

[REDACTED]

Sent: 13 January 2020 10:44
To: 'Jason Mulhall'
Cc: Planning - Plan Review
Subject: RE: Wicklow County Development Plan

A Chara,

I wish to acknowledge, with thanks, receipt of your submission regarding the County Development Plan review.

Regards

[REDACTED]
Administrative Officer
Planning Control.

From: Jason Mulhall [REDACTED]
Sent: 10 January 2020 17:04
To: Planning - Plan Review
Subject: Wicklow County Development Plan

Dear Administrative Officer,

Please find attached for your consideration a submission on the Wicklow County Development Plan 2021-2027 from the Blessington & District Forum.

Best Regards,
Jason Mulhall,
Secretary – Blessington & District Forum

THE CORE STRATEGY & SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY

Blessington is designated a moderate growth town, and population growth should ensure to take into account the location on the periphery of Co. Kildare and the possibilities of development within Co. Kildare adding to Blessington population growth. Currently housing development in our town has not been matched by adequate infrastructure and services being provided. This must be addressed, to ensure Blessington isn't over populated, under serviced and turned into another Dublin commuter belt settlement.

CLIMATE CHANGE, FLOODING & COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT

It's great that Wicklow Co Co are working on the Climate Adaptation Strategy and signed up to the All Ireland Pollinator Plan, however we need to see some physical activities occur within our towns and villages. Some very simple suggestions might include:

- Rollout of public charging points of electric cars
- Rollout of proper cycling lanes
- Protection of our rivers, wetlands, hedgerows and the creation of wildlife corridors.
- Better public transport links
- ECO friendly housing initiatives

HOUSING

- The Blessington & District Forum is in favor of housing being developed in the local area, but we must ensure that all housing developments are carried out in a sustainable manner and only built in parallel with community facilities. Unfortunately this has not been the case in the past.
- The CSO suggests Blessington population growth @ 10% between 2011 and 2016, this is at the higher end of population growth within Wicklow.
- As Blessington is bordered by Co. Kildare this results in a unique scenario in relation to the development of housing that has not been addressed to date. Kildare Co. Co. grant planning permission for large scale housing on the periphery of the town, yet Blessington and more specifically the Municipal District of Baltinglass then need to provide the services and facilities for these new residents whilst receiving none of the benefits, this must be addressed soon, otherwise it will be too late!

- In future all estates built in Blessington, and indeed within Co. Wicklow as a whole, should be built to a much higher standard than in the past, taking into account energy and resource consumption best practices. Estates should be provided with well designed public open spaces, with properly planned inner roads, with ample off street parking.
- Social housing should be provided within all private estates, and serious consideration needs to be given to the elderly and those with disabilities to ensure proper and suitable housing is provided, as this is currently not the case and needs to change.
- Consideration should be made to encourage residents back into the centre of our towns and villages; maybe this can be achieved by the use of grants to encourage shop owners to rent upper floors as residential units.
- The timeline between estate completion and taking in charge by WCC should be lessened, the current process is not fit for purpose, and estates are completed 5-10-15-20 years yet still not taken in charge.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & EMPLOYMENT

- Deliver a plan that will support small business and startups.
- Support the creation of Enterprise Hubs
- Deliver free WIFI within town centre public spaces
- Blessington is close to Dublin, and therefore offers good supply chains for businesses to benefit from, yet doesn't see the same economic development as other towns in the proximity of Dublin. The reasons for this need to be determined and then addressed.

TOWN AND VILLAGE CENTRES & RETAIL

- Invest in better public realms and works that improve rather than simply maintain and patch what exists.
- The enforcement of dereliction orders and increased vacant site levies to minimize the impact of these empty sites, many of which may never be developed.
- Consider the introductions of shop front improvement schemes as a directive from WCC to all districts.
- Encourage the provision of pedestrian areas and open spaces in town centres, such an example would be the pedestrianization of the market square in Blessington as opposed to its current status as a car park.
- Prioritize and encourage the delivery and maintenance of town centre retail units to ensure communities remain resilient, active and alive.

TOURISM AND RECREATION

- Completion of Blessington E-Greenway around Lakes, and provision of support facilities
- Develop and enhance the public realm in Blessington by improving street furniture, improving the parking conditions, the concealment of overhead cabling to underground and deliver a public park.
- Expansion of tourist accommodation facilities in the area
- Development of Culture and Heritage Activities
- Development of Viking TV Series links within West Wicklow, potentially film sites and driving routes, similar to what has been done in NI with Game of Thrones.
- Develop a walkway from Blessington into and through Glen Ding Woods, existing right of ways should be protected.

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- Ensure sufficient lands in appropriate locations are zoned to cater for social and community needs. Promote the shared use of educational and community facilities, to maximize the sustainable use of such infrastructure and promote community cohesion.
- There are several groups in society with specific design and planning needs including: children, young people, and people with disabilities, older people, ethnic minorities and the Traveler community. Planning must be considered to meet specific needs. This can be achieved by promoting the highest levels of universal accessibility in all community facilities. Ensure that community buildings are flexible and adaptable and can be used by all age cohorts, including young people. The need for adequate youth spaces in West Wicklow is very evident (youth programmes, youth cafes, etc).
- Promote social inclusion through equality of access to services and facilities and to assist in the removal of barriers to full participation in society. Support and encourage communities in the restoration of community halls / centres, thereby facilitating a greater level of social and community inclusion.
- Planning to participate in a multiagency approach to deliver adequate services in West Wicklow.

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

- Blessington is served by the N81 and serious consideration and pressure needs to be applied to TII for a much improved and safer road network for the residents of West Wicklow. Housing is being planned, but no road network improvements are planned, the N81 and Blessington town are at times bottle necks and

this is only going to get worse as housing is delivered without adequate improvements to the road network. More housing = More Residents = More Cars = More Traffic Congestion.

- Improved bus services are required, along with edge of town developed park and ride facilities, to ensure towns like Blessington are not cluttered with commuter parking.
- The inner relief road in Blessington should be completed without delay; it will serve to alleviate town centre bottle necks. At times Blessington can be simply described as a town choked by traffic.
- That better consideration needs to be made with regard to town planning to ensure industrial sites are located in areas closer to the road network and not within the town centres.
- The secondary school in Blessington is already over capacity and yet no firm plans are in place to deliver a much needed extension or new build.
- Consideration should be made to make all towns, including Blessington to become more self sustaining by delivering on high speed broadband and encouraging working from home or from within community run enterprise hubs.

TOWN & VILLAGE PLANS

- Blessington as a designated large town currently has its own standalone 'Local Area Plans', which will be reviewed after the adoption of County Development Plan 2021 – 2027. The existing plan contained a lot of excellent suggestions on town development but unfortunately little if any have been delivered upon, and in some cases the opposite has occurred to what was deemed the best plan for our town.
- Into the future Blessington should be better planned, to ensure all developments are done in a sustainable manner. Housing should only be built with enhanced community facilities, and in parallel business and employment opportunities need to be delivered to ensure residents are afforded the opportunity to work locally in their community rather than heavy traffic commutes into Dublin.
- It is imperative to ensure that population growth in Blessington is managed and that the sense of community is not diminished by over population.
- Blessington has huge opportunities into the future to be a destination town as opposed to a town people pass through. The County Development Plan and future LAP must proactively ensure Blessington becomes a destination town. We have an enviable location, on the edge of the Blessington Lakes, beside the Wicklow Mountains, within short distances of Dublin and Kildare and a rich local heritage that should be explored. All of these characteristics should be maximized to build the Blessington brand.