

Saturday 14 December 2019

Wicklow County Development Plan 2021 to 2027 - Response to issues Booklet

We would like to participate in the new Wicklow County Development Plan and assist in what way we can to make the needs and wishes of Ashford apparent in the decisions made. We would like first to make you aware of our background.

The Ashford Development Associated Ltd. was established for the primary purpose of participating in the then 2004 - 2010 Development Plan. The ADAL registered as a Charity and a Limited Company in early 2007 and has continued to serve the Community of Ashford to this date. We have built and run the Ashford Community and Heritage Centre which is at the heart of the Community. We partner with the Wicklow County Council in many different circumstances and have built a good relationship over time with the Council.

Here we are back to our foundations, giving you a full picture of what our needs and wishes are for the future as a Community. We will try to answer your questions and cover what has gone well and what has gone not so well over the intervening years.

Page 9 - Compact Growth

What is the best designation for your town?

The best designation for Ashford is **Village**. We appreciate that the time for this is long past, so we accept that we are designated as a Small Growth Town although the "feeling" of the community is as a Village. We must point out that where there has been growth elsewhere, Ashford has reduced in size between the censuses from 1449 to 1425 population. We believe that this has continued to the present in 2019 until the new Ballinahinch Estate comes online (to be discussed separately). There can be several causes that can be proposed for this change with the following observations.

- ☼ Lack of housing in the area - **At no time has there been a lack of available housing**
- ☼ Poor Transportation Infrastructure - **There is very poor transportation in the area**
- ☼ Lack of Children's Schools and Creches - **This is a large problem**
- ☼ Lack of work in the area - **There is little or no work in or around Ashford**
- ☼ Crime and Antisocial Behaviour - **Absolutely not in Ashford.**
- ☼ Cost of Living - **Same as all of SouthEast, cheaper than Dublin.**
- ☼ Rental Accommodation - **Little or none.**
- ☼ Air, Water, Pollution - **Not an issue.**
- ☼ Non-expanding, ageing population - **This is the most likely scenario.**

What we can surmise from these observations is that the people of Ashford wish to remain a **Village**. People do not come here to commute to Dublin but remain as they always have. People get old, children move away. This is a future worry and there should be an effort made to

regenerate the population, but making a Dublin Computer Belt settlement is not the answer. This has already begun and steps need to be taken to absorb what has been done. We need to prevent further continuation of this policy as there is and will not be any infrastructure to support this kind of growth.

What Towns and Villages should be promoted for population growth?

As we have said above, Ashford should be promoted for small or moderate growth of young families, working from home. Artists, Crafts, Teachers, Professionals. Ashford has no transport to Dublin and no work opportunity within Ashford.

Bray, Greystones are ideal for good transport to and from Dublin and can absorb High Growth. Wicklow - Rathnew has moderate transport to Dublin and could absorb Moderately High Growth. Arklow - Could grow but the transport to the main source of work, Dublin, would be difficult. In all cases, we need to find places with Rail not Road Transport. You cannot add traffic to the M11 as it is already impossible. With the 169 new Houses in Ashford and two cars each house is over 300 new cars on the road to Dublin. With the RSA saying they have no plans to upgrade the M11 and it cannot support more development, we should listen to them.

Do you think your town has the capacity to sustain more housing growth? if so, why?

The RSA has declared they have no plans to upgrade the M11 in the near or within the next period of the development plan and it cannot support more development. Ashford is too far from the Rail Service in Wicklow and the trains are infrequent and do not run regular in peak hours. The schools are overfilled at present and any new families will arrive without places in Schools. The current new 169 residents **will not** have spaces in the current available two primary schools. When the current residents took the Ballinahinch Estate to An Bord Pleanála, their inspector wrote a devastating vision of the future and recommended that permission was denied to the 169 houses. An Bord Pleanála chose to ignore the Inspector's recommendation. Please read this comprehensive inspectors's report and think carefully before any new housing in Ashford is planned, zoned or expected. Remember that this Inspector Report reflects the situation before 169 new houses were introduced.

Do you think that the level of housing development in your town has been matched by adequate infrastructure and services?

There are no new schools in the area, nor any planned. There are 0 spaces in the current schools. How many school places can we assume are needed by the 169 houses? We have no creche spaces. With the 169 houses there is a new Creche for 40 children. How many extra spaces will be needed? There is no change in transport, planned, expected or imagined.

We did a small survey of the car parking in the Village of Ashford. These spaces are shared by both the Staff and the patrons of the businesses.

Three pubs, national school and churches have their own **Private** parking.

Cafe / Charity Shop/ 2 Retail Units/ Estate Agent/ Garda Station/ Post Office - 13 spaces (There are more staff that cover most of these spaces.
Post Office / Residence / Play School / Ashford Community Centre / Church / School - 13 spaces
Play Park - 12 spaces
Bottle Bank / GAA - 5 spaces
Chemist / Centra and 3 retail units - 20 spaces
Martsworth Carpets - 5 **Private** spaces
Take Away - 6 spaces
Butcher / Solicitors - 6 spaces

We are beginning to see the ABP Inspector's vision becoming a reality and seeing a great increase in time to enter the parking in front of the Chemist (see the ABP Inspector Report. We can supply this if you need).

What are the service shortfalls in your area?

Transport, Schools, Creches, Parking, Work (of course).

How should we deliver compact growth in each of the County's towns and villages?

This is the first opinion question that is strategy vs. facts. We believe that growth must be looked at as a County as a whole. Some places need growth, some do not. All have some growth need as people age. We need to really step back and say "Wicklow is Wonderful!" why do we all feel that it is so wonderful. It is these perspectives that need to be understood. For example, Ashford which we know well and is only one piece of the puzzle. We would probably be very similar to Aughrim in many respects.

We are a good proportion of old families that have been here for 100's of years, some 20-50 years, some newcomers. All are proud to be a small village (town) that has simple shops, Avoca, Mount Usher Gardens, Ashford Film Studio, the home of the River Vartry, Bel Air Hotel, Hunter's Hotel, a real treat for tourists and a fine example of the "Garden of Ireland".

Our difficulties are not being targeted as a Dormitory Community for Dublin and radically change what we are and what we can offer. We are an ageing community and we always need good people who are resident here, not traveling, to join the community and take up the houses that become available. New Estates are possible but of the size of 10-30 big quality houses. Can we meet these aspirations for the likes of Ashford and Aughrim?

Each community should have the growth in accordance to their nature.

What is required to make our towns more self-sustaining?

This is, of course, a difficult question that we would all like to answer. What we can add to this dialogue is that if we should start with the agreement that we are already looking at a "Wonderful Wicklow". Of all Counties, we feel we have the best. Where are the challenges? We need continual initiatives to promote Tourism which can bring work into the County. Since our County is the "Garden of Ireland", we need to above all to treat our Natural Environment as our "Gold".

Employment in the County is very important to making it sustainable but is always a challenge. When rents in Dublin skyrocketed, companies moved out and there was opportunity. When

everything crashed, the same companies moved back. We no longer believe that, other than Bray, big employers will move to Wicklow. But... Times change and transport costs, over crowded public transport encourage "working from home". We need to see that Wicklow fits this bill perfectly and is ahead of the curve. This makes Wicklow a beautiful place to live and a wonderful place to work from, not a hard place to commute from. Here is what we need to service this new and emerging market.

- ☼ High Speed Internet Access for everyone
- ☼ Housing with work spaces
- ☼ Benefits for Houses with "working from home"
- ☼ Good proximity to Dublin for 1 time a week visits
- ☼ Stationary, Office Supplies, and other sub-services needed by enterprise
- ☼ Advice and assistance to home workers
- ☼ Incentives to getting small seminars, workshops and conferences to Wicklow
- ☼ Wicklow Working at Home initiatives.
- ☼ Group insurance schemes
- ☼ Once we get started, we can invent and come up with many ideas.

Page 11 - Flood Risk

How do you think that the County Development Plan can address Climate Change?

The reality is that we are seeing the effects of Climate Change from an Ashford perspective. The River Vartry runs through the centre of Ashford and no longer is following the patterns of the past. We saw that there was a drought that lasted from 2017 through to September 2019. During that period there was never sufficient water and levels reached critical level for the Salmon many times. The Roundwood Treatment Works impounds 95% of the flow of the Vartry and diverts it to Dublin's water needs, but even so, there was not enough water even for their needs. This problem is upon us and we can only affect this by two things.

- Cause
- Mitigation

It is now an indisputable fact that carbon gases and our carbon footprint contribute to this Climate Change. Lowering our Carbon Footprint may not reverse this but may be possible to avoid some of the worst times to come. Wicklow should do its part and make new commitments and initiatives to help reduce this. Here are the areas that need support and strengthening.

- ☼ Farming is important part of Wicklow but all must be done carefully. Slurry Injection should always be used over Slurry Spreading. Grants must be publicised and encouraged for young farmers to do this responsibly. Individual farmers should be visited and helped to a more sustainable farming community.
- ☼ "Work from Home" Initiative
- ☼ Drive Electric encouragements and subsidies enforced as well as more charging stations visible.
- ☼ Continual support for Solar Energy Farms and other sustainable energy initiatives.
- ☼ Insulation grants and high rated homes

Mitigation is about making sure that Climate Change has as little effect on us as possible. Low water levels in the Vartry River means a serious threat to the Salmon and Trout as well as the overall beauty of our Ashford. High Water means flooding. We can reduce the impact of flooding by making a commitment to stronger corridors of flood zones. In Ashford, there should be a ban

for building on either side of the Vartry from below Bramble Glade through to the source at the Broadlough to a distance of 100 meters on each side where possible. This would allow for the necessary absorption to avoid floods.

Low water is more difficult as we have already had a long process with Irish Water about the amount of water in these conditions that they will release. This is an ongoing assessment and WCC need to commit itself to the support and preservation of the River Vartry and other Rivers in Wicklow. Wicklow County Council need to see that the rivers are supplied with sufficient water in drought and that they will work with Irish Water to maintain these at safe levels.

Are you aware of any areas that are subject to flooding that should be identified by the SRFA?

River Vartry from below Bramble Glade through Mount Usher Gardens, Hunters Hotel and down to the Broadlough. This is the flat part of the River Vartry with little height change. When the water flows over the spillway at the Roundwood Reservoir, flood occurs. In 1860 this was 138 days a year and now it is less than 60 days. We need to maintain the tradition flood plains and prevent building in these areas. There is plenty of land in Ashford that is not along the flooding part of the River Vartry.

How Should the Council manage pressure for development in Flood Risk Areas?

Make sure it is clear to the Public that we take our Rivers seriously and need them for the future of Wicklow as the "Garden of Ireland". If we are to maintain that special place, we must make sacrifices. There is sufficient building land on high ground and not in the vicinity of rivers for our needs. The current Strategic Land Reserve designations should be withheld though the next plan to keep these places free from development that might remove flood plains.

Are the policies in the Current Development Plan adequate to protect Wicklow's coastline?

This is not an area where we feel we have sufficient knowledge to offer any opinion.

What type of development should be allowed along the coastline outside of settlements?

In our opinion, all of our natural resources are vital to maintaining Wicklow's position in the greater scheme of things. No development should be allowed on our coastline unless it enhances nature such as Dune Restoration and carefully designed walk.

Are there any areas of coastline in need of protection in terms of conservation or physical defences?

The Broadlough from Clonmannon to Wicklow is a Natura 2000 site of extreme importance to the EU, Ireland and Wicklow County. The highest point on the land protecting the Broadlough is about 3 Meters and lower here and there. With rising sea levels and high tides, this could easily flood over into the Broadlough, damaging delicate balances between brackish and sea water.

Page 14 - Rural Housing

What types of houses are required to meet housing demand?

This is a question better suited to each individual area, as one solution cannot fit all. We will answer this in respect to Ashford and similar places like Aughrim and Rathdrum.

Ashford, which has been designated as a Small Growth Town, is one of the few places that has a reduction in population. That clearly shows that there is no “burning” need for new housing. This is especially clear with 169 houses coming available early 2020. Ashford has also the reputation of a beautiful Village, the home of Mount Usher Gardens, a fine example of what Wicklow has to offer. To keep this image it is necessary to make some restrictions on what can or will be built. Building should be restricted to 2 story housing with a maximum height of 9.4 meters. No expansion, retention or relaxation should be made to this.

This has been the case for Ashford until the “rogue” estate, Mt. Usher View, decided to take it upon themselves to build three story buildings without permission and then seek Retention from the Wicklow County Council. This continues to be an eyesore and a monument to bad planning in the centre of Ashford. We need to prevent this from happening again and protect against urban sprawl. There are probably other lessons to be learned in this bad example.

The character of Ashford should be declared in the Plan, renewed, enforced and maintained. We are the home to many fine buildings and pubs with two story dormer style housing. Where as some planners may see this as “old style Ireland”, something to be ashamed of, we do not agree. A “cityscape” as recommended to Mt. Usher View by the Wicklow County Council Planners, is not in character in Ashford, is not what most of the Community want. This is the best example of “urban sprawl” and what not to do, that speaks for maintaining the statues quo of Ashford.

Are there certain groups in society that find it difficult to access housing?

There are certainly many people that are disadvantaged in this way. Ashford would not however see this problem nor be a solution to the problem. To be frank, there is no developer that would be building houses that are not for sale at prices way beyond this population. Ballinahinch Park was built by the Council as Council Flats and has been maintained and integrated into the wider Ashford Community.

Is there a need for special type of housing in your area e.g. the elderly, those with special needs?

All new housing should be compliant with Elderly and special needs. This being said, again we need to point out that Mt. Usher View is the most un-accessible site produced in the modern era. It would be impossible for those in a wheelchair to access green space or even to go to the bottom floor of one of the houses. The stairs are too narrow, steps on the outside, no parking near enough to houses for wheelchair access. This should be an immediate rejection of planning permission, and should never been allowed.

Where and how should social housing be provided?

We believe it should be integrated with the housing being built. Ballinahinch Park was social housing build for the requirement of very expensive housing on the Macreddin Golf Course. This displacement of housing should not be standard practice. The community that builds, should be responsible for those that need, not another community.

Where can high density development be accommodated?

Obviously, Ashford would not be a good place for this as will be seen over time now that we have 169 new residences. It must be a place with easy public transportation to Dublin like Bray and Greystones.

How can increased densities be achieved in Wicklow's towns and villages?

The first question for the plan is to ask "Why do we want increased densities in Wicklow?" Is just to satisfy the voices of the central government shouting for more housing, or a real need? Is it to increase taxes so that the Wicklow County Council has more money to provide better services? In the same vein as how each town and village in Wicklow should have self-determination in these matters and one formula does not suit all, each County needs to self-determine what it can add to the bigger picture. Perhaps Wicklow can offer something else to the Central Government in the area of nature, beauty and tourism, not dormitories for the growing city demands. A place to work from home, where home is comfortable.

Is the rural housing policy working effectively to facilitate genuine rural housing needs while protecting the landscape from inappropriate urban generated development?

The straight answer from Ashford is NO. We have two examples in Ashford where the opposite is true, Mt. Usher View and Ballinahinch Wood. Mt. Usher View is an unmitigated disaster. Ballinahinch Wood, although nicely implemented, faces the commuting challenge on the M11 and the infrastructure collision as described by the An Bord Pleanála Inspector Report. This requires a full read to understand the consequences, yet to be felt, of placing urban development in a rural setting.

Page 17 - Economic Development

What are your views on economic development in County Wicklow?

We have been making "sound bites" about attracting employers to Wicklow to reduce the commute to Dublin since before the 2004 Plan. Yet this has not happened and there are more and more commuters on the roads. It is time we face the reality and do something because there will be no Multi-national or American companies relocating to Wicklow, now or in the future. Within Ashford/Rathnew/Wicklow we have many unoccupied industrial units. We need to look at our assets.

- ☼ We are a beautiful, affordable (perhaps the most) County to live in.
- ☼ We are close enough to Dublin for a 1 day a week out of rush hour commute.
- ☼ We have reasonable Internet that can be improved
- ☼ We have good supply chains to Dublin to get what we need in 24 hours
- ☼ We have many good spaces for small working hubs, supported by the Council.
- ☼ We have a good, working, Public to Council relationship.

This last point needs extra emphasis. We work well together. This can be seen in the most recent election. All Council members that wished for re-election were re-elected. This is not a party County, it is one where the public support the current councillors to continue to build bridges between the Community and the Council to better reflect the aspirations of the local Community.

This gives us a unique position to forge a new Plan to bring prosperity to Wicklow County.

What measures can be put in place to insure Wicklow is viewed as a more attractive employment base?

Build a strategy suitable for Wicklow that focuses on small business, work from home, non-commute opportunities.

How can the Plan promote and facilitate new economic opportunities?

We have answered this above.

Where should economic development be located?

It is possible for Bray to expand its economic possibilities. If Bray can not succeed, then it is unlikely that any other community will have better results. Greystones perhaps, but in the past this has not been their contribution.

Do you think brownfield sites should be promoted for new economic development?

Again do we really have many of these in Wicklow and are we really in a position (outside of Bray) to offer good access to Public Transportation, the Airport, or Dublin. Let us face the reality of who and where we are.

Are there new ways of working that should be facilitated in the Plan? e.g. co-working hubs, working from home, live-work units.

This is where we have most to offer. We need to brain-storm how to capitalise on our advantages over other Counties. We are probably the best County to reap the benefit of this new way of working. Included in this discussion should be Flexi time, another trend.

How can the County's rural economy be diversified to sustain rural areas?

Wicklow has a large farming community and part of its nature comes from this rural farming background. There are challenges here with Climate Change and carbon footprint so we need to address these directly with the Wicklow Farmers. There are new opportunities with Organic Farming and production of Vegan products and foods.

Are there adequate policies in place to protect the countryside from commercial / industrial / economic development?

We are not sure. The demands have not been great enough to test these. Wicklow Town has already been hurt by having a sprawling industrial area at the entrance to the town. This kind of development should be prevented in other towns and villages as it does not really say "Welcome to our beautiful town". The Plan should directly address this issue and prevent it from happening elsewhere by stating a position on this.

What kind of economic development is appropriate for rural areas?

This is really covered above. We need reasonable services for our own use. We need to attract young families to live and work in Wicklow. We can promote and assist seminars, conferences, and workshops into Wicklow with new incentives. Light, specialised, Artisan industry that can fill the unused industrial units in all of our industrial estates.

What measures are required to make our towns and villages more vibrant and attractive as places to live in, work in, shop and visit?

We need to all understand the assets and what each different place has to offer. One plan fits all is not the solution. An active Tidy Towns does much to promote getting the best visually out of what we have. In Ashford we compete with Aughrim year on year, catching up slowly. What this gives us is a goal and it really serves to pull ourselves up and do the best of what we can with what we have.

We do not want to continue to harp on Mt. Usher View, but mistakes like this in the planning process really set back a community from achieving this goal. We have a PPN network which should cover this, but does not, as the PPN does not address Planning Issues. The Ashford Development Association, set up for the purpose of giving the Wicklow County Council a window into the thoughts of the Community of Ashford, has never been invited by the Planners to a meeting. When we have requested one, but have been told that they must remain impartial.

We believe that an open regular dialogue should be maintained with groups like ourselves which exist throughout Wicklow. The County Plan should be a live ongoing document which lives from regular contact with Communities throughout its term. Communities should not be surprised by planning in their area and the Planning system should not be publish notice, objection, appeal, ending in An Bord Pleanála. Planning should be the warm acceptance of everyone's needs and working together for a better future.

How can the Plan improve retail vibrancy in Wicklow's towns and villages?

The Plan should inspire retailers to look towards designs that would meet an overall style and look enhancing the village or town. In Marin County, California, there is a natural style which would attract visitors from around Ireland if something similar were adopted by Wicklow. This would take some research on behalf of the Plan but could encourage and incentivise retailers to a new standard of Wicklow retail.

What can we do about vacant units in our towns and village centres?

I can only think that someone has to look at each individual situation in each place and try and see what is missing from that Community and then look for tenants that can provide the missing services. It is not something that any of us do, but that is the only way to change this. It is the owner of the vacant unit that benefits most but perhaps there is some way they can be helped to fill these units.

What scale of retail development is appropriate for Wicklow's towns and villages?

This of course, depends on the town or village, the space available and the economics of the situation. Ashford for example, has a privately owned, old cattle mart in the centre of the Village.

There has been talk of building a Californian style market and shops which would have a very unique draw to the Village. This development could include underground parking which would eliminate some of the parking congestion currently a problem in Ashford. This would be a suitable development other than there is a request for high rise apartments in a special designated green zone overlooking Mount Usher Gardens. This zone should not be revoked but the planning department, the neighbours and the Ashford Community should find a way to make this development go forward. It is challenges like this where we need to commit to a new way of working.

Is there a shortage of retail in the County?

We do not really see a shortage but retail can bring new people to the County. A day out in the countryside, with shops that cannot exist in the cramped city, is an attractive opportunity for residents of Dublin and other places. Artisan shops, outdoor food markets, well designed, wood and brick, "country style" would go very well and attract many to our stores.

Have previous plans been successful in guiding retail development to the right locations?

We are not sure exactly what initiatives have previously been suggested, but Ashford remains unchanged.

How can retail spend be retained in the County?

Most people involved in small retail, live and work in the County. Large retail of the Ikea kind, move far from Wicklow. The suggestion that we promote Artisan shops, keeps more profits in the County. The aim would be to try and source most produce in Wicklow, but obviously some would come from outside. To make this happen the County would need to incentivise new and existing retailers to come on-board with this new initiative.

How should tourism be developed throughout the County Wicklow without compromising our valuable resources including our scenic landscapes and rich heritage?

This is the top question as this would resolve all others or greatly enhance the road to recovery on most. We really need a "think tank" taking each site around the County and focusing on what more can be done. We have Avoca's best spots centred in Wicklow. We have the Ashford Studio and Mount Usher Gardens in Ashford. We have Waterfalls and Avoca in Powerscourt. There are many other sites, less known and more in need of promotion.

There is also the work of establishing cross compatibility of sites. In Ashford an attractive package can be imagined of a breakfast at Chester Beatty, a guided tour of the Ashford Studios in the late morning, lunch at Mount Usher Gardens and an afternoon at Mount Usher and spending the dinner and night at Hunters Hotel. We have thought of this, but have not as yet organised it. Some incentive might push us forward or even the interest and cooperation of the Wicklow County Council. We all need to be more proactive.

Is there a need for more tourist facilities within the County? If so, what is needed and where should they be located?

We really have more than most and need to make more of what we have. This is a leadership role that is ideal for Wicklow County Council.

How can County Wicklow capitalise on the potential of Ireland's Ancient East?

There are unknown mysteries about Wicklow's past. Guided tours on the history of Kilcoole gun running would be an excellent source of tourists. The site of where St. Patrick first landed. Walking "beyond the Pale" with animated robbers and thieves.

Are there any outdoor tourism and recreation facilities that the County lacks?

There is not a concentrated effort to combine outdoor activity, other than walking. We could use outdoor climbing walls, climbing centres and any that might encourage younger Irish tourists.

Are you aware of any public rights of way that should be identified in the county development plan?

Do we promote Devil's Glen? It used to draw tourists from around the world in the 1700's and became part of several "walkers guides" of the time.

What aspects of Wicklow's Heritage do you consider should be protected?

From the aspect of Ashford, most physical heritage has been added to the record. The missing element is not the physical stuff but the **stories**. The people of Wicklow have within their families are the stories of the past which have a rich heritage woven in real people. There are photographs held in cupboards and boxes that deteriorate with time. There needs to be a concentrated effort by the Heritage groups to capture these stories and copy these photographs before our ageing population disappears with these. Again incentives would help. Even an offer of a duplication service with the proviso that the Original or the copy would be retained with publishing rights included.

How can we balance the need for new development against the protection of our natural environment?

There is a question that comes to mind, "Why the need for new development?" We need to understand this need. Our natural environment comes above any other need. **Never** should development be at the sacrifice of our Natural Environment. We cannot recover from this.

Are there any buildings that should be added/removed from the Record of Protected Structures?

As far as Ashford is concerned, we have in past Plans added what we felt worthy.

How can the County Development Plan encourage the reuse of historical buildings that have fallen into disuse?

We have the Garda Station in Ashford that is promised to be re-furbished and turned into a new station for the Traffic Corps. The Traffic Corps could be encouraged to continue and complete the project as earlier initiatives have fallen away.

Are there any other assets such as views, trees, or natural areas that should be afforded protection as part of the County Development Plan?

This is a sore point for us. The entrance to Ashford from the South was lined with large mature trees of great beauty. Prior to applying for planning, Developers have a habit of arriving early on Saturday morning and cutting down trees to the ground. This happened at the entrance to Ashford and at Ballinahinch Woods. Before anyone can stop them, the trees are gone. By the time a complaint can be raised with the Council, on Saturday morning, the illegal act is complete. How can we put into the Plan that if anyone does this, permission will be refused on this basis only and any new application will be conditional on restoring or replacing the trees with mature ones.

The River Vartry flows though the whole area of Ashford connecting the 2000 Natura site of the Wicklow Mountains to the 2000 Natura site of the Broadloughs. It forms a corridor of green

surrounding the river that is a natural thoroughfare of wildlife to and from the two protected sites. The River Vartry is an EU protected Salmonoid River affording it protection for the species. Even though this sounds great, it is not truly protected without the full attention of the Wicklow County Council. Currently for example, there is a Retention Application with An Bord Pleanála that suggested a Surface Water Sewer in the conditions of the Retention grant. This is an environmental issue not suitable for the Retention process.

The River Vartry is a vital part of the ecosystem formed by the two 2000 Natura sites. An effort should be announced in the new Plan to protect and propose that the Vartry become a 2000 Natura site or at least a SPA or SAC like Devil's Glen. Much of this is in the hands of landowners but with our help we can encourage and have a good possibility of agreement of the landowners who wish to do the best for the River.

How can we encourage the use of green buildings, green streets, or other green infrastructure as part of the built environment to enhance quality of life and adapting to climate change?

There is really a lot of work to be done here. Ireland in general is behind other places in the world and in many cases we have not even thought of this yet. We agree that Wicklow is really the best place to start and get ahead of everywhere else. We need the reputation as the "Green County" as well as the "Garden of Ireland" title. This is work to maintain and enhance our image as well as meaningful efforts to combat Climate Change. We need to bring Seminars, Conferences and Workshops to our local areas. We would certainly offer our Community Centre to host such events as would many towns and villages. We need expert advice.

We need noticeable things that work but **are** noticeable. Planted flat roofs. Solar Panels arrays servicing the infrastructure needs of the Village. Solar Panels for lighting. Sufficient car charging points, free is possible, discounted for residents, priority for EVs. proportion of proceeds plowed back into the environment. Grants for solar, wind turbine or other emerging technologies. Planting of trees and absorbers. Planting of pollinators in places administered by the Council. Planting of trees and blocks for unsightly parts of our Towns.

We need a forum to discuss these idea to share, invent and encourage a wider involvement of everyone.

Page 27 - Recreation

Are there adequate community facilities in your area? If not, what additional facilities are needed?

We have a working, successful, Community Hall but it is limited to 60 people which just suites our needs for the moment. If the Community grows, this will run into difficulties. Bigger halls are hard to come by and we do not see any large spaces coming available.

We have a lovely park that people come from all around to visit on a regular basis. Other parks of this quality would be very welcome but this one is an essential part of the Village across from the Garda Station and next to the new to be built regional traffic corp in the old Garda Station.

Are there adequate facilities in the County to cater for an ageing population particularly in terms of residential and day care facilities?

There is a new old age facility at the entrance to Wicklow Town which has helped the situation. There are areas designated for this purpose that do not become available because the owner of the property only needs to build once permission is granted on the housing attached. If they never get permission for more housing, it never gets built. This is a "catch 22 situation" as more housing creates more need. If we do not unlock some of these, there will be greater and greater need.

Are the educational needs of our population being met? What additional facilities are needed and where?

Ashford has been shouting for years that the two schools are full and have no room for expansion. Again there is additional land zoned for educational use next to the Nun's Cross School and the National School in the Village. These are zoned but locked in the same situation as above. Unless they are built on, the land will not be given nor unlocked.

Where do you think new open space facilities should be provided?

The park in Ashford is a great success for residents far and wide, mostly from Wicklow County. What that says is that if you build something designed well and maintained well, it becomes very popular. The worries of social misbehaviour did not materialise and it has remained undamaged and unlettered. We are fortunate to have a lovely small stream that flows through the park and that too has remained pristine. We are fortunate in that the park is across from the Garda Station and will be next to the Traffic Corp refurbishment of the old Garda Station is quintessential to its success. Right in the centre of the Village, across from the Community Hall, makes it a poor place for anti-social behaviour, which can be an issue with other places. When we look back, it was not understood that this was really the only safe place in Ashford for the park and its integrated stream. It is places like this, which form a backbone to Communities drawing in potential new residents, with young families, into the Village with the thought "Wouldn't it be nice to live in Ashford?". All of Ashford are proud of what we have and everyone jointly looks after it. This is the positive example of Open Space.

We would like to imagine that the ugly uncompleted estate, Mt. Usher View, would turn into a beautiful green space at the other end of town, but that is not a very likely outcome of the long term fight to correct the planning problems.

Most towns could benefit from a open space such as ours and each contributes to the overall, appeal of the town.

Are the open space requirements set out in the County Development Plan adequate for new development?

Some times the open spaces are overwhelmed by the larger developments. If you look at the example of the Ballinahinch Woods, the open spaces are not obvious and the overall impression is of a very large amount of houses. This is not broken up by bits of green here and there. The semi-detached nature of the housing, does not afford a view of nature but built up residents, more suitable for Greystones than Ashford. The Open Space requirements should be expanded in rural settings and encouragement be made for detached houses on larger plots, surrounded by grass, more sustainable and suitable for areas like Ashford.

What methodology should be used to deliver active open space and recreational facilities?

Areas of green should be combined where possible. In Ashford we have Bramble Glade as an example of an estate which combines open space and housing in a simple way. The residents feel that they are surrounded by nature not looking out on each other.

Page 29 - Transportation

What transportation improvements are needed throughout the County?

There are two main corridors for Road infrastructure, the N81 and the M11. The M11 has for a long time been overused and unsuitable for traffic growth. Those of us who are lucky to not have to commute to Dublin, wonder how anyone can survive and stay sane doing that journey twice a day. We feel so sorry for those neighbours that HAVE to make that suffering and pilgrimage to Dublin. Those that do it, can only swear "Why did I ever move to Wicklow?" It is an impossible situation getting worse when you add 169 house and 300 cars to Ashford alone.

The bus service does not run regularly enough, nor sufficient buses to accommodate the needs of a commuting public. In the morning it runs every 15 or 20 minutes to Dublin. From Dublin the bus runs every half hour from 14:00 to 18:00 otherwise every hours. The train from Wicklow leaves at three times in the morning 6:33, 7:30 and 9:00 and is very crowded by the time it reaches Wicklow and misses the peak times when transport is necessary. It is 6.2 kilometres from Ashford, outside of the planning radius to be considered public transport for residents of Ashford.

Ashford cannot be considered for future development in the new Plan until the public transportation is improved in some way. We cannot subject new residents, who buy houses on Saturday and Sunday, to face the impossible gridlock on their first Monday morning. Some creative thinking must be done to solve this which faces all of the M11 corridor.

How can we encourage more people to walk and cycle and use public transport?

There has to be public transport and there must be cycle paths. As we know Ashford best, we can only give examples from here. Ballinahinch Woods, 169 houses, a new cycle path which takes you to a roundabout on the R764. From there there is no footpath to the village and a road just wide enough for two cars without a shoulder. How many of those cars will drive into the Village and expect parking? If it is raining?

We do not have full solutions which can support walk and cycle.

How we can reduce the reliance on the private car as dominant means of travel?

Better transport but "Work from Home" initiatives.

How can permeability in existing residential areas be improved?

We need to invest in Grants, Prizes, and Incentives to encourage entrepreneurs to harvest and use rainwater for gardens, and flushing toilets. We need to encourage solutions of green roof gardens which both insulate and absorb the rain.

Where should major public transport facilities such as park and ride or transport interchanges be located to cater for journeys to Dublin and within County Wicklow?

First you need the transport. For Ashford only Wicklow Town has transport and that is lacking as well for an easy journey to Dublin. We are not near to any Park and Ride and none could be envisaged. We can get to the bottom of the Dart at Greystones or the bottom of the Luas but this would require better transportation at these hubs and clear roads to reach reach Park and Ride. The Luas is 30 km in traffic and the Dart 19 km also in traffic.

Are there any issues in relation to water or wastewater facilities in your area?

There is a shortage of water in the River Vartry and at times it severely endangers the Salmon in this EU Salmonoid protected river. Conservation is not made a top priority and should be emphasised in the Plan. Toilet flushing habits, although often not discussed, should be as a small matter to solve, multiplied by every resident. Calculations on how much water can be saved might encourage a 3 or 4 to 1 flush regime .

Surface Water is an issue in Ashford with a proposed new Surface Water Sewer being recommended by the Council to be dumped into the river. We have great reservations on this proposed sewer that it can be done with protecting the River just above Mount Usher Gardens. For Ashford The River Varty is a vital resource and damage to the fish and the cleanliness of the river, threatens its survival. We need to know with 100% certainty that nothing will happen to the river. Putting surface water into the wastewater system is frowned upon, but are there exceptions where this is the safer path?

How would you like Ashford to develop in the future?

We would define this as organically. We already have had more expansion that we can absorb as far as new housing. All the zoned land should be limited in scope and size. Those zoned Strategic Land Reserve should be retained as SLR. Potential Developers should be encouraged to make houses of greater size, detached in substantial plots rather than squeezing many small houses in a small space. The profit made would be similar but we would not have the issues with lack of transport and infrastructure. This may require changing the houses per hectare thresholds or the amount of housing that is required in Ashford.

We would like to see more spaces available in schools and creches to accommodate the existing new residents of Ashford.

What do you think are the main issues facing Ashford?

We would like to resolve the situation with Mt. Usher View and find a solution that can mitigate the awful look of the estate. This includes a resolution to the current objection for the Surface Water Sewer proposed for the estate.

We have no available parking in the centre of the Village. This is an urgent situation to be resolved. We have line painting on the roads that needs renewing. We have signage issues with the very severe bump at the entrance to the Village. Visitors often do not see this and wheels take air.

The most important issue is the Ashford Weir which was destroyed in 2016 by the flood. There is an initiative to replace with a fish-friendly waterscape in the future. Wicklow County Council has kindly put aside funds to clean up the space but this is just a minor fix. What is needed is a full fledged project to do the following:

- ☼ Get the approval of all stakeholders setting up design parameters
- ☼ Have an Architectural Design Competition to design a suitable landscape or fish ladder.
- ☼ Construct a "catch-all" silt and dirt trap for protecting the River downstream
- ☼ Protect and bury the foul sewer pipe that runs across the river by the bridge
- ☼ Remove some remnants of the old weir and grade parts of the river.
- ☼ Build the new waterscape during the summer when works are allowed.

The cost of this will be upwards to €100,000 and will not be done without the commitment of the Wicklow County Council. This is both an environmental issue and one of an aesthetic issue for the Community. Wisely the Council would be able to find a grant structure suitable as a joint project between Ashford and Co. Wicklow.

and how should these be addressed in the Development Plan?

A commitment to working with Ashford on the Weir project would be helpful. Parking can only be address in the greater scheme of renewal of the town centre. Putting a curb on development in the area is a sensitive issue but saying "Until" ... would be honest and forthright as the situation of more housing and no transport is not resolvable in the life of the Plan.

How can the town centre be regenerated and the range of services enhanced?

There is a project in the works that could do much for the centre but has its difficulties with height of housing and building in a green belt. We need a creative solution by all the stakeholders working together with the Wicklow County Council. This would be a unique way of working together but could solve many problems of parking, regeneration, and making a natural "California" type rural solution. Very appealing but needing real creative people to work together and find a good solution. The people are there, but we need leadership from the Wicklow County Council.

This project could be of great benefit to the Community and perhaps there is a solution for many problems. The proposal includes a large underground parking as well as retail shops and perhaps a hotel. If the housing were limited to two story housing and very low density, the land which is green belt could be used for a Constructed Wetland and reed pond, affording a very attractive and useful feature to Ashford. We could divert all the surface water that is currently causing a concern and being dumped into the River Vartry at Mount Usher Gardens into these filtration ponds and wetland serving many purposes. This would host pollinators, be a surface water solution for Ashford, and be an example of forward thinking, green, and right at the heart of the Village. We would be so proud of our place, hosting such a good solution. We would believe this all possible with your Leadership.

Has the town been able to absorb recent development or are there any problems arising?

The problems are just to come. No one will be able to get to the Chemist. There will be more stopped traffic waiting on the street to get into the 20 spaces shared by staff and all the other businesses. There will be more and more double parking on the street and along the curb. The double yellow lines will be crossed. The town centre cannot accommodate the 300 new cars in the Village from Ballinahinch Wood. Only 20 - 30 houses are filled and we are seeing the problem accelerate, including the traffic to Dublin is worse. Traffic at 8:00 am was seen at the junction for Abwood on the M11. We cannot ignore this issue any longer.

The school issue will soon be evident as the new houses fill up. We suspect to have to host some town meeting on the subject of schools and creches pretty soon.

Page 40 - Environment

What environmental considerations should be taken into account in the Strategic Environmental Assessment?

Surface Water is a big issue for Ashford but we suspect for the County which is rich in natural rivers. How can we prevent the Rivers being looked at as paths to the sea for oil, silt and other run-off from estates? In our case the River Vartry is an essential corridor between two Natura 2000 sites.

Have you any information that would assist in the assessment of the implications of the Plan on Natura 2000 sites?

The River Vartry runs between the two 2000 Natura sites, the Wicklow Mountains and the Broadlough. This corridor is essential to the survival of all of the ecosystem. It should be a proposed Natura 2000 site and this protects this narrow corridor through the middle of Wicklow for the future. It is a hidden gem and if one could see it from the perspective of all the wildlife that survive and travel its distance, from Bat to Badger to Otter to Salmon, we might understand better its importance. We can supply you with all the data and arguments you need and the support of the Inland Fisheries Ireland, River Trust, River Vartry Protection Society, Anglers association and key environmentalist. We can produce a good case for being a proposed SAC or SPA and start its permanent protection. A good deed for the future of our natural environment.

Are you aware of any areas that are liable to flooding that should be identified in the SFRA?

The flat part of the River Vartry from the corner of Bramble Glade down through the fields on the left going downstream to the Weir. Mount Usher Gardens was cleverly constructed to have flood defences but these can only work so much and if Flood Plain is compromised, it will flood. Down to Hunters Hotel and to the Broadlough are all subject to flooding when the upper flood plain is compromised.

We hope that we can be of further assistance to you on the next stage of the Development Plan and are available at any time.

Matthew Weiss - Chair
for and behalf of the Ashford Development Association Ltd. (Charities no. 20066888) and its Directors.