

Albrighton: Village Centre Audit Analysis, 2023



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Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Albrighton's main shopping streets was undertaken in September 2023 as part of an on-going piece of research reviewing the vibrancy of Shropshire's main market towns and key settlements. Albrighton centre was first audited in July 2019 and then again in September 2020, 2021 and 2022. The objective of these audits is to provide a snapshot of the vitality of the settlement 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
- 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, and through 2020 and 2021 the coronavirus pandemic has 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 has also impacted people's spending power.

Key Findings

- 53 commercial units, occupying 6,100m² gross floor space
- Amongst the smallest centres in Shropshire, accounting for 2.1% of all Shropshire High Street traders
- Lower than average number of stores per head of population at 11 per 1,000 (13 on average across Shropshire)
- Average store size 115m² compared with the Shropshire average of 147m²
- One premise reclassified from commercial to residential between 2019 and 2020. One additional trader was identified in 2023.
- 27 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of 2:1 commercial versus residential properties
- Albrighton had a 15% business churn rate between 2019 and 2020—this reduced to just 6% in both 2021 and 2022 but rose slightly to 9% in 2023.
- 9% of all commercial premises were vacant in 2023 - the number of empty premises fell by 1 in this year, taking the vacancy rate to below the Shropshire average (11%)
- Key commercial sectors include retail services, comparison retail and hospitality, although the representation of comparison is low compared to the Shropshire average

Methodology Statement

Only the main retail centre of the settlement was surveyed, as shown on Map 4.

Both retail and non-retail businesses will be operating in other parts of the village.

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 2022 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 Address Base (complete version) 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.

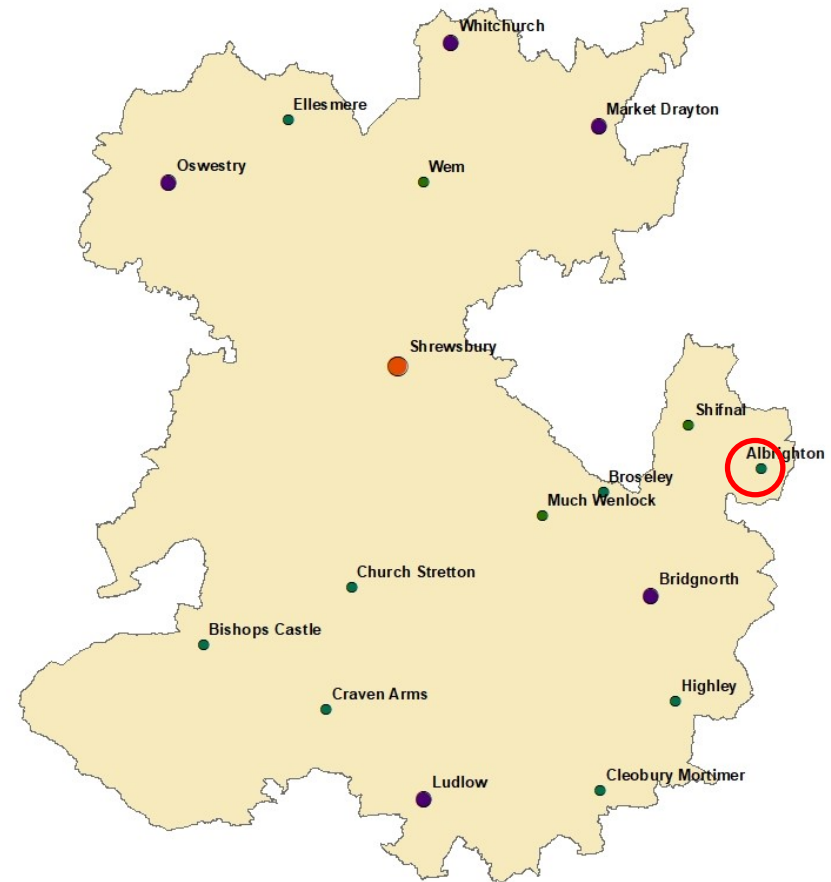
However, not all centres have comparable functions. Larger centres tend to attract workers and shoppers from much further afield than smaller centres, and consequently offer a much greater volume and variety of retail trade and consumer and business services.

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

Albrighton, with 53 commercial units in the village centre, is amongst the smallest of Shropshire's retail centres even amongst the tier three settlements.

Map 1: Shropshire's Main Retail Centres



About Albrighton

Albrighton is a large village located in the east of Shropshire. The settlement's origins can be traced back to the end of the 6th Century. Today it has a population of 4,444 and 1,945 households (*2021 Census*). Its population has grown by less than 3% since 2011. It is currently the eleventh largest settlement in Shropshire.

Albrighton is well served with transport links. The only motorway directly serving Shropshire (the M54) is easily accessible, with J3 just two miles away. This provides easy access to the Black Country, the West Midlands conurbation and the M5 and M6 (13 miles to the M6). The I54 development, which is home to major manufacturers Jaguar Land Rover, Eurofins and Moog Aerospace, is within a 15 mile commute. The M54 westbound leads to Shrewsbury (24 miles). The nearby A41 provides direct links north to Newport (11 miles), Whitchurch (31 miles) and on to Cheshire. Southbound, the A41 links to Wolverhampton (8 miles). The A464 provides access to nearby Shifnal (5.5 miles).

The village is on the main railway line between Shrewsbury and Birmingham.

The total population within a 10 mile radius is approximately 563,200.

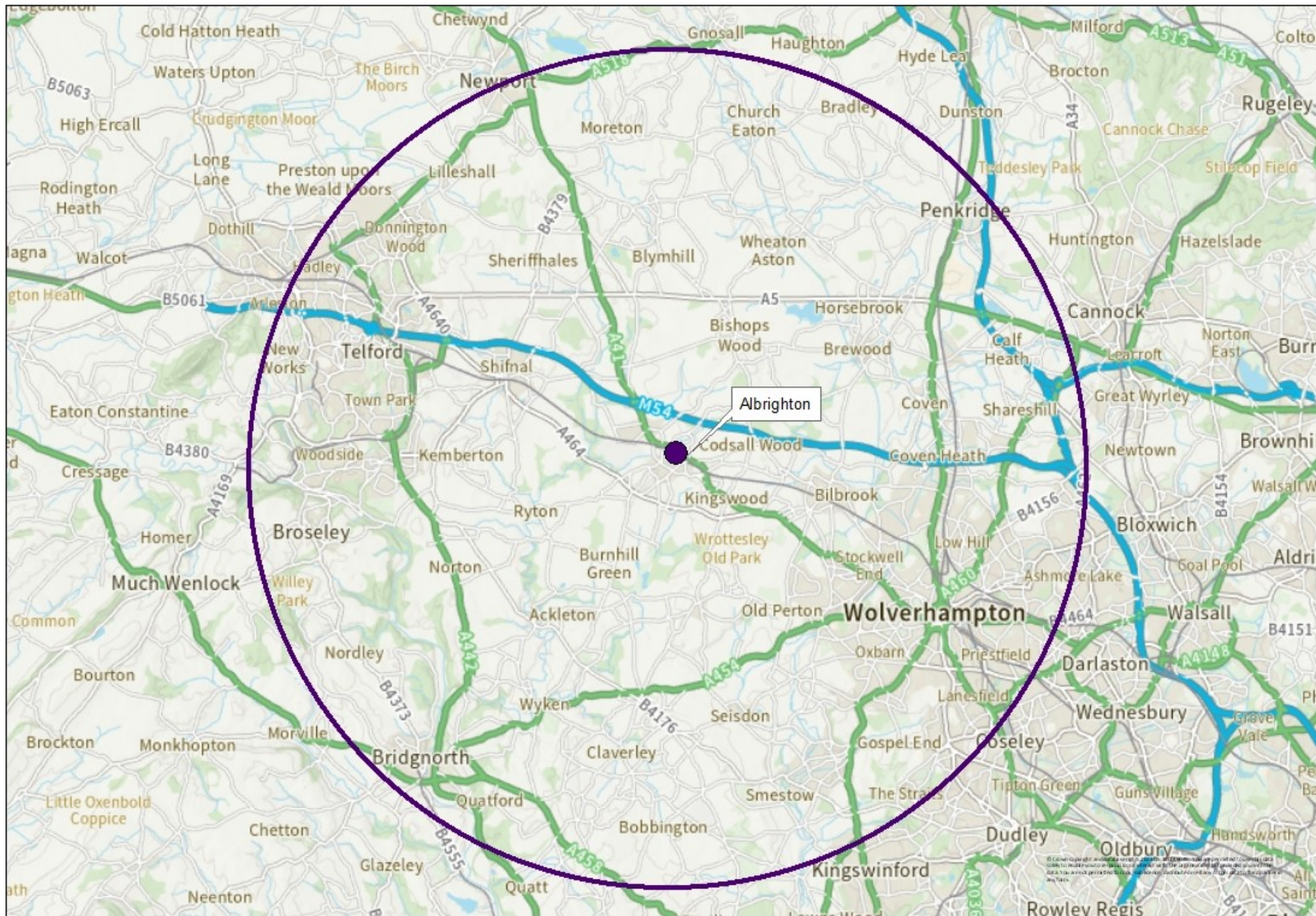
Albrighton provides approximately 1,400 jobs across the parish council area (*ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2022*). Key sectors include:

- Health (34.4% of jobs)
- Retail (11.6% of jobs).
- Accommodation & Food Services (10.9% of jobs)
- Wholesale (10.1% of jobs)
- Education (7.2% of jobs)

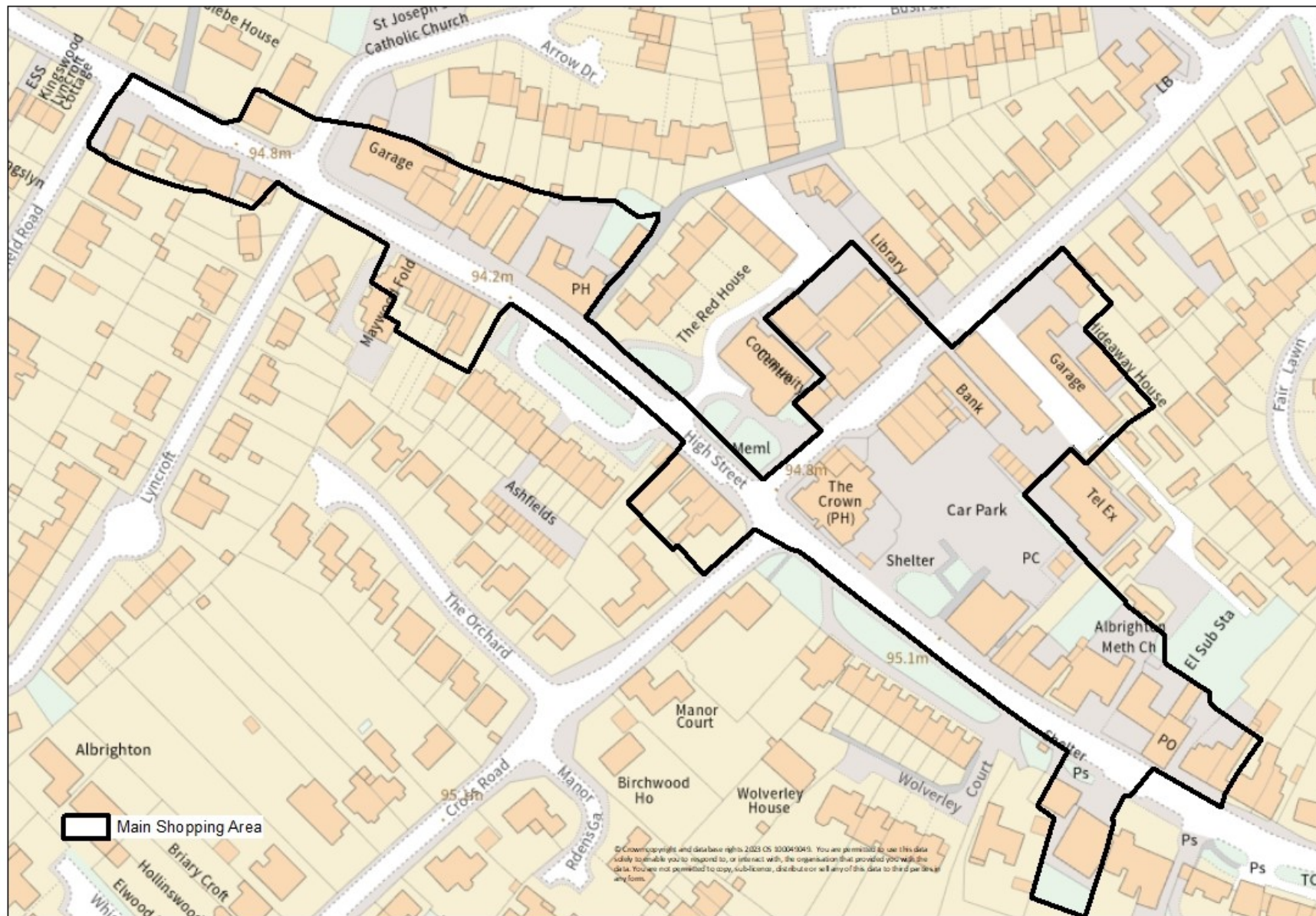
Overall, Albrighton parish council area (depicted on Map 3) covers an area of 894 hectares. The main shopping area (depicted on Map 4) is much smaller than this, at around 2 hectares.

The village comprises predominantly independent retail and there is a small amount of residential housing stock in the main shopping area of the town.

Map 2: Location of Albrighton showing 10 mile radius



Map 4: Main Retail Shopping Area



Alternative Shopping Destinations

Albrighton primarily services its own local population, the postcode district WV7. However, residents in this postcode are frequent visitors to other nearby shopping centres which offer a greater choice of comparison retail and more leisure and hospitality opportunities. The charts below show the proportion of the WV7 postcode district which visited Telford, Wolverhampton and Bridgnorth in each month between April 2020 and February 2022. All three locations are within a 10 mile radius of Albrighton (see map 2). It is clear that a very high proportion use nearby Telford which is easily accessible via the M54. 54.2% of the WV7 population had visited Telford at least once in February 2022. In the same month, 16.2% had visited Wolverhampton, which is also easily accessible via the A41. WV7 represents part of the core catchment for both Telford and Wolverhampton. As the following charts show, the proportion of the WV7 population visiting Telford or Wolverhampton fluctuates on a monthly basis. Visits to Telford dipped at the beginning of 2021 when the country was in lockdown but subsequently the trend has been upwards. Visits to Wolverhampton peaked in October 2021 at 31.7% of the WV7 population. The proximity of Telford and Wolverhampton means that a significant amount of Albrighton retail expenditure is leaked out of Shropshire.

Chart 1: Telford

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)



Chart 2: Wolverhampton

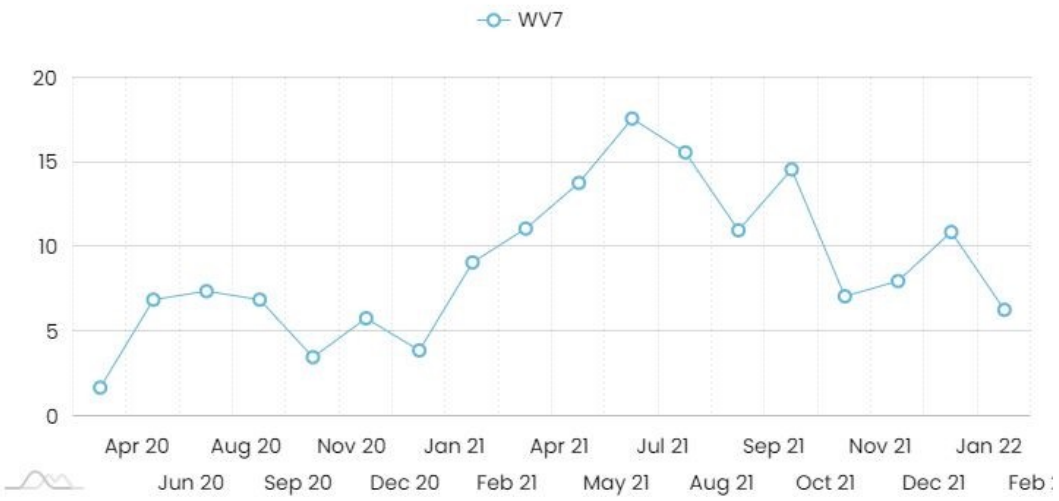
Postcode Conversion Trend (%)



Bridgnorth is the closest retail centre to Albrighton that is located in the Shropshire local authority area. 6.3% of the WV7 population visited Bridgnorth at least once in February 2022. As the chart following shows, visits to the town tend to be higher during the summer (peaking at 17.6% in July 2021) indicating that it is as much a destination for a day out as it is for shopping.

Chart 3: Bridgnorth

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)

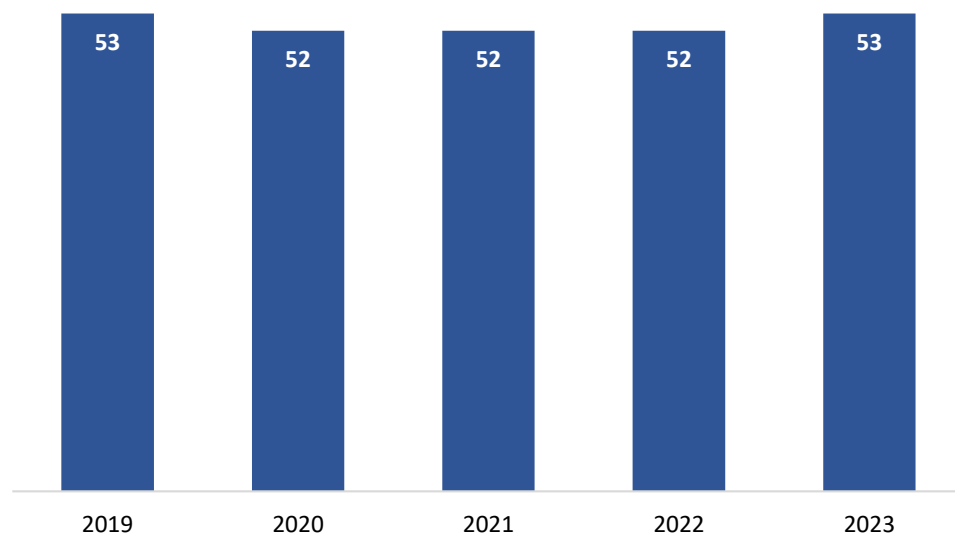


Charts have been downloaded from the Town and Place AI tool, which monitors visitor numbers and footfall across a range of town and city centres across the UK.

Key Audit Results

A total of 53 commercial premises are located within the Albrighton survey area. These are primarily in High Street (38 businesses) and Station Road (15 businesses). Gross floor space allocated to these businesses is around 6,100m² (over two-thirds on High Street). The average store size is 115m² with units ranging in size from 24m² to 426m². There is a further cluster of 12 shops further up the High Street outside of the main shopping zone. Likewise, there are an additional five outlets (including a Londis supermarket) further up Station Road that fall outside the main shopping area.

Chart 4: Number of Commercial Units in Albrighton, 2019-2023

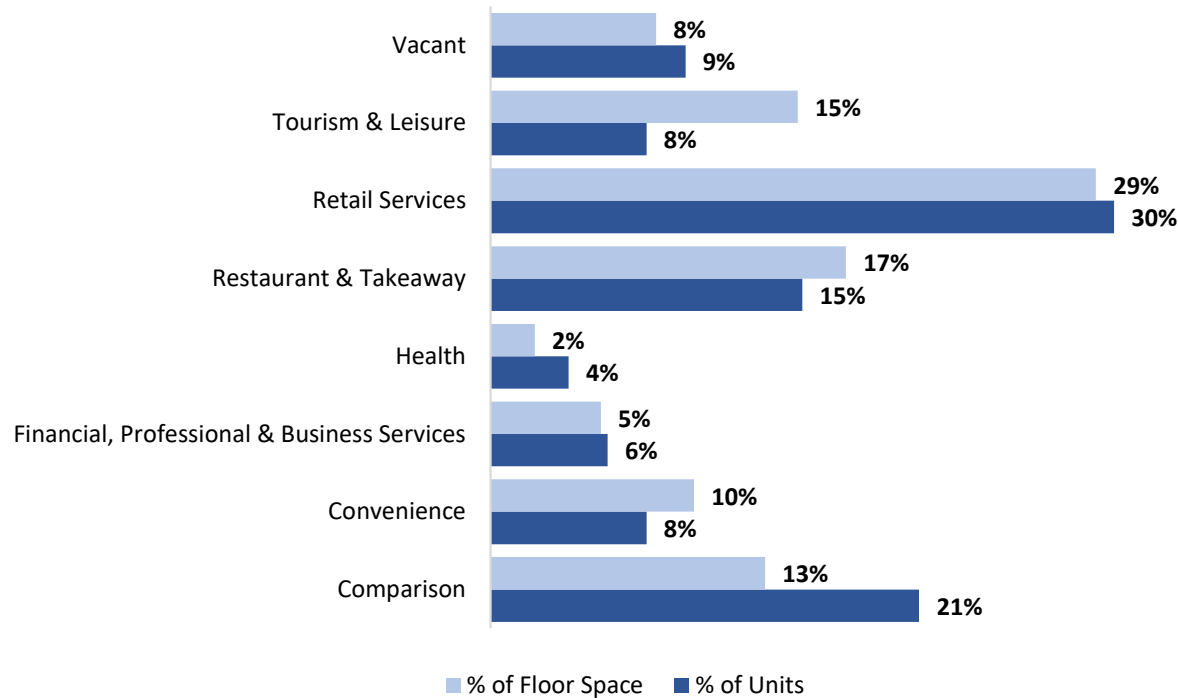


The amount of commercial space in Albrighton village centre was slightly higher in 2023 compared with the previous three years. This was due to a business operating within the village hall. There was a loss of approximately 75m² in 2020—the equivalent of one fewer outlet which has been converted into a residential property. Other than these changes, the retail space in the village has been stable over the last five years.

The highest proportion of commercial units in Albrighton is allocated to retail services, accounting for 30% of units and for 29% of floor space in 2023. A substantial share is allocated to comparison retail (21% of units and 13% of floor space). Convenience retail accounts for only a small share of units (8%) but for a slightly higher proportion of floor space (10%). 15% of units are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, while 8% of units are occupied by tourism and leisure operators.

There were five vacant premises in Albrighton in 2023 (9% of units), which is the equivalent of 8% of floor space.

Chart 5: Breakdown of Albrighton Commercial Premises by Classification, 2023



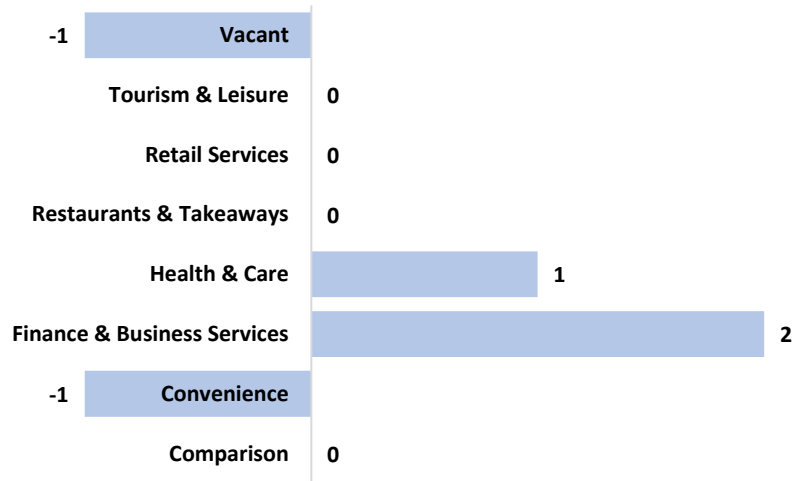
Change since 2022

There has been very little change in the business mix in Albrighton over the last year. There were two business closures — one restaurant closed, as did a butcher. A new restaurant opened in the premise previously occupied by the butcher. Two professional services providers began trading, both occupying previously vacant premises. In addition, a health provider began operating in the village hall.

There has been no change in the comparison, retail service or tourism and leisure sectors over the last year, and there is one fewer vacant premise.

Overall, business turnover in Albrighton rose slightly in 2023 to a 9% churn rate. This compares with 6% in the previous two years but is lower than in 2020 when eight businesses underwent some change.

Chart 6: Change in Number of Units by Category, 2022/2023



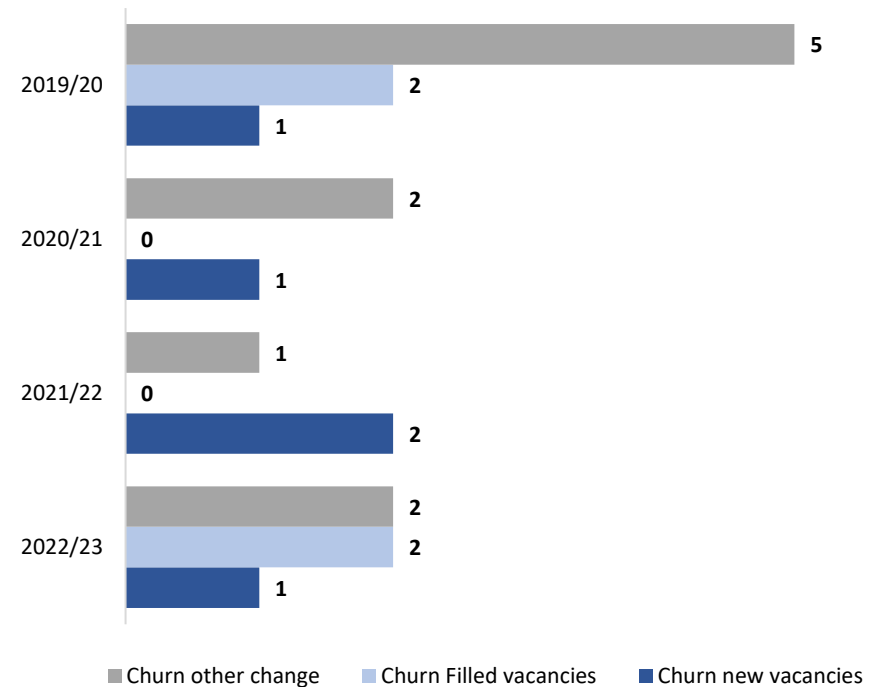
The adjacent chart shows change on the high street broken down by new vacancies, old vacancies that have been filled and all other change.

A fifth of churn between 2022 and 2023 was attributable to new vacancies (the equivalent of just one new vacant premise). This compares with two new vacancies in 2022. One new vacancy was recorded in 2021 and in 2020.

Two previously vacant premises in the town had become occupied by the time of the 2023 audit—no previously vacant premises had been filled over the previous two years.

Other churn (premises changing hand or purpose) accounted for 40% of churn in 2023 compared with a third in 2022 and approaching two-thirds in 2021 and 2020.

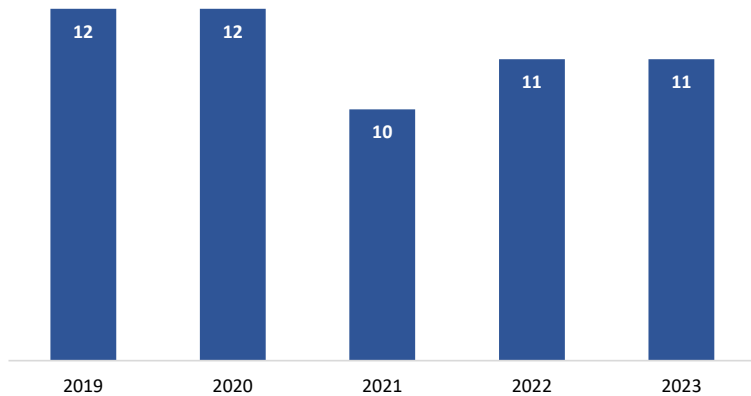
Chart 7: Breakdown of Business Churn, 2019-2023



Comparison Retail

The second largest proportion of commercial units in Albrighton is dedicated to the comparison retail category, which accounted for 21% of units and 13% of gross floor space in September 2023. This equates with 11 stores with over 800m² of floor space. Like other tier 3 towns in Shropshire, there is less emphasis on comparison retail in Albrighton than in Shrewsbury or the tier 2 towns, with Telford a close destination offering a wide range of choice in the comparison sector.

Chart 8: Number of Comparison Goods Stores, 2019-2023



The number of comparison goods stores remained unchanged between 2019 and 2020, although there was some churn.

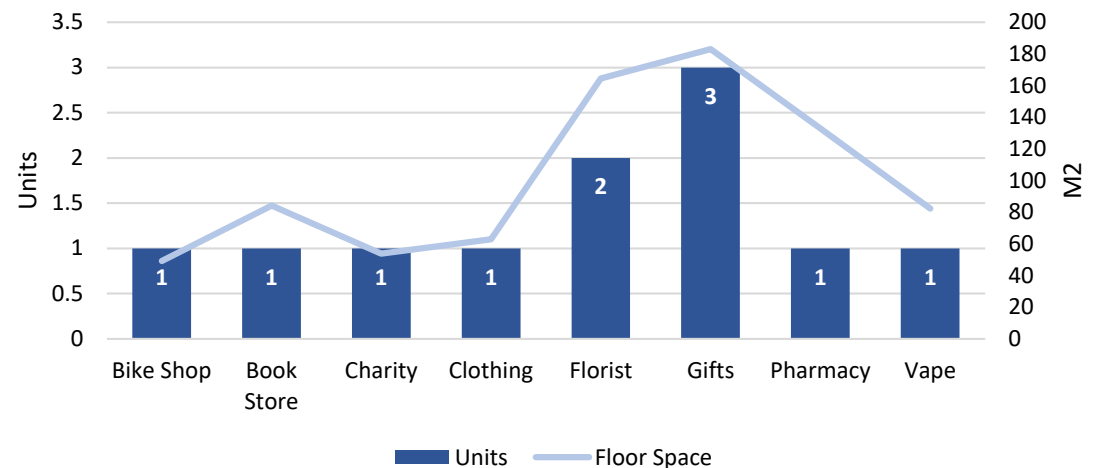
However, two comparison goods stores closed between 2020 and 2021 (a 16.7% reduction), with the loss of an antiques store and a shoe shop. This equates with a loss of 100m² comparison floor space. There was some recovery in 2022, with a dog gift store opening, which has added 50m² to comparison floor space.

There was no change at all in the comparison offer in 2023.

Within the town there are three gift shops, two florists, a clothing shop, a bicycle retailer, a book shop, a charity store, a pharmacy and a vape store. The pharmacy is considerably larger than the other comparison retailers in the town, accounting for 17% of all category floor space.

All stores are independent.

Chart 9: Breakdown of Comparison Retail by Type, 2023



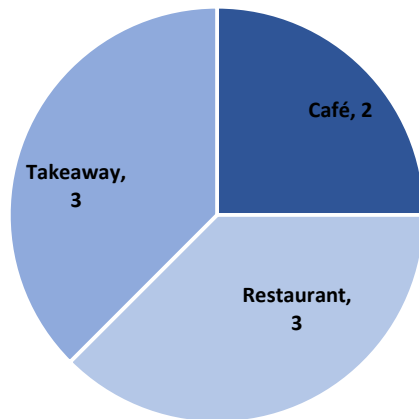
Convenience Retail

There are four convenience stores within the main shopping area of Albrighton, representing around 600m² of floor space. The convenience offer was unchanged between 2019 and 2022, but the butcher closed between the 2022 and 2023 audits, with the loss of approaching 200m² of floor space. The classification accounts for 8% of all units and for 10% of gross floor space. The proportion of units attributable to convenience retail in Albrighton is slightly higher than many of the other tier 3 Shropshire settlements.

As well as two supermarkets (the Co-op and the Spar, the latter incorporating a post office), there is an off-licence and a newsagent. There is also a Londis on Station Road, albeit outside the main shopping area zone. Similarly, the village benefits from another butcher just outside the survey area. The main supermarket facilities for Albrighton residents are located in nearby Telford.

Restaurants & Takeaways

Chart 10: Breakdown of Units in the Restaurant/Takeaway Sector, 2023



15% of units in Albrighton are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, with this category accounting for a slightly larger proportion of gross floor space (17%). This sector is particularly important to the settlement. Although one restaurant closed in 2023, another opened in the premise previously occupied by the butcher, resulting in no net change (apart from a slight increase in floor space). The closure of a café in 2022 meant there is now one fewer outlet in the sector than there was in 2021. There are three restaurants, three takeaways and two cafes. A range of cuisines are represented, including fish and chips, Indian and Chinese.

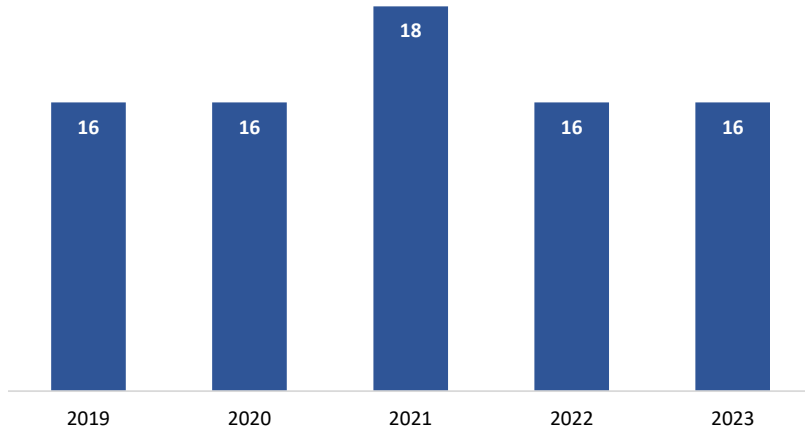
There are no chain stores in the restaurant and takeaway category in Albrighton.

Tourism & Leisure

Also within the hospitality sector, there are three public houses. These take up approximately 800m² gross floor space. There is also a health and fitness outlet in the town centre. There has been no change in the tourism and leisure classification since 2019.

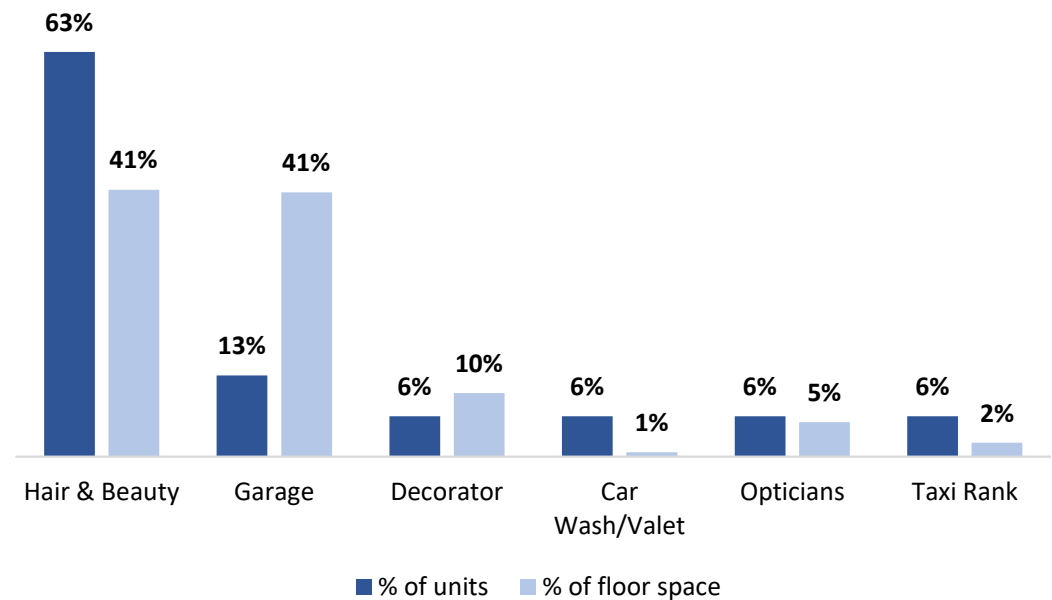
Retail Services

Chart 11: Number of Retail Services Business, 2019-2023



There are 16 retail service businesses operating in Albrighton centre, with these accounting for almost 1,800m² of gross floor space. This equates with 30% of all units and 29% of floor space. The number decreased by two in 2021, taking the number back down to the level seen in 2019 and 2020. There was no further change in the retail services offer in 2023.

Chart 12: Breakdown of Retail Services by Type, 2023



There are a very high number of operators are in the barber and hair salon classification, with these together representing approaching two thirds of units and 41% of retail services floor space. There is one barber and nine unisex or ladies' hairdressers/beauty salons. Both closures in the retail services classification in 2022 were in hair and beauty.

In addition, there are two garages/motor repair operators, with these accounting for a high proportion of category floor space (41%). There is also an optician, a taxi rank, a car wash and valet service and a home decorating business.

Finance, Business & Professional Services

Since the closure of the Lloyds bank in Albrighton in 2021, there has been no bank in the village. Two professional services providers began trading in 2023, both occupying premises which had been vacant in 2022. One of these is a technology company, the other a surveyor. These join an electrical contractor to take the number of finance, business and professional services companies in the village to three. They occupy over 300m², accounting for 6% of all units in the village and for 5% of floor space.

Health & Care

Within the health classification, there is a dentist practising in Albrighton village centre. In addition a foot clinic began operating out of the village hall during 2023.

Vacant Units

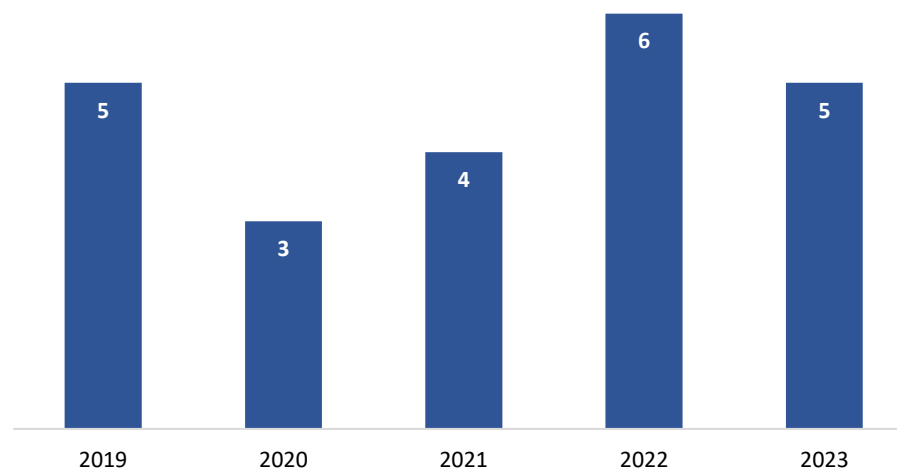
The number of vacant premises in Albrighton has fluctuated slightly in recent years. In 2019 there were five vacant premises. This number had fallen to three by 2020 and crept back up to four in 2021. By 2022 the number had risen still further to six, which is the equivalent of almost 500m² floor space. In 2023, the number of vacant premises fell by one to five, which is the equivalent of a vacancy rate of 9% compared with 12% in 2022.

The vacancy rate is now lower than the Shropshire average (11%) and is also lower than the national average, which stood at 13.9% in the third quarter of 2022 according to BRC (data relating to high streets only).

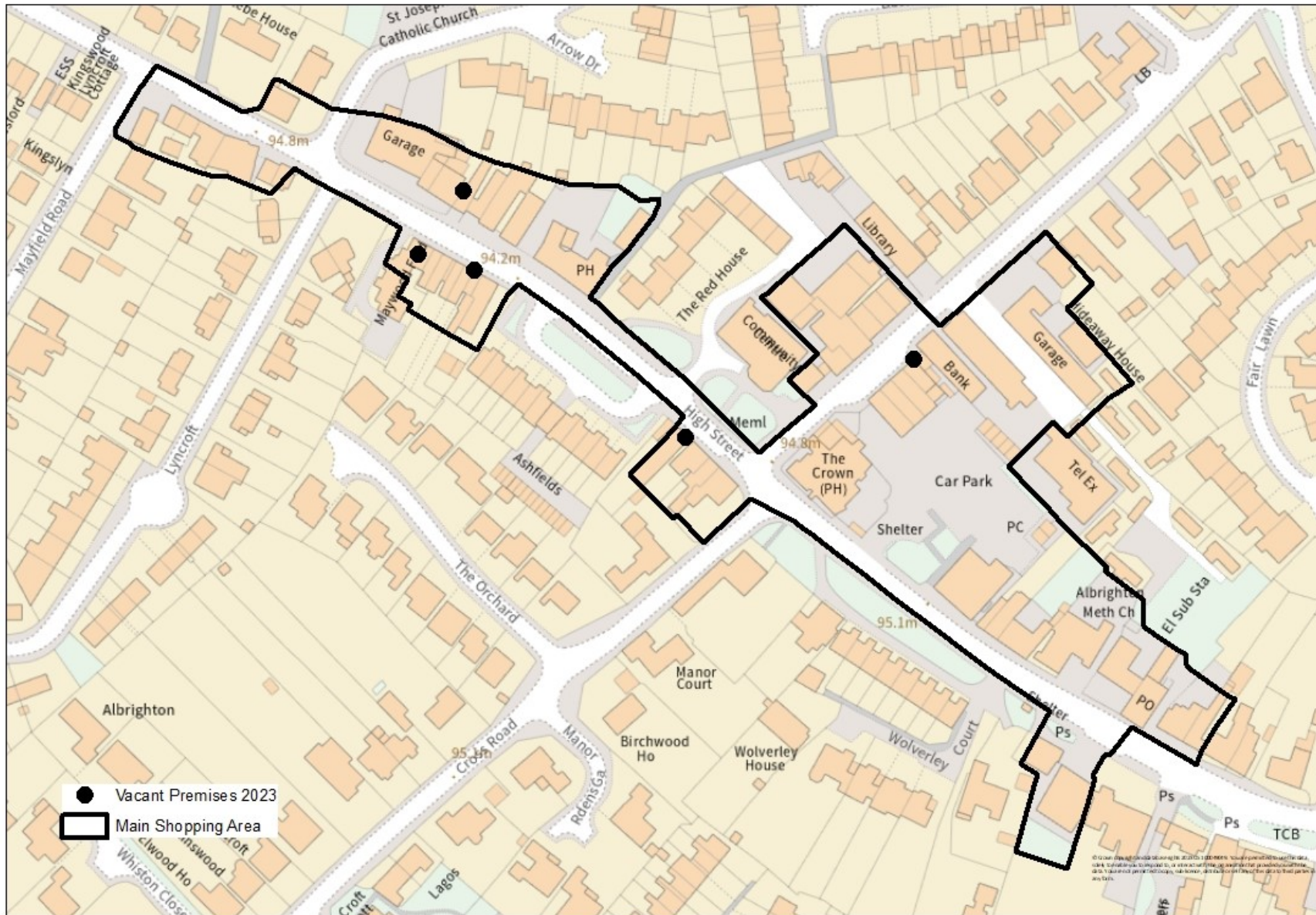
There are four vacant premises on the High Street and one on Station Road.

A fifth of vacancies in 2023 became vacant between the 2022 and 2023 audits (one unit). One unit has been vacant since at least 2019 and another since 2020.

Chart 13: Number of Vacant Units, 2019-2023

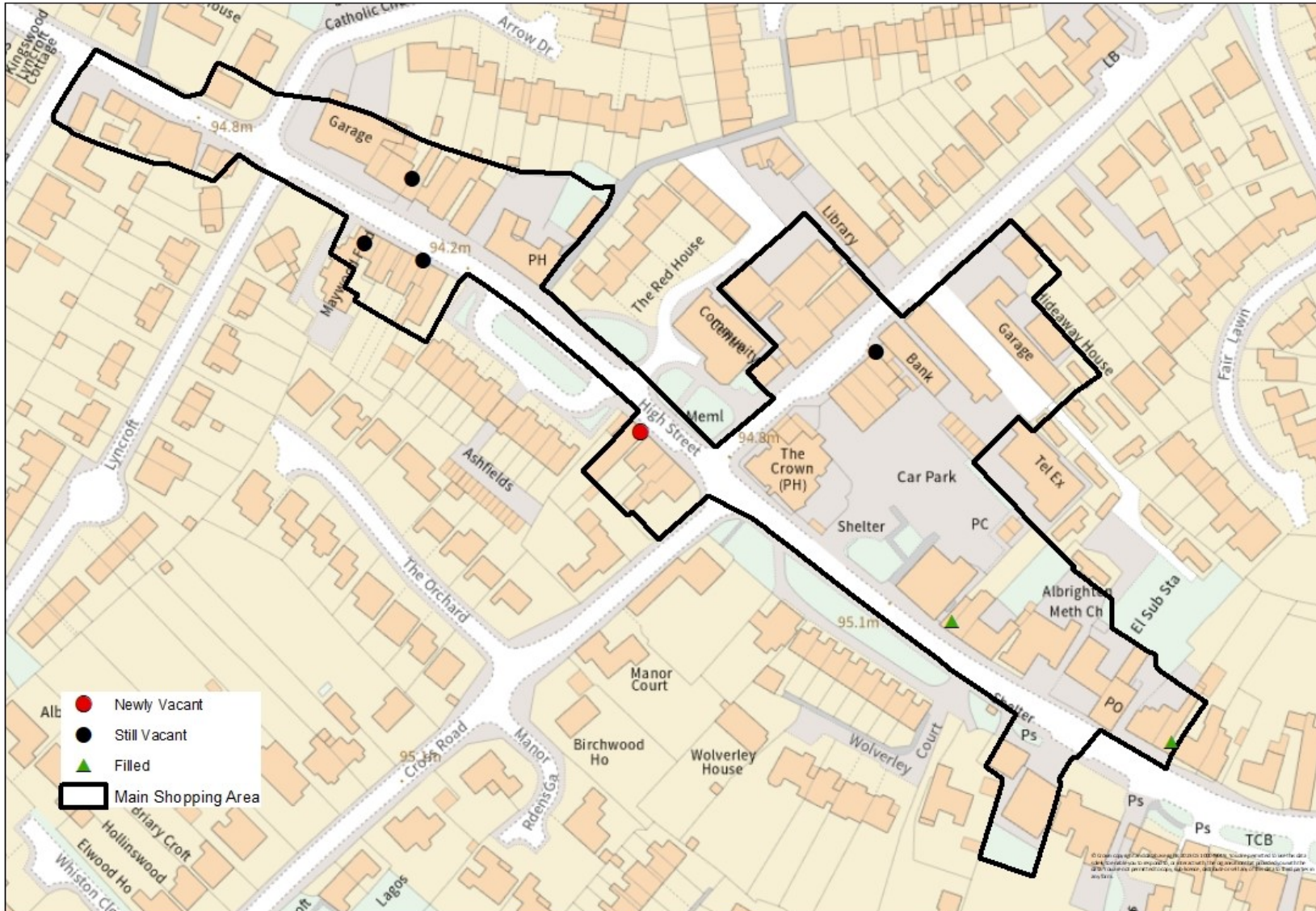


Map 5: Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2023



Of the five vacant premises in Albrighton in 2023, four had been vacant in 2022, while one had become vacant at some point during the year. Over the same period of time, two premises which had been empty became occupied.

Map 6: Change in Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2022-2023



Residential Premises

Although the main shopping streets in Albrighton are primarily occupied by commercial premises, there is also a small quantity of residential dwellings. In total, 27 residential premises are located in the audit area, of which the majority are flats (24 or 89%) which are largely located above retail or other commercial outlets. This stock is primarily along the High Street. There are also three terraced houses, but no detached or semi-detached premises within the shopping zone. The amount of residential stock in the shopping area has not changed since 2019.

Map 7: Location of Residential Premises in Albrighton Town Centre

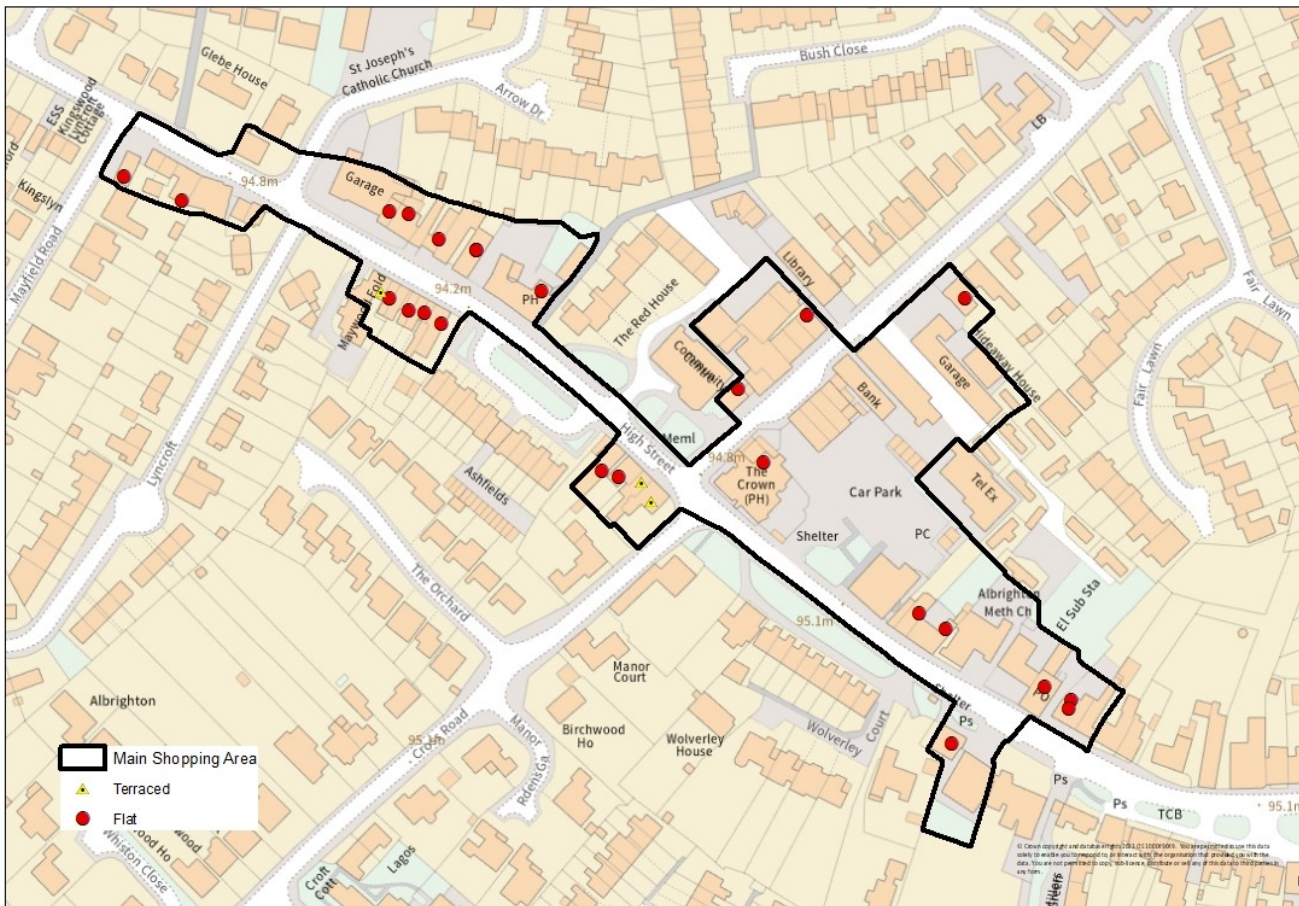


Chart 14: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type, 2022

