Market Drayton: Town Centre Audit Analysis, 2020

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Introduction

An audit of businesses operating in Market Drayton’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 Market Drayton centre first audited in May 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

- 125 commercial units, occupying 17,100m² gross floor space
- 5th largest centre in Shropshire behind Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Bridgnorth and Ludlow, accounting for 4.9% of all Shropshire High Street traders
- Low number of stores per head of population at a rate of 10 unit per 1,000 population
- Average store size 137m² which is very slightly larger than the average across Shropshire (132m²)
- 132 residential premises in the main shopping area, giving a ratio of 0.9:1 commercial versus residential properties
- Market Drayton had a 21% business churn rate between audits, which is the highest in the county (alongside Wem and Shifnal)
- 10% of all commercial premises were vacant in 2020, which is marginally lower than the Shropshire average (12%)
- There is one more vacant premise now than in 2019, but half of those vacant in 2019 have subsequently been filled
- The highest proportion of commercial units is attributable to retail services (25% of units)
- Restaurants/takeaways are also slightly over represented (14%)
- In contrast, there are comparatively few businesses operating in comparison retail which at 22% is lower than in Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Ludlow, Bridgnorth or Whitchurch
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 hairdressers 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.
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 is a comparable size to Whitchurch, but somewhat smaller than other three tier two Shropshire towns.
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 12,300 (2019 Mid-year estimates) and 5,144 households (2011 Census). The town’s population has grown by 2.1% since 2015. It is the third largest market town in the county, with its population now just slightly exceeding the population of Bridgnorth. The population is projected to rise to 13,900 by 2026.

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, providing approximately 4,800 jobs across the town council area (ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2019). Key sectors include:

- Wholesale (16.5% of jobs)
- Manufacturing (15.5% of jobs)
- Retail (10.3% of jobs)
- Transport & Storage (10.3% of jobs)
- Professional, Technical & Scientific (9.8% 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.

More information about Market Drayton can be found here: https://shropshire.gov.uk/media/9688/market-drayton.pdf
Map 4: Main Retail Shopping Area
Key Results

A total of 125 businesses operate within the Market Drayton survey area. These are primarily in Cheshire Street (52 businesses), High Street (27 businesses), Shropshire Street (20 businesses), and Queen Street (24 businesses 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 17,100m² (40% in Cheshire Street, 20% in High Street, 16% Queen Street). The average store size is 137m² with units ranging in size from 20m² to 1,230m². Compared with the other 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: Breakdown of Market Drayton Commercial Premises by Classification
There are 28 comparison retailers in Market Drayton town centre, which cover a combined gross floor space of just over 6,000m². This is the equivalent of 22.4% of units and 35.4% 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 31 stores operating, which is a quarter of the total. These units tend to be smaller than average, and hence account for just 14% of gross floor space. Of the comparator towns, Market Drayton supports the highest proportion of retail service units.

There are 18 restaurants and takeaways in Market Drayton town centre, which is the equivalent of 14.4% of units and 12.0% of floor space. These proportions are broadly similar in Oswestry, Bridgnorth, Ludlow and Whitchurch.

12.8% of units and 10.1% of floor space is attributable to financial institutions and professional services providers. This is higher than in any of the other market towns of the same hierarchy.

A small proportion of outlets in Market Drayton are attributable to the convenience retail, education & community facility, health and tourism & leisure categories.

10.4% of units across the town centre are vacant, which is the equivalent of 9.3% of gross commercial floor space.

**Change since 2019**

There has been relatively little change in the mix of businesses operating in Market Drayton between 2019 and September 2020. Other than a net increase in vacancies of two units, there has been a decline in the number of comparison retailers operating (by three) and more moderate declines in non-service and finance & professional services (down one unit in both cases).

Two new retail service businesses are now trading, as is one extra restaurant/takeaway and an additional convenience store.
Despite relatively little change in the composition of the business mix in Market Drayton town centre, there has been a notable amount of churn, with 26 outlets altering their purpose or name over the year. This is the equivalent of 21% churn compared with the Shropshire average of 15%.

More than half of churn is attributable to either new vacancies arising (31%) or old vacancies becoming filled (27%). The remaining 42% of churn is attributable to businesses changing hands or purpose but that which do not involve vacancies.
**Comparison Retail**

The second largest proportion of commercial units is dedicated to the comparison retail category, which accounts for 22% of units. There are several large stores in this category, which means that comparison retail accounts for a disproportionately high share of floor space (35%). There are 28 stores operating with a combined floor space of just over 6,000m$^2$, which equates with an average floor space of 216m$^2$. There are three fewer comparison stores in Market Drayton than there were in 2019 which is the equivalent of a 9.7% decrease.

Within the town there are five clothes shops, of which one is a chain (Peacocks) and the other four independent. This includes one dress agency. There are also six charity shops, which is an increase of one since 2019. Four of the charity stores are national — Oxfam, Sue Ryder, Barnados, Cancer Research, with two local based charity (Salopian Care and AE Donate).

There are two florists, three home improvement stores (a carpet shop, a soft furnishings store and a furniture shop). There is one each of the following store type: antique shop, book store; card store; catalogue store, discount store, gift shop, mobility store, pet shop, pharmacy, sewing shop, stationers and vape store. The town is under-represented in the pharmacy category, and does not have a bespoke jewellery store.

*Chart 4: Breakdown of Comparison Retail by Type*
Convenience Retail

There are nine convenience stores within the main shopping area of Market Drayton. These account for 7% of all units and 9% of gross floor space. There has been a relatively high level of churn within the category, with the net number of operators rising by one. Overall, three new stores have opened while two have close. In the town there is one each of a bakery, confectioner, delicatessen, general food, frozen food, health food and a market. There are two specialist food stores, both selling Polish products. 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

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.
Restaurants & Takeaways

14% 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 18 units are split between cafés (28%), restaurants (33%) and takeaways (39%). Takeaways account for a lower share of floor space (25%) while restaurants have a disproportionately high share of floor space (42%).

The number of units and floor space allocated to restaurants and takeaways is typical for a town the size of Market Drayton.

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 takeaways and two kebab outlets.

There is just one chain in the restaurant and takeaway category in Market Drayton—Domino’s Pizza, which is a newly opened store.

Tourism & Leisure

Also within the hospitality sector, there are five public houses. These take up approximately 1,200m² gross floor space, the equivalent of 7% of all floor space in the town. There is an absence of guest accommodation (B&Bs or hotel bed spaces) within the town centre, although one of the main restaurants has 10 guest rooms.

Festival Drayton Centre is just outside the main shopping area boundary.
Finance & Professional Services

There are 16 commercial operators in the finance and business services area in Market Drayton town centre, accounting for just over 1,700m² of gross floor space. Included within this classification are three banks (Barclays, Nat West and Lloyds TSB) plus one building society (Leek); there are three accountants, two estate agents, two insurance brokers and two solicitors.

Retail Services

There are 31 retail service businesses operating in Market Drayton town centre, with these accounting for over 2,300m² of gross floor space. 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 65% of units and 54% of floor space. In addition, there are three opticians and two bookmakers.

Amongst other services provided in the town (by one operator only) are post office, shoe repairs, travel agency, tattoo artist and a funeral director.

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.
Vacant Units

10% of Market Drayton town centre outlets are vacant (9% of gross floor space). This is slightly below average in comparison with comparable market towns in Shropshire. 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). There are two vacant units on Cheshire Street, three on Shropshire Street, and five on the High Street and three on Queen Street. The size of vacant units ranges from 44m$^2$ to 311m$^2$.

Map 6: Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2020
The count of vacant premises in Market Drayton has risen only slightly between 2019 and 2020—by one to 13. Despite this, there has been considerable churn, with eight premises becoming vacant, and seven that were previously unoccupied having been filled by the time of the 2020 audit in September. Five premises that were vacant in 2019 were still unoccupied in 2020. Vacancies are concentrated at the southern end of the town, in Shropshire Street and the High Street.

*Map 7: Change in Location of Vacant Commercial Premises, 2019–2020*
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, 132 residential premises are located in the audit area, of which the vast majority are flats (120 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%).

Map 8: Location of Residential Premises in Market Drayton Town Centre

Chart 9: Breakdown of Residential Properties by Type