RETAIL AND TOWN CENTRE - FACT SHEET 4

South East Lincolnshire
Joint Strategic Planning Committee

Introduction

- The National Planning Policy Framework recognises: that town centres are at the heart of communities; and that competitive town centres which provide customer choice and a diverse retail offer should be promoted. South East Lincolnshire's town centres are key drivers of the local economy, and also help foster civic pride, promote local identity and contribute towards the aims of sustainable development.
- This fact sheet reviews the health and vitality of South East Lincolnshire's town centres. Boston town centre is the defined retail centre for Boston Borough whilst the South Holland Local Plan sets out a hierarchy of town centres for retail policy purposes identifying Spalding, Holbeach, Long Sutton, Crowland, Donington and Sutton Bridge as places with defined retail centres.

What has been achieved?

Vacancy rates: Increasing vacancy rates are a seemingly unavoidable fact-of-life in most of Britain's town centres, as a consequence of changing consumer behaviour such as online shopping and car-based out-of-centre retail developments. The number of vacant ground floor units in South East Lincolnshire's town centres stands nearly as high as ever recorded – 105 in 2017, compared to a historical average of 97. However, this hides considerable variation between town centres, with:

- Crowland, Donington, Sutton Bridge and having fewer vacancies in 2017 than their historical averages; and
- Boston, Spalding, Holbeach, Kirton, and Long Sutton experiencing vacancy levels above historical rates.

Number of vacant ground floor units within town centres (31st March)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Boston	38	48	32	37	28	41	40	37	45	45	44
Kirton	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Spalding	21	23	22	29	21	26	20	14	21	25	23
Holbeach	10	9	13	11	9	5	13	14	17	12	17
Long Sutton	9	10	9	9	12	10	9	9	10	9	12
Sutton Bridge	5	5	7	7	7	7	3	3	4	1	3
Crowland	4	4	6	6	7	4	4	3	5	1	0
Donington	4	6	7	5	5	4	4	4	4	1	2
Total	**91**	**105**	**96**	**104**	**89**	**97**	**93**	**84**	**106**	**94**	**105**

Source: Boston Borough Council and South Holland District Council

A1 units in primary shopping frontages: Policies RTC6 and RTC7 of the Boston Borough Local Plan and Policy EC6 of the South Holland Local Plan state that development proposals resulting in the change of use from retail (Class A1) to non-retail on the ground floors within the primary shopping area will be permitted except where the number or coalescence of such uses would undermine the dominant retail function or harm the vitality or viability of the town centre.

Number of A1 units in primary shopping frontages (31st March)

		Boston Prime Frontages	Boston Prime Area	Spalding*
2009	Nº of A1 units	28	29	36
	% of A1 units	93%	74%	63%
2010	Nº of A1 units	28	37	35
	% of A1 units	93%	73%	61%
2011	Nº of A1 units	26	33	33
	% of A1 units	81%	60%	58%
2012	Nº of A1 units	29	37	35
	% of A1 units	90%	73%	61%
2013	Nº of A1 units	22	39	31
	% of A1 units	73%	65%	54%
2014	Nº of A1 units	40	93	30
	% of A1 units	82%	61%	61%
2015	Nº of A1 units	40	94	31
	% of A1 units	80%	58%	62%
2016	Nº of A1 units	51	109	32
	% of A1 units	86%	61%	63%
2017	Nº of A1 units	45	115	33
	% of A1 units	73%	64%	63%

Source: Boston Borough Council and South Holland District Council

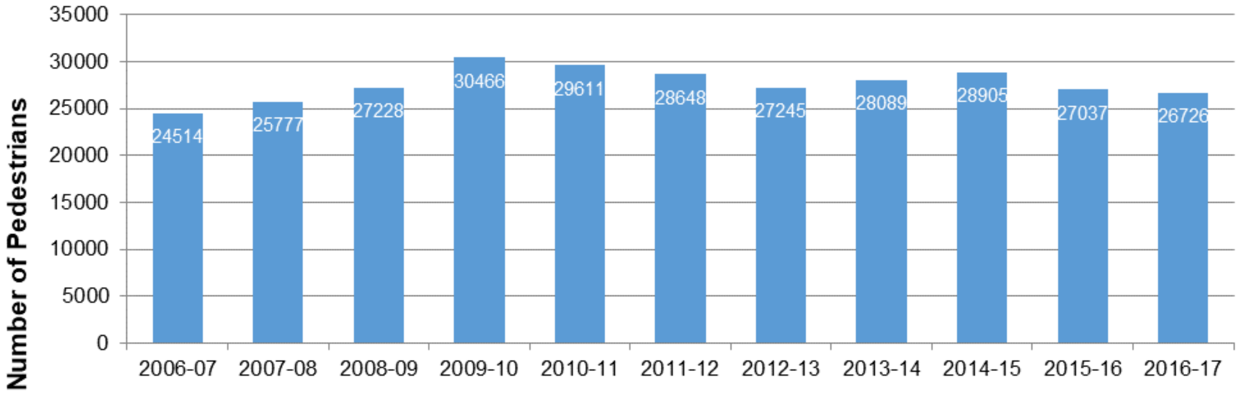
***** Please note that from 2014 onwards, the suggested Primary Shopping Frontage for Spalding set out in the South East Lincolnshire Retail and Town Centre Capacity Study (December 2013) was the area that was monitored.

The above table shows that, in all three defined areas/frontages, the percentage of units in retail use varies greatly from year to year, and clear trends cannot be discerned. Nonetheless, the figures demonstrate that, in two defined areas/frontages, the situation in 2017 is not far from the historical averages, the other being 10% below the average:

- Boston Prime Frontages – 73% of units were in retail use in 2017, compared to an average of 83% for 2009 to 2017;
- Boston Prime Area – 64% of units were in retail use in 2017 , compared to an average of 65% for 2009 to 2017; and
- Spalding – 63% of units were in retail use in 2017, compared to an average of 61% for 2009 to 2017.

Town Centre Pedestrian Counts (Boston Only): The number of people walking through a town centre is one of the key measures of a town centre's health and vitality. The graph below shows the total number of pedestrians recorded as passing through Strait Bargate, Boston during monthly surveys conducted on Wednesday market days. It shows year-on-year increases between 2006/07 and 2009/10, followed by a dip and partial recovery between 2009/10 and 2014/15. Since that date, however, the figures have dipped again to a level similar to 2012/13.

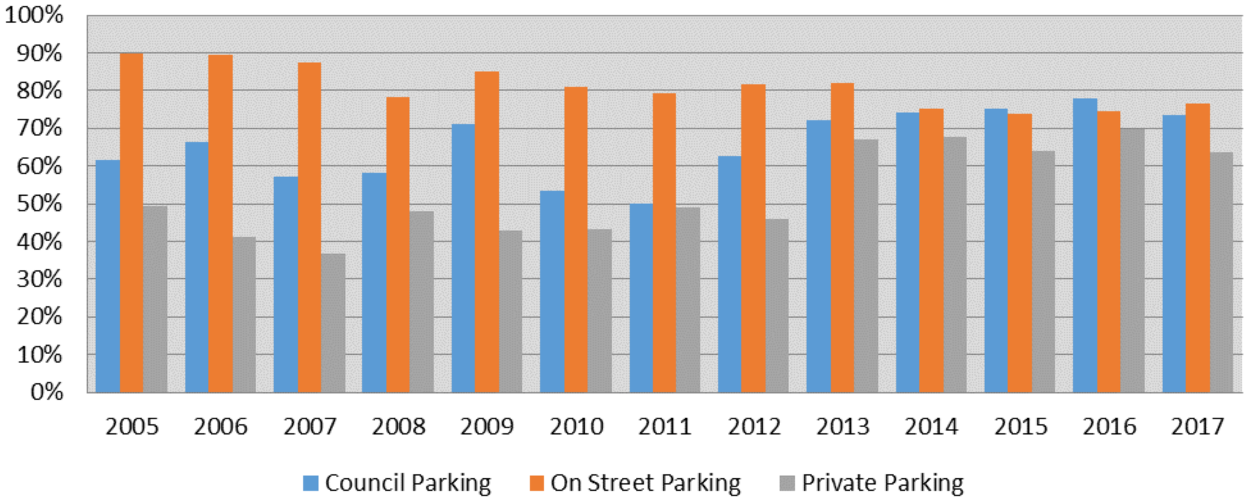
Hourly pedestrian traffic through Strait Bargate on Wednesday market day (2006/07 – 2016/17)



Source: Boston Borough Council

Town Centre Car Park Usage (Boston Only): As with town centre pedestrian counts, the usage of town centre car parks provides another general measure of the town centre's vitality. The following graph shows that the occupancy rate of on street car parking has varied the least between 2005 and 2017 although there has been an overall decrease of around 15%. In contrast, the use of Borough Council off street car parks declined significantly from 2009 to 2011 (reflecting both the nationwide reduction in vehicle use caused by the recession, as well as the local effects of increased bus usage), but has recovered in more recent years. Between 2005 and 2012, the occupancy of private parking remained below 50% although this has risen and fallen over the last 5 years to stand at around 63%.

Occupancy of Boston's town centre car parks in October (2005 to 2017)



Source: Boston Borough Council