Dewsbury Town Centre Health check

2026

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Dewsbury Town Centre

Dewsbury is the second largest of Kirklees' town centres. The defined town centre is bounded by the Dewsbury Ring Road (A638), and the Goad area extends slightly to include the Lidl and other commercial units to the north. This Goad area contains 293 retail, leisure and service units amounting to 42,278 sq.m gross. The layout of the town centre partly reflects Dewsbury's historic and present role as a market town. The main shopping and leisure streets are dispersed around Market Place, Foundry Street, and the Princess of Wales Shopping Centre.

The latter provides a focus for comparison retailers, including some national multiples. The Rishworth Centre and the other surrounding edge-of-centre retail warehouse units are relatively well-connected to the town centre and provide for larger-format non-food shopping uses.

A Lidl supermarket lies to the north-west of the town centre, within the Goad area but outside the defined boundary. Additional large edge- and out-of-centre national multiple foodstores located to the south (Asda, Aldi, Sainsbury's and Iceland) provide for the vast majority of local residents' day-to-day convenience needs. As a result, convenience provision within the defined centre itself is largely independent and supplemented by the Market traders, which focus on traditional and specialist food products.



Figure 1: Dewsbury's Markets contribute to the strength and diversity of its retail offer



Figure 2: Comparison retailers are concentrated within the Princess of Wales Shopping Centre



Figure 3: The shopping environment is boosted by heritage assets such as the Listed Town Hall



Figure 4: Lidl is located to the north-west of the centre, outside the boundary formed by the A638

Table 1 Dewsbury Town Centre Floorspace Composition

GOAD Category	Floorspace at 2013 (sq.m)	Floorspace at 2013 (%)	Floorspace UK Average at 2013 (%)	Floorspace at 2025 (sq.m)	Floorspace at 2025 (%)	Floorspace UK Average at 2025 (%)
Comparison	12,240	27.7	36.4	9,097	21.5	28.7
Convenience	6,020	13.6	14.4	6,221	14.7	15.3
Financial & Business	6,020	13.6	8.3	3,433	8.1	6.1
Leisure	5,750	13.0	22.7	5,551	13.1	27.7
Retail Service	4,120	9.3	7.2	3,215	7.6	7.2
Vacant	10,010	22.7	10.1	14,760	34.9	14.5
Total	**44,160**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**42,278**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: Composition of town centre based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of April 2025; 2013 data from WYG's Retail Capacity Study for Kirklees District (February 2014); UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025.

Table 2 Dewsbury Town Centre Unit Composition

GOAD Category	Units at 2013 (no.)	Units at 2013 (%)	Units UK Average at 2013 (%)	Units at 2025 (no.)	Units at 2025 (%)	Units UK Average at 2025 (%)
Comparison	85	27.9	33.0	62	21.2	26.1
Convenience	15	4.9	8.0	24	8.2	9.3
Financial & Business	39	12.8	11.0	20	6.8	7.9
Leisure	47	15.4	21.9	47	16.0	26.5
Retail Service	37	12.1	13.6	28	9.6	15.8
Vacant	82	26.9	12.2	112	38.2	14.1
Total	**305**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**293**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: Composition of town centre based on boundary as defined by Experian Goad and derived from Nexus Planning Survey of April 2025; 2013 data from WYG's Retail Capacity Study for Kirklees District (February 2014); UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025.

Uses

Retail provision in Dewsbury is impacted by the large retail warehouse units located outside the Ring Road which bounds the traditional town centre.

With regard to convenience provision, the figures set out in Tables 1 and 2 above include the Lidl supermarket that lies to the north-west of the town centre, which is within the Goad area but outside the defined boundary. Additional large edge- and out-of-centre national multiple food stores located to the south (Asda, Aldi, Sainsbury's and Iceland) are not reflected in the tables above, but do provide for the vast majority of local residents' day-to-day convenience needs.

As a result, convenience provision within the defined centre itself largely comprises smaller-scale independent food retailers. While the proportion of floorspace and units in convenience use remains below UK averages, the gap has narrowed since 2013 and we consider that the variety of products on offer is reasonably good. Dewsbury enjoys representation from several bakers, butchers, convenience stores, grocers, and a health foods shop.

Moreover, this offer has recently been boosted by the opening of Umrah, a new international supermarket which trades from the former Wilko unit at 20 Crackenedge Lane.[1] This unit was still under alteration on the day of our fieldwork visit and is included in the vacancy figures set out above but, as of July 2025, is now used for the sale of over 70,000 products including freshly baked goods, fresh meat and poultry, frozen foods, fruit and veg, dairy products, soft drinks, and international spices. The new store helps to fill a qualitative gap for larger-format grocery retail space within the defined town centre.

Similarly, the proportion of comparison floorspace and units in the town centre is also below the relevant UK averages, as was the case in 2013. Since 2013, Dewsbury's shares of non-food retail provision have declined. However, it should be noted that this fall is within the context of the well-documented challenges faced by the UK market as a whole (including long-term trends such as the growth in internet shopping, together with major events such as the Covid-19 pandemic). These factors have led to a decline in comparison space across the country over this period.

It should also be noted that Dewsbury residents have access to the Rishworth Centre and other surrounding edge-of-centre retail warehouse units that are relatively well-connected to the town centre and provide for larger-format non-food shopping uses.

In Dewsbury town centre itself, the Princess of Wales Shopping Centre has been the long-term focus of national multiple comparison retailers, many of whom have struggled and even closed in the face of the wider market trends summarised above. These retailers continue to be concentrated within the Shopping Centre, which contains brands such as Boots, Card Factory, EE, Shoe Zone and Vodafone. However, the Shopping Centre has responded to market changes since 2013 by diversifying its offer through the introduction of leisure uses such as Costa Coffee and convenience retailers like Greggs. Despite these efforts, there remain large vacancies within the Princess of Wales precinct.

[1] 'Umrah: New international supermarket coming to Dewsbury town centre', Dewsbury Report, 4th March 2025 [accessed 16th October 2025].

Elsewhere in the town centre, comparison provision is predominantly independent, with retailers trading from units that vary widely in size and format. A number of the operators present reflect Dewsbury's ethnically diverse community, with several stores selling Asian-inspired clothing and other goods. In addition to several clothing shops (including childrenswear retailers), the offer provides for art, cards and gifts, carpets and furniture, charity shops, a chemist, household goods, jewellers, mobile phones and accessories, textiles and soft furnishings.

Importantly, Dewsbury's brick and mortar retail offer is supplemented by its Market traders, which contribute to diversity in both the comparison and convenience retail categories. The new goods market is held on Wednesdays and Saturdays, with a second-hand market held on Fridays, and a car boot sale on Sundays.

The Markets are a key part of Dewsbury's identity and a significant driver of footfall. While they continue to play an important role, our stakeholder engagement exercise and documents such as the Dewsbury Town Centre Strategic Development Framework 2018 & Delivery Programme have recognised a decline in recent years in both the public perception and trading performance of the Markets.

As explained in the 'Opportunity Sites' section below, the Council has recently approved plans for improvements to Dewsbury Market and an adjoining new park which should help build on the existing strengths, address the identified weaknesses, and create a more varied, day-to-night offering with more areas for eating, drinking, socialising and events within the town centre.[2].

Leisure provision in Dewsbury has stayed remarkably consistent since 2013, whereas this sector has seen a significant increase across the rest of the country. As a consequence, Dewsbury's relative under-provision in floorspace and units in leisure use is now even more pronounced compared to national averages.

There are several amusement centres and betting offices in the town centre, but the majority of the existing leisure uses fall within the food and beverage sub-sector. These operators include cafes, restaurants, public houses and several takeaways dispersed throughout the centre.

In terms of retail services, Dewsbury's proportion of floorspace remains above the national average despite a slight fall since 2013. This finding appears to reflect the presence of some relatively large units in the north-east of the Goad area of the centre which provide for car repairs and funeral director services, a reflection of the diversity of Dewsbury's operators and the broad variety of unit formats from which they trade.

In terms of retail service units, however, the town centre is well below the UK average, with the gap widening since 2013. The majority of the retail service operators in the town centre (61%) fall into the health & beauty sub-category, but there is also representation from a dog groomer, optician, post office, photo processing service, and travel agents, as well as the aforementioned car repair businesses and undertaker services.

The proportion of financial & business services floorspace in Dewsbury has declined since 2013 but remains above the UK average. The proportion of units in this use, however, has seen a much more substantial fall is now below the national average (whereas in 2013 Dewsbury exceeded the UK average). This change partly reflects broader market trends, such as banking

[2] 'Plans approved for town's market upgrade and park', BBC News, 20th June 2025 [accessed 16th October 2025].

services increasingly move online and the resulting closures of brick-and-mortar banks. However, financial & business provision in Dewsbury has declined faster than the UK average and this should be monitored in future.

Nonetheless, the town centre does continue to function as a financial & business service destination for its local residents; it contains four banks and building societies, together with business service operators, an employment agency, several estate agents, insurance services, pawnbrokers, and a number of solicitors' offices.

Daytime/Evening Economy

Dewbury's daytime economy is underpinned by its day-to-day retail and, to a lesser extent, service offers which meet the needs of local residents that are not fulfilled by the surrounding large-format convenience and comparison operators. The uniqueness of the retail and leisure offer provided by the Markets plays a key role in driving footfall on specific days of the week, particularly Wednesdays and Saturdays.

The opening times of the town centre's shops and service operators are generally limited to normal business hours, although there are some exceptions.

The evening economy is limited for a centre of Dewsbury's size and role. While there are some scattered pubs and restaurants, proportions of both leisure floorspace and units are well below UK averages and takeaways comprise the dominant late-opening use.

Takeaways can contribute to evening footfall to a degree, but they do not typically encourage people to stay within a centre for a duration of time. Furthermore, in recent years, the growing popularity of food delivery platforms such as JustEat and Deliveroo has led to a decline in physical visits to takeaway outlets, further diminishing the vitality of town centres which rely on these operators to bring activity during evening hours.

Addressing the current lack of a well-rounded evening economy is a key aim of much of the recent and ongoing investment in Dewsbury described in the 'Opportunity Sites' section below. Amongst other things, the aforementioned Dewsbury Market and town centre park investment seeks to support the development of quality food and beverage outlets and the creation of a broader offer with event space that encourages visitors (and particularly families) to spend time in the town centre in the evenings.

Vacancies

At the time of our fieldwork visit, there were 112 vacant units in Dewsbury which amounted to approximately 14,760 sq.m gross of unoccupied commercial floorspace. Thus, Dewsbury's vacancy rates in terms of both floorspace and units are well over double the UK averages, an issue that has persisted since 2013.

However, it should be noted that a number of the spaces identified as vacant in the tables above were under alteration on the day of our site visit because of ongoing works. These units are coloured pink on the accompanying Goad plan, and notably include:

- the aforementioned former Wilko unit at 20 Crackenedge Lane, which has subsequently opened as the Umrah supermarket;

- units at Dewsbury Bus Station, which are being redeveloped as part of a £23m plan to transform the way people travel in and around the town centre, including improved interior design and better accessibility for all bus station users and upgraded public entrances and exits; and
- the town centre's Grade II Listed Victorian Arcade, which is the subject of a £3.68m scheme to create the UK's first community-run shopping arcade, focussing on local independent businesses in the creative sector.

Further detail on these and other key investments in Dewsbury is provided in the 'Opportunity Sites' section below.

Nonetheless, even excluding the units that were under alteration during our site visit, it is clear that Dewsbury, in common with many similarly sized town centres across the UK, suffers from an oversupply of vacant former retail floorspace. In Dewsbury, the issue is slightly compounded by the fact that much of the commercial stock is historic in nature, and often listed, which can make it challenging and costly to bring vacant premises back into beneficial use.

The vacant units in the town centre vary in terms of size and location, and the total amount of empty floorspace includes some of the largest and most prominent units in the centre. As a consequence, the impact of the high vacancy rates is felt throughout Dewsbury and particularly around the Daisy Hill area in the west, which has noticeably less activity and footfall than other parts.

Given the longstanding nature of the issue of high vacancy rates in Dewsbury, much of the work done by the Council and other key stakeholders in recent years has focussed on opportunities to reoccupy and repurpose unoccupied space in the town centre. Indeed, this is one of the key priorities of the Dewsbury Town Investment Plan (discussed below).

Opportunity Sites

Dewsbury has long been identified as a regeneration priority for Kirklees Council, and the town centre is set to benefit from an extensive programme of recent and ongoing investment with the potential to transform its shopping and leisure environment and drive future economic growth.

Key documents relating to investment in Dewsbury include:

- the Dewsbury Town Centre Strategic Development Framework 2018 & Delivery Programme, which sets out the Council's 25-year vision for the town centre and is supported by a delivery programme;[3] and
- the Dewsbury Town Investment Plan, which was produced by Kirklees Council and the Dewsbury Town Deal Board in 2020 to support a (successful) bid for £25m of investment from the UK Government's Towns Fund.[4]

The latter identifies nine key projects, comprising:

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[3] 'Dewsbury Town Centre Strategic Development Framework 2018 & Delivery Programme', Kirklees Council [accessed 17th October 2025].

[4] 'Dewsbury Town Investment Plan', Kirklees Council and Dewsbury Town Deal Board [accessed 17th October 2025].

1. **The Arcade (£1.31m)** – Reopening of the Grade II Listed Victorian Arcade as a hub for independent businesses
2. **Dewsbury Market (£6.60m)** – Creating a 21st Century market as the economic heart of the town centre
3. **Urban Realm - Town Park (£6.25m)** – Creating high quality public spaces for people to spend time in together
4. **Creative Culture Programme (£2.195m)** – a year-round programme of cultural activities to bring the community together
5. **Building Revival (£3.15m)** – Bringing beautiful buildings back to life for people to live and work in
6. **Daisy Hill Neighbourhood (£3.0m)** – Creating a new neighbourhood in the town centre
7. **Construction Skills Village (£1.50m)** – Providing leading-edge training and skills opportunity in the construction and built environment sectors opportunity in the construction and built environment sectors
8. **Fibre capability (£0.25m)** – Ensuring Dewsbury's strong transport connections are matched by strong digital connections
9. **Sustainable transport modes (£1.325m)** – Enabling people to travel healthily and sustainably by bike or on foot

This £25m Towns Fund investment will complement wider investment from Kirklees Council and others, resulting in a total of £60m earmarked to be invested in Dewsbury.

As noted throughout this healthcheck, a number of these investments are currently being implemented. On the day of our fieldwork visit, progress with the Arcade and Dewsbury Market and Town Park projects was evident.

In addition, other investments from sources separate to the Towns Fund are being progressed. These include the £23m Bus Station redevelopment funded by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority in partnership with Kirklees Council.[5]

Pedestrian Flows

Dewsbury Market was trading on the day of our site visit, and it was evident that much of the footfall in the town centre was concentrated around its stalls. We also observed fairly strong pedestrian flows between the Cliffe/Camroyd Street Car Park in the north-east of the central part of Dewsbury including Market Place and the Princess of Wales Shopping Centre.

In contrast, the western part of the town centre, particularly Daisy Hill, felt noticeably less well-visited and this area suffered from the adverse impacts of stretches of vacant or otherwise inactive frontages.

[5] 'Dewsbury Bus Station set for multi-million-pound transformation', West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 7th March 2025 [accessed 17th October 2025].

Accessibility

Good private and public transport linkages are a key strength of Dewsbury. The town centre benefits from its road connections to the M1/M62, together with dedicated rail and bus stations offering frequent services to destinations across West Yorkshire (albeit that the latter was closed for redevelopment on the day of our fieldwork).

Nonetheless, there are opportunities to improve walking and cycling infrastructure in the town centre. We note that the Town Investment Plan identifies new footway/cycleway facilities as a priority project.

Funding is now in place for a new comprehensive scheme to enhance pedestrian and cycling connectivity between the north-east of Dewsbury and the rest of the town centre and college sites. The scheme includes a new two-way cycle track alongside the footway to enable and encourage modal shift to bike through creation of a safer, more attractive environment for cyclists as part of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. It will also provide for a contraflow cycle lane, new surfacing, a new footway facility, and a new zebra crossing.

In terms of accessibility for pedestrians, including those with mobility impairments, we consider that the town centre performs well. Areas of Market Place and Foundry Street are pedestrianised, and pavements are generally reasonably wide and free of clutter.

Perception of Safety

As noted above, Dewsbury suffers from high vacancy rates and a lack of footfall in some areas. These factors can lead to a perception that the centre lacks surveillance, particularly in the western part. Moreover, the relatively limited evening economy can also lead to a lack of activity in the town centre after dark.

As discussed above, a number of ongoing investments are being made to strengthen the town centre's evening economy and make it an attractive place for families, in particular, to visit the centre for shopping and leisure activities during the day and into the evening. These include the Town Centre Park project.

At the same time, the Town Investment Plan notes that Kirklees Council has committed £250k of investment into community safety. The money will be spent on the recruitment of additional officers to patrol the town centre and will undertake enforcement activities with a focus on anti-social behaviour, improving the environment through enforcing Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO) and littering offences.

Environmental Quality

One of Dewsbury's key strengths is its historic shopping environment. The majority of the town centre is in a Conservation Area, and it contains around fifty listed buildings, mainly dating from the 19th century.

While there is little evidence of graffiti or vandalism, the number and scale of the vacant units in the town centre and a lack of good shopfront maintenance does in places detract from the overall environmental quality. This is another issue being addressed through the Towns Fund

investment, with building revival being one of the key projects identified in the Town Investment Plan.

The building revival scheme is aimed at providing support for the conversion of buildings to employment and residential use where appropriate and improving shopfronts to a Conservation Area Standard. The project will link to the Dewsbury Townscape Heritage Initiative and involve grant assistance to owners providing quality accommodation. This work will be in addition to public realm improvements already identified, including the new park and enhancements to the Arcade.

Conclusions

In summary, Dewsbury commercial provision reflects its historic environment and role as a market town, as well as the presence of large national multiple supermarkets and retail warehouse operators at its periphery. The retail offer is largely independent, with operators trading from units of a wide variety of sizes and formats. The recent opening of the Umrah international supermarket in the former Wilko unit has filled a prominent vacancy and helped to address a qualitative gap for larger-format grocery retail space within the defined town centre.

Dewsbury's Markets remain a key anchor and an integral part of the town centre's identity, as well as adding diversity to both its comparison and convenience sectors. The Markets are one of several focusses for substantial investment which will seek to build on existing strengths as well as providing new opportunities for high-quality shopping and leisure space aimed at families. This investment is also expected to provide a boost to the evening economy, which is underdeveloped for a centre of Dewsbury's size and role in the hierarchy.

While high vacancy rates have been a longstanding problem for the town centre, and remain more than double the national averages, regeneration projects are being actively progressed and are expected to provide fruit in the near future. Key investment targets include the redevelopments of the Arcades and the Bus Station.

Altogether, the town centre is set to be transformed by around £60m worth of public and private investment. The works will existing and new occupiers to make the best use of Dewsbury's high-quality and attractive historic buildings, as well as providing improved pedestrian and cycling linkages across the town centre.

Thus, while our overall conclusion on the current health of Dewsbury town centre is that it is showing signs of weakness, we consider that there are strong grounds for optimism about its future vitality and viability.