



Blessington Local Area Plan Submission - Report

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D C W N E Y

PRE-DRAFT LAP SUBMISSION

Blessington Local Area Plan

(STAGE I CONSULTATION)

Client: Quanta Capital

March 2024

BLESSINGTON LOCAL AREA PLAN

HAVE YOUR SAY
ON THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR AREA

Wicklow County Council will be preparing a new Local Area Plan for Blessington. A consultation website is now available for you to access which sets out the key topics that the new plan will address and allows you to make a submission. You are invited to go through the topics, browse the sample questions, view maps and give us your views and ideas.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission is made by DOWNEY, on behalf of our client, Quanta Capital, and is submitted to Wicklow County Council in the context of the Blessington Local Area Plan Pre-Draft Consultation Issues Paper, which is currently on public call for submissions. The submission relates to The Avon Resort, Blessington, Co. Wicklow

Recent research into tourism in County Wicklow show that the majority of visits to Wicklow can only be 'day-visits'. The policies and objectives set out in the various national, regional, and local plans seeks to promote developments that would attract visitors to Wicklow for overnight stays and longer visits; this in turn would be of economic benefit to the County. The Avon Resort in Blessington provides holiday homes with various amenities, providing a service for overnight visits for tourists. Given the location of Blessington at the foot of the Wicklow Mountains, and in proximity to National Roads and Motorways, The Avon Resort can become a key driver in further enhancing tourism to Wicklow and the wider Leinster Area. As such, this submission seeks to ensure that the Blessington LAP, provides the relevant policies and objectives to allow for the protection of, and future growth of the resort.

This submission to the 'Blessington Local Area Plan Pre-Draft Issues Paper' seeks to highlight the strategic location of Blessington, with regards to tourism for the west of Wicklow, along with the wider Leinster area. This submission will have specific focus on how The Avon Resort can be a key benchmark in assisting Wicklow County Council to achieve its tourism policies and objectives.

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DOWNEY

DOWNEY Document Control			
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This planning submission is made in response to the statutory preparation of the Blessington Local Area Plan. Stage 1, known as the 'Pre-Draft' stage, requires submissions to be of a strategic nature. Accordingly, this submission has been prepared in the context of "Strategic Planning Issues" which are detailed throughout this submission to highlight some cross cutting themes that should be examined at the initial stage of the formulation of this important document which will steer development within Blessington until 2030. DOWNEY would like to thank the Council for the opportunity to make this submission, on behalf of our clients.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

DOWNEY, Chartered Town Planners, 29 Merrion Square, D02 RW64, have prepared this submission for the “Blessington Local Area Plan” Pre-Draft Issues Paper to Wicklow County Council. This submission is made on behalf of our client, Quanta Capital, [REDACTED]

This written submission is made in response to an invitation for comments from interested parties, and it is being made within the specified timeframe for submissions, i.e., 2nd April 2024, as set out on the Local Area Plan’s consultation portal.

Wicklow County Council has published a Pre-Draft Public Consultation Issues Paper in relation to the Blessington Local Area Plan. The LAP identifies the following key pillars to the future of Blessington:

1. Housing – Population – Compact Growth
2. Regeneration of Communities & Places – Healthy Placemaking – Urban Design – Opportunity Sites
3. Economic Opportunity – Tourism – Shops & Services – Community Facilities
4. Heritage – Biodiversity – Green Infrastructure – Climate Action – Energy
5. Infrastructure – Sustainable Movement – Transportation

This submission seeks to highlight the strategic location of Blessington, with regards to tourism for the west of Wicklow, along with the wider Leinster Area. This submission will have specific focus on how The Avon Resort can be a key benchmark in assisting Wicklow County Council to achieve its tourism policies and objectives. The Avon Resort is located at The Burgage, Burgage More, Blessington, Co. Wicklow which offers a café, restaurant, and holiday homes along with leisure and recreational facilities.

In relation to Pillar 3 above, Economic Opportunity – Tourism – Shops & Services – Community Facilities, the plan notes that *“Economic development and the creation of employment opportunities are fundamental to the creation of sustainable communities.”* The Plan also acknowledges the importance of the expansion of the Blessington Greenway around the Poulaphouca Reservoir and notes that this provides a significant opportunity for recreation and tourism within Blessington. The Plan also provides ‘sample questions’ of this topic, with the following 2 of specific relevance:

- *“Are all of the tourism assets in the settlement fully exploited?”*
- *“What is needed in Blessington to maximise the opportunities that may arise from the planned expansion to the Blessington Greenway?”*

This submission seeks to provide answers to the above questions, with reference to The Avon Resort, this is discussed further in Section 6 below.

2.0 LEGISLATIVE BASIS

Section 18 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) provides that a Planning Authority may, at any time, prepare a Local Area Plan (LAP) for any particular area within its jurisdiction which the Planning Authority considers appropriate; in particular for areas which require economic, physical, and social renewal, and for areas likely to be subject to large scale development.

The application and content of an LAP are set out within Section 19 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended), whereby a local area plan may be prepared in respect of any area, including a Gaeltacht area, or an existing suburb of an urban area, which the Planning Authority considers suitable and, in particular, for those areas which require economic, physical, and social renewal and for areas likely to be subject to large scale development within the lifetime of the plan. The process for the consultation and adoption of a Local Area Plan is contained within Section 20 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended), which states:

“3 – (a) The Planning Authority shall, as soon as may be after consideration of any matters arising out of consultations under subsections (1) or (2) but before making, amending, or revoking a local area plan-

- (i) Send notice of the proposal to make, amend, or revoke a local area plan to the Board and to the prescribed authorities (and, where applicable, it shall enclose a copy of the proposed plan or amended plan),*
- (ii) Publish a notice of the proposal in one or more newspapers circulating in its area.*

(b) A notice under paragraph (a) shall state –

- (i) That the planning authority propose to make, amend, or revoke a local area plan,*
- (ii) That a copy of the proposal to make, amend, or revoke the local area plan and (where appropriate) the proposed local area plan, or proposed amended plan, may be inspected at such place or places as are specified in the notice during such period as may be so stated (being a period of not less than 6 weeks),*
- (iii) That submissions or observations in respect of the proposal made to the planning authority during such period will be taken into consideration in deciding upon the proposal.*

(c) Not later than 12 weeks after giving notice under paragraph (b), the manager of a planning authority shall prepare a report on any submissions or observations received pursuant to a notice under that paragraph and shall submit the report to the members of the planning authority for their consideration.

3.0 SUBJECT SITE AND DESCRIPTION

The Avon Resort, the Burgage, Burgage More, Blessington, is located on the south side of Blessington Town, on the west side of Blessington Lake. The Resort was constructed in the early 1990s and initially comprised off a leisure centre and facilities with residential holiday homes constructed in the late 1990s. The resort has since grown significantly and provides various amenities and activities including, café, food court, holiday homes, tennis courts, bike hire, water-sports activities, archery range, and more. While some of the holiday homes are owned privately, the majority are in the ownership of the management company of The Avon Resort.



Figure 1: The Avon Resort (note holiday homes in private ownership are outside the ownership red line)

With regards to the site's strategic location, the site is located only 400 metres from the N81 National Road, providing a direct route to Dublin and the M50 motorway to the north-east, and Carlow to the South linking with the N80 leading to Wexford Town further south, and Kilkenny/Waterford south-west. The site is also located only a 20-minute drive to the M7 at Naas, further increasing the site's accessibility. The Avon Resort at Blessington is located at the foot of the Wicklow Mountains on the western side, with direct access to the R759 road and R115 road, at the Sally Gap and Wicklow Gap, with multiple tourist attractions along the way, including Glendalough, only a 30-minute drive from the subject site. In this regard, The Avon is a strategic tourist and leisure destination for Blessington and west Wicklow that is critical in generating employment and economic growth for the area.

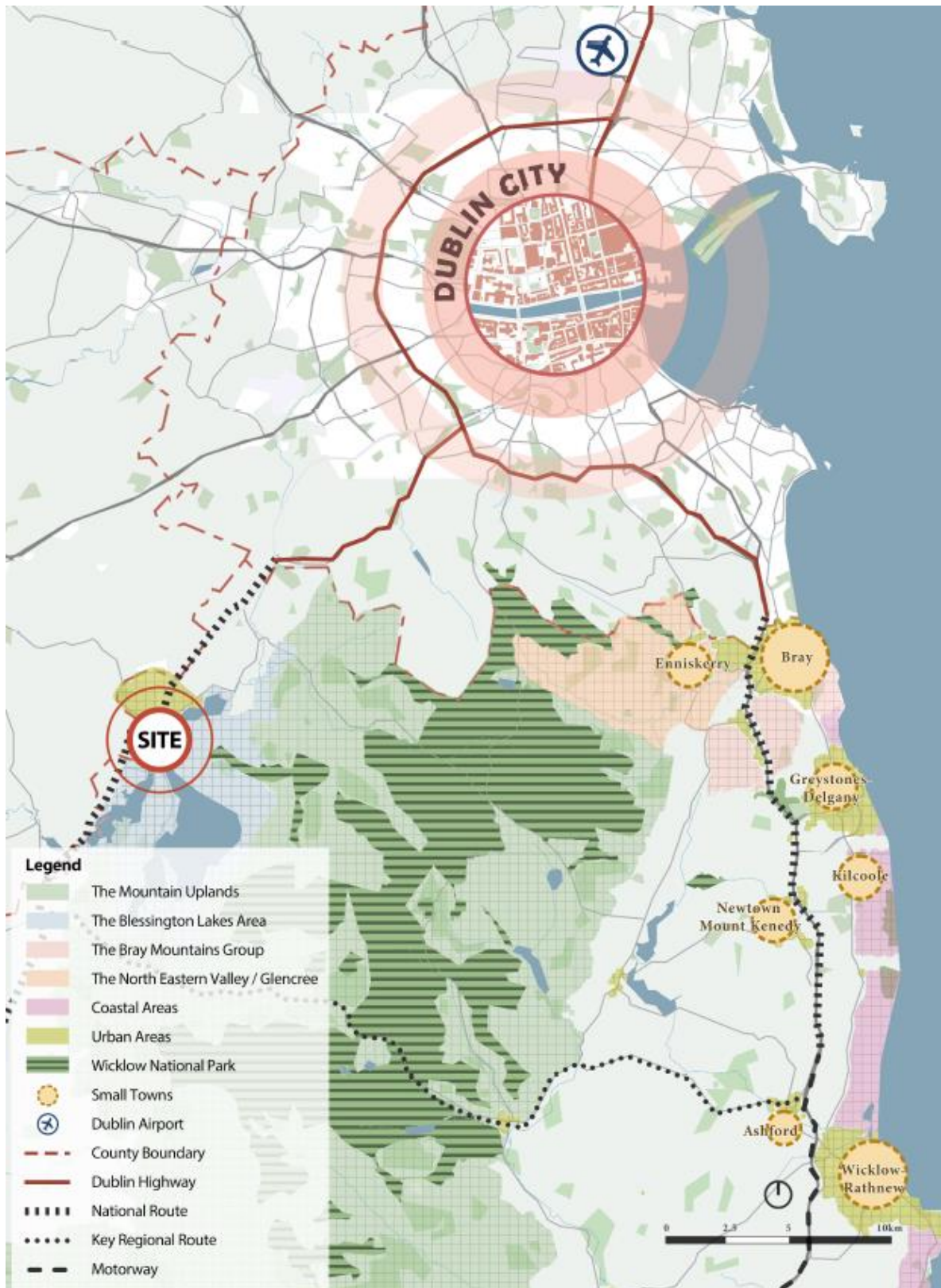


Figure 2: Blessington in its wider context

The Resort is located at the starting point of the existing Blessington – Russborough House Greenway and as such the Avon is used daily by large groups of people. The Blessington Greenway which, when completed will provide a greenway around the Poulaphouca Reservoir. With both the Blessington

Greenway and Blessington Lake, The Avon Resort provides both water and land recreational activities for its visitors.

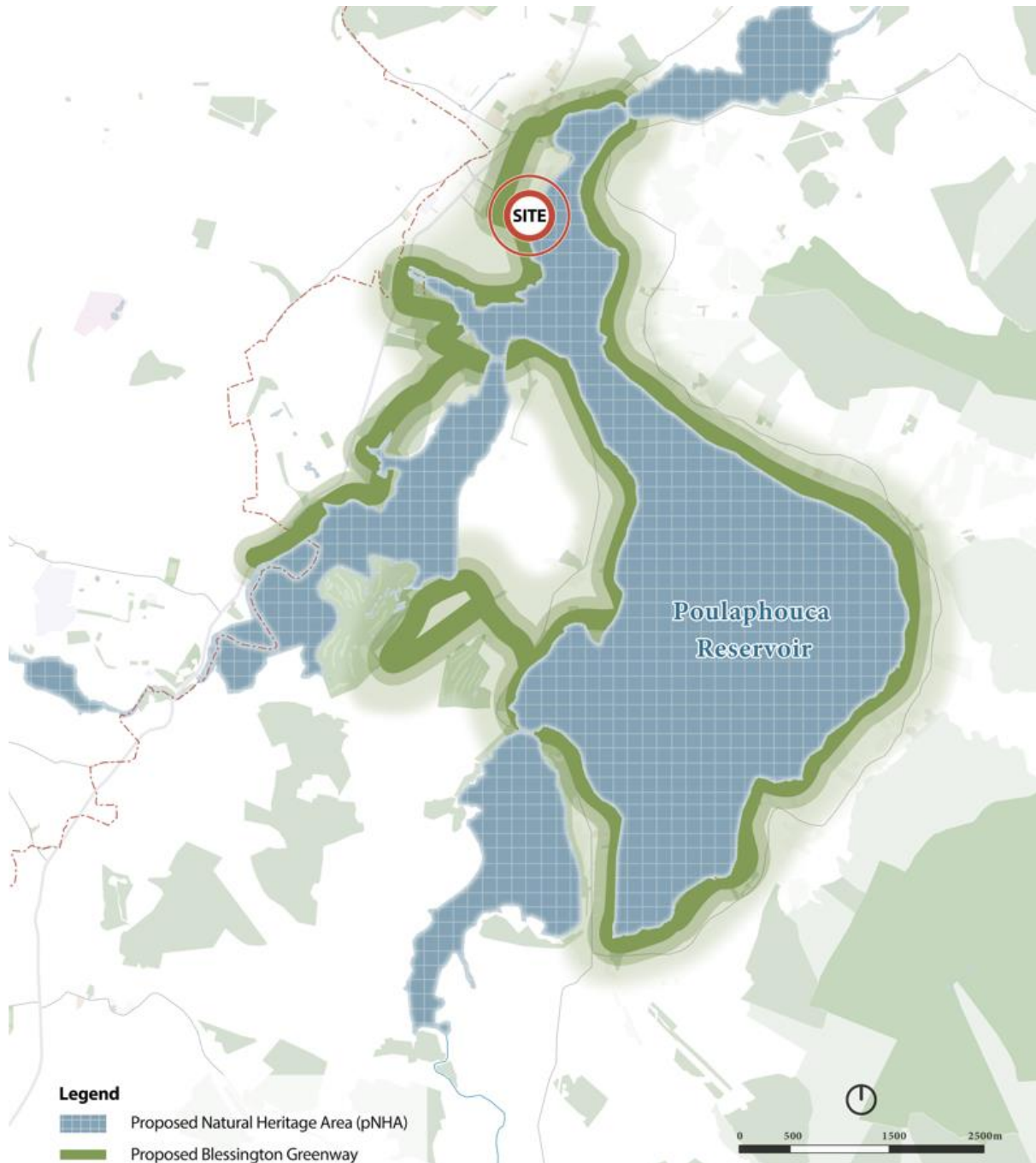


Figure 3: Site in Context of the Blessington Greenway

As per Census 2022 results, Blessington had a population of 5,611 persons which was a slight increase from the 2016 Census population of 5,520. Wicklow County Council saw a greater increase in population with a total of 155,851 persons in the County as per Census 2022 results which was a 9.4% increase from 2016 Census results (population of 142,425 persons in 2016). Figure 4 below shows the catchment area of the site from a 15-minute, 30-minute, and 45-minute driving distance. As can be noted, The Avon Resort has a wide catchment area within its immediate surroundings.

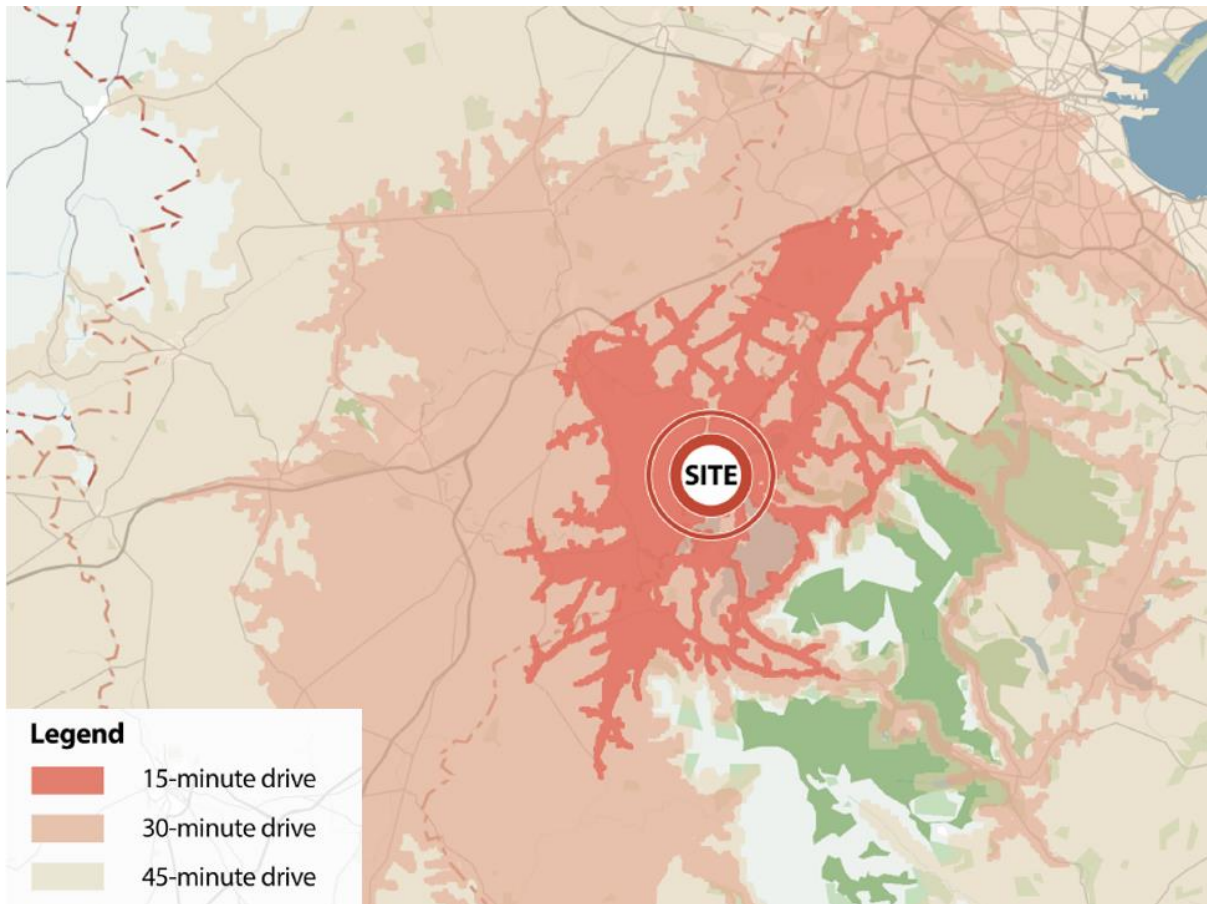


Figure 4: The Avon Resort's accessibility in driving time.

4.0 PLANNING HISTORY

DOWNEY have researched the planning applications on the subject site and found the following:

Reg. Ref. 906432: By Order dated 18th February 1991, permission was granted for a Leisure pursuits centre including stable, changing area, cafe, shop, store, tennis courts & lakeside amenity facilities at the subject site. This acts as the parent permission for the resort.

Reg. Ref. 917705: By Order dated 22nd May 1992, permission was granted for the retention of lakeside pursuits centre within the Resort.

Reg. Ref. 928526: By Order dated 10th May 1993, permission was granted for toilets, changing rooms & a kitchen extension, and the retention of stables.

Reg. Ref. 931076: By Order dated 3rd May 1994, permission was granted for the change of use of the existing stables to build a new reception area, changing area with toilets, accommodation area, assembly area with café, and a staff room.

Reg. Ref. 964427: By Order dated 21st May 1997, following a withdrawal of a third-party appeal, permission was granted for a holiday village comprising 27 no. dormer bungalows and the relocation of the stables, as an extension to the resort. This acts as the parent permission of the resort accommodation facilities.

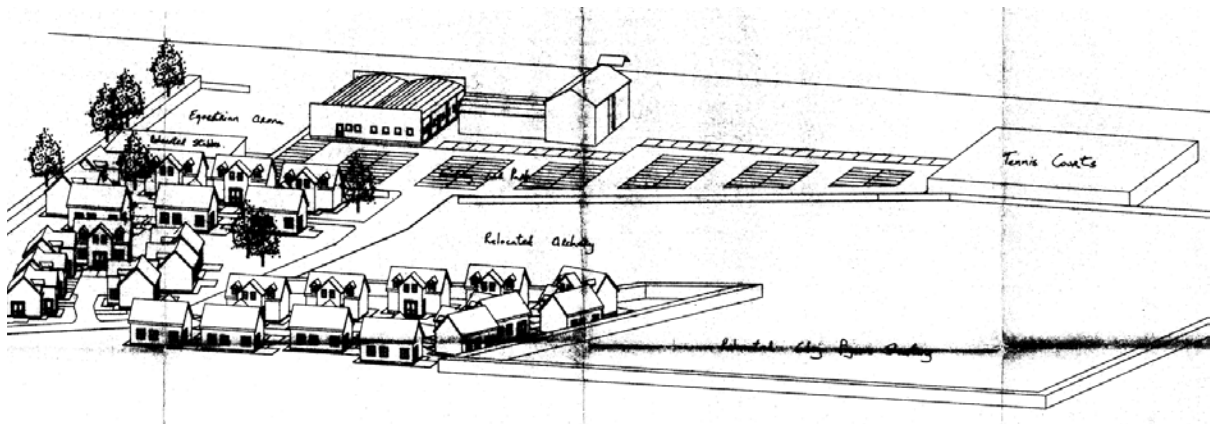


Figure 5: Reg. Ref. 964427 Proposed Aerial View

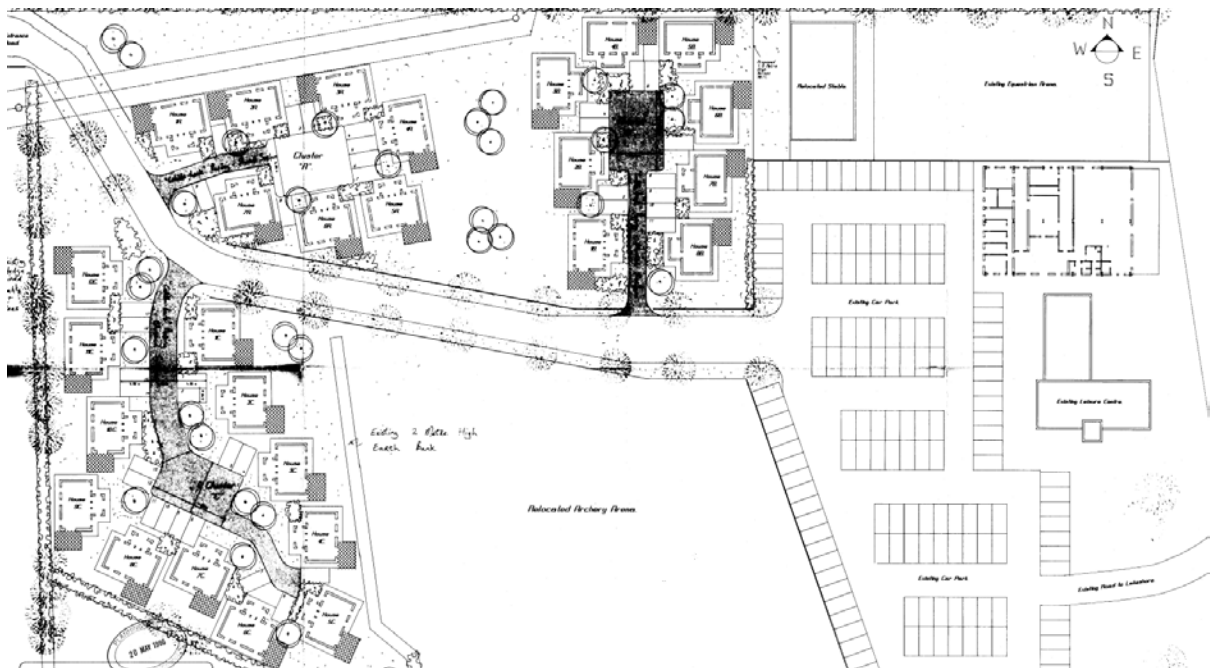


Figure 6: Reg. Ref. 964427 Proposed Site Layout

Reg. Ref. 976849: By Order dated 18th February 1998, permission was granted for alterations to the approved plans under Reg. Ref. 964427 for 27 dormer bungalows and the relocation of the stables.

Reg. Ref. 003607: By Order dated 15th October 2001, following a withdrawal of a third-party appeal, outline-permission was granted for the demolition of the activities building and the construction of 54 holiday homes, sports area & leisure centre.

Reg. Ref. 003325: By Order dated 8th March 2001, permission was granted for additional outdoor facilities to the hotel and leisure development.

Reg. Ref. 026968: By Order dated 13th May 2004, following a withdrawal of a third-party appeal, permission was granted for the extension to the existing leisure centre granted under Reg. Ref. 003607 and an additional 39 holiday houses.

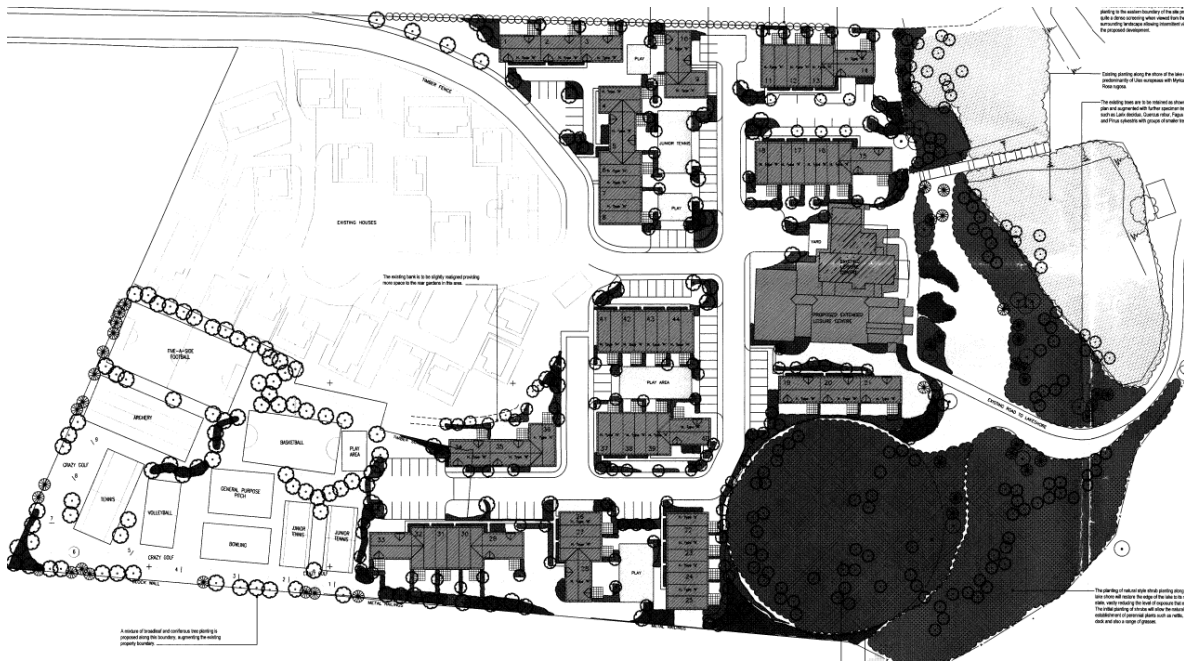


Figure 7: Reg. Ref. 026968 Proposed Site Layout

Reg. Ref. 091042: By Order dated 15th February 2002, permission was granted for a first-floor restaurant/bar extension located over the existing ground floor store along with associated elevational changes.

Reg. Ref. 138011: By Order dated 5th July 2013, permission was granted for a single-storey side and rear extension to the existing main resort building complex, comprising of (1) marquee function room of circa 250 sqm (2) extension to existing ground floor kitchen (3) ancillary alterations to the side and rear elevations (4) surface water to existing surface water sewers (5) independent external male and female toilets with foul water storage capacity (6) associated landscaping (7) all associated site works.

Reg. Ref. 20119: By Order dated 15th October 2020, retention permission was refused for an outdoor activity area comprising a zipline and climbing wall (with associated steel structure that includes toilets, storage areas and terraces), archery area, general activity space, 2 no steel storage units, and all associated activity areas, landscaping, boundary treatment and ancillary works.

Reg. Ref. 21967: By Order dated 3rd November 2021, retention permission was granted for an outdoor activity area comprising a zipline and climbing wall (with associated steel structure that includes toilets, storage areas and terraces), archery area, general activity space, 2 no steel storage units, and all associated activity areas, landscaping boundary treatment and ancillary works.

Reg. Ref. 22792 / ABP Ref. 314730-22: By Order dated 21st November 2023, An Bord Pleanála upheld the decision of Wicklow County Council and refused permission for the change of use from tennis court and car parking to an area for the parking of vehicles where food is served from mobile vehicles. Retention permission is also sought for an outdoor wooden bar area and all landscaping, boundary treatment and all ancillary works.

5.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

5.1 Blessington LAP 2013

5.1.1 Land Use Zoning

Within the current Local Area Plan for Blessington 2013-2019 (as extended), the subject site is zoned 'Tourism'. This zoning has the following objectives:

"To facilitate the provision of tourist-based activities."

Within this zoning, the following uses are 'Permitted in Principle':

"Bed & Breakfast/Guesthouse, Community Facility, Hotel, Public Services, Recreational Building/Facility, Restaurant."

It is noted that The Avon Resort is the only lands in Blessington zoned for such use.

It is also noted from the zoning map, that The Avon Resort is bound to the north by Action Area 2, and to the south by Action Area 3. The 2013 Local Area Plan seeks to provide the following at these sites:

- **Action Area 2:** 9.4 ha. of mixed-use residential development (5.48a.) and Active Open Space (3.95 ha.). The LAP seeks to provide a maximum of 153 residential units at this area.
- **Action Area 3:** 10.3 ha. of mixed residential (3.558 ha.)/employment (2.577 ha.), community (0.8 ha.), and active open space (3.352 ha.). It is noted that under Reg. Ref. 211404, Wicklow County Council submitted a Part 8 application in November 2021 for permission for 106 residential units on part of this land.

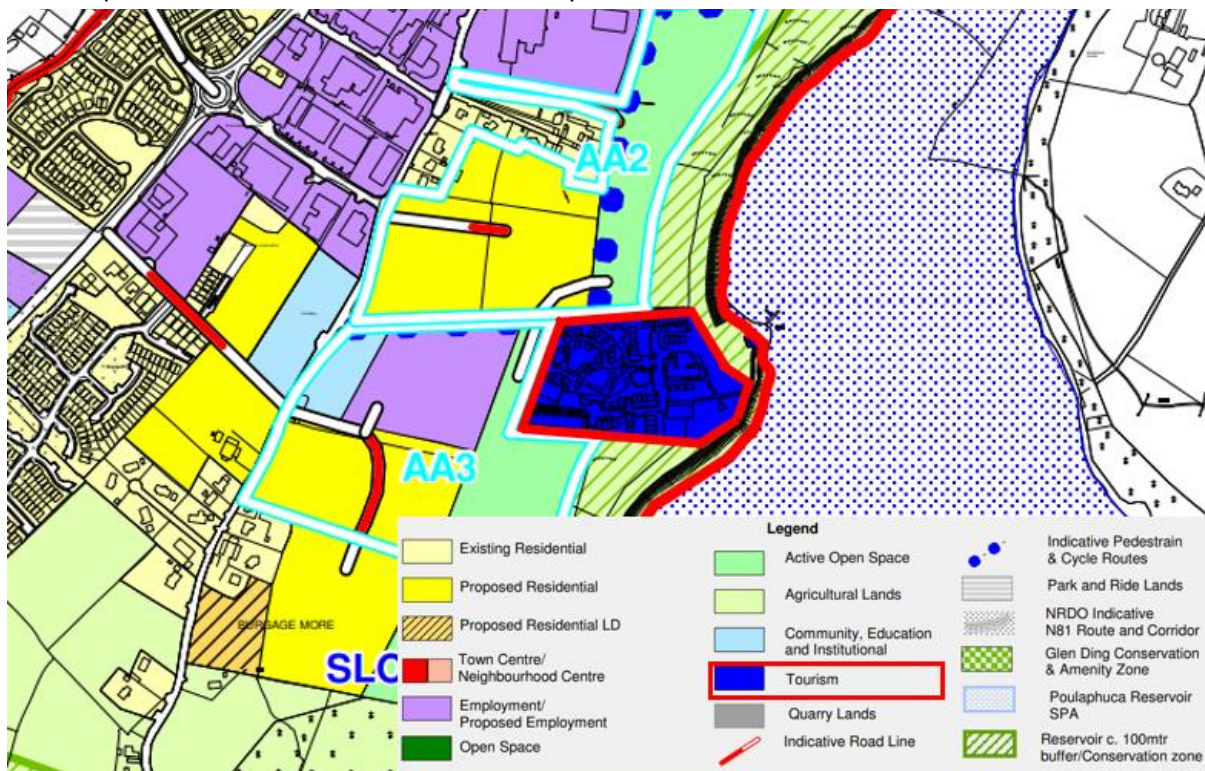


Figure 8: 2013 Blessington Lap Land Use Zoning (subject site in red outline).

5.1.2 Tourism

Section 5 of the 2013 LAP focuses on Tourism in the town. The LAP notes that *“Blessington and its immediate surroundings have both the natural and built assets and the strategic location to act as a major tourism draw and gateway in the west of the County.”* The LAP notes the following criteria that assists this:

- *“Its proximity to the western ends of both the Sally and Wicklow Gap roads means that Blessington can act as a service centre to both those travelling through and for those visiting the Gaps and the Wicklow Mountains themselves;*
- *the Poulaphouca Reservoir adjoins the town and while there are controls on its recreational usage for water security and safety reasons, there are a number of sports clubs on the lakeshore including sailing, rowing, and outdoor pursuits;*
- *while the town itself is an attractive historical town, there are a number of other architectural and archaeological heritage attractions in the area including Russborough House and Glen Ding Wood.”*

Figure 9 below shows the specific tourism zones for Blessington, with the subject site located in Zone 1 – ‘Amenity Routes around the Reservoir’. While the LAP notes that the reservoir is a Special Protection Area (SPA), the potential for the development of attractions such as amenity walks and cycle routes bordering the lakeshore and surrounding area is recognised. The Avon Resort currently acts as a key driver for this tourist area, particularly with it being the starting point of the Greenway, and therefore its protection and future growth is vital to tourism in Blessington and County Wicklow.

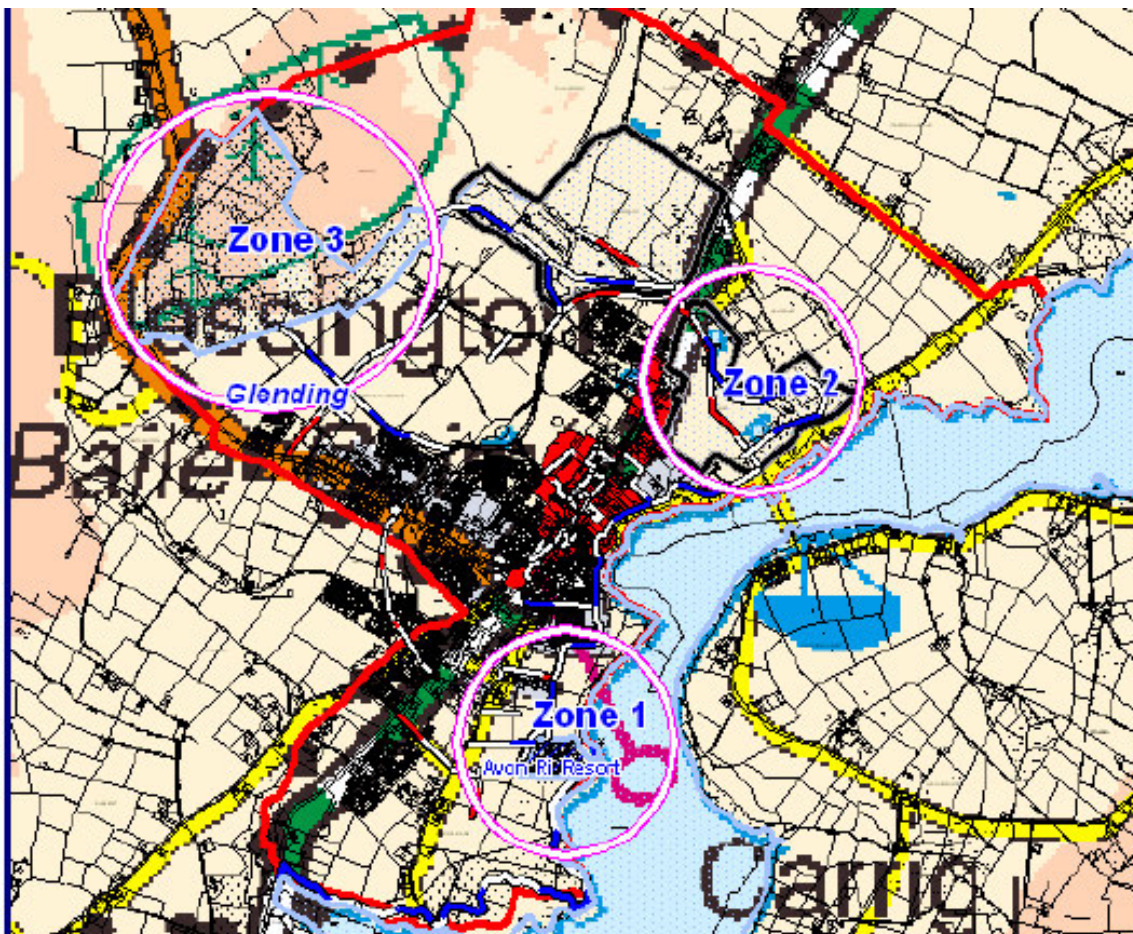


Figure 9: Blessington Tourism Zones

5.2 Wicklow County Development Plan

Chapter 11 of the 2022-2028 County Development Plan focuses on Tourism & Recreation in the County. The County Development Plan states that in 2017, 275,000 overseas tourists visited the County generating revenue of €73m with a further 352,000 domestic visitors generating an estimated €53m in revenue. The tourism sector took a significant hit during the Covid-19 global pandemic with the current County Development Plan seeking to bring tourism levels in Wicklow back to pre-Covid levels.

The Development Plan states that given Wicklow's proximity to Dublin, there are a significant number of opportunities to expand the existing tourism offer and brand for the County. The Plan also acknowledges that current tourism in Wicklow can be 'daytrips and states that *"the additional enhancement of the visitor experience is needed to increase dwell time – particularly in the west, east and south of the County, and ensure the County fully benefits from growth in the tourism sector."* As such, the County Development Plan sets out the following objectives:

"CPO 11.1: To promote, encourage and facilitate the development of the tourism and recreation sectors in a sustainable manner."

"CPO 11.5: The Planning Authority recognises that certain tourist facilities that are located in rural areas may be provided as standalone development, and that ancillary uses (e.g. club house, café, restaurant, shop etc) may be required in order to ensure the long-term viability of the tourist facility. Additional uses will only be permitted in cases where the additional use is integrated with and connected to the primary use of the site as a tourist facility, and in cases where the Planning Authority is satisfied that the additional use is ancillary to the primary use of the site as a tourist facility. The additional use shall be located adjacent to the tourist facility, and avail of shared infrastructure and services, insofar as possible."

*"CPO 11.30: In conjunction with Fáilte Ireland, to support the development of Bray, Wicklow-Rathnew, Arklow, Greystones-Delgany, **Blessington**, Baltinglass, Enniskerry, Kilcoole, Newtownmountkennedy, Rathdrum and Tinahely – Shillelagh - Carnew (southwest Wicklow) as tourism hubs."*

"CPO 11.35: To support the development of a strategic national network of walking, cycling, horse riding and water-based trails."

"CPO 11.36: Support and facilitate the delivery of the Blessington Greenway and the South Wicklow Greenway Arklow to Shillelagh including facilities ancillary to these routes (such as sign posting, car parks) and the development of linkages between these trails and other local routes."

"CPO 11.37: To support and promote the development of tourism infrastructure, services and accommodation so located so as to service and support users of the Blessington Greenway and future extensions thereto, in particular (but not limited to) those located in the following settlements – Blessington, Ballyknockan, Lackan and Valleymount – with particular support for developments that include the renovation of existing building stock, especially historic / vernacular buildings"

*“CPO 11.46: To support the development of the following outdoor recreation hubs/clusters – Glendalough, Rathdrum, **Blessington**-Baltinglass, Tinahely-Shillelagh and East Coast Maritime.”*

The County Development Plan also recognises the overarching policies included in ‘Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework’, and the ‘Regional Spatial Economic Strategy’, with the following included within the Development Plan:

*“**National Policy Objective (NPO) 22:** Facilitate tourism development and in particular a National Greenways, Blueways and Peatways Strategy, which prioritises projects on the basis of achieving maximum impact and connectivity at national and regional level.”*

*“**Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 4.57:** Support the development of Wicklow-Rathnew as a tourism hub having regard to its accessibility to key tourist destinations in the Region.”*

*“**RPO 6.15:** Support the preparation and implementation of Visitor Experience Development Plans within the Region to underpin the overarching regional tourism brands and to deliver greater tourism benefits and to promote the natural and cultural assets of the Region.”*

*“**RPO 6.16:** Support working with relevant landowners and recreational/ tourism agencies to increase access to the countryside and coastal areas to ensure maintenance of the existing network.”*

*“**RPO 6.17:** Support the maintenance of, and enhanced access to state and semi-state lands such as National Parks, Forest Parks, Waterways, etc., together with Monuments and Historic Properties, for recreation and tourism purposes. Access should be planned and managed in a sustainable manner that protects environmental sensitivities, ecological corridors, and the ability of local infrastructure to support increased tourism.”*

As such, The Avon Resort can assist Wicklow County Council in achieving these goals given its proximity to the N81 road and Dublin and given the holiday homes available at the location. Blessington can be a key asset to Wicklow County Council in achieving its tourism objectives and in reaching the pre-Covid levels of tourism in the County. It is therefore submitted that The Avon Resort should be of key consideration to the Council in the preparation of the new LAP for Blessington to ensure its protection, while also giving it the capacity to grow and expand further as the demand arises.

5.3 Wicklow Tourism Strategy and Marketing Plan 2018-2023

Wicklow County Council adopted their Tourism Strategy and Marketing Plan in 2018 and it is understood that Wicklow County Council aims to prepare a new Tourism Strategy and Marketing Plan, following the completion of Fáilte Ireland’s ‘Destination Development Plan’ for County Wicklow. The 2018 Tourism Strategy and Marketing Plan sets out the following vision for the County:

“Our vision is to make Wicklow the number one choice for visitors seeking an idyllic escape that harmonises a wide range of outdoor pursuits in County Wicklow’s world-class natural arena, while driving job creation in the local economy.”

The Plan set a target to achieve visitor numbers of 750,000 and spend of €200m by 2023 (at 2017 prices) (up from €157m in 2016) during the 2018-2023 period. In retrospect of this target, following

the global pandemic of Covid-19, these figures may not have been achieved and it is assumed that this will be discussed further in the new Tourism Strategy and Marketing Plan to be prepared by Wicklow County Council.

The Plan notes Blessington (along with Bray, Greystones, Wicklow, Enniskerry, and Arklow) as a Key Town as Visitor Hubs for County Wicklow. The Plan states that these areas have “many essential services and varying levels of supporting experiences (i.e. attractions & restaurant/cafes).” It is hoped that these towns would act as key places that would attract visitors to stay for multiple days “as part of a wider itinerary.”

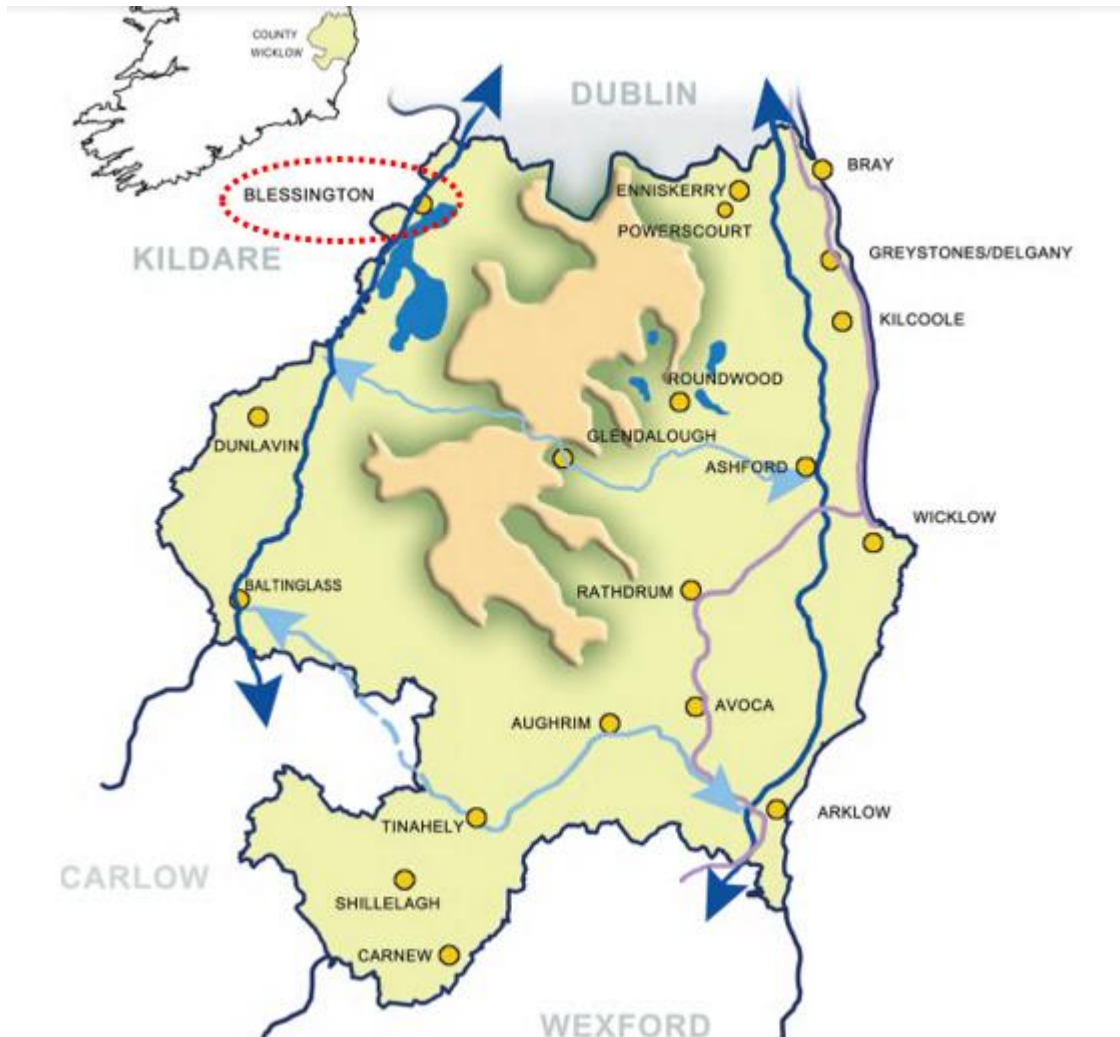


Figure 10: County Wicklow Tourism Map

5.4 Fáilte Ireland

In October 2023, Fáilte Ireland, in partnership with Coillte, National Monuments Service, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Office of Public Works, and Wicklow County Council, adopted the ‘Masterplan for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park and Visitor Orientation Recommendations for County Wicklow’. The Masterplan was designed to provide a phased roadmap to protect and enhance the setting of Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park, and to establish key sustainability objectives against which future projects will be assessed.

Section 4.3 of the Masterplan focuses on the ‘Wider Wicklow’ area and notes that many of the visits to County Wicklow are ‘day-visits’ with overnight and longer stays in the county being limited. The Masterplan notes that many places in the ‘Wider Wicklow’ area have the potential to deliver “*more and better*” for tourists. With this in mind, the Plan notes Blessington as a “*hub for an area of rolling landscapes and expanses of water*”. The Masterplan also notes the Greenway as an “*extensive, safe and easily accessible facility*” with the lakes as “*as relatively sheltered water bodies provide opportunities for a range of safe, readily accessible water sports.*” With reference to Blessington, the Masterplan states that; “*Opportunities to consolidate this offer should be investigated; improving and enhancing the existing hospitality and accommodation provision.*”

It is therefore submitted that the protection of, and allowing further growth to, The Avon Resort at Blessington will act as a key enabler for the relevant bodies to further increase opportunities for tourism in Wicklow, particularly visits that are longer than ‘one-day visits’.

6.0 PLANNING SUBMISSION

6.1 Protect the Tourism Zoning

DOWNEY, on behalf of Quanta Capital, wish to ensure that the new Blessington Local Area Plan will include the necessary objectives and policies to continue the growth of tourism in the area. DOWNEY notes that under the previous 2013-2019 LAP, The Avon Resort was zoned ‘Tourism’, and our client would welcome the same zoning in the new LAP. Within this zoning, the following uses were deemed ‘Permitted in Principle’ from the 2013 LAP:

“Bed & Breakfast/Guesthouse, Community Facility, Hotel, Public Services, Recreational Building/Facility, Restaurant.”

Once more, our client would welcome the same uses ‘Permitted in Principle’ within the land use zoning but would consider that there is an opportunity to include some additional uses that are complementary to tourism.

It is also noted that ‘Café’ is not listed as a ‘Development Category’ within the zoning matrix. The Avon Resort comprises multiple recreational and amenity facilities, and while it is noted that ‘Restaurant’ is considered ‘Permitted in Principle’, it is requested that ‘Café’ is also included as a use that is ‘Permitted in Principle’.

Similarly, there is an opportunity to facilitate a limited range of retail that would be tourist related or associated with some of the activities that take place in the resort and on the reservoir.

The Avon Resort is continually seeking to grow as the demand arises and our client is seeking to ensure that the new LAP will not restrict this growth, where appropriate. In this regard, uses such as restaurant, café, food courts, and recreational/leisure activities as well as health and wellness could be considered within the zoning matrix.

6.2 Future Growth of the Resort

As can be noted from Section 4 – Planning History, above, the resort has been subject to a number of Planning Permissions from its construction, seeking modifications, extensions, and new facilities to the resort. It is the intention of our client, and the owner of the resort, to continue to grow and

expand The Avon Resort in years to come, as the demand arises. Our client, therefore, is looking to work collaboratively with Wicklow County Council, during this consultation process, to ensure that appropriate policies and objectives are included within the new LAP for Blessington allowing this growth, where appropriate.

6.3 Importance of The Avon Resort

6.3.1 Tourism in Wicklow

It is submitted that The Avon Resort can become a key benchmark for Blessington and west Wicklow in attracting more tourists to the area for longer stays. Allowing the growth of The Avon Resort will assist not only local planning policy, but national planning policy too. As noted in Section 1 above, the LAP suggests the following questions:

- *“Are all of the tourism assets in the settlement fully exploited?”*
- *“What is needed in Blessington to maximise the opportunities that may arise from the planned expansion to the Blessington Greenway?”*

It is submitted that The Avon Resort has the potential to further expand and exploit the tourism assets of Blessington, Wicklow, and the wider Leinster Area. The Avon Resort can provide longer visits to the area while also being a hub to and promoting the Blessington Greenway and utilising the natural assets provided in the area. It is also submitted that The Avon Resort can become a key anchor for tourism in west Wicklow to counterbalance the dominance of east Wicklow, ensuring the sustainable growth of tourism in Wicklow and connecting to the wider Leinster area. The new Blessington LAP therefore provides a great opportunity to include specific objectives and policies within the Plan to assist in the growth of the resort.

6.3.2 Economic Benefits

Through the benefit of tourism, The Avon Resort, does, and will continue to, enhance the economic benefits and employment opportunities within the area. The Avon Resort provides employment opportunities all-year around to local residents of Blessington, with a further peak and employment demand during summer months to work in the resort. Through the growth of The Avon Resort becomes an increase in the investment to Blessington, bringing more and more tourists to the town. As such, not only can The Avon Resort assist Wicklow County Council in achieving its tourism policies, but it can also increase the economic benefits of the area.

As such, it is respectfully submitted that appropriate policies and objectives are included within the Blessington LAP, recognising the importance of the resort, and ensuring its potential to expand and grow further, as appropriate.

7.0 CONCLUSION

DOWNEY, Chartered Town Planners, 29 Merrion Square, D02 RW64, have prepared this submission to the Blessington Local Area Plan Pre-Draft Issues Paper, on behalf of our client, Quanta Capital. The submission relates to the importance of providing the necessary policies and objectives to allow the future growth of The Avon Resort, which in turn, would assist in achieving local and national objectives for tourism in west Wicklow and can assist in developing The Avon and Blessington into a key tourist destination for national and international markets.

The resort was established in the early 1990s and has grown significantly since then, providing various amenities and activities including, café, food court, holiday homes, tennis courts, bike hire, water-sports activities, archery range, and more. The site is located at the start of the Blessington Greenway which, when completed will provide a greenway around the Poulaphouca Reservoir. The site is also located in proximity to the N81 National Road which in turn connects to the M50 at Dublin and the N81 to Wexford; the site is also located only 20-minutes from the M7 Motorway at Naas, increasing the sites accessibility. As outlined above, it is considered that the resort can provide the necessary facilities to provide tourist facilities and attractions that are longer than 'day-visits' as tourists can avail of the holiday homes provided on-site.

On behalf of our client, DOWNEY requests that Wicklow County Council take the comments set out above into consideration during the drafting of the Blessington Local Area Plan. We hope that the Council finds our views to be reasonable, and that the needs and interests of this resort within this emerging town of Blessington are given due consideration.