

Craven Arms: Town Centre Audit Analysis, 2025



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Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Craven Arms' 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. Craven Arms 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

- 59 commercial units, occupying 10,800m² gross floor space.
- 12th largest centre in Shropshire, accounting for 2.3% of all Shropshire High Street traders .
- Slightly higher than average number of stores per head of population at a rate of 21 units per 1,000 population (13 on average for Shropshire).
- Average store size 183m² which is the second largest behind Shrewsbury and significantly larger than the average across Shropshire (147m²).
- 162 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of 0.4:1 commercial versus residential properties.
- Craven Arms had a 12% churn rate in 2025; this compares with a rate of 17% in 2024 and with just 3% in 2023. Although churn was higher than the Shropshire average in 2024, since 2019 there has been less overall change.
- 15% of all commercial premises were vacant in 2025 which is amongst the highest in Shropshire and notably higher than the Shropshire average (11%).
- There were three fewer vacant premises in 2025 compared with 2024, but the rate remains elevated compared with 2019.
- A disproportionately large share of commercial units are attributable to finance, professional and business service providers, which account for 17% of all commercial operations. This compares with 8% on average for Shropshire.
- Retail services also account for a high share of units (17%), but notwithstanding this, the sector is under-represented (19% on average across Shropshire).
- In contrast, there are comparatively few businesses trading in comparison retail, with this sector accounting for a lower proportion of units than in any other Shropshire towns except Highley and Cleobury Mortimer.
- Proportionally there are fewer restaurants/takeaways in Craven Arms than anywhere else in Shropshire (7% of all units compared with an average of 14%).
- There are relatively few convenience retailers, but the presence of a large supermarket means that convenience retail accounts for around a third of all commercial space in the town. This store pushes the average size of units in Cravens Arms up considerably.

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 & Professional 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

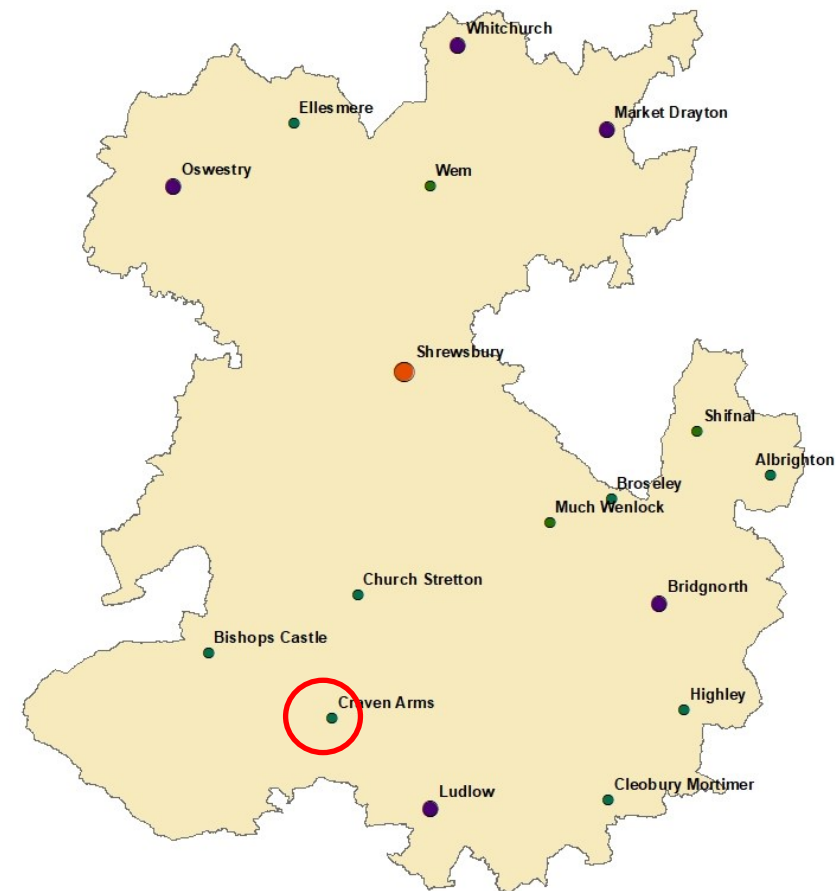
Town centres represent important employment, entertainment and shopping hubs for their local population and hinterland. They also represent an important component of the visitor economy.

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

Map 1: Shropshire's Main Retail Centres



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Craven Arms is not a major retail centre, although it has more commercial enterprises in the town centre per head of population than most tier three towns.

About Craven Arms

Craven Arms is a small market town located in the south of Shropshire on the A49 south of Church Stretton and to the north of Ludlow. Craven Arms developed as a small rural settlement, and in relation to much of Shropshire is a relatively new town. The arrival of the railway line in the 19th Century led to the town's growth, and today it has a population of 2,870 (ONS mid-year estimates 2024) and 1,287 households (2021 Census). The town's population has remained stable since 2021. It is one of the smallest key settlements in the county.

The town is located on the A49, with Church Stretton and Shrewsbury to the north (seven miles and 21 miles respectively) and Ludlow to the south (nine miles). Hereford is further south on the A49 (33 miles). Craven Arms is on the national rail network on the Cardiff to Shrewsbury line. The total population within a 10 mile radius is approximately 38,000.

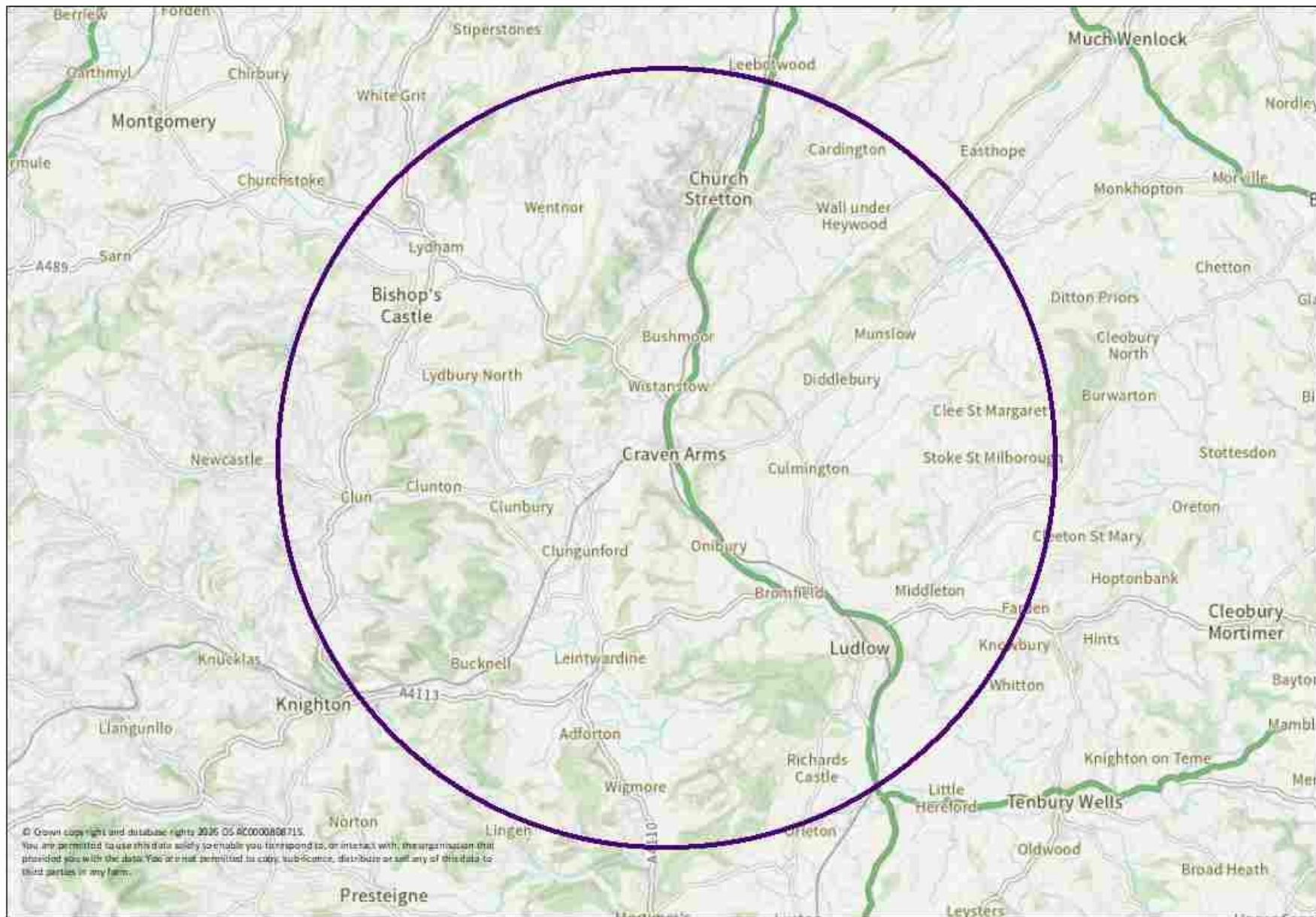
Craven Arms provides approximately 1,300 jobs across the town council area (*ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2024*). Key sectors include:

- Property (28.1% of jobs)
- Manufacturing (15.2% of jobs)
- Retail (11.8% of jobs)
- Education (5.7% of jobs)
- Health (5.7% of jobs)
- Accommodation & Food Services (5.7% of jobs)

Overall, Craven Arms town council area (depicted on Map 3) is large, covering an area of 1,843 hectares. Much of this covers the rural hinterland. The main shopping area (depicted on Map 4) is much smaller than this, at around 7 hectares.

The town is not a main retail hub, but the retail sector nonetheless accounts for more than a tenth of all employment within the town council area. Most retail is independent and there is a significant amount of residential housing stock in the main shopping area of the town. The Craven Arms Farmers' market is held at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre on the first Saturday of every month. This is just outside the main shopping area. Craven Arms residents are also able to access retail and leisure facilities in Ludlow to the south or Shrewsbury to the north.

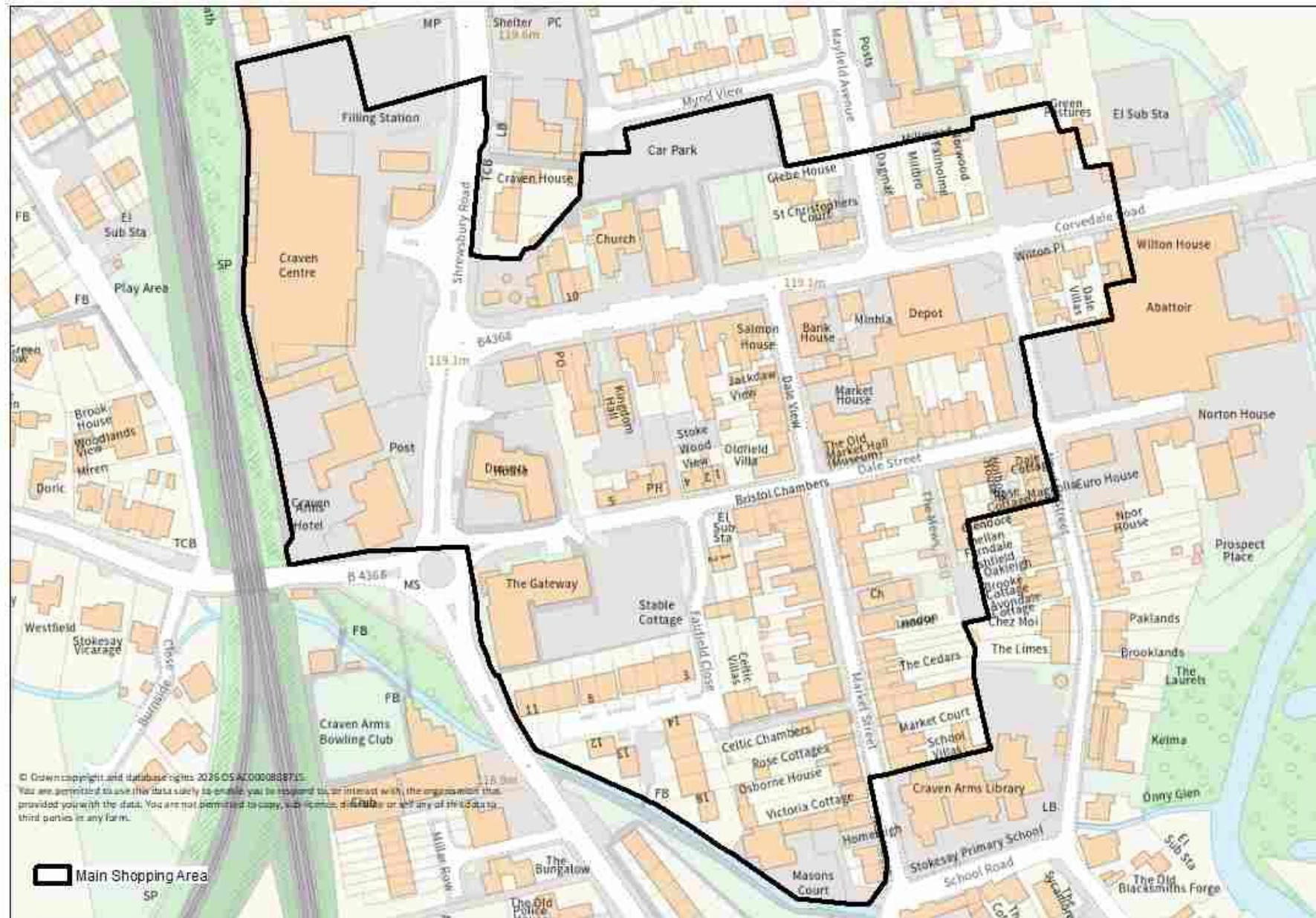
Map 2: Location of Craven Arms showing 10 mile radius



Map 3: Craven Arms Town Council Area



Map 4: Main Retail Shopping Area and Survey Boundary



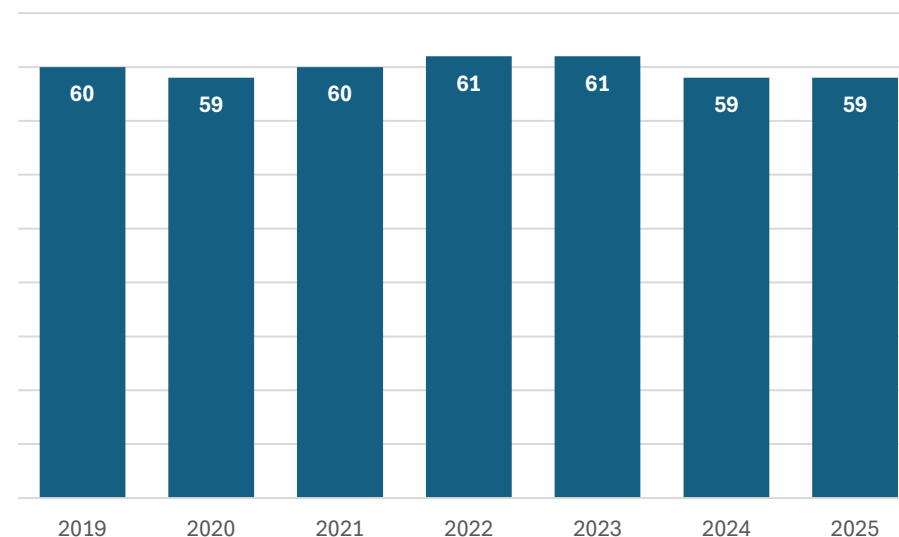
Key Audit Results

A total of 59 commercial premises are contained within the Craven Arms survey area. These are primarily in Corvedale Road (20 premises), the Auction Yard (13 premises), Shrewsbury Road (10 premises) and Market Street (10 premises) with a small number in Dale Street (5) and Newton Street (1).

Gross floor space allocated to these businesses is approximately 10,800m² (two thirds in Corvedale Road and Shrewsbury Road). The average store size is large at 183m² with units ranging in size from 31m² to 3,240m². The largest store (Harry Tuffins) pushes up the average size considerably.

Businesses on Dale Street are much smaller than the average for Craven Arms (74m²) while those on Shrewsbury Road are much larger (each an average of 450m²).

Chart 1: Number of Commercial Units in Craven Arms, 2019-2025

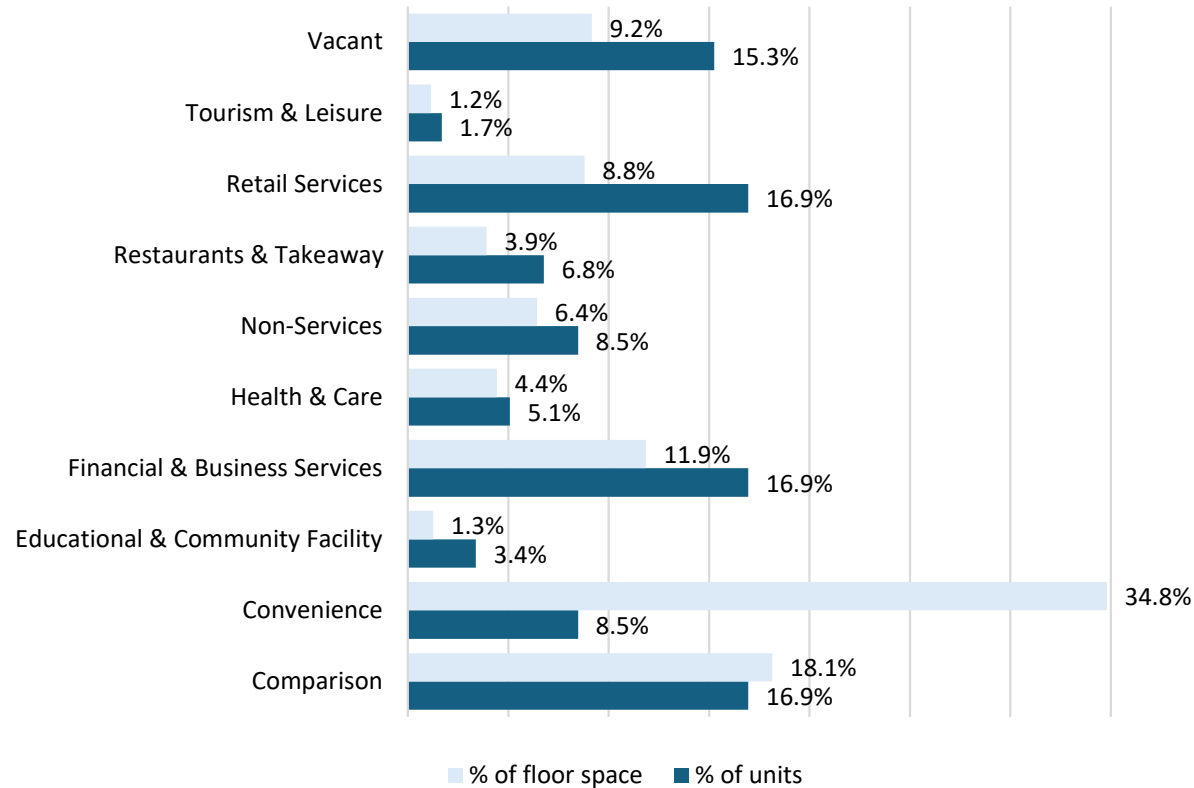


The number of commercial units has fluctuated between 59 and 61 since 2019—reducing by one in 2020 when two units merged into one premise, and increasing by one in 2021 with the opening of a new unit on Shrewsbury Road. In 2022 a further unit was created when a bakery, which occupied two adjacent units, closed. The units are being advertised separately for re-letting but are still vacant. The number of commercial units fell by two in 2024, with a taxi firm no longer appearing to operate and a unit being repurposed into residential accommodation. There was no further change in 2025.

Finance and business services providers are very well represented in Craven Arms, accounting for 16.9% of units and 11.9% of floor space, making this one of the largest sectors in the town. Also accounting for 16.9% of units are retail services and comparison retail. As the former are relatively small in size, they account for a smaller share of floor space (8.8%). Comparison retail accounts for a fairly low share of units compared with other towns of a similar size. Convenience retail accounts for only a small share of units (8.5%) but for the highest proportion of floor space (over a third). 6.8% of units are attributable to restaurants and takeaways. Small numbers of units are filled by tourism & leisure operators and other types of organisations.

There are nine vacant premises in Craven Arms (15.3% of units), which is the equivalent of 9.2% of floor space.

Chart 2: Breakdown of Craven Arms Commercial Premises by Classification, 2025



Change since 2024

The main change in the commercial mix of stores in Craven Arms between 2024 and 2025 was an increase in two in the number of operators in the comparison retail sector. The convenience retail and retail services sectors were also boosted by an additional outlet. In contrast, there was one fewer restaurant/takeaway in operation in 2025 than there had been the previous year.

Overall, business turnover in Craven Arms was lower in 2025 at 12% than it had been the previous year (17%). This followed churn of just 3% in 2023, 15% in 2022 and 10% in both 2021 and 2020.

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

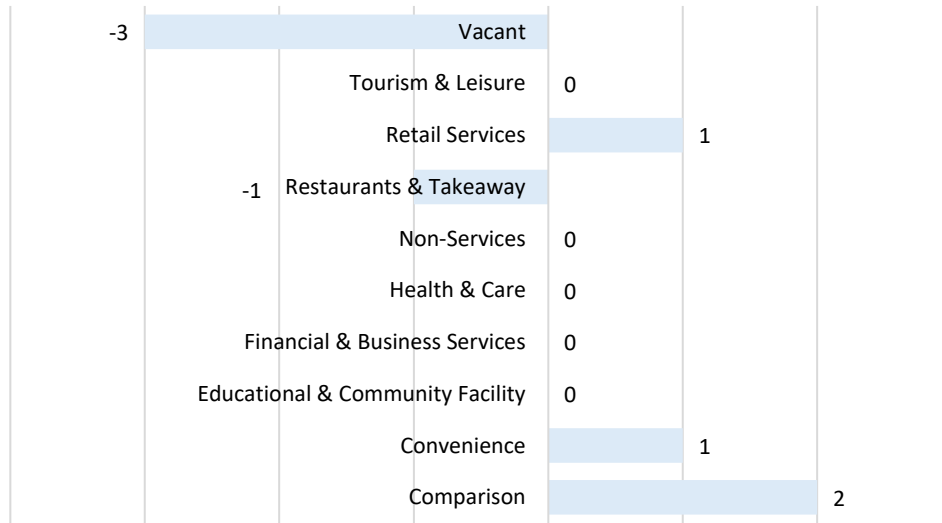


Chart 4: Levels of Business Churn 2019-2025

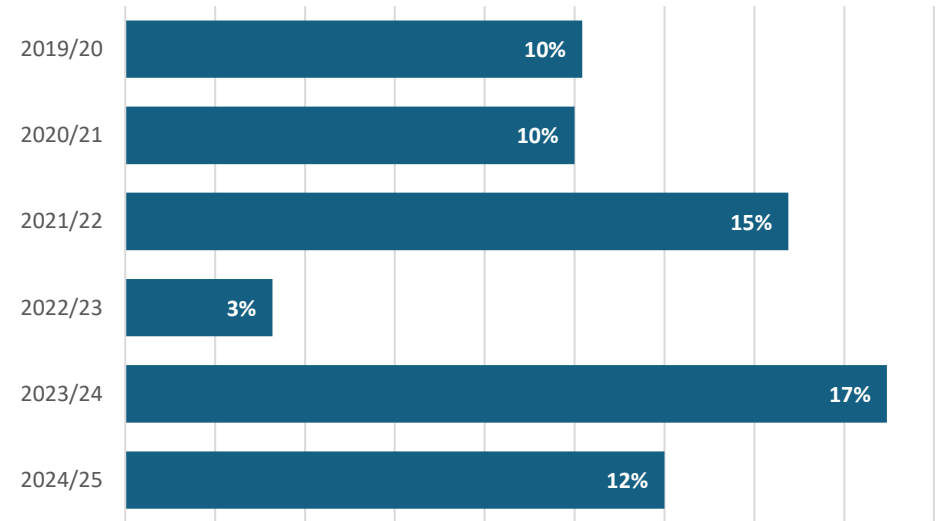
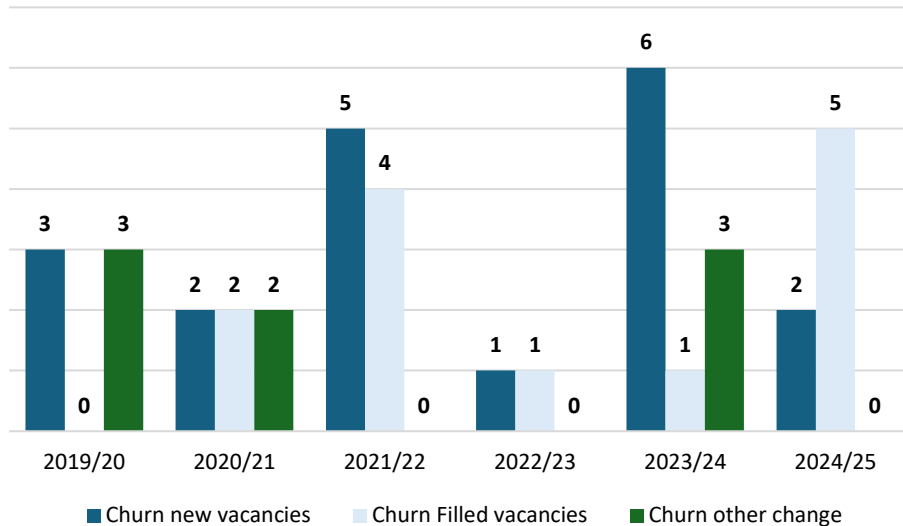


Chart 5: Breakdown of Business Churn 2019-2025



Seven units in Craven Arms changed in some way between the 2024 and 2025 audits. Two premises had become unoccupied, while five previously vacant premises were filled. There was no other type of change. This reversed the 2024 trend, when there were six new vacancies and just one empty premise was filled.

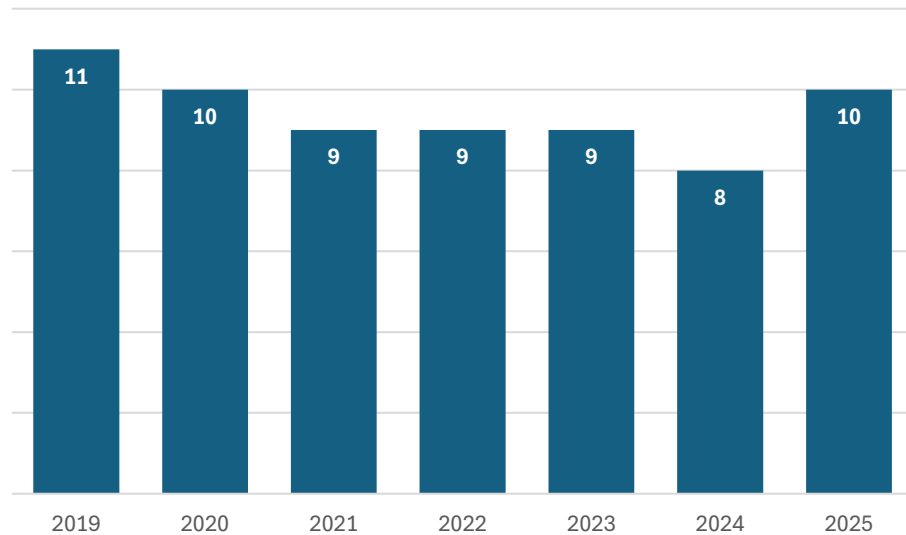
In 2023, only two changes were identified (one vacant premise becoming filled and one new vacancy).

Overall, since 2019, 19 premises have become vacant in the town as opposed to 13 premises which were vacant becoming filled.

Comparison Retail

The fact that Craven Arms is not a main retail hub is reflected in the low number of comparison retail stores that are in operation. There are just 10 stores of this type in the town, covering approaching 2,000m² of gross floor space. This is the equivalent of 17% of all commercial units in the town and 18% of floor space. Craven Arms has a lower proportion of comparison retail stores than any other town in Shropshire. The town lost one comparison retailer between 2019 and September 2020 and another between 2020 and September 2021 and a third in 2024. 2025, however, bucked this downward trend with two new stores opening.

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



Within the main shopping area there are three charity shops (one new in 2025), which account for almost a third of all units. All other classification types are represented by just one store. These include a hardware store, a pharmacy, a mobile phone shop and a store selling used machinery and another selling windows. There are no dedicated clothes retailers in the town. Since 2023, a kitchen and bathroom showroom has opened while a furniture store and a gift shop have closed. As well as a second Severn Hospice charity shop, an antiques retailer began trading between the 2024 and 2025 audits.

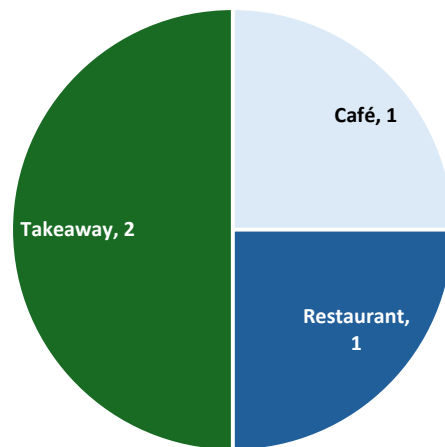
The majority of stores are independent, although the town is home to Lunts pharmacy, Severn Hospice charity shop and Get Connected (mobile phones).

Convenience Retail

There are five convenience stores within the main shopping area of Craven Arms. These account for just 9% of all units but for the highest share of gross floor space within the town (just over a third). This is primarily due to the presence of the Harry Tuffins supermarket, which is Shropshire's largest independent retailer. This accounts for not only 86% of floor space within the convenience retail sector, but for 30% of all commercial floor space within the town centre. As well as Tuffins, there is a butcher, a newsagent and two convenience stores, one of which was new in 2025. The town's bakery closed in 2022.

Restaurants & Takeaways

Chart 7: Breakdown of Units in the Restaurant/Takeaway Sector, 2025



The number of places to eat in Craven Arms is small, and proportionally, this category accounts for a lower share of commercial activity than in any other town. However, there is a further café and takeaway outside the shopping zone along Shrewsbury Road.

7% of units are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, with this category accounting for a slightly lower proportion of gross floor space (4%). The four units are split between cafés (25%), restaurants (25%) and takeaways (50%).

The offer was reduced in 2025 when the town's branch of Subway closed.

Tourism & Leisure

The museum located in the town centre (Land of Lost Content) closed between the 2022 and 2023 audits. Craven Arms is the Gateway to the Shropshire Hills Natural Landscape and offers easy access to key tourism destinations such as Church Stretton and surrounding hills plus Ludlow. The Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre and English Heritage owned Stokesay Castle are just outside the town centre boundary. There is just one public house within the main shopping zone.

Finance & Business Services

There are 10 commercial operators in the finance and business services category in Craven Arms town centre, accounting for approaching 1,300m² of gross floor space. This sector is important in Craven Arms, accounting for 17% of units and 12% of all floor space. Included within this classification are three estate agents, three other property related agents (a housing association, a maintenance company and a developer), two accountants, a solicitor, and a vet. There are no banks within the town. The number operating in this sector reduced by one in 2022 with the loss of an accountant but there was no change in 2023, 2024 or 2025.

Retail Services

Chart 9: Number of Retail Services Businesses, 2019-2025

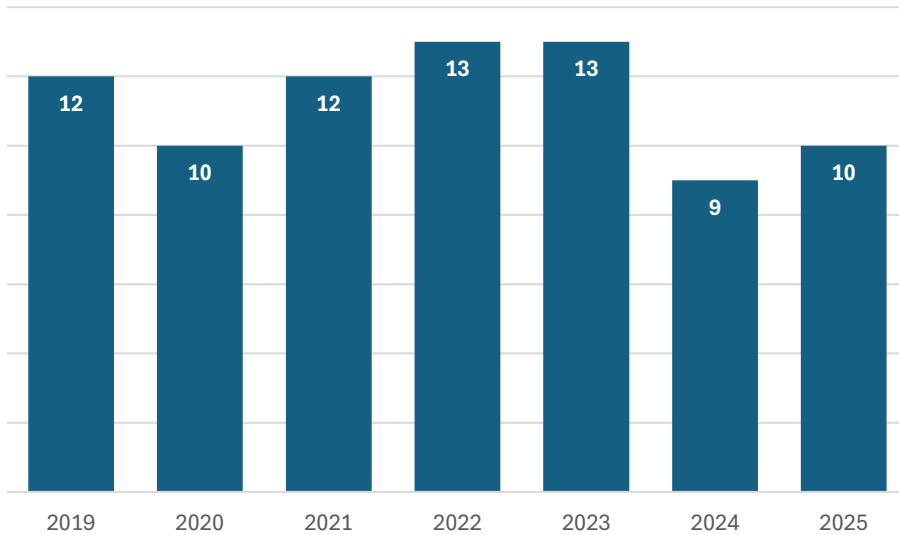
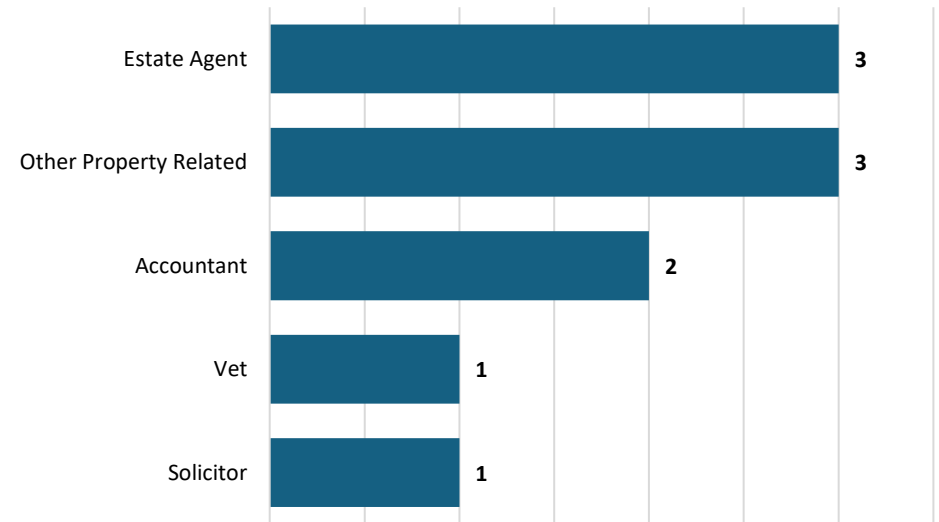


Chart 8: Number of Finance & Business Services Providers by Type, 2025

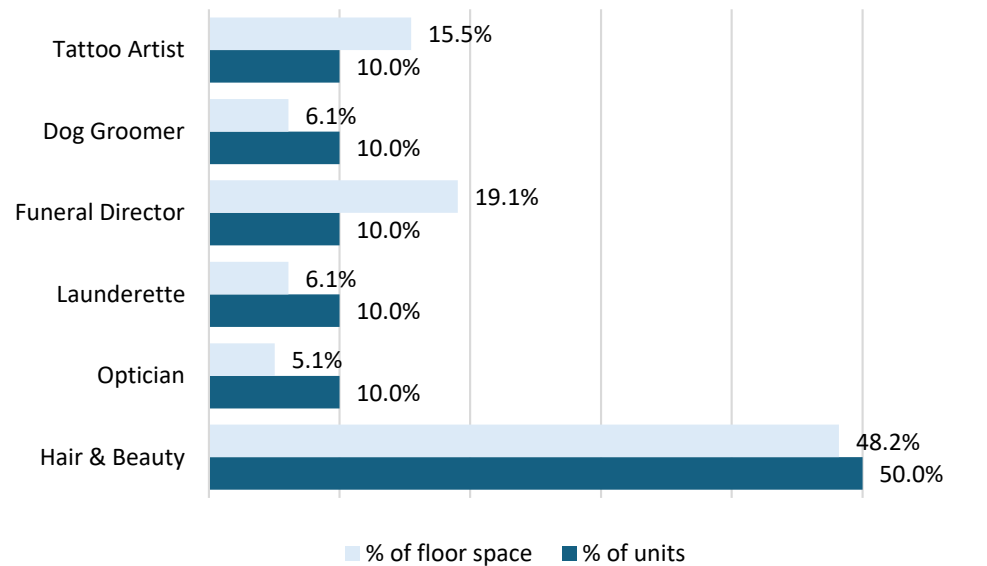


There are ten retail service businesses operating in Craven Arms town centre, with these accounting for almost 1,000m² of gross floor space. Retail services account for the equal highest number of units in Craven Arms (alongside finance & business services and comparison retail), but a much smaller share of floor space (17% and 9%).

Four retail services businesses ceased trading in 2024, which is the equivalent of a 31% decrease. However, the number edged back upwards to 10 in 2025.

The highest number of operators is in the barber and hair & beauty salon classification, with these together representing around half of units and floor space. In addition, there is an optician, a funeral director, a launderette and a dog groomer. Between 2023 and 2024, two hair salons closed, as did a taxi rank and a furniture restorer. In 2025, a tattoo artist began trading, as did a new barber shop. The latter was offset in the hair & beauty sector by the closure of a nail bar.

Chart 10: Breakdown of Retail Services Businesses by Type, 2025



Health

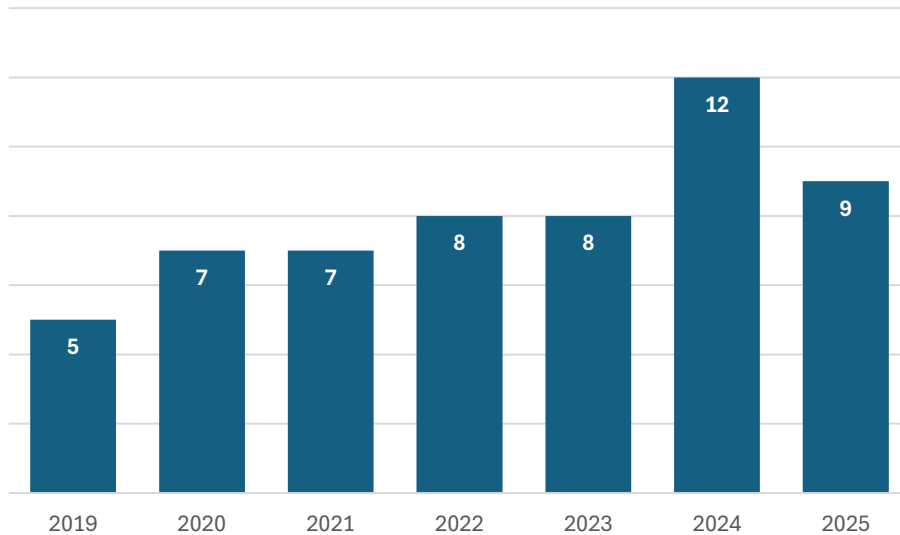
There are three health and care operators within the town – a dentist plus two home care agencies. One of these was a new trader in 2023, occupying a previously vacant premise. In 2024, this sector reduced by one with the closure of a chiropody clinic. There was no change in 2025.

Vacant Units

15% of Craven Arms town centre outlets are vacant (9% of gross floor space). This is the equivalent of nine empty units, which represents a decline from 12 empty premises in 2024. The rate is higher than the Shropshire average (11%) and is also above the national vacancy rate, which stood at 13.5% in the third quarter of 2025 according to BRC (data relating to high streets only).

Despite a 25% reduction in the number of vacant units in 2025, the number remains elevated compared with pre-pandemic levels. In 2019, there were only five vacant units in the town.

Chart 11: Number of Vacant Premises, 2019-2025

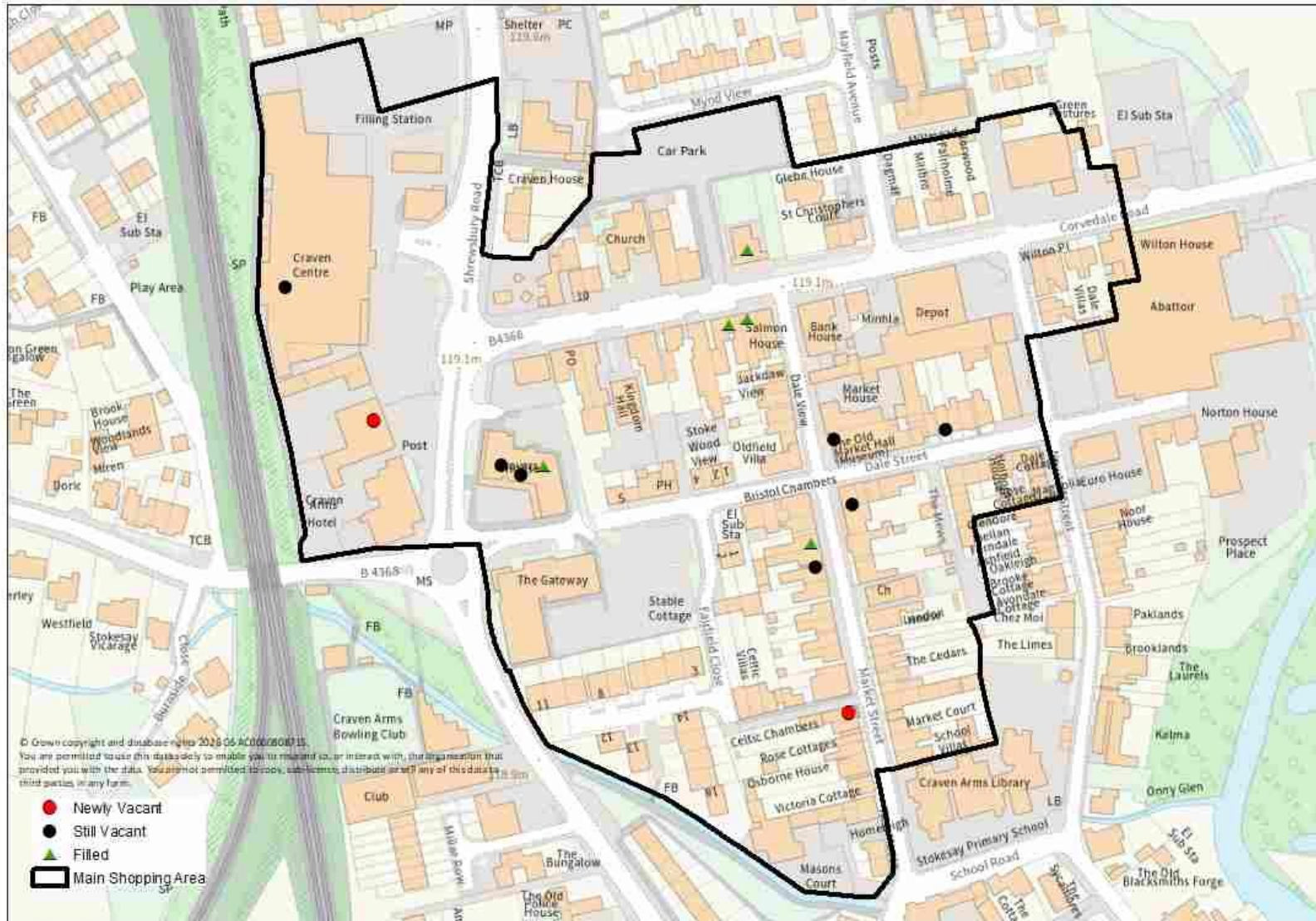


Four vacancies were on Market Street in 2025, two were in the Auction Yard, two on Shrewsbury Road and one on Dale Street.

Of the nine vacant premises in 2025, two had become vacant over the last year (22%). The town has one long-standing vacancy—the site of the former Land of Lost Content museum. The premise of the former Barclays Bank was unoccupied for many years, but was filled by a tattoo parlour in 2025.

Of the nine vacant commercial premises in Craven Arms in 2025, seven had been vacant in 2024, while two were newly vacant. Five premises which had been vacant in 2024 are now occupied.

Map 6: 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 Craven Arms—in fact there are more than twice as many residential properties as commercial premises. In total, 162 residential premises are located in the audit area, of which the highest proportion are flats (70 or 43%) which are largely located above retail or other commercial outlets. Much of this stock is along Corvedale Road, Market Street and Shrewsbury Road. There are small quantities of detached and semi-detached housing stock (10 of the former and 18 of the latter), most of which is towards the periphery of the main shopping area. There are 64 terraced houses, which is 40% of housing stock in the area. There are clusters of terraced housing on Market Street, Dale Street and Fairfield Close. The number of residential premises in Craven Arms has risen by 15 since 2021, including five additional terraced houses in 2025.

Map 7: Location of Residential Premises in Craven Arms Town Centre

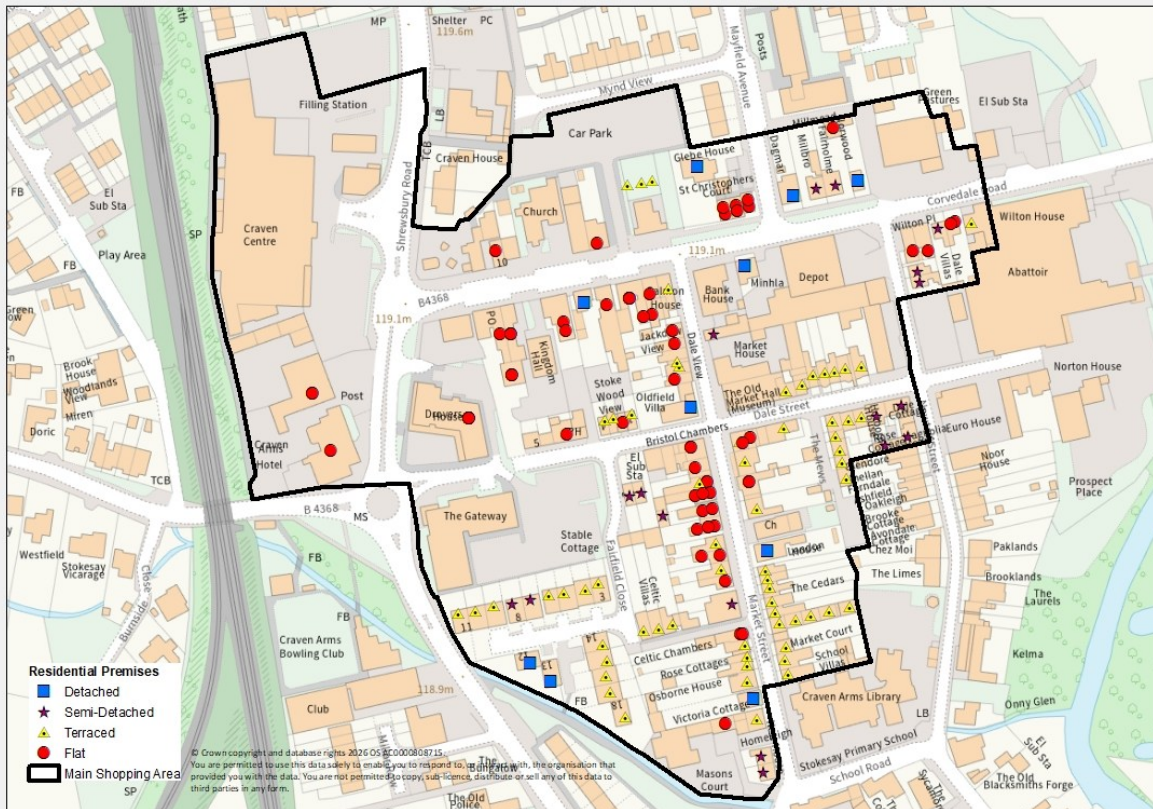


Chart 12: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type

