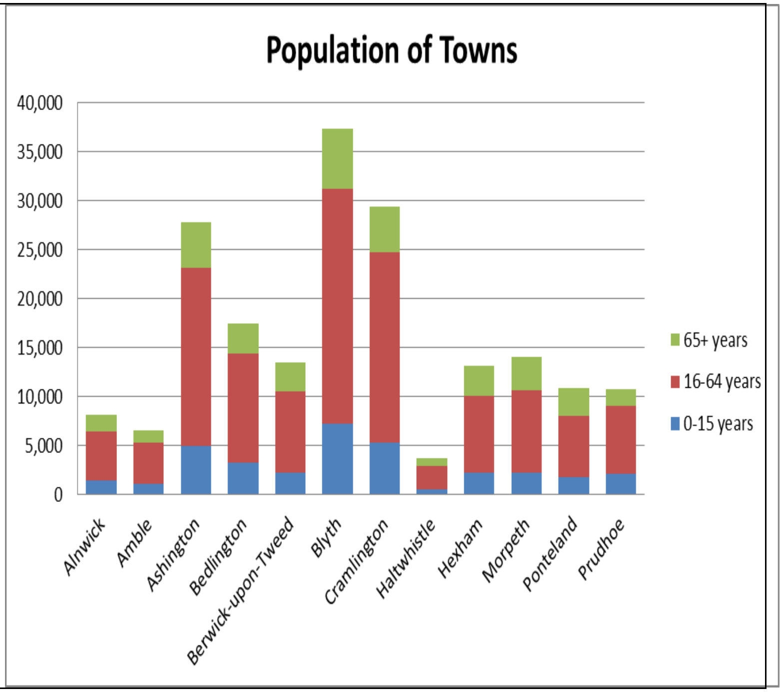
The 12 Northumberland Towns

The table below gives basic demographics of the 12 participating Towns to provide some context for the benchmarking study. With a population of 37,300, Blyth is the largest town. Haltwhistle is the smallest with a population of just 3,800. Proportionately, Ponteland has the largest older population of 26.6% aged 65 and over. Prudhoe has the smallest at 15.6% of the 65+ age group. Both Blyth and Prudhoe have the largest percentage of 0-15 year olds – 19.3%. Morpeth has the lowest proportion of younger residents at 15.7%.

Population	All Persons	Change	Sex		Age		
Census 2011		(from 2001)	All Males	All Females	0-15 years	16-64 years	65+ years
Alnwick	8,100	300	3,800	4,300	1,400	5,000	1,700
Amble	6,600	0	3,200	3,400	1,100	4,200	1,300
Ashington	27,800	300	13,600	14,200	5,000	18,100	4,700
Bedlington	17,500	600	8,500	9,000	3,300	11,100	3,100
Berwick-upon-Tweed	13,400	400	6,400	7,000	2,300	8,200	3,000
Blyth	37,300	1,500	18,200	19,200	7,200	24,000	6,100
Cramlington	29,400	-1,100	14,100	15,300	5,300	19,400	4,700
Haltwhistle	3,800	0	1,900	1,900	600	2,300	800
Hexham	13,100	500	6,200	6,900	2,200	7,900	3,000
Morpeth	14,000	200	6,800	7,300	2,200	8,400	3,500
Ponteland	10,900	100	5,300	5,600	1,800	6,200	2,900
Prudhoe	10,900	600	5,200	5,600	2,100	7,000	1,700



The town centre area includes the core shopping streets and car parks attached or adjacent to those streets.

Summary of Key Performance Indicator Data

	Occupied Commercial units	Retail by Comparison/ Convenience %	Key attractors	Vacant Units	Markets/ traders	Rents £/sq.ft.	Yields %	Footfall (Market Day/Non market day)	Car Parking	Vacant spaces (quiet day)	Vacant spaces (busy/ market day)	Business Confidence (Turnover increase/ decrease) %	Shoppers Satisfaction (Good retail/ Good leisure) %	Shoppers Origin (Local/ Visitors/ Tourists) %
Alnwick	186	78/22	8 (8%)	14 (7%)	7	36	n/a	103/100	728	39%	40%	30/5	47/69	43/26/32
Amble	81	71/29	2 (5%)	6 (7%)	0	15	6	62/53	321	58%	40%	42/0	71/39	77/13/10
Ashington	193	82/18	10 (9%)	27 (11%)	26	35	9	299/178	1048	30%	21%	No data	17/17	No data
Bedlington	107	79/21	1 (2%)	13 (11%)	3	21	n/a	82/57	600	54%	44%	42/8	8/7	60/36/4
Berwick	240	88/12	9 (7%)	24 (9%)	4	45	8	177/116	1070	56%	48%	15/50	16/41	41/10/48
Blyth	213	62/38	11 (10%)	22 (9%)	23	35	9	151/140	1089	35%	19%	27/23	11/24	74/22/3
Cramlington	127	79/21	10 (14%)	10 (8%)	13	n/a	n/a	410/332	1743	22%	20%	43/14	68/75	52/44/4
Halthwhistle	67	71/29	2 (6%)	5 (7%)	3	13	n/a	54/39	160	32%	26%	No data	45/51	No data
Hexham	296	80/20	16 (10%)	26 (8%)	16	45	8	233/179	1862	30%	31%	24/21	43/80	42/34/24
Morpeth	219	77/23	12 (9%)	21 (9%)	17	41	8	141/110	1560	37%	33%	36/28	86/65	33/51/17
Ponteland	65	57/43	2 (5%)	5 (8%)	6	13	n/a	61/36	241	34%	29%	17/17	47/63	78/19/3
Prudhoe	91	71/29	2 (5%)	4(2%)	0	19	n/a	85/68	446	41%	33%	31/31	31/61	64/33/3
North East	n/a	76/24	8%	9%	15	28	8	154/115	n/a	33%	26%	33/17	44/52	57/32/11
National Small Towns	n/a	79/21	6%	8%	17	27	8	122/90	n/a	36%	28%	44/16	52/59	53/31/16

AMT Town Benchmarking captures data on 12 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and compares them to regional figures which are an amalgamation of the data for all the towns in a specific region and national figures which are the average for all towns which participated in Benchmarking during the same year. The resulting information helps identify high performing and under achieving towns, identifies strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement, measures the impact of initiatives and developments within the town centres and facilitates the measurement of town centre performance year on year.

The KPIs are as follows:

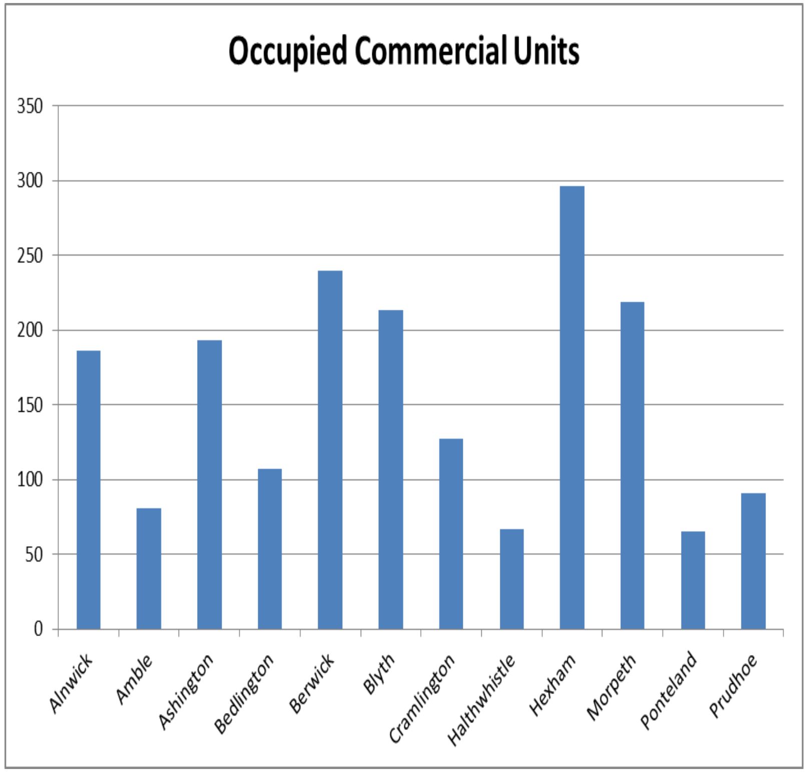
Number of commercial units	Retail by Comparison/Convenience	Key attractors/multiple trader representation	Number of vacant units
Number of markets/traders	Zone A retail rents	Prime retail property yields	Footfall
Car parking availability/usage	Business confidence survey	Town centre users survey	Shoppers origin survey

The AMT Town Benchmarking system classifies a 'large town' as having upwards of 250 commercial units, of the 12 Northumberland Towns that participated in the study, only Berwick (240 occupied units and 24 vacant units) and Hexham (296 occupied units and 26 vacant units) were classed as large. However for the purposes of overall comparisons, mainly Small Town averages were used. When compared with the local working age population, Cramlington had the lowest proportion of occupied commercial units (0.7%) and Alnwick and Hexham had the highest (3.7%).

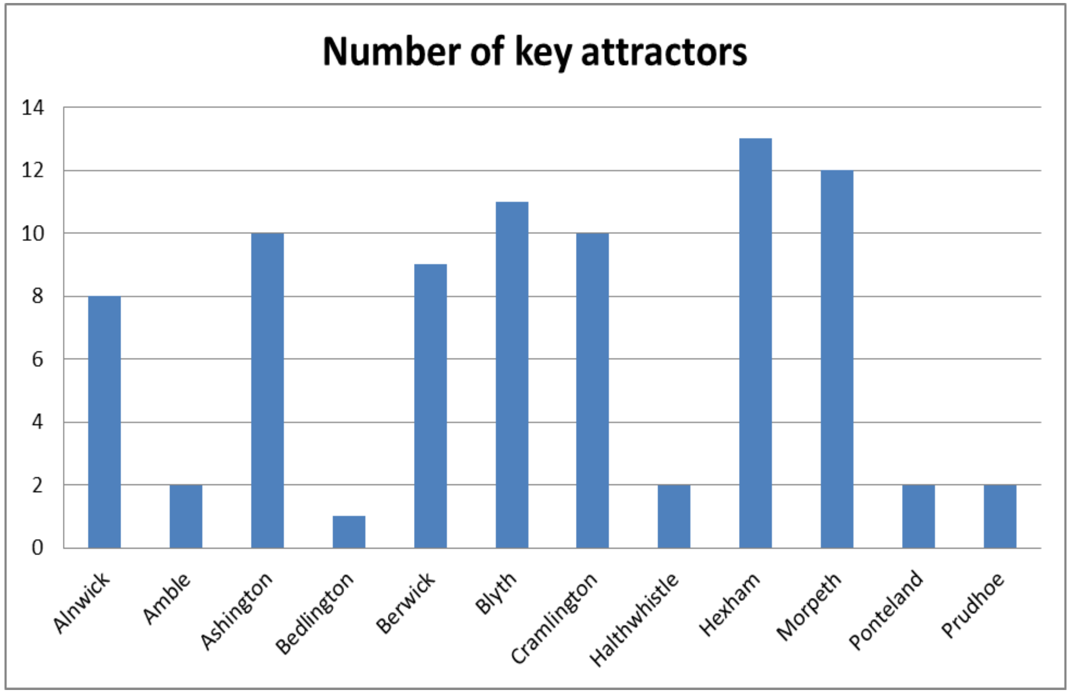
The following points summarise the main findings of the key performance indicators.

- Hexham has the largest number of occupied commercial units (296) and Haltwhistle has the least (67).
- Blyth (62:38) and Ponteland (57:43) have a low ratio of Comparison versus Convenience stores – traditional retail theory suggests that a good balance of comparison and convenience is anything over two thirds comparison offering. Berwick (88:12) and Ashington (82:18) are heavily supplied with comparison goods.

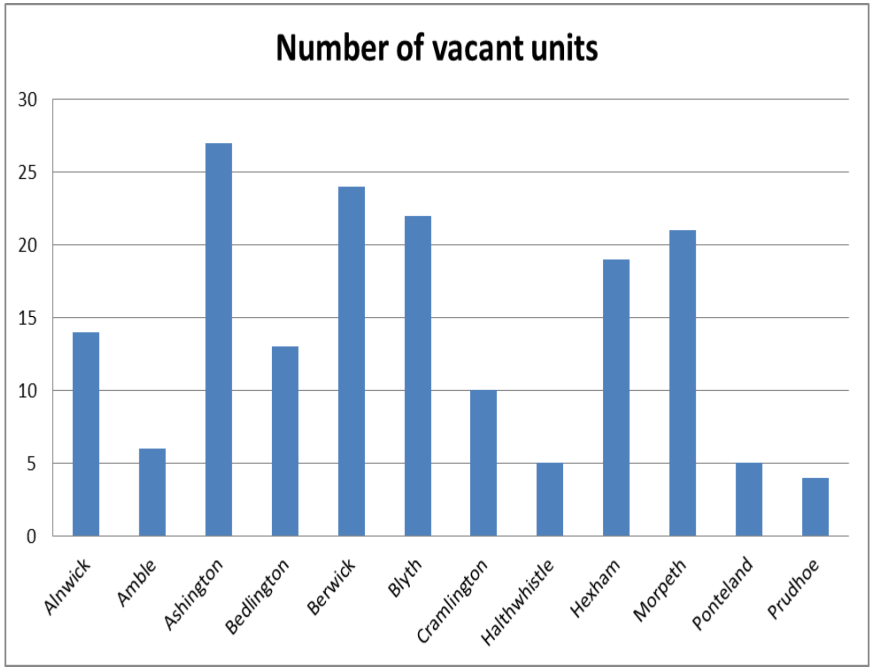
- Ashington and Morpeth are dominated by A1 shops (60%). Ponteland has the smallest proportion of this use class (32%), but it has the highest proportion of financial and professional services (25%).



- Ponteland and Alnwick offer the highest proportion of restaurants and cafes (11%), Haltwhistle has the largest proportion of drinking establishments (10%) and Amble and Prudhoe dominate in terms of hot food takeaways (9%).

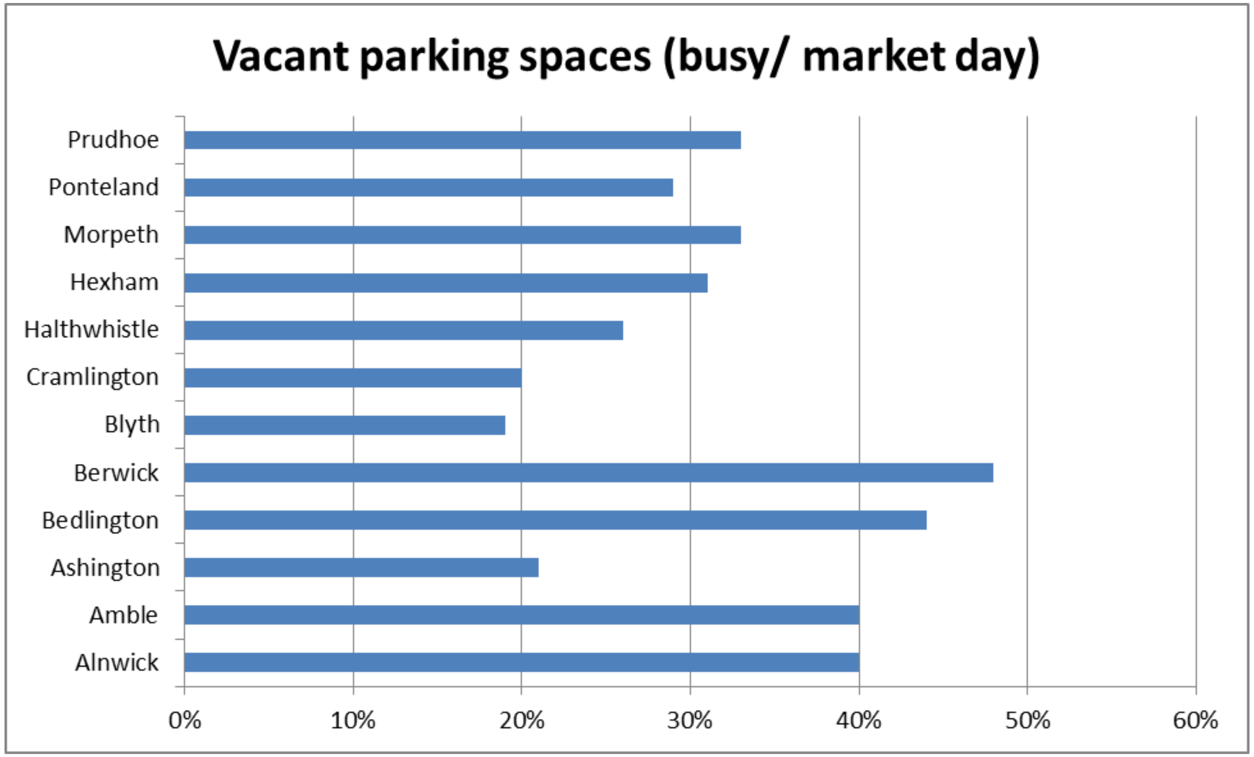


- Hexham has the most key attractors (13), but Cramlington has the highest proportion compared with other shops (14%). Bedlington has the lowest (2%). Conversely, in terms of the variety and mix of independent shops which may provide a "unique selling point" for a town, Bedlington has the highest percentage of independent shops (84%) and Cramlington has the lowest (31%).
- All towns have unit vacancy rates well below the national average of 14%. Bedlington has the highest rate of 11% and Prudhoe has the lowest (2%).



- Ashington and Blyth have the largest selection of Market traders (26 and 23 respectively).
- Retail rents can provide a useful indication of a town's performance and highlight how attractive it is to businesses. Berwick and Hexham have the highest retail rents at £45/sq.ft, which is considerably higher than the regional and national averages. Ponteland and Halthwhistle have the lowest retail rents at £13/sq.ft, less than half of the regional and national average.
- Although a simple snapshot, the footfall counts reveal Cramlington to be the busiest town with an average of 410 persons per 10 minutes on a busy/market day. Haltwhistle had the smallest footfall average of 54 persons per 10 minutes.

- In February 2013, a British Car Parking Conference outlined that a 15% vacancy level indicates that the pricing and provision levels are set correctly. There are positive vacancy rates above this figure in a number of reports, however there are also negative comments from those surveyed about the parking offer. Further investigation may be necessary to explore any mismatch between reported parking provision and the perceptions of local users and other issues such as seasonality should be considered, together with wider evidence and more recent changes to parking policies. All Towns involved in the study, via the snapshot taken, had car parking vacancy levels upwards of 15% ranging from 19% in Blyth to 48% in Berwick.



- Business confidence appears lowest in Berwick (in future Turnover terms). Half of businesses expected their turnover to decrease in the following year and only 15% expected an increase. Amble, Bedlington and Cramlington indicated more confidence, with almost half of businesses anticipating an increase in turnover.

- Bedlington displays the least shopper satisfaction with only 8% considering the variety of shops to be good or very good. Morpeth displays the most shopper satisfaction with 86% of town centre users rating the offer as good or very good.

- The most satisfaction in terms of the leisure and cultural offering was found in Hexham, where 80% of users considered the provision to be good or very good. The least amount of leisure and cultural satisfaction was in Bedlington with only 7% considering the offer to be good or very good.

- Market Towns that appear to generate a predominantly local shopper population are Amble (77%), Bedlington (60%), Ponteland (78%) and Prudhoe (64%). Alnwick (58%), Berwick (58%), Hexham (55%) and Morpeth (68%) have a heavier influx of Visitors and Tourists.

Survey evidence

Although the Confidence Survey only covered a sample of the Town's businesses, the age of business data gives an indication of the survival rates in each of the Towns. Both Berwick and Cramlington had the largest proportion of businesses based in those towns for more than 10 years (81%).

	Less than 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	10 years +
Alnwick	10%	29%	5%	57%
Amble	0%	25%	0%	75%
Ashington	No data	No data	No data	No data
Bedlington	0%	31%	0%	69%
Berwick	10%	5%	5%	81%
Blyth	4%	8%	8%	79%
Cramlington	0%	0%	13%	81%
Haltwhistle	No data	No data	No data	No data
Hexham	8%	12%	27%	54%
Morpeth	8%	15%	15%	62%
Ponteland	0%	33%	17%	50%
Prudhoe	6%	19%	13%	63%
North East	5%	19%	14%	63%
National Small Towns	7%	21%	15%	57%

The business and shopper surveys both asked for the positive and negative aspects of each town centre. The most significant comments are summarised below.

	Business		Shopper	
	Positive	**Negative**	**Positive**	**Negative**
Alnwick	Local custom	Parking	Access to services	Parking
Amble	Local custom	Parking	Convenience	Parking
Ashington	No data	No data	Access to services and easy to walk around	Physical appearance
Bedlington	Local custom	Rental values/ property costs	Convenience	Leisure facilities
Berwick	Tourist custom	Parking	Easy to walk around	Shopping
Blyth	Local custom and parking	Prosperity of the town	Access to services	Physical appearance
Cramlington	Local custom	Parking	Access to services	Parking
Halthwhistle	No data	No data	Easy to walk around	Conflicting data
Hexham	Local custom	Parking	Access to services	Parking
Morpeth	Local custom	Parking	Easy to walk around	Parking
Ponteland	Prosperity, location, local custom	Parking, rental values/ property costs, competition from elsewhere	Access to services	Physical appearance
Prudhoe	Local custom	Parking, rental values/ property costs, competition from elsewhere	Access to services	Shopping

Car Parking was mentioned as the most negative aspect in 8 town centres by either the businesses surveyed, the shoppers surveyed or corroborated by both.

Ashington and Blyth had the highest proportion of negative comments on their physical appearance, and Bedlington, Ponteland and Prudhoe were proving rather expensive for businesses located there.

Visitor Satisfaction	Negative Aspects			
	Physical Appearance	**Shopping**	**Car Parking**	**Other significant**
Alnwick	17%	40%	64%	39% Transport
Amble	43%	22%	69%	53% Leisure Facilities
Ashington	77%	76%	31%	65% Leisure Facilities
Bedlington	35%	74%	21%	80% Leisure Facilities
Berwick	69%	74%	72%	47% Leisure Facilities
Blyth	85%	82%	18%	68% Markets
Cramlington	28%	21%	59%	35% Markets
Halthwhistle	39%	47%	25%	52% Restaurants
Hexham	37%	53%	58%	33% Pubs, Bars, Nightclubs
Morpeth	6%	12%	53%	35% Cultural Activities
Ponteland	46%	37%	35%	41% Markets
Prudhoe	59%	63%	30%	54% Cultural Activities
North East	43%	48%	40%	40% Cultural Activities
National Small Towns	29%	42%	39%	37% Leisure Facilities and Cultural Activities

Visitors were highly dissatisfied with the shopping in Blyth and the lack of leisure facilities were the most significant negative aspect for visitors to Bedlington.

Key Findings by Town

Alnwick

- 65% of the A1 shops in Alnwick are regional/independent which is the same proportion as the North East Small Towns average but 10% lower than the National Small Towns average. 34% of the A1 shops have a nationwide presence, 26% of which are multiple traders.
- 53% of town centre users felt that the 'variety of shops' in the town centre was either 'very poor' (41%) or 'poor' (12%). Improving the 'retail offer' was a key theme to emerge when town centre users were provided with the opportunity to make suggestions.
- Footfall in Alnwick is very consistent. On a market day, the count is 103 persons per 10 minutes, whilst on a non-market day, the figure slightly drops to 100. The market day footfall count in Alnwick is lower than both the regional (154) and national (122) figures, whilst the non-market day average is slightly higher than the national figure (90), but again lower than the regional one (115).
- On both a market and non-market day, car parking vacancy rates hover around the 40% figure which is higher than the regional and national averages. On a farmers market day this reduces to 26%.
- 81% of Alnwick's businesses reported that 'car parking' was a negative aspect of the town centre, noticeably higher than the North East and National Small Towns average of 53%.
- 64% of town centre users stated that 'car parking' was a negative aspect of Alnwick, again noticeably higher than the regional (40%) and national (39%) averages. A number of qualitative comments centred on the need to introduce free parking and remove parking in Market Square.

Amble

- Footfall in Amble on a busy day is 62 persons per 10 minutes, whilst on a quiet day the figure is 53. Both sets of figures are much lower than the regional (154/115) and national (122/90) averages.
- 38% of those interviewed reported that they spent £10.01-£20 on an average visit to the town centre which is higher than regional (30%) and national (32%) averages.
- 71% of town centre users felt the 'variety of shops' in the town centre was either 'good' (55%) or 'very good' (16%), considerably higher than the regional (44%) and national (52%) averages.
- Town centre users suggestions to improve Amble focussed on 'car parking', 'cleanliness', 'retail offer', and 'shop fronts'.
- 53% felt that 'leisure facilities' and 48% felt that 'cultural activities' were negative aspects of the town centre.
- Overall, on a busy day, 40% of all car parking is vacant, whilst this figure increases to 58% on a quiet day. Both figures are much higher than the national averages of 28% on a busy day and 36% on a quiet day.
- 91% of Amble's businesses stated that 'car parking' was a negative aspect of operating in the town centre, considerably higher than the national and regional averages (53%).
- 69% of town centre users stated that 'car parking' was a negative aspect of Amble, 30% higher than the national average.

Ashington

- 62% of the A1 shops in Ashington are independent/regional and 38% have a nationwide presence, which is 13% higher than the National Small Towns average. 29% of the nationwide shops are multiple traders.
- 83% of town centre users felt the 'variety of shops' in the town centre was either 'very poor' (44%) or 'poor' (39%). This is much higher than the national average of 47%. Improvement to the 'retail offer' was one of the key themes to emerge when town centre users were asked to make suggestions. A number of comments centred on the need to reduce Charity, Pawn and Phone shops.
- Footfall in Ashington on a market day is 299 persons per 10 minutes, whilst on a non-market day the figure drops to 178. These figures are much higher than the regional (154/115) and national (122/90) averages.
- 83% of respondents reported that the 'leisure and cultural' offering in Ashington town centre was 'poor' (49%) or 'very poor' (34%) – the National Small Town's average is 41%.
- 75% of town centre users felt that the physical appearance of Ashington was either 'poor' (37%) or 'very poor' (35%), more than double the national average of 26%. A popular theme to emerge from the qualitative comments was to improve 'cleanliness/appearance'.
- 53% of town centre users stated that 'restaurants' were a negative aspect, implying that an improved eating out offer was required.

Bedlington

- 40% of the units in Bedlington town centre are A1 shops, which is lower than the regional and national averages of 53%.
- 31% of those interviewed reported that they spent £5.01-£10 on an average visit to the town centre. 20% spent £10.01-£20.
- 92% of town centre users felt that the 'variety of shops' in the town centre was either 'very poor' (49%) or 'poor' (43%), substantially higher than the regional (56%) and national (47%) figures. A large number of suggestions from town centre users highlighted the need to improve the town centre.
- 63% of Bedlington's businesses and 58% of Bedlington's visitors chose 'car parking' as a positive aspect. This is 24% higher than the national figure for businesses and 12% higher than the national average for visitors.
- 93% of respondents reported that the 'leisure and cultural' offering in Bedlington town centre was 'very poor' (52%) or 'poor' (41%), more than twice as high as the National Small Towns average of 41%.

Berwick

- 85% of town centre users felt that the 'variety of shops' in the town centre was either 'very poor' (43%) or 'poor' (42%). The National Small Towns average is 47%. Improvement to the 'retail offer' was one of the popular themes to emerge when town centre users were asked to make suggestions.
- 9% of the units in the defined town centre of Berwick were vacant at the time of the study, 1% higher than the national average. A number of qualitative comments centred on the need to reduce the number of vacant premises in the town centre.
- On a market day 48% of all car parking is vacant and this figure increases to 56% on a non-market day. Both figures are much higher than the national average of 28%. It was noted during the retail audit that a large number of cars were parked illegally on the streets.
- 90% of business respondents and 73% of town centre users stated that 'car parking' was a negative aspect of using Berwick town centre.
- 79% of businesses reported that compared to last year their turnover had 'decreased', noticeably higher than the regional (24%) and national (28%) figures.
- 76% of businesses stated that 'competition from out of town supermarkets' and 67% stated that 'rental values/property costs' were negative aspects of operating in the town centre.

Blyth

- 60% of the A1 shops in Blyth are regional/independent, whilst 40% have a nationwide presence, 10% of which are key attractors. The proportion of shops with a nationwide presence is higher in Blyth than both the regional (35%) and national (25%) averages.
- 36% of participants in the Shopper survey reported that they spent £10.01-£20 on an average visit to the town centre, higher than both the regional (30%) and national (32%) figures.
- 89% of town centre users felt that the ‘variety of shops’ in the town centre was either ‘very poor’ (56%) or ‘poor’ (33%), 85% of users felt the ‘physical appearance’ of Blyth was ‘very poor’ (39%) or ‘poor’ (46%) and 70% of town users rated the ‘cleanliness’ as ‘very poor’ (25%) or ‘poor’ (45%). In all cases these proportions are considerably higher than the regional and national averages. Improvement to the ‘retail offer’ was one of the main themes to emerge when town centre users were asked to make suggestions.
- 23 market traders were present at the time of the audit which is higher than the regional (15) and national (17) averages. 68% of town centre users rated the ‘market’ as a negative aspect of the town centre, again much higher than regional (32%) and national (29%) opinion. Furthermore, when asked to comment on how improvements could be made to Blyth ‘the market’ was one of the key themes.
- 82% of businesses reported that ‘car parking’ was a positive aspect of operating in Blyth, more than double the North East (35%) and National Small Towns (39%) averages. Indeed, over half of the visitors confirmed that ‘car parking’ was a positive aspect of using Blyth Town Centre.

Cramlington

- 8% of the units in the defined town centre were vacant at the time of the audit. To place this data in context, in March 2014, the Local Data Company reported that the vacancy rate in ALL town centres across Great Britain was 14%.
- 94% of participants in the User survey visited Cramlington at least once a week and 42% reported that they spent £20.01-£50 on an average visit to the town centre.
- Footfall on a busy day is 410 persons per 10 minutes, whilst on a quiet day the figure drops to 332. Both sets of figures are very high for a small town, however it should be pointed out that the retail offer and structure in Cramlington is very different from those with which it is compared.
- 59% of town centre users stated that 'car parking' was a negative aspect of Cramlington. Qualitative comments centred on the need to reduce the time limitations.
- The majority of town centre users visited Cramlington for 'Convenience Shopping' (77%) and 78% stayed in the town centre for less than 2hours.

Haltwhistle

- The majority (67%) of town centre users visited Haltwhistle for ‘convenience shopping’, 25% higher than the National Small Towns average and 89% at least once a week.
- Footfall in Haltwhistle on a busy day is 54 persons per 10 minutes, whilst on a quiet day the figure is 39. Visitor numbers are considerably lower than regional (154/115) and national (175/121) averages.
- 65% of town centre users felt that the physical appearance of Haltwhistle was ‘good’ or ‘very good’, this reflects public opinion at both regional and national levels.
- 52% of town centre users found ‘restaurants’ to be a negative aspect of the town centre and 50% stated ‘markets’ were a negative aspect. Both figures are substantially higher than regional and national averages, which may imply that both are in need of improvement.
- Qualitative comments received about Haltwhistle centred on improving the ‘car parking’, ‘retail offer’, ‘restaurants’ and ‘cleanliness/appearance’.

Hexham

- 68% of the A1 shops in Hexham are regional/independent whilst 32% have a nationwide presence, 22% are multiple traders. The figure for nationwide traders is higher than the national (25%) average.
- 57% of town centre users felt that the 'variety of shops' in the town centre was either 'poor' (41%) or 'very poor' (16%) – this reflects users opinions both regionally and nationally. Improvement to the 'retail offer' was one of the key themes to emerge when town centre users were asked to make suggestions.
- In terms of 'on street' parking, only 5% is vacant on a market day and 4% on a non-market day which is lower than the respective national averages of 14% and 22%.
- 58% of town centre users stated that 'car parking' was a negative aspect of Hexham. 'Car parking' was also a dominant theme to emerge when town centre users and businesses were asked to make suggestions to improve the town, comments focussed on free parking and reduced rates.
- 80% of respondents reported that the 'leisure and cultural' offering in Hexham town centre was 'good' (53%) or 'very good' (27%), much higher than the regional (52%) and national (59%) averages.

Morpeth

- 59% of the A1 shops in Morpeth are independent/regional and 42% have a nationwide presence, which is higher than the regional (35%) and national (25%) averages.
- 86% of town centre users felt that the 'variety of shops' in the town centre was either 'good' (68%) or 'very good' (18%), substantially higher than the North East (44%) and National Small Towns (52%) averages.
- Footfall in Morpeth on a market day is 141 persons per 10 minutes, whilst on a non-market day the figure drops to 110. Both sets of figures are higher than the national average but slightly lower than regional counts (154/115).
- 95% of town centre users felt that the physical appearance of Morpeth was either 'good' (58%) or 'very good' (37%). Both regional (60%) and national (75%) satisfaction was much lower.
- 62% of respondents considered that the 'leisure and cultural' offering in Morpeth town centre was 'good' or 'very good' compared with an average of 52% in North East Small Towns and 59% in National Small Towns.
- Improvements to 'traffic/transport' were a common theme to emerge when town centre users were asked to make suggestions.
- 74% of businesses stated that 'car parking' was a negative aspect of the town centre, noticeably higher than both regional and national averages of 53%. Furthermore over half of town centre users felt that 'car parking' was a negative aspect of Morpeth, again higher than regional (40%) and national (39%) averages. Qualitative comments from both town centre users and businesses focussed on improvements to 'car parking'.

Ponteland

- 32% of the units in the town centre are A1 shops – much lower than North East and National Small Town average of 53%. In fact, 25% of the units are A2 Financial and Professional services, 11% more than the national average.
- 30% of those surveyed spent £20.01-£50 on a normal visit to Ponteland, indicating a higher level of spend than recorded at regional (24%) and national (20%) level.
- 78% of postcodes gathered were from Ponteland itself, much higher than visitor averages in North East Small Towns (57%) and National Small Towns (53%).
- 71% of town centre users felt that 'restaurants' were a positive aspect, 27% higher than national and regional averages.
- The two main themes to emerge from the town centre user suggestions for improvement were revamping the 'Merton Way Shopping Centre' and 'physical improvements' to the area.

Prudhoe

- 64% of town centre users lived in Prudhoe, whilst only 3% were from those living more than 30minutes drive away. 92% of users visited Prudhoe at least once a week.
- 69% of users rated the 'variety of shops' in Prudhoe as 'poor' (50%) or 'very poor' (19%), 22% higher than the National Small Towns average.
- Only 2% of Prudhoe's units in the defined town centre were vacant at the time of audit – the lowest rate encountered in the study of all 12 towns and lower than regional (9%) and national (8%) averages.
- 63% of town centre users felt that 'shopping' was a negative aspect of Prudhoe, much higher than the national average of 42%. 59% considered 'physical appearance' to be a negative aspect and 54% chose 'cultural activities'. Both figures are higher than regional and national averages.
- 'Improving the range of shops' was the most popular outcome of the town centre user suggestions for improvement. Specific sub-categories were 'another supermarket to provide competition to the Co-Op' and the 'need for a butcher'.