

2. Ashford Town Plan

1.1 Purpose of the Plan

The aim of this plan is to establish a framework for the planned, co-ordinated and sustainable development of Ashford, and to enhance and facilitate the balancing of economic, social and environmental infrastructure in order to maintain and develop a high quality of life without compromising the protection of the environment and the needs of future generations.

The plan seeks to formulate appropriate Ashford specific development objectives and guidance, compatible with those of the County Development Plan, to assist the Development Management process in managing sustainable progress for the town.

This plan should be read in conjunction with 'level 5 and level 6 plans Introductory Chapter'.

1.2 Physical Context of Ashford

Ashford is situated on the eastern side of County Wicklow, approximately 21km south of the Wicklow – Dublin border, c. 6km northwest of Wicklow town, the county town and c. 4km inland of the coast. The regional road R772 passes north-south through the centre of the town, this road formerly being the N11, the national primary route from Dublin to Rosslare. This road now connects the town, via interchanges to the north and south of the town, to the new M11, which now by-passes the town (opened in 2004), and to Wicklow town via Rathnew to the southeast.

The town is also connected by regional roads R763 and R764 to Roundwood and Annamoe to the west and by local roads to the surrounding rural areas and the village of Glenealy to the south west. Due to these links, the town has strong connections to Wicklow, Rathnew and Glenealy in terms of shared services, parish affiliations and schools.

The River Vartry passes through the town from west to east, which drains to the Murrough, a protected wetlands site running along much of the northern coastline of County Wicklow. The river forms a valley through the centre of the town, with higher lands surrounding the valley to the southwest, northwest and northeast. The flow in the river is constrained further upstream by the Vartry Dam, and rarely experiences serious flood events.

Historically the settlement developed in two poles around Ballinalea and Nun's cross, avoiding the central valley along the river. During the 20th century, the town grew in three main areas – along the main road (N11), at Ballinalea (such that these two areas effectively combined), and around Nun's Cross. A GAA pitch was developed in the centre of the town on the west side of the main road, just south of the bridge. Commercial and retail development was focussed on the N11 – Roundwood Road junction (route out towards Nun's Cross) and along both sides of the main street. Due to the location on the N11, a number of petrol stations were developed. The town was by-passed to the east in 2004, with Inchinappa House, Mount Usher and Rosanna House now located to the west of the motorway. The old N11 was redesignated a regional road, which carries significantly reduced traffic volumes.

On the steeper lands around the town, development has generally been limited to lower density housing, while the denser housing areas are now found around Ballinalea and to a lesser extent around Nun's Cross.

To the southwest of the town core, Ballymacahara's steep topography and woodland accommodate low-density one-off housing. The town core of Ashford has developed in a disjointed manner overtime with a lack of a distinct main street due mainly to the presence of large undeveloped sites being situated within this area.

In recognition of the above this plan has aimed to consolidate the existing built pattern in Ashford by maximising the potential of large sites within the town core in order to create a distinct streetscape capable of meeting Ashford's function as a town serving its immediate and wider hinterland population. The

designation of specific lands for residential development has been provided in a manner that facilitates greater connectivity between the village core and the existing developed lands within the plan area. Sufficient lands have been zoned in order to meet the projected population targets as set out in the Wicklow County Development Plan 2010 – 2016.

Map 1 defines the development boundary in red and shows specific zoning objectives for lands within the town boundary. Map 2 identifies the location of all heritage features such as protected structures, recorded monuments, protected trees and views etc. Map 3 outlines the key transportation objectives of the plan which should be read in conjunction with Section 7 'Services Infrastructure' and the details of the Action Areas detailed in Section 8.

1.3 Overall Vision and Development Strategy

A key aim of a Town Plan is to set out the vision and development strategy for the future development of a settlement and from this vision, all policies and objectives can be developed and implemented with the overall aim of achieving this vision. The vision and development strategy must be consistent with the 'Core Strategy' of the County Development Plan and reflect the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of Ashford.

The vision for Ashford is:

- To ensure a high quality living environment for existing and future residents
- To provide a framework for the growth of the town, in order to provide housing for current and future generations, to revitalise the economy of the town and to allow improvements of social and community facilities
- Sustain a revitalised town centre with commercial, residential and community developments forming a new streetscape along the R772
- Create increased connectivity between a revitalised town core and the existing and proposed residential zonings within the plan area
- Facilitate and encourage the integration of the River Vartry as a key feature in the redevelopment of the town centre, maximising its potential as a local amenity
- Promote and foster economic development and linkages to surrounding larger settlements within and outside the County
- Develop the tourism potential of the area as a visitor/ tourist destination in itself and in its role as a 'gateway' linking the east and southeast of the County and the Wicklow Mountains
- Protect the built and natural heritage of the area

In recognition of the historical pattern of development, the profile of the settlement, the demands of higher order strategies and the vision for the town set out above, the development strategy is as follows:

- To reinforce and improve the visual appearance of the central area of the town and encourage development that will enhance the town's vitality and vibrancy
- To identify key sites suitable for development in the town centre and set out design criteria capable of meeting the overall vision for the town core area
- To plan for and encourage the provision of high quality housing, concentrated principally around Ashford town centre and lands within 500m of the town centre
- To improve linkages between Ashford Town Centre and the Nun's Cross area and in particular, to designate lands for new housing in this area, subject to substantial improvement to access routes, both vehicles and pedestrians and cyclists
- To plan for and encourage the development of new employment opportunities, in the form of both new mixed use developments in the town centre and office / light industrial / warehousing development on greenfield lands to the north of the town centre
- To facilitate and support further development of the existing film studios
- To identify and address deficits in social, community and recreational services; to require developers to provide such facilities in tandem with new housing development and to require the payment of development levies for the provision of such facilities by the local authority
- To ensure that only appropriate land uses are provided on lands identified as being at risk of flooding.

- To create functional public spaces and pedestrian routes linked to new development that maximise the natural features of the area
- To ensure the protection and enhancement of natural habitats, cultural heritage, ecological resources and biodiversity.

2.1 Residential development

The 2008 Local Area Plan for Ashford provided enough zoned land to potentially deliver c. 1,500 new dwellings, at densities on greenfield lands of up to 28 units / hectare. Given the housing requirement of an additional 858 units up to 2022 (see appendix for details of housing demand), the previous plan provided for a significant surplus of zoned housing land.

As such, the plan shall only provide for sufficient zoned land to meet the growth targets as set out in the Wicklow County Settlement Hierarchy.

In accordance with the 'Core Strategy' guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, where a surplus of zoned land is identified, it will be necessary to select the most appropriate land to zone in the plan and then:

- designate the surplus land as a 'strategic land reserve' for the future that will not be allowed to develop within the plan period, or
- change the zoning of the surplus residential land to some other land use that is required during the lifetime of the plan, or
- remove the zoning from the surplus land.

This plan provides for Option 1 above and has designated surplus lands as a 'Strategic Land Reserve' for the future that will not be allowed to develop within the plan period. However, prior to carrying out this step, a review of the existing density provisions has been undertaken, and by reducing density on lands that are simply not capable or suitable of achieving 28/ha, the amount of land that needs to be re-designated as a strategic land reserve has been minimised.

Table 2.1 below sets out the land proposed to be zoned for residential development in this plan, while Table 2.2 sets out details of lands to be included within the 'Strategic Land Reserve'.

Location/Description	Zoning	Potential No. of Units
Lands to west/rear of Ashford House	TC	8
Lands to the south of Ballinahinch Park	R25	30
Action Area 1 Inchinappa (Phase 1)	R20	138
Action Area 1 Inchinappa (Phase 2)	R20	97
Lands at Ballinalea	R20	142
Lands at Ballinalea (SLO5)	R20	56
Lands north of Ballinalea Cottages	R20	11
Lands at Nun's Cross (SLO4)	R15	40
Lands South of Ballinahinch Farm	R20	4
Lands at Ballinahinch (SLO3) Phase 1	R20	92
Lands at Ballinahinch (SLO3) Phase 2	R20	70
Lands west of Ashford NS at Ballinahinch	R20	102
Infill Lands	RE/TC	68
		858

Table 2.1 Residential zoning provisions

Location/Description	Zoning	Potential no. of Units
Lands along the Vartry River (Mount Alto)	SLB	128
Lands at Inchinappa	SLB	156
Total		284

Table 2.2 Strategic Land Reserve

2.2 Residential development objectives

PH1 *To reserve lands for future development beyond the lifetime of the plan in the form of a 'Strategic Land Reserve'. These are lands that are identified as being within the potential built envelope of the settlement with regard to proximity and accessibility to infrastructure. However these lands are not suitable or necessary for development during the lifetime of this plan and may only be considered for detailed zoning and development after 2022. Any development proposals within the lifetime of the plan will be considered under the Wicklow County Development Plan rural objectives.*

3.1 Economic development & employment

As set out in Table 3 of the introductory chapter, it is an objective of the County Development Plan to increase the number of jobs in Ashford to 802 by 2022. The strategy of this plan is to take advantage of the existing economic assets in order to stimulate employment within the area. The key assets the plan area has to offer are:

- Proximity to the N11/M11 and the higher order town of Wicklow/Rathnew
- The established film industry and the potential spin off tourism benefits to the area
- The availability of Local Authority lands earmarked for employment and enterprise
- A large hinterland population offering a wide variety of skills
- A strong agricultural sector
- Sufficient waste water infrastructure
- Sufficient water supply (currently under construction).

Given the town's location, situated in close proximity to the higher order settlement of Wicklow town, it is unlikely that the town can act as an attractor for a large scale employer to locate over the lifetime of the plan. Therefore it is considered likely that most new employment creation will be generated by smaller and medium sized local enterprises / service providers. Opportunities particularly exist to develop 'product based'¹ intensive industries given the town's proximity to the national primary route, while the town's proximity to Wicklow Town offers further opportunities to foster employment linkages and spin off industries from this large employment centre. With the recent construction of a state of the art film studio in north Ashford, which has hosted a number of international productions, the potential to develop related and spin off enterprises arises.

With respect to tourism, the proximity of Ashford to the eastern ends of both the Sally Gap and Wicklow Gap roads mean that Ashford could provide a tourism 'gateway' role between the Wicklow Mountains and visitors coming from Dublin, east Wicklow and the south east of Ireland. The scenic village of Ashford is also home to the famous Mount Usher gardens which act as an attractor for tourists, giving rise to potential for spin off businesses, such as shops, public houses, restaurants and guesthouses/B&Bs.

This plan will therefore make provision for lands to be reserved which will be capable of accommodating both local service employment in the form of light industry / small start up units and heavier industry types / a large stand alone employment development alongside the provision of a number of specific employment

¹ The development of this type of industry by reason of the product based nature of the traded commodity, is dependent on ease of access to the main transportation networks

/ tourism objectives aimed at maximising the potential of this industry in Ashford. Section 4 to follow addresses the development strategy for the town centre and retail.

This plan provides 13ha of greenfield zoned 'employment' land that would be suitable for various types of industries and start up businesses requiring purpose-built premises.

3.2 Economic development & employment objectives

- ET1** *To facilitate and support the growth of the Town Centre of Ashford in accordance with the provisions set out in Section 4 of this plan and to encourage the development of new retail / retail services and business support services (such as solicitors, accountants, architects etc) within the TC zone.*
- ET2** *To facilitate and support the development of the tourism industry in Ashford and maximise the town's location as a gateway between the tourism assets within Co. Wicklow and the east coast of Ireland.*
- ET3** *To facilitate proposals to strengthen and further develop the film industry in Ashford. The Council shall resist and restrict proposals for change of use in this area.*
- ET4** *To promote the development of employment lands within Ashford in accordance with the provisions of Action Area 2 as set out in Section 8 of this plan.*
- ET5** *To improve, as funding allows, the principal access routes and junctions linking Ashford town centre to surrounding tourist attractions and strategic transport corridors.*
- ET6** *To support and facilitate in co-operation with relevant bodies and landowners, the provision of tourism amenity routes around the town.*

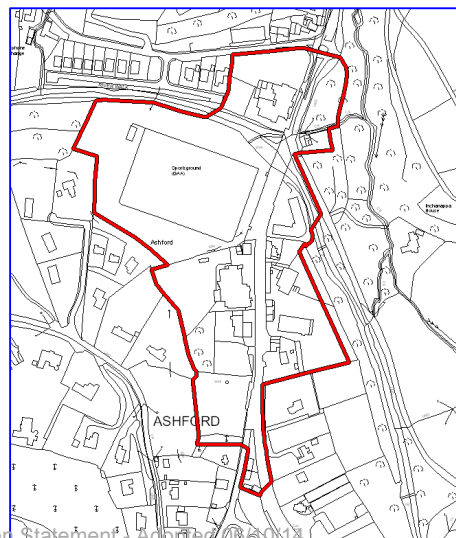
4.1 Town Centre & Retail

The commercial core of Ashford extends from a cluster of shops, cafes and other businesses at the old N11 – Roundwood Road junction, down along the main street over the Vartry Bridge, as far south as the junction up to Ballinalea. The pattern of development within the town core is quite disjointed with large sites remaining undeveloped or underutilised. This has led to the town lacking a distinct street frontage and core for urban activity where residential, commercial and community functions can take place side by side.

The existing retailing services within the town currently fall below what is envisaged by the County Plan for an area of Ashford's size with only a small number of buildings within the town core area actively being used for retail purposes. The plan must therefore address this shortfall and be capable of facilitating the future retailing needs of the projected population.

In accordance with the above this plan identifies two key opportunity sites, which alongside the objectives for the town centre below (and as set out in Part 1 of this Volume and in the County Plan), shall facilitate the overall strategy for the development of Ashford town centre.

Figure 4.1
Ashford Core Area



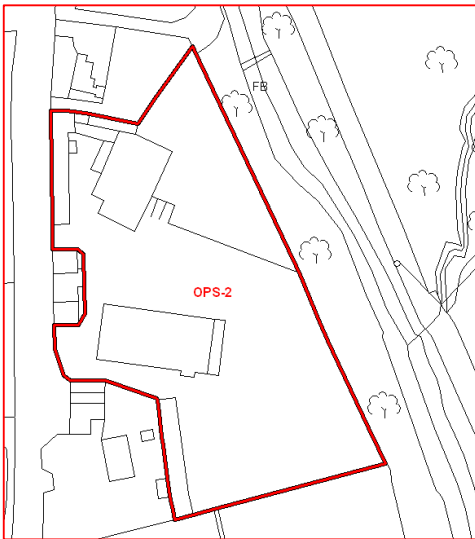
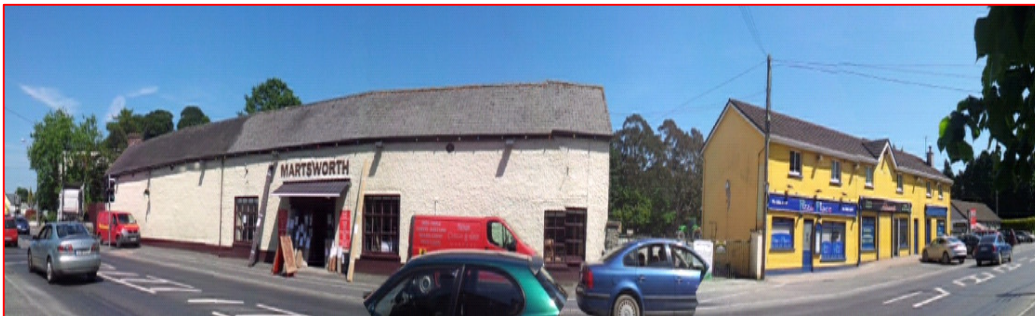
4.2 Town Centre Objectives

TC1 The redevelopment of any lands within the town core area with frontage onto the main street of Ashford shall provide for a street fronting building of a high quality design or for a high quality urban space, including hard and soft landscaping, and appropriate street fixtures and furniture, in order to enhance and create a more attractive streetscape.

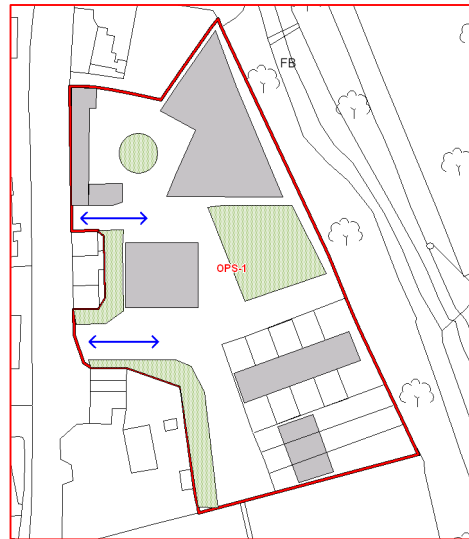
4.3 Opportunity Sites

OP1: The Mart site

This site measures 0.95ha and provides an opportunity to develop a large area of back lands within the town centre of Ashford, while maintaining / providing a new street fronting building. .



Existing Site Layout



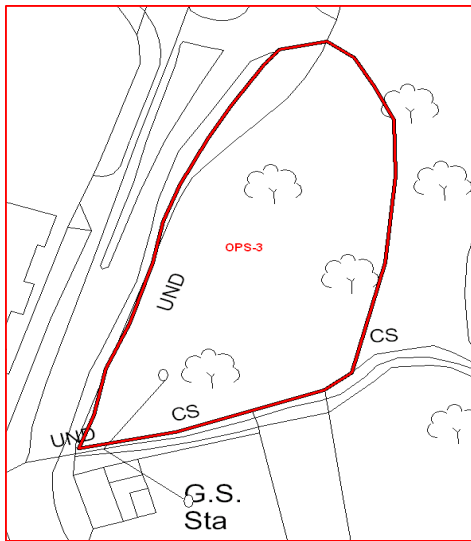
Indicative Block Layout

Objectives

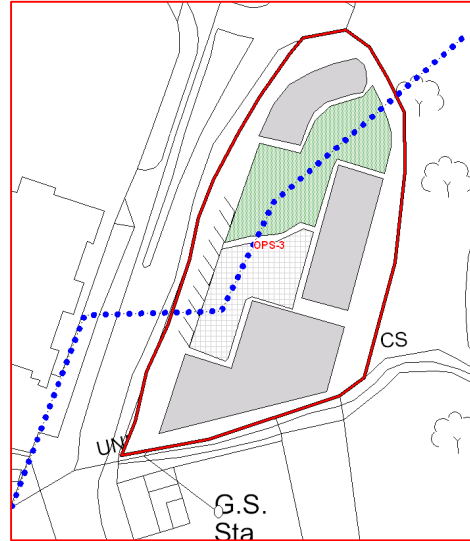
- To provide for a mix of uses capable of accommodating retail/commercial/residential development.
- The development of the northern half of the site should provide for an active retail street frontage with ancillary retail units to the rear centred around a hard and soft landscaped public square/civic space.
- The overall development proposal for the site shall include a detailed landscaping plan. The proposed landscaping plan shall place a specific emphasis on the eastern and southern boundaries of the site in order to screen the proposed development site from Mount Usher Gardens.

OP 2: Lands at Inchinappa adjoining the former Garda Station

This site measures 0.32ha and adjoins the former Garda Station building and provides an opportunity to further enhance the street frontage opposite Ashford House, while also linking southern half of the town centre to the proposed new public park and Inchinappa residential development.



Existing Site Layout



Indicative Block Layout

Objectives:

- To provide for a mixed use development including commercial/retail units, whilst also providing for a 'Multi-Use Games Area' of at least 300sqm.
- The subject lands shall be developed as an extension to the main street and provide for an active street frontage, designed in a manner that is in keeping with the surrounding developments in this area.
- The development of these lands shall include the provision of a pedestrian/cycle crossing, and the overall layout and design shall be laid in a manner that facilitates a passively supervised pedestrian/cycle route to the adjoining open space lands to the immediate north, forming part of SLO1 and the community park under construction.
- Having regard to the location of these lands within Flood Zone 'B' only appropriate 'Less Vulnerable' or 'Water Compatible' development as defined in the 'Planning System and Flood Risk Management: Guidelines for Planning Authorities' may be developed on this site.

5.1 Social & Community infrastructure

In order to meet the needs of the existing and future residents of Ashford and its hinterland, there is a need to enhance community facilities in the town. In particular, this plan must make provisions for the growth of existing schools and sports / recreational facilities and also to provide for more indoor community space (please see appendix for more details).

In this regard, the plan makes the following zoning provisions in addition to the existing uses within the plan area:

Use Group	Specific use	Zoning	Location	Area (ha)
Education/Community	Primary Education	CE	SLO4 Lands at Nun's Cross	1.05 ²
	Primary Education	CE	SLO2 Lands at Inchinappa South	2 ³
	Community Use	CE	SLO2 Lands at Inchinappa South	
	Community Use	CE	Former Garda Station	0.08
Open space	Active Open Space	AOS	Ashford GAA existing playing field	3.1
		AOS	Ashford Rovers existing playing field	1.4
		AOS	Lands at Ballinalea	3.8
		AOS	Action Area 2	2
	Equipped Play Spaces	CE	Lands within SLO2	0.05
		AOS	SLO1 (Ashford Community Park at Inchinappa)	0.4
	Casual Play Space	OS	SLO1 – Informal Park/Walk	3.8

6.1 Service infrastructure

To ensure that Ashford can fulfill its role within the Wicklow Core Strategy, the adequate provision of services infrastructure is essential in order for the town to grow.

6.2 Water Services

Wastewater: Ashford is served by the Wicklow Sewerage Scheme. This waste water treatment system has a capacity of 34,000pe (population equivalent) and is operating at 17,500pe capacity. Therefore there is adequate capacity to meet the needs of the plan area alongside the projected populations for Wicklow and Rathnew up to 2022.

Water Supply: Ashford is served by the Wicklow Water Supply Scheme from Cronroe Reservoir. The water at Cronroe is a combination of water from the Dublin Regional Scheme at the Vartry Reservoir and groundwater abstracted and treated at the Cronroe Water Treatment plant.

Upon completion of a new pipeline from the Vartry supply to the Cronroe Reservoir in 2014, the scheme and Ashford Town, will have sufficient water supply to meet the needs of projected population growth. Notwithstanding the availability of water supply, improvements may be required in the watermain distribution system within Ashford to serve all zoned lands.

6.3 Transportation and movement

Public transport: Public transport to / from Ashford is provided by Bus Eireann, which provide three routes Dublin – Rosslare, Dublin – Waterford and Dublin – Wicklow Town, with stops located along the R772. The

² 1.05ha has been reserved for community and educational use the exact use of which shall be agreed in accordance with the details set out for SLO4.

³2ha has been reserved for community and educational use the exact use of which shall be agreed in accordance with the details set out for SLO2.

proximity of the town to Wicklow Train Station (c. 6km) also offers opportunities to avail this rail service linking the area to Dublin and Wexford.

Walking & cycling: While the majority of the main routes in the town have footpaths, these are need of enhancement to width and overall quality. A number of peripheral locations do not have a complete footpath routes to the town centre. The vast majority of the town's roads are dedicated to the needs of motorists, in terms of width dedicated to the road carriageway and car parking. Therefore there is scope to carry out footpath widening and to provide cycleways in some locations.

Vehicular movement: The main street in Ashford is generally of good quality and reasonably wide, with no bottlenecks; however the R763/R764 junction has been identified as an area in need of improvement. This plan includes a number of objectives for new roads in this area (in SLO-3 and AA2) which could provide for alternative routes for traffic circulation in and out of the town from the R763 (Annamore Road) and R764 (Roundwood Road), thereby reducing traffic at the existing junction and allowing for the development of proposals to improve this junction.

6.4 Service Infrastructure Objectives (see Map 3)

SI 1 *To provide for a new through road linking the R763 and the R764 in SLO-3 and upon opening of this link, to improve / reconfigure the existing R763 – R764 junction to improve safety for both vehicles and pedestrians / cyclists.*

SI 2 *To provide for a new through road linking the R764 to the R772 (old N11) through and serving employment lands designated as Action Area 3.*

SI 3 *To improve / provide new footpaths, cycleways and traffic calming on existing roads where required and to require the provision of new link roads, footpaths and cycleways as specified in this plan in 'Action Areas' and 'Specific Local Objective' areas.*

SI4 *For the purpose of this plan, the minimum set back of all new development (other than employment development) from the M11 shall be 50m. Where housing development is proposed within 100m of the M11, the developer shall be responsible for designing, providing and maintaining suitable noise and light pollution mitigation measures. The design of noise and light pollution mitigation measures shall comply with NRA best practice guidance.*

7.1 Built & Natural Heritage

There are limited buildings and items in Ashford town centre recorded for heritage value – there is only one building on the Record of Protect Structures or the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (the same building – the former Garda Station). However, surrounding the centre, are a number of important demesne houses, their grounds and their associated ancillary buildings (such as gate lodges) and architecturally and socially important historical features such as old schools houses, churches, thatched cottages and bridges.

There are few identified archaeological sites (national monuments) in the plan area; in the main, any features that have been identified are on the grounds of the demesne houses, other than on lands just north of the national school.

In terms of natural heritage, the key feature in the settlement is the Vartry River, which is an EU protected salmonid river. This river flows to The Murrough, a protected wetland on the coast. There are no designated Natura 2000 or NHA sites in the settlement or very close by.

The landscape within and around Ashford is highly attractive, particularly due to its valley topography and numerous mature trees. More in depth development is nestled well into the topography, and in more elevated areas, densities have tended to be very low which allows for excellent integration of development into the landscape.

The landscape around Ashford is designated a 'corridor area' in the Wicklow County landscape assessment, which is considered to be of 'low vulnerability'.

In formulating additional policies for the protection of natural heritage in the Ashford plan area, the Council will be required to give consideration to the potential impacts of development on all such sites, and the plan is accompanied by the required environmental assessments as separate documents.

The protection and enhancement of heritage assets through the plan will help to safeguard the local character and distinctiveness of Ashford and its surroundings, providing local economic, social and environmental benefits.

7.2 Heritage Objectives

H1 *In the interests of the protection and enhancement of biodiversity in Ashford, it is an objective of this plan to:*

- *Protect trees, hedgerows and wooded areas (particularly those containing indigenous species), watercourses and other features of the natural landscape - development that requires the felling of mature trees of conservation and/or amenity value, even though they may not be listed in the Development Plan, will generally be discouraged;*
- *Require the planting of indigenous plant and tree species in new developments and along new vehicular and pedestrian routes.*

H2 *To facilitate the appropriate refurbishment and renewal of architecturally significant buildings and to accommodate new uses in old buildings to ensure their continued use/preservation*

H3 *To maintain and protect the demesne settings of Inchinappa House, Mount Usher House and Rosanna House, and to require all development proposals within or directly adjoining these demesnes to fully evaluate and address any impacts of the setting and character of these demesnes.*

8.1 Action Area Plans and Specific Local Objectives

8.2 Action Area 1

This Action Area is situated at Ballinalea and comprises of c. 11.5ha of lands, zoned for residential development (c. 7.7ha) and Active Open Space (c. 3.8ha) adjoining Ashford Rovers existing sports grounds. Access to the AOS lands shall be provided through the residential land from the R772. Only 50% of the proposed residential element may be developed prior to the AOS lands being leveled and drained suitable for sports use and devoted to an agreed sports body.

Figure 8.1 AA1

