

Cleobury Mortimer: Town Centre Audit Analysis, 2023



Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Cleobury Mortimer'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. Cleobury Mortimer centre was first audited in July 2019 and then again in September 2020, 2021 and 2022. The objective of these audits is to provide a snapshot of the vitality of the 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

- 33 commercial units, occupying 3,400m² gross floor space
- Second smallest centre audited, behind Highley, accounting for just 1.3% of all Shropshire High Street traders
- Slightly lower than average number of stores per head of population at a rate of nine units per 1,000 population (average of 13 for Shropshire)
- Average store size 104m² which is much smaller than the average across Shropshire (147m²).
- 77 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of 0.5:1 commercial versus residential properties
- Cleobury Mortimer experienced considerable business churn in 2022 and 2023 (19% and 15%); this contrasts with 2021 when the churn rate was just 3%.
- 15% of all commercial premises were vacant in 2023—this is the second highest in Shropshire behind Wem
- There were four more vacant premises in the town in 2023 than there were in 2019
- Six premises in the town have been converted from a commercial entity into residential accommodation since 2019
- Most commercial units are attributable to retail service providers, comparison retailers or restaurants and takeaways

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
- 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.

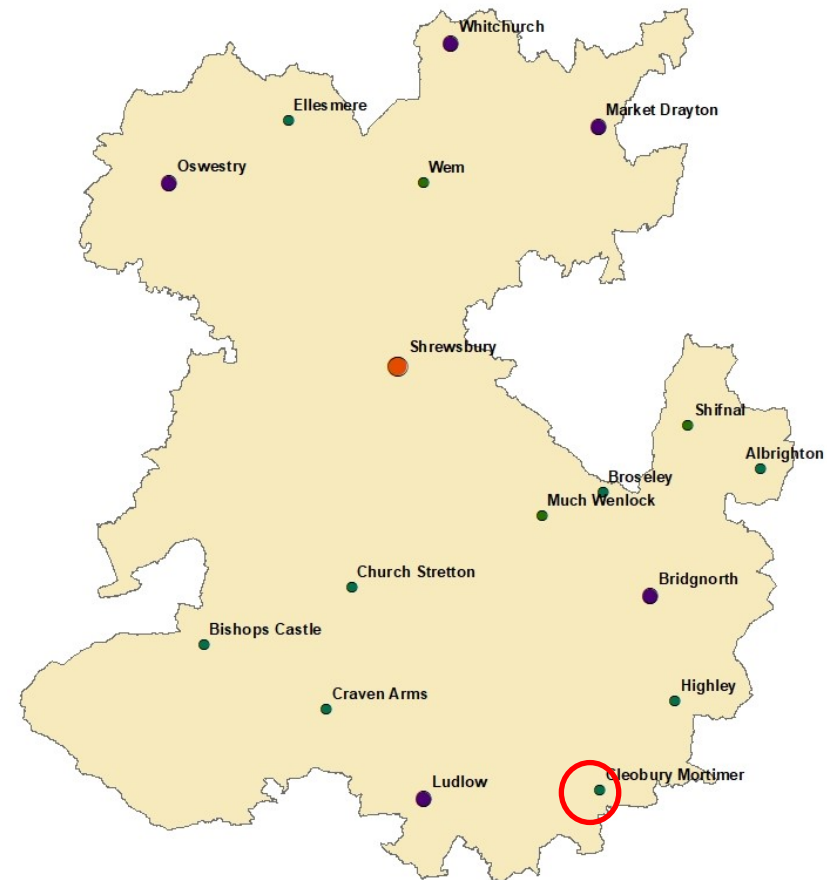
However, not all centres have comparable functions. Larger centres tend to attract workers and shoppers from much further afield than smaller centres, and consequently offer a much greater volume and variety of retail trade and consumer and business services.

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

The retail centre of Cleobury Mortimer is amongst the smallest in Shropshire, with just 33 commercial enterprises in operation.

Map 1: Shropshire's Main Retail Centres



About Cleobury Mortimer

Cleobury Mortimer is a small market town located in the south east of Shropshire near the border with Worcestershire. It is sited midway between the Clee Hills and the Wyre Forest. In the 16th Century, the town played a role in the Industrial Revolution, with the creation of furnaces and forges leading to the production of high quality wrought iron. The decline of the industry in the 19th Century has meant that Cleobury Mortimer has returned to its roots as a market town supporting its rural hinterland. Today Cleobury Mortimer has a population of 3,269 and 1,402 households (*2021 Census*). Its population has increased by 7.7% since 2011. It is currently the 15th largest settlement in Shropshire.

Cleobury Mortimer is located on the A4117 which provides access east to the A456 and then towards Bewdley and Kidderminster (11 miles). The A4117 west provides access to Ludlow (11 miles). The nearest mainline railway stations to Cleobury Mortimer are Ludlow (11 miles) and Kidderminster (13 miles).

The total population within a 10 mile radius is approximately 107,000.

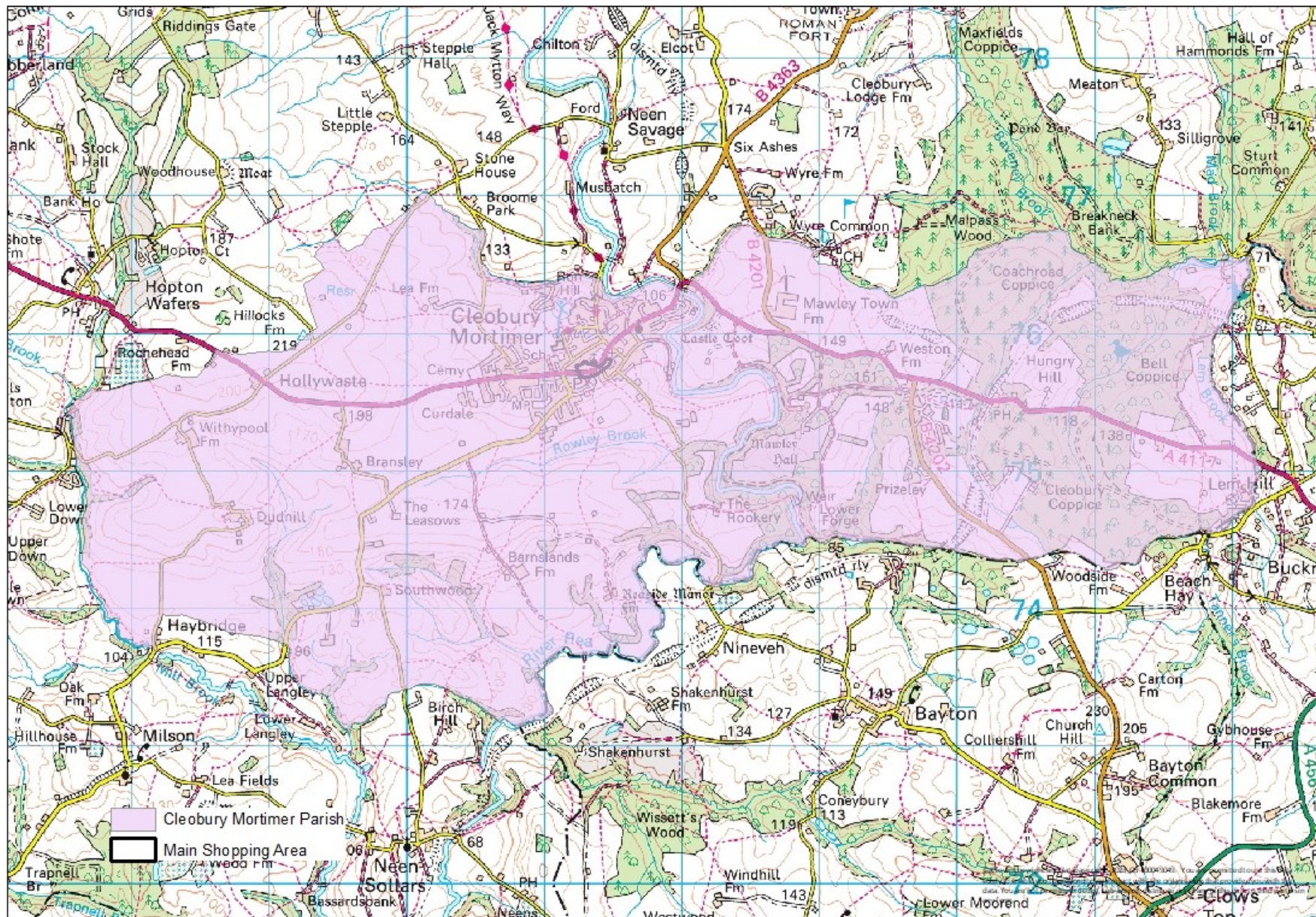
Cleobury Mortimer provides approximately 1,400 jobs across the town council area (*ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2022*). Key sectors include:

- Professional, Scientific & Technical (45.0% of jobs)
- Manufacturing (11.8% of jobs)
- Education (8.7% of jobs)
- Retail (6.9% of jobs)

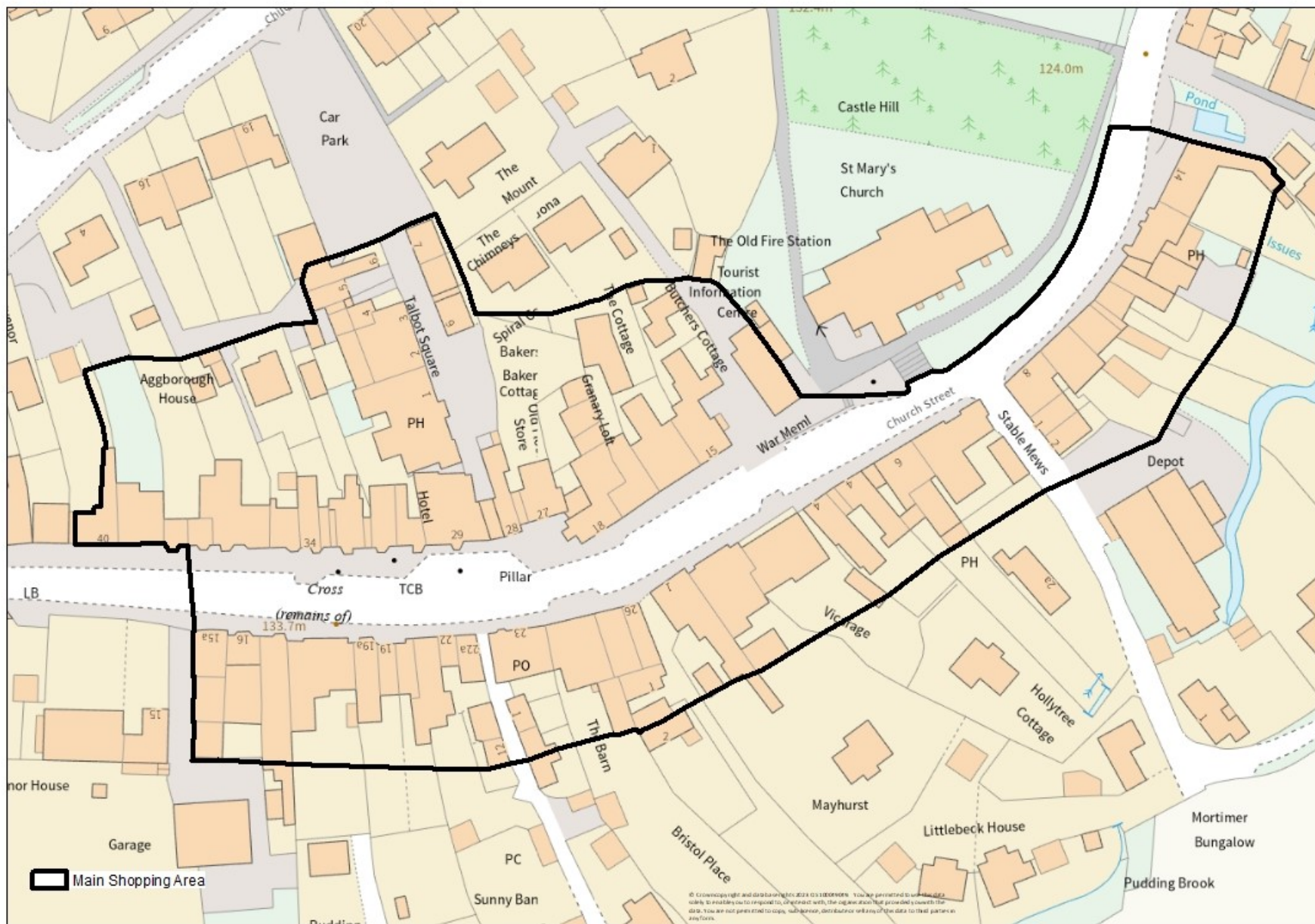
Overall, Cleobury Mortimer town council area (depicted on Map 3) covers an area of 2,005 hectares. The main shopping area (depicted on Map 4) is much smaller than this, at around 2 hectares.

The town comprises predominantly independent retail and there is a reasonable amount of residential housing stock in the main shopping area of the town. The town is served by post office facilities as well as some convenience and comparison retail. Monthly farmers' markets are held around St Mary's Church.

Map 3: Cleobury Mortimer Town Council Area



Map 4: Main Retail Shopping Area



Alternative Shopping Destinations

Cleobury Mortimer primarily services its own local population, the postcode district DY14. However, residents in this postcode are frequent visitors to other nearby shopping centres which offer a greater choice of comparison retail and more leisure and hospitality opportunities. The charts below show the proportion of the DY14 postcode district which visited Kidderminster, Bewdley, Ludlow and Tenbury Wells in each month between April 2020 and February 2022. It is clear that a very high proportion use nearby Bewdley, which is within a 10 mile radius of Cleobury Mortimer, and Kidderminster, which is a larger retail centre, but which is slightly further afield. DY14 represents part of the core catchment area for both of these towns.

44.7% of the DY14 population had visited Bewdley at least once in February 2022, while 45.9% had visited Kidderminster. In recent months the rate of postcode conversion for Kidderminster has been relatively stable at between 40% and 50%. Visitor conversion to Bewdley is subject to a far higher level of fluctuation. Both Kidderminster and Bewdley are in Worcestershire, and as such a significant proportion of Cleobury Mortimer residents' retail expenditure is leaked out of Shropshire.

Chart 1: Bewdley

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)



Chart 2: Kidderminster

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)



DY14 residents are more likely to travel eastwards towards Bewdley and Kidderminster than they are westward to Tenbury Wells or Ludlow. The former is within a 10 mile radius of Cleobury Mortimer, but has attracted more than 20% of Cleobury residents on just two occasions since April 2020. The conversion rates stood at 15.3% in February 2022. In the same month 11.8% of DY14 residents visited Ludlow at least once.

Chart 3: Ludlow

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)

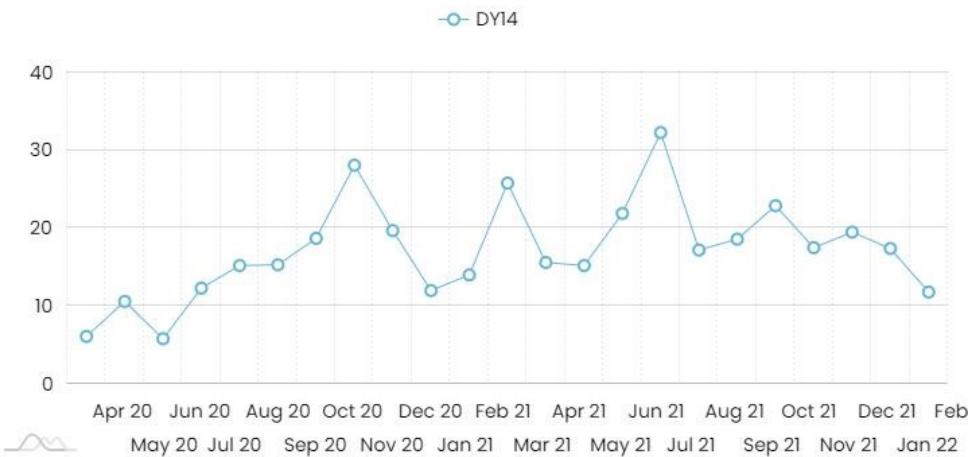


Chart 4: Tenbury Wells

Postcode Conversion Trend (%)



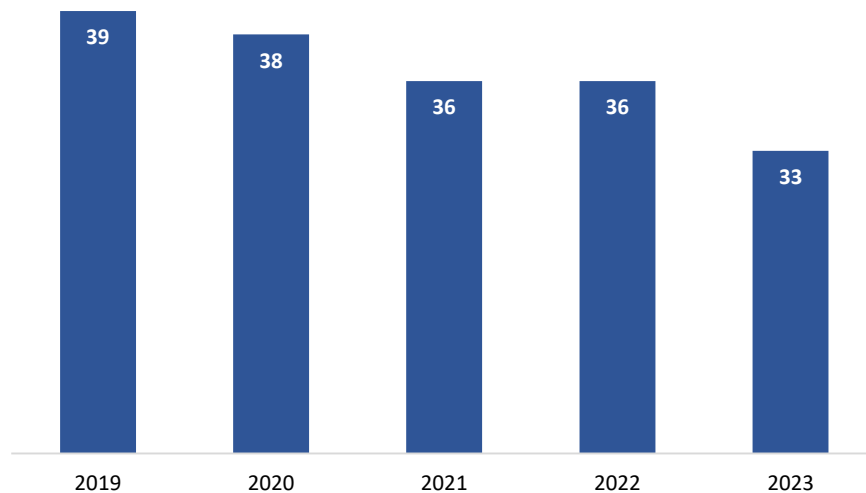
Charts have been downloaded from the Town and Place AI tool which monitors visitor numbers and footfall across a range of towns and city centres across the UK.

Key Audit Results

A total of 33 commercial premises are located within the Cleobury Mortimer survey area. These are primarily in High Street (21 businesses), with smaller numbers in Church Street (10 businesses) and Talbot Square (2 businesses). Gross floor space allocated to these businesses is around 3,400m² (49% on High Street). The average store size is 104m² with units ranging in size from 25m² to 281m².

The number of commercial premises in the town has declined over the last four years from 39 units in 2019. This is due to six premises (three in 2023, two in 2021 and one in 2020) being repurposed as residential properties.

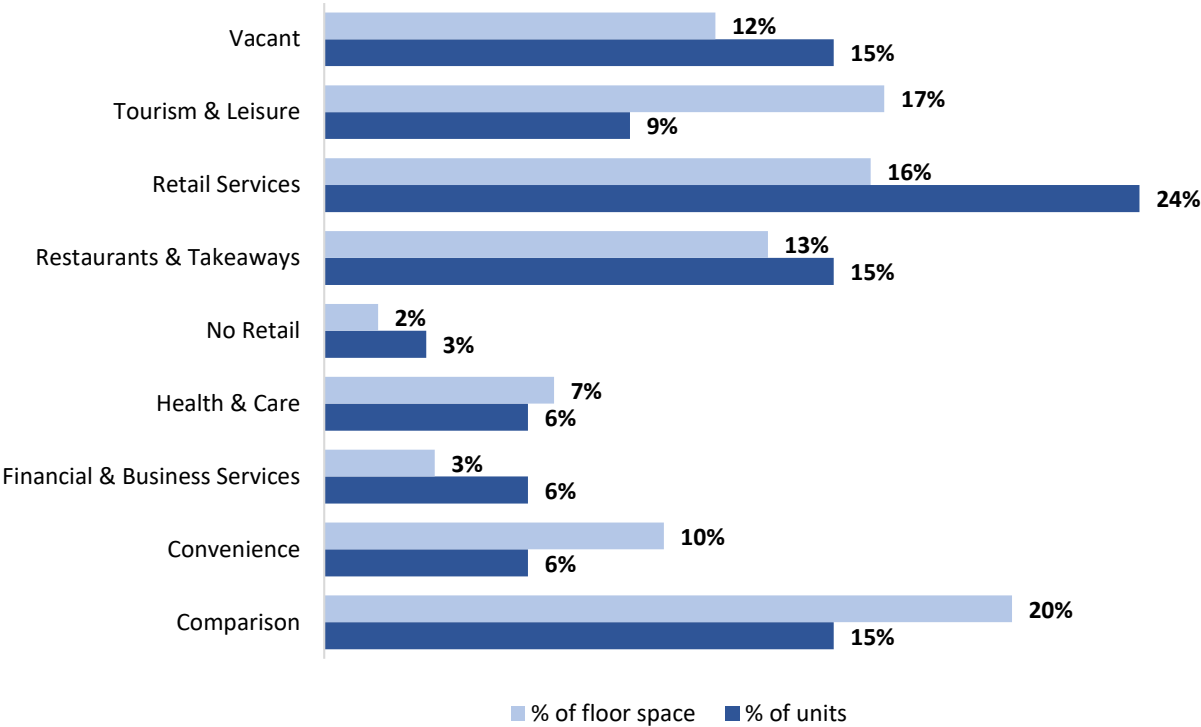
Chart 5: Number of Cleobury Mortimer Commercial Premises, 2019-2023



The highest proportion of commercial units are allocated to retail services. These accounted for 24% of units (16% of floor space) in 2023. Both comparison retail and restaurants and takeaways represented 15% of units, the former holding 20% of floor space and the latter 13%. Tourism & leisure operators account for 17% of floor space, and for 9% of all units. Convenience retail takes a share of 6% of units and 10% of floor space. There are also a small number of financial and business service providers and other operators.

There are five vacant premises in Cleobury Mortimer (15% of units), which is the equivalent of 12% of floor space.

Chart 6: Breakdown of Cleobury Mortimer Commercial Premises by Classification, 2023



Change since 2022

There has been only marginal change in the mix of businesses operating in Cleobury Mortimer between 2019 and September 2023, particularly over the last three years. In 2023, the number of vacancies fell by one unit and there was a reduction of two outlets in comparison retail and another in finance and business services. Three units which were vacant in 2022 have subsequently been repurposed as residential premises.

In 2023, there was one more retail services business trading than there was in 2022. This is the only sector where the offer was boosted between 2022 and 2023.

Chart 7: Change in Number of Units by Category, 2022/2023

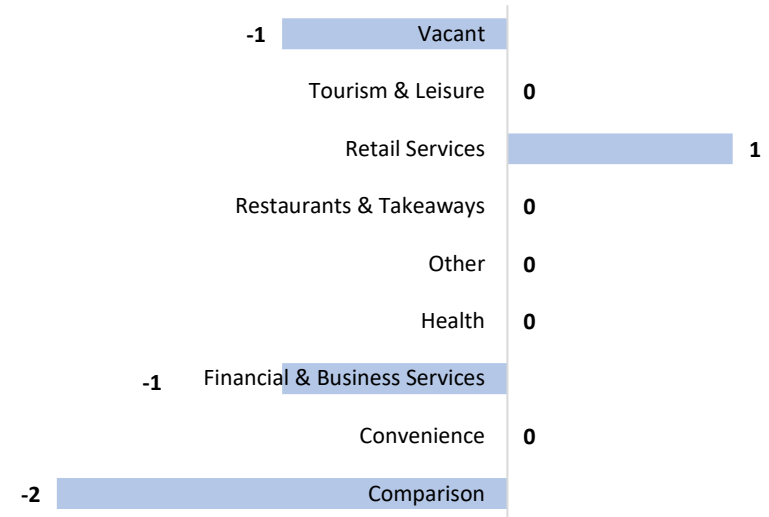
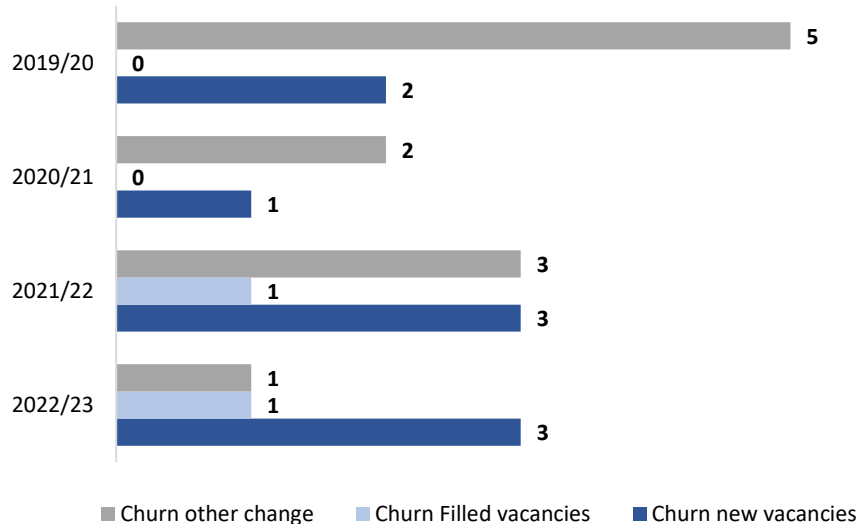


Chart 8: Breakdown of Business Churn 2019-2023



Overall, business turnover in Cleobury Mortimer has been relatively high in recent years despite limited change in the types of businesses trading. Churn stood at 15% in 2023, down from 19% in 2022. 2023 churn does not include the reclassification of three outlets from commercial to residential.

In 2023, new vacancies arising accounted for 60% of all churn, while previously vacant premises becoming filled and all other change accounted for 20% each (the equivalent of just one unit in each case).

The number of new vacancies also stood at three in 2022.

Comparison Retail

15% of commercial units are dedicated to the comparison retail category, accounting for 20% of gross floor space. This equates with five stores with just over 700m² of floor space. The level of space allocated to comparison goods is relatively low compared with other towns of a similar size. The offer is also decreasing, with two stores being lost in 2023.

Within the town there is a charity shop, a gift shop, a haberdashery, an ironmongers and a vape store. Since 2022 a jewellers and a shed/fencing purveyor closed and the town's florist was replaced by the vape store.

Convenience Retail

There are two convenience stores within the main shopping area of Cleobury Mortimer, down from three in 2021. These account for 6% of all units and for 10% of gross floor space. The stores are both general convenience stores (Londis and Select and Save, the latter incorporating post office services). The town's bakery closed between the 2021 and 2022 audits.

Restaurants & Takeaways

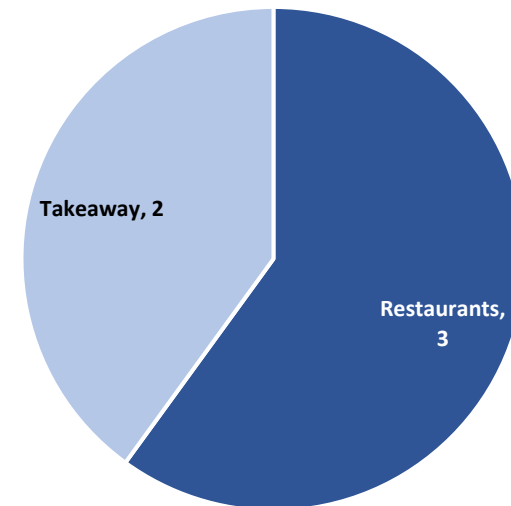
15% of units in Cleobury Mortimer are attributable to restaurants and takeaways, with this category accounting for a similar proportion of gross floor space (13%). The five units are split between restaurants (60%) and takeaways (40%). There is no café in the main zone, although there is one just outside further up the High Street.

A limited range of cuisines are represented, including fish and chips, and Indian.

There was no change in the number or type of trader in this sector in 2023.

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

Chart 9: Breakdown of Units in the Restaurant/Takeaway Sector, 2023



Tourism & Leisure

Also within the hospitality sector, there are two public houses and an hotel. These take up approximately 600m² gross floor space.

Finance & Business Services

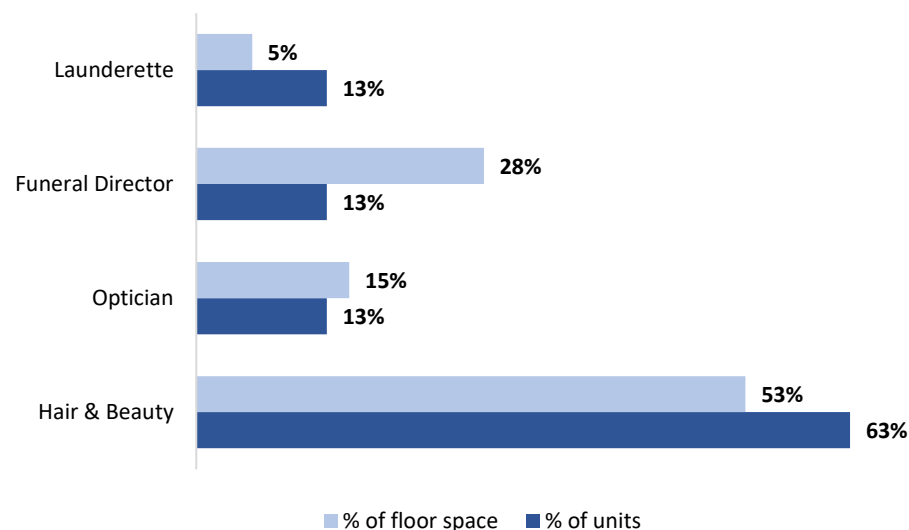
There are two commercial operators in the finance, professional and business services sector in Cleobury Mortimer town centre, accounting for just over 100m² of gross floor space. Included within this classification is an estate agent and a solicitor. The town's only bank—a branch of Lloyds—closed between the 2022 and 2023 audits and is now vacant.

Retail Services

There are eight retail service businesses operating in Cleobury Mortimer town centre, with these accounting for approaching 600m² of gross floor space. This represents an increase of one operator in comparison with 2022. There are a high number of operators are in the barber and hair salon classification, with these together representing 63% of units and 53% of floor space. There are two barbers and two hair salons, plus a tanning salon, which was a new trader, having taken over a previously vacant premise.

In addition, a launderette, a funeral director and an optician are trading. The funeral director opened in 2022 in the premises previously occupied by the bakery.

Chart 10: Breakdown of Retail Services by Type, 2023



Health

There are two providers of health services within the main shopping area of Cleobury Mortimer—a dental practice and a health and well-being centre.

Vacant Units

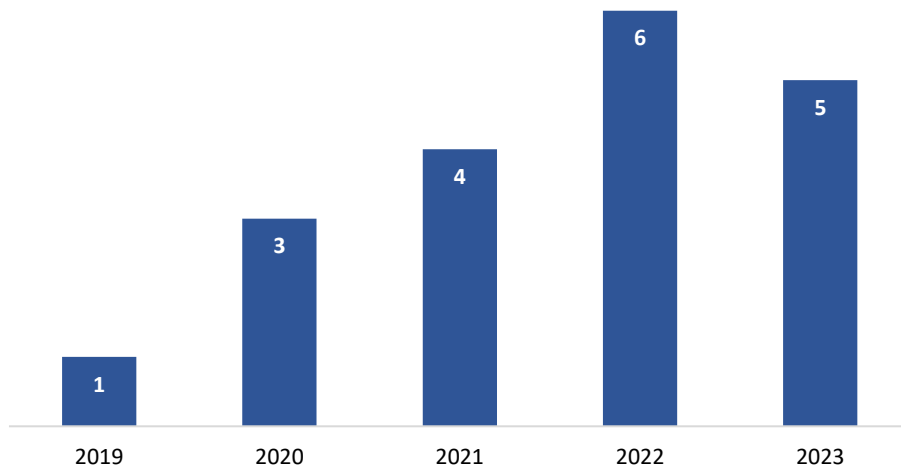
There are five vacant commercial premises in Cleobury Mortimer, which is the equivalent of 15% of units in the town and around 12% of floor space. The vacancy rate is high compared with comparable market towns in Shropshire and is also above the national vacancy rate, which stood at 13.9% in the second quarter of 2023 according to BRC (data relating to high streets only).

Four of the vacancies are on the High Street, and one in Church Street, as shown on the map following.

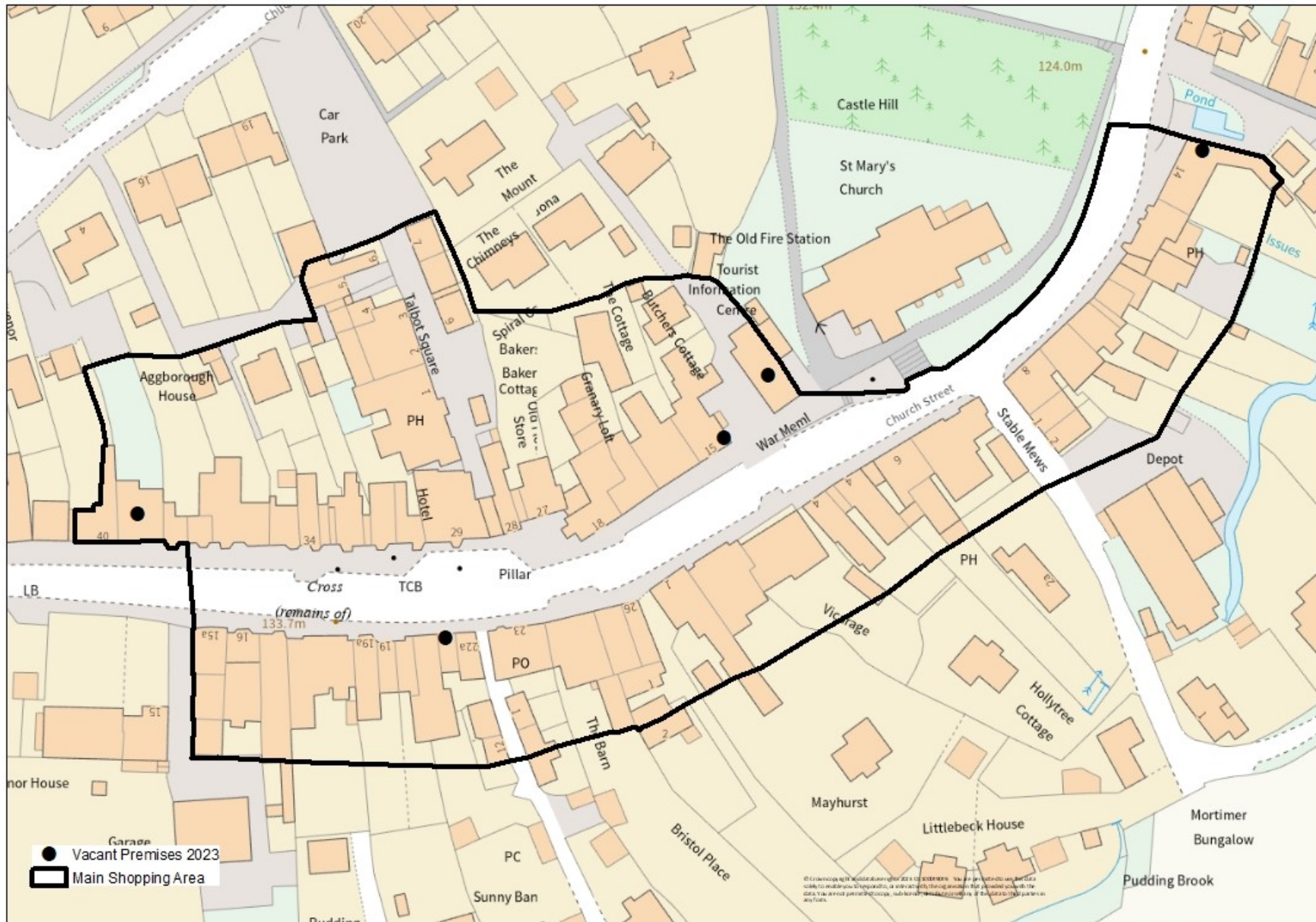
The number of vacancies in Cleobury Mortimer has risen from just one in 2019. Three of the six vacant units vacant in the town in 2022 have been repurposed as residential.

Of the five vacant units in 2023, three became vacant during the year (60%). Of the other two vacancies, one has been empty since at least 2019.

Chart 11: Number of Vacant Premises, 2019-2023

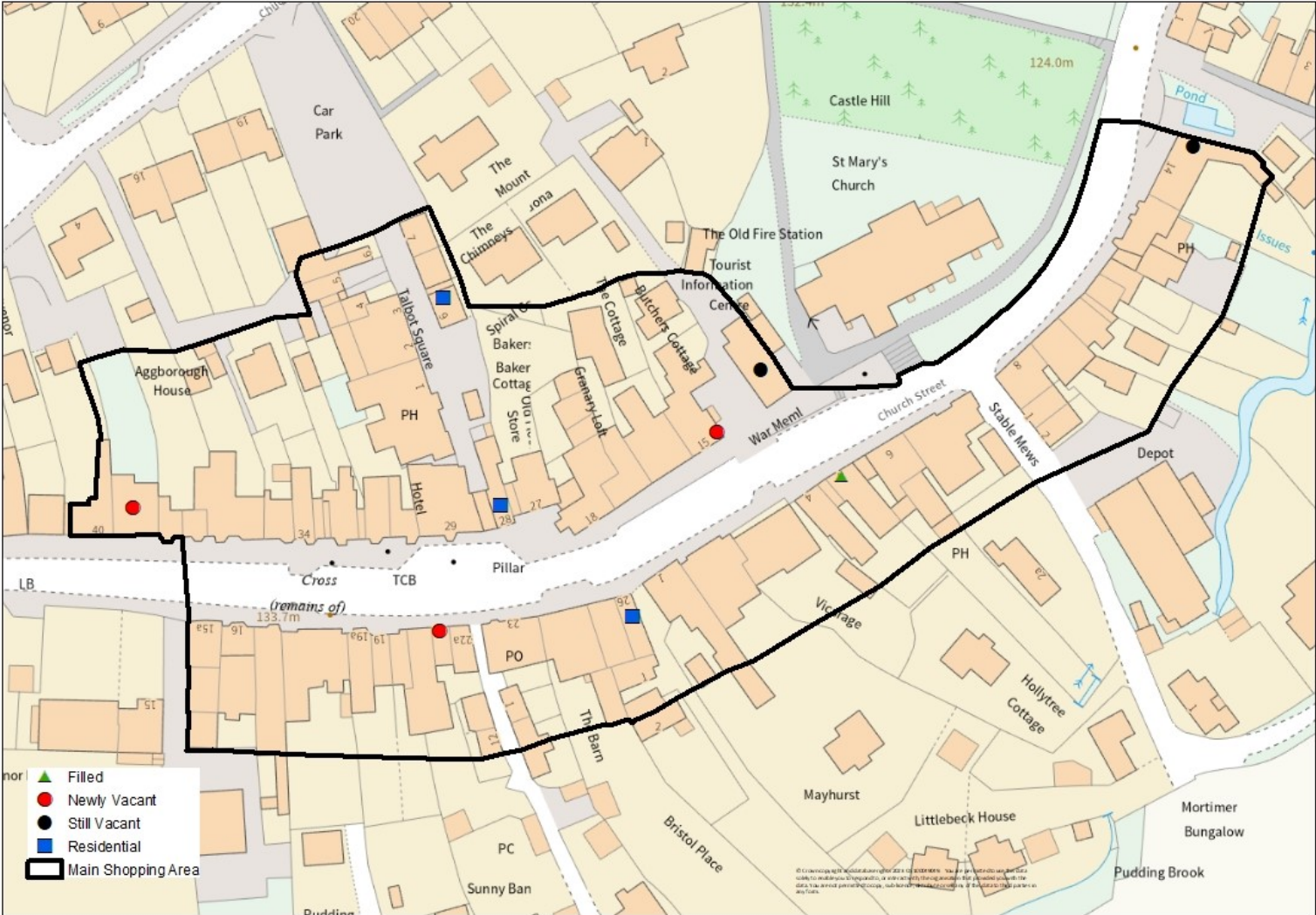


Map 5: Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2023



The number of vacant properties in Cleobury Mortimer has fallen by one to five in 2023, having increased from just one in 2019. There were three new vacant premises in 2023, while two had also been empty in 2022. One of the 2022 unoccupied premises had been filled by 2023. A further three units that were vacant in 2022 are now classed as residential.

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



Residential Premises

The main shopping streets of Cleobury Mortimer comprise a mix of residential and commercial premises. In total, 77 residential premises are located in the audit area, of which the largest share are flats (39 or 51%) which are largely located above retail or other commercial outlets. This stock is primarily along the High Street and Church Street. There are also 25 terraced houses, also principally along the High Street. There are five detached and eight semi-detached properties in the audit area. There are seven additional residential premises compared with 2019— five flats and three terraced houses although there is one detached premise fewer.

Map 7: Location of Residential Premises in Cleobury Mortimer Town Centre

Chart 12: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type

