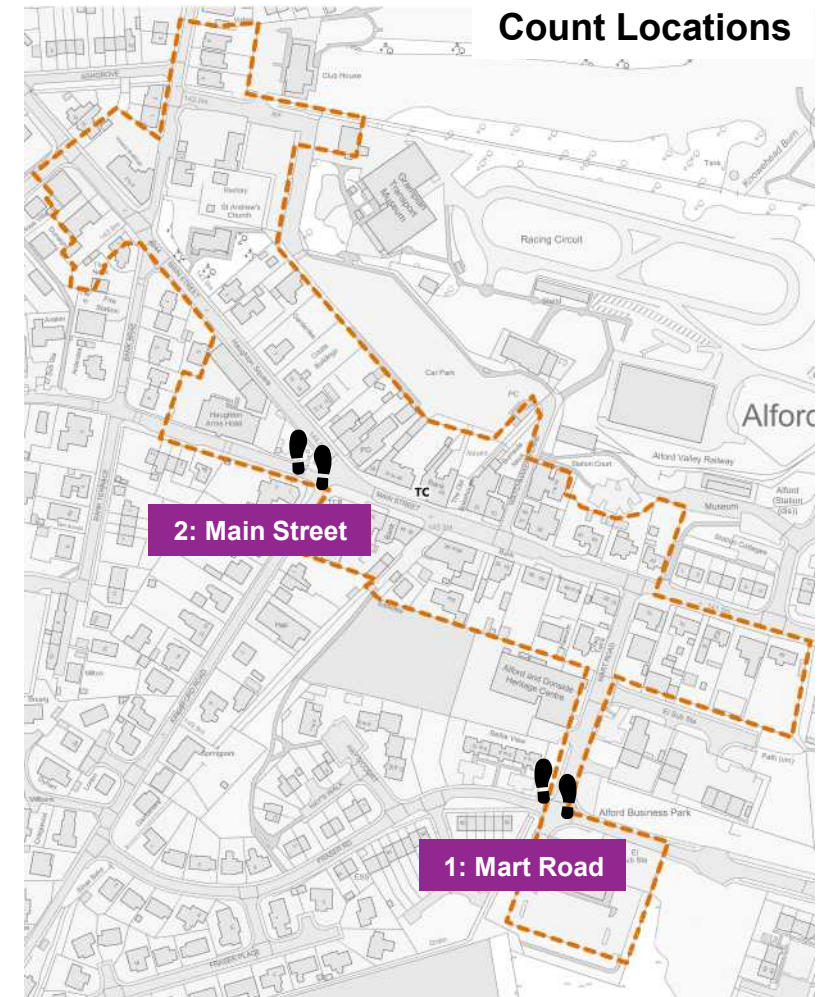
Footfall is a measure of the vitality of the town centre and can be directly linked to economic activity. Pedestrian counts were undertaken by Council staff and community volunteers on Wednesday 21st September 2022 for a duration of 15 minutes, three times a day, in two locations.

The pedestrian count findings showed the highest footfall count was recorded at Mart Road in the morning (37 people). Although, Main Street was busiest count point in general over the course of the survey.

HEADLINES

Busiest Location: Mart Road
Busiest Time: 09:30

Quietest Location: Mart Road
Quietest Time: 14:30

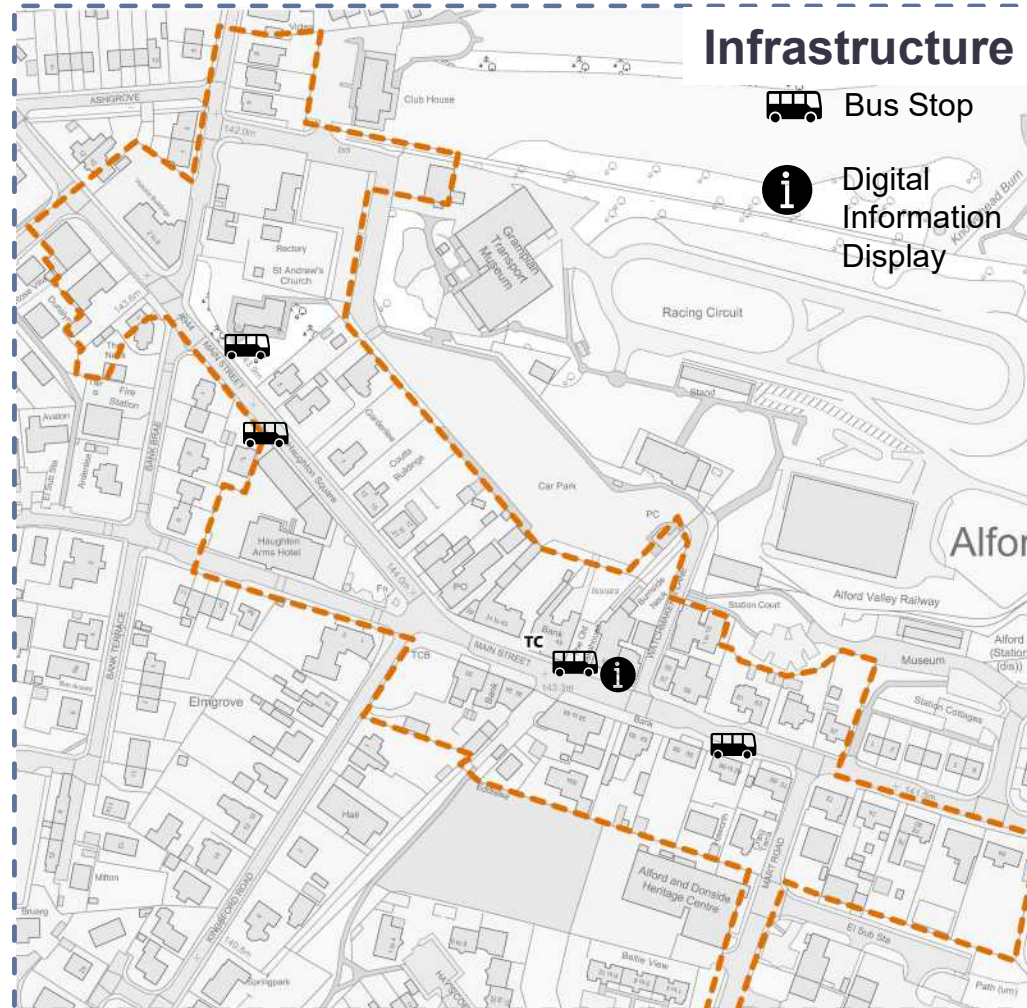


Access to an affordable, reliable and well-connected public transport service is important for all communities. Good public transport encourages people to get around in ways that are better for the environment.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT



Observations: Alford Town Centre two main bus links to the east towards Aberdeen and west towards Braemar. However there are limited direct services to more rural towns/ villages in the area and there is an A2B door-to-door service. The town centre has two covered bus stops on Main Street, one of which has a digital information board. This topic was the lowest scoring in the community survey, with many comments on the reduction and reliability of services.



"We need a reliable bus service."

"Better public transport links!"

"Better bus connections to Huntly even 2 days to go to good supermarkets."

"The public transport links are disappointing."

"Need a more regular bus service."

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PUBLIC TRANSPORT?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor

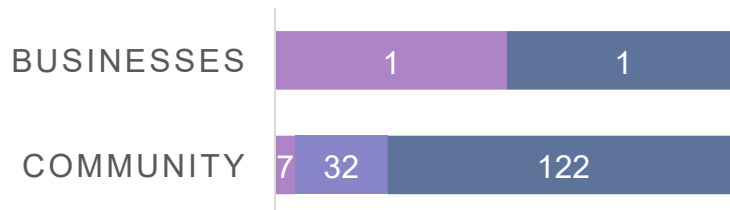
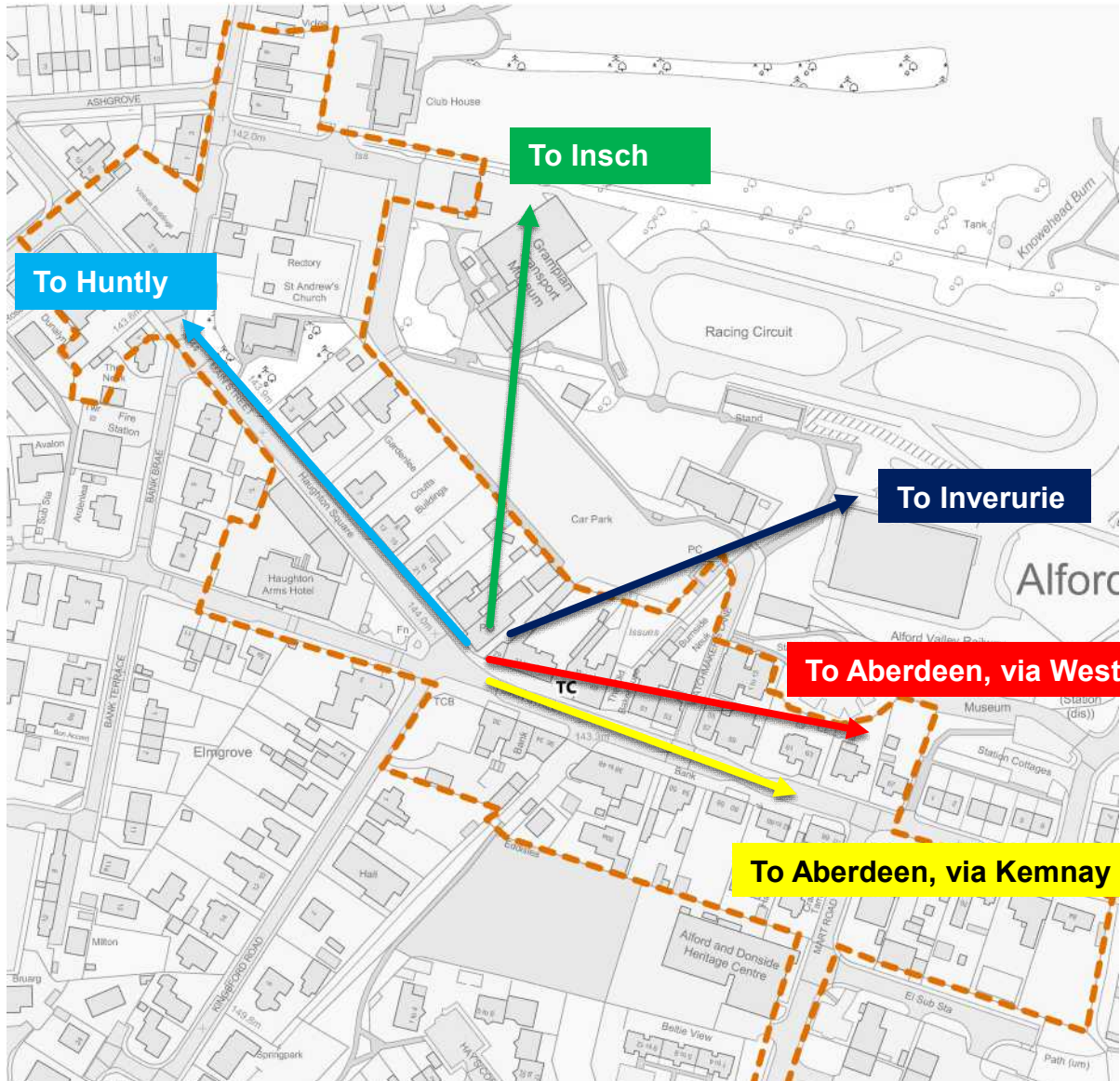


Image: Real time digital display and covered bus shelter, Main Street.

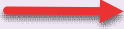




PUBLIC TRANSPORT ROUTES



Route*	Frequency (per week day)	Fastest Journey Time	Earliest Travel Time	Latest Travel Time	Cost (Single Standard Ticket)
Bus to Aberdeen (218)	3	1hr 16mins	09:51	15:51	£10.00
Bus to Aberdeen (X20)	6	1hr 8mins	06:29	21:35	£11:00
Bus to Huntly (231)	1	50mins	07:50	-	£4.20
Bus to Insch (422)	4	26mins	16:42	19:20	£2.60
Bus to Inverurie (421)	3 (Sat only)	42mins	07:45	14:45	£5.70

* Correct at time of survey

Key:

-  Bus Route 218
-  Bus Route X20
-  Bus Route 231
-  Bus Route 422
-  Bus Route 421

An [A2B dial-a-bus](#), pre-booked minibus service is available in Alford. In most cases a door-to-door service is provided, operating during weekdays. The service is free to use.

Too much traffic can cause problems for people who live and work in town centres as well as visitors. Traffic and parking arrangements that allow people to move around safely can help people to get the most out of a place.

TRAFFIC & PARKING

TRAFFIC



Image: Main Street.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: TRAFFIC FLOW?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



“Traffic is too fast.”

“Remove parking on Main Street to improve traffic flow.”

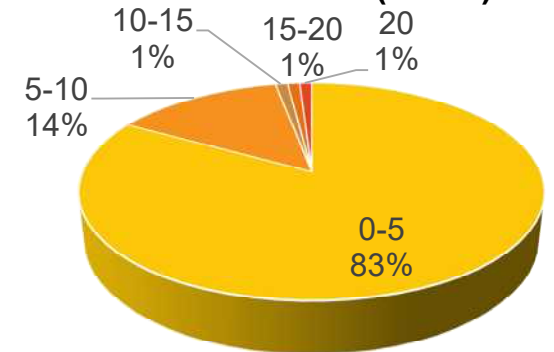
“Where parking is allowed on one side of Main Street from Montgarrie Road junction to Kingsford Road junction, it forces traffic too close to pedestrians on a narrow (1.5m wide) footway. This is workable, were it not for traffic speed.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Observations: The topic of traffic flow received a mix of ratings through the survey but the majority of respondents either rated the topic as good or neutral.

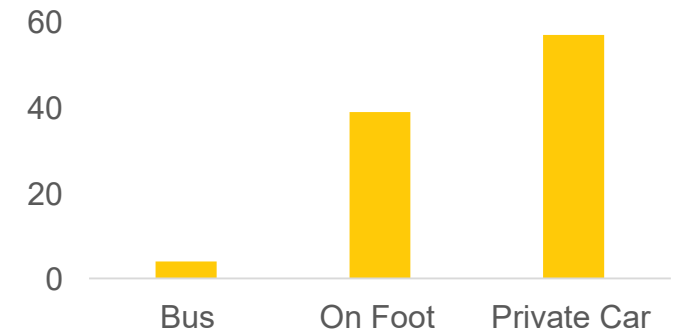
However, the comments that were received to the survey were mostly looking for improvements to be made to the traffic flow within the town centre with a number of comments received relating to the impact that the on street parking has on the safety of the road users and pedestrians.

Distance Travelled to Use the Town Centre (Miles)



Source: Community Survey September 2022

How would you generally travel to the town centre:



Source: Community Survey September 2022

MOVING AROUND: TRAFFIC SURVEY

Day		9:45am-10:00am		11:45am-12noon		2:15:2:30pm		Total number of Vehicles
Wednesday	Location 1	Car	83	Car	87	Car	91	346
		Buses	2	Buses	0	Buses	2	
		Lorries	3	Lorries	4	Lorries	4	
		Vans	18	Vans	23	Vans	12	
		Taxis	1	Taxis	0	Taxis	3	
		Bicycles	1	Bicycles	0	Bicycles	2	
		Other	4	Other	3	Other	3	
	Location 2	Car	88 (30)*	Car	90 (43)*	Car	104 (42)*	370
		Buses	2 (1)*	Buses	1	Buses	3 (1)*	
		Lorries	4	Lorries	6	Lorries	2	
		Vans	20 (2)*	Vans	21 (6)*	Vans	16 (4)*	
		Taxis	0	Taxis	0	Taxis	3	
		Bicycles	1	Bicycles	0	Bicycles	1	
		Other	3	Other	3	Other	2	
Hourly Totals (all traffic):		230		238		248		716

* (numbers in brackets relate to the number out of the total that came from/ entering Mart Road).

Observations: Vehicle counts were undertaken on Wednesday 21st September 2022 for a duration of 15 minutes, three times a day, in two locations. These give information on the number of cars that are passing through the town centre, it can't be confirmed whether these cars have all contributed to the local economy but were in the town centre at the time of the count. The vehicle count findings showed the highest vehicle count was recorded at the Mart Road junction on Wednesday afternoon.

HEADLINES

Busiest Location: Mart Road Junction

Busiest Time: 14:15

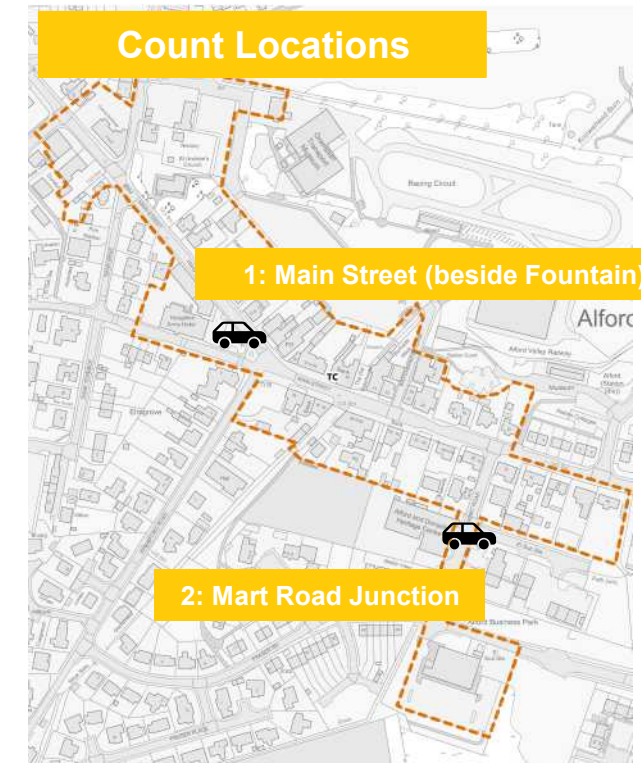
Busiest Day: Wednesday

Quietest Location: Main Street (beside Fountain)

Quietest Time: 09:45

Quietest Day: Wednesday

Count Locations



1: Main Street (beside Fountain)

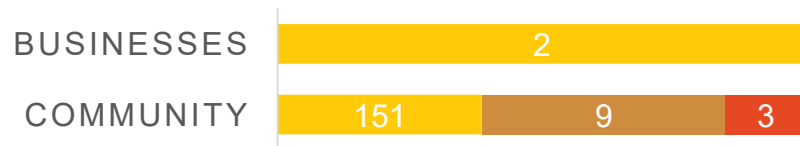
2: Mart Road Junction

TRAFFIC & PARKING

CAR PARKING AFFORDABILITY AND AVAILABILITY

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PARKING AFFORDABILITY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PARKING AVAILABILITY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Image: Car Park Sign, Alford Car Park.



“People parking on the Main Street can cause serious congestion especially outside the butcher shop.”

“There are plenty of parking spaces.”

“Wouldn’t allow parking on Main Street.”

“Stop cars parking on the zigzag lines at the zebra crossing as they can obscure pedestrians waiting to cross.”

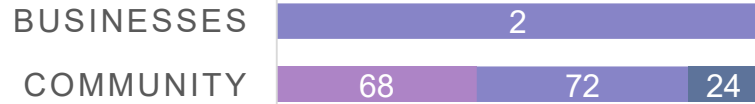
Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Observations: The topic of parking received a lot of comments through the surveys, and generally was a topic that was rated well within both surveys, although a number of comments related to the desire from the community to see parking on Main Street removed. However, it should be noted that the Council Car Park (Alford Car Park) is not located within the town centre boundary for Alford, lying adjacent to the town centre. This means that the only parking within the town centre is on-street parking.

Buildings, landmarks, greenery, views and natural landscape can all help to create an attractive, distinctive place that people enjoy. These features can also help people to find their way around.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: ATTRACTIVENESS OF TOWN?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Observations: There is only one listed building within Alford Town Centre which is the St Andrew's Episcopal Church. The church is located on Main Street and is a category C listed building and adds to the overall attractiveness of the town centre.

Overall, the town is attractive and well kept with planting to brighten up the town, although more would be welcomed. There are a couple of buildings where frontages could be tidied up to further enhance the town centre but it is not thought that these significantly detract from the overall town centre.

“Shops need a tidy up and modernise.”

“Maybe tidy up the street furniture layout.”

“Would be nice to have flowers to brighten up the area.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

STREETS & SPACES

ATTRACTIVENESS OF TOWN CENTRE AND HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT



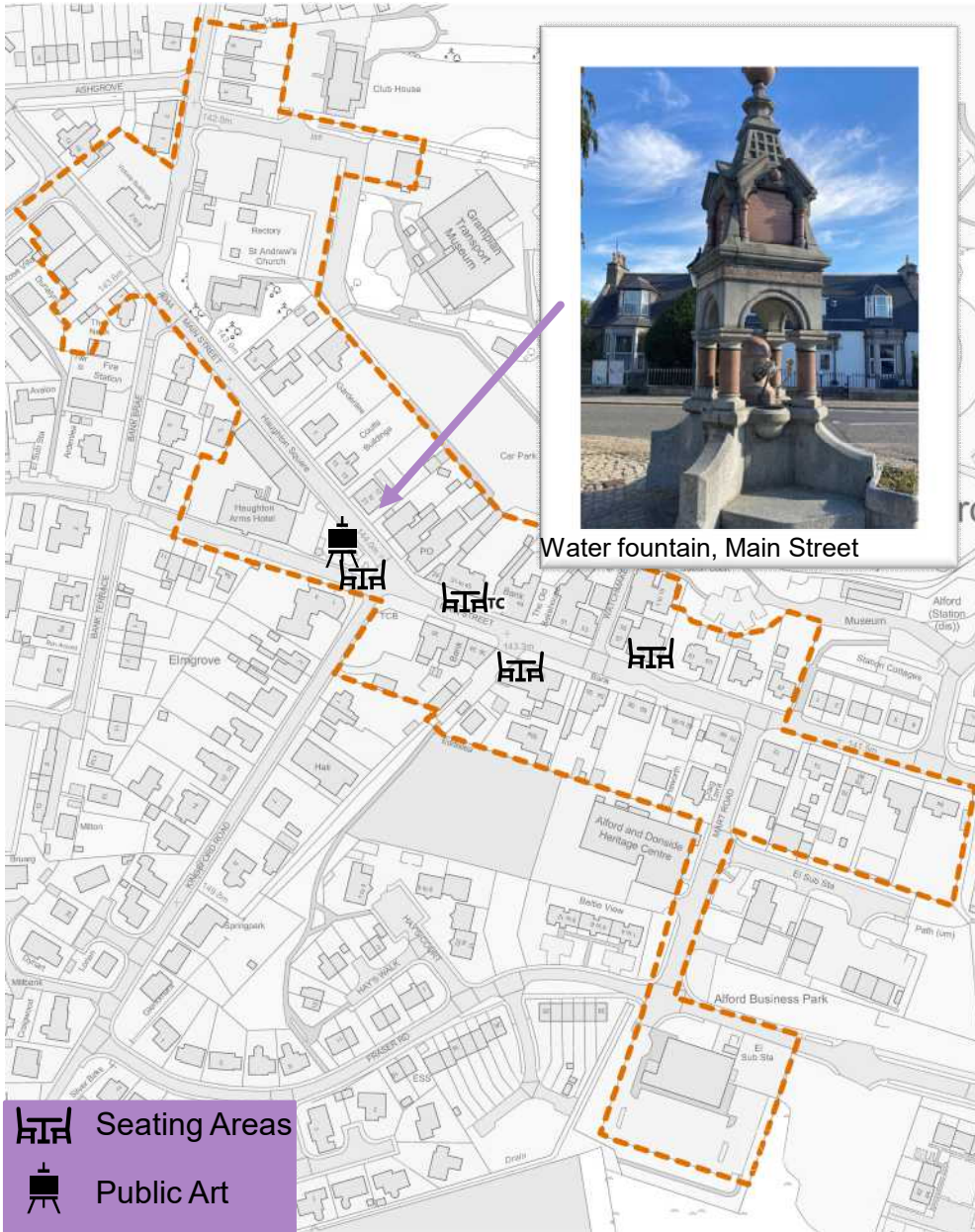
 Listed Building



St Andrew's Church

Shop front requiring maintenance

Main Street shops with planting



STREETS & SPACES: PAVEMENTS, SEATING AND PUBLIC ART

Observations: There are a number of benches located throughout the town centre, generally along Main Street which leaves other areas of the town centre without a resting spot. There is community aspiration to see additional seating within the town centre and this is reflected through the survey as the topic is ranked within the five lowest scoring topics through the community survey.

Pavements within the town centre attracted a number of comments through the survey with a mix of opinions about the condition of the pavements. Although, it should be noted that during the survey no issues were noted with the condition of the pavements.

“Need better condition of pavements.”

“Pavements on the High Street are good, other areas aren’t as good.”

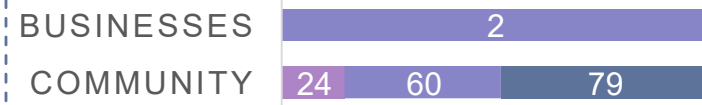
“More seating in the town centre would be welcomed.”

“More seating would be a good idea.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

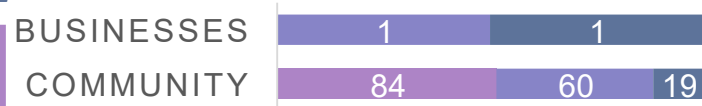
HOW WOULD YOU RATE: SEATING/ AREAS TO CONGREGATE

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PAVEMENT QUALITY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor

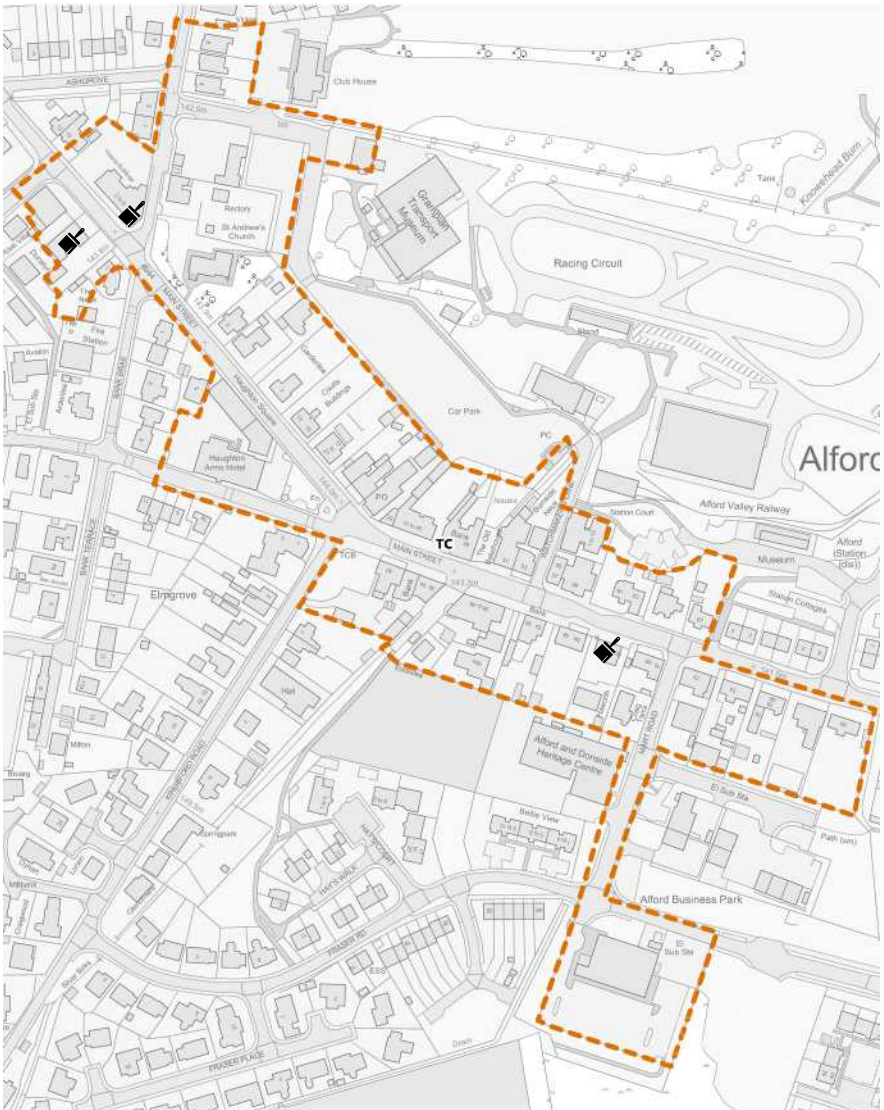



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PAVEMENT CLEANLINESS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



STREETS & SPACES: VACANT RETAIL UNITS



 Vacant Shops



Images (Top Left and Clockwise): Vacant unit under renovation Montgarrie Road; Vacant unit, Donside Road; Vacant unit, High Street.

Observations: The number of vacant units within the town centre is low with a 9% vacancy rate which is significantly lower than the Scottish average at the time of the survey of 15% (Scottish Retail Consortium and Local Data Company). There are three vacant units within the town centre however, one is currently under renovation to open as a new unit. The other two units are a small unit on Main Street and a larger unit on Donside Road. This larger unit has more of an impact in the overall appearance of the town centre and would be good to see being brought back into use.

"Fill empty shop spaces."

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Vacant Retail Units

3 Vacant Units in the town centre

9% Vacancy Rate at time of survey

Natural space includes parks and woodlands, fields, streams and rivers, green space alongside paths and roads, and tree-lined streets. These can be good for wildlife, improve air quality and benefit our health and wellbeing.

Observations: There are no public green spaces within the town centre boundary, however this scored within the top 5 categories in the community survey. There are nearby green spaces such as the golf club and Houghton Country Park, which are key assets and contribute to the qualities of the town. There are planters located on Main Street which appear well maintained and trees around areas such as the car park to the north of Main Street and the Co-op.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: PARKS & GREEN SPACES?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



“Tree-lined street would be nice with seating areas.”

“Beautiful flower displays.”

“No uniquely identifying feature or a natural, open place for community use such as a public square.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

NATURAL SPACE



Alford Golf Club green space outwith town centre



Planters at various locations along Main Street

“Alford town centre is a quaint little place with lovely flowers and nice wide pavements.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022



Tree planting within Houghton Arms grounds



Trees and green space around the Co-op

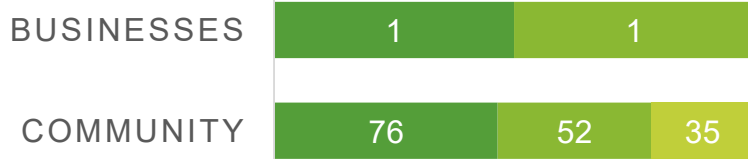
Good public places and facilities encourage children to play and allow adults to enjoy leisure and sporting activities. Opportunities for play and recreation can improve the quality of our lives and our health.

PLAY & RECREATION



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: LEISURE AND PLAY FACILITIES?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Observations: Alford has no play and recreation sites within the town centre boundary itself, but there are opportunities just outwith the town centre boundary, generally less than 0.5 miles from the Fountain on Main Street, and this was reflected through the survey given the mixed responses but weighted towards a good or neutral response. Also, within the survey there was a call for additional leisure facilities to be provided to meet the needs of specific groups namely teenagers, pre-school aged children and families.

“An improvement would be for better signposts to the parks in the area.”

“There should be more for teenagers to do for leisure.”

“Lack of play facilities for pre-schoolers.”

“A soft play zone would attract families to the town centre.”



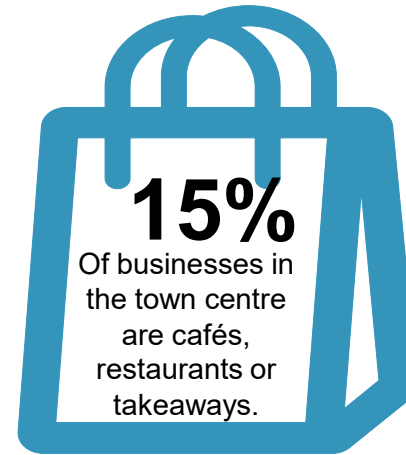
FACILITIES & AMENITIES: RETAILER REPRESENTATION

Retailer Representation

59% of businesses in the town centre are independent retailers

40% of businesses in the town centre are Class 1: Shops

15% of businesses in the town centre are Class 2: Financial, Professional and other services



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: VARIETY OF SHOPS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: QUALITY OF SHOPS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



“A bigger variety in supermarket shopping would be an improvement.”

“There should be a wider variety of shops.”

“There is a brilliant variety of shops.”

“More variety would be good.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022



Observations: There is a good distribution between independent and multiple (chain) retailers within the town centre with the majority being independent retailers. A large proportion of the comments received through the community survey related to the aspiration of the community to see more variety within the town centre. The topic ranked within the five lowest ranked topics through the community survey.

Image (Top to Bottom): both Main Street.

FACILITIES & AMENITIES: CAFÉ AND RESTAURANTS AND EVENING ECONOMY

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: CAFÉ/ RESTAURANT CHOICE?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



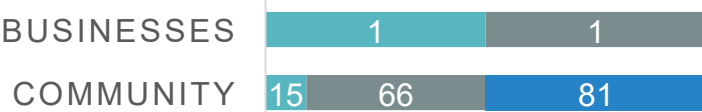
HOW WOULD YOU RATE: CAFÉ/ RESTAURANT QUALITY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: THE VIBRANCY IN THE EVENING :

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Observations: The topic of evening vibrancy was ranked within the bottom five of all topics in the community survey. Only 16 respondents through both the community and business survey rated the topic as good.

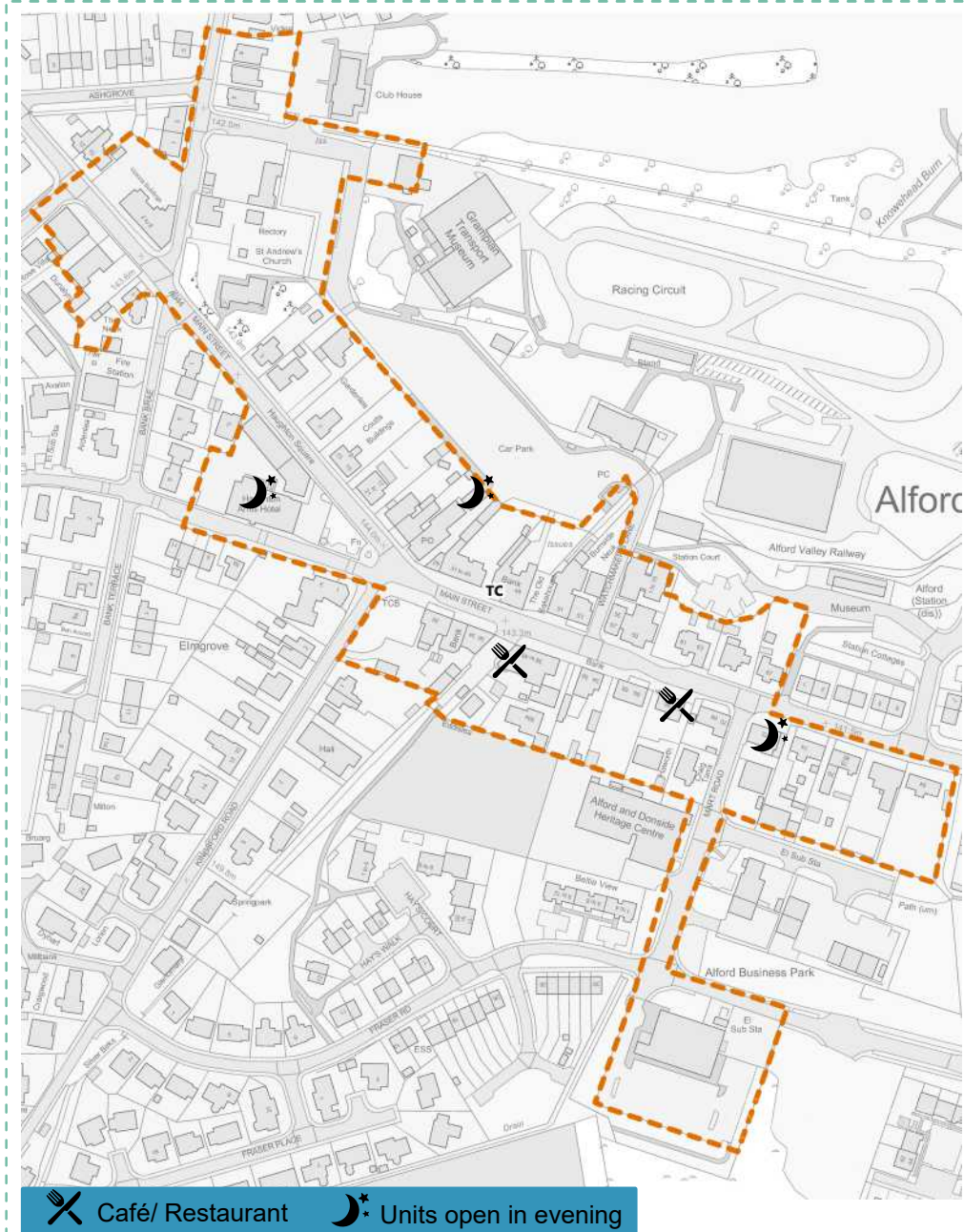
There are only three units within the town centre that have opening hours into the evening, two takeaways and the hotel. A number of comments noted through the survey that there is need for restaurants in the town centre in order to give a choice between the hotel and another venue.

“Need a good quality restaurant not just cafés and the hotel.”

Need more/ better selection of cafés/ restaurants.”

“There should be more of a café culture within the town.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022



FACILITIES & AMENITIES: CULTURAL AND LEISURE OUTLETS, PUBLIC AND OTHER SERVICES AND FARMERS MARKET

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: THE MARKET?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor

BUSINESSES	1	1	
COMMUNITY	15	74	66

“There should be a regular farmers market in the town.”

“A monthly farmers market would be an improvement.”

“A farmers market would encourage people into the town centre.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2021

Observations: Within Alford Town Centre there is only one cultural facility, the St Andrew’s Church and one leisure facility, a gym. However, there are other leisure, cultural and public facilities on the boundary of the town centre.

Additionally, there is not currently a Farmer’s Market within the town centre and this was reflected within the survey. The topic was ranked within the five lowest scoring topics through the community survey. There is a real community desire to see a Farmer’s Market being established within the town centre.



Image: St Andrew’s Church, Main Street.

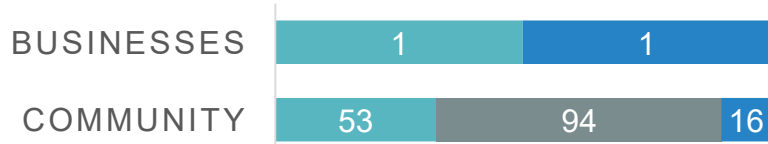


Cultural Outlets
 ATM Point
 Leisure Outlets

FACILITIES & AMENITIES: COMMUNITY AND VISITOR SATISFACTION

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: VALUE FOR MONEY?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



“The supermarket is very expensive.”

“More variety.”

“A cheaper food shop would be an improvement within the town as many people can’t afford the current supermarket prices.”

“Would be nice to have more choice.”

“Need more shops offering a broader range of goods.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Town Centre Offer:

54%

of the community agree that it offers all services expected (retail, café, pubs etc)

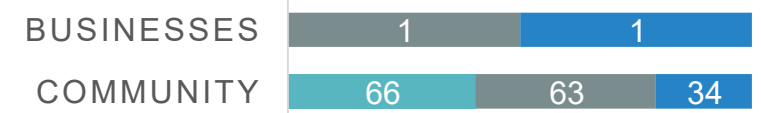
Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Observations: The standard of service within the shops was rated within the top five out of all the topics within the community survey.

Whereas, the topics of variety of goods and value for money received more mixed ratings and comments. A number of comments received noted that the community would like to see additional shops opening within the town to provide more variety of goods. Additionally, a large number of comments were received noting there needs to be better value for money for food shopping within the town.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: VARIETY OF GOODS AVAILABLE?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



HOW WOULD YOU RATE: STANDARD OF SERVICE IN SHOPS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



Tourism: Data provided by VisitAberdeenshire shows the number of page views received for Alford in the ‘Towns and Villages’ section of their website:

2,683

Jan-Dec 2021

FACILITIES & AMENITIES: ONLINE SHOPPING/ CONNECTIVITY

Online Offering

50% of businesses surveyed have online presence

100% of businesses that have an online presence sell online

45% of the community surveyed said they are more likely to shop online rather than going into the town centre for the same item

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

"I like to shop local when I can."

"Cheaper and more availability online."

"Would shop locally if items were available."

"More convenient to shop online."

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Observations: Within the survey there was a mix of responses to the questions about shopping online. A number of respondents noted that they would rather shop local than buy online.

Whilst others noted that availability, convenience, pricing and variety of goods were the main reasons for online shopping.



Image: Main Street.

Mobile Coverage in Alford Town Centre:

		Voice	3G	4G	5G
Three	Indoor	✓	✓	✓	✗
	Outdoor	✓	✓	✓	✗
O2	Indoor	✓	✓	✓	✗
	Outdoor	✓	✓	✓	✗
EE	Indoor	✓	✓	✓	✗
	Outdoor	✓	✓	✓	✗
Vodafone	Indoor	✓	✓	✓	✗
	Outdoor	✓	✓	✓	✗

✓ Good coverage ⚠ You may experience problems ✗ No coverage

Broadband Coverage in Alford Town Centre:

🏠	FTTH/FTTP	✗
📶	Ultrafast Broadband (>=100 Mbps)	✗
⚡	Superfast Broadband (>24 Mbps)	✓
🔌	Fibre (FTTC or FTTH or Cable or G.Fast)	✓
📶	Wireless	✗
📶	LLU	✓
A+	ADSL2+	✓
A	ADSL	✓

Observations: Mobile coverage within Alford Town Centre is very strong with all of the top networks being able to be accessible to a 4G level. There is currently no coverage of 5G within the town centre.

Broadband coverage is also strong with fibre and superfast broadband being available within the town. There is no free public WIFI available within the town centre.

Good-quality work offers important benefits through income, activity, social contact, sense of identity and job satisfaction. A thriving local economy can provide work opportunities and help create lively places where people want to spend time.

Observations: The employment and income picture is as would be expected for a town of this size and location, with a high proportion of retail and hospitality jobs. There is also a mix across other sectors which provides a variety of employment opportunities at differing skill levels. The claimant count rose in 2020, likely in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the rate of the town centre data zone has now significantly reduced to below pre-pandemic levels and of the wider Aberdeenshire area.

**Settlement Type:
Accessible Rural**

(Areas with a population of less than 3,000 people, and with a drive time of over 30 minutes but less than or equal to 60 minutes to a Settlement of 10,000 or more.

Scottish Government's Urban Rural Classification, 8-fold

**Median Household Income 2021
Town Centre Data Zone***

£34,625



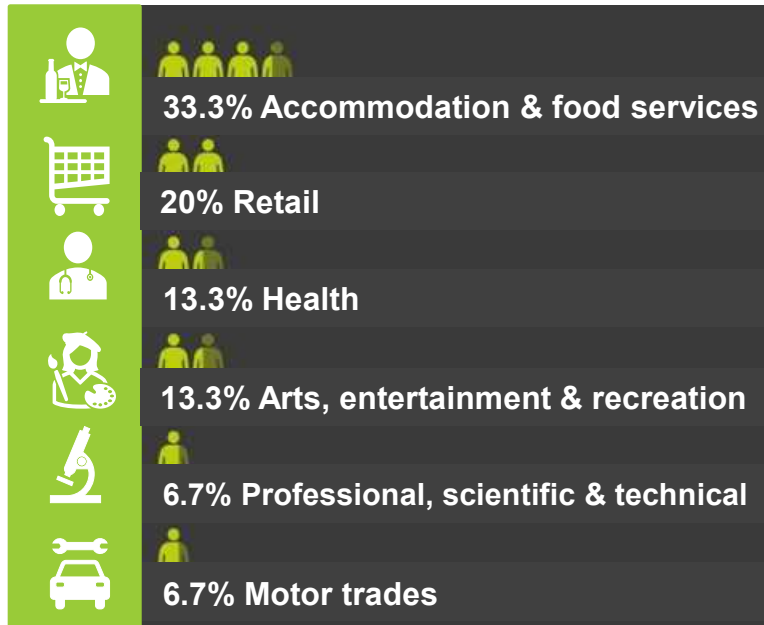
£40,207 Marr; £36,889 Aberdeenshire

Source: © CACI Limited 1996 – 2021 This report shall be used solely for academic, personal and/or non-commercial purposes.

WORK & LOCAL ECONOMY

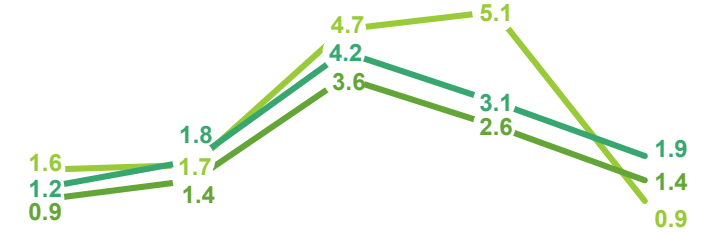


Top 5 Employment Sectors 2021 Alford Town Centre Data Zone*



Source: Business Register and Employment Survey 2021

CLAIMANT COUNT RATE^ (%)



August 2018 August 2019 August 2020 August 2021 August 2022

— Howe of Alford - 05 — Marr — Aberdeenshire
^Includes people claiming Universal Credit or Jobseekers Allowance
Source: ONS Crown Copyright Reserved

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020

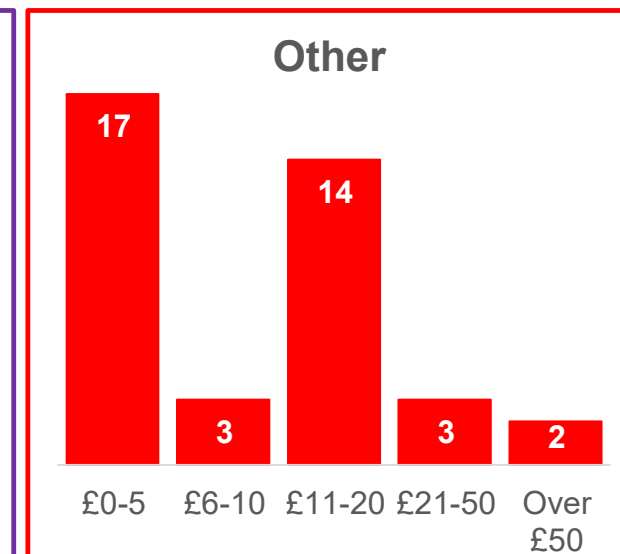
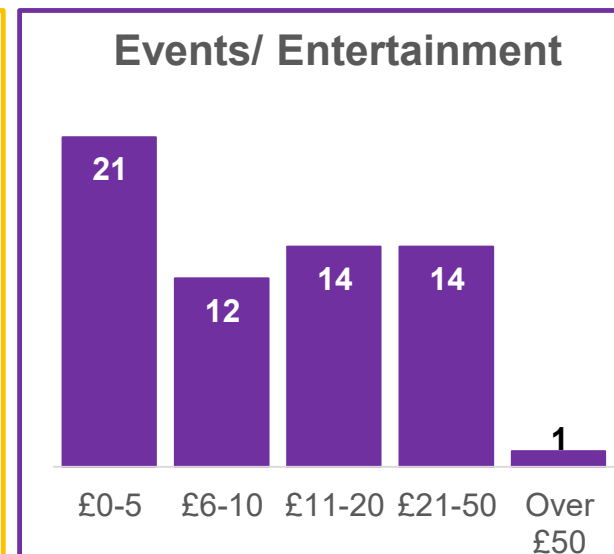
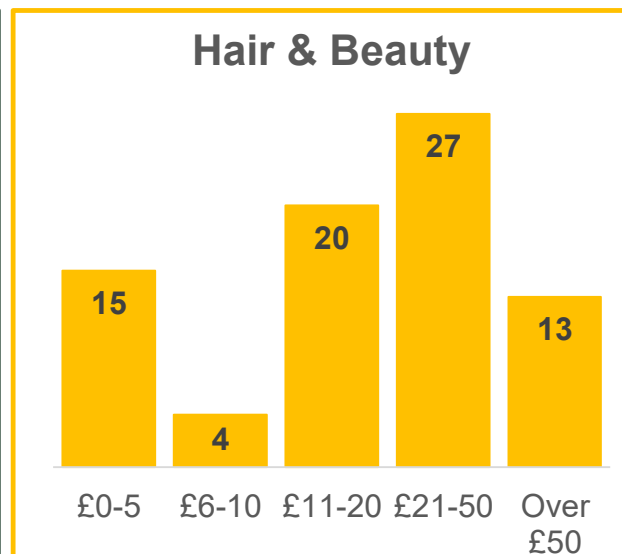
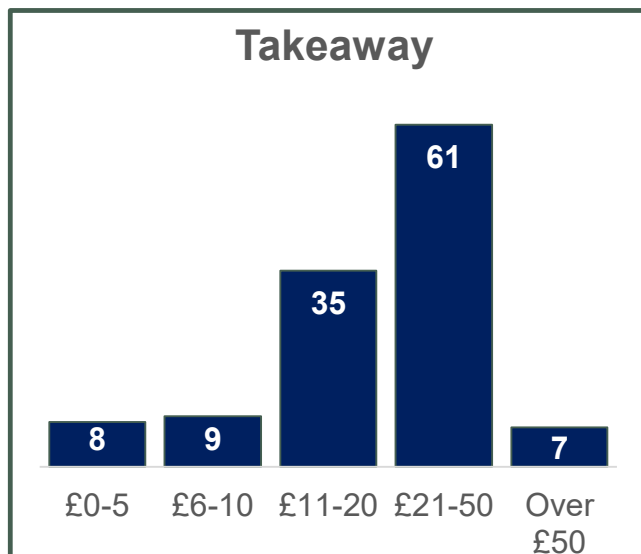
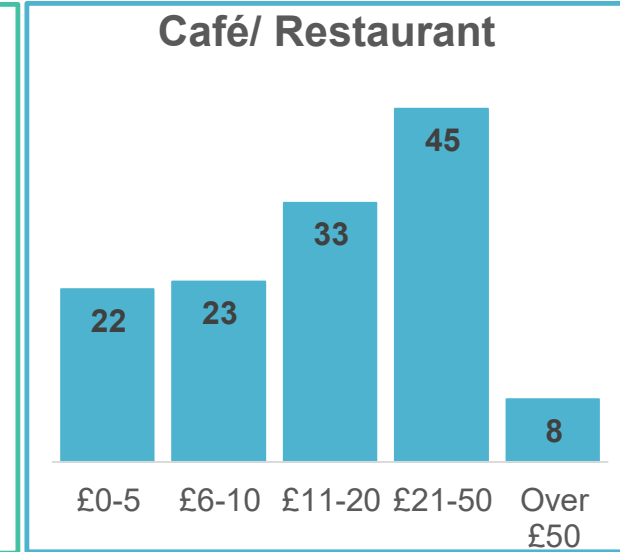
Town Centre Data Zone*:

15-20% least deprived in Scotland

* The data zone (S01006884) that makes up the majority of the town centre.

WORK & LOCAL ECONOMY: AVERAGE CONSUMER SPEND 2022

Observations: The graphs show Food Shopping accounting for the biggest expenditure by visitors. Other Shopping was relatively spread out across the price brackets indicating that people are visiting for a wide variety of different items. The Hair and Beauty sector, although fewer people overall, seems to be a higher value spend. Eating out and Takeaways were from mid range to a higher spend. With the exception of the most expensive price bracket, there was a relatively even spread of spending on events/ entertainment.



WORK & LOCAL ECONOMY: BUSINESS SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS 2022

Observations: Two businesses responded to the survey and provided a mixed outlook for the town, highlighting that over the past five years turnover has decreased, although one business is looking to invest in their business within the next five years which provides some positive encouragement. These businesses are making good use of a variety of online marketing tools.

100% of business owners surveyed were **established and independent** businesses in the town centre

50% of business owners surveyed were **somewhat confident** about future business performance in Alford, with the other 50% **extremely unconfident**

50% of business owners surveyed are looking to **grow or expand** in the next five years. **50%** are not considering **growth or expansion**

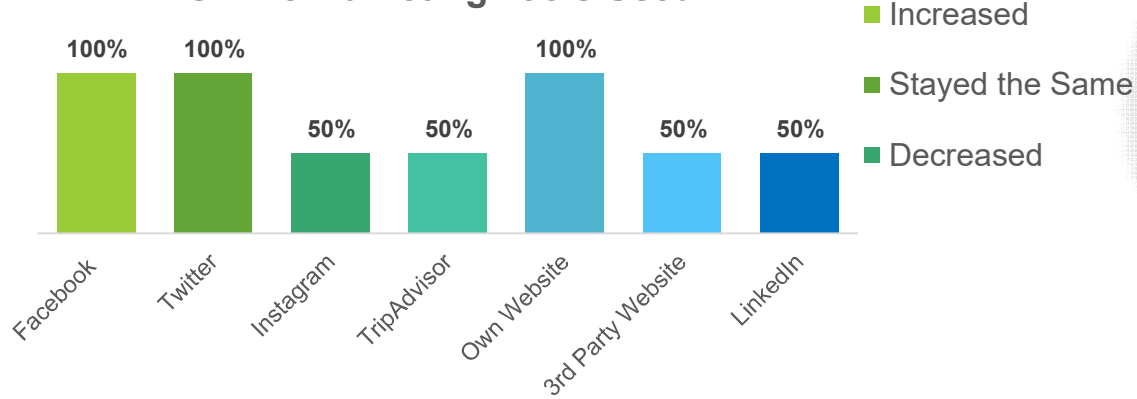
“Prefer to support local businesses if I can.”

“I feel that Alford town centre is developing nicely, it has come through a period of businesses closing and moving out, but is recovering well and most shops are now occupied.”

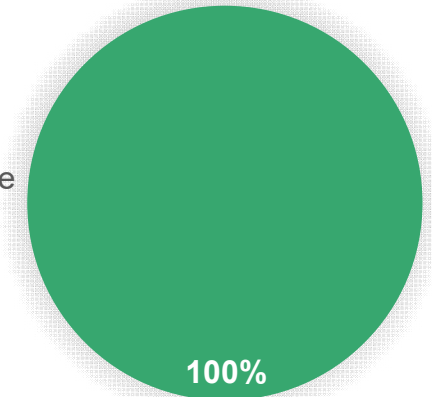
“Encourage investment, restaurants and shops. Fill empty shop spaces.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

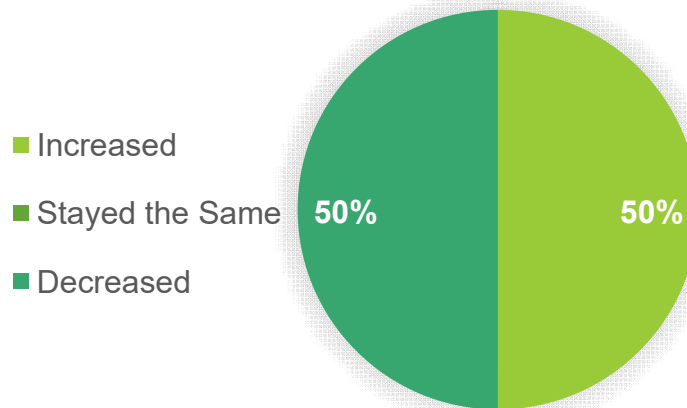
Online Marketing Tools Used



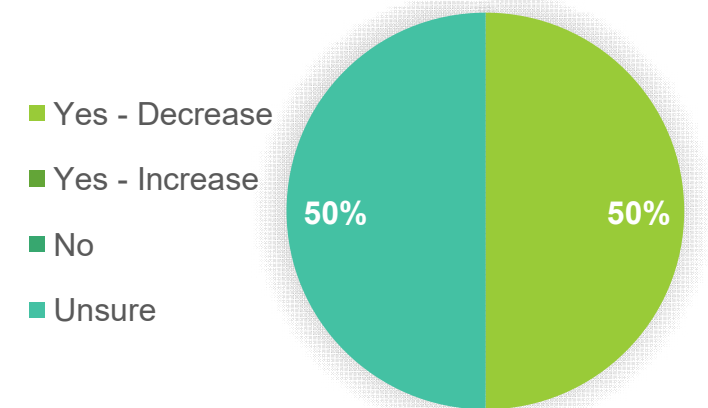
How has turnover at your premises changed in the past five years?



Has employment at your premises changed in the past five years?



Are you looking on making a change to your opening hours over the next year?



WORK & LOCAL ECONOMY: PROPERTY

Observations: The commercial property market appears to have been unstable in the past few years, with comments received in surveys noting that the vacant units were beginning to fill up again. There were still several planning applications submitted for improvement works and change of uses which is encouraging and indicates that the commercial property market may be fairly stable at this present time. Comments received in the surveys have noted the opening of new businesses and improvement in this topic over the past few years, although there were several respondents who are calling for more affordable shops and also more variety in the choice of shops, cafés and restaurants.

“The town centre has improved over the last couple of years and there is no longer empty shops.”

“Although recently, the selection of shops/businesses has been steadily increasing, many are speciality shops or hospitality based, and I fear many will not survive the looming increasing cost of living, both in their business costs but also in reflection of drop in custom as consumers spending becomes squeezed.”

“Nice village although still a few empty shops.”

“Recent opening of new shops has increased options.”

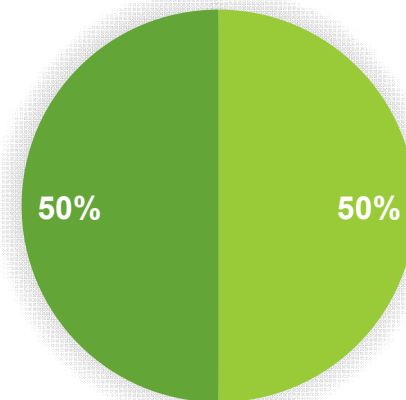
“It was quite sad a few years ago with lots of empty shops but this has turned around and it is a good place to visit with plenty of places to visit, shop and eat.”

“Too many offices and not enough retail shop outlets.”

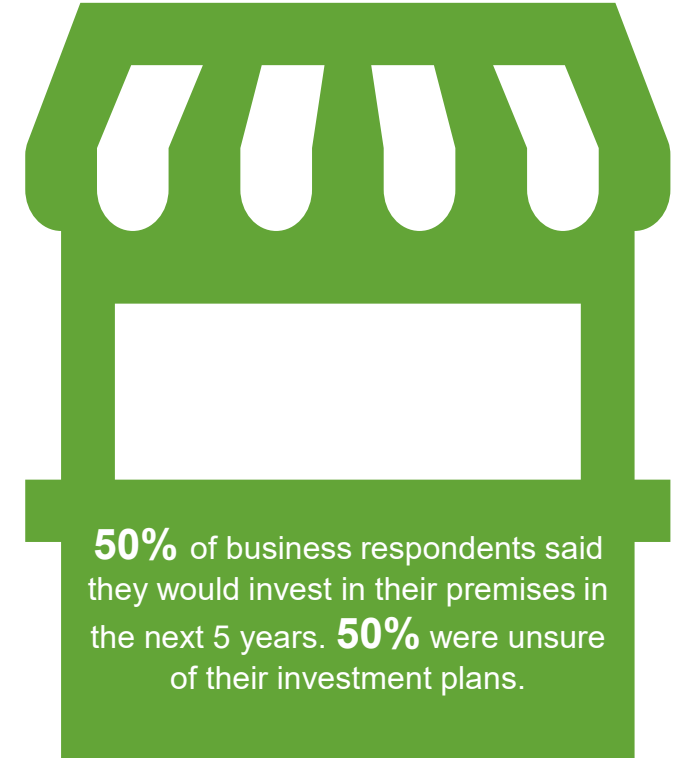
“Fewer and fewer facilities, restaurants, shops etc.”

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Do you rent or own your premises?



■ Rent ■ Own



Planning Applications:

Within the town centre nine planning applications were approved between August 2021 – August 2022. Of note were:

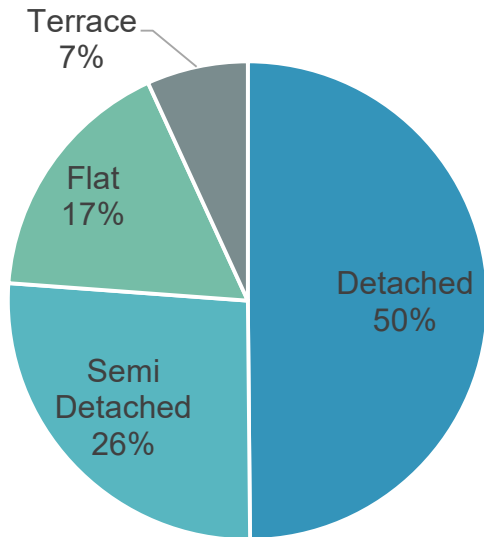
- 2 for signage;
- Change of Use from Shop (Class 1) to Cafe/Bakery (Class 3);
- Alterations to Shopfront;
- Change of Use from Class 4 (Business) to Class 11 (Assembly and Leisure - Gym).

Housing is central to people's lives and helps to shape the appearance and character of places. Good places provide a mix of housing that supports a socially balanced community and meets people's needs throughout life.

HOUSING & COMMUNITY



Dwelling Type



The mix of dwelling types within the town centre is shown above. The largest proportion of dwellings in the town centre are detached properties.

Of these dwelling types within the town centre the main tenure is properties that are either owned outright or owned with a mortgage which make up 78% of all properties.

Housing Profile and Population

The overall population total for Alford in 2020 was 2,610 and it is estimated that approximately 195 people stay within the town centre in 2022.

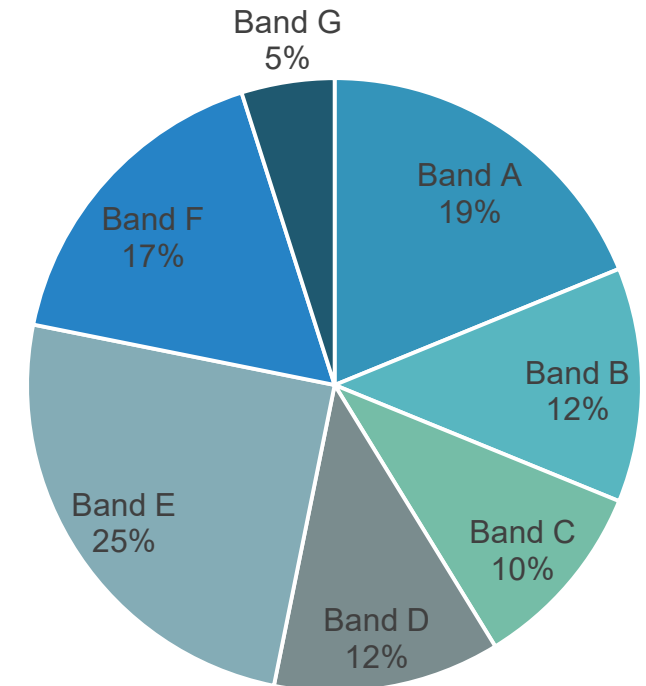
The average house price for dwellings within the town centre boundary in 2018 was £171,960.



Image: Main Street.

In terms of Council Tax Bands (2021), Alford Town Centre has dwellings in Bands A-G on the scale of the Council Tax Bands. There is a mix through all bands within the town centre.

Council Tax Band



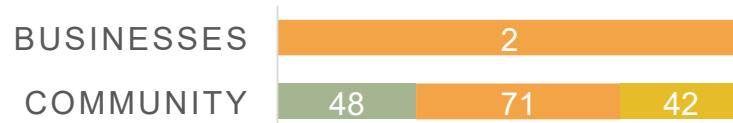
Feeling isolated can be damaging to our health and wellbeing. Good places provide a variety of spaces to meet and spend time with others.

Venue	Indoor / Outdoor	Opening Times
St Andrews Church	Indoor	Daily between 10:00 and 16:00 Sun: Service 10:30 Wed: Morning Prayer 08:30

Observations: Through the community survey it was apparent that there is community desire to see more events happening within the town centre. Particular mention was made to the benefit that a Farmer's Market would bring to the town centre. Additionally, commentary on having events for families was also noted through the responses.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE: RANGE OF EVENTS?

■ Good ■ Neutral ■ Poor



SOCIAL CONTACT



"More events would be good, e.g. a farmers market/ craft fair."

"Be nice to see more family oriented events."

"Would be nice to see some outdoor music events."

"There should be more all year round events (very limited to summer only)."

"More events that are accessible to all villagers."

"More options that are family friendly to eat out/ socialise at."

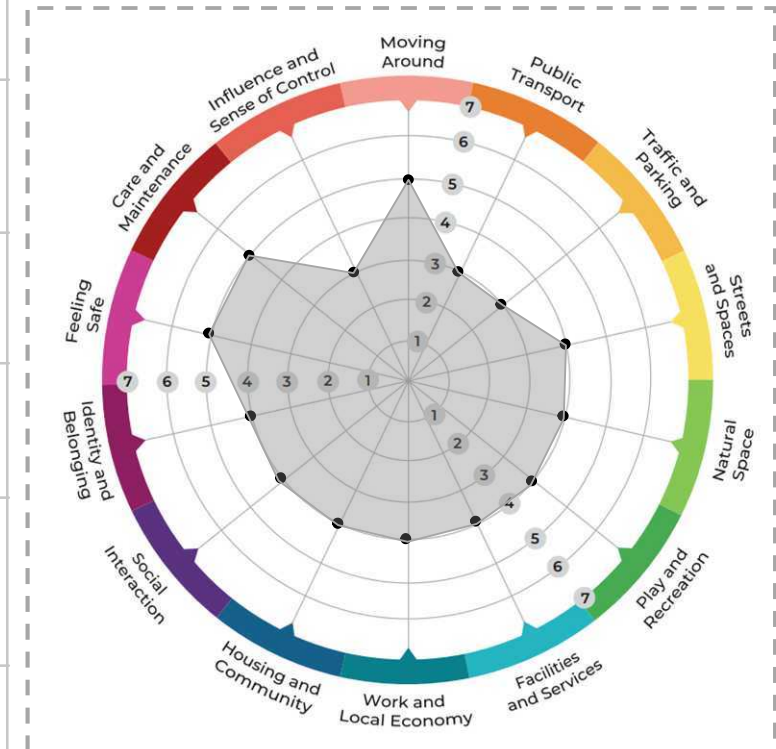
"More events would be an improvement, including potentially a farmers market."

Business and Community Survey, September 2022

Image: St Andrews Church.

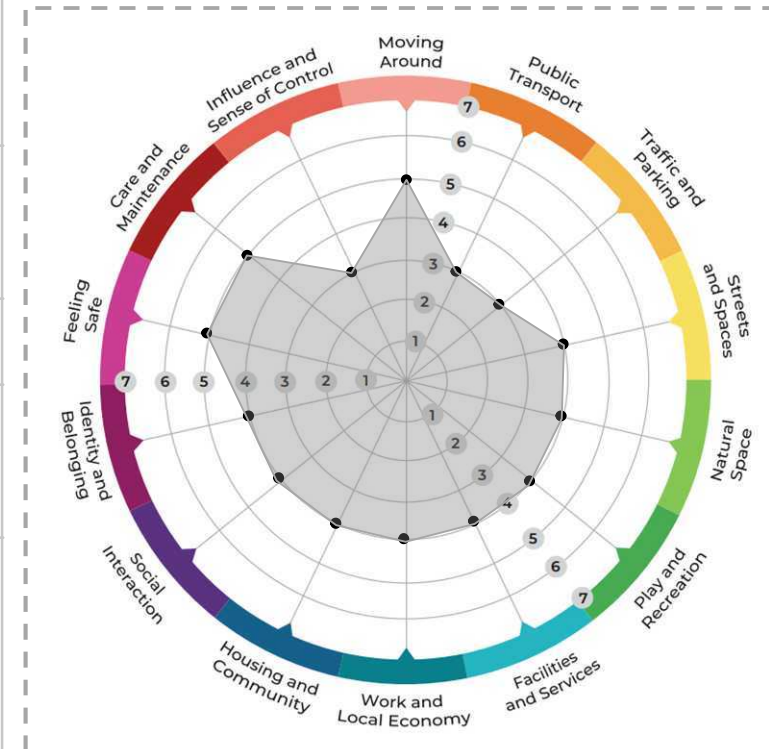
KEY CONSIDERATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

Theme	Key Improvements
Identity and Belonging Rating: 4	Alford has good community spirit and support for its town centre. There was recognition of improvement in the last few years, but there were those that felt the town lacked variety and its appearance could be enhanced. Potential improvements to the general streetscape could improve this theme.
Feeling Safe Rating: 5	Safety during the day and evening both rated within the top five categories by businesses and the community. Safety during the evening received more neutral responses perhaps indicating the town centre is less used in the evenings, therefore if evening usage increases as desired this may require monitoring.
Care and Maintenance Rating: 5	Care and maintenance scored relatively well, however concerns were raised in relation to the condition of certain buildings within the town centre and a community desire to see these upgraded. Improvements to these sites could enhance the overall appearance of the town centre.
Influence and Sense of Control Rating: 3	There are several well regarded groups which relate to areas outwith the town centre, such as the museums, but do have an impact within the town centre. Few people are aware of these groups and greater promotion could be explored.
Moving Around Rating: 5	The compact nature of the town centre gave moving around a generally good rating. Signage at the water fountain, while temporary, were abundant and detracted from the area and consolidation or removal of signs no longer required could be an improvement. There is a desire for safer cycling opportunities and bicycle storage areas.
Public Transport Rating: 3	There is a lack of public transport from the town centre and improved, more regular bus links are a significant community desire.
Traffic and Parking Rating: 3	Traffic flow received mixed ratings, but fewer poor than good or neutral. There was a community desire to reduce on-street parking on Main Street to decrease congestion and allow for safer pedestrian crossing.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES (CONTINUED)

Theme	Key Improvements
Streets and Spaces Rating: 4	Improvements to the visual appearance of buildings and more planters would increase the rating for this topic. Seating/ areas to congregate was a low scoring theme, with aspirations from respondents to see more seating areas within the town centre. Pavement quality and cleanliness were generally regarded as good. The vacancy rate is low, however in a smaller town vacancies are felt more by the community and occupancy of these units to add to add to the town centre offering be supported.
Natural Space Rating: 4	Whilst not within the town centre, there are nearby green spaces which likely contributed to the overall high rating by the community. There are some planters in the town centre and planting within sites, such as Houghton Arms, which should be maintained. Possible improvement to increase planting is encouraged.
Play and Recreation Rating: 4	There are no play and recreation facilities within the town boundary. However, there are several leisure facilities, a park and golf club within 1 mile of the town centre.
Facilities and Amenities Rating: 4	The quality and standard of shops and café/ restaurants was rated well, but the variety was not as well rated. There were few good ratings for evening vibrancy and the farmers market. Further variety of the offering of facilities and amenities and exploration to a regular farmers market would increase the overall score.
Work and Local Economy Rating: 4	There is a range of employment opportunities within the town centre and the consumer spend spread across the different sectors. Few businesses responded to the survey, however those that did were not overly confident of future business performance. One business out of the two respondents said they would consider investment in their premises in the next five years. Exploring opportunities to support businesses or rent or incentives to help existing and new businesses would be welcomed.
Housing and Community Rating: 4	There is a mix of house types within the town centre, mainly detached. This should continue to be monitored to ensure there are a mix of types and tenures that would provide for all of the community.
Social Contact Rating: 4	There was a large desire to see additional events happening within the town centre, particularly a Farmer's Market, to try and encourage more people into the town centre.



BUSINESS & COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSES: How Would You Rate? Top 5 Highest and Lowest Scoring Categories

Community

Top Highest Scoring Categories:

- + 1. Parking Affordability: Car
- + 2. Feeling of Safety During the Day
- + =3. Standard of Service in Shops
- + =3. Parks/ Green Spaces
- + 4. Parking Space Availability: Car
- + =5. Ease of Getting Around
- + =5. Feeling of Safety at Night

Top Lowest Scoring Categories:

- 1. Public Transport Links
- 2. Vibrancy in the Evening
- 3. Seating/ Areas to Congregate
- 4. Farmer's Market
- 5. Variety of Shops

Business

Top Highest Scoring Categories*:

- 1. Café/ Restaurant Choice; Café/ Restaurant Quality; Standard of Service in Shops; Ease of Getting Around; Feeling of Safety During the Day; Feeling of Safety at Night; Traffic Flow; Parking Affordability: Car.

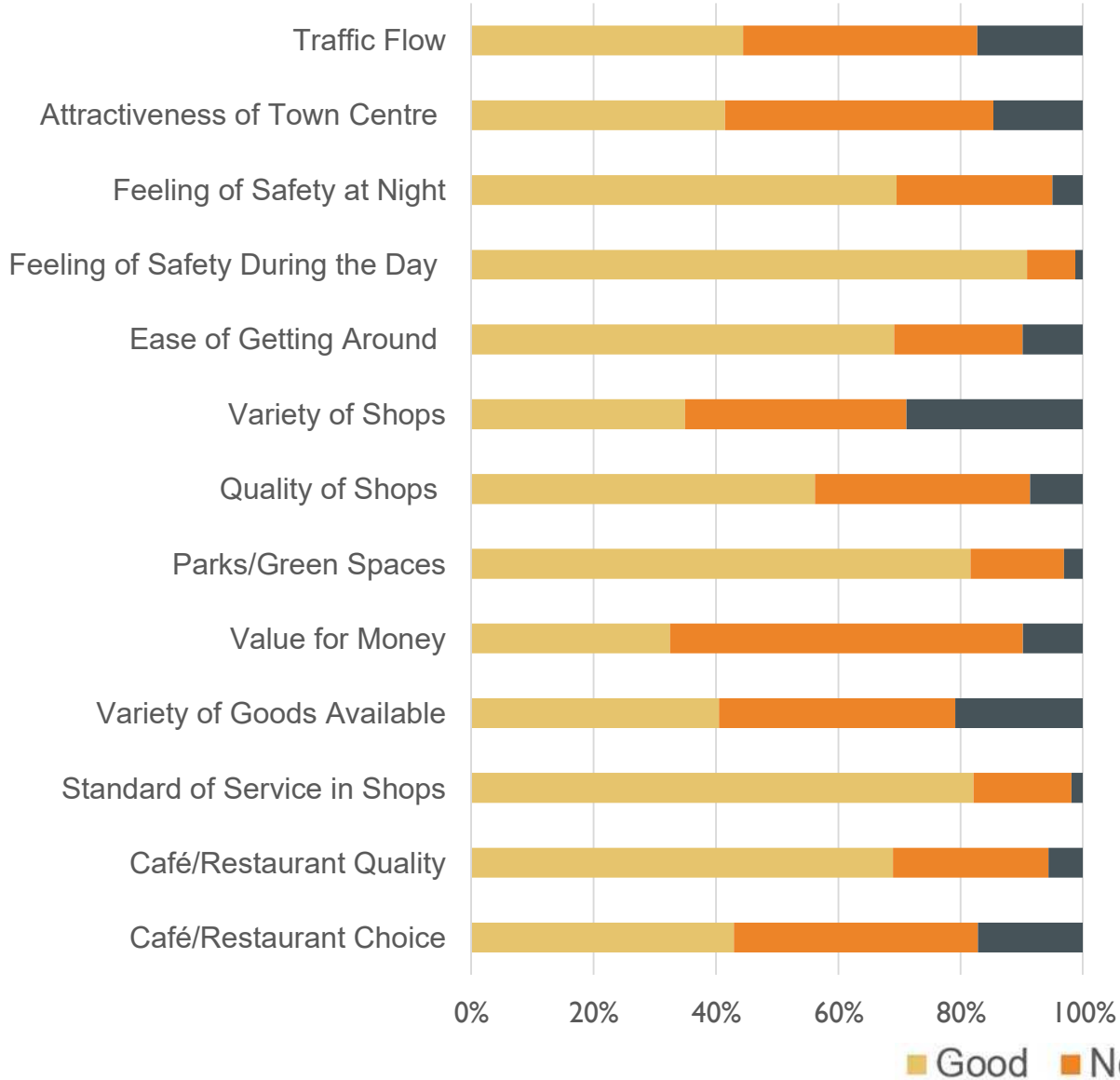
Top Lowest Scoring Categories*:

- 1. Variety of Shops; Attractiveness of Town Centre; Seating/ Areas to Congregate; Pavement Cleanliness; Range of Events.

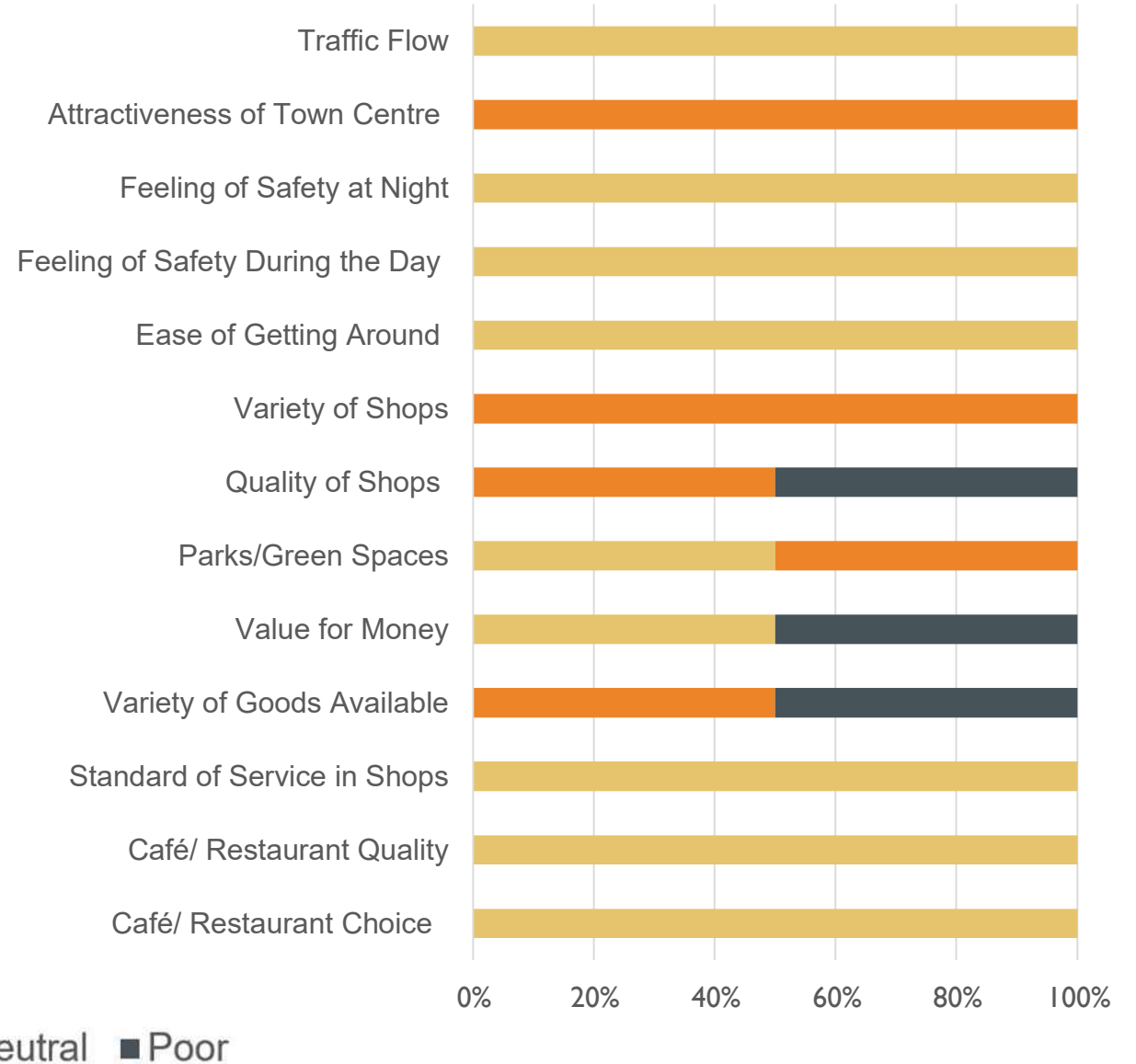
Please note: These categories all scored the same – Good (2) and Poor (2)

BUSINESS & COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSES: How Would You Rate?

Community Responses:

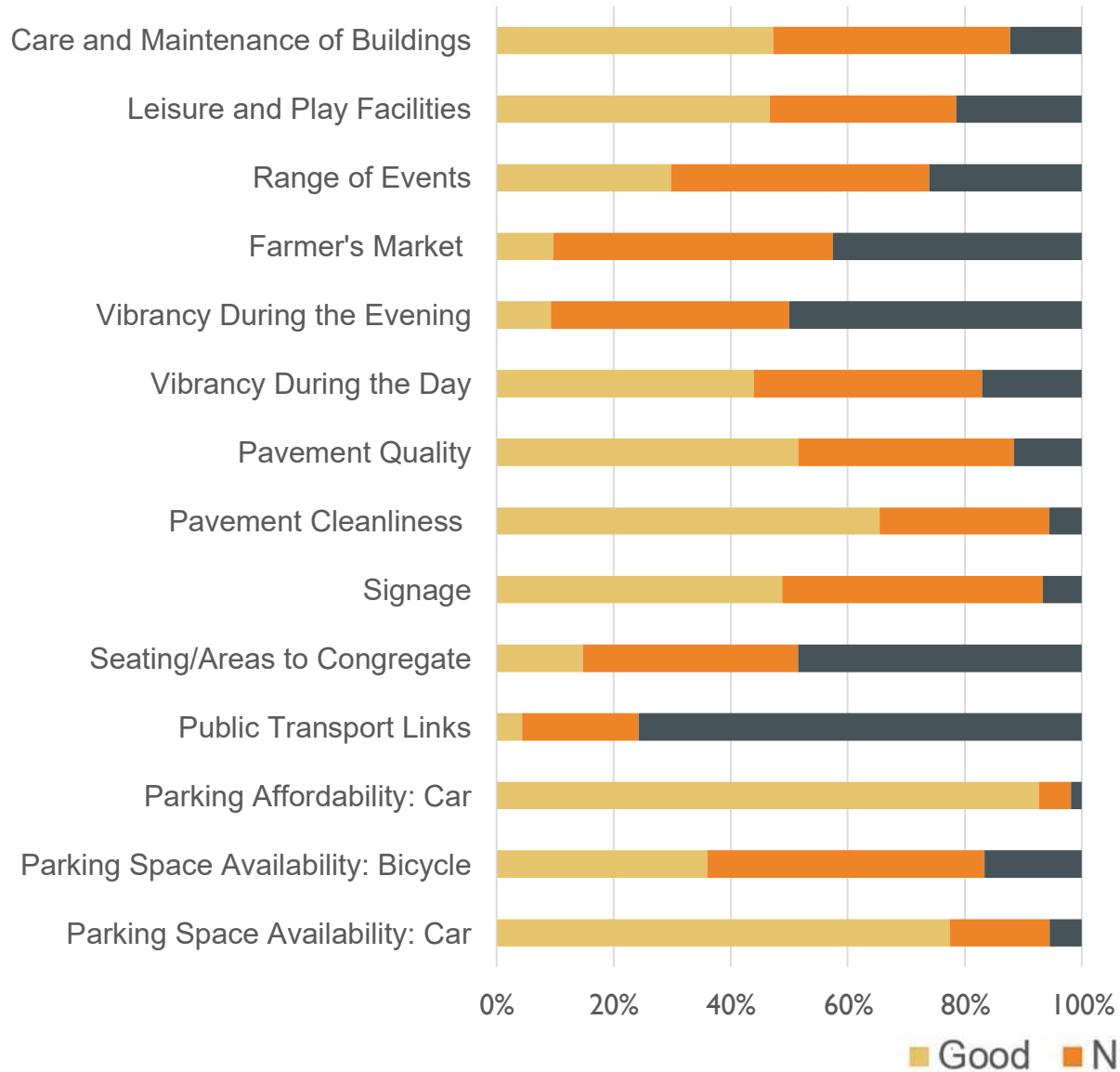


Business Responses:

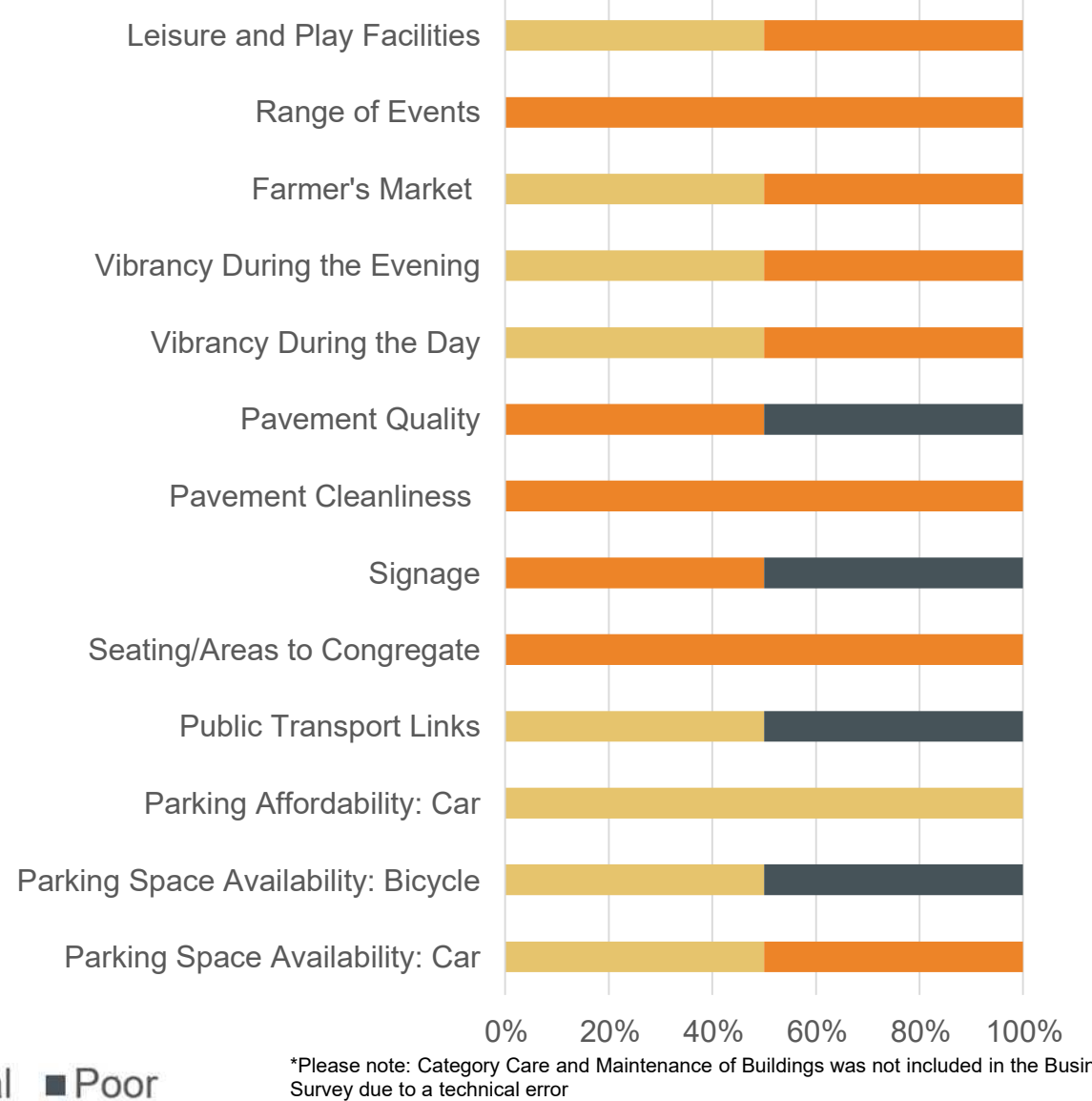


BUSINESS & COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSES: How Would You Rate? (Continued)

Community Responses:



Business Responses*:



*Please note: Category Care and Maintenance of Buildings was not included in the Business Survey due to a technical error

A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH: WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE BENEFIT OF OUR TOWNS

A key element of the new approach to undertaking Town Centre Health Checks in Aberdeenshire is to work in partnership with stakeholders with an interest in the success of our town centres to collect and share knowledge, information and opportunities. This has added an extra dimension to the health checks, providing a base from which future, plans, strategies, engagement and collaboration can be built upon. A big 'thank you' goes to the following teams, organisations and individuals in 2022 for their contributions to the project:

Business and Community:

Footfall Count Volunteers

Partner Organisations:

Sergeant Walker, Partnerships,
Preventions and Interventions, Police
Scotland

Elaine Bisset, VisitAberdeenshire



Council Teams:

Planning Information and Delivery

GIS Team

Community Learning and
Development

Marr Area Office

Community Payback Unpaid Hours
Service

Community Engagement and
Equalities

Economic Development

Transportation

Planning Policy

Customer and Digital Services

Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



Aberdeenshire

COUNCIL



TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK
SEPTEMBER 2022

REPORT PRODUCED BY THE PLANNING INFORMATION AND DELIVERY TEAM
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