

CHAPTER 2

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

2.1 National Strategies

2.1.1 The National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) is a 20-year planning framework designed to deliver a more balanced social, economic, physical development and population growth between the counties' regions. It sets out a vision and strategic framework for achieving sustainable and balanced development in Ireland.

The strategy embodies a spatial structure of Gateways and Development Centre Hierarchy leading the development of the regions, including hubs, towns, villages and rural areas having complementary roles within the structure. Such regional development is summarised as developing the full potential of each area to contribute to the optimal performance of the State as a whole, economically, socially and environmentally.

The Strategy envisages investment being focused around the network of Gateways and supports the concept of an urban-rural partnership by linking the focus on the Gateways with support for other urban centres and rural areas. The NSS identifies that Ireland needs to renew, consolidate and develop existing cities, towns and villages, keeping them as physically compact and public transport friendly as possible and minimising urban sprawl. The Dublin and Mid East Region being the Greater Dublin Area, of which Wicklow is a part, includes the remaining two counties of the Mid East, Kildare and Meath and the four Dublin authorities.

The Wicklow Mountains effectively divide the County, with the eastern and western areas having complementary but different functions in terms of the role played by Wicklow in the GDA. The eastern parts of the County form part of the Dundalk – Dublin – Waterford strategic corridor and benefit from good linkage to air and sea international transport connections. While the western part of the County plays a complementary but slightly different role given its more rural characteristics, but its importance in the region for agriculture, tourism and recreation is recognised.

The NSS also recognises the long tradition of people living in rural parts of Ireland and promotes sustainable rural settlement as a key component of delivering more balanced regional development. The NSS called for settlement policies in development plans and their implementation in the administration of planning to take into account both the differing demands for housing in rural areas and the varying rural development contexts. Different policies are needed, for example, for areas with declining populations, as compared with areas in which there are overspill issues associated with proximity to large cities or towns.

The sustainable rural settlement policy framework in the NSS has four broad objectives:

- To sustain and renew established rural communities and the existing stock of investment in a way that responds to the various spatial, structural and economic changes taking place, while protecting the important assets rural areas possess;
- To strengthen the established structure of villages and smaller settlements both to support local economies and to accommodate additional population in a way that supports the viability of local infrastructure and services such as schools and water services;
- To ensure that key assets in rural areas such as water quality and the natural and cultural heritage are protected to support quality of life and economic vitality;
- To ensure that rural settlement policies take account of and are appropriate to local circumstances.

2.1.2 The National Development Plan, 2007 – 2013

Through the prioritisation of investment the National Development Plan (NDP) seeks to maintain National Competitiveness within a sustainable economic and budgetary framework. The Plan focuses investment around the National Spatial Strategy, the regions and the network of gateways identified in the NSS.

The Plan's direction is characterised by the aims of sustainable economic growth, greater social inclusion and balanced regional development. In acknowledging the importance of the spatial management of the Country the NDP focuses upon regional development and environmental sustainability as being central to the investment structure of the plan. It establishes policy and a financial framework within which national and local physical planning can be expressed and its strategies advanced, within a co-ordinated national mutually beneficial framework. Such an approach will be environmentally sustainable, socially cohesive and enhance international competitiveness.

The National Development Plan recognises the Dublin Metropolitan Area as the gateway within the GDA and the main catalyst of regional and national growth. It has identified that while much of Ireland's recent prosperity is attributable to the performance of the GDA the scale, pace of change and spatial distribution of development has produced quality of life challenges and diseconomies of scale.

The NDP continues to deliver significant investment in a range of economic, environmental and social projects in County Wicklow, in particular:

- Investment in the N11 including the Ashford – Rathnew by-pass, Kilpedder Interchange and the Wicklow Port Access and Town Relief Road.
- Investment in rural transport initiatives.
- Investment in regional and rural water programmes including upgrading and expanding sewage treatment capacity and improving drinking water supply, including the Wicklow Town and environs Sewerage Scheme.
- Investment in Wicklow County Enterprise Board.

2.1.3 Sustainable Development – A Strategy for Ireland (1997) & Making Ireland's Development Sustainable' (2002)

Sustainable development may be defined as a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present but also in the indefinite future.

The strategy of sustainable development is based upon three pillars - economic, social and environmental. We are not empowered, when implementing the concept, to pick and choose among the three pillars or to emphasise one as being more important than others but rather implement policies that have regard to all three.

Sustainable development is a process in which these three objectives, which shall be mutually reinforcing, are addressed on an equal footing. Actions, which fail to take account of the need for a harmonious balance between the three objectives, may undermine the system as a whole. An a carte approach to the principles is therefore not appropriate.

As outlined in documents such as 'Sustainable Development: A strategy for Ireland' (DoEHLG 1997) and 'Making Ireland's Development Sustainable' (DoEHLG 2002) all planning and development is obliged to conform to the principles of sustainable development. Collectively they acknowledge that all development impacts on the environment and that sustainable development cannot eliminate such effects altogether. They aspire, however, to change the balance of impacts from negative to positive, pursuing policy choices which promote economic efficiency with less intensive natural resource use and less environmental stress. Their overall aim is to ensure that economy and society in Ireland can develop to their full potential within a well-protected environment, without comprising the quality of that environment, and with responsibility towards present and future generations and the wider international community.

2.1.4 National Climate Change Strategy 2007-2012

This document outlines the measures that Ireland will take in order to meet its commitment to limit its greenhouse gas emissions over the 2008-2012 period to 13% above 1990 levels, which include the following policy mechanisms:

- the need to take a long-term view having regard to likely future commitments and the economic imperative for early action.
- the promotion of sustainable development, including integration of climate change considerations into all policy areas.
- the protection of economic development and competitiveness, utilising market-based instruments with the exploitation of new markets and opportunities.
- the maximisation of economic efficiency both on a macro-economic basis and within sectors; and an equitable approach to all sectors, having regard to the relative costs of mitigation between sectors.

2.1.5 Transport 21

Transport 21 is a national investment infrastructure investment programme for the period 2006 to 2015. It is a component of the National Development Plan.

The aims of the programme are to expand system capacity by addressing existing deficiencies and to encourage greater use of public transport, to enhance quality and increase the accessibility and integration of transport and ensure sustainability by putting in place a transport system that is economical and eco-friendly.

2.1.6 National Heritage and Biodiversity Plans

A key objective of the National Heritage Plan (2002) is to “place heritage at the heart of public life”. The plan recognises that heritage is communal and we all share a responsibility to protect it. Protection of heritage must begin at local level enabling citizens to become actively involved in preserving and enhancing that, which belongs to us all. While this plan sets out a vision nationally for heritage management, it emphasises the needs to manage heritage locally, through the preparation of Local Heritage Plans.

The National Biodiversity Action Plan (2002) sets out actions for the promotion and delivery of biodiversity conservation at both national and local levels. The plan calls on each Local Authority to prepare a Local Biodiversity Action Plan, and emphasises the important role of local authorities in promoting and delivering biodiversity conservation through local plans and programmes. Wicklow County Council is in the process of preparing a County Biodiversity Plan.

2.2 Regional Strategies

2.2.1 Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area

The Greater Dublin Area incorporates the Dublin Regional Authority and the Mid East Regional Authority being the geographical and administrative areas of Dublin City, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal, South Dublin, Wicklow, Meath and Kildare. The Guidelines provide a Strategic Planning Framework for the region providing a link between national policies such as the National Spatial Strategy and the National Development Plan, and plan policies and guidance at the City and County level.

The Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) make a distinction between the existing built up area and its environs, where the built up area is the 'Metropolitan', and the remainder the 'Hinterland' with a wide range of settlement sizes that have the potential to attain an enhanced level of sustainability.

The principal hierarchy of settlement size in Wicklow is identified as the Metropolitan Dynamic Cluster of Bray and Greystones/Delgany, where Bray is designated a Metropolitan Consolidation Town and Greystones/Delgany a Large Growth Town II. The Hinterland area settlements of Wicklow and Arklow are Large Growth Towns I and II respectively, while Blessington and Newtownmountkennedy are identified as Moderate Growth Towns.

The Regional Planning Guidelines recognise that the critical issue in the Hinterland is the leaching out of activities particularly economic, to the Metropolitan Area, thus detracting from the vibrancy and quality of life of settlements and rural areas, and the implications for traffic demand.

The Metropolitan area development will be concentrated in line with the principles of sustainability to accommodate a greater population than at present. This Metropolitan Area development will be balanced by the concentration of development into the identified higher order settlements in the Hinterland. The strategy sees the development of both these areas as being complementary. To compete with the Metropolitan Area it is recognised that the Hinterland Large Growth and Moderate Growth Towns will have to attain a status capable of providing higher order economic, social/cultural and environmental infrastructure.

The Draft County Development Plan Settlement Strategy has regard to the NSS, NDP, the RPGs and their underlying dynamic of sustainable development. The Settlement Strategy is based upon a clearly articulated hierarchy of settlements. This strategy seeks to promote development into a series of tiers with the Metropolitan, Large Growth Towns I and II, Moderate Growth Towns and Small Growth Towns being Levels 1 – 5, with the other towns and villages located in tiers below. The Draft County Development Plan has identified these further tiers as being Rural Towns, Small and Large Villages and Rural Clusters.

In the Hinterland Area the settlement strategy's hierarchical structure aims to facilitate complementary levels of sustainable development for the settlements and their environs. The higher order towns of Bray, Greystones and Delgany and the Large Growth Towns of Wicklow and Arklow shall be encouraged, through policy formulation, to attain levels of achievable self-sufficiency while the remaining Hinterland settlements shall accommodate appropriate levels of Local Growth and thus satisfy local need.

The Review of the RPGs has commenced and will offer strategic advice for the period 2010 – 2022. While the overall structure and implementation of the 2004 – 2016 document will remain unchanged, the review will address the changed and changing economic circumstances of contraction in the short term and lower levels of growth in the long term.

The revised guidelines will also take account of key environmental issues and potential impacts of climate change. Climate change will bear influence on a cross section of themes and will require integrating climate change considerations into many of its strategic objectives. Its strong core focus will continue to be based upon the principles of sustainable development.

2.2.2 Dublin Transportation Office – A Platform for Change 2000 – 2016

A Platform for Change provides an integrated transportation strategy for the Greater Dublin Area. It was designed to support and complement the strategic land use-planning framework outlined in what was the Strategic Planning Guidelines for the GDA (SPGGDA). While the SPGGDA preceded the current RPG 2004 – 2016, A Platform for Change is still of relevance and importance.

The strategic aim of the document is to achieve a more compact Greater Dublin Area, which will create conditions that will reduce the amount of travel, improve public transport and provide a viable alternative to the private car. The strategy is designed to foster sustainable development, consolidate growth in the Metropolitan Area and sustain economic development throughout the region.

This strategy is currently under review and the DTO is preparing a new strategy for the period 2010-2030.

2.2.3 Water Framework Directive & the River Basin Management Plans

The objectives of this draft plan have regard to the provisions of the European Union water Framework Directive (2000) and Wicklow County Council is a lead authority in implementing the Directive. The Directive establishes an integrated approach to the sustainable use of water resources and its primary focus is to achieve good ecological and chemical status for all waters by 2015. Water quality management is centred on river basins that are natural geographical areas occurring in the landscape. Management of these basins will be through management plans created for each River Basin District. County Wicklow falls within both the Eastern (ERBD) and South Eastern Districts (SERBD). Ground waters are protected under the European Community and National Legislation. Local Authorities, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Marine Institute of Ireland are responsible for enforcement. A groundwater protection scheme applies a risk assessment based approach to groundwater protection and sustainable development. The environmental impacts of the River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) will be assessed through the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment processes. The draft RBMPs are due for publication by December 2009.

The foremost surface waters of concern to Wicklow County Council are the Dargle, Avoca and Vartry systems and the Derry, Dereen and Slaney.

2.3 Local plans, strategies and studies

2.3.1 County Development Board 'Outlook – a 10 year strategic plan for County Wicklow'

The main function of the County Development Board is to co-ordinate the plans and activities of all the main players in County Wicklow. This will ensure that the people of Wicklow will benefit from a more efficient and effective service delivery. It is important that any overlaps or gaps in this delivery are identified and addressed, in an integrated way. In order to achieve this, the CDB has drawn up a ten year Strategy for the Social, Economic and Cultural Development of County Wicklow. In addition, the strategies and operational plans of agencies and groups in the County will be proofed against the CDB strategy. This plan can be seen as a framework for decision-making, a look into the future, a problem-solving initiative and a shared values document. The strategy will be delivered by the member organisations of the CDB through their own operational plans.

Outlook sets out a number of 'priority' actions, which were deemed to be those actions that best fulfilled the principles of the County Development Board that are 'integration', 'added value' (i.e. adding something new to the approach), 'partnership' and 'cooperation'. Each action has a lead agency that will take responsibility for its implementation and coordinating with supporting agencies, within an agreed timeframe. The Local Authority, through the County Development Plan and other planning strategies, is a lead agency in the delivery mechanism.

2.3.2 IFPLUTS / LUTS

Integrated Framework Plans for Land Use and Transportation (IFPLUT) and Land Use and Transportation Studies (LUTS) have been prepared for the major settlements in the County, namely North Bray and environs (2006), Greystones (2004), Wicklow and environs (2005) and Arklow and environs (2003).

The purpose of an integrated land use and transport plan is to review the planning, development and transportation context of a settlement and its environs, and to provide land use and transportation guidance for future development.

While the principal role of such studies is to inform local planning strategies, transport has a regional dimension and therefore these plans were considered in the crafting of the draft County Development Plan.

2.3.3 Wicklow Outdoor Recreation, Sports and Play Strategies

Strategies have been adopted for 'outdoor recreation', 'sports and recreation' and 'play' during the life of the County Development Plan 2004-2010. All of these strategies set out policies and objectives with the ultimate goal of improving quality and life and wellbeing of Wicklow residents and visitors, and making maximum use of the County's resources, in the sustainable and sensitive manner. These strategies particularly influence the new County Development Plan in the areas of tourism and recreation and community development.

2.3.4 Wicklow Waste Management Plan

A new County Waste Management Plan was adopted in 2006. The overriding aim to reduce and manage waste pervades all aspects of land use and development planning and therefore is influential in the formulation of the County Development Plan.

2.3.5 Local Plans & other studies

A number of Local Area Plans and Town Plans and one District Plan have been, and will continue to be prepared and implemented by Wicklow County Council. While these plans must be consistent with the County Development Plan applicable at the time of adoption, the cycle of local plan review during the lifetime of the County Development Plan will form a feedback loop which will feed into and inform the drafting of subsequent County Plans.

The following local plans were adopted during the course of the County Development Plan 2004-2010:

- Ashford Local Area Plan 2008 – 2014
- Arklow Environs Local Area Plan 2008 – 2014
- Baltinglass Town Plan 2008
- Bray Environs Local Area Plan 2009 – 2015
- Carnew Town Plan 2009
- Dunlavin Local Area Plan 2008 – 2014
- Enniskerry Local Area Plan 2009 – 2012
- Greystones/Delgany Local Area Plan 2006 – 2012
- Kilcoole Local Area Plan 2008 – 2014
- Newcastle Town Plan 2007
- Newtownmountkennedy Local Area Plan 2008 – 2014
- Rathdrum Local Area Plan 2006 – 2012
- Roundwood Town Plan 2007
- Tinahely Town Plan 2009
- Wicklow Environs Local Area Plan 2008 – 2014
- Wicklow Action Area 6 Local Area Plan 2006 – 2012

The following other plans, studies and strategies have been carried out and inform the development of the County Development Plan 2010-2016:

- The County Wicklow Heritage Plan 2004 – 2008, in partnership with the Wicklow Heritage Forum (currently under review);
- The County Wicklow Biodiversity Plan (currently being drafted)
- National Inventory of Architectural Heritage and the study of 'Vernacular Architecture of County Wicklow' (Wicklow County Council 2009)
- Village Design Statements for the villages of Ballinaclesh, Glenealy, Hollywood and Stratford – on – Slaney;

The County Wicklow Heritage Plan 2004-2008 was produced in response to national policy, and in accordance with guidelines produced by the Heritage Council. This plan was prepared by the Wicklow Heritage Forum, a partnership group set up by Wicklow County Council. The Forum consists of representatives from the relevant stakeholder groups in the County, including representatives from local government, statutory and non-statutory bodies, community and voluntary sector, heritage groups, farming and local development and business sectors.

The setting up of the Heritage Forum offers for the first time a framework in which various bodies, organisations and groups with responsibility for the care and conservation of heritage in County Wicklow can work together in partnership, in a strategic way to achieve an agreed vision. The County Wicklow Heritage Plan has had regard to other frameworks in place in Wicklow, namely the 10 - year strategic plan for County Wicklow, "Outlook" which was produced in 2002 by the County Development Board. Likewise the Heritage Plan has had regard to the aims and objectives of the Council, as set out in the County Wicklow Development Plan.

The 2004-2008 plan is currently under and a new plan will be produced in 2009.

The underlying thesis of the foregoing national, regional and local plans, strategies and guidelines is that all development shall have at its core and, be built upon the principles of sustainable development. It shall be the underlying dynamic of the County Development Plan, in the interests of the common, good that the concept of sustainable development forms the basis upon which the Plan is built.