



Northumberland

County Council

COUNCIL

6 JANUARY 2021

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW: MORPETH

Report of Chief Executive

Cabinet Member: Councillor Nick Oliver

Purpose of report

To consider the outcome of a community governance review in the County.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Council

(1) that the outcome of the Community Governance Review for Morpeth be agreed as follows and for the reasons laid out in the report:-

(1) Hebron

- agree to transfer the area of land marked A on map 3 from Hebron Parish Council to Morpeth Town Council
- agree to transfer the area of land marked B on map 3 from Morpeth Town Council to Hebron Parish Council

(2) Hepscoth

- agree to transfer the Stobhill estate shown to the south of the A192 on map 3 and Turner Square shown to the north of the A192/A196 roundabout from Hepscoth Parish Council to Morpeth Town Council.
- refuse the proposal to transfer of the Southfield Estate from Hepscoth Parish Council to Morpeth Town Council.

(3) Mitford

- refuse the proposal to transfer the area of land marked D on map 3 from Mitford Parish Council to Morpeth Town Council.

- (2) authorises the Democratic Services Manager to make, sign and seal the appropriate orders for the changes by virtue of the powers contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act.
- (3) Subject to agreement of the above recommendations that implementation be delayed allowing for consultation with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on the issue of boundary coterminosity, and to request the related alterations to county electoral divisions.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the “we want you to love where you live” priority included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021.

Key issues

1. A Community Governance Review has recently been conducted concerning the Parish boundary of Morpeth where it borders Hepscoth, Mitford and Hebron Parish Councils. This review was commenced as a result of a request by Morpeth Town Council.
2. It should be noted that, while a full consultation has taken place regarding the parish proposals, any changes agreed by Northumberland County Council as part of this community governance review would require alterations to county electoral division boundaries or consequential changes, and the responsibility for making these alterations now falls to the LGBCE.
3. The Terms of Reference of the review were as follows:-

'To consider the administrative boundaries of Morpeth Town Council with a view to amending its boundaries with Hebron, Hepscoth and Mitford Parish Councils.'

'To make any necessary amendments to the boundaries of Longhorsley, Morpeth North and Pegswood County Council Divisions arising from the former.'

An outline of the areas concerned are detailed below and a full copy of the Terms of Reference and maps are attached as **Appendix 1**.

Hebron

An area of land to be transferred from Hebron Parish to Morpeth which includes the Northgate, St. Andrews Gardens and The Meadows developments, which total 459 properties of which 165 are complete and 294 are under construction or not yet started.

In addition, an area of land shown cross hatched red be moved from Morpeth parish into Hebron parish (marked B on map).

Hepscott

The following two areas to transfer from Hepscott Parish to Morpeth Town Council

- South Fields Estate - This development totals 438 properties of which 207 are complete and 231 are under construction or not yet started.
- Stobhill Manor (part) - This is an established estate which has a parish boundary running through the middle of the estate.

Mitford

- An area of land bounded by the Lancaster Park estate to the east and the A1 road to the west (shown marked D on map).
 - Outline planning permission for mixed commercial/residential development and a countryside park has been agreed. There are currently detailed reserved matters planning applications for the commercial and residential elements but these remain undecided at this time. No development has commenced on the site as yet.
4. In 2017, Morpeth Town Council approached Northumberland County Council for guidance relating to the conduct of community governance reviews and with a view to amending its administrative boundaries with its neighbouring parishes. The Town Council was advised to consult with the Parish Councils which would be affected by the proposals and to supply detailed plans and reasons for requesting the review. In summer 2019, Morpeth Town Council made a formal request for a review to be carried out.
 5. Prior to the commencement of the review, Hepscott and Mitford Parish Councils requested a meeting with officers to further understand the review process and requested that the consultation period be extended from the normal four week period to eight weeks. This extension was agreed to in view of the high level of interest expected in the proposals.

At this meeting Hepscott and Mitford Parish Councils also requested details of the estimated financial impact on themselves should the proposals be approved. This information was supplied to the Parishes and also forwarded to Hebron Parish Council for completeness even though it was not party to these discussions.

6. The original consultation period was delayed due to the General Election and the Christmas/New Year holidays. The revised consultation period ran from 9 January 2020 to 28 February 2020.
7. In accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's Guidance on Community Governance Reviews of 2010 ("Government Guidance"), the extended consultation process was carried out inviting any comments in writing. As part of the consultation the following steps were taken:-

- A press release was issued in the local newspaper,
 - A notice and news item published on the County Council website.
 - Each Parish Council was consulted directly by letter.
 - Each Parish Council was supplied with electronic copies of the consultation documents to be published on their websites.
 - Each Parish Clerk was supplied with public notices to put up around their parishes.
 - The Division County Councillors, Councillors J. Beynon, D. Bawn, D. Towns, H.G.H. Sanderson and R. Wearmouth, were each consulted directly by letter.
8. Hepscoth Parish Council carried out its own consultation exercise and produced a letter with tear-off slip for the affected properties in its area and a petition. Most of the responses received from Hepscoth Parish residents used the Parish Council's proforma or via an e-mail or letter using a variation of Hepscoth Parish's wording, others used Hepscoth's wording and added comments of their own.
9. Hepscoth Parish Council has also submitted the petition against the proposals signed by residents of Hepscoth Stobhill Manor and South Fields Estates. The petition comprises individual sheets for each property within the following estates and asks for name, address, signature and date. Every sheet submitted as part of the petition has been counted and checked for completion and signature. It is to be expected that there will be an element of overlap with some signatories having also responded directly.
- Hepscoth Stobhill Manor - 88 signatures
 - South Fields - 114 signatures
10. Morpeth Town Council also carried out a consultation exercise and produced a proforma for completion by residents. As before, most responses simply filled in the form whilst others added further comments.
11. Details of the consultation responses received are attached in **Appendix 2**. The number of responses received during the consultation period are as follows:-

Objection

- Letters/E-mails using Hepscoth Parish Council's wording - 56
- Individual e-mails and letters - 27

Support

- Morpeth Town Council Flyer
- All - 24
- Hebron - 0
- Hepscoth - 2
- Mitford - 0
- E-mail - 4
- Letter - 0

12. Hepscoth and Mitford Parish Council have both submitted written responses to the consultation, copies of which are attached as **Appendix 3 and 4** respectively. Morpeth Town Council supplied a further copy of its submission for consideration. This is attached as **Appendix 5**.

No response was received from Hebron Parish Council.

Copies of the consultation documents were also sent to Pegswood Parish Council, although none of its area is directly involved in Morpeth Town Council's proposals. A response was received from Pegswood Parish Council stating that it had no observations to make.

13. Councillor H.G.H. Sanderson has written in objection to the proposals (included in Appendix 2). No response was received from Councillors J. Beynon, D. Bawn, D. Towns or R. Wearmouth.

14. **Report**

14.1 In carrying out any Community Governance Review a principal authority such as the Council is required under section 93 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to ensure that community governance within the area under review will be

- Reflective of the identities and interests of the community in the relevant areas and
- Effective and convenient

- 14.2 When considering the statutory criteria referred to in paragraph 14.1 of this report immediately above Government guidance outlines that principal councils should take into account a number of influential factors including:

- The size, population and *boundaries* of a local parish

- 14.3 The guidance emphasises that a factor such as boundaries (as well as size and population) is linked to both statutory criteria referred to in paragraph 14.1 above but perhaps more specifically to community governance being effective and convenient.

- 14.4 As far as specific advice in relation to the review of the boundaries between parishes is concerned with is the only issue of community governance within the scope of this report, in addition to the need for the statutory criteria above to be complied with in making any alteration to the same, Government guidance states that these should reflect the "no man's land" between communities represented by areas of low population or barriers such as rivers, roads or railways. The Government guidance goes on to say that boundaries need to be, and be likely to remain, easily identifiable.

- 14.5 The Government guidance recognises that, over time, communities may expand with new housing developments which can often lead to existing parish boundaries becoming anomalous as new houses are built across them resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours

14.6 The guidance concludes on the issue of boundaries by stating that such a review is an opportunity to put in place strong boundaries, tied to firm ground detail, and remove anomalous parish boundaries

14.7 It is within the context of the statutory criteria and the guidance outlined here in summary and in detail in the attached Government guidance to this report that members must consider these matters in arriving at any resolution as well as taking into account the responses received in respond to the consultation exercise carried out which are relevant to those considerations. One factor which should not be taken into account, but which has tended to dominate many of the consultation responses is that of differing Council Tax precept levels

15. Recommendations

15.1 Proposals relating to Hebron Parish

The detail of the proposals to alter the boundaries between the parishes of Morpeth and Hebron are set out in the Terms of Reference for the Community Governance Review and the relevant accompanying map.

Unlike the other proposals included within the scope of this Community Governance Review there are little or no objections to this particular proposal but it must, of course, still be determined in the context of the relevant statutory criteria and Government guidance as well as, of course, those responses that have been received in relation to the consultation exercise carried out by the Council.

Beyond the apparent broad agreement in relation to this proposal with no response having been received from Hebron Parish Council there does not appear to be any specific rationale given for the revision and relocation of the parish boundary between the parishes of Morpeth and Hebron. In the context of the statutory criteria and the Government guidance as it relates to such revision with no particular permanence associated with the new boundary other than perhaps in part and members may consider that in that context a revised boundary between the two parishes might be more sensibly located along the line of the A192 and A197. However notwithstanding the advice within the Government guidance in particular, and in light of the apparent agreement in relation to the proposal, the recommendation, albeit not a strong one, would be for this aspect of the proposals to be agreed.

15.2 Proposals relating to Hepscoth Parish

The detail of the proposals to alter the boundaries between the parishes of Morpeth and Hepscoth are set out in the Terms of Reference for the Community Governance Review and the relevant accompanying map.

15.2.1 South Fields Estate

This estate lies to the south of the A196 and it is considered that notwithstanding the arguments put forward by Morpeth Town Council for this estate to be transferred to its area, out of Hepscoth Parish, that the A196 is more than capable of forming the sort of strong, permanent boundary which is envisaged by the Government guidance. The retention of the status quo in leaving it within Hepscoth Parish is at least as effective and convenient in terms of community governance as it would be if transferred to Morpeth parish. There are otherwise no compelling arguments in relation to issues relating to or reflective of the identities and interests of the community in what is a relatively new and very much still developing residential area. It would be difficult to establish with certainty what those particular prevailing identities and interests are which would justify its transfer at this time.

15.2.2 Stobhill Manor (part)

Of all the proposals contained within this community governance review this is perhaps the most straightforward to reach a clear recommendation on for members. It involves the sort of anomaly which is addressed directly within the Government guidance where the estate is split between two parishes on what appears to be an entirely arbitrary basis. It would appear entirely reasonable, therefore, in all the circumstances taking into account the statutory criteria, the Government guidance and the relevance of the responses received, which it is conceded are in a majority favouring no change to, nonetheless, recommend that the area of this estate currently within Hepscoth parish be transferred into Morpeth parish. The reasons for the change relating in particular to more effective and convenient community governance such area to include the small triangular area to the north of the A196 comprising those dwellings in the Turner Square area,

15.3 Proposals relating to Mitford Parish

The detail of the proposals to alter the boundaries between the parishes of Morpeth and Mitford are set out in the Terms of Reference for the Community Governance Review and the relevant accompanying map.

In the context of the relevant Government guidance in relation to the revision of parish boundaries Morpeth Town Council make a strong argument for the boundary between the two parishes to be aligned further to the west along the line of the A1. This would, of course, serve as a permanent boundary into the foreseeable future but it is considered an important factor in the ultimate consideration of this matter that there is currently no development of this area and that any relocation of the relevant parish boundary even on the basis of perhaps more effective and convenient community governance is perhaps somewhat premature. If one considers potential future links to the village of Mitford, an issue which the Government guidance specifically contemplates as a potential exception to the preferred approach of a hard or permanent boundary in the context of a major road such as a motorway. Such provision could, of course, affect in time not only the identities and interests of any new community in the undeveloped area but also in those of the current surrounding communities. On balance then and taking into account the statutory criteria, the

Government guidance and the responses received to the consultation exercise it is considered that the status quo should be retained at this time and the area concerned not transferred out of the parish of Mitford.

Background

1. Councils now have extensive powers delegated to them in relation to the creation of parishes, modification of boundaries and names changes by virtue of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act. At the request of parish councils, the public or even on their own initiative they may conduct Community Governance Reviews. The aim of reviews is to improve the local governance in an area. The process is managed by principal councils with outcomes incorporated into formal orders.
2. Delegated powers have been granted to the Democratic Services Manager to conduct reviews subject to full council reserving the power to agree any formal orders arising out of reviews.

Implications

Policy	N/A
Finance and value for money	None. There were no additional costs incurred in the community governance review other than officer time.
Legal	N/A
Procurement	N/A
Human Resources	All the work can be carried out by existing employees who possess the necessary skill and expertise.
Property	N/A
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
Risk Assessment	The items raised pose a minimal risk to the organisation.
Crime Disorder &	There are no crime and disorder implications.

Customer Consideration	The proposals should improve the governance of the local community.
Health & Wellbeing	N/A
Carbon reduction	N/A
Divisions	Morpeth Kirkhill, Morpeth North, Morpeth Stobhill and Longhorsley

Background papers:

Community Governance file

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	Full name of officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Paul Foote
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Chris Hand
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