Norwich City Centre Shopping and Town Centre Floorspace Monitor & Local & District Centres Monitor

Survey at October 2024

Contents

Introduction

1. Norwich city centre is the pre-eminent regional centre in the East of England, focused on a historic city centre with a wealth of heritage assets and an unrivalled historic and natural environment. It accommodates the majority of jobs, key services and economic, leisure and cultural facilities serving much of Norfolk and north Suffolk. It is within the top 15 retail destinations in the UK. The established approach to planning for Norwich city centre has been cited as an example of best practice by Government[1].
2. In order to get a picture of how our high street has changed over time and to help assess the performance of our planning policies and assist in their implementation, regular retail surveys are carried out of the city centre and Norwich's District and Local Centres. The last monitor was carried out in October 2023. A report was written entitled Norwich City Centre Floorspace Monitor & Local & District Centres[2] which reported that whilst Norwich largely recovered from the impacts of the pandemic the previous year, vacancy rates rose quite significantly between October 2022 and October 2023 which may have been as a result of rising costs, inflation and interest rates which impacted both retailers and consumers. In particular, the vacant available retail *floorspace* in the city centre increased from 12.2% in October 2022 to 15.9% in October 2023 and within the primary retail area vacancy rates increased by 4.6% (from 12.2% in 2022 to 16.8% in 2023). However, it was also noted that the percentage of vacant units within the city centre continued to decrease year on year from 14.7% in October 2020 to 12.3% in October 2023 (with it falling by 0.3% during the monitoring period). Between 2022 and 2023 there was the loss of a number of national chains. Nationally it was reported that independents were starting to struggle and some concern was expressed that Norwich's independent sector is being impacted by economic factors.
3. The past year has continued to see challenges in terms of the high interest rates, rising operational costs and higher costs of goods. This report sets out how Norwich's retail sector has coped with these economic pressures.
4. Since July 2021 the report has also looked at vacancy rates for all town centre uses (such as financial and professional services, restaurants and cafes, drinking establishments, hot food takeaways, offices, medical and health services, sport and leisure uses and betting shops). Prior to this the main purpose of the reports was only to measure vacancy rates for retail (formerly Use Class A1) and to provide data on the total amount of retail floorspace within the city centre. Particularly due to the changes in the Use Classes Order and the General Permitted Development Order a few years ago, it is considered important to include other town centre uses as there is a general acceptance, including in government policy, that high streets need to evolve to thrive.
5. With the amount of total retail floorspace reducing year on year, we now need to look at what contribution other town centre uses are making to the long-term vitality and viability of Norwich City Centre. This wider scope provides an improved understanding of the 'health' of the city centre overall and the impacts of current relaxations both on the city centre and more widely. Over time we

[1] Greater Norwich Local Plan, paragraph 312
[2] Shopping floorspace monitor October 2023 | Norwich City Council

will be able to start to look at trends for all town centre uses as well as retailing. This will assist with policy monitoring and help to inform and support initiatives such as a city centre strategy. This will enable us to look at our high street much more holistically.

Policy Context

Existing policy framework

6. The National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (NPPF 2023) states in paragraph 90 that planning policies and decisions should "support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation". "Planning policies should define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability - by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters." The revised NPPF no longer has the requirement for the definition of primary and secondary frontages. Instead, it promotes flexibility and diversification. It recognises the changing face of the high street and the need to take a different approach to retail planning policy in order to reinvigorate and adapt the offer focused in primary centres/core areas to successfully prepare for the future; this includes suitable provision of leisure uses and housing within town centres.
7. The Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) was adopted in March 2024 and replaced the Joint Core Strategy (JCS). The policies within the GNLP provide flexibility and recognise the trend for changing uses and functions in city centres. The aim of the plan is to ensure the centre provides an attractive location in which people can experience a complementary range of different uses which support the retail function as well as promoting diversification of services and facilities to ensure that vitality and vibrancy can be maintained throughout the day and evening.
8. Policy 6 places the city centre retail area at the top of the retail hierarchy, with the Large District Centres of Riverside and Anglia Square, Magdalen Street and St. Augustines providing a complementary role and meeting more day-to-day needs. The extent of, and more detailed policies for, the city centre retail area, and the primary and secondary retail areas within it, along with the Large District Centres, will continue to be set out in the existing development management policies.
9. In light of the rapidly changing retail picture, and based on recent trends and evidence, no sites were reserved for retail development in the GNLP. It is anticipated that any additional comparison retail floorspace will primarily be accommodated through the intensification of retail use on existing sites. A 2020 report[3] produced to inform the GNLP set out that there has been a material change in the level of retail expenditure available to support 'bricks and mortar' comparison goods floorspace and that there was an oversupply in the Norwich urban area of circa -20,00sq m net. These levels of 'negative capacity' or over supply confirm the strategy for retailing in the GNLP which is not to allocate sites/locations for net additional comparison goods floorspace, but to instead concentrate on improving the quality of existing retail provision and allow some

[3] Avison Young 'Greater Norwich Town Centres & Retail Study Update' (December 2020)

units to be redeveloped for other uses which are appropriate within town centre environments.

10. The GNLP also prioritises vibrancy, activity and diversity of uses in defined retail areas outside of the defined primary retail area, permitting the use of redundant floorspace for other uses, including the re-use of upper floors. The policy encourages the development of new leisure and cultural facilities, hotels and other visitor accommodation to support the delivery of a broader range of activities in the city centre and to strengthen Norwich City Centre's role as a visitor and cultural destination.

11. This flexible long-term approach seeks to continue to promote a vibrant city centre in the context of the decline of high street shopping and the growth of online retailing.

12. The Norwich City Centre Future Strategy[4] prepared by the Norwich Business Improvement District endorses this approach. It acknowledges that a vibrant, diverse and accessible offer providing a range of different experiences for the visitor, alongside promotion of a strong and distinctive sense of place and identity, will be key to the long-term economic success of Norwich city centre.

13. The adopted Development Management Policies Local Plan (the DM plan) provides the detail to enable the strategic policies above to be implemented and to protect the vitality and viability of centres. The existing DM policies seek to retain a certain threshold of retail units within defined centres; however given changes to the Use Classes Order, General Permitted Development Order and the NPPF a more flexible approach is needed both when implementing the policies and during any future review. Nonetheless ,it is still important to monitor our existing policies to provide evidence of the changes which have already, and will continue to, occur.

14. In particular, policies DM20 and DM21 aim to protect retail function by managing the proportion of shops (as opposed to other services and facilities) in defined city centre shopping frontages (policy DM20) and suburban shopping areas (policy DM21). In both cases, local policies seek to ensure that proposals for change of use will not result in the proportion of shops falling below a specified minimum level.

15. For the city centre retail frontages the applicable minimum thresholds for policy DM20 are set out in a separate supplementary planning document (the Main town centre uses and retail frontages SPD, adopted in December 2014). For District and Local Centres, the thresholds are set out in policy DM21.

The Use Class Order and permitted development rights

16. Changes to the Use Classes Order which took effect in 2020 and amendments to the General Permitted Development Order which came into force in 2021 have had an impact upon town centres across the country.

17. Replacing a number of use classes with 'Class E' (Commercial, businesses and services) means that buildings used for any purposes within Class E can now change to any other use within Class E without the need for planning permission. This includes retail, financial and professional, café and

[4] Norwich City Centre Future Strategy, The Retail Group on behalf of Norwich BID, November 2020

restaurants, businesses, clinics, health centres and creches and leisure uses. The government's aim was to simplify the system and to allow greater flexibility to both landlords and tenants to adapt to changing needs and to reflect the diverse range of uses in town centres.

18. The government introduced Class MA which is a permitted development right to allow for the change of use from Class E (commercial, business and service use) to residential (class C3) in order to allow high streets to adapt and thrive; however, the Council has concerns that this will mean that it has no ability to consider the impact that the loss of town centre uses will have upon the viability and vibrancy of our centres. The piecemeal loss of retail and town centre units could be a huge threat to the vitality and vibrancy of our high streets as once units are lost to residential use, they are unlikely to ever revert back to a town centre use.

Recent reports

19. There have been a number of reports published over the past year which particularly focus on how city centres need to diversify and evolve, as well as having an attractive public realm, in order to thrive. The most relevant findings from these reports are set out in the paragraphs below. It is encouraging that Norwich is on the whole following many of the recommendations set out within these reports, but they still give us more points to consider over the coming year.
20. The first of the reports is entitled '*Shopping Centres Revisited: Emerging Opportunities in a Recovering Sector, 2024*' which is produced by Lambert Smith Hampton. The most relevant points from the report are as follows:
    - As much as 20-40% of UK retail space may need to be repurposed in the future. Shopping centres in particular continue to have an excess of retail space in many locations, following the collapse of major retail groups, but changing market dynamics and repurposing potential are creating new opportunities for shopping centre owners. Repurposing and repositioning activity is essential to ensuring that these challenged centres have future roles to play in their town and cities.
    - There is a need to evolve from single-use retail locations to diverse mixed-use places that provide people with more reasons to come to them and to stay for longer. Adding a wider range of residential and commercial uses will generate footfall, extend dwell times and enable properties to be used for longer periods, including outside of normal retail hours.
    - There are three approaches to repurposing, "Replace, Reinvent and Revitalise". Lambert Smith Hampton conducted an audit of the 500 biggest shopping centres in the UK to identify where they fall within this typology. The Castle Quarter in Norwich has been cited as a centre that has revitalised by repositioning itself as a leisure destination. The report sets out how it went from being almost entirely retail to having roughly a 50/50 split between shops and leisure.
21. Living Streets have recently published the 3rd edition of '*Pedestrian Pound*'[5] (November 2024). The key relevant points are:

[5] https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/y4ijyp1n/pedestrian_pound_3rd-edition.pdf

- Making our outdoor public spaces more accessible, attractive, comfortable and safe for people walking or wheeling can help to increase pedestrian footfall and revitalise high streets, district, town and city centres. There is increasing recognition that we need to shift away from viewing town centres and high streets simply as centres for shopping, and instead see them as public spaces for socialising and connecting people, which would imply a need for more walkable as well as greener spaces. Public realm improvements that increase footfall have, in some cases, been shown to attract new businesses and help reduce vacancy rates in high streets and town centres.
- There is likely to be increasing future focus on the 'experience economy' to generate passing footfall for retail and hospitality, as well as more temporary use of space and events. Investments in the public realm that improve the walkability and attractiveness of an area make it more likely that people will wander around, linger and meet friends, thus transforming a utilitarian shopping trip into more of an experience.
- An oversupply of retail space, and reduced need for office space due to changes in working patterns, coupled with a need for sustainably located housing means that there is likely to be a move towards more residential development in town and city centres. Although we think of the high street as retail dominated, they are also places where people live.

22. Finally, the House of Lords published a paper entitled *High Streets: Life beyond retail?* in November 2024. The key findings are as follows:
    - Retail will always remain a vital component of the high street, but local communities are increasingly seeking out restaurants and leisure activities as well as wanting to see more public services in their town centres. Variety, both within the retail offer and beyond, will aid recovery now and is key to ensuring the long-term resilience of high streets.
    - What people want from the high street, and the businesses found upon them, has constantly evolved and will continue to evolve. Therefore, towns and small cities should avoid conforming to a fixed vision and monolithic approach to the high street as this leads to a greater risk of systemic high street failures. Instead, they should plan positively for a resilient future by ensuring diversity and adaptability.
    - Celebrating the local history of a place and conserving and repurposing historic buildings on the high street wherever possible celebrates the character and heritage of the high street, encourages a greater sense of pride in place and could draw more people in and potentially increase footfall. Local markets can boost footfall on high streets and contribute to the unique character of towns and small cities across the country.
    - More green space and an improved public realm alone cannot restore the prospects of a high street, but they should be a key consideration in any proposed regeneration programme.
    - High streets do not function in isolation and the introduction of new out-of-town retail and leisure centres can have a significant negative impact on the vitality of a local high street.
    - Although there are a range of views, the introduction of Use Class E in the planning system has made high streets more adaptable to changing

consumer trends. The Government should explore expanding the scope of Use Class E, or expanding another Use Class, to support the renewal of large shopping centres for other leisure purposes.

- The expansion of permitted development rights to convert Use Class E properties into homes risks damaging the vitality of high streets and reduces local control over the design and development of high streets. The Government should undertake a review of the policy to examine the impact it is having on high streets relative to the number and quality of new homes delivered.

National picture

Headline figures	Retail and leisure vacancy rate	Retail only vacancy rates	Leisure only vacancy rates
National figures Green = reduction in vacancy rates between H1 2023 and H2 2023 Red = increase in vacancy rates between H1 2023 and H2 2023 Grey = no change in vacancy rates between H1 2023 and H2 2023	14.0%	15.3%	10.9%

23. The Local Data Company provides regular analysis of town centres across Great Britain and in March 2024 published the retail and leisure market analysis for 2023 (FY 2023 Retail and Leisure Trends Analysis, published March 2024). The main findings from the report are as follows:

(1) The GB vacancy rate (all vacancies) rose from 13.9% at the start of 2023 to 14.0% at the end of 2023. This represents a 0.2% year-on-year increase in 2023. Whilst this is marginal it indicates that the post-pandemic recovery may has stalled with vacancy rates remaining 1.9% above pre-pandemic levels. A 0.2% increase in vacancies in the leisure industry was the main driver of the increase. Retail provided more resilient with the retail vacancy rate staying at 15.3%.

(2) The number of GB-wide closures increased from 48,694 units in 2022 to 55,514 units in 2023, representing a 14% year-on-year increase. This is the highest annual closure figure recorded in the last decade.

(3) There has been a 5% year-on-year increase in openings, from 45,329 units in 2022 to 47,744 units in 2023. This demonstrates that there are still occupiers who are growing their estates and identifying appealing leasing opportunities in the market.

(4) Retail parks continue to do well with vacancy rates currently standing at only 7.6% in H2 2023 (down from 9.0% in H2 2022). This is 0.5% below pre-pandemic figures. Shopping centre vacancy has continued to fall from its H1 2021 peak of 19.4%, reaching 17.7% in H1 2023 but the LDC set out that competition from out-of-town retail has and will continue to be a key challenge for this sector. High streets were the only location type to see an increase in vacancy rates in 2023, from 13.8% to 14.0%. The LDC set out that this was driven by rising interest rates, inflation and tightened consumer spend with high streets being particularly hard-hit by these challenges as they have a significantly higher proportion of independent retailers that retail parks and shopping centres.

(5) Barbers remain the fastest-growing category nationally with nail salons

and beauty salons also featuring in the list of fastest growing categories. Convenience stores are also continuing to expand and fast-food takeaways, Japanese restaurants and café and tearooms also feature in the top 10 fastest growing retail categories.

(6) Pubs were the fastest-declining category with other categories including hairdressers, estate agents, chemists, fashion shops and banks.

(7) The number of comparison multiple retailers holding over 200 stores nationally has dropped by 11% since 2018. Several retailers are upsizing stores in prime retail locations but reducing the total number of stores. Brands such as M&S, JD Sports, Zara, River Island, H&M and Sports Direct are all adopting this strategy.

(8) Independents have performed well over the past couple of years however 2023 saw a net decline of 2,827 independent units. Rising operational costs and energy prices, rising interest rates and low consumer confidence have all contributed to this sector struggling.

(9) In 2023 nationally there was also a net decline of 4,943 multiples units. This is an increase on the 2022 figure where there was a net decline of 3,627 units however is significantly better than during the pandemic where in 2021 there was a net decline of 10,059 units.

(10) The Local Data Company have set out that over the past year whilst there have been many challenges, the retail sector has proved relative resilient. With inflation and interest rates expected to fall, this may restore much-needed confidence. However the LDC also sets out that uncertainty remains due to the effects of economic and political changes.

Main Findings for Norwich

City Centre Overview

Headline figures	Vacant floorspace	Vacant available floorspace (excluding refurbs)	Vacant units	Retail floorspace change (since Oct 23)
City Centre (Retail only) Green = reduction in vacancy rates between Oct 2023 and Oct 2024 Red = increase in vacancy rates between Oct 2023 and Oct 2024	15.4%	12.6%	13.3%	0.4% decrease

24. The retail monitor survey traditionally measured vacancy rates in three different ways:

    a. Retail vacancy rate (Use Class A1) as a proportion of retail floorspace.

    b. Retail vacancy rate (Use Class A1) as a proportion of retail floorspace, excluding space being built or refitted.

    c. Retail vacancy rate (Use Class A1) as a proportion of retail units.

25. However, due to changes to the Use Classes Order, to government policy and the introduction of the GNLP which identifies that there is a need for greater flexibility to allow our high streets to evolve to thrive, the report also now gives vacancy rates for all town centre uses too. This is measured in two ways, vacancies as a proportion of all floorspace and vacancy rates as a proportion of all units.

26. The vacant available retail *floorspace* in the city centre is 12.6% which is a significant decrease from October 2023’s figure of 15.9%. Today’s vacancy rates are however high compared to a pre pandemic figure of only 5.5%. Prior to the pandemic the highest figure was 12.4% in 2010 which compares to the lowest figure of 4.2% which was experienced in 2014.

27. City centre retail vacancy rates ‘as a proportion of all retail floorspace’ has also decreased from 16.9% in October 2023 to 15.4% in October 2024. The pre pandemic level was 10.0%.

28. The percentage of vacant *units* has however increase over the past year from 12.3% in October 2023 to 13.3% in October 2024. Between October 2020 and October 2023 vacancy rates had continued to decrease year on year from a high of 14.7% to a low of 12.3%.

29. Whilst there has been an increase of 1% over the past 12 months, Norwich’s vacancy rates is still 2% lower than the national vacancy rate of 15.3% for retail

only (Local Data Company, March 2024[6]). Norwich therefore still compares very favourably to the British average retail vacancy rate. However, direct comparison with national rates is difficult due to methodological differences between surveys and due to the surveys covering different areas i.e. national figures include high streets, shopping centres, retail parks and standalones in local neighbourhood parades.

30. In terms of all town centre uses, vacant floorspace currently stands at 14.6% (down from 17.0% in October 2023 and 15.4% in October 2022) but vacant units have increased from 13.0% in October 2023 to 14.0% in October 2024 (but down from 15.2% in July 2021). Compared to retail only this is now 0.8% lower for floorspace. In 2023 all town centre uses were 0.1% higher and in 2022 1.2% higher. For units all town centre uses are 14.0% which is 0.7% higher than retail.

31. This suggests that by adding leisure uses (including cafes, restaurants, bars and takeaways) as well as financial, professional and other services the percentage of vacant units increases. Whilst it is very difficult to compare with national figures due to the difference in surveys and methodologies, the national picture is that leisure vacancy rates are lower than retail vacancy rates which does not necessarily seem to be the case in Norwich. However, for floorspace this year for the first time all town centre uses vacancy rates are lower than retail.

32. There has been an 9.5% decrease in retail floorspace since 2008 and whilst the amount of retail floorspace in the city centre continues to decrease, the rate by which it is decreasing has slowed since the previous monitoring period. Between October 2023 and October 2024 it reduced by 737sqm which is a 0.4% decrease. This compares to a reduction of nearly 6,000 sqm between July 2021 and October 2022 (2.9%) and a reduction of 1,954 sqm (0.9%) between October 2022 and October 2023. The total number of retail units also reduced from 938 in October 2023 to 930 in October 2024 which is a 0.9% decrease. Between July 2021 and October 2022, the number of retail units decreased by 2.5%. Generally, over the past few years the loss of retail has largely been due to changes of use to other town centre uses rather than to residential or due to demolition.

33. Whilst in the past a loss of retail has been of some concern, this very much supports the approach now promoted nationally and locally of repurposing and diversifying through increasing other uses such as the early evening economy, employment and cultural and visitor functions to enhance vitality and viability. It has been shown in the past that an appropriate diversity of other town centre uses such as restaurants, cafes and leisure uses can help support the economic vitality and health of the city centre and as we move forward, this is likely to become ever more important.

34. In terms of refurbishment, there has been a significant increase in under construction/refurbishment floorspace since the last monitoring report with 5,797 sqm being under construction/refurbishment. This indicates that investment is still taking place within Norwich.

35. At the time of the 2024 survey 13 retail units were under construction/ refurbishment which compares to 11 unit (1,991sqm) in 2023. The most significant is the refurbishment of two retail units within the Cathedral Retail Park

[6] Local Data Company, “FY 2023 Retail and Leisure Trends Analysis” (Published March 2024)

which totals 3,854 sqm and was formerly occupied by Toys R Us and Peacocks. At the time that the survey was carried out in October 2024 works were nearing completion and Home Bargains (including a garden centre) are due to open on the 7th December 2024. A number of other units which were undergoing refurbishment have opened since the survey was completed which include ProCook in Chantry Place, and Taco Bell on London Street.

36. The redevelopment of Tesco at Guildhall to build a hotel above and behind it appears to have stalled due to the delay in being able to discharge conditions as a result of nutrient neutrality. There has also been quite a lot of redevelopment/refurbishment within premises where the last use was not retail which are not picked up within these figures.

37. Recent years have seen an increased diversification of uses within the city centre with a particular increase in the number of cafes and restaurants, along with other 'service' type uses such as tattoo studios and beauty salons. Since 2018 there has also been a continued growth in leisure uses. Many of these leisure uses have been focused within the Castle Quarter but there have also been several hospitality and leisure uses opening in other parts of the city centre such as Chantry Place and the Lanes. It is likely that this trend will continue especially with planning policies being more flexible and with the changes to the Use Classes Order which makes it much easier and quicker for landlords to offer their premises to a wider range of commercial businesses.

38. Change away from retail is clearly a trend that has been experienced nationally over the past few years. The national net loss in comparison retail in 2023 was -4,461 units. Whilst the net decline is at a lower rate than it was in 2020 (-6,984 units) and 2021 (-4,699 units) it is more than it was in 2022 where the net loss was -2,391 units (Local Data Company, 2024). In 2023 the Local Data Company also reported that there had been a net reduction in leisure uses by -955, convenience uses by -30 units and service uses by -2,324 units which indicates that nationally all sectors saw a year on year net drop in units. In 2022 however there was a net increase in leisure by 904 units and a net increase in convenience stores of 430 units.

39. Since the October 2023 survey was carried out, some large national chains have been lost from the city centre. These have included Superdry, Monsoon, Accessorize, Virgin Money and Byrons. There are also some stores such Poundland and Boots that have rationalised the number of stores that they have but have kept a significant presence within the city. On a more positive note however there are a number of stores which nationally have rationalised over the past few years but have retained their presence in central Norwich which include New Look, Marks and Spencer and Fraser. This is a positive sign for the health and attractiveness of Norwich City.

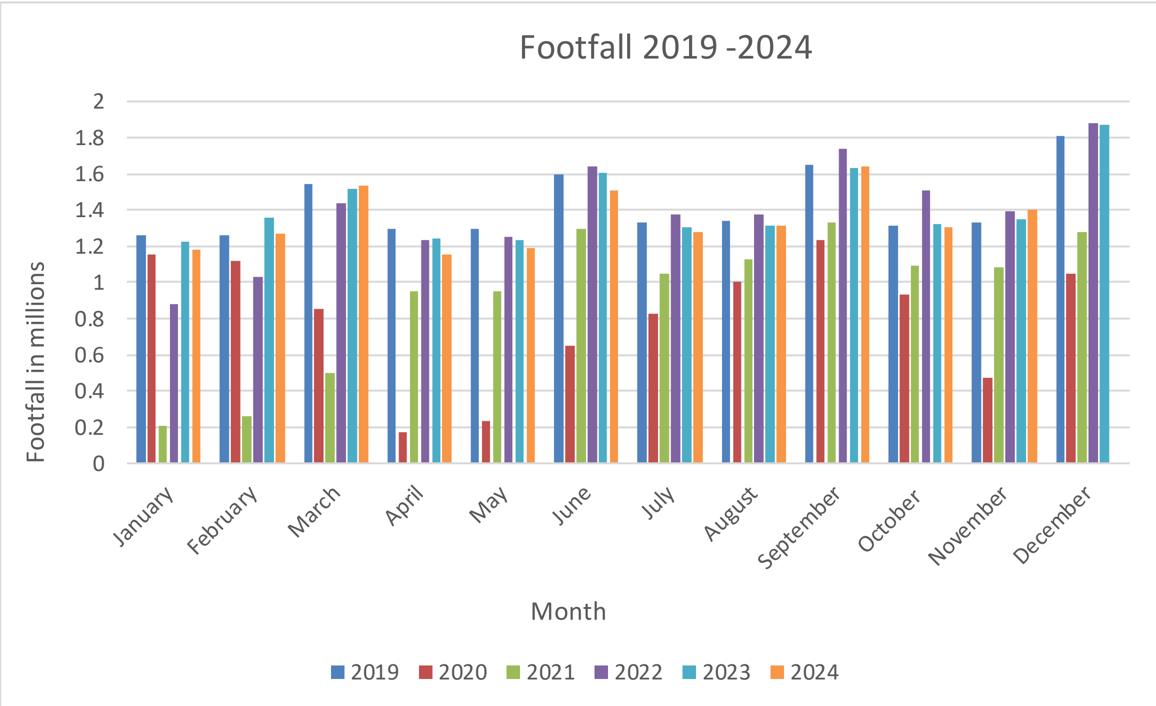
40. Furthermore, there are a number of national chains that have recently opened in Norwich. This includes Julian Charles Home, Rosa's Thai, Flannels, Mango and Sostrene Green. This is a positive sign and suggests that Norwich is seen as a good place for investment.

41. The importance of creating good quality public space in the city centre to attract visitors and investment and boost active travel is recognised in the Transport for Norwich Strategy (December 2021)[1] and the City Centre Public Spaces

[1] Transport for Norwich Strategy - Norfolk County Council

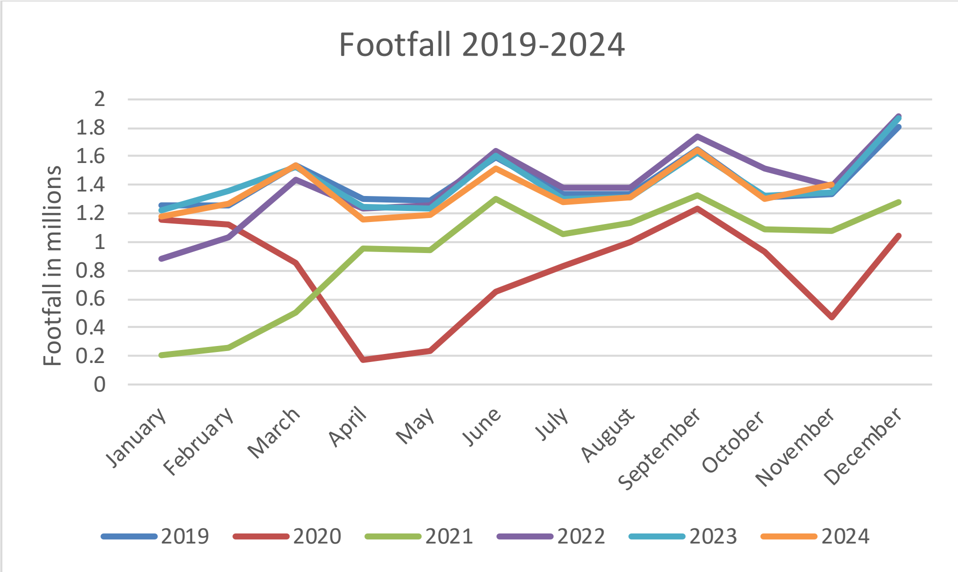
Plan (July 2020)[2]. Since the last retail monitor update in October 2023 the City Council has completed the major project to transform Hay Hill using Town Deal funding. The new design features ample seating, extensive planting and step-free routes. It is already encouraging people to linger and enjoy the area, which will benefit businesses around the space and the perception of the city centre more widely. Unfortunately, the initiative to improve the area around the market place and discourage traffic from driving access the city centre experienced a setback when Exchange Street was re-opened to traffic. Outside the city centre the Plumstead Road shopping centre will benefit from the provision of pedestrian crossings at the Heartsease roundabout that will enable people from Heartsease and residential areas off Harvey Lane and St Williams Way to access the shops

42. Finally, it is also important to look at the footfall figures from the Norwich Business Improvement District (BID). The BID has supplied data for each month from January 2019 to November 2024 and as shown in the graphs below there have been significant fluctuations over the past few years which is unsurprising given the impact that the pandemic had on footfall within the city centre. However as can be seen from the graphs footfall has largely returned back to pre-pandemic levels and it is really encouraging to see that people have returned and are continuing to shop and spend their leisure time in Norwich. It is however noticeable that during 2024 footfall figures have been slightly lower than in 2023 for most (but not all) months. This may indicate that people are visiting the city centre less as a result of the current cost of living crisis.



Graph 1: Footfall in Norwich city centre 2019-2024

[2] [Norwich city centre public spaces plan | Norwich City Council]()



Graph 2: Footfall in Norwich city centre 2019-2024

43. **Summary:** The results of the survey for the city centre as a whole present a mixed picture. It is very encouraging that available vacant floorspace has reduced over the past monitoring period which in part has been a result of the former BHS store becoming occupied and Homes Bargains refurbishing the former Toys R Us store at the Cathedral Retail Park. Unfortunately however, the number of vacant shops has increased which would appear to be as a result of some of the independent shops closing within the secondary retail area, large district centre and rest of the city centre. Notwithstanding this the percentage of vacant retail units currently stands at 13.3% which compares favourably to the average GB retail vacancy rate of 15.3% (Local Data Company, September 2023[7]).

44. Footfall levels have more or less returned to pre pandemic levels in the city and there is clearly investment being made into Norwich. Whilst Norwich seems to have recovered from the pandemic, the past couple of years have presented different economic challenges particularly in terms of the cost of living crisis which have affected by multiples and more recently the independent sector. The future is uncertain and is likely to be challenging, but so far Norwich has demonstrated that its retail and town centre offering is relatively robust. Careful consideration needs to be given to what the survey is telling us about the long-term health of retailing in Norwich in the context of the challenges facing the British High Street/Town Centre retail sector, particularly in light of changes to the Use Classes Order, the NPPF and in terms of how we implement our current polices.

45. Table 1 provides city centre overview data on retail floorspace, enabling comparison over the time period of the plan. Table 2 provides an overview of vacancy rates for all town centre uses and Table 3 compares this to retail uses only.

[7] Local Data Company, "FY 2023 Retail and Leisure Trends Analysis" (Published March 2024)

Table 1: Norwich city centre – provision of A1 retail floorspace

Retail floorspace (use class A1)

	All	Trading	Vacant	Under construction/ refurbishment
October 2024	**207,409**	**175,536**	**26,076**	**5,797**
October 2023	208,146	173,069	33,086	1,991
October 2022	210,100	180,303	25,689	4,108
March 2022	213,701	181,137	32,050	514
July 2021	216,005	183,211	31,409	1,385
October 2020	215,949	193,658	21,686	605
October 2019	217,539	195,891	11,992	9,656
June 2018	223,770	198,519	16,265	8,986
June 2016	223,987	208,342	13,006	2,639
Sept 2015	223,762	210,509	11,028	2,225
April 2014	224,653	213,652	9,513	1,488
August 2013	224,109	208,779	11,849	3,481
January 2011	227,377	203,948	21,035	2,394
July 2010	227,949	198,379	28,315	1,255
January 2010	228,432	206,379	21,810	243
July 2009	229,509	208,674	20,579	256
July 2008	229,120	213,902	14.248	970

Retail units (use class A1)

	All	Trading	Vacant	Under construction/ refurbishment
October 2024	**930**	**806**	**111**	**13**
October 2023	938	823	104	11
October 2022	947	828	106	13
March 2022	966	833	128	5
July 2021	971	834	130	7
October 2020	976	833	140	3
October 2019	971	873	88	10
June 2018	992	885	98	9
June 2016	1023	906	110	7
Sept 2015	1020	908	103	10
April 2014	1048	930	107	11
August 2013	1054	936	97	21
January 2011	1067	949	108	10
July 2010	1070	938	121	11
January 2010	1079	948	126	5
July 2009	1086	955	128	3
July 2008	1084	967	109	8

Retail vacancy rate (use class A1)

	As a proportion of all retail floorspace $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$	As a proportion of retail floorspace excluding space being built or refitted $\frac{Vacant}{All}$	As a proportion of all retail units $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$
October 2024	**15.4%**	**12.6%**	**13.3%**
October 2023	16.9%	15.9%	12.3%
October 2022	14.2%	12.2%	12.6%
March 2022	15.2%	15.0%	13.8%
July 2021	15.2%	14.5%	14.1%
October 2020	10.3%	10.0%	14.7%
October 2019	10.0%	5.5%	10.1%
June 2018	11.3%	7.3%	10.8%
June 2016	7.0%	5.8%	11.4%
Sept 2015	5.9%	4.9%	11.1%
April 2014	4.9%	4.2%	11.3%
August 2013	6.8%	5.3%	11.2%
January 2011	10.3%	9.3%	10.1%
July 2010	13.0%	12.4%	11.3%
January 2010	9.7%	9.5%	11.7%
July 2009	9.1%	9.0%	11.8%
July 2008	6.2%	6.2%	10.0%

Overall retail floorspace change

Since October 2023	**Decreased by 737 sqm (0.4% decrease)**
Since July 2008	**Decreased by 20,974 sqm (9.5% decrease)**

Table 2: Summary of all town centre uses vacancy rates

	As a proportion of all floorspace $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$		As a proportion of all units $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$	
	October 2023	**October 2024**	**October 2023**	**October 2024**
Norwich City Centre	17.0%	14.6%	13.0%	14.0%
Primary retail area	16.2%	14.7%	11.8%	12.0%
Secondary Retail area	21.3%	23.1%	10.3%	13.8%
Large District Centre	12.3%	15.3%	15.1%	22.3%
Rest of Centre	20.0%	10.6%	15.7%	14.0%

Table 3: Summary of retail only vacancy rates

	As a proportion of all retail floorspace $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$		As a proportion of all retail units $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$	
	October 2023	**October 2024**	**October 2023**	**October 2024**
Norwich City Centre	16.9%	15.4%	12.3%	13.3%
Primary retail area	17.8%	14.3%	11.3%	9.9%
Secondary Retail area	25.4%	27.2%	12.1%	15.2%
Large District Centre	8.7%	13.9%	13.1%	21.3%
Rest of Centre	11.6%	15.2%	15.6%	16.1%

The Primary Area: Retail Vacancy

Headline figures	Vacant floorspace	Vacant available floorspace (excluding refurbs)	Vacant units	Retail floorspace change (since Oct 23)
Primary Retail Area (Retail only)	14.3%	13.5%	9.9%	0.3% decrease

46. The extent of the primary area, containing the shopping centres and main comparison goods stores, is shown on Map 1 (see page 45).

47. The vacant available *floorspace* rate is currently 13.5% in the primary retail area which is a 3.3% decrease on 2023 rates where 16.8% of available floorspace was empty. This fall in vacancy rates is a very positive sign. Whilst some large properties remain vacant (Debenhams (8,360sqm) and Wilko (5,600sqm)), over the past 12 months a number of larger premises have become occupied such as the previous BHS store which is now Poundland, Sports Direct which is now Flannels and Jarrold Intersport which is now occupied by Sostrene Grene.

48. It should however be noted that vacant available floorspace is still significantly higher than before the pandemic when vacancy rates were at an extremely low rate of 4.1% in October 2019. Vacancy rates have fluctuated over the past few years. They improved between March 2022 and October 2022 (reduced from 15.0% to 12.2%) which indicated that the primary retail area had started to recover from the pandemic but unfortunately rates went up between October 2022 and October 2023 which may have been a result of the cost of living crisis, the closure of stores such as Wilko and Jarrold Intersport and the relocation of Sports Direct into Frasers.

49. Primary Area retail vacancy rates 'as a proportion of all retail floorspace' have also decreased. The disparity between vacant and refurbishment is only 0.8% which would indicate that there is not a significant amount of development occurring in the primary retail area. The former Tesco unit on Guildhall Hill currently contributes most to the disparity. Work has stalled on the site and it is understood that the discharge of certain conditions has been delayed by nutrient neutrality as the wider redevelopment of the site includes a hotel which constitutes overnight accommodation.

50. The percentage of vacant retail *units* in the Primary Area has also decreased from 11.3% in October 2023 to 9.9% in October 2024 which would also suggest that some of the smaller units within the primary retail area have also attracted new occupiers. Back in July 2021 vacancy rates for units reached 15.2% so this is a significant fall. In July 2021 there was concern that our vacancy rates were getting close to the national average (15.8% in H1 2021) but with national vacancy rates at the end of 2023 being at 15.3% (Local Data Company, published March 2024[8]), Norwich's primary area vacancy rate is now 5.4% below the national average. This reduction in vacancy rates is encouraging and has shown that the city and its key shopping area has bounced back well from the pandemic and on the whole is coping with other economic challenges.

[8] Local Data Company, "FY 2023 Retail and Leisure Trends Analysis" (March 2024)

51. The overall amount of floorspace in A1 retail use within the primary area has only decreased by 384 m² between October 2023 and October 2024, and the number of units has remained the same. Between 2018 and 2019 there was a significant reduction in retail floor space (5,461 m²) when a number of units within Castle Quarter changed use from A1 to other uses including a bowling alley, soft play, retro gaming centre, gym and other community/leisure facilities. Whilst this trend has continued over the past few years, the rate does seem to be slowing and there are actually examples of units within the primary retail area which are changing back to retail.

52. The change of use of a number of units away from A1 prevented a number of units in Castle Quarter sitting empty and has no doubt helped reduce vacancy rates as a few years ago over a quarter of floorspace was vacant. Currently only 7.4% of retail floorspace sits empty (down from 11.6% in 2023 and 15.9% in October 2022). However, during the past monitoring period vacant floorspace for all town centre uses has increased from 10.2% in 2023 to 13.7% in 2024. This is largely as a result of the job centre vacating. Several smaller units are however currently vacant as 11 out of 53 A1 shops are unoccupied (20.8%) (Compared to 13 out of 53 or 24.5% in 2023 or 15 out of 57 or 26.3% in 2022). When taking into account all town centre uses, there are 26 vacant units (27.7%) which compares to 18 out of 93 (19.4%) in 2023 or 21 out of 95 (22.1%) in 2022. Longterm vacancies in Castle Quarter are still of concern but generally it is considered that the leisure uses that now occupy the Castle Quarter are preventing a number of particularly large retail units sitting empty and that although certain sectors are declining, they can be replaced with other successful town centre business uses which will ultimately increase footfall. Castle Quarter is currently up for sale so it will be interesting to see if any offers are accepted and what this may mean for the future of the shopping centre.

53. Chantry Place (formerly Chapelfield) on the whole remains well occupied and at the time of the survey only 5 retail units were vacant out of a total of 85 (5.9%). This compares to 7 retail units (8.2%) in 2023. For all town centre uses 12 are vacant out of a total of 104 (11.5%) which compares to 11 out of a total of 103 in 2023 (10.7%). In terms of floorspace this is 3.6% for A1 (compared to 6.8% in 2023) and 7.2% (compared to 8.4% in 2023) for all town centre uses. This is well below the average for the primary retail area and city centre. Within Chantry Place whilst several shops have closed over the past year, these are often replaced very quickly with new tenants.

54. If all town centre uses are taken into account the proportion of vacant floorspace (including refurbishments) is 14.7% (down from 16.2% in 2023) and compared to retail only of 14.3%). The percentage of vacant units is 12.0% (up from 11.8% in 2023) and compared to retail only of 9.9%.

55. Table 4 provides retail floorspace data for the primary area.

Table 4: Primary shopping area

Retail floorspace (use class A1)

	All	Trading	Vacant	Under construction/ refurbishment
October 2024	**143,851**	**123,220**	**19,359**	**1,272**
October 2023	144,235	118,591	24,217	1,427
October 2022	145,862	124,146	17,838	3,878
March 2022	147,573	125,219	22,136	218
July 2021	148,263	126,098	21,564	601
October 2020	148,498	135,424	12,469	605
October 2019	150,094	134,405	6,148	9,541
June 2018	155,555	139,261	8,265	8,029
June 2016	155,389	143,867	8,883	2,639
Sept 2015	155,139	145,445	7,711	2,017
April 2014	155,884	149,059	5,865	960
August 2013	152,497	141,705	9,382	1,410
January 2011	173,789	157,817	13,967	2,005
July 2010	174,252	153,199	20,448	605
January 2010	174,525	160,541	13,909	75
July 2009	175,256	162,962	12,294	0
July 2008	175,028	168,511	6,434	83

Retail units (use class A1)

	All	Trading	Vacant	Under construction/ refurbishment
October 2024	**505**	**455**	**44**	**6**
October 2023	505	448	51	6
October 2022	508	444	54	10
March 2022	521	445	73	3
July 2021	521	442	76	3
October 2020	524	442	79	3
October 2019	523	465	50	8
June 2018	530	479	48	3
June 2016	562	484	72	7
Sept 2015	559	481	72	7
April 2014	579	499	74	6
August 2013	567	490	72	5
January 2011	574	524	45	5
July 2010	576	513	58	5
January 2010	578	524	53	1
July 2009	581	524	57	0
July 2008	584	537	46	1

Retail vacancy rate (use class A1)

	As a proportion of all retail floorspace $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$	As a proportion of retail floorspace excluding space being built or refitted $\frac{Vacant}{All}$	As a proportion of all retail units $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$
October 2024	**14.3%**	**13.5%**	**9.9%**
October 2023	17.8%	16.8%	11.3%
October 2022	14.9%	12.2%	12.6%
March 2022	15.1%	15.0%	14.6%
July 2021	14.9%	14.5%	15.2%
October 2020	8.8%	8.4%	15.6%
October 2019	10.5%	4.1%	11.1%
June 2018	10.5%	5.3%	9.8%
June 2016	7.4%	5.7%	14.0%
Sept 2015	6.3%	5.0%	14.1%
April 2014	4.4%	3.8%	13.8%
August 2013	7.1%	6.2%	13.6%
January 2011	9.2%	8.0%	7.8%
July 2010	12.1%	11.7%	10.1%
January 2010	8.0%	8.0%	9.2%
July 2009	7.0%	7.0%	9.8%
July 2008	3.7%	3.7%	7.9%

The Primary Area: Retail Frontages

1. Policy DM20 divides the primary area into a number of smaller 'frontage zones' (as defined on the policies map and as identified in appendix 4 to the DM policies plan). The frontage zones are shown on Map 2 (see page 46). The retail threshold applicable in each of these areas is set within the Main Town Centre Uses and Retail Frontages Supplementary Planning Document (December 2014).
2. Table 5 provides data on the percentage of retail uses in the primary area retail frontage zones in October 2024. Since March 2022 the percentage of retail in Castle Quarter has been below the minimum threshold of 80% and since October 2023 the amount of retail in PR06 (Timberhill/Red Lion Street) has dropped below the minimum threshold of 60% set out in the SDP. All other frontages have remained relatively stable and policy compliant.
3. There have been changes to the percentage of retail frontage in all zones over the past year other than in PC03: Chantry Place where retail frontage remains very high at 96.9%. There remain two frontage zones which are not policy compliant – Castle Quarter and Timberhill. Details of the changes to all frontage zones are set out below.
4. Within the following three frontage zones the percentage of retail has actually increased:
   - Within PC01 (Gentleman's Walk/Haymarket/Brigg Street) the retail frontage has increased from 85.0% to 85.3%. Two units have changed from non-retail to retail (21 Haymarket and 149 Provision Market) but one unit has changed from retail to a bank (14 Gentleman's Walk).

- Within PR02: The Lanes east (Bedford Street/Bridewell Alley) the retail frontage has increased from 71.0% to 72.3% as a result of a tattoo studio changing to a gift shop in Bridewell Alley and a Greggs occupying a former café on London Street.
- Within PR03: St Stephens Street/Westlegate the retail frontage has increased from 86.0% to 86.8%. A vacant former A2 unit has now been occupied by a phone repair shop.

5. Within the following three frontage zones, retail frontage has reduced:
    - Castle Quarter (PC02) has seen a significant shift away from retail and has become a leisure destination over the past few years. Back in 2018 only 38.3m (4.4%) of the frontage was non-retail but this increased to 287.7m (32.0%) in 2023. As well as leisure uses, Castle Quarter also has an NHS wellbeing hub and the job centre moved into the centre between October 2022 and October 2023 but unfortunately this has since closed and remains vacant. Between October 2023 and October 2024 the non-retail frontage has increased further to 33.1% due to the change of use of a former retail unit to a drive lounge. The now means around a third of the frontage is non-retail.
    - Retail frontage has reduced from 70.7% to 70.5% in PR01 (Back of the Inns/Castle Street) as a result of a vacant retail unit being occupied by a Mexican café/restaurant.
    - Within PR06 (Timberhill/Red Lion Street) there has continued to be a fall in retail with the retail frontage reducing from 59.0% to 56.8%. This has been a result of a barbers changing to a nail salon and a vacant retail unit changing to Mexican café/restaurant, both on Timberhill.
6. Overall, whilst in the past the city centre has seen a gradual increase in the percentage of non-retail uses and two of the frontage zones now have a retail frontage below the minimum threshold set out within the SPD, during the past year the same number of retail areas have actually seen an increase in retail frontage as those that have seen a reduction. Furthermore, several of the retail frontages remain at relatively comfortable levels above their minimum thresholds.
7. Notwithstanding this the planning authority is now adopting a more flexible approach and the changes that have occurred nationally mean that some changes of use can take place without the need for planning permission so it is inevitable that non-retail uses will increase within some frontage zones. It will be important to continue to monitor these changes in the future.

Table 5: Primary Area Retail Frontage Zones - Retail frontages in October 2024

Primary retail area core frontage zones

Frontage zone	Total frontage (m)	Total non-retail frontage Oct 2024	% A1 retail October 2024 (frontage)	% A1 retail October 2023 (frontage)	Minimum threshold (from 2014 SPD)
Primary retail area core frontage zones					
PC01: Gentleman's Walk/ Haymarket/Brigg Street	856.4	125.6	**85.3%**	85.0%	80%
PC02: Castle Mall (Levels 1 & 2)	898.1	297.2	**66.9%**	68.0%	80%
PC03: Chapelfield, upper & lower Merchants Hall and St Stephens Arcade	641.0	20.0	**96.9%**	96.9%	80%

Frontage zones in the rest of the primary retail area

Frontage zone	Total frontage (m)	Total non-retail frontage Oct 2024	% A1 retail October 2024 (frontage)	% A1 retail October 2023 (frontage)	Minimum threshold (from 2014 SPD)
Frontage zones in the rest of the primary retail area					
PR01: Back of the Inns/Castle Street area	666.8	197.0	**70.5%**	70.7%	65%
PR02: The Lanes east (Bedford Street/Bridewell Alley)	1116.3	309.5	**72.3%**	71.0%	70%
PR03: St Stephens Street/Westlegate	821.5	108.4	**86.8%**	86.0%	80%
PR04: Castle Meadow north		N/A[9]			
PR05: Chapelfield Plain		N/A[10]			
PR06: Timberhill/Red Lion Street	434.2	187.5	**56.8%**	59.0%	60%

Key:
Green denotes no change or increase in A1 retail since 2022
Red denotes decrease in A1 retail since 2022.
Blue denotes frontage is within minimum A1 threshold.
Orange denotes minimum A1 frontage threshold has been breached.

[9] There is no defined frontage in this zone
[10] There is no defined frontage in this zone

The Secondary Area: Retail Vacancy

Headline figures	Vacant floorspace	Vacant available floorspace (excluding refurbs)	Vacant units	Retail floorspace change (since October 22)
Secondary area (Retail only)	27.2%	5.8%	15.2%	0.9% decrease

8. Map 3 (see page 47) shows the extent of the secondary area.
9. The vacant available *floorspace* rate experienced a significant increase between 2016 and 2018 when it rose from 2.8% to 17.2% due to the closure of Toys R Us. It continued to rise to a high of 23.4% in 2023, partly due to the closure of a second unit at the Cathedral Retail Park. However, over the past year the two vacant retail units have been consolidated and refurbished and whilst works were still being undertaken during the October survey, the new occupier Home Bargains is due to open for trading on 7th December 2024. The vacant available floorspace has therefore this year reduced dramatically to only 5.8% which is considered extremely low.
10. In terms of the vacancy rates 'as a proportion of all retail floorspace' whilst this remains very high in October 2024 at 27.2%, once Home Bargains opens the vacant available floorspace will reduce to 8.9% (subject to no other changes taking place within the secondary retail area) which is very competitive particularly for a secondary retail area.
11. The percentage of vacant retail *units* in the Secondary Area also increased between 2016 and 2018 with a rise from 7.0% to 7.7%. This has continued to increase and over the past 12 months has risen from 12.1% to 15.2%.
12. The overall amount of floorspace in A1 retail use continues to decrease but this has only fallen by 202m² since the 2023 report although there has been a reduction in units in the Secondary Shopping area from 174 in 2023 to 171 in 2024.
13. Policy 6 of the recently adopted GNLP places Norwich City Centre at the top of the retail hierarchy but leaves it down to the Development Management Policies Plan to identify the extent of, and more detailed policies for, the primary and secondary retail areas. Policy 7.1 however promotes a flexible approach by supporting a complementary range of uses to support the retail function across both the primary and secondary retail areas and large district centres. It goes on to set out that proposals will be permitted where they promote diversification of services and facilities to ensure that vitality and vibrancy can be maintained throughout the day and evening.
14. The secondary retail area as defined within the DM policies plan includes some streets which provide a specialist mix of shops and is performing very well in providing independent retail diversity and by adapting rapidly it remained resilient during the pandemic and generally continues to perform well within the current economic climate.
15. Notwithstanding this, it is notable that the number of vacant units has continued to rise over the past couple of years which corresponds to the Local Data

Company's findings. During the pandemic independent businesses proved more resilient than multiples especially as they benefited for government support measures and business rates relief. However, the Local Data Company reported that independents started to struggle in H1 2023 with the net decline during that period being the worst recorded net change for the sector since records began. In Norwich vacant units within the secondary retail area increased from 10.7% to 12.1% between 2022 and 2023 and they have continued to rise to 15.2% which is a noticeable change. Whilst the vacancy rate is still just below the national rate, there is some concern that Norwich's independent stores are being impacted by economic factors which may unfortunately mean that some are closing their doors for good. This will need to be monitored carefully in 12 months time.

16. If all town centre uses are taken into account, the proportion of vacant floorspace (including refurbishments) is 23.1% (up from 21.3% in 2023 but compared to retail only of 27.2%) and the percentage of vacant units is 13.8% (up from 10.3% in 2023 and compared to retail only of 15.2%). This would suggest that other town centre uses such as restaurants, leisure uses and business premises are performing slightly better than the retail sector.

Table 6: Secondary area

Retail floorspace (use class A1)

	All	Trading	Vacant	Under construction/ refurbishment
October 2024	**21,123**	**15,379**	**1,219**	**4,525**
October 2023	21,325	15,915	4,991	419
October 2022	21,443	16,454	4,989	0
March 2022	21,826	16,752	5,074	0
July 2021	21,859	16,775	5,060	24
October 2020	21,933	17,180	4,753	0
October 2019	21,611	17,651	3,960	0
June 2018	21,772	17,921	3,741	110
June 2016	21,858	21,243	615	0
Sept 2015	21,793	21,148	594	51
April 2014	21,958	21,569	273	116
August 2013	21,926	21,083	715	131
January 2011	17,785	16,612	878	295
July 2010	17,980	16,709	1,107	164
January 2010	18,076	16,788	1,189	99
July 2009	18,262	17,008	1,207	47
July 2008	18,167	17,604	1,022	81

Retail units (use class A1)

	All	Trading	Vacant	Under construction/ refurbishment
October 2024	**171**	**145**	**20**	**6**
October 2023	174	153	19	2
October 2022	178	159	19	0
March 2022	179	163	16	0
July 2021	183	165	17	1
October 2020	185	169	16	0
October 2019	181	167	14	0
June 2018	182	168	12	2
June 2016	185	172	13	0
Sept 2015	184	173	10	1
April 2014	185	177	5	3
August 2013	187	176	9	2
January 2011	190	174	13	3
July 2010	192	173	16	3
January 2010	194	173	18	3
July 2009	196	173	22	1
July 2008	194	176	15	3

Retail vacancy rate (use class A1)

	As a proportion of all retail floorspace $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$	As a proportion of retail floorspace excluding space being built or refitted $\frac{Vacant}{All}$	As a proportion of all retail units $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$
October 2024	**27.2%**	**5.8%**	**15.2%**
October 2023	25.4%	23.4%	12.1%
October 2022	23.3%	23.3%	10.7%
March 2022	23.2%	23.2%	8.9%
July 2021	23.3%	23.1%	9.8%
October 2020	21.7%	21.7%	8.6%
October 2019	18.3%	18.3%	7.7%
June 2018	17.7%	17.2%	7.7%
June 2016	2.8%	2.8%	7.0%
Sept 2015	3.0%	2.7%	6.0%
April 2014	1.8%	1.2%	4.3%
August 2013	3.9%	3.3%	5.9%
January 2011	6.6%	4.9%	6.8%
January 2010	7.1%	6.6%	9.3%
July 2008	5.6%	5.7%	7.7%

The Secondary Area: Retail Frontages

17. Policy DM20 divides the secondary area into a number of smaller ‘frontage zones’ (as defined on the policies map and as identified in appendix 4 to the DM policies plan). The frontage zones are shown on Map 3 (see page 47). The retail threshold applicable in each of these areas is set within the Main Town Centre Uses and Retail Frontages Supplementary Planning Document (December 2014).

18. Table 7 provides data on the percentage of retail uses in the secondary area retail frontage zones. Out of the three secondary areas that have frontage zones, one (SR03: St Benedicts) is below the minimum threshold as set out in the SPD. During the monitoring period the proportion of retail has stayed the same within two of the frontage zones (SR01: The Lanes West (Pottergate/Dove Street/Lower Goat Lane and SR02: Upper St Giles). It has reduced ever so slightly in SR03: St Benedicts). Overall, the retail frontages still appear relatively healthy and within two of the three retail frontages zones remain at relatively comfortable levels above their minimum thresholds.

Table 7: Secondary area retail frontage zones

Frontage zone	Total frontage (m)	Total non-retail frontage 2024	% A1 retail frontage 2024	% A1 retail frontage 2023	Minimum threshold (from 2014 SPD)
Primary retail area core frontage zones					
SR01	391.3	109.6	**72.0%**	72.0%	70%
SR02	121.7	39.4	**67.6%**	67.6%	60%
SR03	638.0	278.8	**57.3%**	57.6%	60%
SR04	No defined frontage				
SR05	No defined frontage				
SR06	No defined frontage				

Large District Centres

Headline figures	Vacant floorspace	Vacant available floorspace (excluding refurbs)	Vacant units	Retail floorspace change (since October 22)
Large District Centres (Retail only)	13.9%	13.9%	21.3%	0.03% increase

19. Map 4 (see page 48) shows the extent of the LDCs. Riverside was included in these statistics from August 2013 onwards, following the removal of it from the Primary Retail Area and its redesignation as part of the Large District Centre.

20. The vacant available floorspace in the LDCs is currently 13.9% which is significantly higher than it was in October 2023 when vacant floorspace was 8.7% and the highest that it has ever been since Riverside was included in these statistics. Back in 2019 only 3.3% of available floorspace was unoccupied. Despite this significant increase it is still lower than the national average and not that much higher than the city average. It can therefore still be regarded as a low figure for a shopping area which does not form a central part of the city's retail offer.

21. The percentage of vacant retail *units* in the LDCs is however of more concern as this has increased from 13.1% in 2023 to 21.3% in 2024. The difference between vacant floorspace and vacant units would suggest that the larger units are faring well but it is are harder to find and retain retailers for the smaller units.

22. In terms of Riverside in October 2022 the vacancy rate was very low (4.9% for floorspace and 8.5% for units). Between 2022 and 2023 vacancy rates rose to 9.6% for floorspace and 11.8% for units. Whilst rates have remained relatively stable there has been some change with Mothercare becoming occupied by a Cancer Research UK charity shop and Poundland closing down. Riverside has largely been a car based destination, but routes established within the 'St Anne's Quarter' development will create a more attractive walking and cycling link between Riverside and the city centre.

23. The Magdalen Street, Anglia Square & St Augustine's LDC has seen a significant increase in retail vacancies over the past 12 months. Vacant floorspace has increased from 7.9% in October 2023 to 18.0% and the number of vacant units has increased from 13.1% to 22.7%. Whilst this centre has in the past repositioned itself as a niche area of speciality/ethnic retailers and restaurants which has helped historically to maintain relatively low vacancy rates in this area, it would appear that many independents are now struggling in this challenging economic climate which has unfortunately led to closures and an unwillingness to invest.

24. Furthermore, Anglia Square is subject to proposals for comprehensive re-development and planning permission was granted in July 2023 for up to 1,100 dwellings and up to 8,000 sqm (NIA) of flexible retail, commercial and other non-residential floorspace including a community hub. Funded by Homes England, the Council has recently acquired the site. This area is likely therefore to experience significant levels of change and regeneration over the coming years but recent uncertainty has inevitably had an impact upon vacancy rates .

25. The overall amount of floorspace in A1 retail use in the centres has remained stable since Riverside was included as a Large District Centre in August 2013 and has actually increased by 11sqm over the past 12 months.

26. If all town centre uses are taken into account the proportion of vacant floorspace (including refurbishments) has increased from 12.3% in October 2023 to 15.3% in October 2024 (and this compares to retail only of 13.9.%) and the percentage of vacant units is 22.3% (up from 15.1% in October 2023) which compares to retail only of 21.3%.

Table 8: Large District Centres (Magdalen Street, St Augustine's Street, Anglia Square & Albion Way Riverside)

Retail floorspace (use class A1)

	All	Trading	Vacant	Under construction/ refurbishment
October 2024	**32,227**	**28,285**	**3,942**	**0**
October 2023	32,216	29,398	2,818	0
October 2022	32,385	30,561	1,824	0
March 2022	32,695	29,623	3,051	21
July 2021	32,379	29,426	2,932	21
October 2020	32,015	29,974	2,041	0
October 2019	32,164	31,043	1,071	50
June 2018	32,609	30,421	1,748	440
June 2016	32,353	30,534	1,750	69
Sept 2015	32,353	31,237	1,047	69
April 2014	32,647	31,594	784	269
August 2013	32,602	31,256	301	1,045
January 2011	18,314	14,934	3,311	69
July 2010	18,218	14,947	3,202	69
January 2010	18,239	14,811	3,359	69
July 2009	18,289	15,049	3,031	209
July 2008	18,139	15,017	3,031	91

Retail units (use class A1)

	All	Trading	Vacant	Under construction/ refurbishment
October 2024	**136**	**107**	**29**	**0**
October 2023	137	119	18	0
October 2022	141	124	17	0
March 2022	142	124	18	1
July 2021	138	123	14	1
October 2020	138	120	18	0
October 2019	137	123	13	1
June 2018	140	124	14	2
June 2016	139	125	13	1
Sept 2015	139	129	9	1
April 2014	140	130	8	2
August 2013	77	67	7	3
January 2011	135	107	27	1
July 2010	134	109	24	1
January 2010	135	106	28	1
July 2009	136	112	22	2
July 2008	135	111	22	2

Retail vacancy rate (use class A1)

	As a proportion of all retail floorspace $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$	As a proportion of retail floorspace excluding space being built or refitted $\frac{Vacant}{All}$	As a proportion of all retail units $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$
October 2024	**13.9%**	**13.9%**	**21.3%**
October 2023	8.7%	8.7%	13.1%
October 2022	5.6%	5.6%	12.1%
March 2022	9.4%	9.3%	12.7%
July 2021	9.1%	9.1%	10.9%
October 2020	6.4%	6.4%	13.0%
October 2019	3.5%	3.3%	10.2%
June 2018	6.7%	5.4%	11.4%
June 2016	5.6%	5.4%	10.0%
Sept 2015	3.4%	3.2%	7.2%
April 2014	3.2%	2.4%	7.1%
August 2013	4.1%	1.0%	13%
January 2011	18.5%	18.1%	20.0%
July 2010	18.0%	17.6%	17.9%
January 2010	18.8%	18.4%	20.7%
July 2009	17.7%	16.6%	16.2%
July 2008	16.7%	16.8%	16.0%

Rest of the City Centre

Headline figures	Vacant floorspace	Vacant available floorspace (excludingrefurbs)	Vacant units	Retail floorspace change (since October 22)
Rest of City Centre (Retail only)	15.2%	15.2%	16.1%	1.6% decrease

27. This area covers all shops within the city centre which are not included in the defined areas discussed above. There have been some boundary changes which were first reflected in the 2014 monitor. As such, the figures prior to 2014 are not directly comparable with current figures.
28. Vacant floorspace within the ‘rest of the city centre’ currently stands at 15.2%. This is a significant increase from October 2023 when 10.2% of available floorspace was vacant. Vacancy rates within the ‘rest of the city centre’ do fluctuate quite significant and have historically been fairly high. In October 2019 (pre pandemic) only 5.9% of available floor space was vacant which is a bit of an anomaly; however, in October 2020 17.9% of available floorspace was vacant.
29. The number of vacant retail *units* in the ‘rest of the city centre’ has also increased from 15.6% in October 2023 to 16.1% in October 2024. A higher vacancy rate for units compared to floorspace would suggest that some of the smaller units remain vacant.
30. The overall amount of floorspace in A1 retail decreased slightly between October 2023 and October 204 (by 163 sqm) with there being a reduction in retail units of four.
31. The statistics from the past few years suggest that there has been a lot of change and turnover in the ‘rest of the city centre’ area which is expected within the more peripheral city centre shopping streets. Although a number of businesses closed over the pandemic, the ‘rest of the city centre’ seemed to have bounced back in a similar way to some of the more central shopping areas although now it would appear that several of the independent shops are struggling. The loss in retail floorspace during previous monitoring periods would suggest that there has been quite a bit of diversification with a number of retail units changing to other town centre uses.
32. If all town centre uses are taken into account the proportion of vacant floorspace (including refurbishments) is 20.0% (up from 19.3% in 2022) which compares to retail only of 11.6% and the percentage of vacant units is 15.7% (up from 14.1% in 2022) which compares to retail only of 15.6%. Despite all town centre vacancy rates increasing, these are still lower than in 2021 where 22.0% of all town centre floorspace was vacant and 18.1% of all town centre units were empty.

Table 9: Rest of city centre

Retail floorspace (use class A1)

	All	Trading	Vacant	Under construction/ refurbishment
October 2024	**10,208**	**8,652**	**1,556**	**0**
October 2023	10,371	9,165	1,061	145
October 2022	10,410	9,142	1,038	230
March 2022	11,607	9,544	1,788	275
July 2021	13,503	10,912	1,852	739
October 2020	13,503	11,080	2,423	0
October 2019	13,670	12,792	813	65
June 2018	13,834	11,769	1,658	407
June 2016	14,387	12,629	1,758	0
Sept 2015	14,475	12,711	1,676	88
April 2014	14,164	11,430	2,591	143
August 2013	17,084	14,738	920	1,426
January 2011	17,400	14,495	2,880	25
July 2010	17,500	13,524	3,559	417
January 2010	17,593	14,240	3,353	0
July 2009	17,702	13,655	4,047	0
July 2008	17,786	13,310	3,761	765

Retail units (use class A1)

	All	Trading	Vacant	Under construction/ refurbishment
October 2024	**118**	**99**	**19**	**0**
October 2023	122	103	16	3
October 2022	120	101	16	3
March 2022	124	101	22	1
July 2021	129	104	23	2
October 2020	129	104	25	0
October 2019	130	118	11	1
June 2018	135	110	23	2
June 2016	137	125	12	0
Sept 2015	138	125	12	1
April 2014	144	124	19	1
August 2013	157	137	12	8
January 2011	168	144	23	1
July 2010	192	167	23	2
January 2010	172	145	27	0
July 2009	173	146	27	0
July 2008	171	143	26	2

Retail vacancy rate (use class A1)

	As a proportion of all retail floorspace $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$	As a proportion of retail floorspace excluding space being built or refitted $\frac{Vacant}{All}$	As a proportion of all retail units $\frac{Vacant+Refurbishment}{All}$
October 2024	**15.2%**	**15.2%**	**16.1%**
October 2023	11.6%	10.2%	15.6%
October 2022	12.2%	10.0%	15.8%
March 2022	17.8%	15.4%	18.5%
July 2021	19.2%	13.7%	19.4%
October 2020	17.9%	17.9%	19.4%
October 2019	6.4%	5.9%	9.2%
June 2018	15%	12%	18.5%
June 2016	12.2%	12.2%	8.8%
Sept 2015	12.2%	11.6%	9.4%
April 2014	19.3%	18.3%	13.9%
August 2013	13.7%	5.4%	12.7%
January 2011	16.7%	16.6%	13.7%
July 2010	22.7%	20.3%	12.0%
January 2010	19.1%	19.1%	15.7%
July 2009	22.9%	22.9%	15.6%
July 2008	21.1%	22%	15.2%

District and Local Centres

33. Policy DM21 of the Development management policies plan establishes A1 retail use thresholds of 60% for District Centres and 50% for Local Centres.
34. Vacancy rates in District and Local Centres focus on units only. Between 2021 and 2022 there was a significantly reduction in vacancy rates and overall vacancies reduced from 11.6% in 2021 to 6.5% in 2022. Over the past 24 months there has been a very slight increase in vacancies with 6.9% of units sitting empty in 2023 and 7.8% of units being vacant in 2024. However, this is still significantly lower than the 13.3% shop vacancy rate in the city centre which would indicate that despite the challenging circumstances Local and District Centres are faring extremely well. During the pandemic more people started to shop locally and this seems to be continuing.
35. Overall, these figures would suggest that District and Local Centres are continuing to perform their function and to offer an appropriate range of local services and facilities and over the past few years Norwich's District and Local Centres have continued to who their strength and importance.

District Centres

Headline figures	Vacant units	Number of units change
District Centres	6.4%	1.0% increase

36. Whilst vacancy rates have increased from 6.0% to 6.4% between October 2023 and October 2024, vacancy rates are still significantly lower than pre pandemic times where 11.6% of units within District Centre stood vacant in 2018. The total number of vacant units in the 10 District Centres is currently only 13 which compares to 19 in 2021 and 23 in 2018.
37. In term of total number of units, there has been an increase of two units. Both of these units are within the Hall Road District Centre (DC09). There has not been a reduction in units in any of the District centres.
38. The percentage of non-retail units currently stands at 45.5% which is 2.5% higher than in 2023 which follows the general trend experienced since 2019. In terms of units, the total number of non-retail units is 92 out of 202. There has been an increase in non-retail in DC01 Bowthorpe, DC02 Drayton Road, DC04 Plumstead Road, DC08 Dereham Road/Distillery Square and DC09 Hall Road. The percentage of non-retail actually decreased in one District Centre which is DC07 The Larkman where it reduced from 50.0% to 42.9%.
39. There has been one change since 2023 in the District Centres which exceed the 40% non-retail threshold set out in Development management policy DM21. DC01 Bowthorpe now has 41.1% non-retail. The following District Centre exceed the 40% non-retail threshold.
    - DC01: Bowthorpe
    - DC03: Eaton Centre

- DC04: Plumstead Road
- DC05: Aylsham Road/Mile Cross
- DC07: The Larkman
- DC08: Dereham Road/Distillery Square
- DC09: Hall Road

40. A few of these centres have non-retail percentages not too much above 40% and as shown in previous monitoring years it only takes one or two units changing to retail to satisfy the policy ambition. However, patterns both nationally and locally over recent years have shown that things are generally moving in the opposite direction with an increase in non-retail uses and this is very much encouraged by government changes to the use class order and permitted development rights which were introduced a few years ago. Whilst it is recognised that some non-retail units such as restaurants and cafes, along with community, service and leisure uses can add to the vitality and viability of a retail centre there is concern that the change of use to residential would have a significantly detrimental impact upon District Centres and their ability to meet local need. So far, the impacts as a result of the changes to the Use Classes Order and Permitted Development Order have actually been quite minimal but this will need continual monitoring. Furthermore, during the pandemic Norwich's District Centres seemed to thrive with more people shopping locally. The past monitoring period has continued to show the strength of the District Centre, but it will be interested to see whether other economic facts such as the cost of living crisis impact upon the centres in the coming months and years.

41. In terms of the individual District Centres the following is of note:

42. The vacancy rate within Bowthorpe district centre DC01 has reduced during the monitoring period from four units (23.5%) to three units (17.6%). This is still however the District Centre with the highest vacancy rate. The percentage of non-retail units has increased by one which has resulted in the 40% non-retail threshold being exceeded.

43. Lidl within the Drayton Road District Centre (DC02) closed during the 2022-23 monitoring period. This is currently being remodelled as a funeral directors but at the time of the survey had not yet opened. With 2 vacant units this District Centre has the second highest vacancy rates of all District Centres. The non-retail percentage rate has increased from 26.7% to 33.3%, but still sits below the 40% recommended maximum guideline. Once the funeral directors open non-retail will increase further and subject to no other changes taking place will be at 40%.

44. There has been no change to vacancy rates or the percentage of non-retail within DC03: Eaton Centre. With 58.8% of units being non-retail this is the highest of all District Centres.

45. The number of vacant units within DC04: Plumstead Road has increased from one to three which gives a vacancy rate of 9.1%. The percentage of non retail has also increase from 48.5% to 51.5%.

46. DC05: Aylsham Road/Mile Cross has seen no change in vacancy rates or the percentage of non-retail. The Lidl which opened several years ago just outside

of the District Centre boundary (so not counted as a unit within this monitoring report) appears to have strengthened the centre.

47. Earlham House district centre DC06 was previously recognised as one of the poorest performing district centres in terms of vacancy rates in 2016. However, since that time the centre has benefitted from some refurbishment. There has been no change in the monitoring period with it still only having one vacancy and the highest proportion of retail units of all District centres.

48. There are two district centres which have all of their units occupied which are The Larkman (DC07) and Hall Road (DC09) centres. Both of these fully occupied District Centres have over 40% non-retail. Within the Larkman, the percentage of non-retail has actually decreased over the monitoring period and Hall Road has gained two units.

49. Dereham Road/Distillery Square (DC08) only has one vacant unit so a vacancy rate of only 2.7%. Over the past monitoring period one retail unit has change to non-retail.

50. There has been no change in vacancy rates or the percentage of non-retail within Sprowston Road/Shipfield (DC10). This centre only has one vacant unit and 36.8% non-retail.

Table 10: District Centres defined in the adopted Norwich Local Plan 2014

Ref No	Centre name	Total units	Vacant units	% vacant/ annual change	Non retail units	% non-retail
DC01	Bowthorpe	17	3	17.6%	7	41.1%
DC02	Drayton Road	15	2	13.3%	5	33.3%
DC03	Eaton Centre	17	1	5.9%	10	58.8%
DC04	Plumstead Road	33	3	9.1%	17	51.5%
DC05	Aylsham Road/ Mile Cross	24	1	4.2%	11	45.8%
DC06	Earlham House	17	1	5.9%	5	29.4%
DC07	The Larkman	14	0	0.0%	6	42.9%
DC08	Dereham Road/ Distillery Square	37	1	2.7%	19	51.4%
DC09	Hall Road	9	0	0.0%	5	55.5%
DC10	Sprowston Road/ Shipfield	19	1	5.3%	7	36.8%
TOTAL		**202**	**13**	**6.4%**	**92**	**45.5%**

Key

Vacancy rate is **unchanged** since last survey

Vacancy rate is **up** since last survey

Vacancy rate is **down** since last survey

Proportion of A1 retail units is **ABOVE** 60% policy

Proportion of A1 retail units is **BELOW** 60% policy

Local centres

Headline figures	Vacant units	No of units change
Local Centres	8.6%	0.3% change

51. Table 11 below shows vacancy rates and percentage of non-retail units for the 28 local centres.

52. Of the 326 units, the number of vacant units is 28. This is an increase of four vacant units from October 2023 which has increased the percentage from 7.4% to 8.6%. This is still significantly lower than the city centre vacancy rate. Over half of all local centres (15 out of 28) are now fully occupied which is the same as in 2023 and compares to 14 in 2022 and 10 in 2021. There has been an increase of one unit over the past monitoring period.

53. Improvements in vacancies since 2023 have taken place in 4 local centres which are LC03 Hall Road/Southwell Road, LC10 Aylsham Road/Glenmore Gardens, LC20 Colman Road, The Parade and LC30 St Stephens Road. The local centres which have had increased vacancies during the monitoring period are LC01 Hall Road/Trafalgar Street, LC06 Unthank Road, LC13 Catton Grove, LC24 Witard Road, Heartsease Road/Ring Road, LC14 Magdalen Road, LC19 Colman Road, The Avenues and LC28 Magdalen Road/Clarke Road. There is less of a disparity in vacancy rates than in 2021. Back in 2021 LC01 for example had a vacancy rate of 42.9% whilst other Local Centres were fully occupied. Now the worst performing local centres are LC01, LC19 and LC28 which all have a quarter of units empty.

54. The percentage of non-retail units across all of the centres is 51.8% up from 51.1% in 2023, 50.8% in 2022 and 46.0% in 2021. The percentage of non-retail has exceeded the 50% threshold. There are 13 local centres that are not policy compliant which is one more than in 2023. There are now two centres which sits at the recommended 50% threshold and 13 which have more than 50% of units as retail. Over the monitoring period there has been three centres where the proportion of non-retail has reduced (with one local centre now no longer exceeding the 50% non-retail threshold) but six centres where the proportion of non-retail has increased.

55. The thirteen local centres that have exceeded the DM21 policy threshold and have greater than 50% non-retail uses are listed below. LC03 (Hall Road/Southwell Road) and LC30 St Stephens Road have been added to this list and LC10 (Aylsham Road/Glenmore Gardens) has been removed.

    - LC02: Hall Road/Queens Road
    - LC03: Hall Road/Southwell Road
    - LC06: Unthank Road;
    - LC07: St Augustine’s Gate;
    - LC11: Aylsham Road/Boundary Road
    - LC14: Magdalen Road

- LC15: Sprowston Road/Silver Road
- LC17: Bishop Bridge Road
- LC20: Colman Road, The Parade
- LC26: UEA; and
- LC28: Magdalen Road/Clarke Road
- LC29: Aylsham Road/Copenhagen Way.
- LC30: St Stephens Road

56. LC18: Earlham West Centre and LC13: Catton Grove Road/Ring Road have exactly 50% non- retail. Any changes of use of existing A1 units to non-retail uses will cause the DM21 policy threshold to be exceeded.

Table 11: Local Centres[16] defined in the adopted Norwich Local Plan 2014

Ref No	Centre name	Total units	Vacant units	% vacant/ annual change		Non retail units	% non-retail	
LC01	Hall Road/ Trafalgar St	8	2	25.0%		2	25.0%	
LC02	Hall Road/ Queens Road	29	4	13.8%		19	65.5%	
LC03	Hall Road/ Southwell Road	7	0	0.0%		4	57.1%	
LC04	Grove Road	14	0	0.0%		6	42.8%	
LC05	Suffolk Square	9	0	0.0%		3	33.3%	
LC06	Unthank Road	43	4	9.3%		24	55.8%	
LC07	St Augustine's Gate	8	1	12.5%		7	87.5%	
LC08	See footnote[11]							
LC09	Aylsham Road/ Junction Road	8	1	12.5%		3	37.5%	
LC10	Aylsham Road/ Glenmore Gardens	13	1	7.7%		6	46.2%	
LC11	Aylsham Road/ Boundary Road	14	0	0.0%		8	57.1%	
LC12	Woodcock Road	7	0	0.0%		2	28.6%	
LC13	Catton Grove Road/Ring Road	12	1	8.3%		6	50.0%	
LC14	Magdalen Road	14	3	21.4%		9	64.3%	
LC15	Sprowston Road/ Silver Road	8	0	0.0%		6	75.0%	
LC16	See footnote							
LC17	Bishop Bridge Road	8	0	0.0%		6	75.0%	

[11] Local centres at **Dereham Road/Distillery Square** (previously LC08) and **Sprowston Road/Shipfield** (previously LC16) were redesignated as district centres following the development of new anchor foodstores and renumbered as DC08 and DC10 respectively in the 2014 local plan. They are listed in table 10 above. The local centre at **St Stephens Road** newly designated in that plan (LC30) falls partly within and partly outside the city centre.

Ref No	Centre name	Total units	Vacant units	% vacant/ annual change	Non retail units	% non-retail
LC18	Earlham West Centre	22	3	13.6%	11	50.0%
LC19	Colman Road/ The Avenues	16	4	25.0%	5	31.3%
LC20	Colman Road, The Parade	10	0	0.0%	7	70.0%
LC21	Woodgrove Parade	9	0	0.0%	2	22.2%
LC22	St John's Close/ Hall Road	10	0	0.0%	4	40.0%
LC23	Tuckswood centre	5	0	0.0%	1	20.0%
LC24	Witard Road, Heartsease	9	1	11.1%	2	22.2%
LC25	Clancy Road, Heartsease	5	0	0.0%	2	40.0%
LC26	UEA	9	1	11.1%	7	77.8%
LC27	Long John Hill	5	0	0.0%	2	40.0%
LC28	Magdalen Road/ Clarke Road	8	2	25.0%	5	62.5%
LC29	Aylsham Road/ Copenhagen Way	5	0	0.0%	4	80%
LC30	St Stephens Road	11	0	0.0%	6	54.5%
TOTAL		**326**	**28**	**8.6%**	**169**	**51.8%**

Key

Vacancy rate is **unchanged** since last survey
Vacancy rate is **up** since last survey
Vacancy rate is **down** since last survey

Proportion of A1 retail units is **ABOVE** 50% policy target
Proportion of A1 retail units is **BELOW** 50% policy target
Proportion of A1 retail units is **AT** 50% policy target

Conclusions

57. Retail floorspace vacancy rates have reduced within the city centre over the past 12 months although the total number of vacant units increased between October 2023 and 2024. The primary retail area in particular has performed very well seeing a reduction in vacant floorspace and the number of vacant units. The secondary retail area has experienced a significant fall in vacant available floor space but a rise in all vacant floorspace and units although once Home Bargains opens in December all vacant floorspace will fall significantly too. However as shown in table 12 vacancy rates have increased within the Large District Centres and 'rest of the city centre' which indicates that the shopping areas on the peripheral are performing less well. Vacancy rates have continued to increase within the District and Local Centres but still remain significantly lower than the overall city centre rate.

58. High vacancy rates were experienced in July 2021 which was unsurprising given the challenging circumstances faced by retailers during the pandemic and as shown in the October 2022 report it was very encouraging to see how well Norwich recovered and bounced back from this very difficult period. Nationally retailers are now experiencing further economic challenges brought about by the cost of living crisis and other economic and political factors, and Norwich has unfortunately seen a number of closures as a result. Particularly over the past 12 months it would appear that some of the independent businesses have been struggling more than the multiples. Notwithstanding this Norwich has however continued to see investment and whilst some multiples and independent have ceased trading, others have opened within the past couple of years.

59. Norwich's independent retailers have historically been very resilient and have generally performed well. In the past vacancy rates have been lower within both the secondary retail area (when excluding the Cathedral Retail Park) and the Magdalen Street, Anglia Square & St Augustine's LDC than in the primary shopping area and much lower than the national average retail vacancy rate. In 2023 the Local Data Company however reported that nationally independents have experienced the worst recorded net change for the sector since records began and in Norwich the number of vacant units is on the increase within the areas with more independent retailers. The question often posed about the independent market is that of long-term sustainability. Many of these units have shorter average length of occupancy and a higher rate of churn across the market, due to a lack of infrastructure and financial backing so it will be interesting to see how these areas perform in the coming years.

60. This monitoring report now also looks at all town centre use vacancy rates as well as retail. Nationally leisure vacancy rates are lower than retail and whilst it is difficult to compare due to different methodologies of collecting and analysing data, the overall vacancy rate for the city centre (for units) does increase slightly when other town centre uses are taken into account although they are quite significant discrepancies between the primary and secondary retail areas and the large district centre and rest of centre. There are also discrepancies between floorspace figures.

61. In terms of the total amount of retail floorspace within the city centre, it is continuing to decrease although the rate at which it is decreasing has slowed. Within this monitoring period only 737 sqm of retail floorspace was lost which is a 0.4% decrease. This now means that since 2008 Norwich city centre has lost around 9.5% of its retail provision. The retail however is generally not being lost to residential or being demolished; instead, the city is experiencing diversification and the floorspace is generally changing to other town centre uses. Given the changes to the Use Classes Order and the General Permitted Development Order and the change in policy approach that has been brought in through the GNLP it is anticipated that this trend will continue, but we just do not yet know at what rate.

62. This trend of diversification can particularly be seen within Castle Quarter where the retail frontages is no longer within the recommended minimum percentage of A1 use as set out in the ‘Main Town Centre Uses and Retail Frontages’ Supplementary Planning Document (2014). Furthermore PR06: Timberhill/Red Lion Street is the second primary retail frontage which is not policy compliant. However, the other retail frontages all remain relatively stable and comfortably within the recommended minimum percentage of A1 uses with the percentage of retail actually increasing in PR02 The Lanes East and PR03: St Stephens Street and staying the same in Chantry Place. In terms of the secondary area retail frontage zones one out of three (SR03: St Benedicts) is below the minimum threshold and during the monitoring period the proportion of retail reduced slightly within this frontage. However, it stayed the same within the other two frontages. Overall, it would still appear that the retail frontages appear relatively healthy.

63. Vacancy rates in District and Local Centres have increased slightly from 6.9% in 2023 to 7.8% in 2024. This is still significantly lower than it was in 2021 when 11.6% of units were vacant and significantly lower than the 13.3% shop vacancy rate in the city centre. This indicates that despite the challengingcircumstances local and district centres are faring extremely well. The July 2021 report suggested that more people were shopping locally and it would appear that this may still be case, despite fewer people now working from home.

64. The retail sector both nationally and within Norwich has experienced a lot of challenges in recent years brought about by changing consumer behaviour driven by technology and prevailing economic conditions and as a result of the pandemic. Whilst it is likely that these challenges will have ongoing impacts for the viability of some retail businesses, the past couple of years has shown how resilient the majority of our businesses are. Vacant floorspace has reduced over the past 12 months and whilst some multiples and independents have ceased trading within Norwich, there is clearly investment happening with new businesses arriving.

65. It is also encouraging how footfall has returned to pre pandemic levels. Furthermore, with so many improvements taking place to the public realm, such as the recently completed project at Hay Hill, this should enhance the shopping and leisure experience and make it easier for people to get around and enjoy their time within the city.

66. It is however important to acknowledge that Norwich, as with all cities, faces uncertain times ahead. Whilst Norwich has largely recovered from the impacts

of the pandemic, vacant floorspace rates have fluctuated since and in particular independent retailers have more recently been affected by rising costs, inflation and interest rates which have impacted both retailers and consumers.

67. It is also important to acknowledge that there are many changes that can now take place within retail centres without the direction of the council. These include the change of use to other town centre uses and the change of use to residential without the need for full planning permission. The added flexibility within retail centres could reduce vacancy rates and provide a wider range of amenities and services but the Council have also identified several risks associated with this. Whilst we acknowledge that retailing and town centres are currently in a state of flux, this reinforces the need to protect and promote town centres to allow them to recover and evolve in a planned manner. We are concerned that extending the use of permitted development rights to change to residential could be hugely detrimental to this. Without being able to consider the impact that the loss of town centres uses at ground floor level will have, we are concerned that there could be the piecemeal loss of town centre uses at ground floor level which will result in residential interspersed with town centre uses. This will not only affect the way that our high streets function, but it could also reduce rather than increase footfall. For this reason, the Council has concern that the uncontrolled and piecemeal loss of town centre uses could be a threat to the vitality and vibrancy of our high street. It is going to be very important to continue to monitor change over the coming few years.

68. Notwithstanding the above, given the circumstances Norwich has demonstrated that it remains relatively robust and is a thriving regional retail centre. Whilst the number of vacant retail units has increased slightly over the past 12 months, vacant retail floorspace has decreased and footfall levels are still good. To maintain a thriving city centre, the Council may need to identify other ways to influence and cultivate the retail offer of Norwich given the potential challenges faced ahead, including working closely with Norwich BID and other key stakeholders.

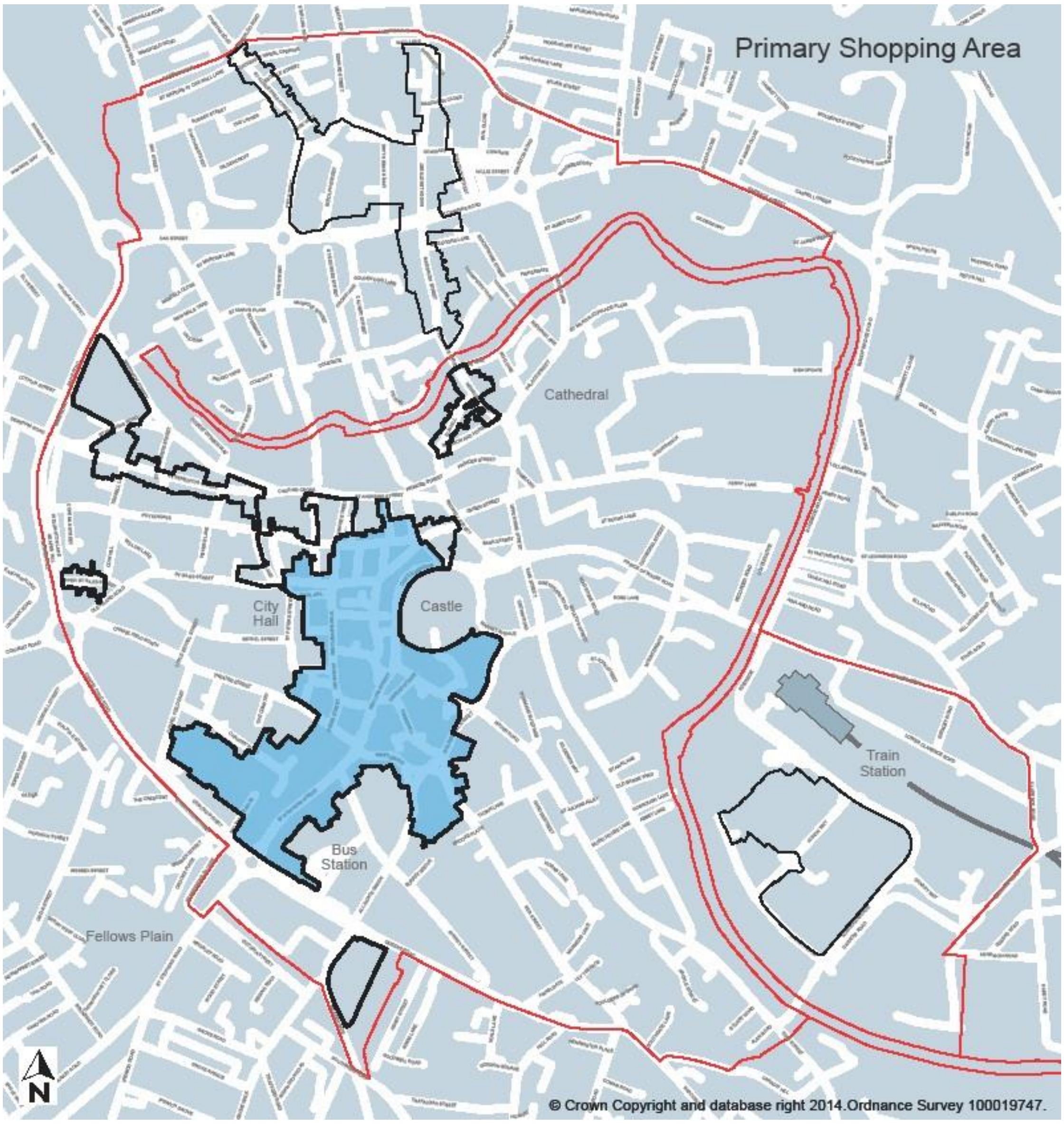
Table 12: 'At a Glance' The direction of travel of vacancy rates and retail floorspace in Norwich since October 2023

Area	Available vacant floor space	All vacant floor space including refurbishment	Number of vacant Units	Overall Floor Area	Overall units
City Centre	↓	↓	↑	↓	↓
Primary Area	↓	↓	↓	↓	
Secondary Area	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓
Large District Centres	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓
Rest of city centre	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓
District Centres	N/A	N/A	↑	N/A	↑
Local Centres	N/A	N/A	↑	N/A	↑

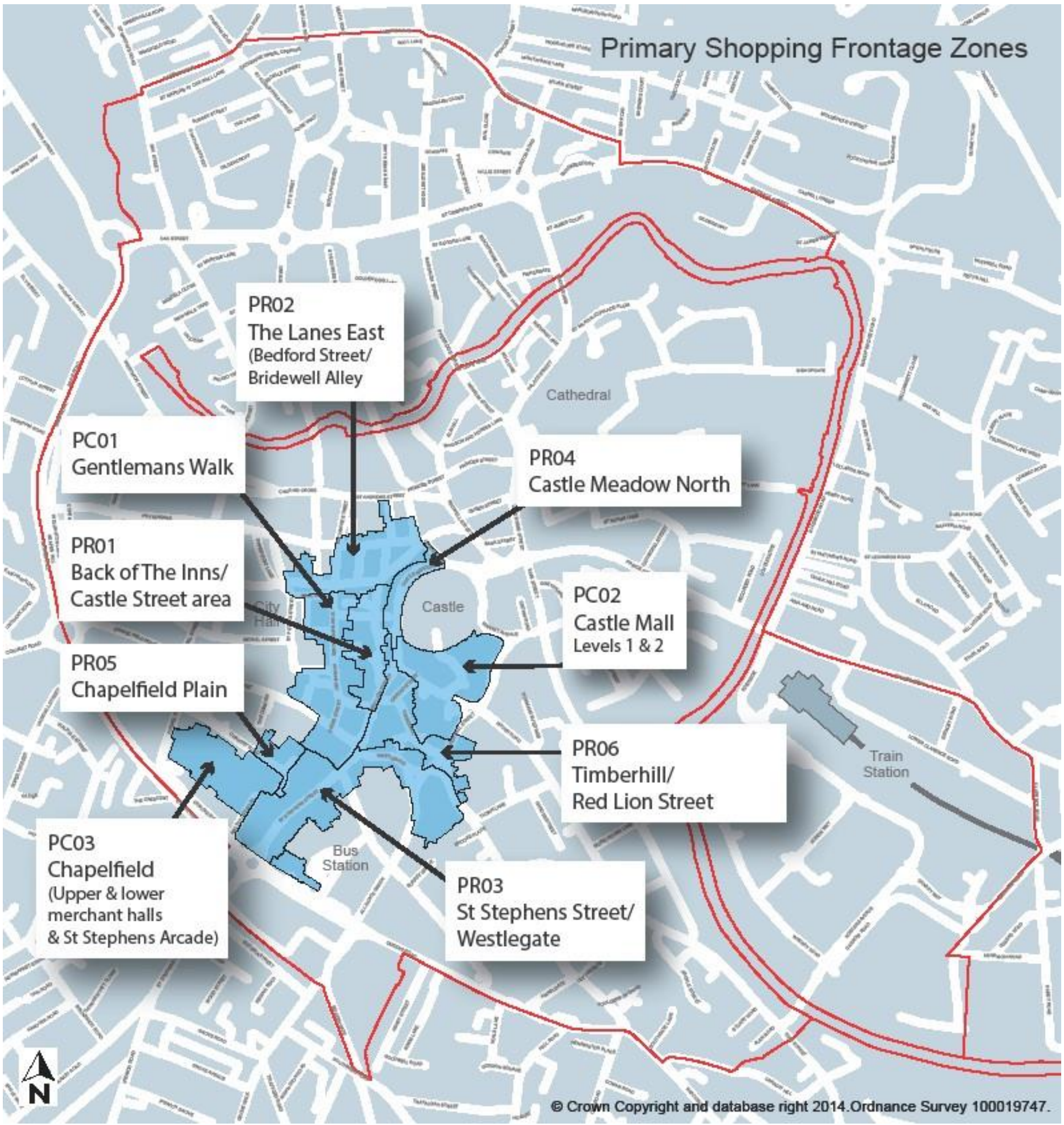
Key
↑ = increase
↓ = decrease
Red = Moving in a negative direction
Green = Moving in a positive direction
Grey = No change

Supporting Maps

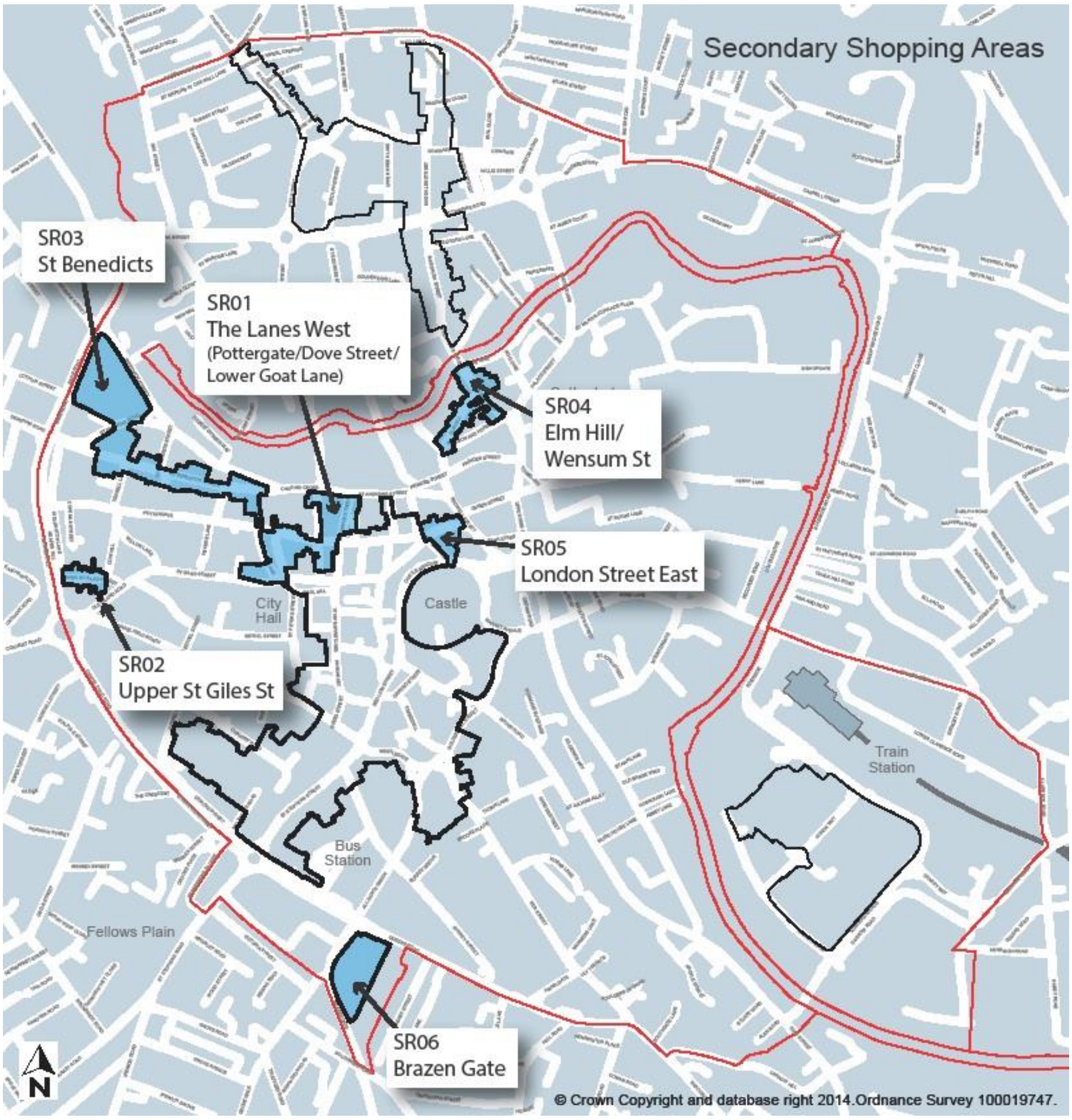
Map 1: Primary shopping area



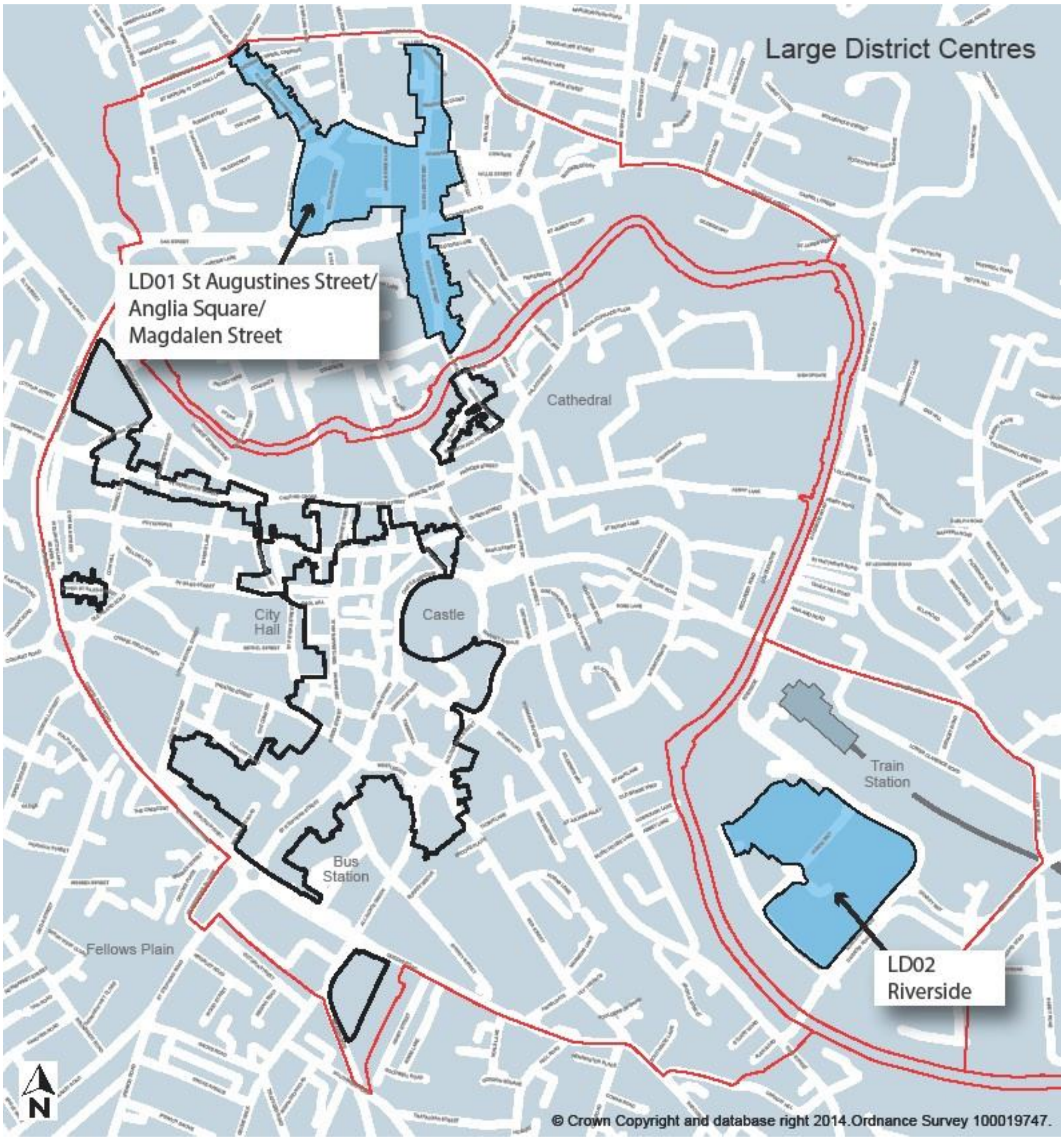
Map 2: Primary area frontage zones



Map 3: Secondary shopping areas



Map 4: Large district centres (Magdalen Street, Anglia Square, St Augustine'sStreet & Riverside)



Contact Information

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