



The Vale in Focus



**A Place Standard
Community Conversation**

A Clydesider Creative publication produced in association with Inclusive Images and the Vale of Leven community written by Amanda Eleftheriades-Sherry.

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Overview

In October 2018 Clydesider Creative Ltd successfully applied for funding from the Scottish Government's Place Standard Conversations fund to host a series of participatory photography workshops and a community event aimed at encouraging community conversations about the quality of life, place and space in central Alexandria and surrounding Vale of Leven.

The workshops and event were organised and run in partnership with local social enterprise Inclusive Images and with support from Alexandria-based Loch Lomond Craft Centre.

The Place Standard - What Is It?

The Place Standard Conversations element of the Making Places fund aims to support communities to begin thinking about their place and how it affects their life.

The Place Standard is a popular and free to use tool that is already being used by communities across Scotland to structure conversations about their local place.

Making Places support is intended to:

- *Increase the ability for disadvantaged communities to come together and begin discussions about their place.*
- *Capture lessons directly from communities on how using the Place Standard can help to bring people together, identify strengths in the local area and help to plan priorities.*

**Making Places, Support for Community-led Design in Local Places
Scottish Government**

Our Methods

Inclusive Images ran seven weekly participatory photography workshops in Alexandria C.E Centre. These were widely advertised on social media and with leaflets and posters distributed across the Vale of Leven.

The aim of the workshops was to encourage discussion based on the Place Standard tool (see below) and look at the opportunities and challenges faced by those living, working, visiting or shopping in central Alexandria.

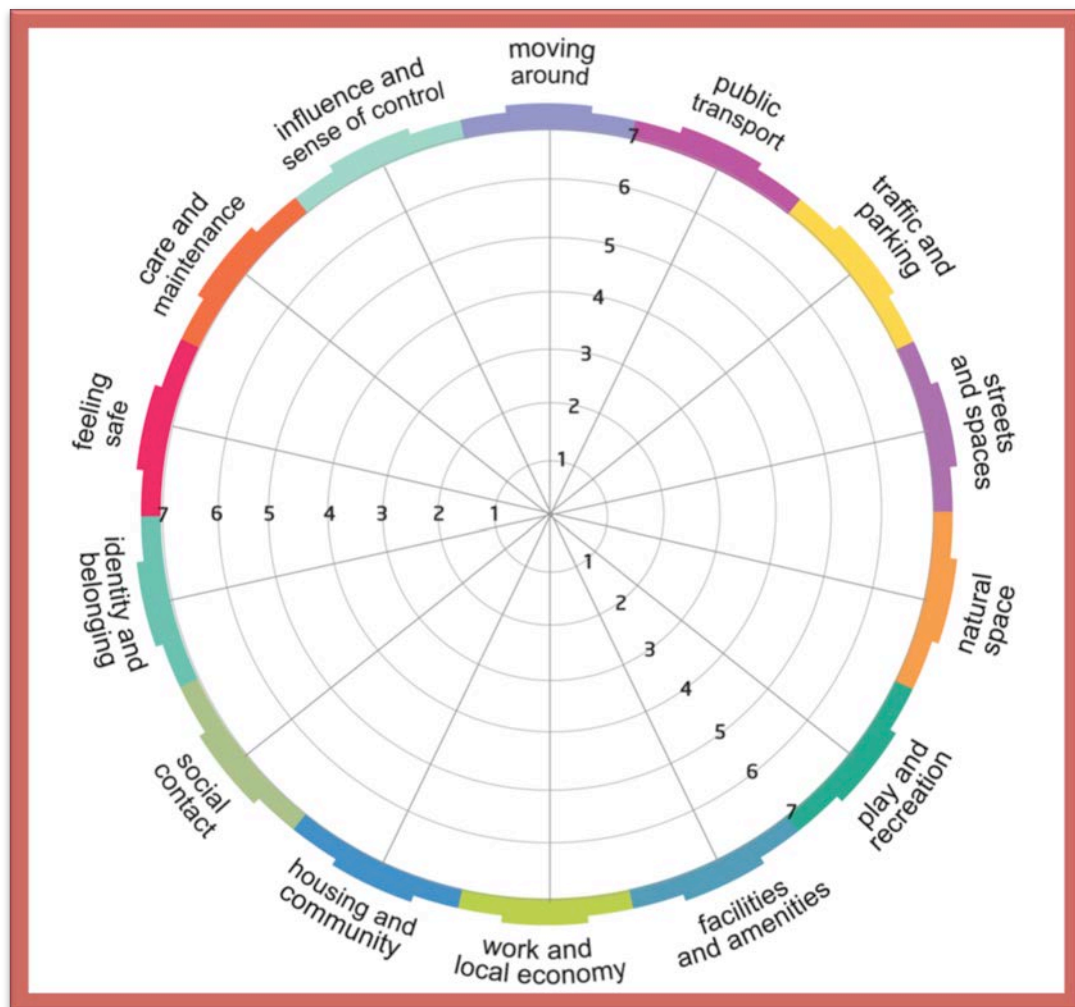
At the end of the seven weeks the workshop participants selected the photos which they felt best illustrated life in the Vale and captioned them. These then formed the backdrop for a Community Exhibition and Community Marketplace event held in Alexandria C.E Centre. We invited local community groups, schools, policymakers and politicians to attend and participate in conversation café style discussions with the photos being used to stimulate debate.

We also recruited a local creative facilitator to host an art workshop for young people to encourage them to creatively share their thoughts and ideas. The images and comments recorded during the workshops and community event form the basis of this report. Print and digital copies will be made available to local community organisations to use as they wish.

The Place Standard Tool

The Place Standard tool is a way of assessing places. It was designed to:

- Assess and improve the quality of both new and existing places
- Bring communities, public, private and third sector together to deliver high quality places
- Promote consistency so everyone across Scotland has an equal chance of living in a good quality area
- Ensure people's physical and social environments support them to live healthy, happy lives



A place is made up of many different elements. It includes the physical environment, such as the buildings, streets or greenspaces and also social aspects, such as the community and the way individuals feel about the place they live.

Issues such as wellbeing and health are all impacted by the places where we spend our time. When places are designed and maintained well, people often have a better quality of life. Giving everyone the same opportunity to live and work in a good environment can reduce inequalities across a range of different measures.

*Understanding the existing and potential strengths of places can help to target and improve areas that need it most. **Place Standard Learning Resource Guide***





Community Priorities and Challenges in Summary

- Alexandria town centre was seen as neglected, a poor relation to Dumbarton and Clydebank town centres when it came to local authority and external investment.
- Central Alexandria is generally well served by public transport however, outlying areas particularly Bonhill, are isolated from the wider community at certain times of the week and year – ie Sundays and icy days.
- Free parking is a benefit to the area however it was felt there was not enough of it and more needed to be done to prevent illegal parking which is hazardous for pedestrians.
- Tow-path is as a local asset which is well-used during the day but in need of significant improvements, particularly lighting, seating and signage.
- Road infrastructure, particularly around Alexandria train station, was felt to be exceptionally poorly designed causing problems for both pedestrians and drivers.
- Mitchell Way was seen as a particular eyesore and plans to bring a new supermarket to the area were viewed as unimaginative and unlikely to resolve the deep-rooted problems in the area.
- Alexandria is in close proximity to an abundance of natural spaces from the River Leven to Loch Lomond and surrounding hills, plus small pockets of open land and woodland such as at the Vale of Leven Hospital. However it was felt that most of the spaces outwith the National Park were badly neglected and poorly lit and therefore underutilised by the local community.
- Despite being so close to the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park and a rich natural environment which attracts local, national and international visitors to the area, Alexandria and the Vale gains very little benefit from its proximity. It is felt much more could be done to improve the town centre and the infrastructure linking it to the National Park which would encourage visitors to spend time there as well.
- While there is a good variety of outdoor spaces for play and recreation it was felt that they are uninviting and underused, particularly for and by young people. Indoor spaces – such as the schools – are not used to their full potential out of school hours.
- For people to access essential services such as police, social work department, job centre and hospital it is seen as vital that they are based locally, particularly as much of the Vale is faced with some of highest levels of social deprivation in Scotland. However, in recent years all of these services have moved out of the Vale.

- There is a real sense of pride in the Vale Hospital where people feel they receive an excellent service despite reduced service provision. It was felt this is a crucial amenity which the local area cannot afford to lose.
- The C.E Centres had changed dramatically since they had been taken over by the Leisure Trust. They were no longer seen as welcoming spaces for the community and were regarded as a real barrier to community involvement and participation in the area.
- The lack of good quality job opportunities was seen as a real problem for the area. It was felt more support – practical and financial - was needed for small start-up businesses particularly those with a social purpose which are rooted in the local community.
- General sense of satisfaction with most of the housing in the Vale, with a small minority of properties in need of extensive upgrading.
- Community spaces where people could meet informally and access support/advice for and about local groups is needed. In the past this type of support had been available from West Dunbartonshire Council in the C.E Centres but now even experienced community activists struggled to find information/advice.
- Older people have a strong sense of belonging to the Vale and fond memories of the town in its heyday but it was felt there is little to provide younger generation with sense of pride and belonging and the knowledge of the area's heritage is rapidly disappearing.
- The area does not feel a safe place particularly for women and members of the LGBT community. Women felt unsafe both indoors and outdoors with recognition that there is a high level of domestic violence locally.
- The area has an air of neglect and it is felt that small changes by the Council could make significant improvements. There is also need for much more extensive work to regenerate the town centre.
- There is a strong feeling of being over consulted and under listened to by those in positions of influence and power.
- There is a desire for more personal and community responsibility and ownership with support from local/national government and statutory bodies to ensure that grassroots initiatives have the best chance of survival and achievement.



Community Conversations

Public Transport

Positives

- Buses are frequent in certain areas and generally reliable.
- Central locations, well served.
- For able-bodied people, public transport fairly safe and accessible.
- Bus stops are generally in the most convenient appropriate places.
- Train stations are generally in central locations and convenient.



Negatives

- Trains are scheduled regularly but slow and less reliable.
- Space between train station and town centre is a disgrace and should be re-designed to get rid of roads and concrete.
- Barriers and challenges to using public transport faced by older and less mobile.
- Bus stops in Bonhill are not within easy walking distance.

Community Comments & Suggestions

"Sunday 206 comes every 70mins – not everyone has access to a timetable."

"I live at the top of the hill – there's one bus an hour."

"It's too expensive for teenagers who don't work but have to pay a full adult fare."

"Try not to use public transport – it's always late and smells."

"Parked cars stop some bus services in Bonhill as buses can't get through."

"Public transport should be free to get cars off the roads, save the environment and improve health."

"Good public transport attracts people and allows prosperity to move around."

"Bus service fine although have to admit don't use it on a regular basis. Bus drivers cope well, but shouldn't have to, with vehicles parked at/close to bus stops."

"The trains are unreliable with cancellations/no shows, often without advance warnings. Makes planning any trips in advance difficult. Can lead to missed or late arrival for appointments, interviews, work. Not very satisfactory overall."

- Reinststate the second Balloch-Dumbarton rail track.
- Bonhill needs its own dedicated bus service with small vehicles.
- Subsidised travel for those on low incomes would greatly help poverty and support quality of life, health etc.
- The railway station is on the wrong side of the track.

Local Context

- In 2016/17, SPT supported 14 local bus services in West Dunbartonshire on contracts that carried 460,000 passengers.
- SPT MyBus services carried 23,000 passengers in WD.
- 25% of local population use public transport as their main mode of transport in WD compared to Scottish average of 11%.
- 79% of local population are 'Very' or 'Fairly' satisfied with public transport in comparison to Scottish average of 53%.

[Transport Outcomes Report: West Dunbartonshire 2017/18: SPT in partnership with West Dunbartonshire Council](#)

Traffic and Parking

Positives

- Free public car parks – just not enough.

Negatives

- Cars take priority over people.
- Traffic pollution/noise has negative effect on health.
- Children are not walking to school.
- Traffic levels and behaviour make it dangerous for pedestrians - two of the group nearly got run over yesterday in separate incidents.
- People park in unsafe places for pedestrians and other drivers.
- Traffic calming measures ineffective - too much reliance on speed bumps.
- There are too many cars and convoys.



Community Comments & Suggestions

"The congestion in the Vale is getting worse."

"A lot of these problems could be solved with improved public transport."

"Individuals can make a difference by walking more and sharing cars."

"Council/Government can raise awareness, invest in public transport, alternative fuels, variety of calming measures."

"Road layouts are awful - railway station sits in the middle of a roundabout."

"I have breathing problems because of all the exhaust fumes."

"Should be more legislation to stop people parking on pavements for wheelchair/scooter access."

"Too many nuclear convoys on roads."

"Government should offer incentives for car-sharing."

- Not enough spaces to park.
- Too many cars parked on the streets.
- Could the Vale have a multi-storey car park?
- Road works always seem to clash at the same time.

Local Context

- West Dunbartonshire's area wide emissions were 4.4 tonnes of CO2 per capita in 2016, well below the target of 5.4 tonnes for that year. [UK Local Authority and Regional Carbon Dioxide Emissions National Statistics](#)
- Car ownership in West Dunbartonshire is lower than the national average with greater dependency on public transport. [West Dunbartonshire Local Transport Strategy](#)
- The majority of commuters from Alexandria travel by car to Garelochhead, Clydebank and Dumbarton. [Datashine Scotland Commute](#)

Moving Around

Positives

- Tow Path great for connecting Vale to Loch Lomond and Glasgow on foot or bike.

Negatives

- Not enough paths connecting Tow Path to town centre, parks and hills and not enough sign-posts (many are dirty and broken).
- No safe cycle lanes on roads in Vale.
- Roads and pavements often dangerously pot-holed and poor surfaces.
- Cycling isn't promoted; nowhere to hire/repair bikes or bike maintenance classes.
- Not safe to use Tow Path in dark. Need lights along river.
- Walking or cycling around town centre/train station is dangerous because of traffic, especially on Bank Street roundabout/dual carriageway - poor lighting.
- Litter/broken glass and dog mess can be a problem - not enough litter bins, especially on Tow Path, and virtually no recycling bins.
- Lots of areas look uncared for and are used as dumping grounds.
- Danger for unaccompanied children walking or cycling near river.
- Not enough picturesque, well-kept, sign-posted paths, wild flowers etc, in housing schemes and leading to the hills and woods.



Community Comments and Suggestions

"The Vale Main Street needs to be looked after!"

"Lets make it a town we want to walk about and linger in."

"You take your life in your hands on bikes on the roads."

"Tow Path is a no-no in the dark."

"Some women feel unsafe walking alone - this could be alleviated to a large extent by better lighting and more 'bobbies on the beat.'"

"There's not a nice signpost for Alexandria."

"Should grow more trees!"

"Uneven state of many pavements make it dangerous for anyone with impaired mobility. One particular concern is the weekend parking around the VoL Leisure Centre. Illegal/inconsiderate parking presents a hazard, especially for buses."

- More cycling spaces, seating on cycle paths and cycle lanes on main roads
- Tow Path needs money spent on it - repair stone work, seats and signs, remove invasive species and plant native species.

Local Context

- Cycling in WD has decreased in the past 5 years while car use has increased. [Local Outcome Improvement Plan Strategic Assessment 2017 – 2027](#)
- 38% of primary schools provide Bikeability training. [Annual Cycling Monitoring report Cycling Scotland 2015](#)
- Frequency of 'visits to the outdoors' is significantly lower in WD than Scotland as a whole. Locally 36% of the population visit one or more times a week in comparison to Scottish average of 52% while 21% reported never making visits to the outdoors. [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)
- Attitudes to public transport were poorer in West Dunbartonshire than Scotland as a whole. [West Dunbartonshire Local Transport Strategy](#)

Streets and Spaces

Positives

- Football pitches are nice and well used.
- Beautiful buildings not being used to potential - library, grand hall, Torpedo Factory, fountain.

Negatives

- Whole infrastructure isn't great.
- Street signs need to be replaced, all faded and dirty.
- Certain streets are in an absolute state and really need cleaning, some have a literal hill of rubbish. There is too much litter.
- Our streets and spaces need attention.
- More trees; grass must be cut; more flowers in the area.
- Finding it difficult to get about with all the works happening just now.
- Nothing to do or nowhere to go when it's bad weather.
- Mitchell Way - poor construction/ugly.

Community Comments and Suggestions

"Not a place to get enjoyment from walking in during the day, let alone at night-time or in bad weather. No vibe."

"Could we have spotlights on our beautiful buildings at night?"

"They keep building more houses and not changing the roads"

"Flats lying empty in Mitchell Way is heart-breaking, could be homes for people."

"That magic roundabout? Whoever thought of that?! There's nothing magic about it."

"Don't need a Jehovah Witness hall in the commercial town centre; waste of good trading/public space."

"Town centre needs a buzz- bandstand, street cafes, food festival, more local shops and local food. One-stop shop to help start-ups - MONEY, advice, opportunities eg free market stalls."

- Don't need ANOTHER supermarket - would ruin the business for existing shops, make it difficult to encourage attractive independent locally run shops and make Alexandria a town you want to go to.
- Need a real community centre with local food café, music, culture, entertainment.
- Don't want any more "big businesses" coming to town centre, or heavy industries- want more local social enterprises.
- Town centre shop rent and rates too high; Lomond Shores even worse and takes footfall away from Alexandria.

Local Context

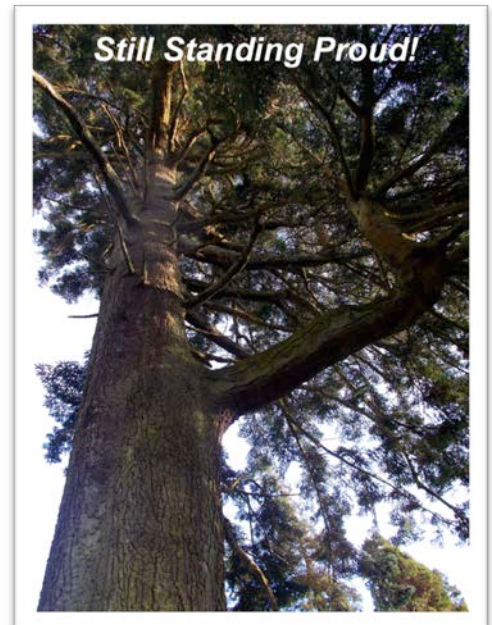
- *"The Mitchell Way area in Alexandria is a key regeneration site, owned by WDC. A preferred bidder was selected for the site in March 2016 to deliver a foodstore (25,000 square feet) with 145 car parking spaces as a first phase and a three-storey development facing Bank Street and Mitchell Way as a second phase - comprising of 10 retail units and 24 residential units. As part of wider works the Council has instructed the demolition of a number of redundant properties in the town centre, to enable future development and improvements to the town centre."*
- In 2015 9% of Citizens Panel respondents described Alexandria town centre as "quite attractive" and 43% rated it 'not attractive at all'. [Local Outcome Improvement Plan Strategic Assessment 2017 – 2027](#)



Natural Space

Positives

- Good variety of natural spaces close by – parks, river corridor, mountains, National Park unfortunately some are not well lit or maintained, puts people off.
- Great opportunities for contact with natural wildlife.
- The natural space is accessible up to a point and if lighting and seating issues were addressed would be more accessible and attractive to all.
- The river is a peaceful and healing place.
- Natural space would meet future needs if left natural and wasted space such as Lomond Industrial Estate were maintained.
- Hospital grounds - good outdoor space with lovely oak trees, but not well managed or walker friendly.



Negatives

- The bits of woodland and open spaces in the Vale are largely unmanaged and often used as dumping grounds. It's not looked after properly for wildlife.
- Due to the dual carriageway and volume of traffic, air quality is poor and noise excessive at points.
- The bypass cuts us off from the hills to the west.

Community Comments and Suggestions

"The woodland/lade near old Greenlight site is disgracefully dirty and neglected - if tidied up would be great for wildlife, a real amenity. It has never been looked after."

"Feel lucky to live in such a lovely area, with Loch Lomond so near."

"Respect for local area – stop treating streets like one big bin."

"More 'policing' of green areas. Encourage local people to take pride in/look after these areas. Local groups encouraging walks/use of green areas to be commended."

- Guided free walks by local folk/students – 20mins easy; walking groups on summer evenings; heritage walking tours; a café in Christie Park
- Better style car parks – more natural with planters/trees
- Grass cutting; more daffodils; cultivate bio-diversity; remove invasive species; attract more wildlife from the Loch Lomond area by planting native trees along the River Leven and connecting with the parks, open spaces and hills.
- No more landfill - more recycling; better use drainage, seats, lighting.
- Identify contaminated land and remedy.
- 'Bitter About Litter' campaign.
- Community gardens promote inclusion, ownership, mental health, biodiversity.
- Need to make the natural land more cohesive and connected.
- Access funding for connecting wildlife spaces - Central Scotland Green Network, Green Infrastructure Fund, Keep Scotland Beautiful.
- A footbridge or underpass over bypass from Christie Park?

Local Context

- 916,200 people visit WD generating £10.53m income. 66% are day visitors [Local Outcome Improvement Plan Strategic Assessment 2017 – 2027](#)
- Significantly fewer people in WD access local greenspaces than Scottish average with 34% never doing so [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)

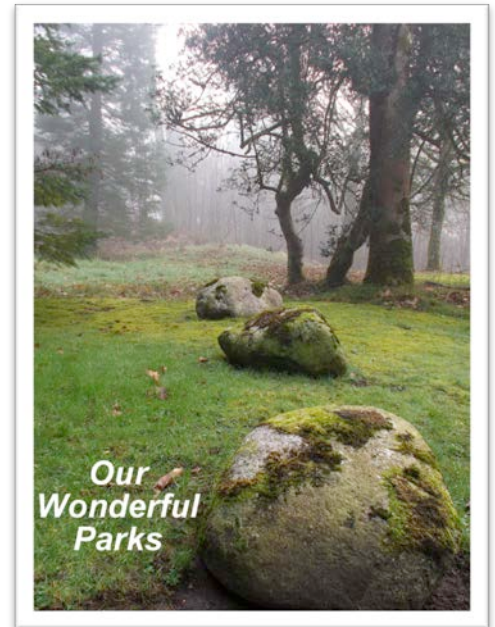
Play and Recreation

Positives

- Spaces are affordable outdoors – indoor activities can be expensive.

Negatives

- Parks could be better used - the weans don't play outside any more.
- Few organised games and sports, outwith football and dancing.
- Neighbours don't take much to do with other people's children, they're afraid to correct bad behaviour, but 'it takes a village to bring up a child.'



Community Comments and Suggestions

"The amount of signs forbidding ball games etc and the situation of some recreation areas doesn't welcome children or teenagers to play outdoors."

"Some areas (e.g. new Bonhill) have little or no opportunities for children or teenagers to play and no areas for children with disabilities or special needs."

"Makes our young people feel undervalued and lacking in confidence, social skills."

"More encouragement in/by schools needed. One has only to look at all the local 'What's On' pages to see what is available, yet hear 'There's nothing to do!'"

"We live in fear of our kids being abducted, but we learned life-skills playing outside."

"Society is run on fear - we must fight the mental and physical isolation."

"Need to make it easier and more pleasant to play outside and enjoy being outdoors, more sports groups, and more places for meeting up, entertainment, being creative, enjoying and learning about the environment, the arts, our culture and our heritage."

- Free dance school for young people
- Traffic wardens
- Support St Andrews church re-development. Children/retired reading room.
- Free activities in parks; more rangers stuff for teenagers; more interactive games and activities in Balloch park; more affordable activities for kids -not tourist process i.e. treezone!!
- Need more people to organise and teach games and sports in parks and supervise - dodgy ball, rounders, skipping, table tennis, tennis, volleyball etc.
- Volunteers for kids clubs.
- Keep flowers in Christie Park - Friends of Christie Park – get started!
- Gardening library.
- Pavement heights to be reduced for walking and wheelchair.
- 20's-30's social club for community connections.
- Public toilets.
- Golf cart/tut tut circular.
- Tie in with "shopping" to create an experience.
- Roller-skating rink; BMX track; public rugby pitches; bring back putting greens; veterans/bowling green.
- Water refill stations.
- Young people with special needs or disabilities should have spaces/times/activities dedicated to them only.
- Safe places.

Christie Park mainly for very young accompanied children, dog walkers and older unaccompanied youngsters using new play equipment. Need more organised and regular supervised outdoor sports/activity groups for young people. Could we have a bandstand and organised events?

Argyle Park mainly for football and dog walking. Tennis courts taken away, when people could have been inspired by Andy Murray.

India Street an area of historical importance where people can sit near river, in summer young people gather, drink and have fun but leave litter - no bin. Heritage is in poor state of repair and should be restored - former Turkey Red Dye factory buildings, gate, cobbles, lamps and walls around the former Alexandria Works. Need nice signposts to town centre and informative plaque describing the heritage.

River Leven Corridor good for walking and cycling for accompanied children, but too dangerous for play - could be organised events to inform about wildlife and do native planting/management/clean up litter/remove alien species. Opportunity to make this a wildlife area drawing biodiversity from the river, up Alexander Street into the town. Good opportunity to replace ornamental shrubs gradually by native plantings and wild flowers and bulbs. Not well managed for wildlife at present.

Hospital grounds could be managed for wildlife and for walkers, with paths, picnic areas and play areas.

Local Context

- 72% people in WD took part in some kind of cultural activity in 2017, compared to 77% of total Scottish population, this drops to 68% in 20% most deprived areas
- Participation in sports in West Dunbartonshire is above Scottish average with walking and swimming being the most popular physical activities
- 78% of people who use local authority sports/leisure facilities reported being 'Very/fairly satisfied' with them while 16% reported being 'Very/fairly dissatisfied' with them. This compares with a Scottish average of 86% and 6% respectively.

[Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)

"Over 40% of the land is classified as open countryside, representing a notably higher proportion than many other local authority areas in Scotland, and there are sizable areas of native woodland and freshwater."

"West Dunbartonshire Council also maintains over 400 hectares of open space and over 100 hectares of public parks. In proportionate terms, this represents a large amount of ground maintained. The majority of residents in West Dunbartonshire live within 300m of an area of open space over 1 hectare in size."

"West Dunbartonshire's industrial past has left a legacy of vacant, derelict and contaminated land, with a number of large sites remaining undeveloped for many years. The most recent survey of vacant and derelict land in Scotland recorded a 19% reduction hectares of derelict and urban vacant land in West Dunbartonshire from 182 (2015) to 171 (2016)."

"Upstream of the River Leven, the Endrick Water Special Area of Conservation is an important habitat for Atlantic salmon and river lamprey. The River Leven is the main outflow for Loch Lomond and acts as a critical wildlife corridor. Loch Lomond is designated as a Special Protection Area under Ramsar. Loch Lomond Woods are designated as a Special Area of Conservation."

[Local Outcome Improvement Plan Strategic Assessment 2017 – 2027](#)

Further Reading

[West Dunbartonshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2010](#)

Facilities and Amenities

Positives

- Autism Centre in Renton is really good.
- The tuck shop with fruit and sandwiches and free milk in our school is fantastic.
- Plenty of chemists and dentists.

Negatives

- No Accident & Emergency; services greatly diminished at Vale Hospital
- Not enough facilities or classes you can get to unless you have a car.
- Area of high deprivation so need locally-based services – police, social work, job centre and hospital services – all moved away from the Vale.
- Need more things going on during the day for parents with young children.
- Loch Lomond medical surgery getting bad for appointments – if you don't phone between 8:30-9am you won't get seen for two weeks.
- Lack of information about facilities/amenities - if you ask at 'community centres' told information cannot be given out due to data protection.
- Schools seem too big - the wee schools seemed to do a better job.
- No hotel accommodation to bring visitors into Vale and improve local economy.
- Need better shops/activities - tourism-based economy.
- Lack of sports facilities other than football.
- Lack of appropriate, affordable shops - rents and rates too high. Need to utilise vacant shops for small businesses/social enterprises eg community baker, fruit & veg shop, shoe shop.
- The C.E centre is not easy to hire for classes, sports and events, also do not accept on the spot cash; no schedule boards, shortage of appropriate space, limited space for advertising activities. Café is sadly missed. Could drive action for participation in sport.
- Need an action plan and vision to help people to get what they want.
- Lack of community entertainment venues, outwith pubs. There used to be two cinemas in the Vale.

Community Comments and Suggestions

"Please save the Vale of Leven Hospital! Given the appalling health statistics in the area, we need these health services to be enhanced."

"They are slowly strangling the Vale Hospital."

"The new school at Haldane is so ugly and uninspiring, unlike the old school which was a real community facility."

"Our unemployed need to travel to seek work often at their own expense – not everyone has access to internet or is confident enough to use internet."

"There are not enough indoor community spaces, where folk can meet and chat and get involved in doing things together. This causes increased isolation and reduced social cohesion of different ages and vulnerabilities. We need places where we can mix and learn from each other and help each other."

"We now have people who do not have enough to eat, and we need to help them."



- Need a community café - affordable, help vulnerable people, improves diets, encourage vegetarian/vegan, improve health.
- A community farm would be great for people, especially children - outdoors and gives access to quality fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Could we have a Star Wars club – would appeal to children and adults and give opportunity for generations to meet.
- Children could put on concerts for the older generation.
- Could we have more/better access to woods for children and could we educate the children about wildlife.
- Local cinema needed.

Local Context

- West Dunbartonshire Council is responsible for 12 community facilities which cost £1.2million to run, costs are split 70% subsidy 30% income. The facilities are used by 223 different groups; almost half of the users attend more than one group [West Dunbartonshire Community Facilities Review. Update Aug 2018](#)
- 36% of people in WD said they were 'very/fairly satisfied' with local sport/leisure services compared to 51% Scottish population while 78% were 'very/fairly satisfied' with cultural and sports facilities in WD compared to 86% in Scotland [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)
- Council buildings in which all public areas are suitable for and accessible to disabled people increased from 50% in 2012/13 to 88% in 2015/2016 [Local Outcome Improvement Plan Strategic Assessment 2017 – 2027](#)
- Satisfaction with local health services is higher in West Dunbartonshire than in Scotland overall – 88% in WD compared to 83% in Scotland [Local Outcome Improvement Plan Strategic Assessment 2017 – 2027](#)
- In March 2019 1,607 people were seen at the Vale of Leven Hospital A&E; 98% were seen within 4 hours compared to Scottish average of 91% nhspersforms.scot

Work and Local Economy

Positives

- This area is so much cheaper to live compared to Edinburgh. I moved here for work and enjoy living here.
- Huge potential – there are so many good things going on in WD.
- Coach companies are looking for places to go – only Antartex and Lomond Shores at moment.



Negatives

- Not the range of shops required – need to go to Clydebank/Glasgow for shoes/clothes shopping. Not everyone can afford to go to Jenner's.
- Lots of shop fronts BUT not affordable - rents are ridiculous.
- Small independent coffee shops would be good – not much more than pubs here.
- WDC should offer incubation support for small businesses – Flamingoland is just going to create traffic jams + zero-hour contracts – need control over your life.
- Since Leisure Trust took over people feel loss of community hub – can't even come in C.E Centres to wait or just use toilets.
- Area of deprivation but Alexandria Job Centre shut, need to go to Dumbarton but local transport is unreliable – risk being sanctioned if late.
- No big employers - only Aggreko. Biggest employers shut down.
- Need change in planning department to make real change with creative and community interests at heart but there are always barriers from WDC.
- Hard to recruit volunteers – job centre doesn't recognise value of volunteering.

Community Comments and Suggestions

"Two young well educated people in my family who can't get a job in the area, though they have tried very hard. I would like them to stay at home but one is now talking about going to work in Denmark, the other Wishaw."

"A young man with a science degree and Masters, has lived independently for 5 years was sent on a life skills course by Job Centre, degrading and humiliating and a waste of time and money."

"Young people are trained to think they are not successful unless they get a job. Give them two years to develop something for themselves rather than two years being forced to get zero hours contract job."

"It's desperate. I've got the work ethic and brought my three weans up that way. My daughter works split shifts and works so hard - her tips pay for tea the next day. That's just one story and it is replicated right across the Vale. I feel very worried for the next generation."

"Visitors to the luxury accommodation around Loch Lomond bring money into the area but it does not trickle down to local people, who are paid minimum wages."

“‘Equal opportunities’ doesn’t come into it here - there are NO opportunities. Young people can’t get jobs and oldies have to work on and on - it doesn’t make sense.”

“Affordable childcare is the biggest con ever.”

“Flamingoland is not a solution, it’s going to kill the area.”

“Development plans for Alexandria - Jehovah’s Witness Church and Lidl – neither are what we need.”

“Ours is an area where the very rich come and spend money in an enclosed economy and the people who live here get treated like shit.”

- Area behind church ideal for small local businesses.
- If area is nice to shop it stops people treating the streets like a bin.
- Torpedo Factory needs improved it’s a beautiful space. Could be heritage money if taken over by community group, could be stop off on way to Loch Lomond.
- WDC don’t need any more consultations – just give money from town centre funds to community to decide.
- Exploit royal connections.
- Allocate the £800k town centre fund directly to community action groups to use it practically - not for Council funds and “consultations”.
- We need a local tourism industry in the Vale, as well as in Balloch, with a tourist trail through West Dunbartonshire, with heritage attractions and more arts and crafts and local food.
- We need heritage centres telling our stories, especially about the textile industries, Turkey Red Dye, Robert the Bruce and the royal struggles to gain the rich lands of the Lennox.

Local Context

- People in West Dunbartonshire have earned less than the Scottish median every year since 2002
- The local economy is heavily reliant on the public sector, notably health and education, and there is strong competition for jobs and investment from neighbouring areas, notably Glasgow.
- Commuting out of the area for better paid jobs, and outward migration of the population, are two of the challenges West Dunbartonshire faces.
- Glasgow’s job density is above the national average, which effectively draws people into Glasgow from surrounding areas.
- West Dunbartonshire was the third most reliant area in Scotland (the most reliant area on the mainland) on the public sector for jobs in 2017, with 32.6% compared to the Scottish average of 25.3%.

[West Dunbartonshire by Numbers 2018](#)

- Overall employment rate in West Dunbartonshire in 2018 was 72% which is slightly below the Scottish average of 74%

[Labour Market Profile West Dunbartonshire](#)

“Alexandria is one of the three town centres in West Dunbartonshire. It has a traditional high street (Main Street), with an area of more recent, but dated development to the east (Mitchell Way).

The Alexandria Town Centre Masterplan (2008) outlines guidelines for six development sites in and around the town centre, including residential development on the former Kippen Dairy site and the redevelopment and refurbishment of Mitchell Way, which is central to the regeneration of the town centre.”

[West Dunbartonshire Council Infrastructure Investment Plan](#)

Social Contact

Positive

- Volunteering helps improve social contact.
- Plenty 'going on'.
- Loch Lomond Craft Centre has become a meeting place/hub for people who want to be crafty.
- There are clubs for sports eg football, badminton, cricket; arts and crafts eg mandolin, knitting, painting, dancing but people do not seem to want to come out so much now.
- Loch Lomond Craft Centre good place for artists to collaborate and network, but limited space; only open limited hours as volunteer-run.
- Slipway Café is a good affordable social enterprise for meeting up in the outdoors with lovely views - need more places like it.
- There are some free/affordable spaces for getting together scattered about eg Co-Op Community room, some cafes and pubs but people often don't know.
- Wee things are happening, we need to build on them and create momentum.



Negative

- Closed all the cafes in the C.E. Centres – they used to be informal meeting spaces – somewhere anonymous and public to meet.
- Have come across some older members of the area who live alone and see few people during the week.
- Hard to find out what groups there are and what the gaps are.
- Need a community place to go, people don't have money to go to the gym or café.
- Young people especially are not well catered for and more activities aimed at this group should be prioritised.

Community Comments and Suggestions

- *"First contact with Women's Group saved and changed my life, I was suicidal then and my GP put me in touch with group. Now there are barriers everywhere."*
- *"Need to bring community activists together and agree a way forward and set up a local committee. Community space has to be managed and run by the community – hard to get started. Could be structured through WDC but needs a huge commitment from a large group of people."*
- *"The C.E Centres should be getting people through doors and be welcoming – if we as community activists feel excluded how are ordinary people feeling?"*
- *People don't feel welcome to just 'pop in' to local community centres any more. Why? It used to be that anyone could pop in at any time and be welcomed into very busy C.E. Centres."*
- *"When the cafes were here [Alexandria C.E Centre] people used to come here but now people only come if they have something to go to."*
- *"We need an identity brand - like Wigton is a "book town or West Kilbride is an "arts and crafts" town."*

- *“There are a variety of spaces to meet indoors and particularly outdoor in different types of weather. These spaces are mostly underused due to lack of awareness/promotion and for some groups of residents not easily accessed. Some of these spaces, especially indoors are not maintained therefore do not look inviting or attractive to use.”*
- *“What makes this place worth living in is being taken away from us - can’t camp around the loch or light a fire but wealthy people can come here with their speedboats and jet skis and ruin the peace.”*
- Should have somewhere to go to find what is available and feel part of a community in an informal way.
- Activities which are free or low cost needed, it reduces costs and gets you involved with other people and activities.
- If you’re isolated you need a space where you can go for company and it saves on the heating.
- Loch Lomond Craft Centre would like to provide more opportunities for workshops and events; a community café would get more people involved; good to bring people together around food.
- A school 'befriending' project?
- There are many of the usual places for social contact - pubs, especially with live music, are good places to meet but many cannot afford this and not good for recovering alcoholics; live music in the Vale is only at weekends.
- The schools are underused for community activities and they are great spaces which could be used for all sorts of activities.
- Need more opportunities for older and less able people to get out; would be good to provide places where older people can mix with young people; not enough things for people to do in the evenings; create a local food initiative.
- Need a community notice board, perhaps at the top of Mitchell Way, so it is easier to find out what is going on.
- Need to bring down condemned buildings in Mitchell Way, they’re so depressing.

Local Context

- 78% of households in West Dunbartonshire have access to the internet in contrast to 85% across Scotland [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)
- Feelings of belonging to a community considered ‘Very or Fairly Strong’ is 7% lower than the Scottish average [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)
- 31% of the population in West Dunbartonshire reported having a long-term mental or physical health problem in 2017 [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)
- Just 3 community groups in West Dunbartonshire are listed as owning community land/assets www.statistics.gov.scot

“The number of people in Scotland with a long-term activity-limiting health problem or disability was slightly lower in 2011 than in 2001. This is despite the fact that the number of people aged 65 and over increased by 10%. In West Dunbartonshire however this is not the case with 23.1% of the population reporting long-term activity-limiting health problems or disabilities as opposed to 22.7% in 2001.” [Local Outcome Improvement Plan Strategic Assessment 2017 – 2027](#) [This had increased to 31% by 2017] [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)

Further Reading

[Alexandria The Place - West Dunbartonshire Council](#)

Housing and Community

Positives

- Housing in the Vale supplies the needs of the community, with a good mix of quality homes for families and people of all ages.
- There is a good range of private and rented housing for various groups.
- Cordale housing is good – enough cupboards, a kitchen big enough for eating in.



Negatives

- Council don't do enough to inform and include the local community in planning matters and decisions – just box ticking exercise.
- No infrastructure. No joined up thinking. No communal facilities.
- Lacks accessible, affordable community facilities. Nowhere to just meet other people without forming a group.
- More play areas and facilities for community activities should be included when planning and building new housing.
- Services too centralised and remote.
- Rents are too high for many people.
- The majority of housing is adequate but the minority that is not is in real need of upgrading/regenerating.
- The different house build types do not work well together visually - need more traditional builds and a more cohesive plan.
- Need to improve home energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty.

Community Comments and Suggestions

"All the community groups I have been/are involved with have a good spirit and are keen to help the community with no thought of reward. Often the same people?"

"I have great neighbours – very important as you can become too isolated."

"My gas central heating cannot keep my top floor flat warm. Front door is drafty and so are the windows – council has come out but no difference – lots of condensation."

- Re-assess rents and repair rates - make housing more affordable for low income families/individuals.
- Create a variety of housing options to attract skilled/creative individuals/groups/families to come and live here.
- Stipulate all future builds must use local materials to fit local heritage.

Local Context

- West Dunbartonshire has a higher than average proportion of flats – 51% compared to a Scottish average of 38%
- Higher than average percentage of dwellings in lowest three Council Tax bands
- Almost half of West Dunbartonshire Council's own housing stock is of non-traditional construction
- West Dunbartonshire has one of the lowest rates of fuel poverty in Scotland

[Local Outcome Improvement Plan Strategic Assessment 2017 – 2027](#)

Identity and Belonging

Positives

- Trying to open old church for community.
- Older generation have sense of identity and belonging.

Negatives

- Don't see neighbours very often apart from when snow came.
- People don't know about the local history – the Turkey Red Dye works; the motor museum is away – the building has a fantastic history – cars and the stars. There's no focal point or identity – missed a trick with the torpedo factory. People came from all over to shop there.
- Needs something to pull people together. Not a strong sense of community.
- People don't know what local groups are doing and how to connect.



Community Comments and Suggestions

- *"In older people there is still a strong sense of belonging - they remember the great shops we had, the active communities and the buzz in the town centre; BUT there is little to keep young people here and make them want to belong. Need to ask young people what would make them feel they belong here."*
- *"Our heritage and history have been so neglected, we feel that our identity is lost; need to celebrate local history and heritage and have heritage centre to celebrate our textile industries, Robert the Bruce and other local history."*
- *"People in Haldane are still proud of their community, though, as many services/amenities have been lost, their sense of identity has been lost."*
- *"The area looks quite run down and neglected in parts and a lot more could be done to improve sense of identity given our natural assets and history. People would then take more of a pride in the area and themselves."*
- *"Young people and people new to the area unaware of our rich cultural heritage."*
- *"Alexandria C.E centre used to be really busy; sense of support and belonging but now there are barriers – used to be grants to get lets but no community workers around to let you know. Used to be community workers in C.E. Centres and they supported you to get the group set up."*
- *"Since Leisure Trust took over community centres, feel a loss of community – lack of flexibility – can't get in before group start; told can't see info about what groups meet here [Alexandria C.E Centre] because of data protection. Need a community hub which is for the community – this venue is not for the community."*
- Need an Action Plan to bring the community together to regenerate the area.

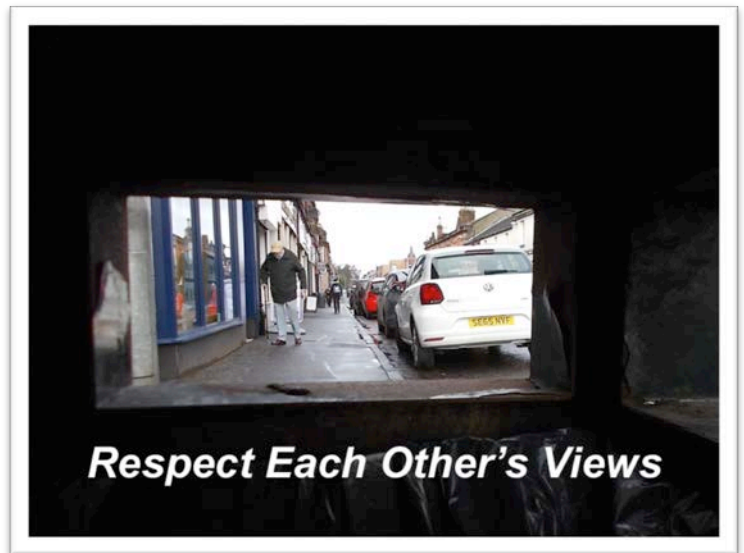
Local Context

- 89% of people in West Dunbartonshire rated their neighbourhood as a Very/Fairly Good place to live compared to 95% across Scotland [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)
- The 40 – 59 age group had least feeling of connection to a community [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)
- 8% of people had experienced discrimination or harassment in West Dunbartonshire compared to 13% in Scotland [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)

Feeling Safe

Positives

- Taxi companies being pro-active to try to encourage passengers to take photos of driver and drivers waiting for you to go in the house.
- 'Ask Angela' campaign in pubs to alert if you feel unsafe.
- Schools, especially Vale of Leven Academy, have been great at promoting LGBT rights and won award for it.
- People in the Vale are very friendly and like to say hello as you pass on the street - this makes you feel safe.



Negatives

- Domestic abuse on the rise and more assaults in the area.
- No-one feels safe at night - feel safe during the day.
- The streets are quieter than before - this could lead to more crime. Crimes don't happen as much in busy places.
- River bank and Stuckie Bridge – hardly used.
- Poor access and lighting in the area.
- Too many cars on the Main Street. No traffic warden.
- Vale station view is poor – feels unsafe.
- Old buildings don't lend to feeling safe.
- Down the riverbank poor seats, lighting, environment – not safe feeling.
- Poor bus service for evenings.
- No accessible public toilets.

Community Comments and Suggestions

- *"There are areas through which I would be reluctant to walk at night. There is no police presence at all as far as I'm aware. Two incidents have occurred which, at the time, made me feel unsafe in my own home. Had there been a local 'bobby' I would have telephoned."*
- *"At the 'Reclaim the Night' action people were saying 'I don't even let my weans out in the street', 'I wouldn't walk through the Vale on my own.'"*
- *"Problem is f... men; good men don't walk around with sticker on them."*
- *"Crime thrives where there is dark, empty space."*
- *"Some women are not safe indoors or out."*
- *"Conversation amongst men should be how do we stop women feeling like that. Guys don't know what to say to let women know they are safe."*
- *"Misogyny very deep rooted in our society - comes right from the Bible - women seen as either a virgin or a whore."*
- *"Can't go on a night out without letting your drink out of your sight."*
- *"Speaking as a gay man, if I see a gang of youths I will rush away because I have friends who have been murdered or attacked because they are 'poofs'."*
- *"The discrimination has moved on to trans-people - woman beaten up in pub because of this."*
- *"I have to teach my daughter how to stay safe, my mum didn't have to do that for me when I was her age."*

- *“Perception is different from reality—feeling of fear is not based on reality.”*
- *“We should be looking at how we can all feel safer.”*
- *“I came here from a safer place but I have not met anyone I feel frightened of; I don’t feel as frightened as I thought I would and I walk along the Leven twice a day, although not at night.”*
- *“I do worry a bit about my boys on the trains, where incidents are quite common, but apart from that it does feel like a fairly safe rural town here.”*
- *Instead of asking ‘what can the community do for me’ we should be asking ourselves ‘what can we be doing for the community’.*
- The “Reclaim the Night” group are trying to make people feel safer; people don’t tend to let their kids out as much but is it really unsafe?
- Men and women need to look for solutions together to make everyone feel safe.
- Vale to Jamestown needs to be opened up again, make it a feature.
- Need ramps on pavements for disabled users.

Local Context

- In 2017/18 there were 9,064 crimes and offences recorded in West Dunbartonshire. Of these non-sexual crimes of violence reduced by 7% but sexual crimes increased by 26% on the previous year [Recorded Crime in Scotland 2017-18](#)
- West Dunbartonshire has the second highest rate of domestic abuse in Scotland with 153 reported cases per 10,000 population, the Scottish average is 110 cases per 10,000 in 2017-18. In four out of five incidents there was a female victim and a male perpetrator [Domestic Abuse in Scotland 2017/18 Statistics](#)
- In June 2018 West Dunbartonshire Council became the first social landlord in Scotland to introduce a policy of zero tolerance of domestic abuse in its properties.
- West Dunbartonshire has a 22% higher overall crime rate than Scotland as a whole [Local Outcome Improvement Plan Strategic Assessment 2017 – 2027](#)
- Drug-related crimes in West Dunbartonshire were 73 per 10,000 population compared to Scottish average of 60 per 10,000 in 2017/18 [Drug-related Offences by Council Area 2017/18](#)
- 71% of people in West Dunbartonshire said they felt Very/Fairly safe walking home alone after dark this compared to a Scottish average of 84% [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)

Care and Maintenance

Positives

- Little vandalism - mostly done by the council!

Negatives

- Council charges too much for communal repairs in mixed tenant/owner flats.
- Council charges too much for uplift of large waste items and take too long to collect, should be free to reduce fly dumping.
- Council should be more pro-active in promoting recycling, upcycling and re-use.
- Council should be more pro-active in promoting home and business energy efficiency.
- The potential of the Vale is being ignored.
- For those needing smooth access, pavements and crossings tend to be uneven and shoddily installed.
- Instead of building new houses they should be looking after the old houses.
- Existing buildings/housing stock need to be maintained as well as new builds.
- Area generally looks neglected and not maintained. Young people could be involved in projects to improve this giving them a pride in their community and feeling of contributing and being valued - should be paid work not voluntary.
- More encouragement and promotion for community, community spaces, community cafes, gardening projects.



Community Comments and Suggestions

- *"The parks are maintained on a basic level but not well used. We must make better use of our parks!"*
- *"Too much grass which needs to be cut which is expensive. Would be better to plant wild flowers - less maintenance, save money, better for environment and more attractive."*
- *"Need to demolish the buildings that have been condemned and not leave them for years to deteriorate and make everyone feel demoralised and unvalued - they really make us feel uncared for."*
- *"Planning system is corrupt 'some' get permission, no good reason given to those who are refused – Council makes money by making people keep re-applying."*
- Need to clean and repair the streets and car parks as very dirty and shabby.
- Need to use paint to stop buildings looking shabby.
- Need more bins to reduce litter - they should be clean and maintained. Recycling bins alongside litter bins would be better for the environment and reduce landfill.

Local Context

- All forms of anti-social behavior were higher in West Dunbartonshire than the Scottish average with drug misuse/dealing, rowdy behaviour, animal nuisance and abandoned/burnt out vehicles being significantly higher [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)

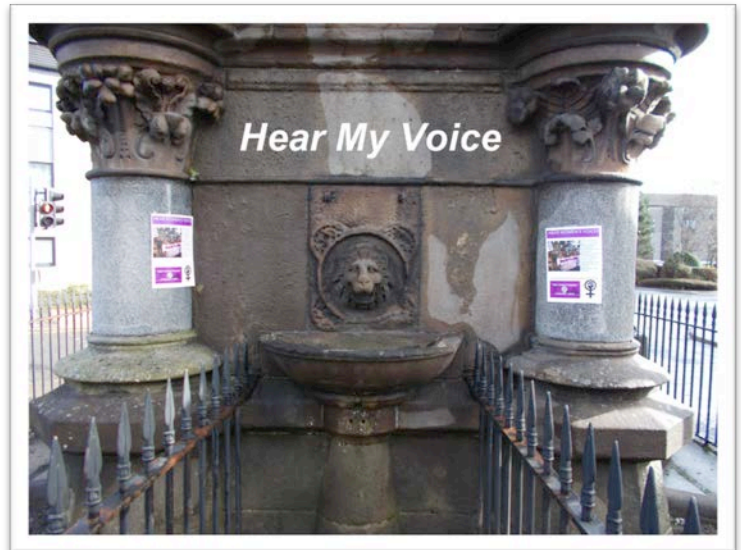
Influence and Sense of Control

Positives

- So many people with great ideas and experience just need to find ways to bring people together.
- Possible funding for community cinema/filmmaking to get young people involved.
- *Clydesider* is really positive for the local community.

Negatives

- People don't know what is available in their community.
- Most people do not feel they have a voice in decision-making processes and even when they are invited to take part, it feels tokenistic.



Community Comments and Suggestions

- *"People go to meetings and give their point of view, but they do not feel they are being listened to by decision makers at WDC or the National Park."*
- *"They do not ask the community appropriately and involve them in decision making: CHARETTES = CHARADES----TOURETTES!"*
- *"The process is inclusive at grassroots level but not at Council level."*
- *"The Council has control of many open spaces and buildings - they keep doing things to us, making changes, without really asking what we want, so money is spent and wasted doing things which don't really solve issues; shops and amenities are too expensive. If they were made more available, free or at least affordable, the community would have more control and be more active."*
- *"They keep doing things to us, rather than listening and doing what we ask, always putting up barriers, causing total disempowerment and de-motivation."*
- *"Community Alliance should have some teeth. Give power back to community."*
- *"Need different strands of WDC community representatives in community centres to help local groups - Haldane did bring the community activists together but there was a development worker and funding available."*
- Local community development worker could help people access funding applications and raise awareness of funding options.
- Need a community skills list + a community action list.
- People who are unemployed sent to charity shops outside the area – forced to do that but it needs to be people who want to volunteer.
- Need funding that works for grantees to allow us to get on and do the work.
- WDC need to have more honest conversations and encourage start-up social enterprises or part fund existing social enterprise.
- People should taking responsibility to clean up the streets.

Local Context

- 10% of people in West Dunbartonshire gave their views on land use in 2017 compared to 15% in Scotland as a whole [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)
- 16% of people in West Dunbartonshire volunteered compared to 28% across Scotland as a whole [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)
- Significantly fewer people felt they could influence local decisions (16%) or wanted greater involvement in decision-making in West Dunbartonshire (25%) than Scotland (23% and 33%) as a whole [Scottish Household Survey 2017](#)

Conclusion

This was the first consultation exercise run in partnership between Clydesider Creative and Inclusive Images and we were delighted with the level of participation from the local community.

Nine people took part in the weekly photography workshops and approximately 70 – 80 people attended the Vale in Focus Community Exhibition event. Between the conversations held on the day and the discussions at the workshops we collated 35 pages of notes and over 150 photos. We have shared as many of them as possible in this report and hope the content will be useful to the local community when identifying projects to develop, applying for funding or in future conversations with statutory bodies, policymakers and politicians.

We found the combination of participatory workshops and a community event brought in a diverse mix of voices to this Place Standard conversation. It was clear from discussions both during the workshops and at the community event that quality of life is linked very closely to place, and people of the Vale want to see improvements in both.

While some felt the duty of care was the responsibility of the local authority – or other statutory bodies – most were keen to be part of a process to bring about positive change in Alexandria and the Vale of Leven. However it was felt they could not do this alone and more easily accessible, localised support to help community groups take forward plans and initiatives was needed. Easy access to free community space was also regarded as essential, this was one of the recurring topics which came up in many of the discussions.

The Place Standard tool provided an excellent starting point for the discussions, however we do feel more could be done at a national level with the information and data being collated – especially as a digital version is available. It would make an interesting map of local opinion if all of the data shared could be viewed online and even has the potential to inform local policy and planning decisions.

Printed copies of this report will be given to all of the community groups who attended our Community Marketplace and copies will be available in Alexandria Library and Loch Lomond Craft Centre. We will also be sending copies to West Dunbartonshire Council's Communities Team, Community Alliance group and the Scottish Government's Place Standard team. Digital versions will be available from our website and the information will be shared on our social media pages. We will also be publishing an article about the process and the report in Issue 10 of *Clydesider* community magazine.

As we send the report away to print we know of plans to use the information gathered in at least three funding applications – plus one we are submitting. We would like to keep track of how the report is used in the future so if you use it please drop us an email to theclydesider@gmail.com and let us know.

Acknowledgements

Inclusive Images who planned and facilitated the participatory photography workshops, organised the community exhibition and took photos of the community event.

Loch Lomond Craft Centre who helped with recruitment, promotion and facilitation of the workshops and at the community event.

Clydesider Creative volunteers who helped with organising and supporting the Vale in Focus community event.

Art Classes by Van Gash who ran the children's art workshop during the community event.

The people of Alexandria and the Vale who shared their time, ideas and experiences in the workshops and at the Vale in Focus community event.



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