



# Blessington Local Area Plan Submission - Report

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## File

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## Foreword:

Blessington & District Forum is a community-based voluntary body.

The Forum is a 32 member body representing Blessington and the surrounding area, and facilitates all matters in relation to community and societal development, planning, town development, and environmental issues in cooperation with Wicklow County Council and other Statutory Bodies. Established in 2001, Blessington & District Forum is the united community body for the area.

The contents of this submission are made up of the feedback from members of the Forum; members of the community from a workshop held on March 12<sup>th</sup>, through online and in person feedback received and has been informed through previous consultations and submissions made by the body.

The submission aims to capture the common themes, and to present these to WCC for consideration in the Local Area Plan.

Group Website: <http://www.blessington.ie>

Town Centre First Plan 2023: <https://tinyurl.com/BlessingtonTCF2023>

Town Health Check 2021: <https://tinyurl.com/TownHealthCheck2021>

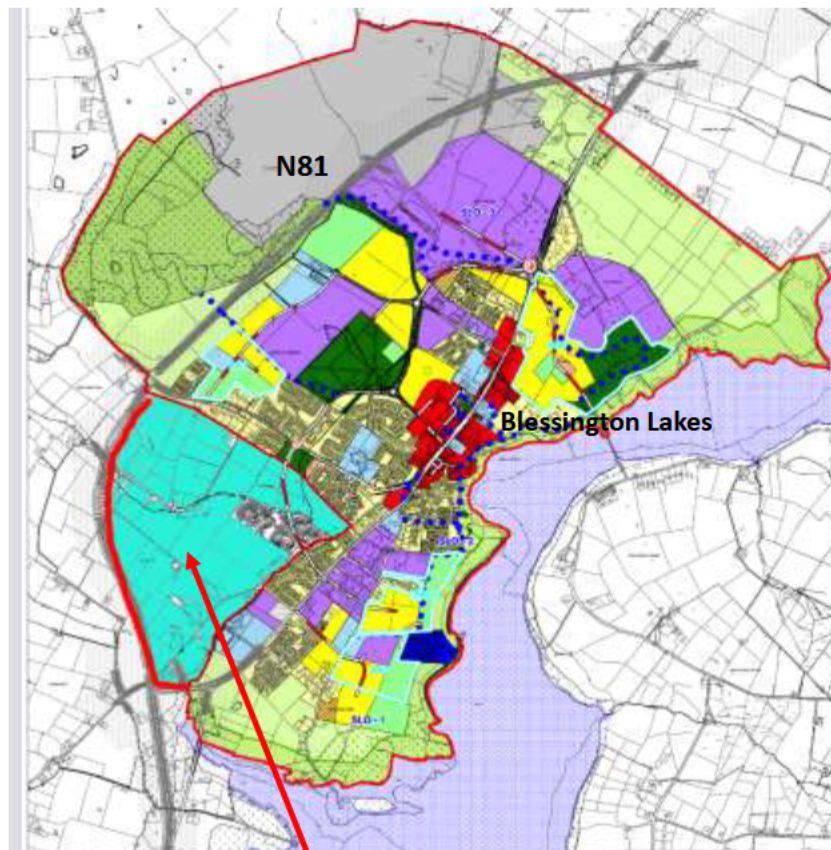
Town Health Check 2019: <https://tinyurl.com/HealthCheck2019>

Blessington Access Report: <https://tinyurl.com/BlessingtonAccessibilityReport>

Age Friendly Walkabout: <https://tinyurl.com/AgeFriendlyWalkabout>

## COMPACT GROWTH – HOUSING – POPULATION GROWTH

1. Blessington is categorised as a medium-growth town. However, it is important to realise that Blessington is effectively restrained by Blessington Lakes, to the east, the proposed route of the new N81 national route – Hollywood Cross to Tallaght – as shown below, to the west, and numerous working or old quarries to the north-east, all in Co. Kildare. Consequently, there is little or no scope for town expansion outside of its existing boundaries.



2. Expansion of the town to the north along the existing N81 should be not be considered in order to avoid linear sprawl along the N81 and to preserve the rural aspect and amenity of the town.
3. However, the boundary to the southwest – Kilmalum Road to 'new' N81 – should be extended to provide additional land for possible zoning as Housing/Industrial/Community etc.
4. All new development should take place within these revised boundaries. This requires that proper and formal working relationship between KCC and WCC are put in place in respect of these contiguous lands. There should be full use of Section 48 in respect of public infrastructure costs arising from KCC decisions and their impact on public infrastructure in Blessington – water, sewage, roads, schools.

5. It is suggested that the population growth figures detailed in the County Development Plan are incorrect and planning decisions should not be based on these. They need to be confirmed based on recent housing growth, existing planning approvals, and predicted housing demand in the Greater Dublin Area.
6. There should be no new housing approvals until all existing approvals are activated.
7. There is sufficient land currently zoned for housing within the Blessington area – but see #3 above. Consequently, consideration should be given to rezoning some 'Housing' and/or 'Industrial' areas to Community Use (Schools, for example)
8. Zoning, supported by appropriate incentives, must encourage diverse retail and commercial use, especially on Main Street.
9. The planning of the town must be cognisant of the distance between housing and existing or new schools in order to minimise car traffic.
10. The planning of the town must be cognisant of the distance between housing and retail outlets in order to minimise car traffic.

# REGENERATION OF COMMUNITIES & PLACES – HEALTHY PLACEMAKING – URBAN DESIGN – OPPORTUNITY SITES

## > What urban design standards should apply in Blessington?

The main principles to be taken into consideration should be:

- 1) Character; creating a sense of place and history.
- 2) Context; a place that has a clear image and is easy to understand
- 3) Quality of the public realm; a place with public spaces and routes that are lively and pleasant to use.
- 4) Ease of movement; connectivity and permeability in a place that is easy to get to and move through
- 5) Adaptability; a place that can change easily, with flexible uses
- 6) Creativity; a town that fosters and thrives on creativity.
- 7) Diversity; a place with variety and mixed uses, and ease of choice.
- 8) Sustainability; a town that explores, develops and supports a sustainable model for all.

### **Main Street**

- Change to parallel parking bays
- Transient traffic to be routed from the main street via the Inner Relief Road
- The wider footpaths to be utilised and quality to be improved.
- Additional seating to be added
- Creation of spill out spaces for businesses such as small parklets
- Introduction of street trees and green areas
- The introduction of SuDS
- The underground of cabling
- The removal of clutter and improvements to existing street furniture
- The introduction of a colour palette
- The development of a Shop front strategy and Business supports for improvements
- The removal of poor signage on buildings, and replacement with more suitable, and some level of adherence to the fact Blessington is an ACA by WCC when planning is being granted.
- The development of a strategy to enhance the public realm.

### **Blessington Square**

- Maximise the potential of this area, by removing car parking, introducing a farmers market, adding improved greenery, and making it a people friendly space with additional seating, and sympathetic lighting.

## **Traffic, Parking and Park & Ride Facility**

- A need exists for the development of a park and ride facility for Blessington. The location should be close to the town, and should be serviced by bus routes and secure. In turn, this would remove traffic and parking from the Main St.
- The introduction of pay parking to discourage all day parking in the main street, and to in turn encourage the use of a serviced park and ride facility.
- Reduce traffic speeds in the town centre
- A change to parallel parking bays on the main street
- Transient traffic to be routed from the main street via the Inner Relief Road

## **> Where do you see potential to enhance the public realm in Blessington?**

- Adherence to the principles of an ACA and enforced by WCC Planning Dept.
- Development of a Shop Front Strategy and Grant Supports for Businesses
- Pedestrianization of key areas of the town centre
- Development of shared spaces, with priority for predestinations
- Development of linkages from the Main street to other parts of the town
- Improved public seating
- Introduction of free public WIFI
- Development and implementation of Green areas in the public realm
- Making Blessington an accessible town for all, and a place to stop, dine and shop, at the moment Blessington isn't inviting to the passer by.
- Open up Blessington to the lake side with the introduction of some water front facilities within the town.
- Improved and appropriate signage for directions and local attractions.

## **> Are there any areas/ vacant buildings you would like to see redeveloped/regenerated?**

### **What uses and design would you like to see?**

- There are plenty of vacant and derelict and unused sites in Blessington, many hidden by simple maintenance by local community groups such as Tidy Towns;
  - ❖ Downshire House Hotel
  - ❖ Ulster Bank
  - ❖ Old Health Centre
  - ❖ Numerous shops, businesses and houses along the main street
  - ❖ New Town Centre multi storey car park, and empty retail units

- Most of these sites could be redeveloped as mix use, with active frontage, accommodation on level one, and the creation of urban green areas.
- Suggestions include, the Greenway Hub at the Old Health Centre, the development of the Ulster Bank as both a commercial and accommodation building, the completion of previously approved plans for an old persons facility at the Downshire Hotel etc..

### > Other Suggestions

- Cycle Lanes required in the town to improve safety and to promote and encourage cycling as an option for all in the community. Extend the town park into Glen Forest
- Discourage employee parking on the main street, to free up spaces.
- The introduction of a free electric bus scheme within the town, and possibly extending into the local towns and villages to encourage sustainable transport.
- The introduction of dog litter bins in the town
- The consideration of one way systems for accessing into and navigating through the town
- The creation of a facility similar to the Carnew Community Care model. This would allow older people to move from large house into smaller purpose built units, within a serviced and supported community, in turn allowing for housing stock to be sold to new buyers.

Blessington ACA: <https://tinyurl.com/Blessington-ACA>

# ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY – TOURISM, SHOPS, SERVICES, and COMMUNITY FACILITIES

*'Vision':*

*Invest in our young people, and you invest in your town. We need to future proof our town.*

## Summary:

### 1. Employment opportunities

- Main street attracts small local businesses, and the feeling is that it should remain this way and that larger franchise do not overtake a small town.
- To increase employment footfall needs to increase and the issue of parking. Suggested solution is the introduction of paid parking along the main street with a 1–2-hour free parking limit. And provide better signage and open up the car park on Kilbride Road. The feeling is it is too isolated.
- Increase the industry in the town and utilize the empty buildings and units. The suggested solution is to contact IDA and Enterprise Ireland and work with them to attract industry thus creating more employment and increase revenue into the local economy which in turn could be used to increase community services and supports.
- Derelict buildings is a major issue, the suggested solution hold the Local Authority accountable for not enacting The **Derelict Sites Act, 1990** (as amended by the Planning and Development Act, 2000) provides that if an objection is made to the proposed compulsory acquisition of a derelict site and the objection is not withdrawn, the derelict site shall not be acquired compulsorily by the local authority without the consent of An Bord Pleanála
- Council to promote working hubs

### 2. Community Amenities/ Education

- We need to move from just zoning land to putting the services into the areas that are zoned. We have seen too much of this with the last LAP.
- The need exists for a multi-Purpose facility that can host a wide range of activities from soccer, general athletics, rugby and sports facility for squash, classes, gym, and including an indoor pool. The suggested solution area is identified as already zoned Community & Education, and is located near the Kare facility and would be suitable for a full 400m permeable athletics track and rugby pitches.



- Rezone Doran's pit area to community use to create a Community Centre and Multi-Purpose facility big enough for all.
- The soccer clubs' priority is the provision of playing surfaces, and an all-weather pitch at Burgage would go some way towards this need. Once again there is a need to utilize land that is already zoned for such purposes at Burgage.
- The existing playground at Oak Drive and the general paths within the town etc. are not suitable for people with disabilities, and the suggested solution is that Wicklow Co. Co. to put the measures in place that were identified in the access audit delivered in partner with WCC and Disability Federation Ireland.
- For young people, there is an increased anti-social behavior and a drugs issue in the town. The need for a Community Garda and Youth work provision exists and must be implemented; however the addition of a volunteer model of peer-based work with junior leadership programmes can work in parallel to help address some issues.
- The Youth Reach programme is at full capacity and children as young as 14 looking to enter the programme as secondary school does not meet their needs.
- We see further delays in the new Blessington Community College (new). This is further pushed out without any justification. We need WCC as a body to pressure the need to address this locally. The young people in our community deserve better from the Dept. of Education, WCC and Government.

### **3. Open Spaces**

- Blessington Park is a very welcome addition to the town. Could this be extended, and the industry land rezoned to amenities. In doing so, we could create natural connection to Glending Forest, with increased open spaces that are safe and secure.
- Basketball Courts. Is it possible to alter the design of the planned tennis courts planned for the new town park, to add basketball hoops and to then create a dual usage court.
- There is a disconnect between Blessington and the Greenway, Glending Forest and the Lakes. We need to look at potential ways in which natural linkages can occur. Can some water front facilities be created to facilitate, swimming, sailing, rowing, fishing, disability fishing area etc maybe be near the Patrick's Well (off the Kilbride Rd), and a case to be made for bike hire shops in the town, and not on the outskirts.

- A real need exists for a much larger Skate Park and upgraded Playground in the town. The existing facilities were too small when originally built, and did not consider the needs of a growing town.
- A puppy (dog) park should be developed which would attract tourist and day trippers to the town, it would also reduce issues with dog fouling around the local area. The facility in Arklow is doing really well, and previously plans to add such a park in Blessington at Burgage under a T&VR programme were halted by WCC. Can this be revisited and a plan out in place to deliver a puppy park on WCC lands?

#### 4. Tourism

- 'Pedestrianisation' should be introduced to the town, particularly around the 'Square'. This action would also facilitate the movement of people to local shops and businesses.
- An improved 'One-Way' system should also be considered to facilitate traffic flow in and around the town square for ease of access to shops and businesses, and for safety.
- The Blessington e-Greenway is to be welcomed but with the additional major influx of tourists (locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally) that is anticipated, more car parking locations will have to be established. However, the parking on Main Street should become linear and cycle lanes introduced on both sides. There is a great need for the cycle lanes owing to the amount of sporting/touring cyclists that come to the town all year round. Bike parking should also be provided. Car parking sites off the main street and within the local area need to be planned for.
- The provision of B&B and other types of accommodation should also be encouraged and stimulated by way of enterprise incentives and grants.
- Any 'derelict' premises on Main Street should be prioritised for refurbishment by encouraging businesses to occupy them through grants etc.
- A 'Farmers' Market' could be fostered and established in the Town Centre in the Square, and would run on a regular basis, with appropriate facilities provided by and owned by the Municipal District.
- The Blessington Lakes should be opened up and utilised more. National and international regattas could be held to attract regional, national and international competitors and tourists. The local army camp might be encouraged to have an annual military tattoo. The introduction of a funded water taxi. All seen as options worth considering and pursuing.

## 5. Other

- Graveyard. Is the addition of a cremation wall to free up space a possibility?
- Intergenerational Activities. A need exists to explore the possibility where social engagements and interactions exist, bringing together younger and older generations for a common purpose. Family Support Centers, cooking, gardening, or playing an instrument are just a few simple examples of intergenerational activities. Intergenerational Practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contributes to building more cohesive communities
- A need for (safe) hangs out spaces for younger people in the local community exists and the LAP should look to address this need.

# HERITAGE - BIODIVERSITY - GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE - CLIMATE ACTION – ENERGY

## Summary:

### 1. Community Climate Change, Biodiversity & Heritage Improvements:

- Enhance Green Spaces in New Developments: As new areas are developed, prioritize creating green spaces. These could be parks, gardens, or natural areas that benefit both residents and the environment.
- Preserve Existing Hedgerows and Trees: The recent removal of trees in the local area highlights the need for better protection. Hedgerows, which provide habitat for wildlife, should be maintained rather than cut down.
- Develop a Proactive Non-Derelict Policy: Prevent buildings from falling into disrepair. Implement policies that encourage maintenance and prevent dereliction.
- Improve Cycling Infrastructure and Pedestrian Crossings: Make Blessington safer and more accessible for pedestrians and cyclists. Safe routes to schools and convenient crossings are essential.
- Encourage Sustainable Practices and Flood Prevention: Design new developments with flood prevention in mind and micro-generation of solar power considered. Consider sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) and minimize non-soakage areas.

### 2. Green Spaces and Heritage:

- Rezone Areas for Community Use: Allocate land from the new park to Glending specifically for community purposes. This could include recreational spaces, gardens, allotments, or cultural sites.
- Create a Large Green Space Linked to Existing Ruins: Rezone lands near planned town park to create a large green space from ring road to the Glending Woods. Imagine a botanical garden or a serene area connected to historical ruins for heritage appreciation.
- Protect Old Trees, the Downshire Hotel and the Ulster Bank: the Main Street's old trees should be preserved. The Downshire Hotel, Ulster Bank along with other landmarks requires safeguarding against dereliction.
- Develop the Blessington Greenway: The greenway project will significantly benefit the town, providing recreational opportunities and attracting visitors.
- Connecting Glending Woods: Linking Glending Woods to Blessington enhances access to nature and promotes biodiversity.

### 3. Nature and Climate:

- **Prioritize Biodiversity and Accessible Pathways:** The world is at a crucial point for biodiversity. Easy wins involve creating pathways to natural areas like Glending, allowing people to connect with nature.
- **Promote Blessington's Benefits:** Signage, communication policies, and the creation of a tourism plan can highlight the town's attractions, including Glending Woods, Dempsey's Lane, and the Greenway.
- **Encourage Active Transportation:** Reduce car dependency by encouraging walking and cycling within the town, or redirecting traffic. Improve existing bus routes such as the 65, and provide park & ride facilities within the town and not outside the town as previously planned for.
- **Consider Industry Opportunities:** Leveraging climate initiatives could attract industry to Blessington. Zone areas for large businesses.
- **Evaluate Street Lighting Practices:** Determine whether street lighting should remain on continuously or if there are more efficient options.

### 4. Heritage:

- The introduction of sympathetic and suitably placed signage around the town, not only for people to know how to locate places around the town itself but how to get to local villages in the district, the lake (drive). Such signage has been requested by various bodies, individuals etc on numerous occasions over the last 15 to 20 years but to no avail.
- The establishment of 'Storyboards' telling the colloquial history of local places (Glen Ding, St Patrick's Well etc) buildings (Credit Union, former Ulster Bank, former Downshire Hotel, the former Toll House etc). These 'Storyboards' would set out the rich heritage of the town and surrounding area.
- Suggestion that a new 'Way' could be established as originating in the town and proceeding to the Seefin Passage Tomb, thus acquainting walking and or cycling tourists with district's culture and heritage.
- A need exists to have a dedicated 'Civic' type building in Blessington that will be used to display the heritage of the town and district, archaeology, photographic history, folklore, and indeed artefacts from the former tramline and crafts etc.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE – SUSTAINABLE MOVEMENT - TRANSPORT**

### **> What are the key transport and movement issues affecting residents, workers and visitors?**

- A lack of buses and frequency is an issue. The need of a direct bus link to Tallaght would be of some use as it would extend connectivity options. There exists a need for a number direct bus services into the City Centre with just Blessington as a pick up point and then express to the City Centre.
- Bus stop pull in areas on the way into the town are not safe as they have no place to pull in off the main road and that should be looked at to improve safety for all road users.
- Not enough shelters at bus stops.
- A need exists for improved and regular services into Naas (for connectivity options) and to Maynooth for University Students.
- A Park and Ride facility is required. The existence of such a facility at a suitably serviced location would alleviate traffic and parking in the town. A need for off street parking outside of the town also exists.
- The idea of paid parking, with free parking for up to two hours and then paid parking might be of benefit to stopping people parking their cars and leaving them all day, and through the weekend, directly impacting local businesses.
- The car park down at the old health centre is rarely used and it isn't well known about, and needs proper signage.
- Road quality and safety should a priority, the amount of trucks coming into the town at speed and shedding debris as a result of not covering loads, results in roads ad paths that are dangerous to walk or run on.
- On development of the Inner Relief Road, it is suggested that trucks should be required to make use of the ring road instead of the main street through the town.

### **> How can we make the towns a safer, friendlier place for pedestrians and cyclists?**

- Pedestrian crossings are limited; and more are needed, near Texaco and the Further Education Centre. If pedestrian crossings are not possible, then maybe zebra crossings might be an option.

- Cycle Lanes are a necessity, however changes should be made in parallel to improved and changed parking practices, with safety as a primary indicator. The introduction of a continuous cycle lane around the town would be of benefit and encourage more people to cycle to shops, school etc
- Traffic lights should be considered for the following areas; AIB crossing the Kilbride Rd, the junction of Aldi and Maxol and at Texaco (alternatively a pedestrian crossing or lights at the Burgage roundabout).

**> What are the issues to overcome in moving from the private car to public transport or walking and cycling?**

- The development and completion of the Inner Relief Road is paramount to successfully altering the flow of traffic and improving safety in the town centre.

**> Are there any services infrastructure issues in the area?**

- The development of the inner relief road needs to happen as soon as possible, and without any further delays.
- Not enough disabled and age friendly car spaces in the town centre.
- The quality of foot paths, particularly around the AIB, Butchers and the Arch has a lot of surface water just sitting there and not draining, this should be remedied. Existing perpendicular parking also results in vehicles encroaching into the foot path at a number of locations in the town. Recommendations made in the Access Audit delivered in partnership with WCC and Disability Ireland need to be implemented.

**> Infrastructure?**

- Lighting on side roads needs to be improved, particularly around Burgage, the Cemetery and the Kilmalum Road. Any new lighting should be sympathetic to nature and climate change, and a determination made whether street lighting should remain on continuously or if there are more efficient options to switch off during the early morning hours.

- The town's waste and water systems are a concern, and future capacity for the development of Blessington is a concern. The zoning of land and planning of housing and industry need to cognisant to the available capacities when decisions are being made.
- All cables for ESB, phone lines etc should all be underground with few exceptions.
- The Kildare boundary remains a threat. It is suggested that WCC take a more active approach to zoning in Kildare, and that for all future developments in Kildare that KCC should have to make a contribution to WCC in respect of water, waste services and community facilities.