

1.0 Introduction

This topic paper will provide evidence to support the policy approach being taken in the Ponteland Neighbourhood Plan with regard to transport and accessibility. In particular, this paper will focus on issues related to car parking availability, cycle lanes and pedestrian footpaths, and opportunities to improve and connect links both on existing routes, and the potential to create new ones. It will form the basis of a chapter on Transport in the Ponteland Neighbourhood Plan. This paper includes proposed draft Policy Areas, and proposed Community Projects that have arisen out of the consultation that has taken place so far with the local community in the Neighbourhood Plan area. It is anticipated that a number of these projects will be delivered through the Ponteland Community Partnership and the Plan will identify partners to bring these projects forward. A number of projects may be delivered through developer contributions.

The Topic Paper is based on the Evidence Base report produced by the 'Transport Subgroup' which is available on the Ponteland Neighbourhood Plan website. It is also based on meetings with the subgroup, and on information available from Northumberland County Council and other sources.

2.0 Consultation

Following extensive consultation, the following objectives were identified for transport and accessibility in Ponteland.

The issues around transport identified by the local community were complex. An objective has been formulated by the Steering Group which seeks to encompass those issues:

Objective 6: To make Ponteland and the rest of the Parish a safer place for all users of the transport network, especially pedestrians, cyclists and children, by reducing traffic congestion, making it easier for people to walk to the schools, shops and public transport whilst ensuring adequate car parking is provided to meet the needs of residents, visitors and businesses.

3.0 Key issues identified through consultation were:

- The need for a relief road for Ponteland
- Speeding traffic
- Access for pedestrians (particularly school children)
- Inadequate provision for cyclists (cycle routes and cycle parking)
- Public transport provision unreliable
- Airport expansion and impacts on road network
- The traffic impacts of the school run
- Accessibility

- Poor local infrastructure in some places making access difficult for those with mobility impairments

Each of these issues will be addressed in turn:

3.1 The need for a relief road for Ponteland

A relief road is allocated in the current Castle Morpeth Local Plan (2003) and the proposal is being taken forward through the Northumberland Core Strategy, where a relief road for Ponteland is included in the list of future transport projects in the region although it remains to be seen whether the route of the relief road will be included in the proposals map for the emerging Core Strategy.

Further evidence is being gathered on the impacts of through traffic in Ponteland, and the results of this is still awaited.

Although the Neighbourhood Plan cannot allocate land for a relief road, which is a strategic matter, and would be major development in the green belt, the Plan does seek to continue to work with NCC to promote the provision of a relief road in the future, and, it is hoped during the Plan period. The relief road is not included in projects identified in the current Local Transport Plan. The Northumberland Strategic Infrastructure Strategy (2012) identifies further studies required with regard to a relief road for Ponteland, and suggests that this should be in collaboration with Newcastle City Council due to the amount of development proposed through the Newcastle/Gateshead Core Strategy to the west of Newcastle.

Community Project: Ponteland Relief Road

Intention: To work with partners at NCC/Newcastle to commence viability studies with regard to a Ponteland Relief Road

3.2 Speeding traffic

Traffic travelling too fast was cited as being a concern to residents. A 20mph speed limit is proposed for Darras Hall estate, where speeding is a common problem with long/straight roads.

Community Project: 20mph limit

Intention: Work with NCC highways to implement a 20mph limit in some areas of Ponteland, initially around schools.

3.3 Accessibility for pedestrians

There are a number of routes around Ponteland for pedestrians, most notably the railway line which is well used by residents as an

Policy Area: Pedestrian routes in Ponteland

Intention: To identify pedestrian routes to be improved/provided to improve the walking environment in and around Ponteland. To identify improvements that could be secured through developer contributions.

off road route to shops and facilities, as well as numerous 'snickets' and routes along roads.

It is considered essential to ensure that any new development incorporates pedestrian access to local shops/facilities/school through the provision of pedestrian routes through the proposed development, and where viable, through contributions to enhance routes elsewhere in Ponteland that are likely to be used as a result of the development taking place.

3.4 Accessibility for cyclists

Policy Area: Cycling in Ponteland

To improve and extend cycle paths on the following routes:

- Badger roundabout
- Prestwick Road Ends into Ponteland centre
- Extend route up to Lime House Lane from Fox Covet Lane (along A696 out of Ponteland)
- Improvements at Diamond junction to benefit cyclists
- Provision of cycle parking in new developments
- Provision of additional cycle parking in Ponteland

Developer contributions will be sought to secure the above schemes.

To ensure that new development incorporates cycle routes and links to existing cycle networks

There are a number of specific locations identified where improvements are required for cyclists in Ponteland. In particular, the Badger Roundabout is identified as a danger spot for cyclists coming into or leaving Ponteland, making commuting into Newcastle, or to the metro difficult for cyclists. There is a need to extend/improve cycling provision in specific locations which are identified in the policy area proposed below:

In addition to seeking developer contributions towards the extension of the above cycle routes, a community project to work with NCC to ensure that improved cycle provision is included in the next round of funding available through the Local Transport Plan is proposed.

Community Project: Cycling in Ponteland

Intention: To work with NCC to seek funding allocations for improvements to cycle infrastructure as referred to in the policy area.

3.5 Public Transport

Although there is regular public transport from Ponteland into Newcastle, residents have identified problems with reliability of public transport. It is proposed that a community project could seek to improve this situation.

Community Project: Public Transport improvements

Intention: The Bus Users Group in Ponteland to work closely with public transport providers to improve the reliability of public transport in Ponteland, and seek to promote investment in real-time information at key bus stops in Ponteland.

3.6 Accessibility of local infrastructure

This was cited as being an issue by some consultees. However, it is clear that much has been done by the Town Council to improve accessibility, and that there are only a few 'hot spots' where work is needed from an infrastructure perspective. However, one 'hot spot' can mean that a resident can't go out, if it is in the wrong place, so a Community Project is proposed to identify those areas where the infrastructure does not meet the needs of those with mobility problems.

Community Project: Accessibility around Ponteland

Intention: To work with local groups to identify 'accessibility hot spots' where simple improvements could improve accessibility for those with mobility impairments. To work with NCC Highways to secure improvements where identified.

3.7 School Run

As in most towns around the country, the school run causes traffic problems at certain times of the day in Ponteland. There appears to be little that can be done through the neighbourhood plan at present. However, if a new site is allocated for a new High School in Ponteland, then it is important that the transport impacts of that site are a key consideration. A specific policy area with regard to a new school site is identified in the Topic Paper 'Education and Youth Facilities'. This policy area seeks to ensure that transport impacts of a new school site are mitigated, through appropriate provision of high quality pedestrian/cycle links to the school, and adequate car parking, as well as a transport assessment to identify and mitigate transport impacts.

3.8 Newcastle Airport

Although Newcastle Airport is outside the Plan area, the car parking areas to the west abut the Plan area, and there are proposals to expand car parking into the Plan area on land close to the existing cemetery.

The Natural Environment Topic Paper seeks to ensure that an appropriate policy will ensure that lighting and landscaping at that site are appropriate and reflect the special qualities of the area. Any further development of car parking could impact on the traffic network in Ponteland, and it would not be inappropriate to require a transport assessment if the provision of car parking is to be significantly increased, and indeed to contribute to safety provision in Ponteland, where traffic will inevitably increase.

4.0 Strategic Policy Context and Evidence

The emerging Core Strategy for Northumberland, although not yet adopted, is the document against which the Ponteland Neighbourhood Plan must align. Specific policies in that document related to transport are broadly aligned with proposals being put forward in the Ponteland Neighbourhood Plan.

- Northumberland Local Transport Plan (2011 - 2026)
- Northumberland Strategic Infrastructure Study (2012)

5.0 National Planning Policy Framework

Chapter 4 of the NPPF seeks to promote sustainable transport. Paragraph 29 states that transport policies have an important role to play in facilitating sustainable development and contributing to wider sustainability and health objectives (see other Topic Papers). The transport system should be balanced in favour of sustainable transport modes, giving people a real choice about how they travel.

The Ponteland Neighbourhood Plan proposes improvements to the pedestrian and cycling environment in and around Hexham. It also seeks to work with bus operators to secure improvements to reliability of local bus services. It seeks to ensure that any new development in the Plan area will incorporate links to sustainable modes of transport (cycling/walking) within Ponteland.

Paragraph 35 states that plans should protect and exploit opportunities for the use of sustainable transport modes for the movement of goods or people. Development should be located and

designed where practical, to give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements, and have access to high quality public transport facilities. They should also consider the needs of people with disabilities by all modes of transport. These aspects are reflected in policy areas proposed in the Ponteland Neighbourhood Plan.

In particular, one of the 17 Core Planning Principles is to actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable.

Evidence Base Documents

Consultation Responses from residents' questionnaires
NCC Strategic Infrastructure Study (2012)
Castle Morpeth Local Plan (2003)
Northumberland LTP (2011 - 2026)