



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

Submission Details

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Who Are You?	Private Individual
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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 Sustainable Growth and a Strong Town Centre

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 young people can eventually find housing, employment and opportunities to build their lives. My husband and I value access to local businesses, services, employment and community facilities. 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 support the provision of additional housing and welcome the opportunity for more people and families to make their homes here. My concern is not with growth itself, but with ensuring that **the infrastructure, services and existing town develop alongside it.**

Existing Development Capacity and Infrastructure

An important consideration in assessing Proposed Variation No. 7 is that Aughrim already has residentially zoned land that remains undeveloped.

During preparation of the current County Development Plan, Wicklow County Council described the preceding Aughrim Plan as containing zoning with the potential for approximately **287 additional residential units**. This is a historical figure and does not represent the number of houses currently proposed under Variation No. 7, but it demonstrates that substantial development capacity has existed in Aughrim for some time.

Much of that anticipated development has not materialised.

A significant constraint has been wastewater capacity. The current Aughrim Town Plan records a wastewater treatment plant design capacity of 1,500 population equivalent and a loading of 1,840 population equivalent as of 2022. The Plan identifies the need for

improvements and provides that new development cannot proceed unless adequate wastewater collection and treatment capacity exists.

This is particularly relevant now that Variation No. 7 proposes additional residential and mixed-use development at Killacoran.

Before further development capacity is added, I believe residents should have a clearer understanding of **the cumulative scale of development being planned for Aughrim.**

The Council should therefore set out:

- the approximate number of homes that could be accommodated on existing undeveloped residentially zoned land;
- the approximate additional number that could arise from Variation No. 7;
- the potential population increase if these lands were substantially developed; and
- the wastewater and other infrastructure required to support that level of growth.

This is important because zoning additional land will not, in itself, deliver housing if the infrastructure necessary to develop land already zoned remains unavailable.

The priority should therefore be an **infrastructure-led and appropriately phased approach to growth**, beginning with adequate wastewater capacity and accompanied by the transport, parking, pedestrian, community and service infrastructure required by the resulting population.

Strengthening Main Street and the Existing Town

Growth should strengthen the town that already exists.

For my family, as for many residents, the ability to walk to a shop, café, community facility, service or recreational amenity is one of the great advantages of living in a small town.

This becomes particularly important at different stages of life. Young people need independence of movement; working-age residents benefit from businesses and services close to home; and older people can become increasingly dependent on having services within an accessible distance.

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

Residential use is an important part of a healthy town centre, but the centre must also retain sufficient opportunities for shops, services, hospitality, small businesses, community activity and employment.

Aughrim needs both.

As the population increases, the objective should be to increase the number of people living in and around the centre while also increasing the reasons and opportunities for people to use it.

Vacancy, Regeneration and Housing Choice

There are vacant and underutilised buildings within the existing centre and built-up area of Aughrim.

Census 2022 recorded 39 vacant dwellings in Aughrim. I recognise that Census vacancy is a point-in-time measure and does not mean that all of these properties are long-term vacant or immediately available for occupation. Nevertheless, vacancy and underutilisation should form part of the discussion about the town's future.

Bringing appropriate vacant homes back into occupation, reusing upper floors and regenerating existing buildings can provide housing while strengthening the established centre and making use of existing infrastructure.

This does not remove the need for new housing.

Regeneration and new development should happen together.

The housing provided should also reflect different stages of life. Young adults, families and older people have different requirements. Smaller and accessible homes close to the centre could allow older residents to remain within their community, while a broader mix of housing would give younger people and families greater opportunities to live in Aughrim.

Employment and Local Enterprise

Population growth should also create economic opportunity.

Housing alone will not enable younger generations to build their lives in Aughrim. There must also be opportunities to work, establish businesses and access services.

A larger population can 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.

This makes it important that sufficient commercial and service space remains available and that new mixed-use development complements rather than competes with Main Street.

The established centre should remain the principal commercial, social and community heart of Aughrim, with new development physically and economically connected to it.

Roads, Parking, the Greenway and Connectivity

Transport and movement are already significant practical issues in Aughrim.

The village is constrained by its historic layout, rivers and regional-road network, including the R753 and R747. Local and through traffic must share a relatively confined centre with pedestrians, businesses and limited parking.

Additional housing will increase movement and parking demand. At the same time, the proposed Arklow–Shillelagh Greenway could bring additional visitors into Aughrim and provide an important opportunity for tourism and local businesses.

These developments need to be planned together.

Residents need greater clarity about additional off-street public parking, Greenway parking and bicycle facilities, safe pedestrian and cycle movement, and how new residential areas will connect with Main Street, schools, community facilities and recreational amenities.

A comprehensive parking and movement strategy would be preferable to attempting to address these needs separately through individual developments.

Strategically located off-street parking within convenient walking distance of Main Street could potentially serve residents, businesses, community facilities, Greenway users and visitors. The location and capacity of this infrastructure should therefore be considered as part of the overall planning for Aughrim's growth.

Good pedestrian and cycling connections are equally important. New residential areas should become extensions of Aughrim rather than isolated developments beside it.

If residents can conveniently walk into the town, they are more likely to use local businesses and services. If most short journeys require a car, existing traffic and parking pressures will inevitably increase.

Planning for the Cumulative Impact of Growth

Variation No. 7 should be considered in the context of everything already planned for Aughrim.

The town has existing undeveloped residentially zoned land, an identified wastewater constraint, existing parking and movement difficulties, vacant and underutilised buildings, a proposed Greenway and now proposals for further residential and mixed-use expansion.

These are interconnected issues.

I respectfully ask Wicklow County Council, in considering Variation No. 7, to:

- quantify the approximate housing and population capacity of existing undeveloped zoned land together with the additional land proposed under Variation No. 7;
- establish the wastewater capacity required and provide clarity on how and when the necessary upgrade will be delivered;
- phase development in step with infrastructure capacity;
- provide a coordinated parking, pedestrian, cycling and movement strategy, including infrastructure associated with the Greenway;

- ensure safe connections between new residential areas and the existing town;
- support regeneration and productive reuse of vacant and underutilised buildings;
- provide a diverse mix of housing for different ages and household needs;
- protect sufficient commercial and service capacity to support an increased population;
- strengthen Main Street as the principal commercial, social and community centre;
- support local enterprise, tourism and employment; and
- ensure that schools, childcare, public transport, recreational amenities and community facilities are considered against the cumulative population growth envisaged.

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 and build their lives 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 sustainable growth requires more than additional zoned land.

Aughrim already has undeveloped residential zoning and an identified wastewater constraint. Before further growth is realised, there should be clarity about **how many additional homes and residents are ultimately being planned for and how the infrastructure required to support them will be delivered.**

Variation No. 7 presents an opportunity to address these matters together rather than separately.

I therefore ask Wicklow County Council to take an **infrastructure-led approach to Aughrim's future development**, in which new housing, existing zoned land, wastewater capacity, town-centre regeneration, transport, parking, the Greenway, economic development and community infrastructure are planned as parts of the same growing town.

The objective should be that Aughrim becomes not simply larger, but **better connected, properly serviced, economically sustainable and capable of supporting people through different stages of life.**

Yours faithfully,

Abigail Brennan