



Visit Royal Sutton Coldfield Business Improvement District (BID) Sutton Coldfield Town Centre Audit: Business Mix and Vacancy Overview June 2025

Overview

- Total number of individual business premises across all sectors: 337
- Number of vacant business premises across all sectors: 62
→ Vacancy rate: 18%

The national average vacancy rates for businesses in town centres:

- High Streets: 14%
- Shopping Centres: 17%
- Retail Parks: 4%

Data from the British Retail Consortium 2024.

Sutton Coldfield town centre currently has a commercial property vacancy rate of 18%, which is above the national average. However, this figure is expected to improve significantly with the completion of key redevelopment sites and a proactive landlord approach to marketing existing vacant premises.

Sector Breakdown

1. Professional Services – 83 (25%)

- Now the largest business sector in Sutton Coldfield town centre.
- Indicates Sutton Coldfield town centre is functioning increasingly as a service-based economy — offices for solicitors, estate agents, accountants, financial advisors, IT, insurance, marketing and recruitment agencies, industry specialists.
- A strong demand for advisory and professional services.

2. Retail – 68 (20%)

- Still a significant presence in the town centre but no longer dominant.
- Shows retail has declined as the lead sector, in line with national trends.
- Still a good mix of independents and national chains.

3. Vacant / Closed – 62 (18%)

- A high vacancy rate — approaching 1 in 5 closed business premises.
- Indicates:
 - Ongoing recovery from economic issues - Covid, inflation, shift in consumer shopping habits to online.
 - Could indicate a need for premises / unit configuration, high rents, need for investment, business uncertainty.

It is important to note that a share of the town centre's vacancy rate is attributable to several key sites that are currently earmarked for redevelopment. These include:

1. Gracechurch shopping centre.

2. Red Rose Centre and multi storey car park.
3. Redevelopment site on Birmingham Road – due to be redeveloped for apartments and shops – Mercia Real Estate.
4. Redevelopment site on the corner of Queen Street – due to be redeveloped for apartments and a Wagamama restaurant.
5. Redevelopment site on Lower Parade – former Rosie’s nightclub.
6. Redevelopment site on Brassington Avenue – new Aldi supermarket.

Note that the new Aldi site is not included within vacant premises data.

These six key development sites represent significant opportunities for regeneration and long-term economic growth in Sutton Coldfield town centre.

Regular communication and updates on all proposed developments, including projected timelines, would help build confidence among businesses, shoppers, and visitors to Sutton Coldfield town centre.

In addition to properties earmarked for redevelopment, several prominently located vacant units remain a concern for the vitality of the town centre. These include:

- The former Poundland shop, O2 shop, and Jimmy Spices restaurant on The Parade – a key pedestrianised area in the town centre.
- The closed TGI Fridays unit in Newhall Walk retail park, behind The Parade.

These 4 units are highly visible, and it is essential that the landlord (Birmingham City Council) takes a proactive role in marketing and letting these premises.

The various redevelopment sites and vacant business premises risk negatively impacting footfall, confidence, and perception of the town centre and regular communication regarding plans and timescales would signal momentum and unlock new opportunities for business growth, inward investment, and town centre recovery.

4. Food & Drink – 53 (16%)

- Strong representation, showing a pivot toward experience-led town centre use.
- Coffee shops, restaurants, bakeries, pubs, cafes, takeaways —more resilient to online competition.
- Indicates a social/leisure orientation.

5. Health & Beauty – 32 (9%)

- Another experience-based sector e.g., hair salons, barbers, nail bars, beauty salons, skincare clinics, dentists.
- Suggests high demand for personal services that are immune to digital substitution.

6. Leisure – 10 (3%)

- Includes the cinema, gym, boxing, and martial arts.
- Slightly under-represented if aiming for a diversified offer that attracts families and younger demographics.

Note that the Town Hall and Sutton Arts Theatre are not within the BID boundary and not included in data.

7. Banks – 9 (3%)

- Good number remain open as many towns have seen closures.
- Reflects a demographic that still values physical banking.

8. Other - 20 (6%)

- Education, garages, car washes, motor services, funeral directors and unknown.

What This Means for Sutton Coldfield Town Centre in 2025

1. Transition from Retail to Services

- Like many towns, Sutton Coldfield has moved from a retail-heavy centre to a more balanced mix, especially favouring professional services, food and drink and personal care.

2. Experience Economy is Crucial

- A quarter of all businesses in Sutton Coldfield town centre fall within the food & drink and health & beauty sectors— a clear sign people are still coming into town for experiential, in-person services and an opportunity to socialise.

3. Vacancy Remains a Major Challenge

- An 18% vacancy rate is a concern, but also presents opportunity for meanwhile use, creative pop-ups, or long-term repurposing e.g., coworking, housing, arts, and culture.
- Sites have been earmarked for redevelopment, which contributes to the current high vacancy rate.

4. Planning & BID Strategy Implications

There is a need for:

- Vacancy intervention strategies.
- Diversification of the offer (more leisure, art, and cultural space).
- Supporting the growth of experience-led and community-oriented services.
- Encouraging modern retail formats or hybrid service/retail models.
- Proactive landlords marketing properties and incentivising businesses to open in Sutton Coldfield town centre.
- Stronger communication regarding future redevelopment plans and timelines so visitors do not only see empty premises but understand the future for the sites.
- As retail makes up 20% of the town centre offer there is the need to ensure that outside of traditional shopping hours visitors feel safe in the town i.e., CCTV, Police presence.
- If visitors to the town are less likely to be coming to shop there should be clear communication/information channels so that the non-retail offer is promoted.

5. Visit Royal Sutton Coldfield BID - Supporting Town Centre Recovery

Visit Royal Sutton Coldfield Business Improvement District (BID) plays a central role in supporting the recovery, revitalisation, and ongoing appeal of the town centre since its formation 14 years ago. Through a comprehensive programme of events, improvements, and business support, the BID continues to drive footfall, enhance the visitor experience, and support the local economy. Key initiatives include:

Vibrant Markets & Festivals:

- Monthly Farmers and Craft Market: Held on the last Sunday of each month, this BID-managed event has been running successfully for three years and was set up to boost Sunday footfall.
- Food Festivals: Major events in September 2024 and April 2025, each hosting over 80 food and drink stalls and attracting thousands of visitors, with the next festival scheduled for 3 days in September 2025.
- Christmas Markets: Delivered festive experiences with a 22-day wooden chalet market in 2024 and an 8-day Victorian-style market planned for December 2025.
- Birmingham Jazz Festival, supporting local hospitality venues by funding live music. The next event takes place in July 2025 benefitting 13 businesses.
- Specialist Markets: Vegan Markets and the Young Traders Market regional finals.

Family-Friendly Events & Seasonal Activities:

- The BID funds and organises a regular calendar of free family events in the town centre including Kid's CarFest, Dino Day, a giant Easter egg trail, kids' music workshop, and themed football table events.
- Character meet-and-greets featuring favourites such as Peter Rabbit, Peppa Pig, Bluey, The Gruffalo, Batman and the Batmobile, the Transformers and many more.
- Celebrations marking Armed Forces Day, VE Day, the Jubilee, and King's Coronation, including live music, entertainment, and interactive attractions such as a flight simulator.
- Outdoor pop-up cinema events, screening Wimbledon finals and popular films.
- Christmas entertainment including reindeer, giant snow globe photo opportunities, meet-and-greet with Father Christmas and festive characters such as The Grinch and The Snowman, the Gingerbreads, Gliding Toy Soldiers and many more.
- Themed workshops to support the hospitality industry, including Christmas wreath-making and mixology, organised, and funded by the BID and hosted by local businesses.

Supporting Local Organisations:

- Support for Sutton Coldfield Fire Station Open Day, funding character Fireman Sam and free face painting and contributing to the Police Emergency Services Day with free family activities.
- Cover the cost of the Sutton Pastors public liability insurance to support their work.
- Planting scheme at the main entrance of the college.

Town Centre Improvements:

- Graffiti removal and fly-tipping clean-ups.
- Planting and greening projects, including adoption of the large brick planters on Birmingham Road, Lower Parade and at the front of the College.
- Funding and installation of 3 public litter bins (Lichfield Road and Birmingham Road).
- Seasonal bunting installation along The Parade (May–November).
- BID Security Marshals patrolling the town centre every Friday and Saturday evening in December to support public safety and enhance the evening economy at Christmas / New Year.
- Lobbying for improvements i.e., boarding up the closed Poundland and TGI to prevent ASB.
- The BID facilitated the introduction of Patty Freaks and Military Chef to the Gracechurch Shopping Centre, helping them secure a unit and support the filling of vacant retail space.

Business Promotion & Engagement:

- Organising high-profile events for local businesses to attend featuring speakers such as retail expert Mary Portas, historian Carl Chinn, Dragon's Den investors Sara Davies, and Deborah Meaden. There will be a business seminar on using AI in autumn 2025.
- Production and distribution of the Sutton Coldfield Food and Drink Guide to 15,500 homes, with an updated edition underway for 2025.
- Creation of a Professional Services Guide, currently being refreshed for 2025.
- Ongoing promotion of town centre businesses and events across BID-run social media platforms, including a Facebook page with over 13,000 followers.

**Data relates to Visit Royal Sutton Coldfield Business Improvement District (BID) boundary only and all 337 individual business premises with a rateable value of £7,500 and above, which is BID criteria. Data has been compiled, checked, and verified by the BID in June 2025.. Data excludes the 7 car parks in the BID area. 6 open and 1 closed.*