



TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENTS

Appendices

**Evidence Considered by Scrutiny Panel
A on behalf of the Environment and
Economy Scrutiny Committee**

July 2023

Previous Scrutiny Activity

The Panel considered the following information from previous scrutiny reviews.

[April 2019 Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee, Item 8 - High Street Revitalisation](#)

The High Street Vitality Working Group report surmised:

- High Streets were changing rather than dying.
- The transition from predominantly retail spaces was to places for leisure, visiting, living, and shopping.
- The Working Group lobbied for changes to planning to support High Street adaptation and changes in Business Rates.
- Five further **recommendations** were made:
 - Collaboration between Districts and the County Council was essential.
 - That all partners recognised the importance of a clean, green, and accessible High Street environment.
 - Recognition of the importance of engaging and supporting the private sector to understand changing consumer behaviours and possible responses– retailers, landowners, property owners and housing organisations – through collaborative business support programmes.
 - Supporting the County Council and Local Planning Authorities to champion ways to support (largely through Local Plan revisions) ways for each Lincolnshire town to complement and not compete with its neighbours (in terms of offer).
 - Work to engage young people to lead social media campaigns to encourage residents and visitors to use their market towns more.

[1.1.1 July 2021 – Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee Report, Impact of Covid-19 on Lincolnshire’s High Streets.](#)

The Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee considered the below:

- Function and form of High Streets and the role of the public sector.
- How working from home, internet shopping and home deliveries had removed people’s dependence on town centres and whilst a trend seen for some time, Covid-19 had made this change ‘revolutionary rather than evolutionary’.
- Balance between the role and interplay of town centres and the community – with town centres as a place to go, that provided a sense of belonging, a focal point with heritage, culture and local distinctiveness and identity.
- The Committee’s areas of focus included:

- **Use of publicly owned buildings and land to increase footfall, including the provision of "hubs" in town centres.** The report suggested that many people were now seeking a place to drop into to work and to meet – perhaps for half a day. Digital hubs were physical spaces with access to superfast broadband alongside community and business focussed services.
- **Members views and experiences of their local towns** following the pandemic and whether businesses in their divisions were working differently following the pandemic.
- **The impact of absent landlords/vacancies.**
- The repurposing of shops and empty spaces for **housing.**
- The **pedestrianisation** of high streets and other improvements such as reducing traffic congestion, improving air quality and increasing parking.
- High Streets and Market Towns as '**destination**' areas.
- **Collaboration** and joined up and joint working between local councils to coordinate improvements.
- The positive impact of the new **Local Transport Plan V** for Lincolnshire.

All the information highlighted by the reviews in April 2019 and July 2021 was used and built upon during the course of our investigations in 2022/23.

Government Funding

Government Funding in Lincolnshire

There are four streams of national funding, which have been allocated to Lincolnshire.

- (1) **Levelling-Up Fund: £187 million** (LUF 1) in round one and **£2.1 billion** in round two (LUF 2), on three themes: regenerating town centres and high streets; (ii) upgrading public transport; and (iii) investing in cultural and heritage asset.
- (2) **UK Shared Prosperity Fund: £2.6 billion** to ‘restore local pride across the UK’ by providing three main areas of investment: (i) improving communities and places; (ii) people and skills; and (iii) supporting local businesses.
- (3) **Towns Fund: £2.4 billion** to ‘unleash economic potential’, including contributions to net zero targets with individual projects supported with up to **£25 million**.
- (4) **Future High Streets Fund: £830 million** to renew and reshape town centres and support recovery post pandemic. This is complemented by a small loans fund for Business Improvement Districts and the implementation of a Parking Code of Practice to regulate the private parking industry.

(1) Levelling-Up Fund

The Government’s Levelling-Up Fund (LUF) is a capital programme designed to invest in infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK. The £4.8 billion national fund will support town centre and high street regeneration, local transport projects and cultural and heritage assets. In Greater Lincolnshire, £30 million was allocated to two projects in October 2021 (LUF 1). A further £124 million was announced in January 2023 (LUF 2).

Lead Authority	Funding Awarded £	Project Summary
Lincolnshire County Council – LUF 1	20,000,000	The A16 Levelling-Up Fund improvement scheme provides six projects along the A16 corridor between Boston and Spalding as a key route for the agri-food industry, reducing congestion, addressing major connectivity issues, and opening up the area for further investment opportunities.

Lead Authority	Funding Awarded £	Project Summary
West Lindsey District Council – LUF 1	10,000,000	Gainsborough Town Centre will be regenerated with projects such as a new four screen cinema and retail space, transforming the town hall into an enterprise hub, improving historic shop fronts, and creating quality residential flats.
Boston Borough Council – LUF 2	14,846,596	Boston’s Rosegarth Square Masterplan will create a new urban park, including new green spaces, improved pedestrian routes and artwork in the heart of Boston to boost resident's health and wellbeing.
City of Lincoln Council – LUF 2	20,000,000	£20 million to build two bridges in Lincoln to run across railway, as part of the development of the Western Growth Corridor.
East Lindsey District Council – LUF 2	8,091,774	In East Lindsey, £8 million will save three of the Lincolnshire Wolds’s most at-risk heritage and cultural sites. This includes Alford Manor House, a Grade II listed building, which will be brought back to life as part of a community visitor complex and Alford’s only remaining windmill.
South Holland District Council – LUF 2	20,000,000	£20 million will build a new swimming pool, a floodlit football pitch and multi-use games area to revamp the Spalding site to inspire people to be active and healthy. There will be community space dedicated for use to provide a health and wellbeing hub, as well as an extra care housing scheme for older residents.
TOTAL	92,938,370	

(2) UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) of £2.6 billion is a successor to the previous EU structural funds. Invested at a local level across three priorities: communities and place, support for local businesses and people and skills. The primary goal of the UKSPF is to build place and increase life changes across the UK. The fund is a mixture of revenue and capital funds. Grant determinations were made in December 2022, confirming over £33 million in Lincolnshire.

The Rural England Prosperity Fund is a top-up to the UKSPF and succeeds EU funding from LEADER and the Growth Programme. It funds capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure. This will help to improve productivity and strengthen the rural economy and rural communities. Over £6 million has been allocated across our region.

Lead Authority	Funding Awarded £	Hyperlink to Project Activity
Boston Borough Council	2,194,351	www.boston.gov.uk/UKSPF
	429,355 REPF	
City of Lincoln Council	2,810,773 REPF	www.lincoln.gov.uk/ukspf
East Lindsey District Council	4,438,286	www.e-lindsey.gov.uk/UKSPF
	1,791,546 REPF	
North Kesteven District Council	3,195,139	www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/ukspf/
	747,556 REPF	
South Holland District Council	2,693,049	www.sholland.gov.uk/UKSPF
	699,884 REPF	
South Kesteven District Council	3,898,582	http://www.southkesteven.gov.uk/UKSPF
	540,469 REPF	
West Lindsey District Council	2,700,436	www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/growth-regeneration/uk-shared-prosperity-fund
	795,821 REPF	

(3) Towns Fund

On 6 September 2019 the Government invited 100 places to develop proposals for a Town Deal, as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund. The Towns Fund is delivered using Town Deal Boards, with investment priorities and project proposals set out in a locally owned Town Investment Plan. There are six places benefiting from over £134 million in Greater Lincolnshire: Boston, Lincoln, Skegness, Mablethorpe, Grimsby and Scunthorpe.

Lead Authority	Funding Awarded £	Project Summary
Boston Borough Council	21,900,000	The investment plan delivers twelve projects, which include Boston Town Centre Regeneration, Boston Train Station improvements, The Centre for Food and Fresh Produce Logistics, and The Mayflower. Details at www.bostontowndeal.co.uk/
City of Lincoln Council	21,900,000	13 projects across the city include restoration and repurpose of the Central Market, regeneration of the Sincil Bank area, and a Hospitality, Events, Arts and

Lead Authority	Funding Awarded £	Project Summary
		Tourism Institute. Details at: https://www.lincoln.gov.uk/lincoln-town-deal-board-1
East Lindsey District Council	48,400,000	The Connected Coast brings together a vision for Mablethorpe and Skegness to maximise their potential. With a total of 13 projects, the programme will deliver a learning campus in Skegness, town centre transformation, for both towns, and a campus for future living in Mablethorpe. Details at https://connectedcoast.co.uk/

(4) Future High Street Funds

The Future High Street Funds (FHSF) is a national programme to support and fund plans in local areas to make high streets and town centres fit for the future. It will renew and reshape town centres and high streets in way that improves experience, drives growth, and ensures future sustainability.

Lead Authority	Funding Awarded £	Project Summary
South Kesteven District Council	5,600,000	An ambitious programme of regeneration in Grantham, which includes: station approach improvements, re-establishment of the Market Place, introducing residential or creative uses of vacant retail space.

Deep Dive into Lincolnshire Towns

During the course of the review, we have looked at various ways to select representative towns for deeper analysis and review selected by size, geography and location. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) describes a town as being 10,000 population and over. Below that nearly all settlements are defined as built up areas. The ONS states:

“Built-up areas are characteristic of settlements including villages, towns, or cities. In 2011 across England and Wales 95 per cent of the usually resident population lived in built-up areas. The total land area of the built-up areas (BUAs) in 2011 was 1.4 million hectares (9.6 per cent of England and Wales). There are 5,493 built-up areas across England and Wales, with the smallest areas having a population of just over 100, and the largest, Greater London having a population of nearly 9.8 million.”

The table below shows all settlements in Lincolnshire which might be deemed to operate as towns. It is based on analysis of local plan settlement descriptions, population scale and a local knowledge of the functioning of places. Each has been assigned a geographical sphere: Greater Lincoln (GL), South East Lincolnshire (SE), East Lincolnshire (E), South West Lincolnshire (SW) and an A631 Corridor.

Town	2011	2020	Change	% Change	Geographical Sphere
City					
1. Lincoln BUA	114,644	125,044	10,400	0.09	GL
Towns					
2. Grantham BUA	43,986	47,004	3,018	0.07	SW
3. Boston BUA	41,340	46,506	5,166	0.12	SE
4. Spalding BUA	31,702	36,737	5,035	0.16	SE
5. Skegness BUA	24,876	25,612	736	0.03	E
6. Gainsborough BUA	20,922	23,339	2,417	0.12	A631
7. Stamford BUA	20,628	21,734	1,106	0.05	SW
8. Sleaford BUA	17,412	18,741	1,329	0.08	SW
9. Louth BUA	16,466	17,637	1,171	0.07	E
10. Bourne BUA	13,948	17,040	3,092	0.22	SW
11. Market Deeping BUA	13,586	14,339	753	0.06	SW
12. Mablethorpe BUA	12,505	12,551	46	0.00	E
BUAs					
13. Holbeach BUA	7,900	8,395	495	0.06	SE
14. Horncastle BUA	6,807	7,219	412	0.06	E
15. Washingborough BUA	6,469	6,869	400	0.06	GL
16. Welton (West Lindsey) BUA	6,385	6,689	304	0.05	GL
17. Bracebridge Heath BUA	5,685	6,081	396	0.07	GL
18. Coningsby BUA	5,193	5,889	696	0.13	E

Town	2011	2020	Change	% Change	Geographical Sphere
19. Kirton (Boston) BUA	4,815	5,492	677	0.14	E
20. Long Sutton (South Holland) BUA	5,147	5,343	196	0.04	SE
21. Market Rasen BUA	4,773	5,277	504	0.11	A631
Smaller 'towns'					
22. Crowland BUA	4,227	4,786	559	0.13	SE
23. Woodhall Spa BUA	4,314	4,382	68	0.02	E
24. Saxilby BUA	3,987	4,319	332	0.08	GL
25. Cherry Willingham BUA	3,963	4,291	328	0.08	GL
26. Sutton Bridge BUA	3,878	3,992	114	0.03	SE
27. Nettleham BUA	3,436	3,972	536	0.16	GL
28. Alford BUA	3,472	3,900	428	0.12	E
29. Spilsby BUA	3,452	3,746	294	0.09	E
30. Metheringham BUA	3,601	3,427	-174	-0.05	E
31. Skellingthorpe BUA	3,356	3,372	16	0.00	GL
32. Donnington	2,801	3,089	288	0.10	SE
33. Caistor BUA	2,489	2,812	323	0.13	A631
34. Billinghay BUA	2,054	2,194	140	0.07	SW
35. Bardney BUA	1,661	2,096	435	0.26	GL
36. Wragby	1,773	1,890	117	0.07	E
37. Wainfleet All Saints BUA	1,749	1,742	-7	0.00	E

Using the ONS 'definition' of a town, there would be:

- Eleven towns in Lincolnshire, plus the City of Lincoln.
- Nine Built Up Areas (BUA) with over 5,000 population and
- Sixteen smaller towns with a population of just under 2,000 to 5,000, which are also relatively important service centres in Lincolnshire due to their strategic positioning and the scale of non-domestic buildings.

We selected four towns for an in-depth study:

- (1) Caistor – no 33 and recognised as a 'smaller town' to the north of the county as an example of a town already undergoing locally led review.
- (2) Mablethorpe – no 12, a BUA chosen as an example of a coastal town/seasonal economy with Towns Fund investment.
- (3) Louth – no 9 BUA selected as an historic market town and major service centre for the eastern part of the county.
- (4) Holbeach – no 13 chosen as the largest of the BUAs and an important market town and service centre for the south of the county.

Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Framework 23

Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Framework (SIDF) 23 was commissioned by the Greater Lincolnshire Infrastructure Group, supported by all eleven local authorities in Greater Lincolnshire. It details the areas where strategic infrastructure investment, as a driver of growth, is most needed in Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland. The SIDF supports devolution. It supports:

- Transport (roads, rail, ports, aviation, rural public transport and active travel), digital, energy, water and waste infrastructure that is fit for growth;
- Housing stock that is affordable, healthy, sustainable, accessible and represents an environment attractive to housing investment (including in town centres);
- Business infrastructure that can create more high value jobs, innovate and increase productivity;
- **Prosperous, accessible high streets and market towns which showcase their unique identities and instil a sense of ownership and pride in our residents while attracting visitors to our area;** and
- A healthy population with access to appropriate services and resources that help them achieve wellbeing and a good quality of life.

This framework is intended as a launch pad that partners across Greater Lincolnshire can use to gather the powers, influence, and finances to make growth in the region happen, and to generate a significant contribution to local and UK growth by supporting our priority economic sectors. This will happen through prioritising projects that align to the SIDF, commissioning action plans that stimulates new activity or accelerates existing activity and strengthening business cases to encourage investment. The SIDF supports devolution by identifying ‘what’ actions are required to deliver growth through strategic infrastructure investment.

Levelling-up requires collaboration, local leadership, and vision to identify sustainable and inclusive growth. Infrastructure investment is a prerequisite to growth, and when coordinated it becomes a springboard to a strong, flourishing economy for residents and businesses.

The SIDF 23 links infrastructure, long-term strategic vision, and social investment to level up the region. It aims to make sure our left-behind neighbourhoods, rural and coastal areas, market towns and city are thriving, attractive communities that residents are proud of, and that provides them with improved wellbeing, opportunity, and quality of living. Infrastructure is vital to attracting visitors, workers, and investment and to achieving sustainable economic growth.

The SIDF 2023 builds upon Greater Lincolnshire Plan for Growth, the extensive Local Industrial Strategy evidence base, adopted Local Plans and Local Transport Plans.

To deliver support the 2050 Vision for Greater Lincolnshire, the SIDF centres around:

- **Place** - levelling up and inclusive growth to create quality places, sustainable communities, and beneficial physical environments.
- **People** - economic growth that helps our 1.1million residents to access well-paid employment, good quality housing and excellent health and well-being outcomes that in turn drive productivity.
- **Planet** - decarbonisation and other responses to climate change that support sustainable growth and help achieve Net Zero targets, while enabling innovation in low carbon technologies and renewable energy particularly in zero emission vehicles, mass transit and the decarbonisation of rail and maritime travel.

Towns such as Grantham, Skegness, Mablethorpe, Boston, Gainsborough, Spalding, and Lincoln have a combination of Levelling Up Fund, Towns Fund and Future High Streets Fund investment helping to deliver inclusive growth. **Collaboration to provide infrastructure that supports these programmes will help them deliver their full potential and achieve value for money.**

A series of ambitions in the SIDF support town centre vitality. These include:

- **Digital connectivity**, this is central to addressing a wide range of health, social, economic, and environmental issues and to creating a place where people want to live, work and visit. This is the core of the SIDF and aligns to Vision 2050. Digital will:
 - Improve local people’s lives.
 - Support the growth of local businesses.
 - Bring new businesses to our area.
 - Drive innovation and Research & Development.
 - Attract new investment.
 - Protect our environment and support sustainability.
- **EV charging points** - these are becoming more available to residents but there is a need for more charging facilities across the region. Lincolnshire is leading on a Midlands-wide Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) pilot in association with Midlands Connect which will deliver over £3 million of Government and private investment to provide on-street residential EV charging in largely rural areas. This will be a catalyst for higher EV ownership, innovation in delivery models and it will raise the profile of EV across Greater Lincolnshire
- **Accessibility (moving people)** - strategic infrastructure needs to encourage the provision of local facilities, improve virtual connectivity through digital connections, and provide improvements to walking and cycling routes. We need sustainable modes of transport to connect residents to their local communities so they can contribute to the local economy and access places to work and socialise, as well as key services like education and healthcare. This will be achieved through investment in improving and extending our existing network, and through the strategic planning of Sustainable Urban Extensions.

SIDP Case Studies

Visitor Economy & Defence Lincoln Be Smarter City, including Lincoln Connected

The Lincoln Town Deal Investment Plan is currently tackling the city's digital issues through two key projects – Lincoln Be Smarter (LMS) scheme and Lincoln Connected. These developments support Lincoln's growth as a smart city, making it a place with smart networks for residents, encouraging business growth and enabling innovation in key sectors.

Led by the University of Lincoln, the LMS scheme accelerates the adoption and development of industrial digital technologies through focused support to SMEs, helping them digitalise, grow and raise productivity.

Building on the cultural, heritage, retail and leisure offers in Lincoln, Lincoln Connected will reimagine Lincoln's High Street using digital technology to connect people with the city's assets. It will enhance visitor experiences, encourage local spend and promote a thriving city centre. Interventions will include open content management, smart signage, lighting infrastructure, and grants to support digital art installations.

Sleaford Town Centre Regeneration – 'The Heart of Sleaford'

Sleaford serves as a shopping, services and facilities hub for its residents and surrounding rural communities. The Heart of Sleaford is an ambitious town centre regeneration project which aims to create a new destination in the centre of Sleaford. Regeneration of Sleaford may address the decline in footfall in the town during and post Covid-19 and increase the numbers of visitors for retail, leisure and tourism purposes.

There is potential in the town to boost the local economy by:

- improving access, including pedestrian and active travel;
- improving the environment, including the marketplace, public realm, shopfronts, street schemes, and historic restoration;
- opening access to the town's green spaces for residents and visitors;
- supporting businesses to achieve their potential and drive local economic growth; and,
- focusing on people, skills and training to help maximise their income.

Previous regeneration plans for Sleaford, including a new cinema complex in the town, have been disrupted by Covid-19 which heavily impacted independent operators throughout the UK. North Kesteven District Council continues to work with the landowner of the proposed site to redevelop the town centre site, deliver pedestrian links, and carry out redevelopment of key identified sites. The Town Centre Masterplan is currently undergoing a refresh supported by the Government's Welcome Back Fund.

Digital Capacity and Skills

Leicestershire and Warwickshire County Councils and Loughborough University undertook a project to determine digital capacity and capability in high street businesses in order to model how to grow a digital high street economy. The key finding was that there were significant gaps between the skills sets of large and small businesses with the smaller lagging significantly and in some areas only 20% had an online presence.

The project divided businesses into five digital categories and tracked changes over time. These were:

- Disconnected
- Digital informers
- Social sophisticated
- Digital enthusiasts
- Trendsetters

The concept to drive growth was to reduce the disconnected, develop maturity and upskill each profile and build capacity and increase the trendsetter category. Over the course of the project, the disconnected category is down 79% and trendsetters are up 110% (includes retail/service/leisure/convenience).

The SIDF will be published in May 2023 and will, through strategic infrastructure provision, support town centre vitality via physical and digital connectivity to and access to services in towns and enabling towns to support the service needs of residents as well as supporting the conditions for business growth and targeting key economic sectors – in particular the Visitor Economy ensuring that the movement of people to and around the county is maximised and sustainable and supporting the infrastructure investment needed to improve the visitor offer – including through digital connectivity, active travel and public transport.

Views of the Business Community

Federation of Small Businesses Lincolnshire

We considered evidence provided by the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), a membership organisation for the small business community in the UK, with around 170,000 members, representing single-person businesses to organisations of up to 249 staff. FSB was the local point of contact for all 3,000 Lincolnshire members and acted as a lobbyist for the small business community across Lincolnshire. There are currently five and a half million small businesses across the UK. In the UK, in total 16.3 million people are employed in small businesses, representing 61% of total employment, with annual turnover of £2.3 trillion.

On 12 April 2022, the FSB published a report called *Local Leadership - How Local Authorities Can Support Small Businesses*, available at [Local leadership | FSB, The Federation of Small Businesses](#)). This report made a series of recommendations to county and district authorities across the UK. Some of the national recommendations that could be supported on a local level were identified for the Panel. We considered these recommendations and highlighted points of particular interest ; these included:

Engaging with Small Businesses

1. *Ensure consultations are clear, simple and well communicated in good time. This means making them accessible online and making local businesses and business groups aware of upcoming consultations.*

We acknowledged the importance of supporting this **particularly for businesses on the high street.**

2. *Visit businesses. Face-to-face contact is important for building a trusting relationship with small businesses and local business groups, fostering good long-term communication. This also includes meeting with businesses who may not have an obvious presence on the high street or physical business premises.*

Local representation was identified to be of paramount importance in engaging with small businesses on the high street. Councillor Tracey Carter served as an example of someone well-connected to the businesses in Holbeach and stated that visiting businesses; getting one's face known; and **showing representation from county council and district council level were important; and businesses valued this contact.**

3. *Have a dedicated Councillor and Single Point of Contact acting as small business champions.*

FSB made a plea, calling through its local leadership approach for a **dedicated Councillor or a single point of contact within a council for small businesses, as small businesses often do not know who to contact.** They might contact their local Councillor, the Parish Council, the FSB, the Growth Hub, or even, they might just give up.

4. *Use the new business knowledge and local relationships which your systems and staff have gathered over recent years, to build relationships, engagement and ideas for the future.*

We agreed that councils had learned a lot more about businesses throughout the pandemic and especially through being responsible for administering the Covid-19 Grant systems. **Ownership and activities development are of paramount importance.** The FSB would like to see that continued in the longer term so that new knowledge and local relationships are maintained.

Planning and Environment

5. *Embrace the 'alfresco' and allow businesses to make the most of their outdoor space by utilising new planning powers, where appropriate.*

We supported the use of outside spaces and the simplification of the process allowing this. This would be possible either through the planning system or other decision making, and aims at **allowing businesses in leisure and hospitality to embrace the use of outdoor space, whilst also helping our high streets look busier, encouraging people's tendency to stay out more, spend more and create viable and sustainable connections with businesses that ultimately will maintain and potentially increase the level of footfall of small Market Towns and Villages as well as bigger cities.**

6. *Where possible, development plans should ensure there is a range of affordable and flexible local business premises, both to encourage new enterprises and to allow existing businesses to grow.*

We were asked whether the County Council or District Councils could investigate, if it were possible for them to take over some of those vacant premises and turn them into flexible working spaces. **That would reduce vandalism and keep people on the high street. If there are working spaces, people will spend money at lunchtime in the shops and cafés.**

7. *Local authorities should look to see how they might include commercial waste and recycling collection within existing services for the smallest of businesses.*

We heard that if commercial waste and recycling collections can be incorporated into general collections, small businesses might not need to pay as much for their own commercial waste. We supported in principle the facilitation of businesses in managing waste collections and **requested examples where other councils had employed successful initiatives where we could extract best practice from.**

Procurement

8. *Pay invoices within 30 days or sooner, and ensure that these terms are passed down the supply chain.*

Regulation

9. *Adopt a “support first, enforcement second” approach across your regulatory services, with a focus on reducing the regulatory burden.*

We acknowledged that some small businesses did not necessarily have all the skills and all the knowledge to manage every single regulatory burden.

10. *Introduce minimum standards for responding to businesses on licensing and inspections, such as food hygiene ratings, allowing businesses to open and operate safely as quickly as possible.*

We acknowledged the significance of applications for licences or inspection reports being processed quickly.

Business Support

11. *Ensure that business support is accessible to all small businesses that need it, not just high growth, high potential firms.*

Councils should avoid charging for business support; Lincolnshire showcased a proactive stance in this area and District Councils were well linked with the FSB. **A cohesive approach that takes into consideration that people might live in one district and work in another is recommended.**

Business Rates

12. *Keep business rate lists and data up to date, including properties which qualify for Small Business Rates Relief. Good data is critically important for both the collection of rates and should grants need to be paid out to those in receipt of rates relief. Knowing who the business owner is, and how to contact them can be critical.*

We heard that it was important to keep business rate lists and data up-to-date; this facilitated with processing grant applications and helping businesses. **We acknowledged that the Council also would know exactly who was running those businesses, which would aid relationships.**

13. *Encourage eligible businesses to apply for Small Business Rate Relief and other available reliefs by proactively contacting eligible businesses to make them aware of how to apply.*

Businesses should be encouraged to apply for rate relief where possible, and Councils could be more pro-active about encouraging those to come forward and claim. In addition, it was suggested that **any opportunities to offer business rate discounts or payment holidays or provide support to businesses to move into empty retail or leisure or hospitality premises, could be highly beneficial.**

14. *Provide appropriate signposting support for any business looking to appeal against their business rate valuation.*

We were informed that **businesses were being deterred from appealing against a valuation and thus they may be paying more than they should be.** Where Councils had powers to support businesses to appeal their valuation, these should be exercised in support.

15. *Support businesses to access any available discretionary reliefs they may be entitled to, including discretionary relief funds provided by the government.*

We acknowledged that Councils should help businesses gain access to any discretionary relief that is available.

Parking

16. *Upgrade parking meters and systems to enable multiple ways to pay. This could include contactless, pay-on-exit, or app-based parking charges.*

It was suggested that to get people onto high streets, parking systems should be upgraded to support virtual/online/card transactions, to allow for users to pay with ease where they had no immediate access the correct amount of change. **We agreed that app-based charging or pay-by-card made it easier for service users to pay and improved chances of the allocated parking being used.**

17. *Trial schemes designed to encourage customers to shop in small businesses on their high streets by giving parking discounts to those who do.*

Reference was made to schemes in Lincoln, where **parking costs were discounted to encourage shoppers to visit independent shops.**

Greener High Street

18. *Create a 'greener' high street by encouraging zero or low emission transport methods, providing EV charging points, and highlighting accessible pedestrianised routes and spaces.*

Net Zero: Electric Vehicle charging points, though expensive to install, could attract people to town centres. Further **technological applications that showed live parking availability would increase ease of use and user satisfaction when visiting a town centre.**

Absent Commercial Landlords

19. *Tackle the problem of absent commercial landlords who allow empty properties to fall into disrepair.*

We requested further information and clarification on the enforcement powers of local authorities on empty premises. **We acknowledged that where landlords keep properties empty for tax reasons, it could have a detrimental impact on the feel of the town, especially where there may have been rows of shops that were being deliberately empty. We were informed that the approach implemented was ‘support first and enforcement second’.** Being a private landlord of retail premises might be someone's small business, therefore **a softer approach of encouragement to fill those spaces where possible, by meeting the landlord or having a forum where landlords could be encouraged to fill empty spaces and help them realise the impact it has on the town centre.**

Other aspects considered in relation to small business viability and support included:

- Recovery from Covid-19: high street businesses particularly were still recovering from Covid-19 – in effect 17 months of on-and off closure. They are faced with recruitment and labour challenges: since the pandemic recruiting quality staff who would work for appropriate wages that businesses could afford had become difficult; in addition, costs of employment are rising.

Instability of footfall; lockdowns meant no high street footfall, and even when measured were lifted, it never came back to pre-pandemic levels. This is partially owed to changes to habits (such as working from home, ordering online). Many businesses on the high street had introduced online selling, which was an opportunity to re-approach their client base and also expand but was also costly.

- Business Rate System and Business Rents: The existing system was characterised as ‘antiquated’ and long overdue for review, which was happening, but slowly. The business rate system was challenging for small businesses, particularly on high streets. In addition, business rents were extremely volatile, with some larger businesses leaving town and city centre premises, simply because the rents had become unmanageable: 56% of business stated that rent levels had been an issue, with over half stating that if there had been rent regulation, it would have made things easier.
- Energy Costs: (as of April 2022) there was no support for businesses to manage increasing energy costs.
- Shifting Payment Trends: moving away from cash to debit and credit cards, with these trends accelerated by the pandemic: only 25% of payments in cash, but that 25% was crucial for the businesses.

- Investment: lockdowns and the increased expense of running a business, stunted growth plans for SMEs. Businesses were feeling cautious about investing either in new staff, new technology or new premises, simply because they were nervous about what their accounts were going to be looking like in the coming months.
- Impact of Loss of Large Retailers: loss of large-footprint businesses on the high street, such as Debenhams or Toys 'R' Us in Lincoln, could make high streets look 'sorry'. When large retailers pulled out, it could diminish confidence. This was probably more so in the City of Lincoln and some of the larger towns, like Spalding in Boston.
- Rural Small Businesses: these tended to feel more positively about their high streets than those in urban areas, but only 50% of businesses stated they were positive about their high street.
- Parking: FSB referred to free parking as something that would make the biggest difference to footfall: 70% of small businesses said free parking, or at least easy access to parking, would make the biggest realistic material difference to footfall and therefore to their income. Businesses would always want free parking, but it was not universally possible. Free short-term slots, for 30 minutes in town centres, could help regular spending in shops. People would be put off if they had to pay for an hour when they only needed ten minutes.

As a Panel we concluded that timeless free parking as a general principle was not appropriate, because free spaces would be used by those working in a town, rather than by the shoppers. We emphasised on the peril of free parking negating the spaces available for shoppers. In contrast, half hour on-street free parking spaces was supported, but we stressed enforcement as key to successful implementation.

Moreover, we also recorded our opposition in principle to pedestrianisation, as this would hinder footfall; there was a tendency for shoppers to prefer to park as close as possible to the shops.

- Access to Banks: 54% of businesses had referred to the closure of bank branches. This tended to impact the elderly and the vulnerable: if people cannot get access to cash, they cannot spend it in the businesses, who then find it difficult to bank the cash. It also impacted businesses also, who needed to bank their cash. The number of ATMs was also reducing. Some sort of banking presence would help but keeping existing bank branches was the preferred solution. 74% of those businesses had seen their bank branches close in recent years. Banking cash could add a journey to the workload and a cost. As Lincolnshire was large and rural sometimes the nearest bank could be forty minutes away.
- Lincolnshire Coast: The Lincolnshire coast had an extremely strong summer in 2021 after a very poor 2020, but this would be difficult to replicate and sustain in 2022. There was some excellent work going on with *Visit Lincoln*, which is going to become *Destination Lincolnshire*, to drive more tourism along the coast, but it is going to take effort replicate the success of 2021 in 2022.

- Optimism: the latest small business index, which was just about to be published (in April 2022), indicated that business optimism had dipped by over 8%, compared to rising optimism in other sectors. This was because of all the reasons referred to above.
- Night-time Economy and Public Transport: limited public transport after 5 pm, may inhibit business activity and hinder night-time economic activity.
- Support for Businesses: where counties can offer support to businesses who wish to investigate making bids for funding, this was found to be encouraging and allowing businesses to take ownership over their town centres.
- Ad Hoc Market Days: pop up markets; and reducing bureaucracy for ad hoc market days, special events and festivals, as this would be valuable for driving footfall and attracting tourism. If a pop-up market is a success, retailers may then want to move into one of those retail premises permanently.
- Skills and Recruitment: retail businesses often had had issues in recruiting: they were getting fewer candidates for every role and because there were more vacancies; and it was taking longer, with more adverts and costs. Some of candidates were either very young, or not 'work ready'. This was because students had spent their last two years of school learning from home. Digital literacy was also an issue, as many cafés used a tablet ordering system. It took businesses far longer to train staff, which was a cost issue.

Lincolnshire Chamber of Commerce

The Panel received a presentation from the Lincolnshire Chamber of Commerce, which was actively present in local town centres, and was very much involved in *Shopwatch Schemes* in a number of Market Towns. More recently, we heard that the Lincolnshire Chamber of Commerce (CoC) had looked to other organisations, such as business improvement districts, to take the lead on high streets.

The points we discussed extensively included:

- The **individuality of town centres**. Reference was made thus to varying challenges experienced in each town centre and how these were influenced by factors such as the type of businesses that operated within these.
- **Using space differently** and looking at new technology to make sure that town centres were environmentally friendly and sustainability.

- **Communicating Strengths and Unique Selling Points**- where the county's town centres were location wise, affected their footfall; nevertheless, we acknowledged that it is important to identify their key strengths, features, benefits and their unique selling points and to be able to articulate those to both visitors and residents and to the town centres.
- **Complementing, Not Competing** – it was recommended that towns should complement, but not compete: if two town centres were close and shared similarities, instead of focusing on one, you could double the footfall over two towns, particularly if there was complementary offering: for example, antiques, history or culture. The Panel agreed that pride in local place was important, leading to enthusiasm and a passion for what it was and what it did.

Nevertheless, we observed that potentially the boundaries of District Councils might not assist towards achieving this (where a town in one district complemented a town in another district). It was emphasised that **shoppers and visitors did not take account county or district boundaries**. It is therefore important to know who the customer is and make the best use of assets. Albeit that we were reminded that being able to collaborate was not always easy; an example of Deeping St James, a large village adjacent to a small Market Town was discussed.

- Awareness of who the **key players** in each town centre are, namely the organisations that generated activity, as working together could maximise impact. This would be along the lines of the approach of business improvement districts: bringing businesses together to get a single vision and to make sure that any funding was used together rather individually.
- **Data and information** - Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are established under legislation and have a duration of five years. There would be consultation with the businesses in a designated district, to ascertain the challenges and develop a plan on what businesses themselves would want to invest in.

If a business improvement district proposal were successful, there would be a levy on the businesses in the area based on their business rates. There would be a ballot in which over 50% of the businesses who voted needed to agree. If there was an agreement all businesses had to pay, with some exceptions owing to size. Business improvement districts could develop a clear vision for the area, as well measures of success and constituted a source of funding for activities.

We enquired whether there was a minimum threshold for each BID in terms of the rateable value of the properties that would be included within the BID and were informed that if businesses met the minimum threshold, they would pay the levy: a business in receipt of small business rates relief would not necessarily be exempt from the business paying the levy.

The Panel also referred to the planned BID for Spalding and we queried whether there were enough big players. In response the importance of stressing the value of a BID over its five-year term and developing a clarity of purpose was emphasised.

- **Market Towns and Markets** play a fundamental role of market towns in place making. Within those towns, open-air or pop-up markets enabled very small businesses to develop cheaply, but subsequently it might enable them to expand, for example into the local shops. In addition, markets in one place could be set up in another place. In some areas there were difficulties: such as who managed the stalls up and who owned the land. However, markets could generate activity in an area that supported the uniqueness of a place. Events and culture also had a role in increasing footfall, but events needed to be of a significant scale to attract sufficient footfall.

We discussed the definition of a 'market town' – whether it required town to have a market or whether the 'market' was in fact the permanent shops and businesses in the town, for example in Market Rasen. The same principles applied irrespective of whether there was a market or not: understanding the strengths and weaknesses; developing aims and objectives; and making the best use of the resources available.

- **Digitalisation**, including free public wi-fi and a *digital town crier*, which would have information on money-off savings. Social media was an important aspect highlighted. It was also important to promote a digital presence, for example in search engines and make sure websites were attractive, with clear information and good quality pictures.
- **Acceptance of change** was also a key factor that emerged in discussions. Lincolnshire businesses might not always be the first to embrace change. The best approach was to show the difference changes could make either to profits, or to savings on costs.

Many small businesses might say they were too busy, and this represented a challenge for Lincolnshire, where 95% of businesses were small. Their focus tended to be on the day-to-day activity, with no time to step back and look at things differently. There were examples where advisors had visited businesses, identified what they needed, and provided a report with suggested solutions. A business then might say they did not have the time to implement the suggested solutions. The businesses almost needed to most hand-holding so that the solution was implemented, and the benefits of the solution were delivered.

The Panel also acknowledged the challenges in very small businesses, with one or two people, who often had other commitments such as family, where there was limited time, where there could often be a resistance to change and concerns any changes would lead to higher costs.

- **Involvement of Businesses in Representative Organisations.** There was a question on the level of business involvement in organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), and particularly if there was lower participation in certain towns. In response Simon Beardsley stated that where businesses were responsive initiatives such as training or providing support, they tended to be aligned to the FSB or the Chamber, because they had decided to contribute towards those organisations. Highlighting the benefits of closer local collaboration was a potential solution, although it was sometimes difficult to get smaller businesses to connect.

The Lincolnshire Chamber of Commerce had been established in 2000, following the amalgamation of the various town chambers. For a short period of time, the Lincolnshire Chamber had acted as an umbrella organisation and until a few years ago the Chamber had been centralised with less focus on individual towns. The Chamber appeared to be focusing on more activity, although there were strands where it was more sectoral-based.

Businesses tended to look at their own areas, where the tangible results were immediately apparent. Government funding, such as the Towns Deals, was a good example of a focus on the needs of towns. That could be a catalyst for businesses to see something in another town and want to be a part of it. There was an opportunity to reinvigorate some of those local business networks.

The Panel made reference to the involvement of businesses in Market Rasen in the Chamber of Commerce and the FSB. Sometimes even the timing of meetings could be an obstacle, for example breakfast or evening meetings. Involvement needed to be encouraged. Simon Beardsley stressed that leadership was important; and developing a vision together. There were leaders in Lincolnshire's towns, often under the radar but they needed to be excited and involved, to get them to understand what the opportunities were.

- **Political Involvement** was another element that we considered and were agreed that contact need not necessarily be via a Town, District or County Councillors, as a community-based individual, who was also well known in the community could also facilitate works.
- **New Roles for High Streets.** The Panel referred to the changing and evolving nature of high streets (losing customers to online shopping). During the pandemic the tendency was to shop locally. The current picture suggests that people were drifting back to the pre-pandemic ways. Much of this rested on 'pride in place' and 'passion in place' with the right range of shops. There was a balance: if there were, for example, too many charity shops or coffee shops, and less retail pull, there would be less rationale for people to visit.

- **Skills and Recruitment.** We acknowledged this was a contemporary challenge affecting a large number of businesses who were having problems recruiting and retaining staff. Skills were important and part of this was the progression within companies. Smaller businesses tended not to look to have the time to look to the long term for skills development: limited opportunity to invest in quality training, for example leading to a formal qualification.

A lot of Lincolnshire’s businesses were good at in-house training: getting people up to a certain level of competence, but they were not necessarily setting their sights on a wider aim: If businesses could attract people in from a wider area that would benefit the individuals and the organisation as well.

It can be difficult to get smaller businesses to see the value and spend the time on upskilling. Larger businesses were seeing the opportunity to retain staff through upskilling and adding value to their employment, because they had time and potentially the funds to do so. There were fewer examples of that in smaller businesses.

The table below summarises **in a snapshot**, issues experienced by businesses as these have been reported to the CoC and proposed solutions as these were described by Simon Beardsley, Chief Executive Lincolnshire Chamber of Commerce, Director and Interim CEO Lincoln Business Improvement Group and Director of Lincolnshire Coastal Business Improvement District:

Consumer/User Points	Proposed Solutions	Businesses / Retailer Points	Proposed Solutions
Accessibility issues – lack of public transport, cost of parking	Upgraded parking systems – make different payment methods available. EV charging infrastructure – access to ensure sustainability	High rents and rates burden, appropriateness of building for use	Understand land/property ownership. Create a collective vision
Lack of offer including loss of anchor stores, too many charity shops and coffee shops	Expanded hospitality offer including alfresco. Improved pavement licence process Create a digital high street that complements customers’ needs	Undercut by the internet	Bring people – increase footfall including animation/cultural offer and events. Support clicks and bricks through business support/digital skills/e commerce and enable retailers to increase their digital presence and support marketing including social media.

Consumer/User Points	Proposed Solutions	Businesses / Retailer Points	Proposed Solutions
	<p>and business offers – free public Wi-Fi, smart benches, digital town crier – push offers and awareness, allow customers knowledge and access to local offers.</p> <p>Ensure bespoke responses – celebrating individual identity of high streets – there isn't a one size fits all – customers want 'individual offers'.</p>		<p>Work with other towns – complementarity</p> <p>Use markets where appropriate to draw people in</p>
Inflation/price pressures	Making a compelling offer to increase footfall may mitigate reduced spend on a degree.	Reduced footfall	
Safety	Address any real or negative perceptions	Skills and employment base	<p>Significant problems recruiting staff. Skills important as were progression opportunities.</p> <p>Many of Lincolnshire's businesses were good at in-house training – but needed to widen the recruitment net and look longer term at training staff.</p> <p>Options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Skills support programmes ➤ Develop entrepreneurs. ➤ Link with schools
N/A	N/A	No clear vision for the high street	Wider engagement with councils – single point of contact and clearly focused consultations

Consumer/User Points	Proposed Solutions	Businesses / Retailer Points	Proposed Solutions
			<p>Complementarity not competition</p> <p>Partnerships – including recognizing who the key players are.</p> <p>Understanding the customer base – current and future</p> <p>Building on strengths and USPs</p> <p>Be data driven – use what data and information you have and identify gaps.</p> <p>Address negative perceptions (including crime and safety)</p> <p>Create an environment to attract investment.</p> <p>Consider the impact and lessons from Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).</p> <p>Align the assets that you have.</p> <p>Harness local community enthusiasm and associated pride of place – these can be the most powerful advocates for a town.</p>

Views of our Future

Evidence from the Lincolnshire Youth Council

Lincolnshire's Youth Council provides a forum for young people to have their say on things that matter to them. It represents their views to the people who make decisions and to the wider community. In November 2022, the panel considered the opportunity of having the voice of youth captured in the review. Members wished to gather evidence pertinent to how young people viewed their towns, what they felt was missing and what they envisaged that their "near future" environment should look like to help them thrive and prosper.

The request was entrusted to our Lincolnshire County Council Quality and Standards Team and in particular to our Participation Officers who met with the Youth Council in 4-6 weekly intervals.

The evidence and contributions gathered by Participation Officers are summarised below, based on the area these were collated from.

Voices4Choices Boston and South Holland

Voices4Choices (V4C) from Boston and South Holland group stated that Holbeach was an "ok/good" place to live in; they added that the school was good and they also "liked the church"; one group, characterised Holbeach as "immense" which indicates that in the eyes of a young person, their locality, no matter what its actual size may be, appears greater and important.

Group participants provided some feedback on what areas they felt needed additional focus and support:

- **Services and facilities that promote and support wellbeing; an,**
- **Better electricity provision; young people explained that in their areas they experienced power cuts often.**

Group participants stated that they wished to see more infrastructure developments including:

- ✓ **Schools**
- ✓ **Shops**
- ✓ **Parks**
- ✓ **a youth centre**
- ✓ **sports facilities (football groups/teams support)**
- ✓ **a hospital**
- ✓ **a fire station**
- ✓ **a Police station**

Young people also added that their area lacked “things to do” in their existing parks and leisure spaces; some suggestions included a zipline, a swimming pool, and a cinema/theatre.

Voices4Choices Lincoln and West Lindsey

V4C from Lincoln and West Lindsey group had a discussion around **perceived safety**. One teen participant stated that they did not feel safe in Gainsborough and explained that the place had a “very different feel in the day and at night”. They **did not “feel safe after dark”** and added that there were “some ‘dodgy’ people about”. This young person concluded that **“greater Police presence”** would help increase the levels of felt safety in the area. What is important is that the same person added that although there were areas such as Marshall’s Yard that they enjoyed visiting, the outlook of Gainsborough was not positive for them and they were in fact looking forward to begin leaving care as to be in position to leave the area and move to Lincoln where they were closer to family and felt that they had more “things to do” there.

Other participants added that they visited Market Rasen on occasion for shopping and to visit Tesco superstore. They added that they go with their carers and they required **transportation** to visit their friends, hence their knowledge and familiarity with the area was little as they were not able to roam and “spend long time” there. Interestingly, group participants noted that “Market Rasen has 2-hour free parking in the main car park” which corroborates their claim that they only spent little time in the area, enough to carry out their shopping/chores and brief visits to friends.

Lincolnshire Young Voices

This is a V4C Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) group. When considering the topic, participants had a great focus on **accessibility** and **toilets provision** which were their key priorities. Participants stated that older shops were problematic in terms of entering and roaming around as they had steps. Pavements were also seen as an issue as some lacked **drop curbs at crossing points**.

Participants stated that cobbled areas such as Horncastle, although they were nice to look at, were proving difficult to navigate through. One young autistic person stated that they liked the market towns like Sleaford and Horncastle as they were interested in engaging in activities such as taking photos along the rivers and in the market areas. They noted bigger places like Lincoln and Grantham had much more to offer in terms of activities and variety of options for recreation.

This group also identified **transport** as a key factor. Distances and lack of transportation services made planning visits an important task. Another young person with autism added that they felt stressed and “got very anxious” if bus was not on time.

As mentioned earlier toilet access was a key factor for some of the participants, especially where an **accessible toilet** or a **changing bench** was required. They noted that very few

toilets provide the latter. Changing Places is an organisation that meets the highest requirements for accessible toilets. Currently there are few outside Lincoln with exceptions being Horncastle, Louth, Mablethorpe and Skegness as well as bigger towns Grantham and Boston. Lincolnshire Young Voices have a report for toilets in Lincoln as part of their priority.

In terms of visiting some places where there is lack of provisions required took a great deal of planning, to ensure “the visit would work”. Louth for example despite being acknowledged as a beautiful place to visit, one carer stated it would be very difficult with the large wheelchair to manage some of the narrow streets and old shops when visiting. One young person said Mablethorpe and Skegness were quite good for accessibility with areas that allowed access to the beach for wheelchair users. Moreover, both Mablethorpe and Skegness have Changing Places toilets as aforementioned.

Young participants also added that they were conscious about **giving back to local communities** when visiting, such as spending a little in cafes and shops whilst being there. This was associated with accessibility and lack of appropriate facilities as mentioned elsewhere.

In line with the evidence collated by our Participations Team at these sessions, we felt that in overall young people hold a positive outlook of towns and villages in their proximities, with exceptions being noted in areas where the overall level of perceived safety is lower. Community safety both felt and perceived is of paramount importance for vibrant thriving communities.

Studies have shown that both neighbourhood violence and perceptions of neighbourhood safety are independently associated with mental health¹. Moreover, according to data from ten sweeps of the British Crime Survey, public trust in the police is influenced more by expressive concerns about neighbourhood stability and breakdown than by instrumental concerns about crime². Hence, trust may be motivated not by the apprehension of criminal activity but by common worries regarding disorder, unity, and informal social regulation.

It must be noted that research indicates that the way young children and young adults perceive safety, is strongly associated with the impact of fear instilled by older children in their environment that make them feel less safe³. Therefore, as it emerged in responses, it is rather fear of crime which may be attributed to negative experiences of the individual (child) associated with their exposure to bullying, threats or acts of violence taking place within their community environment⁴. In addition, young adults are more likely to feel protected in the presence of Police and to think that police is actively dealing with issues on a local/community level; this chimes with the evidence above⁵.

¹ Wilson-Genderson and Pruchno 2013

² Jackson et al 2009

³ (McCormack et al 2010)

⁴ McCormack et al 2010; Pople and Rees 2017; Batchelor, Armstrong and MacLellan 2019

⁵ SCJS 2017/18

In terms of views around what would improve their wellbeing outcomes, it must be acknowledged that the question was posed loosely and in absence of a definition that explored domains (namely, positive emotion, engagement, relationships, accomplishment). Therefore, the observation around “facilities that promote and support wellbeing” should, in future, be explored within given frameworks to allow for a clearer view of what is associated with wellbeing and how the objectives of wellbeing are met through certain requested facilities. According to the Measuring What Matters programme (ONS 2011)¹ that considered how individuals *felt* about their own lives and wellbeing, objective circumstances may improve without necessarily causing the improvement of the felt and perceived views of individuals. Hence, another important element and limitation of this report is the level of access that these young people have to the facilities, owed to their circumstances (need to be accompanied by carer, need for special assistance). In addition, certain themes relevant to infrastructure development (such as schools, parks, hospitals, fire stations and police stations) should be taken as perceptions of young persons who may be faced with obstacles when requiring certain services or where they must travel a long distance for them.

Parking restrictions appears to be impeding local shopping and limiting the extent of use of towns and villages by young persons, especially where they need to travel long distances and in the company of a carer. Beyond the responses of the Youth Council, we also considered the impact of transportation and parking availability in association to the night-time economy of towns and concluded it posed an additional limitation.

The SEND group’s point of focus was around accessibility of towns and villages. What emerges from the responses is the apparent requirement for planning and careful consideration of options for transportation and visits, particularly - but not merely for SEND young persons. The availability of accessible spaces, toilets, reliable transportation, and options for recreational activities are prominent through the views captured.

- Perceived safety and crime levels is a concern emerging in our towns.
- Navigability is of paramount importance as is ensuring that our towns and villages remain accessible to all users.
- Limited public transport and restrictions in parking have a negative impact on the footfall of our towns and villages.

Appendix 7

Traffic Regulation Orders

Traffic Regulation Orders⁶

As part of the evidence gathering process, the Panel requested information relevant to Traffic regulation orders (TROs) which can be used to restrict traffic to certain areas and can be tailored to restrict certain types of vehicles to certain times of day or days of the week.

TROs can also be used to manage parking by introducing limited waiting times to get a turnover of vehicles, and businesses are generally supportive of this. TROs can also be used to apply restrictions to an area which means that yellow lines do not have to be used, if an area is environmentally sensitive.

In Lincolnshire there is a small, dedicated team processing TROs, which prioritises issues affecting schools. TROs can also be prioritised to facilitate business. The Team Leader preferred a systematic approach, looking at a whole area in one go, rather than making piecemeal changes. In February 2022, a backlog of about 200 traffic regulation order requests was reported. A standard TRO will take probably about four months, if there are no objections; and will probably take up to eight months if objections are received.

Lincolnshire has been operating a dedicated TRO team since a restructuring in 2017. It is a specialist area, and it is very hard to recruit staff. Prior to this, TROs were absorbed into the workload of divisional officers, who tended to have other priorities.

Traffic Regulation Orders are made under the provisions of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and it is this legal status which is required to allow them to be enforced either by the County Council's Civil Parking enforcement team in the case of parking restrictions, or by the police with regard to moving offences.

These orders may be permanent, experimental or temporary and are used to regulate, restrict or prohibit the use of the public highway. They can be introduced for a number of reasons such as to improve highway safety, to facilitate the passage of traffic or prevent the use of a highway by unsuitable traffic. Examples of orders include parking restrictions such as yellow lines, parking bays restricted to a time period or a specific user, such as Blue Badge holders or parking permit holders, and loading restrictions. Examples of orders which restrict access or traffic movements include pedestrian zones, one-way streets and prohibited turns. Under other legislation, the highway authority is also able to introduce pedestrian crossing facilities, shared use footway/cycleways and bus stop clearways.

⁶ *The House of Commons Library Briefing Paper on Traffic Regulation Orders provides further background: [Traffic Regulation Orders \(TROs\) \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/resources/hcl/briefing-papers/traffic-regulation-orders-tros/)*

The TRO Process

TROs are delivered via a process set out in the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) Regulations 1996, and we must comply with the statutory requirements for consultation and public advertisement of proposals.

On receipt of a request for an order the steps below are followed:

- Assessment and monitoring – to identify if a scheme is justified and potential measures which could be applied (up to three months).
- Scheme is designed and signage checked for compliance with regulations. Signs designs may be required from Design Services (two to four weeks).
- Consultation documents are prepared and sent to the local Member for the area for comment (two weeks).
- Documents are sent to statutory consultees which will include district/town/parish councils, emergency services, Road Haulage Association, Freight Transport Association, all bus companies using the route affected and other highway authorities affected. We may also consult with other stakeholders at this stage such as residents' groups, NFU and the Chamber of Commerce, depending on the nature of the proposal. If objections or comments are received at this stage, they may be resolved by the Planning and Regulation Committee to gain approval for the scheme in its current form, or the proposal can be amended prior to public advertisement (4-6 weeks or 3 months if reporting to committee).
- The Order is publicly advertised via site notices, in the local press and on the County Council website. Although we are not required to consult directly with residents or businesses, we do so out of courtesy where they are directly affected by a proposal (6-8 weeks).
- If no objections are received than we can advertise the making of the Order, have it sealed by Legal Services and arrange the works on site. This involves preparing a works order which is then submitted to our contractor for programming (2-6 months).
- If objections are received following public advertisement, then these will be reported to the Planning and Regulation Committee (three months).

It is a requirement that TROs are taken through these stages, any one of which can introduce delay. The time taken for a standard waiting restriction for junction protection where no objections are received might take between four and six months to deliver on site, but more complicated schemes and those which need to be reported to committee may take twelve months or more to complete.

Enforcement

A number of Civil Enforcement Officers are managed by the council's Parking Services Team, and they enforce all restrictions across the county which relate to on street parking (see Lincolnshire Civil Parking Enforcement Procedures V2).

Contraventions of moving offences currently rely on enforcement by the police. These would include one-way systems, weight restrictions and vehicles accessing pedestrian zones. Police resource for this function can be limited. In the long term there is an aspiration by the government that local authorities will enforce these along with parking restrictions.

Resource

Additional higher-level staff would assist in reducing the backlog of requests and allow more focus on larger, more complex schemes. However, TRO work is a specialism, and it can be difficult to recruit experienced staff. The team consists of several younger members of staff who we are working to develop in this discipline.

There are approximately 220 live TRO schemes ongoing at various stages and 180 requests awaiting assessment at the time when the discussion took place (Nov 2022)⁷.

A system by which requests for waiting restrictions can be scored and prioritised is being developed and it is anticipated that this may reduce the team's workload to some degree.

Traffic Management in Town Centres

Several of the county's towns have TROs in place to manage traffic within shopping areas with varying degrees of success. These orders generally control or prohibit access by vehicles and can, to some extent, be tailored to suit requirements via the inclusion of exemptions for vehicles involved in certain activities. Difficulties can arise however if a scheme attempts to meet the conflicting needs of an area rather than seeking compromise.

Annex 1 provides some examples of the signage used to convey those Orders which prohibit traffic in this way and thereby introduce a Pedestrian Zone. The TRO can restrict all or certain types of vehicles and specify days and times when the restriction applies. Any exemptions contained in the Order may apply either throughout the day or again, at certain times, and this can also be communicated via signage. These zones are generally accompanied by waiting restrictions and the yellow backed signs shown at Appendix A function as repeater plates for the zone and confirm the waiting restrictions in operation.

Annex 2 shows signage relating to Restricted Zones. These do not restrict access but are a means of controlling on-street parking without the need for yellow lines. Exemptions can be applied for certain activities in marked bays provided within the zone. Best suited to small areas with limited access, access by traffic will be deterred by the unavailability of parking.

⁷ These are available to view on the County Council website: <https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/traffic-management/find-traffic-regulation-order>



Fig.1.High Street, Lincoln



Fig.2. High Street, Lincoln



Fig.3. Waterside South, Lincoln



Fig.4. Bailgate, Lincoln

Fig.1: The High Street in Lincoln is subject to a prohibition of vehicles but permits access for loading/unloading before 10am and after 4pm. The digital panel is blank between those hours when the exemption does not apply.

Fig.2: The restriction at the southern end of High Street incorporating the level crossing is similar, with an additional variation to cater for those needing access to off-street carparks on this section. A permit system is in place to exempt these vehicles.

Fig.3: This shows the signage for a Restricted Zone on Waterside South off Melville St. Marked bays are provided for loading and Blue Badge holders.

These schemes work well but the restriction on access to Bailgate shown on the sign in **Fig.4.** is largely ineffective due to an exemption in the order for access to on-street marked parking spaces. Traffic uses the area freely as enforcing a restriction where it will be necessary to differentiate between vehicles wishing to park and those just passing through will be difficult.

Owing to the historic nature of the Bailgate area the restriction signs are fixed to bespoke hoops for which permission from the Department for Transport was required.

The development of an effective town centre traffic management scheme will rely on engagement with all stakeholders, businesses, and residents to identify the function of the spaces under consideration, access requirements, and potential concessions. Walking and cycling will be promoted where the opportunity arises. Signage will be minimised where possible to reduce its visual impact, but it should be recognised that there will be minimum requirements in this respect to allow enforcement. There may also be limitations on what can be achieved through TROs owing to the restrictions on the design of the traffic signs and road markings prescribed in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016.

Overall, effective town centre traffic management requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach, involving a range of measures and stakeholders. TROs can be a powerful tool in achieving this, but they must be carefully designed and implemented to ensure that they are effective, efficient and acceptable to all parties involved.

The Panel, considering the aforementioned, acknowledged the hardships experienced by the TRO Team as well as their efforts to process TROs as swiftly as possible. We heard that the team was short staffed due to limited recruitment options within this technical field and we agreed to consider formulating a recommendation through this report in support of them and their efforts, with a view to strengthen the Highways Team.

In order to support effective town centre traffic management using TROs, the following recommendations can be made:

- **Conduct a traffic survey:** Before implementing any TROs, it is important to conduct a comprehensive traffic survey. This will help to identify the volume and types of traffic in the town centre, as well as any existing problems or bottlenecks. The survey can also help to identify potential solutions, such as new road layouts, traffic calming measures or parking restrictions.
- **Involve local stakeholders:** Town centre traffic management affects a wide range of stakeholders, including businesses, residents, and visitors. It is important to involve these stakeholders in the decision-making process, to ensure that any TROs implemented are acceptable to all parties.

- **Prioritise pedestrian safety:** In town centres, pedestrian safety should be a top priority. Measures such as pedestrian crossings, pavement widening, and speed limits can be implemented to ensure that pedestrians can move around safely and comfortably.
- **Implement parking controls:** Parking controls can be an effective way to manage traffic in town centres. Measures such as time limits, parking charges, and resident permits can be used to discourage all-day parking and encourage turnover, which can benefit local businesses.
- **Consider road closures:** In some cases, road closures can be an effective way to manage traffic in town centres. This can be done on a temporary or permanent basis, and can help to create pedestrianised areas, reduce traffic congestion, and improve air quality.
- **Use technology:** Technology can be used to support town centre traffic management. For example, sensors can be used to monitor traffic flow, and variable message signs can be used to provide real-time information to drivers.

Role of Heritage

Lincolnshire Extensive Urban Survey

Lincolnshire Extensive Urban Survey

We reviewed the Council's Historic Places Team's work on the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS), which is part of a national programme funded by Historic England to better understand the character of the country's historic places. The Lincolnshire survey covers a total of 30 towns across Greater Lincolnshire in partnership with colleagues from North Lincolnshire Council and North East Lincolnshire Council.

The main aim of the project is to increase the understanding of the historical development of each town and to identify how the history of each place can be read in how the town looks today. The EUS has undertaken historic urban character assessments attributing values to evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal attributes. This has enabled an opportunity to look at the modern-day town at the hyper local level and used digital mapping to plot the changes in the towns over time. The survey will cover the towns of the historic county of Lincolnshire, so.

The towns were evaluated to assess their historic character and identify the nature and extent of surviving heritage assets whether as standing structures, below ground archaeological deposits or in the surviving historic town plan. The towns of Lincolnshire vary greatly in their origin. Some towns date to the Roman period (Caistor and Horncastle) while at the other extreme, there are towns which grew as a result of industrialisation (Scunthorpe) or the growth in the leisure sector (Skegness and Woodhall Spa). The towns are as diverse as the internationally acknowledged beauty represented by Stamford to the suburban growth of North Hykeham. The project website, with examples of project reports www.lincsabout.town

Moreover, in Lincolnshire there are a wide variety of towns, some like Stamford [MergedFile \(lincolnshire.gov.uk\)](http://lincolnshire.gov.uk) have been dictated by its geology and proximity to limestone quarries resulting in a high number of well-preserved Georgian mellow limestone buildings prompting Sir Walter Scott to call it "the finest stone town in England". The facades are synonymous with the town as they are in Market Deeping and Spalding. Meanwhile in Boston [Boston1.pub \(lincolnshire.gov.uk\)](http://lincolnshire.gov.uk) it is primarily brick build due to its location close to local clays which have given it's unique character along with the skills, trade and technology brought from Europe through the port of Boston during medieval times when the town grew rapidly.

The Historic England supported programme closed at the end of 2022. The results will be held as part of the Lincolnshire Historic Environment Record (HER) and the HERs of NLC and NELC both in a database and spatially in a Geographic Information System (computerised mapping). The principal outputs will be an Historic Character Assessment report for each town. Due to limited resources these will not be available in hard copy form but will be made available digitally through the project's bespoke website (www.lincsabout.town) and will be archived with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS).

The project outputs will be used to support and inform a variety of planning policies from national objectives as reflected in the NPPF to the local policies of respective local planning authorities. This improved evidence base will assist the local authorities of the historic county of Lincolnshire and their partners in planning for the care of the county's historic urban settlements, protecting historic character and promoting sympathetic regeneration at a time of intense development pressure.

The County Council's Historic Places Managements Team have set about characterising the environment of the towns of Lincolnshire, one town at a time. Great progress is being made and there is ally good cooperation from partners across the county.

Inevitably the pandemic has had an impact upon the delivery of aspects of the project. With resources such as the County Archives and Local Studies Libraries being inaccessible for large parts of the last year progress has been slowed. The pandemic has also hugely impacted the amount and type of community engagement that the team had been able to do.

We strongly felt that the survey reports should be used as a source document for authorities and be instrumentalised to showcase Lincolnshire towns in a number of fashions:

- **Promoting tourism:** The EUS can be used to promote the heritage and historic character of a town to visitors. By highlighting the unique features and history of a town, it can attract more tourists and enhance the local economy.
- **Supporting local planning:** The information gathered through the EUS can be used by local planners to inform decisions about conservation and development in the town. This can help to ensure that new developments are sympathetic to the historic character of the town, and that historic buildings and spaces are protected.
- **Enhancing community engagement:** The EUS can be used as a tool to engage local communities in discussions about the heritage of their town. By showcasing the unique features and history of the town, it can foster a sense of pride and ownership among residents and encourage them to get involved in local initiatives and projects.
- **Supporting funding applications:** The EUS can be used to support funding applications for heritage projects in the town. By providing a comprehensive overview of the historic environment, it can demonstrate the importance of the town's heritage and the need for investment to protect and enhance it.
- **Providing educational resources:** The information gathered through the EUS can be used to develop educational resources for schools and other groups. This can help to increase awareness and understanding of the town's heritage among younger generations and foster a sense of appreciation for the historic character of the town.

The benefits of this work demonstrate the distinctiveness of each town with supporting maps and digital maps for each of the 30 towns covered. Various benefits and interdisciplinary

opportunities were discussed, and the reports provide a data led approach to support future place shaping.

They also provide an opportunity to support two digitised high street pilots known as **‘Hidden Histories – A Virtual High Street Tour’**.

‘Hidden Histories – A Virtual High Street Tour’

Following on from the discussions of the Scrutiny Panel 2 pilot projects are being developed to support:

- a) Holbeach and
- b) Mablethorpe

These have been selected due to targeted funding opportunities, the availability of historical evidence and mapping from the EUS and the opportunities afforded by a pilot to demonstrate specific opportunities.

The aim is to create a virtual immersive environment (VIE) for both high streets with the objective of driving new footfall, encouraging new visitors, and re-engaging the ‘place’ with the local community.

The VIE will have interactive hotspots that will reveal some of the hidden histories of the high streets architectural and social past. The VIE will be a digital creation of exterior spaces and building interiors and produces a self-led tour of a space or place and can be viewed online or via a mobile device.

Information hotspots or points of interest can be added via text, images, videos, and audio. Multiple copies of a space can be created with hot spot adapted to appeal to a particular audience, for example businesses and residents.

In Mablethorpe an underspend on the Coastal Communities Fund programme is being used to support digital reimagining of the High Street. This will lean to engaging schools and students in content creation and harnessing local history components in the KS1/2 national curriculum. Pupils will engage with family members to collect local stories and develop an understanding of ‘place identity and its heritage’. These stories will support the story telling.

In Holbeach the focus will be around providing businesses with an opportunity to advertise events and offers and the potential to operate local discount schemes, whilst telling residents and visitors the hidden story of Holbeach it will also act as a mobile town notice board.

Case Study - County Durham Pound Project ⁸

This project harnessed the collective spending power of 12 public sector organisations and looked to focus that spending locally.

Including social value in decisions to award contracts was central to the premise. It was accepted procedure to consider quality, price and timescales in a contract award, but this was expanded to a contractor's environmental policies, apprenticeship programmes and community outreach work.

This was accompanied by wealth building, working with residents, businesses, and partner organisations to create and retain wealth within communities. Examples of this were promoting locally owned and socially minded enterprises, establishing local supply chains, or managing assets to allow communities greater control of buildings and land in their area. The aim is to maximise the value of every County Durham pound spent to ensure it benefits as many people and businesses as possible.

Focused on a high street/market town this could be a viable way to support high street sustainability – physical regeneration community engagement and local businesses receiving higher numbers and value of contracts.

Exploration of something similar to the Durham Pound in Lincolnshire would accord with evidence received by the panel and aligns with wider discussions and objectives.

Visitor Economy

Market towns make a significant contribution to the visitor economy in the UK, both in terms of attracting tourists to the area and providing employment opportunities in the tourism sector.

Market towns attract a significant amount of tourism spending from visitors who come to explore the area. This includes spending on accommodation, food and drink, attractions, and shopping, which in turn helps to support local businesses and boost the local economy. This also links the tourism sector in market towns with a pool of talent that seeks employment opportunities (especially local residents), ranging from jobs in hotels and restaurants to positions in tourism-related businesses such as tour operators and attractions.

Market towns often have a rich heritage and unique character that makes them attractive to visitors. In Lincolnshire there is a wide breadth of heritage and many of the smaller market towns are indeed historic urban settlements that can serve as a pole of attraction for visitors both from outside the County (nationwide and foreign) as well as domestic visitors (individuals living in the County and traveling across to explore different places). The tourism

⁸ [County Durham Pound project seeks to maximise local benefits from £1billion spend - Durham County Council](#)

industry, in turn, can help to preserve this heritage by supporting the restoration and maintenance of historic buildings and landmarks.

Another important part of maintaining a vibrant visitor economy is the ability to run and host events and festivals. Market towns often host a variety of events and festivals throughout the year, from farmers' markets and craft fairs to music festivals and cultural celebrations. These events can attract visitors from outside the area and help to boost the local economy. In Lincolnshire some characteristic examples include the Beyond the Wood's Festival (Horncastle), the 1940's Festival (Woodhall Spa), the SO Festival (various locations), the Holbeach Music & Beer Festival, and the Forbidden Forest (Grantham).

It must also be acknowledged that the tourism can set strong foundations for increased investment value. The presence of a thriving tourism industry can help to attract investment in the local area of Market Towns, including funding for infrastructure improvements and the development of new tourism-related businesses.

In summary some of the key elements that contribute to creating a vibrant mix that attracts visitors to a market town, include:

- Historic character: Market towns that have preserved their historic character and architecture can be very attractive to visitors, creating a sense of charm and uniqueness that is difficult to find elsewhere.
- Range of independent shops: Market towns that have a diverse range of independent shops, boutiques, and artisanal businesses can be very appealing to visitors, as they offer a unique shopping experience that is different from the homogenised offerings of larger towns and cities.
- Markets and events: Markets and events can be a great draw for visitors, creating a lively and festive atmosphere that encourages people to linger and explore. Farmers markets, craft fairs, and food festivals can all be effective in attracting visitors.
- Cultural attractions: Market towns that have cultural attractions, such as museums, galleries, and performance venues, can be very attractive to visitors who are interested in learning about the history and culture of the area.
- Natural beauty: Market towns that are located in areas of natural beauty, such as the countryside or by the coast, can be very appealing to visitors who are looking for a peaceful and relaxing break.
- Food and drink: Market towns that have a thriving food and drink scene, with a range of pubs, cafes, and restaurants, can be very attractive to visitors who are looking for good quality, locally-sourced food and drink.
- Walkability and accessibility: Market towns that are easy to walk around and have good public transport links can be very appealing to visitors, as they offer a convenient and stress-free way to explore the town and the surrounding area.

Overall, a vibrant mix of historic character, independent shops, markets and events, cultural attractions, natural beauty, food and drink, and walkability and accessibility can all contribute to creating a market town that is attractive to visitors.

The main points highlighted to the Panel about our visitors were:

- It is crucial to know your visitor (families, young couples, local or international travellers, interested in heritage or recreational activities or sports);
- visitors (like locals) want cleanliness, a good range of shops including independents, and eateries;
- provide safe storage for cyclists;
- consider parking charges – pay on exit more popular than pay and display, and short periods of free parking encourage a churn of visitors; and
- try to establish a unique selling point to attract certain types of visitors; and
- consider new established types of vacationing- tourists contemporarily, favoured self-catered accommodation such as Airbnb, which meant that they were also more likely to use local hospitality venues.

Our Head of Infrastructure Investment informed us that in Lincolnshire in 2019, the visitor economy was worth £2.49 billion, but fell to £1.24 billion in 2020 and recovered to £2.03 billion in 2021, not quite pre-pandemic levels. In 2021, there were 22.7-million-day trippers to Lincolnshire, a reduction of 26% compared to pre-pandemic levels, but an increase of 58% on 2020.

Visit Lincolnshire (www.visitlincolnshire.com) recorded 40,200 visits in the thirty days prior to 8 June 2022, with a conversion rate of 16%. Visitlincolnshire.com had been extensively updated during lockdown to be both inspiring and informative and it continues to develop its product.

We welcomed that the Visit Lincolnshire portal had been established and suggested that it offer a centralised place for mapping Lincolnshire's cycling and walking products. Nevertheless, we acknowledged that many of the Lincolnshire's current walking and riding trails needed significant maintenance and better signage so visitors could make better use. Viking Way and Lindsey Trail were cited as tourism products that needed better maintenance.

County Council Officers meet with their District Council Tourism Colleagues on a monthly basis to exchange ideas, modes of best practice, local intelligence, costings and STEAM data. We requested that in future meetings local apps should be raised as a means of promoting local offer and catching up with the digital needs of our visitors.

Visit Lincolnshire did not yet have tracking technology for data purposes; at the time of the review this was still being investigated after having established further content.

Signs variations for Pedestrian Zones (Extract from Traffic Signs Manual: Chapter 3)



Figure 6-1 Diagram 618.3B (S8-2-1) Entry to, and waiting in, pedestrian zone restricted



Figure 6-2 Diagram 618.3C (S8-2-2) Entry to, and waiting in, pedestrian and cycle zone restricted



Zone operates at all times



Zone operates for part of the day at the same times on every day of the week



Zone operates for part of the day at the same times on certain days of the week



Zone operates for 24 hours on certain days of the week

Figure 6-3 Examples of different times of operation for a pedestrian zone



Figure 6-7 Examples of signs indicating a prohibition of waiting and loading in a pedestrian zone

Signs variations for Restricted Zones (Extract from Traffic Signs Manual: Chapter 3)

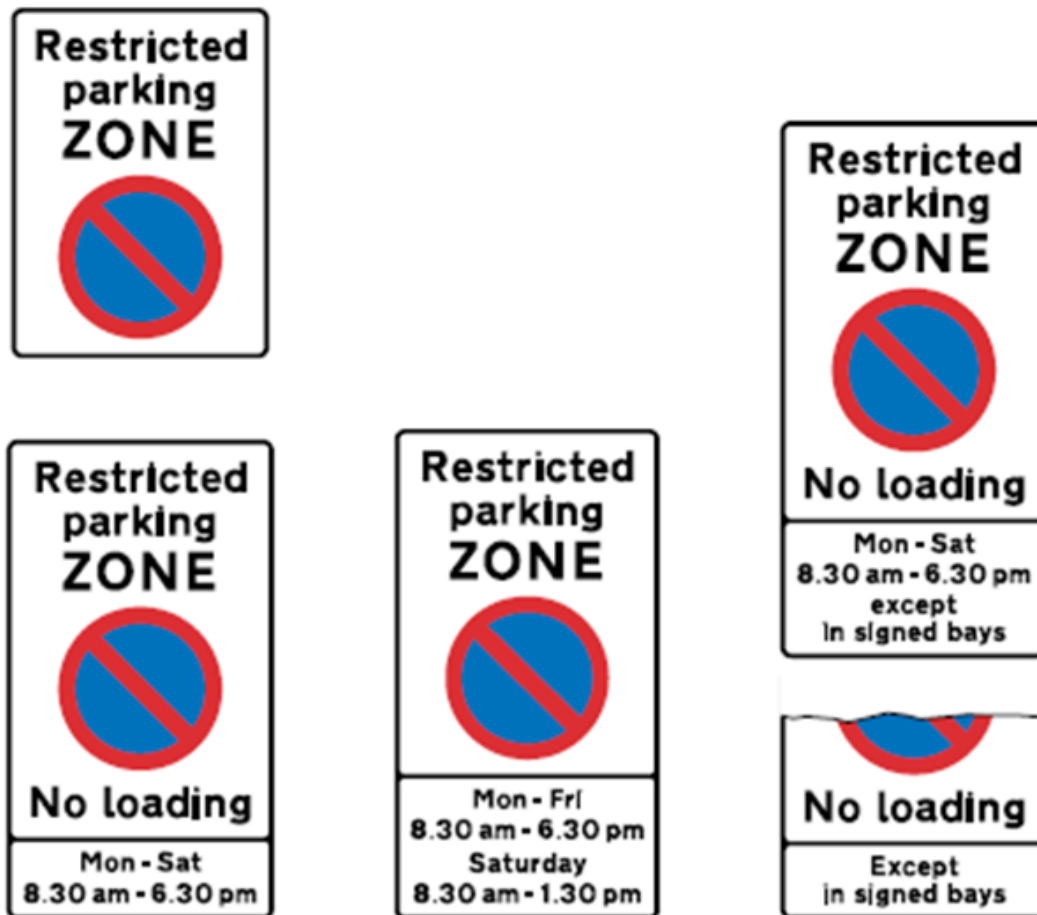


Figure 15-1 Examples of signs indicating the entrance to a restricted parking zone



Figure 15-2 Examples of signs indicating a prohibition of waiting and loading in a restricted parking zone