

HEPSCOTT PARISH COUNCIL

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HPC/PA/SJ

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Tracey Bell
Clerk to Morpeth Town Council
Town Council Offices
Town Hall
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Dear Tracey

Hepscoth Parish Council's Response to Morpeth TC F&GP Final 'Position Statement on Parish Boundaries'

1. Introduction

Thank you for sending your final Position Statement and inviting our comments, which are below.

I am afraid that we found this document deeply disappointing. It seems unchanged from the original document of January 2018, except that what evidence and data presented then has been omitted. This despite meetings with HPC when we tried to convey the really significant impact that your proposals would have on our Parish and our residents.

I regret to say that these land grab proposals appear to be driven by financial gain for Morpeth Town Council to the detriment of their neighbours.

2. Impact of your proposals on our residents

We have repeatedly stated the impact of your proposals on our residents. They will suffer an increase in their Council Tax of £100 to £150pa depending on the size of their property (eg Band D goes from £20 to £120) and can expect further increases over the next few years. We are yet to receive a satisfactory, clear explanation of the benefits or the improved services that our residents will receive for these increases. Your final proposals seem to ignore them, if they exist.

On the other hand whilst Morpeth keep raising its Council Tax each year, Hepscoth decrease theirs (by 9.3% '18/'19 and 8% '19/'20). Will Morpeth be reducing their Council Tax?

3. Impact of your proposals on our Parish

The impact will be massive. Hepscoth Parish will see a 50% reduction in our residents and a 50% reduction in our precept. The proportion of residents from South Fields grows all the time as the estate grows; there are about 200 houses occupied now of the 400 to be built—how many by 2021? Most I would suggest. Your proposals will take from us the opportunities this growth presents and keep them for yourselves.

We are at a loss to understand why you would want to inflict this on a neighbour, other than for pure financial gain?

4. What benefits are there for our residents?

Point 2 above covers the impact of your proposals on our residents but we can see no benefits to them. Your early drafts papers listed services provided by MTC but these have not been reproduced in your final version. You will have realised that (a) most of our services are provided by NCC anyway, and (b) virtually all the services listed by you are already supplied by HPC (active Parish Hall, bus shelters, litter/dog bins, benches, playgrounds and maintenance, allotments, graffiti removal, watercourse inspection etc. etc.). So what are the extra services that the residents can expect for their extra Council Tax?

Remember that South Fields residents already pay extra for services from a maintenance company for SUDS maintenance, grass cutting etc.

5. You say that residents “lack political representation”. That is laughable

Our Parish is served by 7 Councillors, a far higher Councillor-to-resident ratio than Morpeth. We have a South Fields Councillor, who lives on the estate, and a Councillor elected by the separate ward of Hepscott-Stobhill Manor.

6. Impact on neighbourhood planning and future relationship

HPC has been an active and supportive member of the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan from its inception to its being made. Our councillors have been active members of the Plan Preparation Group and the Plan Steering Committee, and contributed significant amounts of time on a purely voluntary basis. We have had a cooperative and friendly relationship with the Town Council whom we view as our friends and neighbours. We are at a loss why MTC would wish to affect this relationship so badly. Neighbourhood Plans are live legal documents that need to be reviewed periodically and HPC is still anxious to play a part. If a full boundary review goes ahead it will make this difficult for us, given the time and resources our opposition will involve.

7. What are the costs?

What are the financial costs of applying for a boundary review? You have already spent many hours discussing it and if these proposals go forward to include HPC you risk many more hours and expense. These costs should be identified and quantified and your electorate informed.

And what of the political costs? HPC is strictly non-party-political but it has not gone unnoticed that within a very short time of the arrival of a new MTC political regime the land-grab was on their agenda. We are amazed that you do not have bigger fish to fry with the next elections looming large, yet you choose to make this a major project. It appears that you are driven by political and financial considerations rather than by improving the lives of the residents.

8. Timing

Will you be able to complete a full Boundary Review before the 2021 Elections? Will other wards' boundaries be considered? Will the issues of the Review interfere in those elections?

9. Conclusion

The above represent our main objections and comments on your proposals.

We are very disappointed to have to make them and we ask again—please reconsider the severe impact on our residents and on our Parish. Please do not include Hepscott Parish in your proposals. We really do not wish to spend further time on this but if this is your decision, prepare for further strong opposition as it is the least our residents and Parish would expect.

On behalf of Hepscott Parish Council

Carolyn Reid
Chair