

Hamilton Town's Future

Consultation Report



Angela Crawley MP
Lanark and Hamilton East

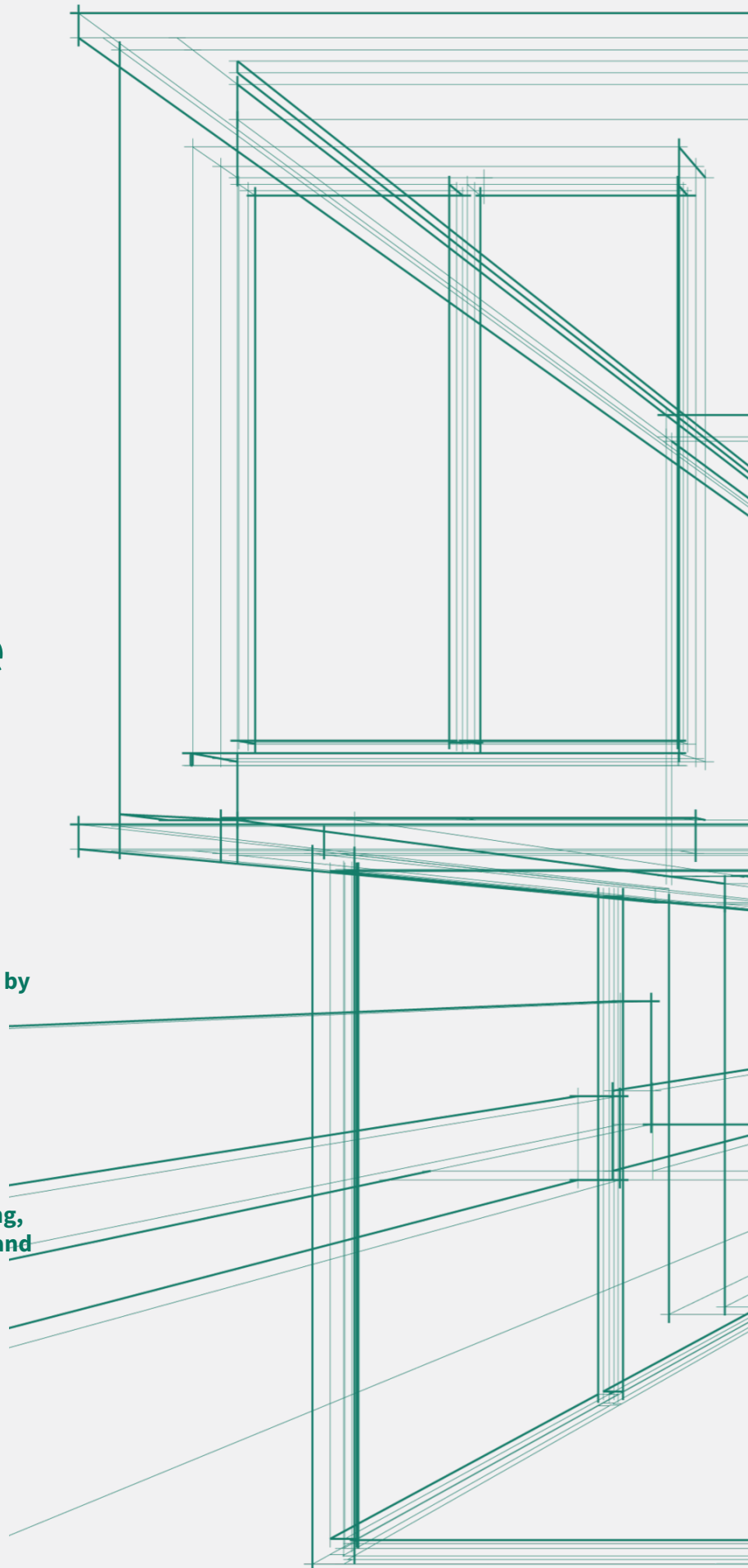
Hamilton Town's Future Consultation 2023/4

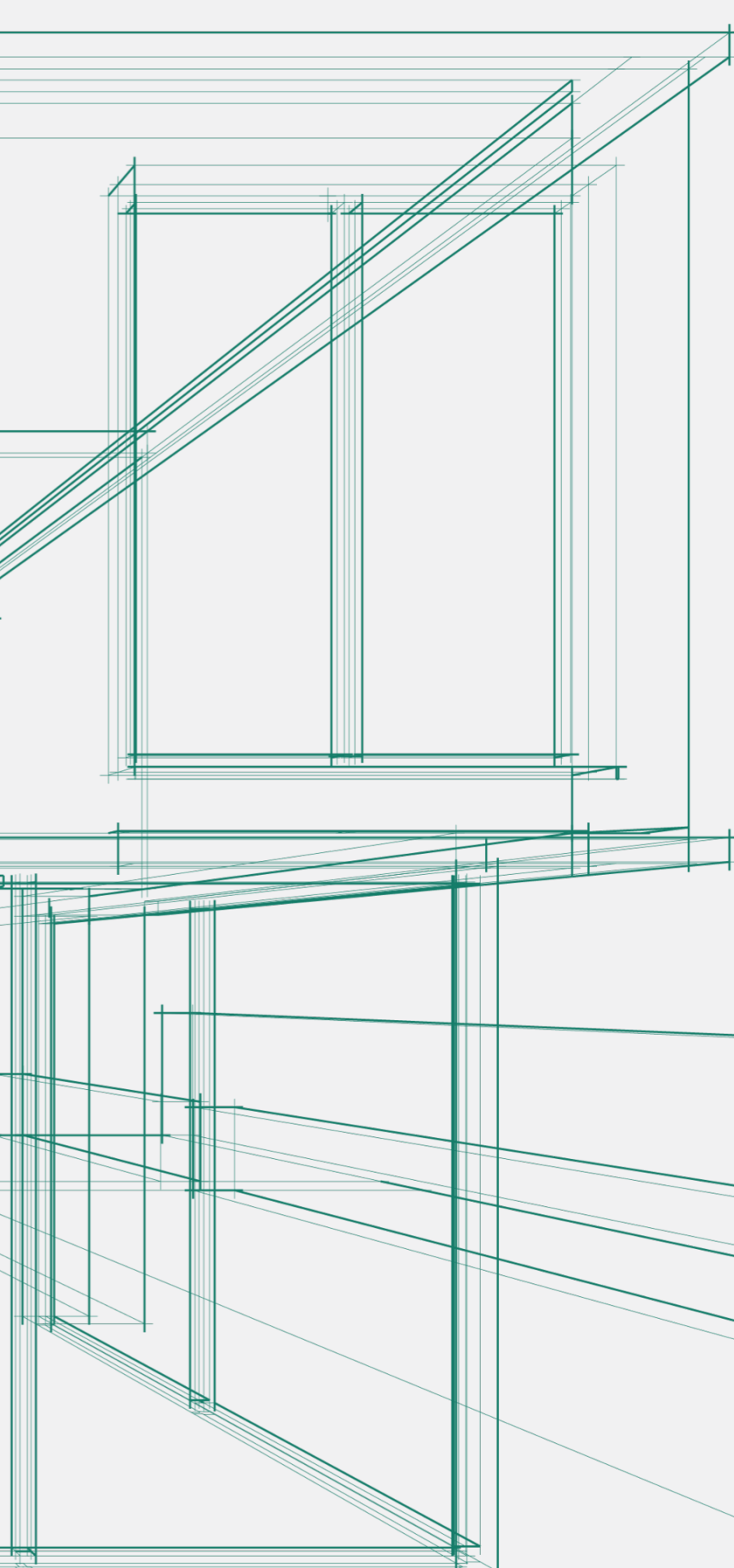
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Foreword

As the Member of Parliament for Lanark and Hamilton East, I have lived most of my life here and have witnessed several decades of change to the landscape of our town. While it is almost impossible to stem against the tide of some of the changes to the high street, the lasting effects of changing patterns of shopping, online banking, coupled with high business rates and excessive parking charges have contributed to a changing landscape in the town centre.

Hamilton town centre's once-vibrant high street has experienced decline in recent years. It is clear we need a rethink on the future of the town centre and urgently need to take bold, ambitious, and transformative action to sustain and secure these spaces for future generations.

South Lanarkshire Council has published a masterplan to improve the town centre. The various uses for the development being considered by the council include residential housing, leisure and retail areas, public spaces and parking places.

I want changes to our town centre to reflect the wishes of its residents, business owners and visitors in the years to come. In September 2023, I launched the Hamilton Town's Future Consultation, which aimed to ensure that those with a stake in Hamilton have their voice heard on their vision for the future of our town centre. Throughout the consultation process, I sought to engage with a wide variety of stakeholders, including the Hamilton Business Improvement District, Members of the Scottish Parliament, local councillors, South Lanarkshire Council officers, students from the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), and the business community in Hamilton.

This report summarises the responses and aims to inform the council's latest plans for the town centre. My primary objective is to ensure that the voices of the people of Hamilton are heard clearly by those leading the regeneration of our town.

Angela Crawley

Angela Crawley MP
Lanark and Hamilton East





Hamilton Our Town are a not-for-profit organisation in place to support the town centre of Hamilton. Directed by a volunteer board, the organisation is one of many Business Improvement Districts operating in Scotland and in the UK, set up to support the economic fortunes of a specific geographical or industry area.

The challenges of town and city centres are well documented and Hamilton, like many, faces increasing challenges in the face of online and out of town retail.

Hamilton Our Town's role has been to use existing resource and funding, whilst gaining new funding opportunities to deliver projects that support the BID area. In the past year the organisation has delivered events such as Hamilton Easter Gala, Pride South Lanarkshire, Hamilton Christmas Festival and Hamilton Market in support of footfall and our community. In total 13 events were delivered in 2023 gaining an additional 35,978 estimated visitors to the central BID area.

In the year our social media recorded a huge 180k engagements, we created 2,530 promotional online posts and 130 businesses accessed our free digital advertising and photography services. 53 planter maintenance visits took place, 50 area checks and 13 incidents of fly tipping were reported. We featured on the front cover of the Hamilton press 9 times throughout the year with 40 pages of content in promotion of the area. We were also delighted to host MSPs for the Scotland Loves Local week and Scotland's First Minister Humza Yousaf at Pride South Lanarkshire.

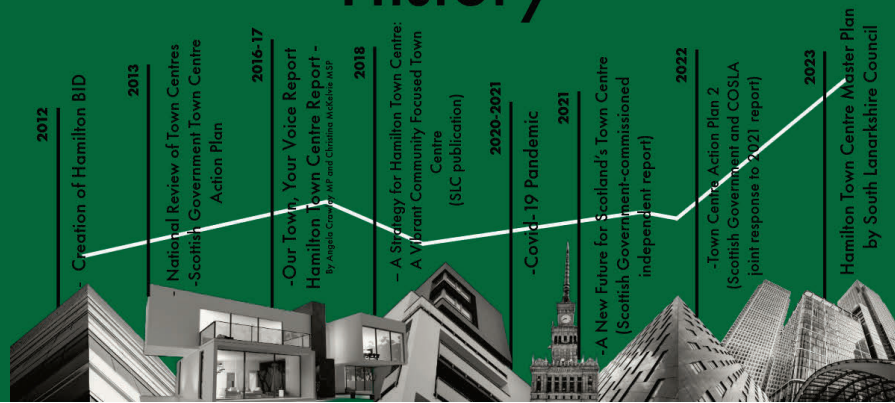
Projects such as Hamilton Our Town social media, shop front grants, free market stalls, regular waste reporting, collaboration with the local police, town centre planters, free wi-fi and networking are just some of the initiatives delivered, providing important value to the area.

Hamilton Our Town supports any and all efforts to improve the town centre and as such supports the consultation and welcomes positive changes for our area.

**Malcolm Thomas-Harley, Hamilton
Business Improvement District**



History



In 2016, Angela Crawley MP and Christina McKelvie MSP published the report “Our Town, Your Voice”. This consultation-led report was presented to South Lanarkshire Council, resulting in the 2018 report “A Strategy for Hamilton Town Centre,” accepting and reflecting many of the recommendations within the report.

The strategy included recognition of the need to develop buildings such as the Town Hotel on Townhead Street (now the Premier Inn), the Hamilton Advertiser building (now developed as flats), the Vogue building (due for redevelopment as social housing), the Keith’s Building and the former Bairds site.

It advised to open Quarry Street to traffic, which are due to commence in February 2024. It also included recommendations to review parking arrangements and charges. SLC conducted temporary changes to the parking regime, however its conclusions were never published and this was not progressed beyond the pilot. Unfortunately, much of the progress on the town centre was halted by the pandemic, which has significantly damaged the resilience of retail premises and sped up much of the existing decline, including the closure of large shops in the Regent Centre.

In 2023, South Lanarkshire Council announced a new regeneration project in the form of the Hamilton Town Centre Master Plan, which aims to modernise the town centre for multipurpose use. These plans must reflect the wishes of the people who use the town: its residents, customers, business owners and students.

On 15th September 2023, I launched the Hamilton Town’s Future consultation to better understand the concerns and views of the residents, customers, business owners and students of Hamilton town centre. I have sought to engage as widely with civic society and key stakeholders throughout this process. The consultation was promoted and circulated over a 12-week period, closing on 8th December 2023.

This report is a summary of the findings of that consultation, which received over 1500 contributions, and outlines both their views and vision for the future of the town. The responses indicate that there is a demand for a series of changes to improve the structure of the town: to parking, business rates, and traffic management. It is clear from the results of this consultation that people want the future of Hamilton to be the heart of our community and a space that can be enjoyed by generations to come.

The consultation was conducted over a 12-week period, from 15th September until 8th December 2023.

The consultation was produced using Google Forms and asked 16 questions, with some tailored to students and business owners specifically. The survey format generated both qualitative and quantitative data, aided by a series of open and closed questions to allow for participant direction where appropriate.

The responses were kept securely through a password protected account. All personal identifying data was destroyed upon completion of this report, with only the anonymised responses being shared with South Lanarkshire Council, in compliance with GDPR.

The consultation was conducted using a variety of formats and methods of engagement, including social media, a wide-scale letter campaign to over 5000 households and businesses and a series of engagement events including a roundtable event with stakeholders and a number of face-to-face civic engagement events around Hamilton. Through this exercise, we received over 1500 responses, which reflect the diverse needs of the town. This included events on the Lanarkshire campus at the University of the West of Scotland, at weekend market stalls in the Regent Centre and through leaflet drops across the town.

We hosted a roundtable event in Hamilton Town House which brought together representatives from the private, public, business and academic sectors.

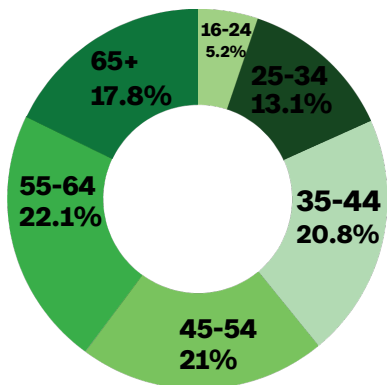
The event was attended by Christina McKelvie, MSP for Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse, Councillor Colin Dewar, Iain Ross and Alison Brown as representatives from South Lanarkshire Council, Malcolm Thomas-Harley as Chair of the Hamilton Business Improvement District, a representative of Monica Lennon MSP, Grace Kone as a Student Representative from UWS and several local business owners. The event provided an opportunity to engage in a cross-sectoral dialogue on the current needs of residents, businesses, and students and how they can be met within the future of the town centre. The themes that arose from the event are consistent with the findings of this report; stressing the importance of supporting small and local businesses, utilising existing structures to create multipurpose civic spaces and improving transport and parking options to make Hamilton work for everyone. I would like to thank everyone who attended for their constructive approach and valuable feedback.



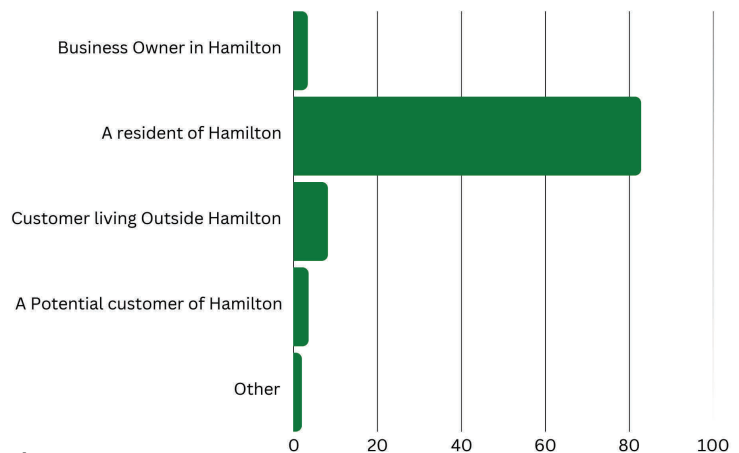
Demographic Findings

From an estimated audience of approximately 8000, we received over 1500 responses. The survey collected 1566 responses from a wide range of age groups. The largest representation came from the 55-64 age group category, with 344 respondents. The smallest demographic represented in the study was those aged between 16 and 24, making up 5.2% of the respondents with 81 responses. The majority of responses were from residents; however, we were also able to gather 17 responses from students, and 82 business owners.

What age group do you belong to?

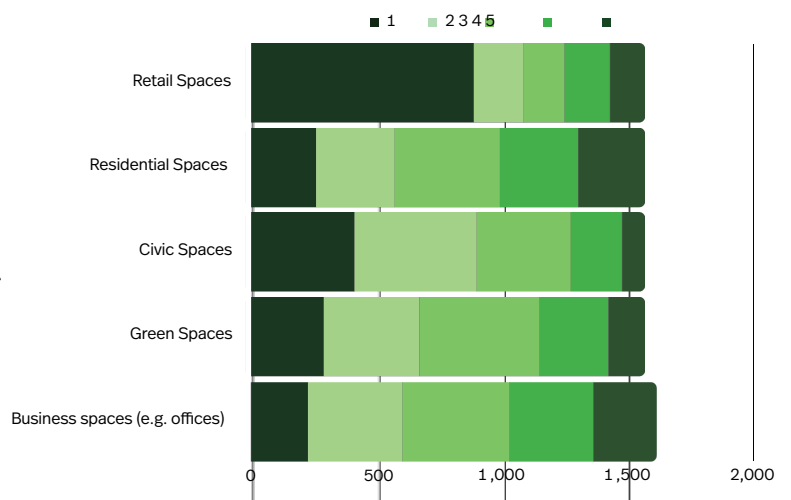


What best describes you?



Respondents overwhelmingly expressed the opinion that retail spaces need to be the first priority for the future success of Hamilton town centre, with 883 respondents in total. 410 respondents felt that improving and creating civic spaces was of equal importance in the future, reflecting the analysis already outlined in this report.

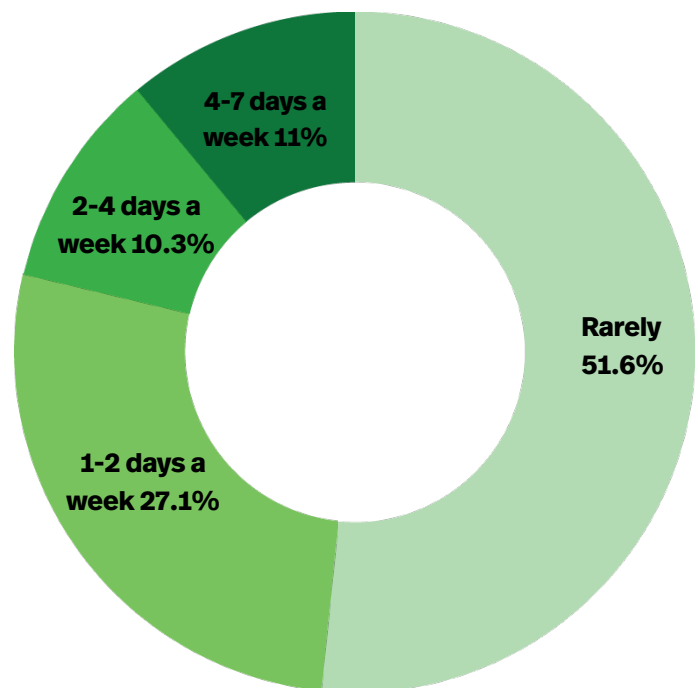
Respondents overall felt that residential spaces should be prioritised last alongside business spaces. It was clear from the qualitative responses that respondents felt that the future for Hamilton should be focussed on shopping local, and spaces that work for everyone, with diverse needs.



How Often Do You Use Hamilton Town Centre?

The nature and relationship that consumers have with town centres is changing. It is crucial to hear directly from those who live, work and use the town centre themselves. How often they use the town centre and what attracts them into the town can provide insight on the biggest issues facing Hamilton, and what residents would like to see from their town in the future.

Around half of all respondents said that they rarely utilised Hamilton town centre, 27% said they used it 1-2 days a week, 10% utilising it 2-4 days a week, and only 11% said they used the town centre 4-7 days a week.



"I remember as a child and teenager I would spend about 3-5 days a week going into Hamilton town centre. It used to be filled with good shops and cafes. Now it's full of empty shops or nail bars. Personally, I used to love shopping in Hamilton but now I have to travel to Glasgow!"

It was evident from the responses that visits to Hamilton are heavily influenced by the need to access specific services, and not with the intention to spend a long period of time in the town.

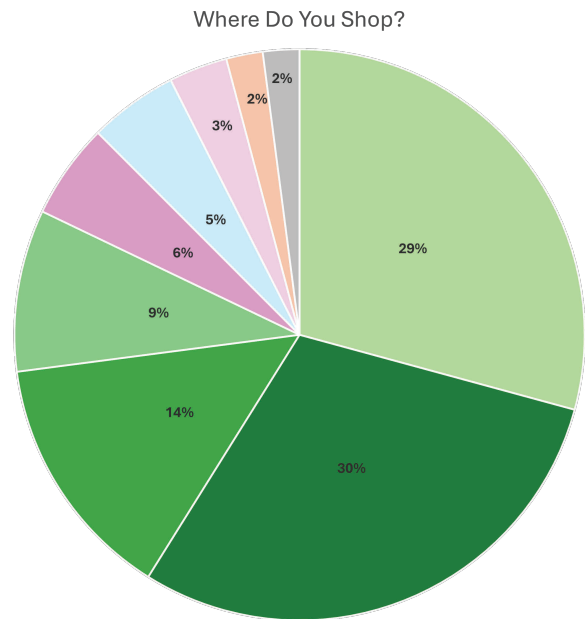
Respondents spoke of how they felt there was no reason to come into Hamilton town centre. When asked what draws them to Hamilton town centre, the majority of respondents mentioned coming in for shopping, dining out or for work. However, a sizeable majority of respondents mentioned only coming into the town centre to access one particular service, such as the bank or the opticians.

If not Hamilton, then where?

Question 16 was left open-ended to allow respondents to signal where they shop as an alternative and why 68% of all survey respondents stated they would shop elsewhere with a total of 27 other locations mentioned.

Glasgow and the Retail Parks were the most common alternative locations, but East Kilbride and Motherwell were noted for being more user friendly for those with disability. While the Clyde Valley was noted for its aesthetic and scenic atmosphere.

Respondents also signalled they would like the option for longer opening hours.



■ The Fort - 325 ■ Glasgow City - 330 ■ East Kilbride - 156 ■ Motherwell - 102 ■ Silverburn - 60
 ■ Braehead - 56 ■ Larkhall - 37 ■ Strathaven - 23 ■ Bothwell - 23

“ Fort Glasgow for shopping. Easy to get to, good range of shops, free parking, shops have longer opening hours. ”

“ East Kilbride. Better parking and disabled friendly ”

“ Usually to one of the Clyde Valley Garden Centres. Easier to get to and nicer surroundings than the town centre ”

“ East Kilbride or Glasgow. East Kilbride has the advantage of having a covered shopping area, the Plaza, which suits more people because they can shop when the weather is not good ”

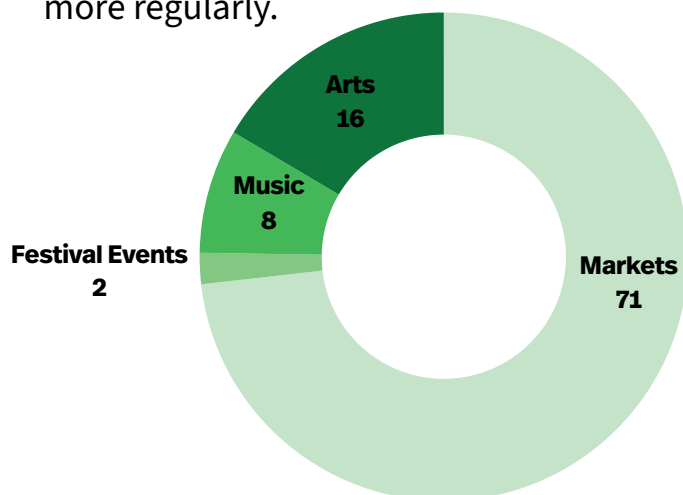
“ The Fort because they have more variety of shops and is always busy so isn't so grey looking ”



“Hamilton should be a creative, family friendly town with places to meet, eat, shop and visit.”

A Town For Everyone

Many respondents spoke highly of the weekend markets and recent events like Hamilton Pride which brought them into the town for the day. Respondents would like to see recurring events and markets more regularly.



Hamilton Pride event July 2023

“The markets are great for supporting local businesses and finding items you wouldn't usually see in shops and the entertainment is great for children”

“The recent markets have shown that local businesses moving goods and services will succeed”

“Markets are good and bring in visitors other such events should be considered”

“Brilliant atmosphere around this time due to markets totally brings people into the centre, but we need more”

“I regularly go a wander with my son who loves when there are markets and entertainment, that's the type of buzz I hope continues”



Free-Parking, Transport and Accessibility



One of the main issues raised by respondents was parking and public transport. Both residents and business owners felt that Hamilton town centre was suffering due to its parking charges and poor links to surrounding areas. Of all respondents, 21% mentioned parking as the biggest issue hindering the future success of Hamilton while half of business owners who did not feel positive about the future of their business in Hamilton mentioned parking when asked what would need to change.

“Parking although small in charge level is a barrier to footfall”

Residents viewed the re-introduction of free parking as one of the key priorities to improving the town centre. Throughout the consultation, free parking was mentioned more than 500 times. The lack of free parking has left residents feeling that they are unable to browse the town in a flexible way. As such, they are only minded to spend short periods of time in the town while they access essential services. Those who mentioned keeping parking charges in place felt that the fees had to be reduced dramatically or allow for a few hours free. This opinion was mirrored by business owners who felt customers are unable to “pop in” as they must park in the multi-storey, pay and display, then walk to the location they are visiting.

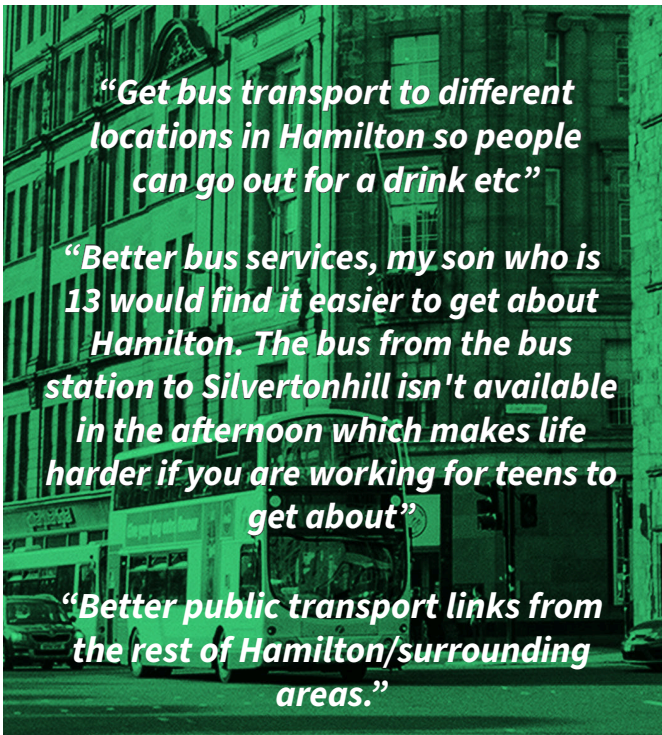
“Charging for parking and lack of ability to pull up in a car to business is significant.”

Of respondents who chose to go elsewhere rather than using Hamilton town centre, 23% mentioned the parking situation as a reason for going somewhere else. Retail parks were the most common source of free parking but towns such as Larkhall, Strathaven, East Kilbride and Motherwell were all noted to have either better free parking (specific days or longer hours) or cheaper parking than Hamilton. It was also noted that the current price of parking in Hamilton made it a less attractive option than travelling to Glasgow. For example, an adult return from Hamilton Central to Glasgow Central costs £5.30 while parking in Hamilton town centre ranges from between 80p and £1.20 for an hour to £5.20 a day.

“I look at Paisley and Renfrewshire and it is a total contrast. The footfall in Hamilton is hampered by the charging to park, empty shops, no identity and general mess of shops.”

“The Fort and Glasgow City Centre. I can park for free or I can pay as much to go on the train as I would to park my car in Hamilton.”

Residents felt that Hamilton should be a go-to destination across the Central Belt of Scotland but that it is hindered by poor transport links. Transport was highlighted as the biggest issue hindering the future success of Hamilton by 5% of respondents. One resident mentioned increasing bus operating times and improving the reliability of bus links across other areas of Hamilton to allow people to come to the town centre to use bars and pubs.



“Get bus transport to different locations in Hamilton so people can go out for a drink etc”

“Better bus services, my son who is 13 would find it easier to get about Hamilton. The bus from the bus station to Silvertonhill isn't available in the afternoon which makes life harder if you are working for teens to get about”

“Better public transport links from the rest of Hamilton/surrounding areas.”

With petrol and diesel cars being phased out over the coming decade, some respondents urged the council to have a forward-thinking planning approach and include additional space for electric vehicles.

“

“Encourage more parking for electric vehicles”

“Free charging for electric vehicles”

“I think the town needs to be accessible - and that means car friendly (we will be moving to green vehicles, so this will not have negative environmental impacts)”

”

The lack of disabled parking was mentioned on 7 occasions with residents stating that they are forced to shop elsewhere as a result.

“

“Unfortunately due to layout & carparks, the town centre is not accessible for disabled resident”

”

“I go to Motherwell or Braehead because they both have proper usable wheelchair parking spaces & they are all accessible especially for self-propelling wheelchair users as they have actual accessible down kerbs & pathways & shop entrances & are clearly built using the experience/expertise of actual wheelchair users”

Residents felt that increasing driver accessibility within the town would benefit businesses that are currently invisible to a driver passing through Hamilton. Both residents and business owners felt that the one-way system was serving to the detriment of the town centre and felt that efforts should also be made to make Hamilton accessible by foot with improved pavements, greenery and cycle lanes. In total, 8% of respondents said the one-way system was the biggest issue hindering the future success of Hamilton town centre.

All demographics represented within this report commented on the town's inaccessibility and its role in the success of the town in future. Most respondents felt that more efforts were needed to increase in making the town more accessible from surrounding areas.

Business Rates

Of the 80 business owners who responded to the consultation, only 11% thought that the current business rates were set at a fair level. Of the remaining responses, 54% were of the opinion that the rates were too high. Common themes in the responses were that rates were too expensive considering the quality of the location, buildings and footfall. Business owners felt that rate levels were a hinderance to new businesses coming into the town centre, several respondents noted that they were based from home or from less convenient industrial units because they had been



"I don't need to pay them. It's one reason I don't have a unit in Hamilton town centre. They are too expensive."

"I don't pay rates as my premises are small but its definetly a deterrant to expanding."

unable to afford the rates for a town centre location.

Some respondents also said that they felt that the rates had discouraged them from expansion. Most of the remaining 35% were exempt from rates and the rates relief had been very gratefully received by these businesses. Several responses indicated that without this relief their business would have struggled to survive. A small number of those that had rates relief stated that they used to have town centre locations but could no longer afford to be there.

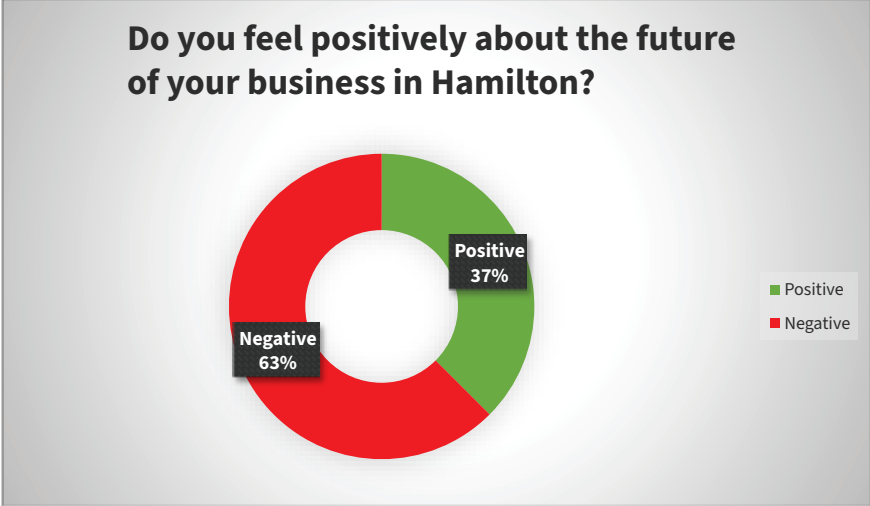
When asked what was the biggest hinderance to the future success of Hamilton town centre, 29% of business owners cited business rates as the top issue.

"Very high and affect small businesses growing and expanding investment. The opportunity and thought of expanding, creating more jobs is definitely put off with high costs of living and rates."

I own a large leisure (sporting) centre in Hamilton town centre. I feel that in order for us to continue to provide our services, we would require some support from the council and government in the form of financial relief. All business rates and rents are based on a thriving town centre and a business model of pure retail. Experience and activity centres should be given incentives to operate in town centres, as they encourage regular and repeat visitations from locals as well as tourists.

When business owners were asked about the future of their businesses, 63% responded that they did not feel positively about their businesses' future in Hamilton.

When asked what would need to change for them to feel positively about the future, the responses were very varied.



“ Make it affordable even for the small guy that has a niche market, make the centre interesting. We don't have farmers markets in town or anything where people can just come in and have a wonder around and spend a morning in town. The only thing is always Poundland. Why are we looking at what other UK cities are doing? Look abroad to where you go on holiday, what are they doing that you enjoy and try bring that in. ”

“ The town centre has totally lost its vibrancy and become an unwelcoming place with litter, youths hanging about. People can't even park for 2 minutes to pop in and drop something off at our business. The Regent Centre needs redeveloped for mixed use with residential uses similar to what's happening in Shawlands. ”

“ Increase community involvement, Bothwell has a scarecrow festival and Lanark have a Dinosaur trail I have not heard of Hamilton center's version that can incorporate business, family and community engagement if it exists? ”

“ I think more needs to be done to help small business, lowering rates, funding for taking on young people. ”

“ I have so many ideas and thinking a business steering group backed by a yearly budget to promote the town would be welcomed. A clear identity for the town is needed. It's unclear what the town does. Is it local shops, charity, coffee culture? Hard to tell. ”



"If we keep and enhance the sandstone Quarry Street, add green spaces, cycle paths and free parking, we can encourage folk to visit."



"Visionary architect needed. The old Bairds Store, the empty UWS building on Almada Street - make them award-winning housing. Encourage artists to live and work here. Transform the old place."



"Other towns in South Lanarkshire have beautiful flowers, trees and green spaces, even wildflowers growing. Hamilton lacks in this area."



"Try and bring out the best of the old buildings. Try and save Keith's building on Cadzow Street. Heed the lessons of history. Try and find solutions that link back to the heritage of the old town. Be proud of all the good things that make the town what it is."

Shopping Experience

“Empty commercial property is increasingly making the town feel run down”

When asked "What is your vision of a regenerated Hamilton Town Centre?" 44% of respondents mentioned improving the shops in Hamilton, including increasing the variety of shops and promoting small and local business

“Have shops that sell a decent variety of clothes and shoes”

“More up market shops - there are very few shoe or clothes shops now”

“A place that you can go and buy nice clothes, gifts for people, shoes. Being able to see and feel the product instead of trying to judge it on internet shopping”

This absence of variety is driving shoppers outside of Hamilton town centre and towards online shopping and other towns and shopping centres.

“I now shop online as there is very little choice of stores, particularly clothes and shoe shops”

Businesses equally felt that the aesthetics of the town was hurting their business. Comments on how “run down” it appeared, the litter, the shabby facades of the shops on the high street and businesses leaving due to vandalism and crime. A local gaming business which relocated to Glasgow to avoid a string of vandalism incidents was cited. A small number of the business owners said that they no longer felt safe in the town centre, particularly at night.

“Litter and fly dumping is astonishingly bad.”

“There is nowhere to buy men’s clothes. Primark and Asda have two rails and that’s it”

“It’s not worth the effort to go to Hamilton. Even the train station doesn’t feel safe anymore”



“The town centre is derelict and needs upgrading. It now feels very unsafe too”

Some respondents mentioned despite their intentions to shop local, they often found this difficult because of the accessibility of the town, and poor advertisement of what is on offer. One respondent offered an interesting solution to this issue by referencing the ‘Derry Card’ from their home city.

“

What makes Derry a thriving city is the amount of bigger shops still open in the shopping centres such as River Island, Zara etc but also the local businesses and independent shops. A great incentive for people of Derry was a "shop local" card that gave customers discount etc

”

Scotland Loves Local offer gift cards which can be used by participating shops and stores within a local authority area. At the end of 2023 sales of the gift card topped £1 million for the first time showing its growing popularity. Although only a small number of stores are currently participating in Hamilton this may be an option worth exploring for a regenerated town centre.

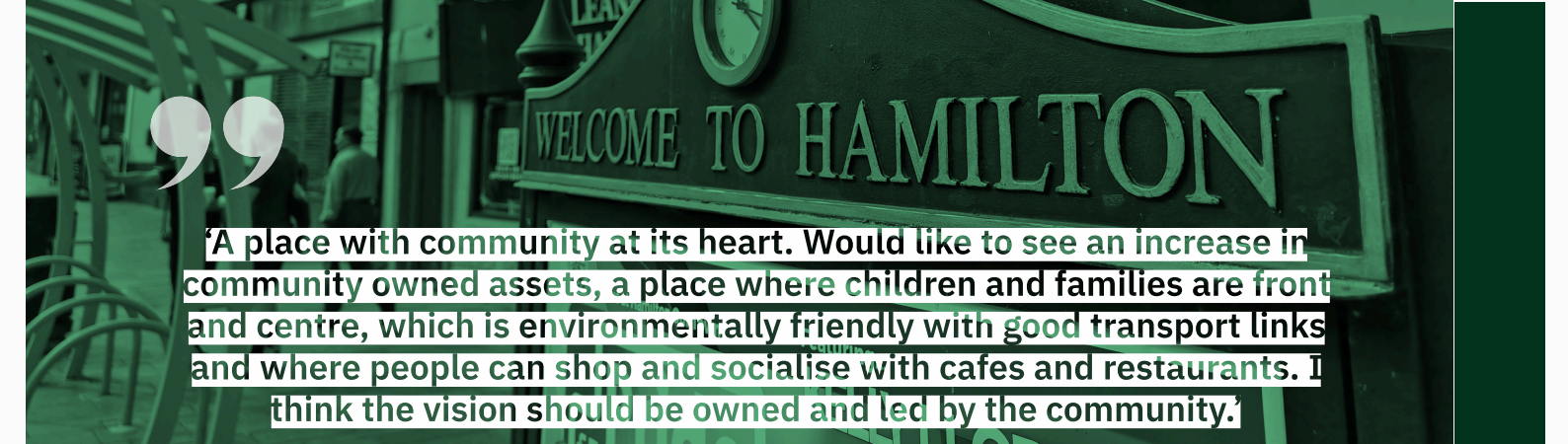
“A loyalty discount for residents of Hamilton. This is used in towns in the Lake District and encourages locals to shop locally”

“Make it enticing for residents to come back offer special incentives/discounts at coffee shops restaurants/pubs already situated in the Regent Shopping Centre and centre of Hamilton”

“

I would keep the traditional shopping street of Quarry Street and encourage a mix of independent shops, cafes, restaurants, charity shops. Make Hamilton centre somewhere people want to visit for its independent shops.

”



'A place with community at its heart. Would like to see an increase in community owned assets, a place where children and families are front and centre, which is environmentally friendly with good transport links and where people can shop and socialise with cafes and restaurants. I think the vision should be owned and led by the community.'

Multipurpose Civic Spaces

Respondents felt that existing spaces within the town should be regenerated to create multipurpose spaces, blending living, eating and entertainment together. Respondents agreed that Hamilton already had the potential to host everything they wished for in a town centre: high quality accommodation; small and local businesses; welcoming green spaces; and spaces for community engagement. There was enthusiasm for spaces which combine leisure, bars, restaurants and socialising, similar to Glasgow's Ashton Lane.

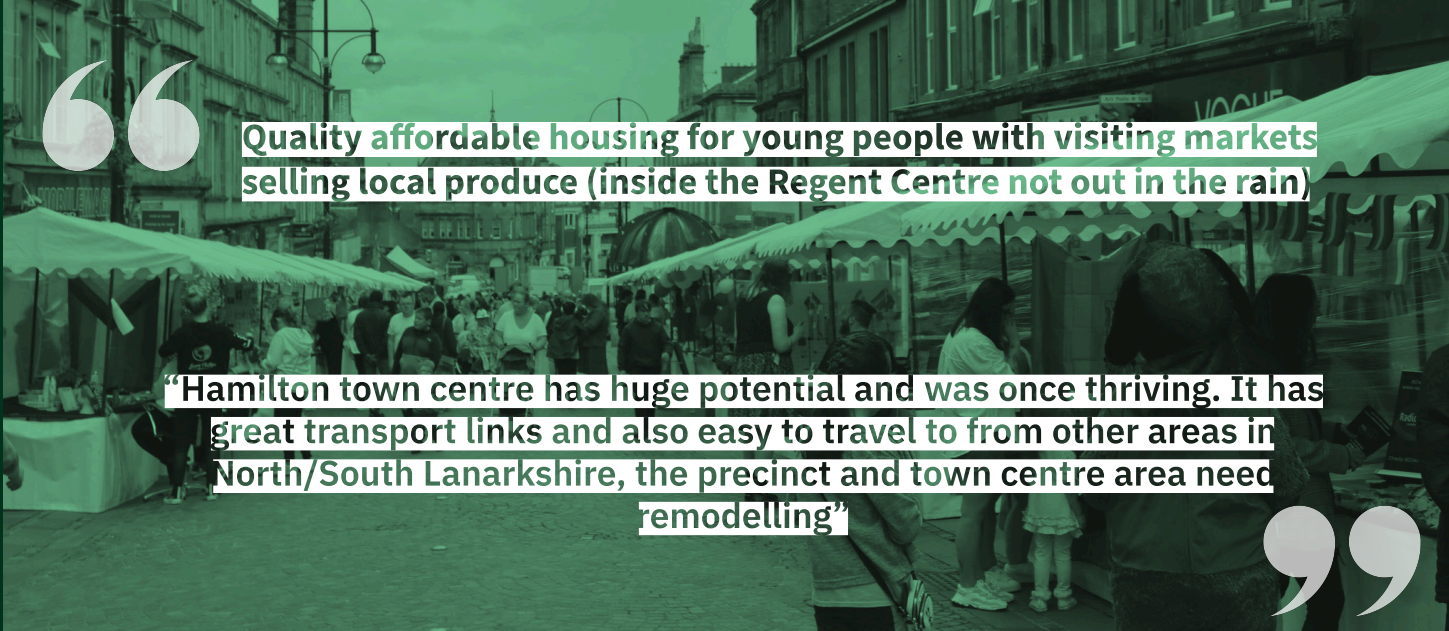
"I think Hamilton has great potential, the units within the centre would make great facilities for shops, bars, cafes, restaurants"

An area which serves as a central hub for gatherings of all kinds that reflect the needs of everyone. Places for young people to hang out and enjoy without being labelled as a nuisance. An area for children and parents to gather and play. An area for the elderly to walk and have coffee.

Mix of housing, small unique businesses such as butchers, bakers, grocers, boutiques, gift shops, restaurants, cafes, upmarket bars. Street dining, green spaces. Live music, kids play areas both inside and out. Like a small village feel or like Glasgow West End, I would find that very attractive.

There was an increased emphasis on regenerating or repurposing the spaces already in existence, for example, 17 respondents felt that the Regent Centre should be demolished however, 9 respondents mentioned utilising the existing structure of the Regent Centre to create multipurpose spaces for the diverse range of needs in the town.

"Units need to be re-imagined for use of something you can only do out of the house - soft plays, family arcades, social media studios, mini-golf, youth clubs, coffee and book shops, art exhibits, fashion shows in line with city fashion weeks, a directory unit that can tell you about all walks, events, landmarks in Hamilton...these things bring back footfall and the shops will benefit from it."



Quality affordable housing for young people with visiting markets selling local produce (inside the Regent Centre not out in the rain)

“Hamilton town centre has huge potential and was once thriving. It has great transport links and also easy to travel to from other areas in North/South Lanarkshire, the precinct and town centre area need remodelling”

“A multifunctional space where children and teenagers can socialise/enjoy activities. Build on what Hang On is providing”

“We also need to cater for the 30-60 age groups as well as youths in entertainment, a comedy festival a few years ago seemed successful.”

“Venues where teenagers could gather and take part in activities or just chill out together, maybe learn a skill of some sort.”

“There needs to be more variety for a range of ages to shop in Hamilton.”

A focus on town centre living, central student accommodation and affordable housing were widely acknowledged as important factors in a regenerated town centre. When asked what they would like to see in a regenerated Hamilton, 89 respondents called for quality affordable housing and more social housing to be factored into any design plans.

“Concentrate shopping in Quarry Street and build social housing and apartments on Regent Way”

“All the empty flats above shops converted to social housing”

“More affordable housing for young people and families”

“Build new social housing with shops underneath.”

“These empty shops could be turned into social housing and that would increase foot fall in the area as the new residents would have everything on the doorstep”

Green Spaces

“I’d love to see trees being planted in the town centre. If you look at any quaint, affluent town in the UK or Europe, their town or city centres are very green spaces. It attracts people to spend more time shopping and socialising”

Scotland’s target is to reach net-zero by 2045. Towns will play an important part in achieving that ambitious target as acknowledged in the Independent Review of the Scottish Government’s Town Centre Action Plan.

Hamilton is already home to some key green spaces within the town centre such as Cadzow Glen, but as the results of the consultation show, there is the feeling amongst users of Hamilton that these spaces could be expanded and utilised more in a regenerated town centre.

Question 13 of the consultation asked respondents to rank their priorities for a new Hamilton Town Centre in order of importance. 18% declared that ‘open, green spaces’ were their top priority. A further 54% ranked it among their top 3 considerations for Hamilton’s future.

Respondents repeatedly spoke of how they were disappointed by the current aesthetics of the town centre. They felt that if more green spaces were to be incorporated it would encourage more people to spend time in the town centre. When asked directly to give their vision for a regenerated town centre, green spaces were mentioned over 60 times.

Outdoor seating was also mentioned 13 times, with a recognition that optional coverings or heating options would have to be provided to make this a success.



There were further calls to redesign Quarry Street to not only incorporate new green spaces but also to update the existing artwork and update the signage. We received repeated calls for a unified approach to signs in the town centre to give the town a more appealing aesthetic.

Active Travel and Connected Places

One respondent called for a 'corridor of green space' between Strathclyde Park and Chatelherault with the town centre as the link between the two. Another called for an active travel hub to be established as they believe it could help Hamilton establish itself as a destination town to those completing the Clyde Walkway.

Although parking was one of the key themes of the consultation, there were a number of direct calls for the creation of dedicated cycle lanes and to improve the pedestrian experience.

The Walking and Cycling Index 2022 was the biggest ever survey of walking, wheeling and cycling in urban areas in the UK and Ireland. It showed that 58% of people in Scotland walk at least five days a week, while 21% cycle at least once at week. If these figures were to be shown to replicated in Hamilton then it would be paramount this is taken into consideration in a regenerated town centre.



"A better town centre to travel to with more pedestrianised areas. Hamilton town centre has huge potential"

“

“ I'd like to see it replaced with a fully pedestrianised zone, with good bike infrastructure (segregated cycle lanes) to/from as well as bike parking rails.”

”

Hamilton: The University Town

The consultation sought the views of students at the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) Lanarkshire Campus. The consultation results included 18 respondents studying at the Lanarkshire Campus.

The campus is used by around 4000 students – all who have the potential of visiting, shopping in and enjoying Hamilton town centre.

Additionally, there were many conversations had with students through the visits to campus and views gathered from students and other stakeholders at the roundtable meeting.

"Too many empty shopping units. Parking is expensive or time limited around the town centre."

"My family living there is the main reason, though usually I gravitate towards Palace Grounds or west retail park rather than the town centre itself. There just aren't many shops I like there, it's either strange charity shops, travel agents, or boarded up windows. Whereas Palace Grounds and west retail offer supermarkets, Currys, TK Maxx, fast food etc. Would love a book shop."

A key question that students were asked was "Do you feel that Hamilton Town Centre offers enough to attract students?"

95% of those asked gave a negative response.

"Not really looks a bit run down and out of date"

"There are a couple of places spread out around the town centre such as Junkyard and Bar Milano but most bars/pubs feel like they are for an older generation."

Students were asked "What brings you to Hamilton Town Centre? (e.g. shopping, dining out, nightlife, business, events, weekend markets etc.)"

In response to this question 56% of the students mentioned shopping.

22% of the students said they never used Hamilton town centre with one student going as far as to say "Nothing, I avoid it at all costs".

Respondents were asked about improvements they would make to enhance their student experience and what their vision is for a regenerated Hamilton town centre.

“

Make the town centre like Glasgow's Merchant Square. Restaurants and cafes with seating in the middle. Keep the shops at the retail parks where there is car and bus access and the town centre could be a good place for entertaining.

”

"Cheaper / free car parking. Looking at the rent on the units to encourage more people to consider having a business in the town centre, pop up food stalls. Pop up Markets etc."

"Better transport to the university. The bus has been cut down over the years and it regularly late."

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Bigger variety of shops offering student discounts.

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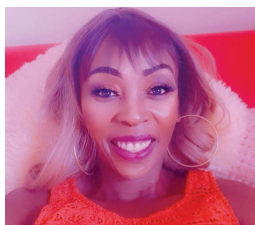
"Better shopping to use student discounts, discounted rent/rates for potential entrepreneurs leaving university or otherwise, affordable/free parking, better stocked book shop for academia for those who wish to purchase them, bigger coffee shop/work zone so people can chill out and work on studies etc away from the university or home"



In direct conversations with the university and at the roundtable discussion, students raised the need to cater for the large cohort of international students at UWS and help them to adjust to life in Hamilton. There was agreement reached at the roundtable meeting between local businesses and students about the need for a greater link with the University and the town centre regarding jobs. The perception from respondents was that not many students currently worked in the town centre. A local jobs fair held at the University was suggested as an event that could be beneficial to students, businesses and the local economy.

Duncan McKay – UWS Communications and Public Affairs Manager

“UWS is deeply committed to our community in Lanarkshire. The future prosperity, socially and economically of the region relies on having thriving town centres in Hamilton and throughout the region. We were delighted that our staff and students were given the opportunity to contribute to this important consultation.”



Grace Kone – UWS Student Representative

“As a student representative I think it is wise to revive Hamilton town as it is the future of Lanarkshire. We have a lot of national and international students who are studying in Hamilton and the only way they can reduce their stress is through socialising. We want a productive town which can provide jobs, shopping, parking, restaurants and clubs.”

Shop Local

I often choose not to shop in Hamilton because the shops are not very interesting. Independent shops selling interesting goods would really improve the appeal of Hamilton to higher-end shoppers who are likely to also spend money in cafes and restaurants as part of their trip.

Since the coronavirus pandemic, spending behaviours have changed across the UK. This has been reflected in the consultation responses, where respondents have expressed their preference to shop local. Local or independent shopping was referenced 101 times throughout the report. The majority of respondents felt that Hamilton town centre needed to return to the market town it once was, with Quarry Street showcasing small local shops, cafes, bars, and restaurants. Respondents hoped that the town centre could return to the former market town, utilising its links to surrounding agriculture, and using the town to 'showcase' the businesses of the town.

I don't want to drive for 25 mins to go to the shop and would rather shop local, but the whole place is dire. If I could go into the town centre, go to a few shops, then a nice lunch, I'd leave my car at home and spend a lot more money in Hamilton.

Respondents expressed their willingness to shop local and cut their carbon footprint but did not feel that they could get everything they wanted from the town centre. Respondents were keen to see a greater variety of businesses opening in the town centre.

"It should be accessible to all, clean and welcoming with small local businesses encouraged, more of a market town as you won't be able to gain larger retailers"

"Good variety of shops including encouraging self-employed, craft shops etc to open, make it a market town again and a nice place to visit"

Summary and Recommendations

South Lanarkshire Council have recognised the need for regeneration of Hamilton town centre and are in the process of consulting on the new phase of their plans for change. However, this change must reflect the wishes of the community. It is vital to hear their voices.

This report is the culmination of an online consultation, in-person engagement, and stakeholder meetings on the challenges and visions of the future.

We would like to thank everyone who engaged with this consultation, offering visions for the future use of our town centre and insight into the current problems felt by those who live, work and shop in Hamilton. With more than 1500 responses, the strength of feeling around Hamilton is palpable. These recommendations are designed to attract people into the town and boost the local economy:

Update the parking regime, it is clear that parking charges are a deterrent to those who seek to access the town centre. Introduce free parking periods within the town centre and increase affordable and flexible parking options.

Review the business rates and support mechanisms in place for businesses and start-ups.

Invest in a dedicated economic development plan for Hamilton, with resources dedicated to supporting business development and attracting new businesses into the town centre.

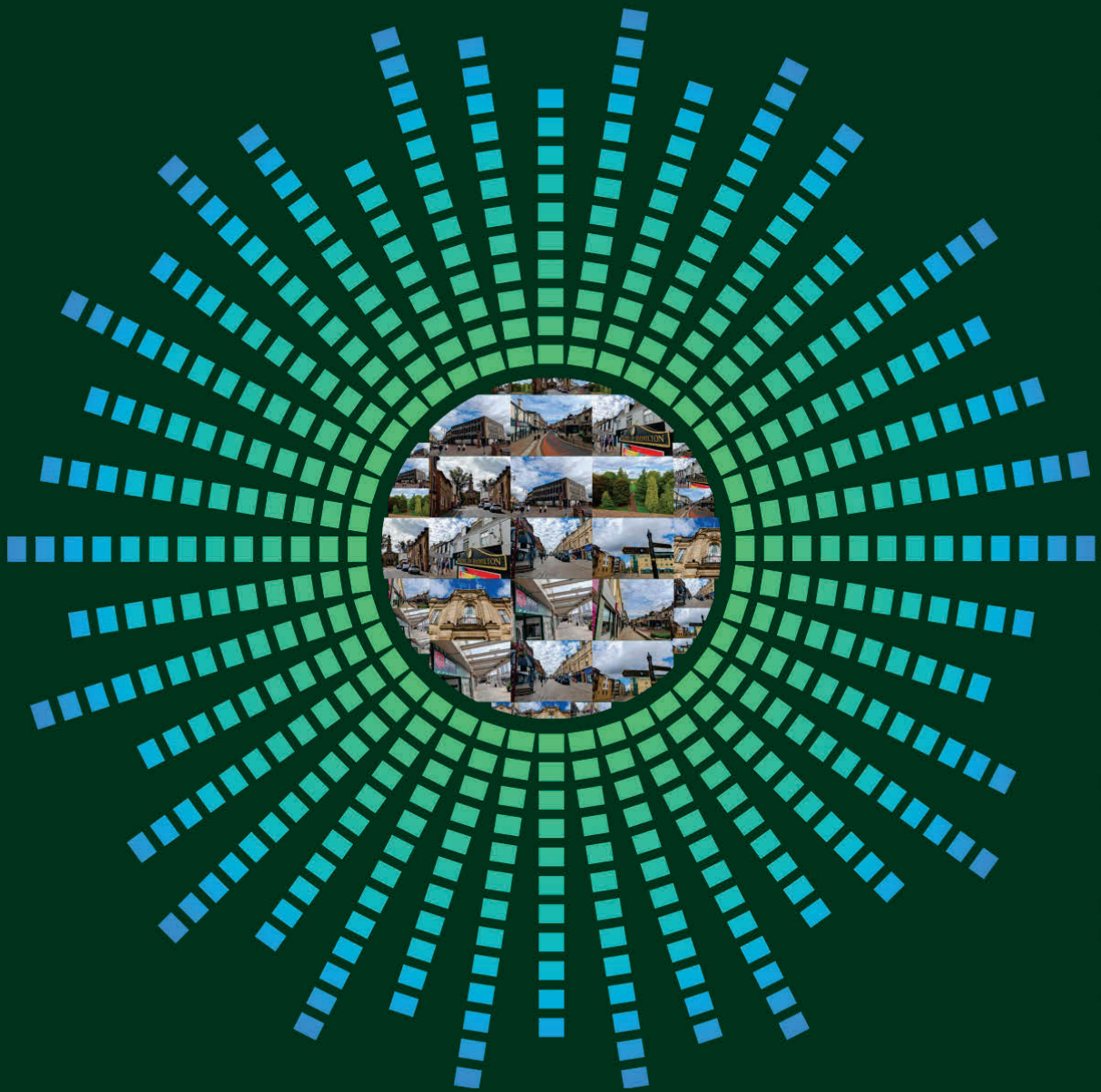
Commit to a long-term plan for the future development of the town landscape that ensures diversification of the existing spaces, supports investment and ensures that the area is utilised as a multipurpose zone.

Create new multipurpose civic and green spaces. Including leisure, entertainment spaces, community gardens, areas for children and young people. These include possible spaces for growing food, safe accessible play areas, and green spaces with walkways for people to enjoy.

Focus on Hamilton in the next South Lanarkshire Tourism Strategy. Highlight Hamilton's historical and cultural facilities and ensure the town centre is promoted to best effect. Build on the work of the 2022-25 strategy by making Hamilton a destination town for the Clyde Walkway.

Incentivise local shopping and support local business. Through schemes such as the expansion of Scotland Loves Local, with the option of a loyalty scheme, discounted parking, or through local advertising.

Diversify the types of business located in the town centre by reviewing the provision of change of use for premises and licensing.



Angela Crawley MP
Lanark and Hamilton East