



Draft Blessington Local Area Plan Submission - Report

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Submission to Blessington Local Area Plan (2025)

General Comments

The draft LAP for Blessington is a well-thought-out document, with clear considerations for the different scenarios across various land use objectives. However, for the final document, I recommend the following:

Clarify the Purpose and Title

The purpose of the document should be clearly stated as a land use zoning framework; the title, *Blessington Local Area Plan*, is misleading.

It should be evident that:

- The zoned lands are largely in private ownership, and there is no requirement for individuals or developers to commit to the proposed uses.
- The LAP does not have supporting funding or specific timelines for implementation.

Enhance Zoning Color Scheme

The current color scheme is confusing with regards to existing facilities, and new zoning objectives for CE, AOS, and OS1 zones. Differentiating these by using distinct colors or patterns would provide for clarity.

Residential Development

RN1 and RN2 Zoning

Although the intent behind RN1 and RN2 zoning is well understood, the LAP needs to incorporate, criteria and expectations related to the sequencing of RN1 development in a way to ensure RN2 is not hindered and impacted negatively, which could limit Blessingtons residential capacity in the coming years.

Cross-County Coordination

The plan overlooks the impact of residential development within Kildare on the Blessington community. To address this:

- Lands in Kildare should be included in consultation with Kildare County Council.
- Zoning in Kildare's Development Plan should align with Blessingtons needs.

- Examples from towns like Carrick on Shannon could provide a precedent for cross-county collaboration.

Introduction of an RN3 Category

An RN3 category could be introduced, taking into consideration and planning for the need for potential future housing that might be required before the end of the proposed plan. This would provide flexibility in addressing future residential demands.

Cross-County Collaboration: Inclusion of Kildare Lands in the Blessington LAP

The existing designation of the Blessington LAP boundaries cuts off residential and other developments within County Kildare, which would clearly be part of the everyday functional relationship with the Blessington community. This is not a reflection of the real life of the residents, with Blessington acting as the centerpiece for a greater area across Wicklow and Kildare.

The nature of these issues is, by definition, interconnected, and, therefore, cross-county cooperation with Kildare County Council should be explicitly provided for within the LAP. In tandem, joint planning would ensure that zoning, infrastructure, and the delivery of services are effectively coordinated. This would also help to address the cumulative impacts of development across county boundaries, including:

- Residential demand.
- Pressure on public facilities, such as schools and healthcare facilities.
- Transport linkages.

Precedents for Cross-County Planning

There are a number of towns in Ireland where cross-county collaboration has been implemented in either a Local Area Plan or similar framework, including the following:

Drogheda (Louth and Meath), Athlone (Westmeath and Roscommon), Carrick on Shannon (Leitrim and Roscommon), and indeed Bray (Wicklow and Dublin), where the town's development considers impacts in both counties, particularly in terms of transport links and suburban growth. Applying similar principles to Blessington would ensure coherent growth and make the town viable for a long period.

Infrastructure and Amenities

Impact of eGreenway Rejection

The rejection of the Blessington eGreenway by An Bord Pleanála (ABP) has raised concerns regarding tied infrastructure plans. Specifically, I suggest revisiting car parking locations, community facilities, and economic opportunities associated with eGreenway to identify a stand-alone solution.

Cemetery Zoning

The previous draft LAP had identified an area for cemetery use, which is missing on the current draft. This ought to be reinstated appropriately under CE zoning, with deliberation from relevant authorities who would identify an appropriate size determination.

Community Amenities

For CE and AOS zoning, clear objectives should ensure infrastructure meets community needs.

Suggested additions include:

- Recreational Facilities: Athletics track, playing pitches, basketball courts.
- Community Facilities: Scouts den, Community center, Community allotments.
- Public Spaces: Dog park, Playgrounds, Dedicated bike track.

Active Open Space (AOS) and Open Space (OS1)

Ensure adequate land is zoned for AOS to meet community needs and that OS1 zoned land can be readily used.

Transport and Traffic

Blessington Inner Relief Road (BIRR)

- Development along the BIRR route should be developed further only in tandem with the completion of the relief road network, including both the Kildare and Wicklow sections.
- Furthermore, road connections from Blessington GAA roundabout to the Naas Road should be prioritized.

Public Transport

Public transport through Blessington is very poor. The situation may improve under Bus Connects, but the LAP needs to have goals for the following:

- Expanding 65 bus route services and integrating Local Link services.
- Advocating for specific goals tied to Bus Connects' timeline and delivery.

Parking and Pedestrianization

- Parking is a persistent issue in Blessington. While additional parking is welcomed, it should be strategically located to encourage use and support pedestrianization.
- Enhance the town center by reducing car dominance, creating people-friendly spaces, and improving connectivity between the main street and surrounding areas.

Mixed Use (MU) Zoning

Land Utilization Concerns

The MU zoning and SLO4 areas have remain undeveloped since the 2013 LAP. If this condition persists, the community forfeits potential residential, recreational, or economic development.

The LAP should provide for contingency plans regarding the underutilization of MU zoned lands to ensure benefits to the community..

Architectural Integrity

Past planning decisions have resulted in inappropriate building structures that detract from Blessingtons character. The LAP should incorporate, some architectural guidelines to preserve the integrity of the town and ensure that future developments align with its heritage and aesthetic values.

Conclusion

The LAP in Blessington is an important framework to guide the development of the town. Addressing the issues outlined above, and in other submissions, the plan will serve the community's needs in a long-term manner and make Blessington grow in a sustainable way while preserving its character.