

Oswestry: Town Centre Audit Analysis, 2020



Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Oswestry's main shopping streets was undertaken in September 2020 as part of an on-going piece of research reviewing the vibrancy of Shropshire's main market towns and key settlements. The research was begun in 2019, with Oswestry centre first audited in August 2019. 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 into 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).

Key Findings

- 354 commercial units, occupying 55,400m² gross floor space
- Second largest centre in Shropshire behind Shrewsbury accommodating 13.8% of all Shropshire High Street traders
- Relatively high number of stores per head of population at a rate of 20 units per 1,000 population
- Average store size 157m² which is notably larger than the average across Shropshire (132m²)
- 316 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of 1.1:1 commercial versus residential properties
- Oswestry had a 14% business churn rate between audits, which is low given the size of the town (Shropshire average 15%)
- 11% of all commercial premises were vacant in 2020, which is marginally lower than the Shropshire average (12%)
- The number of vacancies has risen by 12 premises which is an increase of 42.9% since 2019
- The highest proportion of commercial units is attributable to comparison retail (27%), although this proportion is lower than in Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Bridgnorth and Oswestry
- Retail services are also slightly over represented (20%)
- In contrast, there are comparatively few businesses operating in convenience retail (7%)

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 Oswestry, the Business Improvement District Area covers a substantially larger area (see Map 3).

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 & Professional 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 2019. 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

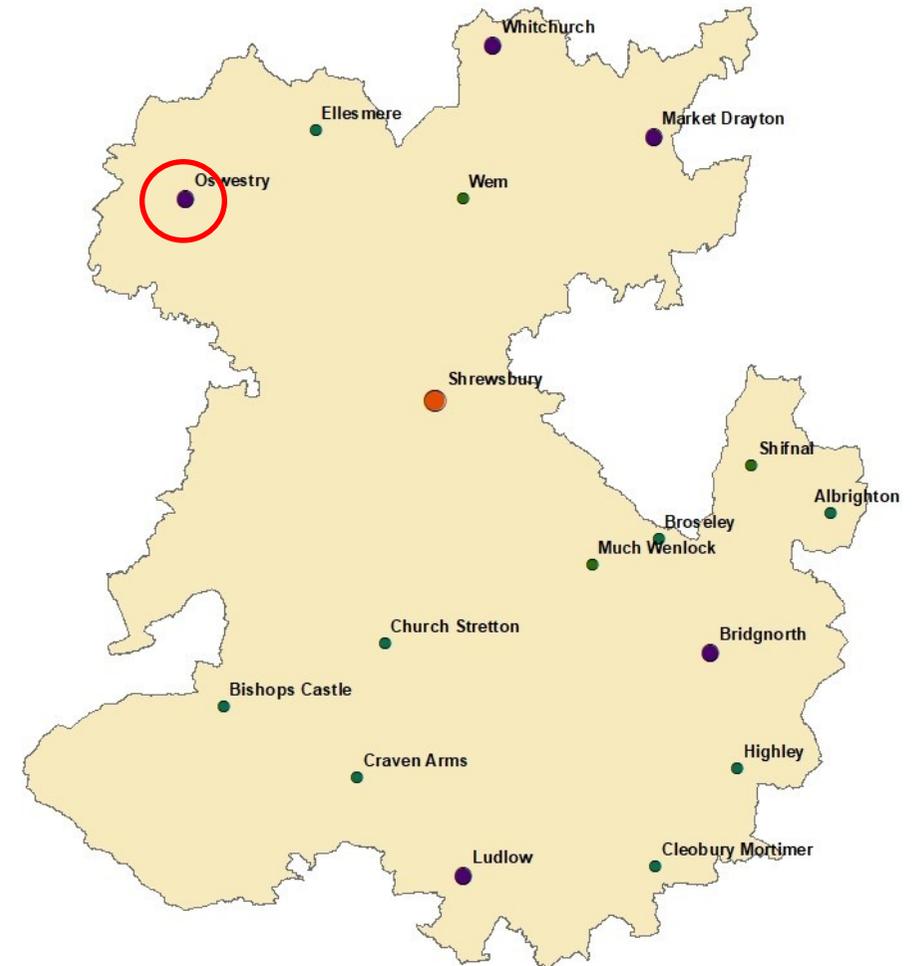
Town centres represent important employment, entertainment and shopping hubs for their local population and hinterland. They also represent an important component of the visitor economy.

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
Clebury Mortimer
Craven Arms
Ellesmere
Highley
Much Wenlock
Shifnal
Wem

Map 1: Shropshire's Main Retail Centres



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Oswestry is the second largest town in Shropshire, and also supports the second largest shopping centre, which caters not only for local residents, but for a hinterland which stretches into Wales.

About Oswestry

Oswestry is located in the north west of Shropshire close to the English-Welsh border. Today the town has a population of 18,200 (2019 Mid-year estimates) and 7,671 households (2011 Census). The town's population has grown by 4.7% since 2015. It is the second largest town in the county behind Shrewsbury and is amongst the fastest growing. The population is projected to rise to 23,200 by 2026.

Oswestry is on the A5, which provides a direct southerly link to the main Shropshire market town of Shrewsbury (18 miles). Taking the A5 north provides a direct route to North Wales and the port of Holyhead (88 miles). The A483 provides access north to Wrexham (15 miles) and south to Welshpool (15 miles). The A495 heads east from the town to take in Whittington (3 miles), Ellesmere (9.5 miles) and Whitchurch (21.5 miles). The total population within a 10 mile radius is 92,700.

Oswestry is not on the mainline rail network. The closest railway station is at Gobowen, approximately 3 miles away.

Oswestry is an important employment hub, second in size only to Shrewsbury. It provides approximately 6,700 jobs across the town council area (*ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2019*). Key sectors include:

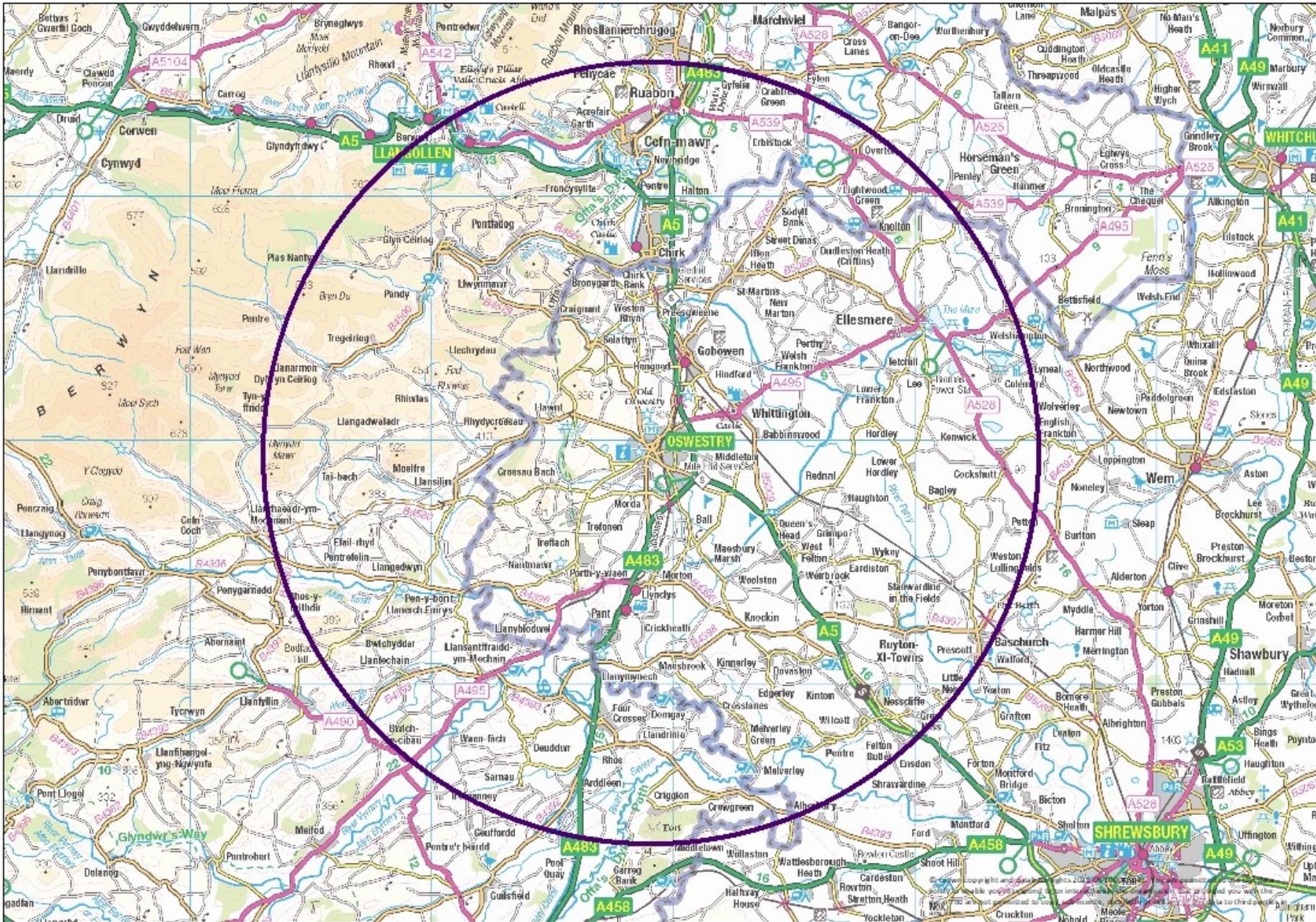
- Retail (18.8% of jobs)
- Education (10.5% of jobs)
- Manufacturing (9.0% of jobs)
- Health (9.0% of jobs)
- Accommodation & Food Services (9.0% of jobs)

Overall, Oswestry town council area (depicted on Map 3) covers an area of 739 hectares. The main shopping area (depicted on Map 4) is much smaller than this, at around 14 hectares. This is nonetheless notably larger than the main shopping areas in Market Drayton or Whitchurch.

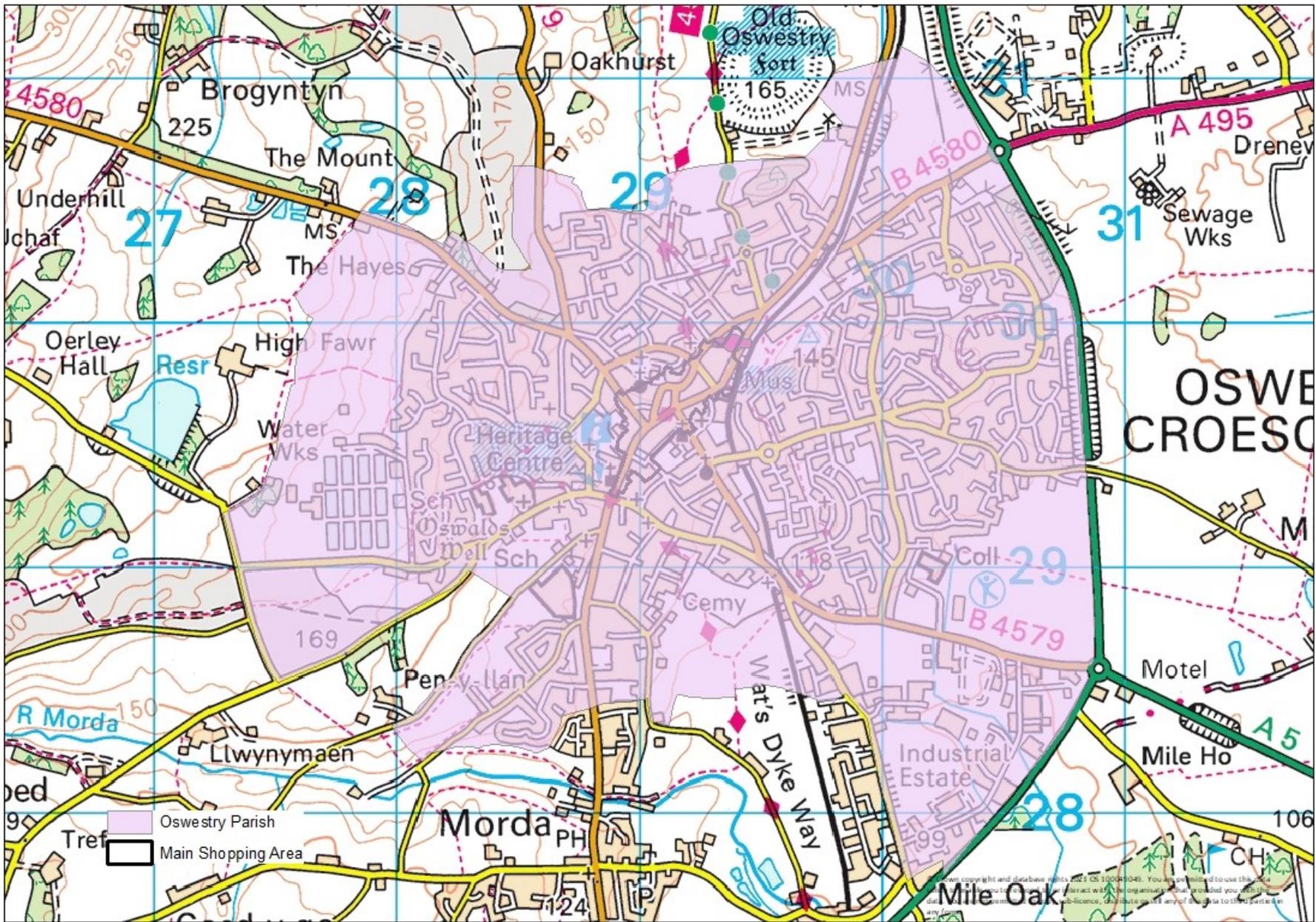
Today the town retains its vital function as a market and shopping centre serving North West Shropshire and Mid Wales. The town comprises predominantly independent retail, although the centre is large enough to have attracted a number of chains, particularly in the comparison retail and financial and professional service sectors. The main indoor and outdoor markets take place on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. The town is supported by the work of the Business Improvement District which is "a designated zone or area in which businesses benefit from a wide range of additional services over and above those funded through the standard commercial rates and council services".

More information about Oswestry can be found here: <https://shropshire.gov.uk/media/11449/oswestry-final-version-091117.pdf>

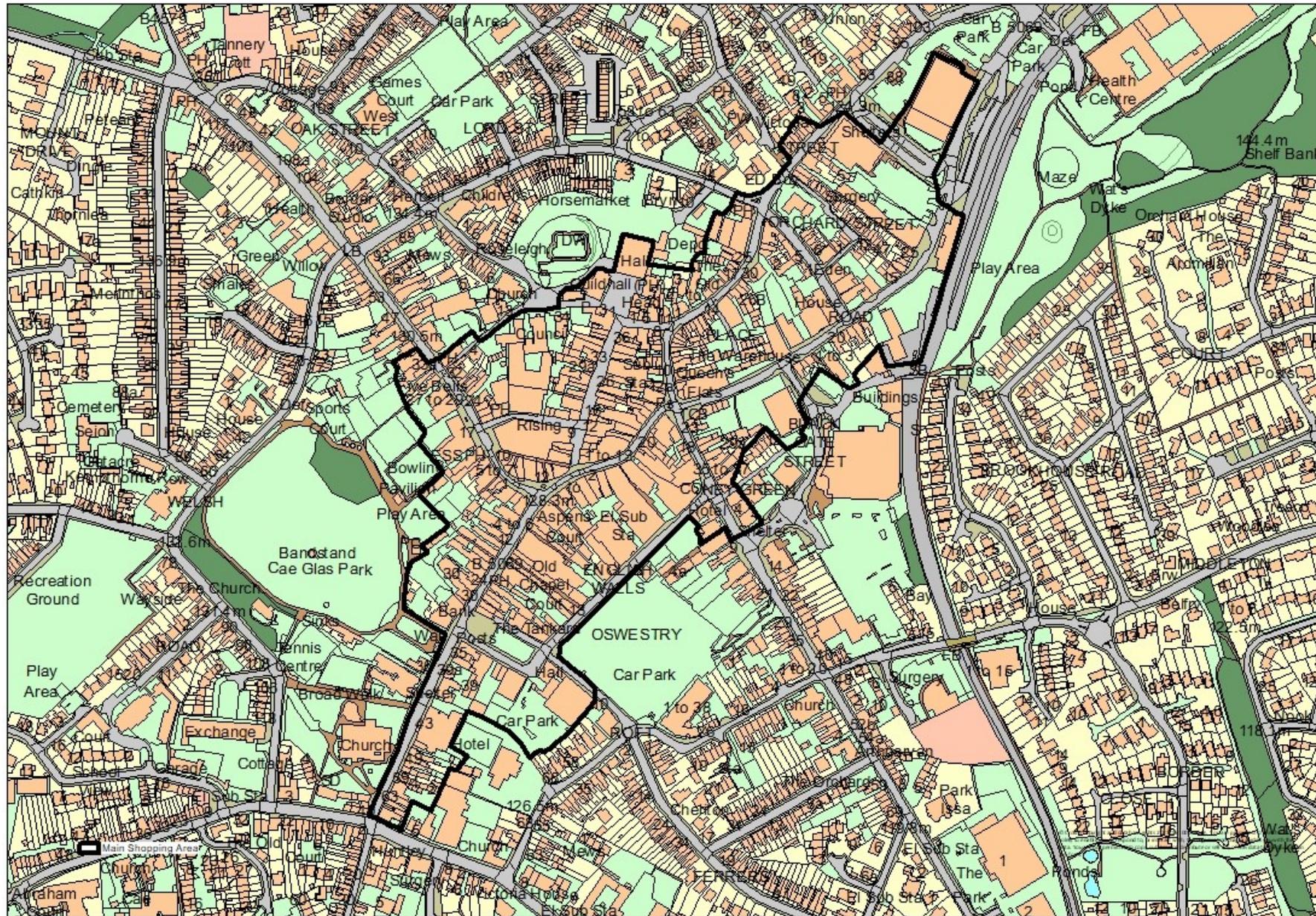
Map 2: Location of Oswestry showing 10 mile radius



Map 3: Oswestry Town Council Area



Map 4: Main Retail Shopping Area



Key Results

A total of 354 businesses operate within the Oswestry survey area. Oswestry town centre is the second largest in Shropshire behind Shrewsbury, and is notably larger than the other four tier 2 town centres. It has more than twice as many commercial operators than either Market Drayton or Whitchurch and more than 50% more than either Ludlow or Bridgnorth.

The Oswestry businesses are primarily in Church Street (59 businesses), Bailey Head and Bailey Street (55 businesses), Beatrice Street (41 businesses), Leg Street (38 businesses), The Cross and Cross Street (34 businesses) and Oswald Road (36 businesses).

Gross floor space allocated to these businesses is over 55,400m², split by street according to the adjacent table. The average store size is 157m² with units ranging in size from 15m² to over 2,000m². Compared with the other tier 2 retail centres in Shropshire, the average store size is large. Stores are notably smaller than average in Beatrice Street and Leg Street and are larger on Cross Street and Oswald Road.

Chart 1: Location of Businesses Operating in Oswestry

	% of Units	% of floor space
Bailey Head	4.0%	4.6%
Bailey Street	11.6%	11.7%
Beatrice Street	11.6%	6.9%
Church Street	16.7%	15.5%
Cross Street/The Cross	9.6%	12.5%
English Walls	6.5%	5.5%
Leg Street	10.7%	5.8%
Oswald Road	10.2%	14.2%
Willow Street	8.8%	7.5%
Other	10.5%	15.9%

Business Classifications

The highest proportion of the town centre is allocated to comparison retail. There are 97 comparison retailers in the main shopping streets, which cover a combined gross floor space of almost 16,700m². This is the equivalent of 27.4% of units and 30.1% of space. The proportion of units attributable to comparison stores is low compared to the other comparable market towns in Shropshire (albeit higher than in Market Drayton). However, in terms of floor space, the share allocated to this category is higher due to the presence of some very large outlets (including Boots, Home Bargains, B&M Bargains).

Retail service businesses are also very well represented in Oswestry, especially in unit terms, with 66 stores operating. This is almost a fifth of the total. These units tend to be smaller than average, and hence account for just 10.5% of gross floor space. The proportion of outlets attributable to retail services in Oswestry is higher than in Ludlow or Bridgnorth, but lower than in Market Drayton or Whitchurch.

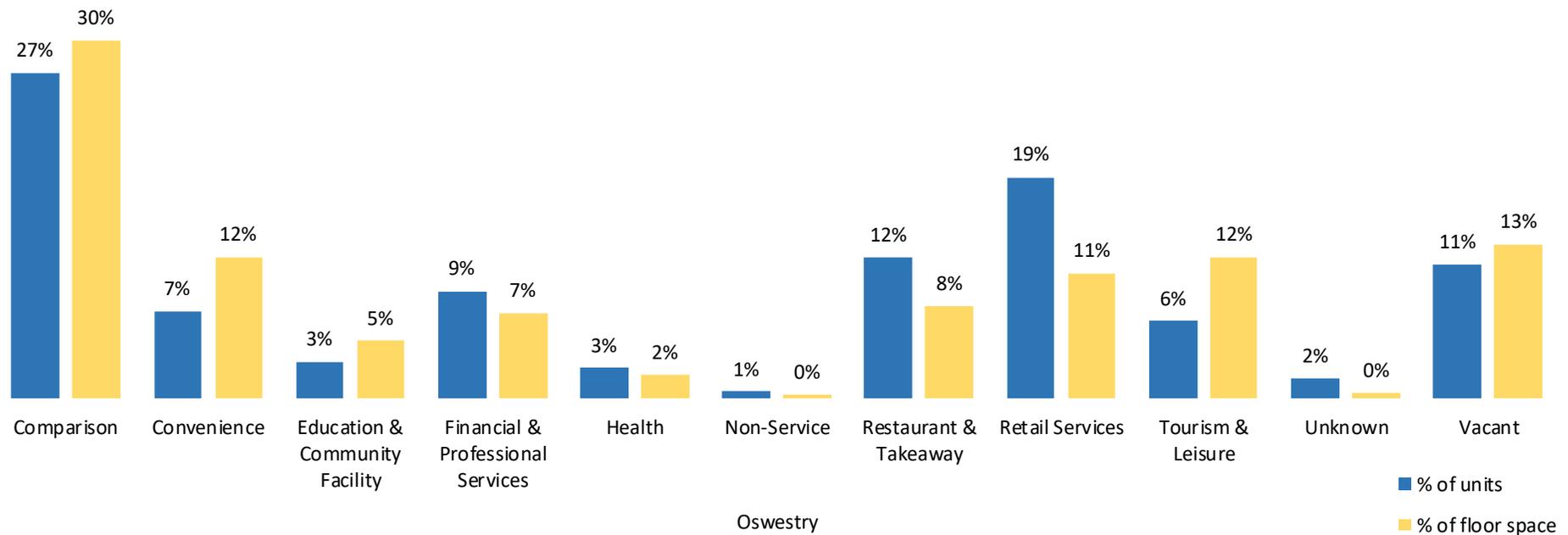
There are 42 restaurants and takeaways in Oswestry town centre, which is the equivalent of 11.9% of units and 7.7% of floor space. These proportions are slightly lower than for the other tier 2 towns, except Ludlow.

9.0% of units (and 7.2% of floor space) is attributable to financial institutions and professional services providers. This is broadly similar to the other market towns of the same hierarchy.

A small proportion of outlets in Oswestry are attributable to the convenience retail, education & community facilities and tourism & leisure categories. All three classifications account for a higher share of floor space than they do of units.

11.3% of units across the town centre are vacant, which is the equivalent of 13.0% of gross commercial floor space.

Chart 2: Breakdown of Oswestry Commercial Premises by Classification



Change since 2019

There has been relatively little change in the mix of businesses operating in Oswestry between 2019 and September 2020. Other than a net increase in vacancies of 12 units, there has been a notable decline in the number of comparison retailers operating and more moderate declines in retail services and convenience retail.

Churn has, therefore been comparatively low, particularly given Oswestry's status as the second largest retail destination in Shropshire.

A total of 48 units changed in some way between 2019 and 2020 giving a churn rate of 14%. The average rate across all Shropshire towns is 15%.

Chart 2: Change in Number of Units by Category, 2019/2020

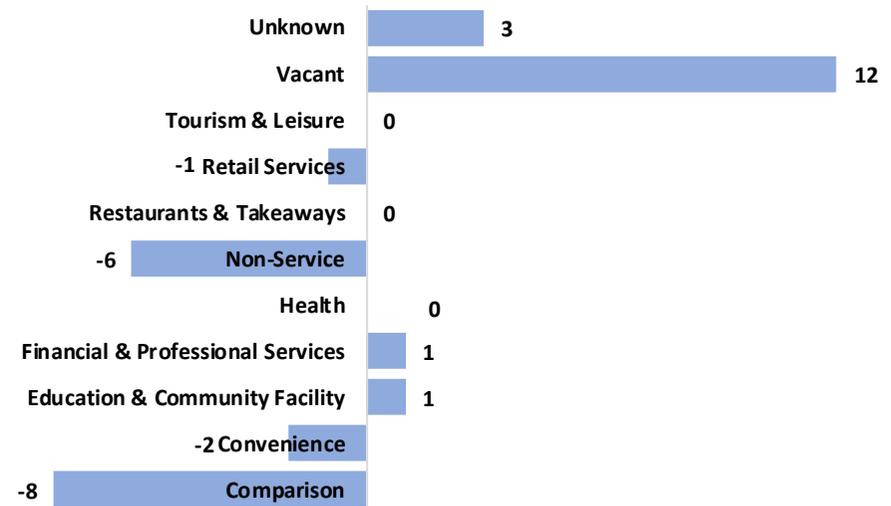
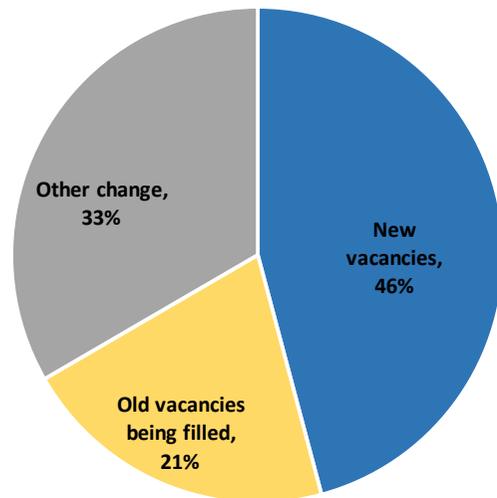


Chart 3: Breakdown of Business Churn 2019-2020



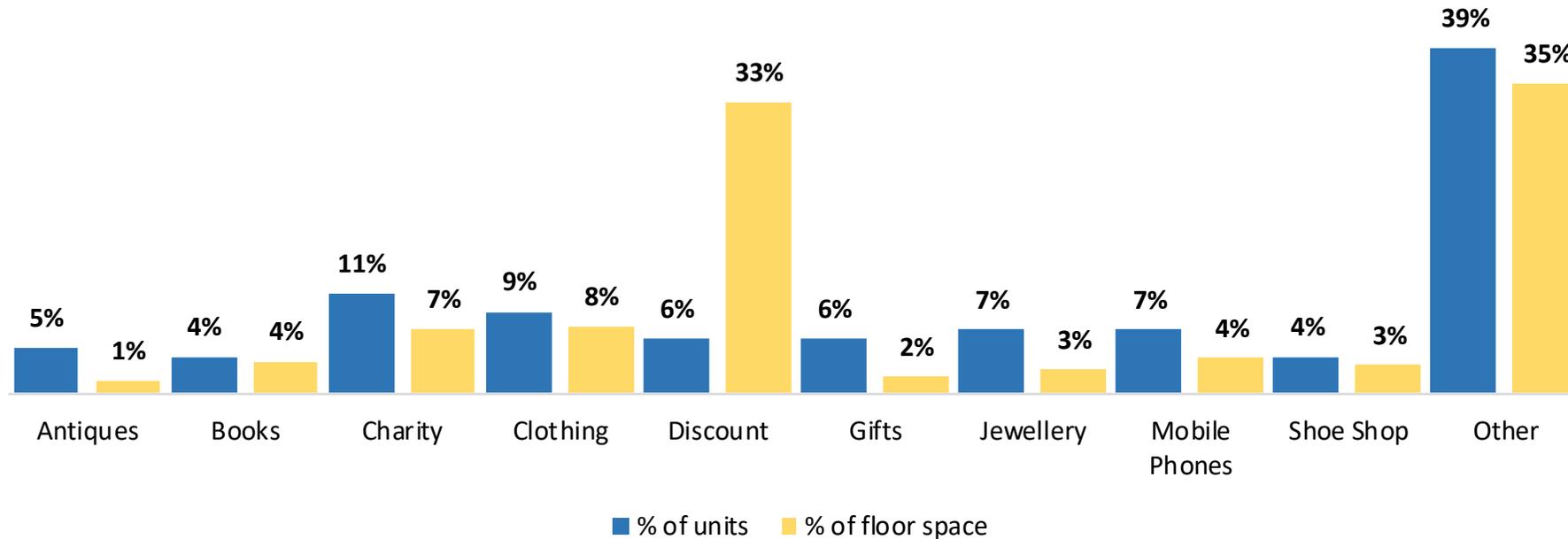
Most business churn in Oswestry town centre is attributable to vacancies—either new vacancies arising or, less commonly, premises which were previously unoccupied becoming filled. New vacancies account for 46% of all churn, while new businesses in previously unoccupied premises account for 21%.

This means that a third of churn is attributable to other change, which includes businesses changing hands, rebranding, relocating or changing purpose.

Comparison Retail

The largest proportion of commercial units and space is dedicated to the comparison retail category, accounting for 27% of units and 30% of gross floor space. This is the equivalent of 97 stores accommodating gross floor space of 16,700m². There are 8 fewer comparison goods retailers operating in 2020 than in 2019 which constitutes a 7.6% decrease. Despite this, the range of different comparison good stores is wide, and there is a balance between independents and national chains.

Chart 4: Breakdown of Comparison Retail by Type



Within the town there are 9 clothes shops and four shoe shops. The shops cater for men, women and children, and include small up-market boutiques as well as larger mass market outlets. Although most stores are independent, there is a strong presence of chains, including Majors, Dorothy Perkins, New Look, Clarks and M & Co. There have been some closures over the last year in this sub-sector, most notably Edinburgh Woollen Mill, which is now vacant. In total four clothes shops have closed since the audit took place in 2019. Despite being a larger shopping centre, there are fewer clothes shops in Oswestry than in either Ludlow or Bridgnorth.

One in ten outlets is a charity store, with 11 units trading. Most of these are national charities (Barnados, British Heart Foundation, Salvation Army, Age UK, British Red Cross, YMCA), but more local charities are also represented (Hope House, Nightingale House, Severn Hospice, the Rural Charity).

There are six discount stores in Oswestry, with these accounting for more than a third of comparison retail floor space against their 6% share of units. These are all chains. Two of the largest stores in the town (Home Bargains and B&M Bargains) operate in this sub-category. The average size of discount stores is much larger than the classification average (927m² compared with 172m²).

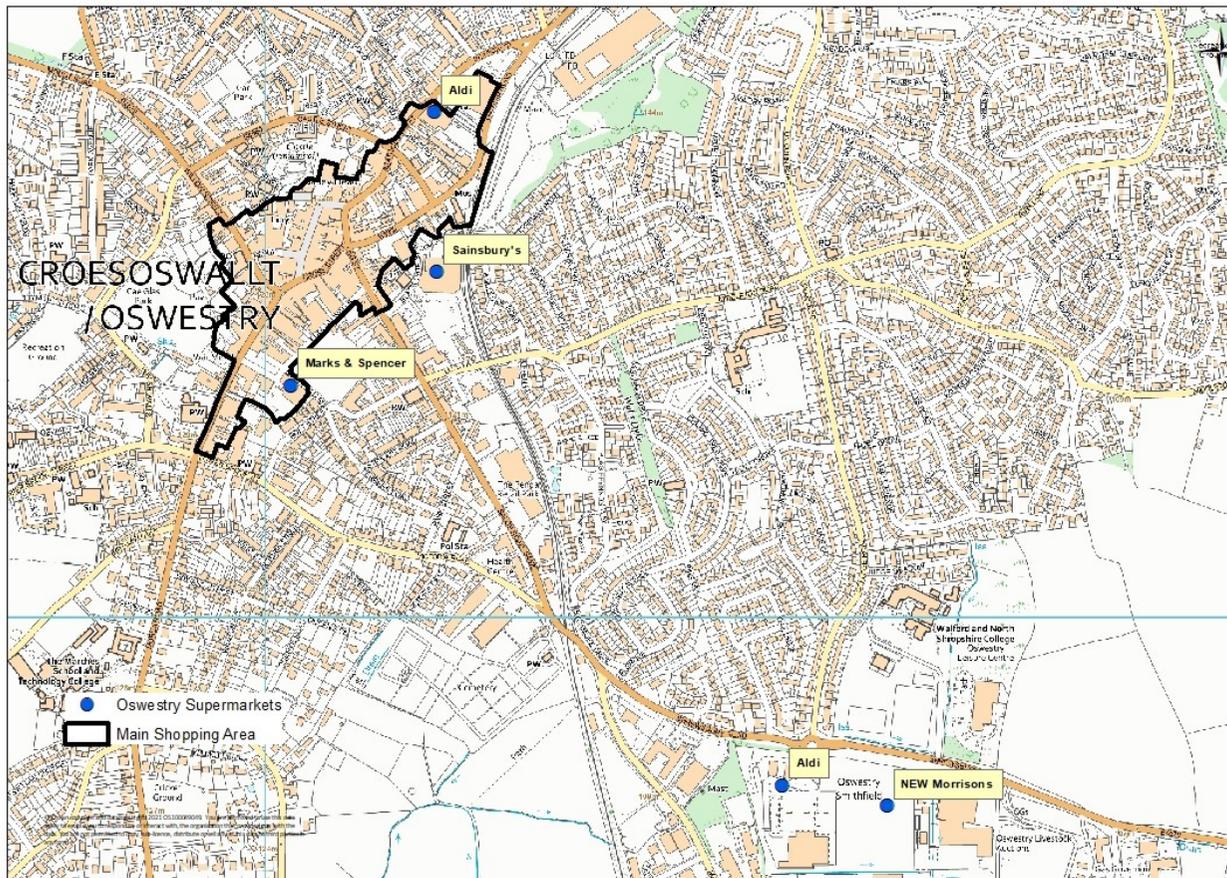
Also very well represented in Oswestry are mobile phone stores, of which there are seven (including EE, O² and the Carphone Warehouse). There are also seven jewellery stores, as well as six gift shops, five antique shops and four book shops.

There are also two florists, three furniture shops, three pharmacies, two household goods stores, two vape stores and two stationers.

Convenience Retail

There are 26 convenience stores within the main shopping area of Oswestry. This is two fewer than in 2019. They account for 12% of floor space against a share of just 7% of units, meaning that the average size of units in this classification is almost twice the size of the overall average for businesses within Oswestry town centre. The reason for this is the presence of some large supermarkets within the principal shopping area. Accounting for less than one in ten convenience stores, supermarkets take a 38% share of gross floor space.

Map 5: Location of Oswestry's Main Convenience Stores

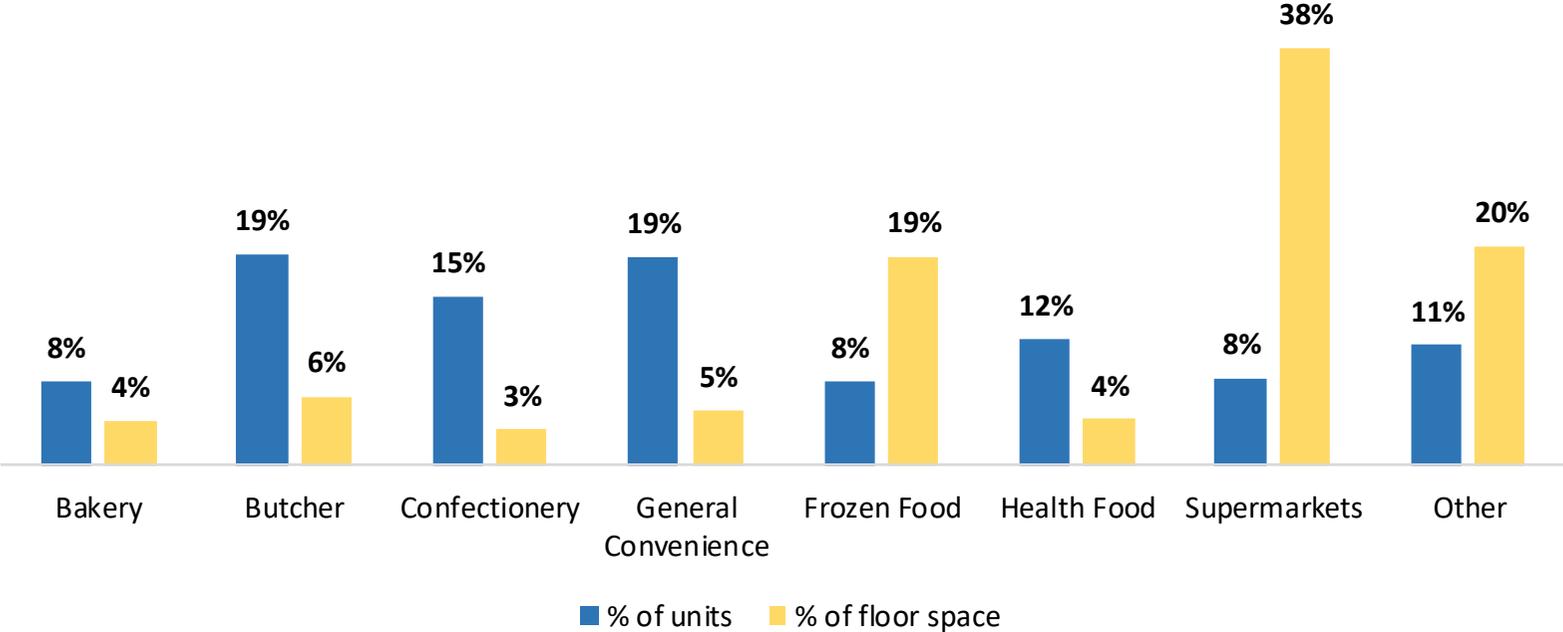


Between the two audits, the town centre Morrisons has closed, with a new store opening outside the main retail centre. This leaves Aldi and Marks and Spencer Food with a presence in the centre. Like the other two tier 2 Shropshire towns in the north of the county (Market Drayton and Whitchurch) the main supermarkets serving the town are now located outside the main shopping centres. As shown in the adjacent map, Aldi and Sainsbury's as well as Morrisons operate a store outside the centre.

The closure of Morrisons in the town has meant that the number of convenience stores has fallen and particularly the amount of floor space allocated to this category is down.

As well as the main supermarkets, there are also five other general convenience stores. The town centre is also home to five butchers, four confectioners, three health food stores, two bakeries and two frozen food outlets. There is also a delicatessen and a greengrocer. The indoor market hall has multiple permanent stalls, which have been included as individual units within their relevant category.

Chart 6: Breakdown of Convenience Stores by Type



With the exception of the supermarkets, most operators in the convenience retail category are independent, although the chains Greggs, Heron Food and Iceland are all present.

Restaurants & Takeaways

12% of units in Oswestry are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, with this category accounting for a lower proportion of gross floor space (8%). The 42 units are split between cafés (36%), restaurants (26%) and takeaways (38%). Takeaways account for a lower share of floor space (30%) while restaurants have a disproportionately high share of floor space (39%).

The number of units and floor space allocated to restaurants and takeaways is typical for a town the size of Oswestry and has remained unchanged between 2019 and 2020. There has also been very little churn, although two establishments have opened in previously vacant premises and another two have closed.

The range of cuisines on offer by Oswestry restaurants includes Thai, Chinese, Indian, Italian and modern British. In terms of takeaways, there is a range of Indian, Chinese, pizza, kebab and fish and chip outlets. Although most outlets in this category in Oswestry are independent, there is a Costa Coffee coffee shop and a Prezzo Italian restaurant.

Tourism & Leisure

Also within the hospitality sector, there are 14 public houses and bars. These take up approximately 2,700m² gross floor space, the equivalent of 5% of all floor space in the town. The town has seen one public house close over the last year. Oswestry's status as the largest of the tier 2 retail centres in Shropshire is evidenced by other tourism and leisure facilities that the town has to offer. Although there is only one hotel (the Wynnstay, which has 31 bedrooms and has four stars), there are three museums (the Oswestry Town Museum, Qube Museum and Art Gallery and the Cambrian Railway Museum). There are also other leisure facilities that are absent from the smaller towns in the same hierarchy, including a gym, a night club and an amusement arcade.

Outside the town centre, Oswestry has both a Premier Inn and a Travelodge.

Chart 7: Breakdown of Restaurant/Takeaway Units by Type

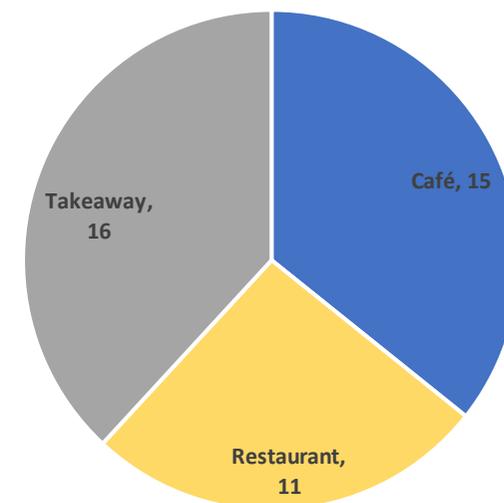


Chart 8: Oswestry Town Centre Tourism & Leisure Offer

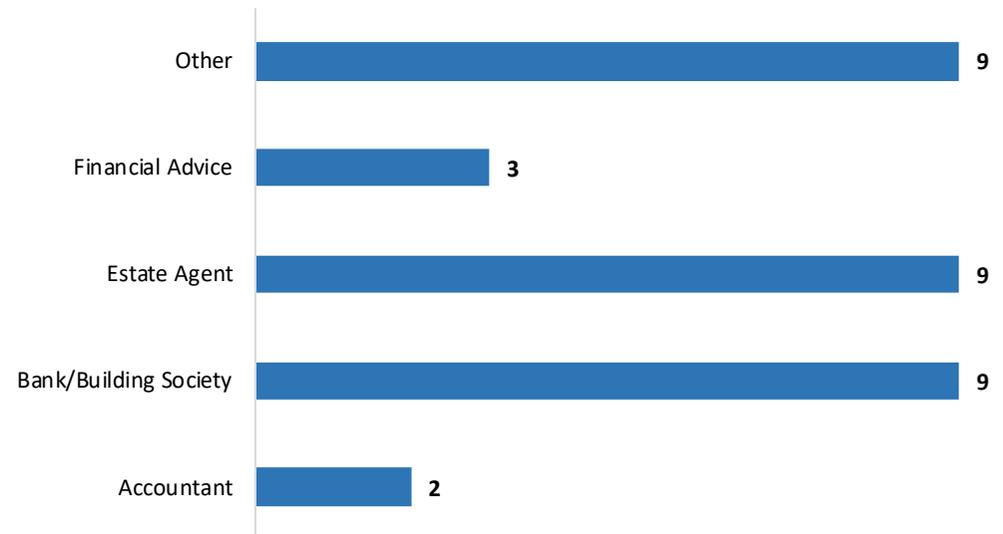
	Units	Floor Space (m ²)	Average Size (m ²)
Public House/Bar	14	2725	195
Hotel	1	1060	1060
Museum	3	1574	525
Visitor Attraction	1	564	564
Amusement Arcade	1	389	389
Night Club	1	198	198
Gym	1	100	100
Total	23	6610	287

Finance & Professional Services

There are 32 commercial operators in the finance and business services arena in Oswestry town centre, accounting for around 4,000m² of gross floor space. Included within this classification are six banks (Barclays, Nat West, Halifax, HSBC, Santander and Lloyds TSB) plus three building society (West Brom, Nationwide and Principality). There are two accountants and nine estate agents.

Also included within this classification are a solicitor, an insurance broker, a mortgage broker, an employment agency and a job centre.

Chart 9: Number of Finance & Professional Service Businesses by Type



Retail Services

There are 66 retail service businesses operating in Oswestry town centre, with these accounting for just over 5,800m² of gross floor space.

Although the range of services provided is wide, a very high number of operators are in the barber and hair/beauty salon classification, with these together representing 62% of units and 44% of floor space. There are 18 hair dressers, 10 barbers and 13 beauty salons (including four nail bars). Although most are independent, there is a Toni & Guy hair salon on Cross Street.

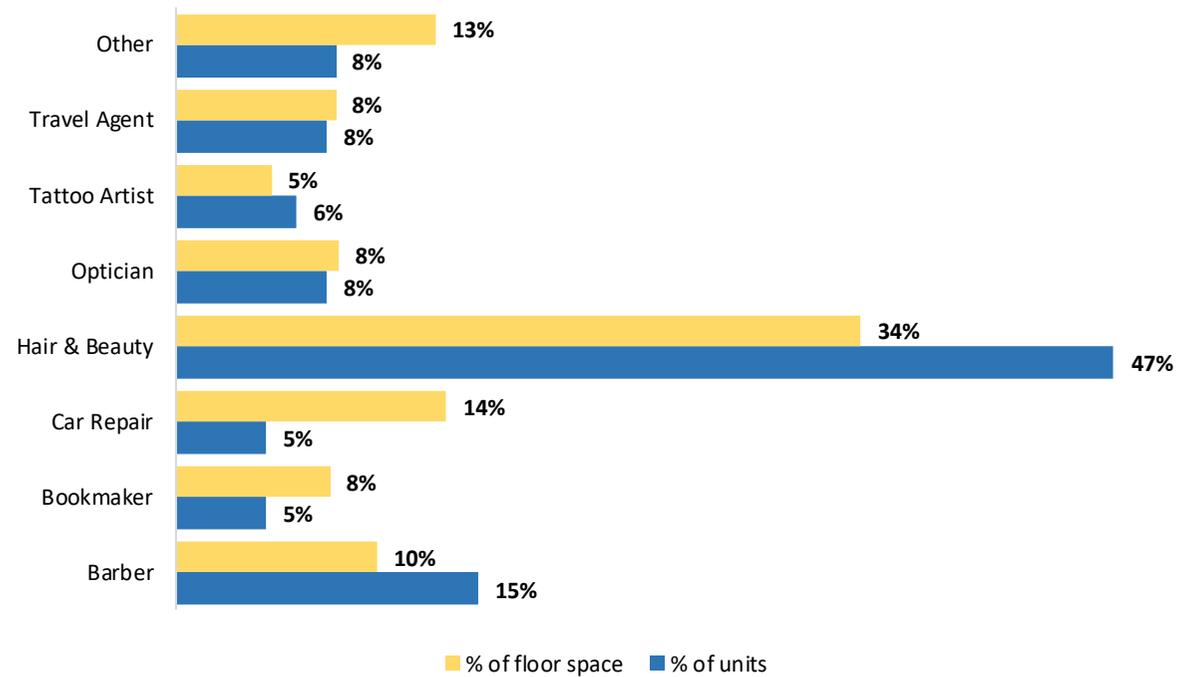
In addition, there are five opticians (including the chains Vision Express and Specsavers), five travel agents (including a branch of Hays), four bookmakers (William Hill, Coral, Bet Fred and Corbett) four tattoo artists and three car repair outlets.

Other operators include a funeral director, a post office and a taxi rank.

Health

There are nine operators in the health sector in Oswestry town centre, with a combined floor space allocation of almost 1,200m². There are three counselling/mental health service providers, two massage parlours (one Chinese), a dentist, a pain clinic, a chiropodist and an alternative therapy provider.

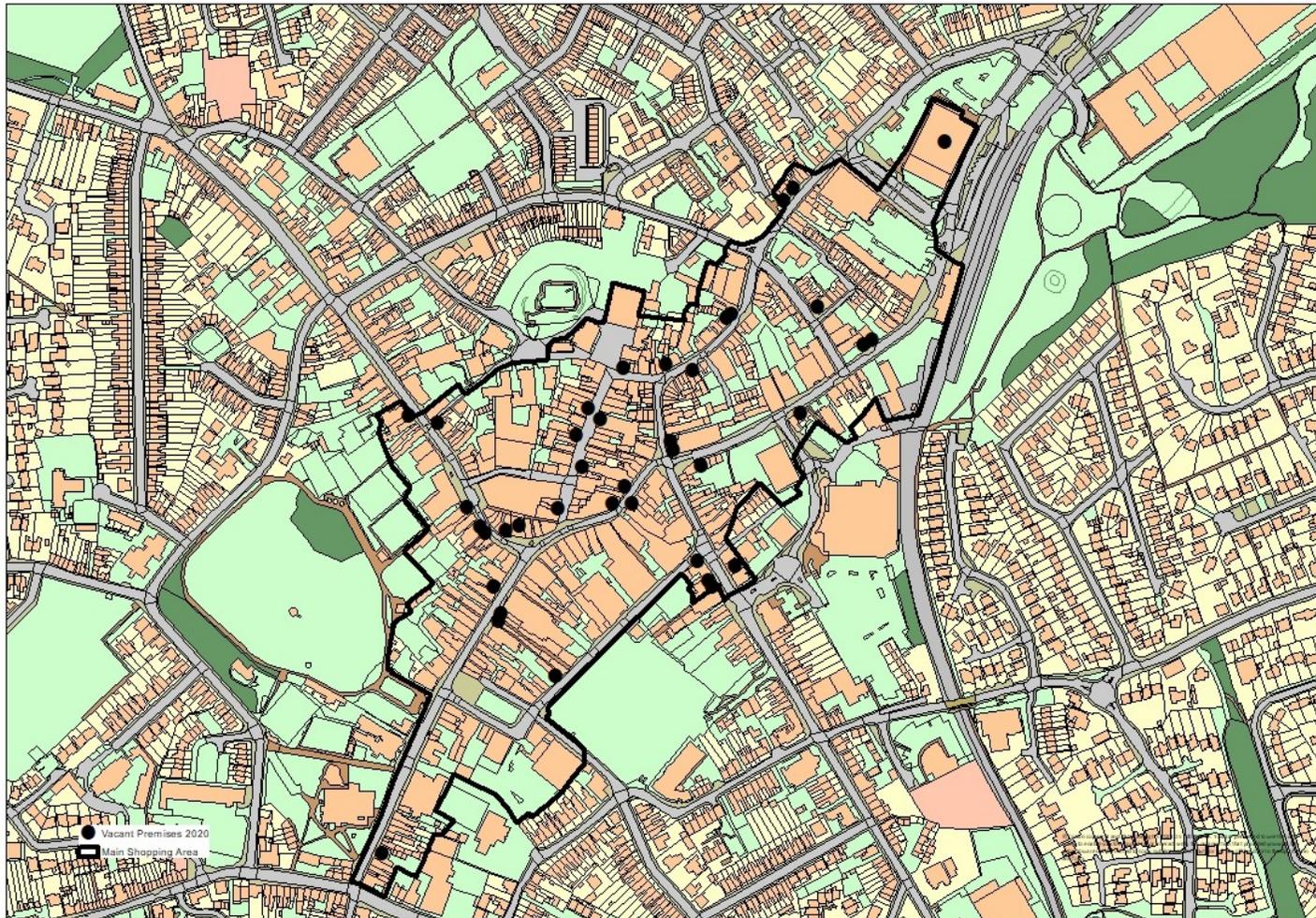
Chart 10: Breakdown of Retail Services by Type



Vacant Units

11% of Oswestry town centre outlets are vacant (13% of gross floor space). This is higher than in Ludlow or Bridgnorth, lower than in Whitchurch and about the same as Market Drayton. It is also slightly lower than the vacancy rate nationally which stood at 12.5% in the second half of 2020 according to Statistica (data relating to high streets only). The size of vacant units ranges from 20m² to over 2,000m².

Map 6: Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2020



The number of vacant units in Oswestry has risen by 12 between 2019 and 2020 to 40. This represents a rise of 43%. 22 premises have become vacant over the period, while 18 of the premises which were vacant in 2019 were still unoccupied at the time of the 2020 audit. 10 premises which were vacant in 2019 have subsequently been filled—there is a concentration of these along Bailey Street.

Map 7: Change in Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2019 –2020

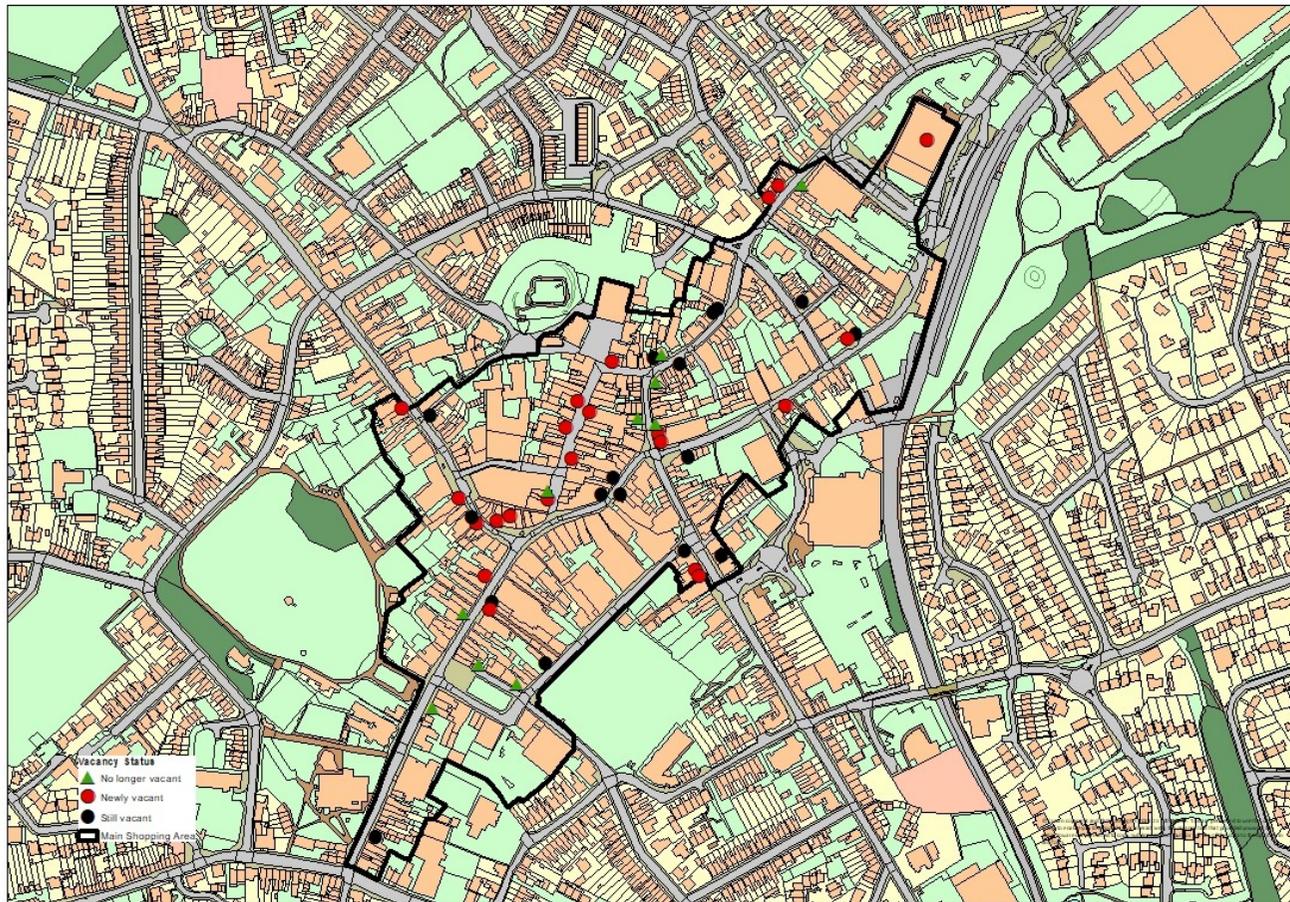


Chart 11: Vacancy Rates by Street, 2020

Street	Vacancy Rate	% of all Oswestry Vacancies
Bailey Head	0.0%	0.0%
Bailey Street	12.2%	12.5%
Beatrice Street	14.6%	15.0%
Church Street	6.8%	10.0%
Cross Street/The Cross	14.7%	12.5%
English Walls	4.3%	2.5%
Leg Street	5.3%	5.0%
Oswald Road	13.9%	12.5%
Salop Street	66.7%	10.0%
Willow Street	16.1%	12.5%
Other	9.7%	7.5%

The table opposite shows the location of Oswestry vacant premises by street. The highest proportion of vacant commercial premises in Oswestry are located in Beatrice Street (15%), with Bailey Street, Church Street, The Cross/Cross Street, Oswald Street, Salop Street and Willow Street all accounting for at least 10% of vacancies in the town.

In terms of vacancy rates, the rate in Salop Street (the proportion which falls within the designated main shopping area) is particularly high, with two-thirds of units vacant. The rate is also higher than the Oswestry average in Beatrice Street, Cross Street/The Cross, Oswald Road, Willow Street and Bailey Street.

Premises that were empty when the audit took place in 2019 and which have subsequently been filled are concentrated on Leg Street, Church Street and English Walls.

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, 316 residential premises are located in the audit area, of which the majority are flats (244 or 77%) which are largely located above retail or other commercial outlets. There are 61 terraced houses in the area, which is the equivalent of a fifth of all housing stock in the town centre. There is a cluster of terraced housing towards the north end of Beatrice Street and along Orchard Street and Albert Place. At the other end of the town centre, there are also some terraced properties at the southern end of Church Street. There are 10 semi-detached homes in the town centre, again mainly on Beatrice Street. There is just one detached premise in the area. There are four more residential flats in the town than there were in 2019.

Map 8: Location of Residential Premises in Oswestry Town Centre

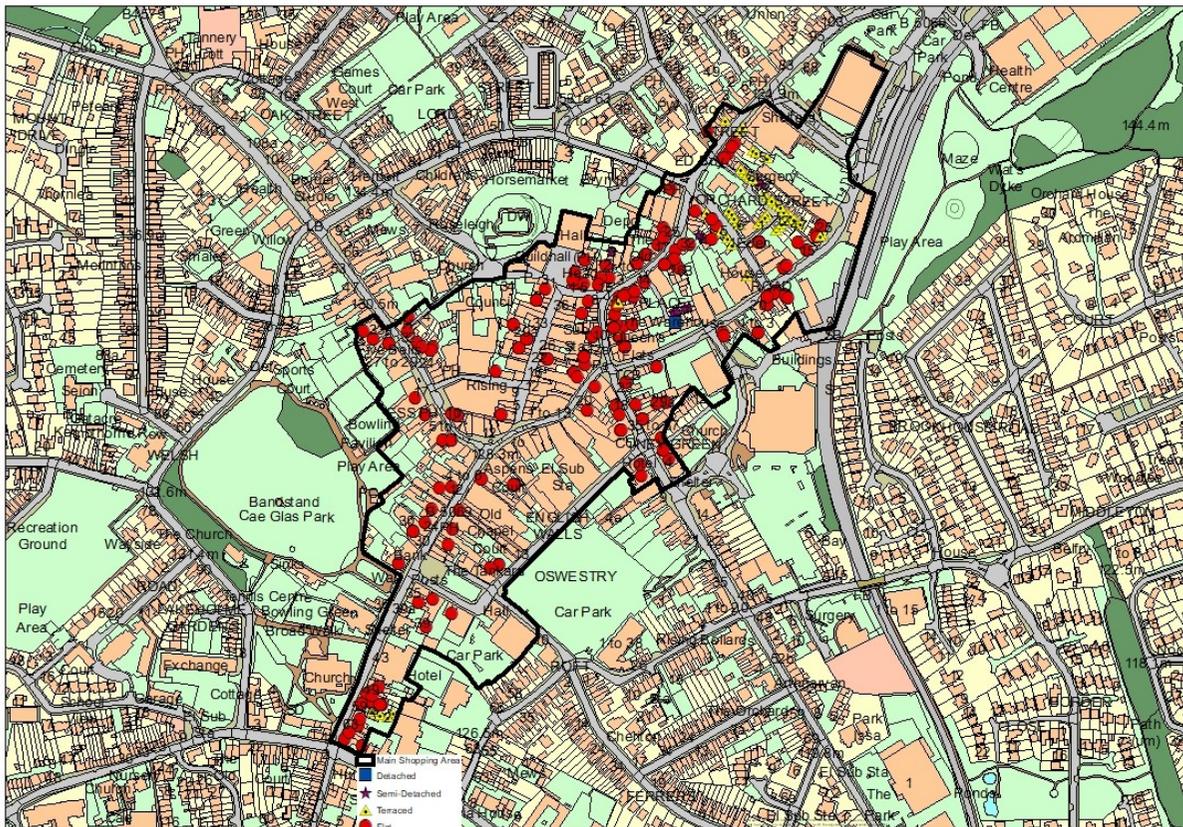


Chart 12: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type

