

Neighbourhood Plan Environment Group

Town Hall 7pm – 12/11/12

Present:

Nic Best (NB) [chairing]

Ken Brown (KB)

Ian Campbell (IC)

Linda Doherty (LD)

Eric Fletcher (EF)

Stuart Hendy (SH)

Charlie Marshall (CM)

James Mee (JM)

David Mutton (DM)

Peter Scott (PSc)

Pat Snowdon (PSn) [notes]

Leslie Starkie (LS)

Paul Thompson (PT)

Introduction:

NB outlined what the Neighbourhood Plan do. A collection of policies, protective designations and site allocations covering Morpeth and the four surrounding parishes (Hebron, Hepscott, Mitford, Pegswood) which will sit underneath the County wide framework (aka Core Strategy, LDF or 'Local Plan') – and once passed through examination and approved by referendum of all the voters in the Plan Area, will be adopted with statutory status, and has to be used by planning committees and planning officers to make decisions for the next 15-20 years. It is a real opportunity to give local people a chance to have a say in how Morpeth develops.

Individual introductions:

NB is a Morpeth Town councillor (MTC) and provisional lead for the Environment Group

KB is a Morpeth Town councillor and chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

IC is the Neighbourhood Plan co-ordinator employed by MTC and a former planning officer with NCC

LD is a Pegswood Parish councillor (PCC) with a particular interest in maintaining links between Morpeth (Bluebell Woods) and Pegswood (Pegswood Community Park) when the North Morpeth ByPass is built

EF lives on Staithes Lane and is particularly interested in flooding and the Morrison's development

SH is an architect and concerned about development pressures and settlement boundaries on the south side of Morpeth

CM and DM are born and bred Morpethians concerned for the character of the town

PSn is active in the South Morpeth Coalition which successfully contested the recent Loansdean application (and volunteered to take notes)

LS lives on Lancaster Park and is concerned about the impact of the Morpeth Northern Bypass

PT is concerned about climate change, sustainability and alternative approaches such as the Transition Towns movement

Process:

NB explained the approach being taken. There are four 'topic groups' of which this Environment Group is one, the others being Economy, Housing and Heritage. Economy and Housing are seen as the development 'drivers' to be managed, while Environment and Heritage are seen as the forces which define local character. In addition, there will be four cross-cutting themes: Transport, Education, Sport & Leisure and Infrastructure which are envisaged as being reactive – addressing eg transport implications, pressure on schools, need for community facilities, capacity of sewage system raised by the ideas being examined by the Topic Groups. The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG) is seeking individuals or groups to 'champion' these cross-cutting themes.

LS commented [outside the meeting, but it is relevant here] that there should be opportunity to identify major infrastructure projects eg a south Morpeth Bypass.

IC read out the aim of the Environment Group, to:

- Establish the nature and extent of natural environment interests
- Consider how the need to protect and enhance the natural environment will inform and influence future development.
- Consider how the connectivity and “multifunctionality” of the green infrastructure network can be developed and enhanced.
- Consider how flood risk minimisation will influence development.

NB noted that the NP process was running in parallel with the County Core Strategy process, and that ideas and issues emerging in our Groups could be fed into the NP, the Core Strategy and/or passed on to the parish and town councils to address. The NP cannot be submitted before the countywide Core Strategy is adopted, since it must be shown to be ‘aligned’ to the strategic plan. The current timetable is that the Core Strategy will be adopted in Summer 2014 – so we are looking at a two year process.

So – although the NP will run for 15-20 years, it must assume a number of things likely to happen over the next two years including the North Morpeth Bypass, the EA Flood Defence Scheme and the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) proposals for development at St. George’s – though HCA are keen to talk to NP Groups about ‘masterplanning’ the St George’s development. And, the further advanced the NP process is, the more weight it will have in ‘prematurity’ arguments against other developer pressures.

Concerns & Interests:

There was a brief general discussion where people raised individual concerns:

- settlement boundaries (these and the Green Belt are likely to be defined in a Sept ’13 iteration of the county Core Strategy)
- types of shops (though this was felt to be more in the remit of the Local Economy Group)
- footpaths (reference was made to the Greater Morpeth Development Trust)
- the link road isolating Pegswood from Morpeth (need for an underpass or bridge)
- identifying/creating a network of footpaths/cycle paths around Morpeth
- development of “the Wannie Line”

It was noted that the NP will not be an action plan, or a management plan, or have any funding attached to it. These will remain matters for GMDT, Groundwork etc. The NP will essentially set policies to regulate planning applications.

Launch Events:

NB reported that some 200 people had registered an interest at the five launch events, with some 25 signed up for the Environment Group. He listed the main issues identified at the launch events:

Flooding (65)	Community Facilities (8)	Built Environment (2)
Green Spaces (23)	Wildlife (5)	Litter (2)
Green Belt (16)	Energy (4)	Education (1)
Trees & Woodland (13)	Sustainability (3)	Housing (1)
Footpaths, Access (10)	Quality of Environment (2)	

There was a queries about:

Newminster Abbey – in private ownership, uncertainty on protective designation. GMDT interested
The Willows – owned by NCC who seem reluctant to transfer them, various interests to develop as
Museum, workshops and/or affordable housing
Morpeth has sites of special scientific interest in Morpeth
Designated heritage sites
Contacts at County Hall: David Rollinson and David English are the designated NP liaison planning
officer. Colin Marlee was mentioned as a possible resource person for the Environment Group
how to find an overall picture of land use

Who do we (the Environment Group) need to talk to?

Barry Mead and team at GMDT
Environment Agency
Who else?

Flood defences:

comments on the importance of getting this right, then 'beyond the defence scheme':
identifying burns, culverts, wild life corridors, rivers, surface water
making sure that all new builds take account of flood issues, including surface run-off

Protected green spaces:
how do we identify what we have and want to keep?

IC commented on how Localism, NPPF etc 'sit' together, and on the timings of the NP and county
Core Strategy

The immediate work of the Group was

- i) scoping what information was needed
- ii) evidence gathering (Jan/Feb)
- iii) drafting an Environment chapter on what there is in the Plan Area, together with
aspirations, threats and needs for the future – to go into
- iv) a NP 'Issues and Options' document which would be consulted for six weeks in May/June
'13 (after the local elections) – and then
- v) start formulating policies etc

Subsequent stages would include a second six week consultation period on the final draft NP, an
independent examination of the NP, and a referendum.

NB suggested that there were three types of work in the evidence gathering stage:

Contacting and talking to people and organizations

Tracking down, reading and summarizing relevant plans, surveys, policies and strategies etc

Carrying out walkabouts, photo surveys, fieldwork

He suggested that Group members might think about which of these they could help best with.

Future Steps:

It was agreed that it would be impractical and unwelcome to have lots of meetings, and that much of
the work could be done by email and in small groups reporting back. All present agreed to share
email addresses, though a caution about passing them outside the Group through the 'reply all'
button was made.

Nic agreed to circulate minutes of the meeting – which would also go on the NP website, where they could be commented on – and invited everyone to

- i) to think about specific expertise/help they could offer
- ii) to suggest other people we could approach to help and
- iii) to suggest information or evidence we need to think about getting
 - in time for next meeting which would be Mon 3rd Dec, 7pm Town Hall