

Morpeth Sustainable Travel Audit

Developing a programme of works for active travel in the Town Centre

January 2015



1 Town Centre Audit

Introduction

Facilities for pedestrians and cycling were recorded within the town centre boundary in order to inform future improvements to the area. This section begins with some key observations regarding the primary retail and town centre streets.

The location and condition of key infrastructure was recorded, including: drop kerbs, ramps, hand rails, stairs, foot/cycle bridges, underpasses, sub-standard lengths of footway, pedestrian refuges, zebra crossings, Puffin crossings, Toucan crossing, shared paths, cycle routes (off and on road), advisory cycle lanes, cycle parking, pedestrian/cycling signage, obstructive street furniture, pedestrian areas/zones. Full details of the audit and photo index are included at the end of this report.

An interactive map showing locations and features of the audit, as well as recommendations that follow in this report is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/MorpethTravelAudit>¹

Morpeth is a busy market town that attracts visitors from around Northumberland for its shops, restaurants and other amenities. Traffic volumes are consistently high throughout the day, with up to 11,600 VPD on Newgate St, compared to a population of just over 14,000 in the local area, hinting at a high car dependency in the local area as well as high levels of car ownership.

Off road footpaths and routes into Morpeth are relatively attractive, but are incohesive or not obvious to many users. Visitors to the town on foot from the south can cross the River Wansbeck via ancient bridges, stepping stones, through parks and castle grounds. Aside from some short sections of advisory cycle lanes to the south of Morpeth, there is no dedicated cycle infrastructure in Morpeth.

Unfortunately, a large proportion of car parking in the town centre is only accessible using one street (Newmarket) and alternative routes to this area are limited. This is compounded by a lack of local routes north- south across town such that means much of the A1-bound traffic must pass through the town centre via Bridge St and Newgate St. Hence, these conditions regarding car parking locations and A1 access create a significant amount of vehicle traffic in the town centre.

1.1 Bridge Street

Bridge St is arguably the heart of the retail core of Morpeth and considered an important gateway into the town centre. However, current conditions create a poor welcome and overall experience for visitors. They are faced with high volumes of (low speed) vehicle traffic and few crossing opportunities, particularly towards the west end of the street and Market Pl. Taxi, loading and public parking bays excessively line the street that affects the footway as well as vehicle flows in the carriageway.

Currently two pelican crossings allow pedestrians to cross the street. There



Figure 1: vehicle convenience outweighs the visitor experience on Bridge St.

¹ Up to date web browser required.

are a number of desire lines along the road that align with passageways or shops that show high levels of footfall when people are able to cross the street freely between breaks in the traffic. It is clear that more crossings- controlled and uncontrolled- are needed on Bridge St.

Footways have been widened along parts of Bridge St during more recent developments, although it is clear that the footway is still too narrow towards the east end, where the quality and width drops. Cash machines and street items, such as advertising boards, planters and numerous ATM machines can cause frequent areas of congested footways.

1.2 Newgate Street

This wider street is a similar retail environment to Bridge St but with narrower, cluttered footways. This makes it a particularly cumbersome street to negotiate, particularly at the south end nearest the Market Place. A larger proportion of the shops on Newgate Street are cafes, restaurants and food stores which often causes more mingling visitors and foot traffic.

Newgate St is one of the few North-South routes in Morpeth and links the town centre with communities in the north as well as the A1 and the Northgate Hospital further afield. The latter hosts a number of clinical services whereby patients (and staff) would benefit a great deal from better access for active modes of transport.



Figure 2: Newgate St at Manchester St

1.3 Newmarket

This is a bustling environment with a variety of activities and users. The street contains a mix of shops, cafes, the Jobcentre, a large public house, Riverside Leisure Centre and a handful of small business premises. Newmarket also links the town to Carlisle Park south of the river via Elliot Footbridge for visitors on foot or bike.



Figure 3: Zebra crossing adjacent to the St. Robert's school on Oldgate

However, Newmarket is also the main route to a large proportion of the town's public parking, with two large car parks accessed from the street and three further public car parks on the adjoining Whalebone Ln.

Hence, there is a large volume of traffic along Newmarket that impedes crossing along the street, which is not an ambient environment to visit.

1.4 Oldgate

This is a considerably quieter street in terms of traffic as well as footfall, with a physical barrier in the form of the Clock Tower at the mouth of the street that serves as one of the focal points of the town. Oldgate contains a

number of independent shops and businesses, as well as a St Robert's RC First School and Nursery. Westwards, there is access to residential areas and routes along the banks of the River Wansbeck.

1.5 Damside

Damside provides access to routes to the north and east of the town and a small number of shops and local amenities along the road. It is also the main access route for northbound buses heading to the station. It typically exhibits low speed, high volumes of vehicle traffic and is dominated by an excessively wide mini roundabout at the south end that is particularly difficult to cross for users on foot. This roundabout also serves a large car park and library on adjoining Staithes Ln.



Figure 4: Damside roundabout at Gas House Ln is a difficult junction for cyclists and pedestrians to cross.

1.6 Stanley Terrace

This road to the north of the primary retail area links a number of newer supermarket developments and large car parks, as well as Morpeth Bus station. Vehicle speeds and volumes are low. However, the large number of car parking, derelict sites and wide access roads along Stanley Tce presents an unappealing environment for users on foot or bike. It is likely that the development of the former petrol station and Morrison's site will attract significant interest due to their proximity to the town centre. Stanley Tce also requires some consideration due to the amount of school children that cross the street at the bus station, often in large numbers that exceed the capacity of the crossing point.

1.7 Whalebone Lane



Figure 5: Whalebone Ln contains a number of public car parks and is missing footways in many parts.

There are three public car parks on this relatively quiet back street which shows low but steady vehicle flow throughout the day. The main concern is the discontinuous footway on both sides of the street, particularly around the area of the Queens Head Hotel Car Park. Pedestrians must cross the road twice along the street and there are no dropped kerbs or crossing facilities at the entrance to the housing development opposite the hotel. This area presents a serious safety concern for users with mobility issues and who must walk in the carriageway at sections of the route along Whalebone Ln.

2 Network and Street Development

Introduction

Recommendations for walking facilities and cycle infrastructure have been made to maximise and highlight existing routes to make walking or cycling into Morpeth irresistible for as many users as possible, particularly local residents.

The following observations were central in developing the recommendations in this study:

- High volumes of traffic from A197 and A192 along Castle Bank, Telford Bridge and Bridge Street present a poor entrance into Morpeth for all users.
- Poor crossing opportunities on Bridge St and Newgate St due to the frequent traffic congestion and lack of crossing points.
- Bridge Street and Newgate Street/ Oldgate used as a short cut across town due to convenience.
- Good permeability between buildings for pedestrians but some improvements needed for cycle access around town.

This chapter outlines proposals that include:

- Enhanced pedestrian gateways at existing river crossings and entrances to the town at Chantry Place and Elliot Footbridge/ Riverside Leisure Centre.
- Shared space improvements to Bridge Street and Newmarket.
- Dedicated/ off-road walking and cycling routes into Morpeth.

Speed Reduction

Establishing a town-wide 20mph speed limit in Morpeth would be highly recommended for making safer streets in addition to the physical measures. This speed limit should encompass the residential areas that surround and lead into the town centre. In areas where shared space measures are to be implemented, the street design itself should encourage drivers to travel at walking speeds.

The safety benefits of 20mph are well established: recent Department for Transport road casualty data show significantly lower casualty rates on 20mph roads and a 2009 study of London speed limits found that the introduction of 20mph zones was associated with a 42% reduction in road casualties. The benefits of 20mph reach beyond road safety, increasing social interaction, physical activity and improved air quality and noise levels.

Controlled Parking Zone

Parking schemes should be considered for a specific area within the retail area boundary to where public space, shared space or significant improvements are being proposed. This would then enable parking bays to be integrated in specific and necessary places, while maintaining the integrity of the schemes and rationalising parking in these areas.

2.1 Chantry Place and Footbridge Square



Figure 6: Chantry Place functions as a key pedestrian gateway into the town centre.

Arguably the most important existing pedestrian route into town would benefit from the development of a shared space town square from the entrance at Bridge Street to end of shopping area on Chantry Place, encompassing the Chantry Museum and Chantry Footbridge entrance. The areas at both ends of the end of Chantry Footbridge (Chantry Pl and Wansbeck St) effectively function as shared space areas at present, so it would be prudent to upgrade the existing poor surfaces and highway environment with a more welcoming and attractive treatment.

The footbridge itself is just 1.5m wide which is not wide enough for cycles to pass pedestrians. It would be highly

recommended to widen this route into town to enhance this important and attractive route. This would be an expensive construction but suffice to say the existing iron deck and railings replaced an original stone arch. Its large abutments could potentially accommodate a wider bridge.

2.2 Bridge Street

Following improvements made on Chantry Pl, a shared space scheme is highly recommended on Bridge St to improve pedestrian movement and the public realm on this primary retail street.

Ample informal crossing points should assist movement between the shops and further reduce vehicle speeds. A reduction in the parking bays would also deter a number of users who are using the streets to search for single parking spaces, encouraging the use of main car parks throughout the town.



Figure 7: Exhibition Rd- before and after (BBC). Street furniture and car parking have since been added to this street that dilutes the shared space principles.

A phased development of this integral shopping street starting with Chantry Pl would initiate a change of environment and user

priority and create a gateway to the town centre. The upgrade of the rest of the street could then be timed to coincide with the completion of the Northern bypass in Autumn 2016.

2.3 Newgate Street

Newgate St requires widened footways in order to cope with the amount of ambling foot traffic and enable some retailers to increase their curtilage. The highway itself is frequently congested, similar to Bridge St. This creates an uncomfortable environment for cyclists and difficult to cross as a pedestrian. Traffic volumes of 11600 vehicles per day points towards segregated cycle infrastructure along the street. This would be beneficial for creating a safe link to communities in the north of Morpeth, Lancaster Park and Northgate Hospital. A two way segregated track on the west side of the street from the Bridge St roundabout to Dogger Bank could be installed using the existing footway and verge. From this point, footway widening in certain parts would accompany a shared footway to Leslie's View.

2.4 Newmarket

Newmarket has the potential to provide a high quality and attractive route on foot or bike into the town centre and Morpeth Riverside Leisure Centre. Newmarket should be redesigned for a shared space scheme along with Bridge St, with effective footway improvement (east side) and widening (west) to maximise pedestrian access. This would also allow better use and visibility of shop frontages.

Parking should be limited to allocated loading bays only, particularly justified due to the proximity to a number of large car parks at the end of the street.

The following car park improvements are recommended to correspond with the shared space improvements:

- Relocation of Newmarket East car park entrance to the north end from Phoenix Court
- Reorganisation of bays (allowing additional 5-10 spaces)
- Removal of Newmarket West side car park and construction of public space/ park with cycle parking facility.

2.5 Bennett's Walk, Goose Hill and River Wansbeck Cycle Track

Despite its name, Bennett's Walk is a poor environment for users on foot with a raised footway following a high flood wall and protected with extensive pedestrian railing (due to the significant drop to road level). A number of simple improvements could be installed to create a continuous route along the river that is a welcoming environment for cyclists on the road. In theory this would create an attractive route to Morpeth First School on Goose Hill, connecting communities to the east and improvements to Green Ln.

A coloured surface treatment should be used along a 2.5m section of the carriageway with intermittent planters adjacent to the footway, possibly to highlight the openings in the pedestrian railings and to create a more welcoming route.

This treatment should be carried along onto Goose Hill, with a priority change that shows a continuation from Bennett's Walk onto Goose Hill, rather than Alexandra Rd as is currently the case. To complete the route adjacent to Morpeth First School, the road mouth that leads onto Castle Square should be narrowed and a raised surface introduced to reinforce a change of environments into the 20mph zone. This area would be a suitable location for a 'DIY Streets scheme' (see **Error! Reference source not found.**, page**Error! Bookmark not defined.**) with the aim of engaging the residents and school users for a creative and tailored street design.

2.6 Residential Cycling Corridors

A number of potential long distance routes would serve to link residential areas and communities around Morpeth with the town centre as well as schools, the train station, local amenities and employment areas.

2.6.1 Lancaster Park

This north-west area of Morpeth contains a disconnected housing estate of detached properties surrounded almost entirely by trees and woods. Chantry Middle School and Morpeth Rugby Club lie between the housing area and the town centre; hence a 'green corridor' would be the ideal improvement to link the area to the town centre, via the school.

The following improvements would be required to implement this route:

1. Footway widening in Lancaster Park: existing block paved footways should be widened to accommodate cyclists. These include a North-south path linking Pinewood Dr and Wansdyke, and an east-west path linking the ends of the same roads as well as Leslies View.
2. Scotch Gill Wood/ Davie's Wood path: path widening and upgrades to provide a link through this local nature reserve with routes that lead to Chantry Middle School grounds and Lowford Bridge. There are a number of footpaths through the wooded area, but the most western path would be practical for cyclists. A widened Bitmac surface would be most recommended, but an unbound surface may also be considered depending on the incline and drainage conditions.
3. Lowford Bridge to High Stanners: an existing signed 'private' road should be remarked and re-signed to encourage users on foot or bike. The footpath that continues along the river at Lady's Walk should be widened and upgraded to enable a variety of users to share the path, with consideration to modifying the steps into a ramp.



Figure 8: Green Ln that links Coopies Ln and Bennett's Walk.

2.6.2 Stobhill and Coopies Lane Industrial Estate

Green Lane is closed (except for access to premises) from Salisbury St at the south end to Bennett's Walk and has the potential to create a high quality traffic free link between the town centre, the train station, Coopies Lane Industrial Estate and residential areas along the way. Access for large vehicles is required at the south end Salisbury St to the Sewage treatment works, but this is very infrequent. A number of improvements are needed to develop this route:

1. Coopies lane resurfacing and speed cushions: standard road calming measures should be introduced alongside clear cycle route signage to establish this road that currently is in a poor state with no footways that lead to the level crossing.
2. A resurfaced road would encourage more cyclists to the route, as the surface of the road is particularly poor. Other features along the road should be introduced to create resting places and to mark the route, such as benches and bollards at the side of the road. It would also be recommended to introduce wildflower plants and other soft landscaping features to improve the appearance of the road.
3. Bridge ramp alignment at the Stobswood footbridge: the area around this important link over the River Wansbeck serves as a junction into town from the East or along Bennett's Walk.

2.6.3 Kirkhill and Loansdean

Castle Banks and Shields Road are busy roads into the town centre that links the train station and communities to the south. Northumberland County Council in Loansdean is the largest employer in Morpeth and the surrounding area, based in County Hall at the south edge of Morpeth in Loansdean. Although it has been confirmed that Northumberland CC will be relocating to Ashington, it is likely that a large residential development will replace the existing building.

The A192 from the town centre at Bridge St to the roundabout with the A196 suffers from frequent congestion and high volumes of traffic of over 12,700 vehicles per day². Furthermore, Grange Ct and the continuation of Shields Rd to the east have alarmingly wide entry and exit carriageways that are more appropriate for trunk road environments. Not only are these difficult streets to cross but they are hostile environments for cyclists as they encourage higher vehicle speeds and put vehicles in conflict with cyclists. An advisory cycle lane follows a section of the A192 (Shields Rd) on the east side for the benefit of cyclists riding uphill. Hence, a safer route linking County Hall, the train station and large residential areas with the town centre would serve a significant amount of users and build on existing infrastructure.

A number of improvements should be made to improve this important link into town (south to north):

1. Footway widening (east) and conversion of grass verge (west) to cycle lane. This would create a continuous off road cycle route along the A192 to Shields Rd East.
2. Side road entry narrowing: removal of the slip roads would free up large amounts of space that could be used for footway and segregated cycle track. Raised table crossings would complete the route over the side streets at Shields Rd and Grange Ct, which is already restricted to local access only.
3. A192/ Shields Rd to town centre hybrid lanes: the remaining section into the town centre would make use of redundant carriageway space and hatched areas could be utilised. This could be continued all the way to developments at Castle Square and the Chantry Footbridge to create a continuous link into town. Alternatively, cycle separators could be installed along large sections of this route to create lightly segregated cycling infrastructure on the carriageway.
4. A197 Cycle separators: the wide (9m) and busy road that links to the A1 Southbound is an uncomfortable environment for cyclists due to traffic volume and congestion, particularly towards The Farquhar Deuchar Park.
5. Footway widening and realignment between the car park and County Hall; raised table priority crossing on Whinham Way



Figure 9: Hybrid lanes through a residential area along an arterial route (Old Shoreham Rd, Brighton).

² 2013 AADF (average annual daily flow), Department for Transport Traffic points (ID 56772). A significant drop occurred on this section of road between 2008 (17026) and 2009 (12497)

2.7 North Morpeth Cycle Streets



Figure 10: A cycle street.

and attracting visitors. It would be highly recommended to emphasise new or developed routes outlined in this report. Suitable sites would include Chantry Place, Carlisle Park, Scotch Gill Wood/ Davie's Wood or Green Lane at the Stobswood Footbridge. This site would be an effective way to welcome visitors using the route, attract locals to travel on foot or bike and act as a visible cue for passing motorists.

In order to create a suitable grid system of cycle friendly streets in the north of Morpeth, Howard Rd and Cottingwood Ln (south) would benefit from a number of simple improvements to create a safer environment for cyclists using these routes. Road narrowing strips should complement speed cushions (if necessary), as the perception of danger is high due to the width of the roads.

2.8 Artwork and Cycle Tourism

Installing artwork along new or existing cycle routes is an effective way of highlighting routes



Figure 11: Artwork at the entrance to Lumsden's Ln from Morpeth Market PI (left); twisted Arch' gateway by Cod Steaks at the Bristol entrance to The Bristol & Bath Railway Path, National Route 4 (right).

2.9 Cycle Parking

One of the barriers to residents and visitors accessing local towns by bike are a lack of convenient and safe cycle parking. Small and frequent bike stands in visible locations can encourage people to cycle that would normally use other modes of transport.

Cyclists generally want to park as close to their destination as possible, not only for convenience but for security concerns of leaving a locked bike unattended. Fortunately, cycle parking is very space efficient and requires little or no maintenance costs when compared to typical vehicle parking. In order to reinforce the transport hierarchy, cycle parking should be sited as close as possible to the final destination or main access of buildings. Experience suggests that where this is not the case cyclists are likely to 'fly park' in locations that are convenient to them.

Morpeth is currently poorly served by cycle parking, with 'Sheffield' type stands at just three locations (Riverside Leisure Centre, Newgate St and Morpeth bus station). Figure 12, below, illustrates new locations for an extensive network of convenient cycle parking around the town. Locations have been assigned as 'primary' (red) for multiple bikes or 'secondary' (green) for single bikes (see Annex 5 for examples of cycle parking solutions). Primary locations have been chosen at key locations (Morpeth Library, Carlisle Park and Morpeth First School). Other locations have been chosen for prominent and convenient locations around the town centre (eg Chantry Place, Bridge St).



Figure 12: Cycle parking locations.

2.10 General Improvements and Upgrades



Figure 13: Clear and rationalised visitor signage that links public transport and local amenities.

2.10.1 Signage

Cycle and walking route signage is not only an important feature for way-finding, but serves to encourage and reassure users of safe and continuous routes. Consistent and clear signage is another important aspect of signage design. As with other towns and cities, Morpeth contains a range of signage and information boards at transport hubs, public spaces and visitor attractions. It is highly recommended that a new signage system is commissioned that integrates cycle and walking route signage, visitor attractions and key public transport services.

2.10.2 Green Streets

Areas or pockets of soft landscaping and plants that are integrated into typical roads or footways are constructed to replace large areas of concrete or paved surfaces, road build-outs or road entry/ exits. Natural

'parklets' are grown to encourage biodiversity and reduce rainwater run-off, hence they are often used in areas that are prone to localised flooding or ponding. Parklets can also be used as a gateway feature to streets, highlighting a residential area, for example, that warns drivers of a change of environment and to take extra caution. Low maintenance planting is recommended.

2.10.3 Green Corridors

Morpeth is a particularly well landscaped town with a great deal of trees on streets that provide shade and pleasant landscaping. Two large parks south of the River Wansbeck just beyond the boundary of the town centre boundary but are well within walking distance of the town, residential areas and large employment centres in the area. Routes into these spaces should be highlighted and encouraged, through improvements to crossings and footways that lie along existing desire lines.

2.11 Network Development Summary

Table 2-1 : Major developments

	Ref	Description
Priority ⇄	4.6.3	County Hall to Station and town Path widening, resurfacing and extending to Whinham Way Raised table crossing on Whinham Way Route signage.
	4.1	Chantry Place redesign Shared space redesign and construction
	4.6.2	Green Ln resurface Road resurfacing Landscaping and maintenance of 500m section Road entries build-outs or bollards Benches and route signage.
	4.2	Bridge St shared space Shared space redesign and construction.
	4.4	Newmarket Reorganisation of car parking and entries Shared space in the shopping area Footway widening
	4.3	Newgate St Footway widening (South) Two way cycle track Bridge to The Dell 1.14km
	4.5	Bennett's Walk 2.5m coloured surface on Bennett's Walk and Goose Hill to Castle Sq Priority change at Goose Hill Planters adjacent along footway at openings. Road entry narrow and radii reduction at Morpeth First School and raised surface.
	4.6.1	Lancaster Park route Path resurfacing and signage

Table 2-2 : Further Improvements

	Ref	Description
Priority ⇄		No entry except cycles Copper Chare; Green Ln and Goose Hill pending NCC review of exception.
	'Cycle improvements Streets'	Howard St Cottingwood Ln

City-wide
signage.

integrated

Market town signage scheme.

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