The Rural Shop Report 2025

A report by the Association of Convenience Stores

#RuralShopReport

ACS | the voice of local shops

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James Lowman
Association of Convenience Stores

The UK's almost 19,000 rural shops are crucial to the communities that they serve, providing not just a wide range of products – often from small local suppliers - but also essential services like the Post Office, prescription collections and other banking services. Rural shops operate uniquely at the heart of their communities, but the change of pace in retail and the growing expectations of customers mean that they need support to be able to deliver on those expectations every day.

Thousands of rural shops trade by themselves in isolated locations, with no other businesses to draw in footfall. With cash and carries often a long drive away, and wholesaler deliveries limited by the sparsity of businesses in the area, it can be costly and time consuming to access to range of fresh, chilled and frozen products that the community needs. Rural shops also continue to face challenges when it comes to connectivity. While broadband provision and 4G/5G signals are improving, many rural shops still operate in areas where connectivity is slow and patchy, holding back investment in technology and other innovations in-store.

The Rural Shop Report demonstrates the importance of these businesses, the services and technology that rural retailers are already investing in, and highlights the need for policymakers to include them in conversations about delivering services that their communities need in the same way as urban retailers.

Rural shops are increasingly acting as miniature high streets in their own right, taking on services that would have previously been available locally like access to cash, bill payments, Post Office services and prescription collections. In some cases, and especially in the case of providing access to cash through the provision of a free to use ATM, retailers are operating this service at a loss but are committed to doing so because of its importance to the community.

In addition to the data presented in this report, we have also included case studies outlining the challenges and successes of rural retailers operating in very different circumstances, but with one commonality – they are all the beating heart of their communities ■

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There are

50,387 convenience stores in mainland UK

18,969 of these stores are rural

76% are owned by **independent** retailers

Source: William Reed 2024

Location of rural convenience stores

49% **Isolated store**
No other retail/service businesses close by.

40% **Located on a small parade**
Up to five retail/service businesses close by.

11% **Located on a larger parade or a high street**
Up to 10 retail/service businesses close by.

Source: Lumina Intelligence 2020-2024

Why we are important

£18.5bn total sales

Source: ACS/Lumina Intelligence 2024

£241m invested

Source: ACS Voice of Local Shops 2024

£4bn in GVA

Source: ACS 2024

178,000+ jobs

Source: ACS/Lumina Intelligence 2024

Who we are

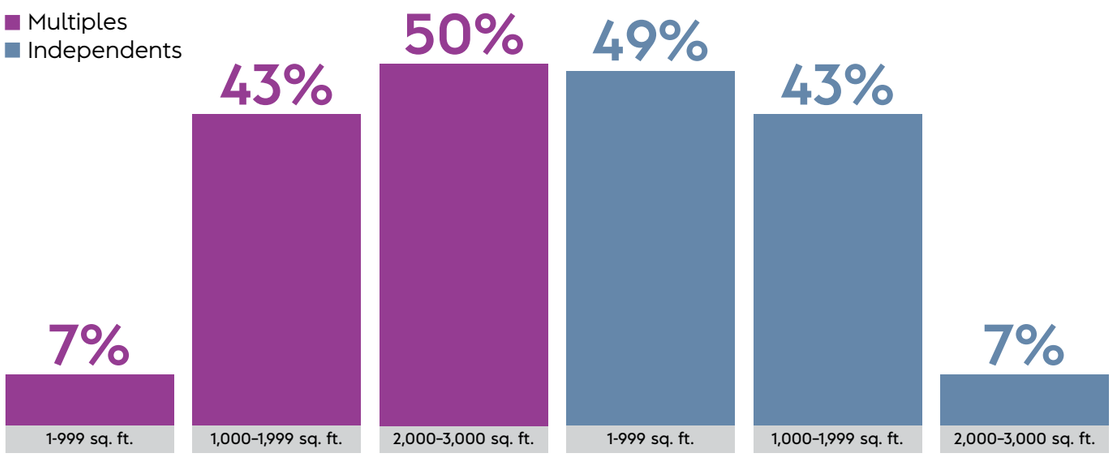
Opening hours

5% are open **24** hours

6% Closed on Sunday

Typical convenience stores are open **7am** until **10pm**

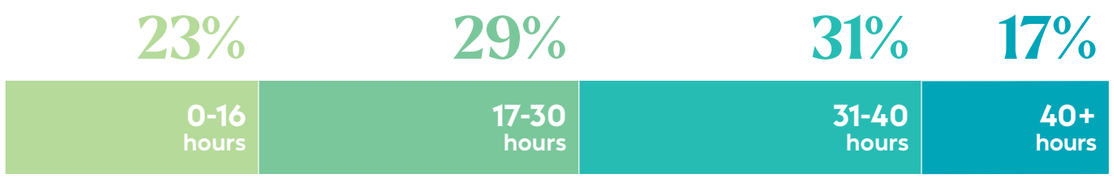
Sales space in-store



Our colleagues

178,000+ jobs provided by mainland UK rural convenience stores

Hours worked



All data on this page source: ACS/Lumina Intelligence 2024

Retail crime

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Ian Lewis
SPAR Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire

SPAR Minster Lovell is an award-winning village shop on the outskirts of Witney, Oxfordshire run by independent retailer Ian Lewis and his family. The shop was founded in 1937, and currently attracts around 5,000 customers per week.

The shop is located close to the A40 between Oxford and Cheltenham, so can attract a lot of passing trade in addition to the community that lives, works and shops in the area. However, the downside of being close to a major route across the country is that the shop can also be attractive to criminals.

> **"I wonder whether people see the brand above the door and think we're just part of a big corporate, so taking a few things off the shelf for themselves won't have any impact. The reality is it has a massive impact not just on me and my colleagues, but my wider family as well. This is a family business, every crime against us feels personal."**

The shop is a frequent target of thieves, despite wall to wall CCTV (26 cameras) and security measures in store. Ian reports that in a recent spree of theft, £120 of product was stolen in less than three minutes. For the most part though, despite tight stock controls it can be difficult to know exactly how much the store is losing day to day to theft. The total amount being stolen by shop thieves is significant, but not enough to justify a full time member of dedicated security staff, so the store finds itself stuck in the middle about ways to address the problem.

One way that retailers have been fighting back themselves is posting CCTV of incidents locally on social media, often with positive results as people known to the offenders convince them to go back into store and pay for the goods that they've stolen. Ian has had some success with this approach, but it does have its limitations: "In some cases we've had people come back and own up to what they've done, but because we're close to major through road, there are plenty of thieves that we'll only ever see once and then they'll be off across the country so it's very difficult to get any follow up."

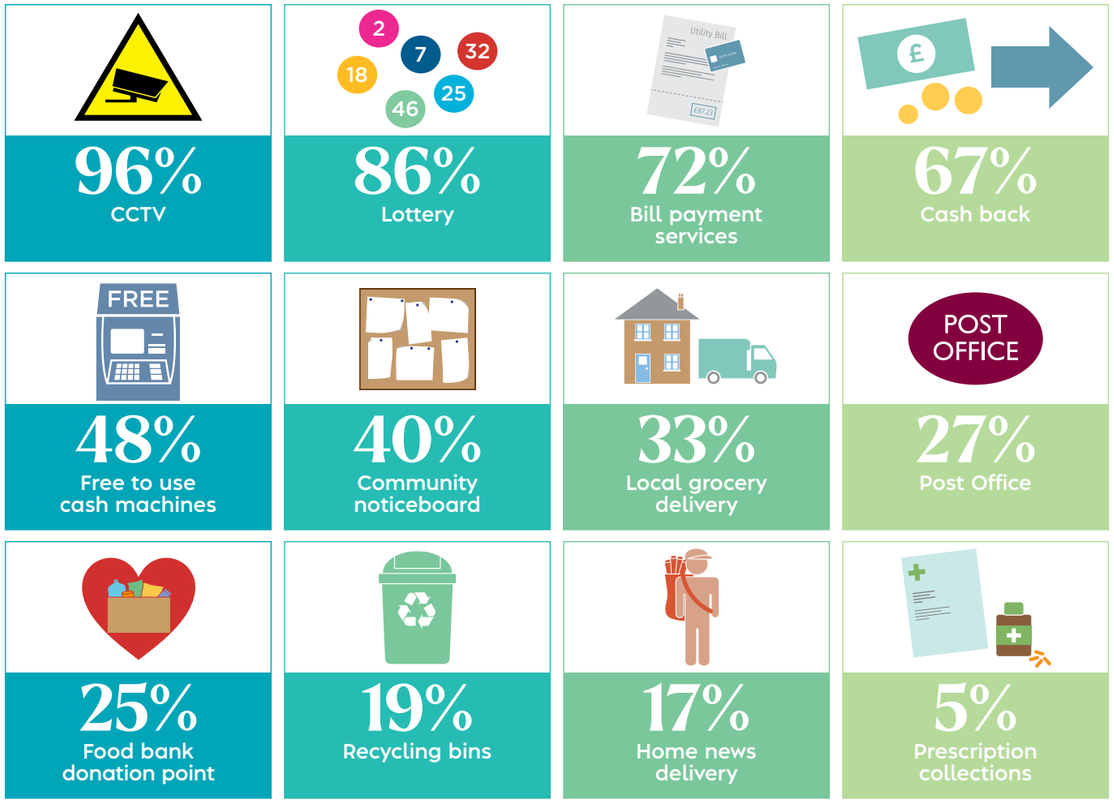
Ian has considered whether the symbol group branding that he has above the door, which has brought a lot of positives to the shop, has an impact on the perception of the business to thieves: "I wonder whether people see the brand above the door and think we're just part of a big corporate, so taking a few things off the shelf for themselves won't have any impact. The reality is it has a massive impact not just on me and my colleagues, but my wider family as well. This is a family business, every crime against us feels personal."

In September 2024, there was an attempted break-in at the shop during the night, where three offenders armed with crowbars and angle grinders tried to get to the cash machine inside. They were unsuccessful, but the store lost half a day's trading due to the damage caused – mitigated only by the phenomenal response of the local and business community in helping the shop get back on its feet.

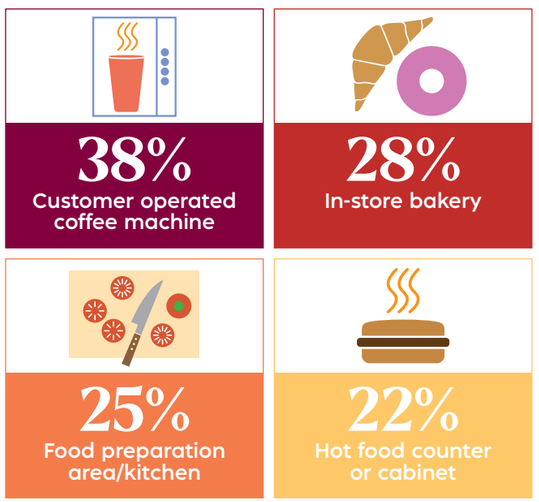
The shop was targeted again in the early hours of December 27th, when the business was ram-raided by criminals in a Land Rover and the cash machine ripped out, all while Ian's parents were sleeping upstairs. In a statement after the raid, Ian Lewis said: "The voicemail that I got from my dad this morning, I don't think I'll ever forget the fear and the absolute distraughtness of my mum in the background. It's something that will live with me forever."

The services and technology we offer

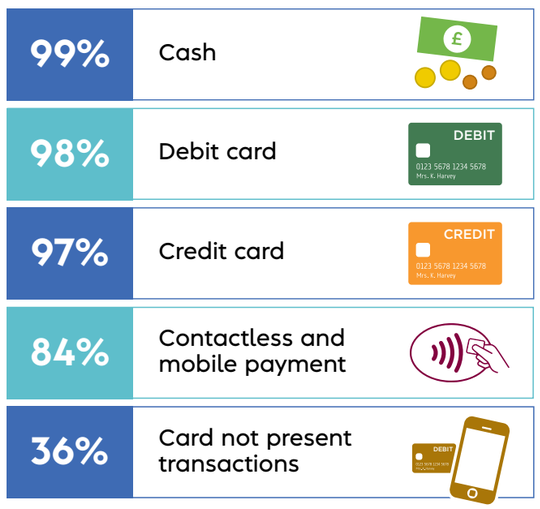
The percentage of rural stores in the convenience sector that provide each service is as follows:



Food service



Payment methods



All data on this page source: ACS/Lumina Intelligence 2023/2024

Services in isolation

Christine Hope
Hopes of Longtown, Herefordshire

Hopes of Longtown is an award-winning independent village shop and Post Office operating on its own at the foot of the Black mountains in Hereford, run by Christine Hope and her family. The shop has been trading since 2001, and in that time has been gradually expanding the range of products and services on offer to customers.

Since the floods that hit several parts of England and Wales due to Storm Bert in November 2024, the shop had been without a landline connection for weeks, which has caused significant problems for the Post Office, especially at the busiest time of year. Because of the isolated nature of the business, Christine reports that there appears to be no rush to fix the issue – something that wouldn't be the case if the shop was in a more densely populated area.

> **If we see someone coming in and they're talking on their phone, and then they continue to talk on their phone as they walk around, that's a pretty big red flag for the staff. There's no way they'd be able to hold any signal in the store, so they're usually up to no good and trying to mask their activity with a phony phone call.**

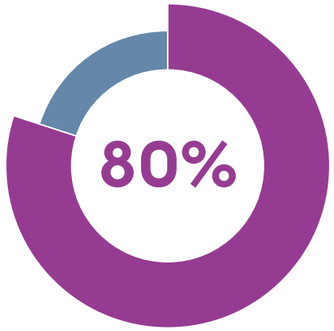
As with many rural shops, parts of the shop are complete dead zones for mobile signal, so the options for services and technology in the business are naturally limited. However, Christine says this does act as a telltale sign for potential thieves: "If we see someone coming in and they're talking on their phone,

and then they continue to talk on their phone as they walk around, that's a pretty big red flag for the staff. There's no way they'd be able to hold any signal in the store, so they're usually up to no good and trying to mask their activity with a phony phone call."

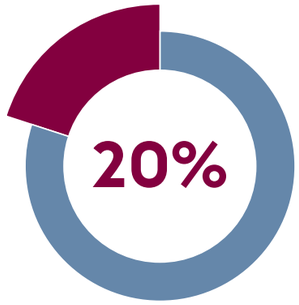
Hopes of Longtown currently benefits from discretionary 100% business rate relief provided by Herefordshire Council due to being the only general store or Post Office in the village, but Christine is concerned that this could be removed in the near future as council budgets are cut to deal with major financial deficit. This uncertainty has an impact on Christine's future plans, as the profitability of the business is finely balanced and increasingly reliant on tourism. This was felt acutely during the energy cost crisis of 2022/23, when the business was at risk of closure due to huge increases in gas and electricity bills.

Christine and her family have built Hopes of Longtown into a destination store that provides a wide range of products and services for customers of all age groups. The shop has very low staff turnover and pays significantly above the rate of National Living Wage, something that Christine feels is necessary given the responsibilities that her and her colleagues have: "We have plenty of people who come into the store and need additional support, whether that be because they're suffering from dementia, are confused about something that they're trying to do in our Post Office, or are so used to shopping online in a big city with 24/7 availability that coming into a rural shop like ours can be a daunting experience. My colleagues and I need to have the skills to be able to help everyone who walks in the door, and we pride ourselves on being able to provide that service."

How we operate



of independent rural retailers **started** the business themselves



of independent rural retailers **inherited** the business from family

Source: ACS/Lumina Intelligence 2024

How independent retailers source their products

62% I get the majority of products delivered

7% I use both, but get more products delivered

12% I use both roughly equally

7% I use both, but get more products from a cash and carry

9% I get the majority from a cash and carry

Source: ACS/Lumina Intelligence 2024

Community owned shops

There are **424** community owned shops trading in the UK

With a **94%** survival rate

Providing employment for **2,000** people

With around **11,500** volunteer positions created

Source: Plunkett UK 2024

Community shops

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Community shops are owned and run by members of their community, trading primarily for community benefit. The majority of these shops are run by a combination of paid staff and volunteers. Below are two award-winning examples of successful community shops provided by the Plunkett UK, which is the membership organisation for community-run businesses in the UK.

Bledington Community Shop & Café
Gloucestershire

From opening in 2019, Bledington Community Shop & Café had a vision to utilise local trades and craftspeople. The shop's product range has been developed significantly over time, but the focus has always been on 'keeping it local' and currently 76% of suppliers are from the local area including bread, eggs, meat, honey, chocolates and coffee. The shop has created its own products and branding, including gins, ales, whisky, mugs, cushions, aprons and tea towels.

Bledington Gins was the first of these and the team worked closely with Woods Brothers Distillery in Oxfordshire to create a botanical recipe using the rare Bledington Lady's Finger apple and Bledington-grown rosemary. The shop works closely with key local suppliers to put together a Christmas ordering service and, once a year, to celebrate its birthday, the shop invites local producers to donate a prize for the draw. Any surplus from the business is reinvested into village projects, with donations to the Bledington and Foscot Community Association totalling £8,500

Bathford Village Shop & Café
Somerset

This community-owned village shop and café is located in an ancient village near Bath. It provides much more than the typical convenience store. Free services include WiFi, a drinking water station for both humans and dogs, an ATM, and a library of board games, jigsaw puzzles, and books that residents can borrow at no cost. The shop doubles as a tourist information centre. The setting is a popular gathering place for local groups, including the Crochet and Craft Group, a Mahjong group, a supper club and a lunch buffet.

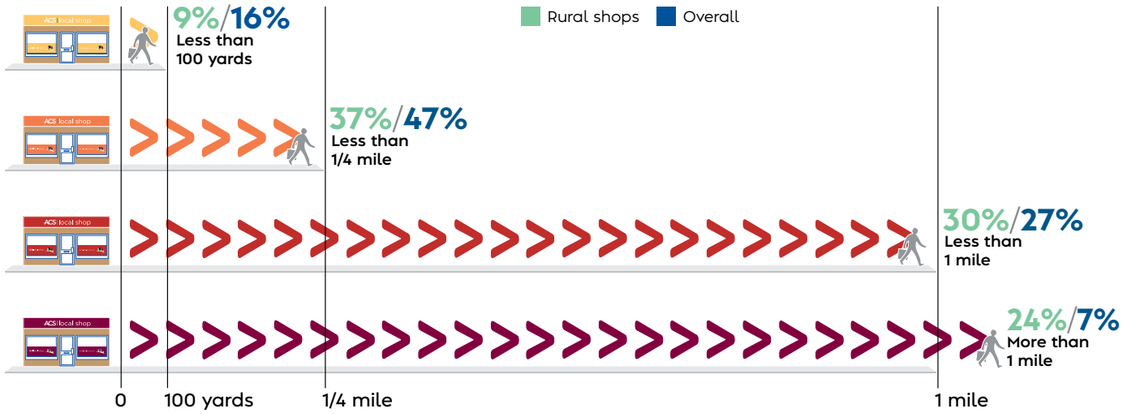
The shop has also served as a Community Warm Space during the last two winters. Additional services include dry cleaning and a free home delivery. In support of local businesses, the shop features a local artists' corner, providing a platform for residents to launch and test their ideas. The shop and café also accommodates people with mental health issues, young individuals exploring work opportunities, and participants in the Duke of Edinburgh Award and school work experience programmes

Who we serve

Source: Lumina Intelligence CTP 2024

Source: ACS Community Barometer 2024

Distance travelled to store



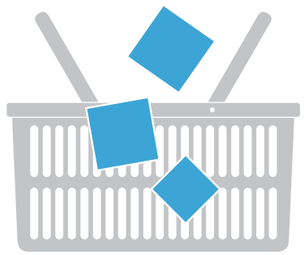
If their **local shop was no longer there,** customers would have to travel **2.93 miles** to find another local shop

Source: ACS Community Barometer 2024

Purchases

The average **basket size is**

2.6 items



The average spend is **£6.89**

Source: Lumina Intelligence CTP 2024

Our communities

Most positive impact on the local area

Most essential

Most wanted services

Source: ACS Community Barometer 2024

Community activity

90% **of independent rural retailers** engaged in some form of **community activity** in the past year

Source: ACS Voice of Local Shops polling 2024

"Rural shoppers said **convenience stores** were the **most important** business in supporting the local economy

Source: ACS Community Barometer 2024

Local shops' role in rural communities

Source: ACS Community Barometer 2024

Methodology

For more details on the data sources for this report, visit: https://www.acs.org.uk/research/rural-shop-report-2025

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the support of a number of industry and research organisations that have helped by providing data. These sources are referenced alongside the relevant sections of the report, and those organisations are:

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