

Highley: Town Centre Audit Analysis, 2025



Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Highley'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. Highley centre was first audited in August 2019 and then again in September every year between 2020 and 2025. The objective of this audit was 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

- 16 commercial units, occupying 1,900m² gross floor space.
- Smallest centre audited, accounting for just 0.6% of all Shropshire High Street traders .
- Lowest number of stores per head of population across the settlements at a rate of 4.2 units per 1,000 population (average of 13 for Shropshire).
- Average store size 119m² which is smaller than the average across Shropshire (147m²).
- 35 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of 0.46:1 commercial versus residential properties.
- In the recent past business churn has generally been low in Highley. There was no business churn at all between the 2019 and 2020 audits. However, in 2021, there was a much greater level of churn (27%). This fell back down to 7% in 2022 (one store changing hands/branding). Again, there was no churn in 2023. Two stores changed purpose/branding in 2024, giving a churn rate of 12.5%. In 2025, the churn rate stood at 19%. Since 2019, there has been less change in Highley town centre than in any other Shropshire towns except Much Wenlock, Bishop's Castle and Church Stretton.
- 31% of all commercial premises were vacant in 2025, which is much higher than the Shropshire average (11%). The vacancy rate rose substantially in 2025 with three more unoccupied premises than there had been in 2024.
- The highest proportion of commercial units is attributable to retail services at 25% - this proportion is higher than anywhere else in Shropshire except Albrighton, Cleobury Mortimer, Market Drayton and Shifnal and compares with the county average of 19%.
- There are no finance/professional service providers or tourism & leisure operators in the main shopping zone of the town, and the comparison offer is also very limited.

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.

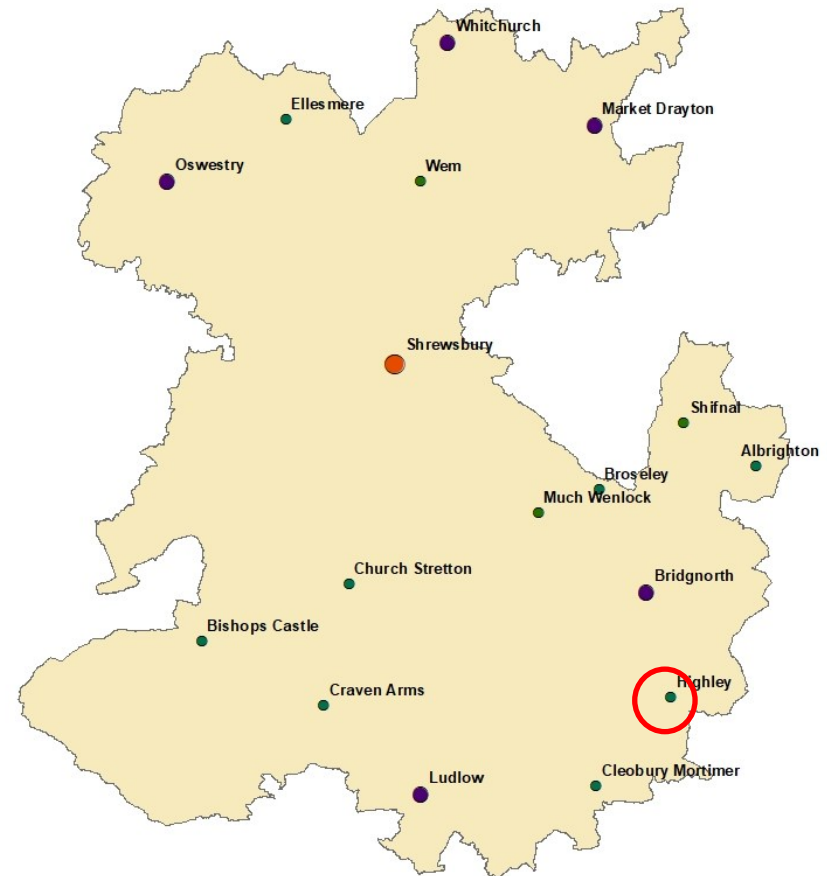
However, not all centres have comparable functions. Larger centres tend to attract workers and shoppers from much further afield than smaller centres, and consequently offer a much greater volume and variety of retail trade and consumer and business services.

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

Highley is the smallest retail centre of the settlements surveyed, with only a handful of retailers operating in the centre of the town.

Map 1: Shropshire's Main Retail Centres



About Highley

Highley is a large village located in the south east of Shropshire, just seven miles south of the market town of Bridgnorth. Highley is a long settlement which is spread over a mile on the B4555 along the River Severn to the west. Highley began as a rural farming community, and had an entry in the Domesday Book as Hughli , named after the lord of the manor. Later the area became a significant area for stone quarrying, and provided some of the stone for Worcester Cathedral. Coal mining began in the area in the Middle Ages but it was the formation of the Highley Mining Company in 1874 that saw the expansion of the village. The mine closed in 1969 and is now home to the Severn Valley Country Park. Today Highley has a population of 3,800 (ONS Mid-year population estimates 2024) and 1,670 households (2021 Census). Its population has increased by 1.1% since 2021. It is currently the 16th largest parish in Shropshire according to the size of its population.

The total population within a 10 mile radius is approximately 200,500.

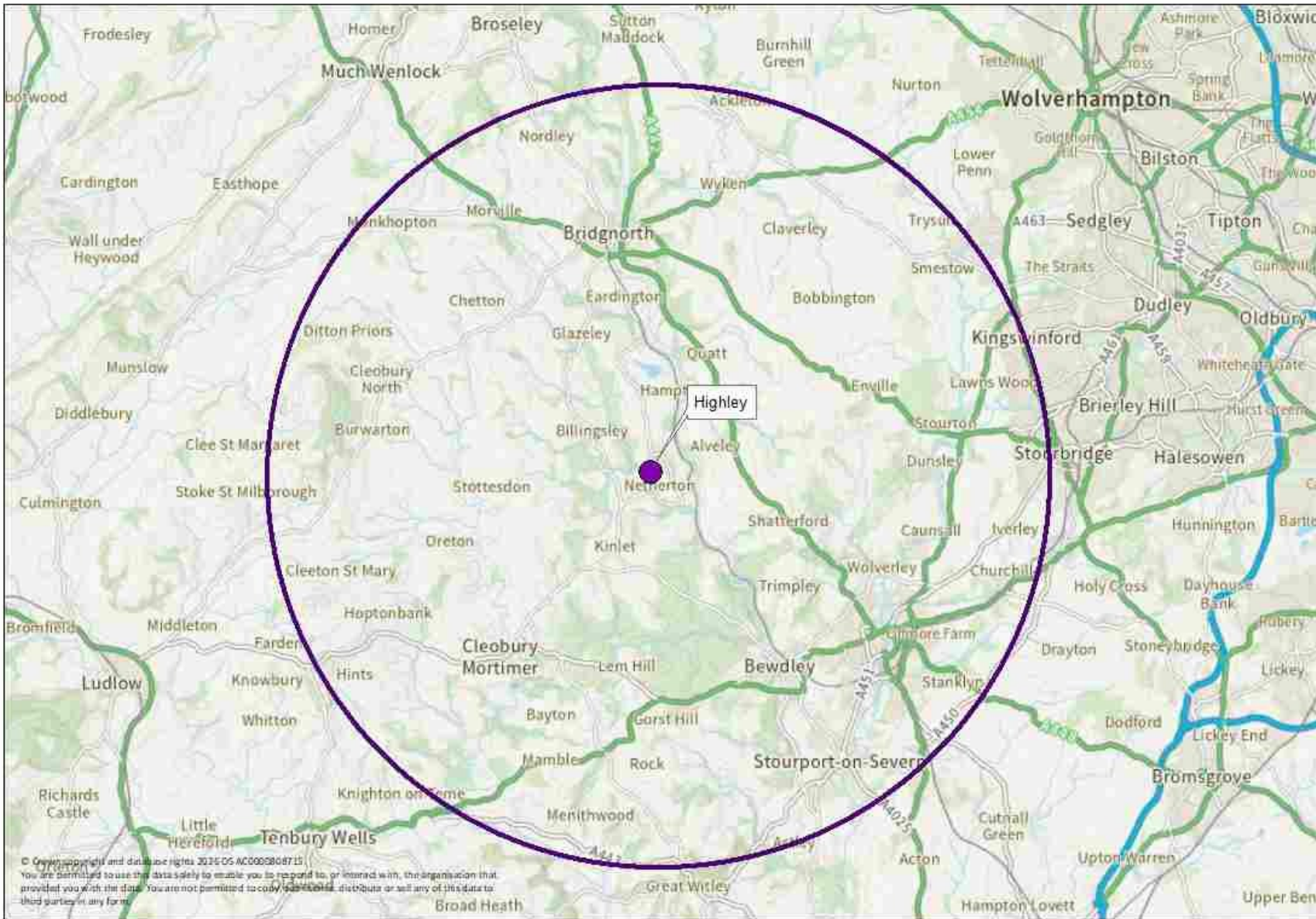
Highley provides approximately 400 jobs across the town council area (*ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2024*). Key sectors include:

- Manufacturing (28.2% of jobs)
- Education (14.1% of jobs)
- Professional, Scientific & Technical (8.8% of jobs)
- Retail (9.9% of jobs)
- Construction (8.5% of jobs)
- Arts, Entertainment, Recreation (8.5% of jobs)

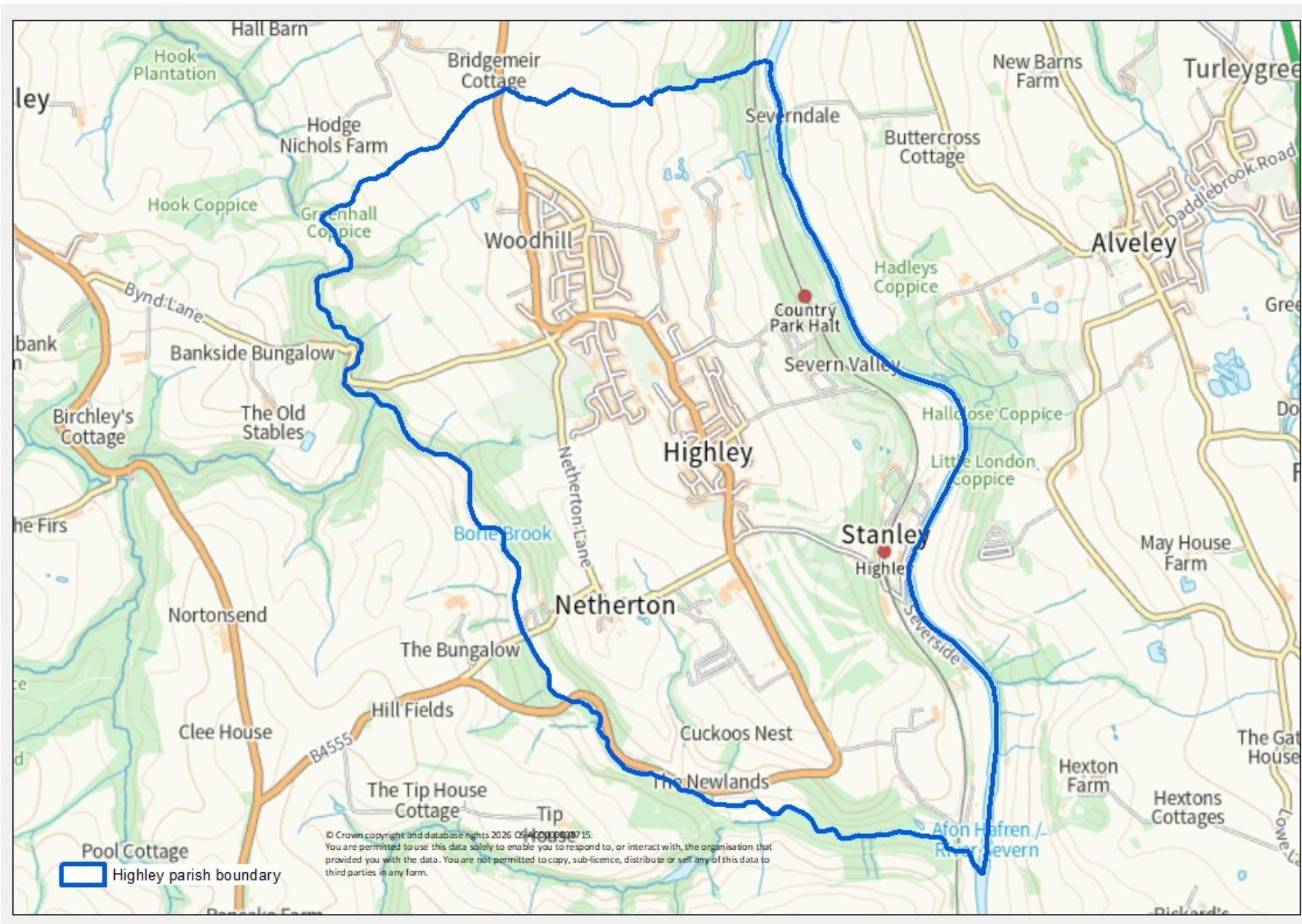
Overall, Highley town council area (depicted on Map 3) covers an area of 638 hectares. The main shopping area (depicted on Map 4) is much smaller than this, at around 1 hectare.

The town is not a main retail centre, with nearby Bridgnorth serving as the closest town offering a wide range of retail goods and services. The stores that do operate are predominantly independent retail and there is a significant amount of residential housing stock in the main shopping area of the town.

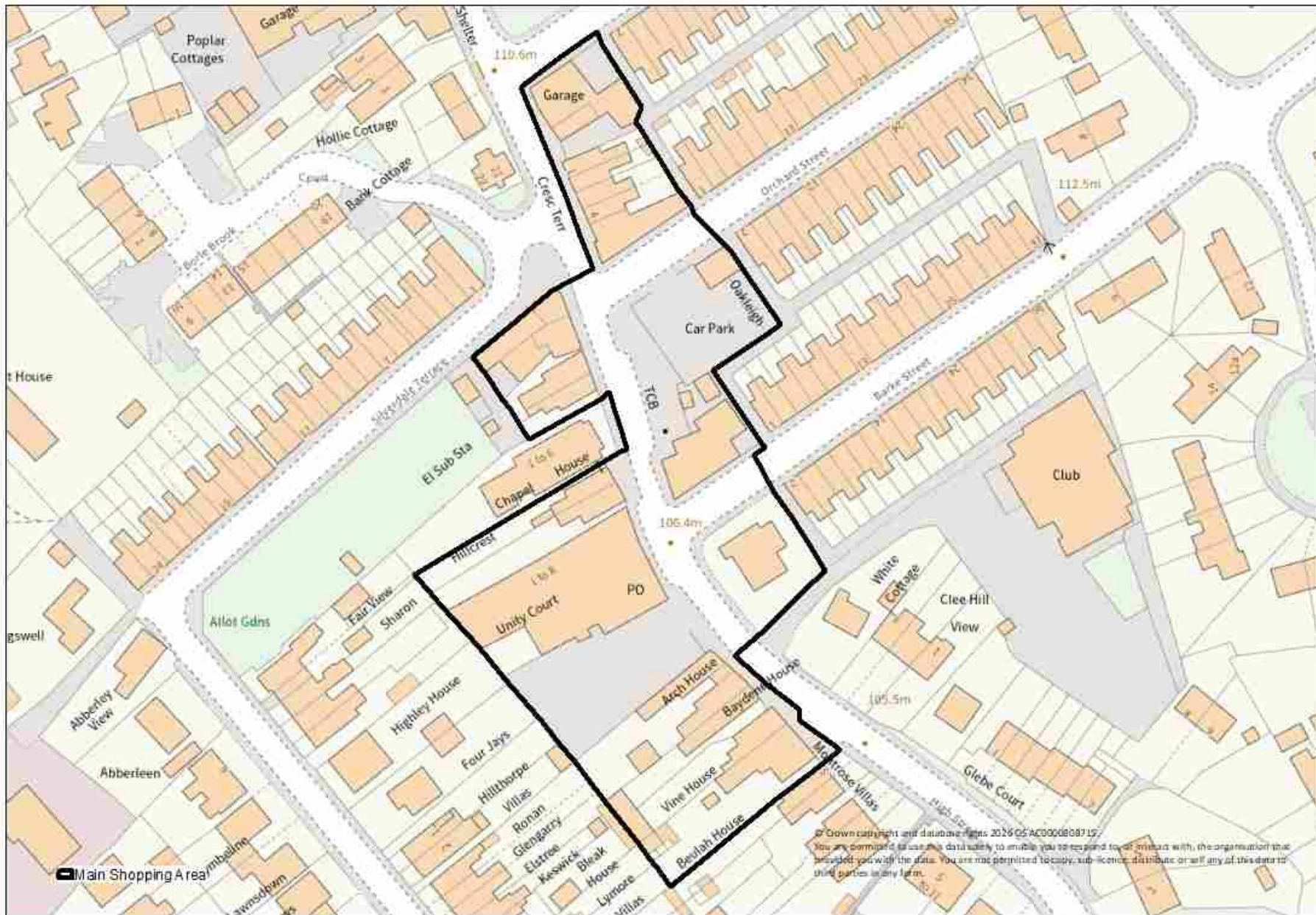
Map 2: Location of Highley showing 10 mile radius



Map 3: Highley Parish Council Area



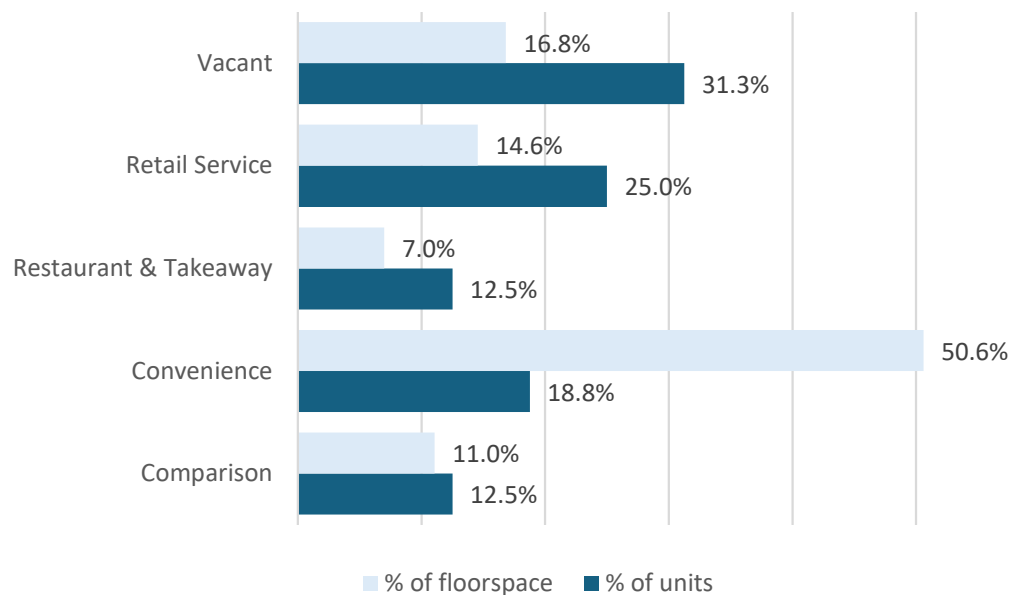
Map 4: Main Retail Shopping Area and Survey Boundary



Key Audit Results

A total of 16 commercial premises are located within the Highley survey area. These are primarily in the High Street. Gross floor space allocated to these businesses is around 1,900m². The average store size is 119m² with units ranging in size from 38m² to 770m². Outside the main shopping street, there is a small cluster of shops in the Crescent, which is to the north of the town. However, many of these premises are now vacant or have been repurposed into residential properties, meaning that the retail offer is even more heavily concentrated on the High Street. There has been no change in the number of commercial premises in Highley over the last three years.

Chart 1: Breakdown of Highley Commercial Premises by Classification, 2025



The highest proportion of commercial units is allocated to retail services businesses, with these accounting for 25% of units (14.6% of floor space). Comparison retail accounts for 12.5% of units, taking a share of 11.0% of floor space. Convenience accounts for half of available floor space and approaching a fifth of units. Restaurants and takeaways account for 12.5% and 7.0% of total units and floor space respectively.

There are five vacant premises in Highley town centre (31.3% of units), which is the equivalent of 16.8% of floor space.

Change since 2024

The only changes to the retail offer in Highley between 2024 and 2025 were the closure of a hairdresser, a restaurant and a florist, resulting in an additional three vacant units.

Comparison Retail

13% of commercial units are dedicated to the comparison retail category, accounting for 11% of gross floor space. This equates with two stores with approximately 210m² of floor space.

The outlets operating in this sector include a pharmacy and a gift shop. The town's florist shut between the 2024 and 2025 audits.

Convenience Retail

Convenience retail accounts for half of all commercial floor space in Highley town centre, with three stores taking up approaching 1,000m² of floor space. There are two general convenience stores/supermarkets, with the Co-op incorporating a post office. The other general store is a Cost Cutter. There is also a village butcher/farm shop.

Restaurants and Takeaways

There are two operators in the restaurant and takeaway classification, and since the closure of the restaurant in 2025, two takeaways (an Indian and a Chinese) are the sole representatives in this classification. There is no café in the main shopping zone.

Tourism & Leisure

There are no public houses within the area designated as the main shopping area, although there are a couple just outside the boundary.

Financial & Business Services

There are no operators in this sector within the main shopping area of Highley.

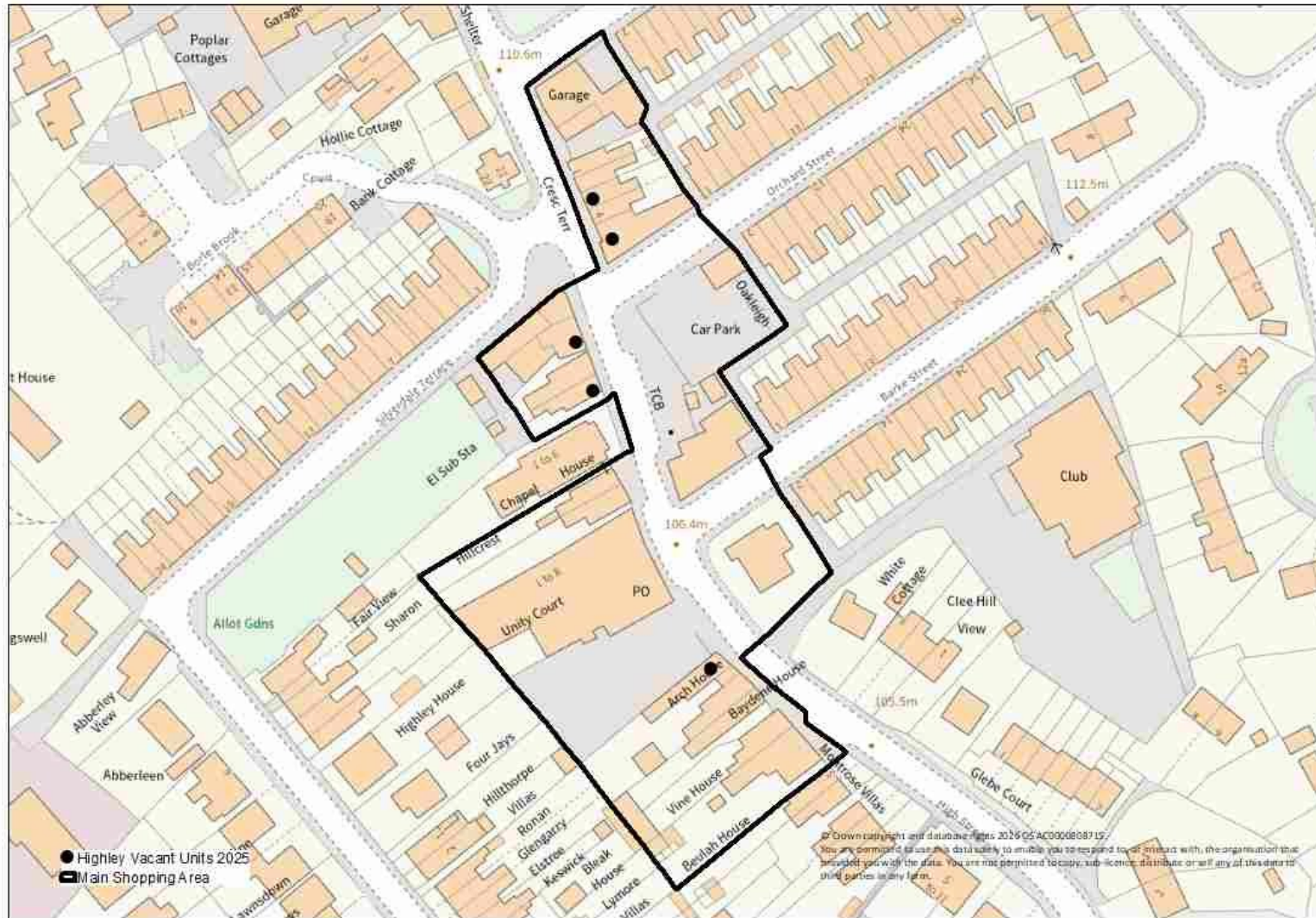
Retail Services

There are four commercial providers of retail services in Highley shopping area, including a hairdresser, a funeral director, a petrol station and a motor repair garage. A hairdresser ceased trading between the 2024 and 2025 audits.

Vacant Premises

There were five vacant premises in Highley town centre in 2025, meaning that approaching a third of commercial outlets were empty this year.

Map 5: Location of Vacant Commercial Premises in Highley Town Centre, 2025



Residential Premises

The main shopping streets of Highley comprise a mix of residential and commercial premises. In total, 35 residential premises are located in the audit area, of which the largest share are flats (26 or 74%) which are largely located above retail or other commercial outlets. There are also 7 semi-detached houses, 1 detached and 1 terraced property within the audit area.

Map 7: Location of Residential Premises in Highley Town Centre



Chart 2: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type

