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# **LIBRARIES NORTHERN IRELAND – REVIEW OF LIBRARY SERVICE IN THE GREATER BELFAST AREA**

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Paper providing GIS and impact analysis of Libraries Northern Ireland's rationalisation proposals.

Library Research Papers are compiled for the benefit of Members of The Assembly and their personal staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public.

## Summary of Key Points

The following paper provides an impact analysis of Libraries Northern Ireland's (LNI) rationalisation plans in the Greater Belfast Area, utilising geographic information systems software. It contains eight figures which examine LNI's measurement of accessibility, namely that *85% of the population have access to a public library service (fixed or mobile) within two miles.*

Figure 1 charts the location of existing libraries in the Greater Belfast region, with those earmarked for closure identified with a red cross. It is notable that closures are disproportionately high in the East Belfast parliamentary constituency.

Figures 2 and 3 plot fixed and mobile libraries, providing a before and after picture of total library provision. Whilst mobile libraries may provide an alternative in areas where the fixed service is reduced it should be noted that:

- Mobile libraries within the Greater Belfast Area (GBA) stop weekly or every three weeks, with stops ranging from 15 minutes to 1 hour and 40 minutes;
- The nature of mobile libraries ensures the range of services on offer is limited for practical reasons; and
- LNI intend to hold a review of mobile provision once the current consultation process is complete.

Figures 4 to 7 outline distances to libraries within the GBA before and after proposed closures. The figures show that there are a number of areas in the GBA which currently exceed the desired two mile distance to a library. This is true whether mobile libraries are included or not, although their inclusion decreases the number of these regions.

Similarly, if LNI's proposals were to be undertaken as they stand, the number of regions exceeding the two mile limit would increase. Again, this is true whether the mobile service is considered or not.

Figure 8 outlines the additional miles from Greater Belfast output areas to libraries after closures. The figure shows that the proposed closures will have an impact across the GBA. Although the largest increases in travel distance are grouped in the east where there are the greatest numbers of closures.

The impact assessment outlined in Table 1 shows that, if mobile libraries are discounted, LNI's proposals would mean that:

- 53% of the GBA population would be within 1 mile of a library (a decrease of 16.6%);
- 64.4% of the catholic community would be within 1 mile of a library (a decrease of 11.9%);
- 46% of the protestant community would be within 1 mile of a library (a decrease of 20.1%);
- 52.4% of pensioners would be within 1 mile of a library (a decrease of 17.7%);

- 58.2% of disabled households would be within 1 mile of a library (a decrease of 16.9%); and
- 56.7% of households with lower educational attainment would be within 1 mile of a library (a decrease of 16.4%).

Furthermore:

- 10.6% of the GBA population would be more than 2 miles away from a library (an increase of 4.3%);
- 5% of the catholic community would be more than 2 miles away from a library (an increase of 1.5%);
- 13.8% of the protestant community would be more than 2 miles away from a library (an increase of 6.1%);
- 11.6% of pensioners would be more than 2 miles away from a library (an increase of 5.7%);
- 8.3% of disabled households would be more than 2 miles away from a library (an increase of 3.9%); and
- 9% of households with lower educational attainment would be more than 2 miles away from a library (an increase of 3.9%).

Similarly Table 2, which provides an impact assessment that includes mobile provision, shows that;

- 74.4% of the GBA population would be within 1 mile of a library (a decrease of 5.9%);
- 81.4% of the catholic community would be within 1 mile of a library (a decrease of 1.8%);
- 70.4% of the protestant community would be within 1 mile of a library (a decrease of 8.2%);
- 74.6% of pensioners would be within 1 mile of a library (a decrease of 6.7%);
- 79.6% of disabled households would be within 1 mile of a library (a decrease of 5.3%); and
- 77.9% of households with lower educational attainment would be within 1 mile of a library (a decrease of 5.4%).

And:

- 6.7% of the GBA population would be more than 2 miles away from a library (an increase of 2.2%);
- 2.9% of the catholic community would be more than 2 miles away from a library (an increase of 0.7%);
- 8.7% of the protestant community would be more than 2 miles away from a library (an increase of 3.1%);
- 6.9% of pensioners would be more than 2 miles away from a library (an increase of 2.7%);
- 4.9% of disabled households would be more than 2 miles away from a library (an increase of 1.5%); and
- 5.6% of households with lower educational attainment would be more than 2 miles away from a library (an increase of 2.1%).

Significantly, however, in both scenarios **more than 85% of the population will be within two miles of a library** (89.4% when mobile libraries are excluded and 93.3% when they are included).

Finally, with regard to LNI's consultation document, it is notable that the document provides a breakdown of the maintenance backlog, that opening hours, the cost per issue, the percentage of time computers are in use, the active membership and the number of issues for each library earmarked for closure, but does not include the same information for the sites that are to be retained. This makes an informed comparison impossible.

Additionally, the consultation outlines a three year plan which will begin in 2010/11 with the rationalisations and "major strategic refurbishments" and end with new builds on existing or new sites in 2012/13. How these refurbishments and new builds may impact an already diminished service is not addressed in the consultation document.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The following paper provides an assessment of Libraries Northern Ireland's (LNI) proposed revisions to the library system within the 'Greater Belfast Area'.

The paper makes use of geographic information systems software, which has allowed research to map the impact of the proposals. The eight maps below provide a before and after picture of LNI's proposals and examines their potential impact.

LNI's review of libraries in the Greater Belfast Area outlines four criteria for assessing the future of existing libraries:

- Fit for purpose;
- Capable of delivering on the vision of Libraries NI;
- In the right locations; and
- Sustainable.

This paper looks specifically at the location criteria, but also touches on the accessibility element of the LNI's vision. As such the maps provided examine LNI's measurement of accessibility, namely:

*Can 85% of the population access a public library service (fixed or mobile) within two miles?<sup>1</sup>*

The analysis looks at two scenarios, one with that includes mobile services and one that does not. The paper also provides a socio-economic snapshot of those likely to be affected by these proposals.

The term 'output area', which is used throughout the document, refers to 'census output areas', which are predefined areas based on postcodes. Output areas have similar population sizes and are designed to be as socially homogenous as possible.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. GREATER BELFAST

LNI's consultation is a review of libraries in the 'Greater Belfast Area' (GBA). The GBA is problematic and is not robustly defined. LNI's consultation document makes reference to libraries within the four Belfast parliamentary constituencies and a number which lie on the periphery of these areas. The analysis in this document examines the 32 libraries outlined in the LNI consultation. It also considers three other peripheral libraries as these too will be accessible to certain library users in the GBA within two miles.

## 3. MOBILE SERVICES

The maps provided below examine the provision of library services in scenarios which include consideration of current mobile provision.

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<sup>1</sup> Libraries Northern Ireland (2010) *Meeting the demands for a modern Public Library Service within Northern Ireland – Stage 1: Greater Belfast Area*, p9

<sup>2</sup> National Statistics, *Beginners Guide to UK Geography, Census Geography*  
[http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/census\\_geog.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/census_geog.asp) (accessed 05/03/10)

The current mobile service within the GBA consists of two types, those which visit areas once a week and those which visit every three weeks. The time spent in a region varies from stop to stop but is between 15 minutes and 1 hour and 40 minutes. Figures 2 and 3 outline mobile provision within the GBA, the blue squares on the map represent weekly mobile stops, whilst those in orange represent those which stop every three weeks.<sup>3</sup>

Given the nature of mobile libraries, the range of services on offer is likely to be limited for practical reasons.

Libraries NI intends to hold a review of mobile library services across Northern Ireland once their current review of Libraries in the GBA is complete.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. PROPOSED CLOSURES

Of the 32 library sites considered in the LNI document, 14 are earmarked for closure, namely:

- Andersonstown;
- Ballyhackamore;
- Ballymacarrett;
- Belvoir Park;
- Braniel;
- Cloughfern;
- Dunmurry;
- Gilnahirk;
- Ligoniel;
- Oldpark;
- Sandy Row;
- Tullycarnet;
- Whitewell; and
- Woodstock.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 1 outlines the geographical location of all libraries in the GBA, those earmarked for closure are indicated by a red cross. It is evident from the diagram that the East Belfast parliamentary constituency would be hardest hit should LNI's proposals go forward in their current form. The area would lose six out of the eight libraries within the constituency boundary.

Moving on to Figures 2 and 3, which show a before and after picture of library provision in the GBA that includes the provision of mobile areas the following can be said of the proposals:

**North Belfast** – would lose three libraries within its constituency area as well as one on the periphery, leaving five libraries within the immediate parliamentary constituency area

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<sup>3</sup> Correspondence with Libraries Northern Ireland 08/02/2010

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> Libraries Northern Ireland (2010) *Meeting the demands for a modern Public Library Service within Northern Ireland – Stage 1: Greater Belfast Area*, p13

as well as one on the periphery and those in neighbouring constituency. Residents in the constituency will also have access to eight weekly mobile libraries in the immediate area.

**East Belfast** – as stated above East Belfast stands to lose six out of eight libraries within the constituency boundary. If mobile library provision is retained in its current form the region will have access to ten services which stop weekly.

**South Belfast** – South Belfast stands to lose two libraries from within its constituency boundary, one on its immediate periphery and one that borders East Belfast. It will retain access to four sites within the constituency border, two within the wider periphery and a number in neighbouring constituencies. They will also retain access to eight weekly mobile stops and two that stop once every three weeks. Three week mobile services will also be available in the wider area. Again, this is dependent on the subsequent review of mobile services.

**West Belfast** – the West Belfast region will lose one library within its constituency boundary, retaining access to six. They will also lose access to two libraries which currently border the constituency. Current mobile provision provides access to nine weekly services within in the boundary and nine outside the boundary that stop every three weeks.

## **5. DISTANCE TO LIBRARIES BEFORE AND AFTER PROPOSED CLOSURES**

### **5.1 Excluding Mobile Provision**

Figures 4 and 5 examine distances to libraries (excluding mobile libraries) within the GBA before and after proposed closures. Areas in red ('red zones) represent parts of the region where the distance to the nearest library is three miles or more. Orange areas ('orange zones) equate to between two and three miles distance; yellow areas ('yellow zones') to between one and a half to two miles distance; light-green areas (light-green zones) denote areas where the distance is between one mile and one and a half miles; and dark green areas (green zones) denote areas where the distance is below one mile.

Looking at Figure 4 as a whole it is evident that 'red zones' are currently concentrated in the areas bordering parliamentary constituency boundaries. The largest proportion of 'orange zones' are found in West Belfast, although they are also found in North and East Belfast. The majority of South Belfast is within one and a half miles of a library. As would be expected the distance to a library reduces towards central Belfast.

Figure 5 provides the same information as Figure 4 but excludes the libraries earmarked for closure. Comparing the two maps highlights the regions where distance to libraries increases with the closures. What is evident from the two maps is a decrease 'dark green zones' and an increase in every other colour.

### **5.2 Including Mobile Provision**

Figures 6 and 7 provide a similar analysis but include mobile library provision.

Comparing Figure 4 with Figure 6 (which both look at a before scenario) demonstrates that including current mobile library provision reduces the overall proliferation of red and orange zones throughout the area. It is perhaps interesting that there is little change



within the North Belfast constituency boundary, particular those within those areas where distance exceeds the desired two mile limit.

Comparing Figure 6 with Figure 7 demonstrates that even if current mobile services are included the number of areas that exceed the desired two mile limit will increase if the proposals are brought forward as they stand. It is evident that this increase will affect those within Belfast constituency borders more acutely, particularly those living within the North Belfast constituency area.

### **5.3 Overall**

Examining figures 4 to 7 in their totality there are a number of areas in the GBA which currently exceed the desired two mile distance to a library. This is true whether mobile libraries are included or not, although their inclusion decreases the number of these regions.

Similarly, if LNI's proposals were to be undertaken as they stand the number of regions exceeding the two mile limit would increase. Again, this is true whether the mobile service is considered or not.

## **6. ADDITIONAL MILES FROM GREATER BELFAST OUTPUT AREAS TO LIBRARIES AFTER CLOSURES**

Figure 8 outlines the additional miles from Greater Belfast output areas to libraries after closures. It shows the number of miles that will have to be travelled to a library by residents of specific output areas, should the proposals go ahead, *on top* of those currently travelled. Red zones denote areas where the distance has increased by one mile; yellow zones denote areas where it has increase by between a half a mile and one mile; and green areas denote areas where the travel distance has increased by up to half a mile.

The figure shows that the proposed closures will have an impact across the GBA. Although the largest increases in travel distance are grouped in the east where there are the greatest numbers of closures.

## **7. IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Tables 1 to 3 present an impact assessment of the proposed closures; they provide a socio-economic picture of those likely to be affected by the suggested closures.

The figures are based upon the distance each output area is from its nearest library (before and after closures) and utilise census 2001 data (unless otherwise stated) to analyse the demography of each output area. The findings for each output area are combined to provide the overall percentages.

Table 1 outlines a picture of those who would be most affected by the proposals in a scenario where mobile library are not included. Overall, should the plans go ahead the percentage of the population who do not live within two miles of a library would increase from 6.3% to 10.6% - a 4.3% increase.

The impact would be felt more acutely by those from the protestant community (a 6.1% increase) and pensioners (a 5.7% increase). There is however an increase in the percentage of people who will no longer live within two miles of a library across all groupings: an increase among people from the catholic community of 1.5%; an increase amongst disabled households of 3.9%; and an increase amongst areas with higher levels of educationally unqualified people of 3.9%.

Examining the figures from another perspective, Table 1 shows a percentage decrease in those living within one mile of a library. This is true of the overall population as well as each grouping examined. The percentage decreases are broken down as follows:

- All GBA: -16.6%
- People from the Catholic Community: -11.9%
- People from the Protestant Community: -20.1%
- Pensioners: -17.7%
- Disabled (households): -16.9%
- Educationally Unqualified: -16.4%

Table 2 provides similar information, factoring in the impact of the mobile library service. Again the proposal, if introduced, would increase the percentage of people who live beyond two mile from a library across the whole population (a 2.2% increase). Breaking down this larger figure into specific groupings it is people from protestant communities (a 3.1% increase) and pensioners (a 2.7% increase) who are most affected. All other groupings are impacted also, the proposals will result in an increase in those living more than two miles away from their nearest library of: 0.7% amongst those in the catholic community; 1.5% amongst those in disabled households; and 2.1% amongst those in areas lower levels of educational attainment.

As is the case with Table 1, the figures presented in Table 2 show that LNI's proposals would lead to percentage decrease in the numbers of the population living within one mile of their nearest library (although the introduction of mobile libraries lessens the impact). This applies to the overall population and each grouping examined. The percentage decreases are as follows.

- All GBA: -5.9%
- People from the Catholic Community: -1.8%
- People from the Protestant Community: -8.2%
- Pensioners: -6.7%
- Disabled (households): -5.3%
- Educationally Unqualified: -5.4%

Notably however, the figures in Table 1 show that 89.4% of the population would live within two miles of a library should the proposals go ahead. Similarly, Table 2 demonstrates that 93.3% of the population would live within two miles of a library, fixed or mobile, should the proposals go ahead. This is in keeping with LNI's target of ensuring 85% of the population live within two miles of a library (fixed or mobile).

Table 3 compares the characteristics of areas that would be affected by the proposals with those that would remain unaffected. Again the table suggests that those from the

protestant community and pensioners are more likely to be affected. The figures also demonstrate that affected areas are likely to be more deprived than unaffected areas (this does not mean that all affected areas are areas of higher deprivation and all unaffected areas are areas of lower deprivation).

**TABLE 1: DISTANCES TO NEAREST LIBRARY BEFORE AND AFTER PROPOSED CLOSURES (EXCLUDING MOBILE SERVICE)**

	<b>All Greater Belfast</b>	<b>Catholics</b>	<b>Protestants</b>	<b>Pensioners*</b>	<b>Disabled (households)</b>	<b>Educ. Unqualified</b>
<b>Before</b>						
% population within 1 mile	69.6	76.3	66.1	70.1	75.1	73.1
% population within 1 - 2 miles	24	20.3	26.2	23.9	20.5	21.7
% population more than 2 miles away	6.3	3.5	7.7	5.9	4.4	5.1
<b>After proposed closures</b>						
% population within 1 mile	53	64.4	46	52.4	58.2	56.7
% population within 1 - 2 miles	36.4	30.6	40.2	36	33.5	34.4
% population more than 2 miles away	10.6	5	13.8	11.6	8.3	9

\* 2009 State Pension Claimants

**TABLE 2: DISTANCES TO NEAREST LIBRARY BEFORE AND AFTER PROPOSED CLOSURES (INCLUDING MOBILES)**

	All Greater Belfast	Catholics	Protestants	Pensioners*	Disabled (Households)	Educ. Unqualified
<b>Before</b>						
% population within 1 mile	80	83.2	78.6	81.3	84.9	83.3
% population within 1 - 2 miles	15.5	14.6	15.8	14.5	12.1	13.2
% population more than 2 miles away	4.5	2.2	5.6	4.2	3	3.5
<b>After proposed closures</b>						
% population within 1 mile	74.4	81.4	70.4	74.6	79.6	77.9
% population within 1 - 2 miles	18.9	15.6	20.9	18.5	15.5	16.5
% population more than 2 miles away	6.7	2.9	8.7	6.9	4.9	5.6

\* 2009 State Pension Claimants

**TABLE 3: PROFILE OF AFFECTED V NON-AFFECTED AREAS**

	Affected	Non-Affected
No. of Census Output Areas in Gtr. Belfast	556	973
% Catholic	31.5	43.8
% Protestant	63.7	52
% Aged 60 and over	20.4	18.7
% with no educational qualifications	40.1	39.4
% households with disabled person(s)	42	42
Average COA Deprivation Rank*	2581	2657

\*Based on 2005 Economic Deprivation Measure (where 1 = most deprived)

Sources: 2001 Census; NINIS database

## 8. OTHER ISSUES ARISING FROM THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

A number of issues arise out of the LNI's consultation document. The document provides a breakdown of the maintenance backlog, the opening hours, the cost per issue, the percentage of time computers are in use, the active membership, and the number of books issued for each of the libraries earmarked for closure. This information is not outlined for libraries that are to be kept as they are or developed. This makes it impossible to adequately compare the sites like to be closed with those likely to remain the same or to be improved.

This is further complicated by the differences in performance across site suggested for closure, for example a comparison of:

Ballyhackamore Library:

- Maintenance Backlog - £1,150;
- Open – 40.5 hours per week;
- Cost per issue - £2.60;
- Computer use – 54.34%;
- Active membership – 2642; and
- Number of issues – increased from 51,500 (approx) in 2008 to 53,000 in 2009.<sup>6</sup>

with:

Oldpark Library:

- Maintenance Backlog - £54,975;
- Open – 6.5 hours per week;
- Cost per issue - £19.88;
- Computer use – 3.99%;
- Active membership – 144; and
- Number of issues – decreased from 5,500 (approx) in 2006 to just over 1,000 in 2009.<sup>7</sup>

presents a picture of two libraries with very different performance histories. The lack of information regarding the performance of libraries which are to be kept or redeveloped makes it difficult to put these marked differences into context.

Furthermore, the consultation outlines a three year plan which will begin in 2010/11 with the rationalisations and “major strategic refurbishments” and end with new builds on existing or new sites in 2012/13.<sup>8</sup> How these refurbishments and new builds may impact an already diminished service is not addressed in the consultation document.

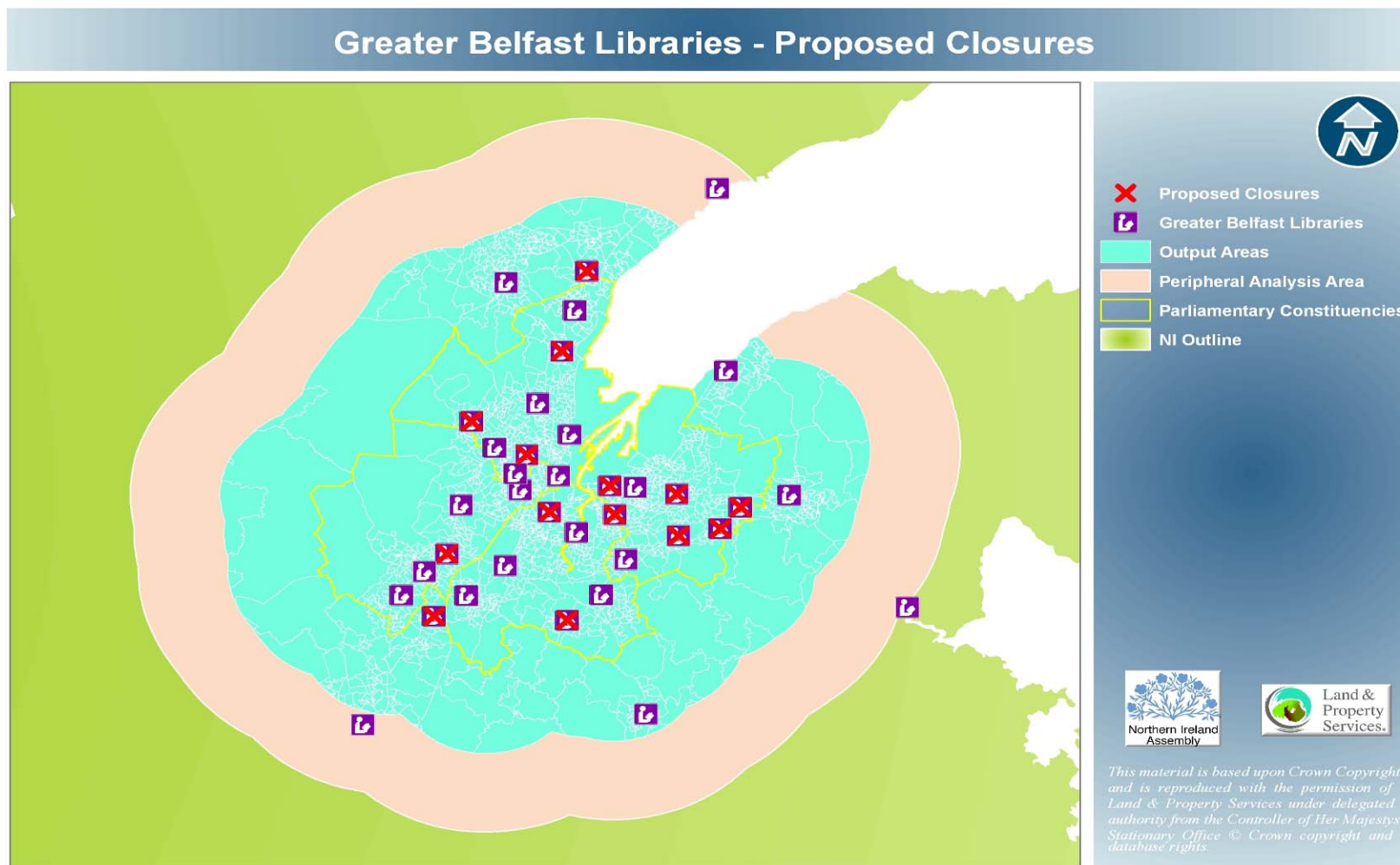
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<sup>6</sup> Libraries Northern Ireland (2010) *Meeting the demands for a modern Public Library Service within Northern Ireland – Stage 1: Greater Belfast Area* p15

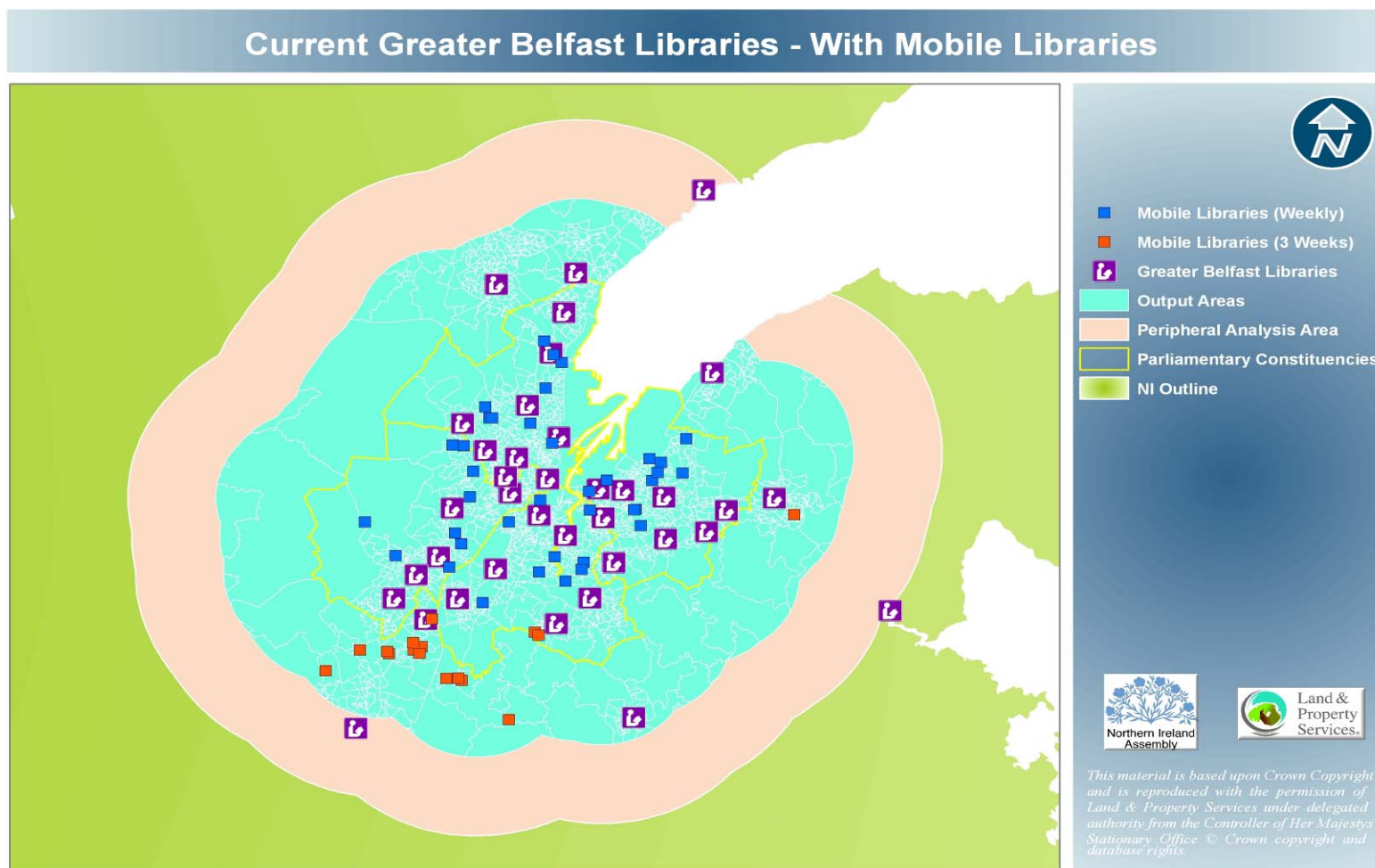
<sup>7</sup> Libraries Northern Ireland (2010) *Meeting the demands for a modern Public Library Service within Northern Ireland – Stage 1: Greater Belfast Area* p19

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid* p23

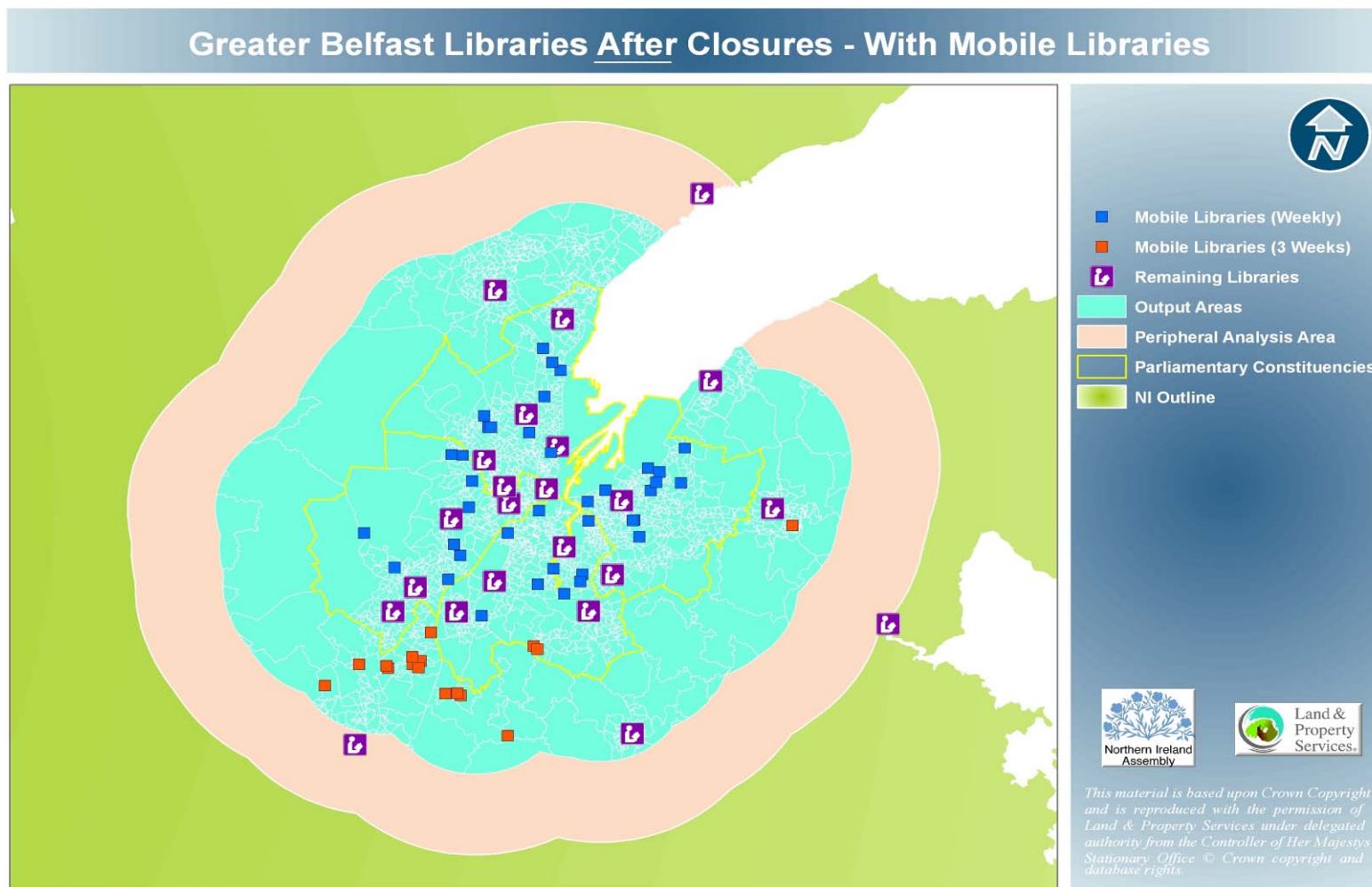
**FIGURE 1: GREATER BELFAST LIBRARIES – PROPOSED CLOSURES**



**FIGURE 2: CURRENT GREATER BELFAST LIBRARIES – WITH MOBILE LIBRARIES**

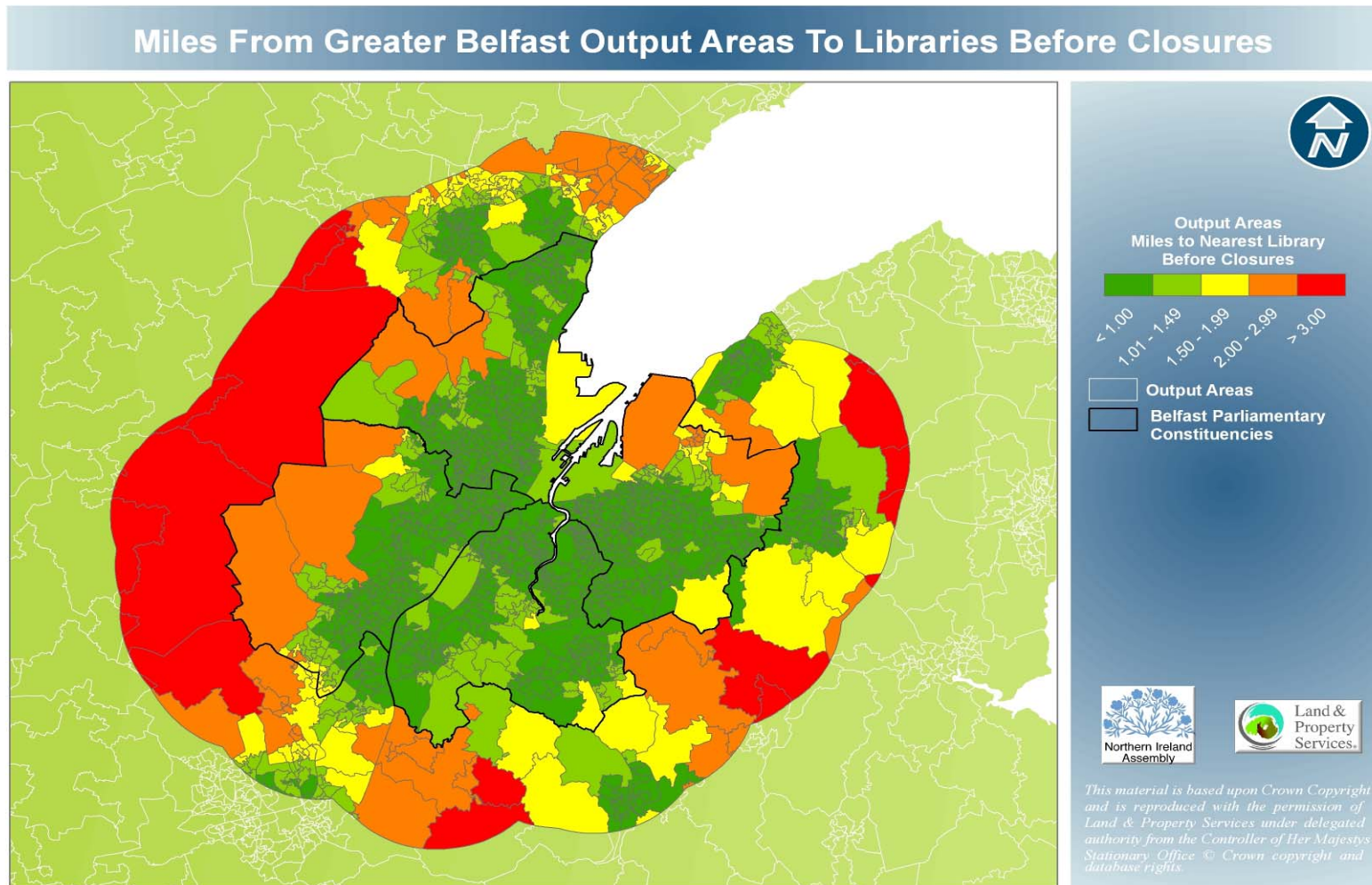


**FIGURE 3: GREATER BELFAST LIBRARIES AFTER CLOSURES – WITH MOBILE LIBRARIES**

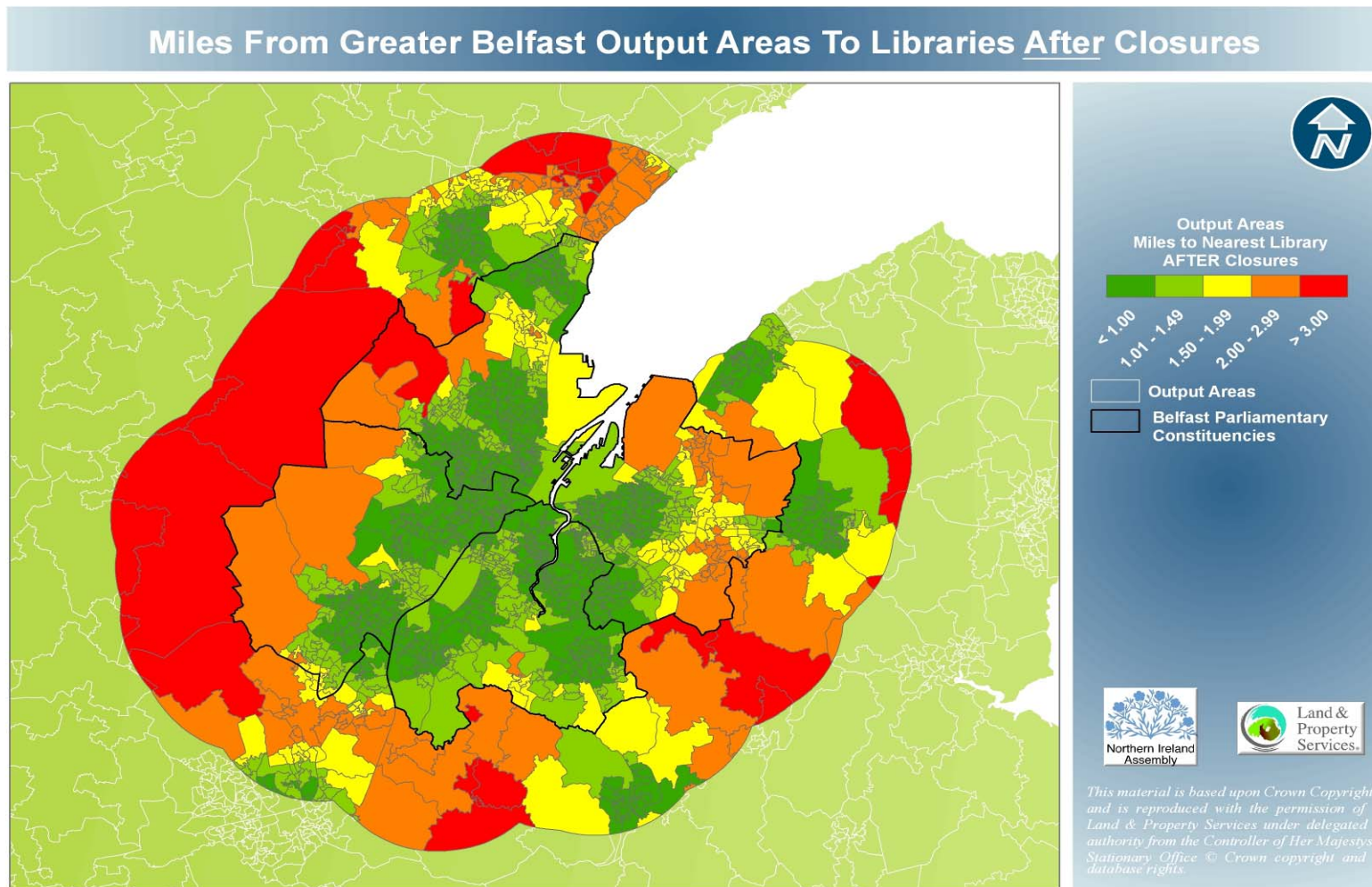




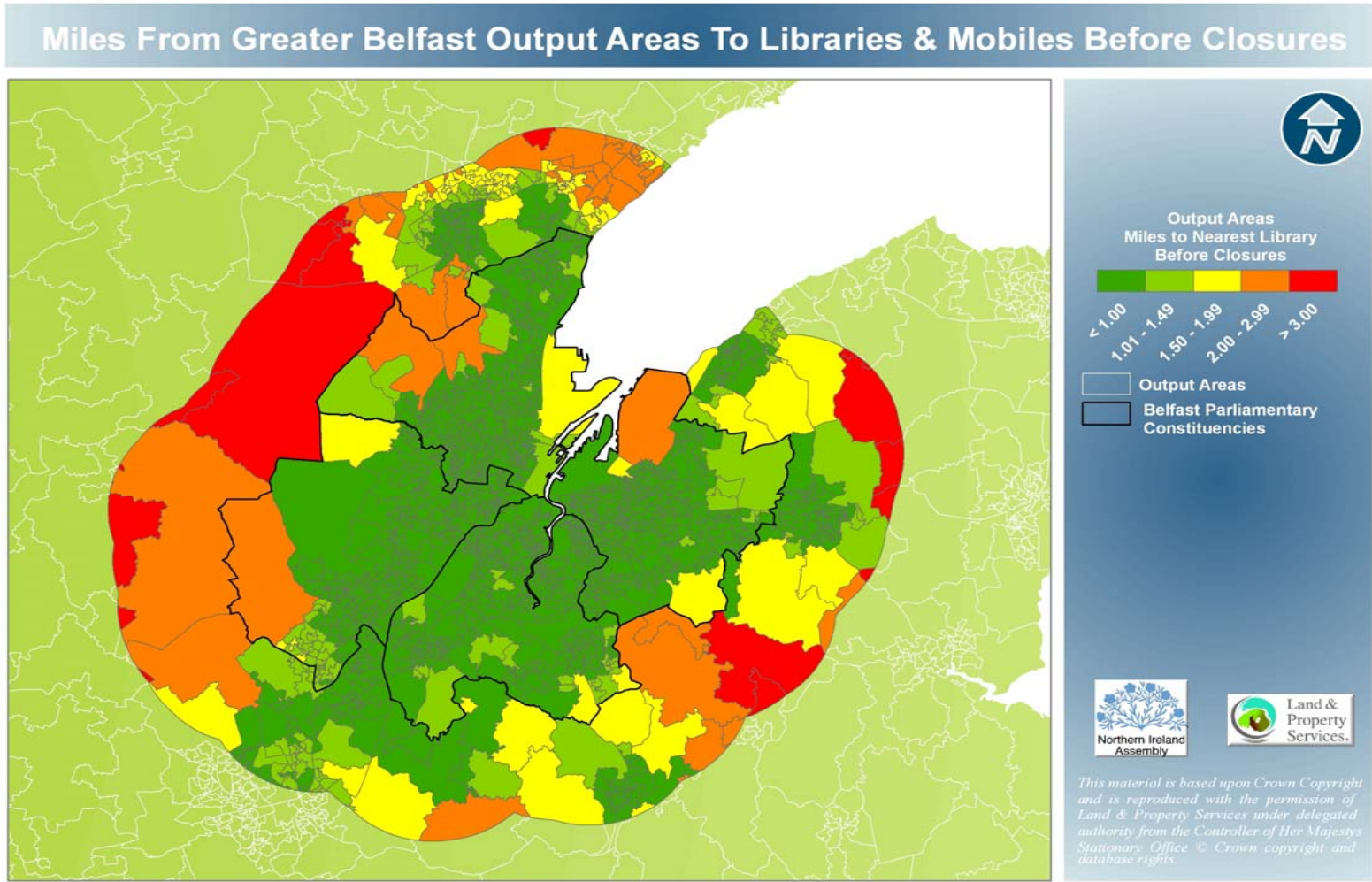
**FIGURE 4: MILES FROM GREATER BELFAST OUTPUT AREAS TO LIBRARIES BEFORE CLOSURES – EXCLUDING MOBILE SERVICE**



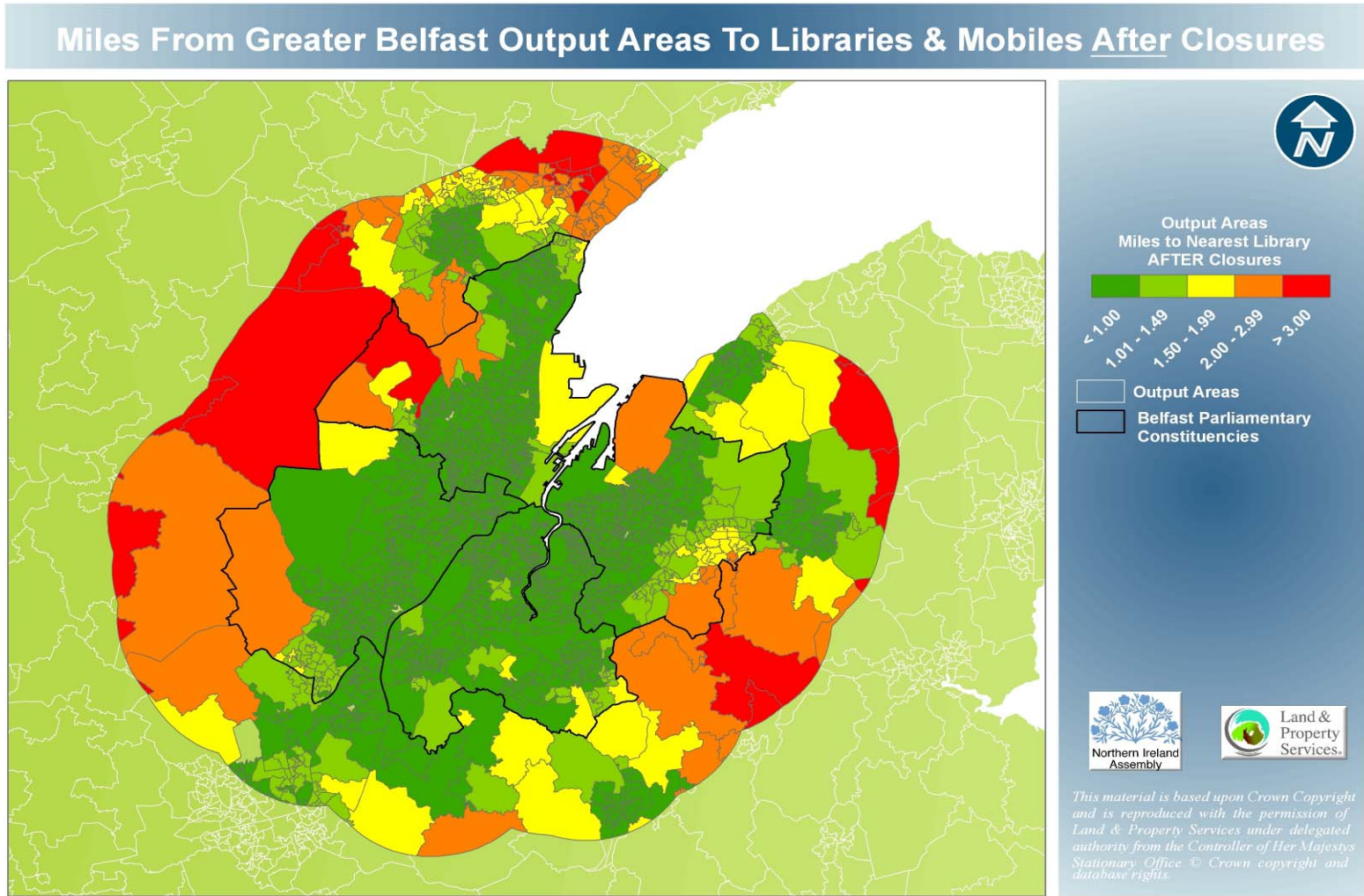
**FIGURE 5: MILES FROM GREATER BELFAST OUTPUT AREAS TO LIBRARIES AFTER CLOSURES – EXCLUDING MOBILE SERVICE**



**FIGURE 6: MILES FROM GREATER BELFAST OUTPUT AREAS TO LIBRARIES BEFORE CLOSURES – INCLUDING MOBILE SERVICE**



**FIGURE 7: MILES FROM GREATER BELFAST OUTPUT AREAS TO LIBRARIES AFTER CLOSURES – INCLUDING MOBILE SERVICE**



**FIGURE 8: ADDITIONAL MILES FROM GREATER BELFAST AREAS TO LIBRARIES AFTER CLOSURES**

