

Much Wenlock: Town Centre Audit Analysis, 2025



Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Much Wenlock'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. Much Wenlock 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

- 46 commercial units, occupying 4,900m² gross floor space.
- One of the smallest high street shopping zones (just Highley, Cleobury Mortimer and Broseley smaller), accounting for 1.8% of all Shropshire High Street traders.
- Average number of stores per head of population at a rate of 13.4 units per 1,000 population (average of 13 for Shropshire).
- Average store size 108m² which is notably smaller than the average across Shropshire (147m²).
- 107 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of 0.4:1 commercial versus residential properties.
- Much Wenlock had a 13% business churn rate in 2025, which represents an increase from 9% in 2024. Overall churn since 2019 is the lowest in Shropshire.
- The vacancy rate, at just 2%, is the lowest in Shropshire (county average 11%). The number of vacancies in the town has been consistently lower than the Shropshire average since 2019.
- The highest proportion of commercial units is attributable to comparison retail (28%) with convenience also accounting for a high share (13%). Of the tier three towns, only Church Stretton and Bishop's Castle support a higher proportion of comparison retailers. The representation of convenience retailers is third highest in Shropshire behind Highley and Broseley.
- In contrast, there are comparatively few retail service businesses (15% of units), although the number of units trading in the sector has risen by two over the last year. This compares with a Shropshire average of 19% and is amongst the lowest in the county behind Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton and Ludlow.
- Much Wenlock supports a high number of operators in the tourism and leisure sector (the third highest in Shropshire at 13% of all commercial operators behind Broseley and Bishop's Castle) but a slightly lower than average representation of restaurants and takeaways.

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.

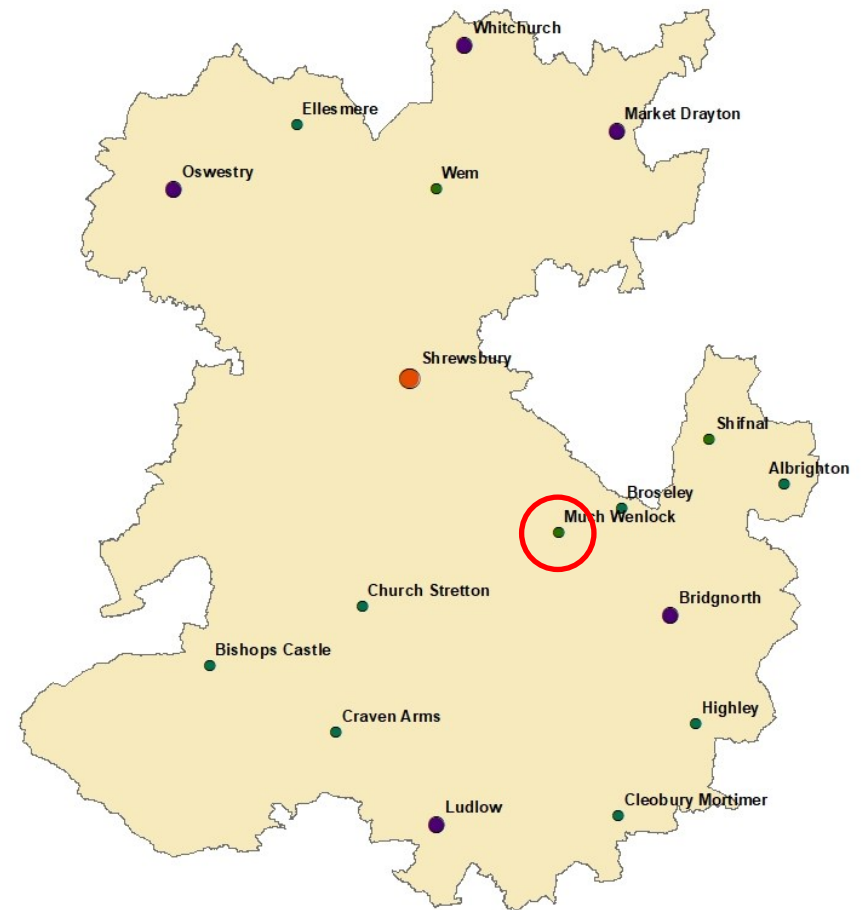
However, not all centres have comparable functions. Larger centres tend to attract workers and shoppers from much further afield than smaller centres, and consequently offer a much greater volume and variety of retail trade and consumer and business services.

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

Much Wenlock is amongst the smallest retail centres, but nonetheless has a broad selection of commercial operators trading.

Map 1: Shropshire's Main Retail Centres



About Much Wenlock

Much Wenlock is a small medieval market town located between Shrewsbury and Bridgnorth. The town developed around the abbey, which was built in around 685 AD. This remained until the invasion of Danish Vikings around 874 AD. In the 11th century a religious house was built on the same site. This was subsequently replaced by a monastery following the Norman Conquest. The town and monastery prospered until the dissolution of monasteries in 1539. The ruins of the site can still be seen today. Much Wenlock is located alongside Wenlock Edge, which is a limestone escarpment which runs from Craven Arms to Ironbridge. Today the town has a population of 3,400 (ONS mid-year estimates 2024) and 1,550 households (*2021 Census*). Its population has increased marginally (by 0.8%) since 2021.

Much Wenlock is located alongside the A458, which provides access northwards to Shrewsbury (15 miles) and southwards to Bridgnorth (8 miles). Local roads provide access to Telford (12 miles) from where motorway connections can be made. There is no mainline railway connection—the nearest station is Telford Central.

The total population within a 10 mile radius is approximately 220,400.

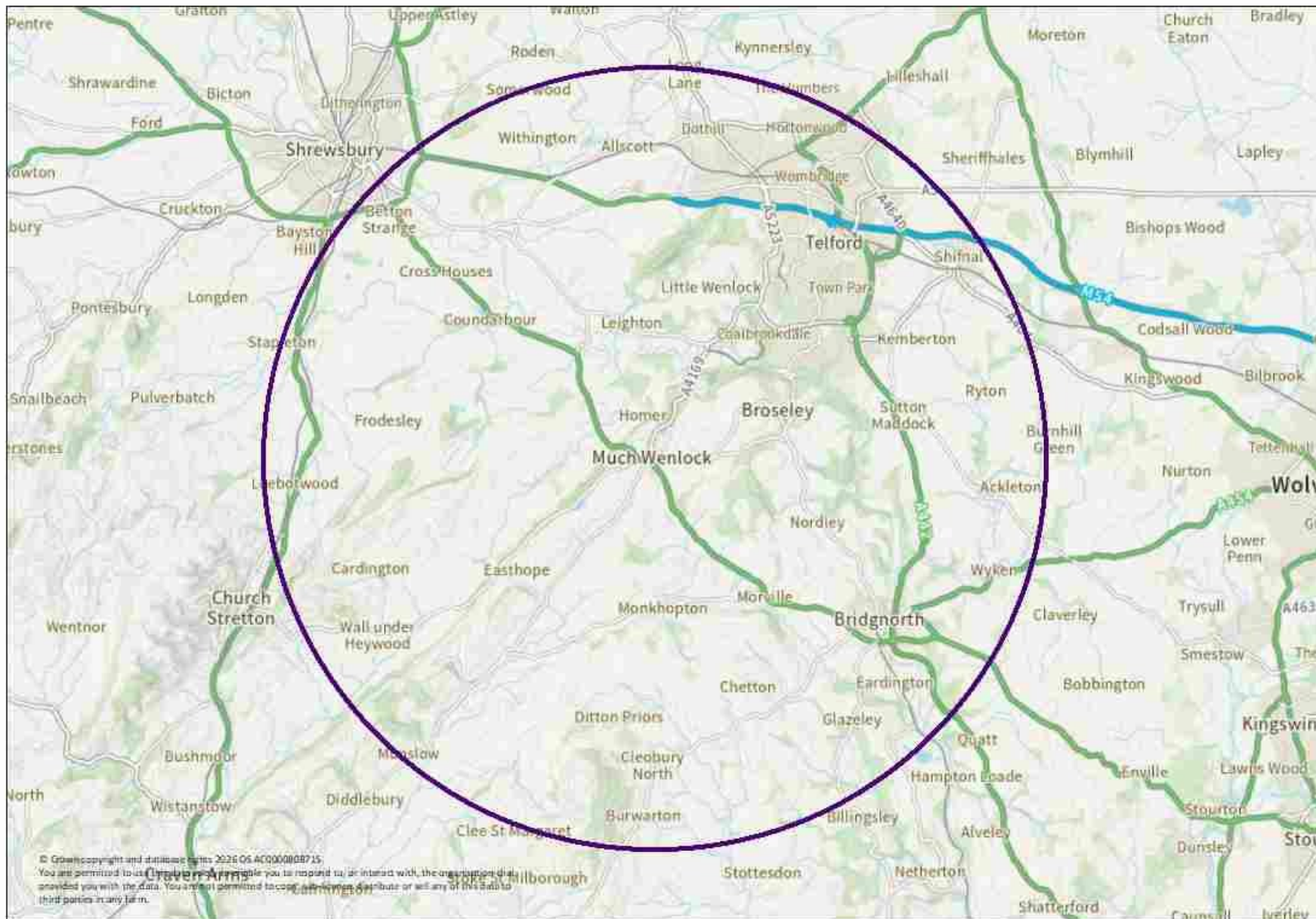
Much Wenlock provides approximately 900 jobs across the town council area (*ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2024*). A significant proportion of local residents work outside the immediate local area, and as such the town is not one of Shropshire's key employment hubs. Key sectors include:

- Education (20.0% of jobs)
- Accommodation & Food Services (12.8% of jobs)
- Health (12.2% of jobs)
- Professional, Scientific & Technical (10.6% of jobs)
- Retail (8.3% of jobs)

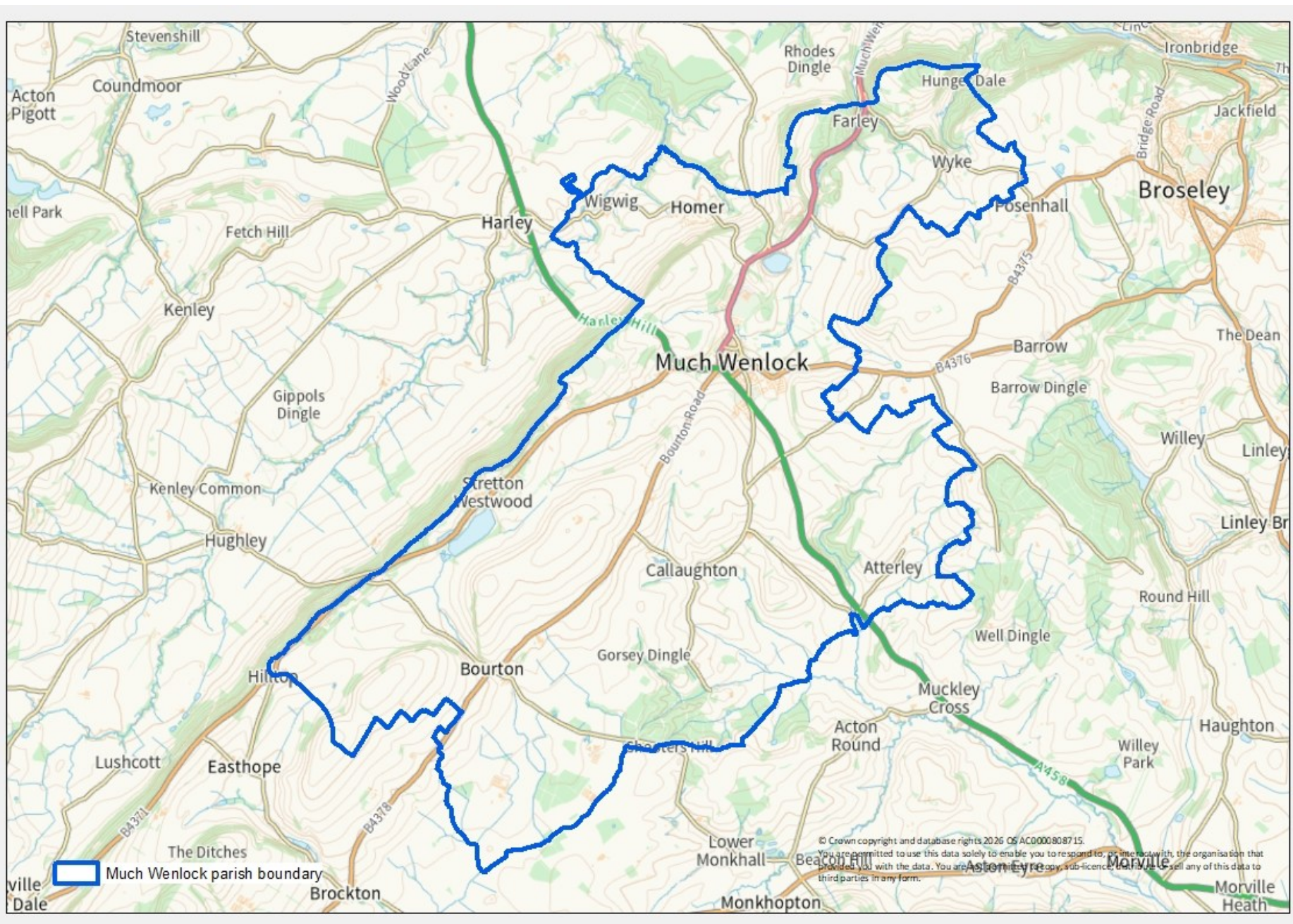
Overall, Much Wenlock town council area (depicted on Map 3) covers a large predominantly rural area of 3,540 hectares. The main shopping area (depicted on Map 4) is much smaller than this, at around 3 hectares.

The town comprises predominantly independent retail and there is a significant amount of residential housing stock in the main shopping area of the town. Residents of Much Wenlock also have relatively easy access to retail and leisure opportunities in Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth and Telford.

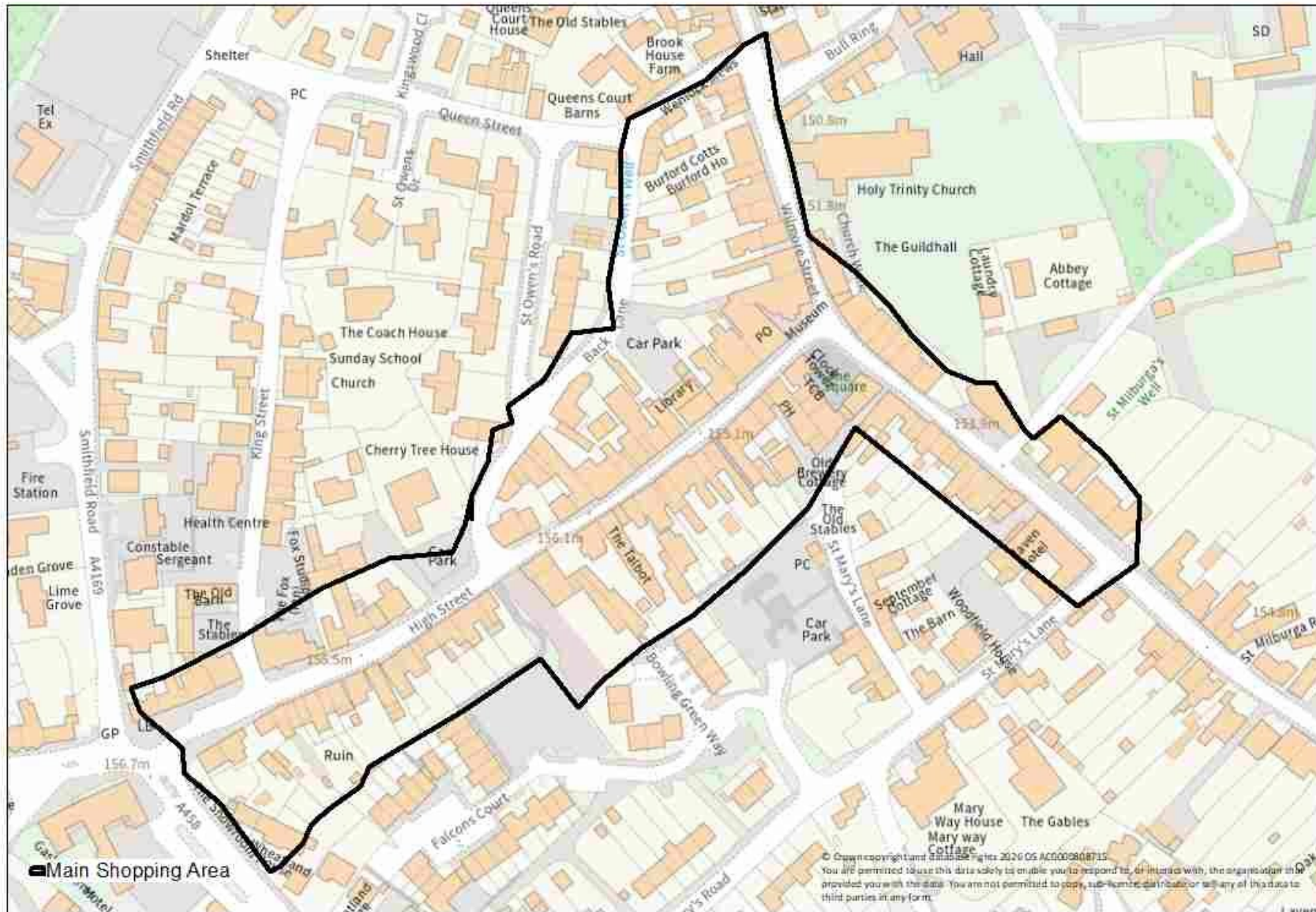
Map 2: Location of Much Wenlock showing 10 mile radius



Map 3: Much Wenlock Town Council Area



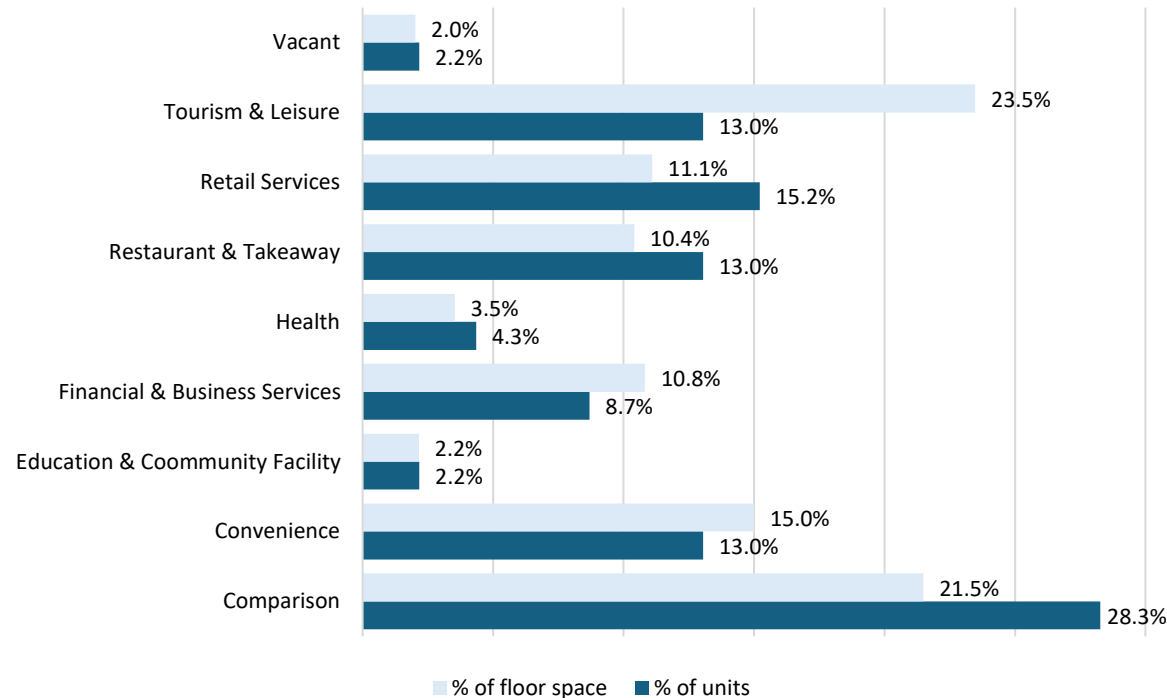
Map 4: Main Retail Shopping Area and Survey Boundary



Key Audit Results

A total of 46 business premises are contained within the Much Wenlock survey area. These are primarily in High Street (29 business premises), with smaller numbers in Barrow Street (9 business premises), the Square (6 business premises) and Wilmore Street (2 business premises). Gross floor space allocated to these businesses is around 4,900m² (nearly two-thirds on High Street). The average store size is 108m² with units ranging in size from 12m² to 455m². The number of commercial units in the town reduced by one in 2024, when one business took over the premises next door; hence there has been no change in commercial floor space. Other than this, there have been no changes in the number of commercial premises since 2019.

Chart 1: Breakdown of Much Wenlock Commercial Premises by Classification, 2025



The highest proportion of commercial units is allocated to comparison retail, with these accounting for 28.3% of units (21.5% of floor space). Convenience retail accounts for 13.0% of units and a slightly larger share of floor space (15.0%).

Financial and business service providers account for a high share of units and floor space at 8.7% and 10.8% respectively. 13% of units are allocated to restaurants and takeaways (10.4% of floor space). 13% of units are in the tourism and leisure sector (accounting for 23.5% of floor space).

A comparatively small share of capacity is dedicated to retail service providers (15.2% of units and 11.1% of floor space).

There is just one vacant premise in Much Wenlock (2.2% of units), which is the equivalent of 2.0% of floor space.

Change since 2024

There has been very little change in the number of businesses trading in each sector in Much Wenlock between September 2024 and September 2025. There is one fewer comparison store and two fewer vacant units. Two additional retail services providers now trade, as does an additional health outlet.

Overall, business churn in Much Wenlock has typically been low since 2019. However, the churn rate did pick up to 13% in 2025 compared with 9% in the previous year. Of the six businesses recorded as changing over the year, one was a new vacancy, three previously vacant premises had become occupied and two represented other change.

Chart 2: Change in Number of Units by Category, 2024/25

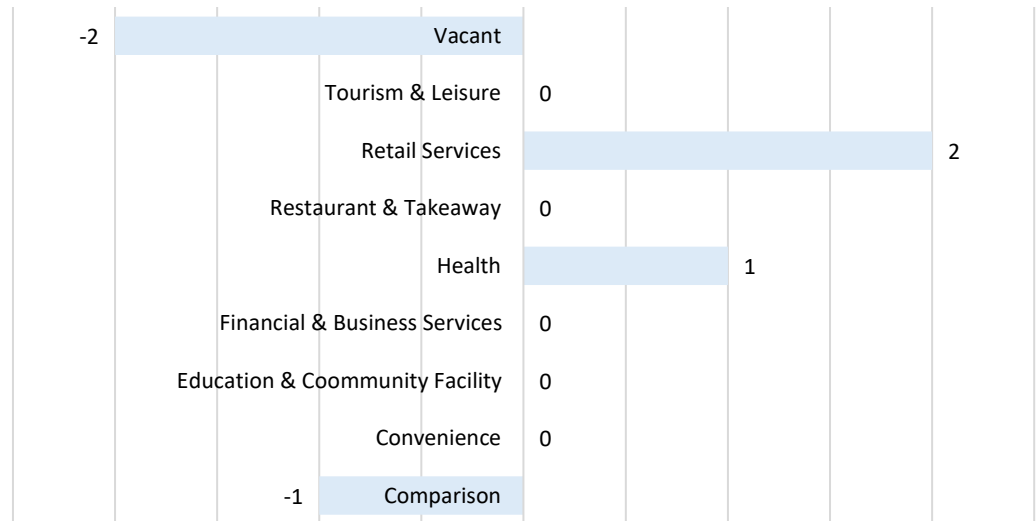


Chart 3: Levels of Business Churn, 2019-2025

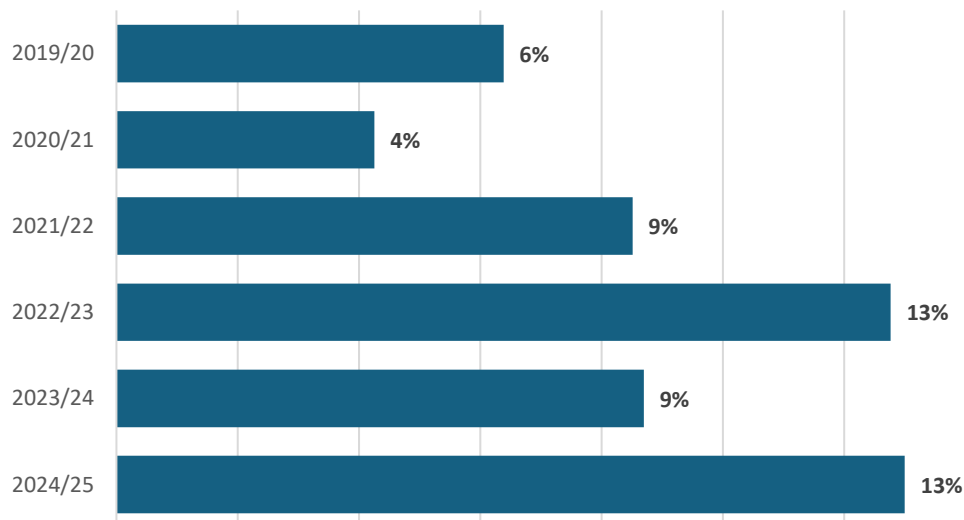
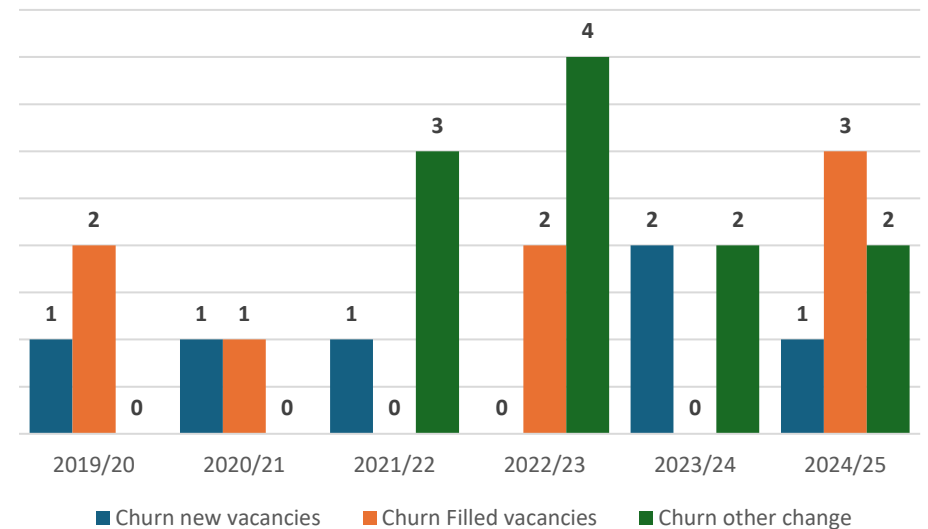


Chart 4: Breakdown of Churn, 2019-2025

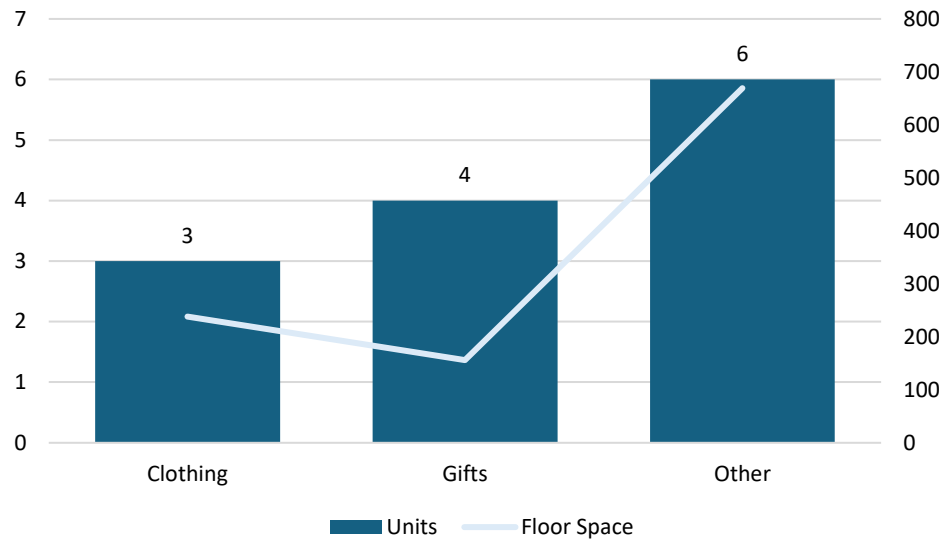


Comparison Retail

28% of commercial units are dedicated to the comparison retail category, accounting for 22% of gross floor space. This equates with 13 stores with almost 1,100m² of floor space. This means that the comparison category accounts for the largest share of both units and retail space in the town. However, the offer has declined over the last two years, with one comparison retailer being lost in both 2024 and 2025.

Within Much Wenlock there are three clothing shops, including stores catering for both men and women and four gift shops. One clothes store closed in 2025, and an additional outlet opened. A gallery in the town also closed between the 2024 and 2025 audits, leaving just one trading in this classification. Also represented by just one outlet are a book store, a florist, a pharmacy, a charity shop and an antique store. The latter accounts for a disproportionately large share of floor space (16%).

Chart 5: Breakdown of Comparison Retail by Type, 2025



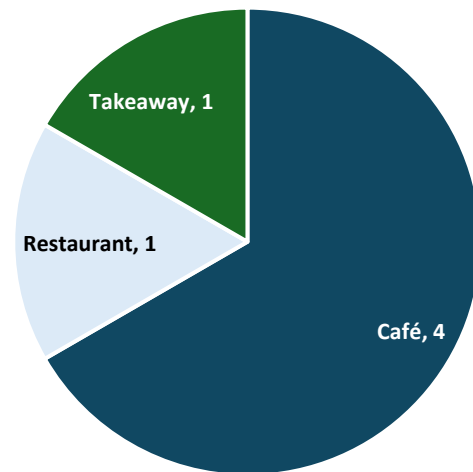
All outlets in the comparison goods category in Much Wenlock are independent.

Convenience Retail

There are six convenience stores within the main shopping area of Much Wenlock. These account for 13% of all units and 15% of gross floor space. Although there was no change in the number of operators in 2025, one general convenience store closed and a cheesemongers opened. There is also a Spar supermarket, a butcher, a pie shop, a health store and a newsagents.

Restaurants & Takeaways

Chart 6: Breakdown of Units in the Restaurant/Takeaway Sector, 2025



13% of units in Much Wenlock are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, with this category accounting for a slightly lower proportion of gross floor space (10%). The six units are split between cafés (67%), restaurants (17%) and takeaways (17%). The only change in the classification over the last two years was the relocation of the town's chocolate café in 2023. There are no chain stores in the restaurant and takeaway category in Much Wenlock.

The sole restaurant offers Indian cuisine, while the takeaway is Chinese. The Raven hotel also has in-house dining facilities.

Tourism & Leisure

Also within the hospitality sector, there are three public houses, one of which was newly opened in 2023. These take up approximately 610m² gross floor space. The Raven hotel is also located in the main shopping area of the town—it is still open but is up for sale. There is a tourist information centre plus museum in the Square as well as some self-catering accommodation which opened in 2023.

Finance & Business Services

There are four commercial operators in the finance, professional and business services sector in Much Wenlock town centre, accounting for over 500m² of gross floor space. Included within this classification are two estate agents, a chartered surveyor and an IT consultant. A solicitor used to trade in the premise next door to the surveyor but shut between the 2023 and 2024 audits—the latter has now taken over the former’s premises.

Retail Services

There are only seven retail service businesses operating in Much Wenlock town centre, with these accounting for less than 600m² of gross floor space. These account for 15% of all commercial operators within the town. The offer has been bolstered over the last year with two new outlets opening—a dog groomers and a vets. There are also three hair and beauty salons, an optician and a funeral director. Despite recent growth, compared with other towns of a similar size, this classification is notably under-represented in Much Wenlock.

Health

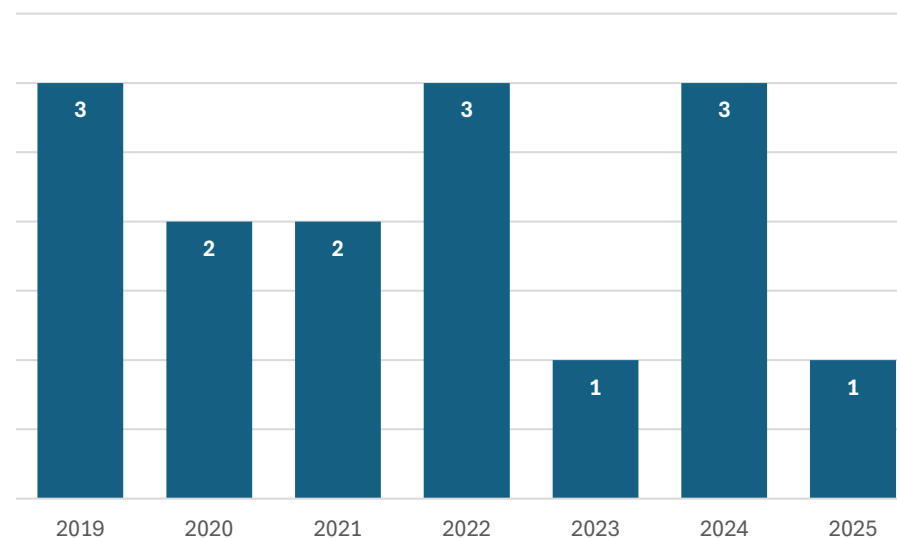
There is a dentist practising within the main shopping streets of Much Wenlock and in 2025 a pilates studio opened.

Vacant Units

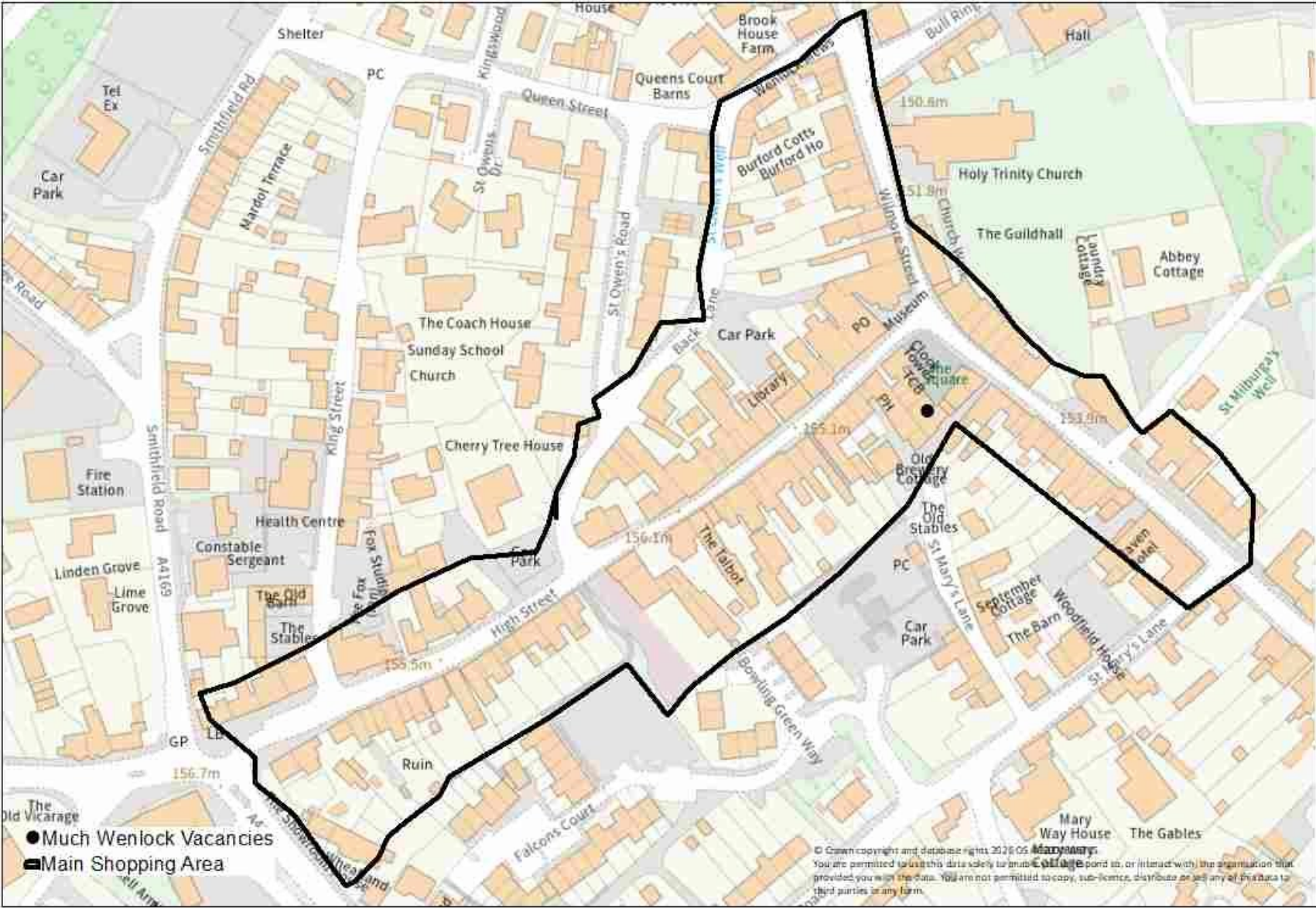
Since 2019, the number of vacancies has fluctuated between one and three and the vacancy rate has consistently been amongst the lowest of all Shropshire towns. There was just one vacant premises in 2025, down from three the previous year. This equates with a rate of 2%, which is much lower than the Shropshire average (11%) and also much 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 one remaining vacant premise is in The Square.

The town’s one long-standing vacancy became filled in 2025.

Chart 7: Number of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2019— 2025

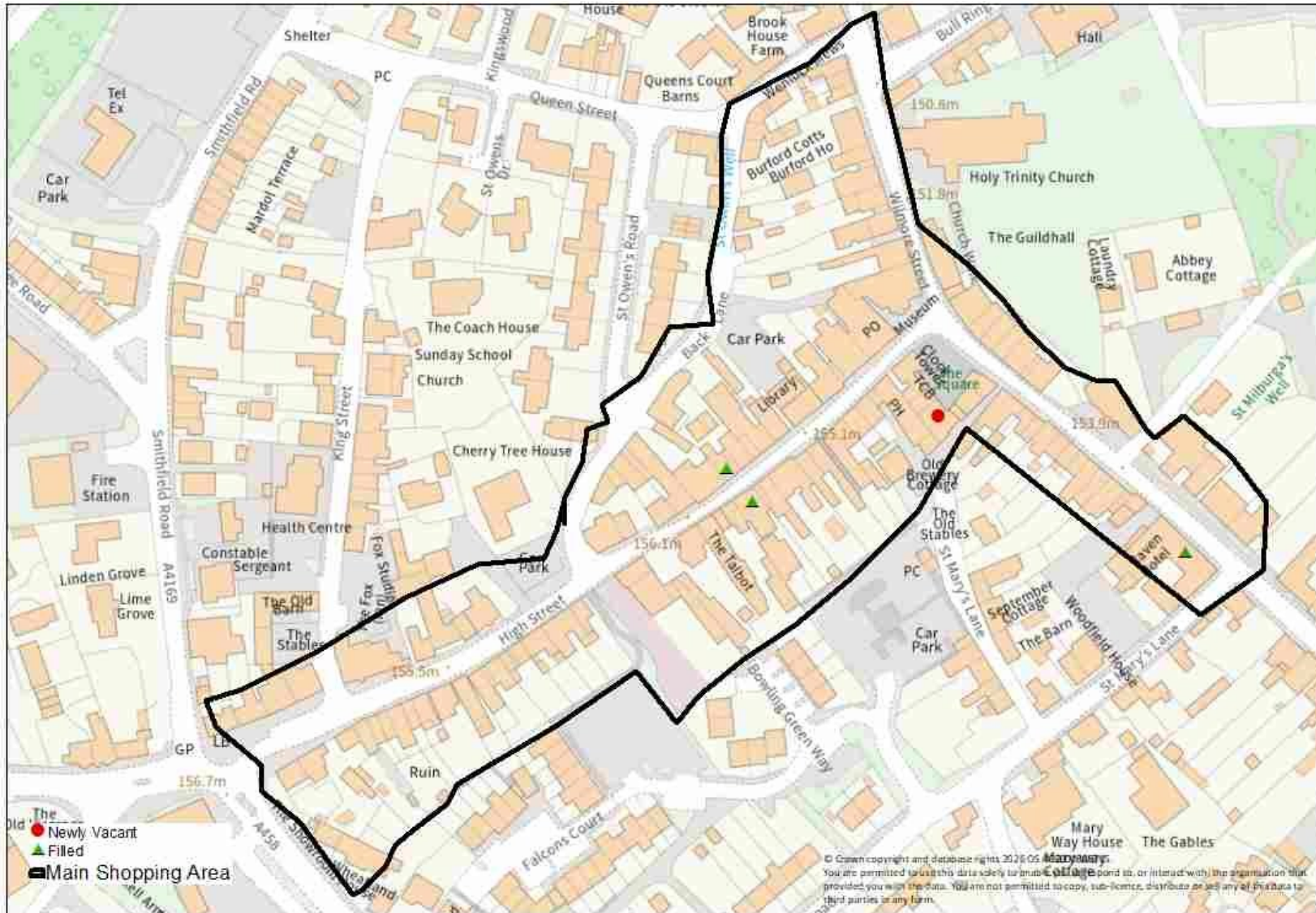


Map 5: Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2025



The number of vacant premises in Much Wenlock declined by two to just one in 2025. All three of the premises which had been empty in 2024 are now filled.

Map 6: Change in Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2024-2025



Residential Premises

The main shopping streets of Much Wenlock comprise a mix of residential and commercial premises. In total, 107 residential premises are located in the audit area, of which the majority are either terraced or flats (45 premises and 33 premises respectively). Flats, the equivalent of 31% of all residential premises, are largely located above retail or other commercial outlets. This stock is primarily along the north eastern stretch of the High Street where most of the commercial outlets are situated. Terraced houses, accounting for 42% of stock, are also principally along the High Street, albeit on the more southerly section. There are 12 detached and 17 semi-detached properties in the audit area. There have been no major changes in residential stock levels over the last few years.

Map 7: Location of Residential Premises in Much Wenlock Town Centre

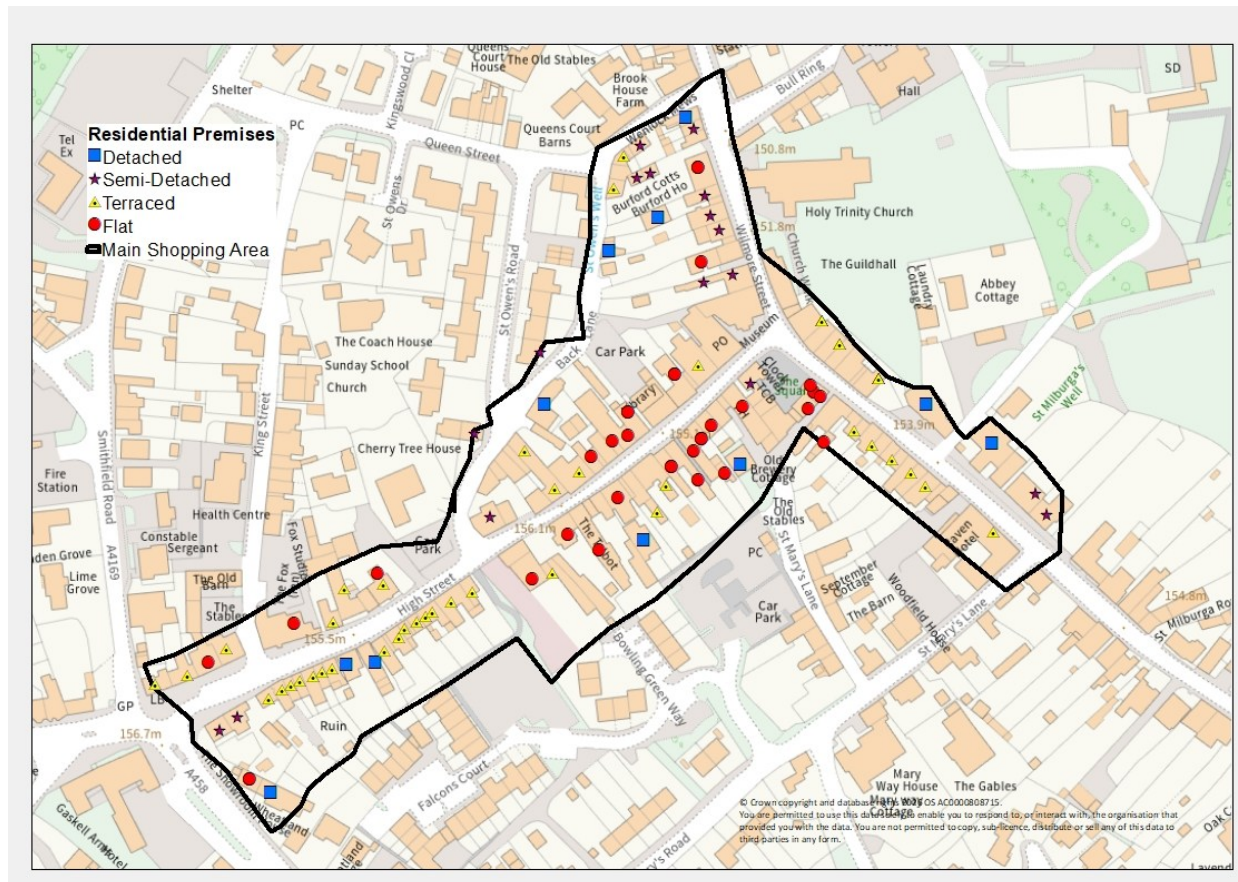


Chart 8: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type

