

MORPETH TOWN COUNCIL

POSITION STATEMENT ON PARISH BOUNDARIES

Background

The town of Morpeth has changed and is changing fundamentally due to a raft of planning permissions granted between 2008 and 2017.

When built out, a significant increase in the population of Morpeth is envisaged including an approximately 50% increase in the number of households. A significant % of those households will be families, with children, because developers are building 3, 4 and 5 bedroomed properties.

This has led to a material increase in the physical size of the town with several orbital housing estates being built out adjoining Morpeth.

The existing parish boundaries have not changed in decades and are out of date. This has created an anomaly that although many of the new estates are physically, practically and *de facto* part of the town of Morpeth they are actually located for administrative purposes in the surrounding rural parishes on land that was previously uninhabited farmland.

Those purchasing and moving into these new properties which are marketed as part of Morpeth will assume they are part of Morpeth, use Morpeth services and are in some cases within the settlement boundary of Morpeth in planning terms. However, they will lack the political representation of a vote for the Morpeth Town Council which provides the services they use in the Town and will not contribute through the precept towards those services.

The Town Council therefore entered into informal consultation with our partner neighbouring parishes on amending the parish boundaries of Morpeth to reflect the reality of the increased development of the Town.

Once embarking on this potential reorganisation it is also sensible to address existing anomalies such as the Stobhill Manor estate in which the parish boundary cuts through the middle of a street with half of the estate within the Parish of Morpeth and half the estate within the rural parish of Hepscott.

Following such consultation Morpeth Town Council has identified four parcels of land currently located in the neighbouring parishes of Hepscott, Mitford and Hebron which merit formal statutory consultation, detailed further in this report.

Any change would have no effect in planning terms or amend any of the settlement boundaries identified in the made Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan or the Northumberland County Council emerging Local Plan.

Pros and Cons of the proposed boundary changes in general

FOR

- The parish boundaries are out of date and do not reflect the current development of the town.
- Morpeth is a Hub, and provides services enjoyed in full or part by a wider population. It should therefore seek to ensure that in so far as is practical and sensible it recovers the cost of providing these services by those who use them.
- It is appropriate that those living in what all disinterested parties would regard as the Town of Morpeth should pay precept to the Town Council of Morpeth.
- It is appropriate that those living in what all disinterested parties would regard as the Town of Morpeth should have political representation in being able to vote for Town Councillors who are responsible for those services.
- The Town Council of Morpeth is in a position to provide the services to the new estates at a better cost to the taxpayer by utilising economies of scale and the NEAT team.
- By divesting the rural parishes of the burden of maintaining the services to the new estates there would be less budgetary pressure on the parishes and less requirement for them to raise their precept.
- The fundamental injustice of one section of the town's inhabitants paying less for the services used by (in some cases their immediate) neighbours through the accident of a Victorian field line would be resolved.

AGAINST

- Those already living in the affected areas may object to an increase in their parish precept to bring it line with Morpeth rates.
- Parishes with current housing planning permission may suffer a loss of anticipated precept.

Plot A Land currently within Hepscoth Parish- MAP 1

This represents the land occupied by the Southfields development and half of the Stobhill Manor estate. The Southfield development currently consists of 175 properties are on the site, with extant planning permission for a further 243.

Hepscoth Parish Council currently receives £2,606.61 per annum in Parish precept (Appendix B) in respect of the existing properties at Southfields.

Stobhill Manor is an established estate and represents around 114 dwellings currently within Hepscoth with the remainder in Morpeth. It is entirely within the Morpeth Stobhill county division boundary.

Hepscoth Parish Council currently receives £3,147.24 per annum in Parish precept in respect of the existing properties at Stobhill Manor.

FOR INCORPORATING THE SOUTHFIELDS ESTATE

- This is a substantial development which lies within the Morpeth Town settlement boundary designated in the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan but which currently lies within the parish of Hepscoth.
- The development is of a suburban character and flows naturally from the neighbouring estates immediately adjacent to it.
- The majority of the development is yet to be built minimising disruption and change to existing residents as it is envisaged that any transfer process would be completed before the site is fully occupied.
- As the majority of the development is yet to be built this will not have a material effect on the current budget of Hepscoth parish.

AGAINST INCORPORATING THE SOUTHFIELDS ESTATE INTO MORPETH

- Hepscoth parish council are anticipating receiving this precept in the future.
- Some of the houses are occupied and therefore they will see an increase in their precept.

FOR INCORPORATING ALL OF STOBHILL MANOR ESTATE INTO MORPETH

- This is a clear anomaly where the parish boundary runs through the middle of an existing estate resulting in immediate neighbours paying different levels of precept; this is a stark illustration of the unfairness of the current situation.
- The development is of a suburban character and flows naturally from the half of the estate currently within the Parish and the neighbouring estates immediately adjacent to it.
- The estate includes a children's play area which could more efficiently be managed by the Town Council. The Town Council also has the capital resources to renew the area in future beyond the capabilities of the parish council.

AGAINST INCORPORATING ALL OF STOBHILL MANOR ESTATE INTO MORPETH

- Hepscoth parish council are currently receiving precept from this estate.
- The houses are occupied and therefore they will see an increase in their precept.

CONSULTATION WITH HEPSCOTT PARISH COUNCIL

Hepscoth Parish Council are opposed to any change to the boundaries at any time, citing the effect on their budget and the increased precept payable by some residents if they move into Morpeth.

Members of Morpeth Town Council have been invited to and attended a meeting of Hepscoth Parish Council to outline the Town Council's initial proposals. No agreement or compromise could be reached.

CONCLUSION

On balance Morpeth Town Council feels it is appropriate that a formal consultation is triggered in respect of this parcel of land being incorporated into the administrative parish of Morpeth.

Plot B Land currently within Hebron Parish- MAP 2

This plot is to the North of Morpeth in parish of Hebron and consists of the Northgate, St Andrews Gardens and The Meadows developments. It consists of 96 currently occupied properties and there is extant planning permission for a further 372 houses.

It also includes the established "West View Cottages" which are the only portion of the existing Fairmoor estate east of the A1.

Hebron Parish Council currently receives £473.94 per annum in Parish precept in respect of the existing properties.

FOR

- The current parish of Hebron is the smallest of the neighbouring rural parishes with a population in 2010 of 464. The completion of the Northgate development will more than double the size of the parish forcing the parish to increase the services offered and correspondingly increase the precept paid by existing inhabitants.
- The development is of a suburban character and flows naturally from the North of Morpeth. It is not a separate settlement and with the designation and permissions in place for plots D & C is will become virtually contiguous with the town of Morpeth.

AGAINST

- Those currently living there will notice a particularly large increase in their precept.
- This is the furthest plot of land under consideration from the current boundary.

CONSULTATION WITH HEBRON PARISH COUNCIL

Members of Morpeth Town Council have had several very productive meetings with Hebron Parish Council.

The Parish Council were keen to work collaboratively with Morpeth Town Council in seeking views of residents and a joint leaflet was distributed to those currently living in the affected areas with a new email address to send enquiries to. 7 emails were received. One against the proposal, one seeking further information and 5 broadly supportive.

CONCLUSION

On balance Morpeth Town Council feels it is appropriate that a formal consultation is triggered in respect of this parcel of land being incorporated into the administrative parish of Morpeth.

Plot C Land currently within Mitford Parish- MAP 3

This plot of land is within the parish of Mitford and planning permission has been granted to large scale residential and commercial development.

Part of the land is designated as safeguarded for future economic development in the draft Local Plan. It currently has one property and no extant planning permission for future housing.

Mitford Parish Council currently receives £33.80 per annum in Parish precept in respect of the existing property.

FOR

- Adopting this piece of land would make the administrative boundary contiguous with the A1 which forms a natural physical boundary the existing inhabitants of Mitford Parish are all located to the west of the A1
- There are no current residents who will object to an increase in precept.
- It will have no immediate budgetary effect on the parish council.

AGAINST

- None identified.

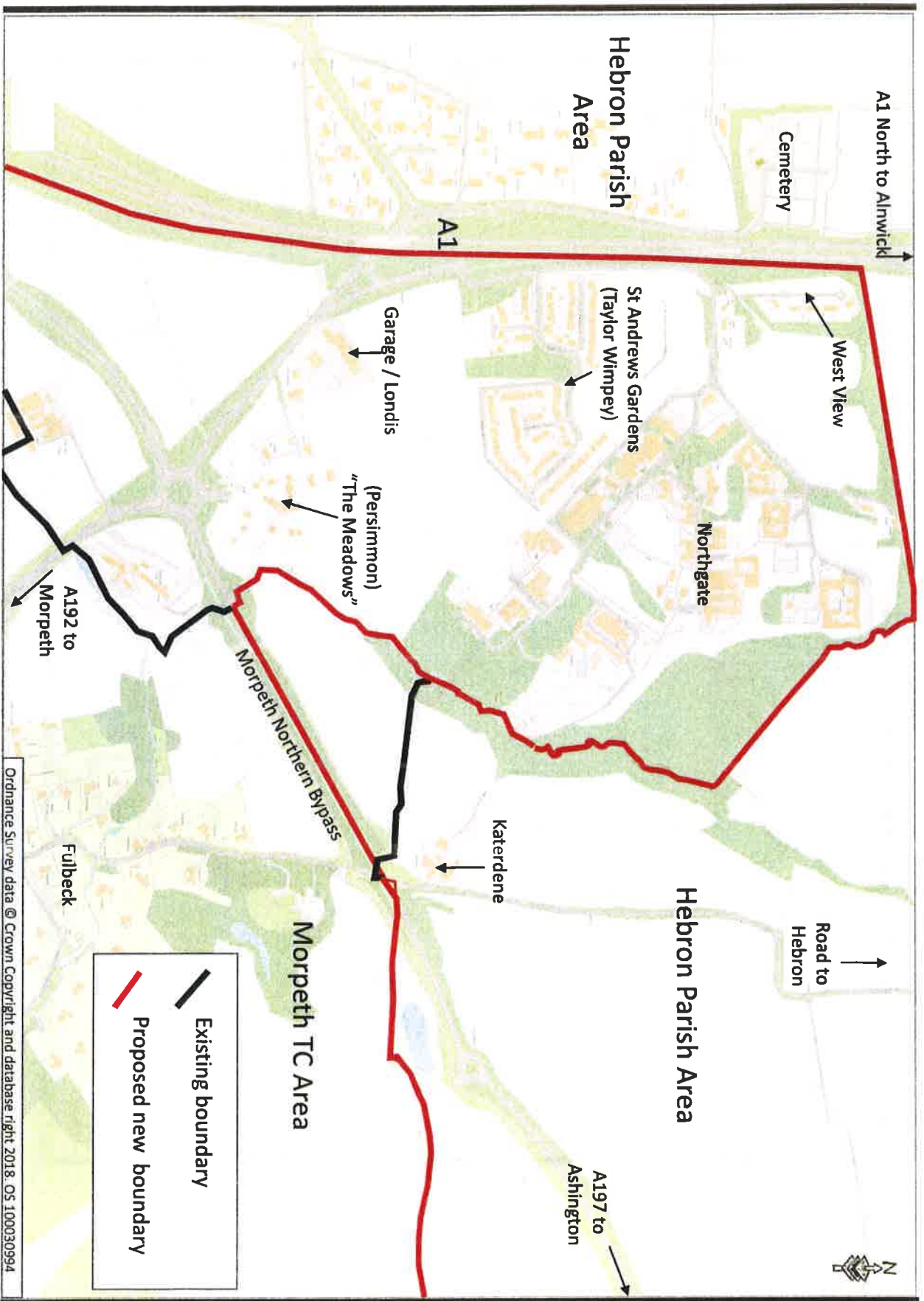
CONSULTATION WITH MITFORD PARISH COUNCIL

Members of Morpeth Town Council have attended Mitford Parish Council to outline initial proposals.

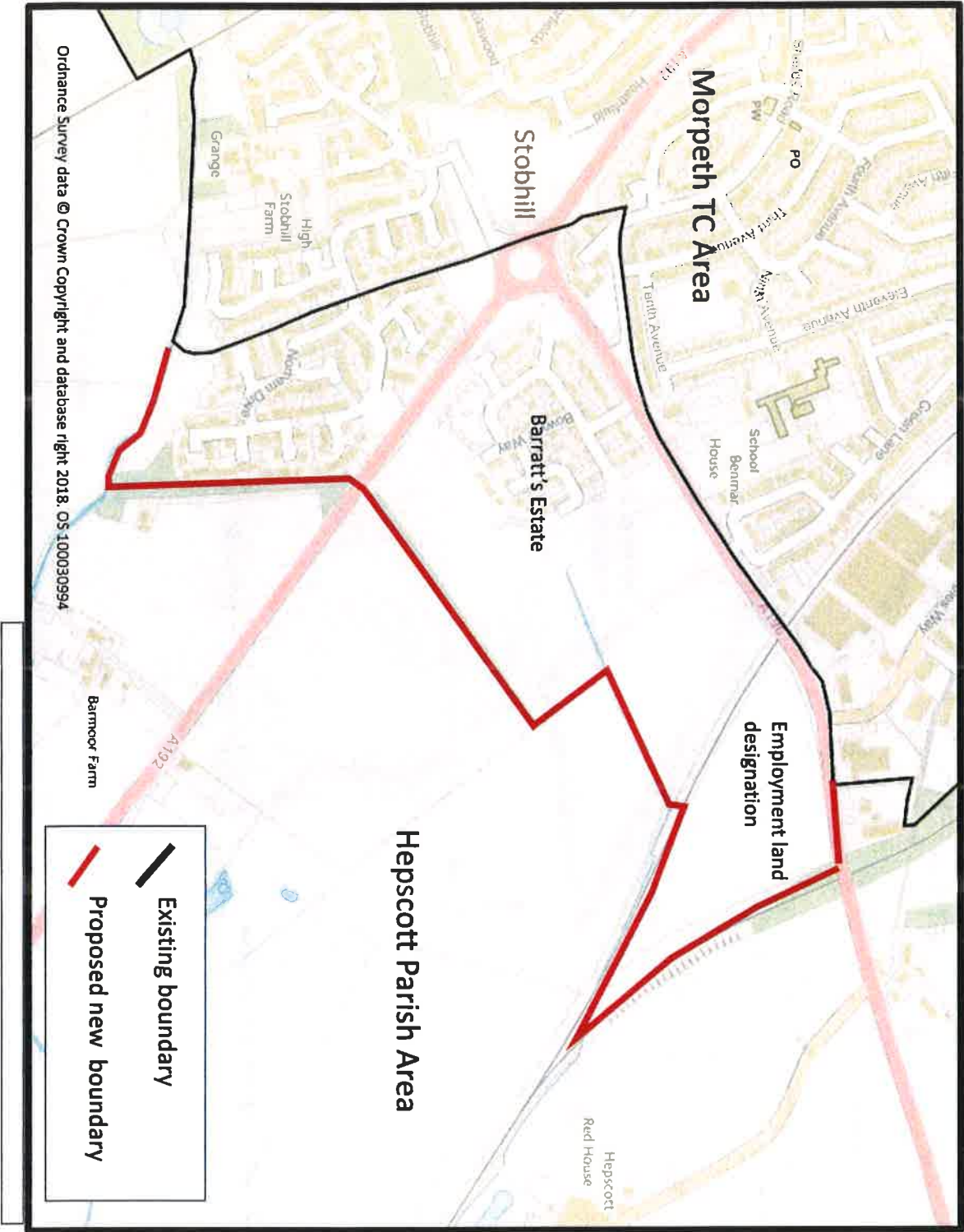
Following discussions with Mitford Parish Council, the proposed land under discussion was amended to remove several houses in the rural corridor to Mitford which are of an established and rural character.

CONCLUSION

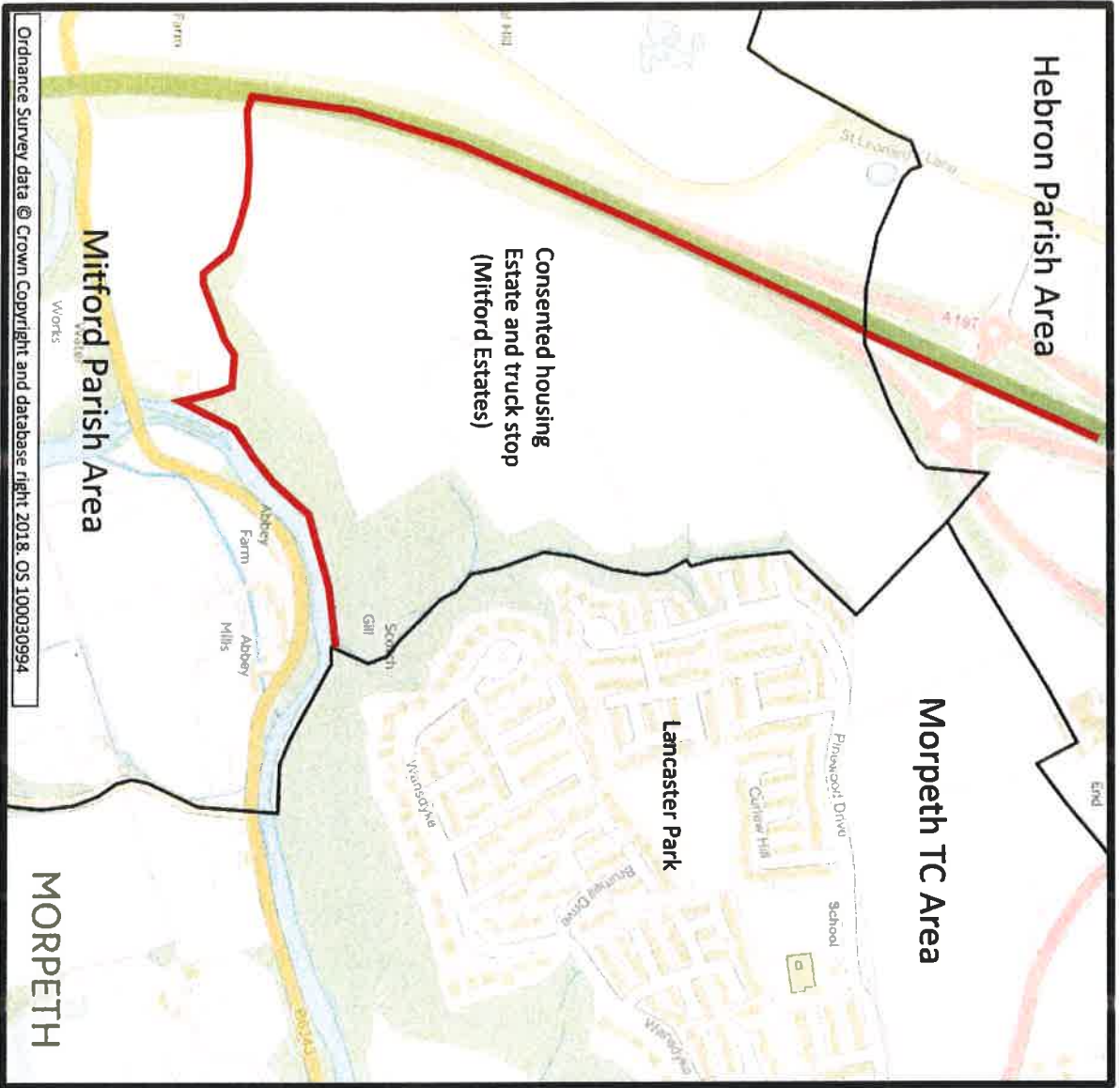
On balance Morpeth Town Council feels it is appropriate that a formal consultation is triggered in respect of this parcel of land being incorporated into the administrative parish of Morpeth.



Proposed changes: Morpeth / Hebron



Proposed changes: Morpeth / Hepscoth



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Proposed changes: Morpeth / Mitford