

# Ellesmere: Town Centre Audit Analysis, 2025



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## Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Ellesmere'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. Ellesmere 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

- 81 commercial units, occupying 9,000m<sup>2</sup> gross floor space.
- 10th largest centre in Shropshire, accounting for 3.2% of all Shropshire High Street traders.
- Slightly higher than average number of stores per head of population at a rate of 15.9 units per 1,000 population (13 for Shropshire).
- Average store size 112m<sup>2</sup> which is amongst the smallest in Shropshire (average is 147m<sup>2</sup>). Only Shifnal, Broseley, Cleobury Mortimer and Much Wenlock stores have a smaller average size than Ellesmere, while the average shop size in Wem is similar.
- 132 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of 0.6:1 commercial versus residential properties.
- Ellesmere had a 17% business churn rate between the 2024 and 2025 audits. This is notably higher than the Shropshire average (13%). Since 2019, there has been more change in Ellesmere than any other Shropshire town except Market Drayton.
- 12% of all commercial premises were vacant in 2024, which is marginally higher than the Shropshire average (11%).
- The number of vacant premises is significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels but fell back by two units in 2025.
- The highest proportion of commercial units is attributable to comparison retail, which accounts for 27% of all commercial operations. Unlike many other towns, the comparison retail offer has strengthened in Ellesmere since the pandemic. The only tier three towns with a higher penetration of comparison retailers are Church Stretton, Much Wenlock and Bishop's Castle.
- Although there are comparatively few businesses trading in convenience retail, these do account for the second highest share of floor space.
- Retail services and finance, professional and business services are slightly under-represented in Ellesmere, while restaurants and takeaways have an average representation.

## 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
- 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.

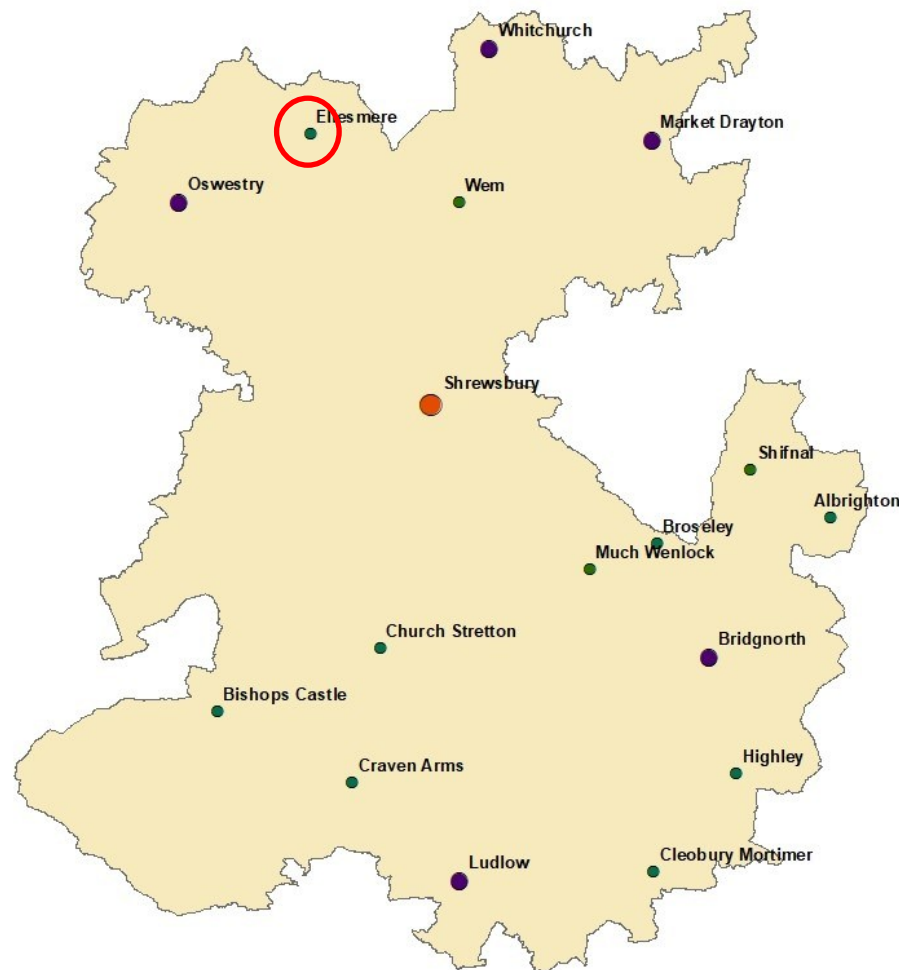
However, not all centres have comparable functions. Larger centres tend to attract workers and shoppers from much further afield than smaller centres, and consequently offer a much greater volume and variety of retail trade and consumer and business services.

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

Ellesmere is an important retail centre for its local residents, with 81 commercial businesses trading.

Map 1: Shropshire's Main Retail Centres



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## About Ellesmere

Ellesmere is a small market town located in the centre of Shropshire to the north of the county town, Shrewsbury. The area was first settled by Ancient Britons and today has a population of 5,100 (ONS mid-year estimates 2024) and 2,270 households (*2021 Census*). The town's population has grown by 2.5% since 2021. It is the twelfth largest market town in the county.

Ellesmere is located on the A495 which links Oswestry (10 miles) and Whitchurch (12 miles). Local roads provide access north to Wrexham and south to Shrewsbury. Ellesmere is situated on the canal network, with the Shropshire Union/Llangollen Canal branch running adjacent to the town. As well as the canal, the town benefits from the mere itself, which is a short walk from the town centre.

There is no mainline train service from Ellesmere. The total population within a 10 mile radius is approximately 132,900.

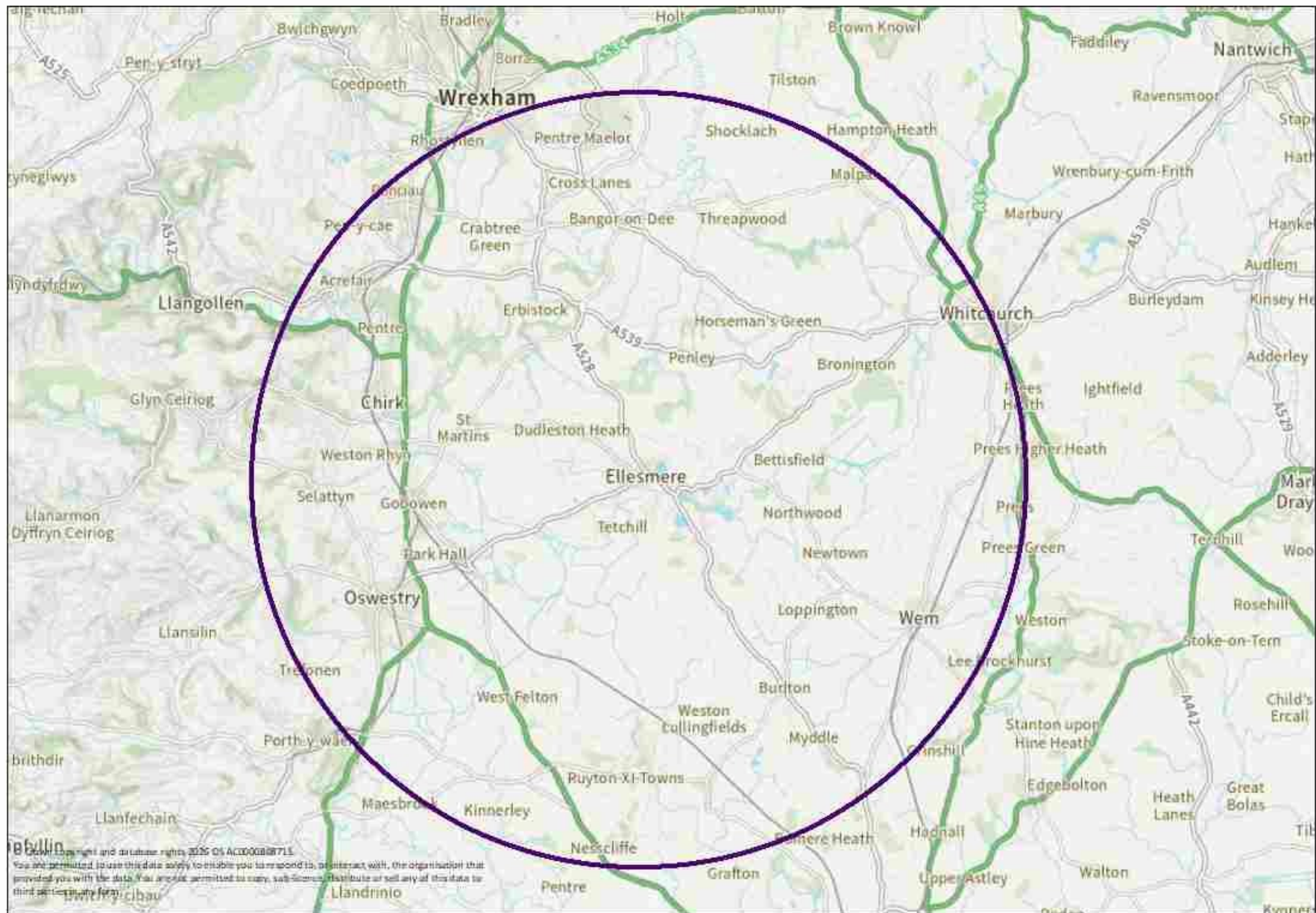
Ellesmere provides approximately 1,100 jobs across the town council area (*ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2024*). Key sectors include:

- Manufacturing (19.4% of jobs)
- Retail (18.5% of jobs)
- Accommodation & Food Services (14.4% of jobs)
- Health (11.6% of jobs)
- Education (10.2% of jobs)

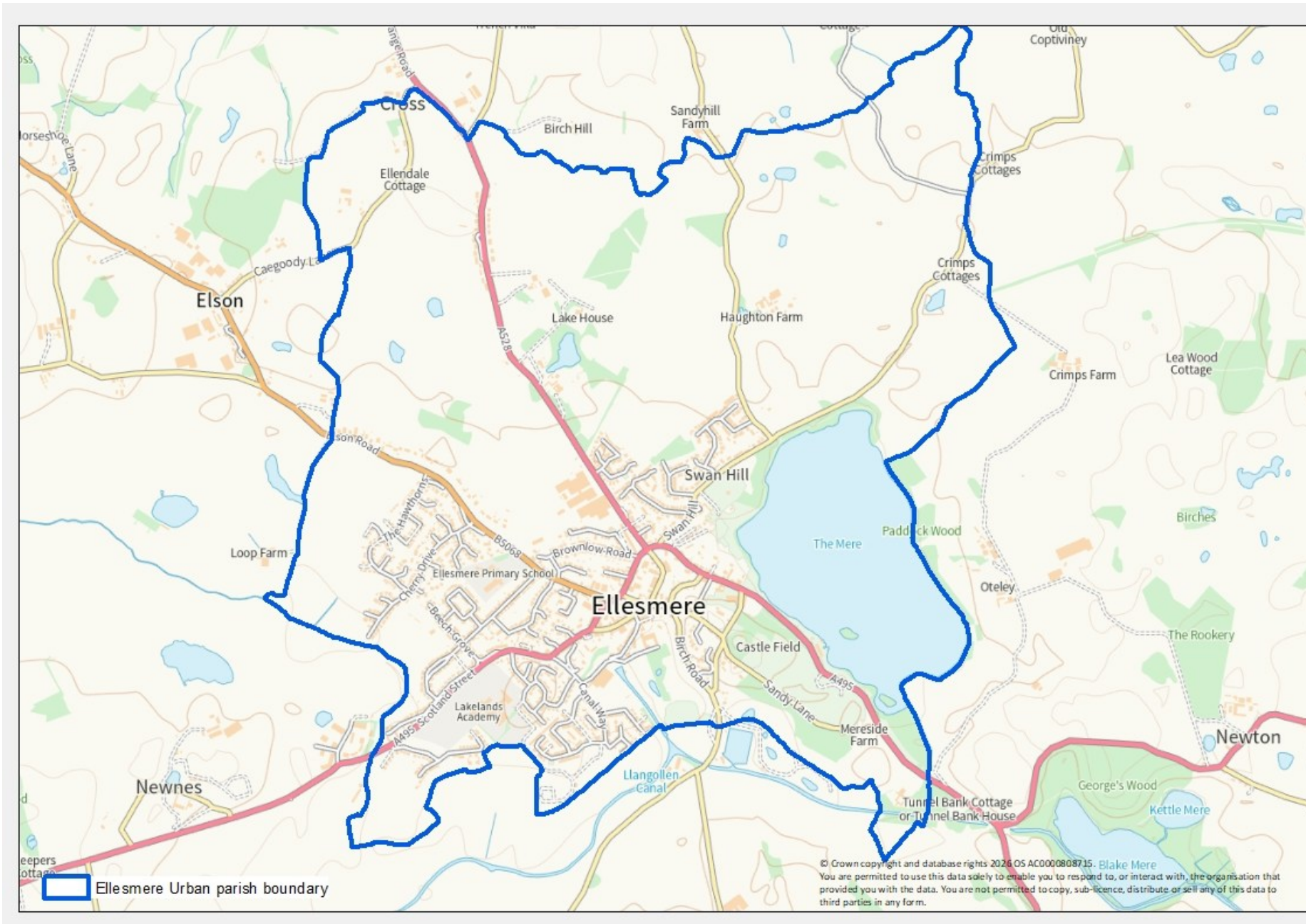
Overall, Ellesmere town council area (depicted on Map 3) covers an area of 493 hectares. The main shopping area (depicted on Map 4) is much smaller than this, at around 2 hectares.

The town comprises predominantly independent retail and services, and there is a significant amount of residential housing stock in the main shopping area of the town. A market has been held in Ellesmere since the 1300's. The current market hall was built in 1879 and continues to hold a market every Tuesday. Oswestry to the west and Shrewsbury to the south provide alternative retail destinations offering a wider choice of comparison retail and hospitality and leisure services.

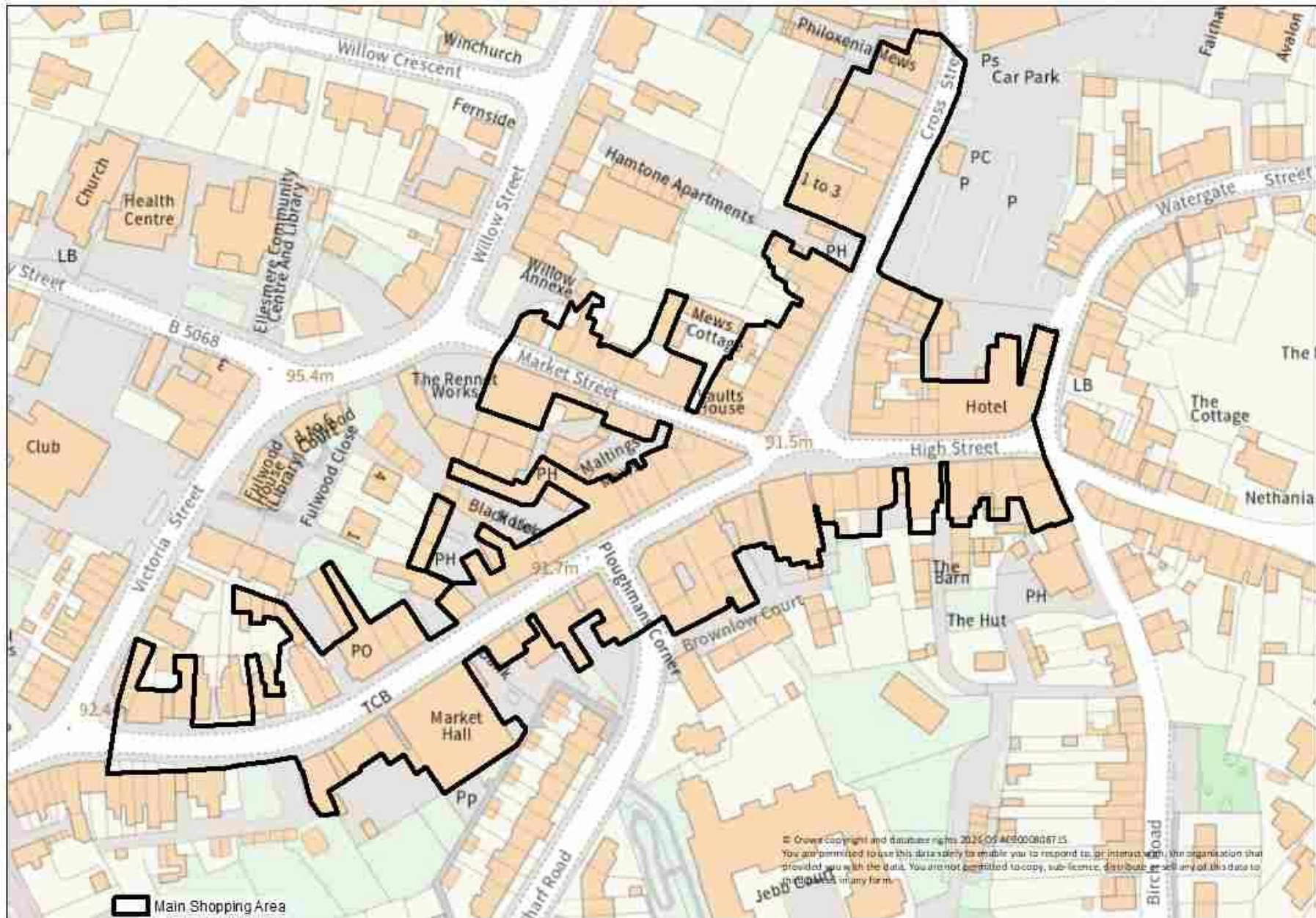
Map 2: Location of Ellesmere showing 10 mile radius



Map 3: Ellesmere Town Council Area



Map 4: Main Retail Shopping Area and Survey Boundary



## Key Audit Results

A total of 81 business premises are located within the Ellesmere survey area. These are primarily in Scotland Street (33 business premises), Cross Street (16 business premises), High Street (16 business premises) and Market Street (7 premises), with smaller numbers on Wharf Road (4 businesses) and nearby streets. Gross floor space allocated to these businesses is over 9,000m<sup>2</sup> (almost half in Scotland Street). The average store size is 112m<sup>2</sup> with units ranging in size from 24m<sup>2</sup> to 711m<sup>2</sup>.

The number of commercial outlets in Ellesmere has changed in recent years. Eight serviced units on the Rennet Works site opened between the 2021 and 2022 audits. These were occupied by consumer facing businesses until 2025. Although still commercial premises, they have been taken out of scope for this audit on the basis that the businesses cannot be identified at street level. Additional units also opened in either 2022 or 2023 which are either new or are now more clearly consumer facing than they were previously.

Another new premise has been made by converting the former bank in Scotland Street into two units in 2024.

To offset this, some previously commercial premises have been repurposed into residential property, including two in 2022, a further two in 2024 and an additional one in 2025. Also in 2025, one of the premises that had previously been reclassified as residential became holiday accommodation and consequently commercial again. In addition, two units were merged to create one larger store.

The highest proportion of commercial units are allocated to retail services and comparison retail, the former accounting for 16.0% of units and the latter for 27.2%. Both store types are comparatively small in size and account for 22.3% (comparison) and 11.3% (retail services) of floor space. Convenience retail accounts for only a small share of units (8.6%) but for a significant proportion of floor space (18.6%). 14.8% of units are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, while 7.4% of units are filled by a financial/professional services operator. Small numbers of units are filled by health facilities and tourism & leisure operators.

There are 10 vacant premises in Ellesmere (12.3% of units), which equates to a slightly smaller proportion of floor space (9.4%).

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

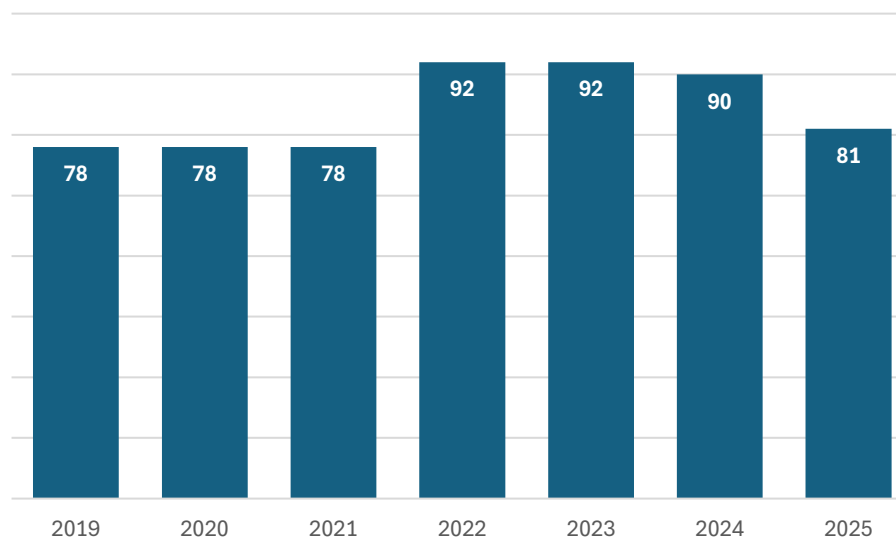


Chart 2: Breakdown of Ellesmere Commercial Premises by Classification, 2025

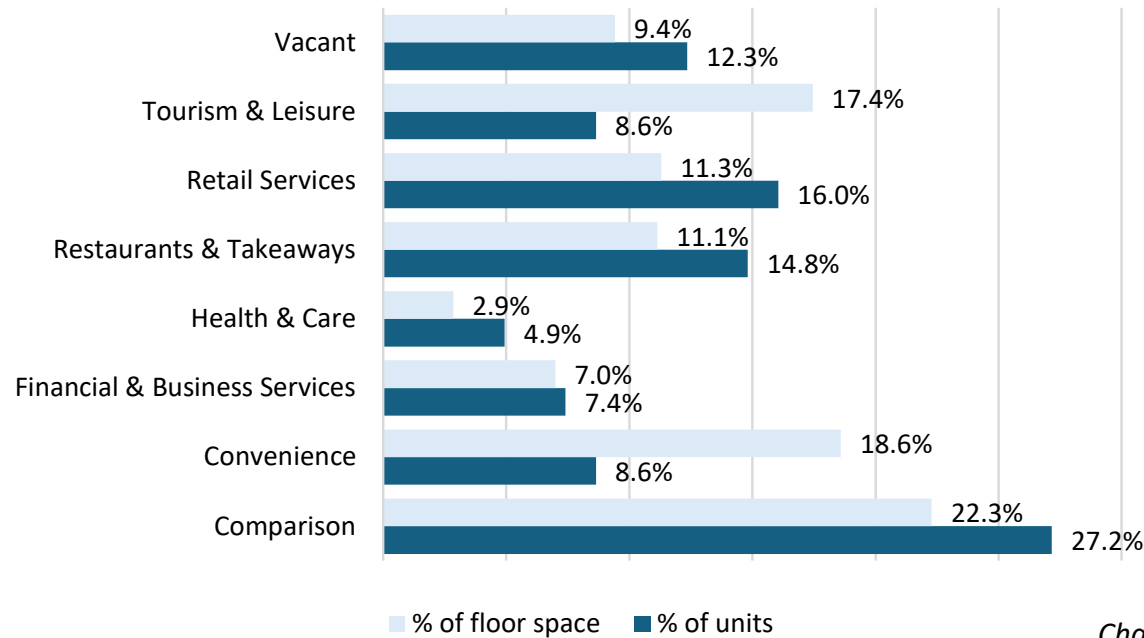


Chart 3: Change in Number of Units by Category, 2024/25



## Change since 2024

There has been some change in the mix of businesses operating in Ellesmere between September 2024 and September 2025, with three more operating in tourism and leisure but one fewer restaurant/takeaway, two fewer in retail services and four fewer comparison retailers. There were also two fewer vacant premises.

Note: One premise that was recorded as commercial in 2024 was reclassified as residential in 2025. In contrast, one formerly residential premise was reclassified as commercial. Two units were merged together to create one larger unit. In addition, the 8 units on the Rennett works have been removed from the audit scope since they are no longer customer-facing

Overall business churn has fluctuated considerably in Ellesmere over recent years. Standing at 17% in 2025, this is similar to the 16% churn recorded in 2024 but is down notably from 24% in 2022. Since 2019, the level of business churn has been higher in Ellesmere than in any other town except Market Drayton.

Chart 4: Levels of Business Churn 2019-2025

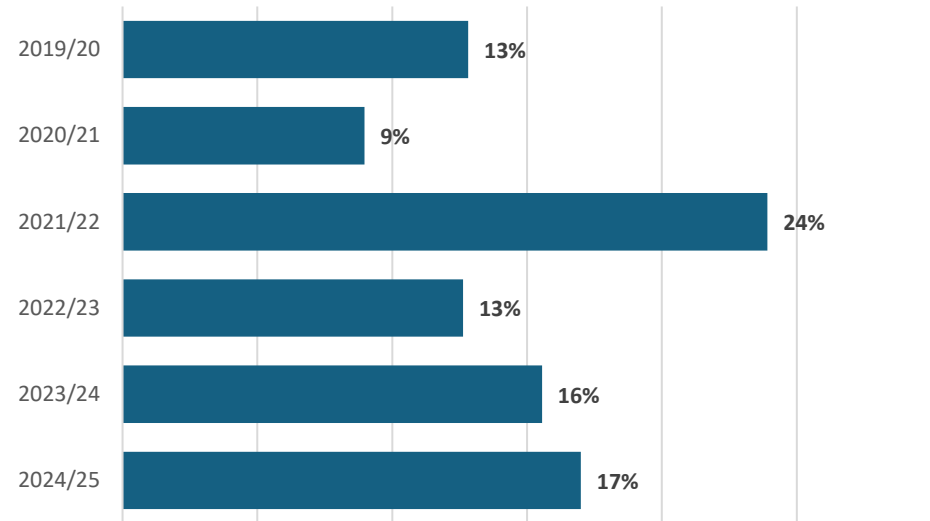
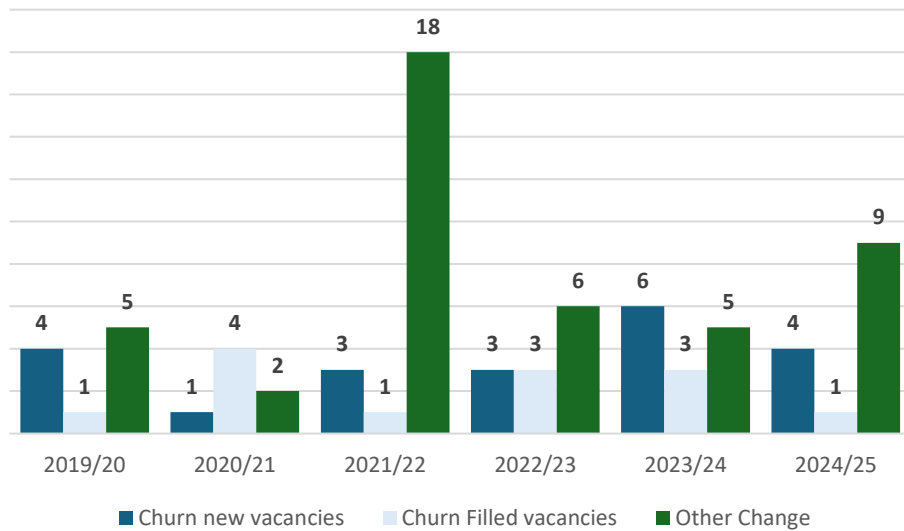


Chart 5: Breakdown of Business Churn 2019-2025

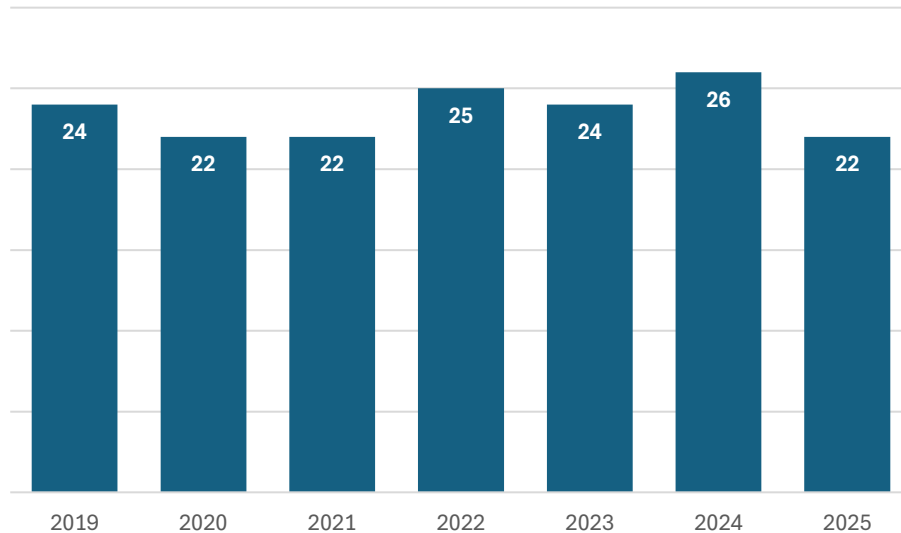


In 2025, a third of all business churn was attributable to premises either becoming vacant (29%), or previously vacant premises becoming occupied (7%). The majority of change was therefore associated with businesses changing hands or use. Although only one previously vacant premise was filled, another was reclassified as non-commercial and other units in the Rennett Works that were vacant in 2024 have been moved out of scope for the 2025 audit.

## Comparison Retail

The largest proportion of the commercial offer in Ellesmere is dedicated to the comparison retail category, accounting for 27% of units and 22% of gross floor space. This equates with 22 stores with over 2,000m<sup>2</sup> of floor space. Of the tier 3 Shropshire towns, only Church Stretton, Much Wenlock and Bishop's Castle support a higher proportion of comparison retail. The number of comparison stores fell to 22 in the immediate post-pandemic period, but subsequently rose in each year except 2023 until 2025, when four units were lost.

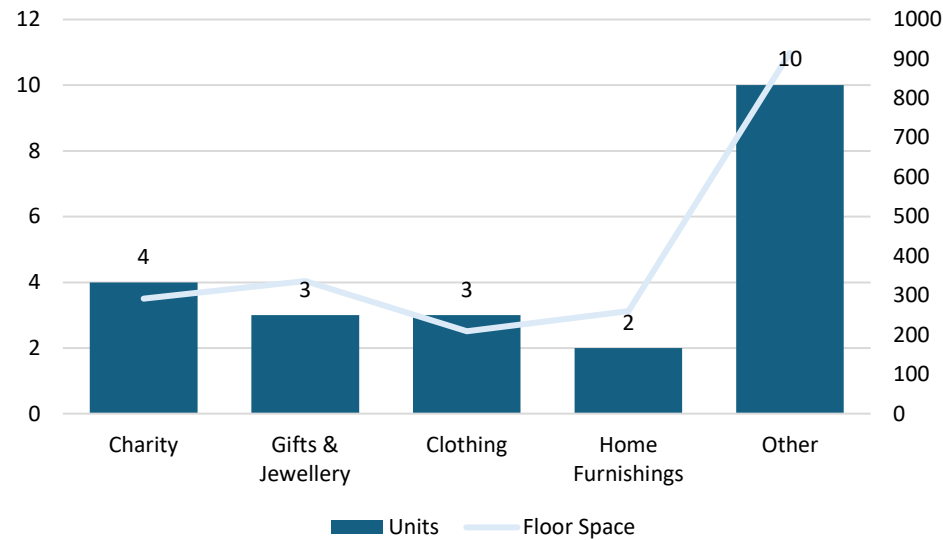
*Chart 6: Number of Comparison Retail Units, 2019-2025*



There is a wide range of different comparison products on sale in Ellesmere, with most represented by a sole operator. Within the town there are four charity shops and three jewellers/gift stores. There are also three clothes shops, one of which opened between the 2021 and 2022 audits and another which opened in 2024. There are also two home goods stores (a carpet shop and a furnishings shop) as well as a pharmacy, and electricals store, a pet shop, a party goods shop and an antiques store. The latter opened in 2025, replacing one of the town's gift shops. Another gift shop was lost in 2025, as was a party goods shop, a bicycle shop and a toiletries retailer.

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

Chart 7: Breakdown of Comparison Retail by Type, 2025

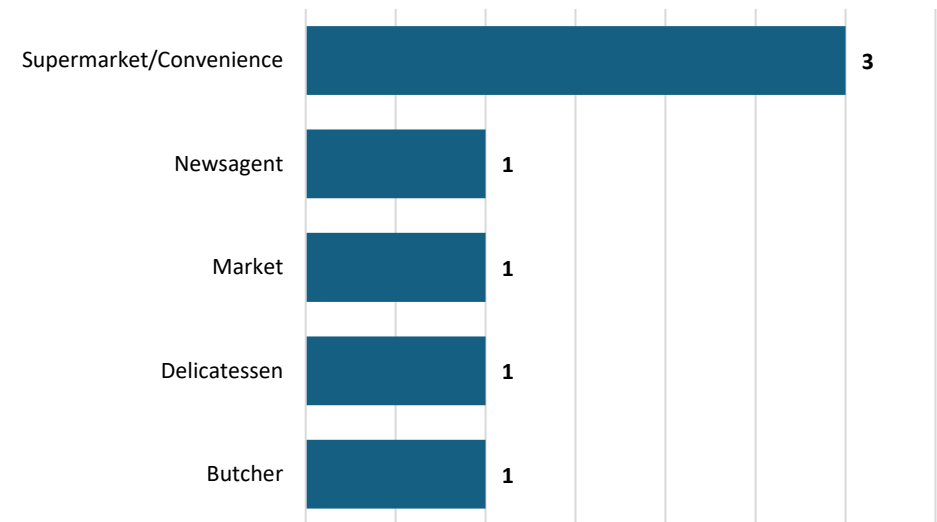


## Convenience Retail

There are seven convenience stores within the main shopping area of Ellesmere. These account for 9% of all units and for 19% of gross floor space. As well as a supermarket (the Co-op), and a general convenience store (Premier Stores), there is a delicatessen, a butcher and a newsagent. There is also an indoor market, which although not operating every day, accounts for the highest share of convenience retail space (41%). A specialist Polish convenience store opened in Ellesmere between the 2019 and 2020 audits, which has boosted the convenience offer in the town. The number of convenience stores in Ellesmere declined by one in 2023 with the closure of the sweet shop but there has been no further change since.

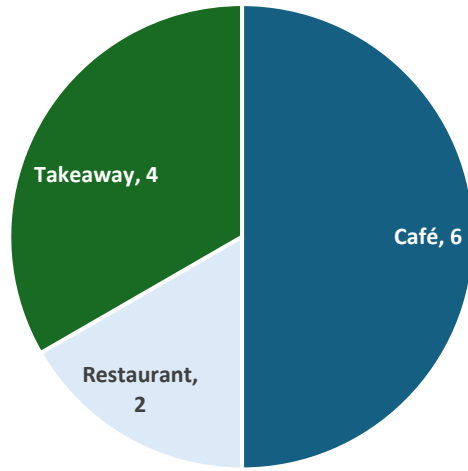
Other than the Co-op, other operators in the convenience retail sectors are independent.

Chart 8: Number of Convenience Stores by Type, 2025



## Restaurants & Takeaways

Chart 9: Breakdown of Units in the Restaurant/Takeaway Sector, 2025



15% of units in Ellesmere are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, with this category accounting for a slightly lower proportion of gross floor space (11%).

The 12 units are split between cafés (50%), restaurants (17%) and takeaways (33%). Two restaurants closed in 2025, including the town's Greek restaurant. In terms of takeaways, there is fish and chips, Chinese and a kebab shop. A new juice bar opened in 2023. An additional café opened in a previously unoccupied premise in 2025.

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

## Tourism & Leisure

Also within the hospitality sector, there are five public houses/bars. These take up approximately 1,400m<sup>2</sup> gross floor space. One public house closed between the 2023 and 2024 audits but re-opened in 2025. Also opening in 2025 were a gym and holiday accommodation.

## Finance & Business Services

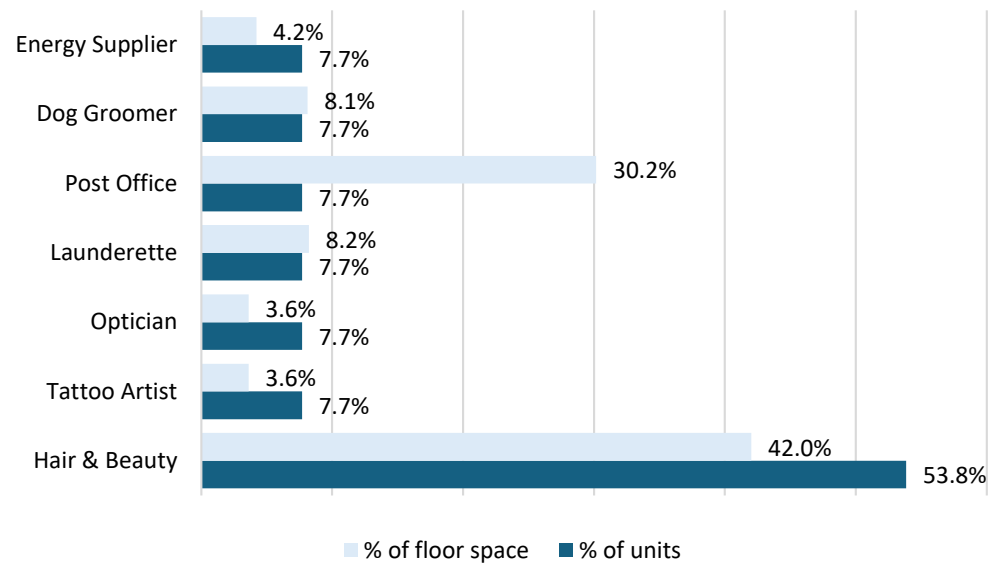
The finance and business services sector contracted by four operators in 2024 and there are now six businesses, which is the equivalent of 7% of commercial activity in the town. These have a combined floor space of over 600m<sup>2</sup>. Since the closure of the Ellesmere TSB branch, there has been no bank or building society in the town, but there are two estate agents, two accountants, an event planner and a consultancy. The event planner was new in 2025; however, this was offset by the closure of a printing store.

## Retail Services

There are 13 retail service businesses operating in Ellesmere town centre, with these accounting for just over 1,000m<sup>2</sup> of gross floor space. The offer expanded by three outlets in 2023 in comparison with the preceding year but fell back by two outlets in 2024 and by a further two outlets in 2025. 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 54% of units and 42% of floor space.

Amongst other services provided in the town (by one operator only) are a launderette, an optician, a post office, a tattoo artist and a dog groomer.

Chart 10: Breakdown of Retail Services by Type, 2025



## Health

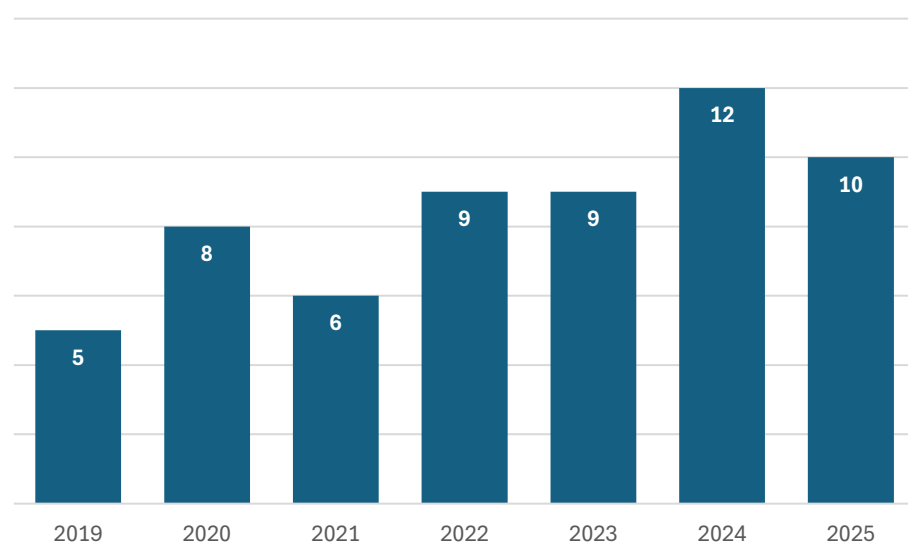
There are four health care practitioners within the main shopping area of Ellesmere, which account for over 250m<sup>2</sup> of floor space. There is a dentist, two chiropodists as well as a care provider. A sports injury clinic and alternative therapist both closed between the 2023 and 2024 audits.

## Vacant Units

12% of Ellesmere town centre outlets are vacant (9% of gross floor space). This is the equivalent of 10 units covering over 850m<sup>2</sup> of floor space. This is slightly above average in comparison with comparable market towns in Shropshire. It is, however, slightly lower than the vacancy rate nationally which stood at 13.5% in the third quarter of 2025 according to BRC (data relating to high streets only).

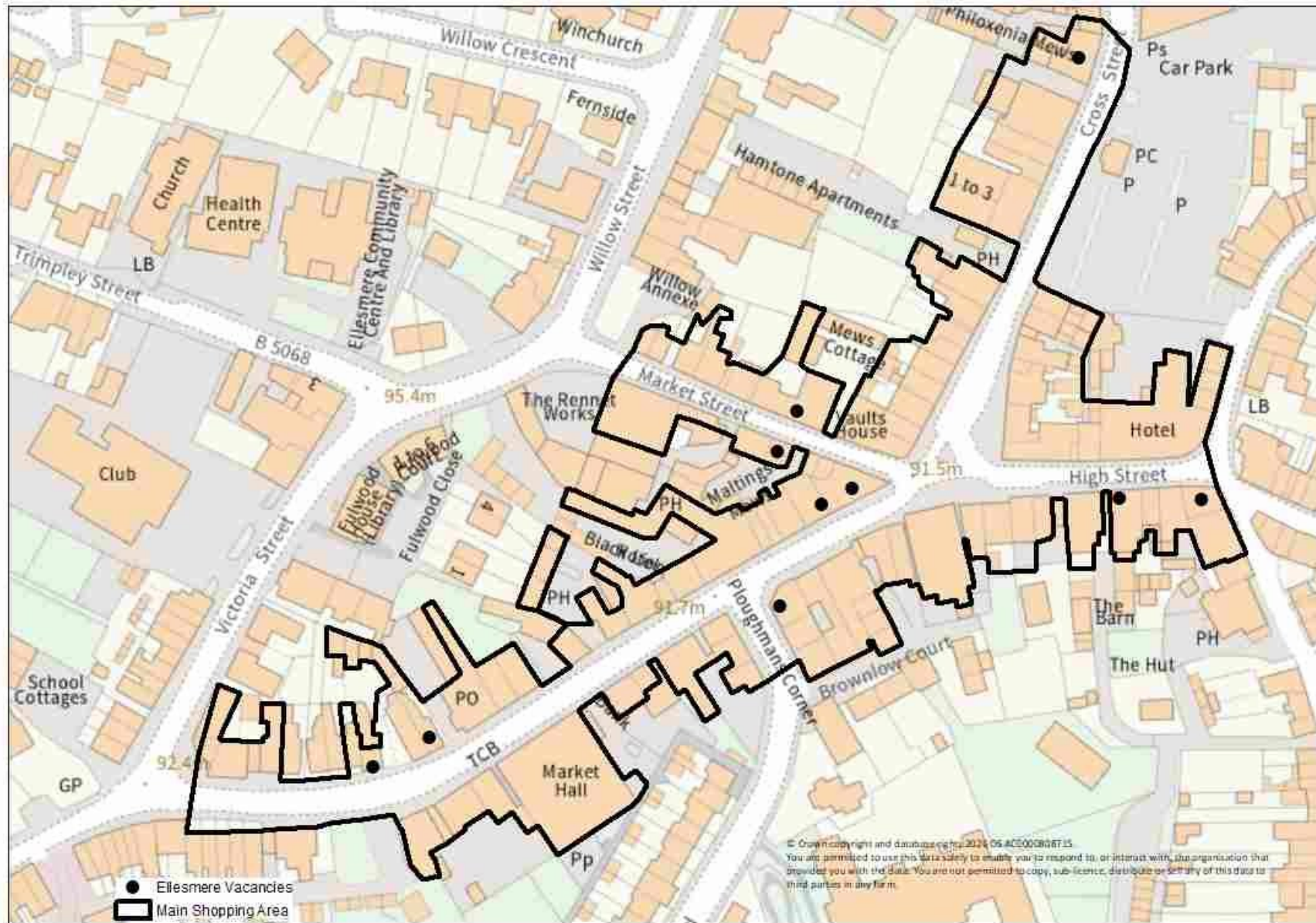
The number of vacant units in Ellesmere was twice as high in 2025 compared with 2019, despite a reduction of two in 2025. Two of the empty premises are in Market Street, four in Scotland Street, two in High Street and one each in Cross Street and The Square.

*Chart 11: Number of Vacant Commercial Units, 2019-2025*



Of the 10 vacant premises in 2025, four had become vacant during the year (40%). There are two long-standing vacant units, one which has been empty since 2020 and another which has been unoccupied since at least 2019.

Map 5: Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2025





## Residential Premises

There is a significant amount of residential property within the main shopping centre in Ellesmere. In total, 132 residential premises are located in the audit area, of which the majority are flats (118 or 89%) which are largely located above retail or other commercial outlets. Much of this stock is along Scotland Street. There are very small quantities of detached and semi-detached housing stock, most of which is towards the periphery of the main shopping area. There are 11 terraced houses in Ellesmere town centre (8% of the total), with a cluster along Market Street. There is also sheltered accommodation on Scotland Street. The number of residential premises has increased by four in the last year.

Map 7: Location of Residential Premises in Ellesmere Town Centre

Chart 12: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type

