Greater Morpeth Development Trust

Regeneration of town & countryside

www.gmdt.net

GMDT Annual Report

GMDT Annual Report April 2025 to March 2026

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 Rail, 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 5676236, Charity Number 1117036, VAT Number 101 6832 50

Chair Report

Hello everyone,

For those who haven't met me before my name is Tamsin Sharp and I have been Chair of GMDT since June 2025

2026 is a special year as it's the 20th Anniversary this year for GMDT!

The year has been one of ups and downs which is often the case in Charities.

You can see from our Interest group reports how much has been achieved by Board members and Volunteers so I won't go into specifics, suffice to say that our achievements as a Trust are impressive. With our Environmental work, another fantastically successful Book Festival, our well attended and popular Community Cinema and our input to and organisation of Heritage Open Days. We are still endeavouring to obtain funding to progress a Performing Arts Centre in Morpeth. Grateful thanks to the Morpeth Pantomime Society for their donation of £3,000 a good start for our funding for the Centre.

Another year where our financial status has been at the top of our agenda. There have been great efforts and lots of man hours made by Dai Richards to look at areas where money could be saved within our budget and make service provision more efficient and relative to our needs. Dai has made a number of improvements and with Leanne Baxter, our Station Manager & Lease Co-Ordinator continues to review costs.

Tracey Brown, Financial Co-Ordinator, together with Kevin Suttie our new Financial Advisor, have improved our financial recording systems and it is hoped that next year we can keep our main financial systems in house.

It has been recognised that the amount of time spent maintaining the railway station is increasing year on year as the building gets older and the use of it increases. We have been working with Northern Rail and Network Rail to obtain more support financially to assist with the running of the station and discussions are continuing. We have obtained funding from the Community Rail Network Fund to assist with maintenance and hope to make application for further funding in 2027.

We have managed to lease 6 of our 7 rooms and hope that by the end of the year we will have all 7 occupied the first time since taking over the station resulting in a consistent income.

2025 has been a year of comings and goings in terms of Board members and staff. Linda & Julie, our support staff left us to retire in 2025 and Tracey Brown and Leanne Baxter have made a great job of stepping into their shoes. Both have made a huge impact within the administration and day to day running of the station. Ian Foskett left the Trust after a short spell as Heritage Director and Lyn Robson then took, over the role.

We started our new year with Frank Rescigno temporarily taking over as Chair until I took over the role in June 2025 and Dai becoming our Vice Chair. Richard Burrow has been with the Trust for 10 years and decided to give us notice of his intention to retire in July 2026. Richard had many roles with the Trust and with a vast amount of knowledge and experience, he is a big miss ……although often contacted to help with various issues albeit when he is not off on his bicycle somewhere!

Last but not least, our volunteers. We as a Trust could not achieve consistent successful work and events throughout the year without our volunteers. It never fails to surprise me just how our volunteers are prepared to turn up in all weathers, (Dai's tree cover removal is testament to that), work all weekend at the Book Festival, and support the Community Cinema goers again in all weathers. One particular volunteer has, with support from Kim Bibby-Wilson organised and ran the Heritage Open Days this year increasing all the visitor numbers.

This is also my last year with the Trust as my everyday workload increases so unfortunately, I cannot commit the amount of time needed to do the role of Chair justice. I hope that the Trust continues with its amazing contribution to the lives of residents and visitors to Morpeth thank you for allowing me to be part of that ethos.

A huge thank you to our volunteers, admin staff and Board members for all your time, energy, ideas and support to the Trust in this the 20th year of the Greater Morpeth Development Trust.

Tamsin Sharp, Chair of Greater Morpeth Development Trust

Heritage Interest Group Report

Since Kim Biby Wilson left GMDT as a Director and Heritage Group Lead we were without a lead for several months until our AGM in October 2025 when Ian Foskett agreed to take over the role how-ever he left the Trust at the beginning of the year and I took over role.

We again took part in the Heritage Open Days in September 2025. Carol Elliott, one of the Trust volunteers who had been with us for some time agreed to take on the task of organising the open days with Kim Bibby Wilson.

Carol has made a brilliant job of the organisation together with minimal admin support from Leanne when needed.

The numbers show an increase of 283 visitors (see below table) across all the venues which is very encouraging and that the Heritage of Morpeth is still an important issue to many.

Thank you to Kim for being there when we needed advice.

Hopefully over the coming year, the Trust shall be able to do more work to raise the profile of Heritage in Morpeth.

2025 HODs	Visitor Numbers	Volunteer Hours	2024 Visitors
Antiquarian Exhibition	396	114	305
Town Hall Treasures	51	10	31
St Mary's Morpeth	51		26
St Mary Mag. Mitford	24	24	23
St Andrews Bothal	30		not open
Collingwood Society	41		49
Poets	16	18	15
Pipers	114		n/a
Walking Tours	49	5	40
Masonic Hall	16	12	not open
St James the Great	38	30	62
Clock Tower	135	25	131
St George's	20		18
Manchester St Hall	25		23
Totals	**1006**		**723**

Heritage Open Days 2025/26

The pink banners and bunting of Heritage Open Days certainly brightened up a very wet Saturday and gave a feeling of celebration to our town, and over a thousand people shared our history and heritage over the four-day event.

The visitor numbers for this year increased, from 723 last year to 1006 this year. The number for this year includes 114 visitors to the Chantry to hear the Piping Society, which may overlap with the Poetry Society visitor numbers, but even so, there was an increase in footfall despite facing a number of problems.

The dreadful weather on the Saturday may have affected numbers on that day, and we lost our main sources of local publicity: *Inside Morpeth* magazine is no longer published at the right time, and *The Morpeth Herald* did not give our events the coverage we had hoped. We did, however, advertise on Facebook, and distributed leaflets to cafes in the town as well as the Library and Chantry. We may need to expand this to more venues next year, and look for other kinds of publicity. Walkers on James Boyd's tours made donations of £62, which he passed on to The Trust towards the cost of publicity next year.

Feedback from the events was very positive, everything went smoothly and visitors commented on how welcoming the guides were, especially in the churches. Comments included: "We have visited places we wouldn't normally see"; "Loved to learn more about the bridges of Morpeth"; "The guides were very friendly and helpful. Top marks!"; "Welcoming volunteers"; "Peaceful, ancient and interesting"; "Friendly, informative welcome from the volunteer". The Town Treasures were on display for just one day and proved so popular we hope a second day might be possible next year. The Historic Walking Tours were fully booked, and it is hoped that an additional, easy-access walk might be offered next year.

Julie Whiteman's retirement from GMDT will leave a gap, as she gave so much time and expertise to the organisation and support of our Heritage Open Days. We will need support from the office as well as volunteer input next year, starting as early as March.

Heritage Open Days continue to be a successful way of showcasing the wonderful history of Greater Morpeth, and obviously give visitors pleasure, information and a warm welcome.

Arts & Culture 2025/26

Morpeth Book Festival

The 2026 Morpeth Book Festival was our must successful. An award-winning line up of authors and TV personalities plus the added a sports evening at the Morpeth Rugby Club featuring the former Newcastle player, physiotherapist and part of Alan Shear's management team, Paul Ferris attracted 1000 book lovers. The successful weekend event was held in St. Georges Church.

The 2026 list included MARI Hannah, Steph McGovern, Sally Magnuson, T. M. Logan, former Labour minister Alan Johnson, Alistair Moffat and former Labour MP Chris Mullin, B.A. Paris, Ret. Major General Tim Hodgetts to name a few.

Thanks to our major sponsor Zonic Holdings Ltd, Maximize Education and Rutherford's Department Store the book festival committee and all of our volunteers for making the 2026 MBF so successful.

We are currently working on the 2027 book festival which promises to be even better.

If you are interested in joining us as a volunteer, please send your details to info@gmdt.org





MORPETH PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE

The multipurpose performing arts centre is progressing however slowly. This will be a multi- purpose facility with a varied offering of performance theatre, cinema, dance, comedy nights, music, pantomime, community groups and much more.
We will be looking to the community for their moral and financial support together with funding opportunities as this facility will be for the people of Morpeth
We have been on this particular journey since July 2020. We are confident we will achieve the necessary funds to make the Morpeth Performing Arts centre a reality.

MORPETH CINEMA

Morpeth Cinema has been operating for 16 years and is still proving a popular event for 9 months of the year. Run by Phil Kramer and helped by a group of 9 volunteers. Usually there are about 80-90 tickets sold for each showing. The demographics have changed since the cinema started it's not just the elderly that attend now but those in middle age. This seems to be because of the choice of films and that Phil makes the evening an event not just a film showing. Our thanks to Morpeth Town Council for donating the use of St. James Hall for 9 Fridays a year and to Phil Kramer for the continued success of the cinema. A weekend of cinema is a proposal suggested by Phil which is something we can run in the future as part of the Performing Arts Centre in Morpeth.

PICNIC IN THE PARK

The annual picnic is scheduled every year on the second Sunday in July. It is a free family event in Morpeth Carlisle Park. The excellent summer weather saw 3000 picnickers enjoy the many activities. The highlight of the day was the free BBQ sponsored by Morpeth Churches together and organised by the people of New Life Christan Church Music was provided by the KEVI Steel Pan Band to the enjoyment of all. Children were entertained by a magician, Little Movers and the dance for older children by a local academy.
It is thanks to Vertu Honda, Coca Cola, IMMI of Coopies Lane ad Stuart Parker Estate Agents who help make this event possible






Frank Rescigno, Director of the Morpeth Book Festival and the Arts and Culture Interest Group

GMDT Environment Annual Report

Another successful year during which the Environment volunteer numbers have increased. We have taken on a new project (Tree Guard removal) and the other projects have matured and progress – moving to closure.

The Morpeth Litter Group has completed 9 litter picks (523 people picking up 637 bags) between April 2025 and March 2026. Clearing the annual bonfire by Castle close alone cleared 80 bags of detritus. One of our volunteers planted wild flowers seeds and the difference was astounding:

	
Castle Close Bonfire – February 2026	June 2026 – post some sprinkling of seeds

We have been successful with a bid for funding from National Lottery for a repeat of the BIN IT TO WIN Poster where we ask all schools to enter into a competition where new posters are placed on our street bins to encourage people to not litter. With funding in place this will start in September 2026. Last time we did this in 2022/23 we had over 530 entries received. Thanks to MTC for their support in updating the posters on the bins.

Hugh Edmundson's partnership with Morpeth Lions / Rotary and MLG, in improving the front of the Railway station has continued to strive, beds are looking lovely this year, plus with the support for Northern Rail the new benches put down which are very popular to the rail travellers.

The rear of the Railway station has been again given us a beautiful display of spring bulbs – more crocus planted in October 2025 bring the total to about 10,000 bulbs. Our thanks to NCC Carlisle Park team who donated 1000 wallflowers which were

planted in August and gave us a lovely Autumn colour display. Volunteers deweeding have received some lovely “thank you” from the public.




Our Signage project for 2024/25 has been delayed but is now moving towards closure – this summer we expect to erect new Information boards for the following:

- St Roberts church
- St James Church and Boys Brigade
- Ha Hill
- KEVI school
- Bothal Mill – replace lost board

With the help of funds from Northern Rail, we have erected a new Information board at Morpeth Railway station – this is located near the 2 new benches in the gravelled area.

In late 2025 NCC awarded us another amount of money – with the money we will deliver the following new Information boards:

- Newminster Abbey – planned erection Autumn 2026
- Mitford Castle
- Wannie Line / Craik Park
- Morpeth Court House

Tree planting has continued in November with over 600 saplings planted in a new wood in Northumberland – this is now an annual event.

The garden to the south of the library building was block planted by the Council but not maintained and had become unattractive. Three GMDT volunteers started work on 25 February 2026 focussing on 8 of the 15 sections in the border, creating a Physic garden in the eastern walled garden and supporting planting in the woodland adjacent to the river. By 31 March volunteer hours totalled 50. Work in the 8 sections next to the building entailed weeding, moving some of the existing plants to create a more interesting and attractive border, creating a cottage garden and an edibles section. Many plants were donated by the volunteers and exiting plants utilised to minimise expenditure from the Crowd funded budget. The area is definitely looking much tidier – this is embryonic and, in the years, ahead we should see a beautiful display for flowers. It is recommended to go and see the £600 of spring bulbs that bloomed in Spring 2025 – with more bulbs being planted (thanks to Morpeth Lions, Morpeth Litter Group and Rotary donations) each autumn for 3 years – you can expect the display to get better and better.

In 2025 we supported the NCC NEAT team in the clearance of Tree Guards along the stretch of the Northern Bypass from Whorral Bank to the A1 junction. During the period 79 people put in 198 hours effort to clear the guards – it is estimated over 30,000 hard plastic tree guards have been removed.

Early 2026 we have started to look at reprinting the old GMDT Walking maps – these are still popular to the visitors of Morpeth. WE are looking a reviewing and updating 8 routes in the next 6 months with plans to reprint in summer 2026. The targeted routes are:

- Bothal Heritage walk
- Longhirst Lope
- Heritage Hike
- Two Rivers Walk
- Twin Ford Walk
- Longhirst to Morpeth
- Railway Heritage Walk
- Collingwood Common

During the year the following Environmental Interest Group meetings took place:

- 11th September 2025
- 11th December 2025 (AGM)
- 20th March 2026

Dai Richards, Director of Environment Interest Group

GMDT Activities & 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

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://youtube/-4XOlNDaTQQ

Morpeth Talking Newspaper

The 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@gmdt.org

Volunteer Opportunities

The Trust is always on the lookout 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.

Financial Report

Statement of Activities Year ended 31 March 2026

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	2026 Total funds	2025 Total funds
Income and endowments				
Donations and legacies	8,850		8,850	11 ,878
Other trading activities	13,562	20,009	33,571	12,492
Other income	54,787	_	54, 787	57,235
Total income	**77,199**	**20,009**	**97,208**	**81 ,605**
Expenditure				
Expenditure on charitable activities	27,797	132,585	160,382	158,165
Total expenditure	**27,797**	**132,585**	**160,382**	**158,165**
Net expenditure and net movement in funds	49,402	(112,576)	(63, 174)	(76,560)
Reconciliation of funds				
Total funds brought forward	101,371	1,491 ,384	1,592,755	1,669,315
Total funds carried forward	**150,773**	1,378,808	**1,529,581**	**1,592,755**

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