

# Wem: Town Centre Audit Analysis, 2025



## Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Wem'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. Wem centre was first audited in July 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

- 100 commercial units, occupying 11,100m<sup>2</sup> gross floor space.
- 8th largest centre in Shropshire (according to the number of commercial units) accommodating 4.0% of all Shropshire High Street traders.
- Average number of stores per head of population at a rate of 15.8 units per 1,000 population (13 for Shropshire).
- Average store size 111m<sup>2</sup> which is notably smaller than the average across Shropshire (147m<sup>2</sup>) but in alignment with many other tier three Shropshire towns.
- 187 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of 0.6:1 commercial versus residential properties.
- Wem had a 17% business churn rate between the 2024 and 2025 audits, which was the same as 2024 and slightly higher than the Shropshire average (13%). Since 2019, overall churn stands at 84%, which is on a par with the average for Shropshire.
- 17% of all commercial premises were vacant in 2025, which is higher than the Shropshire average (11%). The number of vacancies rose by four in 2025, and the vacancy rates is amongst the highest in Shropshire.
- The highest proportion of commercial units is attributable to retail services (24%). This compares with an average of 19% across Shropshire.
- In contrast, there are comparatively few businesses operating in comparison retail (21%) although this does represent the second largest sector.
- The largest store in the town is the Co-op, meaning that convenience retail accounts for a disproportionately high share of floor space (18.1% compared with 6% of units).
- Wem has lower than average numbers of restaurants and takeaways and tourism and leisure operators. The number of restaurants is particularly low, with just one trading in 2025.
- The number of businesses classified as financial, professional and business services providers is lower than the Shropshire average (7% of all commercial operators).

## 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. In Wem, the business park is just outside the scope of this audit.

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.

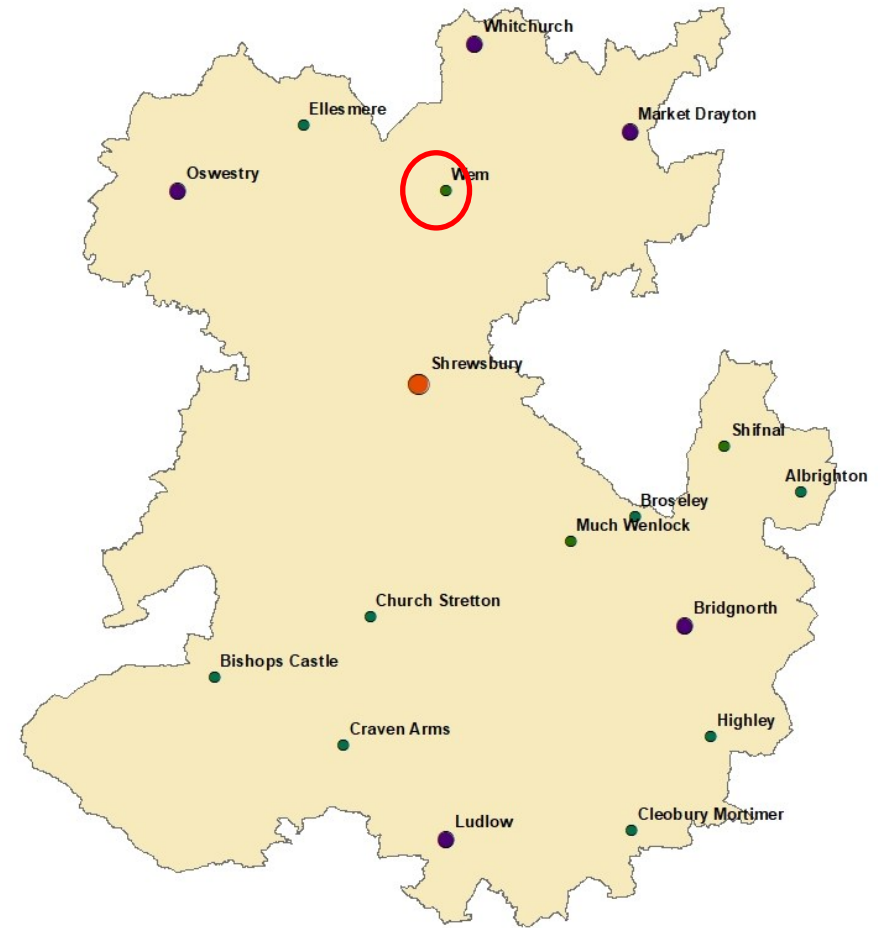
However, not all centres have comparable functions. Larger centres tend to attract workers and shoppers from much further afield than smaller centres, and consequently offer a much greater volume and variety of retail trade and consumer and business services.

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**

Along with Shifnal and Ellesmere, Wem supports a relatively large retail centre compared with other tier 3 Shropshire towns.

Map 1: Shropshire's Main Retail Centres



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## About Wem

Wem is a small market town located in the centre of Shropshire to the north of the county town, Shrewsbury. The area was first settled during the Celtic Iron Age, and today has a population of 6,300 (ONS Mid-year estimates 2024) and 2,832 households (*2021 Census*). The town's population has grown by just 0.4% since 2021. It is the eighth largest market town in the county.

The town has Whitchurch to the north, Market Drayton to the east, Shrewsbury to the south and Oswestry to the west. Wem is located west off the A49 which provides access south to Shrewsbury (13 miles) and north to Whitchurch (10 miles). Local roads also provide access to surrounding market towns, including Ellesmere, and the countryside. Wem is also on the national rail network on the Manchester to Shrewsbury line. The total population within a 10 mile radius is approximately 101,000.

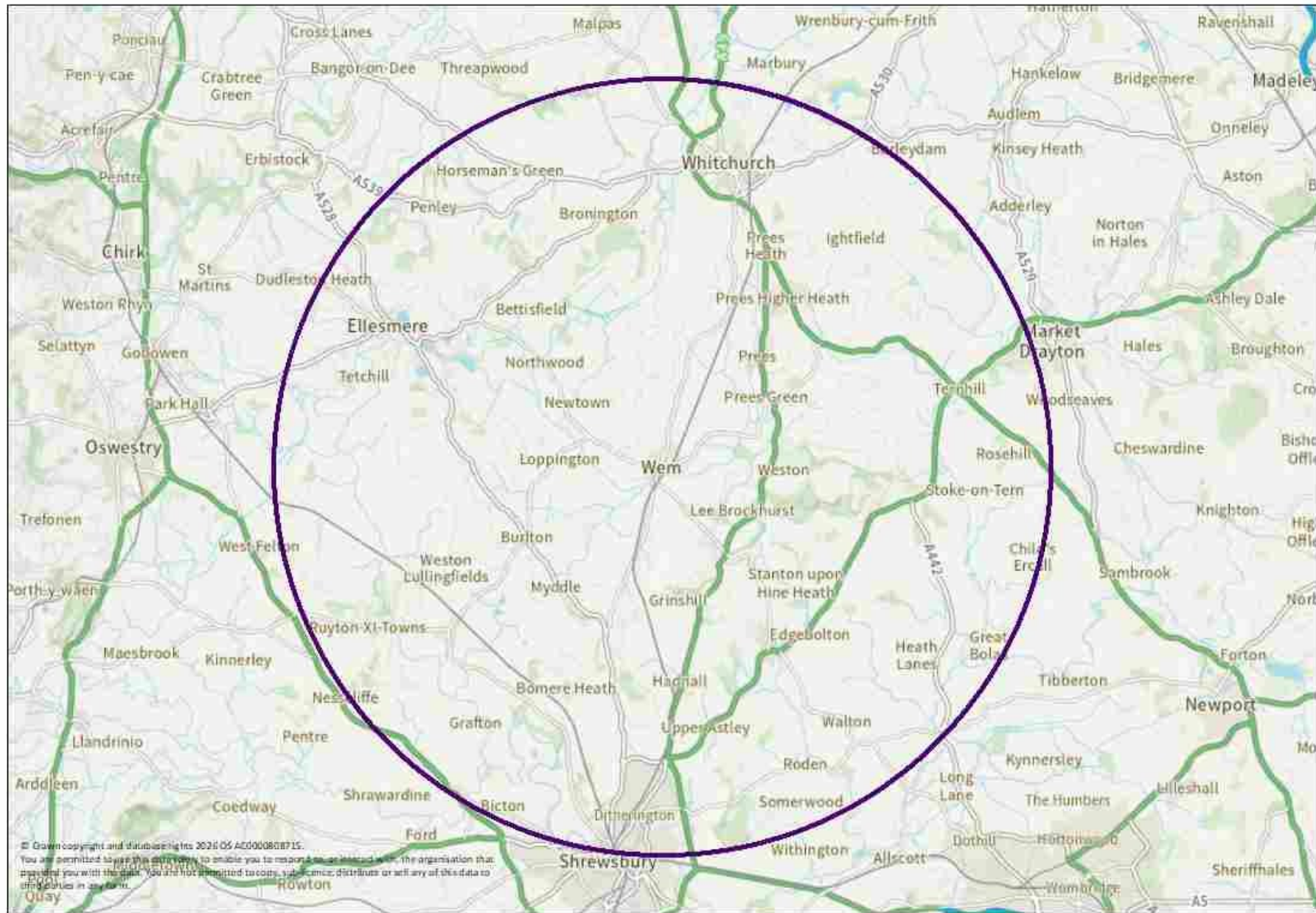
Wem provides approximately 1,400 jobs across the town council area (*ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2024*). Key sectors include:

- Education (19.4% of jobs)
- Health (17.6% of jobs)
- Retail (9.2% of jobs)
- Accommodation & Food Services (7.7% of jobs)
- Construction (5.9% of jobs)
- Property (5.9% of jobs)

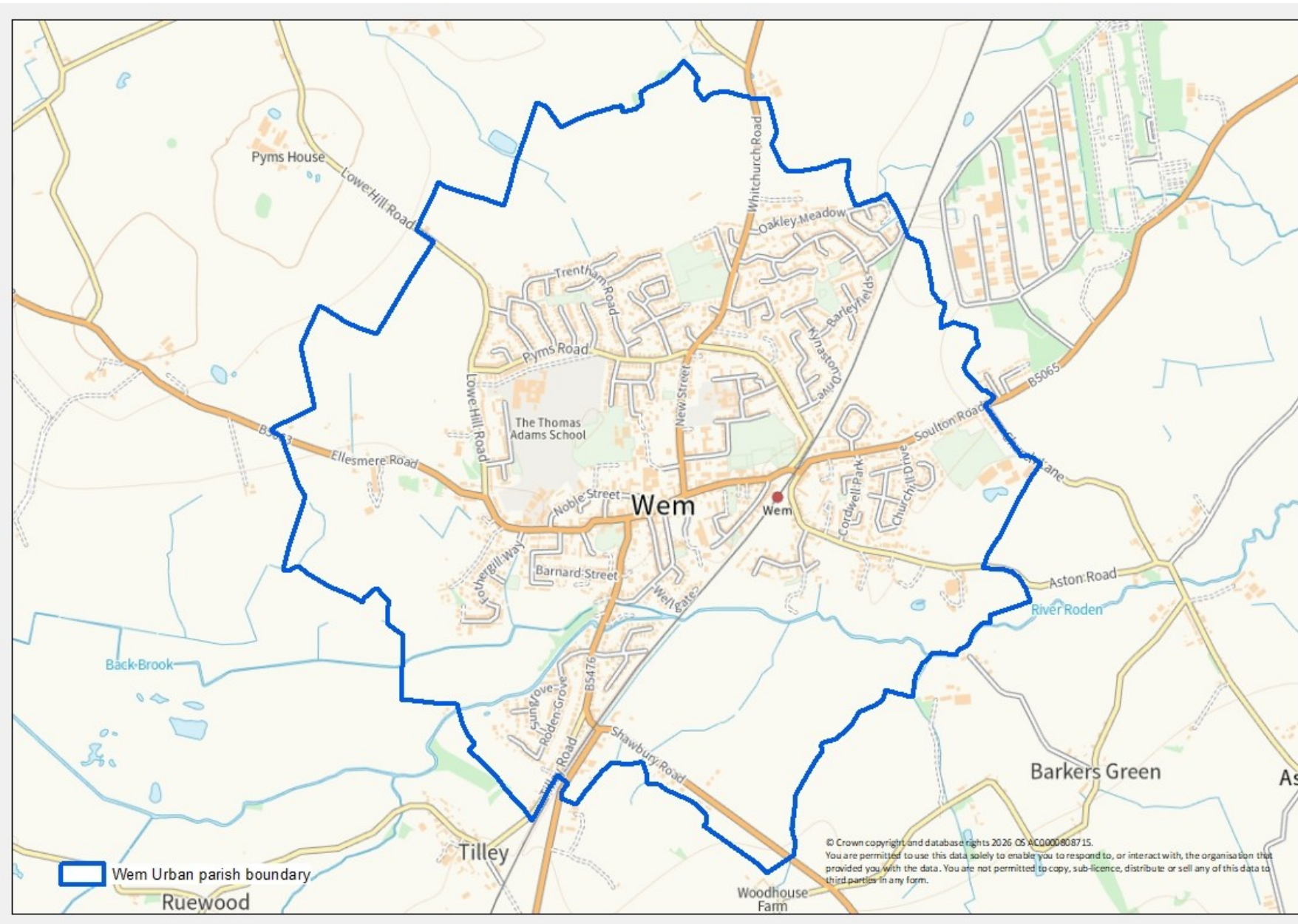
Overall, Wem town council area (depicted on Map 3) covers an area of 367 hectares. The main shopping area (depicted on Map 4) is much smaller than this, at around 6 hectares.

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 at the town hall and square every Thursday. Residents of the town are also within relatively easy access of much more extensive retail and leisure opportunities in Shrewsbury.

Map 2: Location of Wem showing 10 mile radius



Map 3: Wem Town Council Area

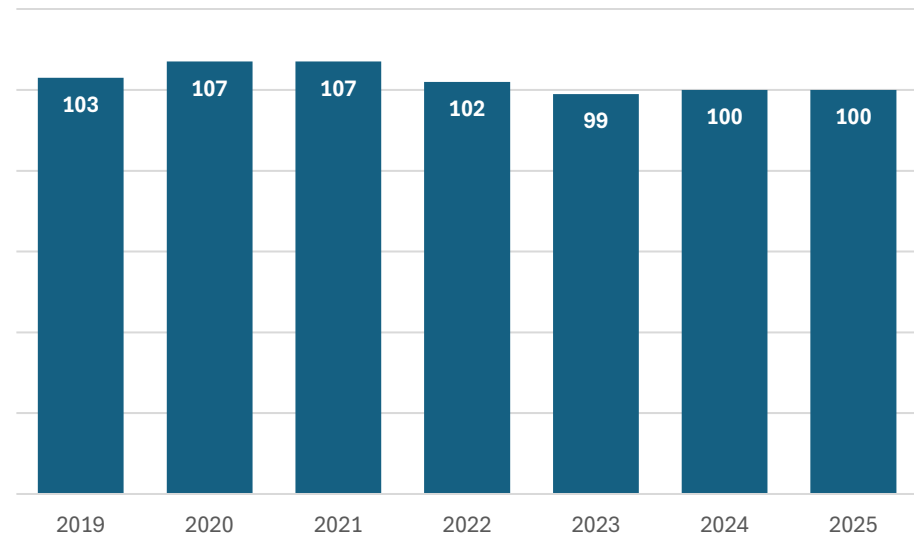




## Key Audit Results

There are a total of 100 commercial premises within the Wem survey area. These are primarily in High Street (78 business premises), with a small number in Aston Street (9), Leek Street (6), Mill Street (1) and New Street (6). Gross floor space allocated to these premises is approximately 11,100m<sup>2</sup> (more than 80% in High Street). The average store size is 111m<sup>2</sup> with units ranging in size from 10m<sup>2</sup> to 1,586m<sup>2</sup>. Generally, the number of commercial premises in Wem has been on a downward trajectory in recent years as a number of units have been repurposed as residential premises. The number of units remained stable between 2024 and 2025.

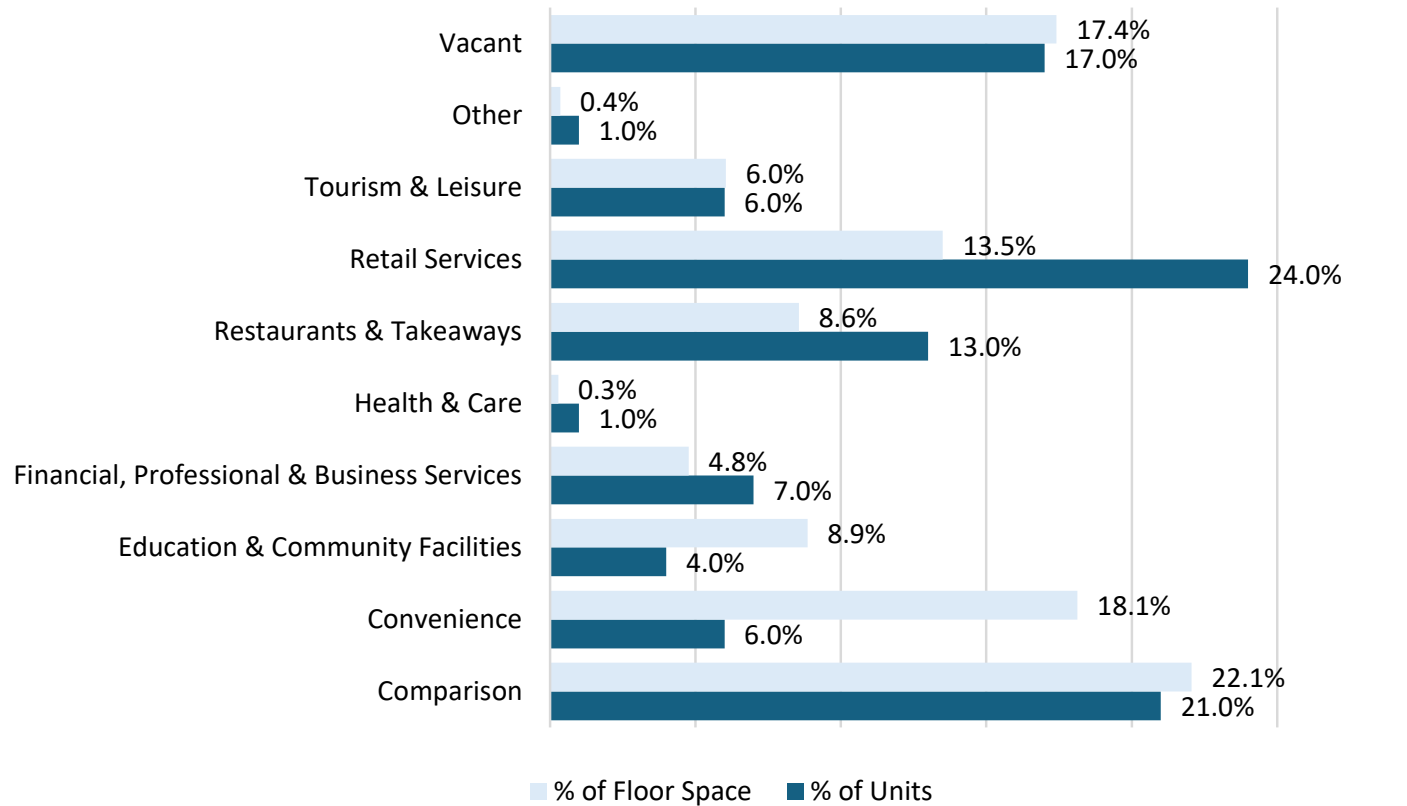
Chart 1: Number of Commercial Premises in Wem, 2019-2025



The largest proportion of commercial units in Wem is allocated to the retail services sector, at 24.0% of the total. These account for a smaller share of space (13.5%). Comparison retail also accounts for a large share of units (21.0%) and for the largest share of floor space (22.1%). Convenience retail represents only a small proportion of units (6.0%) but for a significant proportion of floor space (18.1%). 13% of units are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, while 7.0% of units are filled by a financial/business services operator. Small numbers of units are filled by educational/community facilities, tourism & leisure operators and non-service and other types of businesses.

There are 17 vacant premises in Wem (17% of units), which is the equivalent of 17.4% of floor space.

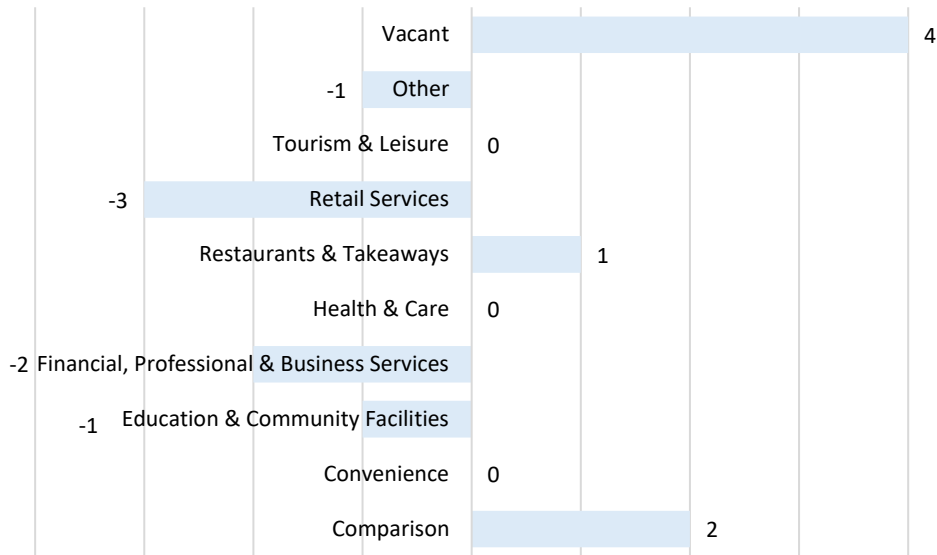
Chart 2: Breakdown of Wem Commercial Premises by Classification, 2025



## Change since 2024

There has been minimal change in the commercial mix over the last year, although the number of vacant premises did rise by four. The comparison sector was bolstered by an additional two units, and the number of restaurants/takeaways also increased with the opening of a new café. In contrast, the number of retail services providers reduced by three, the finance and businesses services sector declined by two and there was also a closure in the education and community facilities classification.

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



The level of churn in Wem town centre—premises changing hands or use—was very high in 2020 (20%) but was much reduced in 2021, with just 8 stores changing hands or purpose (7% churn rate). This number was similar in 2022 at nine units (9% churn). Since then, levels of churn have crept up—to 14% in 2023 and to 17% in both 2024 and 2025.

In 2025, premises becoming vacant accounted for almost half of all churn (41%); in contrast, previously vacant premises becoming occupied represented just 11% of churn. Since 2019, the number of premises that have become vacant has been identical to the number which have become filled (23 units in each case).

Chart 4: Levels of Business Churn 2019-2025

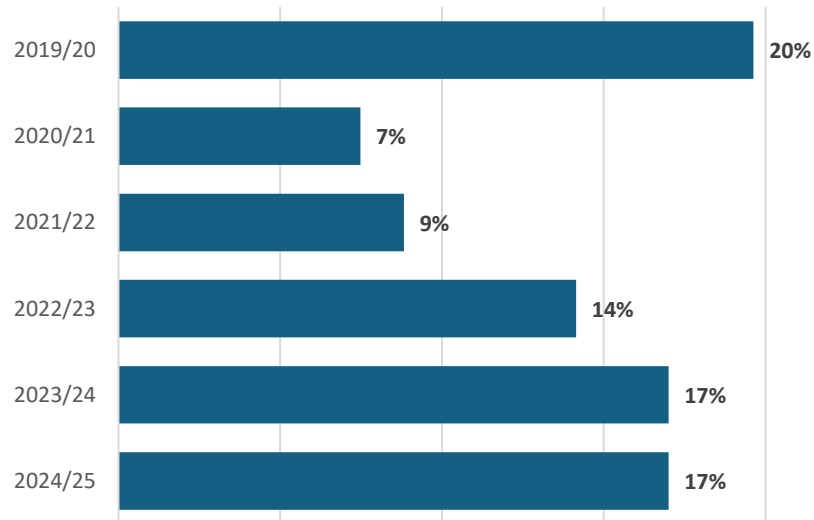
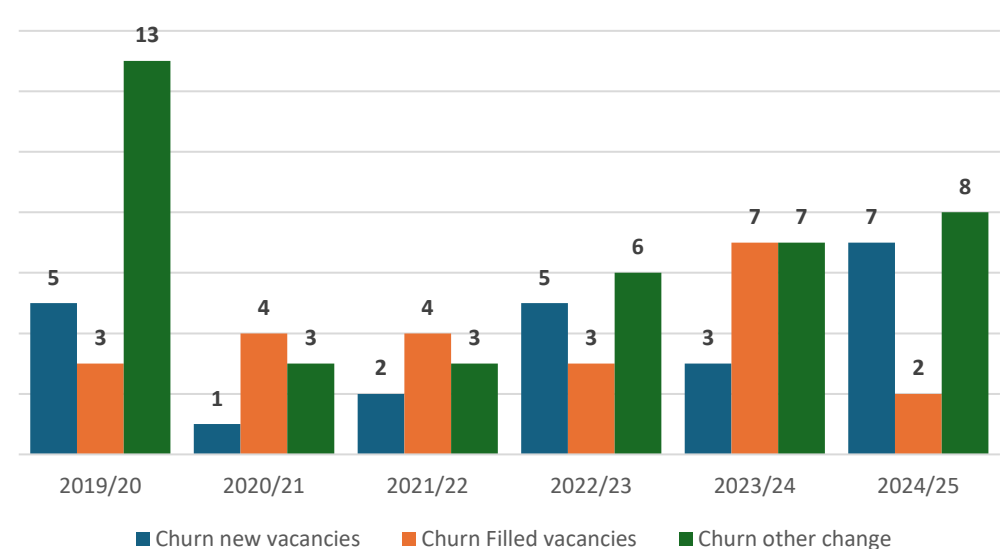


Chart 5: Breakdown of Business Churn 2019-2025



## Comparison Retail

The second largest proportion of commercial units is attributable to comparison retail (21%). This classification accounts for a similar proportion of floor space. This equates with 21 stores with almost 2,500m<sup>2</sup> of floor space. There has been some fluctuation in the number of comparison retailers trading since 2019; while the overall trend was downward until 2023, one net additional operator began trading in 2024 followed by two more in 2025.

Although they account for a substantial portion of all commercial activity, comparison retail is under-represented in Wem, accounting for a lower proportion of units than any where else except Highley, Craven Arms, Cleobury Mortimer, Broseley, Market Drayton, Albrighton, Broseley and Shifnal.

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

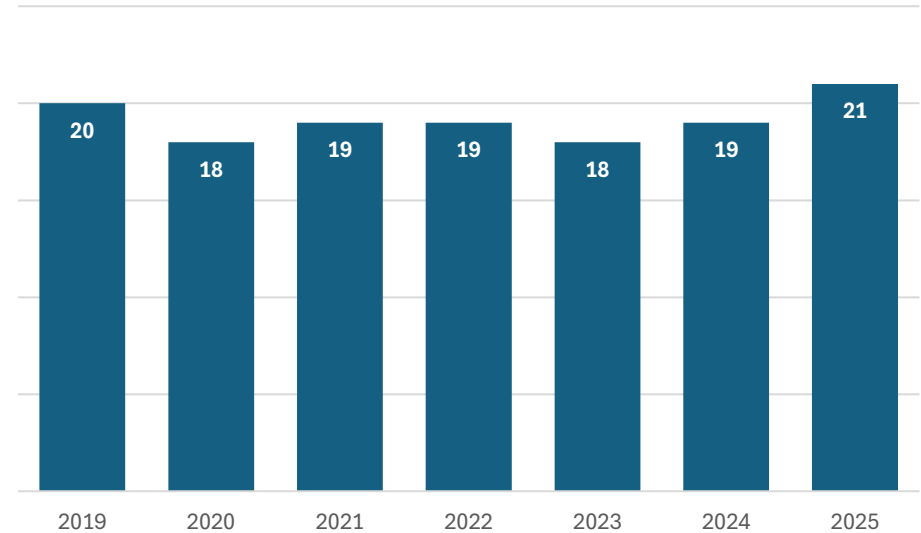
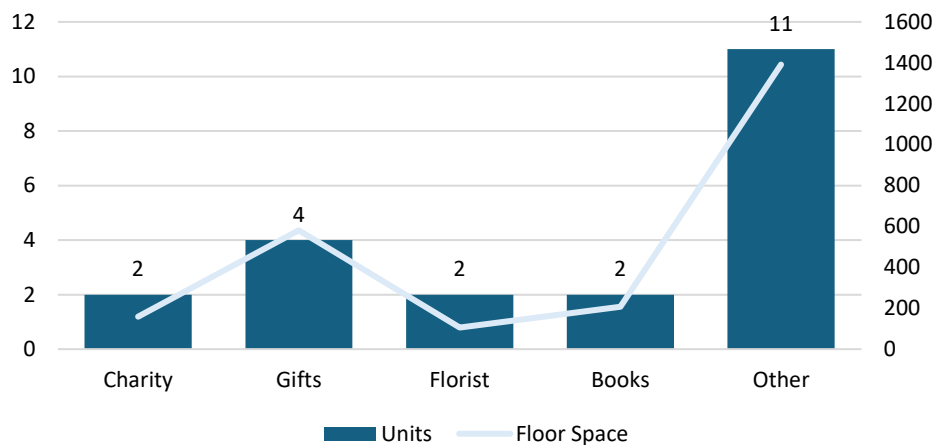


Chart 7: Breakdown of Comparison Retail by Type, 2025



Within the town there are four gift shops, two charity shops, two book stores and two florists. Two of the gift shop began trading between the 2023 and 2024 audits, as did one of the florists and one of the book sellers. All other classification types are represented by just one store. These include a computer shop, a DIY store, an electronics store, a jewellery shop, a carpet shop, a music store and a pharmacy.

Three stores opened in 2025 in the comparison sector—the music store, the antiques shop and a purveyor of headstones. A curtain shop closed between the 2024 and 2025 audits. There have been no clothes shops in Wem since 2022.

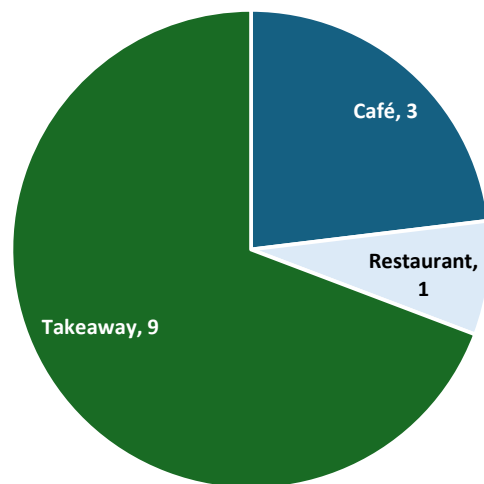
The majority of stores are independent, although the town is home to Rowlands pharmacy and Severn Hospice charity shop (a local charity, but nonetheless a small chain of stores).

## Convenience Retail

There are six convenience stores within the main shopping area of Wem, which is one more outlet compared with 2022. Convenience accounts for 6% of all units and for 18% of gross floor space. As well as a supermarket (the Co-op), there is a delicatessen, a butcher, a confectionery store and an outlet offering a food subscription service. A new general store opened in 2023 in a previously vacant premise—this closed in 2024, but another general convenience store opened in the premise that was previously occupied by the antiques store. There was no change in the sector in 2025. Other than the Co-op, which is the largest store in Wem and contributes to the category's high floor space share, other operators in the convenience retail sector are independent.

## Restaurants & Takeaways

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



13% of units in Wem are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, with this category accounting for a notably lower proportion of gross floor space (9%). There has been a net increase of one unit operating since 2024—a café with a children's play area.

The 13 units are split between cafés (23%), restaurants (8%) and takeaways (69%). There is now just one restaurant in Wem which offers Indian cuisine. An Italian restaurant closed between the 2023 and 2024 audits. There are three cafés in the town, one of which opened in 2024 and another in 2025. In terms of takeaways, there is fish and chips, Chinese, Indian and pizza. Takeaways account for a proportionally lower share of floor space (56%) compared with restaurants (19%) and cafés (25%). The number of takeaways in Wem is high compared to the number of restaurants or cafés.

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

## Tourism & Leisure

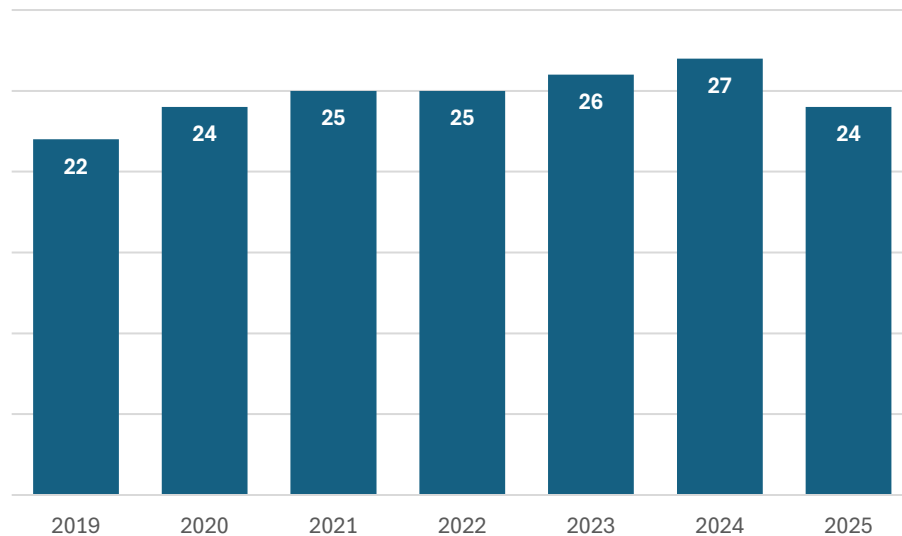
Also within the hospitality sector, there are three public houses. These take up approximately 450m<sup>2</sup> gross floor space. One public house closed in 2023, but this closure was offset by a new operator on the High Street in the same year. There is self-catering holiday accommodation located within the town as well as a theatre. The town's dance school has closed in 2023. A new gym began trading in 2024. There were no further changes in 2025.

## Finance & Business Services

There are seven commercial operators in the finance, professional and business services sector in Wem town centre, accounting for around 500m<sup>2</sup> of gross floor space. Included within this classification are three estate agents (one fewer than in 2023), two consultants, a solicitor and a sound engineer. There are no longer any banks or building societies open in Wem.

## Retail Services

Chart 9: Number of Retail Service Providers, 2019-2025

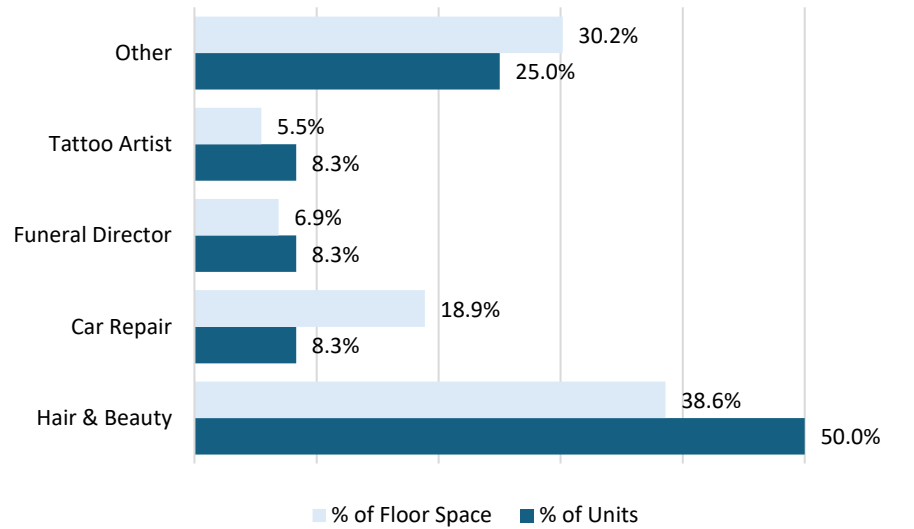


There are 24 retail service businesses operating in Wem town centre, with these accounting for almost 1,500m<sup>2</sup> of gross floor space. The number trading has fallen by three over the last year.

Compared with many other towns, retail services make up a high proportion of the commercial offer in Wem, especially in unit terms. They represent 24% of all traders, which compares with an average of 19% for Shropshire. The average size of stores is small, so this classification represents a much smaller share of floor space (14%).

Although the range of services provided is wide, a very high number of operators are in the barber and hair salon classification, with these together representing 50% of units and 39% of floor space. In addition, there are two garages (one offering a valet service), two funeral directors and two tattoo artists. Amongst other services provided in the town (by one operator only) are dry cleaners, launderette, optician, travel agents and a post office.

Chart 10: Breakdown of Retail Services by Type, 2025



## Vacant Units

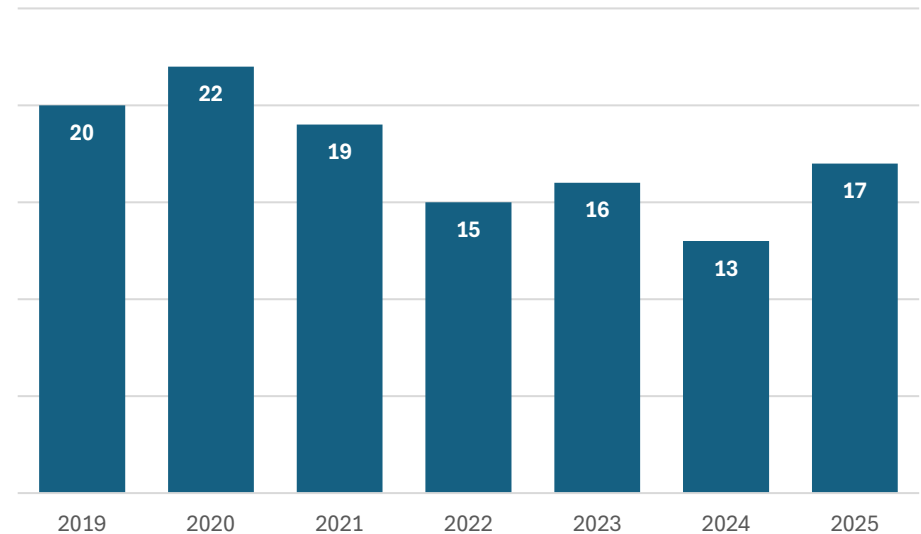
17% of Wem town centre outlets are vacant (17% of gross floor space). This is higher than the Shropshire average of 11% and also exceeds the vacancy rate nationally which stood at 13.5% in the third quarter of 2025 according to BRC (based on high street data only).

The number of vacant premises in the town declined between 2020 and 2022 but has since fluctuated—rising to 16 in 2023, falling to 13 in 2024 before rising again in 2025. One of the units classed as vacant in 2024 is no longer classed as commercial.

In 2025, 41% of vacancies were new since 2024. Almost a third of empty premises (five units) have been vacant since 2020, and there are three units that have been empty since at least 2019.

11 of the 2025 vacancies are on the High Street, three are on New Street, two on Aston Street and one on Leek Street.

Chart 11: Number of Vacant Units, 2019-2025







## Residential Premises

There is a significant amount of residential property within the main shopping centre in Wem. In total, 187 residential premises are located in the audit area, of which the majority are flats (115 or 61%) which are largely located above retail or other commercial outlets. Much of this stock is along the High Street. There are small quantities of detached and semi-detached housing stock, most of which is towards the periphery of the main shopping area. There are 50 terraced houses in Wem town centre (just over a quarter of the total), with significant clusters around the west end of the High Street and along Aston Street. The number of residential premises within this area of Wem has increased by four since 2024.

Map 7: Location of Residential Premises in Wem Town Centre

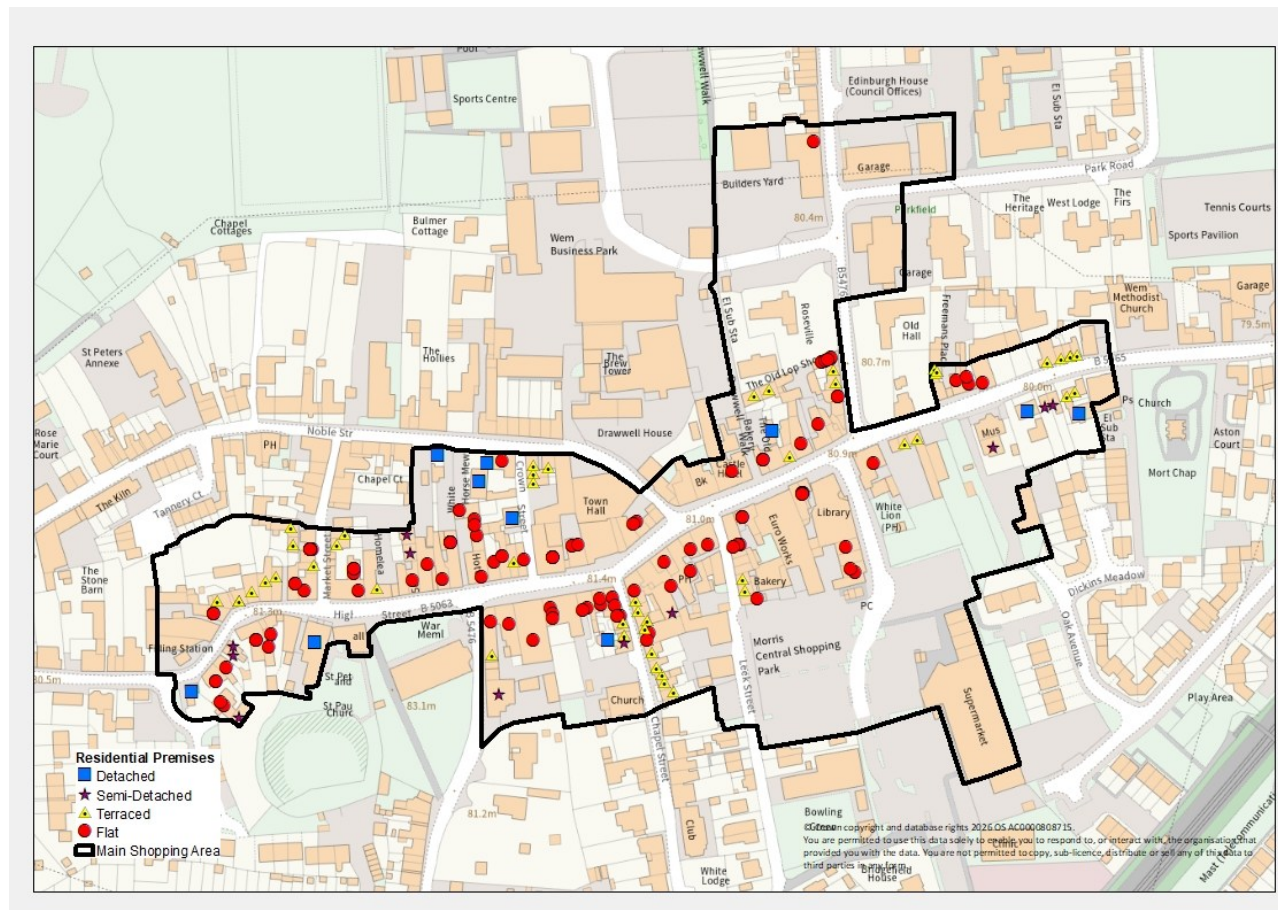


Chart 12: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type

