

Ellesmere: Town Centre Audit Analysis, 2023



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Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Ellesmere'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. Ellesmere centre was first audited in August 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 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
- 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

- 95 commercial units, occupying 9,600m² gross floor space
- 9th largest centre in Shropshire, accounting for 3.7% of all Shropshire High Street traders
- Slightly higher than average number of stores per head of population at a rate of 19 units per 1,000 population (13 for Shropshire)
- Average store size 101m² which is amongst the smallest in Shropshire (average is 147m²).
- 128 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of 0.6:1 commercial versus residential properties
- Ellesmere had a 13% business churn rate between the 2022 and 2023 audits
- 13% of all commercial premises were vacant in 2023, which is marginally higher than the Shropshire average (11%)
- The number of vacant premises remained unchanged in 2023 compared to 2022, but is significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels
- The highest proportion of commercial units are attributable to comparison retail, which account for 25% of all commercial operations
- In contrast, there are comparatively few businesses trading in convenience retail, although these do account for the second highest share of floor space.

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 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.

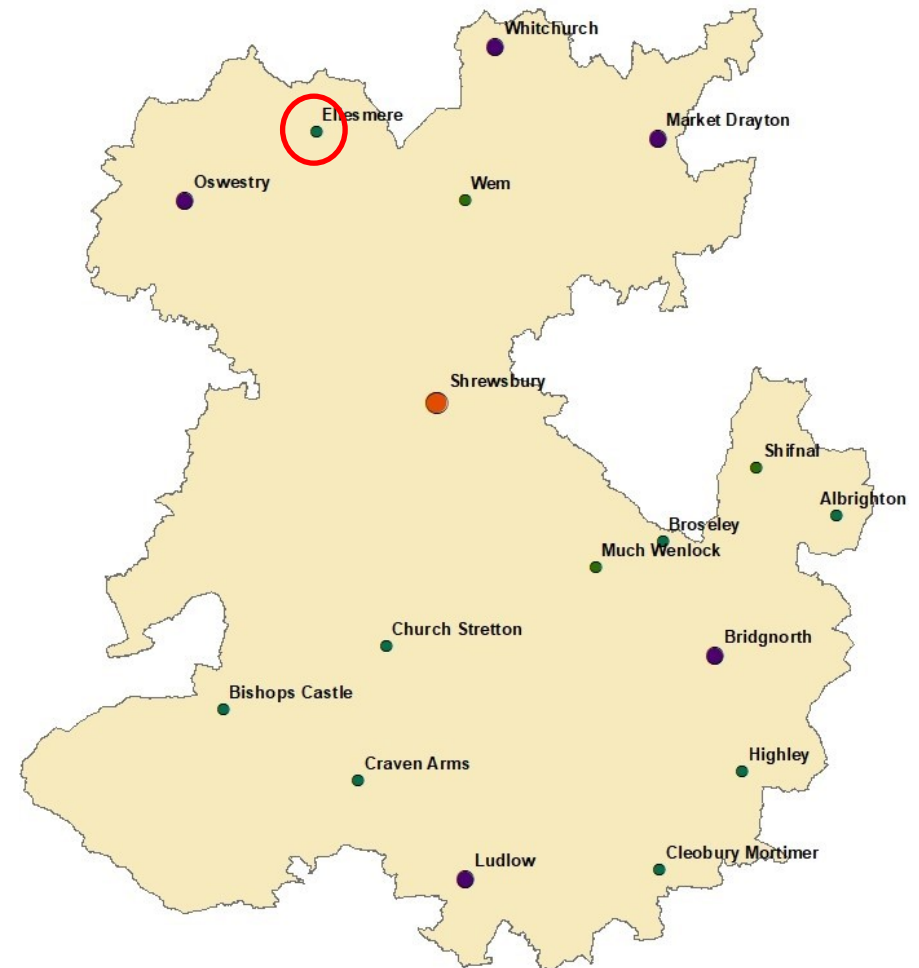
However, not all centres have comparable functions. Larger centres tend to attract workers and shoppers from much further afield than smaller centres, and consequently offer a much greater volume and variety of retail trade and consumer and business services.

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

Ellesmere is an important retail centre for its local residents, with more than 90 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 4,419 and 2,029 households (*2021 Census*). The town's population has grown by 15.2% since 2011. 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 129,100.

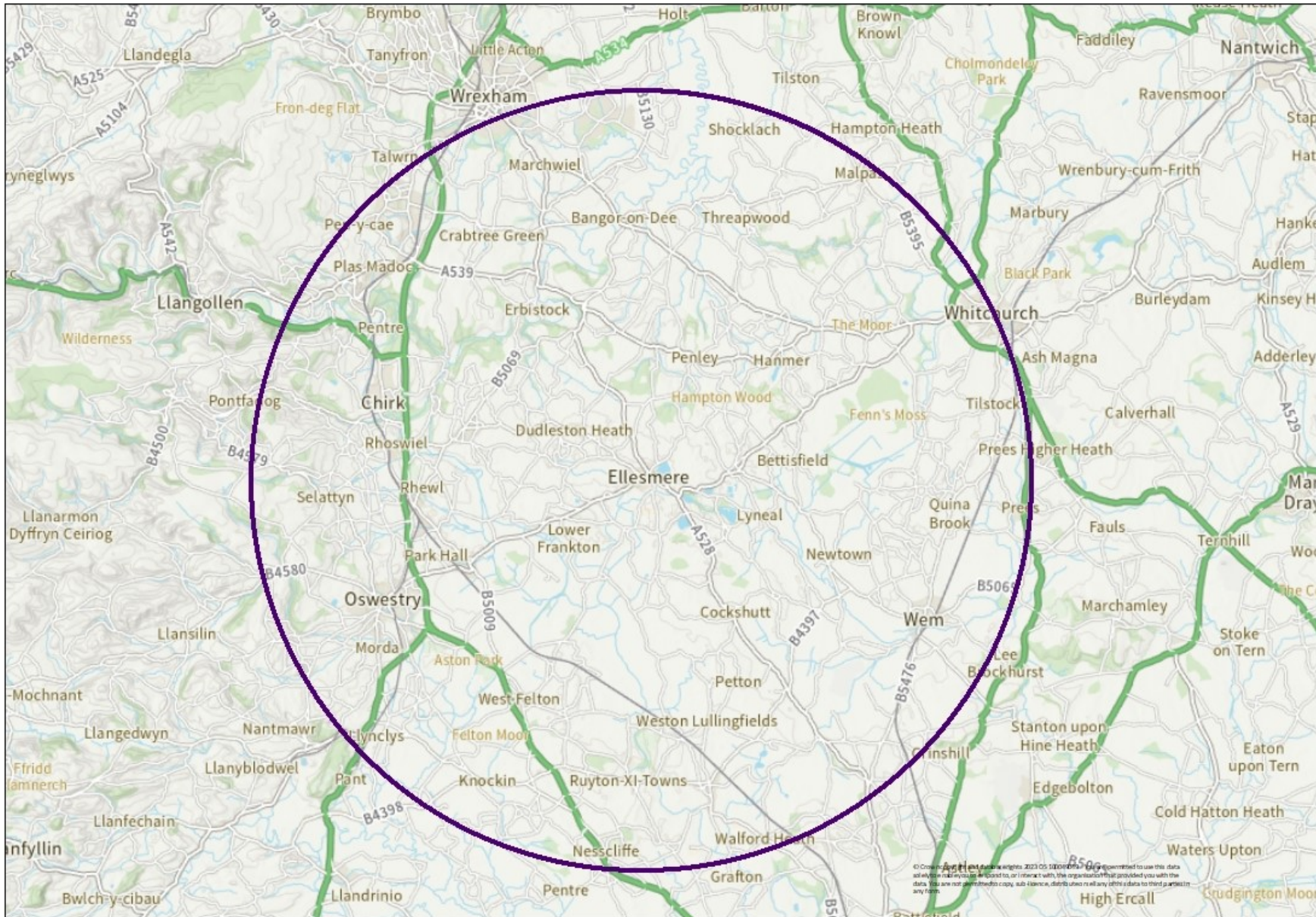
Ellesmere provides approximately 1,100 jobs across the town council area (*ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2022*). Key sectors include:

- Manufacturing (24.1% of jobs)
- Health (16.7% of jobs)
- Retail (12.3% of jobs)
- Accommodation & Food Services (12.3% of jobs)

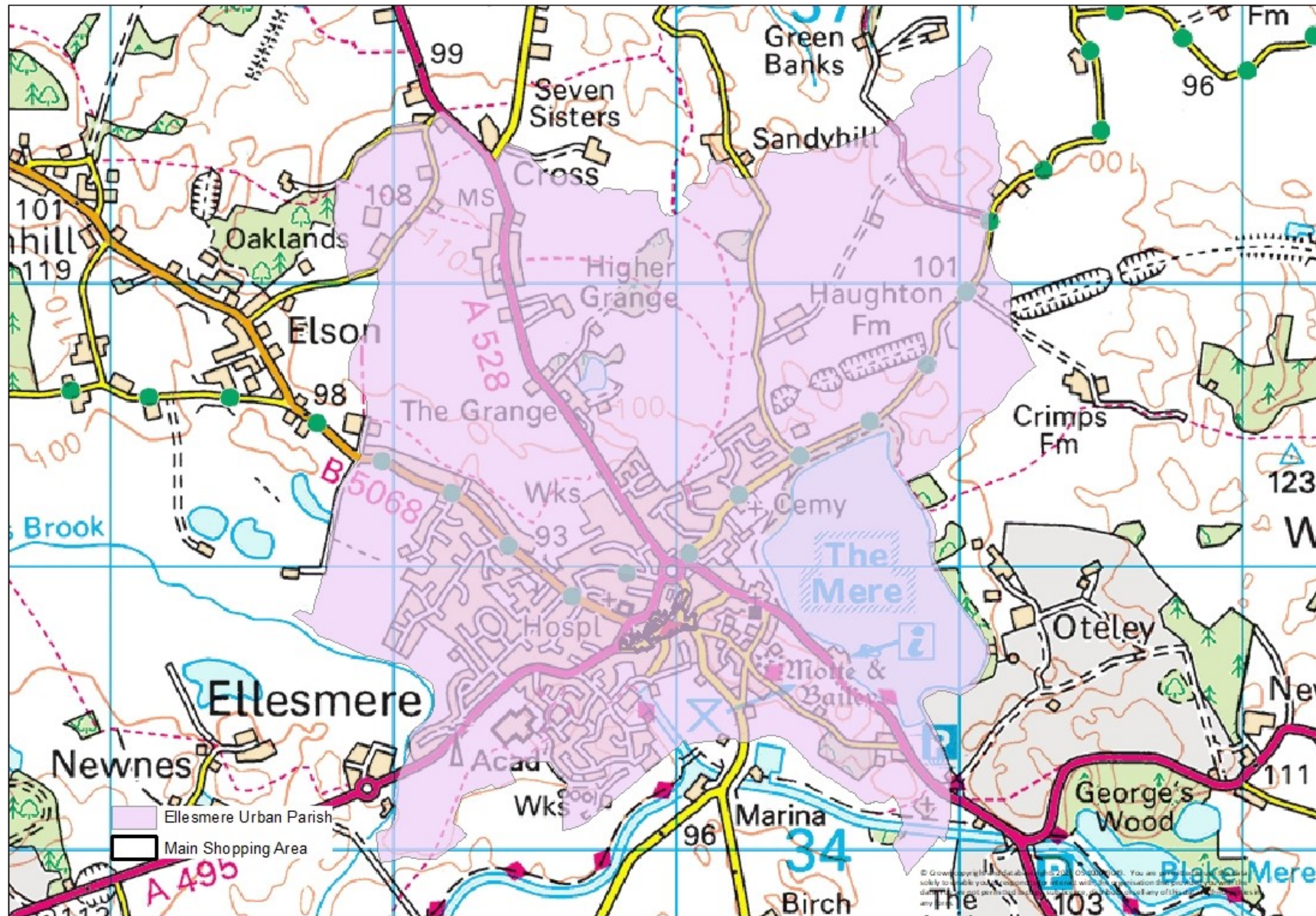
Overall, Ellesmere town council area (depicted on Map 3) covers an area of 493 hectares. The main shopping area (depicted on Map 4) is much smaller than this, at around 2 hectares.

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.

Map 2: Location of Ellesmere showing 10 mile radius



Map 3: Ellesmere Town Council Area



Map 4: Main Retail Shopping Area



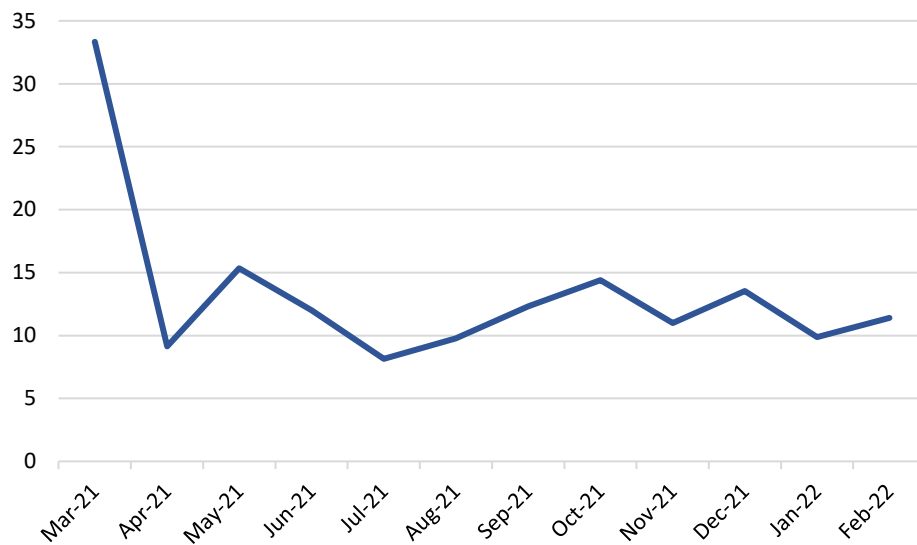
Catchment and Footfall

The following map shows the main catchment for Ellesmere town centre. It covers the town itself and a significant hinterland that stretches into Wales to the west and north, and into Cheshire to the north east. Overall, the area includes eight postcode districts.

The total population within the catchment is 162,293 people, which is larger than the other north Shropshire towns except Oswestry. The average catchment distance is relatively short, at 12.8 miles.

The chart below shows that percentage of the catchment population visiting Ellesmere at least once a month since March 2021. The conversion rate has ranged between 8.1% (July 2021) and 33.3% (March 2021).

Chart 1: Catchment Conversion (%)

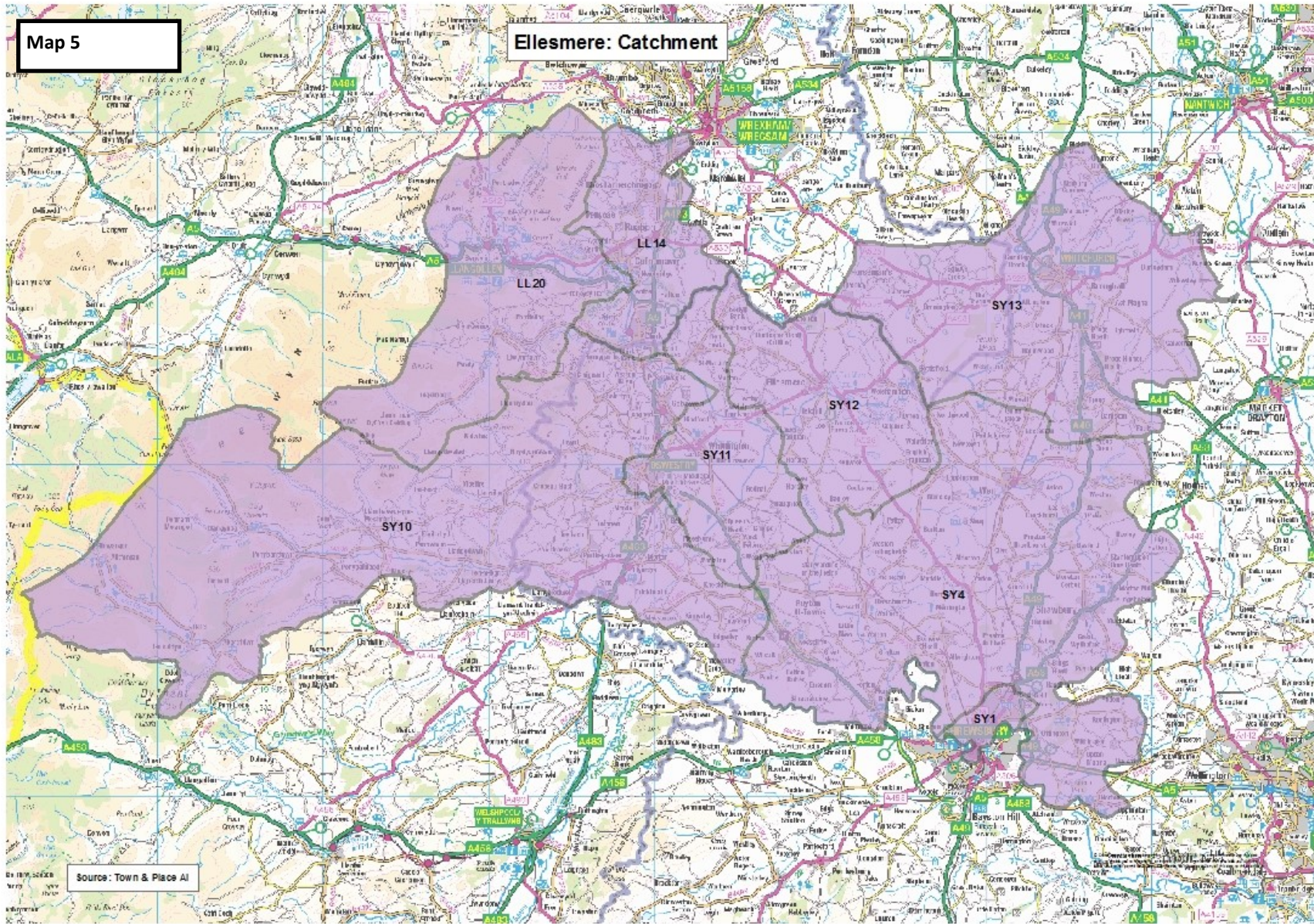


Source: Town & Place AI

Note: Catchment defined as any postcode district from which at least 3% of residents visited the town on at least one occasion during the preceding month. Hence, the precise catchment area and catchment population will change on a monthly basis.

Map 5

Ellesmere: Catchment



The map on the following page shows the percentage of each postcode that forms part of the Ellesmere catchment area that visited the town centre at least once in February 2022.

The overall catchment conversion stood at 11.4% in February 2022. However, this ranges from more than 60% in SY12, where Ellesmere itself is located, to less than 4% in SY1 and LL14.

Overall, 43% of visitors to Ellesmere originated from the two postcode districts that make up the core catchment (SY12 and SY11). The remainder of the catchment accounts for 41% of visitors, with the remaining 16% representing visitors from further afield (classified as tourists).

Chart 3: Trends in Ellesmere Postcode Conversion

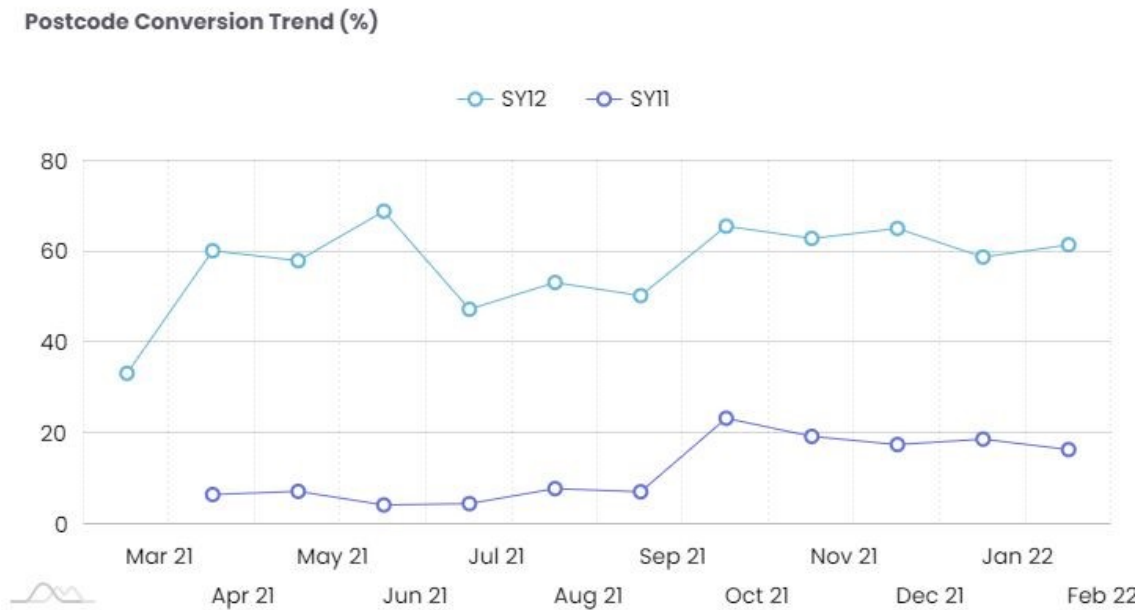
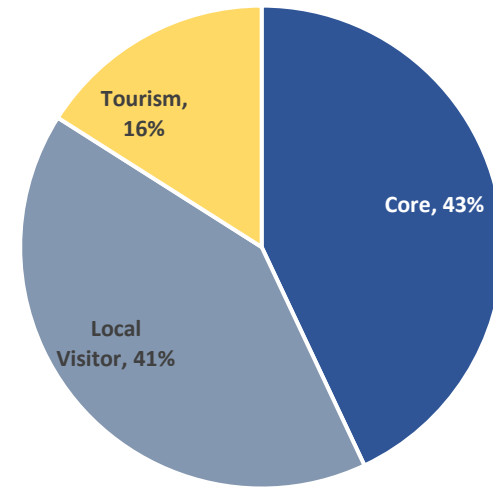


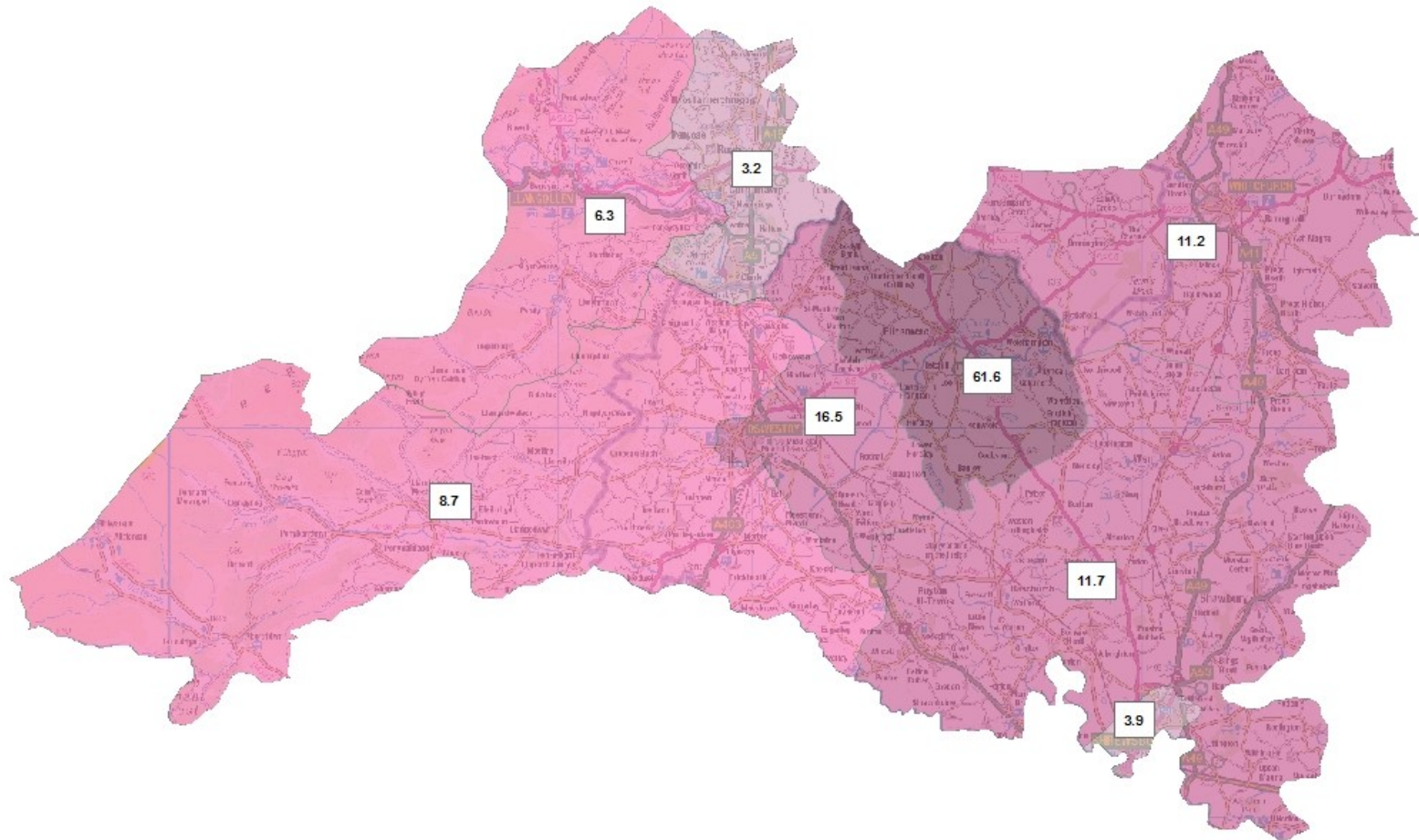
Chart 2: Breakdown of Visitors to Ellesmere, February 2022



The following chart shows trends in postcode conversion of the Ellesmere core catchment area. It shows that conversion from the core postcode district SY12 has been relatively consistent at over 60% over the last six months. SY11 also forms part of the town's core catchment, and although the rate of conversion is much lower (16.5% in February 2022) it has risen significantly over the last year.

Map 6

Ellesmere: Postcode Conversion
February 2022

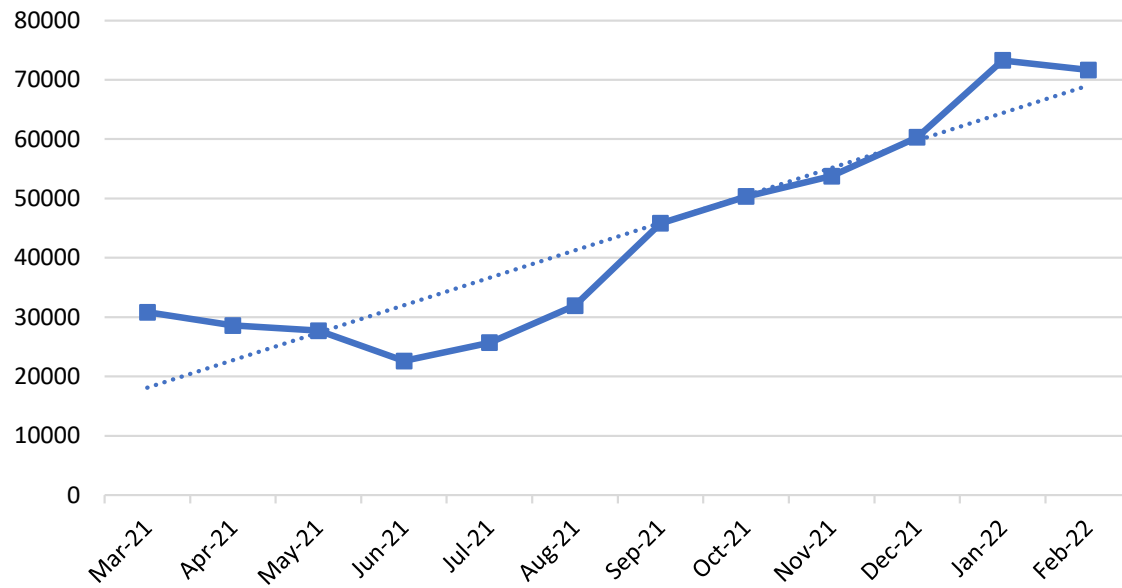


Source: Town & Place AI

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The following chart shows footfall in Ellesmere town centre from March 2021 to February 2022. Not surprisingly, the overall trend is upward given that the start of the review period the country was in the third national lockdown due to Covid-19 precautions. Overall footfall stood at 71,670 in February 2022, which represents an increase of 133% compared with March 2021.

Chart 4: Trends in Footfall



Ellesmere attracted 17,480 unique visitors in February 2022, each of whom visited an average of 4.1 times to generate footfall of just under 72,000. The average dwell time was 33 minutes.

Alternative Shopping Destinations

Although around 62% of Ellesmere (SY12) residents visited the local town centre in February 2022, the town's population also utilises alternative shopping destinations further afield where there might be a greater choice in the number and types of stores and where the leisure and hospitality offer might be wider. The most frequently visited alternative destination is Oswestry, with 25.8% of residents visiting at least once in the month. Oswestry is just within a 10 mile radius of Ellesmere (see Map 2) and is easily accessed via the A495. This compares with 18.5% who visited Whitchurch and 19.2% who visited Shrewsbury. Visits to Oswestry and Shrewsbury have been higher in the summer than in the winter, while visits to Whitchurch appear less seasonal.

Chart 5: Oswestry

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)



Chart 6: Shrewsbury

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)



Wem also draws a sizeable number of visitors from SY12, with 14.6% visiting in February 2022.

Ellesmere residents are also frequent visitors to Wrexham, which is across the border in Wales. 30.5% of SY12 residents had visited at least once in February.

Chart 7: Whitchurch

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)



Chart 8: Wem

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)



Postcode conversion charts are 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 95 business premises are located within the Ellesmere survey area. These are primarily in Scotland Street (35 business premises), Cross Street (17 business premises), High Street (16 business premises) and Market Street (15 premises including eight at the Rennett works building), with smaller numbers on Wharf Road (7 businesses) and nearby streets. Gross floor space allocated to these businesses is over 9,600m² (almost half in Scotland Street). The average store size is 101m² with units ranging in size from 24m² to 711m².

The number of commercial outlets in Ellesmere has changed over the last two years, with two premises which were commercial having been repurposed as residential premises in 2022. There are eight serviced units on the Rennet Works site which opened between the 2021 and 2022 audit, and there are also an additional ten units which opened in either 2022 or 2023 which are either new or are now more clearly consumer facing than they were in 2021. Another new premise has been made by converting the former bank in Scotland Street into two units.

The highest proportion of commercial units are allocated to retail services and comparison retail, the former accounting for 18% of units and the latter for 25%. Both store types are comparatively small in size and account for 21% (comparison) and 13% (retail services) of floor space. Convenience retail accounts for only a small share of units (7%) but for a significant proportion of floor space (17%). 14% of units are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, while 11% of units are filled by a financial/professional services operator. Small numbers of units are filled by health facilities, tourism & leisure operators and non-service/other business types.

There are 12 vacant premises in Ellesmere (13% of units), which is the equivalent of 9% of floor space.

Chart 9: Number of Commercial Premises in Ellesmere, 2019 - 2023

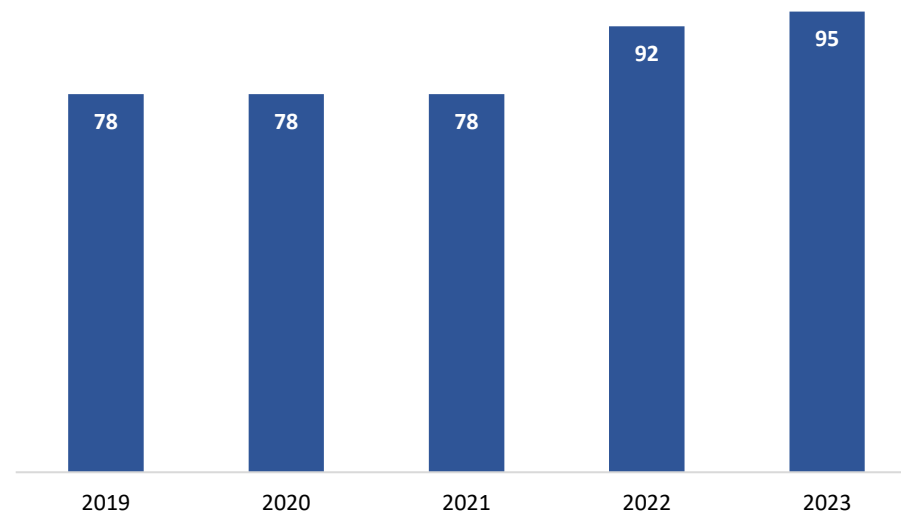
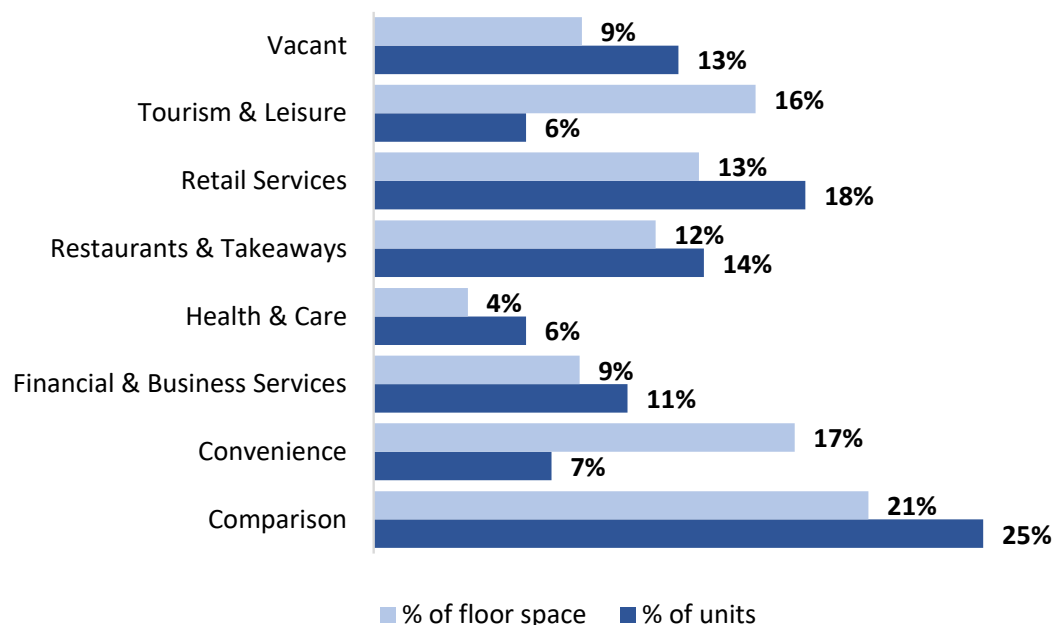


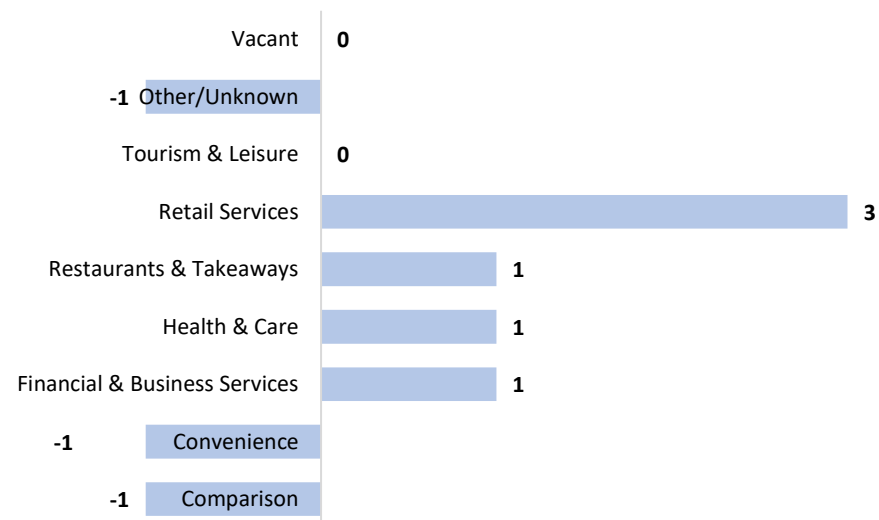
Chart 10: Breakdown of Ellesmere Commercial Premises by Classification, 2023



Change since 2022

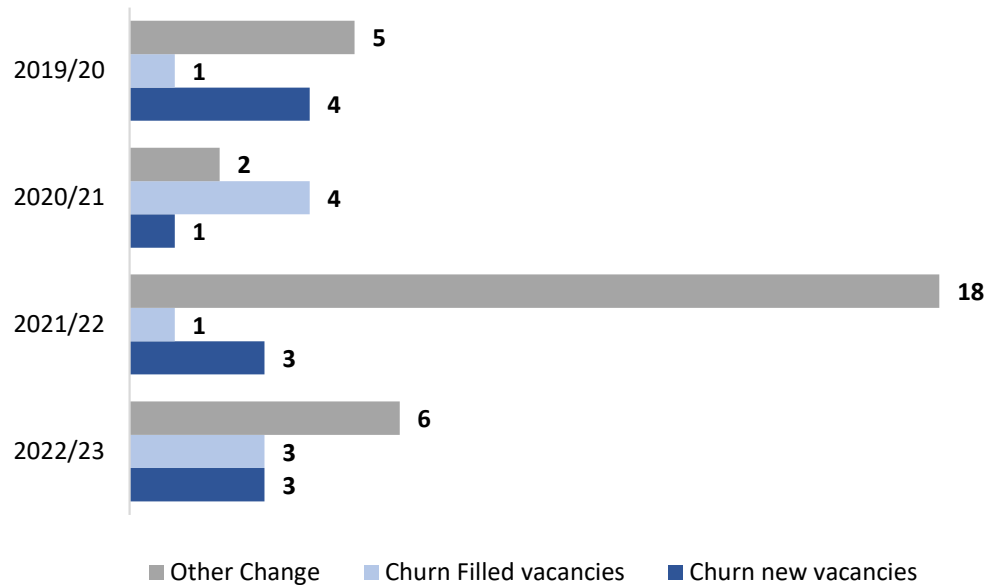
There has been relatively little change in the mix of businesses operating in Ellesmere between 2022 and September 2023 except in the retail services classification, in which there are three new operators. There is also an additional restaurant/takeaway, health care provider and finance/business services operator. In contrast, there is one fewer convenience retailer and comparison retailer.

Chart 11: Change in Number of Units by Category, 2022/2023



Overall, business turnover in Ellesmere had been relatively slow compared with much of Shropshire, with a churn rate of 13% (12% for Shropshire) in 2023 compared with 2022 when churn stood at 24%. This figure is likely to be inflated as all new identified operators have been classed as having changed. Excluding these premises, churn drops to 9%.

Chart 12: Breakdown of Business Churn 2019-2023



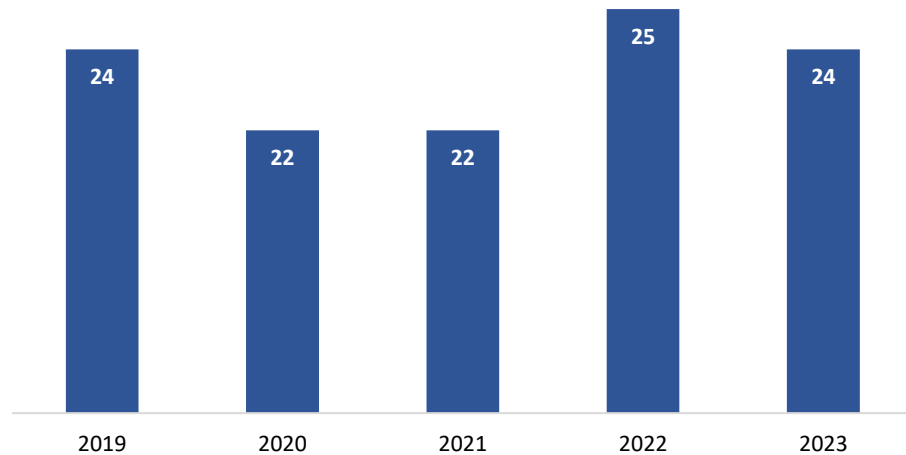
In 2023, half of all business churn was attributable to premises either becoming vacant, or previously vacant premises becoming occupied. Both accounted for a quarter of churn, meaning that half of all change on the high street was premises changing hands or purpose.

In 2022, the vast majority of recorded change was new traders being identified. It should be noted that some of these may have been trading in 2021 but were less evident at street level as consumer-facing businesses.

Comparison Retail

The largest proportion of the commercial offer in Ellesmere is dedicated to the comparison retail category, accounting for 25% of units and 21% of gross floor space. This equates with 24 stores with almost 2,000m² 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 has dropped by one since 2022, although the number is still slightly elevated compared with the immediate post-pandemic period.

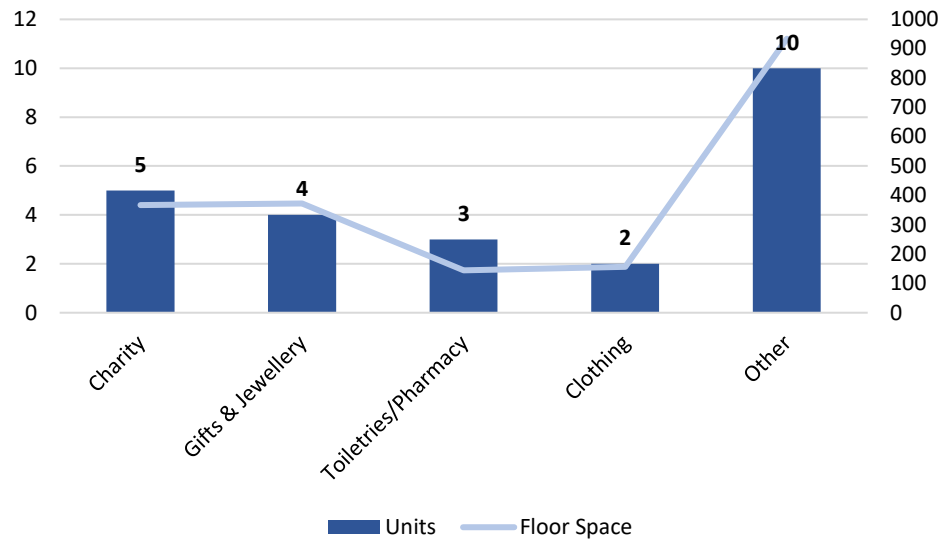
Chart 13: Number of Comparison Retail Units, 2019-2023



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 five charity shops, three pharmacies/toiletries outlets and four jewellers/gift stores. There are also two clothes shops, one of which opened between the 2021 and 2022 audits. There is also a bicycle shop, a carpet store, an electricals supplier and a pet shop. The town's antique store closed between the 2022 and 2023 audits.

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

Chart 14: Breakdown of Comparison Retail by Type, 2023

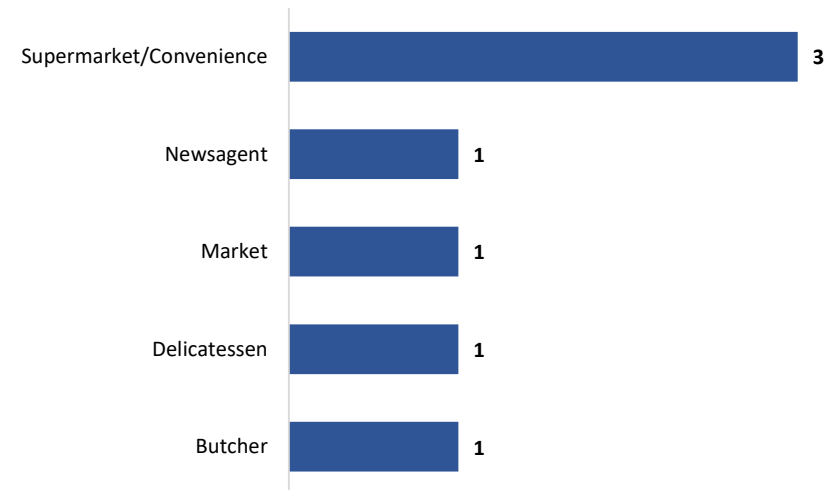


Convenience Retail

There are seven convenience stores within the main shopping area of Ellesmere. These account for 7% of all units and for 17% 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.

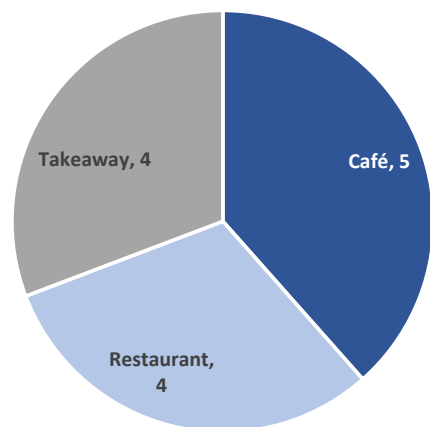
Other than the Co-op, other operators in the convenience retail sectors are independent.

Chart 15: Number of Convenience Stores by Type, 2023



Restaurants & Takeaways

Chart 16: Breakdown of Units in the Restaurant/Takeaway Sector, 2023



14% of units in Ellesmere are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, with this category accounting for a slightly lower proportion of gross floor space (12%).

The 13 units are split relatively evenly between cafés (38%), restaurants (31%) and takeaways (31%). One of the Ellesmere restaurants is Indian, another British and a third Greek. A fourth restaurant in the town opened between the 2020 and 2021 audits, offering American fare. In terms of takeaways, there is fish and chips, Chinese and a kebab shop. A new juice bar opened in 2023.

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 1,400m² gross floor space. There is also a gym within the main shopping area of the town. A new art gallery was opened between the 2020 and 2021 audits but has since closed and is now a clothes shop.

Finance & Business Services

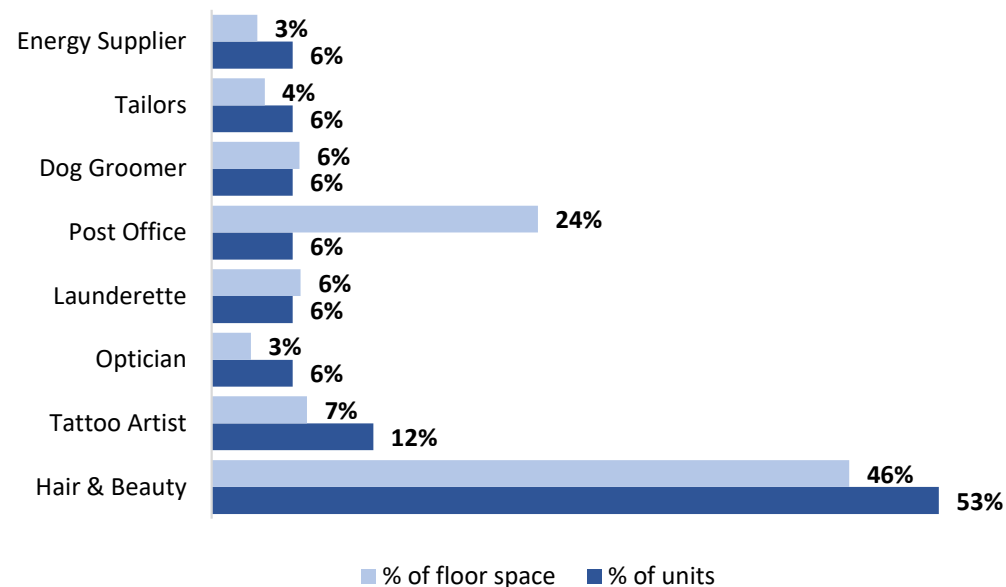
The finance and business services sector has expanded since the 2021 audit, and there are now ten operators, which is the equivalent of 11% of commercial activity in the town. These have a combined floor space of over 800m². Since the closure of the Ellesmere TSB branch, there is no bank or building society in the town, but there are two estate agents, two accountants and two consultancies. One consultancy shut between the 2022 and 2023 audits, with an executive coaching company taking its place. In addition a property developer started trading in what was a previously unoccupied premise.

Retail Services

There are 17 retail service businesses operating in Ellesmere town centre, with these accounting for almost 1,300m² of gross floor space. The offer expanded by three outlets in 2023 in comparison with the preceding year. 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 53% of units and 46% of floor space. There are two tattoo artists in the town (one newly opened).

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

Chart 17: Breakdown of Retail Services by Type, 2023



Health

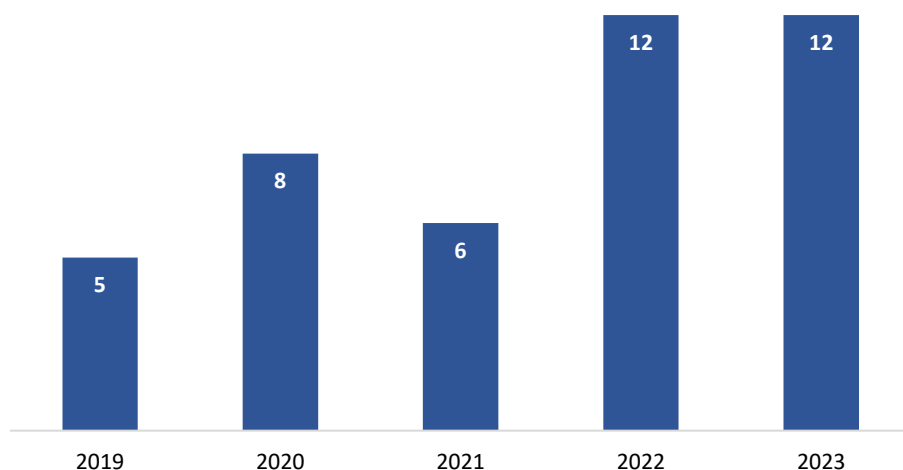
There are six health care practitioners within the main shopping area of Ellesmere, which account for almost 400m² of floor space. There is a dentist, two chiropodists as well as a care provider plus a sports injury clinic. An alternative therapist began trading in 2023 in a formerly vacant unit.

Vacant Units

13% of Ellesmere town centre outlets are vacant (9% of gross floor space). This is the equivalent of 12 units covering over 800m² 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 13.9% in the second quarter of 2023 according to BRC (data relating to high streets only).

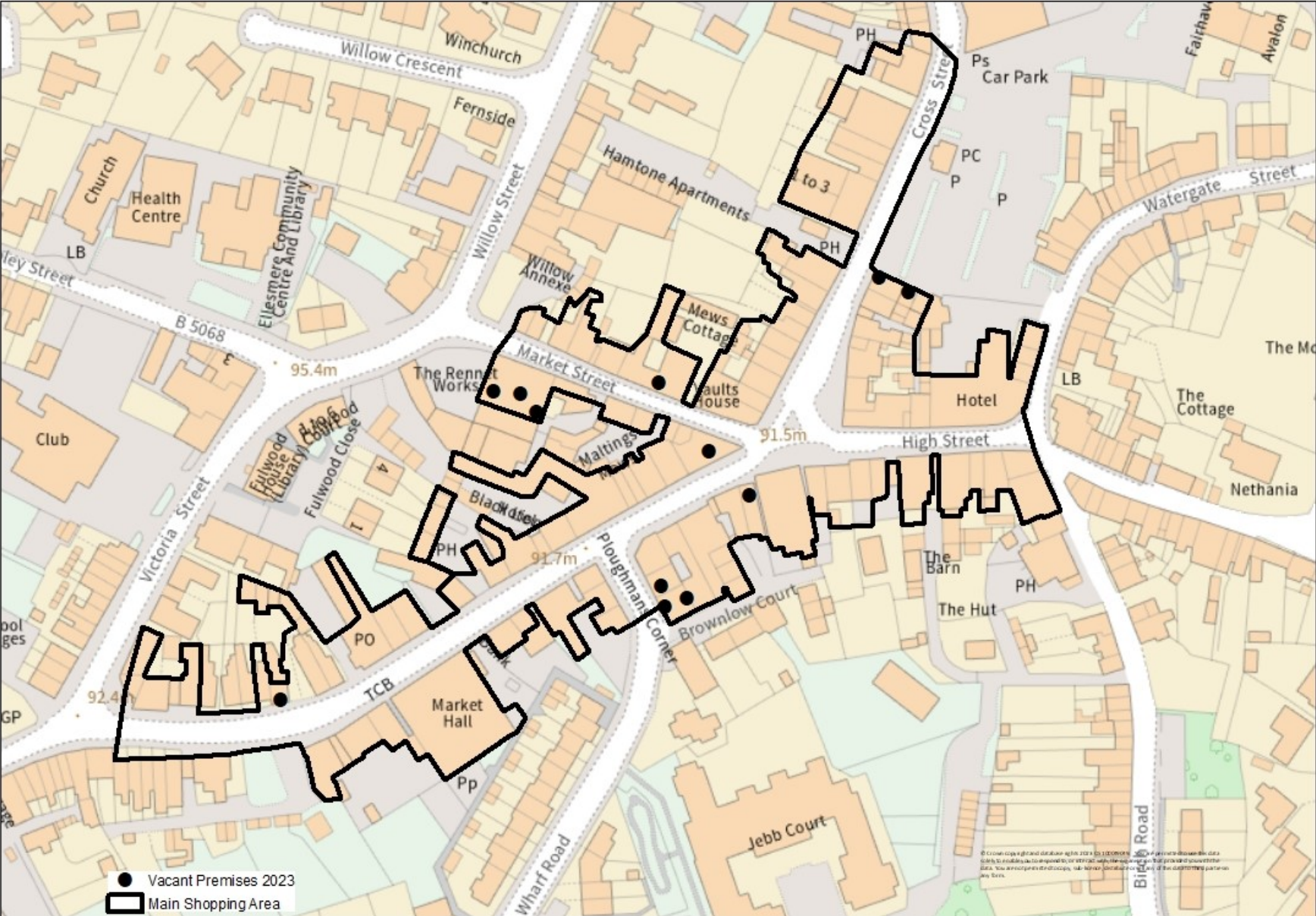
The number of vacant units in Ellesmere was seven higher in 2023 compared with 2018, but there was no change in 2023 compared with the previous year. Four of the empty premises are in Market Street (three in the Rennet Works), three in Wharf Road two in Scotland Street and one each in Cross Street, the Square and High Street.

Chart 18: Number of Vacant Commercial Units, 2019-2023



Of the 12 vacant premises in 2023, three had become vacant during the year (25%). 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 7: Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2023



Nine premises in Ellesmere that were vacant when the town was audited in 2022 were still vacant in 2023. Three had become occupied. In addition, three premises had become vacant during the months between the two audits.

Map 8: Change in Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2022 –2023



Residential Premises

There is a significant amount of residential property within the main shopping centre in Ellesmere. In total, 128 residential premises are located in the audit area, of which the majority are flats (116 or 90%) 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 nine terraced houses in Ellesmere town centre (7% of the total), with a cluster along Market Street. There is also sheltered accommodation on Scotland Street.

Map 9: Location of Residential Premises in Ellesmere Town Centre

Chart 19: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type

