

Blessington Local Area Plan Submission - Report

Who are you:	Group
Name:	Community Pool for West Wicklow
Email Address:	
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File

Community Pool for West Wicklow Blessington LAP Submission April 2024.pdf, 2.27MB

CPWW Joint Submission Letter of Support Blessington LAP.pdf, 0.14MB

Jennifer Whitmore Blessington LAP Letter of Support March 2024.pdf, 0.21MB

John Brady TD - Blessington LAP.pdf, 0.34MB

Stephen Donnelly Letter of Support Blessington LAP.pdf, 0.15MB



Introduction & History of West Wicklow Pool Campaign



- The Community Pool for West Wicklow committee are a voluntary community group who have been campaigning for the development of a swimming pool in the Baltinglass MD (West Wicklow) since July 2018.
- During this time we have worked with Wicklow County Council, local Councillors, TDs, community groups, sports clubs, businesses, schools, Water Safety Ireland and Swim Ireland to demonstrate the many benefits that the development of a swimming pool in West Wicklow would have for the local community.
- Wicklow County Council have previously identified a 30 acre site of Council owned land in Blessington beside the Avon as the most suitable location for the development of a swimming pool and community sports facilities in West Wicklow.
- The prioritisation of the development of a swimming pool facility and sports complex in West Wicklow was included in the most recent Wicklow County Development Plan.
- In 2022 Community Pool for West Wicklow and Swim Ireland, in collaboration with Wicklow County Council, brought a temporary Pop-Up Pool to Blessington for a 12 week period. 600 children a week had the opportunity to learn how to swim during this period.

CPO 7.43

To prioritise, facilitate and support the development of a community swimming pool facility and a sports complex within the western region of the County, so located to achieve maximum accessibility to the residents of West Wicklow.

Chapter 7 Community Development, Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028

Why does West Wicklow need a swimming pool?



- The Baltinglass MD (West Wicklow) is the only district in Wicklow without a swimming pool (public or private).
- The Baltinglass MD has a population size comparable with Arklow. Blessington is the largest town in the MD with a population of approx. 6,000 but this is closer to 7,000 when the surrounding villages are included.
- Residents of West Wicklow and schools within the district must travel outside of Wicklow to Naas, Tallaght, Athy, Carlow, and as far as Wexford to go swimming.
- At present the average travel time West Wicklow residents must travel to access swimming facilities in other counties is 30 minutes.
- The closest Wicklow County Council operated swimming pool to the majority of West Wicklow residents is in Bray and has a minimum travel time of 45 minutes with no public transport links from West Wicklow.

Level 2 – settlements with Population Range 7,000 – 15,000				
Multi-purpose Community Resource Centre	Outdoor Multi-Use Games Areas – Synthetic/ Hardcourt			
Sport & Recreation Centre	Playground(s)			
Swimming Pool/Leisure Centre	Playing Pitches			
Youth Resource Centre	Alternative/Minority Sports Facilities			
Local Multi-Purpose Community Space/Meeting	Open Space/Urban Woodlands/Nature Areas			
Rooms	Library			
Outdoor Water Sports Facilities (where applicable)	Arts and Cultural Centre			
Neighbourhood and Local Parks				
Acceptable rural catchment time by car: 15 mins				

Community Facilities Hierarchy Model from Section 7.2 Community Development & Land Use Planning, Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028

Educational Benefits of a Swimming Pool



- Drowning is the second leading cause of death in children in Ireland.
- Swimming is part of the national curriculum in schools but Principals in West Wicklow are finding it increasingly more difficult to incorporate it into their school day.
- Blessington school children currently travel to Naas and Tallaght to access swimming facilities. Primary school children in Donard have to travel as far as Athy or Carlow to go swimming.
- A 40 minute swim lesson can take three hours out of the school day due to long travel times – loss of potential teaching time for other subjects.
- Long journeys to access swimming facilities have a direct impact on our environment and carbon emissions.
- The arrival of the Pop-Up Pool in Blessington in 2022 gave some local schools an opportunity to access swimming facilities for their students for the first time.

Benefits of a Swimming Pool for Local Sports



- West Wicklow has an abundance of local sports clubs which would benefit from the use of local swimming facilities.
- Everyone should have the opportunity to be involved and develop their skills at their chosen sport.
- Swimming is an inclusive sport which people of all ages and abilities can take part in.
- Studies have shown that girls are more likely to stop engaging and participating in sport as they grow up than their male counterparts.
- Women tend to swim more than men, especially as young adults (ESRI 2013).



Health Benefits of a Swimming Pool

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- The health benefits of swimming are boundless.
- It has been proven to aid good mental health, help in the recovery of heart patients and the rehabilitation of patients with limited or weakened mobility.
- Swimming is a low impact sport which all members of the community regardless of age, sex, mental or physical capability can take part in.
- Currently four out of five Irish children are not meeting the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per a day (HSE 2019).
- With obesity levels rising, inclusive sports like swimming should be encouraged and swimming facilities should be readily available.



Water Safety Benefits of a Swimming Pool



- On average, over the past 10 years there have been 130 drownings per year in Ireland. (WSI 2019)
- 62% of drowning fatalities occur inland on rivers and lakes, a total of approximately 81 people / year. (WSI 2019)
- Between 2010 and 2015, HSE figures reveal 22 children died in drowning incidents.
- In general, males are at higher risk of drowning across all age groups with peak incidence seen in boys aged one to four, with deaths occurring predominantly in swimming pools and adolescent males predominantly in freshwater. Lack of swimming ability and substance misuse in adolescents also poses an increased risk. (Davey M, et al. Cureus. 2019.)
- Blessington Lake is the biggest Fresh Water Lake closest to the largest population centre in the country.

"...if kids don't know how to swim they might drown and die."

Stiofan , Age 7,

Blessington Pop-Up Swimming Pool



In September 2022 the Community Pool for West Wicklow campaign, in partnership with Swim Ireland and Wicklow County Council brought a temporary swimming pool to Blessington for a twelve week period.

The following slides demonstrate the scale of this project and the positive impact it had on the community here in Blessington and across West Wicklow.



Pop-Up Pool Project Timeline

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Summer 2021

 Community Pool for West Wicklow (CPWW) met with Swim Ireland to discuss opportunities to work together, including making submissions to the Wicklow County Development Plan in relation to the development of a permanent pool in West Wicklow and other projects.

November 2021

- Swim Ireland approached CPWW about working together on the Pop-Up Pool Project with the aim of bringing a 12 metre by 3.44 metre portable swimming pool to Blessington in September 2022.
- Following a presentation by Swim Ireland's Head of Participation, Ashley Hunter, CPWW and Swim Ireland officially started working together to bring a Pop-Up Pool to West Wicklow.

January 2022

A list of specifications for a suitable site for the Pop-Up Pool was agreed upon. CPWW put our local knowledge and contacts to use to find a suitable site. CPWW began to formally contact local TDs, Councillors and Wicklow County Council about this project and possible funding streams. The estimated cost to bring the Pop-Up Pool to West Wicklow is approximately €20k.

February 2022

- A suitable site for the Pop-Up Pool is identified and negotiations begin with the Chairperson of St Kevin's Community Hall.
- Swim Ireland and CPWW made a presentation to the Wicklow County Council Baltinglass Municipal District meeting about the Pop-Up Pool project and formally requesting financial support for the project.
- The question of the need for planning permission for the Pop-Up Pool and Marquee was raised at this meeting. Planning Permission had not been required by other Local Authorities at other proposed Pop-Up Pool sites but CPWW agreed to investigate this further.
- Members of the Baltinglass MD voiced their support for the project but more details regarding the site, planning permission requirements and other possible funding streams would be needed before a decision regarding financial support for the project could be made.
- CPWW publicly announce that we are working with Swim Ireland to bring a Pop-Up Pool to West Wicklow in September 2022. This is welcomed with huge support from the local community.

March 2022

CPWW apply for Lottery Funding for the project.

April 2022

 The Head of Planning at Wicklow County Council confirms that Swim Ireland will need to apply for planning permission for the Pop-Up Pool and Marquee for the period of time that it will be in West Wicklow.

May 2022

- The first Pop-Up Pool in Ireland opens in Donabate in Co Dublin. CPWW visit the pool and support Swim Ireland in this exciting event.
- Negotiations with St Kevin's Community Hall successfully conclude. CPWW and Swim Ireland have permission to locate the Pop-Up Pool in the car park of St Kevin's Hall from September 2022 to December 2022 subject to planning permission.
- A local architect is identified who will complete the planning application process on behalf of Swim Ireland.
- Following support from local TDs Wicklow County Council agree to fund the project subject to planning permission.
- CPWW host a number of Information Meetings for local schools, community groups and sports clubs with Swim Ireland about the Pop-Up Pool and how they will be able to avail of it.

June 2022

- Planning permission application is submitted to Wicklow County Council for the Pop-Up Pool.
- CPWW learn that we have not received Lottery funding for this project.

July 2022

- Planning permission is formally granted by Wicklow County Council.
- Work begins to source local contractors to help prepare the site for the arrival of the Pop-Up Pool.
- CPWW publicise the Pop-Up Pool in local newsletters and newspapers, online and on local radio station East Coast FM and encourage local Community Groups and Sports Clubs to contact Swim Ireland directly to book classes and swim sessions.

August 2022

- CPWW secure sponsorship from Hudson Brothers & Sons in the form of gravel to create a level surface for the pool to sit on.
- The Wicklow County Council District Engineer assists in the surveying of the pool site to create a level surface.
- Hugh O'Keeffe, local contractor, agrees to create the level surface for the Pop-Up Pool free of charge.
- A local electrician does the preparatory work and cabling at the site to enable the pool to use the three phase power from a near by primary school.
- Preparations for the Grand Opening of the pool by CPWW and Swim Ireland are underway.
- Another round of information meetings are held over zoom for local Community Groups and Sports Clubs, hosted by CPWW with Swim Ireland.
- Swimming classes for the public and schools go on sale.
- August 30th 2022 the Pop-Up Pool arrives in Blessington.
- August 31st 2022 the Pop-Up Pool is filled.

September 2022

- The Pop-Up Pool is officially opened by Minister Jack Chambers at an event which is well attended by the local community, Councillors, TDs and the press.
- Swimming lessons begin at the pool which include public classes, school classes, autism friendly classes, adult swim lessons with the local Women's Shed, an Introduction to Life Saving Training class for local Transition Year Students and Aquafit classes which are run by the local Physiotherapist practice, Method Physio.

October - November 2022

- Over 600 children a week are attending swimming lessons at the Pop-Up Pool and weekend public swim slots are popular.
- East Coast FM host their Morning Show live from outside the Pop-Up Pool.
- During the midterm break a swim camp for Neurodivergent children is run in association with Wicklow Local Sports Partnership and is very well attended. Following this camp CPWW are contacted by local parents to request more weekly autism friendly, inclusive swimming lessons. Two new classes are added to the schedule and both are very popular.

December 2022

The pool closes and is very much missed by the community.

January 2023

The pool and marquee leave West Wicklow for their next location. CPWW arrange to donate the gravel surface which was created for the pool to sit on to with the local football club, Blessington FC, to help surface their driveway and car park to their football pitches.



Diverse Community Use of the Pop-Up Pool



- 6 local schools
- Blessington Women's Shed
- Method Physio Aquafit Classes
- TY Rookie Lifeguard Classes
- Blessington Forum Autism Group
- Wicklow Local Sports Partnership Inclusive Halloween Camp
- Adult Learn to Swim Classes
- Child Learn to Swim Classes
- Public Swims
- Private Hires e.g. Birthday Parties



Pool Usage from Sept – Dec 2022

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School Swim Classes
 448 children

• Public Swim Classes 135 people

Blessington Forum Autism Group
 16 children

Aquafit classes twice a week
 16 adults

• TY Rookie Lifeguard Classes 13 teenagers

Wicklow Local Sports Partnership Inclusive Halloween Camp
 8 children

• Public Swims 453 people

TOTAL SWIMS OVER 12 WEEKS: 7,449



Olympic swimmer Shane Ryan gives school talks

mittee helped organise for Irish Olympic swimmer Shane Ryan to visit three local Blessington Primary Schools during the week as part of the Swim Ireland Athlete Ambassador Programme.

On Wednesday, October 12, the children from Blessington Educate Together, St Mary's Junior School and Gaelscoil Na Lochanna had the opportunity to meet the two-time Olympian and ask him what it was like to go to the Olympics.

They also asked other important questions such as what does he eat for breakfast, how much does he trains and if he likes being a

Many of the children who met Shane are attending the Swim Ireland Pop-Up Pool in Blessington for swimming classes, or with their parents during the public swim slots. Shane was more than happy to share some swimming tips with the children and encouraged them all to learn the important life skill that is swimming.

The Swim Ireland Athlete Ambassador Programme is made possible by grant funding by the International Federation FINA.

The visits have been taking place since 2021 and Olympic athletes have visited clubs and schools across the island of Ireland.

at St Kevin's Hall in Blessington and will be wicklowpool.ie.



there until Christmas. For information on the The Pop-Up Pool is located in the car park timetable and how to book, visit www.west

Community Reaction

I was one of those people who used the pop up pool on a weekly basis, as a retired lady I found this facility a huge benefit. I would love to have a local pool and would definitely use it regularly as would the rest of my family. Thanks again for all those involved with the pop up pool... Lorraine Fallon

We had demand for extra classes to be introduced however the demand for the pool was too great to accommodate us.

Ever since the pool has left our community we have a drop off in exercise participation in certain client cohorts. We had very positive feedback about our classes and many have expressed their disappointment at not being able to continue with this service. Unfortunately similar services are not accessible for many due to the distance needed to travel. Method Physio

My 3 children had great use of the pop up pool while it was in Blessington and miss it a lot, as do I now having to drive a long distance to bring them swimming elsewhere since it has left Blessington. Olivia Ryall

The pop up pool was such a wonderful facility in Blessington and can't wait for the construction of a pool in the town. I really miss the AquaFit classes. My sons attended swimming lessons there also with their local school Manor Kilbride ... highlight of all the kids week. Jennifer Fitzsimons





In Conclusion



600 children a week attended swimming lessons for the three months that the Pop-Up Pool was in Blessington. Many of these children had not had this opportunity before and will not have the chance to continue learning how to swim until there is a local swimming pool developed for our community.

We have outlined the many advantages and health benefits of swimming as well as the safety importance of this life skill. We have also demonstrated that there is a demand for access to local swimming facilities in Blessington.

It is imperative that any plan for the development of Blessington must include and make reference to the development of a swimming pool for our community.

Recommendations for the Blessington Local Area Plan



- The inclusion of the development of a swimming pool and multi-use sports complex in the Blessington Local Area Plan. With the aim for development of the swimming pool to have started within the lifetime of the LAP.
- The Blessington community is expanding and local sports clubs in Blessington such as Blessington AFC, Blessington Rugby Club, the Lakeshore Striders Running Club and other clubs are growing in popularity but do not currently have adequate facilities for their members. With this in mind we see the new Blessington LAP as an opportunity to plan for the towns future and locate facilities for all of these sports together at the same site as the swimming pool and sports complex. This will allow for a sharing of facilities such as changing rooms, car park facilities and training areas.
- The zoning of land for the development of a swimming pool and multi-use sports complex including football pitches, rugby pitches and a running track located at the Council owned land beside the Avon in Blessington.

• A general increase in the amount of land around Blessington zoned as "open space" and available to the community and local

sports clubs for recreational purposes.









Contact Details



Community Pool for West Wicklow can be contacted via email at

or by phone

c/o the Chairperson, Deirdre McCormack on



		Co. Wicklow
	Phone	
Email:		
Facebook:		
Twitter		

Wicklow County Council Planning Department

April 2nd 2024

RE: Inclusion of a multi-use sports complex in the Blessington Local Area Plan

Dear Members of Wicklow County Council Planning Department,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Community Pool for West Wicklow Committee as part of the Blessington Local Area Plan Pre-Draft Submission process to voice our support for the need to include the development of a multi-use sports complex in the new Blessington Local Area Plan.

We have been campaigning for the development of a swimming pool in West Wicklow since July 2018. During this time, we have worked with several local sports clubs and community groups and have seen the impact that the lack of local sporting facilities and amenities are having on the ability of these clubs to grow in our community.

Blessington AFC have over 700 members ranging from their children's Academy all the way up to their adult teams. This enthusiastic and ambitious club have now outgrown their current pitches, located at Crosschapel, and are in need of access to facilities within Blessington to ensure that the club can continue to grow and become more accessible to our community.

Blessington Rugby FC have over 450 families involved in the club but have no dedicated home and currently split their training between the grounds of Russborough House and training facilities in Naas.

The Lakeshore Striders Running Club are a well established and popular club within our community. They offer couch to 5km introductory courses and numerous race events throughout the year to help and encourage more members of our local community to get involved with the sport. However, they only have access to a shared running track behind Blessington Community College for a couple of hours a week.

The Baltinglass Municipal District is the only district in Wicklow without a swimming pool. At present members of our community must travel to Naas, Tallaght, Athy and further afield to access swimming facilities. Swimming is a life-skill that everyone should have the opportunity to learn and take part in. Swimming is also one of the most inclusive sports which anyone can take part in regardless of their age, physical or mental ability.

In 2022 we worked together with Swim Ireland and Wicklow County Council to bring a temporary Pop-Up Pool to Blessington for a 12-week period. During this period 600 children a week attended swimming lessons at the Pop-Up Pool, which included two autism friendly swim classes per a week. There were also Aqua-fit classes, adult swim lessons, a rookie life-guard training course, public swims and a Halloween swim camp. The success of the Pop-Up Pool demonstrated the demand for swimming facilities in Blessington.

Blessington is a growing community and the popularity of the diverse range of sporting clubs in the area demonstrates the need for the development of sporting facilities in the town. We believe that it is imperative that the development of a multi-use sports complex with a swimming pool, football and rugby pitches and a running track is included in the new Blessington Local Area Plan.



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The location of these facilities in the same area will enable a sharing of resources and facilities such as changing and shower facilities and car park and help to promote and encourage an increase in participation across all sports in the town.

We would also like to take this opportunity to recommend a general increase in the amount of "open spaces" or "recreational spaces" in the town. As our community grows and more people move to Blessington it is hugely important that we have designated and protected spaces for our community to exercise, play, walk and enjoy being outside.

If you have any questions about any of our suggestions and recommendations, we would be happy to discuss them further with you.

Kind regards,

<u>Deirdre McCormack</u>

Chairperson

Community Pool for West Wicklow





27 March 24

Wicklow County Council Planning Department

Re: Blessington Local Area Plan Community Pool for West Wicklow Letter of Support

Dear Members of the Wicklow County Council Planning Department,

I am writing to you in support of the Community Pool for West Wicklow committee's submission to the Blessington Local Area Plan. The committee have been calling for the development of a swimming pool in West Wicklow since 2018 and I have been working and supporting their campaign for over four years now. I recognise the extraordinary dedication and commitment that the committee bring to this project as well as the value that this project will bring to the wider West Wicklow community both from an economic and Health and Wellbeing perspective.

At present the Baltinglass MD is the only district in Wicklow without a swimming pool, meaning that residents must travel long distances to access swimming facilities. Since the formation of the Community Pool for West Wicklow campaign almost six years ago the committee have continuously demonstrated the importance and need for the development of such a facility in the district. They were successful in having the development of a swimming pool included in the most recent Wicklow County Development Plan and through their work with Swim Ireland brought a temporary swimming pool to Blessington enabling 600 children a week to learn how to swim over a 12-week period in 2022.

Wicklow County Council have previously indicated that Blessington is the location of choice for the Council to develop a swimming pool and sports facility for the west of the county.

As well as being an important life skill, swimming is the most accessible sport to everyone regardless of their physical or mental ability, age or gender. Generations of children and families in West Wicklow have been denied the opportunity to learn to swim because of the lack of local swimming facilities. The Blessington LAP is an opportunity to right this wrong and to plan for the future of the town and its growing community. I believe that an important part of this is ensuring that there are spaces for sports clubs and community groups to grow whilst also being accessible and inclusive for all members of the community.

I fully support the development of a multi-use sports complex with a swimming pool, football and rugby pitches and a running track at a shared location in Blessington. This sharing of resources and facilities will help to promote participation in sport and support community groups within Blessington and surrounding areas. I hope that these facilities will be included in the upcoming Blessington Local Area Plan so that everyone in the local community can access and participate in sport.

Kind Regards,

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore

AS 1Q-R















Sinn Féin spokesperson on Equality, Youth and Integration

'Blessington LAP' Administrative Officer Planning Department Wicklow County Council Station Road. Wicklow Town Co Wicklow

27 March 2024

RE: Blessington Local Area Plan - Community Pool for West Wicklow

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to acknowledge my support in respect of the submission made by The Community Pool for West Wicklow Committee under the Blessington Local Area Plan.

As Wicklow County Council will be aware, the committee have been campaigning and fundraising since 2018 for a community swimming pool for West Wicklow. This is a much needed facility in the local area as there are currently no private or community swimming pool facilities in West Wicklow.

There are many advantages of having a swimming pool in the community. Swimming is recommended as one of the best activities for all-round fitness. Swimming helps promote physical exercise, improves strength, flexibility, mental health and well-being. Swimming is also an all-inclusive activity that anyone of any gender, age, physical or mental ability can participate in.

The population of Baltinglass Municipal District is increasing year on year. Individuals, families and children have been prevented for many years from having the opportunity to gain a valuable life skill and reap the benefits of being able to access local swimming and sports facilities.

It is unsatisfactory that there is not a dedicated sports centre and swimming pool in Baltinglass Municipal District. The implementation of a dedicated Sports Centre and Community Swimming Pool for Baltinglass Municipal District is a vital and much needed amenity and would be a significant benefit to the local community.

I wish to propose that prioritisation is given to the provision of a sports centre and swimming pool in Baltinglass Municipal District in the Blessington Local Area Plan and would like to acknowledge my support in respect of the submission made by The Community Pool for West Wicklow Committee.

If you have any queries in relation to the above, don't hesitate to get in contact.

Is mise, le meas,

John Brady TD

Teach Laighean/Leinster House,







Emer O'Gorman Chief Executive Wicklow County Council Whitegates Wicklow Town

2 April 2024

For the attention of the Chief Executive,

I wish to express my ongoing support for the amelioration of Sports Facilities in West Wicklow.

The development of a multi-use sports complex with a swimming pool, football and rugby pitches and a running track would enable local sports clubs to grow in line with the growing Blessington community and give everyone in the community access to sports participation.

The development of a swimming pool for West Wicklow is included in the most recent Wicklow County Development Plan and the *Community Pool for West Wicklow committee* have been campaigning for a pool since 2018.

Swimming is a life skill which is accessible to everyone regardless of their age, physical or mental ability. It is an inclusive sport which promotes participation among all demographics. With Swim Ireland the team brought a temporary Pop-Up Pool to Blessington for 12 weeks in 2022 and enabled 600 children per week to take swimming lessons. These figures demonstrate the desire for this amenity in the Baltinglass district which is the only Wicklow local area without a swimming pool.

I am grateful for your attention to the strong consideration of Swimming and all Sports in your development Plan for the Blessington Local Area.

Kind regards,



