

# Northumberland

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## Comment text:

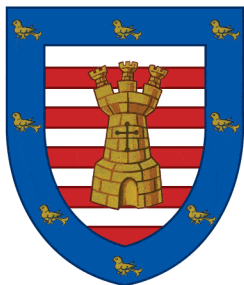
Please see attached Morpeth Town Councils submission regarding the proposed Boundary changes

Kind regards

Tracey Bell  
Chief Officer / Town Clerk  
Morpeth Town Council  
Market Place  
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NE61 1LZ  
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## Attached Documents:

- Boundary Commission Submission 10 July 23 .pdf



# Morpeth Town Council

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Clerk of the Council

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Review Officer (Northumberland)  
The Local Government Boundary Commission for England  
PO Box 133  
Blyth  
NE24 9FE

9th July 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

## **Morpeth Town Council Boundary Commission Submission**

Morpeth Town Council (MTC) has considered the proposals from the boundary commission for the various county council divisions that would have some form of interaction with MTC controlled area.

Before making comment, we must observe our disappointment that Northumberland County Council (NCC) failed to notify the Boundary Commission (BC) of the local governance review conducted up to 2021 that makes changes to the area covered by MTC. This may well have had a material impact on the way that the BC drew up the proposals on which they are now consulting.

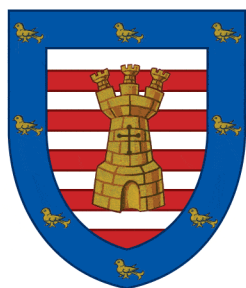
## **Local governance review (LGR)**

MTC requested a review to be triggered in a number of communities surrounding Morpeth in 2020. It was our feeling that communities in Hebron (i.e. new estates immediately north of MTC we reference as "Northgate"), Mitford (planned estates to the west of MTC which have not started construction) and Hepscott (the "South Fields" estate and polling district W27HSM) were part of Morpeth and should be served by MTC as a result.

NCC consulted on our proposals and two of the four areas did elect to relocate to MTC. These included the "Northgate" area of Hebron and the polling district W27HSM in Hepscott. Mitford PC and Hepscott PC campaigned against the moves. In particular Hepscott PC campaigned to not have the "South Fields" estate move to MTC and their residents agreed with them during the ensuing consultation.

The implications of the review due to the time it took NCC to complete the consultation was that the changes could not take effect until 2025. This is no doubt why NCC has not recalled the matter and notified the BC.

For reference the documentation can be found via the link for the NCC meeting in January 2021: [Meeting of County Council on Wednesday, 6th January, 2021, 3.00 pm - Northumberland County Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)



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## General comments on the Boundary Commission proposals

MTC suspects that we might have been commenting on different proposals from the BC had they been in receipt of the information regarding the 2025 changes, however this is speculation, and we can only comment on the proposals about which we are being consulted.

With specific regard to the BC proposals this leaves Morpeth so far as the BC were aware with 4 wards due to the area needing to be covered by 4 county Councillors and they reference this in their documentation. In fact, of course, there would be a fifth Councillor, as when the "Northgate" area relocates this area under the current BC proposals is in the Division of "Longhirst".

This will at least initially leave MTC with 5 wards with some areas represented by 1 town councillor and others represented by 4 or 5. Administratively from our perspective it is less than ideal and confusing for residents.

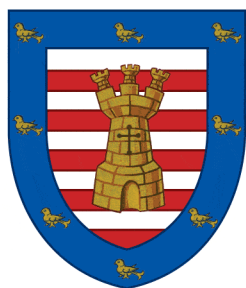
Whilst less relevant to MTC we note that the BC proposals do move the area of "South Fields" into a county division of "Stobhill" which agrees with the view of MTC that this area is very much a part of "Morpeth" but disagrees apparently with the feeling of the residents who stated in the LGR that they felt part of the "Hepscott Parish and that was to where they felt connected.

We note that the lack of desire to move from Hepscott Parish to MTC was very much linked in the minds of residents by Hepscott Parish Council to the higher precept required by MTC but ultimately the view was theirs to express. Ideally in our view this area should be part of Morpeth.

Given the above we make the following observations regarding the number of electors in the MTC area.

There are several polling districts that currently make up Morpeth's 3 council wards. One of these is in Hepscott Parish W27HSM, but moves into Morpeth in 2025 as noted above.

PD	Ward details	2023	2028
W19KIR	Morpeth Kirkhill (Kirkhill Estate)	2397	2452
W20KIR	Morpeth Kirkhill (Loansdean etc)	1947	1987
W21MN	Morpeth North (Stanners, Gas House, Middle Greens etc)	1045	1087
W22MN	Morpeth North (St Georges, Olympia, Mitford Road, Cottingwood etc)	1753	2719
W23MN	Morpeth North (Lancaster park & Fulbeck)	1154	1179
W24MS	Morpeth Stobhill (Deuchar Park, Middle Greens, Bankside)	731	779
W25MS	Morpeth Stobhill (Morpeth – Avenues / all east of A192 / north A196)	1374	1405
W26MS	Morpeth Stobhill (Morpeth – Grange i.e. all East of A192)	1131	1150
W27HSM	Morpeth Stobhill (Parts of Stobhill Manor area currently in Hepscott PC)	311	309



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The relevant area of Hebron which is due to move to MTC in 2025 is not a separate ward with in Hebron. It is therefore challenging for MTC to establish exactly how many residents are located in this area now and how many would be in 2028 given that the various housing estates that make up the area are not completed. Our estimates are as follows.

PD	Ward details	2023	2028
W31HEB	Hebron – rural (Not transferred to MTC)	402	402
W31HEB	Hebron – urban (Transferred in 2025 to MTC)	648	904

The implication of the changes and the population growth can be summarized as follows for MTC as a whole:

Area encapsulated	2023	2028
Morpeth without “Northgate”	11,843	13,067
Morpeth with “Northgate”	12,491	13,971

It is the understanding of MTC that the ideal number of electors for a county council division where there are 69 councillors in Northumberland is 3856. Given this we recognize without “Northgate” that the average Morpeth division without cross over into neighboring parishes would be 13% above or 15% below the target which would not be justifiable. Based on the 2025 MTC boundaries this changes to 21% over or 9.5% below the ideal division size.

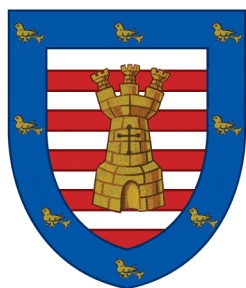
## Further Feedback

The Finance and General Purposes committee of MTC, in an initial meeting following publication of the BC proposals, tasked the Clerk and some councillors with establishing better what the implications were of the proposals through discussion with NCC. It was during these discussions that NCC confirmed to MTC that the LGR information had not been shared with the BC.

In a follow up meeting on the 5<sup>th</sup> July councillors on the committee delegated to the Clerk and three councillors the task of trying to establish possible alternative boundaries for consideration by the BC.

The guidance from the committee, given the committee had established it was feasible to have 4 wards in Morpeth within the BC tolerance of +/- 10%, was to try to generate 4 wards that were administratively logical, reflected Morpeth’s communities / estates and were all within the relevant tolerance.

It was noted in the meeting that there was an alternative which saw the Morpeth area added to the communities which are part of the Morpeth Neighborhoods Plan i.e. the parishes of Pegswood, Hebron, Mitford and Hepscoth. This area has a population of 19,409 giving an average division size if represented by 5 councillors of 3809, a near prefect sized average division.



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PD	Ward details	2023	2028
W17HEP	Longhorsley (Hepscott – Hepscott including Southfields)	1095	1272
W18MIT	Longhorsley (Mitford)	391	661

W19KIR	Morpeth Kirkhill (Kirkhill Estate)	2397	2452
W20KIR	Morpeth Kirkhill (Loansdean etc)	1947	1987
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W31HEB	Pegswood (all Hebron)	1050	1306
W33PEG	Pegswood (all Pegswood)	2642	2743

Area encapsulated	2023	2028
Area including all Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan Parishes	17,021	19,409

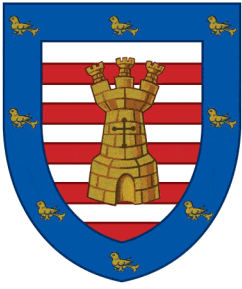
The committee felt this was suboptimal to stray outside MTC area and preferred a 4-division solution entirely within MTC.

## Options review

Firstly, it must be noted that MTC has no GIS system can cannot easily break down the areas being considered other than to use polling district data that was in the consultation pack and our best estimates of the number of properties and therefore the likely number of electors in each of the areas we consider.

The margin for error it should also be noted is very small. Assuming a 4-division solution in MTC area each ward needs to be sized c. 3490 and this will necessitate a street by street analysis to ensure that the number of electors does not stray outside +/-10%. On average MTC need to be +/- 20 electors to stay within the tolerance which is very challenging as it could come down to between 8-15 households at any one time.





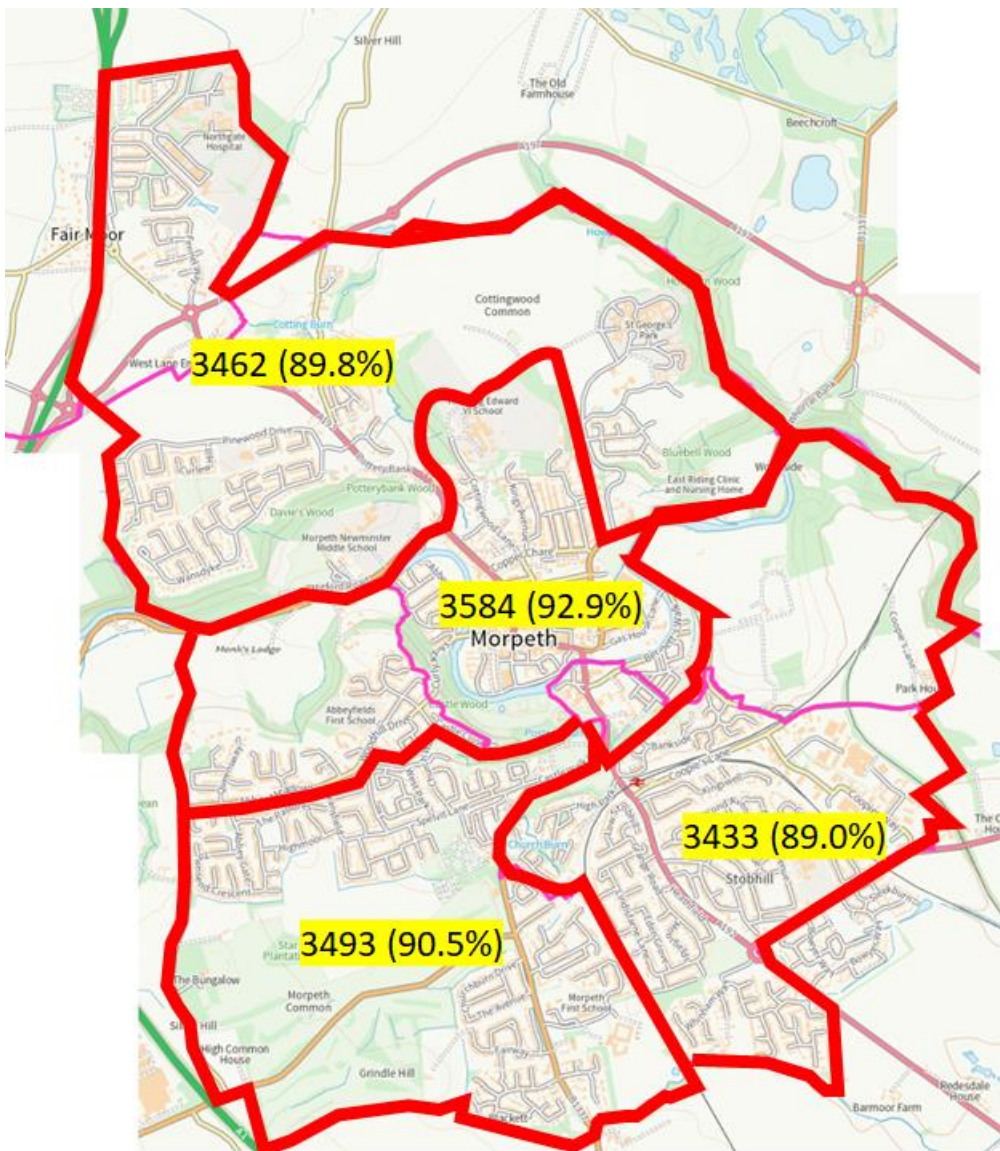
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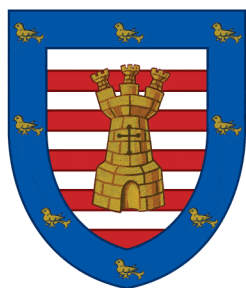
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A possible solution has been identified that creates logical blocks of estates / streets etc. The calculations MTC have been able to undertake have a level of accuracy that means that any solution would need to be further refined by the BC. The option is shown below.



The four blocks that are created include:



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**Morpeth Stobhill (3433)** – this option effectively removes an area of polling district W24MS which is somewhat detached from the rest of the Stobhill ward in any case. It also adds in a street “Conningsby Gardens” which is better located in Stobhill than in Morpeth North where it is currently located, the same also applies for “park house”. We suspect with minor changes the ward might fall within the +/-10%.

**Morpeth Kirkhill (3493)** – this option moves all properties on or north of Abbey Meadows as well as Clarks Field and Castle Close into a new Morpeth Central Division. It is possible that the area lose some individual properties on “Castle bank” to Stobhill division to help balance numbers.

**Morpeth North (3462)** – This area captures W23MN and then adds the newbuild estates at Ste Georges and at Northgate. With careful alignment of the boundary along Pottery Bank /the top of Newgate Street the ward could be brought into tolerance of +/-10% with relative ease.

**Morpeth Central (3584)** – This division takes the remainder of the old Morpeth North boundary adding the part of W24MS lost by Morpeth Stobhill. It would be the bulk of the old town of Morpeth with an area of Kirkhill added to balance the numbers.

What MTC is not able to do is fully understand the consequences of the proposals we outline about on other wards in the county and the viability of the BCs proposals. We note that the wards are at the very bottom end of the scale in terms of size acceptability which may make them simply too challenging to ever be implemented.

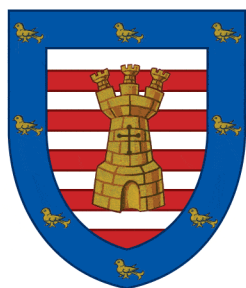
## Alternative arrangements

Historically what MTC had asked for under the LGR was for the logical grouping of all communities that would clearly make up “Morpeth”. From the MTC perspective this included the areas that would be encompassed by the town in 2025, plus two further areas that if one was to draw a line around a map of what “looked like Morpeth” then the line would include these communities.

The first of these areas is now a very well established new build estate in Hepscott, “Southfields”. Southfields is so we understand, a ward in its own right in Hepscott Parish albeit we cannot see any data identifying a polling district for the ward. As a result we can do nothing but estimate the population of this area as follows.

PD	Ward details	2023	2028
-	South Fields	525	702
-	Hepscott	570	570
W17HEP	Hepscott Parish	1095	1272

There was a second area of land which will be far from obvious looking on any map as it represents an area that has consent for 375 homes but is yet to start construction. This was located in Mitford parish between Lancaster Park and



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the A1 dual carriage way. The area has no logical interaction or connection with Mitford and is other than its administrative boundary clearly a part of Morpeth.

MTC is not aware what exactly makes up the data provided by NCC to the BC however we note that the rural parish of Mitford is to grow by a projected 270 electors. We strongly assume that this population growth equates to the partial buildout of this "Morpeth adjacent" estate.

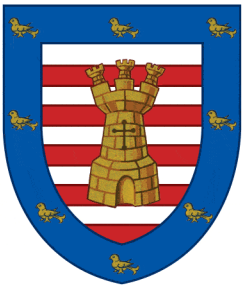
PD	Ward details	2023	2028
-	New Estate	0	270
-	Mitford	391	391
W18MIT	Mitford Parish	391	661

Adding into the Morpeth "catchment" these areas would result in the following:

Area encapsulated	2023	2028
Morpeth 2025 adding Mitford "New Estate"	12,491	14,241
Morpeth 2025 adding "South Fields"	13,016	14,673
Morpeth adding both estates	13,016	14,943

The impact to the average ward size by 2028 if both areas were added would be 4 wards on average just -3% below the ideal target set by the BC.



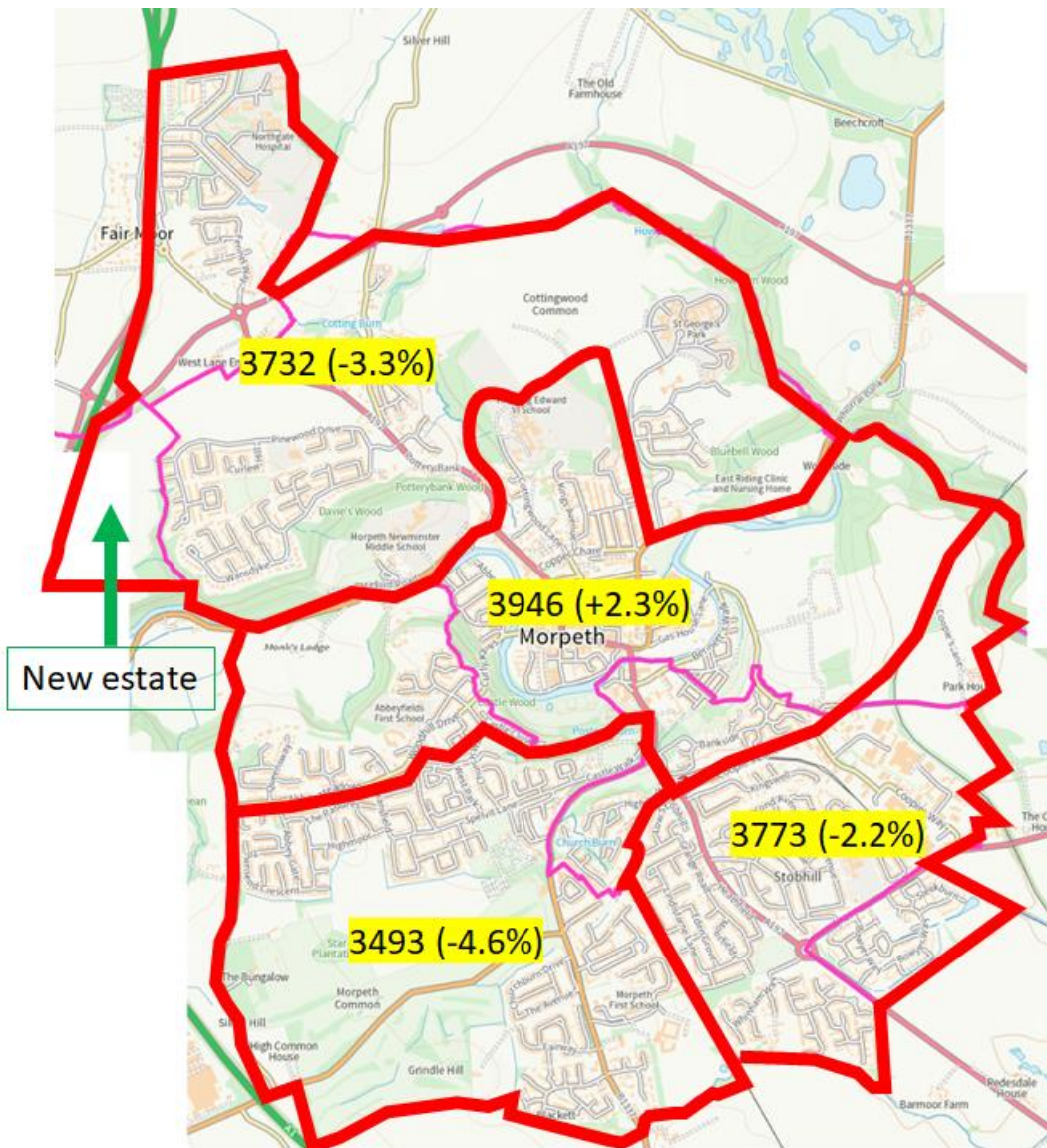


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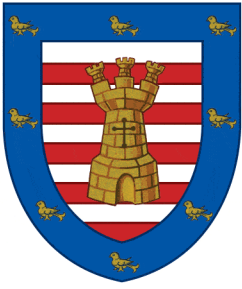
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We note that the Longhorsley division in the BC proposals is 3,829 electors making it undersized by -1%. so removing 270 electors from Mitford in this area is not challenging. However, we note knock on impacts to the Choppington division and the Pegswood Division that we envisage are far more problematic for the BC.

## Summary



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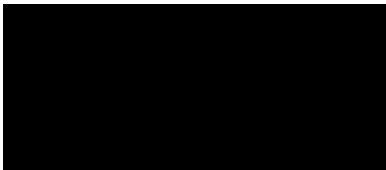
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MTC suspects we are too late to have a meaningful impact on the commissions work because it is starting from a position where there was not a clear picture from NCC as to the extent of our community in 2025. The majority of the inconvenience for MTC from the current BC proposals comes not from the actual divisions created but the administrative headache it creates in the subsequent warding of MTC.

In the event that the BC progress a variation of their current proposals MTC will seek changes via a LGR by NCC to the wards that make up the town council ward boundaries in the hope of making these more logical. Any guidance from the BC on the best way to achieve this would be appreciated either as a follow up to our consultation reply or in the final report from the BC.

Yours Sincerely,



Mrs Tracey Bell  
Clerk Morpeth Town Council