

## CHAPTER 5

# TOWN & VILLAGE CENTRES - PLACEMAKING & REGENERATION

### 5.0 Introduction

Wicklow has a strong and diverse network of towns and villages that perform a variety of roles and functions for their residents and the wider rural communities. The strengths of these settlements lie in their capacity to accommodate a mix of uses including residential, employment, community and other functions in a compact, walkable environment that provides a high quality of life. They are a hub for social, economic and administrative functions in addition to providing places for recreation, worship and leisure.

Town and village centres have experienced significant challenges to retain vibrancy and vitality. The National Planning Framework (NPF) places a strong emphasis on strengthening Ireland's urban structure by targeting both population and employment growth in urban areas, promoting urban infill and brownfield development and ensuring that towns and villages are attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and wellbeing. The NPF acknowledges the importance of rural towns and villages in terms of their economic, administrative and social functions and seeks to activate the potential for renewal and strengthen and diversify rural towns as a focus for local housing and employment growth and regeneration.

Towns and villages are continually evolving. This is essential for their survival. It is important that Wicklow's planning policy is flexible to allow town centres to evolve and diversify.

#### **It is therefore the strategy of this plan to:**

Activate the potential for regeneration and renewal of our town and village centres, creating resilient, adaptable and vibrant places with a strong focus on creating compact towns and villages. Planning policy for Wicklow's town and village centres will:

- Protect and maintain the future viability of town and village centres by facilitating a diverse mix of uses;
- Embrace the historic character and heritage attributes of town and village centres and strengthen the strong sense of place;
- Support and enhance the potential of our towns and villages as focal points for the local community, for tourism and culture;
- Ensure that town and village centres are attractive places to live in, to work in and to visit, easy to get to, easy to walk and cycle within and are competitive places to conduct business;
- Enable town and village centres to address economic challenges and exploit opportunities;
- Maximise the use of public assets;
- Create compact towns and villages by reusing existing buildings and maximising the potential of infill and brownfield sites;
- Promote healthy placemaking and prioritise walking and cycling;
- Use public realm improvements to stimulate investment and economic confidence;
- Facilitate an expansion of convenience and comparison floorspace within the County to reduce leakage of expenditure from County Wicklow to other counties;
- Guide and promote the expansion of retail floorspace first and foremost within the core retail areas / existing town and village centre areas and thereafter in accordance with the sequential approach to retail development;
- Require a high quality of design in all centres.

## 5.1 Role of Town & Village Centres

Town and village centres need to be able to adapt and evolve to remain vibrant and relevant. The challenges facing town and village centres are evident in the number of vacant units and underutilised sites in some towns and villages. Town and village centres throughout the County need to be dynamic and able to evolve to accommodate new uses. The reuse and regeneration of vacant buildings is an essential catalyst to transform the capacity and potential of our smaller towns and villages.

The growth of online retail has undoubtedly impacted on towns and villages. Retailers can access new markets without the need for physical presence. This has undermined the traditional function of the 'Main Street'. Second to online retail, the most significant challenge for town centres has been the growth in out-of-town shopping centres and retail parks and their ease of accessibility. As the nature of retail evolves it will be necessary for some town and village centres to redefine and broaden their functions. It is no longer sustainable to rely on retail as the only use in town and village centres. The lasting effects of the COVID 19 pandemic will further redefine how retail operates into the future, particularly in relation to floor space requirements as businesses move towards a more hybrid way of operating and probable mix of both on-line and physical experience.

Geodirectory, in their analysis of commercial data between 2010 and 2019, identified a number of trends in urban areas including '1) an increasing café and bar culture, 2) a greater number of beauty salons and personal grooming establishments and 3) a growing preoccupation with health, fitness and well-being'. The number of cafés in the GDA (excluding Dublin) has grown by 11% while the number of beauty salons has increased by 22%.

There is significant potential in Wicklow to expand the role of towns and villages and to develop them as enterprise hubs, becoming viable and attractive alternatives to major employment centres. These smaller settlements have a comparative advantage in terms of lower costs. Wicklow boasts a highly skilled workforce and this is a significant asset for towns and villages, particularly in terms of making them attractive to new employers. Technological advances are making it easier to work remotely. There is potential to greatly expand the provision of shared / remote working hubs. This will also increase activity and footfall in town and village centres. It is important to support and strengthen local distinctiveness, a key element in placemaking that makes a place attractive to investment.

In addition, there is significant potential to facilitate additional residential development in the centres by reusing existing buildings, intensification and densification. This will reverse the long term trend of people leaving town and village centres and help put people back at the heart of town and village centres. This can be achieved through a range of options including infill, conversion of existing underutilised buildings, over the shop residential etc.

Town and village centres must be accessible and attractive to all, a place where people come together, interact, socialise and enjoy. They should include facilities and services which serve the needs of all members of the community; children, adolescents, young professionals, families and elderly people.

## 5.2 Successful Town Centres

The Framework for Town Centre Renewal (Retail Consultation Forum) identifies 11 key attributes for successful town centres. These are presented in Figure 5.1. The two attributes which are of particular importance in terms of planning and the built environment are 'Place Making Strategy' and 'Visual Appearance Strategy'. The Framework notes that '*as investment and people are increasingly mobile, considering the quality of a place becomes ever more important. A place making strategy is essential for ensuring that a town positions itself as an attractive location for investment, for talent and as a place to enjoy a good quality of life*'. The visual appearance of a town has an immediate impact on the perception of a town. Interventions in the public realm can have a transformative effect and act as a catalyst for regeneration and future improvements.

Figure 5.1 Key Attributes of a Successful Town Centre



Source: Framework for Town Centre Renewal (Retail Consultation Forum)

A 'health check' assessment provides a consistent framework for assessing the vitality and viability of a town centre. The *Retail Planning Guidelines* (DoECLG 2012) identify a number of health check indicators<sup>1</sup>. The community has been very active in County Wicklow in carrying out health check assessments. To date health check assessments have been carried out for Bray, Blessington, Kilcoole, Baltinglass, Newcastle and Dunlavin. Preliminary health checks have also been carried out for Wicklow and Arklow. These assessments help to understand how the town is performing.

<sup>1</sup> Annex 2 Assessing the Vitality and Viability of Town Centres, Retail Planning Guidelines 2012.

<b>Qualities of a Vital &amp; Viable Town Centre</b>	
<b>Attractions</b>	These underpin a town and comprise the range and diversity of shopping and other activities which draw in customers and visitors.
<b>Accessibility</b>	Successful centres need to be both accessible to the surrounding catchment area via a good road network and public transport facilities, and to encompass good local linkages between car parks, public transport stops and the various attractions within the centre.
<b>Amenity</b>	A healthy town centre should be a pleasant place to be in. It should be attractive in terms of environmental quality and urban design, it should be safe, and it should have a distinct identity or image.
<b>Action</b>	To function effectively as a viable commercial centre, actions need to follow: development and improvement projects should be implemented efficiently; there should be regular and effective cleaning and maintenance and there should be co-ordinated town centre management initiatives to promote the continued improvement of the centre.

**Source:** Retail Planning Guidelines, DoECLG 2012

Vitality and viability are key indicators in determining the health of a town or village centre. Vitality refers to how active a centre is and viability refers to the commercial wellbeing of the centre. Successful healthy town centres provide a diversity of uses, activities and experiences which in turn feed off each other. A broad mix of uses encourages trade and activity and contributes to a range of activity from daytime through to night time.

The predominance of one particular use along a street or in an area can limit the potential for activity and have a negative impact on the streetscape. The quality and vitality of the street can be undermined by the concentration or clustering of uses that fail to interact with the streetscape - enclosed car parks, blank shop frontages and ground floor offices. Such uses can result in bland inactive frontages that detract from the vitality and appearance of the streetscape. Solid ground floors with few windows and doors and no relief in colour or texture create a hard edge that is unwelcoming to pedestrians.

A strong sense of place is created by a street that is lined with active street frontages. Active street frontage provides for passive surveillance and promotes pedestrian activity. Within the town and village centres, ground floor units should be occupied by uses that promote a high level of activity and animation, including residential use. In order to maximise the effectiveness of street activity in town and village centres, setbacks should be minimised and where possible a high frequency of entrances provided.

Internalised shopping or commercial environments that 'turn their back' on the public realm and present a blank street frontage have negative impacts on the attractiveness of urban centres and will not be encouraged. The *Retail Design Manual* advocates that where large units are required '*negative streetscape impacts can be avoided by 'wrapping' the large floorplates with complementary streetfront units such as hairdressers, cafes, bookshops and suchlike*'.

Artisan food and craft shops, pop-up shops and country markets are a positive addition to towns and villages as they increase vitality and viability. Markets should be appropriately located in the town or village centres where they can be accessed by pedestrians rather than at sites which require vehicular travel.

### 5.3 Placemaking

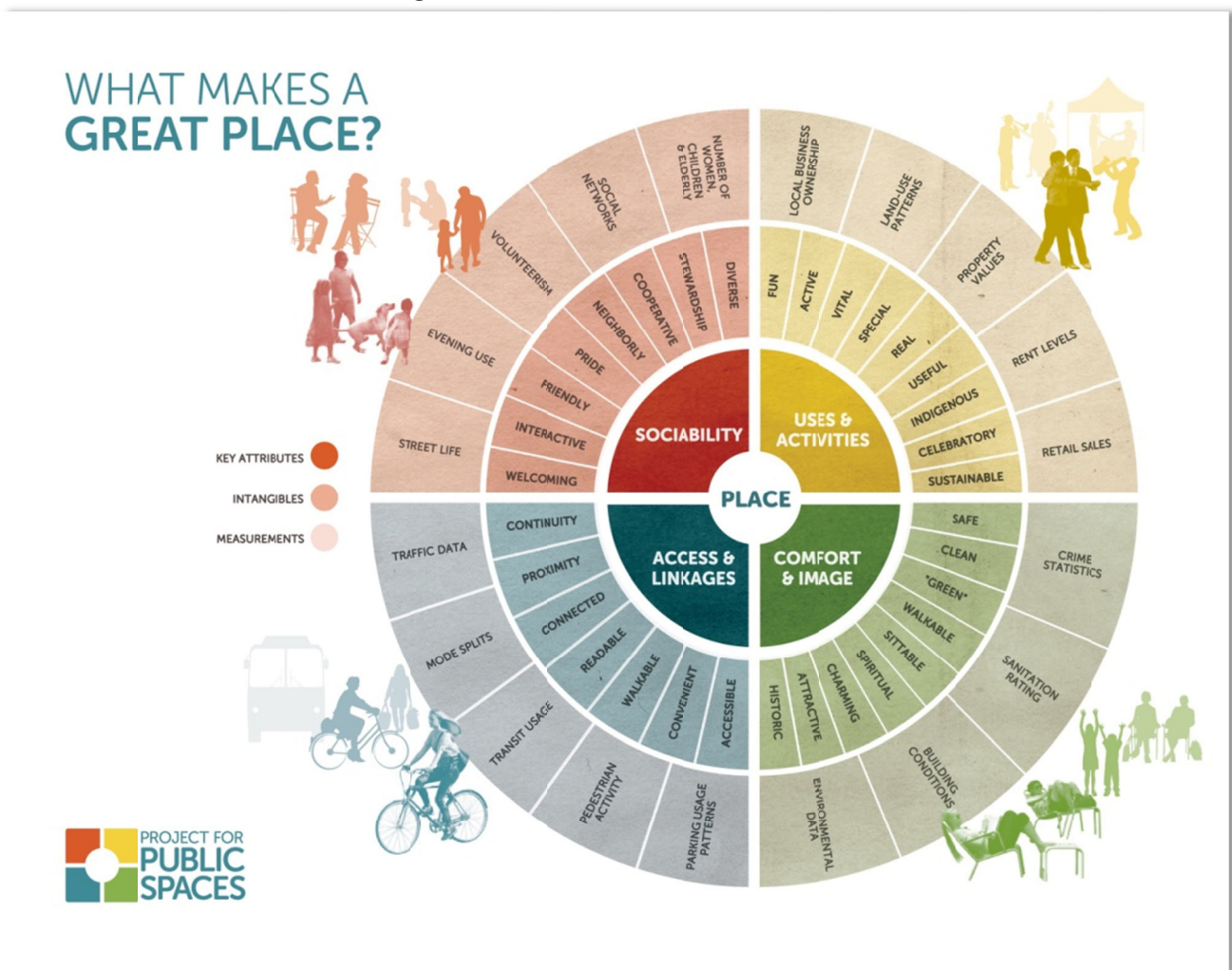
Placemaking focuses on the interaction between people and the built environment, a sense of place and facilitating a high quality of life. There is growing acceptance that placemaking generates social and economic outcomes and fosters healthy sustainable communities. Placemaking encapsulates all the elements that make a place memorable and enjoyable to be in. There are key elements in the creation of attractive places and these include, but are not limited to, the quality of the built environment, the public realm, how buildings and spaces interact with each other, active street frontage, variety of uses, permeability and pedestrian activity, the availability of community facilities

and amenities. The experience a place offers is now considered as important as the range of shops a place can offer. The principles of placemaking have the potential to transform underutilised public space into vibrant assets that enhance the town or village centre.

Figure 5.2 illustrates the many elements of placemaking. In evaluating thousands of public spaces, the 'Project for Public Spaces' <sup>2</sup> has found that to be successful, public spaces generally share four qualities:

1. They are **accessible**;
2. People are engaged in **activities**;
3. The space is **comfortable** and has a good image;
4. It is a **sociable** place, one where people meet each other<sup>3</sup>.

**Figure 5.2: What Makes a Great Place?**



Source: <https://www.pps.org/article/grplacefeat>

<sup>2</sup> The 'Project for Public Spaces' was founded in 1975 in the USA by Fred Kent and Kathy Madden as a project to prove why public space matters.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pps.org/article/grplacefeat>

### 5.3.1 Placemaking & Heritage

Towns and villages that tap into a rich cultural heritage and harness their distinctive assets tend to perform well. Heritage is used to forge the identity of places and make them attractive to further investment.

The built environment often tells a story about the evolution of a town or village. The influence of the sea, agriculture and industry may all inform or play a part in defining the character and identity of Wicklow's towns and villages. This 'sense of place' is important not only for residents and visitors but for future investment. The Heritage Council identify historic assets as including 'streetscape, key buildings, green and public spaces or intangible heritage such as literary or musical associations'<sup>4</sup>. The NPF recognises that 'investment in our towns and villages through regeneration, public realm improvements and the appropriate adaptation and re-use of our built heritage, are key factors in developing, promoting and investing in a sense of place'.

Heritage should not be seen as a constraint but as a resource to create interesting, attractive and distinctive places. It is a key element in defining our townscapes. It is important to retain and embrace the historic structures and streetscapes that make our towns and villages such enjoyable places to be in. Where possible, heritage and local identity should be the cornerstone of regeneration and redevelopment proposals.

*'Most towns have a varied mix of existing buildings that can be adapted and reused while retaining their existing unique qualities in terms of design and materials. Such opportunities could include retaining old shopfronts with new 'creative' businesses inside, converting upper floors back to urban living, adapting streets and spaces for interesting public activities and events, or reusing churches and historic structures for cultural purposes and regular place-specific seasonal events. The historical fabric of most Irish towns is also largely intact, with traditional street patterns, plot sizes, a mix of building types, distinctive paving, and street furniture. Maintenance and care of the existing built fabric is essential to ensure that a town's character and quality remains attractive and conveys a strong sense of the local community working together. Retaining older features shows that local people care about and have pride in their heritage and history'* (RIAI Town and Village Toolkit).

Historic shopfronts are one of the most attractive elements of our streetscapes. They should be retained and sensitively repaired rather than replaced.

Maximising the historical and cultural attributes of our towns and villages will contribute to tourism activity. It will attract tourists, enhance visitor experience, increase the number of accessible tourist attractions, increase the length of stay in the town or village and increase job opportunities. Festivals and events also encourage tourists and locals to visit historic town centres.

Understanding the historical context of a place will give greater appreciation of the way it has evolved and the street patterns that exist. New development which extends existing towns and villages should be cognisant of the historical context and should avoid the imposition of incongruous street layouts.

### 5.3.2 Healthy Placemaking

Healthy communities are a key consideration in the development of our towns and villages. The built environment can positively impact on people's behaviour and overall wellbeing. Healthy placemaking involves creating places that encourage and support healthier lifestyles. The NPF notes that communities that are designed in a way that supports physical activity e.g. generously sized footpaths, safe cycle lanes, safe attractive stairways and accessible recreation areas, all encourage people to make healthy choices and live active healthier lives. It further advocates that healthy places in turn create economic value by appealing to a skilled workforce and attracting innovative companies. There are many factors to consider but some include play, active recreation, walking, cycling, access to quality open space, access to social support, health care facilities and healthy food options.

<sup>4</sup> Ballybrilliant: Heritage-led Regeneration in 5 Irish Towns (The Heritage Council, 2018)

The Council will actively pursue public realm improvements and the provision of amenities that create more attractive places and encourage healthier lifestyles for people of all ages and abilities. New development should be located and designed to prioritise walking and cycling especially for shorter journeys. Residential schemes should include open space and recreation facilities that provide physical activity opportunities for all ages. The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets is a joint publication launched in 2013 by the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport and the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government and it aims to put well-designed streets at the heart of sustainable communities. The permeability and safety of an area can be the determining factor in whether people walk or drive.

### 5.3.3 Public Realm

The public realm plays an important role in defining the image of settlements and influencing their perception as a place to live, work in or visit. The public realm is defined as all external spaces that are publicly accessible, including streets, parking areas, footpaths, squares and parks. It is increasingly recognised that investing in quality public spaces and the public realm generates tangible benefits including stimulating economic growth. High quality public realm generates confidence and makes an area attractive to potential investors and visitors. Measures to improve the public realm include harmonising signage and reducing overall visual clutter by adopting a consistent approach in terms of street furniture, lighting, paving etc. Other measures include planting, landscaping, boundary treatments, painting buildings, clean and safe streets, undergrounding of wires and accessible footpaths. Shopfronts and signage frame the public realm and play a fundamental role in animating the streetscape. A high quality public realm encourages people to use public spaces, to socialise and in turn enhance the vitality of the town or village centre. The Council will continue to be proactive in securing funding for public realm improvements and implementing environmental enhancements.

## 5.4 Compact Town & Village Centres

It is increasingly important to maximise the potential of town and village centres. A greater proportion of residential development will be located within existing built up areas. In accordance with NPO3c of the NPF, County Wicklow is required to deliver a minimum of 30% of all new homes within the built-up footprint of our existing towns and villages. This includes infill sites, brownfield sites and repurposing existing buildings. A compact growth policy combined with a strong focus on high quality design provides the best opportunity to harness the potential of our existing town and villages centres and make them desirable places to live, work and visit. It is a policy of the NPF to target the reversal of decline in the core of towns and villages through sustainable targeted measures that address vacant premises and deliver sustainable reuse and regeneration outcomes.

In order to deliver compact growth, the NPF requires focus on four key areas:

- The liveability and quality of life of urban places;
- Making the continuous regeneration and development of existing built-up areas as attractive and viable as greenfield development;
- Tackling legacies such as concentrations of disadvantage through physical and social regeneration and by encouraging mixed tenure and integrated communities;
- Linking regeneration and redevelopment initiatives to climate action.

### 5.4.1 Renewal & Regeneration

The RSES recognises that achieving compact growth targets will require active land management responses to ensure that land and building resources within existing settlements are used to their full potential. It requires Local Authorities to establish a database of strategic brownfield and infill sites so that brownfield re-use can be managed and co-ordinated across multiple stakeholders as part of the active land management process.

Investment in regeneration, renewal, public realm improvements, amenity projects and placemaking actions is essential to transform the capacity and harness the potential of our towns and villages. There are many sites and buildings throughout the County that are underutilised. The potential of these assets needs to be harnessed. In particular, the Council will be proactive in seeking funding to harness public lands as catalysts to stimulate regeneration and wider investment. By combining public and private support and investment it will be possible to bring about the transformation of towns and village centres in an integrated manner.

Town and village regeneration and rejuvenation projects to be prioritised include strategic transformative urban renewal projects, brownfield regeneration, adaptive reuse and reversal of vacancy and dereliction, public realm and urban amenity projects linked to regeneration, heritage led regeneration, placemaking enhancement and compact growth. Other proposals to be pursued include developing projects that will act as economic stimulants, address social infrastructure deficits, provide community facilities and develop social enterprise. The overarching emphasis will be on the long term viability of places. The Urban and Rural Regeneration and Development Funds (URDF & RRDF) were established to help realise the outcomes and objectives of the National Planning Framework.

The URDF aims to support more compact and sustainable development, through the regeneration and rejuvenation of Ireland's cities and large towns and to enable a greater proportion of residential and mixed-use development to be delivered within the existing built-up footprints of our large towns. The Fund is seeking to ensure that more parts of our towns can become attractive and vibrant places in which people choose to live and work, as well as to invest and to visit.

The RRDF seeks to provide investment to support rural renewal, strengthen and build resilience in rural communities and assist in the regeneration of towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and outlying areas. The fund represents an opportunity to make a significant and sustainable impact on rural communities, to strengthen the fabric of rural towns and villages, support job creation and address population decline.

The funds provide an opportunity to deliver projects that would otherwise not be realised. The Council will continue to be proactive in identifying projects and seeking funding under the Urban and Rural Regeneration and Development Funds. Projects will include transformational regeneration and renewal proposals and public realm initiatives that give town and village centres back to the people, encourage greater town and village centre living, new economic activity and enhanced recreational spaces.

It is important that all proposals for renewal and regeneration ensure that the attractive qualities of the town and village centres are retained intact. RPO 6.14 in the RSES states that the EMRA will support the use of targeted financial incentives to re-establish the dominant role of town centres provided for in planning policy to encourage a greater take up of town centre development opportunities for retail, residential, commercial and leisure uses.

Regeneration projects to be prioritised in County Wicklow include regeneration of the harbours in Bray, Wicklow and Arklow, revitalising town and village centres and reversing stagnation by identifying new roles and functions, addressing dereliction, repurposing underutilised land and providing new remote working hubs and community facilities.

#### 5.4.2 Infill & Brownfield Development

The redevelopment of infill and brownfield lands within town and village centres presents a significant opportunity to consolidate the town and village centres. Brownfield lands may be defined as land which has been subject to building, engineering or other operations excluding temporary uses or urban green spaces and generally comprise redundant industrial lands or docks but may also include former barracks, hospitals or obsolete housing areas<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (DoEHLG 2009).



Infill sites may range from small gap infill, unused or derelict land and backland areas, up to large residual sites or sites assembled from a multiplicity of ownerships<sup>6</sup>.

The NPF acknowledges that infill and brownfield development is more challenging to deliver for a variety of reasons, including land management but also the challenge of integrating with existing communities. As a result planning policies needs to be flexible, focussing on design-led and performance based outcomes rather than specifying absolute requirements in all cases. Accordingly planning policy will be flexibly applied to well-designed high quality infill and brownfield development proposals provided that public safety is not compromised and the environment is protected.

### 5.4.3 Re-use of Vacant Buildings

Vacant buildings and underused building stock undermine the vitality and appeal of our towns and villages. Bringing them back into use presents a significant opportunity to consolidate, revitalise and strengthen town and village centres as attractive and durable places to live, work in and visit. Many vacant buildings form part of the historic core of town and village centres and contribute towards the character and appeal of these settlements.

County Wicklow's commercial vacancy rate was 12.2% in 2020 which compared well with the national rate of 13.5% and the average for Leinster (excluding Dublin) at 12.6%<sup>7</sup>. A study carried out by Geodirectory found that out of 80 towns across Ireland, Greystones at 6.9% has the lowest vacancy rate. The results for Bray and Wicklow town, 12.5% and 11.3%, respectively were also positive. Arklow's vacancy rate is higher than the national average, at 18.8%. Blessington has a commercial vacancy rate of approximately 13.7%<sup>8</sup>.

A key objective of Pillar 5 of 'Rebuilding Ireland' is to ensure the existing housing stock is used to the maximum degree possible with a particular focus on measures to use vacant stock to renew towns and villages. *'Bringing Back Homes – Manual for Reuse of Existing Buildings'* was developed to support and facilitate the reuse of older / vacant buildings in our towns and villages for residential use (DHPLG 2018). The Manual recognises that revitalising our main streets through well-planned and designed residential units, particularly above shops, could help to rejuvenate smaller town centres.

The Council encourages the reuse of vacant buildings in town and village centres for a variety of uses including residential, commercial, enterprise and retail. There are financial supports and schemes available to help bring units back into residential use. These include the Repair and Leasing Scheme and the Buy and Renew Scheme. The focus of the latter scheme, while not exclusive to, is on older stock, and in particular derelict properties which when complete will improve streetscapes and provide much needed accommodation.

The Council will support measures and actions outlined in the 'Local Authority Retail Support: Improving our Cities and Towns' (CCMA / AILG 2015) to address difficult issues associated with vacancy and to ensure that potential benefits associated with retail activity are captured.

In accordance with the Urban Regeneration & Housing Act 2015, the Planning Authority maintains a vacant site register and implements the vacant site levy.

### 5.4.4 Living Over the Shop

The Council will encourage 'living over the shop' in town and village centres. This is a significant opportunity to increase activity within town and village centres and to deliver compact growth. Where independent street access to upper floors exists it should be retained to ensure use of the upper floors of buildings for residential

<sup>6</sup> Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (DoEHLG 2009)

<sup>7</sup> GeoView Commercial Property Report (Geodirectory, Q2 2020)

<sup>8</sup> Results from combination of Geodirectory and survey work within town centre boundary.

accommodation or commercial development. Where a 'living over the shop' use is proposed, a relaxation in density, car parking and open space standards will be considered, where the development meets a high quality of design and accommodation.

#### 5.4.5 Derelict Sites

A Derelict Site is any property/land which detracts, or is likely to detract, to a material degree from the amenity, character or appearance of land in the neighbourhood in question because of neglected or unsightly condition. The Council will continue to use its powers under the Derelict Sites Act, 1990 (as amended) to require owners to maintain their properties to ensure that they do not detract from the amenities of the area.

### 5.5 Accessible Places – Universal Design

*'Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability'* (National Disability Authority)<sup>9</sup>. This includes streets, parks and public spaces. The design of the built environment can significantly influence a person's ability to have a healthy and active lifestyle or one characterised by limited mobility and high levels of social isolation<sup>10</sup>. Universal Design therefore requires an appreciation of the varied abilities of every person to ensure that places and buildings are designed to meet the needs of all users.

*'Building for Everyone – A Universal Design Approach'*<sup>11</sup> provides practical guidance on the universal design of buildings, places and facilities and advocate that designing for one group can result in solutions that address the needs of many others. For example:

- *'level entry (step-free) entrances facilitate not just wheelchair users but also people with buggies, people with suitcases or shopping trolleys, people using walking or mobility aids, and people with visual difficulties;*
- *larger toilet compartments provide easier access to wheelchair users; those with luggage or parcels; parents with pushchairs or accompanying small children; those using walking or mobility aids; and larger-sized people;*
- *clear, well-placed signage that uses recognised symbols or pictograms helps people with reading or cognitive difficulties, and those whose first language is neither English nor Irish'.*

In order to overcome challenges posed by topography or existing built environment constraints, universal design should be considered at the earliest design stages. The design of the built environment should be easy to understand.

<sup>9</sup> National Disability Authority, an independent statutory body that provides information and advice to the Government on policy and practice relevant to the lives of persons with disabilities.

<sup>10</sup> How walkable is your Town? (Age Friendly Ireland, 2015)

<sup>11</sup> Published by the National Disability Authority

## 5.6 Town & Village Centre Objectives

### Healthy Town Centres – Vitality & Viability

- CPO 5.1** To protect and maintain the viability of town and village centres, target the reversal of decline and deliver sustainable reuse and regeneration outcomes.
- CPO 5.2** To protect and increase the quality, vibrancy and vitality of town and villages centres by promoting and facilitating an appropriate mix of day and night time uses, including commercial, recreational, civic, cultural, leisure and residential uses and to control uses that may have a detrimental impact on the vitality of the streetscape and the public realm.
- CPO 5.3** To particularly promote and facilitate residential development in town and village centres:
- Promote the 'active' use of above ground floor levels, and in particular to promote the concept of 'living over the shop' in centres. Where a 'living over the shop' use is proposed, a relaxation in density, car parking and open space standards will be considered, where the development meets very high quality of design and accommodation.
  - Other than in the retail core area, residential development shall be the primary development objective for lands zoned town centre or village centre. This shall not preclude commercial development on lands zoned town centre or village centre when suitable sites are not available in the core retail area.
  - For smaller towns that do not have a defined core retail area the priority will be to facilitate uses which are consistent with maintaining activity and vitality in the town centre and addressing vacancy. While this may allow for the development of residential only developments in the town centre, any such proposals shall fully justify how such use will not diminish vibrancy in the town centre, or result in the town not being able to meet the retail / services needs of the local population.
- CPO 5.4** To limit the concentration or clustering of uses that have bland inactive frontages and that fail to interact with the streetscape including car parks, blank shop frontages and ground floor offices. Such uses undermine the vitality of the town or village centre.
- CPO 5.5** To facilitate country markets in town and village centres subject to proper planning and development.

## Regeneration & Renewal

**CPO 5.6** To seek funding and focus new investment into the core of towns and villages in order to reverse decline, foster resilience and encourage new roles and functions for streets, buildings and sites within towns and villages.

<b>Town and Village Regeneration &amp; Rejuvenation Priorities</b>	
<b>Bray</b>	<p>Harness the potential of the former Bray golf course, Bray harbour and key town centre development sites to deliver compact growth, prioritising sustainable mobility, expand employment opportunities and strengthen the viability and vibrancy of the town centre. There will be a strong focus on addressing dereliction and underutilised sites and delivering placemaking that will strengthen the town's image and sense of place.</p> <p>Key projects include Bray Central (formerly known as the Florentine), Bray Public Transport Bridge and regeneration of the harbour. The redevelopment at Bray Central will help balance the footfall between the Main Street and the seafront. Regeneration of the harbour may include marine works, amenity and public realm improvements, provision of promenade board walk linking the promenade and the harbour, provision of a cycle bridge and relocation of boat storage to north of the harbour.</p>
<b>Wicklow-Rathnew</b>	<p>Revitalisation of the town centre and regeneration of the harbour, quays and the Murrough coastal area to facilitate a mix of uses, capitalising on its potential to significantly increase economic development, deliver compact growth and improved amenities. Regeneration proposals will be heritage led reflecting Wicklow's town's historic town centre. This includes restoration of the Abbey Grounds, the Wicklow heritage trail and associated signage and lighting of key buildings.</p> <p>Prepare a detailed Wicklow Waterfront Masterplan to cover the North Quay, Packet Pier and South Quay. This shall include comprehensive engineering, environmental and marine analysis and examine the feasibility of developing an outer harbour providing a deep water berth and in the shorter term development of an inner dock providing additional sheltered berths. The Masterplan will also look to developing the necessary infrastructure to attract and support renewable energy operators. Redevelopment of the South Quay from the Bridge Tavern to the Sailing Club for mixed use development including retail, leisure and tourism featuring waterside restaurants and residential units, and connectivity improvements linking the Main Street to South Quay will also be examined.</p> <p>Upgrading of the existing riverside walk, from the Railway Bridge to Parnell Bridge to provide a green corridor between the port, the town centre and the Murrough will also be explored. Redevelopment of lands and vacant warehousing and commercial premises between the Railway Bridge and the Parnell Bridge will be considered to provide a mix of residential, hotel and leisure facilities.</p> <p>Strengthen and revitalise the urban structure of Rathnew to provide a stronger streetscape and enhanced public realm, capitalising on the potential to deliver compact growth and mixed use development on underutilised sites.</p>

<b>Greystones-Delgany</b>	<p>Capitalise on the potential of underutilised sites and brownfield sites to deliver compact growth, new economic opportunities and to strengthen the Greystones urban structure. The lands around the Council’s office, park and ride site and former depot are a key public asset which should be the focus of any regeneration proposals. Redevelopment of this site should retain and enhance the existing public amenities including Council offices, playground and car parking and incorporate high intensity mixed use development.</p> <p>The Greystones Public Realm Plan identifies a number of opportunities to improve the public realm, improve permeability and public safety, improve access to the sea for recreational purposes, develop an events space, harness the potential for renewable energy to power public lighting and smart street furniture, enhance green space and biodiversity and harness the town’s heritage potential.</p> <p>Strengthen and revitalise the urban structure of Delgany, harnessing its unique heritage and environmental assets. Address dereliction and underutilised sites to deliver compact growth and revitalise the town centres.</p>
<b>Arklow</b>	<p>Revitalisation of the centre of Arklow, including (but not limited to) Upper and Lower Main Street and surrounding side streets and Castle Park; the riverside and quays, and the harbour area, with particular focus on Arklow’s intrinsic link to the Avoca River and sea, and the re-generation and re-use of vacant sites and buildings throughout the town core.</p> <p>Preparation and implementation of an integrated urban renewal plan for Arklow Harbour including north and south quays which will redefine the role of the harbour to deliver a mix of uses including employment, high density residential and leisure. Repurposing vacant sites at the harbour to develop a major hub for maritime sectors including off-shore wind, aquaculture, fisheries and other marine food sectors. Development of a National Maritime Centre of Excellence.</p> <p>Following completion of the Arklow Transport Study, the delivery of major improvements to transportation infrastructure in the town centre and environs, and in particular projects to divert heavy and passing traffic away from the town centre and harbour / quays area, to enable significant enhancement of the public realm and pedestrian / cyclist safety in the town core.</p> <p>Key projects include Arklow Quays Integrated Urban Renewal Plan, Arklow Pottery Museum, Historic Town Centre Project, Digital Hub at the Court House, public realm improvements at the Parade Ground, the Harbour to Headwaters river tourism project, Medieval Arklow walking trail project.</p>
<b>Blessington</b>	<p>Regeneration of the town centre to include reclaiming the Market Square as an amenity space and focal point for the town, providing public realm improvements, addressing dereliction, providing remote working / enterprise hub, repurposing the former HSE building to create a visitor centre for the Blessington e-Greenway and significantly improving permeability and sustainable mobility. The regeneration proposals will strive to include measures to increase economic opportunities within the town to reduce the need for commuting.</p> <p>The delivery of the inner relief road is a key element in realising the revitalisation of the town as it will remove the excessive traffic volumes travelling through the town centre.</p>
<b>Baltinglass</b>	<p>Key projects including making Baltinglass a hub for south-west Wicklow. This includes</p>

	restoration of the Courthouse and re-use as a new library and heritage hub and the conversion of the library into a Digi-hub, restoration of the Courthouse courtyard for use as an event / market space, enhance amenities in the town centre including age friendly seating and an informal play space, regularisation of parking and improved pedestrian facilities and safety measures. Develop the huge potential of Baltinglass Hillfort complex.
<b>Enniskerry</b>	Heritage led regeneration to deliver compact growth and provide opportunities for shared working space / remote working hub. Enhance the public realm with particular emphasis on improved facilities for pedestrians.
<b>Kilcoole</b>	Strengthen and revitalise the town centre, address dereliction and repurpose underutilised properties. Revitalisation of the centre will strive to include the creation of a formal town square and new civic building to create a new focal point for the town with amenity and cultural focus, a public park, improved permeability within the town centre, new pedestrian and cycle links between the town centre and the train station, Kilcoole beach and Greystones.
<b>Newtown-mountkennedy</b>	Placemaking project for Newtownmountkennedy that will address the need to deliver catch-up facilities and regeneration of the town centre. The project includes provision of a new community centre and sports facilities, public realm improvements, and improvements in permeability. Extension of the existing riverine park into lands to the east of the main street, via a shared main street plaza, with green connections to other watercourses and recreational lands such as the Coillte forest to the north of the town.
<b>Rathdrum</b>	Develop Rathdrum as a tourism gateway town having regard to its strategic location at the foothills of the Wicklow mountains and adjacent to Avondale Forest Park. Heritage led regeneration to revitalise the town centre, address dereliction and underutilised sites and buildings, deliver compact growth, improve sustainability mobility, strengthen the role and significance of the Market Square as a public space and deliver a new community facility and remote working hub.
<b>Ashford Aughrim Carnew Dunlavin Tinahely</b>	Strengthen and revitalise the urban structure of these settlements, harnessing their unique heritage assets and develop strong attractive streetscapes. Address dereliction and underutilised sites to deliver compact growth and revitalise the town centres.
<b>Avoca Donard Kilmacanogue Newcastle Roundwood Shillelagh</b>	Revitalise the centre of these settlements through small scale regeneration projects that address dereliction, deliver compact growth, provide remote working space and improve amenities.
<b>Villages</b>	Public realm and amenity enhancement and bringing unoccupied buildings back into use.

**CPO 5.7**

To identify and pursue transformational regeneration and renewal proposals and public realm initiatives that revitalise town and village centres, encourage more people to live in town and village centres, facilitate and incentivise new economic activity and provide for enhanced recreational spaces.

- CPO 5.8** To target development that will regenerate and revive town and village centres, address dereliction and vacancy and deliver sustainable reuse and quality placemaking outcomes.
- CPO 5.9** To facilitate and support well-designed development that will contribute to regeneration and renewal, consolidation of the built environment and include interventions in the public realm and the provision of amenities.
- CPO 5.10** To support and facilitate proposals for heritage or technology led regeneration.
- CPO 5.11** To identify obsolete and potential renewal areas within town and village centres and facilitate the re-use and regeneration of these areas and derelict lands and buildings with a view to consolidating the core of town and village centres.
- CPO 5.12** To encourage the redevelopment of brownfield sites in order to maximise the sustainable regeneration of underutilised/vacant lands and/or buildings particularly in town and village centres.
- CPO 5.13** In many settlements in the County, there are sites and areas in need of development and renewal, in order to prevent:
- adverse effects on existing amenities in such areas, in particular as a result of the ruinous or neglected condition of any land,
  - urban blight and decay,
  - anti-social behaviour, or
  - a shortage of habitable houses or of land suitable for residential use or a mixture of residential and other uses

It is an objective of this plan to encourage and facilitate the appropriate development of such sites / lands and all available tools and mechanisms, including the Vacant Site levy, may be utilised to stimulate such development.

In this regard, plans for towns in Levels 4 and 5 of the settlement hierarchy include a map showing the area within the town where it is deemed that renewal and regeneration is required and these areas will be examined in detail to determine if there are sites where the Vacant Site Levy should be applied.

In addition, the following zones in larger towns (with stand alone plans) may include sites that are in need of renewal and regeneration, and these areas will be examined in detail to determine if there are sites where the Vacant Site Levy should be applied.

Settlement	Zones <sup>12</sup>
<b>Bray &amp; Environs</b>	Town Centre (TC), Neighbourhood Centre (NC), Seafront Zone (SF), Gateway & Transport Hub (GTH), Mixed Use (MU)
<b>Wicklow Town &amp; Rathnew</b>	Town Centre (TC), Village Centre (VC), Port (PT), Mixed Use (MU)
<b>Arklow Town &amp; Environs</b>	Town Centre (TC), Waterfront Zone (WZ)
<b>Greystones - Delgany &amp; Kilcoole</b>	Town Centre (TC), Village Centre (VC), Small Local Centre (SLC)
<b>Blessington</b>	Town Centre (TC)

<sup>12</sup> or other such zoning codes as may replace these, during the making of future local plans

**CPO 5.14** Promote the Town and Village Renewal Scheme as an enabler to bring vacant and derelict buildings and sites back into use as multi-purpose spaces and for residential occupancy.

### Placemaking

**CPO 5.15** Support the preparation of Placemaking Strategies for towns and villages, where feasible, which shall address physical, social and economic elements. The strategies shall provide a strong focus on public realm improvements and bringing life back into town and village centres. For strategic sites, notably in Bray, Wicklow-Rathnew, Arklow, Greystones and Blessington, detailed masterplans for town centre renewal may also be prepared.

**CPO 5.16** To actively pursue and implement environmental and public realm improvements and provision of amenities that create more attractive places and encourage healthier lifestyles for all ages and abilities.

### Heritage

**CPO 5.17** To harness and integrate the special physical, social, economic and cultural value of built heritage assets through appropriate and sensitive reuse, recognising its important contribution to placemaking. New development should respect and complement the historic fabric of existing towns and villages – the traditional street patterns, plot sizes, mix of building types, distinctive paving and attractive street furniture.

**CPO 5.18** To protect, integrate and enhance heritage assets, including attractive streetscapes and historic buildings, through appropriate reuse and regeneration and restrict inappropriate development that would undermine the settlement's identity, heritage and sense of place.

**CPO 5.19** To implement environmental and public realm improvements in town and village centres to a high standard and finish.

**CPO 5.20** To establish a database of strategic brownfield and infill sites so that brownfield re-use can be managed and co-ordinated across multiple stakeholders as part of the active land management process.

### Design

**CPO 5.21** To strengthen the urban structure of towns and villages by ensuring that any new development contributes to a coherent urban form, focused on a high quality built environment of distinct character. New development shall incorporate a legible and permeable urban form that protects and complements the character of the street or area in which it is set in terms of proportion, enclosure, building line, design and by the marrying of new modern architecture with historic structures.

**CPO 5.22** Within town and village centres, particularly the retail core, new development is required to provide for active street edges. Ground floor units should be occupied predominantly by uses that promote a high level of activity and animation. In order to maximise street activity, set-backs should be minimised and there should be a high frequency of entrances (every 5 to 10 metres).

**CPO 5.23** To require that new town centre development particularly public realm improvement works incorporates the principles of universal design to create an environment that is accessible, usable, convenient and a pleasure to use for all users.



**CPO 5.24**

In accordance with Government policy to support increased building height and density in locations with good public transport accessibility, particularly town / city cores, planning authorities are required to explicitly identify areas where increased building height will be actively pursued for both redevelopment, regeneration and infill development to secure the objectives of the NPF and RSES. In this regard, the identification of locations for increased building height shall be carried out in the preparation of Local Area Plans for settlements in Tiers 1-3 of the County Settlement Hierarchy as these are deemed the only settlements of sufficient scale and diversity in urban grain to accommodate such increases in height.