

## **Intro and Disclaimer**

This preliminary information is not integral to the plan. Its purpose is to describe the methodology should any questions arise.

1. The design of the survey (appended) worked well. Questions were open ended such as used for market research. All questions were responded to and respondents reliably demonstrated complete understanding of the questions and the purpose of the questionnaire. In one section, relating to familiarity with Dynamically Different Dumfries, a yes/no format was used.

2. The exercise/administration was admittedly under-resourced. The survey design, printing, hand delivery to business owner or designate, follow up calls for pick up, & the collation of responses were all completed by one DPAG member. With some additional help the survey could have been used more widely – ie provided to hoteliers, B & Bs and to the shops in the town centre representing national chains.

## **Survey Results**

Number of Questionnaires delivered and returned: Approximately 35 questionnaires were delivered and 24 returned completed.

Notably the majority of respondents had not heard of Dynamically Different Dumfries – (the name of the document describing the planning exercise carried out by DGC and community partners in 2021-23). A smaller number had heard of the project but had not been involved as a participant nor read the document and didn't know what the contents were nor the conclusions reached. Two respondents had been involved in some type of consultation exercise. The shortcoming in terms of public engagement can be explained by the constraints that acted against face-to-face engagement during the pandemic years and supports the utility of this recent public engagement exercise.

## **Findings**

The main concerns about Dumfries town centre expressed by those who completed the survey (24 in total) were remarkably consistent. They included the following:

- The number of empty buildings in the town centre
- The poor property maintenance of many of these buildings
- The amount of litter, dirt and rubbish in the town centre streets and closes
- The disturbing impact of the gull population in the months from March to September
- The limited range of shops and the high level of business rates for struggling business owners
- Other concerns were not shared by all but by a large majority. They included parking issues, pedestrianisation issues and levels of anti-social behaviour. Of especial concern was the large number of derelict buildings owned by absentee landlords which become more and more unsightly as the years go by and detract from the overall majestic appearance of the town centre.

All of the respondents expressed pride in their status as independent business owner/operators. They felt good about managing to keep afloat during the pandemic and the lock-downs. They expressed pride in being an integral part of the community, contributing to the local economy, providing services or goods to their customers, and keeping their premises and shop fronts clean and attractive. Many expressed pride in their businesses' longevity. Many have been in business for decades and some family businesses for a century or longer. A repeated theme was 'customers' as friends and commerce as a transaction between friends.

They also expressed pride in belonging to this town, and doing business in this town, with its wonderful architecture and historical significance. Special affection is held for the Burns statue, the Midsteeple, the fountain, the Plainstones and the River Nith. Recognized was recent benefit from that CARS programme in terms of grant funding for shop facelifts. The positive impact of flower beds, containers and hanging baskets were also mentioned.

Opportunities identified, which required action, included:

Intervention by the local authority towards absentee owners to bring about consistent and effective maintenance of empty buildings.

A general, thorough, clean-up of the town centre and the neglected historic buildings was seen as necessary; littering, dog fouling, were cited as a chronic problem needing *daily*, or more frequent attention. The irregular, unsightly and dangerous paving in the pedestrianised town centre needs to be attended to urgently. Anti-social behaviour needs consistent attention.

Respondents did not always indicate which agencies they expected to carry out this range of work, but the local authority was often mentioned, and the levelling-up fund which has been awarded to the town.

The need for more – and more varied – shops and businesses, especially independent clothing and footwear shops

Better promotion of Dumfries as a place to visit, a destination town. Signage for tourists.

Preliminary steps to create a night-time economy and thus create more jobs.

More town centre events and activities to attract both Dumfries residents and visitors into the town ***especially in the evening***. Many mentioned cinema and bowling alley to attract families and visitors. Also family-friendly low-cost eateries open after 6 PM.

Overall, there was a sense that the local authority should be prioritising efforts to turn these aspirations into reality, with urgent co-ordinated action to address all issues. New investment in the town is desperately needed – and should be partly forthcoming from the levelling-up award – and the improvement of Dumfries would have a knock-on effect on Dumfries and Galloway as a whole. The town remains the administrative centre for the region and once word spreads that Dumfries is on an upward trajectory, more visitors will come to the town and this will help to support a wider economy and more jobs – and a more vibrant town centre.

It is clear from the survey that many of the shopkeepers, particularly those of longer standing, have

a feeling that the town has suffered in recent years and that it is time to stop the decline and make a serious effort to turn things round. The survey confirms the feelings of local people and findings should be acted upon in the shortest possible timescale.

## Appendix

### PLACE PLAN DUMFRIES -- Traders/Voluntary Agency Survey

Loreburn Community Council & Dumfries Partnership Action Group have joined forces to draft a place plan for Dumfries Town Centre. The fundamental tenet underlying the plan is that business owners, voluntary agencies, and ordinary citizens must all be genuinely involved so that the plan reflects the hopes and ambitions of all who reside within, do business in, or visit the Town Centre to shop or for other purposes.

What is a place plan? A place plan is a proposal based on:

- the physical, architectural, historical, social and cultural aspects of a place. A good place plan recognizes:
- the aspirations and hopes of the people
- An inventory of what already exists
- Highlights elements that should be conserved , and
- Nuisances that need removed or remedied
- Gaps in the Market' - ideas for ventures/businesses that would attract locals, visitors and tourists to the centre and the further reaches of the town and region

Involvement will not be 'token' involvement. Your views matter! The attached brief questionnaire is only a start.

1.

a) Name or Business/Agency, location & year of establishment

b) What you are most proud of about your business/ agency?

2 . Tell us

a) three things you like about the town centre

b) Three things you don't like

. Thinking of the town, especially the centre, what one thing would do you most want to see changed?

The ten year plan for Dumfries – DYNAMICALLY DIFFERENT DUMFRIES (DDD) was published in 2022

Have you heard of the document? Yes No

Have you seen the document? Yes No

DDD was based on wide public consultation including consultation with traders

Were you invited to a consultation event? Yes No

Did you attend such an event? Yes No

Did you complete any questionnaire or write to the agency about the event?

Yes No

Were you ever, in any manner, approached; asked to provide input into the ten year plan (DDD)?

Yes No

When you think of Gaps in the Market in relation to Dumfries what jumps to mind?

Finally,

Looking ahead: what do you think needs to happen to make Dumfries a better place to live, work, do business?