

Market Drayton: Town Centre Audit Analysis, 2024



Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Market Drayton's main shopping streets was undertaken in September 2024 as part of a longitudinal research study 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 every year between 2020 and 2024. 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 October 2024, 27.6% 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 has also impacted people's spending power. By 2024, inflation was much reduced, but economic confidence remained low.

Key Findings

- 131 commercial units, occupying 16,800m² gross floor space.
- 5th largest centre in Shropshire behind Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Bridgnorth and Ludlow, accounting for 5.2% of all Shropshire High Street traders.
- Low number of stores per head of population at a rate of 10.5 units per 1,000 population (13 on average for Shropshire).
- Average store size 128m² which is slightly smaller than the average across Shropshire (147m²).
- 135 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of almost 1:1 commercial versus residential properties.
- Market Drayton town centre is subject to a considerable level of churn. The rate stood at 17% in 2024, down slightly from 20% in 2023. It remains amongst the highest in Shropshire, and higher than the Shropshire average (15%). Since 2019, there has been more change in Market Drayton than in any other Shropshire town.
- 14% of all commercial premises were vacant in 2024, which is higher than the Shropshire average (11%) and is on a par with the national average. The closure of two large units between the 2023 and 2024 audits means that almost a quarter of all available commercial space in the town was unoccupied at the time of the 2024 audit.
- The highest proportion of commercial units is attributable to retail services which accounted for 28% of units in 2024. Only Highley, Albrighton and Shifnal support a higher representation of retail services.
- Comparison is the second largest sector, but the offer has declined over the last two or three years (as it has in many places) and the sector is under-represented, accounting for 18% of units (27% on average for Shropshire).
- The number of restaurants/takeaways has also declined over the last year, and this sector also accounts for a lower share of commercial units than the Shropshire average (12% compared to 14%).
- Financial and business service providers are well-represented in Market Drayton, and the town still benefits from banking services. Accounting for 12% of all businesses, this sector is proportionally larger in Market Drayton than in all other towns except Craven Arms and Shifnal.

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 2023 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.

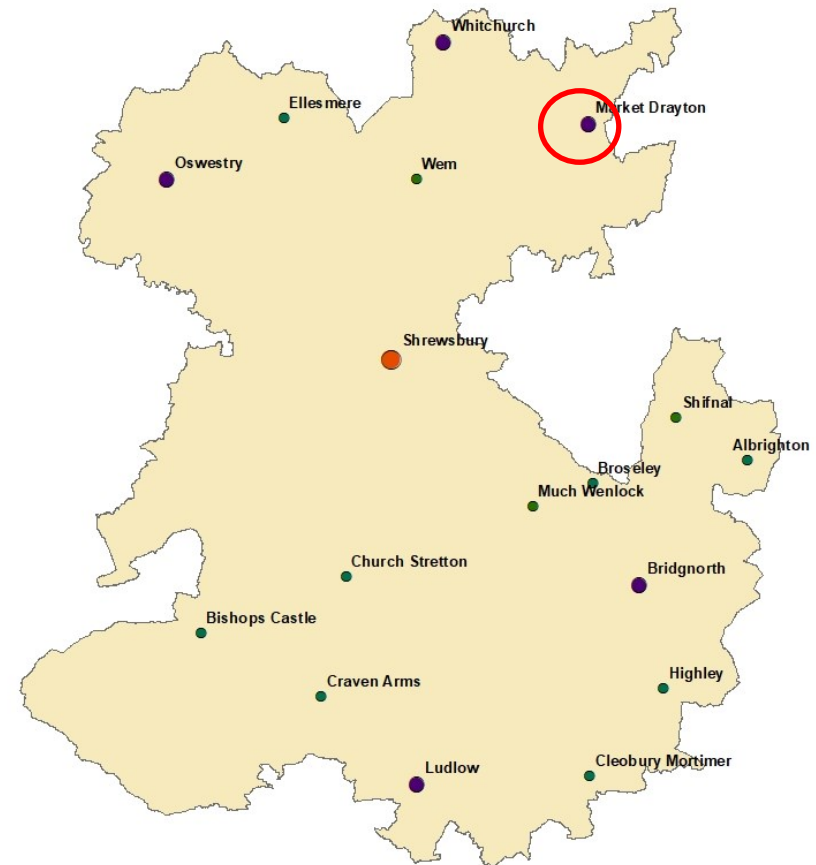
However, not all centres have comparable functions. Larger centres tend to attract workers and shoppers from much further afield than smaller centres, and consequently offer a much greater volume and variety of retail trade and consumer and business services.

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



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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.

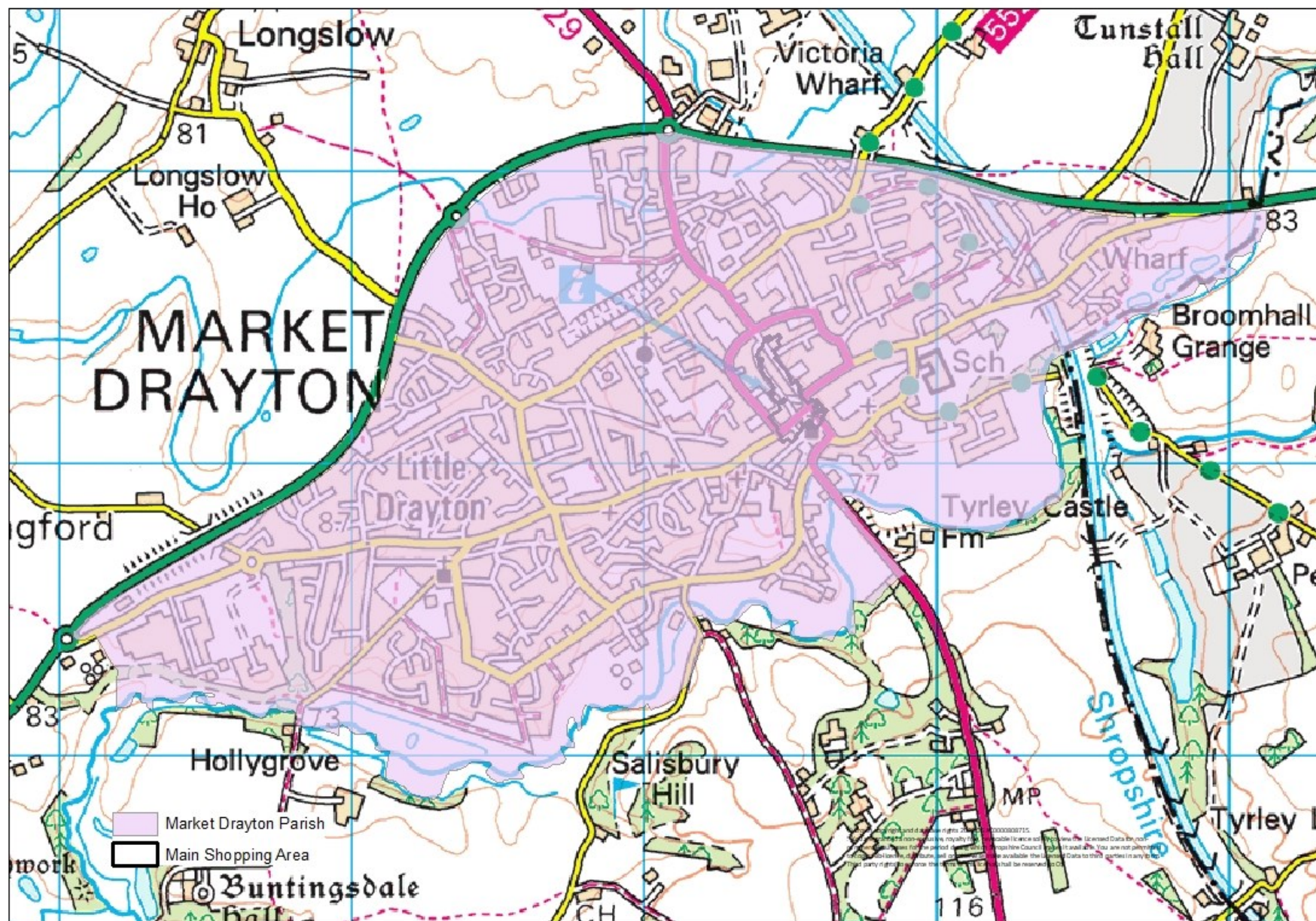
Market Drayton is an important employment hub (the third largest in Shropshire behind Shrewsbury and Oswestry), providing approximately 6,600 jobs across the town council area (*ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2023*). Key sectors include:

- Manufacturing (26.7% of jobs)
- Professional, Scientific & Technical (17.2% of jobs)
- Transport & Storage (12.2% of jobs)
- Retail (7.6% of jobs)

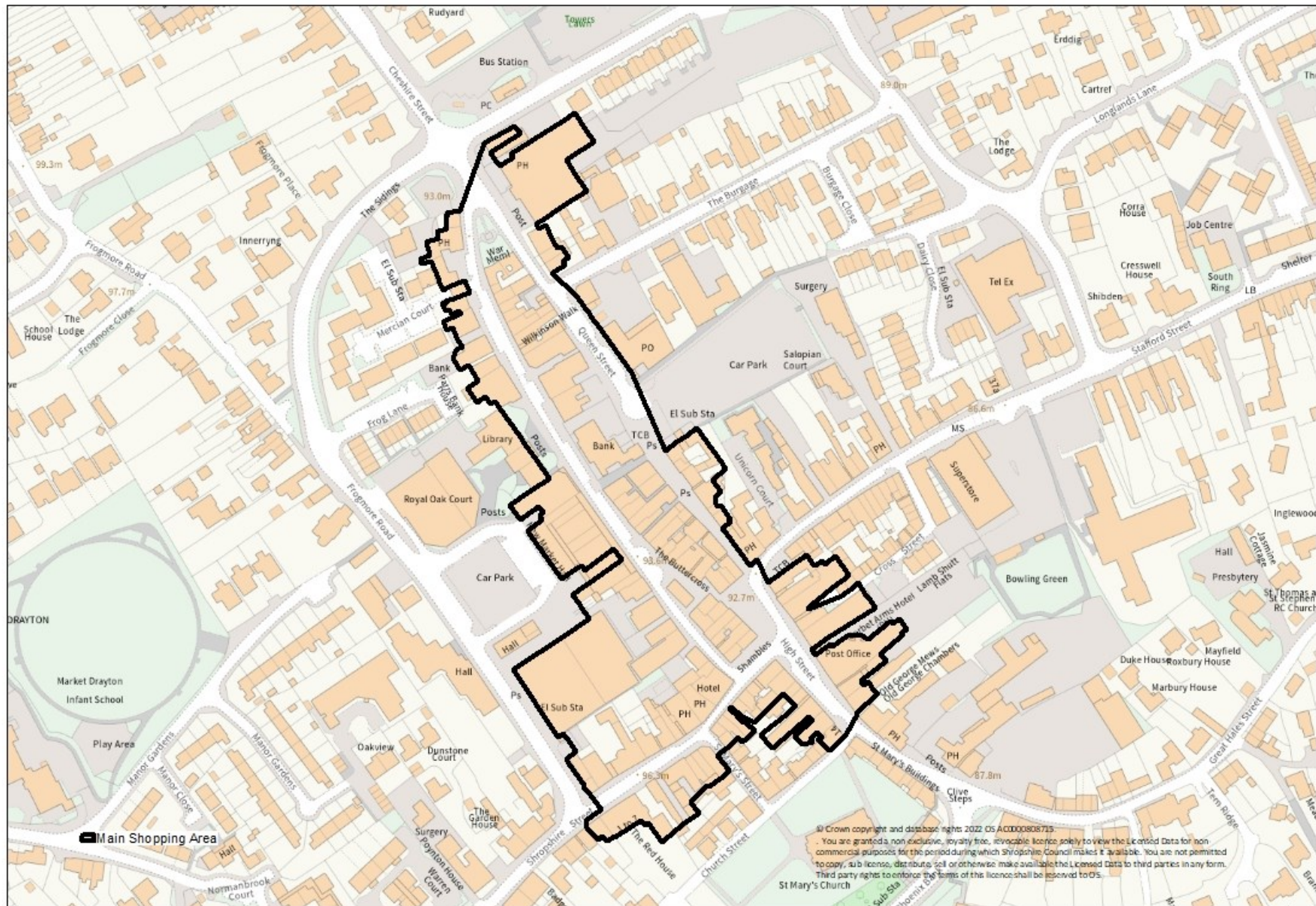
Overall, Market Drayton town council area (depicted on Map 3) covers an area of 461 hectares. The main shopping area (depicted on Map 4) is much smaller than this, at around 3 hectares.

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 3: Market Drayton Town Council Area



Map 4: Main Retail Shopping Area and Survey Boundary

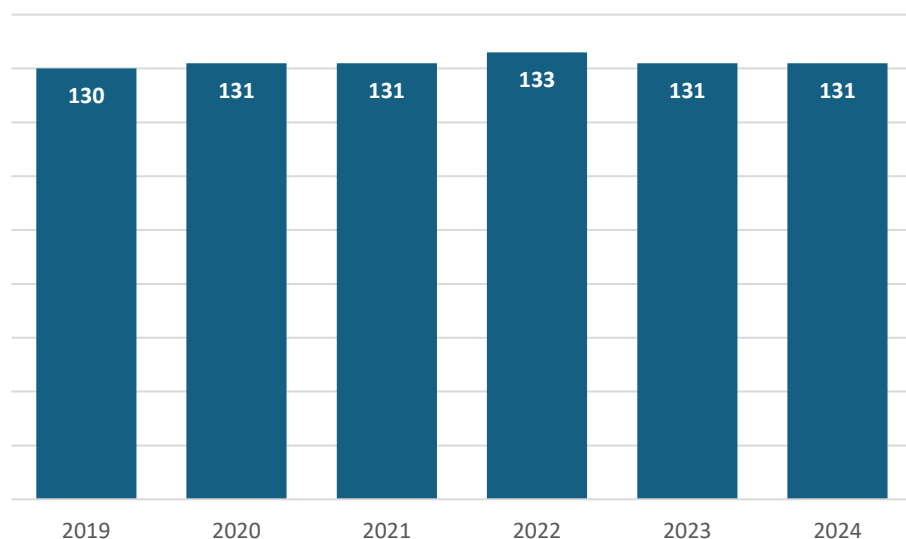


Key Audit Results

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 16,800m² (41% in Cheshire Street, 20% in High Street, 16% in Queen Street). The average store size is 128m² with units ranging in size from 21m² to 1,230m². 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 1: Number of Commercial Premises in Market Drayton, 2019-2024



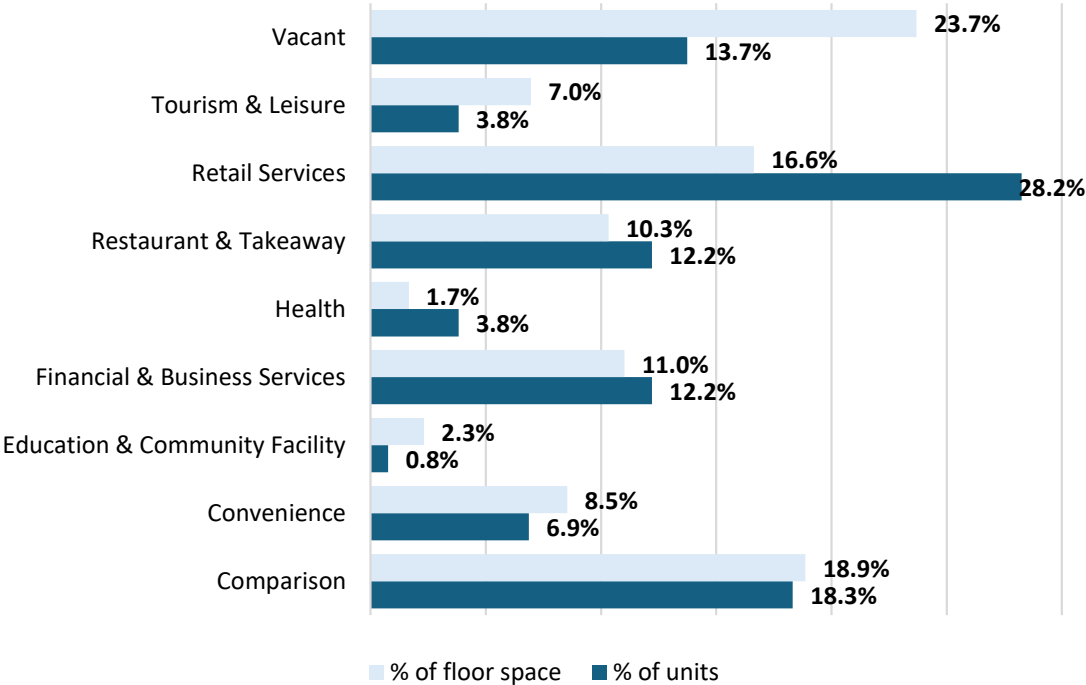
The number of commercial premises in Market Drayton has fluctuated slightly since 2019, at between 130 and 133 units. This small level of change disguises a greater level of reconfiguration within the town, with some premises being repurposed from commercial to residential and other commercial units 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 was no further change in the number of commercial units in 2024.

There are 24 comparison retailers in Market Drayton town centre, which cover a combined gross floor space of over 3,100m². This is the equivalent of 18.3% of units and 18.9% of floor space. The proportion of units attributable to comparison stores is low compared to the other comparable market towns in Shropshire and commercial space allocated to comparison has reduced considerably over the last year following the closure of Argos and Wilko.

Retail service businesses are also very well represented in Market Drayton especially in unit terms, with 37 stores operating, which is more than a quarter of the total (28.2%). These units tend to be smaller than average, and hence account for just 16.6% of gross floor space. Market Drayton supports a higher proportion of retail service units than anywhere else except Highley, Shifnal and Albrighton. There are 16 restaurants and takeaways in the town centre, which is the equivalent of 12.2% of units and 10.3% of floor space. These proportions are broadly similar in Bridgnorth and Whitchurch. 12.2% 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.

13.7% of units across the town centre are vacant, which is the equivalent of 23.7% of gross commercial floor space.

Chart 2: Breakdown of Commercial Premises by Classification, 2024



Change since 2023

There has been relatively little change in the mix of businesses operating in Market Drayton between September 2023 and 2024. The most significant change has been in the provision of restaurants and takeaways and comparison retail, with the offer reducing by three units and two units respectively. The retail services offer was boosted by the opening of three businesses and an additional operator was identified in the health sector.

In comparison with 2023, there is one additional vacant unit in the town.

Chart 3: Change in Number of Units by Category, 2023/2024

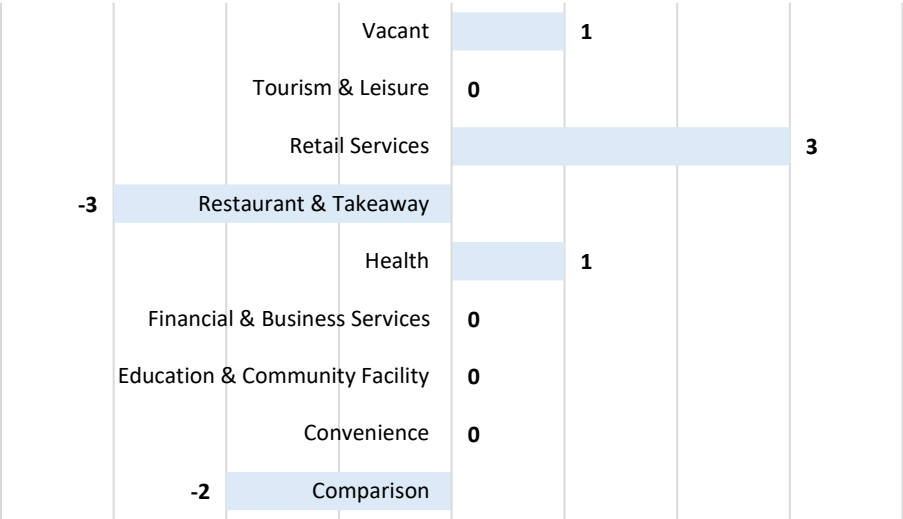
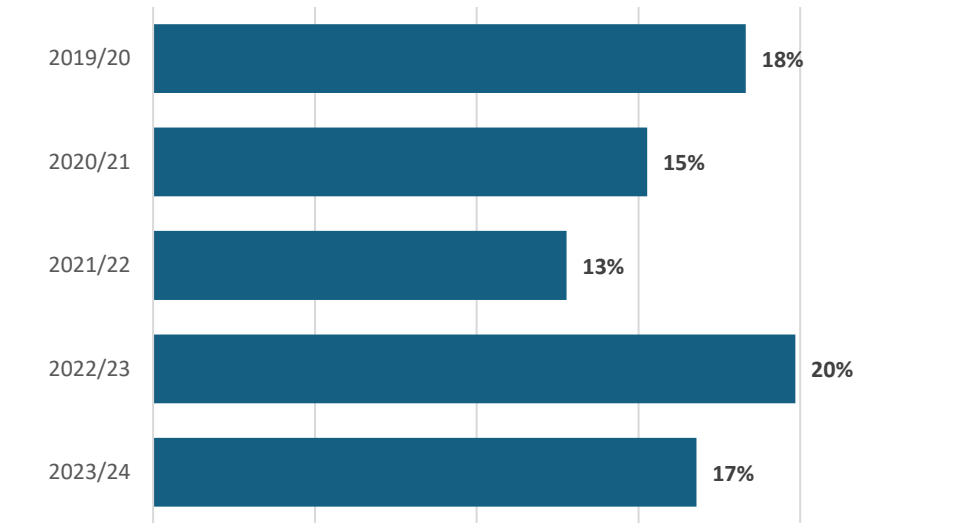


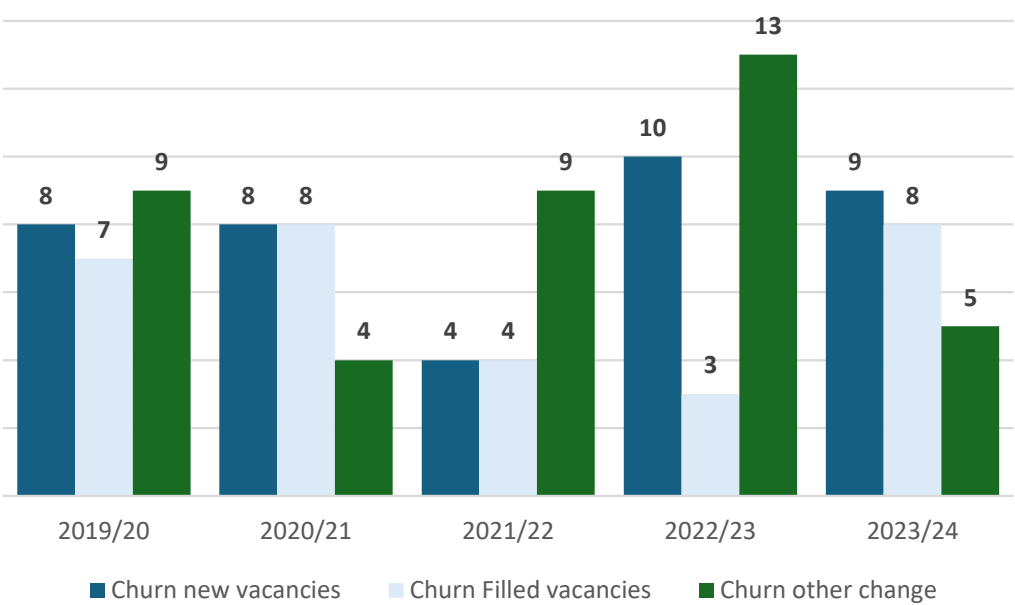
Chart 4: Levels of Business Churn 2019-2024



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 five years with 22 outlets altering their purpose or name between 2023 and 2024, 26 changing 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 18% churn in 2020 (15% in Shropshire), 15% in 2021 (11% in Shropshire), 13% in 2022 (13% in Shropshire), 20% in 2023 (12% in Shropshire) and 17% in 2024 (15% in Shropshire).

Chart 5: Breakdown of Business Churn 2019-2024

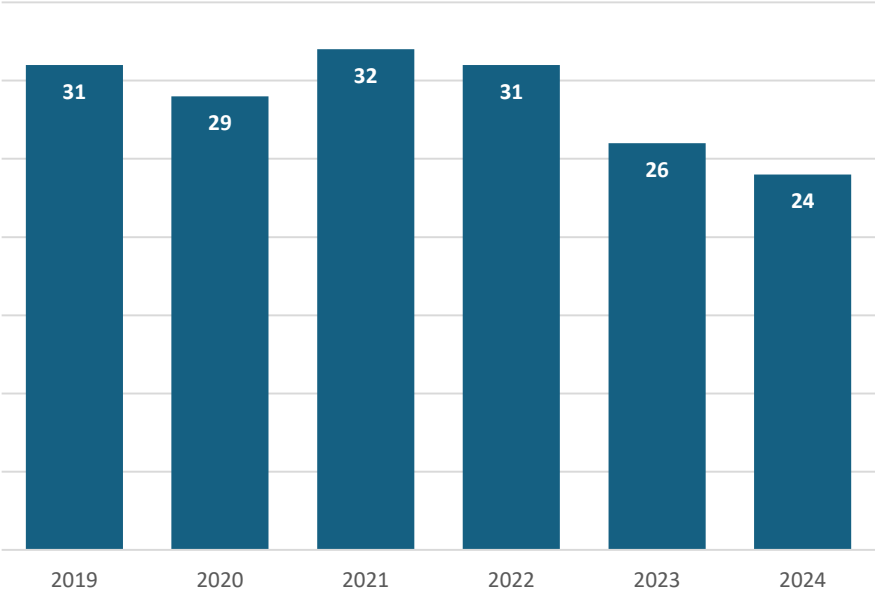


Over the last year, 41% of churn was attributable to new vacancies arising and 36% to old vacancies becoming occupied. Other change therefore represented less than a quarter (23%) of all churn. In 2023, half of all churn was attributable to other change. Over the last two years, 19 premises in Market Drayton have become vacant compared with just 11 premises which were vacant becoming occupied.

Comparison Retail

The second largest proportion of the Market Drayton commercial offer is dedicated to the comparison retail category, which accounts for 18% of units and 19% of floor space. There were 24 comparison retailers in 2024, which represents a reduction of two over the preceding year—the loss of these stores has had a notable impact on the amount of comparison commercial space as both closures (Argos and Wilko) were of above average size. Overall the amount of space designated to comparison retail fell by 48% between 2023 and 2024.

Chart 6: Number of Comparison Retail Units, 2019-2024



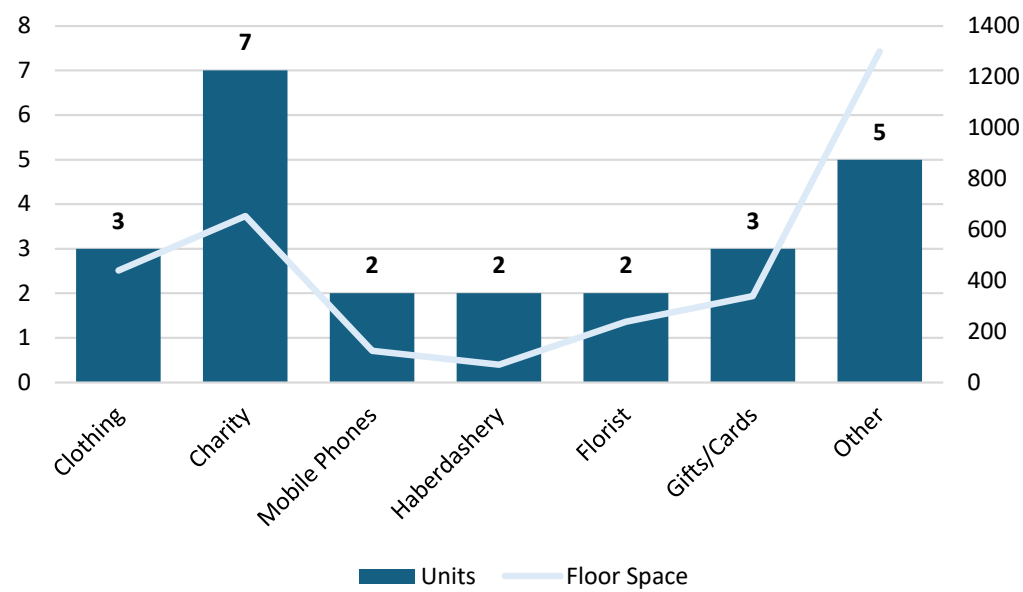
The comparison retail sector has been in decline since 2021, with eight stores being lost over the four year period to 2024. This is the equivalent of a 25% reduction. This trend is reflective of the national situation, with on-line retail having been a major competition to the high street in the comparison sector in recent years and especially since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Within the town there are three clothes shops, all of which are independent. Two clothing stores closed between 2023 and 2024, including the branch of Peacocks, but another opened in a previously vacant premise. Two clothing stores also closed between the 2022 and 2023 audits. This includes one dress agency. The other clothes store relocated to Tern Valley Business Park. This means that the number of clothes shops in Market Drayton has halved over the past two years.

There are seven charity shops in the town, which is an increase of one since 2023. Four of the charity stores are national —Oxfam, Sue Ryder (which opened a second branch in 2024), Barnados, Cancer Research, with two local based charity shops (Salopian Care and AE Donate).

There are two mobile phone stores, two haberdashers, two florists and three gift shops. Both phone stores, plus one of the haberdashers and one of the gift shops were opened in 2024. There is one pharmacist, a stationers/book store, a furniture store, an antiques store and a card shop. As well as the two discount/catalogue stores that shut in 2024 (Argos and Wilko), the town has also lost its carpet shop.

Chart 7: Breakdown of Comparison Retail by Type, 2024



Although most traders are independent, Market Drayton hosts the following multiples: Card Factory, WH Smith, Boots.

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 9% of gross floor space. In the town there are two bakeries (one new in 2022) and a confectioner, a delicatessen, a frozen food store, a health food shop, a market and a general convenience store. The latter opened in 2024. There is also a specialist food store selling Polish goods. A confectionery store closed between the 2023 and 2024 audits. Operators in this sector are mainly independent, although there is an Iceland food store and a Greggs bakery.

Map 5: Location of Market Drayton’s Main Convenience Stores

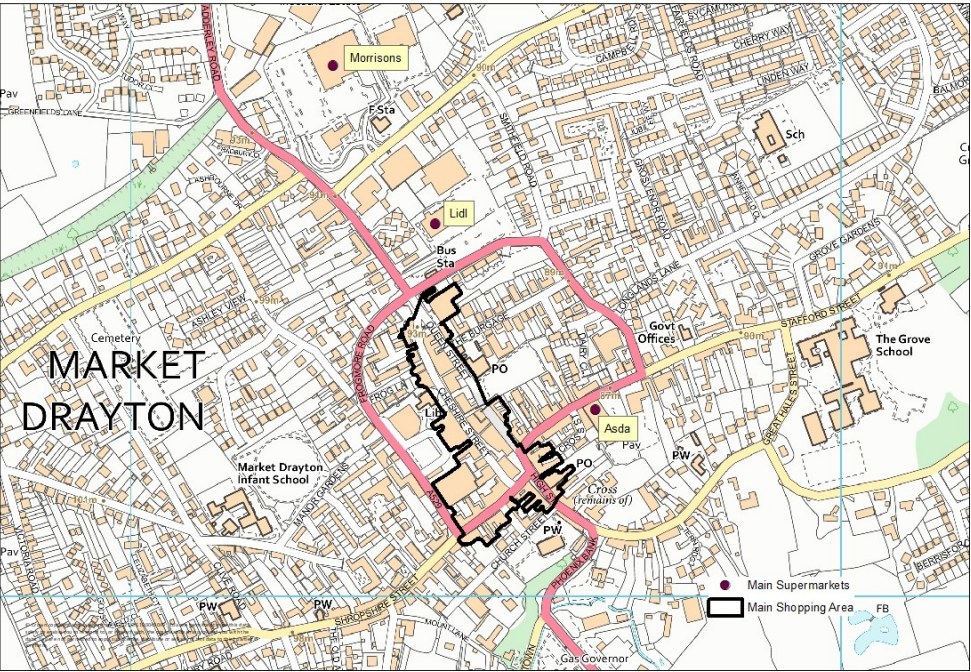
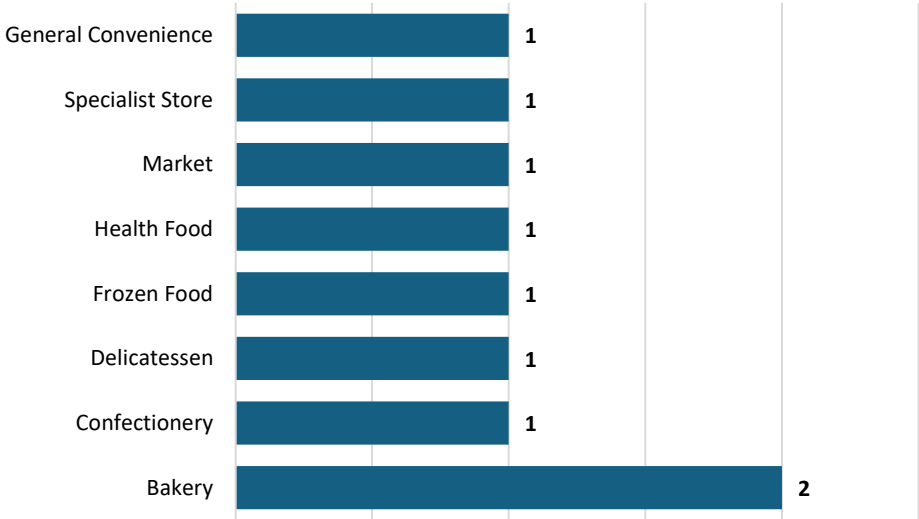


Chart 8: Breakdown of Convenience Retail by Type, 2024



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

12% of units in Market Drayton are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, with this category accounting for a slightly lower proportion of gross floor space (10%). The number of operators in this classification rose from 17 to 20 between 2019 and 2021, but declined by one in 2022 and by a further three in 2024. This means that the offer has declined by four since 2021 (-20%) to 16.

The 16 units are split between cafés (25%), restaurants (31%) and takeaways (44%). Takeaways account for a lower share of floor space (28%) while restaurants have a disproportionately high share of floor space (42%).

Chart 10: Breakdown of Restaurant/Takeaway Units by Type, 2024

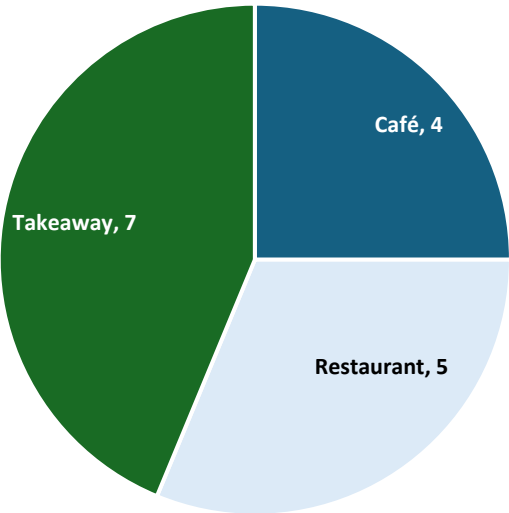
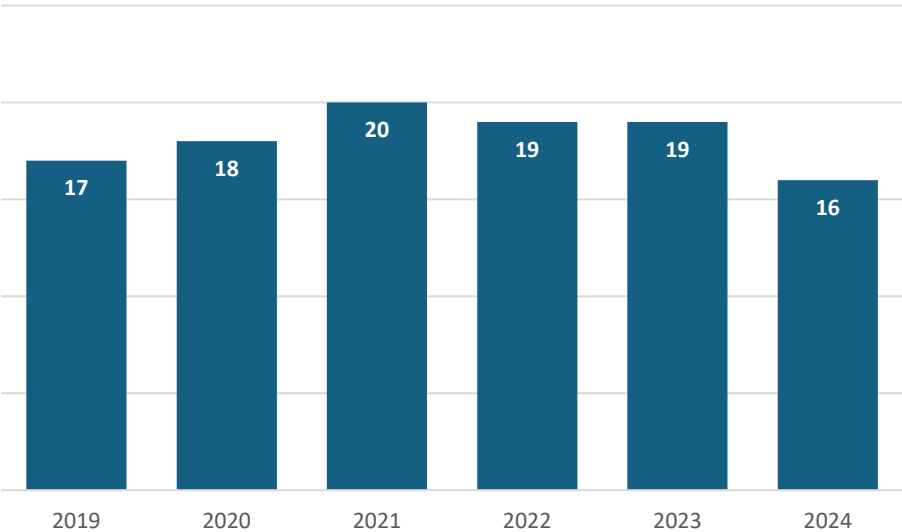


Chart 9: Number of Restaurant/Takeaway Units, 2019-2024



The number of cafes in Market Drayton fell by one in 2024, while two restaurants closed. There were no other changes in the restaurant and takeaway sector.

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 1,100m² 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.

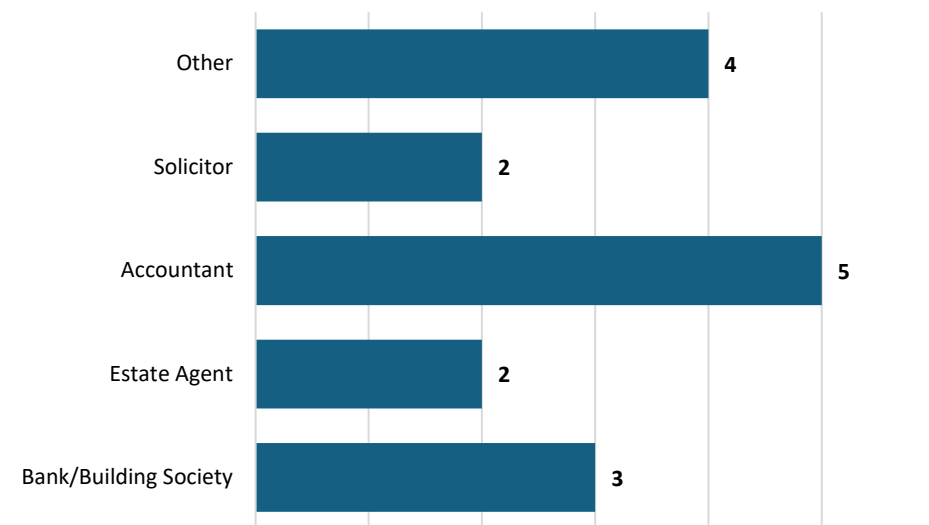
Finance & Business Services

There are 16 commercial operators in the finance and business services arena in Market Drayton town centre, accounting for approximately 1,800m² 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 estate agents and two solicitors. One of the estate agents is new since the 2021 audit.

There is also an insurance broker, a stonemason and a surveyor in the town.

Chart 11: Number of Finance and Business Services Providers by Type, 2024



Retail Services

There are 37 retail service businesses operating in Market Drayton town centre, with these accounting for almost 2,800m² of gross floor space. This represents a gain of three stores compared with 2023. Overall, the offer has risen by six units since 2019 (+19%), with fluctuations in the intervening years.

The retail services sector accounts for the highest percentage of commercial units in the town (28%) but for a smaller share of commercial floor space (17%).

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 54% of units and 48% of floor space. There are four barbers and 16 unisex hair salons and beauty parlours in the town centre. The offer has risen by two stores since 2023.

Chart 13: Breakdown of Retail Services by Type, 2024

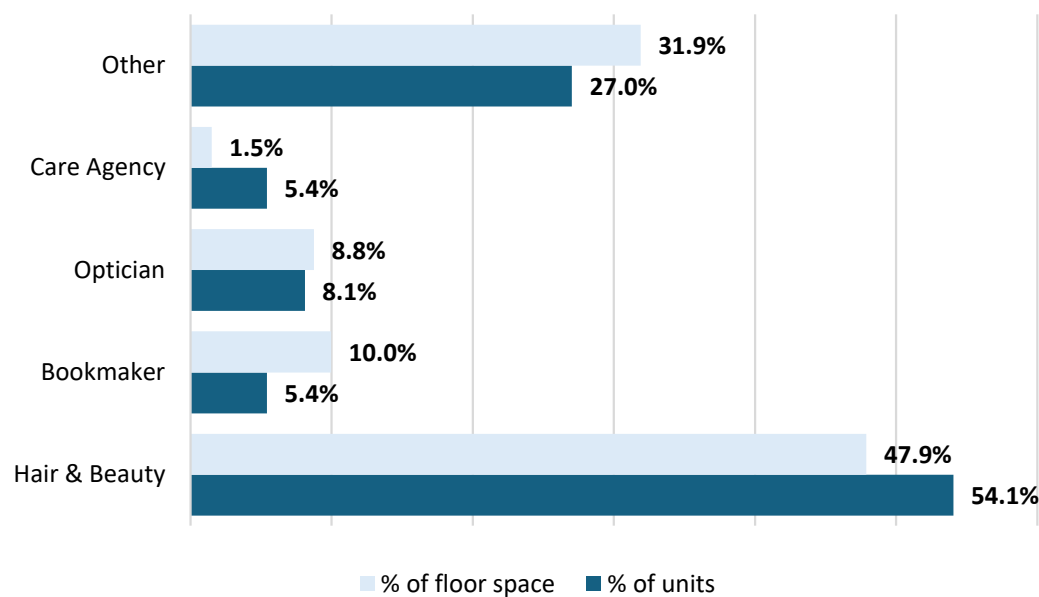
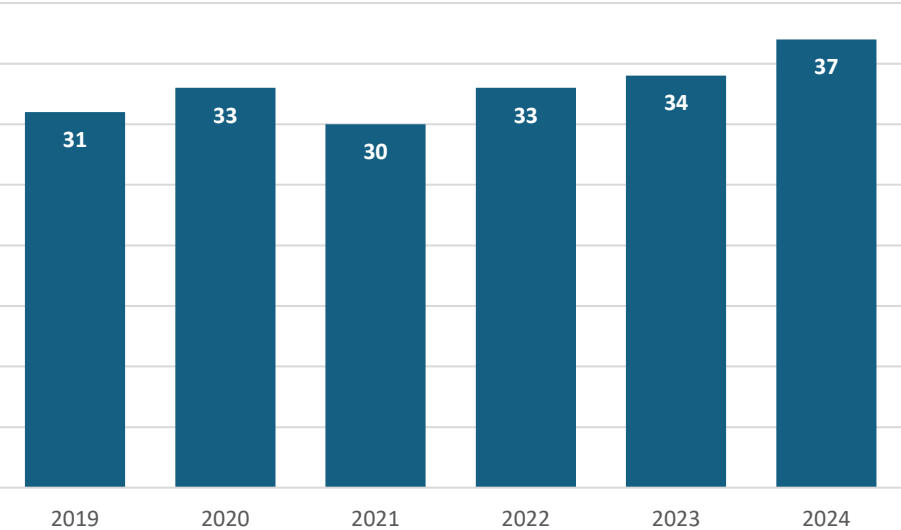


Chart 12: Number of Retail Service Providers, 2019-2024



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. A new dog grooming business opened in 2024.

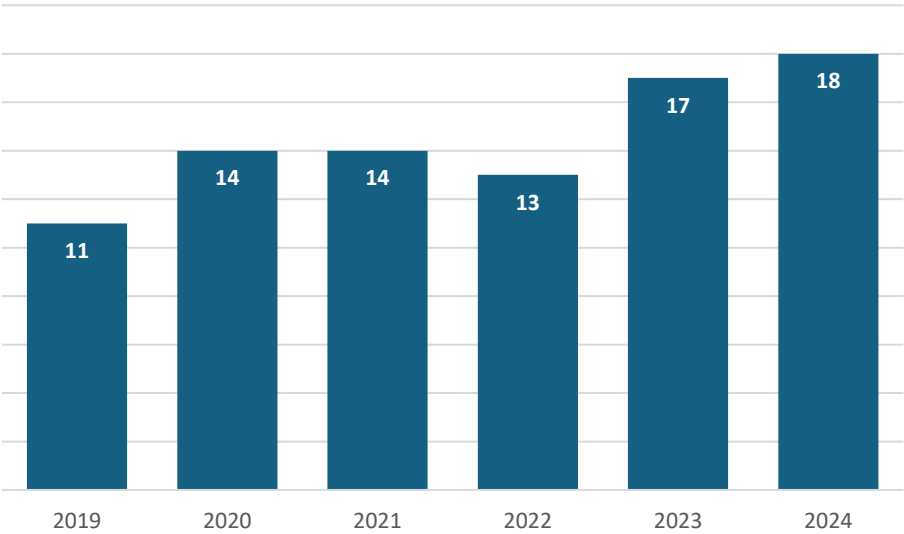
Health

There are five health care practitioners within the main retail centre of Market Drayton. There is a foot care business, an osteopath and a health and well-being practitioner and a yoga studio.

Vacant Units

14% of Market Drayton town centre outlets are vacant (24% of gross floor space). This is above average compared with Shropshire as a whole (11% vacancy rate) and about the same as the vacancy rate nationally which stood at 14.0% in the fourth quarter of 2023 according to BRC (data relating to high streets only). The number of vacant units rose by one to 18 in 2024. Three of these vacancies are on Cheshire Street, five on the High Street, six on Queen’s Street and one on Shropshire Street. There are also two on Frogmore Road—the premises formerly occupied by Argos and Wilko, and the closure of these stores has pushed up the amount of vacant commercial space in the town by a considerable margin (+232%).

Chart 14: Number of Vacant Premises, 2019-2024



The number of vacant premises in Market Drayton has risen from 11 in 2019.

Nine of the 18 vacant premises in 2024 had become unoccupied since the 2023 audit (50% of the total). The town has relatively few long-standing vacancies, with one unit empty since at least 2019 and another since 2020. Six have been vacant since 2022 (a third of all current vacancies).

● Vacancies 2024
 ■ Main Shopping Area

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Of the 17 vacant premises in 2023, nine were still vacant in 2024, and eight had become occupied. There were nine new vacant premises in 2024.

Map 7: Change in Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2023—2024



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, 2023 or 2024.

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

Chart 15: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type

