



Flooding in the streets and homes of Morpeth

30.46.4 The system of sewers in many parts of Morpeth is old and in certain locations in need of renewal, and parts of it are operating over capacity in storm conditions.



Sewage and surface water from the areas north of the river and the lower lying parts of the town and outskirts south of the river reach Morpeth Sewage Treatment Works via the Northumbrian Water pumping station in Low Stanners.

Sewage and surface water from other areas such as Stobhill flow through Allery Banks / Middle Greens directly to the Morpeth Sewage Works.

As the town has grown more load has been placed on the drains carrying sewage and surface water from as far away as Fairmoor via the centre of Morpeth to the Morpeth Sewage Works.

Morpeth lies in the bottom of a valley. Any surface water falling on the valley sides flows down towards the river.

As the town has developed naturally occurring streams have been encased in a multiplicity of culverts. What happens in the drains and culverts serving the essential function of carrying the surface and ground water and sewage is largely out of sight and out of mind, until it rains.



High Stanners 5th July 2009



Entrance to Morrisons Petrol Station Dark Lane 1st November 2009



Outside Goosehill School 5th July 2009





Bennetts Walk 7th July 2009 The gully is clean but the drains cannot carry the water away



These fountains are from a Northumbrian Water sewer manhole cover on Bennetts Walk 7th July 2009



Northumbrian Water manhole full to overflowing Bennetts Walk 17th July 2009



Goosehill School 1st November 2009



Northumbrian Water manhole cover Bennetts Walk 17th July 2009



Stream from gulley in Dark Lane 17th July 2009



A stream flows from the gulleys and beneath the road surface towards the electricity substation 17th July 2009



The kerb and road surface have been forced upwards by the groundwater The red speck is a trapped frog formerly living beneath the road surface.



An electricity supply company engineer arrives to monitor the flooding of the substation

The above pictures are a small selection of those gathered by concerned residents.

Flooding of this nature occurs whenever there is heavy rain. Residents must either stay indoors during these periods or paddle.

Unfortunately they are frequently paddling in sewage.

What action are the relevant bodies taking to remedy these problems?

Environment Agency

The Environment Agency are planning an upstream storage reservoir to limit the height of floods from the River Wansbeck in the future at the expense of the flooding being of longer duration.

The Agency also have plans to improve flood defences alongside the river and increase the capacity of the culverted streams which are their responsibility. That is the Church Burn and the Cotting Burn. The Church Burn manhole cover which was not fixed down and blew off during the September 2008 flood resulting in dozens of homes being flooded has been fixed down so that it will not be a problem in future.

The Agency has removed trees and gravel from some parts of the river as part of an ongoing maintenance programme.

Northumberland County Council

The major surface water drain in Middle Greens which had not been cleaned for over twenty years has been cleared so that some surface water from the higher parts of Middle Greens can drain into the River Wansbeck during normal river level conditions. During floods it will not function to drain that area.

There have been no proposals put forward by Northumberland County Council to manage surface water in low lying areas during normal rainfall or during floods when river levels are higher than the defended riverside areas.

Northumbrian Water

Northumbrian Water has submitted a planning application to increase the size of the Morpeth Sewage Treatment Works so that more sewage can be brought into the low lying parts of the town from additional developments.

The Castle Morpeth Local Plan <http://www.cmlocalplan.co.uk/> was adopted in 2003 and is the current document for the area. It was written before the major flood of September 2008.

These are sections of that plan.

30.46.2 Northumbria Water has indicated that there is adequate capacity in the present water supply system to cater for any likely increased population during the Plan period. The existing ring main serving Morpeth ensures ease of supply to a variety of sites within its immediate locality. Areas to the south of the town are not so well served and accordingly development in this locality may require significant infrastructure improvements.

30.46.3 Flood prevention works undertaken over recent years are designed to cater for storm frequency floods of one in 100 years on the Wansbeck, but the area around the Cotting Burn from Fulbeck to Low Stanners remains vulnerable to further flooding. Northumbria Water have stated that any surface water connections discharging into the Cotting Burn may exacerbate existing flood problems. Also, surface water discharge as a result of development from sites above the Catchburn may exacerbate the flooding problem at Hepscott to the southeast of Morpeth. Flood defence functions are now exercised by the Environment Agency.

30.46.4 The system of sewers in many parts of Morpeth is old and in certain locations in need of renewal, and parts of it are operating over capacity in storm conditions. It is known that additional connections to certain parts of the sewerage system will cause increased problems of overloading. In most cases the effects of overloading will be experienced in the lower sections of the system rather than at the point of connection of any additional sewers. Northumbria Water has indicated that it would not wish to recommend refusal to development on grounds of inadequate sewerage and that it will seek to upgrade or otherwise render existing sewers capable of dealing with likely flows as part of development works. The Council will advise developers on the acceptable point of connection

into the existing sewers and also encourage that sewers within new housing developments will be built to adoptable standards.

30.46.5 Agreement has been reached with Northumbria Water to carry out investigations into the capacity of the sewage system in the town generally and survey work has started. Once specific problems are identified a programme of works will be carried out to deal with them. It is anticipated that these works will be undertaken during the Plan period as part of Northumbria Water's ongoing five year Capital Work Programme.

30.47.1 The main sewage treatment works for Morpeth is located at Parish Haugh. The two hospitals of St. George's and Northgate have their own disposal works. To the north of the town, Fulbeck and The Dell are connected to the existing system via small pumping stations. Sewage disposal facilities serving Hepscott are close to capacity, although the limited development envisaged for this area can be accommodated. Fairmoor is currently being connected to the main sewerage system at Morpeth to eliminate problems of disposal in that area. Northumbria Water has stated that the existing site of the Morpeth Sewage Treatment Works is fully utilised. Further development in the Morpeth area is likely to require the treatment works to be extended. It is appropriate to restrict development in the immediate vicinity of the works and reserve land to facilitate any necessary extensions.

Item 30.46.5 states that the remedial works will be undertaken during the five year period ending in 2008. This has not come to pass.

Northumbrian Water has been given more than adequate time to carry out the necessary works to increase the capacity of the drains but failed to do so.

What was the result of the agreement with Northumbrian Water to investigate the capacity of the system? In 2003 survey work had started according to the Local Plan document but no results have been published as yet.

The capacity of the Sewage Treatment Works is being called into question. The inability of the works to cope with the load applied has not been illustrated in the application in any meaningful manner. There is sufficient information within the application however to suggest that more than a third of the load is surface water.

The works and more importantly Morpeth town centre streets homes and residents are suffering from overload and sewage spillages during periods when rain is falling or to a much worse degree when flood conditions occur because the sewers have been combined with the drains.

Where do we go from here?

What action is Northumberland County Council Council taking to correct this situation?

No study has been carried out to determine the effect that passing more sewage through drains in the town will have on flood risk in the low lying areas.

In September 2008 long before the River Wansbeck flooded the town, sewage flowed into the streets and people's homes. In Staithes Lane a manhole cover blew off a sewer and a spout of sewage two feet high flowed down the street and into people's homes. In Carlisle View sewage flowed into people's homes. Pretoria Avenue was flooded by sewage. Bennetts Walk was flooded by sewage from before noon although the river flood did not reach its peak until dusk. Residents had to wade chest deep in sewage to escape the flood.

Northumbrian Water has put forward no plans to address this problem.

The company has claimed that when the main sewage pumping station loses power, as happened during the flood, their system has emergency discharge overflows which allow sewage to drain into the river. This emergency solution might be considered reasonable if it actually worked.



Unfortunately it does not so that the Fire and Rescue Service, later assisted by the Environment Agency, had to pump out Low Stanners the following day although the river was then no longer in flood

The planning application is further flawed as the land which is the subject of the planning application floods and Parish Haugh has been flooded by the River Wansbeck although the Entec company retained by Northumbrian Water have attempted to claim that the Environment Agency flood map is incorrect and that Parish Haugh flood risk is incorrectly shown on the Agency's flood risk plans.



Parish Haugh early afternoon before the flood reached its height on 6th September 2008

The river Wansbeck rose several feet later in the afternoon.

The trees to the right line the river bank

The red and white barriers surround Northumbrian Water engineering works which involved repairs to large storm drains which were carried out before the weekend of the flood.

Councillors would be either reckless, careless or both to grant permission to Northumbrian Water to expand their sewage treatment works before the existing problems in the low lying areas are remedied and a means of draining areas behind flood defences has been put in place.

Morpeth
Flood Action Group

