

	<h1>Variation No.6</h1>
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Reference:	VAR6-161335
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- SEA Screening & Determination – Proposed Variation No. 6
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Submission on Proposed Variation No. 6

Wicklow County Development Plan 2022–2028

I wish to make a submission on Proposed Variation No. 6. This submission raises serious procedural, environmental, and governance concerns, independent of the merits of housing delivery in principle.

Defective Public Consultation and Publicity

This proposed Variation was **not adequately publicised** in a manner consistent with genuine, meaningful public consultation.

I became aware of the consultation only in the final **two days** of the process. I have been unable to identify evidence of proactive publication through newspapers or other effective public channels, beyond a single notice hosted on the Council's website. This represents a narrowing of access to information and an undermining of public consultation requirements, particularly for residents without routine engagement with council portals or websites.

This approach conflicts with established Irish public consultation standards, which require consultation to be **genuine, accessible, timely, and proportionate to the significance of the proposal**. Where consultation is truncated or limited, the public body must clearly justify that approach. No such justification is provided here.

Given that Proposed Variation No. 6 materially alters the Core Strategy and housing delivery framework for major settlements such as Bray, this lack of effective publicity **undermines public participation and procedural fairness**.

Use of Strategic Variation to Pre-empt Local and Environmental Planning

Although described as "non-spatial", Proposed Variation No. 6 **sets binding housing quantum at Core Strategy level** in advance of completed Local Planning Frameworks, including for Bray.

This sequencing has the effect of fixing development pressure first, while deferring environmental, infrastructural, flood risk, and biodiversity resolution to later stages. In practice, this risks converting strategic housing targets into determinative factors in development management, rather than contextual ones.

This represents a **substantive policy shift**, not a neutral technical adjustment.

SEA Screening-Out Is Not Credible

The Strategic Environmental Assessment screening determination concludes that a full SEA is not required. This conclusion is not credible given:

- the scale of housing uplifts now assigned to already constrained settlements;

- the cumulative and in-combination effects of increased density, transport demand, wastewater loading, flood risk, and climate adaptation pressures; and
- the rollback, dilution, or sidelining of previously adopted biodiversity and environmental commitments contained in the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022–2028.

Screening out SEA at this stage **removes the only strategic mechanism** for examining cumulative environmental effects before decisions harden downstream.

Appropriate Assessment Screening Is Equally Deficient

The Appropriate Assessment screening determination similarly concludes that Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is not required. This is particularly concerning given Bray's proximity to sensitive coastal, riverine, and downstream Natura 2000 sites, and the scale of existing and proposed coastal and marine development affecting the Wicklow coastline, including offshore renewable energy projects, associated landfall works, and multiple Marine Area consents and Marine Usage Licences granted along the coast.

These include projects affecting or adjacent to Bray Head SAC, The Murrough SAC and SPA, and Wicklow Reef SAC. Deferring in-combination effects to later stages, after housing quantum is fixed, inverts the precautionary purpose of plan-level assessment required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

Bray-Specific Environmental Constraints and Cumulative Risk

Bray is a coastal settlement with a constrained river corridor, floodplain sensitivity, and downstream marine receiving waters, all of which materially limit its environmental carrying capacity. Increased housing targets at Core Strategy level will inevitably intensify pressure on the Dargle catchment and its tributaries through increased surface water runoff, wastewater loading, construction disturbance, and urban pollution pathways.

These pressures do not arise from any single development in isolation, but **accumulate incrementally over time**, increasing flood risk, degrading water quality, and reducing ecological resilience in both freshwater and coastal environments. Screening out Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment at this stage fails to examine these **in-combination and downstream effects**, despite their foreseeability and strategic relevance. Once higher housing numbers are fixed, the opportunity to avoid or meaningfully mitigate such impacts is substantially reduced, particularly in a town where physical expansion options are limited and climate-related flood risk is already increasing.

In addition, multiple recent and ongoing large-scale residential, infrastructural, and commercial developments in and around Bray have already pushed local environmental systems to or beyond their sustainable limits, particularly in relation to the river corridor, floodplain function, wastewater capacity, and coastal receiving waters. Despite this, the **Bray Biodiversity Action Plan is not referenced or integrated** into the Proposed Variation or its environmental screening, and no account is taken of existing cumulative pressures.

This omission is inconsistent with the requirements of the Aarhus Convention, the Habitats Directive, the EIA Directive, and the Environmental Liability Directive, all of which require early, transparent assessment of environmental risk, meaningful public participation, and the

application of the precautionary principle and polluter-pays principle at plan-making stage, rather than deferring impacts to later, project-by-project resolution.

Conclusion

Proposed Variation No. 6:

- has been subject to **inadequate publicity and fundamentally inadequate public consultation procedures**;
- fixes housing numbers in conflict with the completion of proper, place-based, environmental, and infrastructural planning;
- improperly screens out SEA and AA despite clear potential for cumulative effects; **does not screen for EIA** and
- undermines environmental and biodiversity safeguards previously endorsed through statutory plan-making.

For these reasons, I request that Wicklow County Council pause and reconsider Proposed Variation No. 6, revisit the consultation process, and subject the proposal to full Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment, and screening for environmental impact assessment as required under the EIA Directive, and consistent with the precautionary principle and good planning practice.

In addition, I request that the Bray Biodiversity Action Plan be expressly recognised and treated as a material consideration in any revised assessment of Proposed Variation No. 6, including within any Strategic Environmental Assessment, Appropriate Assessment, or subsequent plan-making and decision-making processes arising from this Variation