

**REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARIES
COMMISSIONER FOR THE PROPOSED DISTRICT OF
ANTRIM AND NEWTOWNABBEY**

Trevor Rue, Assistant Local Boundaries Commissioner

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Section One: **Background and Statutory Framework**

Background

- 1.1 The commencement of the current review of local government boundaries in Northern Ireland was announced in a public notice on 3rd February 2021. The notice explained the role and remit of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner and advised that in due course she would publish provisional recommendations and might cause a public hearing to be held in each of the current 11 local government districts. The notice and a subsequent information video placed on the Commissioner's website (www.lgbc-ni.org.uk) explained the process and the opportunities for participation in the consultation on the provisional recommendations.
- 1.2 The terms of the review are set out in Article 50 and Schedule 4 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 1972 as amended. Copies of the legislative framework are available on the Commissioner's website
- 1.3 The Commissioner's provisional recommendations with proposed boundaries and names of 11 districts and their 462 constituent wards were published on the Commissioner's website on 27th July 2021 and announced by way of public notice inviting comments on the proposals made. The consultation was launched on Citizen Space to enable ease of public inspection and maximum public participation. Accessibility points for online access to the proposals and the consultation portal were facilitated at public facilities including Council premises and public libraries by the Commissioner's team in partnership with local councils and with Libraries Northern Ireland. Hard copies of any part of the proposals or the associated maps were made available on request. Other accessibility requirements were promoted on the Commissioner's website including language translation, braille and sign language.
- 1.4 The consultation portal was open for eight weeks and closed on 21st September. Details of the programme of public hearings were notified by press release, social media channels and on the Commissioner's website in September 2021.
- 1.5 All representations received were acknowledged and have been made available for inspection on the Commissioner's website. The Commissioner received five written representation specifically in respect of the proposals in the district of Antrim and Newtownabbey, all of which were submitted after the closing date.
- 1.6 I was appointed as an Assistant Commissioner by the Department of Communities on 1st August 2021. My task is to gather, assess and report on the representations made in relation to this proposed district of Antrim and Newtownabbey and to submit a report to the Commissioner, including my conclusions and recommendations, within four weeks of the end of the

relevant public hearing. I conducted a public hearing in this proposed district at the Theatre at The Mill, Newtownabbey on 8th October 2021.

- 1.7 The public hearing was staged in accordance with government guidance and public health recommendations in respect of the Covid-19 pandemic were observed. The number of people in the room at any one time was limited to 20 and alternative participation was facilitated by a simultaneous online interactive platform.

Public Hearing

- 1.8 The public hearing on the provisional proposals was attended in person by one individual, a local Councillor who spoke in a personal capacity. No one attended via the online platform. The hearing was facilitated in an informal and accessible manner and the participant was afforded a full opportunity to give his views.

My Report

- 1.9 This report presents and addresses the views of the interested parties who made written representations after the deadline set for submission of such representations as well as those of the interested party who attended the public hearing. It seems to me that the relevant provisions of Schedule 4 to the 1972 Local Government Act do not preclude the Commissioner from taking late representations into account. I have set out details the objections to her recommendations and the counter-proposals. I have also set out my conclusions on the issues raised, having regard to the legislative framework of this review. The submissions considered in the report are listed in Section Seven.
- 1.10 As part of my research for this report I have studied and tested the areas of the district where alternative boundaries have been proposed using the geographical information mapping systems of the Land and Property Services of Northern Ireland. This has been facilitated by the staff of Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland and I am indebted to them for their technical assistance. Where I refer to numbers of electors in particular areas, the data relate to the enumeration date of 4th January 2021.

Section Two: **District Boundaries**

- 2.1 The Commissioner's approach to district boundary lines is one of minimum intervention. She has, however, proposed that the boundary between the districts of Antrim and Newtownabbey and Mid and East Antrim be altered at Farm Lodge Road and Upper Greenisland Road to take account of relatively minor defacements to the existing line caused by new housing. She considers this to be a compelling reason to change the boundary. The change would result in the removal of nine electors from the Jordanstown ward. There have been no objections to the proposed district boundary.
- 2.2 I therefore recommend that the Commissioner's proposed district boundary line at Farm Lodge Road and Upper Greenisland Road is affirmed.

Section Three: **Ward Boundaries**

- 3.1 The Alliance Party commented that the changes proposed by the Commissioner would rationalise the boundary between Mallusk and Hightown Wards. It said this is particularly welcome as it creates a clear dividing line along Mayfield High Street. The movement of The Poplars and Rogan Manor developments from Mallusk Ward to Ballyhenry Ward would also help to address the rapidly expanding population in Mallusk Ward.
- 3.2 The Councillor who attended the hearing is a member of the Democratic Unionist Party but spoke in a personal capacity. He also noted that since the last review of local government boundaries, there has been considerable development in Mallusk Ward and an increase in electors relative to other wards in the district. He also accepted the need to rejig its boundaries. In her provisional recommendations, the Commissioner proposed that the neighbouring wards of Hightown and Ballyhenry could take some of the surplus. The Councillor agreed with that approach in principle but had different ideas as to which areas should be transferred.
- 3.3 The Councillor noted that although due to urban sprawl the existing Mallusk Ward had become much more urban in feel, it nevertheless includes the peripheral areas of Roughfort, Boghill, Ballycraigy and Ballyvesey. It is still much more rural than Hightown, he argued. It was the urban/rural distinction to which he wished to draw attention.
- 3.4 The Councillor explained that while there are long-established and settled communities in some places, in others individuals have an affinity to the urban area they have come from and this is reflected in their engagement with community and retail facilities. Elected representatives from urban and rural areas have differing priorities and boundaries should reflect the need to ensure that people get the best representation possible.
- 3.5 The Councillor welcomed the proposal to include more of the relatively new Mayfield development into the Hightown Ward. He said a large proportion of the people who now live in that area have an affinity to Glengormley rather than to the Greater Belfast area. He believed it would be beneficial also to include the Alderley development within Hightown. That development also has an affinity to the Glengormley urban area. This would make the Mayfield Link Road, which has no residential properties facing on to it, the dividing line between the Mallusk and Hightown Wards.
- 3.6 The Councillor stated that new development in the Hightown Ward is largely finished and the Glengormley Ward is also settled. By contrast, although the Mallusk Ward would shrink in area under the Commissioner's proposals, it is still growing in population. He said that over the next 10 years, the ward would experience significant additional development given the amount of

zoned land and land with outline planning permission. He told me that the Council recently granted approval for a further 300 homes in the ward.

- 3.7 The Councillor then referred to the area to the north east of the M2 motorway and to the north west of the A8(M) road. He said that this area, though close to metropolitan Newtownabbey, is nonetheless very rural. It continues to be comprised of farmland. He argued that, even though this area has not many electors, they have a rural affinity and are more suited to the Mallusk Ward than to the Ballyhenry Ward.
- 3.8 The Councillor had no objection to the proposal to transfer the relatively new Rogan Manor and Rogan Wood development, which lies to the south west of Antrim Road, from the Mallusk Ward into the Ballyhenry Ward, as its residents see themselves as orientated towards the urban Glengormley area. But, he maintained, it would be more logical to use the M2 major route through the area as the ward boundary than the single carriageway Ballycraig Road.
- 3.9 The Councillor noted that in her provisional recommendations the Commissioner used Park Road as a boundary between the Mallusk and Ballyhenry Wards. It was unfortunate in his view that under her proposals the small development known as The Poplars, being on the eastern side of Park Road, would go into Ballyhenry. He stated that that development is within the village of Mallusk and on the outer side of the City of Belfast Playing Fields and does not have a continuous footway connection to the urban area. He said that the polling place for the village of Mallusk is close to The Poplars but if the development were moved into Ballyhenry Ward, electors would have to go to an urban centre to vote.
- 3.10 The Councillor maintained it would be illogical to annex The Poplars into an urban area with which residents had little affinity. He argued that the development should be retained within Mallusk Ward given its geographical location. He suggested that part of Black Water, a watercourse which runs to the back of The Poplars, might be used as a boundary.
- 3.11 In considering the largely conflicting representations from the Alliance Party and the individual Councillor, I remind myself of the rules set out in Part III of Schedule 4 to the 1972 Act, in accordance with which recommendations of a Commissioner are to be made.
- 3.12 Among other things, these rules require:-
- that regard be had to the desirability of determining ward boundaries which are readily identifiable (Rule 14);
 - that a townland shall not, except where in the Commissioner's opinion it is unavoidable, be included partly in one ward and partly in another (Rule 15);
 - that regard be had to the size, population and physical diversity of the district and the desirability of proper representation of the rural and urban electorate (Rule 17); and

- that there shall, as far as is reasonably practicable having regard to Rule 17, be substantially the same number of local electors in each ward (Rule 19).
- 3.13 Within the urban area of Newtownabbey, townland boundaries have been overlain by development. Building plots and street layouts cut across townlands to the extent that old boundaries do not reflect modern realities and in some places are no longer identifiable on the ground. In consequence, the division of individual townlands between two or more wards is unavoidable in this area.
- 3.14 The Councillor's representations are predicated on the desirability of proper representation of the rural and urban electorate. This is a consideration to which I am required to have regard. While I do not believe that it would be possible to separate the district into exclusively urban and rural wards, I accept the Councillor's premise that the preliminary recommendations are capable of being amended to produce an improved urban/rural distinction.
- 3.15 Having inspected the area, I do not accept that it is desirable to run the boundary between the Hightown and Mallusk Wards along Mayfield High Street. That boundary would sever associated retail and service facilities, and more importantly a significant number of residential properties, from the rest of the Mayfield development.
- 3.16 While Alderley is a self-contained development, it abuts Mayfield and is similar in character to it. I have no good reason to doubt the evidence that Alderley residents, like those of Mayfield, have an affinity to Glengormley. In my opinion, Mayfield Link, a wide distributor road with no direct accesses to individual dwellings, would provide a readily identifiable ward boundary which would better respect the pattern of development in the area than the boundary currently proposed. The rear boundaries of the domestic gardens on the northern side of Alderley Place and the northern boundary of the open space known as Mayfield Park are also readily identifiable.
- 3.17 I appreciate that under the Commissioner's provisional recommendations a large swathe of urban development, including substantial residential areas to the west of Mayfield Link and to the north east and west of Hydepark Road, remains within Mallusk Ward. It seems that further urban development in the ward is expected in years to come. However, for the reasons I have given, I consider that the transfer from Mallusk Ward to Hightown Ward of the area depicted in Appendix A to this report, while not producing a perfectly clean break, would provide for improved representation of the rural and urban electorate. On the enumeration date, there were 184 electors in this area.
- 3.18 I have inspected the area bounded by the M2 and A8(M) and readily agree that it is overwhelmingly rural in ambiance. There is a small housing development adjacent to the intersection of Ballycraigy Road and Ballyvesey Road but it sits within, and is dominated by, open countryside. The M2 and the A8(M) would both provide strong, readily identifiable boundaries. I agree

with the Councillor that the area depicted in Appendix B to this report should be retained within Mallusk Ward. On the enumeration date, there were 90 electors in this area.

- 3.19 Having also inspected The Poplars, I judge that it too has a rural ambiance. It is small in scale and does not abut any other housing area. The dwellings are enfolded in landscaping and rural in design and appearance. They are well separated by industrial premises and open spaces from the large-scale urban development on the northern side of Mallusk Road. I consider that this group of dwellings is better related to developments on the western side of Park Road, including the housing area known as Park Manor, and that it should therefore remain in Mallusk Ward.
- 3.20 During my inspection I noticed a small row of dwellings some distance to the south of The Poplars on a laneway which runs eastwards from Park Road. This housing group is, like The Poplars, discreetly placed in the surrounding landscape and rural rather than urban in character. I have therefore concluded that a strip of land to the east of Park Road, depicted in Appendix C, should remain within Mallusk Ward. Part of the Black Water stream, together with road and tree lines, would provide a readily identifiable boundary. On the enumeration date, there were 73 electors in this area.
- 3.21 I must now consider the requirement to have substantially the same number of local electors in each ward. In formulating her preliminary proposals, the Commissioner took the approach, with which I agree, that ward electorates within a variation of not more than 10% from the average in the district should be regarded as substantially the same.
- 3.22 The average number of electors per ward in Antrim and Newtownabbey District is 2523 and, on the Commissioner's approach, the permissible range is between 2271 and 2774. The net effect of the changes I am recommending would be to reduce the electorate of Ballyhenry Ward by 163 to 2541 and to reduce the electorate of Mallusk Ward by 21 to 2733. Both 2541 and 2733 lie within 10% of the average. The electorate of Hightown Ward would, however, increase by 184 to 2816. This figure lies outside the permissible range and I have therefore given consideration to whether there is scope for a compensatory transfer of electors out of Hightown Ward.
- 3.23 The Councillor's evidence identified Glengormley as an area with which many electors in Hightown Ward have an affinity. The existing boundary between the Hightown and Glengormley Wards runs along Antrim Road and the Commissioner's provisional recommendations do not propose to change that.
- 3.24 At the entrance to the city-bound section of Antrim Road from the Sandyknowes Roundabout (Junction 4 on the M2), there is a sign which says "Welcome to Glengormley". To my knowledge, both sides of Antrim Road from the roundabout at least as far as its junction with Ballyclare Road are commonly regarded as part of Glengormley.

- 3.25 I therefore see merit in transferring the properties on the south-western frontage of Antrim Road, and a small number of adjoining backland properties, from Hightown Ward into Glengormley Ward, as depicted in Appendix D. The area is defined using readily identifiable garden and plot boundaries. The number of electors affected by this change would be 146.
- 3.26 The compensatory transfer which I am recommending would reduce the electorate in Hightown Ward to 2670, which is within the permissible range. It would increase the electorate in Glengormley Ward by 146 to 2483, which is also within the permissible range.
- 3.27 I recommend as follows:-
- that land to the east of Mayfield Link and to the north of Mayfield High Street, including the Alderley development, identified on the map in Appendix A, is transferred from Mallusk Ward to Hightown Ward;
 - that land to north east of the M2 motorway and to the north west of the A8(M) road, identified on the map in Appendix B, is retained within Mallusk Ward;
 - that land to the east of Park Road, including The Poplars, identified on the map in Appendix C, is retained within Mallusk Ward; and
 - that land to the south west of Antrim Road, identified on the map in Appendix D, is transferred from Hightown Ward to Glengormley Ward.

Section Four: **Names of District and Wards**

- 4.1 I am aware that there have been representations concerning the adoption of a bilingual or trilingual naming policy for local government districts and wards across the whole of Northern Ireland. This is a matter for consideration by the Commissioner when she publishes her revised recommendations.
- 4.2 Several representations specific to the Antrim and Newtownabbey District sought recognition for the Irish language version of the district name, *Aontroim agus Baile Nua na Mainistreach*; and suggested *Baile Raghnaill* for Randalstown Ward. In my opinion, these suggestions should not be considered in isolation from an overall regional policy setting out the circumstances, if any, in which district and ward names in languages other than English should be adopted.
- 4.3 I therefore have no recommendations to make for changes to the naming of the district or its wards.

Section Five: **Other Issues**

- 5.1 The single representation which I received at the public hearing was concerned solely with ward boundaries and did not stray into other issues. Whilst the objector referred several times to district electoral divisions, he accepted that the future grouping of wards for local election purposes is not a matter for this review. The Alliance Party also made mention of district electoral divisions but I have discounted its references to this subject.
- 5.2 An individual representation noted that Newtownabbey is split between three constituencies. The current arrangement was said to result in poor accessibility to polling places for those living at the edge of wards and in the splitting of communities with shared interests. A distinction was drawn between the hilly and the less elevated parts of the Fairview, Carnmoney and Carnmoney Hill Wards. It was submitted that residents of those wards who live lower down the hill have things in common with people in Monkstown, Ballyduff and Rathcoole, such as bus routes and socio-economic concerns. It was asserted that the Commissioner's preliminary recommendations would make the existing problems worse.
- 5.3 The delineation of Parliamentary and Assembly constituencies is not a matter for this review. The appointment of polling places is likewise outside the scope of the review. While this representation makes reference to six named wards, it does not explain what specific changes, if any, to the Commissioner's preliminary proposals are being sought.
- 5.4 I have therefore no changes to recommend in response to these issues.

Section Six: **Summary of Conclusions**

- 6.1 Recommendation 1: I recommend that the Commissioner's proposed district boundary line at Farm Lodge Road and Upper Greenisland Road is affirmed.
- 6.2 Recommendation 2: I recommend that land to the east of Mayfield Link and to the north of Mayfield High Street, including the Alderley development, identified on the map in Appendix A, is transferred from Mallusk Ward to Hightown Ward.
- 6.3 Recommendation 3: I recommend that land to north east of the M2 motorway and to the north west of the A8(M) road, identified on the map in Appendix B, is retained within Mallusk Ward.
- 6.4 Recommendation 4: I recommend that land to the east of Park Road, identified on the map in Appendix C, including The Poplars, is retained within Mallusk Ward.
- 6.5 Recommendation 5: I recommend that land to the south west of Antrim Road, identified on the map in Appendix D, is transferred from Hightown Ward to Glengormley Ward.
- 6.6 I have no recommendations to make for changes to the naming of the district or its wards.
- 6.7 I have no recommendations to make in response to any other issues.

Section Seven: **List of Submissions**

Part One: **Written Submissions**

Representations from four individuals

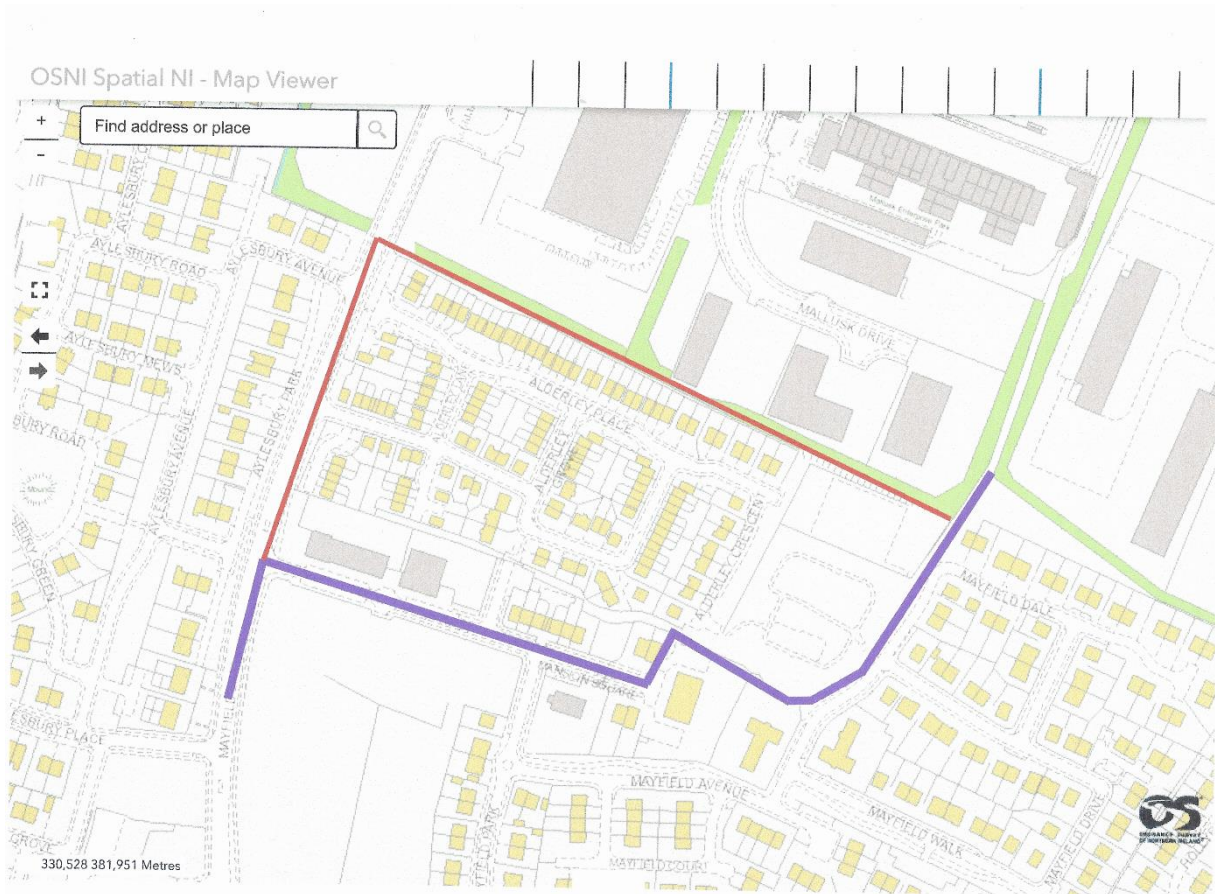
Representation from the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland



Part Two: **Oral Submissions at Public Hearing**

A Member of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, speaking in a personal capacity

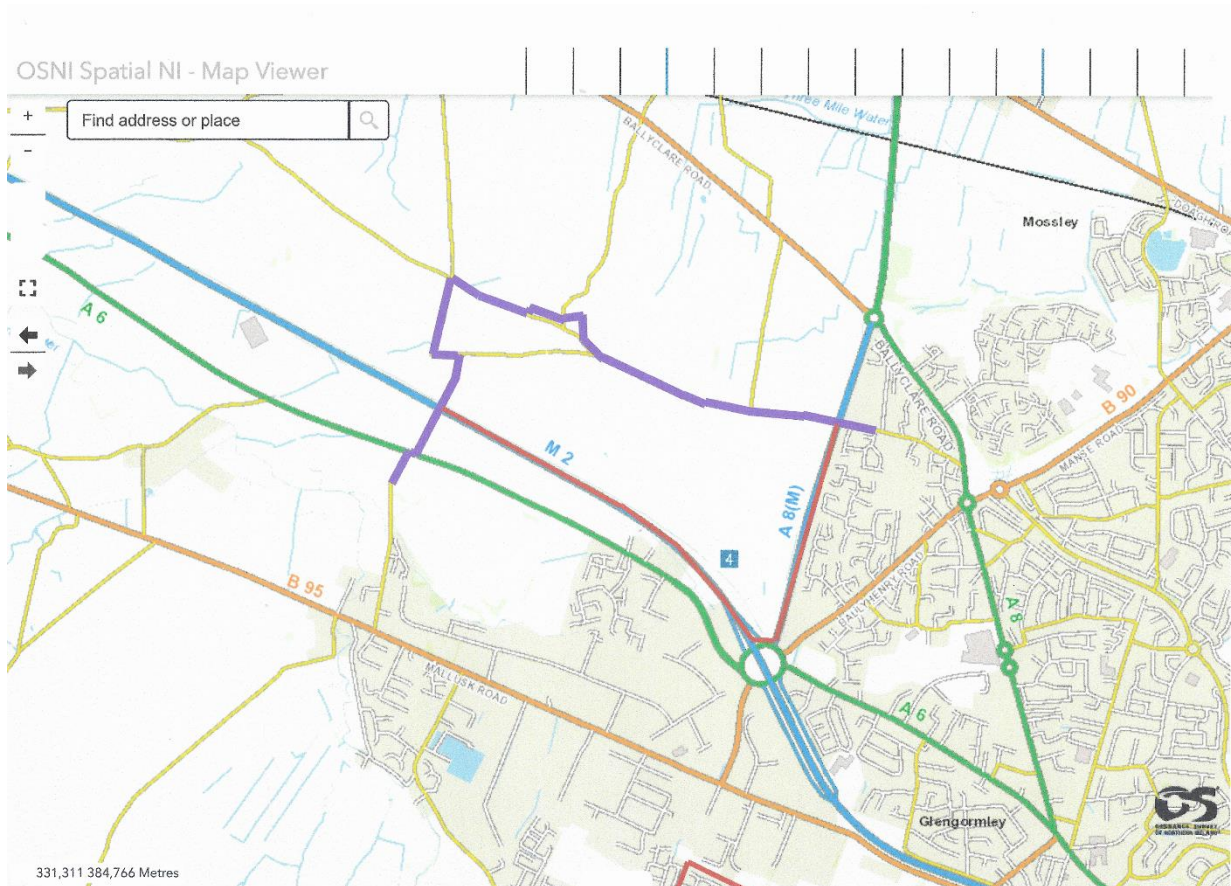
Section Eight: Appendices

Appendix A: Map showing area proposed to be transferred to Hightown Ward



-  ward boundary proposed in July 2021
-  recommended change to ward boundary



Appendix B: Map showing an area proposed to be retained in Mallusk Ward



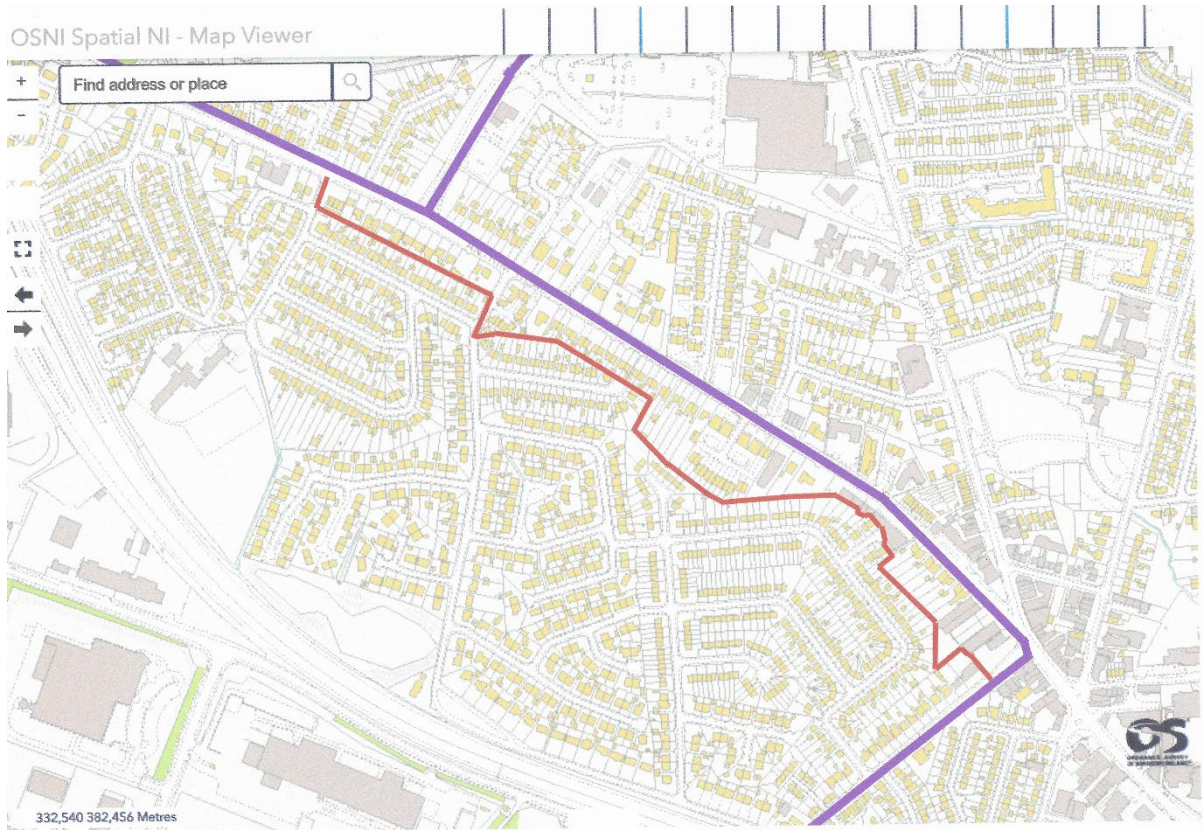
- ward boundary proposed in July 2021
- recommended change to ward boundary



Appendix C: Map showing another area proposed to be retained in Mallusk Ward



-  ward boundary proposed in July 2021
-  recommended change to ward boundary

Appendix D: Map showing area proposed to be transferred to Glengormley Ward



-  existing ward boundaries
-  recommended change to ward boundary