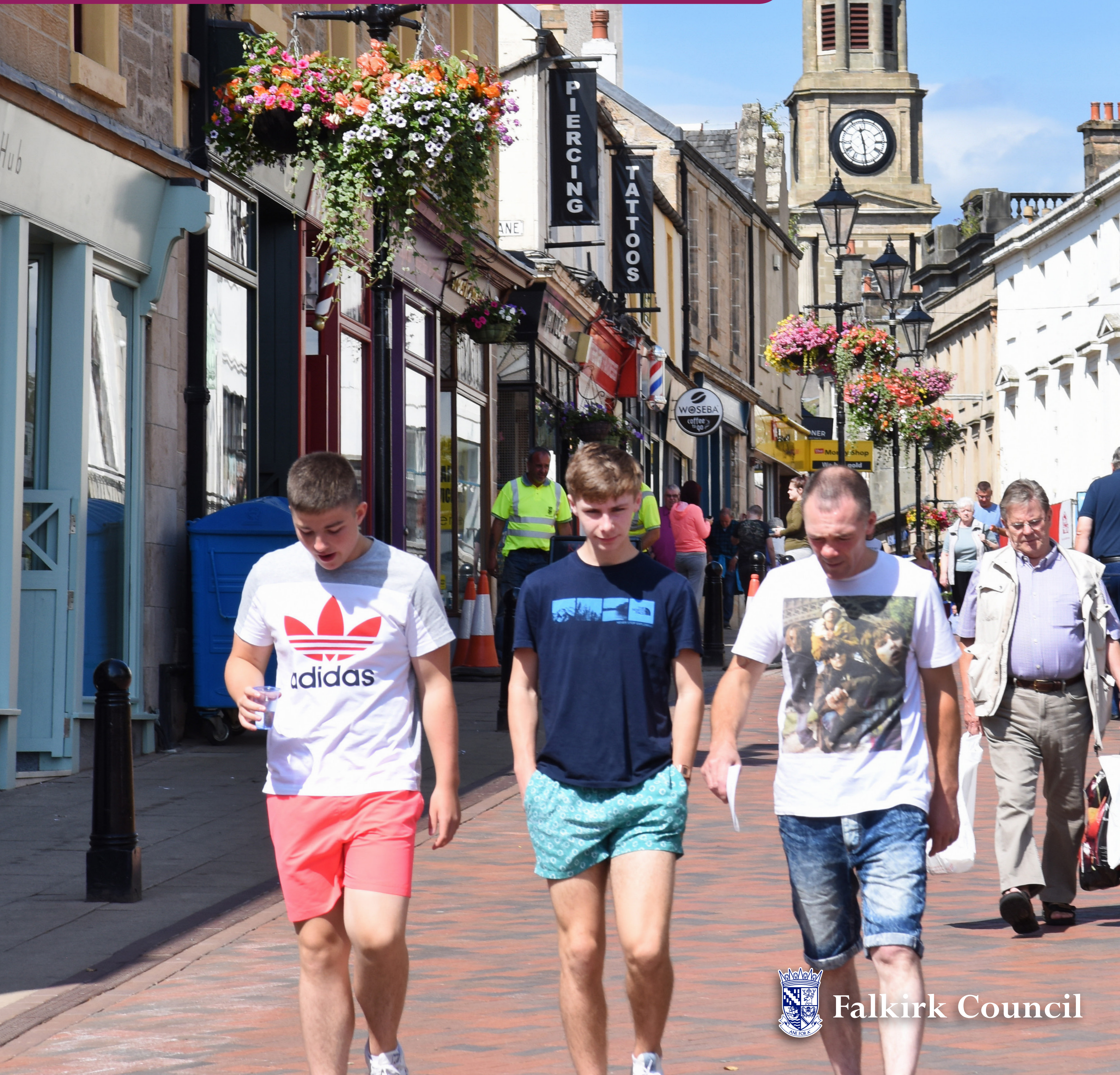
Falkirk Local Development Plan 3

Topic Papers March 2024

Town Centres and Retail

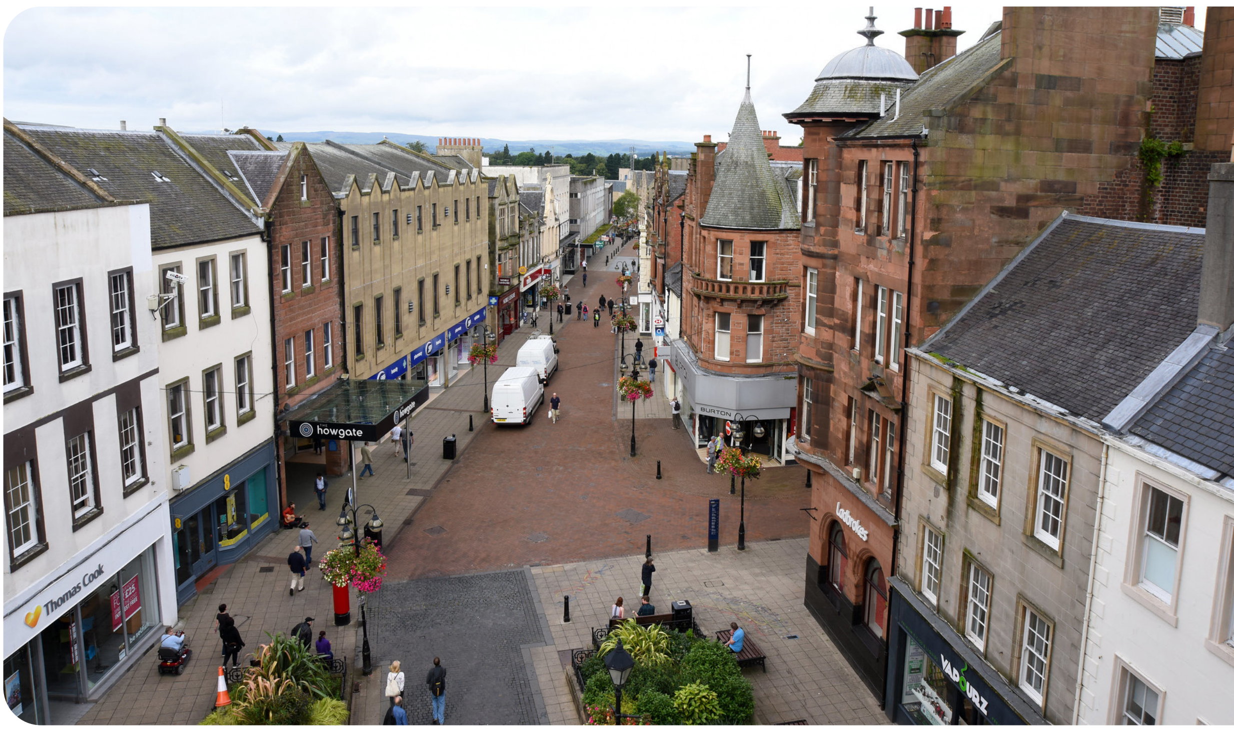


Falkirk Council

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 This topic paper provides evidence relating to Town, Local and Commercial Centres in the Falkirk Council area, as well as a review of retailing patterns in the area. Its purpose is to support the preparation of LDP3 and in particular to provide input to the LDP3 Evidence Report. The paper sets out information on the centres in terms of the physical and commercial attributes of the centres, and regeneration activity, and considers both national and local retail trends.



2. Policy Context

National

2.1 **National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)** contains policies related to town centres and retail. Policy 27 (City, town, local and commercial centres) seeks to encourage, promote and facilitate development in our city and town centres, by applying the Town Centre First approach. There is also provision to restrict certain non-retail uses where they may be detrimental to centres or communities, as well as drive-through developments unless they are specifically supported in LDPs. The policy also seeks to promote town centre living as a way of bringing back life back into centres.

2.2 Policy 28 (Retail) makes related provisions on the location of retail investment, seeking to direct it to the most sustainable locations through the application of the Town Centre First principle.

2.3 Centres have an important role to play in supporting the aims of Policy 12 (Local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods) since they typically provide the most convenient and accessible location for people to access services and facilities.

2.4 The independent report **'A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres'** was commissioned by the Scottish Government in 2020 as a review of the 2013 Town Centre Action Plan. In response, the government published a updated Town Centre Action Plan 2022 which focuses action on areas such as the Town Centre First principle, taxation, town centre living, digital towns, enterprising communities and vital local economies, and climate action.

Local

2.5 The **Falkirk Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2)** identifies the network of centres in Falkirk, which consists of the principal town centre of Falkirk, the four district centres of Bo'ness, Denny, Grangemouth and Stenhousemuir, 12 local centres comprising smaller town and village centres and suburban centres, and the two commercial centres in Falkirk of Glasgow Road and Central Retail Park. The location and boundaries of the centres are shown here.

2.6 The policy for centres and retail development in LDP2 is articulated through Policy JE07 (Town and Local Centres), Policy JE08 (Commercial Centres) and Policy JE09 (Town Centre First). There is a reasonably close alignment with the parallel NPF4 policies in terms of intent, because both are based on the Town Centre First principle, but the detailed expression is different in some respects.

2.7 The Council periodically prepares a **Town Centre Health Check**, the latest version of which was published in December 2021. This provides information on the vitality and viability of Falkirk and the district centres using a number of data sources and indicators. The 2021 report forms the basis of the assessment of centres presented in this report, along with additional subsequent updates such as the 2022 floorspace survey.

2.8 The regeneration of Falkirk Town Centre is overseen by a **Revitalising Falkirk Town Centre Partnership**, established in 2019, which works to a Vision and Action Plan. More recently, a **Falkirk Town Centre Vision and Development Framework** has been prepared and approved which focuses on the repurposing of the Town Centre in the context of the decline of the role of retailing, with a focus on four key generation opportunities.

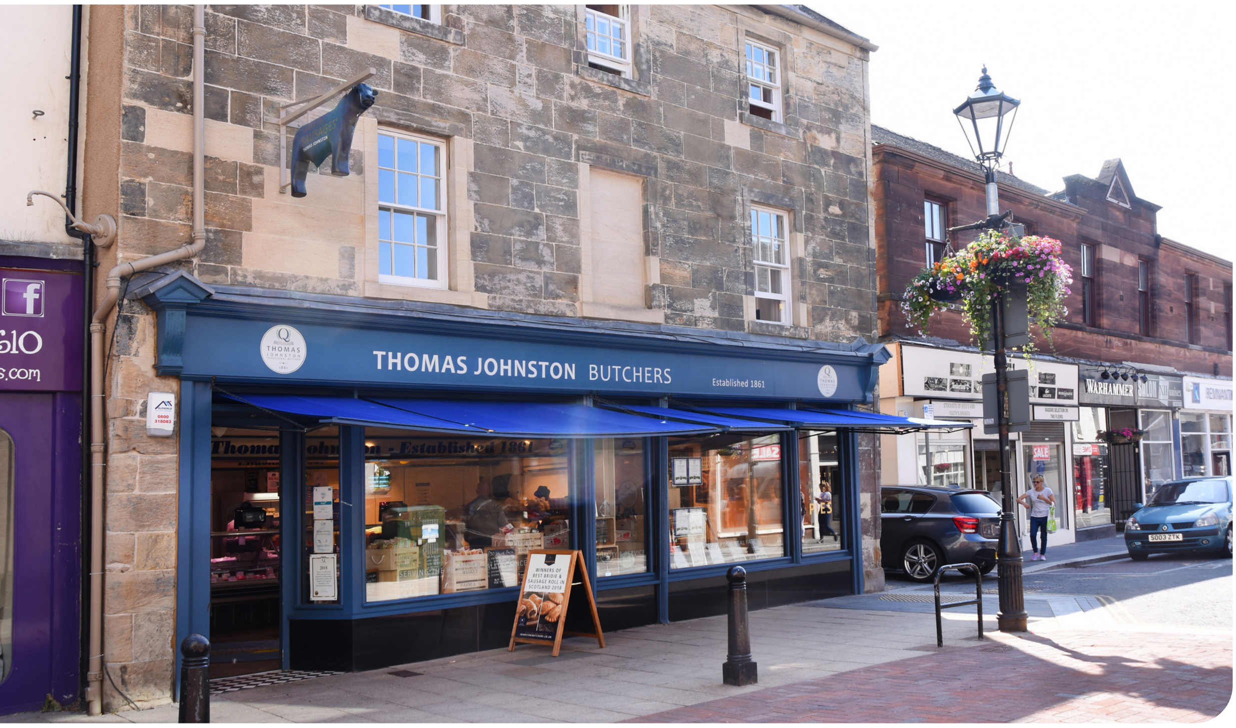
2.9 The 'Creating Great Places' strand of the **Falkirk Growth Deal** includes projects which relate to both Falkirk and Grangemouth Town Centres. The Falkirk Art Centre, the Falkirk Central Sustainable Transport Hub and the Outdoor Art Park will have a significant impact on Falkirk Town Centre, whilst the Greener Grangemouth project will include investment aimed at revitalising and repurposing Grangemouth Town Centre.

3. Falkirk Town Centre

Overview

3.1 Falkirk is an historic burgh town centre with a traditional high street at its core, off which two modern shopping centres, the Howgate and Callendar Square were developed in the 1980s/90s. Central Retail Park adjoins the centre to the north. The centre is defined as the 'principal centre' in LDP2's network of centres.

3.2 In common with many sub-regional town centres of its type across Scotland and the UK, it has been adversely affected over the last 10-15 years by economic and social trends including restructuring, retraction and consolidation in the retail sector and the rise of internet shopping. It currently faces significant challenges in terms of repurposing, revitalising and reimagining itself so that it can remain a vibrant, attractive and relevant focus for the life of the community.



Activities and Uses

3.3 The profile of uses in Falkirk Town Centre, and how they have changed between 2014 and 2022 is shown in Figure 1. It should be noted that in 2014, the town centre boundary included Central Retail Park, whereas in 2022 it did not. Some of the changes are therefore attributable to this change of definition.

Figure 1: Falkirk Town Centre Floorspace Survey 2014 and 2022

2014	Floorspace (m^2)	Number of Units
Convenience Retail	22,930	25
Comparison Retail	75,509	231
Services	37,636	180
Vacant	25,894	55
Total	**162,059**	**491**

2022	Floorspace (m^2)	Number of Units
Convenience Retail	16,9830	17
Comparison Retail	36,866	123
Services	38,184	258
Vacant	28,599	78
Total	**120,459**	**476**

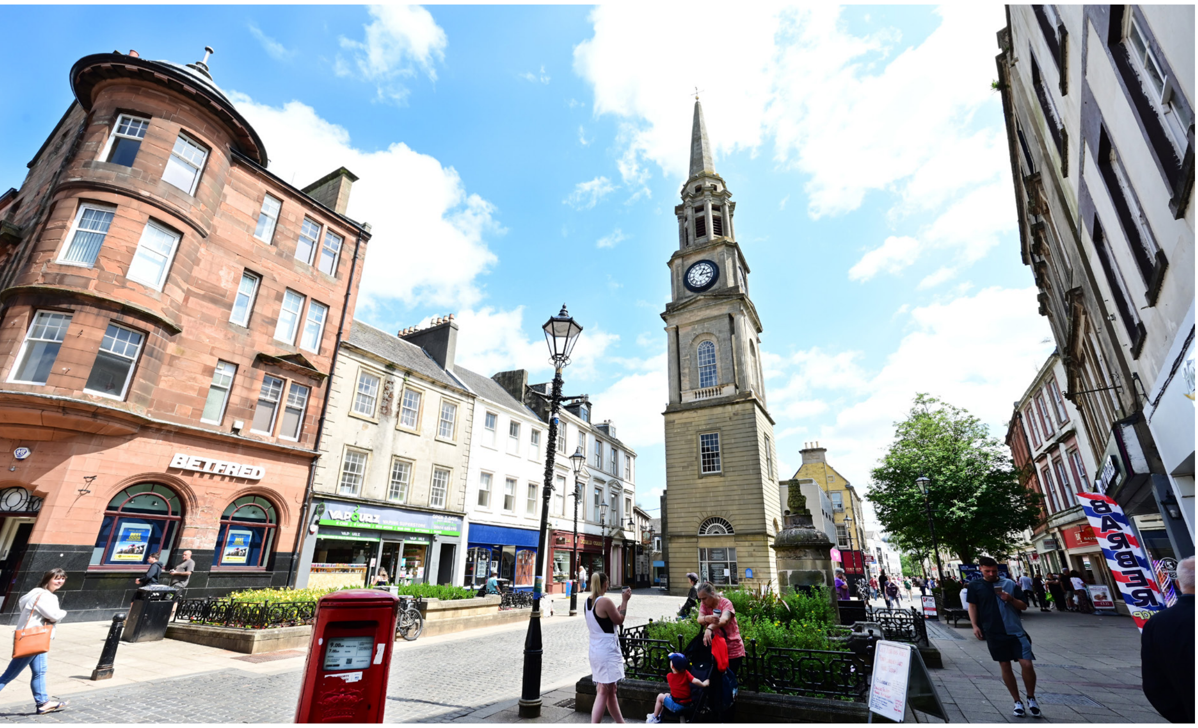
3.4 In common with trends across the UK there has been a significant decline in the role of comparison shopping, and in the representation of national retailers on the High Street. Of the two indoor shopping malls, Callendar Square has now closed, and the Howgate faces major challenges given low retail demand. Convenience shopping, which has traditionally been a strong feature of Falkirk Town Centre, remains an important component of the centre's role and vitality.

3.5 In parallel with the decline of retail, services have seen steady growth and are playing an increasingly important role, occupying over 50% of units and around 30% of floorspace. Leisure and hospitality remain a key element in attracting visitors and the sector appears to have weathered the pandemic reasonably well. However, the town centre has not seen the full benefit of the growth in tourism in the area as whole, and there is a lack of hotel accommodation.

3.6 The Town Centre does not have a strong office function and there is a lack of quality accommodation. Nonetheless facilities such as the Hub demonstrate the potential for small office/work space.

3.7 The Town Centre has a relatively small residential population, but there has been a rise in the conversion of vacant and underused space to residential use, and potential for the delivery of new town centre housing as part of various sites in and around the centre.

3.8 There has been an increase in vacant units and floorspace between 2014 and 2022. Vacant floorspace now amounts to about around 24% of the total, whilst 16% of units are empty. Closer analysis shows that the problem is most acute in the High Street and the two shopping malls, with secondary areas proving more resilient.

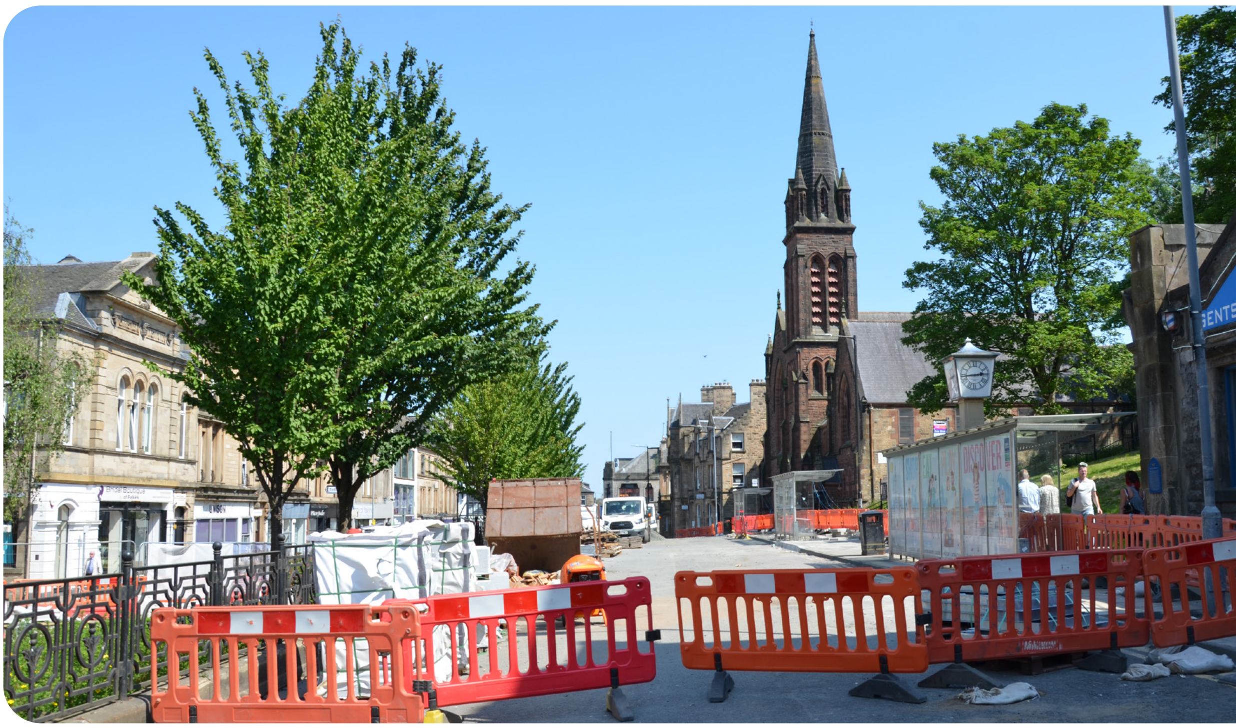


Accessibility

3.9 Around half of people accessing the Town Centre do so by private car. This is reflective of the ease of access by car, with significant congestion only evident at peak times. Parking is generous and relatively cheap, with parking surveys suggesting significant excess capacity. Clearly, there is a need to promote more sustainable modes of transport in line with national policy.

3.10 Walking is a mixed experience for those accessing the town centre on foot, the traffic free pedestrianised centre contrasting with the barriers presented by the busy peripheral roads. Few people come on bike due to the relatively hostile cycling environment on the main roads coming into the centre, and in general, active travel linkages into the town centre from other parts of the town are not well developed.

3.11 Access to the centre by public transport is good, with a good level of bus services. The main bus station closed several years ago and the main hub for services since then has been Newmarket Street. Falkirk Grahamston station provides good rail access, but offers a poor arrival experience for visitors, and integration of transport modes could be better. The proposals for the Falkirk Central Sustainable Transport Hub, which is part of the Falkirk Growth Deal, offer a range of possibilities for the enhancement and better integration of sustainable transport infrastructure within the town centre.

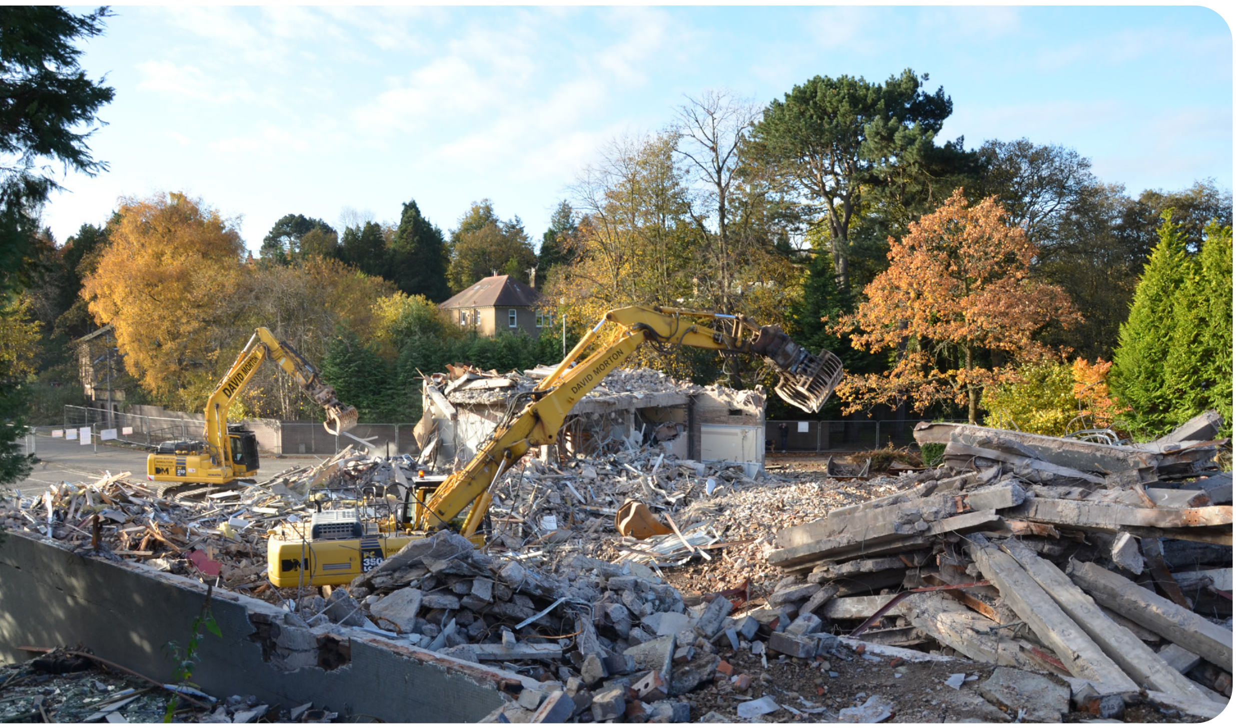


Environment

3.12 Falkirk is a traditional town centre with a pedestrianised High Street and an historic street pattern which offers a legible and attractive walking experience. Conservation area status and a high concentration of listed buildings provide strong historic character, identity and heritage interest.

3.13 A number of projects over recent years have enhanced the public realm, including the redesign of the grounds of the old parish church, the streetscape improvements undertaken as part of the Townscape Heritage Initiative and most recently the upgrading in Newmarket Street/Lint Riggs. The pedestrianisation of the High Street and Callendar Riggs is now over 30 years old and is likely to need refreshed and redesigned as part of the next phase of regeneration of the town centre.

3.14 Although the increasing incidence of vacant properties has had some detrimental impact on the environment of the town centre, the incidence and prominence of vacant and derelict sites has been low. However, the demolition of the Municipal Buildings and Callendar Square, and the vacancy of these sites pending redevelopment, are likely to have a significant impact on the environment of the centre in the immediate future.



Regeneration Activity

3.15 The town centre has a long standing and successful Business Improvement District (BID) which was first established in 2008 and was renewed for a fourth 5 year term in 2021. It delivers a range of services and initiatives in support of the centre and its business community and was particularly vital in sustaining business activities through the Covid 19 pandemic.

3.16 A Revitalising Falkirk Town Centre Partnership was established in 2019 with a diverse range of stakeholders represented. A vision for the Town Centre has been agreed and an Action Plan developed around a number of themes.

3.17 Regeneration projects pursued over recent years include the £5.5m Townscape Heritage Initiative, the introduction of public WiFi, the Newmarket Street/Lint Riggs public realm improvements, and a Repurposing Grant Scheme offering grants for design and feasibility work to repurpose large units in the High Street.

3.18 Two key town centre projects are being taken forward through the Falkirk Growth Deal:

- Falkirk Central Sustainable Transport Network, which seeks to create a new Falkirk Central Transport Hub at Falkirk Grahamston station and develop a green active travel corridor from Falkirk to Grangemouth;
- The Arts Centre project which will be constructed on the Callendar Square shopping centre site, and which is intended to provide a major focus of activity at the east end of the High Street.

3.19 In August 2023, the Council approved a Falkirk Town Centre Vision and Development Framework. Prepared by Threesixty Architecture, it outlines an agenda for radical change in the town centre with an emphasis on repurposing, consolidation, repopulation and revitalisation. It builds its vision around four focus areas with major redevelopment potential:

- High Street West End - including the Howgate, the former M&S unit and the large block of mostly vacant 1960 retail and office space wrapping round into Cockburn Street;
- Callendar Square - including the shopping centre itself, car park and former bus station;
- Grahamston Station - which will be the focus for the Falkirk Central Sustainable Transport Hub;
- Municipal Buildings Site – the site of the former Town Hall and Council HQ.

3.20 The Vision and Development Framework is intended to present a long term direction for the town, illustrating was could happen on the key sites and how these could contribute to wider regeneration of the centre.

4. District Centres

4.1 The four district town centres identified in LDP2 are Bo'ness, Denny, Grangemouth and Stenhousemuir. Their role as described in LDP2 is to serve the larger towns in terms of main food shopping, limited comparison shopping and a range of local services.

Bo'ness

4.2 Bo'ness is a small traditional historic burgh centre situated adjacent to the River Forth and providing local shopping and services for a population of 14,400. The third largest centre by floorspace, it is distinguished by its exceptional historic environment and its tourism potential arising from various attractions in the town.

4.3 The profile of uses in Bo'ness Town Centre, and how they have changed between 2014 and 2022 is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Bo'ness Town Centre Floorspace Survey 2014 and 2022

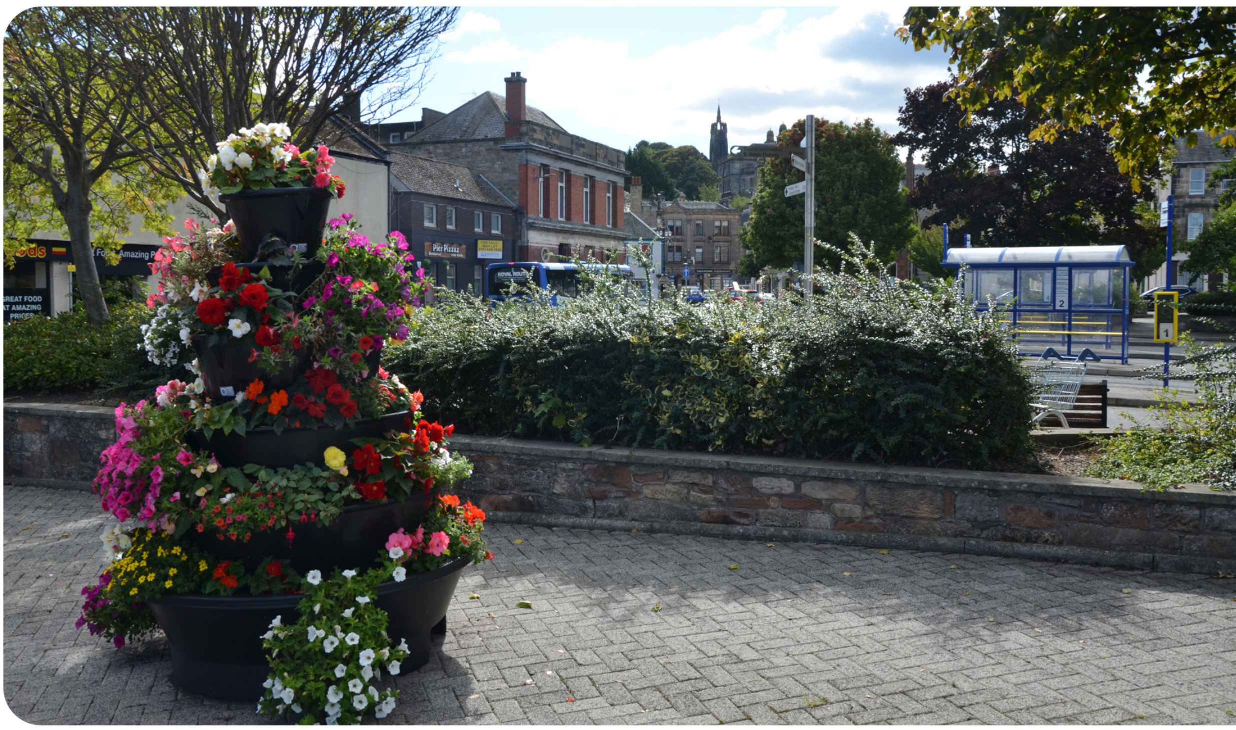
2014	Floorspace (m2)	Number of Units
Convenience Retail	5,098	3
Comparison Retail	2,423	29
Services	4,631	34
Vacant	826	9
Total	**12,978**	**95**

2022	Floorspace (m2)	Number of Units
Convenience Retail	4,812	9
Comparison Retail	1,971	24
Services	4,354	50
Vacant	1,155	13
Total	**12,292**	**96**

4.4 Bo'ness Town Centre's main role is providing convenience shopping and services to its local population, and this is reflected in Figure 2. The main supermarkets are Tesco and Lidl, which are relatively small, and slightly off centre, and Farmfoods in the centre. Service uses have grown in terms of number, but the loss of the post office and local banks over the years means service floorspace has decreased. Comparison floorspace is limited although these shops still add to the attractiveness of the centre. The level of vacancies has increased slightly, but in overall terms the centre seems stable, and adapted to its local role. Residential use is a more prominent part of the make-up of Bo'ness than in some other centres. Accessibility of the centre in relation to the population it serves is somewhat hampered by its location and the steep topography of the town.

4.5 The historic environment of the town centre is a major asset, with Conservation Area status, and a significant concentration of listed buildings. There have been efforts over the years to conserve and enhance this, with a successful £5m Townscape Heritage Initiative completed in 2012, and a more recent building repair and shopfront grant scheme in South Street.

4.6 The town centre benefits from some tourism assets in the town, including the Hippodrome Cinema at the heart of the centre, the SRPS, the Foreshore and John Muir Way and, further away, Kinneil Estate. However, the offer in terms of visitor accommodation and hospitality is still fairly basic.



Denny

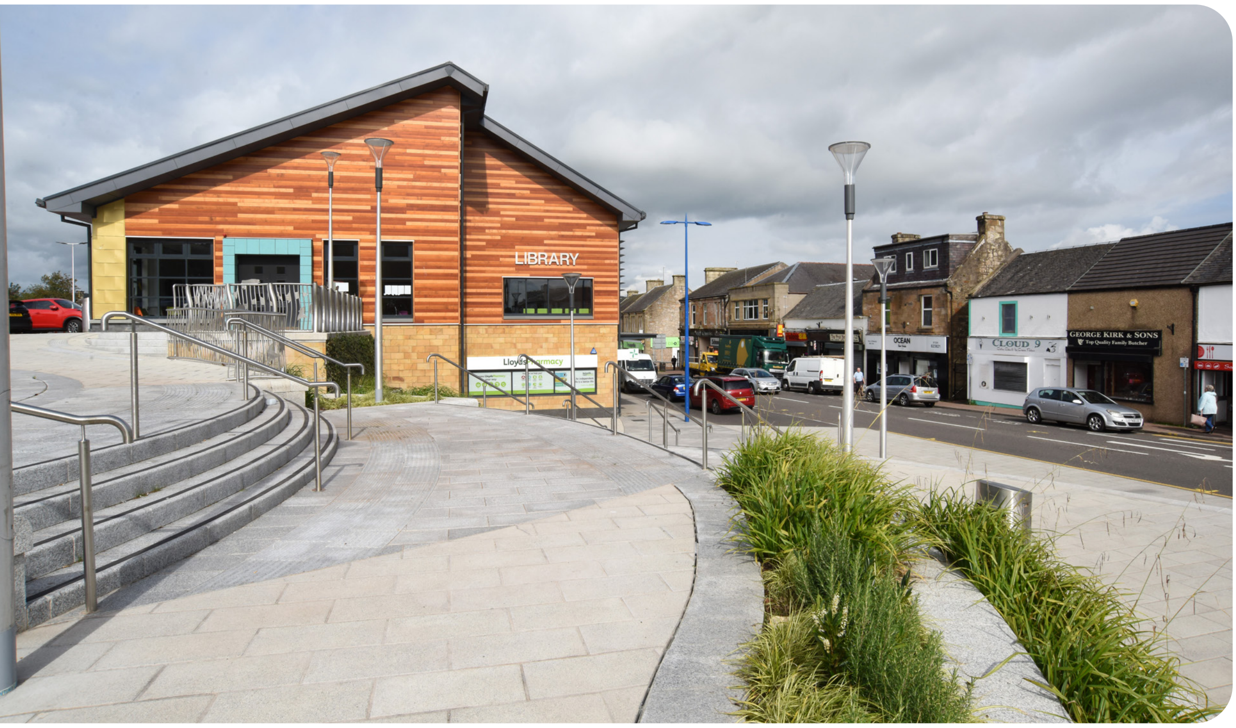
4.7 Denny is a small burgh centre providing local shopping and services for a population of around 12,500. It is limited in extent and focused around Stirling Street, with traditional properties on the east side, and a modern development of library, shops and public realm on the west side, which replaced the previous 1960s style precinct in 2018.

4.8 The profile of uses in Denny Town Centre, and how they have changed between 2014 and 2022 is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Denny Town Centre Floorspace Survey 2014 and 2022

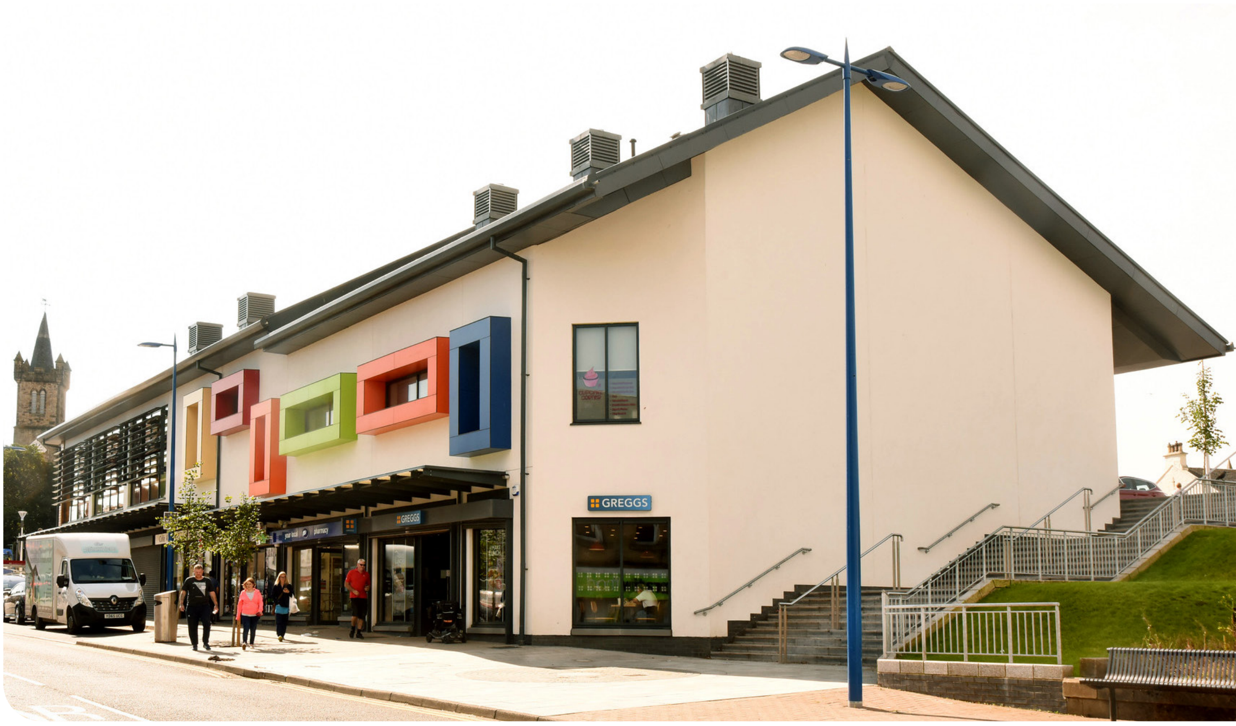
2014	Floorspace (m2)	Number of Units
Convenience Retail	1,619	5
Comparison Retail	856	11
Services	2,779	34
Vacant	397	7
Total	**5,651**	**57**

2022	Floorspace (m2)	Number of Units
Convenience Retail	1,811	7
Comparison Retail	945	11
Services	2,268	30
Vacant	85	1
Total	**5,109**	**49**



4.9 The overall floorspace and number of units has changed from 2014 to 2022 due to the redevelopment of 2018. Denny's main function is the provision of local services. Although there is a convenience shopping presence, the Co-op supermarket is small and few local people do their main shopping there. Nonetheless, vacancy levels are currently low and the centre appears to have adapted well to a more limited function.

4.10 The redevelopment of the west side of Stirling Street (phase 1) has improved the environment of the centre significantly. Phases 2 and 3 remain to be developed. Vehicular accessibility to the town centre is hampered by the long-term congestion issues at Denny Cross, although these should be addressed by the construction of the Denny Eastern Access Road.



Grangemouth

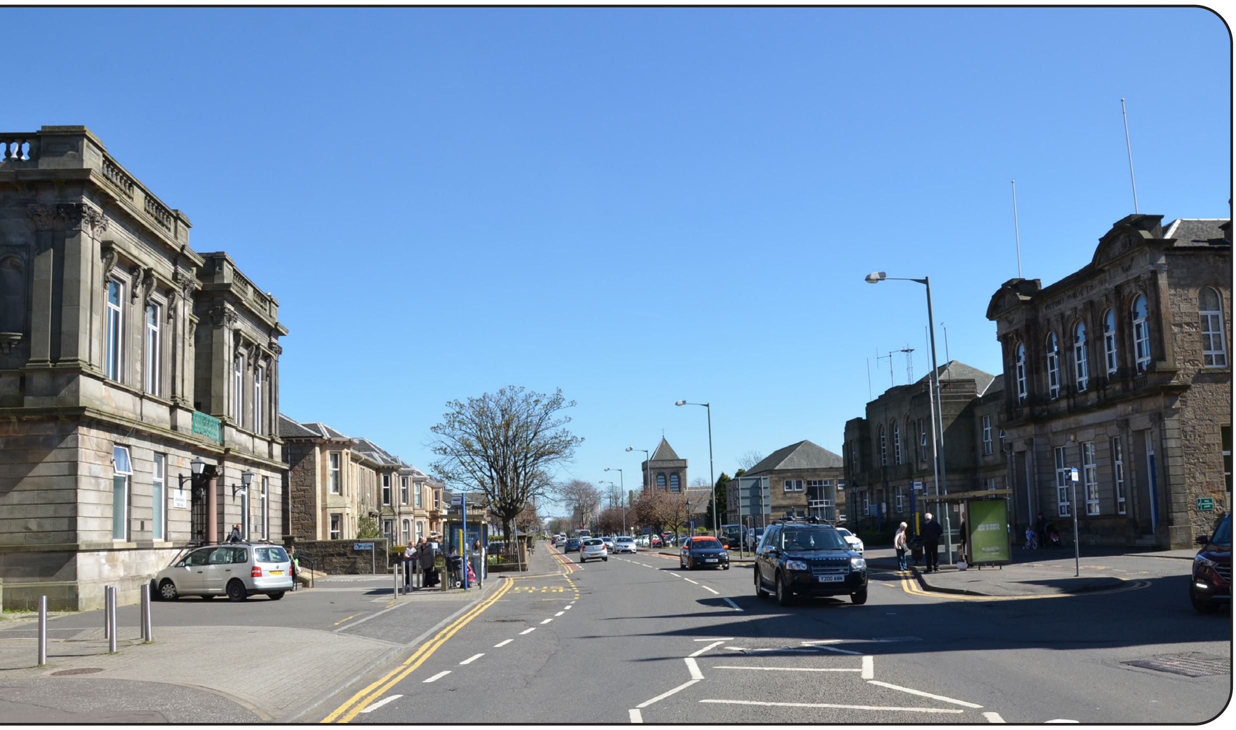
4.11 Grangemouth is the second largest town centre in the Council area behind Falkirk. It comprises a 1970s precinct which was refurbished in 1990s; the traditional civic buildings along Bo'ness Road; and a large Asda store to the north behind the Town Hall which was built in 2006.

4.12 The profile of uses in Denny Town Centre, and how they have changed between 2014 and 2022 is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Grangemouth Town Centre Floorspace Survey 2014 and 2022

2014	Floorspace (m2)	Number of Units
Convenience Retail	9,978	14
Comparison Retail	4,348	24
Services	6,108	49
Vacant	1,016	13
Total	**21,450**	**100**

2022	Floorspace (m2)	Number of Units
Convenience Retail	7,323	9
Comparison Retail	4,529	19
Services	4,497	48
Vacant	2,264	25
Total	**18,613**	**101**



4.13 Convenience retail in 2022 made up around 40% of total floorspace, of which the majority is the large Asda store. Asda is not well integrated with the rest of the Town Centre and probably contributes little in terms of shared trips with the main precinct. Nonetheless it does allow the town to retain a relatively high proportion of its convenience expenditure.

4.14 In common with other centres, retail has been reducing in terms of both number of units and floorspace. The number of service units has remains fairly constant. In recent years, the number of vacant units has been running at a high level, reflecting the difficulties which the centre has had in adapting to changes in retail patterns and behaviour. In recognition of the excess of retail floorspace, the Council is proposing to demolish and redevelop the Kerse Road block at the southern end of La Porte Precinct. Alternative uses for the site are under consideration.

4.15 In terms of environment, the main precinct, comprising La Porte Precinct and York Arcade/Square, retains a somewhat dated appearance and requires upgrading. Bo'ness Road has a number of attractive buildings including the town hall, the library and the vacant former La Scala cinema, which collectively represent an important heritage and townscape asset.

4.16 Grangemouth is a focus for regeneration within the Council's Growth Deal, with the Greener Grangemouth programme likely to include the Town Centre as one of the targets for action, including repurposing and enhancement proposals.

Stenhousemuir

4.17 Stenhousemuir is a small district centre, serving the wider Larbert/Stenhousemuir area. It benefitted from a substantial £15m redevelopment in 2010 which provided a new Asda foodstore, new non-food retail floorspace, new library, health centre and civic space. Part of the original precinct remains, which is dated in appearance and separated from the new shopping environment by the main access road to the town centre. The old and new shopping areas do not integrate particularly well.

4.18 The profile of uses in Stenhousemuir Town Centre, and how they have changed between 2014 and 2022 is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Stenhousemuir Town Centre Floorspace Survey 2014 and 2022

2014	Floorspace (m2)	Number of Units
Convenience Retail	5,096	6
Comparison Retail	2,508	11
Services	2,701	28
Vacant	773	3
Total	**11,078**	**48**

2022	Floorspace (m2)	Number of Units
Convenience Retail	6,021	7
Comparison Retail	1,314	12
Services	2,437	25
Vacant	1,659	7
Total	**11,458**	**51**

4.19 Convenience retail makes up over 50% of the floorspace of the centre, with the anchor store of Asda providing the greater part of this, and helping retain around a third of local convenience expenditure. Services are also strong, occupying around 50% of units, including a council gym. Vacancies have risen slightly over the period 2014-2022, but overall the centre is reasonably stable, enjoying good accessibility to a large catchment population.

5. Local Centres and Neighbourhood Shops

5.1 LDP2 identifies 12 local centres which serve the smaller towns and suburbs in terms of top-up shopping and limited local services. These were last surveyed by the Council in the 2019 floorspace survey. They are listed in Figure 5 below. One significant change to provision since 2019 is the demolition of the Carron Centre and its replacement by a smaller Co-op, which has significantly reduced floorspace in that centre. It should also be noted that in 2020, under LDP2, a cluster of retail/leisure uses on Glasgow Road, Falkirk were removed from the Camelon Local Centre and designated as a discrete commercial centre. Camelon therefore is now significantly smaller in terms of floorspace

Figure 6: Local Centres

	Floorspace (m^2) 2019	Number of Units 2019
Bainsford	961	17
Bonnybridge	5,643	49
Brightons	2,280	24
Camelon	14,038	50
Charlotte Dundas	2,868	20
Grahamston	5,274	48
Laurieston	1,774	23
Larbert	2,139	27
Newcarron	8,672	6
Polmont	3,244	15
Redding	6,940	1
Slamannan	751	12

5.2 There is a lot of the variation in the size and nature of the local centres. Some (Redding, Newcarron, Polmont) are anchored by a significant modern store, whilst others are a collection of smaller units, often in tenemental properties. All, however, are significant to their communities, providing convenient access to some essential services and supporting the 20 minute neighbourhood concept.

5.3 In addition to the local centres, the area is served by a large number of smaller neighbourhood shops, located either in clusters or individually, as well as larger free-standing out of centre units . These were also surveyed as part of the 2019 floorspace survey and amount to some 500 units and around 93,000 sq.m.

6. Commercial Centres

6.1 In LDP2, two retail/leisure areas at Central Retail Park and Glasgow Road, Camelon were identified as discrete commercial centres for the first time.

Figure 7: Commercial Centres Floorspace Survey 2022

Central Retail Park	Floorspace (m2)	Number of Units
Convenience Retail	9,619	3
Comparison Retail	24,319	16
Services	10,741	10
Vacant	1,568	2
Total	**46,247**	**31**

Glasgow Rd Camelon	Floorspace (m2)	Number of Units
Convenience Retail	6,950	2
Comparison Retail	1,858	1
Services	4,920	4
Vacant	0	0
Total	**13,728**	**7**

Central Retail Park

6.2 Central Retail Park was constructed in two phases in the 1990s and early 2000s on former industrial/railway land immediately to the north-east of Falkirk Town Centre. Up until LDP2, it was included within the Falkirk Town Centre boundary, but is now a separate commercial centre. Comparison retail predominates but there is a strong leisure component, including a multi screen cinema, gyms and restaurants. Convenience retail is on the increase, with the original Tesco store joined by M&S Food. The retail park is doing well commercially, with low vacancy levels. Refurbishment of Phase 1 facades has recently been undertaken. A Section 75 agreement restricting the type of goods which can be sold in Phase 2 is still in place.

6.3 The relationship between Central Retail Park and Falkirk Town Centre is a complex one. There is a positive synergy between the two in that the retail park provides a large area of free parking which is used by people accessing the town centre, and there is likely to be a considerable volume of joint visits. However, the continuing success of the retail park stands in contrast to the struggling High Street. Undoubtedly, there has been a degree of diversion of investment, footfall and spend from town centre to retail park over the years, although clearly the problems now experienced by the town centre are attributable to a wider set factors than just this.

Glasgow Road, Camelon

6.4 The Glasgow Road commercial centre is more a cluster of related uses that have grown up over time, rather than a formal retail park. Leisure uses have occupied the eastern part since the 1980s. A large Tesco was developed in 2011 on the former Wrangler site, followed by Aldi, Home Bargains and McDonalds. In LDP2, the decision was made to designate the cluster as a commercial centre, rather than as part of Camelon Local Centre, in recognition of the lack of a strong functional relationship between the two.

7. Retailing

7.1 The retail industry continues to be affected by a range of social, economic and technological factors, which have a range of local impacts some of which have been described in the analysis of centres above. Structural changes in the retail industry have resulted in the demise of many high street retailers and there has been a general trend towards consolidation and a shift towards higher order regional centres at the expense of smaller sub regional centres such as Falkirk. Internet shopping is now a major component of retail behaviour.

Comparison Retail Provision

7.2 The last full floorspace survey in the area was carried out in 2019 (although more selective surveys in the main centres have been carried out since). This actually shows a rise in comparison provision since 2014 of some 7,573 sq.m. to 122,736 sq.m. However, this is a result of the addition of a number of off-centre units which had hitherto been excluded from the survey, and so distorts the general picture of a continuing reduction in comparison floorspace evident from analysis of the centres. In reality, there has been limited comparison retail development since 2014, the main instances being new discount stores (B&M, Home Bargains). The two main concentrations of comparison retailing remain Falkirk Town Centre (about 30% of the total) and Central Retail Park (about 20% of the total).

Convenience Retail Provision

7.3 The 2019 floorspace survey indicates a slight rise in convenience floorspace since 2014 to 89,169 sq.m. Historically, there was a strong concentration of convenience provision in Falkirk Town Centre. From 2000 onwards there was a process of growth and decentralisation, with substantial new stores built in the district centres of Stenhousemuir and Grangemouth, and off-centre stores established in Redding and Camelon. Since 2014, as the figures above suggest, the situation has been stable with the main additions being a new Aldi foodstore at Camelon and an enlarged Lidl at Arnot Street in Falkirk. There are also two new foodstores in Central Retail Park, including an M&S Food. Meanwhile, the Co-op in the Carron Centre in north Falkirk has been demolished and replaced with a small store.

Retail Patterns in the Falkirk Area

7.4 The Council has not carried out a full household survey exploring retail behaviour since 2009. However, a retail impact assessment prepared in 2019 by planning and property consultant Lichfields in relation to retail proposals at the Falkirk Gateway gives a more recent indication of retail behaviour in the area.

7.5 As regards convenience shopping, the study indicated a high level of self containment with only around 8% of expenditure flowing outwith the Council area. Falkirk Town Centre still plays a prominent role, its stores accounting for about 65% of expenditure in the town of Falkirk and 30% of expenditure across the area as a whole. The extent to which expenditure is retained in the other towns varies depending on location and the extent of local provision. Grangemouth is high at around 66%, as is Bo'ness at around 58% and the Braes at 46%. Larbert/Stenhousemuir sits at around 35%, whilst Denny is low at about 30%.

7.6 In terms of comparison shopping, the study indicated that there is about 30% leakage of expenditure out of the area. Falkirk Town Centre captures around 42% of expenditure in the town, and about 24% in the area as a whole, although given the further decline of the comparison shopping offer in the Town Centre since 2019, this figure is now likely to be lower. Central Retail Park takes around 26% of expenditure across the area.

Future Retail Development

7.7 There were no other significant committed retail developments in the Council area at the time of writing, in terms of active consents. The Falkirk Gateway mixed use development, allocated in LDP2, makes reference to the scope for non-food retail subject to retail assessment, and food retail to meet local neighbourhood needs. The developer, Hargreaves/Fintry, has signed a development agreement with the Council as landowner, and a planning application will be forthcoming in due course. A site is Denny Town Centre (phase 2 of the redevelopment) which was originally earmarked for a small supermarket, has not been successful in attracting a developer/operator.

7.8 Clearly, there is a general oversupply of retail floorspace in the area, and the market seems mature, but there is likely to be some continuing interest in development in specific sectors, formats and locations, and there may be a rationale for such development where it meets a clear need, for example supporting 20 minute neighbourhoods, and meets the relevant policy tests in NPF4.

8. Summary

8.1 The key points are:

- The network of centres in the Falkirk area consists of the principal centre of Falkirk Town Centre; the four district centres of Bo'ness, Denny, Grangemouth and Stenhousemuir; and 12 local centres,
- Falkirk Town Centre is experiencing challenges in terms of its status, the decline in its retail function and high levels of vacancies, particular in the High Street. Nonetheless, it retains an attractive environment and the public realm continues to be subject to investment and improvement.
- Falkirk Town Centre needs to adapt and repurpose in response to these challenges. A Revitalising Falkirk Partnership and Action Plan is in place, a Falkirk Town Centre Vision and Development Framework has been prepared, and projects are being developed to stimulate revitalisation including the Growth Deal projects of new Arts Centre and Falkirk Central Sustainable Transport Hub.
- Grangemouth Town Centre also faces issues around vacancies and the dated physical environment of its main precinct. It also requires revitalisation, improvement and adaptation, with resources likely to become available through the Greener Grangemouth Growth Deal programme.
- The other three District Centres are generally stable and have adapted to their role of providing convenience shopping and services to their local communities.
- The two commercial centres are successful with low level of vacancies.
- Local centres and neighbourhood shops provide access to top up shopping and local services and play an important role in sustaining 20 minute neighbourhoods.
- Retailing patterns and behaviour in the area have been influenced by national trends including restructuring in the retail industry and the rise of internet shopping. There is a general oversupply of retail floorspace.
- Convenience shopping provision in the generally well developed, with little expenditure leakage outwith the area, and reasonable levels of retention of local spend in local centres.
- As the retail role of Falkirk Town Centre has declined, so leakage of comparison expenditure outwith the area has increased.
- NPF4 establishes a rigorous approach to future retail provision based on the Town Centres First principle which will guide future retail development.

Sources

- National Planning Framework 4
- Falkirk Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2)
- Town Centre Health Check 2021
- Floorspace Surveys 2014-2022
- LDP2 Technical Report 7: Town Centres and Retailing
- Falkirk Gateway Retail and Leisure Statement 2019