



Blessington Local Area Plan Submission - Report

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Blessington LAP,
Administrative Officer,
Planning Department,
Wicklow County Council,
County buildings,
Station Road,
Wicklow Town,
Co. Wicklow
A67 FW96

SLR Project No.: 501.065452.00001

**RE: Blessington Local Area Plan -Submission to the Pre-Draft Issues Paper
Submission on behalf of Roadstone Ltd.**

SLR Consulting Ireland acts as planning and environmental advisors to Roadstone Ltd. of [REDACTED]. This submission relates to the Blessington Local Area Plan (hereafter referred to as "LAP") Pre-Draft Issues Paper Consultation, which concludes on the 3rd of April 2024.

1.0 Introduction

Blessington is the largest town on the western side of County Wicklow and is a Level 3, self-sustaining growth Town, with good transport links and capacity for growth. According to Census 2022, the population of Blessington has increased to 5,611 persons, a 10% increase on the 2011 census.

Roadstone Ltd. hold significant portions of strategic landbanks within the LAP area, as follows:

1. In the north-western portion of the LAP area, lands in the townlands of Blessington Demesne, Dillonsdown and Deerpark, are accessed by the N81 national secondary road.

The land use zonings attached to these lands are 'quarry lands', 'employment use', 'Glen Ding Conservation and Amenity Zone' and 'Agriculture Lands'.

Of importance the NRDO indicative N81 Route and corridor traverses these lands. There are also a number of indicative road lines and indicative pedestrian and cycle routes shown traversing the subject lands within the LAP zoning map. See Figure 1 below.

2. Within the eastern portion of the LAP area, in the townland of Haylands, accessed by the N81 national secondary road, which connects Blessington to Dublin City Centre to the north (c.27km) and Kilbride Road linking Blessington with the wider hinterland.

These lands are included under 'Action Area 4 – Lands at Doran's Pit', which states that the subject lands shall provide for mixed residential development, a local neighbourhood centre and active open space areas. A portion of these lands are also located outside the eastern boundary of Action Area 4 and are currently zoned 'employment use'. See Figure 1 below.

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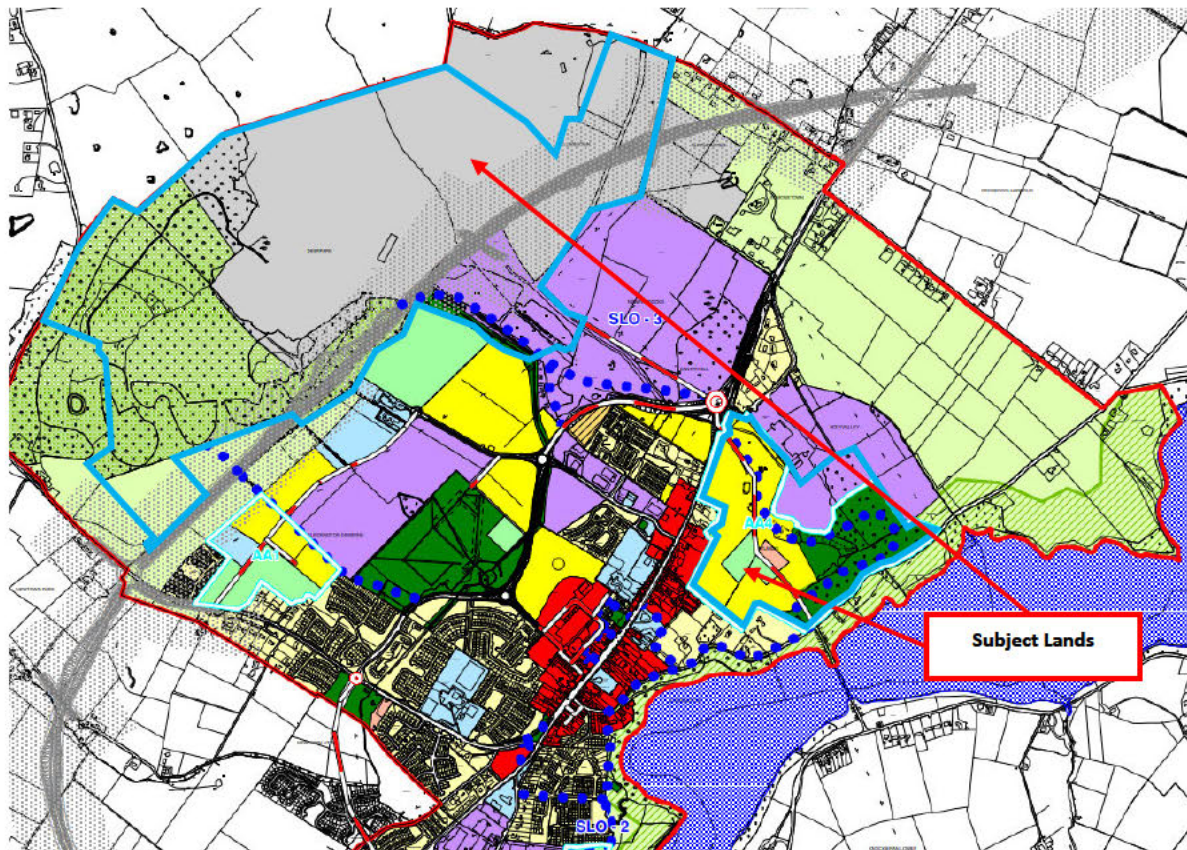


Figure 1: Lands in Ownership outlined in Blue

2.0 Basis of this Submission

2.1 Current Development Plan Policies

2.1.1 Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028

The Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 (CDP) came into effect on the 23rd of October 2022.

Within the Plan, Blessington is a key Town for population growth, economic growth and strategic employment development. The targeted population growth rate of Blessington is 25%-30%.

The N81 national secondary road passes directly through Blessington town centre. It is intended to realign the current route of the N81 to the west of the town between Tallaght and Hollywood Cross. In the short term, the priority shall be the completion of the partly constructed Blessington Inner Relief Road (BIRR) in conjunction with Kildare County Council.

The following provides an outline of the key policies and objectives within the CDP that are considered relevant to this submission.

2.1.1.1 Preparation of the LAP

CPO 4.8 To prepare new local plans for the following areas during the lifetime of this development plan: Bray Municipal District, Wicklow-Rathnew, Arklow, Greystones-Delgany and Kilcoole, Blessington.



2.1.1.2 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.*

Blessington: *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. 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.*

2.1.1.3 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.*

2.1.1.4 Residential Development

CPO 6.1 *New housing development shall be required to locate on suitably zoned or designated land in settlements and will only be considered in the open countryside when it is for the provision of a rural dwelling for those with a demonstrable housing social or economic need to live in the open countryside.*

2.1.1.5 Economic Development

CPO 9.1 *To support all forms of employment creation, especially where this can mitigate long distance commuting, subject to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and compliance with all other objectives of this plan. Strategic employment development will be directed into the towns of Bray, Wicklow-Rathnew, Arklow, Greystones and Blessington.*

2.1.1.6 Extractive Industry

CPO 9.52 *“To support and facilitate the exploitation of County Wicklow’s natural aggregate resources in a manner, which does not unduly impinge on the environmental quality, and the visual and residential amenity of an area.”*

2.1.1.7 Tourism & Recreation

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

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



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

2.1.1.8 Public Transport

CPO 12.21 *To promote the development of transport interchanges and ‘nodes’ where a number of transport types can interchange with ease. In particular: to promote the Luas extension from City West / Tallaght to Blessington.*

CPO 12.44 *To support and drive the development and completion of the Blessington Inner Relief Road (in consultation with Kildare County Council) and upon completion, to significantly improve pedestrian and cycling infrastructure on Blessington Main Street and surrounding town centre local road network.*

CPO 12.47 *To improve regional road links between Wicklow and other counties, in particular the Blessington to Naas route and routes from Dunlavin and Baltinglass to the M9/N9.*

2.1.1.9 Green Infrastructure

CPO 18.4 *To facilitate the development and enhancement of suitable access to and connectivity between areas of interest for residents, wildlife and biodiversity, with focus on promoting river corridors, European sites, nature reserves and other distinctive landscapes as focal features for linkages between natural, semi natural and formalised green spaces where feasible and ensuring that there is no adverse impact (directly, indirectly or cumulatively) on the conservation objectives of European sites.*

2.1.2 Blessington Local Area Plan 2013-2019

The Blessington Local Area Plan 2012-2019 came into effect on the 11th of January 2013. It is the purpose of this Plan to establish a framework for the planned, co-ordinated and sustainable development of Blessington. The aim of the Plan is to enhance and facilitate the balancing of economic, social and environmental infrastructure in order to maintain and develop a high quality of life without compromising the protection of the environment and the needs of future generations.

Roadstone Ltd. hold a significant portion of strategic landbank within the LAP area, as described earlier on page 1 of this submission.

With respect to these lands a number of key policies and objectives are of relevance:

2.1.2.1 Extractive Industry

Specific Local Objective 3: *These lands located within the Roadstone Quarry to the west of the N81 shall be developed as a comprehensive (not piecemeal) integrated scheme providing for low density employment use, alongside the provision of an open public amenity/nature park, capable of facilitating pedestrian and cycle access to the Glending Woods from the N81 and the Blessington Inner Relief Road. The proposed employment units within this area shall be designed and finished in a manner capable of fully integrating into the surroundings of the amenity lands, whilst also providing passive supervision of surrounding walks and cycle routes. A comprehensive scheme outlining the design and layout of this scheme will be required which shall include a detailed phasing programme.*

EX – Extractive Industry *To provide for extraction / quarrying and associated activities including processing of extracted materials and land restoration.*



2.1.2.2 Economic Development

E1 *To facilitate the development of employment generating activities on suitably zoned lands within Blessington in accordance with the objectives and development standards set out in the County Development Plan.*

E5 *To require the design and layout of employment lands located at Blessington Demesne to provide for a pedestrian walkway (linked to the proposed public park) along the southern boundary, adjoining Action Area 1.*

2.1.2.3 Tourism

T1 *To promote and facilitate improvements to tourism and recreation infrastructure in the Blessington area.*

T2 *To improve, as funding allows, the principle access routes and junctions linking Blessington town centre to surrounding tourist attractions such as the lakeshore and its associated villages, the Wicklow Mountains, Russborough House and Glen Ding.*

T4 *To require new developments in proximity to the reservoir / Glen Ding (or between the town centre and these areas) to provide / fund the development of new roads, and pedestrian / cycle linkages between the development and the existing town centre (generally as shown on Figure 5.1 below).*

2.1.2.4 Roads and Infrastructure

S6 *To facilitate the N81 (Tallaght to Hollywood) re-alignment and to work with the NRA road design office to ensure that amenity routes from the town centre to Glen Ding are facilitated in the final design of the road. Any development within the preferred route corridor will be assessed for acceptability having regard to potential affects on the future viability of the proposed road.*

2.1.2.5 Mixed Development

The Lands are included under 'Action Area 4 – Lands at Doran's Pit' within this LAP which states that the subject lands shall provide for mixed residential development, a local neighbourhood centre and active open space areas. A portion of these lands are also located outside the eastern boundary of the Action Area 4 and are currently zoned employment. See Figure 1 above.

Section 9 of the Blessington Local Area Plan Written Statement 2013 – 2019 highlights the requirement to prepare an Action Area Plan for Action Area 4 – Lands at Doran's Pit. Separate applications for sections of each Action Area will not be considered until an overall Action Area Plan has been agreed in writing with the Planning Authority unless it can be shown that any application will not undermine the achievement of the overall objectives for that Action Area.

As highlighted in the Blessington LAP, the development of this area offers significant opportunity to link the N81 directly to the L-4371 (Kilbride Road) and the L-4372 (Blessington Bridge). The Blessington LAP further states that 'no residential development shall take place until a programme for the delivery and completion of this road from the N81 to the L-4371 has been agreed with the Planning and Roads Sections of Wicklow County Council'. The provision of a continuous footpath along the L-4372 from Blessington Bridge to the subject lands will also be required.



The residential element of the Action Area shall be developed in 3 phases which shall be tied in with the provision of the Active Open Space lands and the local neighbourhood centre / community lands as follows:

- Phase 1 shall provide for a maximum of 250 residential units alongside the delivery of an active open space area measuring a minimum of 1ha. The type, form and layout of this active open space area shall be subject to agreement with the Planning, Community and Enterprise Sections of Wicklow County Council.

- The commencement of any further phases shall be contingent on the completion and opening of the N81 to L-4371 link road

- Phase 2 shall comprise the provision of a maximum of a further 100 residential units which shall be developed alongside the delivery of a passive open space area / casual play area and the local community/neighbourhood centre area both measuring a minimum of 0.5ha. The type, form and layout of any such open space shall be subject to agreement with the Planning, Community and Enterprise section of Wicklow County Council.

- A neighbourhood centre including community facilities, of scale commensurate with the needs of the future population of the Action Area shall be provided on a site of 0.5ha. This local neighbourhood centre shall adjoin the active open space area and provide for a small anchor retail unit alongside smaller local shops and services including non-retail and professional services. The community element of this zoning shall be provided in accordance with the requirements of the Planning, Community and Enterprise section of Wicklow County Council.

- Phase 3 shall comprise of the provision of a maximum of 126 units which shall be developed in conjunction with the delivery of a lakeside open park and amenity area measuring 10.8ha. Units within this phase shall only be occupied upon completion of the parkland area. This parkland shall provide sufficient car parking and open onto the lake to the east. The proposed lakeside park area shall provide for extensive hard and soft landscaping to be agreed with the Planning, Heritage and Community and Enterprise Sections of Wicklow County Council.

E4 *To encourage the development of significant new employment zones at - Downshire demesne lands (part of permitted 'Cookehill' development) - Roadstone - Haylands / Mart site in accordance with the detailed requirements set out in Section 10 of this plan.*

3.0 Pre-Draft Issues Paper

The Pre-Draft Issues Paper published indicates that the 'big picture strategy' for Blessington focuses on three over-arching themes that will inform and shape the Blessington Local Area Plan, these are:

1. "Health Place-making"
2. "Climate Action"
3. "Economic Opportunity".

In relation to the subject lands, Roadstone Ltd. request that the existing use and zoning on the subject lands, is continued within the new Blessington Local Area Plan.

The following areas are considered important in ensuring that existing and any future proposed developments on these lands are feasible under the Blessington LAP:



Self-Sustaining Growth Town: To retain the existing zoning on the subject lands, which are strategically located within the development boundary and will contribute to compact growth, economic development and employment growth within the LAP area.

Economic Development / Secure Supply of Aggregates: To ensure the LAP continues to recognise the economic importance of all quarry lands in securing the supply of sand & gravel aggregates locally and nationally. The importance of the extractive industries to the wider economy and the need to protect the operations of working quarries and proven aggregate resources is firmly established in national, regional and local planning policy (e.g. refer to the strategic objective for the Extractive Industry in the Wicklow CDP 2022-2028 in Section 2.1.1.6 above).

The extractive industry provides the necessary raw materials for the majority of building and infrastructure development in Ireland, including roads, motorways, homes, schools, hospitals, colleges, factories, water and sewerage systems, power stations, railways and sporting stadia. The construction of such infrastructure is heavily dependent on the supply of concrete and other building materials made from aggregates, refer to the *Essential Aggregates – Providing for Irelands Needs to 20204 (Irish Concrete Federation, 2019)* for further details, copy enclosed with this submission.

Aggregate extraction can only take place where suitable resources such as the sand & gravel deposits at Blessington exist; i.e. they are a ‘tied’ resource. It is considered, therefore, that planning policies / landuse planning should be carefully constructed to avoid adverse effects on aggregate resources and the related extractive industries and added-value production that are essential for our built environment, infrastructure and future economic development.

Movement – The completion of the Blessington Inner Relief Road and the realignment of the N81 to the west of the Town as a matter of priority to improve traffic flows and allow for sustainable growth of the town in line with the Wicklow CDP.

Water Services Infrastructure and Utilities -The continued provision, operation and improvement of water, waste, energy and telecommunications services infrastructure to ensure economic growth can be achieved over the lifetime of the Plan.

4.0 Concluding Remarks

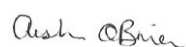
Roadstone Ltd. are supportive of Wicklow County Council and its work to further a spatial planning framework for the future growth of Blessington to develop a self-sustaining growth Town.

Roadstone Ltd. as landholders of a strategic landbank within the LAP, would welcome the opportunity to participate in further consultations with the County Council as work on the draft Local Area Plan is progressed. They look forward to engaging further with Wicklow County Council in due course.

In the meantime, should you have any queries on the above submission, or wish to discuss any matter further, please to not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours faithfully

SLR Consulting Ireland



Aislinn O'Brien

Technical Director Planning

Cc. Mr. J. Glynn / Mr. S. Geraghty (Roadstone Ltd.).

