



Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	7 th May 2025
Subject:	Boston Markets Update and Development / Action Plan Report
Purpose:	To provide a report on progress against the Boston Market Development Plan
Key Decision:	No
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Dale Broughton, Deputy Leader
Report Of:	Phil Perry – Assistant Director, Culture & Leisure
Report Author:	David Smith – Markets Manager
Ward(s) Affected:	All
Exempt Report:	No

Summary

This report provides an update on the Boston Markets Development plan that was initially considered at the 13 February 2024 Environment and Performance Scrutiny Committee, before being agreed at the 27 March 2024 Cabinet meeting. The Plan subsequently went back before the 11 February 2025 Environment and Performance Scrutiny Committee, to provide an update on its progress over its first year of delivery.

This report provides an update on the four key objectives within the Boston Markets Development/Action plan (**Appendix 1**) and an overview on how Boston's regular Wednesday and Saturday markets have been performing and provides.

The Markets Development Plan has 4 key objectives:

- Objective 1 – To deliver a sustainable Markets Service and become financially resilient.
- Objective 2 – To deliver Modern Markets, improving both Infrastructure & Delivery.

- Objective 3 – The Boston Markets Service becoming known for its Specialist Markets and Events.
- Objective 4 – The Markets Service is successfully Promoted and Well Marketed.

Markets were one of many industries that suffered during the COVID pandemic with only essential stalls allowed to stand. A cost-of-living crisis has subsequently added to the impact on the traditional town centre retail offer, and markets across the country have had to adapt as they work towards recovery.

The Council has an aim to move the Markets Service to a break-even position and find savings year on year, and the Partnership Annual Delivery Plan includes two projects for the Boston Markets Service to undertake during the 2024/25 financial year. These were to review the Markets Policy and to undertake a review of the Markets Service with an aim to deliver savings, whilst also growing the Markets Service.

The Council has also agreed a Boston Town Centre Strategy, and the Development / Action Plan aims to support the strategy's aim to regenerate the town centre. There are currently 13 actions within the Boston Market Action Plan, and to date 9 have been completed, 2 are on target and 2 amber that require further work to ensure they can continue to aim to meet the timeline set.

Recommendations

That Cabinet notes the progress made to date against the commitments set out in the Boston Market Development/Action Plan.

Reasons for Recommendations

The Boston Market Development/Action Plan is a live document which was agreed at the Council's Cabinet on 27 March 2024. Now that it has been in place for a year, it is important to review and report on progress against the commitments that were made.

Other Options Considered

To not review progress against the Boston Market Development/Action Plan. This has been discounted to ensure through a review the commitments made by the Council's Cabinet are delivered against, whilst enabling consideration of any additional actions and challenges with mitigating action/s as appropriate.

1. Background

- 1.1 Boston Borough Council has responsibility for a market that takes place twice a week (on a Wednesday and Saturday) in the Market Place. Markets are an important and historic part of Boston as a market town, but across the country, markets have faced many challenges over recent years, including the rise of online and out of town shopping retailers, competition from unregulated car boot sales, the COVID pandemic as well as the cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.2 A dedicated Market Manager in a shared post across the Partnership, has been in place since 28th October 2024, and this post is supported by a Boston based Markets Officer and a small team of part time stall erectors.
- 1.3 The Markets Service initially reported on a new Development plan, to the 13 February 2024 Environment and Performance Committee, before it went to the 27 March 2024 Cabinet meeting for agreement. Following the implementation of the Development Plan, a full review of the service has also been undertaken in line with the Partnership's Annual Delivery Plan, including its policies and practices, to ensure the market is operated efficiently, consistently, and safely. The Development Plan subsequently went back before the 11 February 2025 Environment and Performance Scrutiny Committee, to provide an update on its progress over its first year of delivery, and the Markets policies were determined under a separate report Cabinet, at its 19 February meeting.
- 1.4 This report details the progress made against the Markets Development Plan, since it was agreed at Cabinet on 27 March 2024. This report provides an update on the four key objectives within the Boston Markets Development plan, including progress made since reporting to the 11 February 2025 Environment and Performance Scrutiny Committee, in order to provide a complete update on its progress over its first year of delivery. This report also provides an overview on how Boston's regular Wednesday and Saturday markets have been performing and proposes actions for the further development of the service.

2. Report

2.1 The Boston Market Development/Action Plan

- 2.1.1 The purpose behind the Boston Market Development/Action Plan was to develop closer relations with traders through involving them more in its future development, to support the ongoing need to increase footfall within the Town Centre, whilst also working towards ensuring the Markets Service is sustainable. The Action Plan therefore has a focus on:

- Delivering modern traditional markets that are cost efficient delivering the best value for money.
- Delivering vibrant attractive markets that appeal to visitors and residents alike.
- Attracting new young traders.
- Increasing marketing activity.
- Working with the Council's Events Team and local partners to add value to markets with entertainment and events.

2.2 Plan Strategic Objectives

2.2.1 The Plan, as detailed in appendix 1, was developed around 4 key objectives, and 13 key strategic actions, all with target timescales for delivery.

2.2.2 **Objective 1** – To deliver a sustainable Markets Service and become financially resilient.

2.2.2.1 Objective 1 has 4 actions (2 grey/completed, 2 green/on target)

2.2.2.2 Actions completed over the past year include:

- New Markets Policy and Severe Weather Policy in place since April 2025.
- Efficiency savings identified through restructuring the Markets service. Consultation with staff was undertaken in line with BBC HR Policy and procedures. Old Stall Erector Team have now left and a new team on smaller contracts now employed.
- A successful capital, invest to save, funding bid for £47,750, for a replacement van, gazebos, and equipment to support the delivery of the evolving markets service.
- Additional 30 gazebos and equipment now on order, current 30 mostly in use already. These are funded from the Covid Reserve.
- Market fees have been reduced from April 2025 to bring in line with other markets in and around Lincolnshire with the aim to attract new traders.

2.2.3 **Objective 2** – To deliver Modern Markets, improving both Infrastructure & Delivery.

2.2.3.1 Objective 2 has 3 actions (2 grey/completed, 1 amber)

2.2.3.2 Actions completed over the past year include:

- The Wednesday market was consolidated into the Market Place, to increase parking income for the Council.
- A Saturday Market, road closure was introduced following consultation in Q2, final consultations are currently ongoing to apply for a road closure on Wednesday market days which will be applied for in April 2025.
- Reduction in the Stall erector team and hours of operation in Q3, with savings built into the 25/26 budget.
- Specification for a shared bookings and payment platform across the partnership completed. The proposal is currently being evaluated by ICT colleagues and an external supplier. An alternative option to introduce a Process data quickly (PDQ) machine/payment system is also being investigated.
- A new markets plan is now being created to maximise the use of the space within the market for events and markets.

2.2.4 **Objective 3** – The Boston Markets Service becoming known for its Specialist Markets and Events.

2.2.4.1 Objective 3 has 3 actions (2 Grey/completed, 1 amber).

2.2.4.2 Actions completed over the past year include:

- Niche Markets trialled, with a Flea Market, Street Art and Buskers events added to the Teen Markets during 2024.

- Markets integrated into events such as the Christmas Festival and Boston College Food festival.
- Other integrated events include annual Hanseatic celebration and street performance artists.
- The Teenage Market events have continued to develop.
- A new Makers and Farmers Market introduced in March 2025 which has been a great success, selling at least 19 additional pitches per month alongside our regular market. On Saturday, 26th April the market saw 61 pitches in total occupied out of the 64 available. The market hasn't seen this for several years.

2.2.5 **Objective 4** – The Markets Service is successfully Promoted and Well Marketed.

2.2.5.1 Objective 4 has 3 actions (3 Completed).

2.2.5.2 Actions completed over the past year include:

- Development of the social media presence particularly on Facebook, and this is due to be expanded to other platforms, such as Instagram and Google.
- The Markets Facebook page has now reached its previous target of 3000 followers in April 2025.
- During March, the Market Facebook received over 120,000 page views, a record since being created.
- Over 30 local Facebook groups have now been joined where all promotions are shared, reaching residents in and around the Boston area.
- Consultation with both traders and the general public undertaken Q1, with further Trader consultation exercised on a new Market layout due Spring 2025.
- New branded gazebos now in use from April 2025.
- New banners, advertisement boards, market bunting, barrier covers now being used from April 2025.
- A new 'Featured trader of the week' now in place, promoting one trader per week providing a summary of their history and their business.

2.2.6 To further promote the markets and seek new traders, the new Market Manager has recently commissioned new photographic content of the Market Place, and its trader's stalls, to be provided for rejuvenation of the existing Boston Market Facebook page. A new Boston Market Instagram account will be created to engage with a younger audience. And Boston Market Google account will be updated and promoted to ensure its precedence online.

2.2.7 The Markets Team have worked with Boston College students to create a new promotional video for both the regular market and the new Makers and Farmers Market, due to be finalised in May 2025.

2.3 **Monitoring and Governance Arrangements**

2.3.1 Monitoring and governance arrangements for this plan and its actions are in place, through regular reporting to Portfolio Holder Briefings, as well as to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee meetings as appropriate.

2.3.2 The current lead officers to ensure delivery against the plan are:

- Markets Manager
- Assistant Director for Leisure and Local Services

2.4 Performance of the Markets

2.4.1 The delivery of the Action Plan aims to increase the occupancy rates of both Boston Market days, with the recent occupancy rates being as follows:

2.4.2 In the opinion of the Markets Manager there is a risk to safety due to adverse weather conditions.

2023/24

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Wednesday & Saturday	68%	58%	60%	54%

2024/25

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Wednesday & Saturday	69%	59%	52% Decrease from 23/24 due to Severe Weather Policy being implemented properly and those markets being restricted without stalls, leading to a decrease of approx. 75% occupancy for those days.	54%

2.5 Fees and Charges Benchmarking

2.5.1 To remain competitive, annual benchmarking exercises are undertaken to assess the Council's fees and charges against markets in neighbouring authorities. This benchmarking helps to inform proposed fees and charges for future years, during budget setting each financial year.

The Environment and Performance Scrutiny Committee at its 11 February 2025 meeting discussed the trader charges which had been applied and the comparisons to other local areas, and consideration was given to whether they could be reduced. The Portfolio Holder subsequently reviewed this position, and as from 1 April 2025, the Boston Markets reduced their fees to keep the rates competitive. The table below details fees and charges for Markets within the current financial year.

Market	Regular Trader With gazebo	Casual Trader With gazebo	Regular Without gazebo	Casual Without gazebo
East Lindsey	£15.00	£18.00	£15.00	£18.00
Bourne	£21.60	£23.80	£18.40	£18.90
Grantham	£24.40	£27.70	£22.70	£23.80
Stamford	£28.10	£31.40	£24.90	£28.10
South Holland Spalding	N/A	N/A	£10.00	£10.00
Boston	Was £22.00 Now £17.00	Was £27.00 Now £20.00	Was £1.60 per foot Minimum 10ft (3m) £16 Now £1.50 per ft, £15.00 a pitch	Was £2.20 per foot Minimum 10ft (3m) £22.00. Now 1.80 per ft, £18.00 a pitch.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1. The Boston Market Action Plan has been developed as a “live document” to be continually developed to support accountability within the service to deliver strategically and operationally what is required from this important borough asset.
- 3.2. There are currently 13 actions within the Boston Market Action Plan, and to date 9 have been completed, 2 are on target and 2 amber that require further work to ensure they can continue to aim to meet the timeline set.
- 3.3. In conclusion the Boston Market Development/Action Plan Annual Review report on year one activity is presented to Cabinet Briefing for its consideration.

Implications

South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership

The Boston Market Development/Action Plan is an integral part of a Partnership approach to delivering a more sustainable markets service. The Plan sits under the Boston Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan 2023-27, which recognises the contribution to the economy that Boston Town Centre plays in the South and East Lincolnshire sub-region as a wider strategic economic hub and the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership from a place making perspective.

Corporate Priorities

The proposed Plan aligns to the following Sub-Regional South and East Lincolnshire Council Partnership priorities:

- Priority 1: Growth and Prosperity
- Priority 2: Healthy Lives
- Corporate Priority: Efficiency and Effectiveness

Staffing

The action plan includes an action to seek to improve resilience in the service through a remodelling of staffing arrangements.

Workforce Capacity Implications

The remodelling of staffing arrangements referenced in point the report includes consideration of the capacity for the workforce to deliver the required service.

Constitutional and Legal Implications

The Council's Markets are required to conform to the requirements of charters granted in 1308 for weekly Wednesday and Saturday markets, and 1545 through Boston's Charter of Incorporation.

Data Protection

There are no specific data protection implications to report as a consequence of the development of the report.

Financial

There are no direct financial implications to note regarding this report. Financial matters associated with actions are covered where necessary through reports to Cabinet and Council.

Risk Management

There are no key risks to report as a consequence of the development of the action plan.

Stakeholder / Consultation / Timescales

The action plan has been developed following engagement work with the Portfolio Holder, Lead Officers and Partners.

Reputation

The action plan supports work to uphold the reputation of the Council by promoting an efficient and effective service that safeguards the appropriate use of the Boston Market for members of the public.

Contracts

None.

Crime and Disorder

There are no key implications relating to crime and disorder as a consequence of this report.

Equality and Diversity / Human Rights / Safeguarding

An equality impact assessment will be provided to support the action plan.

Health and Wellbeing

There are no key implications with respect to Health and Well-Being to consider regarding the development of the action plan. The positive use of Boston Market by the public support's matters relating to community cohesion and health and wellbeing.

Climate Change and Environmental Implications

There are no direct climate change and environmental implications.

Acronyms

BBC – Boston Borough Council

Appendices

Appendix 1 The Boston Market Action Plan

Background Papers

Background papers used in the production of this report are listed below: -

Document title	Where the document can be viewed.
Boston Market Update & Development Plan	Boston Market Update Development Plan Report.pdf

Report Approval

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