# Minutes

## Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**(Extraordinary)**

**Thursday, 16 January 2025, 10.30am**

**Council Chamber – South Kesteven House, St Peter's Hill, Grantham, NG31 6PZ**

**SOUTH KESTEVEN DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### Committee Members present

Councillor Bridget Ley (Chairman)
Councillor Gareth Knight (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Graham Jeal
Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Paul Martin
Councillor Max Sawyer
Councillor Lee Steptoe
Councillor Murray Turner

### Cabinet Members present

Councillor Ashley Baxter (Leader of the Council)
Councillor Richard Cleaver (Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement)
Councillor Paul Stokes (Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure)

### Officers

Richard Wyles (Deputy Chief Executive and S151 Officer)
Graham Watts (Assistant Director of Governance and Public Protection, Monitoring Officer
Emma Whittaker (Assistant Director of Planning and Growth)
James Welbourn (Democratic Services Manager, Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Nick Hibberd (Head of Economic Development and Inward Investment)
Melanie Brown (Grantham Engagement Manager)
Claire Saunders (High Street Heritage Action Zone Project Manager)
Amy Pryde (Democratic Services Officer)

Thomas Rossington (Visitor Insights, Virtual)
Kelly Navon (Visitor Insights, Virtual)

## 60.  Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gloria Johnson, Mark Whittington and Ben Green.

Councillors Graham Jeal and Paul Martin acted as substitutes for this meeting.

**61.  Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

**62.  Visitor Insights Presentation**

Thomas Rossington and Kelly Navon from Visitor Insights provided a presentation in order to explain the data to the Committee.

Visitor Insights had been working with the Council for the last 2-3 years to assist in analysing the footfall data through their platform.

The presentation provided:

• Data source and how data is collected.
• Data processing and extrapolation.
• Terain platform.
• Key features (Historic Trends, GDPR Compliant, Granular Outputs and Varying Scales).
• How the Terain platform worked on location-based analytics.
• Data pipeline refreshes.
• Terain's product enhancement cycles.
• Terain's three geofences.
• Additional visitor insights products.
• Customer access strategy.

One Member queried how data would account for visitors without a mobile phone.

Visitor Insights clarified that representative samples by extrapolating the data to provide a real-world context. The modelling and attribution of visits based on the devices picked up and switched were based on visitors that do not have a mobile phone or do not have their device switched on.

Visit attribution algorithm which would take a representative sample of the UK, ensure from data aggregations that provided enough of a cross section of the market and factor in elements such as, the population size of the area in which the device was coming from and the weight applied to that visit attribution when looking at allocating visits to a certain area. Taking into consideration the weighting according to a population size, to allocate for a certain area. There were instances where the sample size may be relatively low in population where the device usage was low. A weight was still applied to that, however, it was difficult to allocate visits from a low population size.

Clarification was sought around how figures may be inflated or deflated as a result of trains travelling through Grantham.

Visitor Insights clarified that a device or visitor would need to spend a minimum of five minutes within a geofence, to ensure they were a legitimate visitor. Any trains passing through a geofence at 50/60mph would not be counted as a visit, which would ensure data set was not corrupt.

A consideration in terms of allocating locations to geofences was the velocity and time devices may ping. The system tracked pedestrians rather than vehicular data, which was calculated by velocity of the device.

A query was raised on what percentage of the figures provided was made up of non-device footfall.

Visitor Insights would look into a sample representation of the market to extrapolate the data cross. In some instances, 25% of the population count in a specific area to extrapolate against which would provide enough context for a sample size. They would not require 100% to 80% view of the entire population from a device count perspective to be able to extrapolate and get the real-world context.

The footfall figures being produced were not 100% certain of being accurate. It was ensured that real-world context was being used to ensure trends largely align with alternative data sets available within the market.

It was highlighted that a percentage of the figures of non-device footfall was unknown.

The data set from August-September 2023 was broken down by day and then into four sections (morning, afternoon, evening and night). It was queried why within the 2023 data, there were 17 sections (equated to 5 days) which collected 0 data.

The specific time period of August-September 2023, Visitor Insights saw a drop in the original data supply. The algorithm and extrapolation factors depended on original device coverage and the quality of geolocation data received from their supplier, in the timeframe from August-September 2023, there had been a drop-in service with their supplier which was rare.

If the August-September 2023 data was filled in with estimations, this would equate to around 20,000 visitors.

It was stated that data peaked in evenings when national sporting events and local events were taking place, it was queried whether this had been taken into consideration.

It was confirmed that a number of functions within the algorithm that take into consideration the average number for specific geofences. The system did not take into consideration specific events within geofences, however, it would flag up if an abnormal dramatic increase in the data.

One Member queried if a visitor sat in the same location for 3 hours, would their data be included hourly or as one visit.

Each classification of a smaller geofence such as, shops and pubs. As part of the algorithm, devices that were in a location for a longer period of time were factored out and equated normally. A device would be allocated as one visitor for 3 hours in the same place, however, if the period of time was longer, it may be a staff member.

It was questioned as to why outliers were discounted alongside the percentage of total data that anomalies and outliers represent.

The GPS data received for anomalies and outliers needed to be refined due to duplicate signals stacked upon each other. Duplicates were removed via necessary measures by looking at reference data. Another form of excluding anomalies and outliers would be to remove vehicular data.

The percentage of total data that were anomalies or outliers were unknown, due to the output seen on Terain at the end was post refinement and processing of the data.

It was highlighted that an individual may have more than one mobile device, it was queried as to how this would be accounted for within the data.

Concern was raised on an individual parking their car in a train station car park (within the geofence) and walked to the train station (which was outside the geofence), it was queried whether this person would count as a visitor to the town within the data, when in fact they would be leaving the town.

The algorithm was able to identify when one individual had two mobile devices as they would be in the same 'home-zone' where the devices were stationary between 7pm and 7am. At this stage, one device would be deleted within the data to avoid duplicates. Within the raw mobility data, a hashed advertise ID was unique per device, but not to an individual.

In terms of the train station car park, a person within the geofence of a car park for 5 at least 5 minutes would count as a visitor.

One Member outlined an indisputable strong correlation between days where train strikes took place and the visitor figures. It was highlighted that the entrance to the train station was within the geofence, meaning the data would be impacted by people that commute to work.

It was confirmed there may be an impact on train station data on particular days due to train strikes, in conjunction with the use of other modes of transport being used as an alternative.

A query was raised on what the margin of error was on the boundary of a geofence.

There were several types of geofence. Cluster geofences were defined by a geofence line. For location geofences, as they were smaller, a slight buffer would be implemented by a few meters radius for a GPS signal to ping an estimated area.

Clarification was sought on the fact that the data was designed to reveal trends, rather than be exact figures. A wider list of assumptions was requested, it was felt that 5 minutes was too little time to assume somebody was visiting Grantham, a 20-minute timeframe would be preferred alongside moving the geofence away from the trainline.

Further information was requested on certain modules that the Council currently did not have access to.

Visitor Insights confirmed that data allowed to unveil trends and analysis. It would not be 100% accurate and was based on assumptions.

In terms of a delayed train, the velocity of speed seen on the GPS data would examine whether the train was passing or had stopped or delayed.

Visitor Insights provided a visual to the Committee on the area that had been defined since the beginning of the contract. The geofence did not cover the train station tracks, therefore, any data in terms of actual trains would not be included. The geofences could be amended at any time.

The resident analysis module allowed the user to create postcode grid zones up to 200 postcodes in total. Using current cluster and location geofences, data could be produced on people living in that postcode and where they travel to and from, which can be filtered for a period of time over days/nights/weekdays and weekends.

A query was raised on how far back data could be tracked to.

Historic data could be viewed from January 2018 onwards.

Clarification was sought around the train station and whether these were in the same geofence as Grantham Town Centre, Westgate and the Marketplace.

Grantham Train Station slightly overlapped the geofence for Grantham Town Centre.

During debate, Members commented on:

- Concern was raised on the lack of information provided on days where no data had been provided.
- That GPS signals on devices could be tracked back to home addresses.
- Whether other competitive providers who could provide more informative data.

The HSHAZ Project Manager confirmed the data was commissioned in 2020 as a requirement of the Future High Street Fund reporting. The data provider went through a competitive process, however, following liaison with other users of the product, Terain seemed to be the most reliable. This contract would come to an end in March 2025, whereby alternative providers could be explored.

- Whether the best indicator for footfall would be to engage with local businesses to see whether they had seen an increased turnover.
- Concern was raised on the reliance on the data provided and it being misinterpreted. It was felt the data undermined work being undertaken for the growth of Grantham Town Centre.
- It was suggested whether Members could go into businesses in Grantham and ask anonymously whether the road works within the Market Place had affected their business turnover.

The Grantham Engagement Manager continuously liaised with Grantham businesses throughout the process of the road works in the Market Place.

- Whether Officers felt that the same contract should be renewed in March 2025, a new supplier be sought or whether the whole scheme be abolished.

The Assistant Director of Planning & Growth highlighted that procurement processes would need to be followed lawfully and via financial regulations.

Although the data may or may not be used in the future, the team would explore other measures in terms of the health, vitality and viability of Grantham Town Centre.

**63. Grantham Town Centre Action Plan**

The Chairman informed the Committee of the following amendment to Section 2.11 of the report:

*'Across 2024 Grantham Market has shown significant growth and there are now more than 40 stalls let on a regular basis to traders at Grantham Market'.*

The Leader of the Council presented the report which outlined the development of the Action Plan for Grantham Town Centre.

The Committee had previously debated the Action plan on the 26 November 2024, but, requested further opportunity to scrutinise the medium and long-term elements of the Action Plan, through an Extraordinary Meeting. The Committee did, however, endorse the short-term elements of the Action Plan. The aim of the plan was to provide a strategic framework to ensure activities are targeted.

The Head of Economic Development provided a presentation to the Committee, which included:

- Engagement – encourage positivity within the town and the continuation of relationship building with local retailers, stakeholders etc.
- Marketing – A marketing strategy had been developed that will include a website, external marketing via local and regional publications and social media promotion.
- Markets – plans to implement the following:
  - Initiatives to encourage new traders.
  - Promotion and delivery of additional markets, including antique markets, makers market and youth markets.
- Street theatre/performers.
- Business support initiatives.
- Events (April-December 2025), indicative events include:
  - Summer Festival
  - Luna Cinema
  - Mountain Bike Skills
  - Children's show
  - French market/Brocante/Vide Grenier and French Jazz evening
  - Twilight market
  - Street theatre
- Product Development – regeneration pipeline of projects, introduce public realm improvements and work with landlords to set up Pop-up shops in empty retail unit/s.

Councillor Matt Bailey submitted the following statement:

*'I firstly want to thank all the Officers involved in the evaluation of ideas submitted in Appendix 5 and I am delighted that some of those ideas have filtered into the Action Plan. I look forward to seeing these come to fruition and see continued growth and development in Grantham Marketplace. A strong collaboration between Officers, Ward Councillors, local businesses and member of the public will ensure that we responsibly deliver the best value for money when deploying the remaining resources of the Future High Street Fund.*

*Secondly I would like to thank the leader Cllr Baxter for suggesting and arranging a meeting between Officers, Cllr Ley and myself to discuss this in advance of this meeting.*

*Todays focus should be the Action Plan itself Appendix 2, I do believe in previous meetings we have been distracted by the accuracy of the data. I myself am still very sceptical of the data in its accuracy and further analysis I have seen and shared with Officers and other Councillors does show gaps which are difficult to explain. It is important that we both measure our success but can also identify any weakness or concerns. Footfall volumes sounded like a logical way to do this. However without foundations of accuracy, the data becomes meaningless and I fear is now just a distraction to this Committee.*

*As for the Action plan, I would like to Committee to explore a few changes and corrections:*

*Correction-* *The spending of the £114,000 on Events is currently allocated as a Medium term Jan-July 2025, but I believe the actual spending is planned to be spend across all of 2025.*

*Events- Appendix 3 has a proposed list of events:*

1.          *£114,000 is a vast sum to spend in 1 year. Its a short burst of funding, I do think that this money could be spread across multiple years for a more sustained events strategy.*
2.          *It would have been lovely to seen more Cultural and Diversity events in the calendar. Grantham has a rich community and I have suggested we put on an event to celebration Diwali* for example.

*Marketing Plan- The £7,000 Marketing plan was outlined as Short Term up to Christmas 2024, could this be shared with the Committee?'.*

The Head of Economic Development highlighted that the events plan was from April - December 2025. Appendix 3 provided an indicative plan on types of activities that could be delivered within the Town Centre. The team would explore further activities and were open to receiving suggestions.

The £7,000 marketing plan was outlined as short term up to December 2024. It was requested whether the plan could be shared with the Committee.

**ACTION: For the £7,000 marketing plan to be shared with the Committee.**

It was clarified that £5,000 was for the development of the marketing plan and £7,000 for the delivery of it. It was decided to not spend money on developing the plan via a consultant, this had been done internally. The £12,000 related to expenditure over the coming months around website development and advertising.

One Member raised a point that the main focus of the plan was for people living from around the area of Grantham. Concern was raised that an elderly couple from Billingborough would not be able to access the activities due to the lack of public transport.

It was queried whether funding could be utilised to set up a small business grant scheme for local businesses in the District, however, all funds were short-term or had to meet certain criteria.

A suggestion was made for the Council to have its own grant scheme that wasn't reliant on a bid for funding each year to produce funding to encourage local business.

In terms of public transport, bus timetables had been included within the appendices to the report. There was reasonable coverage of public transport across the District, however, certain areas did suffer more than others. There was limiting

funding for the short term period, therefore, subsiding and planning bus routes was not within the action plan at present but would be considered in the future.

UKSPF had been the main funding for Councils to fund business support activity. The Council also encouraged different providers to come forward with solutions to meet specialist provision. There was a new allocation of funding coming forward for the County, however, it was not subject to come directly to local authorities.

A query was raised on whether the Council had undertaken a survey on local residents on whether they believe car parking in Grantham was underutilised as part of a study on car parking utilisation. The study had suggested that most of Grantham's major car parks were only 20-25% occupied on a Friday and Saturday.

It was suggested whether signage could be included around car parks in Grantham in order to encourage utilisation of the car parks on a Friday and Saturday.

The Assistant Director of Planning & Growth highlighted that separate pieces of work were being undertaken on car parking.

The Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement confirmed the Council was committed to undertaking a review of car parking in six months' time after the new charges in Grantham and Stamford were due to come into effect on the 20 January 2025.

A Member raised the concern on the perception of the Town Centre in relation to car parking due to traffic and/or roadworks.

It was felt there could be a danger of overthinking the activities as part of the Action Plan and possible issues that could occur beyond the circumstances out of anyone's control e.g. weather.

One Member queried how many void retail premises were within the Town Centre. Of those, how many were going to be tenanted long-term or in line to become a pop-up shop.

The Head of Economic Development noted that the Council did not currently hold the amount of void retail units in the Town Centre. Several units had been addressed in the report which had previously been vacant: the bookshop, cafes and other businesses which were seeking to bring business to Grantham.

The Chairman informed the Committee that a UKSPF Monitoring Report was being brought to the Committee at the next meeting on 18 February 2025.

One Member commended the work being undertaken by Officers, however, it was noted that these works had been ongoing for several years. It was queried what lessons had been learnt and what would be done differently.

The Leader of the Council highlighted that the funding had assisted in refurbishing the Town Centre. Evidence had shown that progress had been made.

Members thanked the Grantham Engagement Manager for her work.

A Grantham Member stated they had monitored void retail units. In and around the centre of Grantham, 3 shops had been lost in over a year and a half, however, 12 shops had been occupied.

It was confirmed that conversations were taking place for a Local Gallery to fill the empty shops and make them more attractive for visitors and residents.

The Cabinet Member for Property and Public Engagement emphasised the need for the work to be a cross-party unity alongside involvement from the community.

It was confirmed that works would be undertaken in signposting Wharf Road car park and upgrade the car park site. As of the 20 Janaury 2025, there would be 2 hours free parking at Wharf Road car park which may encourage people to utilise it.

**It was proposed, seconded and AGREED that the Finance and Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

**1. Notes the content of the report in respect to the Grantham Town Centre Action Plan.**
**2. Endorses the Grantham Town Centre Action Plan.**
**3. Agrees to receive a further report on progress made against the action plan in six months.**

64. **Close of meeting**

The Chairman closed the meeting at 12:24.