

Bishop's Castle: Town Centre Audit Analysis, 2025



Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Bishop's Castle's main shopping streets was undertaken in September 2025 as part of a longitudinal research study reviewing the vibrancy of Shropshire's main market towns and key settlements. Bishop's Castle centre was first audited in February 2020 and then again in September every year between 2020 and 2025. The objective of these audits is to provide a snapshot of the vitality of the town by investigating:

- The range and diversity of the retail offer
- The number and types of non-retail businesses operating
- The number and location of vacant properties
- The level of business churn—how many businesses are closing and opening each year
- Distinctive characteristics within the town, for example a strong tourism offer or a high penetration of “low end” traders
- The amount, location and type of domestic residences in the centre of the town

The research also aims to monitor change over time. The functionality of the High Street has been changing for some time, with internet shopping a key factor that has impacted. In September 2025, 27.2% of all retail sales were attributable to on-line purchases. Through 2020 and 2021 the coronavirus pandemic posed additional challenges to High Street businesses. The 2020 audits for all towns took place in September, following the first national lockdown. Non-essential retail and hospitality businesses were able to trade at this time (albeit with strict social distancing measures in place). The 2021 audits also took place when High Street businesses were able to trade. By 2022 High Streets were trading normally with no Covid-19 restrictions, but the cost of living crisis was gathering pace. Inflation was elevated in 2023, which also impacted people's spending power. Inflation has since fallen significantly, albeit still above the Bank of England target, but interest rates are comparatively high and economic confidence remains low.

Key Findings

- 69 commercial units, occupying 8,400m² gross floor space.
- Amongst the smallest centres in Shropshire, accounting for 2.7% of all Shropshire High Street traders.
- However, more stores per head of population than any other town, at a rate of 45 units per 1,000 population (13 on average for Shropshire) which reflects Bishop's Castle's importance as a retail and employment hub for the local population and a substantial rural hinterland.
- Average store size 122m² compared with a Shropshire average of 147m². This is larger than any other tier three Shropshire town except Craven Arms and Church Stretton.
- 147 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of 0.5:1 commercial versus residential properties.
- Bishop's Castle had a 7% business churn rate between 2024 and 2025, down from 12% in 2024. Churn has been lower in Bishop's Castle since 2019 than in all other Shropshire towns except Church Stretton and Much Wenlock.
- 13% of all commercial premises were vacant in 2024—this is above average in relation to the rest of Shropshire (11% across all towns) but is down slightly compared with 2024 when the vacancy rate was 15%.
- Tourism & leisure businesses are strongly represented in the town although comparison retail accounts for the largest share of business premises. Comparison accounts for a higher proportion of commercial units than in any tier three Shropshire town except Church Stretton. Tourism businesses are more prevalent in Bishop's Castle than anywhere else except Broseley.
- Relatively low numbers of restaurants/takeaways are located in the town (only Craven Arms has a lower proportion), although the public houses in the town centre (classified as tourism and leisure businesses) also offer hospitality.
- Retail services businesses are also under-represented in Bishop's Castle, accounting for a lower proportion of units than in any other town at just 10%. Within this sector there are relatively few hair and beauty operators.
- Bishop's Castle supports a relatively high number of finance and business services operators, and still has a bank branch.

Methodology Statement

Only the main retail centre of the town was surveyed, as shown on Map 4.

Both retail and non-retail businesses will be operating in other parts of the town.

All commercial premises within the defined area were audited, and classified as:

- Comparison Retail—defined as stores selling non-food/drink/tobacco products
- Convenience Retail—defined as stores selling food/drink/tobacco products
- Retail Service— defined as stores selling a service rather than a product, such as hair dressers or travel agents
- Financial & Business Services — for example, banks, solicitors, accountants, estate agents
- Health - including dentists, health centres, GP practices, alternative therapies
- Restaurants & Takeaways—including cafés and tea rooms
- Tourism & Leisure—hotels and public houses/bars as well as visitor attractions and cultural assets
- Education & Community Facilities—including schools, colleges, libraries, community centres
- Other Non-Retail
- Vacant

Gross floor space was matched to each premise using OS Master Map. It should be noted, that where two outlets shared the same premise (as shown on Master Map) an assumption was made that both occupied the same amount of floor space. For multi-storey buildings occupied by multiple businesses, it is assumed that all floors have the same gross space. Unless it is clear that a single business occupies more than one floor of a building, it has been assumed that it occupies only one floor. This means that in some cases, gross floor space may be under-estimated as some traders use upper floors for storage. No estimate relating to net floor space has been made.

Businesses occupying above ground floor level premises have only been included in this audit if their presence is clear from street level (by door signs or external hoardings for example). It is likely, therefore, that some non-consumer businesses operating in the area may have been missed.

Premises are assumed to have changed hands if their name or function has changed since the 2024 audit. In some cases though, ownership may be unchanged but the business has been rebranded or renamed.

An estimate of the number of domestic residences in the main retail centre has been made using OS LPI using all residential classification codes.

Retail Centre Hierarchy

Town centres represent important employment, entertainment and shopping hubs for their local population and hinterland. They also represent an important component of the visitor economy.

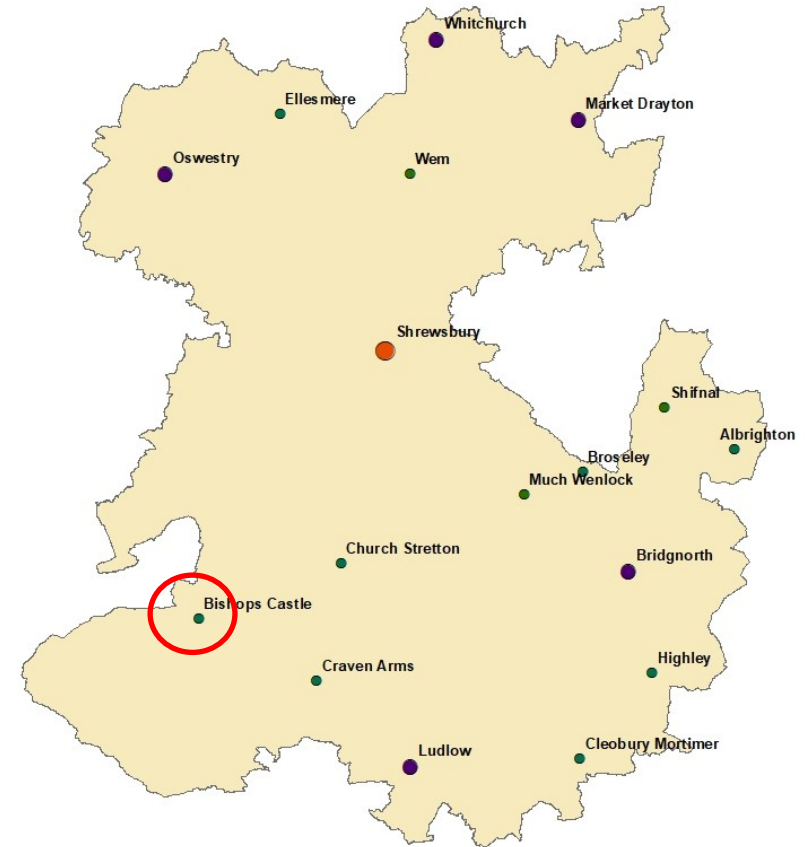
However, not all centres have comparable functions. Larger centres tend to attract workers and shoppers from much further afield than smaller centres, and consequently offer a much greater volume and variety of retail trade and consumer and business services.

In order to benchmark Shropshire towns against each other in an appropriate manner, the following hierarchy has been adopted:

- Tier 1: Shrewsbury
- Tier 2: Bridgnorth
Ludlow
Oswestry
Market Drayton
Whitchurch
- Tier 3: Albrighton
Bishop's Castle
Broseley
Church Stretton
Cleobury Mortimer
Craven Arms
Ellesmere
Highley
Much Wenlock
Shifnal
Wem

With 69 commercial units in the town centre, Bishop's Castle has a large retail centre in relation to the size of the town's population.

Map 1: Shropshire's Main Retail Centres



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About Bishop's Castle

Bishop's Castle is a small market town located in the south west of Shropshire close to the Welsh border. The origins of the town date back to the 8th Century when the King of Mercia, Offa, built a dyke to protect his kingdom. Today, it is a popular destination for walkers, and the commercial offer in the town reflects its status as a tourism hub.

Today the town has a population of 1,500 (2024 ONS mid-year estimates) and 725 households (2021 Census). The town's population has remained stable over the last decade. It is the nineteenth largest settlement in the county.

Bishop's Castle is located in a rural area and lacks direct access to key arterial roads. The A49 is 10 miles east of the town and is accessed via local A and B roads. The A488 is the main transport route in and out of the town heading north to Minsterley (13 miles) and on to Shrewsbury. The A488 heads south to Clun (6 miles) and Knighton (13 miles). Bishop's Castle is no longer on the national rail network. The closest station is at Craven Arms (10 miles). The total population within a 10 mile radius is approximately 24,000.

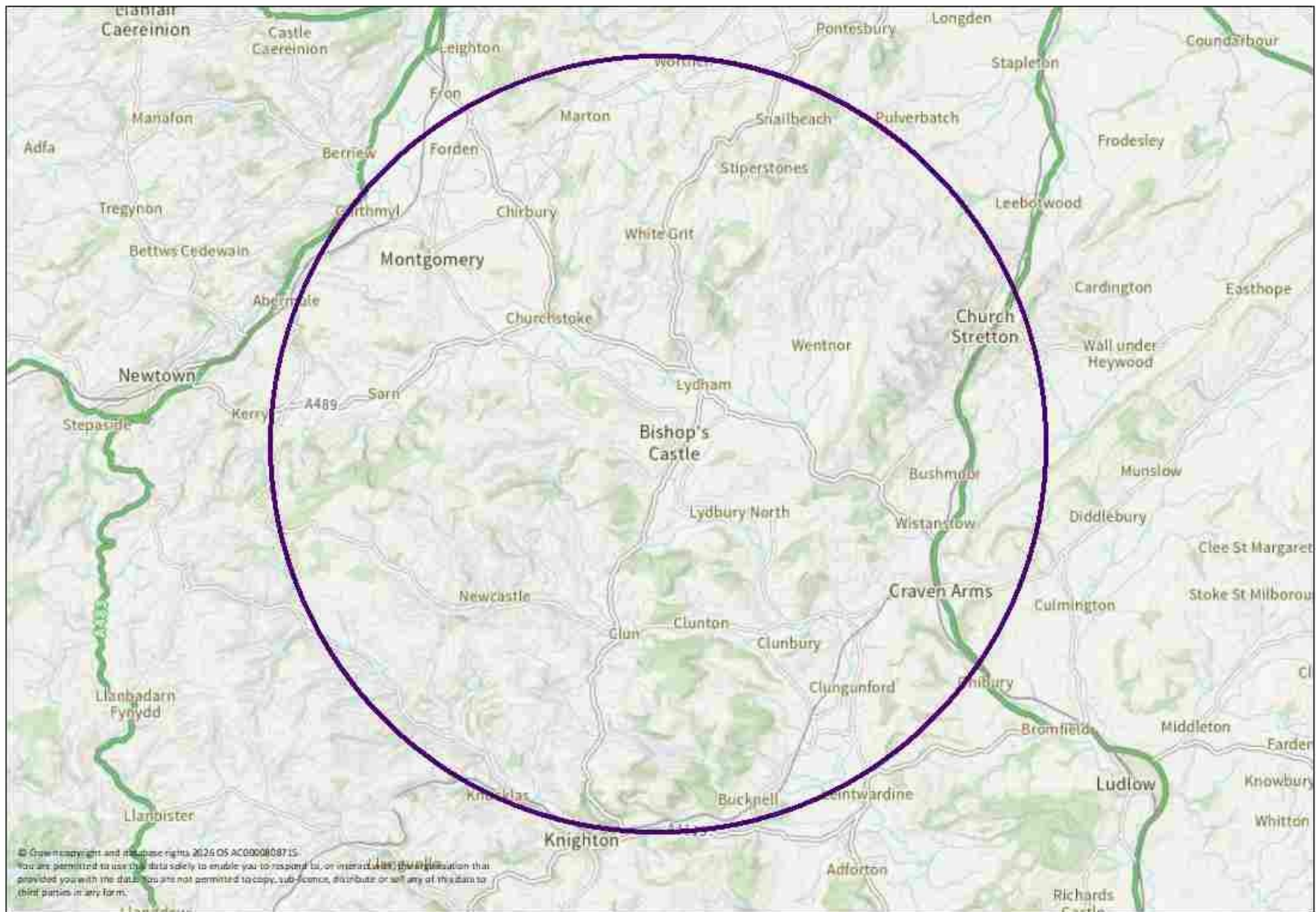
Bishop's Castle provides approximately 500 jobs across the town council area (*ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2024*). Key sectors include:

- Health (30.2% of jobs)
- Manufacturing (22.6% of jobs)
- Accommodation and Food Services (15.1% of jobs)
- Retail (7.5% of jobs)
- Professional, Scientific & Technical (5.7% of jobs)

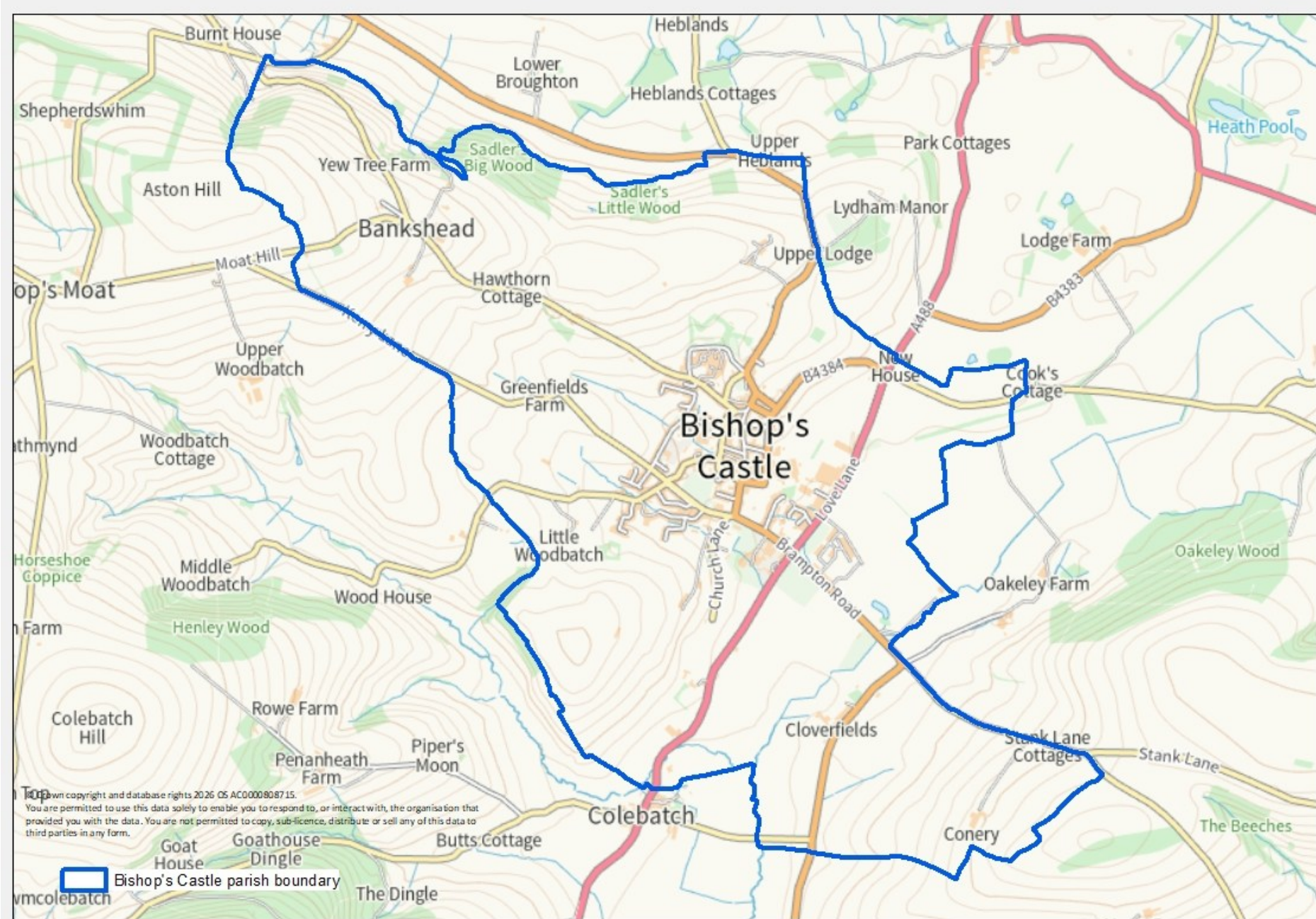
Overall, Bishop's Castle town council area (depicted on Map 3) covers an area of 755 hectares. The main shopping area (depicted on Map 4) is much smaller than this, at around 5 hectares.

The town comprises predominantly independent retail and there is a significant amount of residential housing stock in the main shopping area of the town. A farmers' market is held on the third Saturday of the month in the town hall. There is also a flea market on the first Saturday of the month, as well as a livestock market. Bishop's Castle has a relatively large hinterland given its small population and is comparatively self-contained given the distance to alternative shopping centres such as Shrewsbury or Ludlow.

Map 2: Location of Bishop's Castle showing 10 mile radius



Map 3: Bishop's Castle Town Council Area



Map 4: Main Retail Shopping Area and Survey Boundary



Key Audit Results

A total of 69 commercial premises are located within the Bishop’s Castle survey area. These are primarily in Church Street (24 business premises), High Street (25 business premises), and Market Square (15 business premises) with a small number in Chapel Yard, New Street and Salop Street. Gross floor space allocated to these businesses is over 8,400m² (more than three quarters in Church Street and High Street). The average store size is 122m² with units ranging in size from 20m² to 566m². Two additional units began operating in 2025—one premise on Church Street was split in half while a new business began trading in Market Square in what was previously classified as a non-commercial entity.

Chart 1: Number of Commercial Premises in Bishop’s Castle, 2019—2025

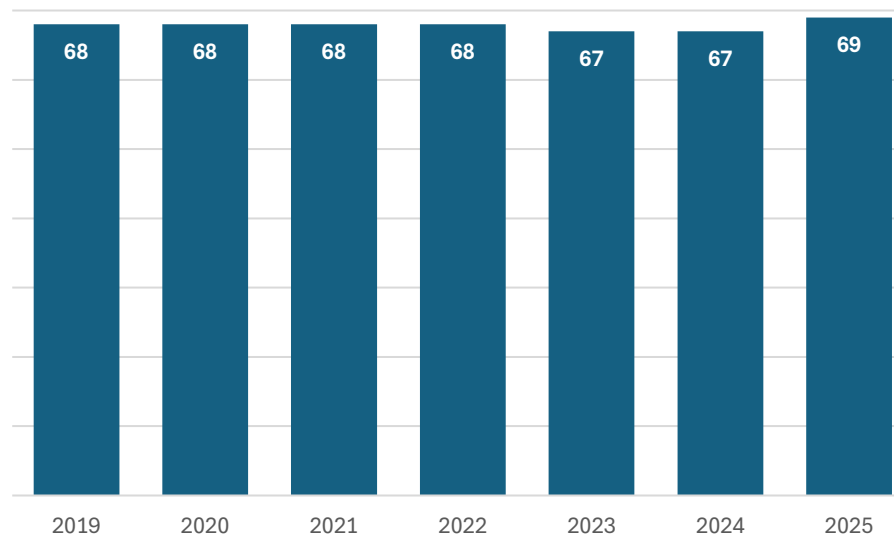
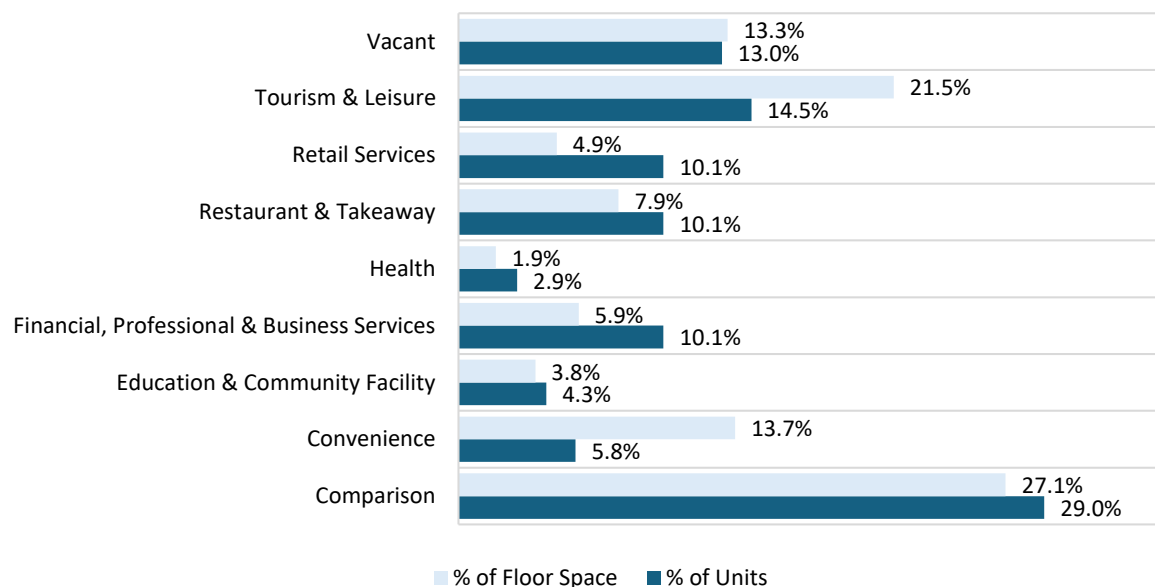


Chart 2: Breakdown of Commercial Premises by Classification, 2025



The highest proportion of commercial units are allocated to comparison retail (29.0%). They account for a similar share of floor space (27.1%). Convenience retail accounts for only a small share of units (5.8%) but for a notably higher proportion of floor space (13.7%). 10.1% of units are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, while the same proportion of units are filled by a financial/professional/business services operator. A relatively small number of retail service businesses operate in the town (10.1% of units accounting for 4.9% of floor space). A significant number of units are filled by tourism & leisure operators (14.5%), with these accounting for 21.5% of gross floor space.

There were 9 vacant premises in Bishop’s Castle in 2025 (13.0% of units).

Change Since 2024

There has only been limited change in the commercial mix in Bishop’s Castle over the last several years, including 2025. The overall number of commercial premises increased by two units in 2025, with a health care operator and a community facility opening.

In addition, a pop-up convenience retailer was trading at the time of the 2025 audit.

There has been no change in the number of comparison retailers, retail services providers, restaurants & takeaways and financial and business services providers over the last year.

The number of vacant premises declined by one.

Chart 4: Level of Business Churn, 2019-2025

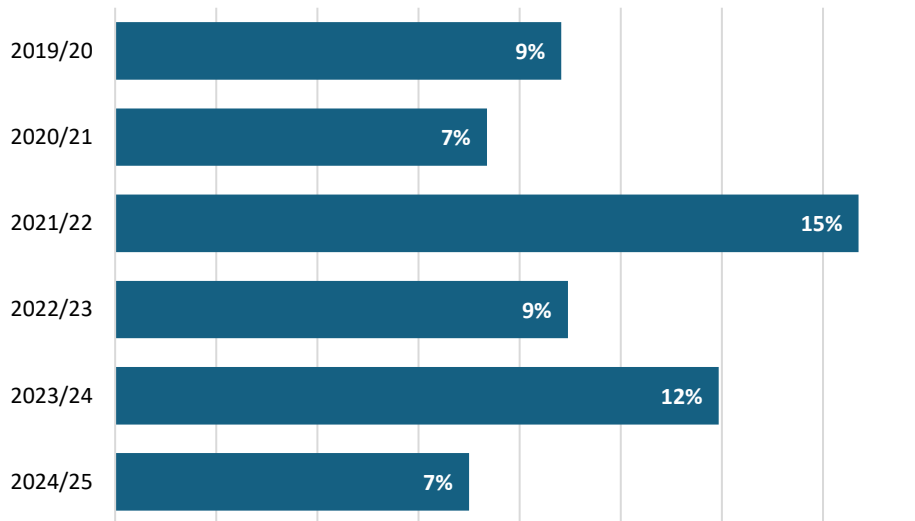


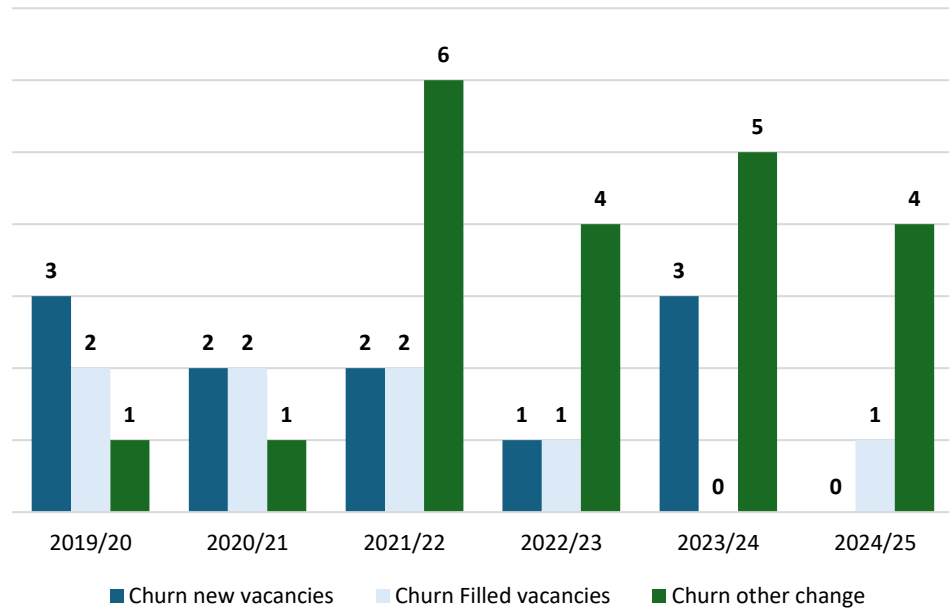
Chart 3: Change in Number of Units by Category, 2024/2025

-1	Vacant	
	Tourism & Leisure	0
	Retail Services	0
	Restaurant & Takeaway	0
	Health	1
	Financial & Business Services	0
	Education & Community Facility	1
	Convenience	1
	Comparison	0

The overall churn rate stood at 7% in 2025, which is lower than each of the previous three years (12% in 2024, 9% in 2023 and 15% in 2022). It is also the lowest of all Shropshire towns (alongside Broseley).

Since 2019, churn has been much lower than the Shropshire average, and lower than all other Shropshire towns except Much Wenlock and Church Stretton.

Chart 5: Breakdown of Business Churn 2019-2025



The chart opposite shows change on the High Street broken down by new vacancies, old vacancies that have been filled and all other change compared with the previous year.

Of the five commercial premises for which change was recorded in 2025, there were no new vacancies arising. This compares with three in 2024. One premise which had been vacant in 2024 had been filled at the time of the 2025 audit.

Most change was, therefore, attributable to other change which has been the case for each of the last four years. In 2025, one store changed purpose, one business reduced its floor space and two additional operators began to trade.

Comparison Retail

The largest proportion of commercial units and the largest proportion of floor space is dedicated to the comparison retail category in Bishop’s Castle, accounting for just under a third of units and floor space. This equates with 20 stores with just under 2,300m² of floor space. This proportion is higher than is typical for a town the size of Bishop’s Castle, and perhaps reflects its rurality and relative self-containment. The number of operators in the comparison sector has fluctuated slightly over the past five years as shown in the adjacent chart.

Chart 7: Breakdown of Comparison Retail by Type, 2025

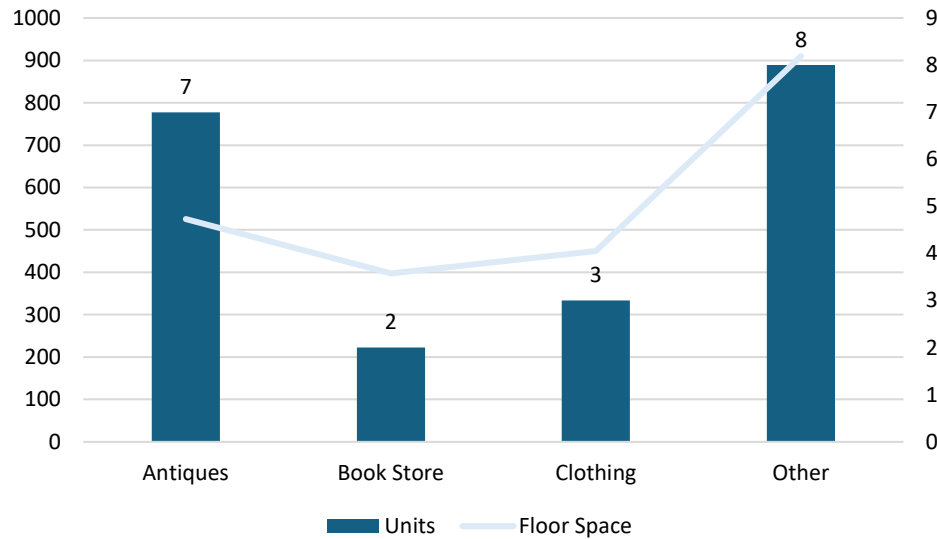
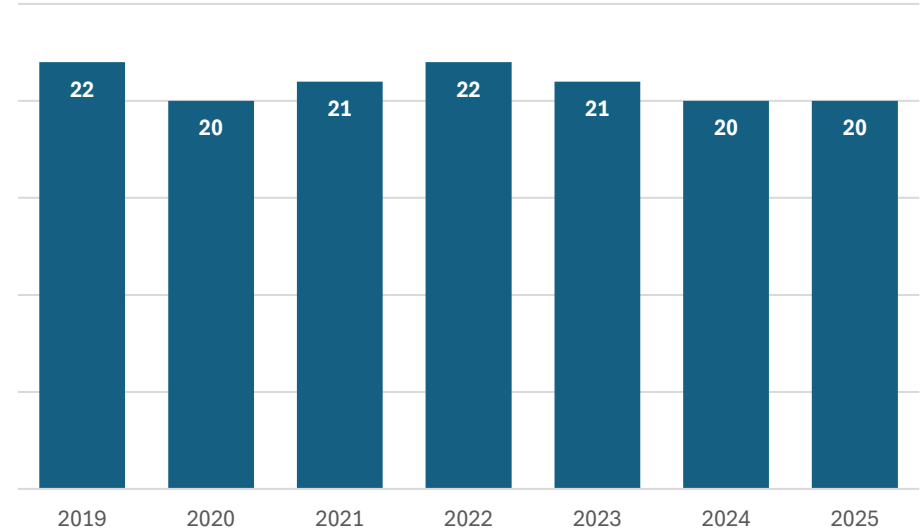


Chart 6: Number of Comparison Retail Stores, 2019—2025



Within the town there are three clothing/shoe shops, seven stores selling antiques and two book stores. One of the book stores incorporates a café. There is a gallery which sell art in the town. Other store types include a charity shop, a pet shop, a pharmacy, a gift shop, a petrol station, a furniture store and a picture framer.

A gift shop/florist closed between 2024 and 2025. The furniture store opened between the 2024 and 2025 audits.

The majority of stores are independent, although the town is home to a branch of Severn Hospice charity shop, which is a County-wide charity. This is the only charity store in the town.

The mix of comparison retailers in Bishop’s Castle helps support the town’s tourism offer (especially the antiques offer) as well as providing goods to local residents, for whom the distance to a larger town is considerable.

Convenience Retail

There are four convenience stores within the main shopping area of Bishop's Castle. These account for 6% of all units and for 14% of gross floor space. As well as a supermarket (the Co-op), there is a Spar convenience store attached to the petrol station and a butcher. In 2025 a pop-up convenience store which also sells a selection of gifts opened, run by Ukrainian residents of the town. This has been the only change in the number or type of convenience store operating since 2019.

Restaurants & Takeaways

10% of units in Bishop's Castle are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, with this category accounting for a slightly lower proportion of gross floor space (8%). The seven units are split between cafés (14%), restaurants (43%) and takeaways (43%). An additional café is located within one of the book stores in the town. There was no change in the number or mix of operators between 2022 and 2025 although one of the cafés did change name in 2024.

A range of cuisines is represented, including Indian, Chinese and fish and chips.

The proportion of the town allocated to restaurants and takeaways is comparatively small, although there are pubs which also serve food.

Chart 8: Breakdown of Units in the Restaurant/Takeaway Sector, 2025

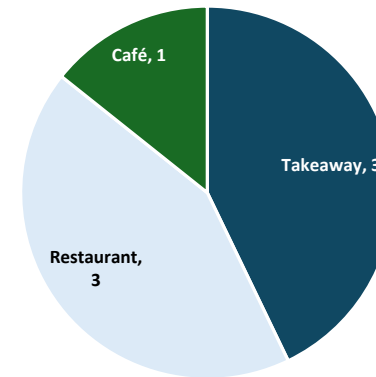
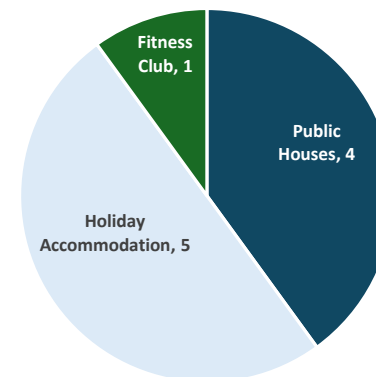


Chart 9: Breakdown of Units in the Tourism & Leisure Sector, 2025

Tourism & Leisure

Also within the hospitality sector, there are four public houses. These take up approximately 840m² gross floor space. One public house has closed since 2019. There are also two B&Bs and three holiday lets located in the town centre. A high proportion of the key visitor accommodation within the town is located directly in the main shopping area. However, there is one fewer B&B in the town than there was in 2020. There is also a health and fitness outlet. There was no change in the number or mix of operators between 2022 and 2025.



Finance & Business Services

There are seven commercial operators in the finance and business services category in Bishop's Castle town centre, accounting for over 500m² of gross floor space. Included within this classification are two solicitors, an accountant, two estate agents (including a chartered surveyor), a publisher and a bank (HSCB). The number of operators in this classification has remained unchanged since 2022. However, the building in which the accountant operates has been divided into two units, so the floor space assigned to the finance and business sector has reduced slightly over the last year.

Retail Services

Chart 11: Number of Retail Services Businesses, 2019 - 2025

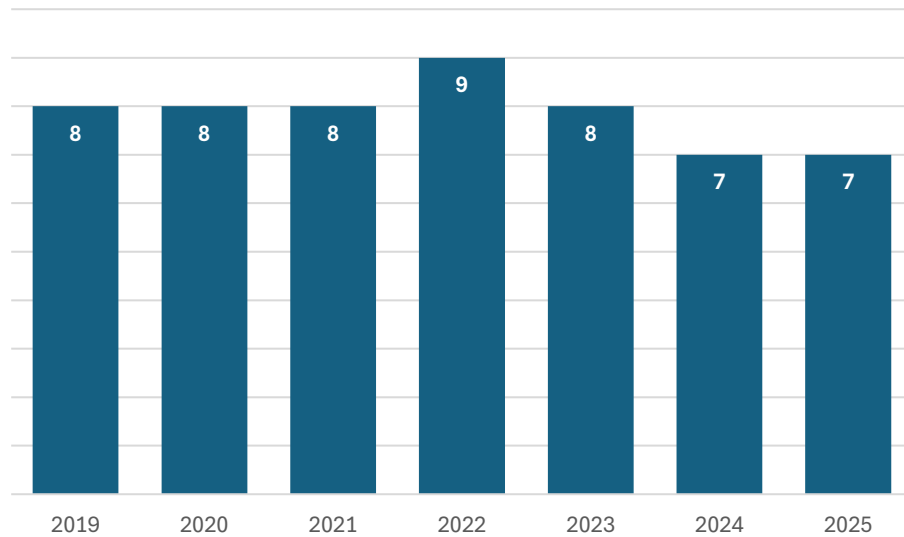
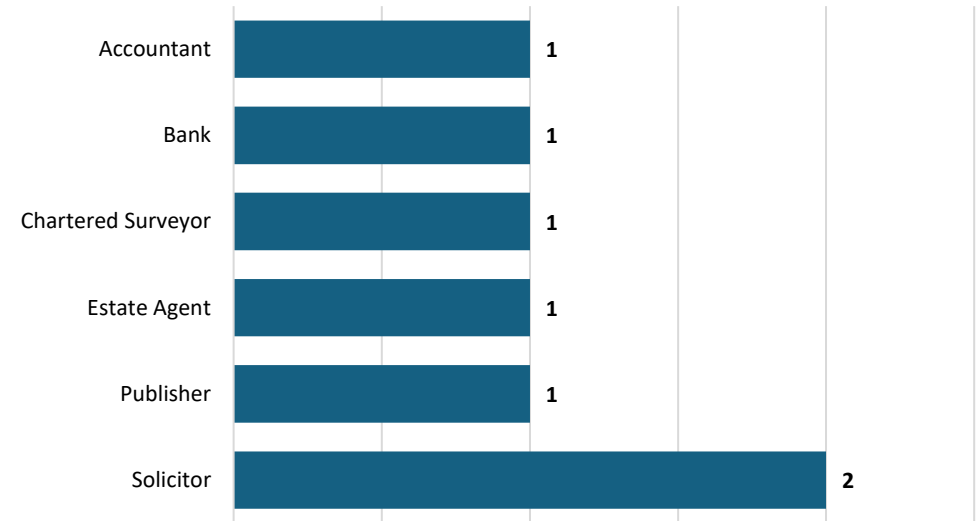


Chart 10: Number of Finance & Business Services Providers by Type, 2025



There are seven retail service businesses operating in Bishop's Castle town centre, with these accounting for over 400m² of gross floor space. This category is under-represented in Bishop's Castle compared with other Shropshire towns of a similar size, accounting for 10% of units and 5% of floor space.

The number of outlets operating in this classification was stable between 2019 and 2021, but grew by one in 2022 with the addition of a new barber's shop. By 2023, this barber's shop had closed, taking the number of commercial units in this sector back down to eight. A further unit was lost in 2024, again in the hair and beauty category. There was no further change in 2025.

The highest number of operators are in the barber and hair & beauty salon classification, with these together representing 42.9% of units and 32.4% of floor space. The number of outlets in this classification has fallen by two since 2022.

In addition, there is an optician, a travel agent, a post office and a dog groomer. The latter opened within the town between the 2020 and 2021 audits but relocated in both 2022 and 2023.

Health

There are two premises occupied by a health care providers in Bishop’s Castle—a dentist which has occupied the same premise since at least 2019 plus a health therapist that opened in 2025. A sports therapy provider opened between the 2022 and 2023 audits but had closed by 2024.

Vacant Units

13% of Bishop’s Castle town centre outlets are vacant (13% of gross floor space), which is the equivalent of 9 units covering around 1,100m² floor space. This is high in comparison with similar-sized market towns in Shropshire (11% vacancy rate across the Shropshire towns surveyed), with the rate only higher in Highley, Wem, Craven Arms and Cleobury Mortimer. The 2025 vacancy rate was similar to the national average, which stood at 13.5% in the third quarter of 2025 according to BRC (data relating to high streets only). Two vacant premises are on Church Street, two are on the High Street, four in Market Square and one in New Street.

There were no new vacancies in 2025. Three units (33% of vacancies) have been empty since 2020 and one since at least 2019.

Chart 12: Number of Retail Services Businesses by Type, 2025

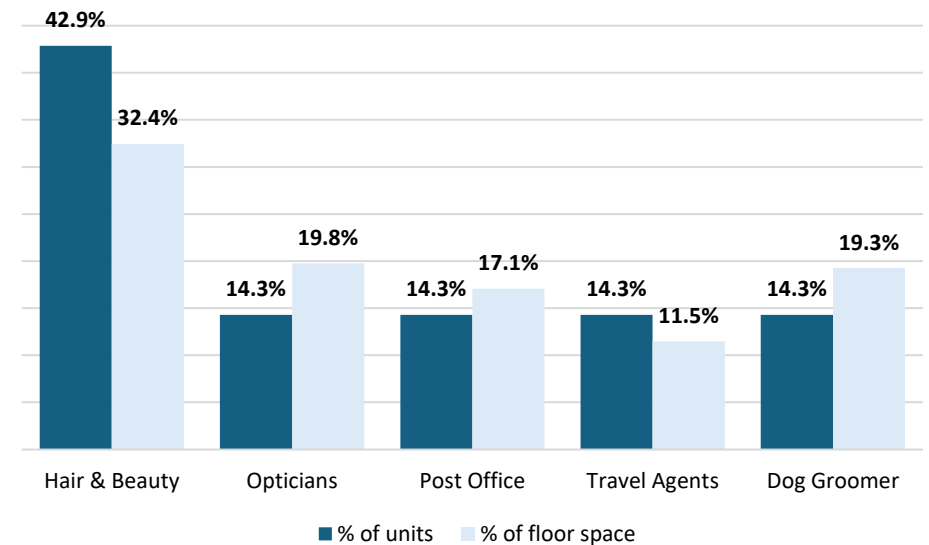
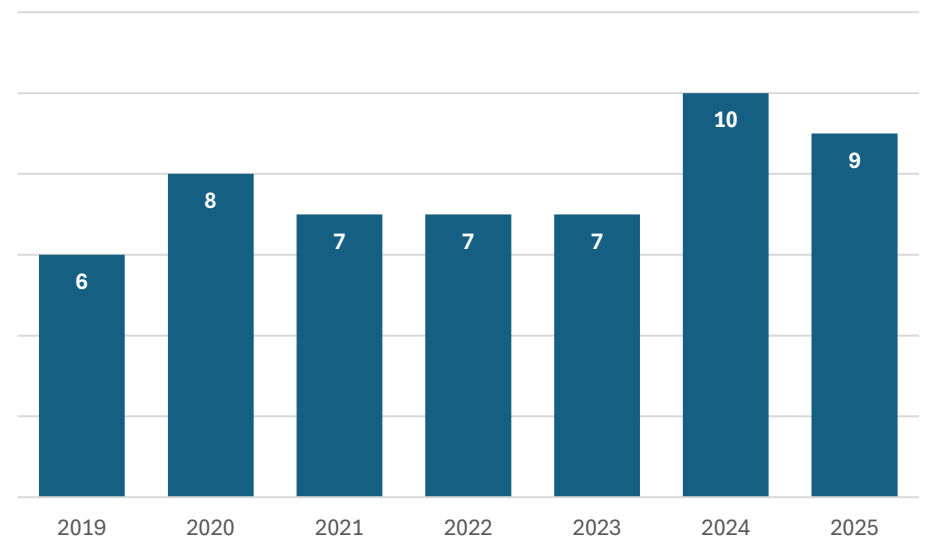
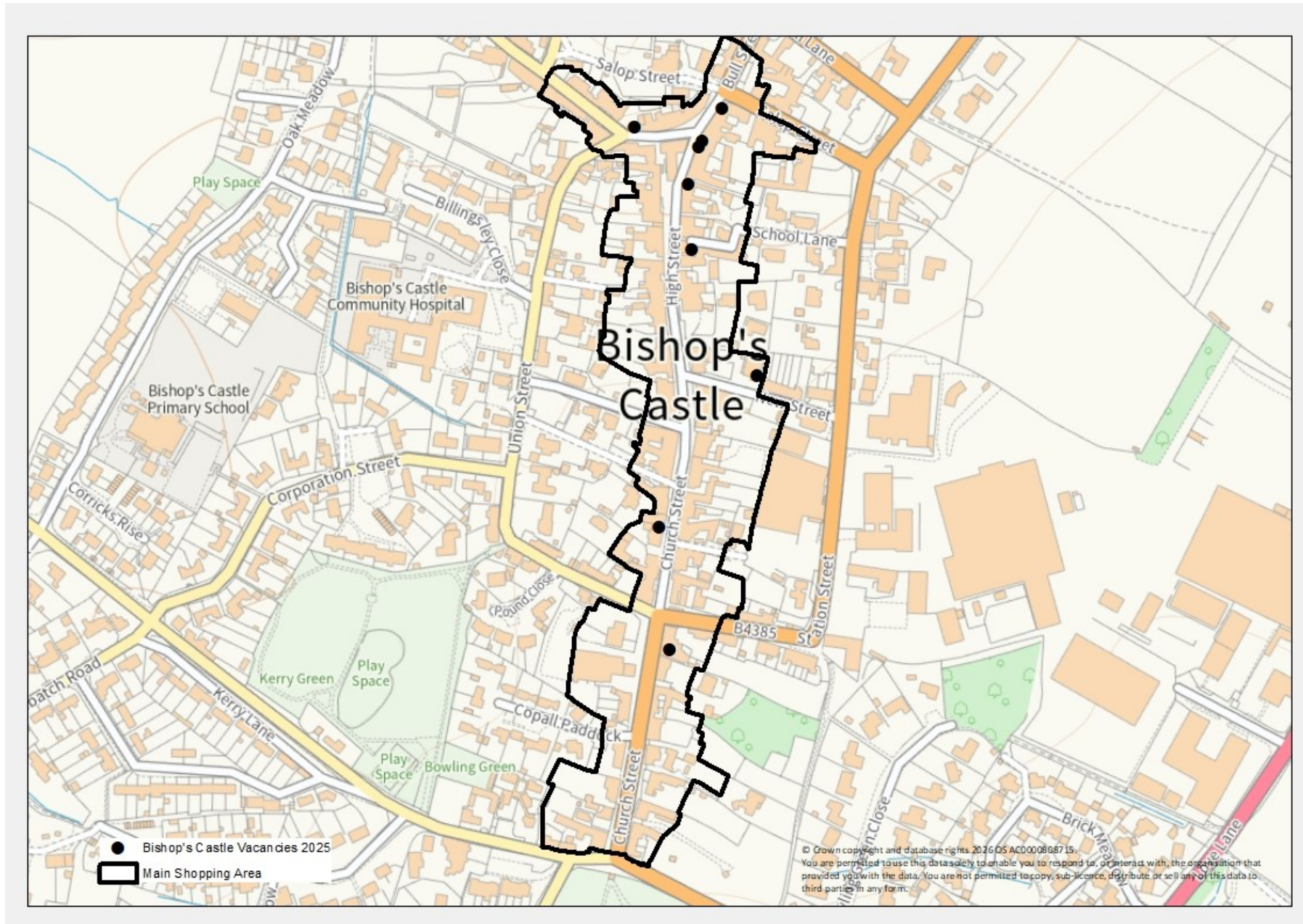


Chart 13: Number of Vacant Units, 2019-2025

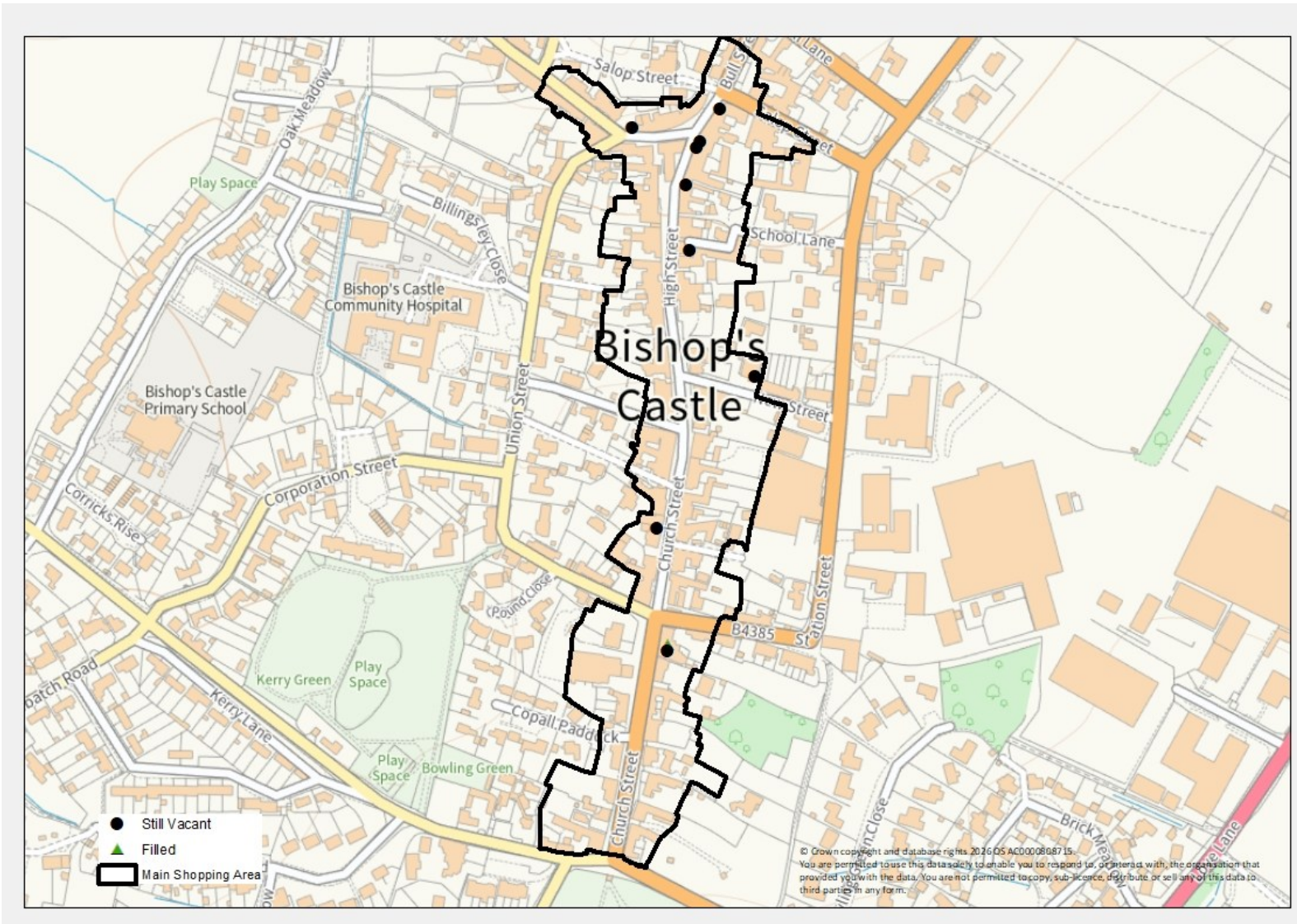


Map 7: Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2025



Nine premises which were vacant in 2024 remained so in 2025. No new vacant properties were recorded in 2025. In contrast, one previously vacant premises was filled in 2025, leading to a net decrease of one unoccupied commercial units.

Map 8: Change in Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2024–2025



Residential Premises

There is a significant amount of residential property within the main shopping centre in Bishop's Castle. In total, 147 residential premises are located in the audit area, of which the vast majority are either terraced houses or flats (116 or 79%). There are 46 flats which are largely located above retail or other commercial outlets. Much of this stock is along the High Street and Market Square. There are 70 terraced houses in the area (48% of all stock), much of which is along Church Street. There are small quantities of detached and semi-detached housing stock, most of which is towards the periphery of the main shopping area.

Map 9: Location of Residential Premises in Bishop's Castle Town Centre

Chart 14: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type

