

Church Stretton: Town Centre Audit Analysis, 2025



Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Church Stretton'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. Church Stretton centre was first audited in August 2019 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

- 88 commercial units, occupying 12,500m² gross floor space.
- The ninth largest shopping centre in Shropshire, accommodating for 3.5% of all Shropshire High Street traders .
- Slightly higher than average number of stores per head of population at a rate of 19.7 units per 1,000 population (average of 13 for Shropshire).
- Average store size 142m²—close to the Shropshire average (147m²) and the fourth highest in Shropshire.
- 171 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of 0.5:1 commercial versus residential properties.
- Church Stretton had a 7% business churn rate in both 2020 and 2021, which was amongst the lowest in Shropshire. This almost doubled to 13% in 2022 before falling back slightly to 11% in 2023 and 10% in 2024 and 2025. Since 2019, churn has been lower in Church Stretton than anywhere else in Shropshire except Much Wenlock.
- 7% of all commercial premises were vacant in 2025—this is lower than the Shropshire average (11%) and is lower than anywhere else in the county except Much Wenlock and Broseley.
- Comparison retail accounts for almost a third of all commercial premises; many operators in this category—alongside the restaurants and public houses – add to the town's appeal as a visitor destination. The only Shropshire town with a higher penetration of comparison retailers is Ludlow.
- There are comparatively few retail services businesses operating in Church Stretton, with these accounting for 11% of commercial units. This is lower than anywhere else in Shropshire except Bishop's Castle, and compares with a county average of 19%.
- While finance, professional and business services providers account for an average share of commercial operators (9%), there have been no banks in the town since 2021.
- Restaurants & takeaways are slightly over-represented, as is convenience retail and tourism & leisure. In the case of the latter, the major part of the town's tourism offer is located outside the main shopping zone.

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.

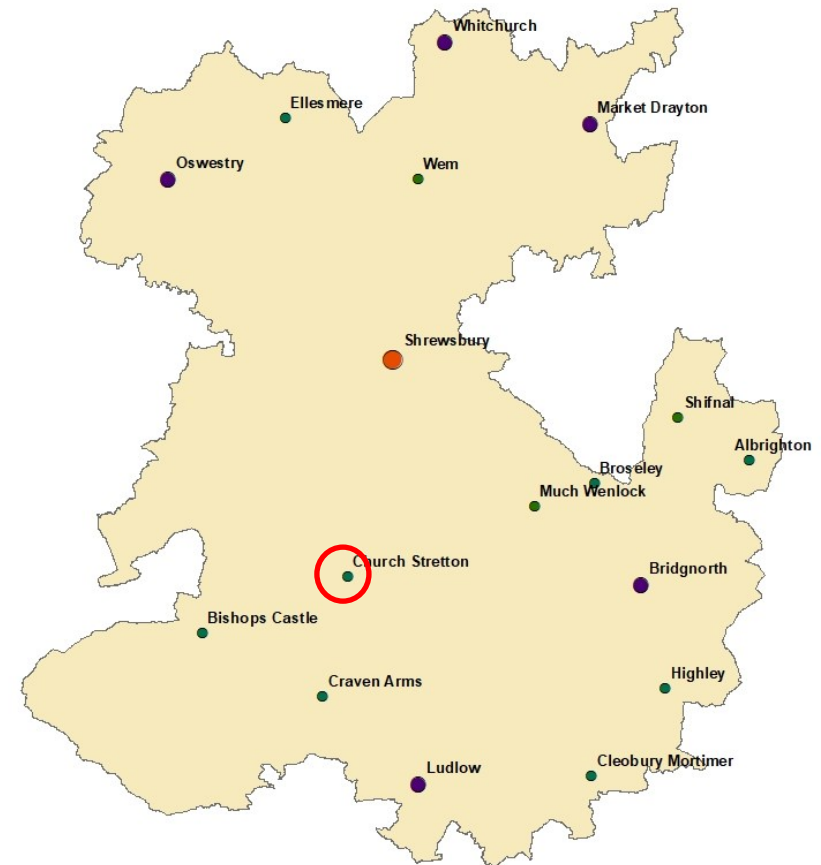
However, not all centres have comparable functions. Larger centres tend to attract workers and shoppers from much further afield than smaller centres, and consequently offer a much greater volume and variety of retail trade and consumer and business services.

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
Bishops Castle
Broseley
Church Stretton
Cleobury Mortimer
Craven Arms
Ellesmere
Highley
Much Wenlock
Shifnal
Wem

Church Stretton is amongst the largest of the tier 3 retail centres, with 88 commercial outlets.

Map 1: Shropshire's Main Retail Centres



About Church Stretton

Church Stretton is a small market town located in the centre of Shropshire to the south of the county town, Shrewsbury, and to the north of Ludlow. The town developed as an Anglo-Saxon village, and today is an important tourism destination, being the only market town to fall entirely within the Shropshire Hills Natural Landscape. Church Stretton attracts considerable numbers of day trippers and overnight visitors as it provides ideal access to the Long Mynd and other neighbouring Shropshire Hills. 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 4,500 (ONS mid-year estimates 2024) and 2,256 households (*2021 Census*). The town's population has declined by 2.4% since 2021. It is the thirteenth largest market town in the county and has one of the oldest demographic profiles in Shropshire.

The town is located on the A49, with Shrewsbury to the north (14 miles) and Ludlow to the south (16 miles). Church Stretton is on the national rail network on the Cardiff to Shrewsbury line. The total population within a 10 mile radius is approximately 35,500.

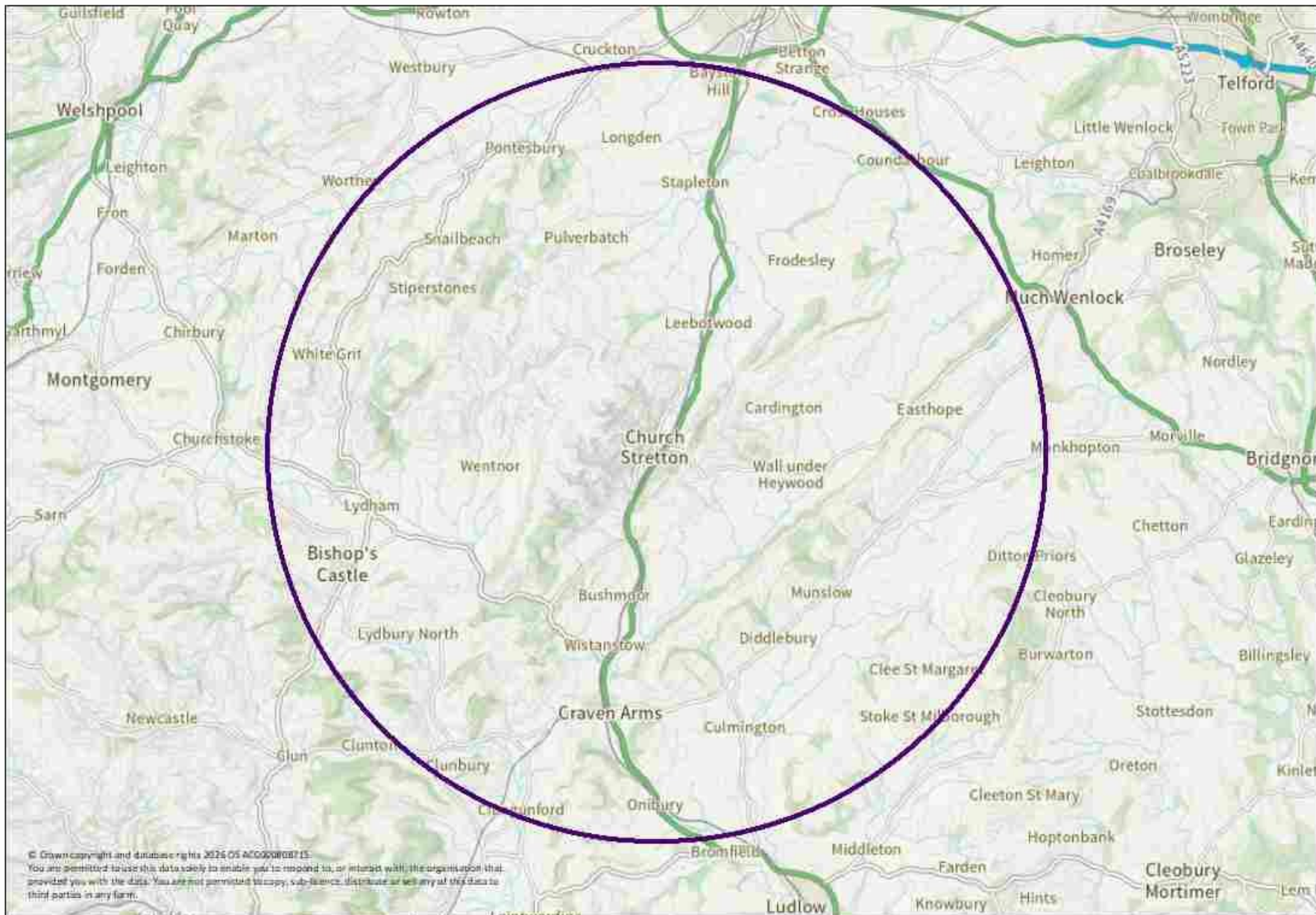
Church Stretton provides approximately 1,200 jobs across the town council area (*ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2024*). Key sectors include:

- Retail (15.6% of jobs)
- Accommodation and Food Services (13.2% of jobs)
- Arts, Entertainment & Leisure (12.3% of jobs)
- Education (11.5% of jobs)
- Health (10.3% of jobs)

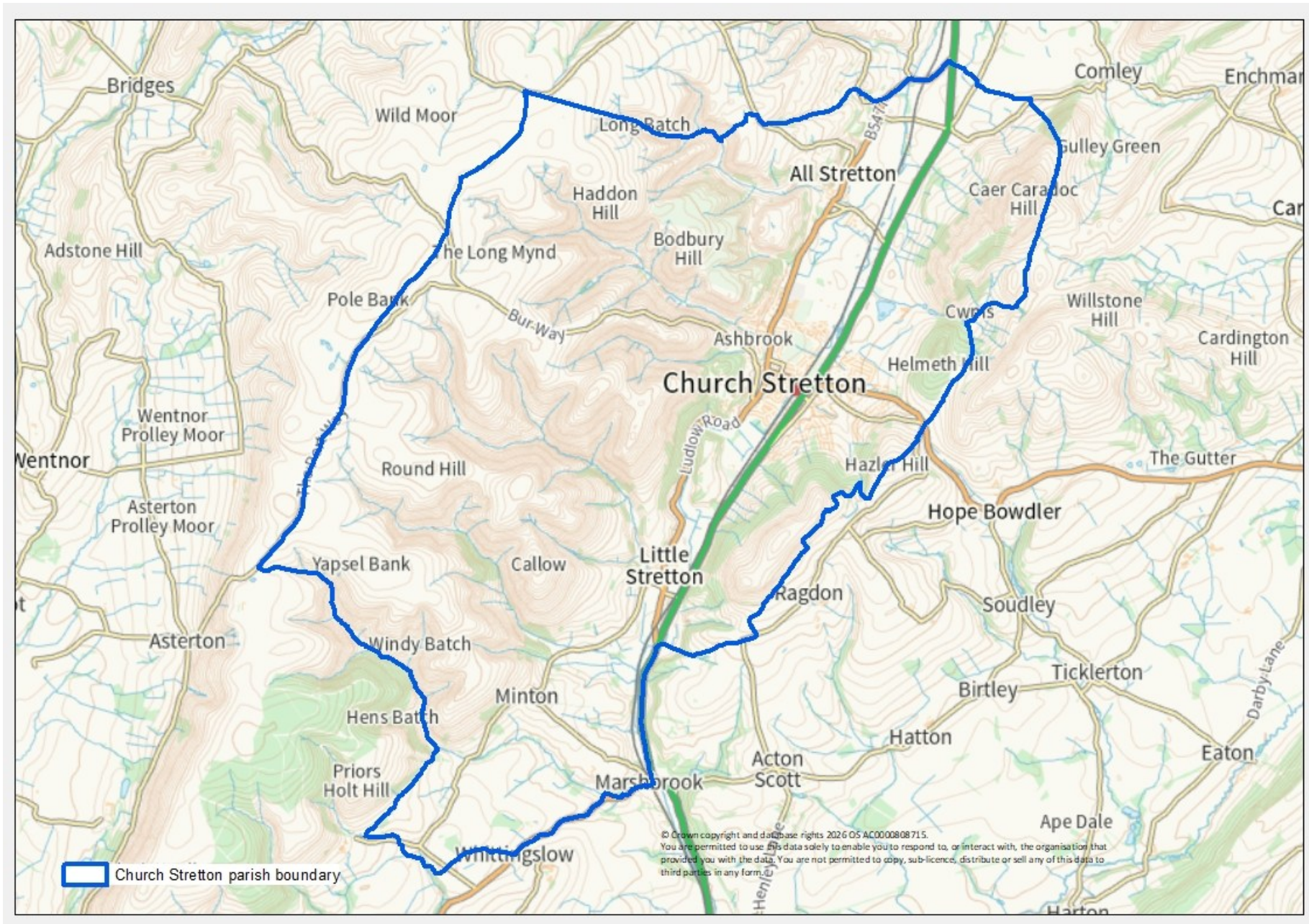
Overall, Church Stretton town council area (depicted on Map 3) is large, covering an area of 3,132 hectares. The main shopping area (depicted on Map 4) is much smaller than this, at around 6 hectares.

The town comprises predominantly independent retail and there is a significant amount of residential housing stock in the main shopping area of the town. The weekly market is held in the Town Square every Thursday and Saturday. Access to the more extensive retail and leisure facilities on offer in Shrewsbury is straightforward for Church Stretton residents.

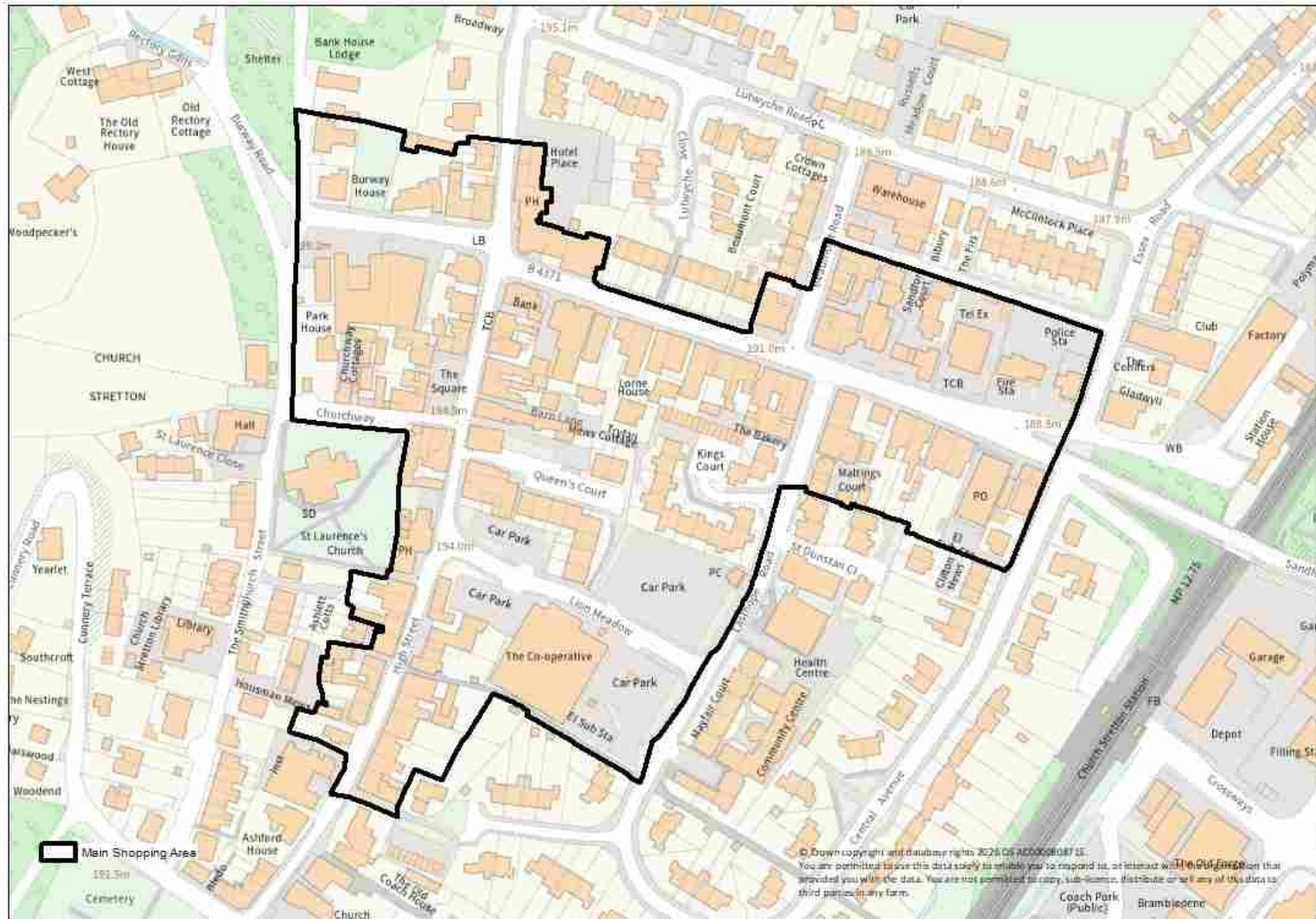
Map 2: Location of Church Stretton showing 10 mile radius



Map 3: Church Stretton Town Council Area



Map 4: Main Retail Shopping Area and Survey Boundary



Key Audit Results

A total of 88 commercial premises are located within the Church Stretton survey area. These are primarily in Sandford Avenue (32 premises) and High Street (28 premises), with a small number in Beaumont Road (7), Burway Road (5), Shrewsbury Road (5) and The Square (5) and surrounding streets. Gross floor space allocated to these businesses is almost 12,500m² (almost two thirds in Sandford Avenue and High Street). The average store size is 142m² with units ranging in size from 20m² to 1,500m². Outside of Shrewsbury and the main Shropshire market towns (Oswestry, Market Drayton, Whitchurch, Ludlow, Bridgnorth), Church Stretton has a relatively broad offering within the main shopping zone.

There was no change in the number of commercial premises in Church Stretton between 2019 and 2021. Between the 2021 and 2025 audits, there has been some consolidation, with one unit taking over two adjacent premises to form one larger store in 2022.

An additional commercial premise was identified in 2023 taking the number to 89 while one unit was repurposed from commercial to residential in 2024. There was no change in the number of commercial outlets in 2025.

The highest proportion of commercial units are allocated to comparison retail (31.8%). They account for a slightly smaller share of floor space (30.9%). Convenience retail accounts for only a small share of units (9.1%) but for the second highest proportion of floor space (20.6%). 15.9% of units are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, while almost one in ten are filled by a financial/professional/business services operator. A relatively small number of retail service businesses operate in the town (11.4% of units accounting for 7.8% of floor space). Small numbers of units are filled by tourism & leisure operators and other types of organisations (including a police station and a fire station).

There are six vacant premises in Church Stretton, including three on Sandford Avenue, and one each in the Square and on Burway Road and Easthope Road. Together these account for 6.8% of units, which is the equivalent of 7.7% of floor space.

Chart 1: Number of Stretton Commercial Premises, 2019 –2025

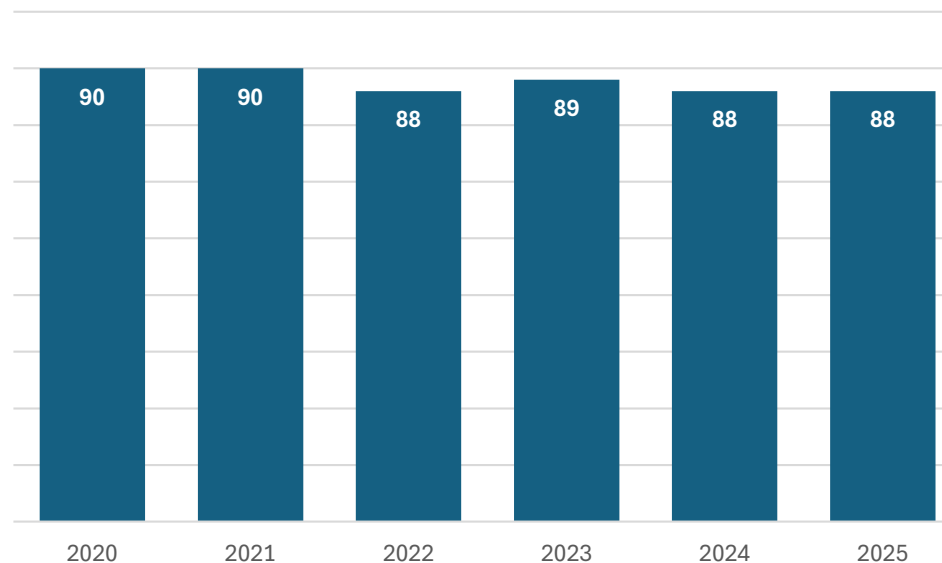
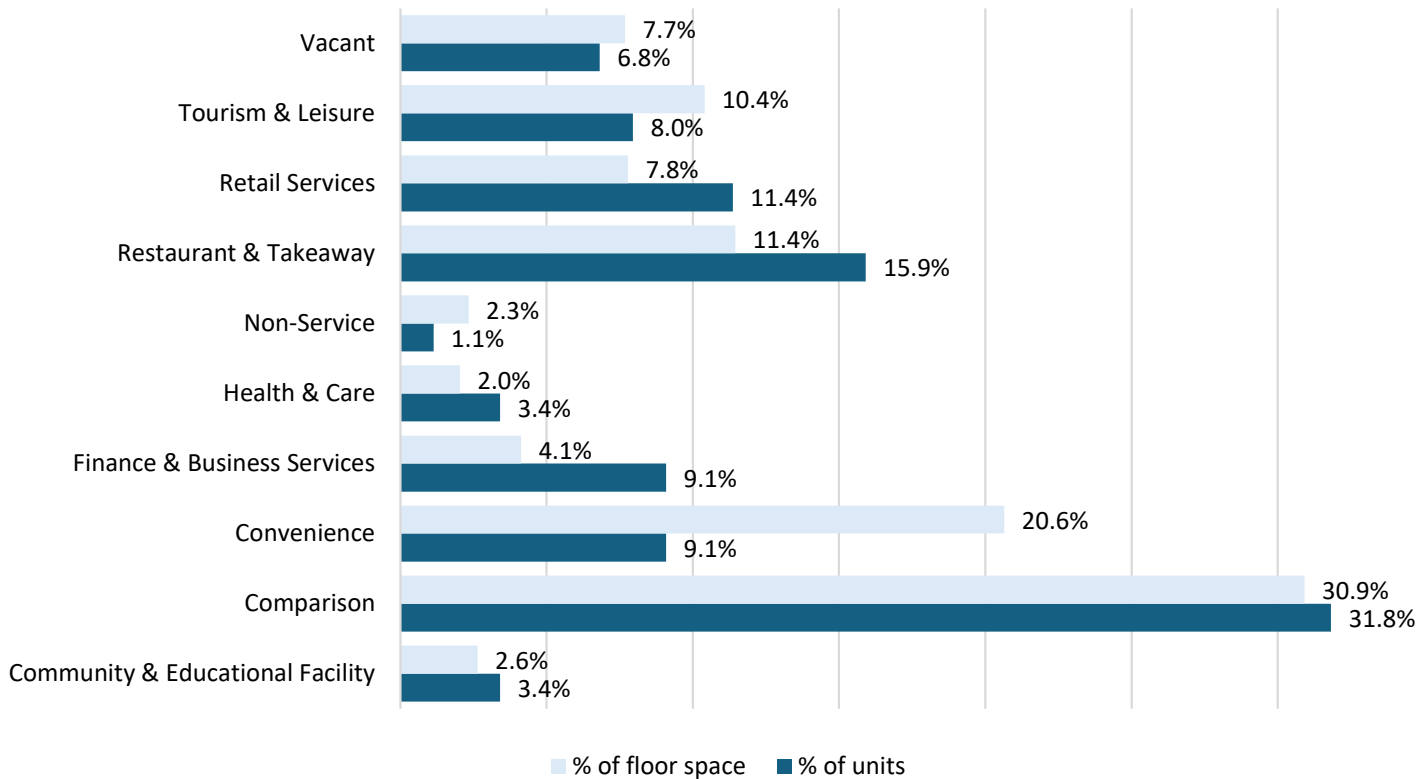


Chart 2: Breakdown of Church Stretton Commercial Premises by Classification, 2025



Change since 2024

There has been only minimal change in the mix of businesses operating in Church Stretton between 2019 and September 2025. Overall, business turnover in Church Stretton has been amongst the lowest in Shropshire over the last six years at 7% in 2019/2020 and 2020/21 before rising to 13% in 2022, 11% in 2023 and to 10% in both 2024 and 2025.

Between 2024 and 2025, there were two fewer operators in the comparison retail sector, while the number of units in tourism and leisure and convenience retail rose by one. There was no change in retail services, restaurants & takeaways, the finance and business sector or health and care, and the number of vacant premises likewise remained unchanged.

Chart 3: Change in Number of Units by Category, 2024/25

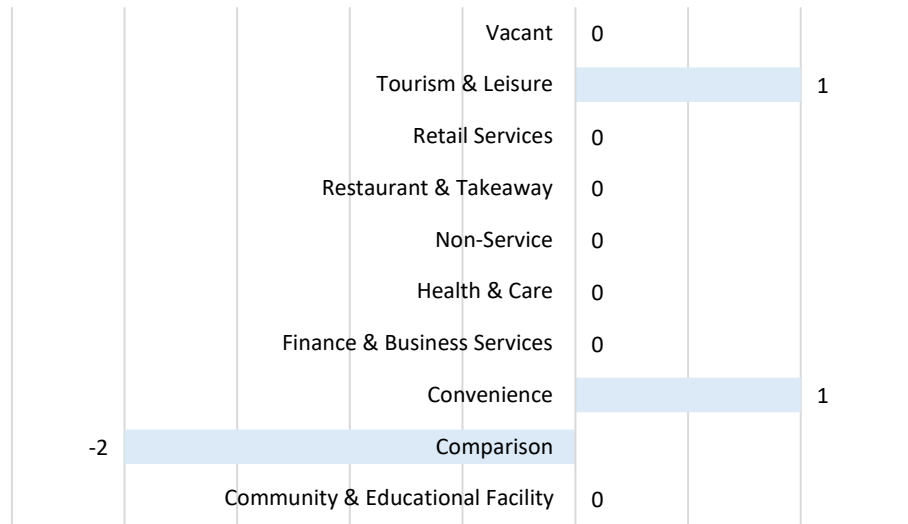


Chart 4: Level of Business Churn, 2019-2025

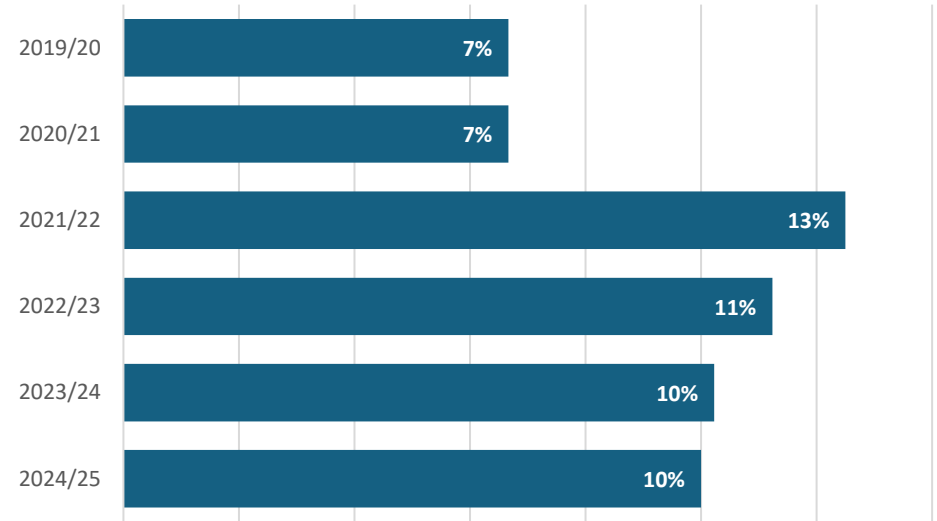
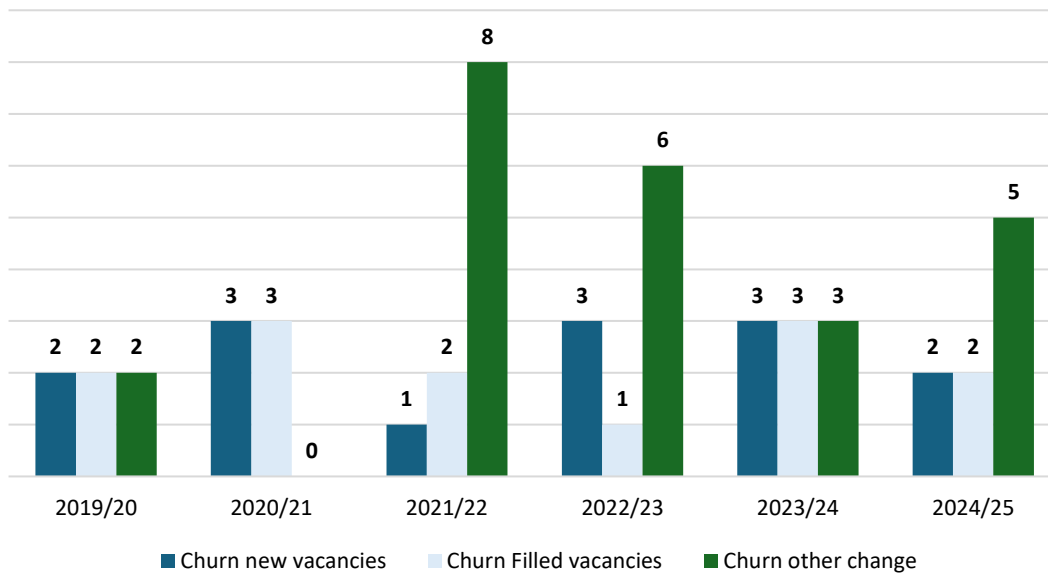


Chart 5: Breakdown of Business Churn 2019-2025



In 2025, two premises became vacant, while two previously empty premises became occupied. Over half of churn was therefore attributable to other change such as businesses changing function or proprietorship.

Between 2019 and 2025, 14 commercial premises have been vacated, while 13 previously vacant premises have become occupied.

Comparison Retail

The largest proportion of commercial units and the largest proportion of floor space is dedicated to the comparison retail category in Church Stretton, accounting for almost a third of units (32%) and for a slightly smaller share of gross floor space (31%). This equates with 28 stores with almost 3,900m² of floor space. More space is allocated to comparison goods in Church Stretton than in any other Shropshire town except Ludlow. Despite this, the offer has been reduced over the last two years with the loss of two operators in both 2024 and 2025. The type of retailers operating in this sector support the town's tourism offer.

Chart 7: Breakdown of Comparison Retail by Type, 2025

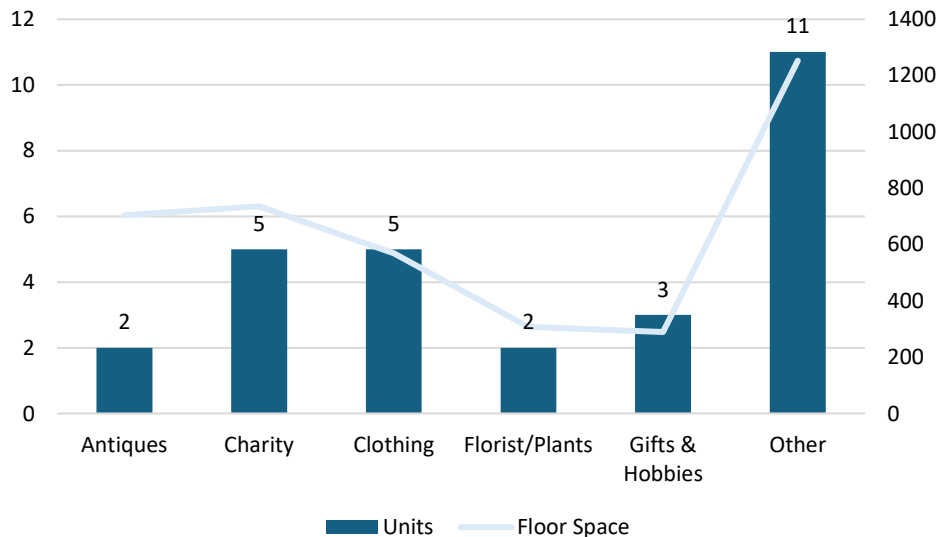
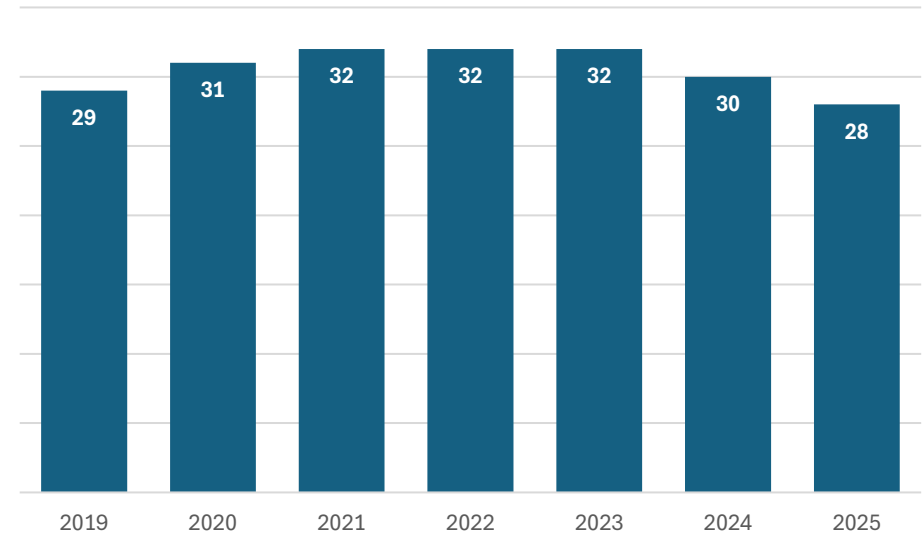


Chart 6: Number of Comparison Retail Stores, 2019—2025



Within the town there are five charity shops, five clothing/shoe shops plus three stores selling gifts and/or hobby and craft products. There are also two antique stores (which together account for a disproportionately large share of floor space), and two florists (one of which also sells home goods and was opened between the 2023 and 2024 audits). All other classification types are represented by just one store. These include a book shop, a DIY shop, a toy shop, a motorised scooter retailer, a mobile phone store, a pharmacy and a photographic equipment store. The classification also includes a general store/hardware shop, which expanded in 2022 to include a store which was vacant as well as a former knitwear store. In 2025, a carpet shop, a craft store and a stationers closed. A second hand book store opened.

The majority of stores are independent, although the town is home to Rowlands pharmacy and Get Connected mobile phone store and to several charity stores that form part of either local or national chains (Hope House, Severn Hospice and British Red Cross).

Convenience Retail

There are eight convenience stores within the main shopping area of Church Stretton. These account for 8% of all units and for 21% of gross floor space. The presence of the town's main supermarket in the town centre accounts for the large share of floor space attributable to convenience retail. There have been only two changes in the convenience sector since 2019—a butcher store closed in 2022 and a bakery opened in 2025.

Chart 8: Number of Convenience Stores, 2019 - 2025

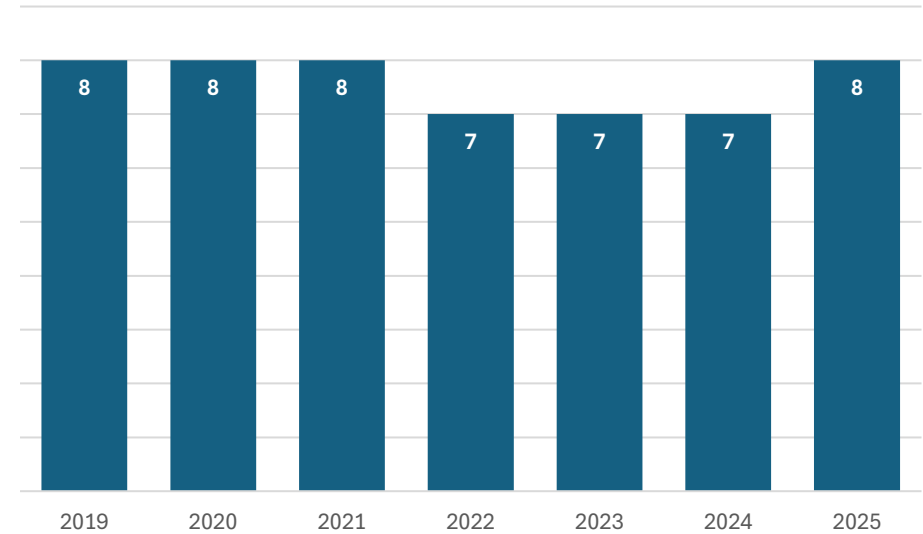


Chart 9: Number of Convenience Stores by Type, 2025



As well as a supermarket (the Co-op), there are two other general food stores, a butcher, two bakeries, a delicatessen and a confectioners. The opening of a bakery in 2025 has been the only main change since 2022, although the delicatessen changed owner/branding in 2023.

Apart from the Co-op, which is the largest store in Church Stretton, other operators in the convenience retail sector are independent.

Restaurants & Takeaways

16% of units in Church Stretton are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, with this category accounting for a slightly lower proportion of gross floor space (11%). The number of units operating in the sector has fluctuated between 12 and 14 since 2019. The restaurant sector was boosted in 2022 with the opening of a restaurant. A new takeaway also opened, but this was offset by the closure of another. The number of units fell by one in 2023 with the closure of the restaurant that had opened in 2022; however, this restaurant re-opened again in 2024 to take the total number of operators back up to 14. There was no change in the offer in 2025.

Chart 11: Breakdown of Units in the Restaurant/Takeaway Sector, 2025

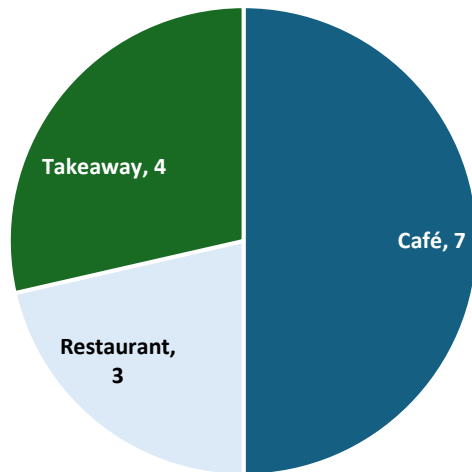
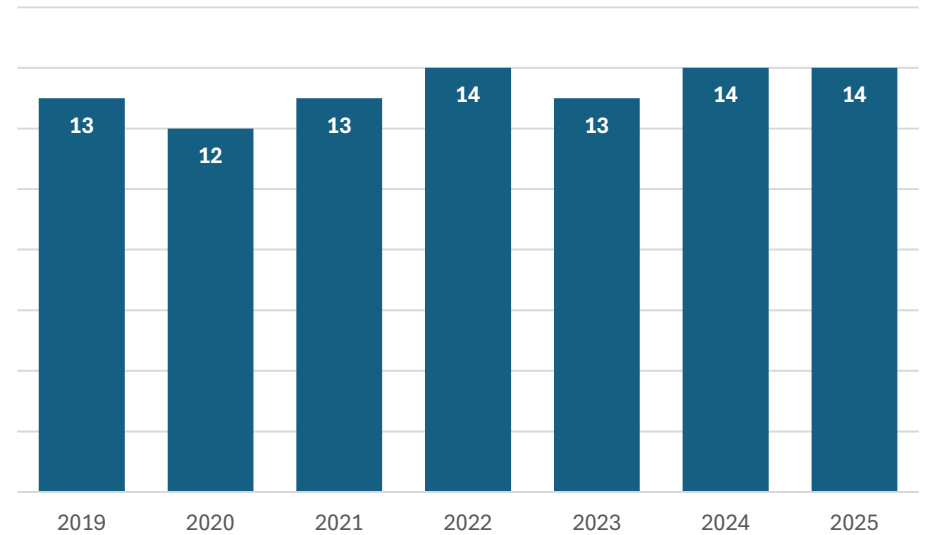


Chart 10: Number of Restaurants/Takeaways, 2019 - 2025



The 14 units are split between cafés (50%), restaurants (21%) and takeaways (29%). Two of the Church Stretton restaurants are Asian. In terms of takeaways, there is fish and chips, Chinese and a kebab shop. One of the Chinese takeaways opened in 2023, although a sandwich shop closed. One of the cafés rebranded or changed ownership in 2024. and another did likewise in 2025.

There are no chain stores in the restaurant and takeaway category in Church Stretton.

Tourism & Leisure

Also within the hospitality sector, there are four public houses. These take up approximately 800m² gross floor space. One of these establishments opened between the 2023 and 2024 audits. There is also a B&B located in the town centre as well as two art galleries, one of which opened in 2025.

Finance & Business Services

There are eight commercial operators in the finance and business services category in Church Stretton town centre, accounting for over 500m² of gross floor space. The number has fallen from 12 in 2019, with the loss of one unit in both 2021 and 2022 and a further two in 2024. There was no further change in 2025.

Chart 13: Number of Financial & Business Services Units, 2019-2025

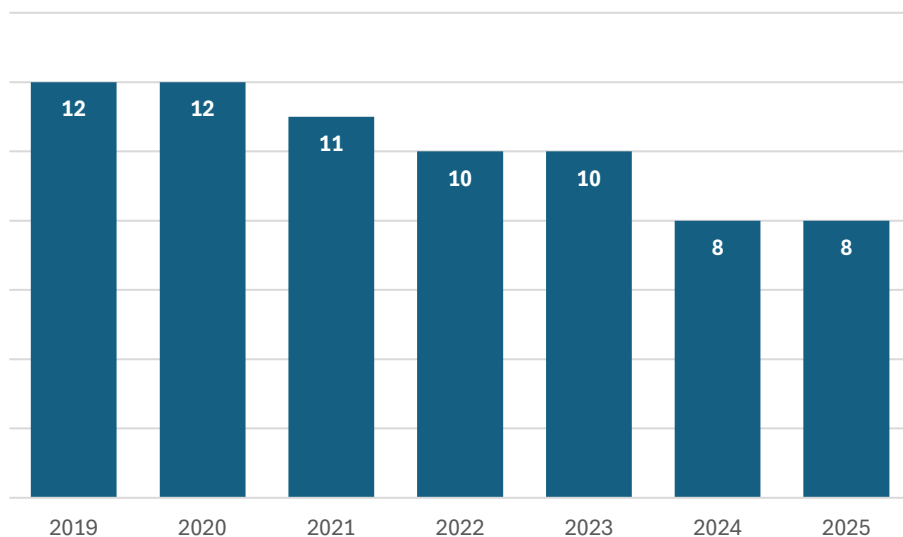
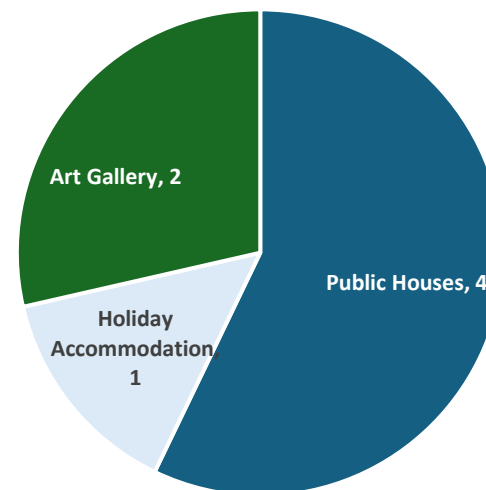


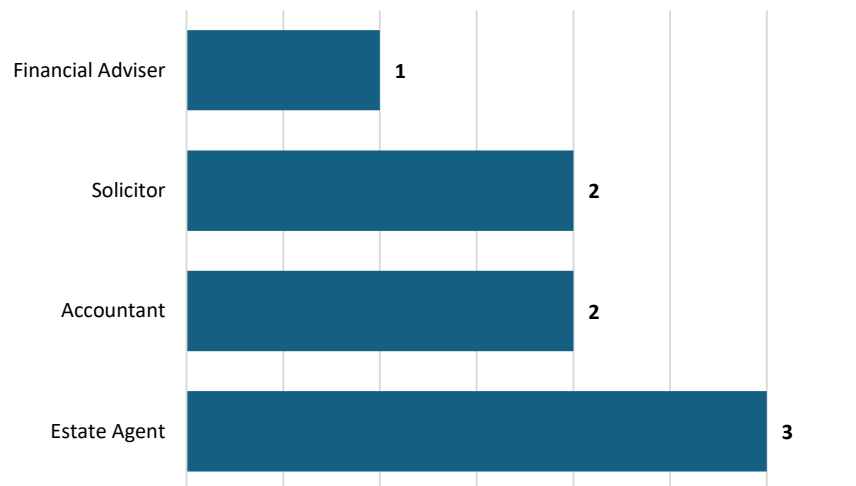
Chart 12: Breakdown of Units in the Tourism/Leisure Sector, 2025



Included within this classification are three estate agents (including a letting and property management company), two solicitors, two accountants and a financial adviser. One estate agent and a veterinary practice closed in 2024.

The branch of the TSB bank that was in the town closed in 2021 and is now occupied by a store selling plants, flowers and home goods. The premise of the former branch of Barclays is now occupied by an outdoor goods store. Consequently, there are no longer any banking services in the town.

Chart 14: Breakdown of Financial /Business Services Businesses by Type, 2025



Health

There are two dental practices within the main retail zone in Church Stretton and a chiropody clinic. There was no change in this classification in 2025.

Retail Services

There are ten retail service businesses operating in Church Stretton town centre, with these accounting for almost 1,000m² of gross floor space. This category is under-represented in Church Stretton compared with other Shropshire towns of a similar size. This may suggest that a sizeable proportion of Church Stretton residents travel to nearby Shrewsbury for retail service provision.

There is one fewer operator in the retail services classification than there was in 2019 although this does represent an increase of one compared with 2023. There was no change in retail service provision in 2025.

Chart 15: Number of Retail Services Businesses, 2019-2025

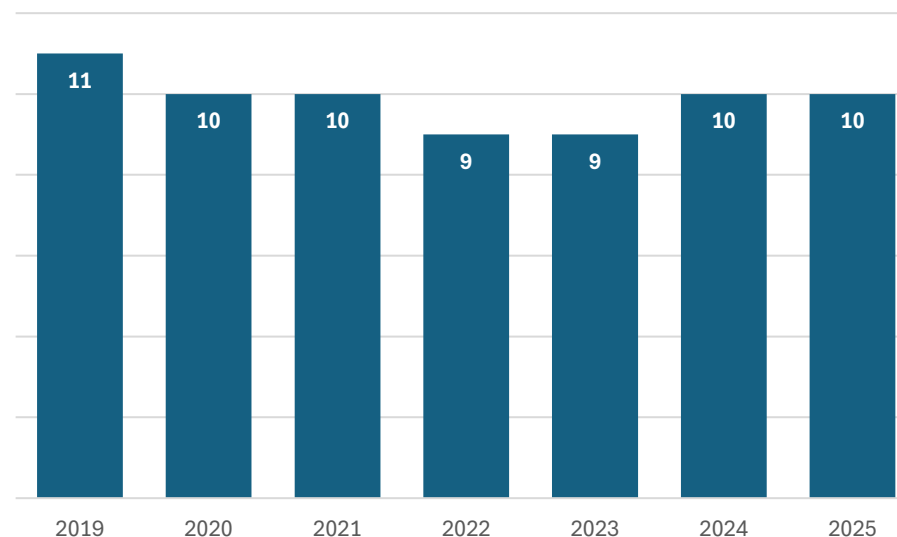
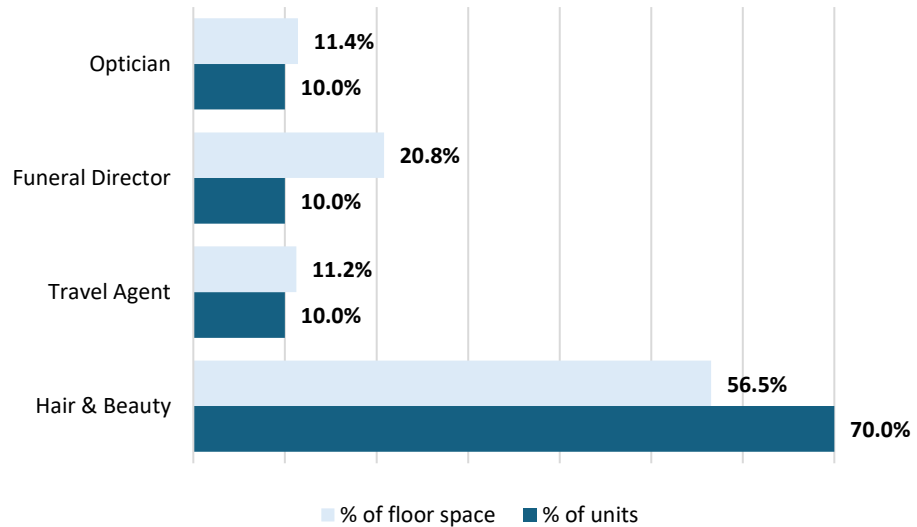


Chart 16: Breakdown of Retail Services Businesses by Type, 2025



The highest number of operators are in the barber and hair & beauty salon classification, with these together representing 70% of units and 56.5% of floor space. In addition, there is an optician, a travel agent, and a funeral director.

The only change in the sector since 2023 was the addition of a barber's shop which opened in the premise of former picture framing business in 2024.

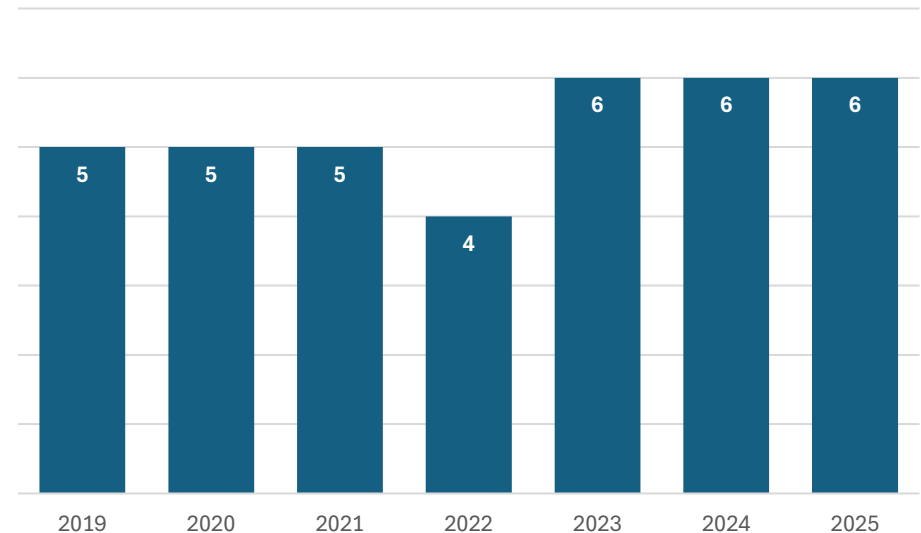
Vacant Units

7% of Church Stretton town centre outlets are vacant (8% of gross floor space) which equates with six premises. This is significantly below the average for Shropshire, which stood at 11% in 2025. The vacancy rate is also much lower than the average nationally, which stood at 13.5% in the third quarter of 2025 according to BRC (data relating to high streets only).

The number of vacant units in Church Stretton has ranged between four and six between 2019 and 2025, remaining stable at six since 2023.

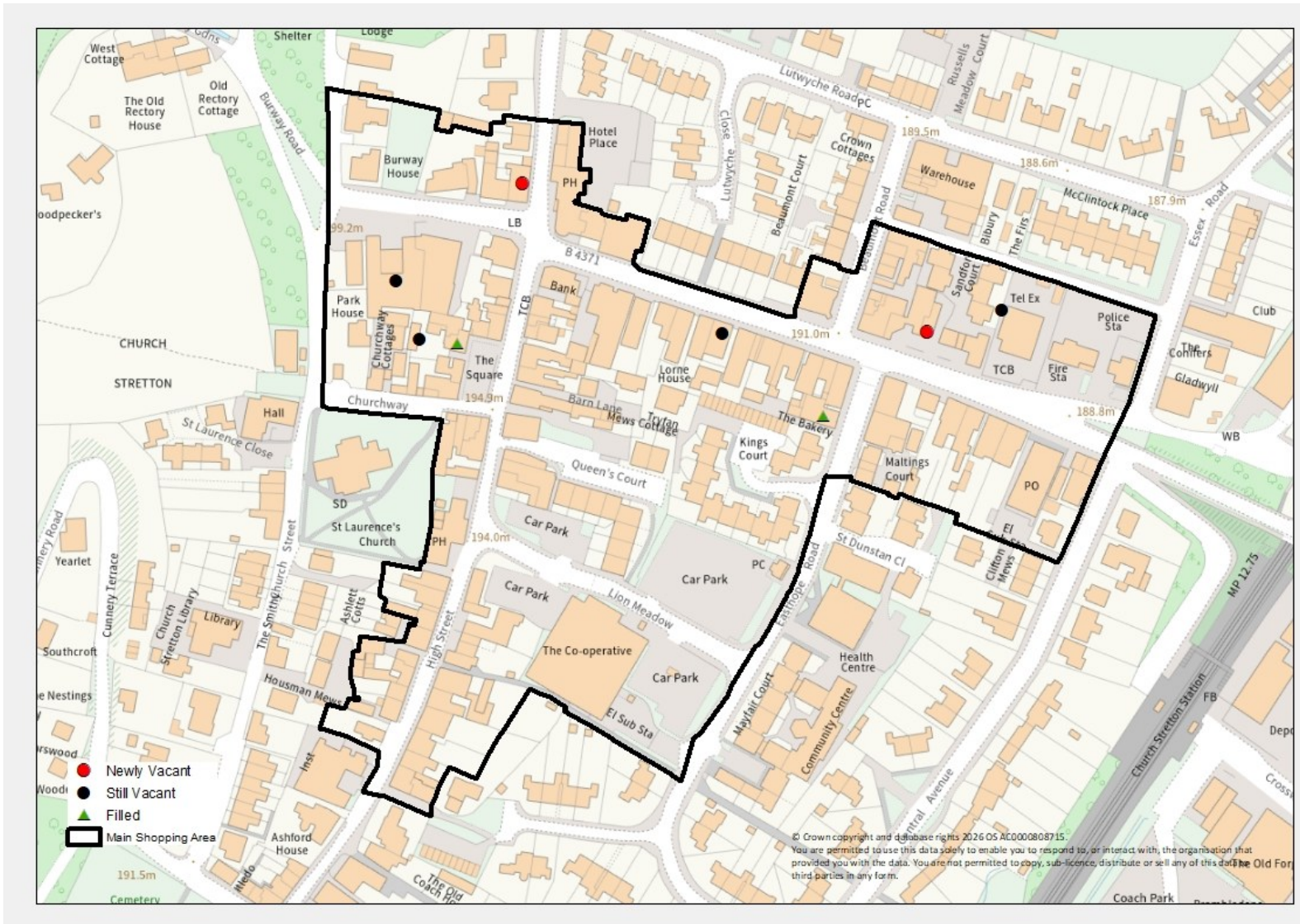
Three of the vacant premises are on Sandford Avenue with one each on Burway Road, The Square and Shrewsbury Road. The vacant premise on Burway Road has been unoccupied since 2019.

Chart 17: Number of Vacant Commercial Units, 2019-2025



The overall number of vacant units in Church Stretton remained stable with six units empty when the town was audited in 2025. Of the six premises which were vacant in 2024, two had been filled, while four remained vacant. Two premises became vacant in 2025.

Map 6: Change in Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2024/25



Residential Premises

There is a significant amount of residential property within the main shopping centre in Church Stretton. In total, 171 residential premises are located in the audit area, of which the vast majority are flats (125 or 73%) which are largely located above retail or other commercial outlets. Much of this stock is along Sandford Avenue and the roads adjacent to the main car park. There are small quantities of detached, semi-detached and terraced housing stock, most of which is towards the periphery of the main shopping area. The amount of housing stock in the area has increased by one since 2023.

Map 7: Location of Residential Premises in Church Stretton Town Centre

Chart 18: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type

