

Neighbourhood Plan – Environment Group
Town Hall – Monday 14th January 2013

1. Present: Nic Best (NB) [chairing], Ian Campbell (IC), John Earl (JE), Eric Fletcher (EF), Stuart Hendy (SH), Charlie Marshall, Peter Scott (PSc), Pat Snowdon (PSn) [notes], Leslie Starkie (LS)
2. Apologies: Phil Ashmore (PA), Alan Davison (AD), Linda Doherty (LD), Maryan Duckworth, Wendy Fail (WF).
3. Minutes: were accepted.
 - NB: Not a lot has happened over Christmas but this group is making fairly good progress.
 - EF said WF was pursuing the definitive footpaths map but unable to reach anyone over the holiday period.
 - NB has not been able to contact anyone re the implications of the Northern bypass. [Subsequently – since several groups wanted a meeting about this, a combined meeting with the NCC Transport planners is being sought by IC.]
 - AD has provided three PDF maps of heritage and environment sites along with river valley, and a historical map of former market garden sites in Morpeth. Also a *copyright* text on the ecological and heritage setting of the town and river valley. NB will circulate these to the group, emphasizing that the material is copyright
 - LS and others raised questions re the progress of the Northern Bypass. The funding is in place and a final pre-application consultation (MTC was consulted) was carried out in November. NB has a CD-ROM relating to this which he is happy to copy and distribute [copy sent to LS].
4. A large map of the Plan Area was as a focus for a lengthy discussion:
 - a. NB pointed out the plan area – town centre, outlying Morpeth estates, Pegswood, Mitford, Hebron and Hepscott. How are we ensuring that the whole area is considered? Pegswood PC has allocated parish councillors to each topic group, and also has regular ‘parish panel’ meetings. LD is the Pegswood rep on the Env Group and has already raised issues re: footpath access between Pegswood (esp Community Park) and Morpeth (esp Howburn Woods, St George’s) across the Northern Bypass. PA – a Hepscott resident – has just joined the group. What about Hebron and Mitford?
 - b. Flooding was discussed, including surface water issues. The Group needs to identify present and future flooding – both surface run-off and river or beck overflow - issues beyond the town centre (which should be addressed by the current EA scheme). Concerns were voiced about new developments and their impact on the current sewage system and future capacity. What flooding issues could arise from the building of the bypass? Concerns were voiced about the use of SUDS ponds – apparently there are local examples of these ponds not working yet they are promoted extensively as an aspect of sustainable

development. The apparently need careful design and maintenance. Geoff Parkin, a hydrologist at Newcastle Uni and member of the Group is a key contact.

c. Transport was discussed: how new developments could generate increased traffic. What measures could be taken to mitigate congestion at Telford Bridge? Could facilities be planned – schools, shops, work etc - and located to reduce the need to cross the river? Concerns about the size of the bypass and its effectiveness in displacing traffic from the town centre. Is its proposed junction with the A1 ‘overengineered’? [Subsequently: the Morpeth Transport Study commissioned by NCC in response to concerns about the Telford Bridge traffic lights has a wide brief (NB can supply the ToR) and it is hoped that it can be used to inform the NP process. Phil Jones, the consultant, is holding a workshop on Mon 4th March and NB has nominated JE and PSc to attend from the Env Group.]

d. Green Belt: The inner and outer Green Belt boundaries will be set in the NCC Core Strategy. Formal consultation on the inner boundaries will be in the ‘Major Changes’ iteration of the Core Strategy scheduled for Sept ’13 – but it should be possible to influence the process informally through the CLG-required ‘continuous engagement’ during the consultation. ie the Morpeth NP process should be able to submit proactive evidence-based suggestions over the summer.

5. Support & News:

a. CABE are providing an expert – Colin Haylock – to assist our NP process with 15 days input by the end of March. [Subsequently: the major part of this will be three evening workshops: Visioning – 5th Feb; Where And What? - 4th Mar; What and How? – 11th Mar. He will also be attending meetings of all four Groups – including Env Group on 11th Feb]

b. Planning Aid are providing planning volunteer support to help the NP process engage with ‘hard to reach’ parts of the community including schools.

c. The Homes & Communities Agency – a government agency - will be managing the development at St George’s and are already tendering for a developer to work with. Although they hope to bring their proposals forward before the NP is complete, they have said that they want to involve the NP process in masterplanning the development. This is likely to be led by the Housing Group.

d. The NCC Core Strategy Preferred Options consultation runs 6th Feb to 20th Mar. MTC will be responding. As part of the consultation there will be a drop-in session at the Town Hall 10:30am-8:30pm on 19th Feb with generic workshops 11am-1pm and 6pm-8pm. There are also themed workshops in Choppington Welfare 11th Mar am ‘Renewable Energy’, pm ‘Sustainable Communities’; 15th Mar am ‘Natural & Built Environment’. There will be further consultations on the Core Strategy in September and ‘Winter ‘14’.

6. Next Steps: NB suggested that the next step was to ask for volunteers to pursue relevant contacts who could help to inform the group eg on footpaths, transport etc. He provided an updated list of contacts for each of our themes. Concern was expressed about how to approach these people - it was difficult to identify specific tasks/ questions to ask. What do we want to highlight as important? NB agreed to give some thought to this.
7. Some progress was made on allocating tasks:
 - LS to approach Colin Hardy and Morpeth Footpath Soc re: footpaths etc.
 - EF, WF to obtain the definitive footpath map
 - PSc to start compiling reports of non-town centre flooding issues
 - AD is preparing something re green corridors and the river corridor
 - NB to explore contacts with Wansbeck Anglers and Brian Parker, the MTC River Warden
8. Next meeting 11th Feb. Town Hall - 7pm