



Wicklow Town - Rathnew LAP Submission - Report

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Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

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Pre-Draft Issues Paper/Key Topics for the Wicklow Town-Rathnew Local Area Plan (LAP) 2024

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly notes that Wicklow County Council has published a pre-draft Issues Paper/Key Topics on their online consultation portal in preparation for the Wicklow Town - Rathnew Local Area Plan (LAP) 2024. This submission on the pre-draft public consultation of the Wicklow Town - Rathnew Local Area Plan (LAP) 2024 has been reviewed by the executive and approved by the members of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly at the meeting of 8th September 2023.

1.0 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

As indicated in the Assembly's previous submissions to the Local Authority, the Council will be aware of the finalisation of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031 (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region which was made on 28th June 2019. In line with the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act), the Planning Authority shall ensure that a local area plan is consistent with the objectives of the development plan, its core strategy, and the Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy of the Eastern and Midland Region, thus ensuring full alignment between local, regional and national planning policy.

2.0 Wicklow Town - Rathnew Local Area Plan 2024 – Pre-Draft 'Issues/Key Topics'

The Assembly notes that Wicklow County Council intends to prepare a local area plan for Wicklow Town and Rathnew covering the period 2024-2030. As part of the first stage of this process the Local Authority has prepared and published, on the online pre-draft consultation portal for the LAP, a list of key topics to be covered within the local area plan and is now engaging in pre-draft public consultation. It is indicated that the local area plan will provide a framework and land use strategy for the future growth of Wicklow Town and Rathnew for the benefit of the town and its citizens.

3.0 Submission

The pre-draft public consultation stage includes a number of key topics to be addressed in the new local area plan. The pre-draft consultation portal also outlines what Wicklow County Council's 'Big

Picture' strategy for the development of Wicklow Town and Rathnew over the local area plan period, including the three cross-cutting themes of 'Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity' which are also included in the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028. The Regional Assembly considers that these key topics set out in the consultation portal give a broad overview of the key issues facing 'Wicklow Town – Rathnew' that will encourage members of the public and interested parties to engage in the process and to make a submission. The Regional Assembly welcomes the recognition in the identified issues/key topics, of the status of Wicklow - Rathnew as a Key Town in the EMRA's Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031 (RSES).

The role of Key Towns within the RSES are to serve as large economically active service and/or county towns that provide employment for their surrounding areas and with high-quality transport links and the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres.

The Assembly welcomes the areas of focus outlined within the key topics namely;

- Housing -Population - Compact Growth
- Regeneration of Communities & Places - Healthy Placemaking - Urban Design
- Economic Opportunity - Tourism- Shops & Services - Community Facilities
- Heritage -Biodiversity - Green Infrastructure - Climate Action - Energy

The Assembly considers that these areas of focus align well with the three Key Principles and Regional Strategic Outcomes of the RSES, outlined at Section 2.3 of the RSES.

In order to assist the Local Authority in ensuring that the LAP is consistent with the RSES, the following are key areas and Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) of the RSES, that the Assembly would like to bring attention to in order to inform the preparation of the draft LAP.

3.1 Growth Strategy

In the Growth Strategy of the RSES (Chapter 3) Wicklow Town - Rathnew is located inside the Core Region of the settlement strategy and is identified as a Key Town. The Key Towns in the Core Region are important within a regional and county context. These towns have capacity and future growth potential to accommodate above average growth coupled with the requisite investment in employment creation, services, amenities and sustainable transport.

The Core Region contains a strong network of county and market towns that have a good level of local employment, services and amenities, which serve not just their resident populations but a wider catchment area. These include Arklow, Balbriggan, Drogheda, Navan, Naas, Newbridge and Wicklow. These towns have capacity for continued commensurate growth to become more self-sustaining and to attract high quality knowledge-based employment at strategic accessible locations.

A noted growth enabler for the settlements in the Core Region includes '*Commensurate population and employment growth in Key Towns, coupled with investment in enabling transport, infrastructure*

and services to facilitate the achievement of compact growth targets of at least 30% of all new homes to be within the existing built up area of settlements.'

3.2 Settlement Strategy

The settlement strategy contained in Chapter 4 of the RSES identifies Wicklow Town - Rathnew as a Key Town in the Region. It has a strategically important location on the M/N11 and rail corridor, and at the centre point of the coastal area of the County. Wicklow has an important position as the County Town, providing higher order services and facilities for the residents and its catchment. Rathnew has a distinct identity and functions as a local service centre for its local community. Key priorities are to strengthen the local employment base, improve sustainable transport and promote compact growth with a focus on regeneration, development of the port and harbour area, and to expand Wicklow-Rathnew's role as a hub for tourism, training and education.

Table 4.3 of the RSES sets out the Region's settlement typologies and policy responses with a particular focus on socio-economic functions, transport profile and policy response relevant to Key Towns.

Chapter 4 of the RSES also provides a regional profile for Wicklow - Rathnew, highlighting areas of strength and priorities for the two centres in relation to key regeneration areas, the importance of Wicklow Port and Harbour as an asset to grow the commercial and tourism potential of the area in addition to the potential to act as a hub for offshore wind development.

It is noted from the online pre-draft consultation topics that Wicklow Town - Rathnew will require c.1,500 new homes built between now and 2031. To facilitate compact growth, the RSES states that 30% of new homes need to be situated within the existing built-up area and town/village centres. The Local Authority is required to identify and reserve an appropriate amount of land in the best locations to meet this housing target. The Local Authority should note that the RSES provides guidance on this matter in relation to the location of new residential development whereby *'Redevelopment and opportunity sites within the core areas of Wicklow-Rathnew will be promoted in the first instance for new residential development, with sites close to transport infrastructure, recreational and education amenities and employment being prioritised thereafter'*.

3.3 Local Area Plan

The Regional Assembly welcomes reference in the online pre-draft consultation topics, on the emphasis to be provided on regeneration in order to provide more vibrant and sustainable communities including the mentioned regeneration sites of Bayview Hotel, the former VEHA factory, opportunity sites at Fitzwilliam Square and the North and South Quay.

It is noted that Wicklow Town has benefitted from previous rounds of URDF funding such as the now completed scheme at Fitzwilliam square that has created a multi-functional space within the town centre that improves accessibility, enhancing the presentation and public realm of the area. It is

noted that a separate project is also planned at the Abbey Grounds to help enhance the tourism potential of the town. The Regional Assembly welcomes such urban regeneration and public realm improvement measures that enhance the economic and tourism potential of the town and support RPOs 4.54 and 4.57 of the RSES.

3.4 Transport & Land Use

The Local Authority should note that under Section 8.3 of the RSES and RPO 8.6 there is a requirement to prepare a Local Transport Plan for Wicklow Town and Rathnew. A Local Transport Plan (LTP) should include the transport priorities for the settlement in terms of public transport infrastructure and services; cycle investment; improvements to the pedestrian environment; and road enhancements. The guidance provided in relation to Local Transport Plans in the RSES also suggests that Local Link Offices (Transport Coordination Units) should also be consulted in the development of LTPs. The policies, objectives and measures which emerge from the LTP are required to be incorporated into the relevant statutory land use plans pertaining to each settlement.

Given the necessity to co-ordinate effective land use and transportation planning and the achievement of compact growth, it is advised that a Local Transport Plan is prepared in conjunction with the Local Area Plan.

The preparation of a Local Transport Plan will also support RPO 4.58 of the RSES in relation to investment in rail infrastructure, ensuring high quality accessibility and connectivity to the Key Town.

3.5 Economic Development

The RSES recognises Wicklow - Rathnew as a major employment hub, with a strong employment base attracting inflows of workers from around the County. The largest sectors in the settlement are commerce, manufacturing and education/ health/ public administration.

Specifically relating to economic development, the Regional Assembly brings your attention to RPO 4.55 which supports the role of the Wicklow County Campus in Rathnew for the provision of third level education facilities and also the development as a hub for the Film Industry and Screen Content Creation Sector which should be highlighted in the Local Area Plan.

The infrastructural asset of Wicklow Port is acknowledged as a home to commercial businesses and fishing as well as providing an important leisure amenity with tourism potential. Wicklow Port is well positioned to become a hub for the service of the off-shore wind energy sector in particular, which is referenced in both the RSES and the pre-draft consultation topics. The Local Authority should give consideration to the inclusion of a vision for Wicklow Port which provides a clear strategy to guide the future development potential of the port area, in support of RPO 4.56 of the RSES.

In addition, the RSES recognises the potential to develop Wicklow - Rathnew as a recreation and tourism hub, RPO 4.57, due to its attractive coastal location and its proximity to key destinations such as the Wicklow Mountains, Glendalough and Brittas Bay and the key attractions within the town.

3.6 Water Servicing

The pre-draft consultation documents outline that the provision of adequate infrastructure is critical to facilitate and sustain growth. In relation to wastewater treatment Uisce Éireann's capacity registers indicate there is spare capacity in both the public water and wastewater networks serving Wicklow Town to accommodate new development, with Level of Service (LoS) improvements required on the local water supply network.

RPO 10.3 requires the Regional Assembly and Local Authorities to liaise and cooperate with Uisce Éireann to ensure the delivery of Uisce Éireann's Investments and other relevant investment works programme of Uisce Éireann that will provide infrastructure to increase capacity to service settlements in accordance with the settlement strategy of the RSES and local authority core strategies, and provide for long term solutions for wastewater treatment for the Region.

3.7 Green Infrastructure

It is noted that the pre-draft consultation topics refer to Green Infrastructure forming part of the Local Area Plan. To assist in the making of any Green Infrastructure Strategy, the Local Authority should note the guiding principles for the preparation of Green Infrastructure strategies as set out in Section 7.7 of the RSES. In addition, RPO 7.22 and RPO 7.23 note the importance of the preparation of Green Infrastructure strategies as part of the LAP making process, their linkage to nature conservation measures (including protection of European sites) and supports the co-ordination of mapping of strategic green infrastructure across the Region. To enhance knowledge and expertise in this area, the Regional Assembly participated in the EU funded PROGRESS project, with the objective of promoting improved governance for regional ecosystem services. This involved working with 6 international partners and regional stakeholders to identify and share relevant Good Practices. A project Pilot Action tested the transfer of a Decision Support Mapping Approach for Ecosystem Services and Green Infrastructure from Catalonia (case study was Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council). Workshops were held with representatives from key stakeholder organisations, including Wicklow County Council. The outputs and learnings from the Pilot Action, including the documented mapping methodology developed with local input from Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, are available and transferable to other local contexts in the Eastern and Midland region. In the preparation of a green infrastructure strategy for the new Wicklow Town - Rathnew LAP, Wicklow County Council is welcome to consult with the Regional Assembly on learnings from the above pilot project.

3.8 Flood Risk Management

The pre-draft consultation topics indicate that the draft LAP will be informed by the preparation of a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). In line with RPO 7.12 of the RSES, the preparation of an SFRA

will be required. In keeping with best practice, it is recommended that the Local Authority take into account the recommendations of the SFRA, while also taking opportunities to enhance biodiversity and amenities, including where flood risk management measures are planned, in line with RPOs 7.14 and 7.15 of the RSES. It is further recommended that the most up-to-date flood mapping should clearly inform the preparation and detail in the LAP.

3.9 SEA/AA

As part of the overall process, the pre-draft consultation documents state that the Local Area Plan will include a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) which is required under the EU SEA and Habitats Directives. The Assembly recommends early engagement with the relevant bodies in this regard, including the Office of Public Works, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency and Uisce Éireann.

4.0 Conclusion

The Regional Assembly welcomes the publication of the Pre-Draft Issues Paper/Key Topics for the Wicklow Town - Rathnew LAP 2024-2030 and looks forward to engaging with the Local Authority on the forthcoming stages of the Local Area Plan process, and as part of ongoing engagement activities to progress the implementation of the policies and objectives of the RSES.

Regards,



Clare Bannon
A/Director
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
11th September 2023