

# Community Insight: Buckhaven

Combining place data for deeper  
understanding.

March 2022

In partnership with the  
William Grant Foundation.

## Background

This briefing is part of a joint project from the David Hume Institute (DHI) and the William Grant Foundation using open data to gain new insights into communities in Scotland.

The approach, methodology and source code for analysis of open data to gain insights into Scotland's places can be found on [Github](#) and the findings are on the David Hume Institute [website](#).

A key finding from this analysis was that although quantitative data can provide useful information, there are risks if it is not combined with qualitative data. By using quantitative data and local knowledge together it is possible to gain a more accurate insight.

This community insight briefing brings together open source quantitative and qualitative data from conversations with individuals from Buckhaven, Denbeath and Muiredge as part of the David Hume Institute's [Action Project](#). The aim of this briefing is to increase understanding of risks and assumptions in analysis of data about Scotland's places.

## About Buckhaven

Buckhaven is a port town of around 4500 residents on the east coast of Fife. It overlooks the Firth of Forth and has scenic beaches and coastal walks close by. The town has a strong sense of local history and identity. It was once a thriving weaving village and fishing port. As these industries declined, coal mining took their place and provided employment for local people. The town's industrial and social history is documented in a permanent and interactive display at [Buckhaven Museum](#).

Corra Foundation began working alongside the community in Buckhaven in 2017, helping to facilitate and enable capacity building within the community; widening community participation; seeking out voices that are seldom heard; and ultimately resulting in locally-led actions being taken. Some examples of recent community activity in Buckhaven are:

- A Smart Play Network project set up for children to enjoy and benefit from outdoor learning, with funding received for outdoor clothing and wellies.
- A six week pilot drama programme for adults with additional support needs and mental health issues, which has benefitted participants' confidence and social wellbeing. This led to the development of the Buckhynd Theatre Players and now includes a youth theatre group and annual pantomime which sold over 900 tickets in its first year.

- A community group project to send weekly handwritten cards to those who do not use the Internet to keep in touch, which has helped combat isolation and loneliness.
- A community baking group formed after nine members attended two taster baking sessions. Buckhynd Community Bakery is now working towards becoming a social enterprise and is developing a partnership with another Fife social enterprise, Scotland the Bread.

## What people in Buckhaven said (qualitative data)

In November 2020, DHI reached out to community members in Buckhaven in partnership with the [Corra Foundation](#) to take part in a conversation about their thoughts on the actions needed to build a Scotland that is sustainable, prosperous, inclusive and fair.

What came through strongly in the conversation was the close sense of community in Buckhaven. One participant said “we might be a small town with big challenges, but the community spirit is really strong”. Other key points from the conversation are captured in the illustration below.



Figure 1: Illustration of the Action Project community conversation in Buckhaven from November 2020.

Residents also expressed their desire to move beyond stereotypical and stigmatising labels for Buckhaven which do not paint a full picture of what is a challenged, but close-knit and vibrant community. Some of these included 'deprived' and 'left behind'. One lady said "It's a great place to live. A really close community. I don't feel deprived. I hate the word".

Another participant said "people from outside of the community often don't give us credit for all the good stuff here", highlighting the importance of policy makers listening to insider perspectives. It was also expressed that political institutions often felt very far away from people in Buckhaven.

With support and encouragement from Corra Foundation , the people of Buckhaven want to take further actions to create a stronger and more hopeful community. These include more community clean-up schemes, community centre activities, committee steering groups for young people, participatory events that include everyone, and knowledge swaps.

## **What does the quantitative data tell us**

The intermediate zone of Buckhaven, Denbeath and Muiredge is in the second decile of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). There are ten deciles and each make up 10% of the index. The first decile is defined as the most deprived and the tenth the least. This means that Buckhaven, Denbeath and Muiredge falls between the 10% and 20% most deprived areas in Scotland, as described by the SIMD.

Female life expectancy is 77 years, compared to a Scottish average of 82. Male life expectancy is 74 years, compared to a Scottish average of 77.

We found that Buckhaven has fewer charities, businesses, and community spaces per 1000 people than the Scottish average. For analysis, we used the intermediate data zone called Buckhaven, Denbeath and Muiredge.

From analysis of public data, Buckhaven, Denbeath and Muiredge has less community assets and infrastructure than Scotland as a whole (Scotland average in brackets):

- 16 businesses per 1000 people (40.5 businesses per 1000 people)

- 1.53 charities per 1000 people (2.66 charities per 1000 people)
- 0.44 community spaces per 1000 people (0.56 community spaces per 1000 people)

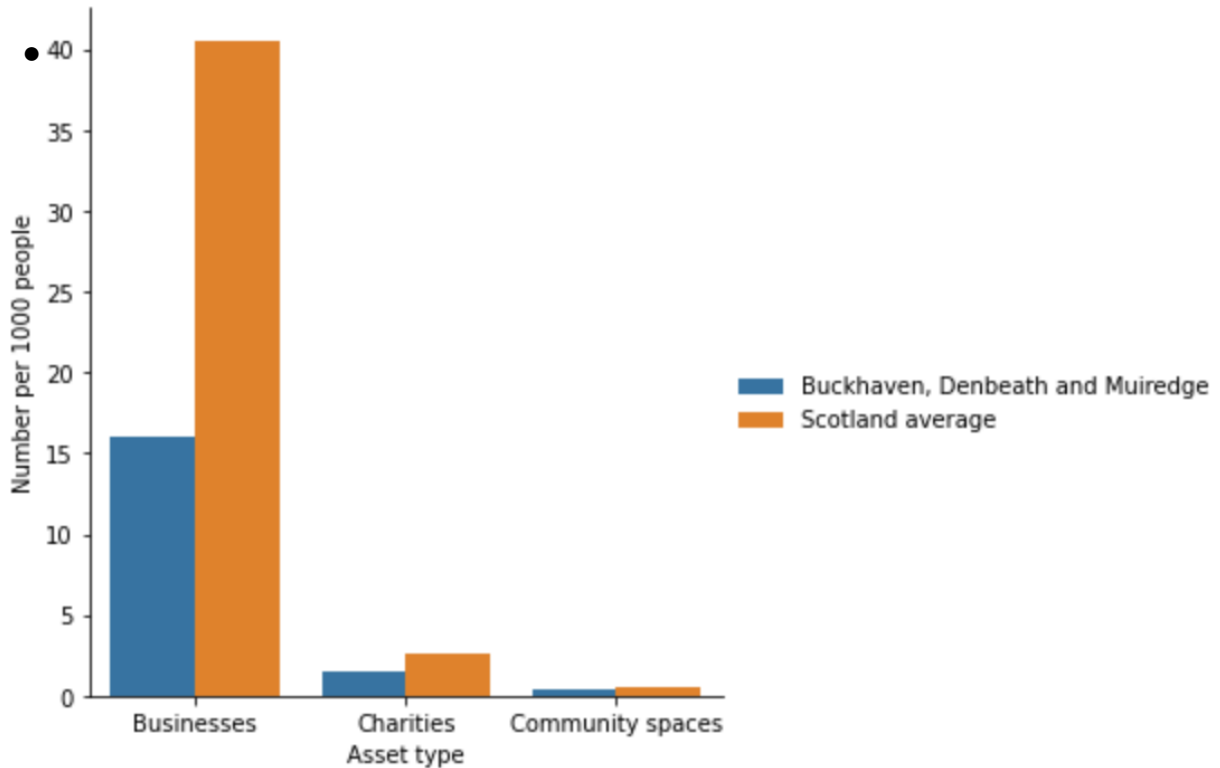


Figure 2. Organisations and community spaces per 1000 people in Buckhaven, Denbeath and Muiredge compared to the Scotland average.

## Combining insights and analysis

Geospatial data is often used by charities and governmental organisations to directly inform policy and service delivery<sup>1</sup>. This analysis combined SIMD data and our own data on community infrastructure with our findings from community conversations undertaken as part of The Action Project.

<sup>1</sup> Bowles (2021). [How charities can use geospatial data](#). Catalyst. Online. Accessed 9th March 2022.

The quantitative data is useful in telling us that Buckhaven has less community spaces for people to meet in than the Scottish average, and this is backed up by what we were told in community conversations. However, it is important not to make assumptions based solely on data. As an outsider looking in, being led by the data could risk jumping to conclusions and prescribing solutions. Although there are less community spaces than average, there is no lack of community spirit.

Data cannot capture the full extent of community action (also known as social capital), much of which tends to be more relational and informal, and therefore less likely to be recorded.

Datasets alone give a narrow understanding of communities, or increase stigmatisation, through the use of labels like 'deprived'. Measures of deprivation such as the SIMD rely on a choice of domains and indicators, which are open to value judgements. The weightings given to these domains and indicators can also be based on subjective decision making.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of Buckhaven, this point seems particularly relevant in the 'Geographic access to services' domain of the SIMD, where it is placed in the 7th decile. This is calculated based on journey times by car and public transport to a variety of essential locations including GP surgeries, schools and shops, as well as from the percentage of premises that do not have access to superfast broadband.

The SIMD implies that access to general infrastructure in Buckhaven is better than at least 60% of places in Scotland, whilst access to community infrastructure like charities and community spaces is below the national average.

However, within the SIMD access to services domain there is a 60/30% weighting in favour of car use over public transport, with the remaining 10% weighted towards superfast broadband. Skewing access to services in favour of car use when the number of households with access to cars varies across Scotland based on levels of income is not a neutral decision.

Giving car use more weight when calculating access to services ignores the evidence on different levels of car ownership in communities across Scotland.<sup>3</sup> This assumption unwittingly puts the burden onto individuals and families rather than public bodies who plan and run services.

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<sup>2</sup> Clelland and Hill (2019, Sage). [Deprivation, policy and rurality: The limitations and applications of area-based deprivation indices in Scotland](#). Local Economy Vol. 34(1) pp.33-50. Online. Accessed 9th March 2022

<sup>3</sup> Scotland's census (2011). [Buckhaven, Methil and Leven: 2011 overview](#). Online. Accessed 9th March 2022.

If access via car is good but public transport is not, this might be masked in the SIMD based on the weightings of different modes of transport. This weighting within the SIMD also has significant implications for climate change by prioritising individual car use over public transport in a measure of deprivation.

It is also important to be aware that technical processes such as mapping deprivation, as in the case of the SIMD, might contribute to a depoliticisation of such issues. The different challenges faced by communities across Scotland are often the result of political decisions and historical factors rather than bad luck or individual failure.

As one Buckhaven resident told us, “this area is being kept poor by politics”. When labelling and mapping deprivation, it is important not to lose a longer term perspective. One way this can be balanced is by including the voices of local residents who might have experienced or seen changes happen over time.