

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION & STRATEGIC CONTEXT

### 1.0 Introduction

The Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 sets out the overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the County for the plan period and beyond. The Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 has been prepared in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act). The plan relates to the whole functional area of Wicklow County Council. There are five municipal districts in Wicklow, namely, Arklow, Baltinglass, Bray, Greystones and Wicklow. Many of the Council's services are delivered through the municipal districts.



Located on the east coast of Ireland, Wicklow covers an area of 2,027 square kilometres and is often referred to as the 'Garden of Ireland', a reflection of the County's scenic landscape. The County had a population of 142,425 persons according to the most recent Census available at the time of drafting this plan (2016). This represented an increase of approximately 13% since 2006<sup>1</sup>. The growth in population is a reflection of the County's appeal as a place to live and enjoy a high quality of life.

<sup>1</sup> Preliminary results from the 2022 Census indicate a population of 155,485 persons, a growth of 9% since 2016.

The County, which is within easy reach of Dublin city, has 21 towns including the major towns of Bray, Greystones-Delgany, Wicklow-Rathnew and Arklow on the east coast and Blessington, the largest town on the western side of the County. The County also has a range of attractive villages which are dotted throughout the rural landscape.

Wicklow boasts a range of natural amenities including pristine beaches, coastal walkways and the Wicklow Mountains. Wicklow Mountains National Park, which covers over 20,000 hectares, is Ireland's largest national park and the only one located in the east of the country. The highest mountain in the range, Lugnaquilla, rises to 925 metres above sea level. The County provides excellent walking, hiking, cycling and climbing opportunities in addition to both coastal and lake water based activities. The Wicklow Way, at 127km, is the oldest marked long distance walking/hiking trail in Ireland.

### **What is the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022 – 2028?**

The County Development Plan (CDP) sets out a strategic spatial framework for the proper planning and sustainable development of County Wicklow for the period between 2022 and 2028. While the CDP is in place for a six year period, it is framed having regard to the long term development objectives of the County beyond 2028.

The CDP in the main, focuses on 'big picture' planning issues<sup>2</sup>. The plan sets out the policies and objectives to guide the future development of the County. The plan is not a 'spending plan', however it sets a framework within which developments could be undertaken, in the event that the public or private sectors have the finance to develop.

The CDP provides for, and controls, the physical, economic and social development of the County, in the interests of the overall common good and in compliance with environmental controls. It includes a set of development objectives and standards, which set out where land is to be developed, and for what purposes (e.g. housing, shopping, schools, employment, open space, amenity, conservation etc). It informs decisions on where public services such as roads and water infrastructure are to be provided, and affects the type of buildings that can be constructed and the use to which land can be put. It affects many facets of daily economic and social life, in terms of where you can live, what services and facilities are available and where job opportunities are to be sited.

## **1.1 Statutory Content of the Plan**

The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) sets out the statutory requirements regarding the content of a development plan.

As required by the Act, the Wicklow CDP 2022-2028 is consistent, in so far as is practicable, with such national plans, policies and strategies as the Minister determines that relate to proper planning and sustainable development. In this regard, Chapters 2 and 3 of this plan outline the statutory provisions, plans, policies and strategies that set the context within which the development plan is framed and which have influenced the strategies and objectives of the plan.

Section 28 of the Act requires the Planning Authority to append a statement to the development plan including information which demonstrates how the Planning Authority has implemented the policies and objectives of the Minister, contained in Ministerial Guidelines, when considering their application to the area of the development plan. This statement is included in Appendix 10.

In making the plan, the Planning Authority shall have regard to the development plans of the adjoining planning authorities and shall co-ordinate the objectives in the development plan with the objectives in the plans of those authorities, except where the Planning Authority considers it to be inappropriate or not feasible to do so. The Planning Authority shall take into account any significant likely effects the implementation of the plan may have on the area of

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<sup>2</sup> The County Development Plan does however include a set of more detailed town plans, which are more 'local' than 'strategic' in their focus (see Volume 2).

any adjoining planning authority. Accordingly, the objectives of this plan have been prepared having regard to the plans of the adjoining planning authorities of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, South Dublin, Kildare, Carlow and Wexford.

Wicklow County Council, being a planning authority within the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) shall ensure that its development plan is consistent with the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy 2016 – 2035 (National Transport Authority)<sup>3</sup>.

The development plan shall include a 'Core Strategy' which shows that the development objectives in the development plan are consistent, as far as practicable, with national and regional development objectives set out in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region. The 'Core Strategy' is set out in Chapter 3 of this plan.

The written statement shall include a separate report which shows that the development objectives in the development plan are consistent, as far as practicable, with the conservation and protection of the environment. The Environmental Report (included as part of the development plan) forms part of the development plan process. It is considered that this report satisfies the statutory requirements in this regard.

With regard to climate change, Section 10(2)(n) of the Act requires that a development plan include objectives for the promotion of sustainable settlement and transport strategies in urban and rural areas, including the promotion of measures to reduce energy demand and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and to adapt to climate change, having regard to, in particular, the location, layout and design of new development. This requirement pervades all aspects of the plan, but is particularly addressed in Chapter 2.

## 1.2 Structure of the Plan

The plan consists of a written statement and plans that indicate the development objectives for County Wicklow.

**Volume 1** of the plan contains the primary written statement.

**Volume 2** contains:

- a) a set of 'town plans' for the following settlements: Ashford, Auhtrim, Avoca, Baltinglass, Carnew, Donard, Dunlavin, Laragh-Glendalough, Newcastle, Newtownmountkennedy, Rathdrum, Roundwood, Shillelagh and Tinahely;
- b) the land use zoning and key development objectives maps for the Local Area Plan settlements / areas of Bray Municipal District, Wicklow Town – Rathnew, Arklow and Blessington which have separate Local Area Plans (the written statement is published in a separate Local Area Plan) but form part of this County Development Plan;
- c) Local Planning Frameworks for the settlements / areas of Greystones – Delgany & Kilcoole, Arklow & Environs and Bray Municipal District (including Enniskerry & Kilmacanogue) when adopted, which will replace the current LAPs on adoption.

**Volume 3** contains the appendices to the plan that inform and clarify the broader strategic context of the written statement.

On adoption of this County Development Plan in 2022 **Local Area Plans** are in place for the following towns / areas: Bray Municipal District, Wicklow Town - Rathnew, Arklow, Greystones – Delgany & Kilcoole and Blessington and form part of this County Development Plan, which will be reviewed during the lifetime of this plan.

Local Area Plans are reviewed and made under Sections 18, 19 and 20 of the Planning and Development Act, and are subsidiary plans to this County Development Plan. The County Development Plan does provide the key parameters

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<sup>3</sup> Which was the applicable Strategy at the time of the drafting of this plan.

for these Local Area Plans such as the future population and housing targets and sets out the broad strategy for the future economic and social development of these towns. To ensure that the zoning and key development objectives of these LAPs clearly form part of this County Development Plan, the land use zoning and key development objectives maps are adopted by way of variation into the County Development Plan during the making of each LAP.

In light of the provisions of the Planning & Development Act 2024, from 2025 onwards 'Local Planning Frameworks' will be prepared and adopted as variations to this County Development Plan in lieu of existing Local Area Plans which will remain in effect until they are replaced.

### 1.3 Strategic Context

The Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 (CDP) is consistent with higher order strategic policy documents including 'Project Ireland 2040' the National Planning Framework (as revised), the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region, the National Transport Authority's 'Transportation Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035' and the National Climate Action Plan. The Plan is also informed by the Ministerial Guidelines as listed in Appendix 10. The strategic policies included in these documents have been crucial in informing the Development Plan Strategy, Core Strategy and development plan policy objectives.

Other national plans, policies or strategies that influence the objectives of the development plan are principally described and considered in Chapter 2 of this plan and thereafter throughout the plan as necessary where they relate to a particular topic or land use.

#### 1.3.1 UN Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainability underpins all planning policy. It entails meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Since 2015, Ireland has been a signatory to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. The UN Sustainable Development Goals set out the targets to achieve universal sustainability. There is a significant alignment between the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals and national, regional and county planning policy. The SDGs address the environmental, economic, and social challenges that the world needs to tackle by 2030 to ensure a sustainable future.



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



### 1.3.2 Climate Action

#### Climate Action Plan (CAP)

The Climate Action Plan outlines the critical nature of the climate change challenge and the current state of play across key sectors including Electricity, Transport, Built Environment, Industry and Agriculture. The Plan sets out clear 2050 targets for each of the sectors and the emissions savings that are expected. The Plan includes a commitment that 70% of electricity needs will come from renewable sources by 2050<sup>4</sup>.

#### Local Authority Climate Action Charter (2019)

The Local Authority Climate Action Charter is a key action in the Climate Action Plan and will ensure every local authority embeds decarbonisation, sustainable development and climate resilience into every aspect of the work they do. Wicklow County Council signed up to the Charter in December 2019 committing Wicklow to include policies on climate action.

The Charter acknowledges that local authorities will, with the support of Central Government:

- *'Be advocates for climate action in our own policies and practices, and in our many various dealings with citizens and to underpin this role through the corporate planning process;*
- *deliver a 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030 (on the 2009 baseline);*

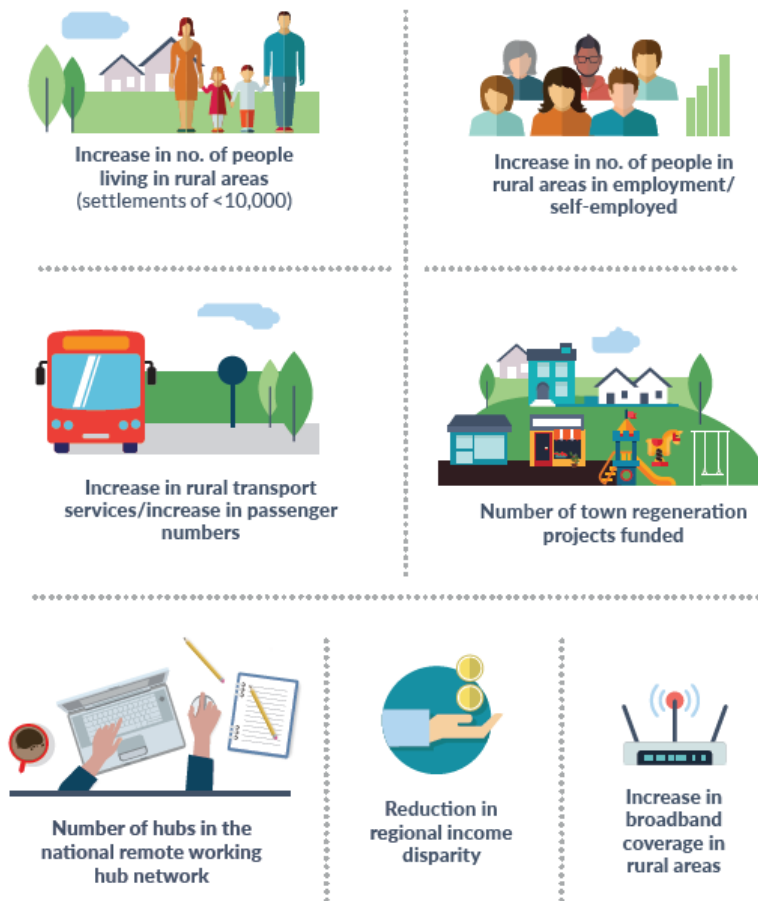
<sup>4</sup> During the making and varying of this County Development Plan, this CAP has been updated regularly, including updated targets for renewable energy, and these have been integrated into the final / varied plan where possible.

- ensure that policies and practices at local government level lead us towards low carbon pathways and put in place a process for carbon proofing major decisions, programmes and projects on a systematic basis, including investments in transport and energy infrastructure moving over time to a near zero carbon investment strategy;
- exercise our planning and regulatory roles to help improve climate outcomes in the wider community and beyond the public sector, by developing and implementing robust evidenced based policy and standards on climate action, through appropriate and relevant adaptation and mitigation measures’.

### 1.3.3 Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025

‘Our Rural Future’ provides a framework for the development of rural Ireland over the next five years. The Framework acknowledges that the country is heading into an era of unprecedented change as we recover from the impact of COVID-19, as we adapt to new ways of working, as the impact of Brexit presents itself and as we transition to a climate-neutral society. This change is considered a significant opportunity for rural areas.

The Framework identifies a number of key deliverables under headings including remote working, revitalising rural towns and villages, unique tourism, culture & heritage, agriculture, the marine & forestry and transitioning to a climate neutral economy. High level goals are identified as set out in the infographic below.



*Our Rural Future* focuses on the following thematic objectives:

- Optimising the opportunities for rural communities from high speed broadband.
- Supporting improved quality employment and career opportunities in rural areas.
- Assisting the regeneration, repopulation and development of rural towns and villages.
- Enhancing the participation, leadership and resilience of rural communities.
- Enhancing public services in rural areas.
- Supporting a Just Transition to a climate neutral economy.
- Supporting the sustainability of Agriculture, the Marine and Forestry.
- Supporting the sustainability of our island and coastal communities.
- Nurturing our culture and heritage.

#### 1.3.4 Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (NPF)

The National Planning Framework, published in February 2018, is a 20 year high level strategic plan to guide development and investment in Ireland. The companion to the NPF is the National Development Plan (NDP), a ten year strategy for public investment. Their joint publication as 'Project Ireland 2040' enables the alignment of investment with spatial planning.

The NPF identifies five key elements for delivering on the overall vision. These include developing a new region-focussed strategy for managing growth, linking the NPF with the National Development Plan, using state lands for certain strategic purposes, strengthened and more environmentally focussed planning at local level, and backing the framework up in law with the establishment of the Office of the Planning Regulator.

The purpose of the NPF is to enable all parts of Ireland to accommodate growth and change by facilitating a shift towards Ireland's regions and cities other than Dublin, while also recognising Dublin's ongoing key role. The NPF requires more balanced growth which also means more concentrated growth. The Framework recognises the importance of reversing population decline in rural towns and villages by encouraging new roles and functions for buildings and streets.

The NPF identifies planning as an established means to implement and integrate climate change objectives at local level and recognises that in order to meet our national targets, it will be necessary to make choices about how we balance growth with more sustainable approaches to development and land use. The NPF identifies ten National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs), a shared set of goals that will inform the content of the County Development Plan.

The NPF acknowledges that the physical format of urban development is one of our greatest national development challenges and identifies **compact growth** as the first **National Strategic Outcome**. This entails delivering a greater proportion of residential development and other development within the existing built-up area of settlements and moving away from a reliance on greenfield development to meet our development needs. Creating more compact development has been traditionally more difficult to achieve than a continuous process of pushing development onto greenfield locations. Specifically the NPF requires that 30% of all new homes be delivered within the existing built up footprint of settlements. This applies to all scales of settlements within the County, from large towns to villages. This will require making better use of underutilised land within the built up areas including infill and brownfield sites.

#### National Planning Framework – First Revision (April 2025)

The National Planning Framework revision process was approved and published by Government and the Oireachtas in April 2025. The revised NPF provides the basis for the review and updating of regional strategies and local authority development plans to reflect matters such as updated housing figures, projected jobs growth and renewable energy capacity allocations, including through the zoning of land for residential, employment and a range of other purposes.

**NPF Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements (July 2025).**

Under Section 28 of the Planning & Development Act, 2000 (as amended), the 'NPF Implementation: Housing Growth Requirements' were issued on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2025. The Guidelines provide new housing growth requirements to planning authorities in order to facilitate the revision and update of development plans in accordance with the NPF. The housing growth requirements provided replace the Section 28 "Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning" Guidelines issued in December 2020.



### 1.3.5 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region

Wicklow forms part of the Eastern and Midlands Region. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region was adopted on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2019 and is underpinned by three key principles – Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action and Economic Opportunity.

The RSES recognises that one of the key challenges facing the Region is the need for better alignment between population growth and location of residential development and employment, to create healthy and attractive places. The transition to a low carbon society is also identified as a challenge for the Region. Achieving sustainable development patterns that promote compact growth, reduce transport demand and encourage low carbon transport modes is identified as one of the primary areas of transition for the Region. The other areas of transition include sustainable transport systems, carbon storing and sequestering land uses and energy efficient buildings and renewable energy.

The RSES identifies 16 **Regional Strategic Outcomes** which are aligned with the NPF National Strategic outcomes.

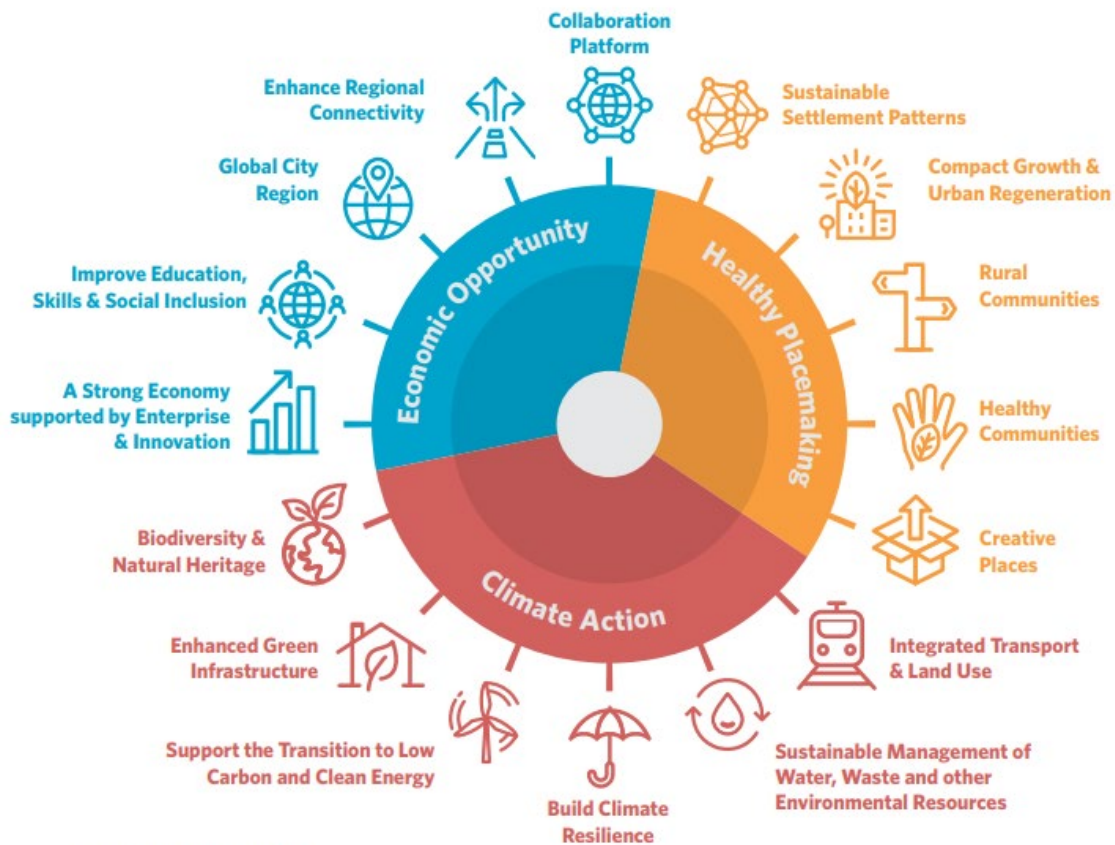


Figure 2.4 Regional Strategic Outcomes

#### KEY PRINCIPLES

##### Healthy Placemaking

To promote people’s quality of life through the creation of healthy and attractive places to live, work, visit and study in.

##### Climate Action

The need to enhance climate resilience and to accelerate a transition to a low carbon economy recognising the role of natural capital and ecosystem services in achieving this.

##### Economic Opportunity

To create the right conditions and opportunities for the region to realise sustained economic growth and employment that ensures good living standards for all.

## 1.4 Environmental Assessment

As part of the Development Plan preparation process, the Council is required to carry out a number of environmental assessments. These include Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA).

In addition, the plan has had regard to other relevant environmental legislation. Legislation is outlined in the relevant chapters of the plan and includes, but is not exclusive to, the Water Framework Directive, Floods Directive, Shellfish Directive, Waste Water Treatment Directive, the Wildlife Acts, National Monuments Acts and Waste Management Acts. It is considered that the development objectives in the plan are consistent, in as far as practicable, with the conservation and protection of the environment.

### 1.4.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is the process for evaluating at the earliest appropriate stage, the environmental consequences of implementing a plan. The purpose is to ensure that the environmental consequences of the plan are assessed both during the preparation and prior to adoption of the County Development Plan. Climate change is addressed as part of the SEA. The European Directive (2001/42/EC) on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment (the SEA Directive), was transposed into national legislation in Ireland by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435/2004) and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436/2004), as amended. Under Article 3 of the Directive, an environmental assessment shall be carried out for plans and programmes, including those related to land use planning.

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Wicklow CDP 2022-2028 has been carried out in compliance with the provisions of the SEA Directive and those regulations transposing the Directive into Irish Law. Lower levels of decision making and environmental assessment should consider the sensitivities identified in the SEA Environmental Report that accompanies the development plan.

The SEA has been informed by the findings of the Appropriate Assessment and the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. The SEA Environmental Report carried out for this plan is included in Appendix 6.

### 1.4.2 Habitats Directive - Appropriate Assessment

The Wicklow CDP 2022-2028 has been prepared in accordance with the Appropriate Assessment requirements under EU Habitats Directive (43/92/EEC) and the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and Section 177 of the Act. These Directives form the cornerstone of Europe's nature conservation policy, built around the European network of nature protection areas made up of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)<sup>5</sup> and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)<sup>6</sup>.

The Planning Authority is required to ensure that any plan or programme and any projects that arise therefrom, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, are subject to 'Appropriate Assessment' to ensure there are no likely significant effects on the integrity (defined by the structure and function) of any European site(s) and that the requirements of Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive are fully satisfied. Where a plan / project is likely to have a significant effect on a European site, or there is uncertainty with regard to effects, it shall be subject to a full Appropriate Assessment. The plan / project will proceed only after it has been ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site or where, in the absence of alternative solutions, the plan / project is deemed

<sup>5</sup> Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are sites designated under European Communities Directive 92/43/EEC known as the 'Habitats Directive'. This requires the conservation of important, rare or threatened habitats and species (not birds) across Europe.

<sup>6</sup> Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are sites designated under the European Communities Directive 79/409/EEC, known as the 'Birds Directive', to conserve the habitats of certain migratory or rare birds.

imperative for reasons of overriding public interest - all in accordance with the provisions of Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the EU Habitats Directive.

The Appropriate Assessment carried out for this plan is attached in Appendix 7.

### **1.4.3 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment**

The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) for the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 has been prepared in accordance with 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (2009). The SFRA is attached in Appendix 8.