

Community Council: Dunkeld and Birnam

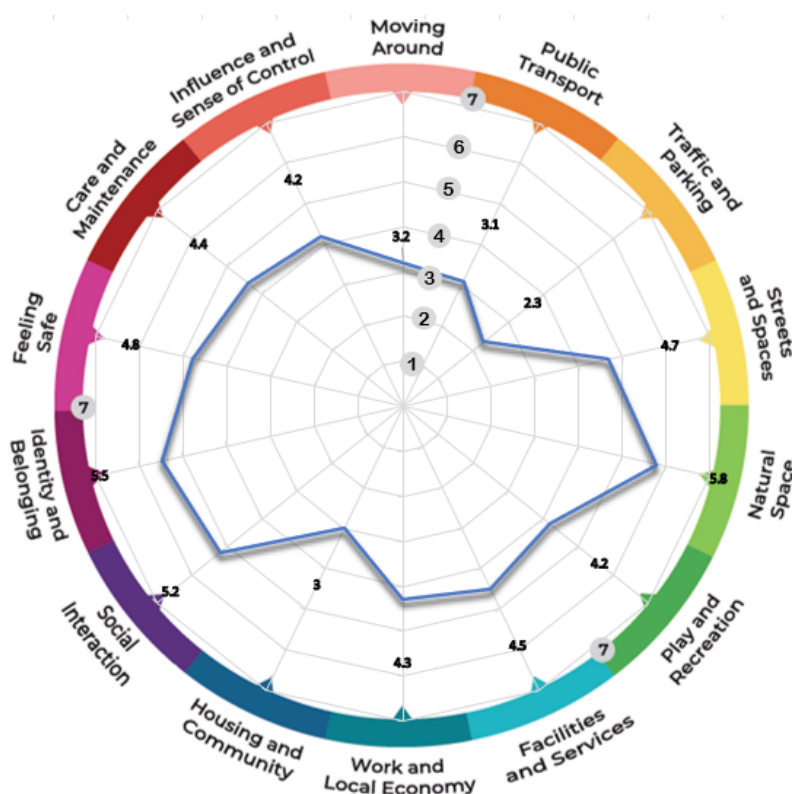
Dunkeld and Birnam Community Council incorporates the southern edge of the Highland Boundary Fault, including the villages of Dunkeld and Birnam, and outlying villages/hamlets of Butterstone, Inver, Trochry, Milton and Amulree. The area is connected principally via the A9 and other A-roads, as well as Birnam station on the Highland Railway Line. The area is a popular visitor destination. Transport Scotland have plans for A9-dualling in the area.

We held a place standard session (including drop-in) in Dunkeld and Birnam, as well as a primary school session and drop-in stall at the Dunkeld Summer Fayre. We also held a place standard session with the Highland Housing Network Group, which included representatives of the Dunkeld and Birnam CDT. A total of 76 people responded to our survey and/or attended an event. This includes 18 primary school children and members of the community development trust. A Community Action Plan (2022-2027) has been prepared by the CDT. A Local Place Plan is being prepared for the area.

Place Standard Scores

Note that due to the tailored nature of conversations not all participants completed scores, this includes drop in events. Note that place standard scores are out of 7. Seven is where the least improvement is needed, and 1 the most.

Dunkeld and Birnam Place Standard Scores



1. Moving Around (3.2)

In Dunkeld and Birnam there is generally considered to be a good variety of paths to get around, although this can be challenging during summer months when there are lots of tourists/visitors and the narrowness of existing paths. Access for disabled people is a challenge and there are issues raised regarding conflict with pedestrians/cyclists and road users e.g. parked cars. A number of specific areas in the villages are noted in terms of road safety including the crossing at the school/doctors as well as wider concerns regarding the A9.

Cycling in the area is generally positive with lots of opportunities however there are concerns raised regarding road safety with other road users.

Suggestions for improvement include cycle parking/charging facilities, improved road safety/traffic calming measures, a more strategic approach taken to 'moving around', improved access to the train station and wider area, improved disabled accesses and street lighting, improved cycling infrastructure including off road trails, and foot bridge over the river.

Children in the area particularly highlighted improvements for getting to/from school and the need for reducing traffic speeds in the village.

For rural areas including Amulree moving around is difficult and crossing the A9 can be a deterrent. Suggested improvements include active travel opportunities, connecting paths, improved rural bus service, and reducing speed of traffic.

2. Public Transport (3.1)

There is a mix of feeling regarding public transport serving Dunkeld and Birnam, with some highlighting that the A9 buses and train service are good and important for visitors/locals whilst others note that the train and bus services are limited and could be improved. It is noted that there is good community dialogue around these issues however delivering action is more difficult.

Access to the station for all users is noted as a significant concern, including issues with the platform heights and lack of lighting, benches and winter maintenance.

Suggestions for improvement include a replacement bus station at the other side of the river, better opening times for public toilets, improved public transport services/frequency for commuters/workers and the wider population, improved services in the local area/community bus, bike racks on buses, EV charging stations, improving road safety/parking problems, and integrated transport solution for the local area.

For rural areas including Amulree, public transport is limited which is acknowledged with private car use to be expected. Community transport network is suggested as well as improvements in road condition and reducing speeds.

3. Traffic & Parking (2.3)

Traffic is regarded as a significant issue in Dunkeld and Birnam. The amount of traffic moving through the village is highlighted as a concern including tourists/visitors, and lorries/HGVs. The A9 junction is seen as a significant road safety issue, with improved crossing(s)/safety a priority for the local area. Parking can be problematic for locals with the numbers of tourists/visitors. Sometimes a lack of parking for locals/workers can be an issue particularly in high tourist season, which also causes issues with moving around due to parking on pavements. Ongoing dialogue with the council highlighted in terms of existing traffic and parking issues.

A range of improvements are suggested including improving road crossings, traffic calming measures e.g. speed bumps/zebra crossings, stronger traffic enforcement, fixing potholes, restricting traffic/parking in - and pedestrianising - the village centre, parking restrictions including timed sessions with permits for locals/workers, change in parking regime, new parking area outwith village centre with one way system on the bridge, improved toilet offering at the car park/improved facilities with overnight parking charge for campervans, redirecting heavy traffic using the sawmills to the old A9, and the potential for a community bus network.

In the rural area traffic is generally considered to be an issue particularly with speeding traffic and number of visitors in the tourist season. Crossing the A9 seen as an issue and availability of parking in Dunkeld highlighted as important for the wider local area where facilities and services are accessed. Enforcement of speeding and traffic calming measures suggested as ways to improve the situation.

4. Streets, Squares & Buildings (4.7)

The villages of Dunkeld and Birnam are recognised as having a strong sense of place, with lots of heritage buildings. High quality green and open spaces in the villages also highlighted, with good work done by the 'Bloom' group. The children at the school particularly like the range of historic buildings/features in the villages. Many shop-owners also take pride in their shop-fronts.

The attractive nature of the villages results in lots of visitors which can make it difficult for daily life for locals. There is little dereliction highlighted however some historic buildings and features could benefit from improved care and maintenance. The style of new development is also highlighted as not being in keeping with the character of the area in some cases.

The train station building is highlighted as being derelict and unsafe to walk to at night with potential for further re-development a significant opportunity highlighted by many in the local area.

Suggestions for improvement include updated conservation management plans for the villages, improved care and maintenance of certain buildings/features including supporting building owners, enhance public spaces including traffic-free areas, address flooding issues, local renewable energy scheme, and more community ownership.

For the landward area including Amulree the area is recognised as beautiful and scenic with Amulree Church and the village hall being key buildings for the local community. Amulree Hotel is highlighted as being an eyesore, and the impact of visitors also recognised.

5. Natural Spaces (5.8)

The local area is recognised as having great connectivity to nature with a wide range of paths and opportunities to experience the natural environment. Highlights include local forests, walks and paths with trees and woodlands of significant importance to the local community, as well as great abundance of wildlife. The children at the primary school highlight numerous places for them to access nature including the playground, local hills, river-side walks, the orchard, and jubilee park. The local estate owner is recognised for providing good range of paths in the surrounding area as well as the work of the local paths group.

Issues raised include the damage from beavers, impact from over-tourism, accessibility issues for particular users, not enough protection for important trees/woodland, lack of litter/dog-

fouling bins in certain places, lack of path connectivity in certain places, littering and dog-fouling, and multiple invasive species e.g. balsam, knotweed.

Suggestions for improving access to nature include improving local roads, prioritising native tree species over re-stocking conifer plantations, protecting path route around carrot field, increased number of benches in local area, more bins for littering/dog-fouling, improved disabled access on local paths, raise awareness of invasive species, improve signage and promote better use of local paths, and provide more protection for important trees.

6. Play & Recreation (4.2)

The opportunities in Dunkeld and Birnam are generally considered to be good, with the MUGA a particularly well-used facility (despite not having the best access). Outlying villages are considered to be well-served by existing facilities including community halls.

The primary school age children highlighted a range of good facilities/places to play including the park facilities at the school, Erigmore, Jubilee Park, and Dunkeld Park. A number of suggested improvements are also highlighted including a 'woodland' club, wooden walkway/treehouse, zip-line and rope swing, football goals at the school and rec park, and address littering.

Whilst some indicate that there are a range of clubs and activities for youth and adults, there are suggestions for improved facilities for older children and young people, particularly places for teenagers to socialise/meet up, as well as for disabled users. There is consensus to provide updated park equipment for all users/ages. Other suggestions include improving public transport to enable better access, hire options being cheaper, and making more use of existing facilities including Birnam Arts.

For the remoter rural area, opportunities for play and recreation are limited to travelling to existing facilities in the main settlements. In Amulree, the development of the community hall is hoped to support the local community in this regard with opportunities for improved play facilities more locally suggested and/or improved public transport to reach existing facilities.

7. Facilities & Services (4.5)

There is a mix of feeling regarding the adequacy of the facilities and services available in the local area. A large proportion of respondents (across members of the public, school children, and members of the community development trust) highlight that there is a good range of local services including a pharmacy, grocery shop, doctor surgery, a range of recreational and tourist facilities, vet facility, dental surgery, diversity of shops, cafes, restaurants, bars, hairdressers, library, community orchard/growing initiative, residential care home, recycling points, and food and charitable initiatives.

A number of concerns are raised in relation to facilities/amenities for residents in Dunkeld and Birnam including cost of living in the area (deterring workers), poor broadband/mobile signal, recruitment/retention of fire officers/carers, school bus availability for those out of catchment, school class sizes due to lack of young families in the area, very little care provision/support/housing for those providing care, shortage of public toilets, shops being expensive, limited social care, poor/dangerous access to doctor surgery, bank in the village closing, lack of available cleaners, lack of affordable business units, and spread of services across both villages making it difficult to access.

Outwith Dunkeld and Birnam the following concerns are raised including reliance on private water supplies and septic tanks, no gas network and reliance on oil, very poor broadband, limited/no mobile signal, difficulty using part-time services (e.g. bank/library) when having to make a single trip for multiple services, potential for Amulree Church to close in next few years, and having to drive to reach amenities.

Suggested improvements include a one stop information source for all services, improved public transport, bigger supermarket/grocery shop whilst still supporting local shops, improved broadband, electric charging facilities, access to childcare facilities at the primary school for working parents, key worker housing, local energy generation for the community, improved education to enable people to be more self-sufficient, building in resilience for future service provision, improved bus service for out of catchment children, funding for Birnam Arts to maintain this asset, improving pedestrian access across whole village, improved facilities for caravans/campers, and modernise primary school including better accessibility for disabled users.

8. Work & Local Economy (4.3)

It is noted by some residents and primary school children that there are a good range of local jobs in the area including opportunities for home working. 'Green' jobs are already prevalent in the local area and spaces traditionally used by trades now being used for active recreation enterprises. Whilst others note that there are limited opportunities outwith hospitality and perhaps an over-reliance on tourism jobs.

In terms of work and the local economy there are a number of concerns raised. Principally the relationship between the local economy and the availability of housing including affordable housing is a significant issue for the local area, where filling jobs including key worker positions is difficult due to a lack of suitable housing. This is highlighted as being exacerbated by an excess of holiday/second homes. Other concerns include the need to commute to Perth (by car), poor transport links for low paid/shift workers, risk of future skills gap due to lack of opportunities including training for young people and unskilled workers, and lack of affordable business/workshop space.

Within the wider local area concerns are also raised in relation to the impact of tourism sector vs the experience of living in the area, limited access to services outwith Perth and for those without technological skills having difficulty in using online services, lack of advertising volunteering opportunities available, need to travel to other bigger settlements for work, online services/homeworking limited where broadband is not good, and too many low paid jobs.

Suggested improvements include improving availability to affordable housing including rentals/hostel accommodation, availability of local outreach incentives to support people back into work/training/apprentices, one-stop information source for jobs/accessing services, expansion of industrial estate and re-let units to support business development, improve community benefits from existing tourism businesses, affordability of industrial/business units and more affordable employment uses, integrated approach to green jobs including training/linking in with existing (tourism) businesses, sustain local trades workers, improve offer of community jobs/uses to reduce reliance on tourism, support for local business expansion and shared space units, improved engagement with local businesses, and improvements suggested for Duchess Anne Hall and Birnam Arts Institute.

9. Housing & Community (3)

The availability of housing in the local area is a significant issue highlighted by many of the respondents, with some expressing that this issue is of most importance to the community. The lack of housing to meet the community's needs is impacting on other aspects of the area including for example the ability to recruit/retain staff and to maintain a mixed community.

Key concerns identified include the lack of affordable/social housing across a range of tenures and that would support different sections of the community e.g. families, key workers, the impact on housing supply from second/holiday homes and short term let accommodation, existing housing not meeting the needs of the community including some empty units, lack of housing for downsizing/elderly, inefficiency of existing housing stock (older properties) and expense of bringing these up to standard, reliance on fossil fuel heating systems, lack of recent affordable housing development, limited land available for new development, high house prices, affordable housing allocation policy not favouring locals, and demographic trend towards more elderly people will make situation worse. A comment also notes that previous plans for a hydro scheme at Braan to serve Trochry area hasn't been implemented. For rural areas, it is also noted that the costs of rural living aren't necessarily reflected in rental values of homes in these areas.

A wide range of suggestions for improving the housing situation in the local area include measures for both existing housing stock as well as for delivering new developments. Suggested improvements include: a cap/planning restrictions on the number of second homes/holiday lets including conversion of existing houses, pricing cap on rent/sale prices, incentives to help people downsize, more focus on affordable housing that targets people who live and work in the area, provide new affordable/social housing across a range of tenures and house sizes, support the work of the CDT who are looking to develop plans for housing including on vacant/derelict sites, focus development to use local trades/materials for community benefit, improved system for EPCs, less private rentals, community-led/owned housing, new developments to be tenure blind, compulsory purchase land for affordable housing if needed, new developments to have higher/solely affordable provision, opportunity to deliver shared space/allotments as part of new developments, improving conditions for listed buildings and those within conservation areas to make it easier to install energy efficiency/low carbon measures, strategy/measures to ensure continuity of affordable housing supply in the area, improve offer of self-build plots, more housing generally, work with the community in delivering new housing projects, and use powers to force landowners to discuss sale of small areas of land for new development.

10. Social Interaction (5.2)

Generally there are a good range of places for social interaction and meeting up with others in the local community including Birnam Arts Institute, Men's Shed, walking routes/outdoor spaces, cafes/bars and a range of recreational activities/facilities such as the MUGA, parks, clubs (ballet, hockey, sports club, scouts, pensioners' lunch club, Warm Spaces). There is a mix of feeling how well the rural community are served with the exception of Dalguise and Amulree where existing facilities are well-used and have a strong community spirit. Better awareness of existing groups is highlighted as well as finding spaces for groups to meet up.

There are a number of suggested improvements including for younger people such as places that aren't cafes, young people drop-in, better use of the Birnam Arts Institute, youth club, and improved facilities at parks for older children.

The wind farm community benefit funds are highlighted as well as small grants from PKC, with a suggestion for more pro-active approach to community asset transfer to help release land/buildings for community use.

11. Identity & Belonging (5.5)

Members of the public express a strong sense of belonging and note that Dunkeld and Birnam is a welcoming place however it is noted that there is little ethnic diversity, and the village wasn't previously as welcoming.

The primary school children generally have a strong sense of identity to the local area highlighting a number of buildings and local features that they are proud of including the Birnam Oka, Beatrix Potter attraction, Highland Games, Christmas celebrations.

Community trust members highlight that they are happy living in the area and sharing this with the community and visitors. The shops are recognised in particular as being positive for the community and appealing to visitors. A number of concerns are raised regarding the impact of visitors/tourists, cost of living, issues with older buildings including business premises, and lack of affordable housing.

In the wider area it is recognised that there are lots of opportunities to volunteer and connect with people however whilst community organisations are strong these are dependent on too few people.

The history and culture of the local area is not celebrated enough with a range of suggestions to help promote and celebrate Dunkeld and Birnam e.g. improve the visitor experience at the Cathedral. Further suggestions include improved signage for local assets, encouraging sustainable travel, encouraging investment and growth of business in Birnam and movement between both villages, and provide housing for local workers.

It is recognised that there is a strong community across Amulree and Trochry area, with community support through various means and providing support for each other. The completion of the community hall will further support community spirit in Amulree area. There are concerns that there is limited support available from PKC, and a need for improved infrastructure such as broadband, roads, and social facilities.

12. Feeling Safe (4.8)

Whilst some have noted that they generally feel safe, road safety and the experience of safety as a pedestrian/cyclist is highlighted as a key concern in the local area. Speeding traffic in both the villages and the rural area in between villages is highlighted as a significant concern. Road safety as a result of road users and narrow/busy/non-existent pavements is noted as a concern. The A9 junction is also highlighted as a dangerous place for both road users and those having to cross the carriageway. The train station is highlighted as being unsafe to walk to (by some) with the differing height of platforms a significant accessibility and safety issue.

The primary school children also highlighted a range of safety concerns including crossing the roads, lack of dipped kerbs for wheelchairs, vandalism in the MUGA, older children/young people swearing and vaping, difficulties with some paths including in winter/flooded conditions, and lack of lighting during darker hours.

Suggested improvements include traffic calming measures, new separate foot bridge across the river, supervision of the train station building/CCTV, one-way system on foot bridge, improved

access/lighting including at the train station building, upgrade A9 road junction, and improve pedestrian access and more safer crossing points.

13. Care & Maintenance (4.4)

The primary school children highlight that a number of buildings/features are already well looked after including the orchard, the high street, Birnam Institute, and Dunkeld House Hotel. One resident also highlighted that the area didn't require much improvement and was already well looked after including pavements and roads.

Other respondents highlighted a range of concerns with current care and maintenance in the area including: littering particularly along the A9, condition/narrowness of paths/pavements, lack of appropriate permissions for listed buildings, condition/safety of the train station building with lack of enforcement by Network Rail/Scotrail, dog fouling, condition of specific buildings and features including Telford Bridge, rusting equipment in playparks, lack of toilet accessibility for disabled users, and fly-tipping in rural areas. There is also a perception that standards of care and maintenance have slipped.

Improvements suggested include better maintenance for biodiversity, more litter clearing, maintenance of buildings in conservation area including upper levels, grit bins more usable, free litter picking equipment, dog poo bag dispensers, enforce dogs to be on leads in parks, improvements and better promotion of Jubilee Park, improve playparks generally, support/assist community ownership bids where there are groups willing to take sites on, repair/maintain bridge, improve toilets at the north car park to be fully accessible, and improved road/verge maintenance.

Residents in Amulree highlight a number of concerns including difficulty accessing disabled toilet facilities, litter increasingly becoming more of a problem, and the Amulree Inn building remaining an eyesore in the area. Suggested improvements include stronger enforcement of repairing walls/structures following road accidents, pursuit of public toilet in Amulree as a result of campers using space behind the hall, enabling local communities to look after their own areas with funding and tools/equipment, and encouraging local employers to volunteer in local area to help with shared sense of pride in community.

14. Influence & Sense of Control (4.2)

In terms of engagement with communities, there is a general feeling that whilst opportunities are there for people to have their say there is apathy to do so by the majority of residents without significant encouragement. Community Action Plan engagement in 2021 a good example of how engagement should be undertaken using surveys. Some note that apathy is related to: too many surveys, lack of listening/action or the timescales involved, with PKC needing to manage expectations around what it can/should do. Example of A9 co-creative process highlighted as an exercise in community engagement with lots of opportunities to feedback resulting in 'white noise'. Relying on the voices of active residents only can be problematic. Primary school children noted an appetite to get more involved in local decision making, as they currently don't feel listened to.

Members of the community development trust note that experiences with PKC have been positive so far, with connections and information useful. However some members of the public highlight that it can be difficult to find the right contact in PKC/other agencies and an automated system can be unhelpful.

Some feel that the community council works to promote their needs, along with elected members and local MPs. A comment also expressed that community councils are an outdated institution.

Suggested improvements include regular (and short) electronic/paper surveys and share results, delivering on action and not just asking for feedback, list of relevant PKC/other agency contacts, use 'Next Door' platform for community notices, engagement with children and young people, improve publicity of how to contact councillors and MPs, and better publicising and coordination of PKC consultations.