

**Submission
to
Wicklow County Development Plan 2021 – 2027**

On behalf of Arklow Municipal Councillors

Cllr Peir Leonard

Cllr Pat Fitzgerald

Cllr Sylvester Bourke

Cllr Tommy Annesley

Cllr Miriam Murphy

Cllr Pat Kennedy

Date: 10/01/2020

Introduction:

Due to a combination of high unemployment and over 15-30% of Arklow's population commuting to Dublin, we recommend that Arklow should be redesignated as a "self sustaining" town rather than a "self-sustaining growth" town until such a time until sufficient investment in essential road/bridge infrastructure, public transport, local employment and sufficient emergency services are implemented. If Arklow is allowed to grow in the next few years it will become a dormitory commuter town which will impact very negatively in terms of social wellbeing, health and the local economy. Building commuter housing that are car dependent goes against the Climate Emergency status that Wicklow County Council declared in 2019. With unemployment at 20%+ (high), approx 20% commuting to Dublin for work (low), poor transport links, Arklow could benefit from targeted "catch-up" investment to become more self-sustaining.

The following is a list of priority items which we feel are imperative to the progression of Arklow Municipal District prior to its status becoming that of a "self sustaining growth town".

Roads & Infrastructure.

Construction of a southern interchange via a slip road from the M11 to the Vale Road. Reason: To alleviate very serious and ongoing traffic congestion in Arklow Town Centre. The existence of only one point of access via the Nineteen Arches bridge to cross the Avoca river poses a serious health and safety issue to Arklow. It also restricts the free flow of emergency services to the northern and southern sides of Arklow Town and lack of investment in a second bridge has led to the poor performance of Arklow Main Street shops and businesses with many buildings lying derelict or vacant for almost a century. With the proposed construction of Arklow's waste water treatment plant in the near future and the proposed development at Kilbride Arklow of potentially 1400 houses there is no question that this piece of integral infrastructure must now be

given top priority on the roads program for Wicklow.

Construction and completion of the Rockbig to Knockmore roundabout road (Roadstone Road).

Reason: To provide direct access onto M11 for heavy goods vehicles and industrial traffic. Currently these vehicles have to drive through the town centre and residential areas to access the M11. The cost of repairing infrastructure that wasn't designed to take heavy goods vehicles will eventually outweigh any investment in a new road. This measure will save money in the long run.

Footpaths & Cycle lanes.

Completion of all interconnecting footpaths to connect Rathdrum, Meetings of the Waters, Avoca, Woodenbridge to Arklow.

As part of Wicklow County Councils current climate emergency status we see these footpaths and cycle lanes as a priority. It is essential that we create safe alternatives and reduce our need for cars. This will have any benefits to our communities such as health, social, better air quality, economic/tourism etc .

Public Transport

Investment in public transport is essential before any further planning developments. Currently the majority of working people living in Arklow are commuting to the greater Dublin areas.

Introduction of more "park and ride" areas are essential together with additional "rail passing points" to facilitate additional train services are long overdue.

We suggest that incentives for investors to construct "park and ride" facilities could be made in the form of a development levy exemption . We feel this would encourage more investment into these kind of developments.

Economic Growth and IDAs

We suggest that a task force be created to market both Arklow and Rathdrum IDAs. With the proposed new Data centre due to commence construction in the near future both Arklow and Rathdrum can provide a very competitive offering to a variety of Tech business in the greater Dublin area.

Retail & Main Street.

Small scale local enterprise needs to be encouraged, local shops, local produce. We need to prevent any more development on the edge of the town ie shopping centres etc.

Maritime Economy

Arklow has a huge amount of potential for both Maritime tourism, leisure tourism activities together with sea angling tourism & shipping. An investment in an ongoing dredging program to increase and maintain the depth of the water channel is key to

unlocking Arklow's Maritime potential. Regeneration of Arklow Harbour and facilities is necessary also to entice investors into this area. Arklow Harbour has all the key elements to provide a home to offshore windfarm maintenance and storage facilities. We also have a vast amount of marine qualified workforce which if invested in could prove to be an extremely valuable resource for potential investment companies in this area.

With Brexit approaching there is opportunity to be had that needs to be investigated. Arklow is a port town and less than one hour away from the greater Dublin area. The potential of new import and warehousing businesses needs to also be explored.

Tourism

Arklow is a town of untapped potential. With its unique location and proximity to Dublin Arklow has the ability to provide a unique offering of accessible Eco/Maritime/Heritage Tourism .

Arklow has a very unique offering in that it can provide a "New Town" ie Bridgewater Shopping Centre, an "Old Town" Main Street, Heritage areas including the Riverwalk, South Quay and Harbour areas. Beaches & Natural Heritage areas such as "Arklow Marsh" , "Arklow Duck Pond" , "Glenart Forest", "Avoca Riverwalk" are all very uniquely positioned within walking distance of the town environs. Together with the untapped maritime tourism from the proposed Blueway from Bray to Dungarvan Arklow can provide more than sufficient quality activities & experiences to provide entertainment for day sailors from Dunlaoghaire and Greystones marinas once the sewage treatment plant is commissioned and the Avoca river is clean.

Aughrim, Rathdrum, Arklow and Avoca have more than ample potential to achieve the status of tourist destinations in the new county development plan. Connected by the Avoca river and upper river catchment the time has come to realise and investment in what is potentially our greatest asset, The Avoca River.

Rich in heritage from the Avoca Mines to the ancient Viking Settlement in Arklow the Avoca river holds many great stories and narratives just waiting to be told. In many towns a villages throughout the world, the whole economy of a town has been built on river tourism. This needs to be capitlised on. The recovery of the Avoca river and the efforts to revive it are a story in themselves. A story of hope for the future generations.

With the regeneration of Arklow Harbour, South Quay and Riverwalk areas as part of the OPWs flood relief scheme it will be essential to also invest in the upper catchment areas of The Avoca. Reconnecting catchment areas, planting trees and creating wildlife corridors will all play a part in the recovery of the Avoca. A tree planting scheme along the Riparian Zones would benefit these wildlife corridors and should be connected with the Ancient Oak Forests along the Avonmore way creating a continuous and important areas of biodiversity which would sustain and support a wide variety off wildlife and bird species.

We propose that Wicklow County Council liaise with the OPW and obtain the building at Ballymurtagh/Avoca Mines. We feel that this would provide the perfect home for a heritage centre together with an environmental recovery project and purification system to mitigate the tailings which are still polluting the Avoca River.

The Avoca mining heritage has the potential to attract year long visitors from all over the world like the Arigna mining experience in Carraig on Shannon
<https://www.arignaminingexperience.ie/>

From industrial pollution, leaching mines and the input of raw sewage its time to reverse and recover our beautiful river and to restore the life that once called it home. Telling this story and using it to build a strong Eco tourism economy is the way forward. The potential of fresh water fishing tourism on the Avoca needs to be explored and considered as an ultimate goal and the journey towards it needs to begin.

Maritime Musuem.

Arklow is home to one of the largest collections of maritime memorabilia in Ireland. With a rich history in seafaring and boat building Arklow Maritime Musuem is home to some very rare seafaring articles from all over the world. With investment this museum has the potential to grow substantially into not only a maritime museum but a heritage museum for Co. Wicklow. We suggest that substantial investment in immersive experiences will play an important part in generating much needed footfall to the museum

Pottery Museum.

Progression of this much needed amenity and tourist attraction in Arklow needs to be advanced. With the trend of immersive experiences we suggest that in addition to the pottery museum that additional artisan craft village be considered. Grennan Mill pottery school in Thomastown Kilkenny runs a biannual ceramics course. We suggest that a studio space for a resident potter be incorporated into the museum. This position could be run on a two year term in conjunction with Grennan Mills academic term and would support a newly qualified ceramist in setting up a small pottery business in Arklow. The pottery museum could also be offered as a home to Ceramics Ireland who have over 100 members. Currently in Ireland there is no dedicated point of sale for studio ceramics and small potters. This could be a major attraction for Arklow. In many small villages throughout Ireland a local pottery such as Louis Mulcahy on the Dingle Peninsula or Nicolass Moss in Bennettsbridge, Kilkenny provide a very important tourism attraction to their local economies. With Arklows rich history in ceramics and art the Pottery Museum could play in integral part in the regeneration of the Main Street. Grennan Mill also run a biannual international ceramic festival, there is potential for the Pottery Museum to run a similar festival in alternative years.

Kilbride Pyramid

While a lot of heritage has sadly been lost in Arklow we still have some unique offerings. The potential tourism from Howards Mausoleum at Kilbride needs to be recognised and maximised. This pyramid can be seen from many viewing points throughout Arklow town but yet there is no information to relay this to tourists and visitors to the town. We suggest that proper tourism signage be installed at key locations throughout Arklow to promote this unique structure. This structure is also in need of more secure boundaries to prevent any future damage to this very unique and important national heritage site.

Kynochs Walk

After a lot of investment of time and money creating this tourist attraction & walk, unfortunately, due to lack of investment in coastal erosion together with complex issues arising with access via the coastal walk because of the coastal erosion as it stands this tourist attraction is now inaccessible to the public. We suggest that Wicklow County Council prioritise the necessary coastal protection works to conserve this very important walk and heritage trail together with the natural heritage of the North Beach and Porters rock area. Preservation of the rights of way are also of extreme importance and enforcement and protection of all of our rights of way needs to be prioritised along our coastline.

Arklow Castle & Historic Core

With the welcome investment of this substantial facelift for Arklow's Parade Ground it will be essential to signpost this historic feature together with other key tourist attractions and promote it online via Wicklow Tourism.

NB: The implementation of "Tourism Signage" on the M11 North and South of Arklow is essential. Signage should also clearly state that Arklow is a maritime town with a "Maritime Museum" & "Pottery Museum" "Pyramid" "Nineteen Arches Bridge" the oldest stone bridge in Ireland etc.

Cultural

Arklow is in need of a community Art / Theatre space. In 2019 a local group of artists and musicians fundraised to open Arklow's first theatre www.asgard.ie this theatre is currently housed above a local pub on Lower Main Street, Arklow and is thriving with artists and performances on a weekly bases from both local people and well known national and international artists.

Arklow is also home to one of the longest running Music Festivals in the country "Arklow Music Festival".

A community theatre/art centre could be used to provide many services such as Sunbeam House, Autism Initiatives, Grow.ie., The Vault Youth Club, Arklow Active Retirement, Arklow Cancer Support with purpose built art resource centre with facilities and equipment etc .

We would hope that this could be progressed if a suitable building becomes available to house such a venue (possibly the Old Ormonde Cinema could be renovated or given as part of any social contribution to the town from a potential developer).

While we have many sports groups and facilities in Arklow the arts has been underinvested in for a very long time and there is a real need for this community space in the town. It is proven that social connection plays a huge part in mental wellness and places like this are invaluable in every town and village.

Once a suitable property is allocated there is no reason a centre like this could not sustain itself and become independent of Council support.

Heritage

Rural Transport & Infrastructure

Additional services are needed to the Rural Link to connect our rural villages with Arklow.

Barndarrig

We suggest that a much needed car park be incorporated into the Development Plan for St. Mary's, **Barndarrig Church**.

Car Parking

Provision needs to be made in the County Development plan for additional car-parking within the town centre. With an approx population of 14,000 residents Arklow has we suggest developing the car park in Castlepark into a multistory carpark. With a minimal daily rate the revenue created could easily recoup any initial investment and after a few years the car park could be an important income resource for Arklow Municipal District.

New Graveyard

St. Gabriel's cemetery is due to reach full capacity within the next 5 year period. Provision must be made for a new accessible graveyard with Arklow Town Environ.

St. Marys Park. (see fig 1)

We propose that the car park behind St. Marys Park on Main Street be developed into a community raised "sky" garden. We feel this would allow a much needed additional community space/parade ground area which could be used throughout the year for community events and festivals. It could be designed in such a way to create a natural amphitheatre leading down to the river's edge which could potentially facilitate outdoor riverside concerts etc . Consideration could be taken to cover over this park also to create some all weather spaces to be enjoyed throughout the year. This would bring nature right back into the town centre and Main Street and help regenerate the diminishing footfall for local shops and business on the Main Street. While we are aware of the cost implications of such a project we believe this would benefit the whole community and also be a play an important role in the climate action and biodiversity plan.

Preservation of natural heritage.

- South beach, Arklow.
Reintroduce dune protection , which has been broken over the last few years , which has worked and proven to be effective.
Develop the grass area as a natural playground for children and plant trees along its border.
- Arklow marsh should be a NHS (natural heritage site) as opposed to a PNHS (proposed). Research should be done on the marsh to see exactly what wildlife live there. Look into enlarging Arklow marsh/natural flood relief.
Once it has protection status, it can then be developed by professional conservationists to ensure the least amount of damage.
- Cleaning up the Avoca river of mine waste and sewage is now underway. Small business will thrive once the treatment plant is constructed, and it is imperative that a large scale wall does not prevent the town from accessing the river. The river will be the main attraction of our town and we must be able to enjoy and use it. Apart from activities like sailing and kayaking, bird watching and angling could give our town a huge financial boost.
- Upper river management should be considered and an incentive to landowners to do their part where there is water through their land. Clearing of scrub and waste during the quiet winter months could help greatly in the amount of debris running down and getting caught at the Nineteen Arches. It has been proven that concrete structures and traps do a huge amount of damage and have the opposite effect.
- Arklow Rock Headland. (also protected view)
- Natural Heritage area behind Arklow Rock & Nuns Beach.
- Wildlife Island on the Avoca River west of the Nineteen Arches Bridge. This is a beautiful feature on the Avoca and home to Herons, Swans, Ducks, Comorrrants all of which call Arklow their home. The island together with its inhabitants is an integral part of Arklows character and contributes substantially to peoples mental wellness by lifting their spirits when they walk or drive across the Nineteen Arches bridge.

Preservation of Mature Trees

- Trees, individually or in groups, make a valuable contribution to the landscape, to the visual appeal of the County and to biodiversity. We wish to propose that new policy be implemented to protect mature trees and that a notice of intent to remove a mature tree be brought before the municipal members for a vote before implementation of the removal.
- Tree planting schemes and creation of Arks (small pocket areas of biodiversity) should be part of the County Development plan also. Rural incentives to landowners to plant native trees around the boundaries of their fields could be an easy way to increase native tree cover .

Green Infrastructure

- The County Development Plan refers to a network of green spaces that help to conserve natural ecosystems & provide benefits to people. But the CDP does not indicate where these green and blue infrastructural elements are to be found. These should be identified, drawn & linked together.

Open Space/Recreation

- According to the CDP the delivery of new sports and other outdoor community facilities and spaces is dependent on adequate “open space” being reserved and developed. This will not happen if the council and developers continue to build on suitable “open space”.
- When a housing development is being planned it must include more open spaces and infrastructure to benefit our children’s future.

Preservation of built heritage

- The slipway in Arklow. This was once the second largest ship builders in the country. The only remaining structure of this is the slipway. It could be used in the future again for boating activities.
- The coastguard houses are also have importance as part of our maritime heritage.
- Dry stone walls on the navie bridge and coolgreaney road are aesthetically pleasing and contribute to the character of these areas.
- “The Warrens” cottage on the Arklow Golf Links .
- “Nineteen Arches” bridge.

Rights of way protected

- Rights of way must be preserved for future generations of the town. These are all well trodden paths by past generations and present. We suggest that a map identifying local rights of way be created and a process be put in place to preserve access and halt any practice of closure on these pathways. This is vital especially around our coastal areas. The pathway at the caravan park/Porter’s Rock being the perfect example.

Flood Risk

- A priority must be given to green infrastructure that respects nature. The County Development Plan should work with nature and not battle against it.
- No development in flood risk areas should be permitted.
- Any new development should have a water attenuation scheme within its own periphery and not contribute to an already overloaded drainage system.
- Public information and participation is vital to any newly planned proposals. Everyone should be considered a stakeholder, not just big companies.

Coastal Erosion

- The whole of Arklow Bay requires review. The trend for rock armour has been a short term solution that has worsened the problem long term. A solution that works with the sea, not against it is required (i.e. breakwaters at sea). This in turn will help return our beaches to the once beautiful areas they were. The North Beach in Arklow being prime example.

Local Produce & Supporting local producers

Provision for a Community Garden & allotments needs to be incorporated into the plan. There are a few potential green field sites within the Arklow Environs namely 1) the green space adjacent to Harbour Court, Tinahask area.

Provision for a farmers market where local producers can buy/sell or swap their produce.

Education

While for the current population Arklow is sufficiently served at primary and secondary level schools there is a need for additional third level education. A marine and habitat research centre, including labs, lecture theatre, board rooms, a place where specialists and academics can carry out research and a longitudinal study as the river and estuary becomes cleaner after the treatment plant is running. The marine centre could track the ecological recovery progress in a scientific environment and make recommendations on best practices, engaging with hierarchical agents from national, European and international level. With Arklow at the helm of the Oyster Regeneration research with Norri.ie and also home to the Irish Mussel Seed Company in its early stages of start up, with the right support Arklow could provide the perfect location to facilitate all of the above under one roof. The Eu will be at the centre of initiatives like this . A steering group should be set up to investigate the potential of such a centre for Arklow and the ideal location would be somewhere in the vicinity of Arklow Harbour.

Inclusiveness & Accessibility

We are aware and wish to support in full, the Disability Federation of Irelands submission to the to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 and trust that Wicklow County Council will strive to have their recommendations incorporated into any future development plan not only in Arklow Municipal District but throughout the county also.

Conclusion.

We hope that wellness and sustainability and quality of living are put at the heart of our community and that the Wicklow County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 will endeavour to reflect this and incorporate the necessary actions to achieve these goals in any future planning.

