

# Market Drayton: Town Centre Audit Analysis, 2023



## Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Market Drayton'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. Market Drayton centre was first audited in May 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

- 131 commercial units, occupying 16,800m<sup>2</sup> gross floor space
- 5th largest centre in Shropshire behind Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Bridgnorth and Ludlow, accounting for 5.1% of all Shropshire High Street traders
- Low number of stores per head of population at a rate of 11 units per 1,000 population (13 on average for Shropshire)
- Average store size 128m<sup>2</sup> which is slightly smaller than the average across Shropshire (147m<sup>2</sup>)
- 135 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of almost 1:1 commercial versus residential properties
- Market Drayton had a 20% business churn rate between 2022 and 2023, which is the highest in the county. Across the four years of survey data, churn in Market Drayton has consistently been higher than in most Shropshire towns.
- 13% of all commercial premises were vacant in 2023, which is higher than the Shropshire average (11%)
- The highest proportion of commercial units is attributable to comparison retail and retail services (20% of units and 26% respectively)
- Restaurants/takeaways are also slightly over represented (15%)

## 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. In Market Drayton a main employment hub, Tern Valley Business Park, is outside the scope of this audit.

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.

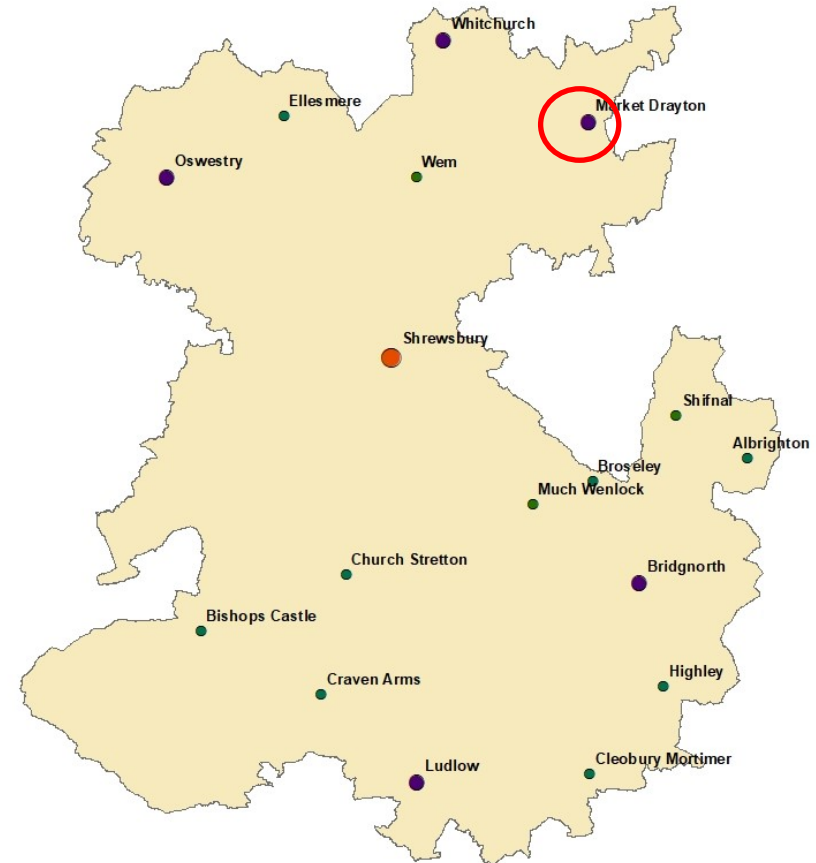
However, not all centres have comparable functions. Larger centres tend to attract workers and shoppers from much further afield than smaller centres, and consequently offer a much greater volume and variety of retail trade and consumer and business services.

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

Market Drayton town centre is a comparable size to Whitchurch, but somewhat smaller than other three tier two Shropshire towns.

Map 1: Shropshire's Main Retail Centres



## About Market Drayton

Market Drayton is located in the north east of Shropshire close to the borders with Cheshire and Staffordshire. It has been inhabited since Saxon times, and today has a population of 12,588 and 5,464 households (*2021 Census*). The town's population has grown by 6.9% since 2011. It is the third largest market town in the county, with its population now just slightly exceeding the population of Bridgnorth.

The town has Cheshire to the north, Stoke and Staffordshire to the east, Shrewsbury to the south and Oswestry to the west. It is accessible via the A53 which stretches between Shrewsbury (21 miles from Market Drayton) and Stoke (16 miles from Market Drayton). The A41 is 4 miles from Market Drayton centre and provides access northwards to Whitchurch (8 miles) and Chester (29 miles) whilst south towards the M54 (20 miles) and Wolverhampton (30 miles). The total population within an 10 mile radius is 71,300.

Market Drayton is not on the mainline rail network. It is, however, adjacent to the Shropshire Union Canal.

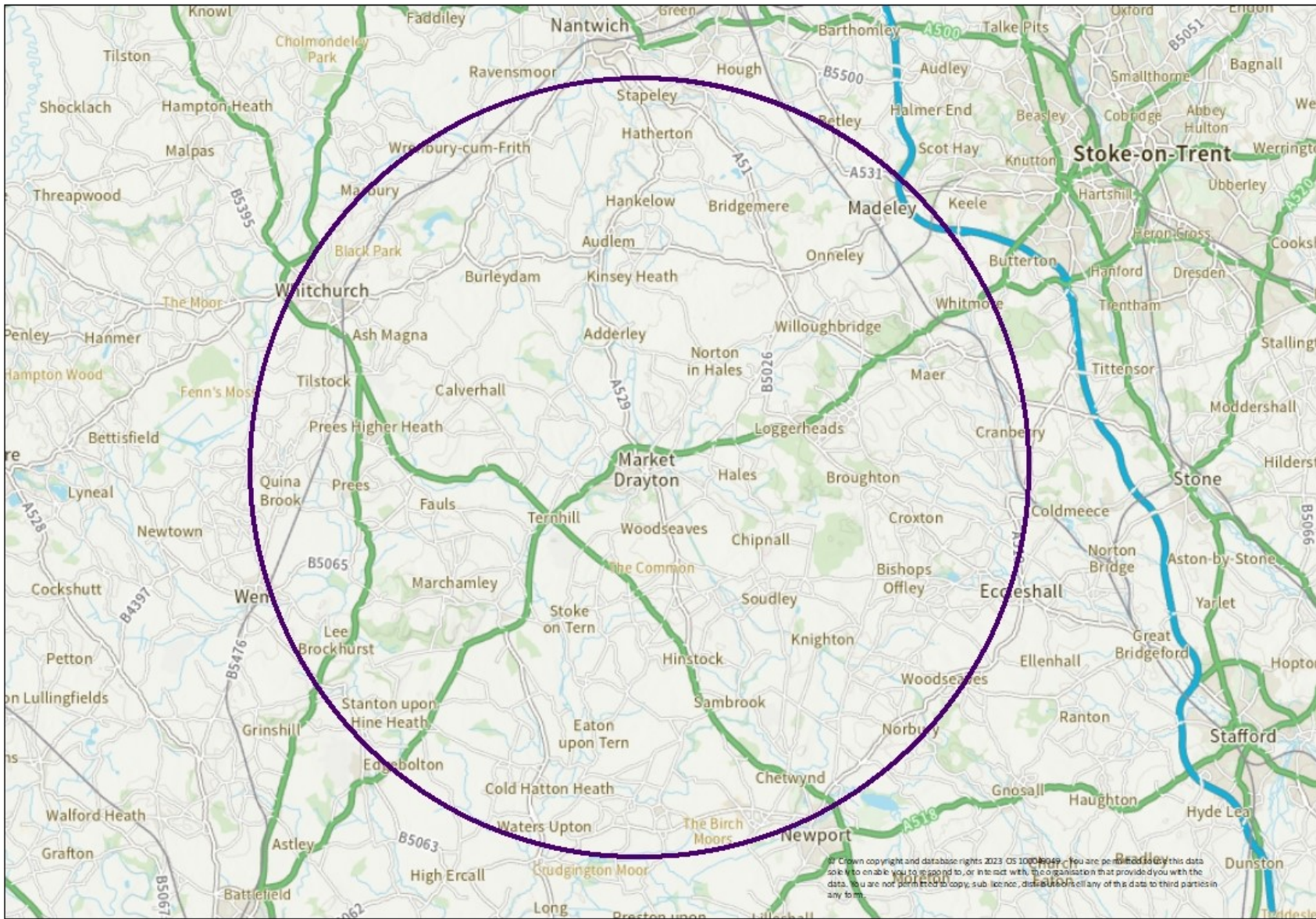
Market Drayton is an important employment hub (the third largest in Shropshire behind Shrewsbury and Oswestry), providing approximately 5,500 jobs across the town council area (*ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2022*). Key sectors include:

- Wholesale (18.1% of jobs)
- Manufacturing (14.5% of jobs)
- Transport & Storage (12.7% of jobs)
- Retail (9.1% of jobs)

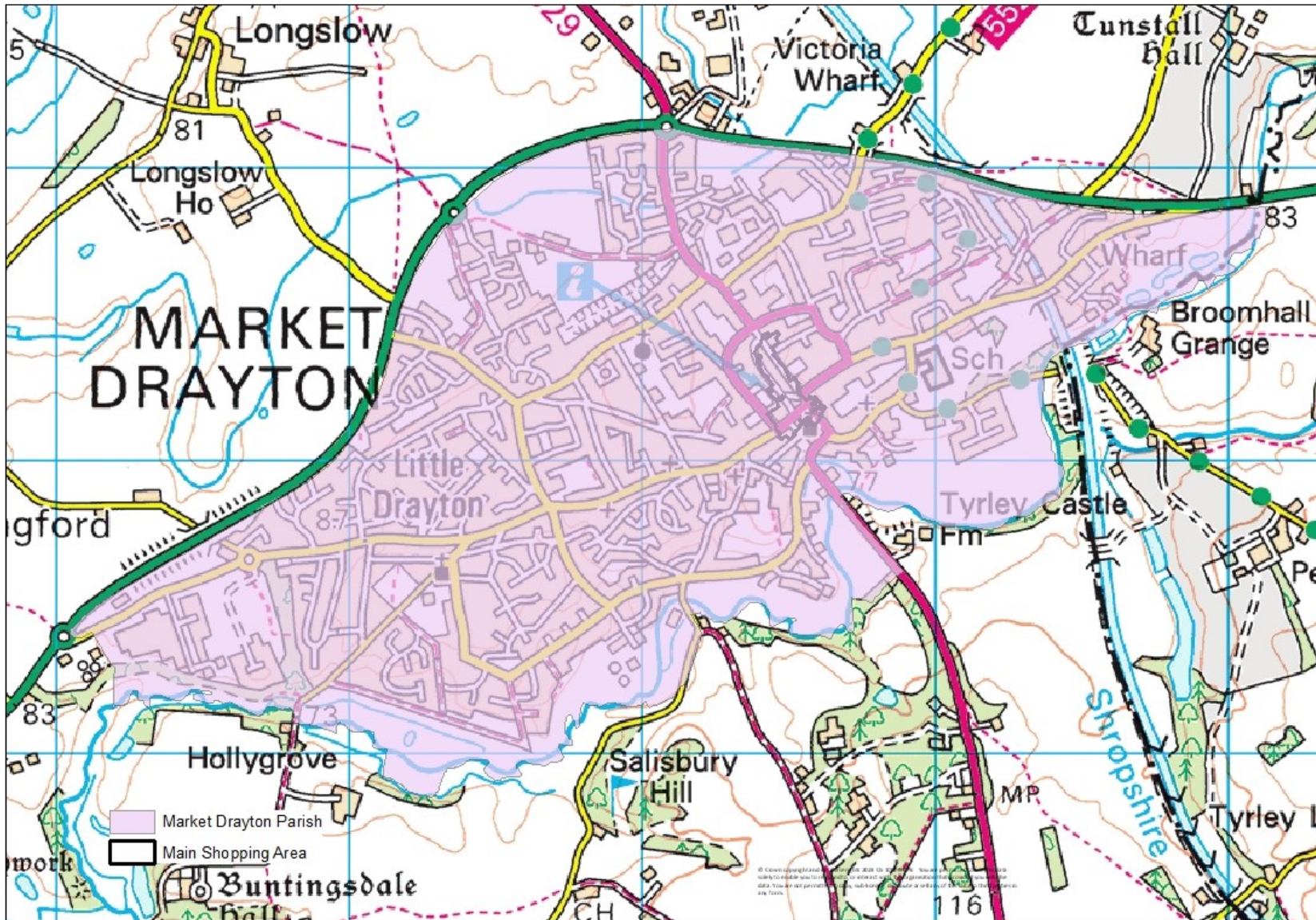
Overall, Market Drayton town council area (depicted on Map 3) covers an area of 461 hectares. The main shopping area (depicted on Map 4) is much smaller than this, at around 3 hectares.

The town comprises predominantly independent retail, although the centre is large enough to have attracted a number of chains, particularly in the comparison retail and financial and professional service sectors. The main outdoor market dates back some 750 years and is held every Wednesday in Cheshire Street from 9.00am until 3.00pm. The indoor market operates on a Wednesday and Saturday.

Map 2: Location of Market Drayton showing 10 mile radius



Map 3: Market Drayton Town Council Area



Map 4: Main Retail Shopping Area





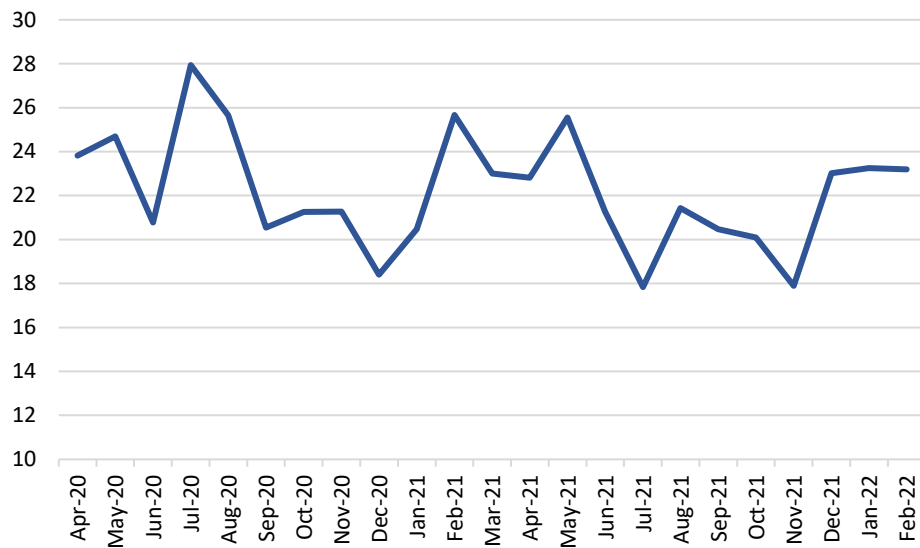
## Catchment and Footfall

The map on the following page shows the main catchment for Market Drayton town centre. It covers the town itself and a substantial hinterland that stretches northwards towards Newcastle-under-Lyme and southwards towards Shrewsbury. Overall, the area includes seven postcode districts.

The total population within the catchment is 107,702 people which is smaller than the catchment for any of the other tier 2 towns in Shropshire and also smaller than Wem, Ellesmere and Church Stretton, which are classified as tier 3. The average catchment distance is relatively short, at 7.88 miles.

The chart below shows the percentage of the catchment population visiting Market Drayton at least once a month since April 2020. The conversion rate has ranged between 17.9% (November 2021) and 27.9% (July 2020).

Chart 1: Catchment Conversion (%)

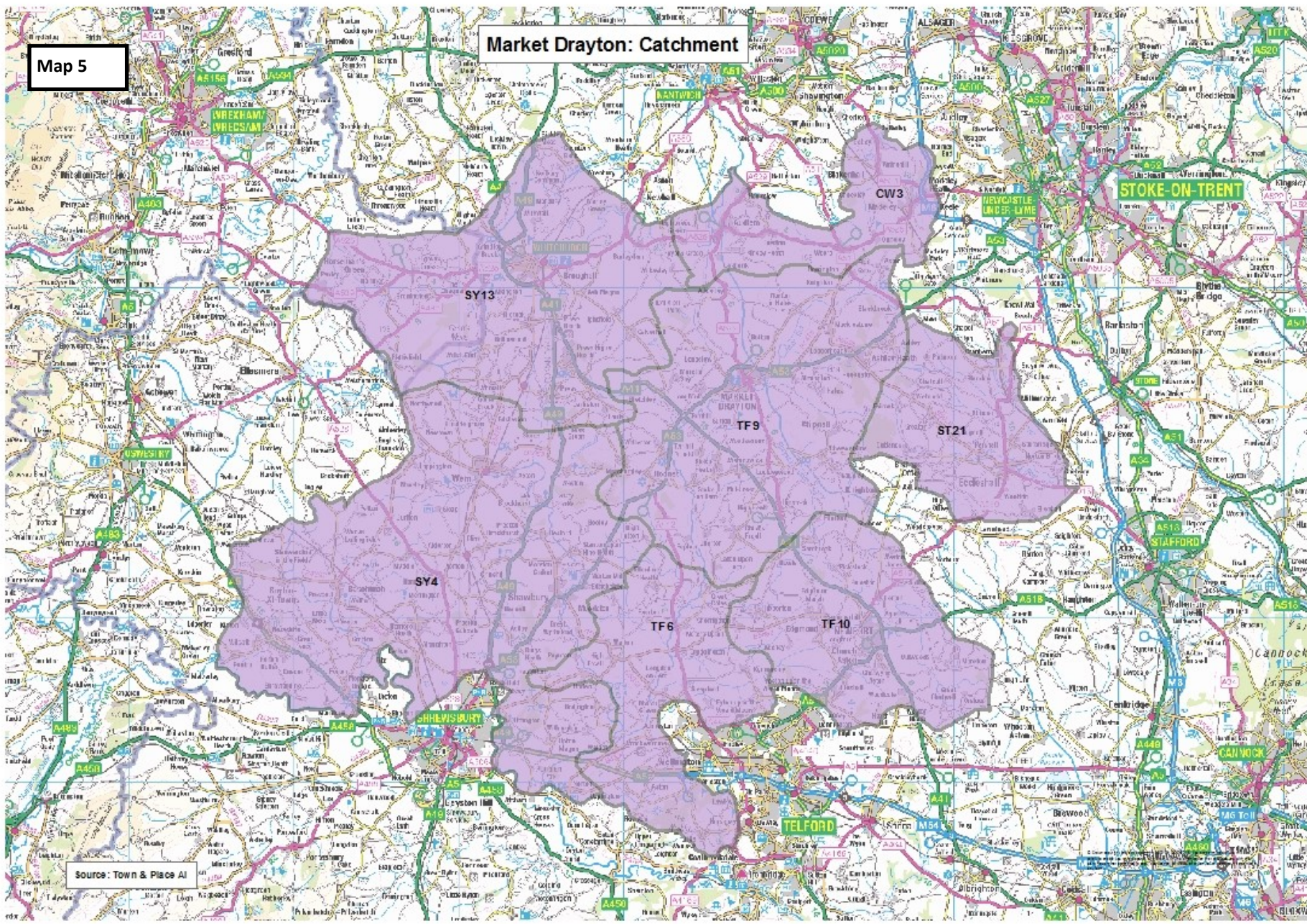


Source: Town & Place AI

*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

### Market Drayton: Catchment



Source: Town & Place A

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

The overall catchment conversion stood at 23.2% in February 2022. However, this ranges from more than 70% in TF9 to just 3% in ST21. The town itself is in TF9.

Overall, 68% of visitors to Market Drayton in February originated from the two postcode districts that make up the core catchment (TF9 and CW3). This proportion is particularly high. The remainder of the catchment accounts for 18% of visitors, with the remaining 14% representing visitors from further afield (classified as tourists).

Chart 2: Breakdown of Visitors to Market Drayton, February 2022

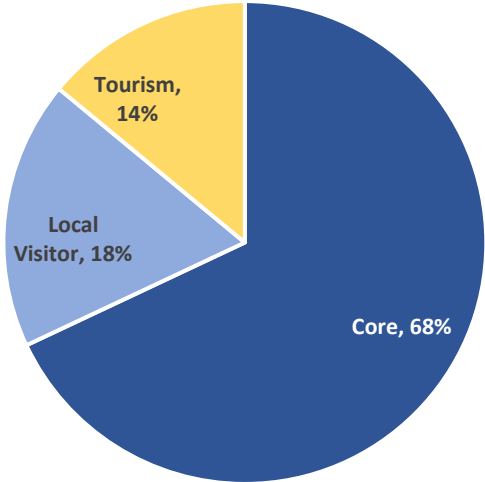
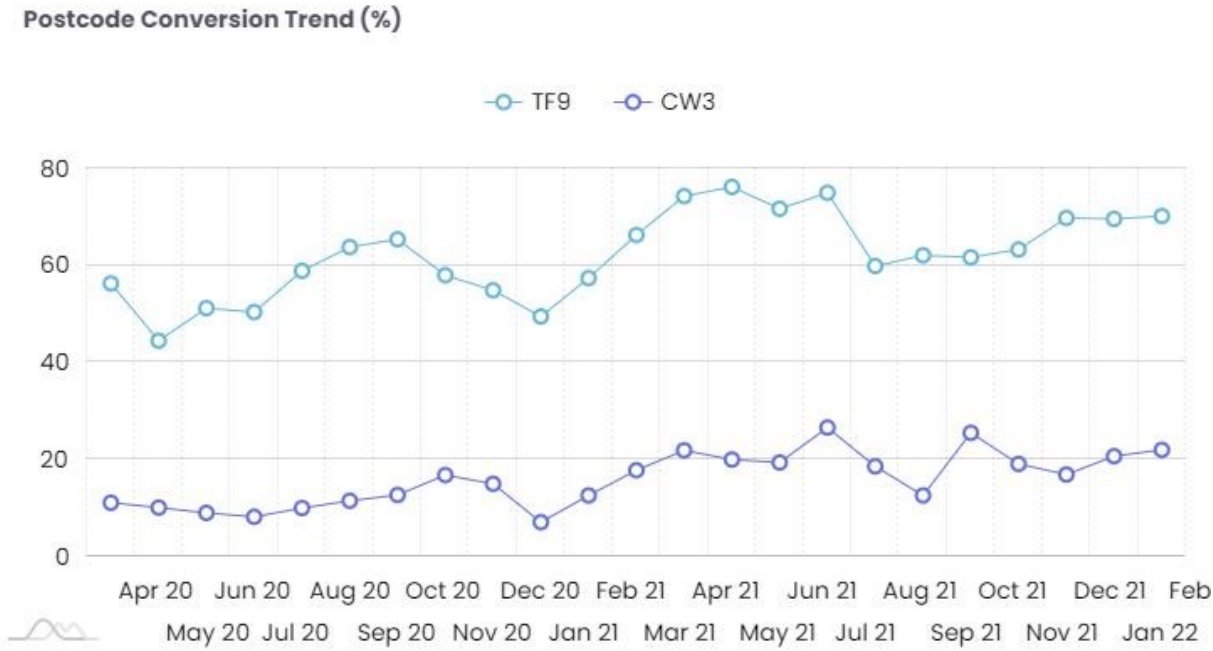


Chart 3: Trends in Market Drayton Postcode Conversion



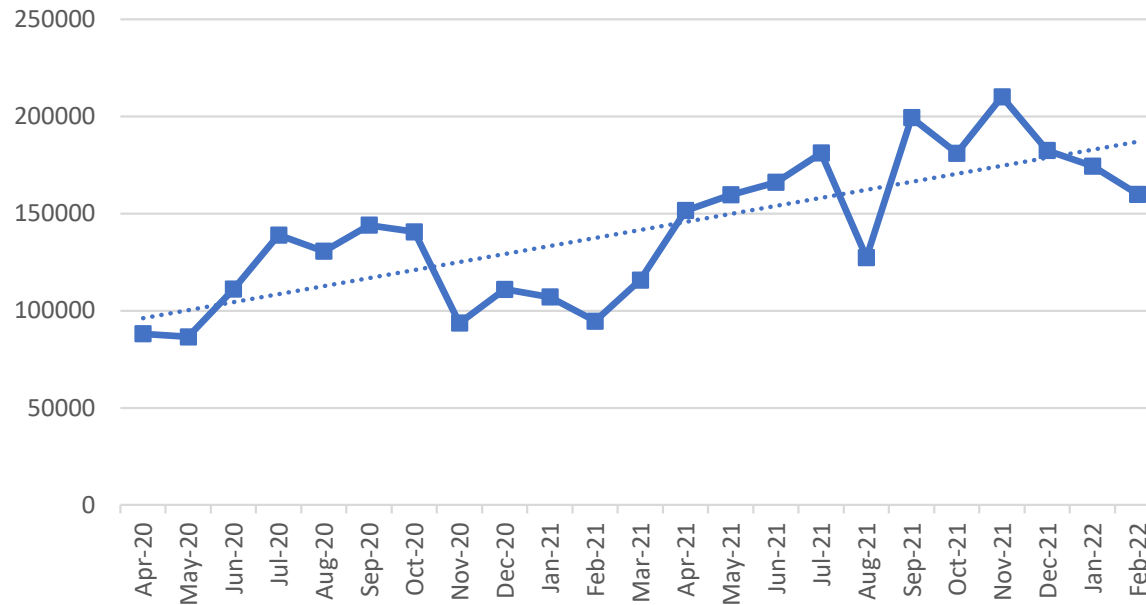
The adjacent chart shows trends in postcode conversion for the Market Drayton core catchment area. It shows that conversion from the core postcode district TF9 has been consistently high since April 2020, peaking during the summer months of 2021. Postcode conversion for CW3 is notably lower but has risen gradually since April 2020 in alignment with the country’s Covid-19 lockdown status.

Source: Town & Place AI



The following chart shows footfall in Market Drayton town centre from April 2020 to February 2022. Not surprisingly, the overall trend is upward given that the start of the review period coincided with the first national lockdown arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. Overall footfall stood at 159,876 in February 2022, which represents an increase of 69% over the same month in 2021.

Chart 4: Trends in Footfall



Market Drayton attracted 24,005 unique visitors in February 2022, each of whom visited an average of 6.66 times to generate footfall of almost 160,000. The average number of visits has been consistently high since April 2020, with visit frequency reaching as high as 8 (April 2021). The average dwell time in February 2022 was 36 minutes.

## Alternative Shopping Destinations

Although over two-thirds of Market Drayton (TF9) residents visited Market Drayton town centre in February 2022, the town's population also utilises alternative shopping destinations further afield. The most frequently visited alternative destination is Telford, with 20.6% of residents visiting at least once in the month. This compares with 17% who visited Newport, 15.2% who visited Newcastle-under-Lyme and 12.9% who visited Whitchurch. These figures show that Market Drayton represents a core catchment for Telford, Newport and Newcastle. None of these retail destinations is as close as Whitchurch, although Newport and Newcastle are only just outside a 10 mile radius (see map 2). As shown in the charts below, the TF9 conversion rate to Telford has fluctuated considerably since April 2020, and has been significantly lower when Covid-19 restrictions have been at their most strict. The conversion rate for Newport has followed a similar trend.

Chart 5: Telford

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)



Chart 6: Newport

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)



Visits to Newcastle-under-Lyme from TF9 residents have risen significantly over the last year.

Chart 7: Newcastle-under-Lyme

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)



Chart 8: Whitchurch

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)

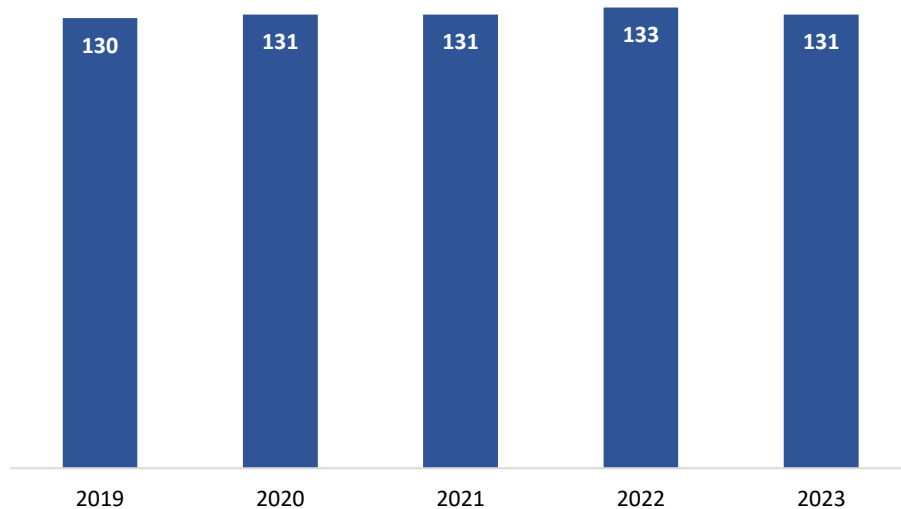


## Key Audit Results

There are a total of 131 commercial premises within the Market Drayton survey area. These are primarily in Cheshire Street (53 business premises), High Street (27 business premises), Shropshire Street (19 business premises), and Queen Street (29 business premises including those in Wilkinson’s Walk). A small number of units are located in Frogmore Street. Gross floor space allocated to these businesses is almost 16,800m<sup>2</sup> (41% in Cheshire Street, 20% in High Street , 16% in Queen Street). The average store size is 128m<sup>2</sup> with units ranging in size from 21m<sup>2</sup> to 1,230m<sup>2</sup>. Compared with the other tier two retail centres in Shropshire, the average store size is around average. Although there are fewer operators in Frogmore Street than in the other main shopping streets, there are some atypically large units in this area, which together account for 13% of gross floor space.

In terms of the number of units operating, Market Drayton is notably smaller than Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Ludlow and Bridgnorth and is about the same size as Whitchurch. In terms of gross floor space, Market Drayton is marginally larger than Whitchurch.

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



The number of commercial premises in Market Drayton has fluctuated slightly since 2019, at between 130 and 133 units. This small level of change disguises a greater level of reconfiguration within the town, with some premises being repurposed from commercial to residential and other commercial units opening. In 2022, the net increase was two units. This gain was offset in 2023 with the loss of two units (one on the High Street and one on Shropshire Street) which are no longer classified as commercial.

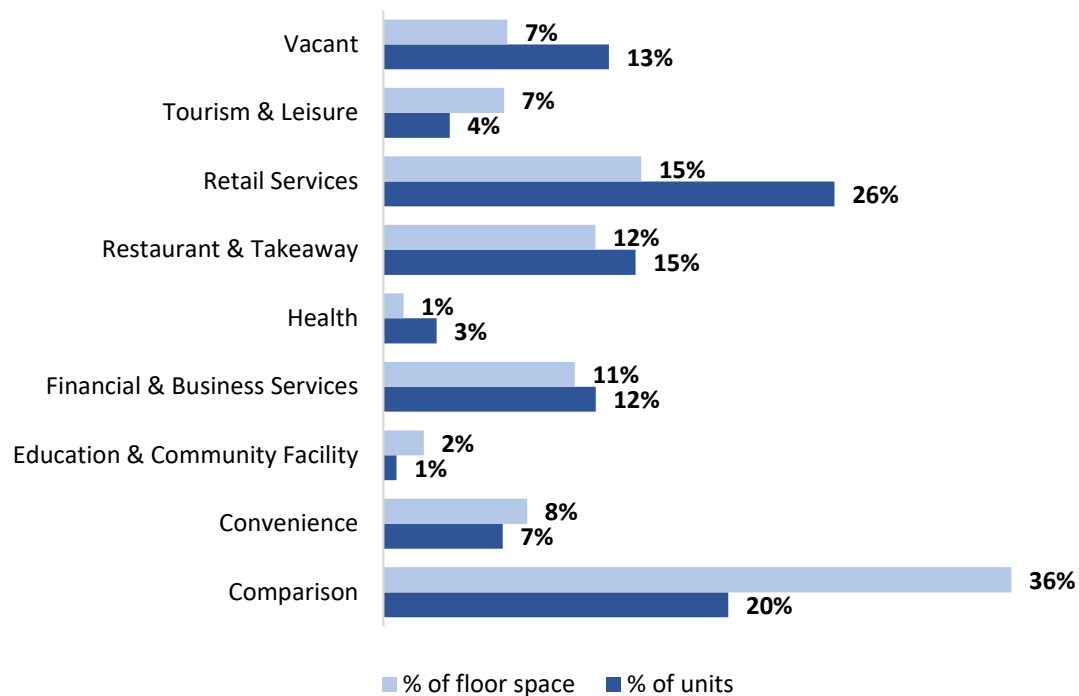


There are 26 comparison retailers in Market Drayton town centre, which cover a combined gross floor space of just over 6,000m<sup>2</sup>. This is the equivalent of 20% of units and 36% of floor space. The proportion of units attributable to comparison stores is low compared to the other comparable market towns in Shropshire. However, in terms of floor space, the share allocated to this category is high due to the presence of two very large units (Argos and Wilko).

Retail service businesses are also very well represented in Market Drayton especially in unit terms, with 34 stores operating, which is more than a quarter of the total. These units tend to be smaller than average, and hence account for just 15% of gross floor space. Market Drayton supports a higher proportion of retail service units than anywhere else except Highley and Albrighton. There are 19 restaurants and takeaways in the town centre, which is the equivalent of 15% of units and 12% of floor space. These proportions are broadly similar in Bridgnorth and Whitchurch. 12% of units and 11% of floor space is attributable to financial institutions and professional and business services providers. This proportion is higher than in other Shropshire towns except Craven Arms and Shifnal. A small proportion of outlets in Market Drayton are attributable to the convenience retail, education & community facilities, health and tourism & leisure categories.

13% of units across the town centre are vacant, which is the equivalent of 7% of gross commercial floor space.

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



## Change since 2022

There has been relatively little change in the mix of businesses operating in Market Drayton between September 2022 and 2023. The most significant change has been in the provision of comparison retail, with the offer reducing by five units. One unit was also lost in the finance and business services sector and within the education and community facility classification.

The retail services offer was boosted by the opening of an additional unit.

In comparison with 2022, there are four additional vacant units in the town.

Chart 12: Breakdown of Business Churn 2019-2023

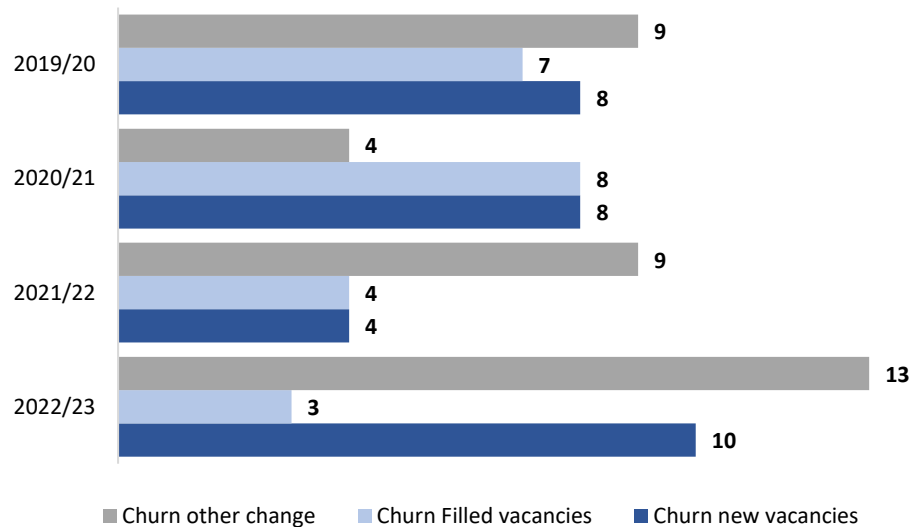
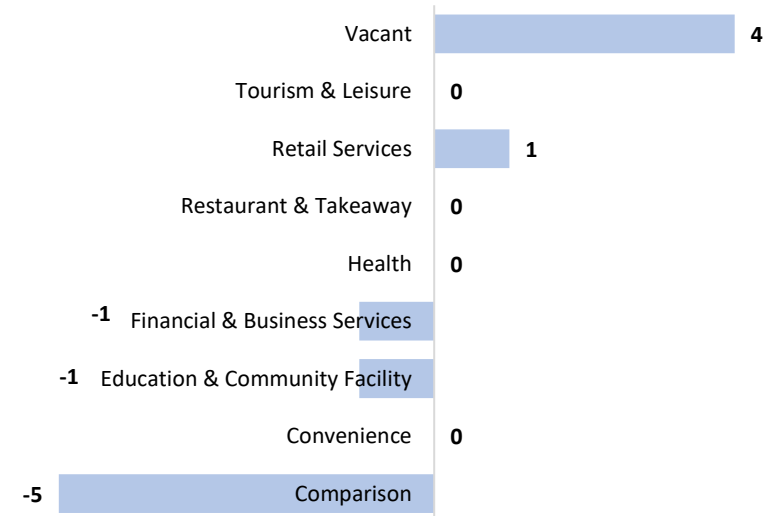


Chart 11: Change in Number of Units by Category, 2022/2023



Despite relatively little change in the composition of the business mix in Market Drayton town centre, there has been a notable amount of churn over the last four years with 26 outlets altering their purpose or name between 2022 and 2023, 17 changing between 2021 and 2022, 20 between 2020 and 2021 and 24 changing between 2019 and 2020..

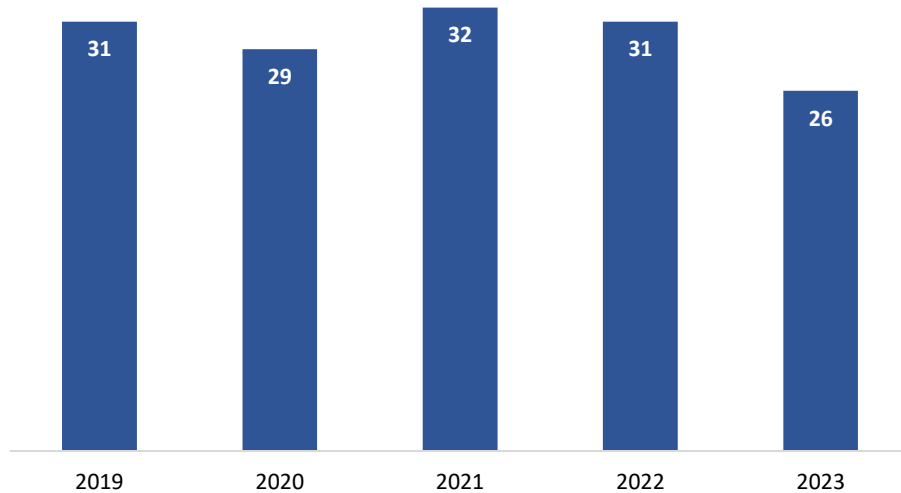
This is the equivalent of 20% churn in 2020 (15% in Shropshire), 15% in 2021 (11% in Shropshire), 13% in 2022 (13% in Shropshire) and 20% in 2023 (12% in Shropshire).

Over the last year, 50% of churn was attributable to either new vacancies arising (38%) or old vacancies becoming filled (12%).

## Comparison Retail

A large proportion of the Market Drayton commercial offer is dedicated to the comparison retail category, which accounts for 20% of units. There are several large stores in this category, which means that comparison retail accounts for a disproportionately high share of floor space (36%). There are 26 stores operating with a combined floor space of over 6,000m<sup>2</sup>, which equates with an average floor space of just over 230m<sup>2</sup>. The number of comparison stores in Market Drayton declined significantly in 2023 with the loss of five stores. This is the equivalent of a 16% reduction.

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

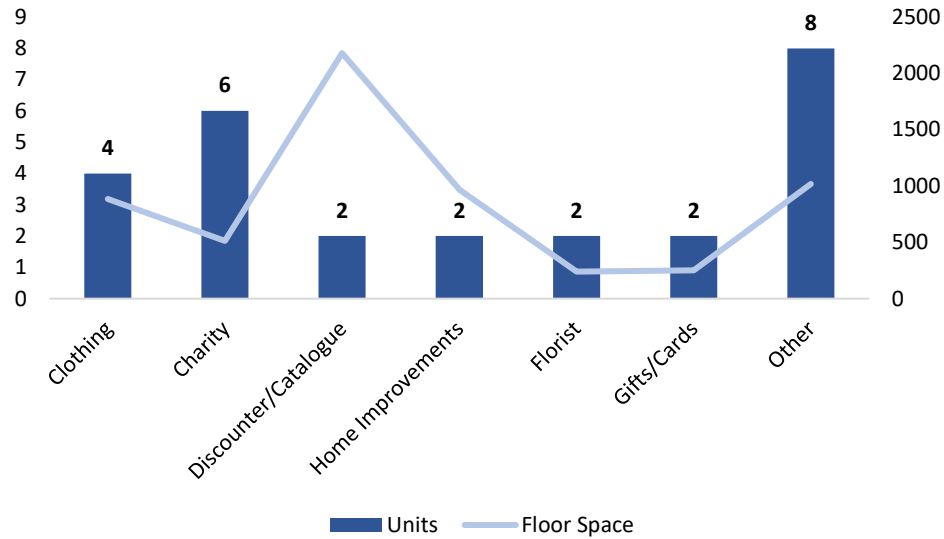


Within the town there are four clothes shops, of which one is a chain (Peacocks) and the other three independent. Two clothing stores closed between 2022 and 2023. This includes one dress agency. The other clothes store relocated to Tern Valley Business Park. There are also six charity shops, which is an increase of one since 2019 but no change since 2020. Four of the charity stores are national —Oxfam, Sue Ryder, Barnados, Cancer Research, with two local based charity shops (Salopian Care and AE Donate).

There are two discounters/catalogue stores (although the branch of Wilko closed shortly after the audit took place), two florists (one incorporating a cocktail bar), two home improvement stores (a carpet shop, and a furniture shop) and two gift shops. There is one each of the following store type: antique shop; haberdasher; gaming shop; record store; pharmacy; stationers and a supplier of door and windows.

Between 2022 and 2023, a soft furnishings store, a yarn shop, a discounter, a gift shop and a computer shop, as well as the two clothing stores closed. The gaming shop and the haberdashery are new and the record store relocated to different premises during the year.

Chart 14: Breakdown of Comparison Retail by Type, 2023



Although most traders are independent, Market Drayton hosts the following multiples (in addition to those in the clothing and charity sectors): Card Factory, WH Smith, Boots, Argos and Wilko (the latter now closed).

## Convenience Retail

There are nine convenience stores within the main shopping area of Market Drayton, which reflects no net change since 2021.

Convenience retail accounts for 7% of all units and 8% of gross floor space. In the town there are two bakeries (one new in 2022) and two confectioners (one new in 2023), a delicatessen, a frozen food store, a health food shop, a refill store and a market. There is also a specialist food store selling Polish goods. A refill store closed between the 2022 and 2023 audits. Operators in this sector are mainly independent, although there is an Iceland food store and a Greggs bakery.

Map 7: Location of Market Drayton's Main Convenience Stores

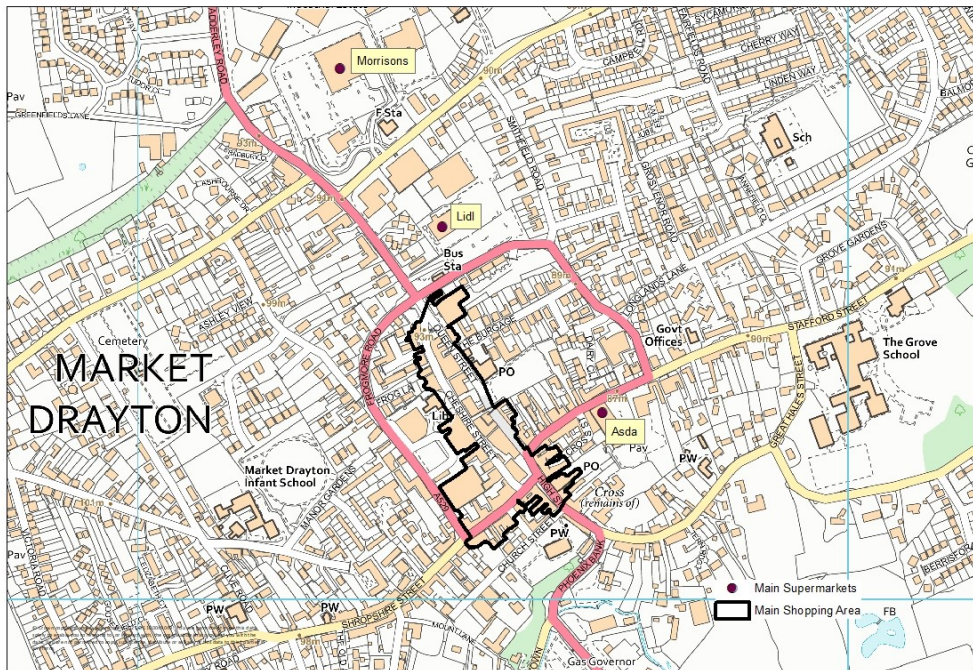
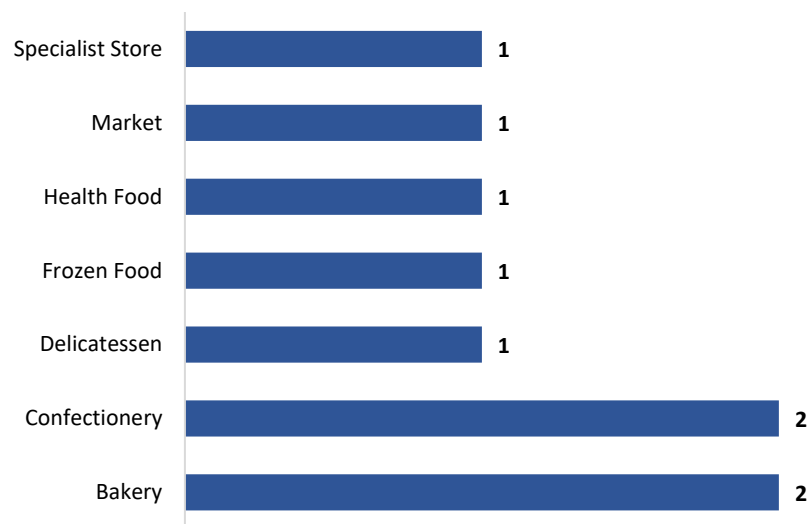


Chart 15: Breakdown of Convenience Retail by Type, 2023



It should be noted that the town's main supermarkets – Morrisons, Asda and Lidl – are all located a short distance from the main town centre shopping streets, as shown on the adjacent map.

Despite the presence of Iceland within the main shopping centre boundary, this means that compared with other towns, a relatively small proportion of units and floor space is allocated to the convenience sector.

There is no butcher in the town centre, and also no specialist greengrocer. The market, however, widens choice in the town.

## Restaurants & Takeaways

15% of units in Market Drayton are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, with this category accounting for a slightly lower proportion of gross floor space (12%). The number of operators in this classification rose from 17 to 20 between 2019 and 2021, but declined by one in 2022. This is because the Pheasant Bar and Grill was closed for refurbishment—the establishment has yet to reopen in 2023. The net number of commercial operators in this sector did not change between 2022 and 2023, although an additional café opened and a takeaway closed. An additional café changed name.

Chart 17: Breakdown of Restaurant/Takeaway Units by Type, 2023

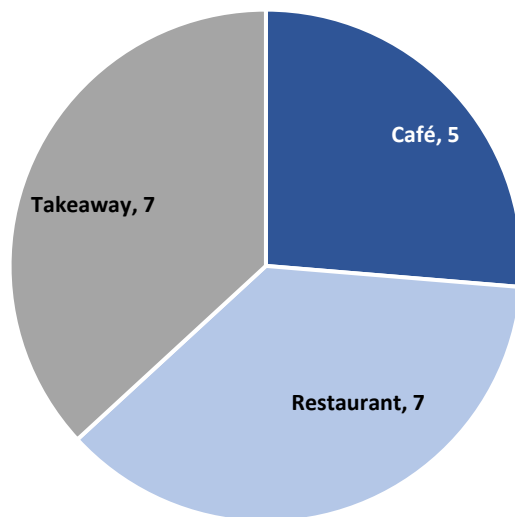
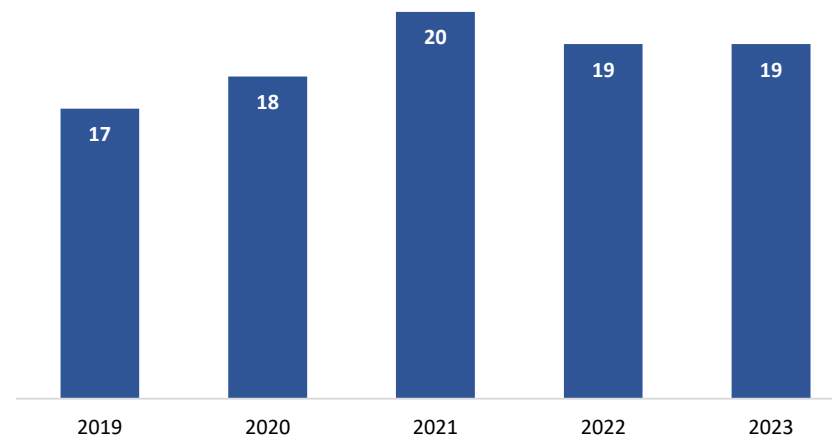


Chart 16: Number of Restaurant/Takeaway Units, 2019-2023



The 19 units are split between cafés (26%), restaurants (37%) and takeaways (37%). Takeaways account for a lower share of floor space (24%) while restaurants have a disproportionately high share of floor space (46%).

The range of cuisines on offer by Market Drayton restaurants includes Thai, Chinese, Indian and modern British. In terms of takeaways, there is a fish and chip shop, Chinese takeaway and two kebab outlets.

There are two chains in the restaurant and takeaway category in Market Drayton—Domino's Pizza and Costa Coffee.

## Tourism & Leisure

Also within the hospitality sector, there are four public houses. These take up approximately 1,100m<sup>2</sup> gross floor space, the equivalent of 7% of all floor space in the town. One bar/public house closed between the 2022 and 2023 audits. A new personal trainer has opened premises in the town, occupying a previously vacant property. There is an absence of guest accommodation (B&Bs or hotel bed spaces) within the town centre, although one of the main restaurants has guest rooms.

Festival Drayton Centre is just outside the main shopping area boundary.

## Finance & Business Services

There are 16 commercial operators in the finance and business services area in Market Drayton town centre, accounting for approximately 1,800m<sup>2</sup> of gross floor space. The number declined by one between 2022 and 2023, with the closure of Barclays Bank and a graphic designer offset to some extent by the opening of an additional accountant.

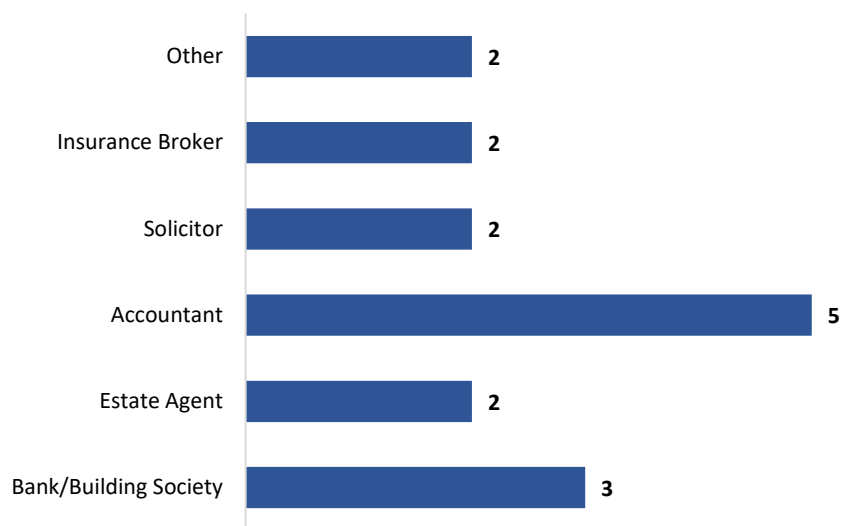
Included within this classification are the two remaining banks (Nat West and Lloyds TSB) plus one building society (Leek). There are five accountants, two insurance brokers, two estate agents and two solicitors. One of the estate agents is new since the 2021 audit.

There is also a stonemason and a surveyor in the town.

## Retail Services

There are 34 retail service businesses operating in Market Drayton town centre, with these accounting for almost 2,500m<sup>2</sup> of gross floor space. This represents a gain of one store compared with 2022. Overall, the offer has risen by three units since 2019, with fluctuations in the intervening years.

Chart 18: Number of Finance and Business Services Providers by Type, 2023



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 four barbers and 14 unisex hair salons and beauty parlours in the town centre. The offer has risen by one store since 2022.

In addition, there are three opticians, two bookmakers and two care agencies.

Amongst other services provided in the town (by one operator only) are post office, cleaning agency, shoe repairs, house clearance, tattoo artist, computer repairs and a funeral director. The post office moved locations in 2023.

Chart 19: Number of Retail Service Providers, 2019-2023

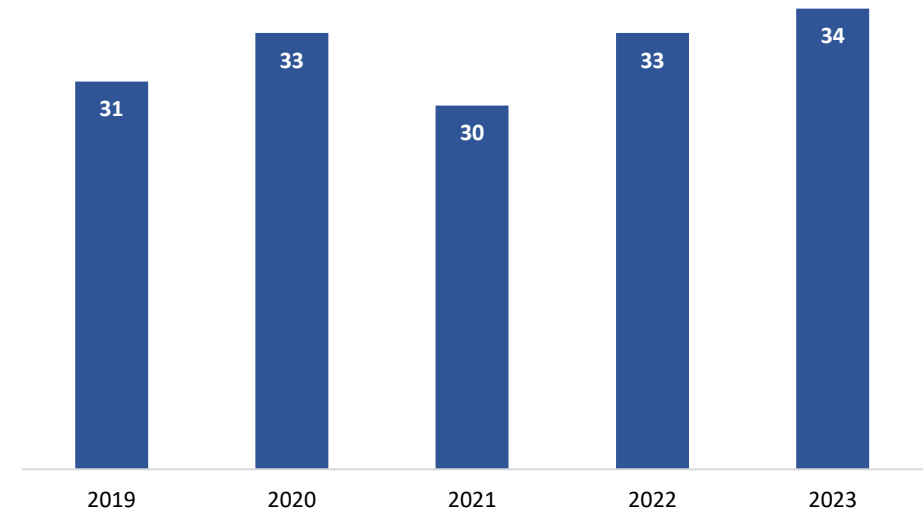
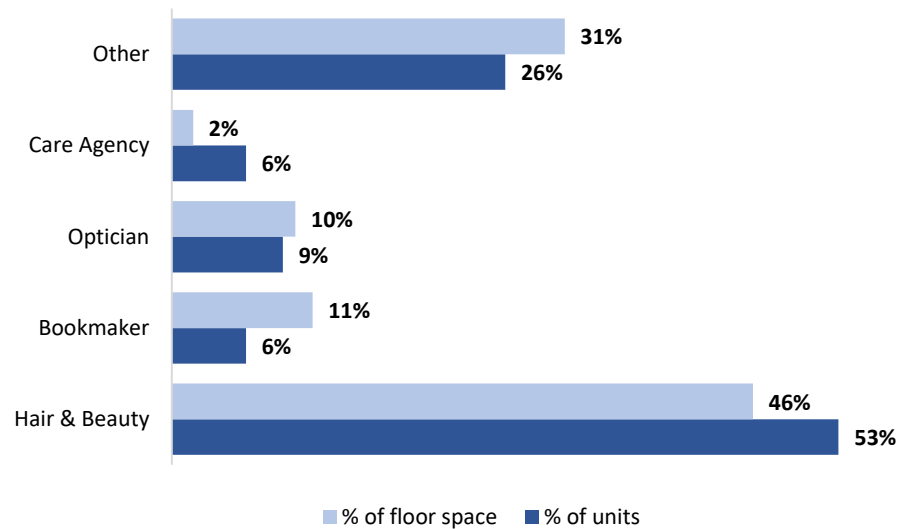


Chart 20: Breakdown of Retail Services by Type, 2023





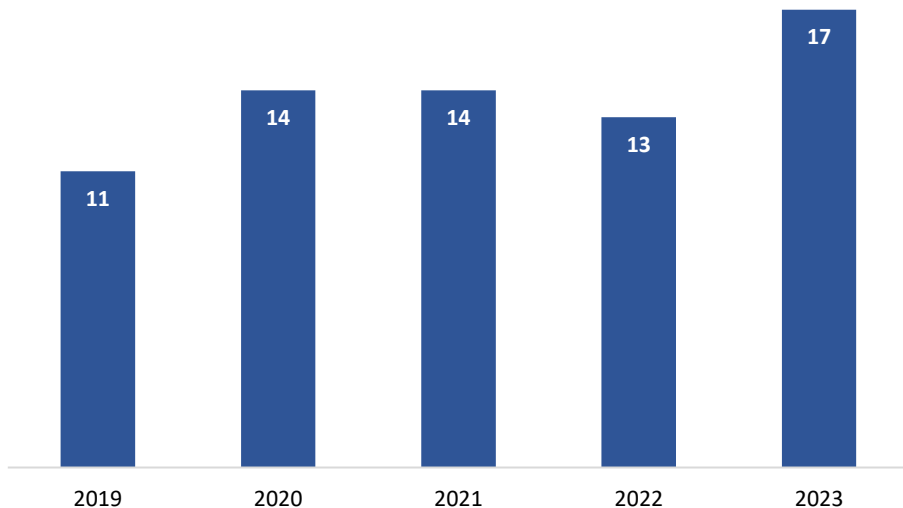
## Health

There are four health care practitioners within the main retail centre of Market Drayton. There are two foot care businesses, an osteopath and a weight management consultant. There has been no change in this sector over the last year.

## Vacant Units

13% of Market Drayton town centre outlets are vacant (7% of gross floor space). This is above average compared with Shropshire as a whole (11% vacancy rate) but 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 rose by four to 17 in 2023. Five of these vacancies are on Cheshire Street, three of the High Street, six on Queen's Street and three on Shropshire Street.

*Chart 21: Number of Vacant Premises, 2019-2023*



10 of the 17 vacant premises in 2023 had become unoccupied since the 2022 audit (59% of the total). The town has relatively few long-standing vacancies, with one unit empty since at least 2019 and another since 2020.



Of the 13 vacant premises in 2022, seven were still vacant in 2023, three had been filled, and two were removed from the list as no longer classified as commercial. There were ten new vacant premises in 2023.

Map 9: Change in Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2022—2023



## Residential Premises

Although the town centre contains concentrations of commercial enterprises, there is also a significant amount of residential property within the main shopping centre. In total, 135 residential premises are located in the audit area, of which the vast majority are flats (123 or 91%) which are largely located above retail or other commercial outlets. There are nine terraced houses in the area, two semi-detached houses plus just one detached house. Most residential premises are on Frogmore Road (23%), Shropshire Street (30%), High Street (18%), Cheshire Street (14%) and Queen Street (9%). The amount of residential stock in the town centre increased by three in 2021 (all flats). There was no further change in 2022 or 2023.

Map 10: Location of Residential Premises in Market Drayton Town Centre

Chart 20: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type

