



Greater Morpeth Development Trust

Regeneration of town & countryside



GMDT Annual Report

GMDT Annual Report
April 2024 to March 2025





A successful development trust

Greater Morpeth Development Trust (GMDT)



GMDT vision

Greater Morpeth Development Trust (GMDT) will continue to support the development Morpeth as a premier market town in the North East England. It works to promote and improve the town and countryside for public benefit, and for the economic and social wellbeing of people living and working in Morpeth and surrounding areas of Northumberland through the promotion of urban and rural regeneration.

About GMDT

GMDT is a community led organisation established in 2006 out of the Local Strategic Partnership to facilitate the development and delivery of community based projects through partnership working. The diverse range of projects carried out over the past nineteen years could not have happened without the invaluable support of our partners, funders, members and volunteers. Major capital schemes which have benefitted the town include the redevelopment of Morpeth Town Hall and Morpeth Railway Station. Sitting alongside these has been our programme of community events such as the regular cinema screenings, annual picnic, book festival, and the national Heritage Open Days. This has been achieved through the support of a number of funding bodies who have invested in our vision – the main funders being Heritage Lottery Fund, Network Rail, Northern Trains Limited, Northumberland County Council, Morpeth Town Council, Railway Heritage Trust and North East Rural Growth Network.

The existing staff team is made up of 2 part time members supported by a range of professional associates to deliver a portfolio of quality projects and through engaging volunteers' support and strong partnership working we work to maintain our level of service delivery for the benefit of Morpeth.

You can find more about our work on our website www.gmdt.net

GMDT is an independent company limited by guarantee and a registered charitable trust. Company Registration Number 05676236, Charity Number 1117036, VAT Number 101 6832 50.

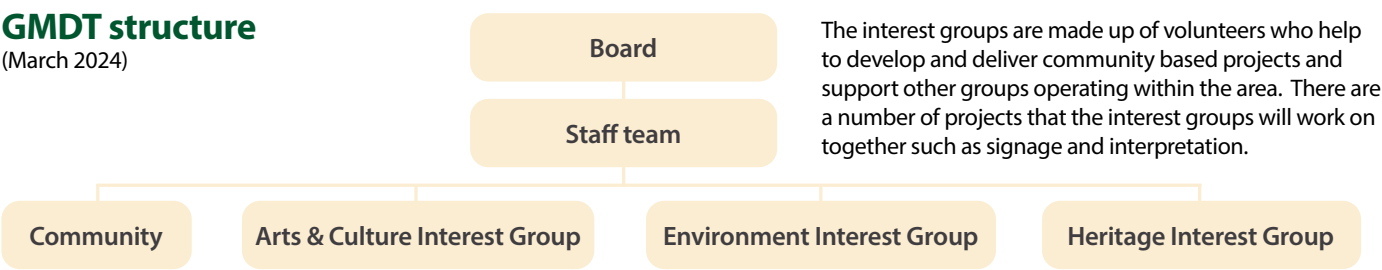
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GMDT Structure, Chair's Report and Articles

GMDT structure (March 2024)



GMDT Staff



Linda Wilson
Office Administrator



Julie Whiteman
Office Administrator

GMDT Board



Mike Willis
Chair and
Community Director



Kim Bibby-Wilson
Heritage Interest Group
Director (Oct 2024)



Frank Rescigno
Arts and Culture Interest
Group Director



Hayley Brown
Community Director
(May 2024)



Dai Richards
Environment Interest
Group Director



Richard Burrow
Community Director



Ian Fosskett
Community Director



Lyn Robson MBE
Community Director



Tamsin Sharp
Community Director

Chair's Report

How has another year passed so quickly? It has been another year full of challenges and some significant changes. The first major change that I have to report is the retirement from the Board of Kim Bibby-Wilson. Kim has been a founder member of the Board since the inception of GMDT in 2006, and has been Chair of the Heritage Interest Group from that time. Kim's commitment to preserving and promoting the rich heritage of Northumberland in general, and Morpeth, in particular has been absolutely outstanding throughout this time and beyond. As well as the work with the GMDT, she has been a key organizer for the annual Morpeth Northumbrian Gathering, (which was started by her father, Roland Bibby) and for Northumbria, an umbrella internet resource dedicated to preserving the proud history, heritage, language and culture of our unique county. She is also the Chair of the Morpeth Antiquarian Society. Kim's retirement also leaves us with a significant challenge – we need someone to step up and take on the Directorship of the Heritage interest group.

Morpeth is a historic market town, with written records back to 1080 when

William de Merlay was granted the Barony of Morpeth as reward for his part in suppressing a rebellion. Since then, there have been many famous names associated with the town, such as Admiral Collingwood, Emily Davidson, William Turner to name but three. We have some fine old buildings such as the Chantry, Town Hall, Morpeth Court and our Railway Station. There are many recently refurbished or new signs around the town (thanks to the Environment Interest Group) that provide fascinating insights into our rich and varied heritage and the people whose past achievements have laid so many of the foundations of our modern world. So, if you are interested in our heritage, please consider getting involved with the Heritage Interest Group. You can contact us on 01670 503866 or info@gmdt.org.uk.

Like most charities, we continue to face financial challenges. We have found tenants for most of the office units at the station, but there are still a couple of vacant units available. We have entered into positive discussions with Northern Rail, who are our immediate landlord, regarding some issues with electricity meters and the overall costs of maintaining and operating the building. These discussions have increased mutual

understanding and we hope to be able to report on some positive outcomes next year.

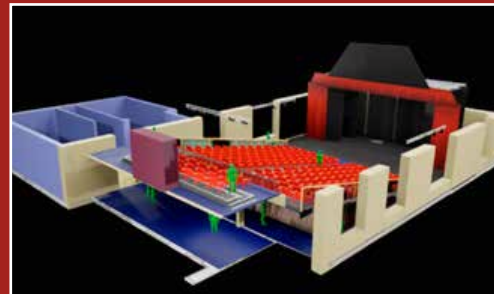
Since the last report, Hayley Brown has also stepped down as a Director, but I am delighted to welcome two new Board members, Ian Fosskett and Lyn Robson. As ever, all of our Directors have been working tirelessly on your behalf to support the Trust's vision of making Morpeth a better place to live, work and visit.

I must also pay tribute to Mike Willis. During the period covered by this report Mike was able to embark on a sabbatical period of leave from his 'day' job which has also taken him away from the Trust for a well-deserved opportunity to recharge his batteries. Mike has been a director since 2016. In his absence, I have been appointed by the Board as Acting Chair.

Finally, I must acknowledge the hard work and commitment of our admin team, the largely unseen enablers of so much of the Trust's activities and achievements. The skill and dedication of Linda Wilson and Julie Whiteman have been key to realising so many of the Trust's achievements.

Richard Burrows, *Temp. Chair GMDT*

Interest Groups Reports



Arts & Culture Director's Report April 2024 - March 2025

Morpeth Book Festival

The 2025 book festival was our most successful festival. With a varied programme there was something for everyone from adults to children. Featuring novels on crime, history, poetry, and an action-packed programme for the children. Authors Mari Hannah, Gervase Phinn, Alistair Moffat, James Naughtie, Sara Cockerill and nationally known children's author Kjartan Poskitt and former MP Chris Mullens to name a few.

Reports from the over 800 plus attendees expressed a desire that we continue the book festival as this is becoming a popular and much anticipated annual event. The Morpeth Book Festival Team is currently working on the 2026 book festival which promises to be even better.

We depend on the support of volunteers and would invite anyone who would like to join the festival team or become a volunteer to please contact GMDT on info@gmdt.net or phone 01670-503866. If you are interested in supporting this project, you can donate via our crowdfunding page.

Morpeth Community Cinema

In January 2025 David Warman handed over organisation of the cinema to Philip Kramer. David had spent nine years at the helm, a fruitful period in which the cinema became well established, for which he is to be greatly thanked. The cinema is supported by 12 volunteers.

Since the beginning of 2025 we have shown to full, or almost full houses, *The Critic*, *The Apprentice*, *Conclave*, *A Complete Unknown* and *Wilding*, to mark Wansbeck Green Week. This last showing was accompanied by a short film, *A World of My Own*, charting John Braine's return to Morpeth in 1969, where he had worked whilst writing *Room at The Top*, together with a short intermission with ice creams, which proved a great success. The opportunity to repeat this format is limited by the length of the main feature, unless we start the programme 30 minutes earlier; this is currently under consideration.

Consideration has been given to inviting amateur film makers to submit short films to be shown together with the main feature, with the potential to build on that to run a prize competition for such films. It is more complicated than it seems as these films will not have been certified by the British Board of Film Censors. The upshot is that permission to show each film will have to be obtained from the licencing authority for the premises, Northumberland County Council. That is being investigated at the moment.

St James Hall is provided for 9 viewings free of charge, as part of support for the Community Cinema from the Morpeth Town Council.

Morpeth Performing Arts Centre

Over the past 3 years the Morpeth Performing Arts team have evaluated 3 potential sites in Morpeth. After extensive studies and site visit all presented potential problems and had to be discounted.

We are currently very close to agreeing on a site. If additional studies confirm the building can be modified to incorporate a professional venue for cinema, music, performance of dance, theatre plus additional space for Community groups such as the Morpeth Music Society, Pantomime Society and other community groups.

We will be receiving a feasibility study from Northumbria University which will prove the viability of a performing arts venue and this plus the additional surveys will allow us to secure funding. If you are interested in supporting this project, you can donate via our crowdfunding page.

Picnic in the park

The 2026 Picnic is scheduled for Sunday 11th July 2025. A lot of work goes into planning and setting up the Picnic in the Park everyone hopes this year the weather will be kind to us.

Frank Rescigno
Arts & Culture Director

Heritage Interest Group Report April 2024 - March 2025

The Interest Group's primary aims are to identify and facilitate delivery of heritage projects, or heritage elements within wider projects, which sustain and enhance the Morpeth area, and to support other organisations involved in heritage activity both locally and nationally.

With resources of funding and manpower still not anywhere matching pre-Covid levels, the chief focus for the year was the co-ordination of a range of special events and building openings for September's national Heritage Open Days, with no new projects in the pipeline. We also provided input into the Signage and Interpretation projects described elsewhere. As well as holding our own group meetings at the GMDT office in the railway station, we met with the organisations of the **Morpeth Heritage Network** at its very useful quarterly sessions in the Chantry Bagpipe Museum to exchange information, news and views on heritage and planning matters.

GMDT has always supported the springtime annual festival of traditional culture, **Morpeth Northumbrian Gathering**, this year through in-kind administrative and stewarding functions. Around 2,500 audience members and participants attended the 54 well-received musical and other artform events staged over three days in April 2024 in all the town's central halls and outdoor spaces, including Morpeth Castle. Luckily a council decision to end Sunday bookings of the Town Hall, jeopardizing the festival HQ and many events and revealed only seven weeks before the festival, was reversed, though the restriction was subsequently implemented, severely affecting preparations for the next Gathering, due in April 2025.

Our invaluable staff member Julie Whiteman again gave sterling service co-ordinating the town's events for September's **Heritage Open Days**, liaising with building and event managers and the national HODs website and publicity team, creating posters, advising on risk assessments, distributing documents and equipment and collating evaluations. A new Morpeth Heritage Walk was



a big hit among the 14 organised events receiving a total of 1029 visitors thanks to 376 volunteering hours. Highest attendances were at Morpeth Clock Tower 131, St. James Morpeth, 62, Heritage Walks 40, Town Treasures 30, Morpeth Woollen Worthies exhibition 103. During the year Carol Elliott has now stepped forward to take on HODs on a voluntary basis, a very welcome offer.

Julie Whiteman's retirement from GMDT will leave a big gap, especially with her involvement in the Heritage Open Day event. Hopefully someone will step forward to take on her role and ensure the Heritage Interest Group grows in the years to come.

Kim Bibby-Wilson
Director and Chair

Environment Director's Report March 2025

Information boards project:

We have completed our Information boards project in partnership with KEVI students. In July 2024, 3 new information boards were erected in St Marys Churchyard (War Graves, Notable Morpethians, Lych Gate).

In October 2024, a new Admiral Lord Collingwood information board was erected at High Stanners, in March 2025 a new William Turner information board at Carlisle Park and in March 2025, with the support of Morpeth Town Council who erected it, a new Tommy fields information board on the banks of the River Wansbeck. It is our intention to put this project forward for NCC's 2025 July Love Northumberland award, Urban Project category.

This project has been very rewarding and has been enjoyed by everyone involved, especially the 9 KEVI students who supported the project. Our sincere thanks to KEVI teacher Sheila Clark for her support, Darren Turner Graphics design, NCC IT team for the creation of the websites behind the Navilens code and NCC Signage team for the making and erection of the signs.

Funding has been obtained for the next set of information boards. In 2024-25 we are working on delivering new boards for Morpeth Railway Station, St Robert's Church and Collingwood House and KEVI School, the latter 2 working in partnership with KEVI's 2024 YR12 students. NCC funding will cover the cost of replacing a lost information board in Bothal Woods as well as additional boards in 2026 – our thanks go to NCC County Councillors Richard Wearmouth, David Bawn and John Beynon for their support.



Railway Station landscape – front and rear:

Work on landscape projects has continued. The Station Adoption/Front (led by Hugh Edmundson, in partnership with Morpeth Lions, Rotary and Morpeth Litter Group) has continued to enhance the bedding at the Railway Station. In March 2025 Northern Rail landscaped the area where the portacabin ticket office was located and added 2 new benches – it is hoped to put up a larger picnic table in the months to come. The borders by the rear paths have given us a lovely display of colour, especially the hundreds of primula donated by NCC Carlisle Park team and planted by GMDT Environment.



The new railway station information board will be erected in the new Northern Rail landscaped area.

Tree planting: Our tree planting project took place in November with over 200 new saplings planted – this is now an annual event working with Northumberland Rivers Trust coordinator who has plans to create a new wood in Northumberland. Would you like to be involved in our next tree planting event?

Tree guard removal: In March 2025 a new project has started working in partnership with NCC where we have teams from GMDT Environment and Morpeth Litter group removing tree guards along Morpeth's northern bypass – over 750 were removed in our inaugural 3-day event – this will continue throughout 2025. Would you like to be involved in our next session?

Garden Project: Another new project has started – working in partnership with NCC librarian Sarah Kennedy-Robson where we are looking to adopt the gardens along the side of the new leisure centre. In October 2024, £600 of spring bulbs were planted with the help from Morpeth Lions and Morpeth Litter Group volunteers. Did you see the lovely display of tete a tetes, daffodils and crocuses this spring? This project will look to have the 4 centre beds fully adopted by groups by mid 2025. Would you like to get involved by helping GMDT's Environment section adopt a bed?



Morpeth Litter Group: (led by Dai Richards, and in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy) Litter blitz activities restarted in February 2025. Last year 133 people came along to the litter blitzes – keeping Morpeth Town Centre litter-free. Our sincere thanks to everyone who comes along. GMDT continues to support the teams in the fight against litter. If you'd like to be involved, send an email to dai_richards@btinternet.com At the recent litter blitz at Castle Close, 18 people collected 75 bags of litter.

Footpath improvement: This project will involve the identification of damaged fences, paths etc along the many walks around Morpeth. A number of issues have been reported to NCC – we will be monitoring progress in 2025. If you're interested in taking this on, please email dai_richards@btinternet.com.

Dai Richards
Environment Interest Group Director



GMDT Activities and Partnership Working

Games Club

GMDT worked in partnership with Morpeth Library and during 2021-2022 obtained funding to purchase some soft furnishings and table top games. A GMDT volunteer runs sessions every Thursday from 11am till 12.30pm. Games include cards, scrabble, dominoes and Rummikub. Attendance is flexible and you can just turn up 5 minutes before the session so groups can be organised. If you would like to co-ordinate a second group please get in touch.

Volunteer Opportunities

The Trust is always on the look out for new volunteers looking for an interest in helping maintain and improve the attractiveness and vitality of their local community. Volunteers can engage in a wide range of activities and roles including helping organise and run the larger projects of the regular Community Cinema, the Annual Book Festival, or the summer event of Picnic in the Park. For those interested in the environment there is always a project where volunteers who want to make a difference can give of their time from an hour a week to committing a regular amount of time to a longer project. For those interested in the Heritage of Morpeth there are many means of showcasing our towns many assets and interesting history. The signage project is one example of how improvements can be made to highlight the town's history and how people have contributed

not just to the town but society in general. One of our volunteers said I volunteer for the Trust because I want to be a more active part of the community in our lovely town. I enjoy meeting people and being involved with initiatives that help contribute to the quality of life in Morpeth. It suits me to work on projects rather than commit to regular tasks, and I enjoy the "buzz" when an event is being planned and carried out.

The Repair Shed (formerly The Human Shed)

A partnership project with Barnabas Safe & Sound, is now all set up with equipment and tools funded by NCC Community Chest. There have been open events to showcase the venue and activities over the year. There is a regular group of people going along on a weekly basis, who are doing various projects either based on what they want to do or what comes up as a need in the community. The space has also been used by Barnabas Safe and Sound to deliver bike maintenance workshops and to make bird boxes during their school holiday programmes. The 'Shed' had been promoted to other groups such as Contact Mental Health, Vision Northumberland, the Morpeth Lions and Morpeth Town Council so that they can pass on information to their members/ other community groups. If you would like to know more please get in touch or have a look <https://youtu.be/-4XOINDaTQQ>

Morpeth Train Station

Thanks to the sterling work of our admin team, Julie and Linda, the trust has continued to make progress in gaining an understanding and experience of managing Benjamin Green House at Morpeth Station. Taking on the tasks of managing the building from the previous managing agents has not been an easy task, but employing a managing agent had become a luxury that could no longer be afforded.

Good working relationships have been established with a range of contractors who provide maintenance to the various building systems and with those who provide a repair service when problems arise. Importantly, we also have good relations with our tenants and with Northern Trains, our immediate landlord.

One of the problems identified during the year was that the electricity meters were not all fit for purpose, so some of them are to be replaced. As we operate as part of a 'live' railway station, and the work requires the main electrical supply to be switched off, the work will have to be done out of hours, when the station is closed to the public. This means between the hours of 00.01 and 05.00 – so it will be a sleepless night for some. At the time of writing there are two office units that are vacant and available to let. Anyone who may be interested is invited to contact the office at the number below.

Morpeth Talking Newspaper

continues to record every 2 weeks. The team of volunteers include members of Morpeth Methodist Church, Morpeth Lions, Morpeth Rotary, Mitford Church, Kings Avenue Reading Team and the U3A, who read articles including items from Morpeth Herald and Inside Morpeth. The readings are saved to memory sticks and are distributed free of charge to those with vision impairment. If you would like further details, please contact the group via info@gmt.org

Morpeth Railway Station Benjamin Green House Office Space For lease



☎ 01670 503866



Greater Morpeth Development Trust

Financial Report 12 months to March 2024

Statement of Financial activities for year ended 31st March 2025

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	2025 Total funds £	2024 Total funds £
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM				
Donations and legacies	6,435	5,443	11,878	10,698
Other trading activities	2,049	10,443	12,492	10,065
Other income	57,235	-	57,235	55,451
Total	65,719	15,886	81,605	76,214
EXPENDITURE ON				
Raising funds	-	-	-	1,301
Charitable Activities	16,725	141,440	158,165	195,916
Total expenditure	16,725	141,440	158,165	197,217
NET EXPENDITURE AND NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS	48,994	-125,554	-76,560	-121,003
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS				
Total Funds brought Forward	52,377	1,616,938	1,669,315	1,790,318
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD	101,371	1,491,384	1,592,755	1,669,315

Balance Sheet as at 31st March 2025

	£	£	2025 £	2024 £
FIXED ASSETS				
Tangible assets			1,578,107	1,660,325
CURRENT ASSETS				
Debtors			-	-
Cash at bank & in hand			37,471	52,356
Total	-	-	52,356	52,356
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year			22,823	43,366
Net current assets			14,648	8,990
Total assets less current liabilities	-	-	1,592,755	1,669,315
Net assets	-	-	-	-
Funds of the charity				
Restricted income funds			1,491,384	1,616,938
Unrestricted income funds			101,371	52,377
Total charity funds			1,592,755	1,669,315

Financial Report

Morpeth Railway Station has taken over seven years from inception to completion and has been a major undertaking for a Charity of our size and could not have been delivered without the support of a portfolio of funders who provided the capital to realise the opportunity of rejuvenating a key asset for the town.

Over recent years given the massive negative impact of covid to this project, and the turnover of staff, the trust has been working hard to ensure that the

railway station project continues to be viable, and indeed to contribute to our core costs, so that eventually we will become self sustaining.

Over the past year particularly, we have stabilised the trust financially, and implemented new robust working practises and procedures. So not only have we been able to reinstate a grade 11 listed building, we have also been able to deliver a sustainable ongoing project in collaboration with Northern Rail etc.

This places us in a good position now to begin to look at new potential projects in our town to help make Morpeth a better place to live and work.

M D Willis
Retiring Chair

NB £1.5M shown as total funds is not cash funds we have but is an accounting requirement showing a 25 year straight line depreciation of the £2.3M invested in the Morpeth Station. The Morpeth station is owned by Network Rail.

Kim Bibby-Wilson – the GMDT Years

'The Board have asked me to write an account of my involvement with Greater Morpeth Development Trust which is rather hard to summarise but here goes. It stems from my commitment to Morpeth and its heritage and prosperity, inherited from my historian and newspaper columnist father (himself the Morpeth-born son of a one-time borough councillor and grandson of the long-term borough surveyor who among other things refurbished the Town Hall in the 1920s) and my Jarrow-born mother, a third generation wool shop proprietor (in her youth an active member of the Morpeth Minstrels wartime concert party, later an all-singing, all-dancing mainstay of the Chamber of Trade and also a wry commentator on the Morpeth scene through her wickedly incisive poems published in the Herald).

Before Castle Morpeth Borough Council (CMBC) set up its Castles, Woods and Water (CWW) project to regenerate the river corridor and enhance council services, and which led to the setting up of GMDT to continue its strategies and themes, I was already closely involved in earlier town initiatives whose roles GMDT eventually took over. These included Morpeth Pride, Morpeth Initiative, Friends of the Coliseum, which evolved

into Morpeth District Arts Trust, which I also represented as Culture Observer at the relevant council committee. I took part in steering groups working on the formation and constitution of a development trust, and was a founding board member from GMDT's inception, also giving input into cross-over CMBC/GMDT events such as the Morpeth Walking Festival.

Although the director for heritage, I have been from the start very active in the other interest groups as well as the original three multi-disciplinary cross-interest Signage teams covering heritage, environment and civic themes. After a rocky first year GMDT found its feet, with a committed board, a strong staff team, young people's work placements and, most importantly for heritage, a highly dedicated and ring-fence-funded Heritage Officer. Until 2011, for most of the post's duration, this was the amazing Tamsin Lilley, who did so much in those first years to produce a coherent strategy and create a vibrant programme of events, exhibitions and oral history projects in conjunction with local groups and agencies. Our activities responded to opportunities and commemorations such as the Collingwood Festival (later resulting in the erection of the Collingwood Bust in the

Butter Market), the Crash Camp community, the 2008 Flood, the Emily Davison centenary and of course collaborations with the long-standing annual festival of traditions the Morpeth Northumbrian Gathering.

With Tamsin at the helm GMDT took over Morpeth Antiquarian Society's original participation in the national Heritage Open Days. From one or two events each year, we increased the number of participating buildings and co-ordinated a vastly expanded festival, making Morpeth the largest provider of HODs events in Northumberland at the time. Tamsin also liaised with councils and local heritage-related groups and individuals to form the Morpeth Heritage Network which continues to meet to this day.

One of GMDT's greatest achievements was the refurbishment of the Town Hall, completed in time for CMBC to hand over ownership of the modernised listed building to the new unitary authority in 2009. I was part of the very active joint steering group made up of CMBC and GMDT representatives to co-ordinate and oversee the phases of the works needed, firstly to make the roof sound and then upgrade the facilities (within the restrictions of a heritage building) and spring-clean the

fabric of the town's central and iconic community and civic hub to make it fit for modern-day purposes. This all culminated in a dense programme of celebratory events which fully inhabited and enlivened all the Town Hall spaces over a packed weekend, with actor Ray Alexander coming all the way from York in the character of 1714 architect Sir John Vanbrugh to cut the ribbon to re-open "his" building. (We're delighted Ray plans to return to Morpeth for the 2026 Gathering in April.)

While GMDT has recently carried out other important heritage-based projects such as the renovation of the railway station, I am perhaps most proud of my direct contribution towards upholding the health of the Town Hall, an invaluable community asset, ensuring its continued existence and continuing to highlight the important role it plays for Morpeth's residents and visitors.

Diary date

Morpeth Book Festival
Saturday 21st and Sunday 22nd March 2026