

Northumberland

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Comment text:

To Whom It May Concern

Please see attached covering note and response to the above mentioned for your consideration.

Kind regards.

Shirley Ann

Shirley Ann Gaut

Town Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer

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Attached Documents:

- Boundary Changes Covering Letter.pdf
- Prudhoe.pdf
- PTC Response Electoral Review July 2023 v2.pdf



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7 July 2023

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To Whom It May Concern

Electoral Review of Northumberland County Council: Draft Recommendations

Please see attached Prudhoe Town Council's response regarding the above mentioned for your consideration.





Yours sincerely

[Redacted Signature]

Shirley Ann Gaut
On behalf of Prudhoe Town Council
Town Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer

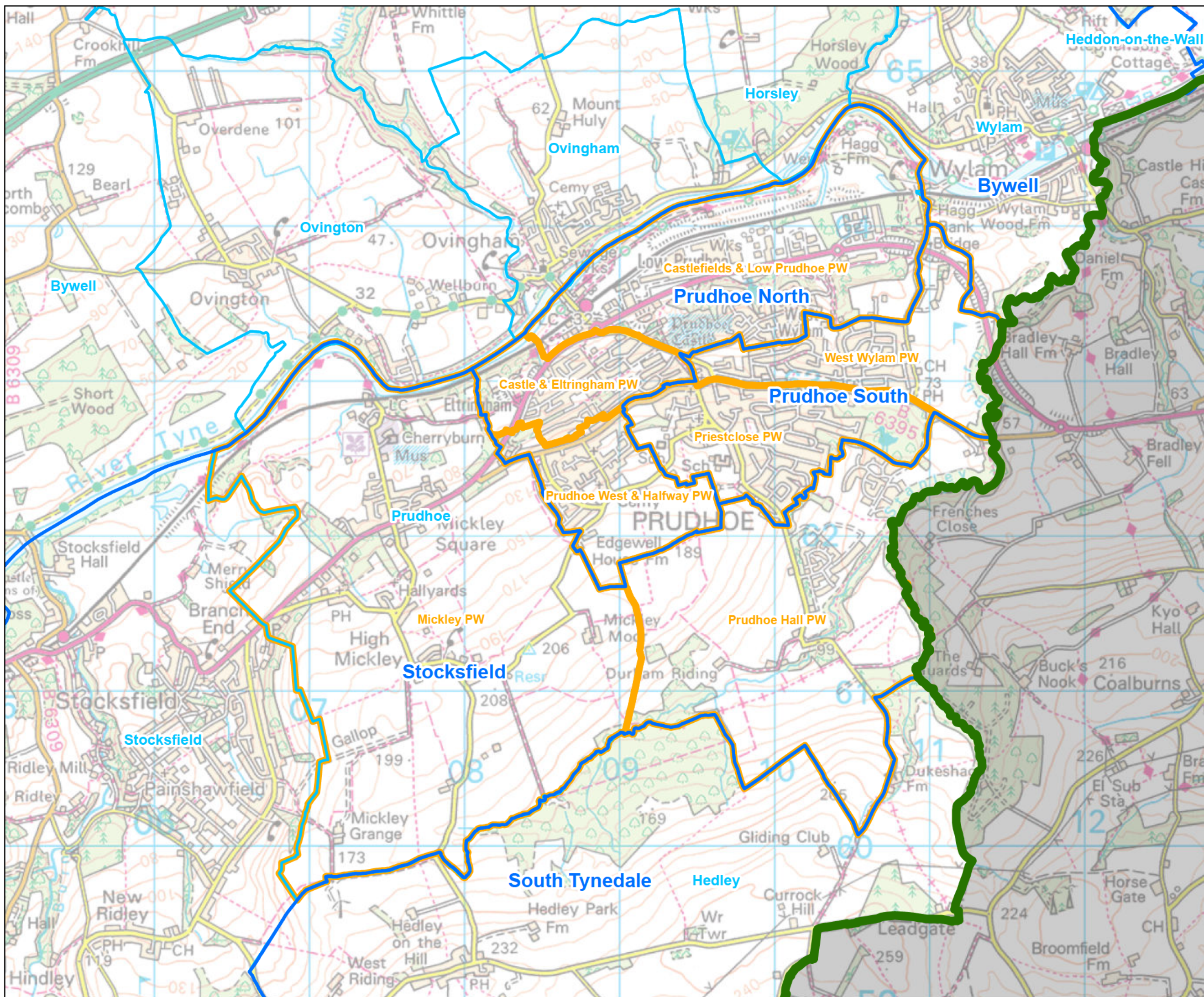
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Parish Warding Arrangements for Prudhoe

-  District
-  Draft Recommendations
-  Parish
-  Parish Ward

0 0.25 0.5 1
Kilometers

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Alternative proposal for boundary changes to Prudhoe county council wards

27th June 2023

Introduction

This document represents a response by Prudhoe Town Council to the Electoral Review (May 2023) conducted throughout Northumberland, for Northumberland County Council (NCC). Our comments relate specifically to the proposed changes to Prudhoe County Divisions as outlined on pages 40-42 of the report.

Electoral Review proposal and our response

The Electoral Review has proposed boundary changes affecting Prudhoe, citing that the town is entitled to 2.5 county councillors, based on the number of electors which means splitting a councillor with an area outside of the town. The Review mentioned 3 priorities:

- a. Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents.
- b. Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity.
- c. Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.

The proposal is that 2 estates, Cottier Grange and Humbles Wood (referred to in the report as Prudhoe Hall), are allocated to a Division covering Mickley and Stocksfield. This proposal appears focused on meeting the first criterion, and demonstrably fails to take account of the other 2 priorities.

We would, of course, prefer to have 3 county councillors. We note, for example, Hexham which has very similar elector numbers to Prudhoe, is deemed large enough to have 3 councillors. It appears therefore unfair to allocate 2.5 councillors to Prudhoe. Hexham and other settlements of similar size across Northumberland (e.g. Ponteland) have incorporated surrounding communities into Divisions representing their towns. This is not the case with Prudhoe and we would suggest that this is inconsistent with the general approach adopted to reorganising Divisional boundaries across the County.

Setting that aside, we wish to table a counter-proposal, which we are confident not only meets the number-balancing priority but also takes a much closer account of the community aspects, as well as offering easier and more effective local government.

Why Prudhoe Hall must remain part of Prudhoe county council wards.

History of Prudhoe Hall

The Prudhoe Hall areas (where Humbles Wood and Cottier Grange estates now stand) is part of the rich history of Prudhoe town. Matthew Liddell, principal owner of Mickley Colliery as well as mines at Hedley, Prudhoe Moor and West Wylam built Prudhoe Hall in 1870 as his family home. The Liddell family were devout Roman Catholics and as there was no Catholic Church in Prudhoe they arranged for a large room in the hall to be used for services. Subsequently, a Catholic Church was built on the site: the foundation stone was laid on 8th Dec 1889, and completion was 1891. It

was 1904 which saw the original Church moved stone by stone to its current location on Highfield Lane.

The Hall was inherited by a nephew, John Aidan Liddell. Captain Aidan won the Victoria Cross in 1915. 1913 saw Prudhoe Hall and the Estate sold to the Poor Law Guardians and became known as Prudhoe Hall Colony, a home for those with learning difficulties. In 1948 Prudhoe Hall Colony was transferred into the National Health Service Prudhoe Hall Hospital complex once employed over 1,200 nurses, doctors and auxiliary staff and many of the staff were located in the Prudhoe and surrounding areas. The current health facility Ferndene is closely associated with Prudhoe and is still known colloquially as Prudhoe Hospital.

Cottier Grange and Humbles Woods also have Prudhoe postcodes, and the street names reference the hospital site and the wider history of Prudhoe.

The people of Prudhoe are very proud of this history and rightly would expect this area to remain within a Division representing and referring to Prudhoe. Culturally and socially these estates are bound to Prudhoe, not Stocksfield. In terms of community identity, it would therefore be a travesty to break these connections in order to simply balance electoral numbers.

Connectedness to Prudhoe and not to Stocksfield

Looking at the geography and connectedness of the 2 estates:

Cottier Grange: there is one way in and out of Cottier Grange. To get to Stocksfield, a traveller would need to go all the way through Prudhoe town centre passing through both Prudhoe North and Prudhoe South Divisions.

Humbles Wood: similarly there is one way in and out. Getting to Stocksfield again requires driving through Prudhoe town centre.

It is evident, therefore that neither estate geographically belongs with Stocksfield and the proposal, therefore, does not represent “effective and convenient local government”. A cursory glance at a map will show that both estates naturally belong in the Prudhoe South Division.

Counter Proposal

We present a counter proposal (see Figs 1-3) which still achieves a rebalancing but also gets much closer to meeting the other criteria of identity and practical governance:

- a. Prudhoe North gains the rest of Castlefields (which the Review proposed) plus West Wylam, and loses streets to the west side of Prudhoe to “Prudhoe West with Stocksfield” as well as houses west of South Road (apart from part of Castle Road and a few surrounding streets to balance the numbers). This would result in an estimated electorate of 3715, very close to the NCC average.
- b. Prudhoe South loses those parts of Castlefields and all of West Wylam but keeps Cottier Grange and Humbles Wood (Prudhoe Hall), gaining the current parts of Prudhoe North west of South Road. This would result in an electorate of 3752 (including an allowance of 321 for the Cottier Grange new houses), very close to the county average. (Note that the figure 321 comes from an estimate of “to be built” houses and is based on comments in the Electoral Review document about the potential future size of Prudhoe South if boundaries are not redrawn).

- c. To balance out numbers, Prudhoe West with Stocksfield gains the west side of Prudhoe (north of West Road and most of the streets west of Station Road) but Riding Mill would be incorporated into Corbridge Division. This would move approximately 1099 electors to Prudhoe West with Stocksfield, resulting in this being very large (5082) but the Electoral Review's own proposal to move Riding Mill and Broomhaugh into Corbridge would rebalance that figure, we believe.

It is important, that the new boundaries properly reflect community identity, and in particular that the new Division includes Prudhoe in its name so that the residents of that part of town feel recognised and fully represented within the new Division. Hence the proposed name of "Prudhoe West with Stocksfield". There are already several examples of this nomenclature which recognises community identity in existing County divisional titles, for example: Amble West with Warkworth, Berwick West with Ord, Hexham Central with Acomb, Ponteland East with Stanington, Ponteland South with Heddon, etc.

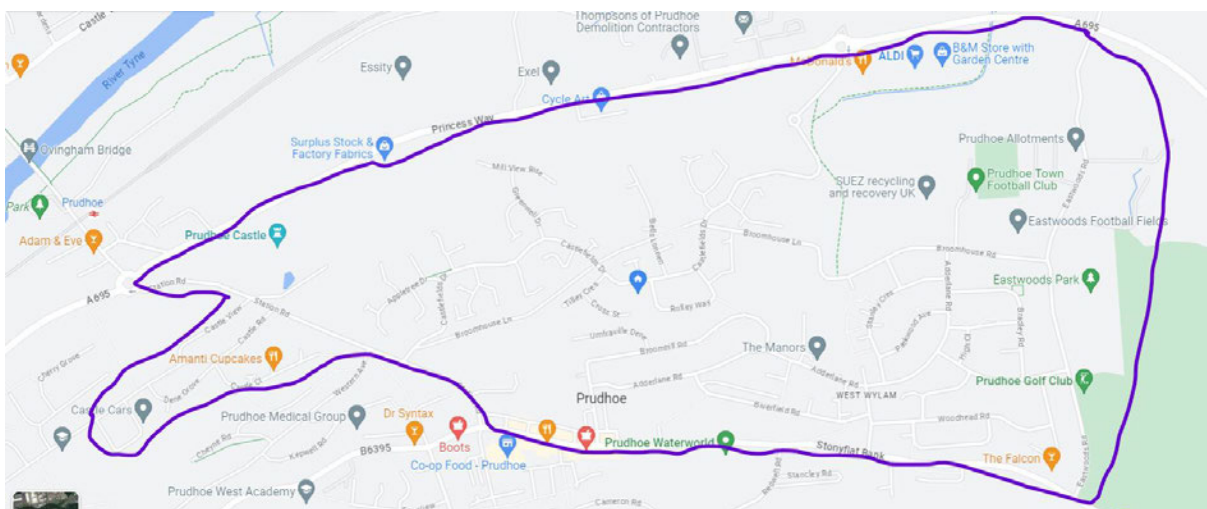


Figure 1: Proposed Prudhoe North (mainly Castlefields and WW)

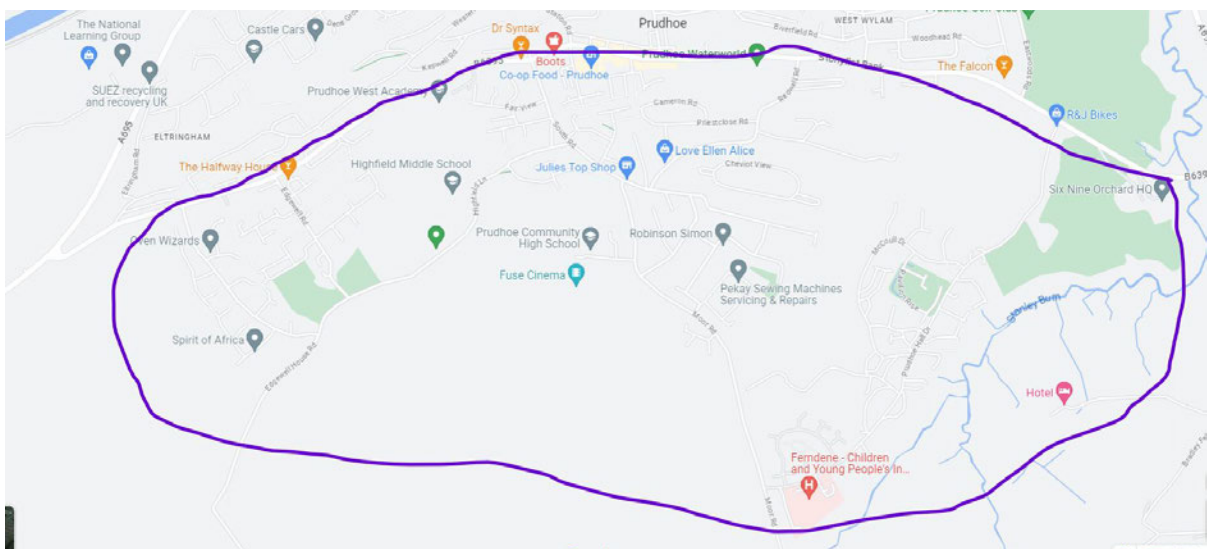


Figure 2: Proposed Prudhoe South (everything south of West Road/Stonyflat Bank)

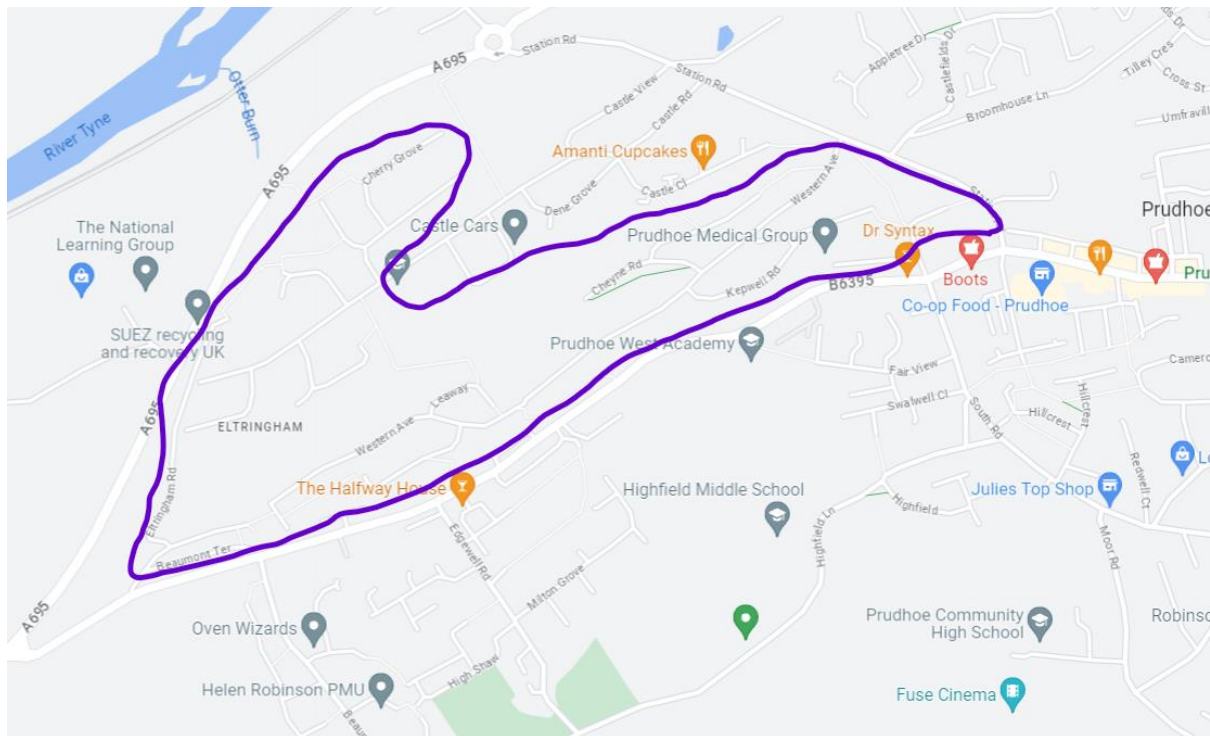


Figure 3: Part of Prudhoe West/Stocksfield (everything north of West Rd and most of west of Station Rd)

Conclusion

Prudhoe Town Council opposes the main recommendation of the Electoral Review that estates in Prudhoe Hall are moved to the new Stocksfield electoral Division. Our opposition is based on the historical importance of Prudhoe Hall to the town of Prudhoe as well as strong practical considerations related to the effectiveness and convenience of the proposed change.

We have presented an alternative proposal which we believe is demonstrably an improvement in terms of meeting the three criteria published by the Electoral Review. We are happy to engage with the Electoral Review to further detail our proposal if required.

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