



# Blessington Local Area Plan Submission - Report

<b>Who are you:</b>	Group
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## File

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An island of swimmers

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Wicklow County Council  
County Buildings  
Whitegates  
Wicklow Town  
A67 FW96

2 April 2024

Reference: Blessington Local Area Plan Submission

To whom it may concern,

This submission has been prepared by Swim Ireland, in response to the public notice for submissions on the Blessington Local Area Plan. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the discourse from the point of view of a National Governing Body (NGB) of Sport.

OVERVIEW OF SWIM IRELAND

Swim Ireland is the National Governing Body (NGB) for Swimming, Water Polo, Diving and Artistic Swimming across the 32 counties of Ireland, recognised as such through Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland. Swim Ireland is also recognised at World level by World Aquatics, and at European level by European Aquatics. With a membership of over 19,000 we have a network of 163 Clubs across every county in Ireland. We see our role as being to improve the opportunity and experience for all swimmers, no matter what their level. Working in tandem with Local Sports Partnerships we are the delivery agents for the aquatic actions and strategic objectives set by the Irish Government in the National Physical Activity Plan and National Sports Policy, one of which is identified as to 'Get Ireland Swimming'. We define swimming as 'a form of physical activity in the water that people engage in whether for social connections, exercise, health and physical activity, challenge, mental wellbeing, skill development, competition, fun, or many of these reasons combined'.

CONTRIBUTION

Our contribution is focused on the topic of *Economic Opportunity -Tourism-Shops & Services-Community Facilities*, specifically in relation to community, sport, and recreation facilities. We believe that there is a strong case for swimming and the development of pool infrastructure to be given specific consideration in the Blessington Local Area Plan. Whilst not as easy to deliver as some forms of physical activity, the longer-term benefits of creating a swimming culture are immeasurable. An ability to swim is not only an essential life skill, but swimming is also one of the few sports that can be participated in over the full life course, can be enjoyed at multiple levels, and by people of all shapes, sizes, and fitness levels.

Taking an evidence-based approach, we make the case that all the research consistently points to the importance of swimming. Irish Sports Monitor data shows swimming to be the second most popular activity undertaken by adults across the nation, second only to personal exercise. The importance of swimming to the health of our nation is recognised at national policy level. The National Physical Activity Plan, published in 2016, includes an action to develop Get Ireland Swimming, Cycling and Running initiatives. Furthermore, National Sports Policy (NSP), published in 2017, called for the prioritisation of swimming, cycling, and running, referencing that these sports have the greatest potential for generating higher levels of active participation over the full life course a fact that we believe warrants consideration in planning for the future health of our populations. Importantly

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Irish Amateur Swimming Association Company Limited by Guarantee  
T/A Swim Ireland  
Registered in Dublin. Registration Number: 112024  
Registered Office: [Redacted]

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from a policy perspective, the National Swimming Strategy is in its final stages of development, and the Local Authority sector will be key stakeholders in the delivery of this strategy.

We are aware the Community Pool for West Wicklow Committee have been campaigning for the development of a swimming pool and sports facilities in the Baltinglass Municipal District since July 2018. During this time Wicklow County Council have identified Blessington as the most suitable location for the development of a swimming pool in West Wicklow. In September 2022, in partnership with Wicklow County Council and West Wicklow Pool Committee, Swim Ireland brought a temporary Pop-Up Pool to Blessington for a twelve-week period. The scale of this project and impact of the Blessington Pop-Up Pool on the local community were significant, with 600 children a week attending swimming lessons. For many of these children this was their first opportunity to learn the life skill that is swimming.

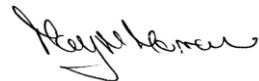
Over the twelve weeks that the Pop-Up Pool was in Blessington there was significant demand to cater for school and public swimming lessons, one-to-one swimming lessons, autism friendly swim sessions and lessons, Aquafit classes, Transition Year life-saving classes, public swims, birthday party swims and an inclusive Halloween swim camp for children with additional needs. There were 450 public swims, and over 7,000 total swims made during this period. The Pop-Up Pool demonstrated the significant need for a swimming pool in Blessington, and with the community ever expanding and demand from other local sports clubs for adequate training facilities, we believe that any plan regarding the development of Blessington must include and refer to the development of a local swimming pool for the community.

As part of the Blessington Local Area Plan, we would like to see commitment by Wicklow County Council to include the following:

- **The development of a swimming pool and multi-use sports complex, with the aim for development of the swimming pool to have started within the lifetime of the Local Area Plan. This would accommodate the ever expanding Blessington community and local sports clubs, with shared facilities such as changing rooms, car park and training areas. Swim Ireland is in the process of developing a Swimming Facilities Planning Model as a useful tool for local authorities, and we would be happy to share the detail of this with you upon request.**
- **The zoning of land for the development of a swimming pool and multi-use sports complex located at the Council owned land beside the Avon in Blessington.**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. We underline that swimming is one of the few sports that is accessible by all ages, genders, and abilities, regardless of fitness levels or health status and as such considered development of pool infrastructure to support swimming would be very much welcomed. We are available to meet with you at any stage to discuss any of the points raised in further detail.

Kind Regards



**Mary McMorrow**

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Director of Operations, Swim Ireland