



Report To:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date:	16 th July 2026
Subject:	Review of the Town Centre Task & Finish Group
Purpose:	To present the findings of the Town Centre Review Task & Finish Group and seek the Committee's consideration of the report and its referral to Cabinet.
Key Decision:	No
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Mike Gilbert, Deputy Leader of the Council
Report Of:	Review of the Town Centre Task & Finish Group
Report Author:	Raymond Flannery, Democratic Services Officer
Ward(s) Affected:	All BTAC Wards
Exempt Report:	No

Summary

This report presents the findings of the Town Centre Review Task and Finish Group and seeks the Committee's endorsement to refer the report and its recommendations to Cabinet. The review considered a range of issues affecting the vitality, accessibility, presentation and promotion of Boston town centre, alongside related workstreams including funding programmes, the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, the Destination Management Plan, business engagement activity, and commissioned studies relating to retail, hospitality and leisure.

Cabinet is asked to consider the recommendations, agree an appropriate officer response, identify relevant lead service areas and receive a progress update within six months through existing town centre, regeneration and place-making governance arrangements.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Note the findings of the Town Centre Review Task and Finish Group;
2. Endorse the conclusions of the Group and recommend that Cabinet considers the report as a basis for future town centre activity;
3. Request that Cabinet gives due consideration to the adoption of a broader, functional definition of the town centre, to be reflected in future strategies and plans;
4. Request that Cabinet considers further measures to reduce vacancy within the town centre, including supporting alternative uses and improving the utilisation of vacant properties;
5. Request that Cabinet continues to prioritise improvements to the public realm and town centre environment, including signage, public conveniences and access to transport information;
6. Request that Cabinet reviews and strengthens the Council's approach to promotion and marketing of Boston town centre; and
7. Request that Cabinet agrees an appropriate officer response to the recommendations, identifies the relevant lead service areas, and receives a progress update within six months, aligned to existing town centre, regeneration and place-making workstreams.

Reasons for Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group has undertaken a structured review of issues affecting the town centre and identified key priorities for improvement. A broader, functional definition of the town centre would better reflect current patterns of use and activity. Addressing vacancy, improving the public realm and strengthening promotion would support the vitality, attractiveness and economic resilience of the town centre. The recommendations align with existing and emerging strategies and can be progressed through established governance routes, including the Town Centre Strategy Board or any successor arrangement, alongside wider regeneration and place-making workstreams. Referral to Cabinet would enable the findings and recommendations to be considered, owned and progressed in a coordinated way.

Other Options Considered

The Committee could choose not to refer the findings and recommendations to Cabinet. This option is not recommended, as it would limit the opportunity for a coordinated response to the issues identified by the Task and Finish Group.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee established the Town Centre Review Task and Finish Group to consider issues affecting the vitality, accessibility and presentation of Boston Town Centre.
- 1.2 The Group undertook a series of discussions and evidence-gathering sessions, recognising the range of related workstreams currently underway.
- 1.3 These include funding programmes, the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, the Destination Management Plan, business engagement activity and commissioned studies relating to retail, hospitality and leisure.
- 1.4 The work of the Group was therefore undertaken within a broader strategic context, with a focus on identifying key issues and opportunities to inform future decision-making.

2. Town Centre Definition and Governance

- 2.1 The Task and Finish Group reviewed the current town centre boundary and considered whether it fully reflects how the town centre is used in practice.
- 2.2 It was recognised that adjacent retail areas, including Asda, the retail area from Halfords to Aldi, and shopping frontages along the High Street and Main Ridge East, contribute significantly to the overall town centre offer.
- 2.3 The Group considered that a broader, functional definition would provide a more robust and accurate basis for future planning, policy development and investment decisions.
- 2.4 The Group noted proposals to restructure and rebrand the Town Centre Strategy Board to improve coordination and reduce duplication. The findings of the Task and Finish Group should be shared with the refreshed board, or any successor arrangement, with future progress reported back through the appropriate scrutiny and Cabinet routes.

3. Town Centre Vitality and Empty Properties

- 3.1. Vacant properties within the town centre were identified as an important issue affecting perceptions of vitality.
- 3.2. The Group supported measures to encourage new business occupation, diversification of uses, and residential conversion of upper floors if appropriate.
- 3.3. Temporary uses, including cultural or heritage displays within vacant units, were identified as a means of enhancing the visual appearance of the town centre.
- 3.4. The Group acknowledged the challenges associated with absentee ownership, limited enforcement powers and financial constraints, noting that such issues are consistent with national trends.

- 3.5. The continued use of external funding and the exploration of community-led asset ownership opportunities were highlighted. Future funding opportunities should be prioritised where they support vacancy reduction, public realm improvements, cultural activation and wider town centre vitality, with progress monitored through existing regeneration and place-making governance arrangements.

4. Public Realm and Infrastructure

- 4.1 The Group recognised recent improvements to street cleaning, market provision, planting and town centre maintenance.
- 4.2 Further improvements were identified, including the need to improve signage to public conveniences and consider extended opening hours where appropriate.
- 4.3 Limitations in public transport information were also noted, with opportunities identified to improve real-time information displays within the town centre core.

5. Learning from Best Practice and Community Initiatives

- 5.1 The Group acknowledged that many challenges are shared across town centres and that opportunities exist to adopt proven approaches from elsewhere.
- 5.2 Support was expressed for low-cost, community-led initiatives that enhance the town centre environment.
- 5.3 The Council is encouraged to consider how best to promote and support such initiatives from residents and stakeholders.

6. Accessibility and Parking

- 6.1 The Group noted previous work relating to car parking and supported the implementation of those recommendations.
- 6.2 It was emphasised that parking policy should support access to the town centre and local businesses.
- 6.3 Concerns were noted regarding the impact of heavier vehicles on infrastructure, with recognition of the County Council's maintenance responsibilities.

7. Community Safety and Enforcement

- 7.1 The Group considered issues relating to shoplifting and anti-social behaviour and noted concerns raised by local businesses.
- 7.2 The Group noted that these issues are being addressed through existing partnership arrangements with Lincolnshire Police.
- 7.3 Concerns regarding unauthorised flyposting were identified, and a more proactive enforcement approach was supported.

8. Promotion, Marketing and Visitor Experience

- 8.1 The Group identified a reduction in the availability and visibility of promotional material relating to Boston and the surrounding area.
- 8.2 While recognising emerging initiatives, the Group considered that there is an opportunity to strengthen promotion in the short to medium term.
- 8.3 Opportunities include improved signage, enhanced access to key attractions and learning from partner authorities' best practice.
- 8.4 The following table provides an indicative summary of proposed lead service areas, timescales and reporting routes for Cabinet's consideration.

Recommendation area	Proposed lead service area	Indicative timescale	Reporting route
Town centre definition and governance	Planning & Strategic Infrastructure	Within six months	Cabinet response and existing town centre governance
Vacancy reduction and property utilisation	Strategic Growth & Development	Within six months, then ongoing	Cabinet response and regeneration programme reporting
Public realm, signage and infrastructure	Culture & Regeneration	Within six months, subject to resources and partner input	Cabinet response and relevant service reporting
Promotion, marketing and visitor experience	Culture & Regeneration	Short to medium term	Cabinet response, Destination Management Plan and place-making workstreams

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 The Task and Finish Group has identified a clear set of issues and opportunities affecting Boston town centre, including vacancy, accessibility, public realm quality, promotion and visitor experience.
- 9.2 The findings recognise recent progress while acknowledging ongoing challenges, many of which reflect wider national town centre trends.
- 9.3 The recommendations provide a practical framework for continued improvement, with delivery to be aligned to existing regeneration, place-making and town centre governance arrangements.
- 9.4 Taken together, the proposed measures support the Council's wider ambitions for regeneration, economic growth and pride in place.

Implications

South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership

Supports wider partnership objectives relating to regeneration and place-making.

Corporate Priorities

Supports regeneration, economic growth, pride in place and community engagement.

Staffing

There are no immediate staffing implications arising from this report. Any further activity agreed through Cabinet would be considered through normal service planning and workforce capacity arrangements.

Workforce Capacity Implications

If Cabinet agrees additional actions or accelerated delivery, any associated capacity requirements would be considered as part of the Cabinet response and aligned to existing regeneration, place-making and town centre workstreams.

Constitutional and Legal Implications

There are no immediate constitutional or legal implications arising from this report. Any future actions involving governance changes, property matters, enforcement activity, procurement or external funding agreements would be reviewed through the appropriate legal and constitutional processes.

Data Protection

None.

Financial

No direct financial implications arise from this report. Any future delivery proposals would need to be considered through the Cabinet response, existing budgets, approved external funding programmes or future decision-making processes as appropriate.

Risk Management

No direct risk management implications arise from this report. Any risks associated with future actions would be considered through the relevant governance, project management and service planning arrangements.

Stakeholder / Consultation / Timescales

Findings informed by member review and stakeholder feedback.

Reputation

Positive impact expected through coordinated improvement.

Contracts

None.

Crime and Disorder

Recognises existing partnership work with police.

Equality and Diversity / Human Rights / Safeguarding

No direct equality, diversity, human rights or safeguarding implications arise from this report. Any future proposals would be assessed through the appropriate decision-making and impact assessment processes.

Health and Wellbeing

Positive impact through improved environment and accessibility.

Climate Change and Environment Impact Assessment

A climate change and environmental impact assessment has not been undertaken at this stage. Any future proposals arising from the recommendations would be considered through the appropriate assessment process where required.

Acronyms

- BBC – Boston Borough Council
- SELCP – South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership
- LCC – Lincolnshire County Council
- UKSPF – UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Appendices

None.

Background Papers

No background papers as defined in Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the production of this report.

Chronological History of this Report

A report on this item has not been previously considered by a Council body.

Report Approval

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