



**Minutes of the Boston Town Board Meeting
held on Friday 28 March 2025 at 10am
at The Len Medlock Voluntary Centre, Boston**

Present: **Board Members:** Jo Bringham (Chair), Claire Foster (Vice Chair), Councillor Anne Dorrian - Leader of Boston Borough, Richard Tice - MP, Richard Tory - Boston Big Local, Andy Lawrence - Port of Boston, Neil Kempster - Chestnut Homes, Tracey Stringfellow - Heritage Lincolnshire, Alison Fairman, BEM - Community Representative, Sandra Dowson, OPE, David Fannin - LVET, Laura Freer - Destination Lincolnshire, Simon Beardsley - Lincolnshire Chamber of Commerce and Abdul Hamid Qureshi - Imam & UKIM Mosque

Observers - Davina Collison & Lydia Barthelmes - MHCLG

Town Board Delivery Team: Pranali Parikh, Debbie McLatch, Jon Burgess, Michelle Gant, Charli Baty and Luisa Stanney

1&2 Welcome & Apologies for Absence

JBr welcomed Davina and Lydia to the meeting who were from the MHCLG.

Apologies for absence were received from Inspector Ian Cotton, Justin Brown, Cllr Wendy Bowkett, Councillor Barrie Pierpoint, James Davenport, Jacqui Bunce, John McHenry and Marc Jones.

JBr informed the Board that Nick Jones had resigned due to his retirement and on behalf of the Board had thanked him for his support.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no new declarations of interest other than those already previously reported.

4 Minutes of the Boston Town Deal Board meeting held on 31 January 2025

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

5 Plan for Neighbourhoods Update

The Board received a report on the Government's Plan for Neighbourhoods technical guidance, which was launched on 4 March. This guidance included the proposed boundary covered by the funding for Boston and indicated that further information on submission requirements would follow. The updated guidance put greater emphasis on community engagement. It was noted that the programme aligned with the Long-Term Plan for Towns formed by the previous Government. Due to the funding not being allocated until 2026, it was essential that current capacity funding was used effectively.

A response was required by 22 April to confirm whether the Board agreed to the boundary outlined in the guidance and the Board refresh would be included in the submission.

Lydia and Divina from the MHCLG were attending the meeting as observers to address any questions not covered in the report circulated to the Board. They explained that the neighbourhood plan was an evolution of the Long Term Plan for Towns, shaped by recent changes in Government policy following the last election. The overarching aim of the programme was to deliver meaningful outcomes for communities and community engagement was highlighted as key. The funding deadline had been extended to allow more time for engagement and to ensure the funding reaches underrepresented groups. Lydia and Divina expressed their hope that this would not be their last attendance at a Board meeting and showed interest in returning to Boston and learning more about local engagement events. The Board committed to keep them informed about developments.

The next steps included confirmation of the boundary by the Board and the development of a regeneration plan grounded in strong community involvement. JBr welcomed the increased emphasis on community focus, recognising its importance to the social fabric of Boston. It was confirmed that the scope of the funding guidance had expanded to cover areas such as skills development, health, and wellbeing.

MHCLG was still determining the level of support it could provide to Councils and how to help overcome potential barriers, particularly around transport and education. They were also considering how best to connect towns dealing with similar issues to share learning and best practices. There was an intention to provide access to specialist expertise, such as planning or legal advice, at a central level rather than having to draw on local capacity funding.

JBr emphasised the importance of towns working collaboratively rather than competitively and suggested MHCLG could support this through structured coordination. Towns would have a significant timeframe to submit their plans, with payments scheduled to begin in March 2026. A full plan was not required immediately; instead, a clear outline of the four-year plan and direction of travel would be sufficient at this stage.

There was potential for the three Town Boards in the area to come under a single unitary authority as part of local government reform. MHCLG was aware of this and would circulate further information as it became available. Local authorities would hold the funds and it was important to ensure the Board continued to play a key role through any transition.

It was confirmed that initial capacity funding would support the start of the programme, with £2 million to follow annually for the next ten years. Boards would have the ability to passport funds to community organisations, who could then approve and distribute micro-grants. MHCLG was supportive of this approach and were keen to see it implemented.

The role of the Board was acknowledged as having evolved. Going forward, the Board would take on a more strategic role - shaping community priorities, overseeing project delivery and ensuring accountability. It was expected that a draft plan would be available by September, with a final version in place by December.

It was agreed that the small working group supporting PP's work on positioning Boston would form the foundation of the regeneration plan. Secondly, it was considered timely to revisit the original long-term plan for Boston and use it to inform the neighbourhood plan. Third, there was a recognised need to move forward with more in-depth public consultation and to utilise existing networks identified in the previous workshops.

JBr asked Board members to contact LS if they were interested in joining the working group to help shape the four-year plan. She also confirmed she would be working with MG and

the delivery team to outline the plan moving forward. Further information would be shared at the Board's May meeting.

DF updated the Board that the community sub group would reconvene shortly. He noted that the LUF project, a community-led masterplan, would be a key element in shaping the neighbourhood plan. He also volunteered to be part of the sub group.

The Board noted the report and formally agreed the boundary as outlined in the MHCLG guidance.

6 Development of the Town Board

JBr thanked all Board members who had attended the recent Stakeholder mapping workshop, noting it had been a productive session which also focused on shaping the Board's direction going forward. The workshop provided an opportunity to reassess how best to address legacy funding and the introduction of the new Plan for Neighbourhoods funding, which had significantly different requirements. Discussions included Board membership and stakeholder mapping and the identification of key stakeholders and partners who, whilst not needing to sit on the Board itself, could use their networks and positions within communities to act as valuable gatekeepers. The intention was for the Board to become slightly smaller and more streamlined, with continuity improved through consistent participation, whilst maintaining wider engagement through these extended networks.

It was proposed that a transition period be used to maintain continuity of focus on the Towns Fund and its associated benefits realisation, whilst beginning to reflect the needs of the new funding model. Membership could be refreshed after a year, once there was greater clarity on strategic focus. SD reported that she had met with officials from MHCLG and, from a national OPE perspective, stressed the importance of including representation from health and wellbeing services, crime reduction, infrastructure funding and town square regeneration. These areas supported the case for relevant organisations having a seat on the Board. SD was due to meet with PP to explore how all funding streams aligned and to identify opportunities to attract alternative sources of funding that supported the Board's aims.

There was agreement that a core group of members had consistently contributed to the Board's work and it was essential that the Board's composition reflected key sectors such as tourism, local economic activity and public safety. These were critical in helping residents reconnect with and take pride in Boston. The workshop had highlighted various groups and clusters that would be instrumental in formulating the Neighbourhood Plan, particularly during the transitional phase. It was felt that the Board should consist of individuals who were committed, engaged and prepared to be involved throughout the process. As the plans evolved, so too should the composition of the Board to reflect the emerging priorities.

The stakeholder mapping session during the workshop had been particularly effective in identifying how best to structure future engagement. There was a shared commitment to reach out as broadly as possible and make it easier for communities to engage meaningfully in the consultation process. Davina confirmed that private sector representation on the Board was both reasonable and beneficial. Board members would be expected to adopt an ambassadorial role, participating in consultation and feedback activities. It was vital that the business acumen represented on the Board matched the ambitions of the community and that efforts were made to understand and reflect what local businesses required for growth and sustainability.

There was a recognised overlap between community and business needs and it was essential to ensure that those involved in the transitional Board period were both passionate and committed.

JBr noted the importance of maintaining the right balance and it was agreed that Board members would contact LS outlining their views on which roles they would be best suited for - whether as full Board members, stakeholders, or delivery partners, within the next seven days. JBr also confirmed that conversations would take place with any current Board members who had not been actively engaged for some time.

MHCLG indicated flexibility around what the Board could be called. Davina agreed to seek clarity on the expectations of Board members and their roles and would provide a response as soon as possible. Further discussion on the name and structure of the Board would take place at the Town Board meeting in May.

7 Healing the High Street/Shodfriars Update

A report was circulated by JBr providing an update on the Healing the High Street and the Shodfriars project. It was noted that this item had been discussed at length at the previous Board meeting; therefore the current report served as a further update rather than a detailed discussion.

It was confirmed that the funding originally allocated to this project was being reallocated to support the neighbourhood/CCTV works, which were already in progress. The Shodfriars project continued to be governed by the financial lenders, with all necessary legal documents and contracts in place with both parties. The target completion date remained 27 March; however, it was acknowledged that this was likely to be extended due to delays in the processing of funding by the financial lender. Legal assurances were confirmed and completion was understood to be imminent.

Following completion, Scorer Hawkins would commence development works on the site. The grant funding agreement with Scorer Hawkins was now in place and included clawback provisions. JBr thanked the team for their work in bringing the project to this stage. It was confirmed that all relevant risk assessments had been undertaken. The team would continue to monitor progress and update the risk register accordingly. Should the risk level escalate or cost increases occur, the matter would be brought back to the Board for further discussion. It was also confirmed that there remained a mechanism to transfer funding between projects, if necessary.

In relation to Healing the High Street, due diligence work was ongoing to reach agreed terms. Grant funding agreements had been completed; however, one project within the programme would not proceed and another was considered to be at risk. Further work would be carried out to assess the sustainability of grant funding for the project at risk. Tender evaluation work was underway for several projects. The Board noted that tenders were returning with increased cost projections.

It was also reported that one applicant for grant funding was currently subject to enforcement action, which included a legal obligation on the owner to carry out works. The Board agreed that it would not be appropriate for public funding to be used to cover costs arising from enforcement action, as this would amount to compensating a breach.

Regular fortnightly meetings continued between the project team and heritage partners, including David Walsh from Historic England, who was offering guidance. Work on the programme would continue, with a further update provided at the May Board meeting, including an assessment of any underspend and the outcome of tender evaluations.

It was noted that when funding was moved from one project to another, a formal adjustment request was not required by the MHCLG. The team would continue to follow relevant guidance and to ensure that any changes were agreed by the Board.

The Board agreed that -

- 1 The Council would continue to work with Heritage Lincolnshire and the proposed grant recipients to finalise the proposed heads of terms for contracting of the approved applications.
- 2 A further options analysis paper to approve any additional spend adjustments that would be required over the remainder of the Healing the High Street project would be circulated at the May Board meeting.

8 Portfolio Update

The Board noted the portfolio update for the Towns Fund projects. JBur confirmed that there were no changes to any of the key risks at this time. The team were looking at lessons learned to help shape responses to future funding opportunities. The next returns window to MHCLG, covering the period October to March, was 22 April. JBur confirmed that project leads were being contacted to provide the most current and accurate information. **It was agreed that JBr would sign off the return and the Board would be provided with sight of the submitted information at the next meeting.**

It was also agreed that a paper would be submitted to the Board on lessons learned, with a particular focus on benefit realisation. The Board noted the importance of understanding lessons not only from successfully completed projects but also from those that experienced challenges - to inform the approach for future project development and delivery.

There was no further update on the St Botolphs' Lighting & Library project. The last information received was that efforts were being made to procure the necessary works. As a small amount of funding remained, the team would chase an update in advance of the next Board meeting.

It was further agreed that where funding had been reallocated to the CCTV project, the Board would find it useful to receive a quarterly report outlining incidents recorded by the CCTV system and the number of arrests resulting from CCTV footage.

TS offered to provide the heritage report assessing the Healing the High Street project. It was agreed that this report could be integrated into the workstream being developed in preparation for the anticipated new funding opportunities.

9 Communications Update

MG confirmed that the annual report had been published which had been highlighted on social media and had generated engagement from the public.

Work was underway to develop a Communication and Engagement strategy that would align with the Government's prospectus on Plan for Neighbourhoods.

In relation to the window wrapping of vacant shops, it was acknowledged that there had been challenges in reaching the owners of some of the buildings. MG had obtained estimated costings for window wrapping of the former Dunelm and Clarkes shop. Indicative costs were in the region of £4k for Dunelm and £1.6k for Clarkes. It was proposed that the window wrapping could include QR codes for the public that would link them to more information.

The Board agreed to proceed with the window wrapping with a view of expanding to other identified properties if the response was positive. MG would also liaise with Lisa Fitzgerald, who managed the Pescod Square shopping area as she had experience dealing with empty properties. Davina agreed to forward any relevant legislation that may apply.

Following a brief discussion it was agreed that a new approach to engagement was required. The Board recognised the need to address the negativity expressed on social media and to broaden community outreach. MG would bring the draft Communication and Engagement Strategy to a future Board meeting.

10 Wider Funding Update

The wider funding update was circulated to the Board. It was important to bring the updates to the Board to allow for an understanding of what the wider funding delivered.

The UKSPF funding delivered community activities, therefore the officers involved could identify areas of best practice.

It was noted that not all of the UKSPF projects were complete and the outcomes of those projects would not yet be known as the timeframe for the funding was short. The outcomes could be part of the scheme, rather than through delivery.

11 Any Other Business

MHCLG - Davina and Lydia thanked the Board for inviting them to the meeting - should there be any further queries the team could reach out to them at any time. JBr offered an open invitation for Davina and Lydia to attend future meetings.

Timing of Meetings - **it was agreed to change the timings/days of future Board meetings to allow for the best representation.**