

## **Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan Infrastructure Audit**

The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group asked students at Newcastle University to prepare an **Infrastructure Audit** for the plan areas to inform the preparation of the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan. This baseline report on service provision would identify any capacity issues that may constrain or otherwise influence potential development patterns and development proposals. It would therefore inform and influence the preferred development framework for Morpeth and its adjoining communities.

The Newcastle University report was supplied to the Steering Group in January 2013 (and is available on the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan website)

It was completed as a desk based exercise, supplemented by meetings with local Town and Parish councillors. It was undertaken having regard to the methodology set out in the Planning Advisory Service document "A steps approach to infrastructure planning and delivery" (PAS 2009).

The following categories of infrastructure were assessed: Transport; Energy; Sewerage and Drainage; Telecommunications; Education; Healthcare; Community Services; Waste and Recycling Services.

As the principal settlement in the Plan Area the majority of services are provided within Morpeth; the range of services in the adjoining communities is very limited, particularly Mitford, Hebron and Hepscott.

This in turn is exacerbated by very limited public transport services; only Pegswood has regular bus services providing connections to Morpeth. Morpeth by contrast has good public transport connectivity with Newcastle, Ashington, Blyth, Alnwick Amble and Berwick upon Tweed, as well as local and national rail services. The smaller rural villages also experience restricted mobile phone coverage and restricted broadband speeds in some areas.

The highway network within Morpeth is similarly under pressure – a reflection of both traffic volumes and the road layout of a historic market town. The development of the Morpeth Northern Bypass will help to alleviate traffic volumes in the town centre and alter traffic movement patterns within the plan area.

A Transport Topic has been established to examine the key transport issues faced within the plan area

Education capacity within Morpeth is under pressure; however this pressure is attributable to demand for school places from outside the catchment area rather than demographic factors within the plan area. Under the market led system of education provision where good schools flourish and attract funding and new providers can enter the market it is difficult to have a strategic plan for education in the plan area. However quality of education is a key driver within the local housing market and equally current schools have a positive impact on the local economy.

An Education Topic Group has been established to examine the key education issues faced within the plan area.

The capacity of sewage treatment works at Morpeth and Pegswood and further investment will be required to allow for future development over the plan period. The sewerage network is similarly

under pressure and will needs to be reinforced over the plan period both to accommodate further development and to mitigate flood risk.

An Initial meeting has been held with Northumbrian Water to better understand the current situation and a further meeting will be held with the Lead Local Flood Authority (Northumberland County Council) and the Environment Agency to discuss flood risk issues across the plan area.

Infrastructure:

1. Do you agree that the critical infrastructure issues to be addressed through the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan are – *The highway network (and related traffic management issues); Sewage treatment capacity (and associated sewerage network); mitigation of flood risk; education provision*

Yes / No

2. Are there any additional physical and community infrastructure issues that you consider should also be addressed through the plan

Yes / No (if yes please specify)

Delivering critical physical and community infrastructure

Community Infrastructure Levy is being introduced to help ensure that necessary additions or improvements to physical and community infrastructure that arise from new development can be funded. It is anticipated that Northumberland County Council will introduce CIL, and an associated charging regime for new development, following the adoption of their Local Development Plan Core Strategy.

Local Planning authorities operating the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will pass on 25 % of the money raised from development within a neighbourhood plan area to the community itself so that where a neighbourhood plan has been through referendum and brought into force the local community (through its elected members) can decide how to spend the proceeds of CIL. Parish and town councils will receive the money directly. The Localism Act sets out what neighbourhood CIL can be spent on: the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure – or anything else that is concerned with addressing demands that development places on an area.