

## Minutes of the Boston Town Board Meeting held on Monday 30 September 2024 at 10.30 am

**Present: Board Members:** Jo Brigham (Chair), Claire Foster (Vice Chair) - Boston College, Councillor Anne Dorrian - Leader of Boston Borough Council, Tracy Stringfellow - Heritage Lincolnshire, Jacqui Bunce - NHS, Andy Lawrence - Port of Boston, Charlotte Goy - Destination Lincolnshire, Alison Fairman - Community Representative, Nick Jones - Transported, Sandra Dowson - One Public Estate, David Fannin - Lincolnshire Voluntary Engagement Team, Abdul Hamid Qureshi - UKIM Mosque & Community Centre, John McHenry - Boston Grammar School, James Davenport - Metsa Wood, Councillor Wendy Bowkett - Lincolnshire County Council, Axel Sedgwick - Youth Representative, Louise Buckingham - CAB Lincolnshire, Inspector Ian Cotton - Lincolnshire Police and Marc Jones - Lincolnshire Police & Crime Commissioner

**Observers:** Heather Langdale - Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

**Town Board Delivery Team:** Pranali Parikh, Lydia Rusling, Jon Burgess, Mark Humphries, Kerry Swadling, Michelle Gant and Luisa Stanney

### 1 Welcome

JBr welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Richard Tice, MP, to his first Board meeting. JBr took the opportunity to inform members that both Andrew Fulbrook and Nick Heath had resigned from the Board and thanked them for their contribution. JBr highlighted that there were now vacancies on the Board but proposed that new/future membership should be discussed in the context of item 12 on the Agenda - future membership should reflect future needs.

### 2 Apologies for Absence & Register of Attendance

Apologies were received from: David Walsh, Neil Kempster, Simon Beardsley, Councillor Barrie Pierpoint, Nick Worboys, Justin Brown, Richard Tory and Joanne Davison.

### 3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Anne Dorrian declared an interest as Boston Borough Council were in receipt of Town Deal funding for the Leisure project and UKSPF projects. Claire Foster declared an interest as she was sponsor of the Mayflower project and Boston College were a partner of the Centre for Food & Fresh Produce Logistics project and involved in the Haven Wharf project. Charlotte Goy declared an interest as Destination Lincolnshire were a delivery partner for the Levelling Up Partnership.

It was agreed that going forward only new declarations of interest would have to be reported as those already declared would be kept on record.

### 4 Minutes of the Boston Town Deal Board meeting held on 24 July 2024 and Any Matters Arising

The minutes were agreed as a true record and there were no matters arising.

## **5 Update on Funding**

LR gave a presentation on the different funding streams received for Boston. In relation to the Levelling Up Partnership funding of £17m, a total of 8 projects had been agreed. The Memorandum of Understanding had been received from the MHCLG and the Council were awaiting the inception meeting with them. Projects included a community organisations package, Boston Leisure Centre and B&M site acquisition which would be led by the Council. Following on from the inception meeting, LR would be able to advise of any role/support required from the Board.

## **6 Leisure Update**

MH referred to the update that was circulated in the meeting pack and was pleased that the Levelling Up Partnership (LUP) funding had been secured for the leisure project. MH also thanked Neil Kempster, Claire Foster, Councillor Barrie Pierpoint and David Fannin for their support with formulating a “plan B”.

MH was in the process of preparing a report that would be submitted to Cabinet on 31 October. The report would deal with the formalities and recommendations to Council and cover the allocation of the LUP funding to the leisure project. An agreement was now in place with Pulse Design & Build to secure the redesign of the value engineering elements and provide a revised phase 1 cost (expected 4 October) and then work would start on the phase 2 element of the project. The target was for the Council to sign off the amended project and budget by 11 November, to secure the award of the contract for phase 1 during December, with works starting on site in January 2025.

In relation to the community volunteer and wellbeing hub, MH had instructed the architect to work up the design in more detail to get to RIBA stage 3 to submit a planning application. Further details would be shared with the Board at the earliest opportunity.

MH would follow up with the Police about the community safety considerations (Designing out Crime).

JBr thanked MH for the update and re-iterated thanks, on behalf of the Board, to the Leisure Plan B Working Group which could now stand down.

## **7 Portfolio Update for Towns Fund Projects**

JBur referred to the next return that was due to be submitted to MHCLG for the period 1 April-30 September 2024. JBur would be writing to all project sponsors to outline what information was required in relation to evidence, cashflow and outputs to provide an accurate return. The aim was to get a completed draft by the first week in November. Focus Consultants had also been appointed to conduct a time limited piece of work on the Boston, Skegness and Mablethorpe projects, working with project sponsors to ensure the evidence base was in place for all projects.

After discussion on the projects, the following was noted:-

- Healing the High Street - Heritage Lincolnshire were meeting on a fortnightly basis to

review the pipeline of projects that were targeted to receive funding. The grant agreement for Shodfriars was in the process of being finalised. Circa £750k of pipeline projects had high confidence of completion within the required timeline with a further circa £700k at lower confidence. It was agreed that TS/JBur would prepare a report for the Board meeting in November which would review the progress of the project including the funding that had been committed, the progress of other all projects in the pipeline, their deliverability and an assessment of the benefit they would have to the community. The Board would consider the report and make the necessary recommendations which would include any scope to re-allocate part of the funding to another project.

- Boston Railway Station - works were continuing on site to the required standard. The main risk was that the contractor was forecasting losses, but any overspend risk sat with the contractor, not East Midlands Railway. Any further legal or financial issues would be reported to the Board.
- Mayflower - work had commenced on site and CF received a monthly progress report and cashflow and the project was on track.
- Blenkin & St Botolph's Lighting - the Blenkin project was completed and had received a building excellence award. The lighting works were ongoing with an anticipated finish date of December 2024.
- Centre for Food & Fresh Produce Logistics - grant funding would close in December. Further details would be shared at the next Board meeting, but the project had already achieved strong output figures, particularly in relation to skills and education outcomes connected to this initiative.
- Plaza area between the Leisure and Mayflower projects - the design of the plaza area was contained within the Leisure project. NJ was leading on the community led artwork with funding available to enable NJ to work with 3 artists and a further workshop was planned with the College and Leisure Centre users. The Plaza project would be covered in future updates.

Project sponsors were reminded to get any updates to the Delivery Team before each Board meeting in a timely manner.

## **8 Annual Report & AGM**

The draft annual report was shared with the Board and the outline content was well received. It was agreed that it would be helpful to include more detail on how the Town Deal projects were selected, as this would help the end audience understand the decision making process and how everyone was working together for the benefit of Boston. The report was a good starting point, written in plain English to ensure accessibility for a wide audience. It would be shared online, with copies sent to stakeholders and Government. The report would also be distributed widely in digital format, including to new subscribers who signed up during recent consultation events. Board members were encouraged to share the report with their networks and the communities they represented.

The Board agreed to hold publishing the report until a formal decision on LUP funding had been agreed by the Council so it could be included within the report. The Board delegated sign off the report to JBr and CF.

In relation to the AGM, in previous years this had been more of an exhibition than a formal event and had a consultation element to it. Local schools and residents had attended to meet with Board members and project sponsors to find out the progress of projects. The Board discussed the possibility of dovetailing the AGM with other events that were already planned in Boston. AS explained that short snappy videos on TikTok promoting the event/Town Board would work well with younger people. The Council could utilise its social media platforms and, although it did not use TikTok, Board Members could share content through their own accounts. AS was happy to work with MG on creating content for social media that would connect with a younger audience.

The Board agreed that MG would put together a communications matrix with recommendations for circulation of the annual report for consideration at the next meeting. The report would also include options for the AGM/exhibition/events which would be delayed until the new year.

## **9 Communications Update**

The communications update prepared by MG was noted by the Board.

## **10 Boston - Initial Assessment and Ideas**

RT gave a presentation to the Board which outlined his review of Boston since being in post as the MP for Boston and Skegness following the elections in July 2024 and reflected on his engagement with local business and residents before and after the election.

The presentation outlined RT's initial assessment of the town centre, retail, the risks and opportunities, issues around safety and security, community rangers, HMO's and possible solutions to the issues RH had identified. He highlighted that only 13% of the Government Funding had been committed to the Town Centre and the need for further and urgent action and investment to reverse the decline.

RH outlined the next steps he felt should take place:-

- A review meeting with the Council.
- A Sub Group assembled.
- Proper private warden service engaged with Police input.
- Urgent engagement with landlords and retailers before they quit the town centre.
- Branding.
- Quick wins including hoarding for empty shops.

The presentation provided a basis for significant discussion including:

The High Street challenge was not limited to Boston; with around 30% of retail spend now online, most towns were suffering from shops closing and the online trend in retail was likely to continue. It was agreed that Boston needed a clear identity, to seek new opportunities and to build on its heritage and culture - this would be outlined further in the next agenda item.

IC updated that the current Police focus in Boston included hot spots patrols and Operation Nevada - which saw the Police and Trading Standards working together to target shops who were trading illegally. IC welcomed RT's engagement and ideas and

a meeting was agreed outside the Town Board.

It was highlighted that many of the recommended actions in the presentation had been considered and/or were being taken forward by the Council, specifically:

- In relation to HMO's WB highlighted that the number of HMOs in Boston were a factor of the low wage, low skill economy and deprivation. AD reported that, in terms of the recommendation to implement Article 4, the Council had already considered this but there was an associated cost of £100,000. The Council did not have the budget to implement this which, if in place, would help restrict the number of HMO's in one area.
- In relation to the recommendation to employ a private, fully uniformed warden service with additional responsibilities/powers, the need to provide a more official looking uniform for the wardens had already been identified by the Council and those were on order; the wardens did not have the responsibilities RT had proposed.
- An upgrade to CCTV and other initiatives for the Town Centre were included in the Council's Action Plan.
- In relation to the concept that play areas and/or opening an SEN school in the Town Centre would bring children in and increase footfall, WB highlighted that a new SEN school had recently opened.

For each Government funding stream, the Board had to work within tight constraints and specific guidelines, determining the choice of projects that had been taken forward to date. RT's observations regarding the allocation of investment re-enforced the need to explain this in the Annual Report (as discussed earlier). A number of initiatives that aligned with the issues raised were included in the Town Board's draft plan - If the Government's Long Term Plan for Towns programme progressed, it would provide funding to take forward the Town Boards plan.

JBr thanked RT for the presentation and expressed some re-assurance that his initial assessment reflected a number of issues that were familiar to the Town Board and Council.

JBr mentioned that the Council had already started work to develop a clear identity for Boston going forward, leading in to the next Agenda item.

## **11 Positioning Boston - Ready for Future Opportunities**

PP gave a presentation to the Board which gave an economic overview of Boston and the town centre. It referred to the plans and policies already in place such as the Growth and Prosperity Plan, Cultural Framework and Sub-Regional Strategy. The presentation also outlined the current challenges for economy, health and skills in Boston and the funding in place to try to alleviate some of the issues.

The next stage would be to fill the gaps in the evidence and analysis of both challenges and opportunities in order to agree a vision and identity (or re-branding) for Boston. It would be important to agree a place narrative and align objectives to deliver consistent messages and place promotion.

PP required a steer from the Board to use some of the capacity funding (approximately £210k was available) for the LTPFT to commission an evidence base

around the health of the retail and leisure sector, demand studies, future skills requirements, all to build a strong place narrative and plan place promotional activities. A Working Group of the Board would be helpful to shape the work and provide a steer, with a review of the information submitted to the Board by April 2025.

JBr thanked PP for her presentation and agreed that the work was critical for the future of the town. Following discussions, the Board agreed that:-

- The Working Group to support PP would comprise of JBr, AD, CF, RT, AL and CG.
- This would need to be an agile group with members willing to allocate the required amount of time (meetings may need to progress with a majority in some cases).
- The Working Group would have the authority to endorse, on behalf of the Board, the use of the capacity funding as required.
- The Working Group would help PP identify any “quick wins” that could be taken forward before the broader work was completed.
- The Board would be updated at each meeting rather than wait until April 2025.

**POST MEETING NOTE:** As the “Positioning Boston” work would include skills, the Skills and Wellbeing Working Group has agreed that its work should transfer (with CF and AL providing continuity) and the Skills and wellbeing Working Group could stand down.

AHQ proposed an additional group to look at Community Cohesion and feed in to the Working group as required. AHQ, DF and AF agreed to consider community cohesion and report back to the Town Board.

## **12 Boston Town Board Going Forward**

JBr referred to the report circulated to the Board in the meeting pack. The report outlined the remit of the Board around specific funding streams. The Board’s role and responsibilities related to the strategy, oversight and delivery as set out in the Terms of Reference and were specific to the Towns Fund and Levelling Up 2 projects and LTPFT (if approved by the new Government). The role of the Board was confined to these programmes and sat within a clearly defined geographical boundary of the town.

Once clarification was received on the future of the LTPFT, along with any governance role the Board may have in relation to the LUP funding, an informal meeting of the Board would be planned. The purpose of the meeting would be to review the Board’s portfolio, related milestones, assess its structure, membership profile and future opportunities. Any new sector or community membership would be considered in this context. The Board was currently made up of members who were passionate about Boston and even if it did not have a formal governance role for the LUP, it could still serve as a sounding Board for the Council.

The Board noted the report and would await further updates from JBr.

## **13 Dates of Future Meetings & Forward Plan**

The Board noted the dates of future meetings and the forward plan.

## **14 Any Other Business**

Open Day - AHQ reported that an open day would be held at Boston Mosque

and Islamic Centre, 27 Horncastle Road, Boston, on 2 November between 1-4pm and Board members and their families were welcome to attend.

Board Reports - JBr suggested that if any Board member had an update on matters that impacted Boston and its residents or had ideas for items they would like to see presented to the Board, they could contact LS who would schedule them as and when possible, on the forward plan.