

A Passion for People

Report to the Boston Town Area Committee, 28th February 2019

Key points:

- An estimated 37% of our visitors reside in Boston Town Centre
- According to projections the project will lead to an additional 9,250 visits annually from people living within the BTAC area.
- According to a 2015 economic impact assessment the project will bring up to £20 million to Boston's local economy over the ten years following its completion
- 53% of our volunteers reside within town centre wards
- Approximately 50% of our community choir members reside within town centre wards

Visitor Statistics and Projections for the Boston Town Centre Area

We currently record the number of people entering St Botolph's Church, via door counters placed at the north and south entrances. During our 'Festival of Remembrance' in late 2018 we also asked visitors to complete questionnaires and to provide us with their postcodes in order to gather data on which wards they lived in. We've used this data to estimate the proportion of our visitors who come from the town centre and to project numbers for future visits to the church.

Our 'A Passion for People' project is projected to lead to an annual increase in recorded visits to the church of around 15%, or approximately 25,000 visits. Of these, should the figure of 37% from Boston town centre hold, we would expect approximately 9,250 additional visits annually from people living within the town centre area. Please note that we are unable to distinguish between unique and repeat visitors, so these figures represent only an approximation of the number of visits and not the number of unique visitors.

The Parish of Boston has a large volunteer team at St Botolph's. Excluding those who make up our choir and help with religious worship we currently have 126 registered volunteers who assist with activities ranging from welcoming visitors, offering guided tours of the church, assisting with administration in the office and manning our church shop and coffee shop. Of these 67, or 53%, live within Boston town centre wards. We expect the number of volunteers to increase with the completion of the capital works and implementation of our project activity plan.

We will be refining our data collection methods as part of the evaluation of our current project and using these in future so that we can better monitor where our visitors are coming from and better target those who may not be being reached by our present outreach efforts.

Benefits to Town Centre Communities

- Volunteers

The benefits of the project are not simply in increasing numbers of visitors and volunteers in the church, but also in improving the quality of service we offer to local people. In terms of our volunteers, of whom 53% live in town centre wards, this means better training – including the provision of regular training courses held at St Botolph's, better facilities, a broader range of volunteering opportunities and a greater sense of community at St Botolph's. This benefits the church, the people served by our volunteer team and the individual volunteer. The project will allow us to make volunteering at St Botolph's a more enriching experience, allowing the volunteer to play an active role in their local community, gain new skills and knowledge and where relevant to move in to paid employment.

- Arts and Communities

Our programme of heritage activities, arts and community events is designed to both enrich and serve local people. Our events, such as 'Boston Connected: Community Table' are designed to bring local people from different backgrounds together, to heal division within town centre communities and for local people to find common ground. We've trialled these events in 2017 and again at our Festival of Remembrance in 2018. We've also been trialling community breakfasts – aimed in particular at the town centre homeless community.

Our programme of concerts and our community choir are aimed at increasing engagement and participation in the arts among the local community. Boston currently underperforms in this area, and as a major community venue in the town centre we see part of our role as addressing this. The project will include more frequent concerts and arts events held in church, the majority of which will be free for local people to attend, and the expansion of our community choir – a non-religious, inclusive group open to all regardless of their background or singing ability in order to bring together local people.

Engagement with Boston Town Centre Communities

We have always sought to engage with local people and the community within Boston town centre where our churches are located. For our most recent large event – our 'Festival of Remembrance' marking 100 years from the end of World War I – we produced a brochure which was posted by volunteers to over 4,000 homes within the Boston town centre area. We also utilised our links with businesses in the town centre to promote the event to local people, and while we attracted tourists from all over the country and beyond, our feedback forms indicate that approximately 37% of our visitors during the two weeks came from town centre wards. We'll be repeating this for future events and using what we learned from the Festival of Remembrance to better reach out to local people, maintain and build on our links with local businesses, schools and charities, and ensure that we are serving our town centre community as effectively as possible.

We of course make use of our website, social media and local media organisations to promote our activities, both to the people of Boston and beyond, but much of what we do is necessarily targeted specifically at the town centre area. The majority of our volunteers come from the town centre, and through word of mouth they are able to promote events and distribute leaflets to keep local people informed and engaged in what we are doing. We also utilise our notice boards beside the market place and outside the entrances to our churches to promote events to local people.

The Parish's primary purpose has always been to serve the people within its geographical area, which, while not overlapping perfectly, does fit within the borders and includes the majority of the Boston town area. The guiding vision behind our 'A Passion for People' project has been to engage the people of Boston in their heritage, in the arts and in their community, and to ensure that our building, the Boston Stump, is used by the local community to fulfil its potential as a resource and 'place of hospitality' for the town.