



The Rural Shop Report 2026

A report by the Association of Convenience Stores

[#RuralShopReport](#)

ACS | the voice of
local shops



James Lowman
Association of Convenience Stores

The purpose of the Rural Shop Report is to highlight what makes the 18,000+ rural shops across the UK great, what sets them apart from their counterparts in towns, cities and high streets, and the unique challenges that they face due to their location. Rural shops are undeniably crucial to the communities they serve, not just for the core groceries that they provide for local people, but for the increasing range of services that they offer local people like the Post Office, pharmacy and prescription services, parcel drop off and collection, banking services, dry cleaning and more.

It is vitally important that policymakers consider the challenges facing rural shops and finds ways to help them grow and invest in their long-term future. Many of the pressures facing local shops — employment costs, business rates increases, lower margins — are the same for rural businesses, but they also have to deal with additional barriers like

unreliable connectivity and less choice of suppliers to deliver products or without cash and carry depots within easy reach.

Rural shops are robust, but they are not immune from pressures on their viability. The presence of community-run shops in hundreds of rural communities demonstrates that when a place loses its rural shop, there remains a need for a local grocery offer felt so strongly that volunteers come together in a community to provide that service.

Alongside the data for this year's report, we have brought some of the views of real rural retailers to life, speaking in their own words about what they need from Government to be successful. These award-winning retailers are just some of the many examples across the UK of hard working entrepreneurs making an enormous positive difference in their communities. ■



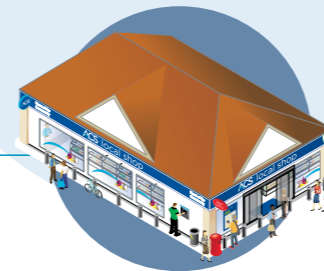
There are **50,486** convenience stores in mainland UK
18,355 of these stores are rural
79% are owned by independent retailers

Source: William Reed 2025

Location of rural convenience stores

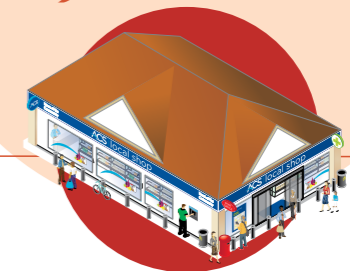
The average settlement size around a rural community shop is

500 people



On average, the services provided by rural community shops support a further

2,000 people in surrounding areas



Source: Plunkett UK 2025

Why we are important

£17.7bn total sales

Source: ACS/Lumina Intelligence 2025

£281m invested

Source: ACS Voice of Local Shops 2025

£4bn in GVA

Source: ACS 2025

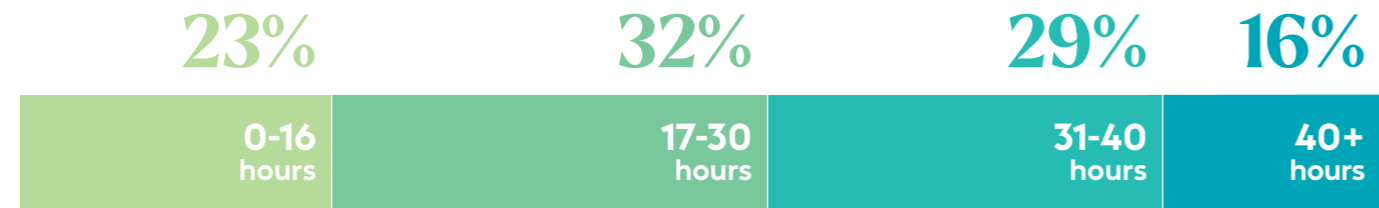
165,000+ jobs

Source: ACS/Lumina Intelligence 2025

Our colleagues

165,000+ jobs provided by mainland UK rural convenience stores

Hours worked



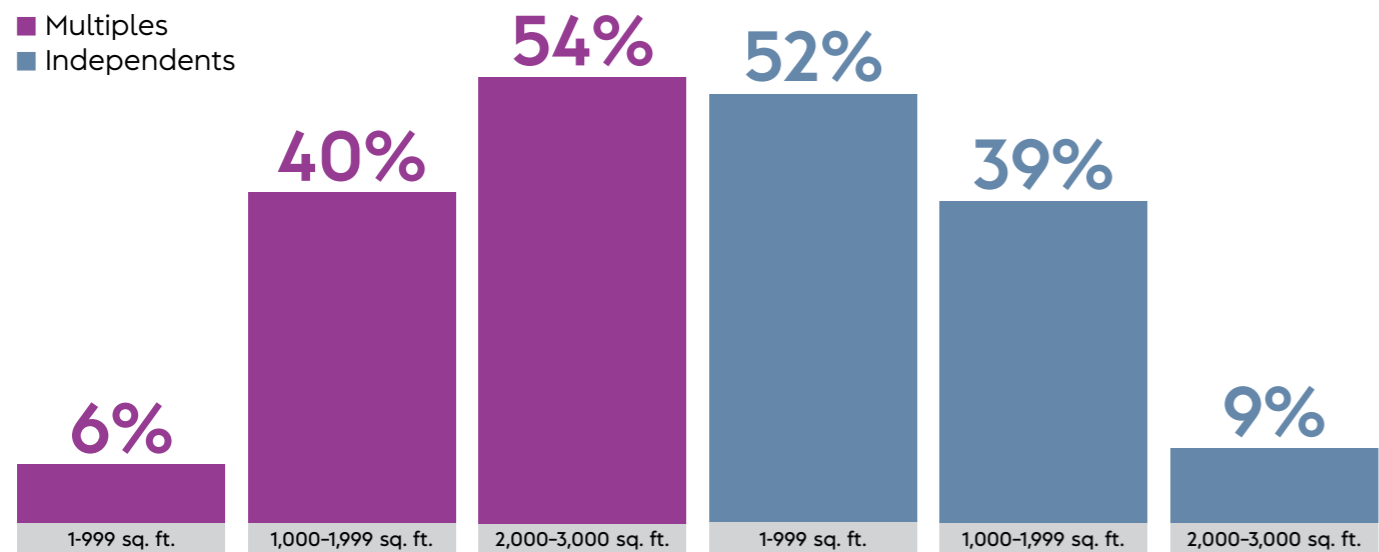
(Rural colleagues only)

Who we are

Opening hours



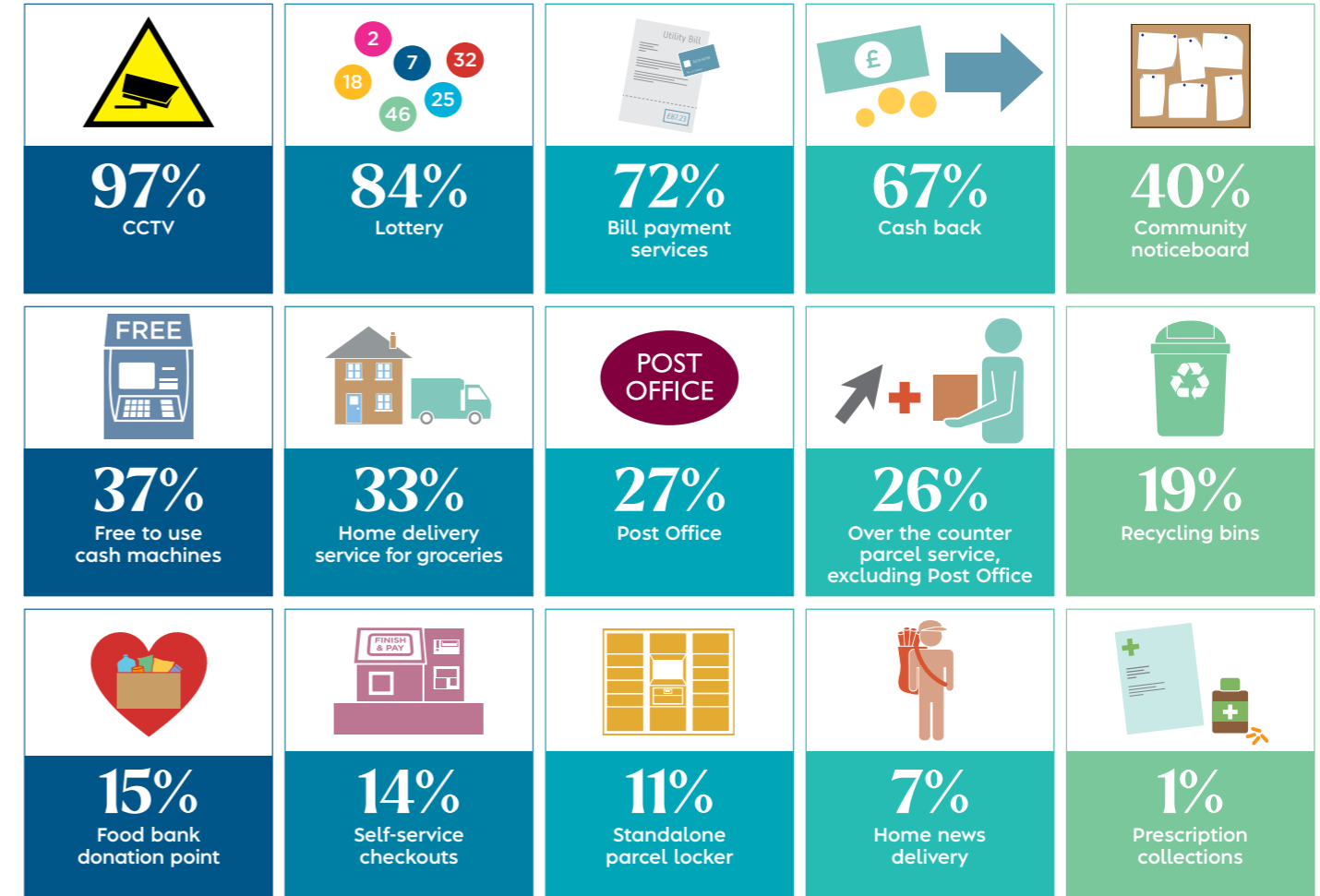
Sales space in-store



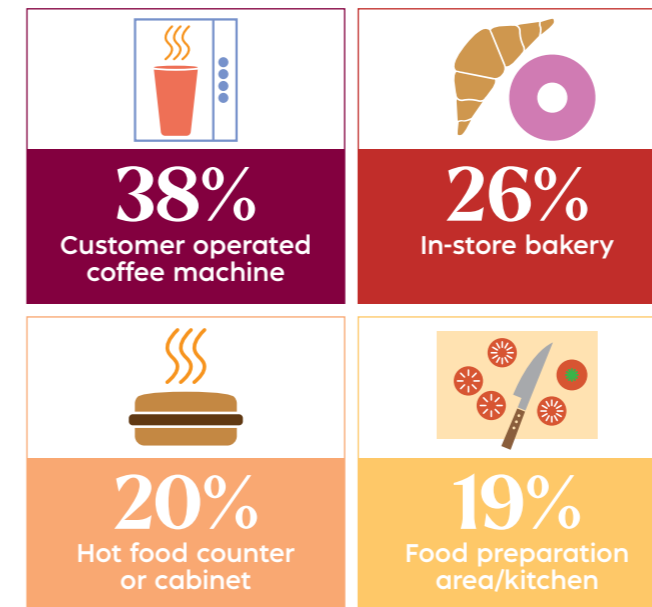
Multiples figures refer to the whole sector, independent figures refer to rural stores only

The services and technology we offer

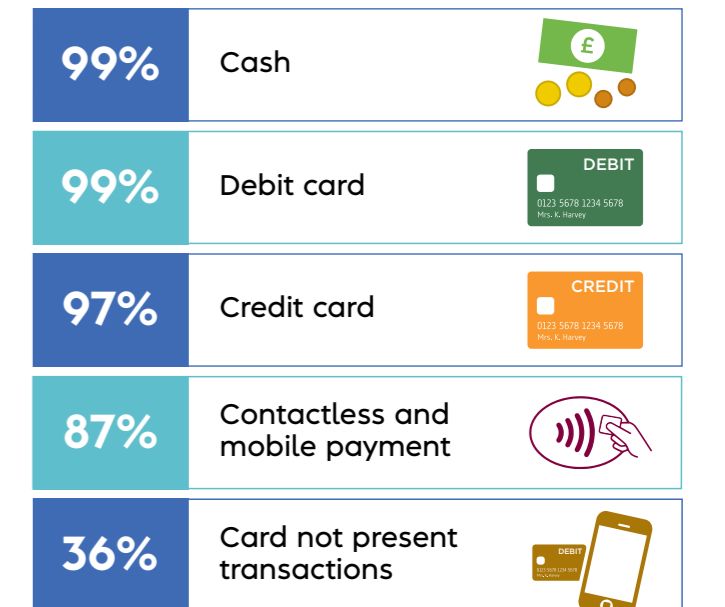
The percentage of rural stores in the convenience sector that provide each service is as follows:



Food service



Payment methods



Who we serve



Source: Lumina Intelligence CTP 2025



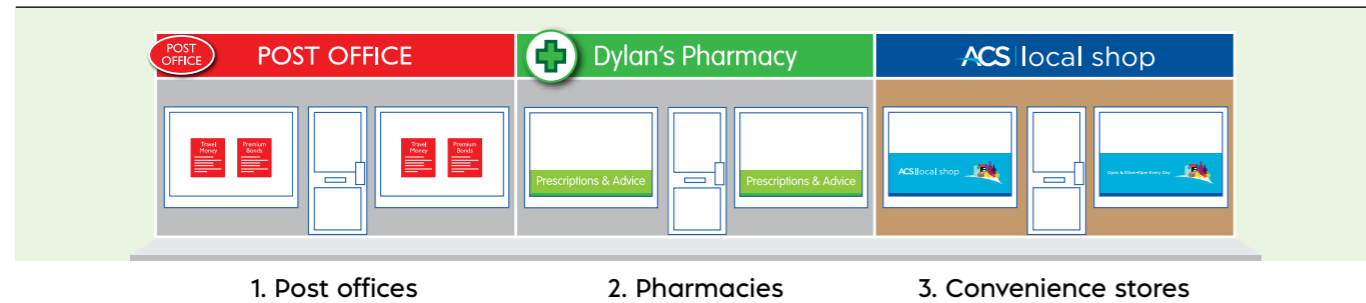
Source: ACS Community Barometer 2025

Purchases



Source: Lumina Intelligence CTP 2025

Most essential



How local shops benefit the community



Source: ACS Community Barometer 2025 — data refers to shoppers in rural areas

What does your local shop mean to you



Case studies



Christine Hope
Hopes of Longtown
Herefordshire

As a rural retailer, the support we're providing in our community is changing as populations change. We're serving an older community with higher health needs and often fewer familiar faces as family members move away, and I often worry about their full-time care needs, particularly shoppers who are struggling to walk or drive safely to store. We also provide Sunflower lanyards for shoppers with hidden disabilities, and take the time to explain what the lanyards mean to customers who ask. We're also able to listen and care for shoppers who are experiencing something difficult in their life - being the only place open during the day we can get told some very personal details. It's a hard thing to quantify but there needs to be more awareness of the social care role retailers play for our communities, and conversations about how people can benefit from extra support from those they still see every day.



Josie Chamberlin
J Robarts & Son
Hertfordshire

Our local police officers are stretched thin as they cover several huge village areas. Resources are more limited by being in a rural area. We're lucky in that we don't have a lot of trouble, but we still try to keep in contact with police officers and build that connection.

We encourage officers to come in and get a coffee, have a bread roll made up, and so on. Police presence is the most valuable thing for us and it can be much harder for teams with larger areas of responsibility. Inviting officers to store on a friendly basis works really well with us.



Trudy Davies
Woosnam & Davies News
Llanidloes

Poor mobile network can have a significant impact on trading and shopper mood. Customers are frustrated if they need anything off their mobile while they're paying or accessing a service in store, but they haven't got the signal strength to make it work. Our staff are under tension as well, especially if there's a queue as they just want to resolve the issue and get on to the next person.

Everything takes so much more time, and even though people know really it's the technology and not you, they can take it out on you. And customers behind them get anxious and annoyed, it's a knock on effect because they think you're being inefficient behind the till or that your store is inefficient and the payment systems aren't working. In the end, people could go elsewhere and stay going elsewhere. Store wi-fi helps but it's an added cost for retailers — extra support in rural areas would go a long way.



Joshua James
Fresh & Proper
Fordham

We have a joke running here that we're a small little village but there's always at least one road closed. It could be water pipes bursting or internet installation or road damage, or all three at once.

The issue is the infrastructure networks planning these closures aren't considering local businesses and the community: in the run up to Christmas, half of the roundabout to our store was closed which had a big impact on access.

We don't know how to start a claim for lost sales or anything like that. Better communication between infrastructure and maintenance and local businesses is essential, because separating shoppers from accessing their local shop affects everyone in the community.



Methodology

For more details on the data sources for this report, visit: <https://cdn.acs.org.uk/public/Rural26%20Methodology.pdf>

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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