



Proposed Variation No. 7 to the Wicklow County Development Plan Submission Report

Submission Details

Ref	VAR7-132451
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Submitted Time:	September 16, 2026 1:28 PM

Proposed Variation Parts

Topic	Part 1: Proposed Variation to town / settlement zoning maps and, where relevant, proposed new or amended site specific policy objectives.
Submission	1. Level 5: Aughrim

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Aughrim – Planning for a Sustainable Town for All Generations

I welcome the opportunity to make a submission on Proposed Variation No. 7 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022–2028.

I am making this submission in a personal capacity as a resident of Aughrim town centre.

I live here with my husband, our teenage daughter, and my elderly mother. As a family, we represent very different stages of life and, consequently, experience the village and its infrastructure in different ways.

My daughter represents a generation who I hope will see Aughrim as somewhere where young people can eventually find housing, employment and opportunities to build their lives. My husband and I are at a stage where access to local businesses, services, community facilities and employment matters greatly. For my mother, accessibility, safe pedestrian movement and the ability to reach services and amenities close to home become increasingly important.

It is from that perspective that I have considered the proposals for significant additional residential development in Aughrim.

I recognise the need for additional housing and welcome the opportunity for more people and families to make their homes here. My concern is not with residential growth itself, but with ensuring that the town develops alongside that growth.

The question I would ask Wicklow County Council to consider is not simply **how many additional homes Aughrim can accommodate, but what kind of town those residents—and those of us already living here—will have around us.**

Growth Should Strengthen the Existing Town

Aughrim is a wonderful place to live, but it is also a relatively small town with significant physical constraints.

It developed predominantly along the R747, with the rivers and surrounding landscape helping to create the distinctive character of the village but also limiting opportunities for expansion within the existing centre.

The current Aughrim Town Plan recognises the importance of the town centre, the relatively limited opportunities for expansion of its commercial core and the need for additional economic and employment activity.

As Aughrim's population increases, these considerations become more important rather than less important.

Additional residents will require shops, services, schools, childcare, community facilities, recreational amenities, transport, parking and opportunities for employment.

For that reason, the additional residential zoning proposed under Variation No. 7 should be considered as part of a wider strategy for Aughrim rather than primarily as a housing-land question.

The Importance of Main Street and the Town Centre

For my family, as for many residents, the town centre is part of everyday life.

Being able to walk to a shop, café, community facility, service or recreational amenity is one of the advantages of living in a small town.

This becomes particularly important at different stages of life. Young people need some independence of movement. Working-age residents benefit from services and businesses close to home. Older people can become increasingly dependent upon having services within a manageable and accessible distance.

A functioning town centre therefore has a social value as well as an economic one.

Residential use is an important component of a healthy town centre and should certainly be encouraged. However, a town centre also requires sufficient space for shops, services, hospitality, small businesses, community activity and employment.

Aughrim needs both.

As the population grows, I would therefore ask the Council to consider the cumulative balance of uses within the existing town centre and ensure that sufficient opportunities remain for commercial, service and employment activity.

The objective should be to increase the number of people living in and around the centre while simultaneously increasing the reasons for people to use it.

Vacant and Underutilised Buildings

There are a number of vacant and underutilised buildings within the existing centre of Aughrim.

Some are residential and others have had different uses.

I believe these properties should be viewed as an important part of the town's future housing and regeneration strategy.

The County Development Plan already supports compact growth, regeneration, the reuse of existing buildings and bringing vacant properties back into productive use.

Before viewing the future of Aughrim exclusively in terms of expansion, we should also look carefully at what can be achieved within the town we already have.

Bringing vacant homes back into occupation can provide housing while also repopulating the centre. Reusing upper floors and other appropriate buildings can do the same. Restoring and adapting existing buildings can improve the streetscape and make better use of infrastructure that is already there.

This does not remove the need for new housing. Rather, **regeneration and new development should happen together.**

Housing for Different Stages of Life

My own family circumstances also make me conscious that housing need is not uniform.

A young person leaving home has different requirements from a family with children. An older person may eventually wish to move from a larger house into a smaller, accessible home while remaining within their own community.

Planning for Aughrim should therefore consider the diversity of housing required over a person's lifetime.

Additional development should include an appropriate mix of house types and sizes rather than concentrating too heavily on any one form of housing.

Smaller homes and accessible homes close to the village centre could be particularly valuable for older residents wishing to remain within Aughrim. In turn, this can release larger existing homes for families.

Young adults also need realistic opportunities to remain in or return to the community in which they grew up.

If Aughrim is to remain a balanced community, it should be possible to find an appropriate home here at different stages of life.

Employment and Local Enterprise

Housing is only one part of retaining younger generations in rural towns.

There also need to be opportunities to work and establish businesses.

The current Aughrim Town Plan acknowledges relatively limited employment opportunities within the town. This should be considered alongside proposals for significant population growth.

A larger population should provide opportunities to support cafés, shops, professional services, crafts and creative enterprises, health and wellbeing businesses, tourism enterprises, remote working and other small businesses.

Suitable and affordable premises are particularly important for small enterprises.

The Development Plan should therefore ensure that population growth is accompanied by opportunities for economic growth and that sufficient space remains within the town for people to establish businesses and provide services.

I would like my daughter's generation to see Aughrim not simply as somewhere they might be able to find a house, but as somewhere where they might realistically be able to build a life.

Parking and the R747

Parking is already a significant practical problem in Aughrim.

The village developed along the R747, which carries substantial through traffic, including heavy vehicles. Main Street has limited capacity for parking, and the physical geography of the village makes finding additional space difficult.

This affects residents, businesses and visitors.

It also has a particular impact on people with reduced mobility. Something that may be a relatively minor inconvenience for an able-bodied person can become a significant obstacle for an elderly person or somebody with mobility difficulties.

The current Aughrim Town Plan already recognises the problem and includes an objective for additional off-street public parking together with pedestrian and accessibility improvements.

However, residents still have little clarity about where meaningful additional public parking will be provided.

If Aughrim is now being planned for significant additional residential development, this question needs to be addressed as part of that process.

Existing infrastructure deficiencies should not simply become larger problems as the population increases.

The Greenway

The proposed Arklow–Shillelagh Greenway presents a potentially important opportunity for Aughrim.

It could bring visitors into the village, support local businesses, encourage recreation, and strengthen Aughrim's tourism economy.

I welcome that potential.

However, there remains considerable uncertainty locally about the infrastructure associated with the Greenway as it passes through Aughrim.

Where will visitors park? Where will bicycles be parked? How will cyclists, pedestrians and existing traffic interact safely? How will visitors be encouraged to enter Main Street and support local businesses?

These questions are particularly important because the Greenway is being considered at the same time as substantial residential expansion.

The cumulative effect of both developments needs to be planned for.

A Strategic Parking Solution

I believe Aughrim requires a comprehensive parking and movement strategy rather than a series of individual solutions attached to individual developments.

Strategically located off-street parking within convenient walking distance of Main Street could potentially serve residents, businesses, community facilities, recreational amenities, Greenway users and tourists.

The Lawless's Hotel site and associated lands have previously been discussed locally as one possible opportunity for centrally located parking.

I do not suggest that this should determine the future of that important site. Its future deserves much wider consideration.

However, it demonstrates why strategic sites close to the centre should be examined as part of a comprehensive plan for parking, pedestrian movement, and access to Main Street.

Connecting New Development with the Existing Town

If significant residential development takes place at Killacloran, it should become an extension of Aughrim rather than a separate residential development beside Aughrim.

That distinction matters.

Safe, attractive, and direct walking and cycling routes should connect new homes with Main Street, schools, community facilities, recreational amenities and public transport.

These connections should be planned from the outset.

If residents can conveniently walk into Aughrim, they are more likely to use local businesses, services, and facilities. If every short journey requires a car, existing traffic and parking difficulties will inevitably increase.

Good connectivity therefore supports both sustainability and town-centre regeneration.

The Proposed Mixed-Use Development

I welcome the inclusion of mixed-use development within the proposals.

Additional population should create opportunities for new services, businesses, and community facilities.

However, any new commercial centre should be designed to complement the existing town centre rather than inadvertently drawing activity away from Main Street.

The established centre should remain the principal commercial, social and community heart of Aughrim.

New development should therefore have strong physical and economic connections with it.

Tourism and Aughrim's Wider Potential

Aughrim has significant unrealised potential.

Its landscape, rivers, built heritage, recreational facilities and location provide opportunities associated with walking, cycling, angling, outdoor recreation, heritage, and nature-based tourism.

The proposed Greenway could strengthen this considerably.

For the village to benefit economically, however, visitors need somewhere to stop, park, eat, shop, and spend time.

This brings us back to the importance of Main Street.

An attractive, accessible and active town centre, combined with appropriate parking, visitor facilities and good pedestrian connections, should therefore be regarded as part of Aughrim's tourism infrastructure.

Infrastructure Must Keep Pace

Additional housing inevitably creates additional demand for infrastructure and services.

Consideration needs to be given to water and wastewater capacity, schools, childcare, roads, public transport, parking, pedestrian infrastructure, recreational amenities and community facilities.

These should not be regarded as matters to be addressed after residential development has occurred.

Where significant additional development is proposed, there should be sufficient confidence that the infrastructure required to support it can be delivered in an appropriate and timely manner.

Planning Aughrim as a Whole

Housing, Main Street, vacant buildings, employment, parking, the Greenway, tourism, community facilities and transport may sit under different headings in a Development Plan.

For people living in Aughrim, however, they are all part of the same place.

My family illustrates this in a very ordinary way.

The needs of my elderly mother, my teenage daughter, my husband and me are different. In time they will change again.

A sustainable town needs to accommodate those different stages of life.

It needs homes, but it also needs somewhere to buy everyday necessities. It needs places to work and establish businesses. It needs safe streets and footpaths. It needs community and recreational facilities. It needs accessibility for older people and independence for younger people. It needs transport and parking. And it needs an attractive and active centre where people encounter one another and participate in community life.

That is why I believe the opportunity presented by Variation No. 7 should be considered in terms of **the future development of Aughrim as a whole.**

I respectfully ask Wicklow County Council to ensure that the proposed residential expansion of Aughrim is accompanied by a coordinated strategy that:

- places regeneration and vitality of the existing town centre at the heart of future development.
- encourages vacant and underutilised buildings to be brought back into productive use.
- provides a diverse range of housing suitable for different ages, household sizes and stages of life.
- maintains an appropriate balance of residential, commercial and community uses.
- supports local enterprise and employment.
- provides a clear strategy for additional off-street public parking.
- identifies the parking, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure required for the proposed Greenway.
- creates safe and attractive connections between new residential areas and the existing town.
- protects and enhances the character of Main Street.
- supports tourism and appropriate economic development; and
- ensures that infrastructure, services and community facilities keep pace with population growth.

Conclusion

I support the principle of providing additional housing in Aughrim.

I would like young people, including my daughter's generation, to have the opportunity to make their homes here. I would equally like older people, including my mother's generation, to be able to remain part of the community as their needs change.

But providing houses alone will not achieve that.

The opportunity presented by additional residential growth should be used to strengthen the town that surrounds those homes.

Aughrim should remain a place where different generations can live, work, access services, participate in community life and move around safely and independently.

I therefore respectfully ask Wicklow County Council to place the **regeneration, accessibility, economic vitality, and long-term sustainability of Aughrim's existing town centre at the heart of its consideration of Proposed Variation No. 7.**

The objective should be that, as Aughrim grows, it becomes not simply a larger residential settlement but a stronger, more accessible, more economically sustainable and more vibrant town for the generations already living here and those who will follow.

Yours Faithfully

Abigail Brennan