

RETAIL AND TOWN CENTRE - FACT SHEET 4



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 at the highest level ever recorded – 117 in 2019, compared to a historical average of 99. However, this hides considerable variation between town centres, with:

- Kirton, Sutton Bridge and Donington having fewer vacancies in 2019 than their historical averages;
- Spalding, Long Sutton and Crowland close to their historical averages; and
- Boston and Holbeach experiencing vacancy levels significantly 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	2018	2019
Boston	38	48	32	37	28	41	40	36	45	45	44	53	54
Kirton	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	3	4	3	2
Spalding	21	23	22	29	21	26	20	14	21	25	23	-	24
Holbeach	10	9	13	11	9	5	13	14	17	12	17	-	16
Long Sutton	9	10	9	9	12	10	9	9	10	9	12	-	9
Sutton Bridge	5	5	7	7	7	7	3	3	4	1	3	-	4
Crowland	4	4	6	6	7	4	4	3	5	1	0	-	5
Donington	4	6	7	5	5	4	4	4	4	1	2	-	3
Total	91	105	96	98	89	97	93	85	110	97	105	-	117

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	N° of A1 units	28	29	36
	% of A1 units	93%	74%	63%
2010	N° of A1 units	28	37	35
	% of A1 units	93%	73%	61%
2011	N° of A1 units	26	33	33
	% of A1 units	81%	60%	58%
2012	N° of A1 units	29	37	35
	% of A1 units	90%	73%	61%
2013	N° of A1 units	22	39	31
	% of A1 units	73%	65%	54%
2014	N° of A1 units	40	93	30
	% of A1 units	82%	61%	61%
2015	N° of A1 units	40	94	31
	% of A1 units	80%	58%	62%
2016	N° of A1 units	51	109	32
	% of A1 units	86%	61%	63%
2017	N° of A1 units	45	115	33
	% of A1 units	73%	64%	63%
2018	N° of A1 units	47	107	-
	% of A1 units	73%	60%	-
2019	N° of A1 units	43	104	35
	% of A1 units	81%	72%	67%

Source: Boston Borough Council and South Holland District Council

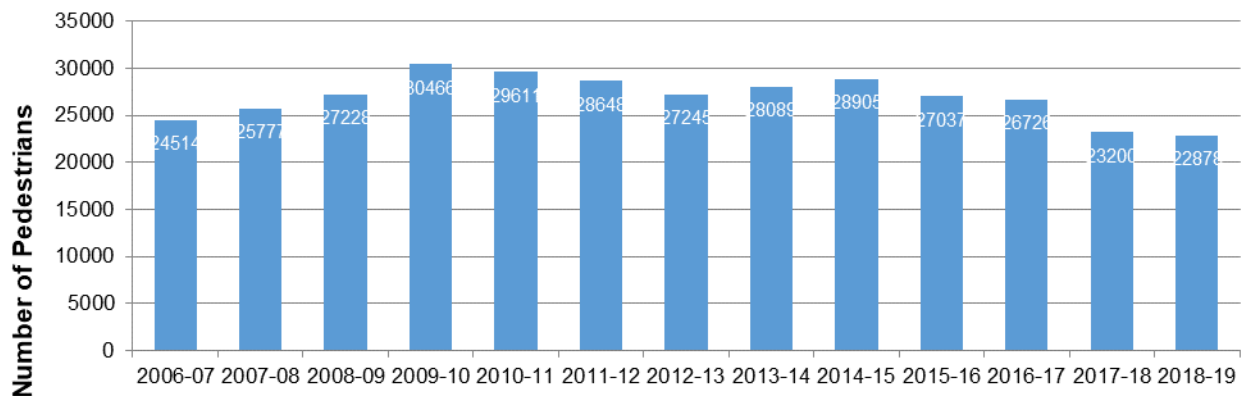
* Please note that from 2014 onwards, the suggested Primary Shopping Frontage for Spalding set out in the South East Lincolnshire Retail and Town Centre Capacity Study (December 2013) was the area that was monitored.

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 all three defined areas/frontages, the situation in 2019 is not far from, or better than the historical averages:

- Boston Prime Frontages – 81% of units were in retail use in 2019, compared to an average of 82% for 2009 to 2019;
- Boston Prime Area – 72% of units were in retail use in 2019, compared to an average of 65% for 2009 to 2019; and
- Spalding – 67% of units were in retail use in 2019, compared to an average of 61% for 2009 to 2019.

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 trend has been consistently downwards, with numbers falling by nearly 21% between 2014/15 and 2018/19 (from 28,905 to 22,878).

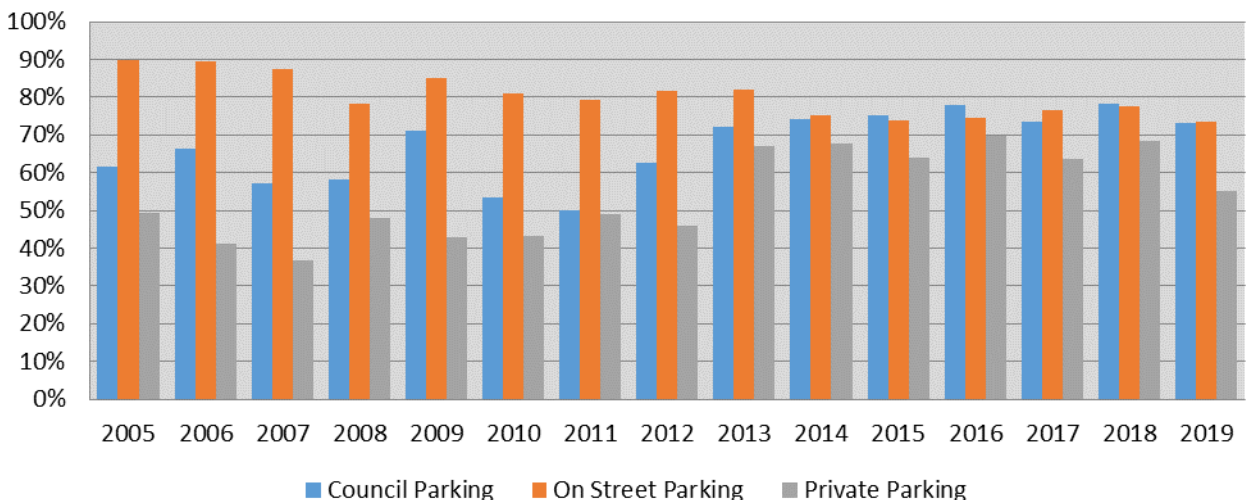
Hourly pedestrian traffic through Strait Bargate on Wednesday market day (2006/07 – 2018/19)



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 not varied greatly between 2005 and 2019 although there has been an overall decrease of around 15% from the beginning to the end of that period. 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 7 years to stand at around 55%.

Occupancy of Boston’s town centre car parks in October (2007 to 2019)



Source: Boston Borough Council