

Community Insight: Stranraer

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 Stranraer and Wigtownshire 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 Stranraer

Stranraer is a port town of around 10,500 residents located at the head of Loch Ryan in Dumfries and Galloway. The town has a long history of welcoming people into Scotland with its sea heritage and port setting. It has many opportunities for coastal walks which include parts of the Southern Upland Way. The town centre is dominated by the 16th century Castle of St John, whilst the Stranraer Museum is housed in the 18th century Old Town Hall. Also in the town is the North West Castle Hotel, the first hotel in the world to have an indoor curling rink.

What people in Stranraer said (qualitative data)

In February 2021, DHI reached out to community members in Stranraer and Wigtownshire 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 in the conversation was a strong sense of pride in the community. The area has a long seafaring heritage and people described Stranraer as a friendly place, used to welcoming people who are passing through. Other key points from the conversation are captured in the following illustration.

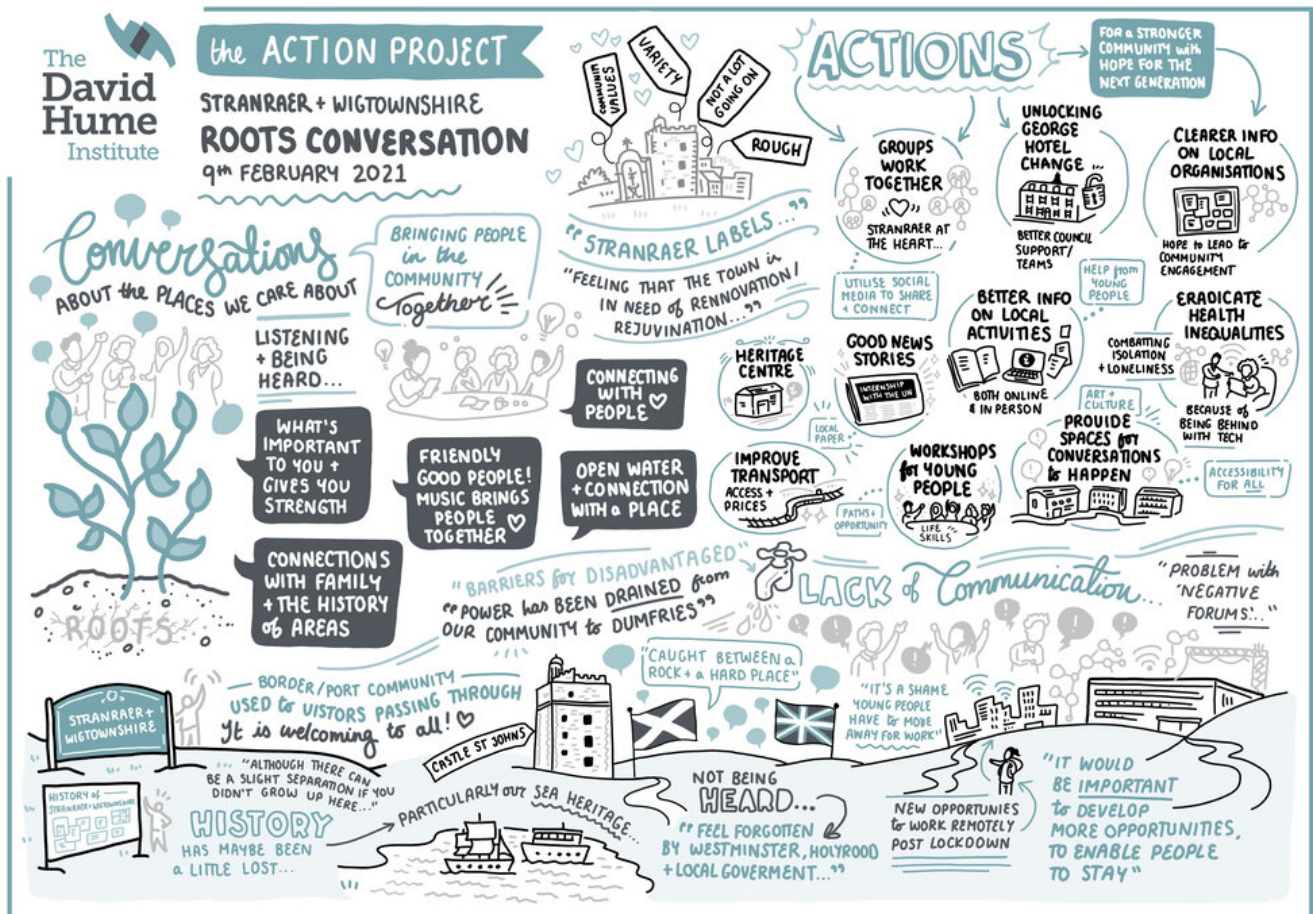


Figure 1. Illustration of The Action Project community conversation in Stranraer and Wigtownshire from February 2021

People in Stranraer also expressed the view that they felt ignored, particularly by politicians and governments at all different levels. Some participants told us that the town was “in need of love and rejuvenation” and that “it’s not a seaside destination, it’s somewhere you pass through quickly”. People told us that the positive aspects of Stranraer are easy to overlook when labels such as ‘rough’ are used to describe the town. This contrasts to the more rural Rhins and parts of wider Wigtownshire which have more tourism.

Residents showed a clear desire to take action to create a stronger community with more hope for the next generation. These included more collaboration between community groups and taking forward action, workshops for young people to learn life skills, better use of empty

buildings potentially through a community ownership scheme and continuation of a local volunteer network to combat loneliness. The conversation highlighted a lack of opportunities, with many people reluctantly leaving an area they love to find jobs, either never to return or to return at retirement age.

One participant in Stranraer felt that “well-paid council jobs and power have been drained from our community to Dumfries”. Others agreed that the loss of middle income jobs as local council offices closed has led to an increasing concentration of resources in Dumfries and less understanding of the challenges in Stranraer. This was felt to have compounded the loss of jobs due the relocation of the ferry terminal and contributed to the idea of the town being at the end of a road. The layout of the town is unlike many coastal ports and there was a feeling that this led to a disconnect with the sea and the landscape.

There was a sense of great energy for change in the community conversation, but also a feeling of not being listened to. The group laughed at a mention of “Boris’s Bridge” commenting “it just shows a complete lack of understanding...it’ll never happen. Wastes everyone’s time and money but got him a headline”.

The Roots community conversation fed into further local activity including the [Wigtownshire Health and Wellbeing Partnership consultation](#). A local volunteer service formed to combat rising loneliness in the pandemic, is now constituting as an organisation to eradicate loneliness in the county.

What does the quantitative data tell us

For analysis we used the three intermediate data zones within Stranraer: Stranraer East, South, and West. Intermediate zones are a statistical geography. The boundaries between them are not obvious in everyday life, as people living in Stranraer will move between zones to access services.

The intermediate zones of Stranraer East, South and West are each in the third 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 the three intermediate zones which make up Stranraer all fall between the 20% and 30% most deprived areas in Scotland, as described by the SIMD.

The following image is taken from the SIMD to show the three intermediate zones. Stranraer East is bordered in blue, Stranraer South is bordered in green and Stranraer West is bordered in pink. The town centre lies around the yellow circle above ‘Stranraer’.

Female life expectancy in Stranraer East and south is 78 years, and Stranraer West is 81. This is compared to a Scottish average of 82 years. Male life expectancy in Stranraer East is 76 years, Stranraer South is 73, and Stranraer West is 72. This is compared to a Scottish average of 77 years.

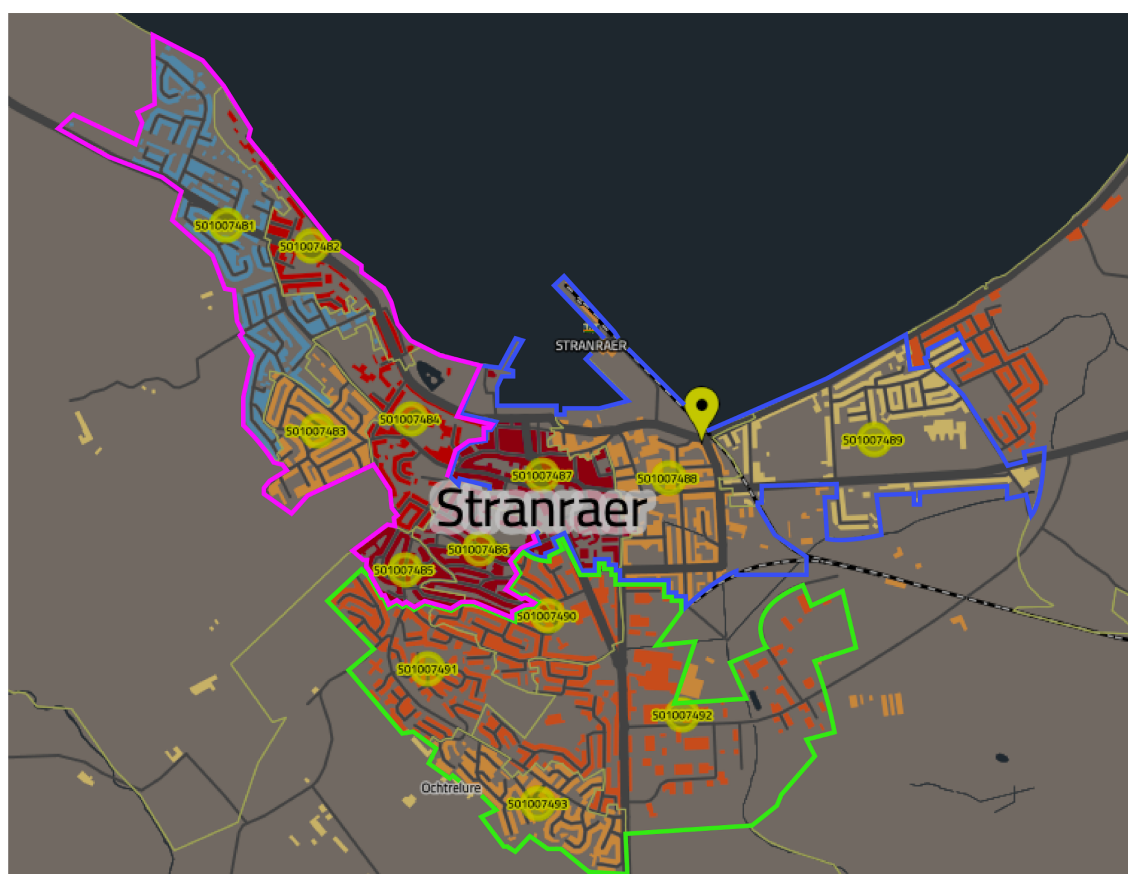


Figure 2: Map of Stranraer with boundaries of intermediate zones, colours of streets relate to SIMD colours, blue less deprived, moving through orange to red as more deprived - [full key available on source](#).

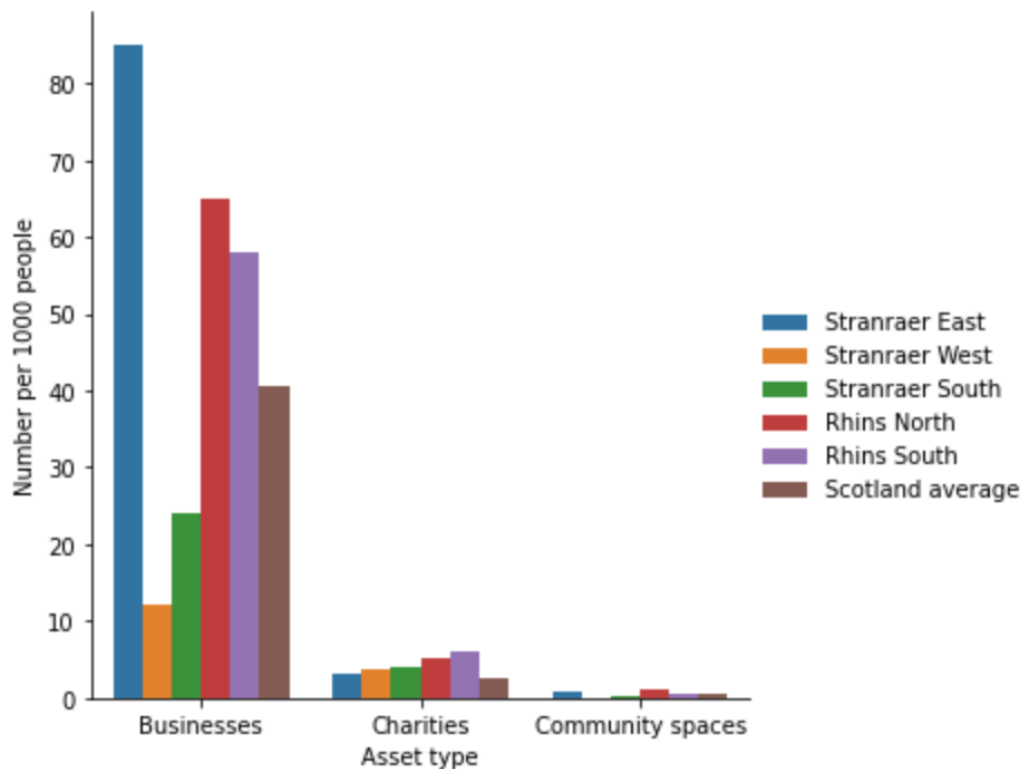
The data shows that Stranraer East has more businesses, charities and community spaces per 1000 people than the Scottish average. Stranraer South has less businesses, more charities and less community spaces per 1000 people than the Scottish average. Similarly Stranraer West has less businesses, more charities and less community spaces per 1000 people than the Scottish average.

We were mindful that the community conversation included perspectives from people living in the more rural Rhins area and wider Wigtownshire, and so have also included the intermediate zones of the Rhins North and South as well as those in Stranraer in the following table showing the breakdown by intermediate zones.

Table 1: The number o organisations per 1000 people in each intermediate zone of Stranraer and Rhins compared to the Scotland average.

Community	Businesses per 1000 people	Charities per 1000 people	Community spaces per 1000 people
Stranraer West	12.0	3.76	0.0
Stranraer East	85.0	3.15	0.79
Stranraer South	24.0	4.14	0.3
Rhins North	65.0	5.28	1.11
Rhins South	58.0	6.01	0.46
Scotland average	40.48	2.61	0.55

Figure 3: The number of organisations per 1000 people in each intermediate zone of Stranraer and Rhins compared to the Scotland average.



When averages for are taken for the three intermediate zones that make up Stranraer, they show a broadly similar quantities to Scotland as a whole (Scotland average in brackets):

- 40.3 businesses per 1000 people (40.5 businesses per 1000 people)
- 3.7 charities per 1000 people (2.66 charities per 1000 people)
- 0.36 community spaces per 1000 people (0.56 community spaces per 1000 people)

Geospatial data is often used by charities and governmental organisations to directly inform policy and service delivery.¹ However, datasets alone cannot give a full representation of a particular area such as Stranraer. That is why it is useful to match SIMD data and our own data on community infrastructure with our findings from community conversations undertaken as part of The Action Project.

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

Further analysis

Our data is useful in showing there are differing levels of community infrastructure across the three intermediate zones which make up Stranraer. However, it is important not to make assumptions based solely on data.

Measures such as 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.² Being led by the data could risk jumping to conclusions and prescribing solutions which are not beneficial to the community.

By combining the three intermediate zones of Stranraer East, South and West it is possible to construct a different image of the town than if each zone is looked at separately. For example the average number of businesses per 1000 people in Stranraer is 40.3 which is very similar to the Scottish average of 40.5. However this masks differences within the town, where Stranraer East has 85 businesses per 1000 people, South has 24, and West has 12. The level of detail at which data is looked at can affect understanding and the conclusions drawn.

In areas with dispersed populations it can be harder to get insights from data as there can be stark contrasts between households living in close proximity.³ Deprivation mapping tools can mask socio-economic variation within rural communities particularly and so listening to community voices is especially important. In Wigtownshire where deprivation and need can be masked in averages, it can be harder for funders or public services to target support than in areas where there are more people in need.

The open data on community spaces fits with views that we heard in our conversations with people from Stranraer and Wigtownshire. Community spaces in Stranraer are unevenly distributed across the town, with some areas having no community spaces per 1000 people and others being closer to or above the Scottish average. This finding fits with the views expressed by participants that there are not enough spaces for learning and enterprise in Stranraer and that there are too many buildings not being used for their full potential in the community.

However, data alone often cannot capture the complexities of using community spaces and infrastructure. In our conversations with people from Stranraer and Wigtownshire, they told us of the need for genuinely affordable and inclusive spaces. One participant said “People must be included. Spaces should be open to everyone, and affordable so people are able to use them”.

² 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.

³ Ibid.

The inclusivity of community infrastructure is difficult to measure, and so matching data analysis with community conversations is very important.

The different challenges faced by communities are often the result of strategic decisions and historical factors rather than bad luck or individual failure.

It is also important to be aware that technical processes such as mapping deprivation, as in the case of the SIMD, might contribute to assumptions about issues such as deprivation and poverty.