



# Blessington Local Area Plan Submission - Report

<b>Who are you:</b>	Private Individual
<b>Name:</b>	Paul Lowry
<b>Email Address:</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Reference:</b>	BLESSLAP-023813
<b>Submission Made</b>	April 3, 2024 2:39 AM

**Topic**

Compact Growth - Housing - Population Growth

**Submission**

See attached

**Topic**

Regeneration of Communities & Places - Healthy Placemaking - Urban Design - Opportunity Sites in Blessington

**Submission**

See attached

**Topic**

Heritage - Biodiversity- Green infrastructure- Climate Action- Energy

**Submission**

See attached

**Topic**

Infrastructure - Sustainable Movement - Transportation

**Submission**

See attached

**File**

Blessington Local Area Plan Submission Paul Lowry.docx, 5.29MB

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Infrastructure / Green Space</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Housing / Public Amenities</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Industry / Community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Improvement #1 : Paths</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Improvement #2 : Town Centre</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Improvement #3 : Crossings</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Improvement #4 : Roundabouts</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Improvement #5 : Amenities</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Q&amp;A</b>	<b>13</b>

## Introduction

I believe that when growing a town, it is critical to seek balance between infrastructure and green space, housing and amenity, industry and community; and that the way to achieve that balance is to connect them, literally, so that all contribute to each other; and I believe Blessington is ideally suited to grow in a manner that can achieve that balance.

I develop these ideas below, and include pictures, most of which are taken from a map I created in Google Maps; please feel free to view my map at...

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1xulhA3JhD7hBsEZHW4tMxiNkr11rwU>

## Infrastructure / Green Space

It's not a new or original thought – each neighbourhood needs some green space for people to congregate and play, so they don't feel like they live in a dense city block, and so families and kids can connect.

The same principle applies to business parks, shopping centres, and even large road junctions: If the landscape contains only factories and offices, only shops and car parks, or only lanes and lights; then it is a purely functional space – it is for things, not for people; but if it is broken up by shared green spaces, then factory and office workers can connect; shopping feels like a social activity; and roads don't divide people.

Good neighbourhoods also create an environment where people can feel equal, regardless of their age or status, creed or colour; and they achieve this by making their green spaces visible

and accessible to everyone. So it follows, the communal spaces in business parks shouldn't be for employees only; the communal spaces in shopping centres shouldn't be for shoppers only; and the communal spaces by roads shouldn't be for drivers only.

So my proposal is simple: zone the land in and around Blessington for various purposes, with conditions that (1) the purpose vary frequently (2) a prescribed percentage of each zoned space is green (3) as much as possible, the green spaces are accessible to all.

## Housing / Public Amenities

Again I'll begin with a familiar and unoriginal thought: school should be close to home. When kids can walk or cycle to their schools, easily and safely, it's a clear indication that the place is designed for people, and so it becomes a sought-after place to live.

The same principle applies to business parks, shopping centres, and even large road junctions: If the landscape is difficult or dangerous to navigate, then everyone drives, and pedestrians are treated as an annoyance; but if it's easy and safe to walk or cycle, then more people walk or cycle, and drivers yield.

What's more, this isn't just about schools, but all attractions and amenities - employees need to reach their places of work easily and safely; and shoppers their shops; and players their clubs; walkers their trails; tourists their attractions (i.e. the lake, forest, and town centre); and they all need to be encouraged to walk or cycle, or they'll all demand a big expensive road to wherever they're going, and all get annoyed when traffic is slow.

On a related note: Blessington still has a kindly driving culture - drivers let parked cars out and pedestrians cross, more than in most towns with growing populations and national roads passing through them. So it's important to the identity of Blessington, that we try to preserve and promote the idea, that drivers yield to pedestrians and bikes; because once we put cars first in a town, it's very difficult to make them yield again.

So my proposal is simple: use tried and tested tools to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists in and around Blessington – generous footpaths and bicycle paths, which span most or all parts of the town; roundabouts to enable a steady flow of traffic; traffic calming (curbs and markings and crossings and planters) to make that traffic steady but slow; raised crossings aplenty, or underpasses in places where the traffic is heavy or moves faster, to get people across roads, easily and safely, to where they want to go. Thus connect Blessington's housing to its amenities, without more roads; and enable the town to grow organically, with most homes and amenities interconnected.

## Industry / Community

New industry is critical to the growth of a town; but too often it's zoned as a circle of business parks surrounding the town and estates; often on a busy ring road, accessible only by car; often gated and stark; and sometimes, if it's stark and busy enough, it causes the homes nearby to become gradually less desirable.

Good industry is part of its environment; it mingles with offices and shops and sometimes housing; it manages its traffic and noise, so as to minimise unwanted impacts on the community

& environment; its infrastructure benefits the people and institutions around it, instead of separating them from it.

Blessington already has a fairly healthy mix of residential and industrial neighbourhoods; but the industrial parts provide no attraction or benefit to neighbouring estates, nor to the town as a whole.

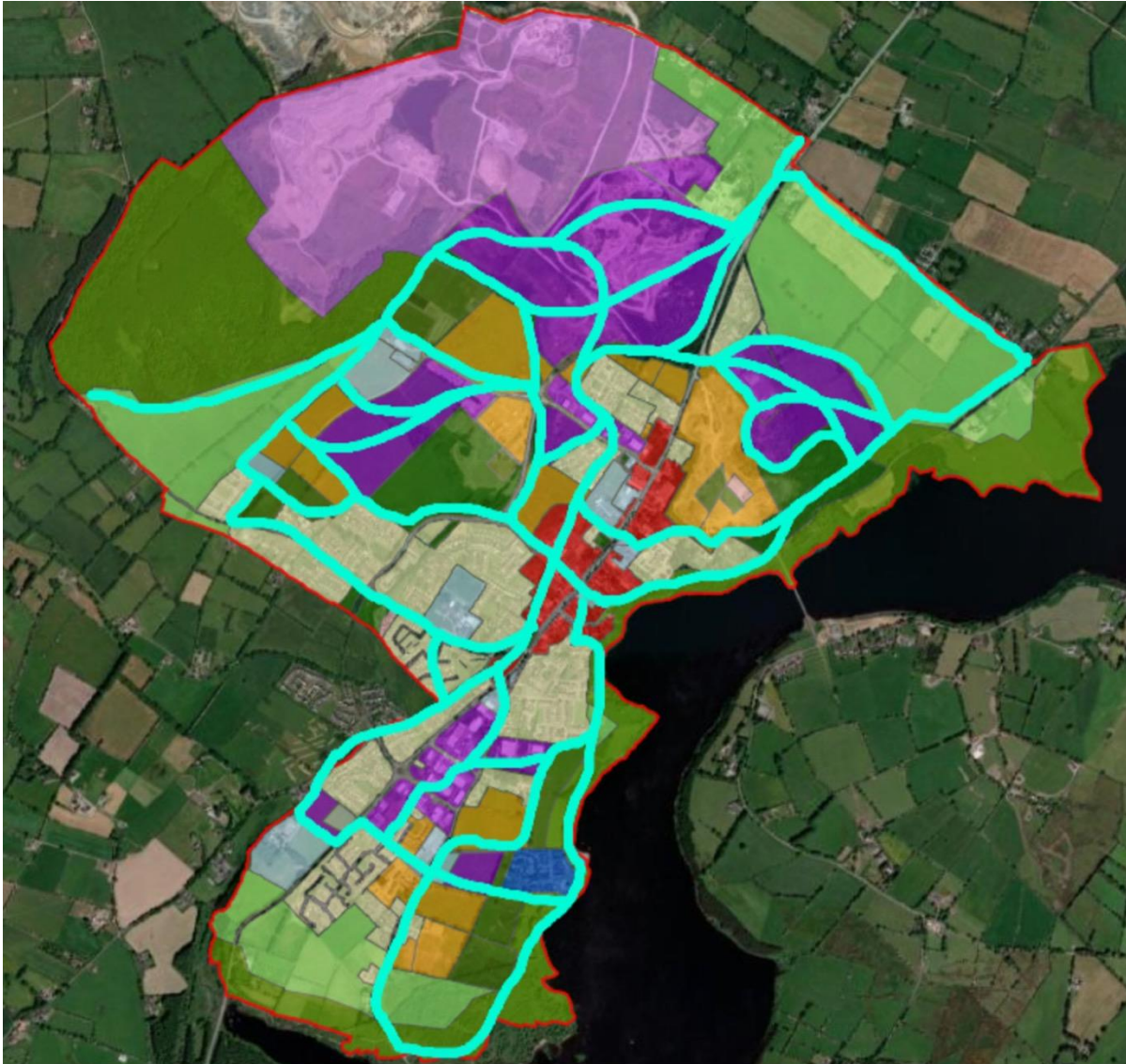
So my proposal is simple: build well-marked, well-lit paths through commercial areas; thus enabling employees to walk or cycle to work in those areas, and children to go to school via those areas, and everyone else to traverse the town via those areas (and maybe stop in one of the aforementioned green spaces); so everyone benefits from new commercial development, and feels like it improves their town.

# Improvement #1 : Paths

I took the map from the portal (<https://blessington-wicklow.hub.arcgis.com/>) and overlaid it with blue lines, to indicate where paths for pedestrians and cyclists could be added, to achieve much of the above.

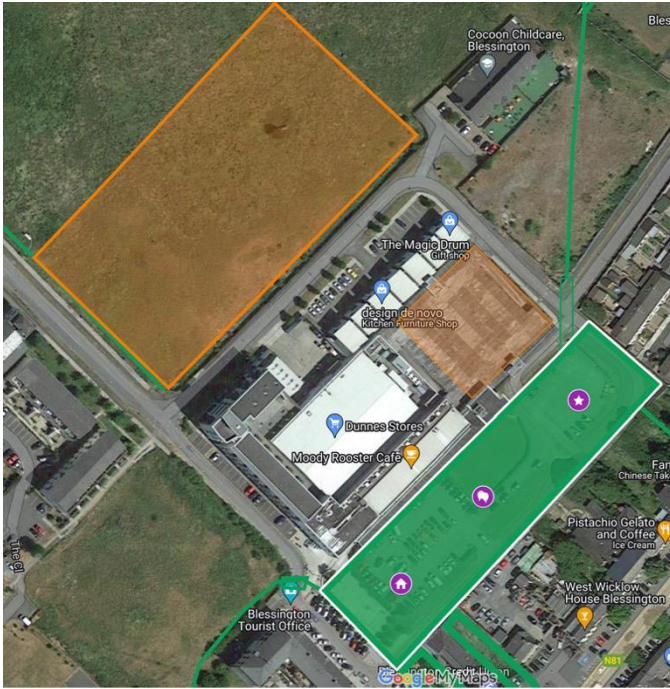
This is not an exact layout but a general idea, subject to scrutiny and practical changes, intended only to illustrate how a good network of paths would connect the various neighbourhoods and amenities of Blessington.

Note how the paths don't just go in and out of town, but around it too; how they reach all schools and public amenities; and how they go around housing but through commercial areas.





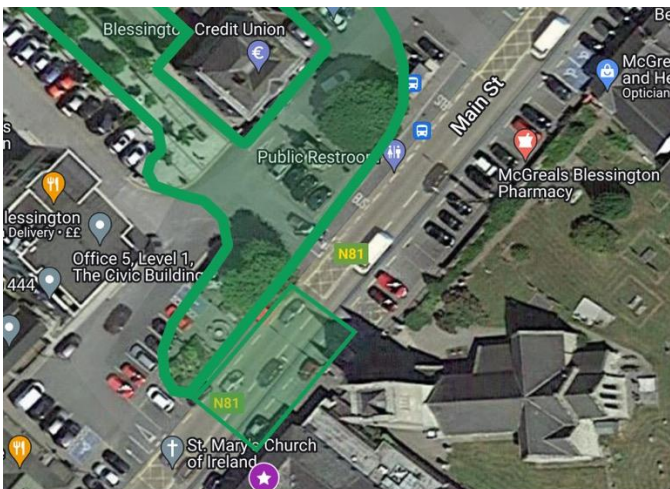
## Improvement #2 : Town Centre



The new town square is dominated by parking, and encourages drivers to approach via the main street. If a new public parking lot (orange) were placed behind Dunnes, the new town square could be reclaimed for public use:

- Art (star) - the Tramway theatre, an open air stage, murals on the ground and walls, gardens to one side where local artists apply to put their work on display
- Fun (balloons) - a playground or splash park or something else, that's for adults and kids alike, right in the centre of town
- Culture (home) - installations, event information, unusual planting... anything!

Note, multiple businesses already back onto the square, so if it were paved and used this way, they would be encouraged to open new doors there, or rent out the space to new small businesses.



The town centre is still pretty, but overrun with traffic. If a large raised crossing were built in front of the church, and the area around the credit union were paved with cobbles and given vintage style lighting, then this small area could once again become an "old town" at the heart of Blessington. It would also act as a traffic calming device, thus making people feel comfortable enough to linger.



## Improvement #3 : Crossings



The junction of N81 and Naas Road is one of the busiest in Blessington. It's the source of most traffic jams. It's also the only way for many pedestrians and cyclists to access the town centre, schools, and amenities of Blessington. It is therefore ideally suited for reconstruction, to include a large new roundabout (more about that later) and a large crossing and two underpasses:

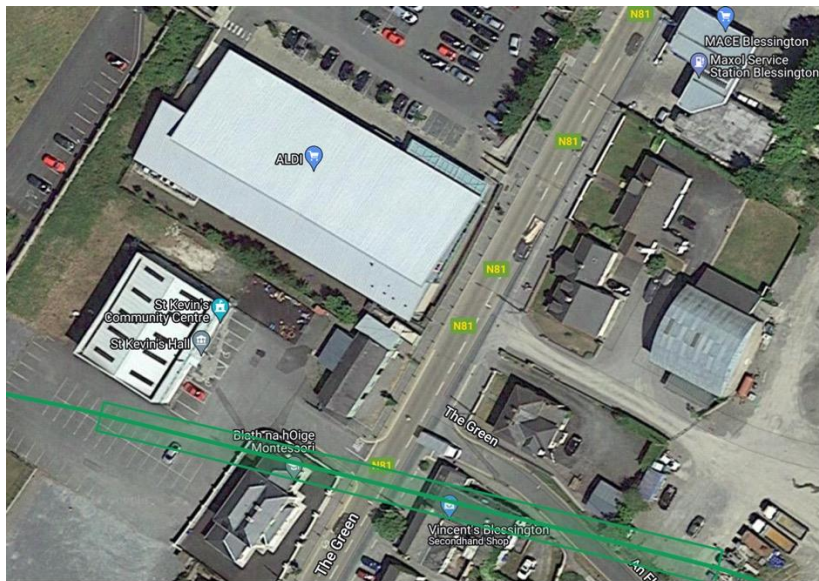


- The crossing would go on Old Ballymore Road, to (1) improve access to the community college and further education centre (2) provide access to the green space (3) discourage the use of Old Ballymore Road as a “rat run” during rush hour.
- One underpass would go under the Naas Road, thus connecting the green space (and everyone and everything South of it) to Blessington town centre.



- Another underpass would go under the N81, thus connecting the green space (and the rest of Blessington) to the further education centre and everyone and everything South of it – housing, business parks, the Greenway and The Avon.

This would enable pedestrians and cyclists from the South to get in and out of Blessington, without any fear of N81 traffic, and without impeding drivers.



Similarly, an underpass in or nearby St. Kevin's Community Centre would enable pedestrians and cyclists from the North to get in and out of Blessington, without any fear of N81 traffic, and without impeding drivers.

It would also connect the town centre to multiple new residential & commercial developments coming soon, and to the Educate Together national school.



As mentioned previously, a raised crossing in front of St. Mary's church would help restore the old town centre, by connecting its "main attractions" and enabling pedestrians to enjoy them:

- St. Mary's
- The Downshire
- The Credit Union building

It would also encourage pedestrians to try more shops and businesses, by providing a safe and pleasant way to walk between the main street and new town square.





Another raised crossing should be placed at the old tram marker; thus connecting...

- The new town square
- St. Mary's national school
- SuperValu and surrounding shops/businesses
- The Kilbride Road and housing thereon

It would also improve access to the lake and Greenway.

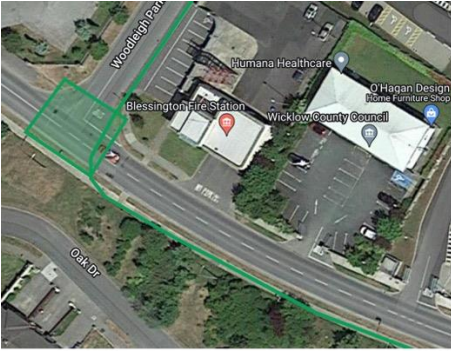


Crossings at the corners of the new town square, specifically at the tourist office and school/theatre, would ensure pedestrians feel safe; in particular kids walking to/from school, and shoppers; but if the town square were reclaimed as suggested above, many others would benefit too.



A crossing at the fire station would serve Woodleigh; and a crossing at the junction of Kilbride Road and Main Street would serve pedestrians and businesses alike.

Note that to be effective, crossings at these locations may need to go all around the junction.



Also note, there are many types of crossings; we just need to find the right ones!



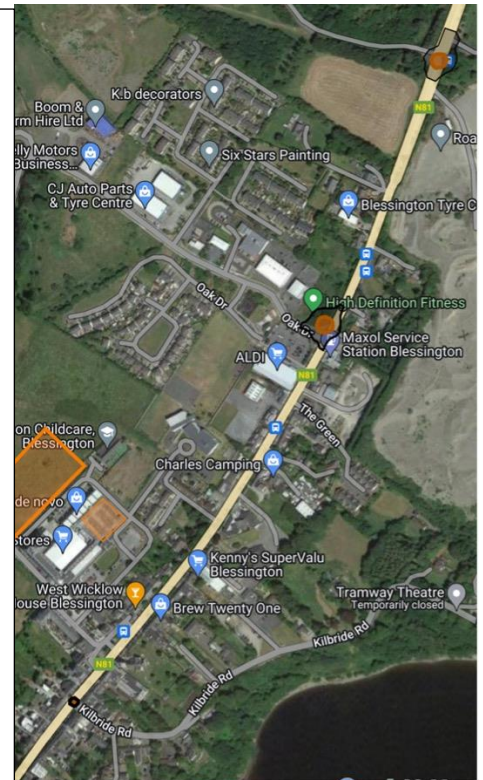


# Improvement #4 : Roundabouts

If a town is for people, pedestrians and cyclists must come first; but that's not to say traffic should crawl to a halt; and Blessington's traffic could be eased, now and in future (as more housing is built and more businesses open) by the introduction of more roundabouts.

The N81 is a fast road, but as drivers approach Blessington from the South, they encounter roundabouts and instinctively slow down. So we should do the same at the North end of town and on Main Street:

- A roundabout at the Blessington Mart would indicate to drivers, coming from the direction of Dublin, that they are entering a populated area.
- A roundabout at Aldi/Maxol would ease traffic problems at that junction, and mark the start of Main Street.
- A roundabout at the junction of Kilbride Road could replace the busy lights, thus make traffic smoother.



There are already some roundabouts to the South of Blessington, but not enough, given (1) the growing residential area (2) the very busy Naas Road junction.

More roundabouts should do the job...

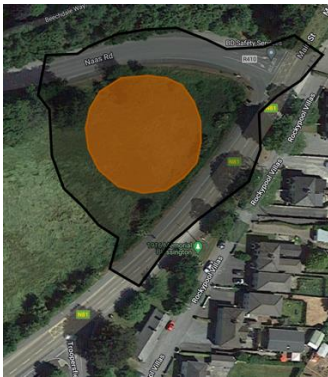
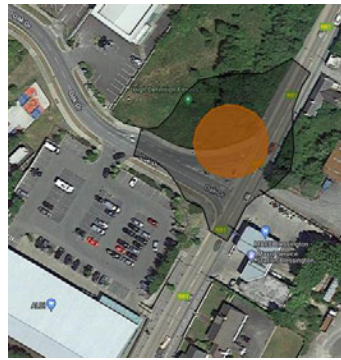
- A roundabout at the Naas Road would ease traffic problems at that junction, and mark the start of Main Street
- A roundabout at Burgage would slow traffic through this residential area
- A roundabout further out of town could mark where we plan to build new housing



And one more...

- A roundabout at the Glending estate would slow traffic approach from Naas, and make residents feel much safer about walking/cycling that busy road into Blessington.





Note, roundabouts are also a place to advertise the culture/identity of a town; so with the introduction of these new roundabouts, each with a different size and purpose, comes an opportunity to show newcomers and passers through (of which there are many) what they can see and do and feel, if they decide to stop or stay in Blessington.



## Improvement #5 : Amenities

“If you build it, they will come” is a line from a movie, which was not written by a town planner. It’s all fine and well improving the accessibility and layout and shape and feel of Blessington, but if there’s no reason to stop and stay, people won’t stop or stay. So we need to make them.

The good news is, Blessington has water and scenery, culture and character, land and people willing to do interesting things with it; so let’s not forget to...

- **Restore the Culture:** there are already plenty of pubs and shops and cafes in Blessington, and a few landmarks, but no unifying feature or theme; so however we restore and adorn the old town (St. Mary’s, the Downshire, etc), some element of that style (e.g. vintage street lights, or a particular kind of flowering plant) should continue through the town; along with some element of the town’s history (e.g. inscribed benches, or old photos); thus giving the whole town centre a single, consistent identity.
- **Highlight the Greenway:** walking trails are the lifeblood of many Irish tourism destinations, attracting foreign and Irish tourists alike; and the Blessington Greenway is an excellent walking trail, less than an hour’s drive from Dublin; so if it’s well marked and maintained, mapped and advertised, and accessible by foot (a short and pleasant walk) from the town centre, then it’s likely to attract more and more people to Blessington over time.
- **Facilitate Events:** nothing brings people together like public, family friendly events; and Blessington has it’s fair share (parades, Christmas lights, GAA celebrations, etc); but more would be better, and to facilitate more events in Blessington, there need to be allotted times and places that can be filled; a stage and/or market in the town square, poster windows advertising free events, and a group of locals appointed by the County Council to ensure the stage/market/posters are used fairly and often, preferably by local organisations.
- **Community Care:** Blessington is for everyone who lives there; but not everyone is equal, and not everyone feels welcome. Organisations like the scouts and dance schools and men’s shed bring joy to our community, but struggle to get by; and there are other social clubs, volunteer organisations and charities, all of which would thrive but for the steep cost of rent and insurance. So if there were a building they could use (share) for cheap/free, it would benefit us all in the long run, by improving our collective quality of life.

## Q&A

Text and questions from the portal, with my answers inline.

### ***Where should higher densities be located? How do we deliver higher densities?***

Probably the best locations are (1) the old Roadstone site (2) between Dunnes Stores and the ring road; as for how to deliver higher densities, duplex apartments don't seem to work well, but we could instead consider large family apartments (3-4 bedrooms per apartment, 1-2 apartments per floor, 3-4 floors); provided they have good communal gardens and good pedestrian access to the town centre.

### ***Where do we deliver our new housing without contributing to urban sprawl?***

(1) the old Roadstone site (2) between Dunnes Stores and the ring road (3) between the estates of Deer Park and Glending

### ***What sites in the town could be redeveloped to maximise opportunities?***

The Downshire, and maybe some of the shops and cafes backing onto Kilbride road, as far as SuperValu; also the line of older shops between the new town square and tram marker, and the unused land behind them (e.g. Go Fonez)

### ***Where are the vacant or underutilised sites in the settlement? How can the plan(s) maximise use of these sites?***

The Downshire could be restored to provide a new hotel and/or apartments and/or amenities; The Avon should be required to house an agreed % split of (1) refugees (2) renters (3) holiday makers, so as to integrate those parties and make them all feel cared for.

### ***How can we revitalise / regenerate the quarry lands?***

A mixture of (1) single family houses (2) low-rise family apartments (3) small business premises, surrounding a central street for small retailers and restaurants; ideally including some rent-controlled premises for local art & crafts & produce; definitely including a public park and playground, or some other activity centre e.g. rock climbing; connected to the town centre by a dedicated pedestrian & cycle path.

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

The town centre is already low-rise, so it should remain so. New developments in greenfield / brownfield sites could go higher, but probably only to 4 floors, otherwise they'll change the character of the town dramatically. Many of the town's established estates have high quality green spaces with mature trees and shrubs, so for continuity and quality of life, generous planting should be a priority in all new estates.

### ***What are the unique features of Blessington's urban environment that should inform future policy?***

Mature trees; lots of publicly accessible green spaces; close proximity to water and walking trails.

### ***What new education, community, sport and recreation facilities are needed and where should they be located?***



The existing community school and educate together national school both need investment to grow. A new school will probably be required, to accommodate large number of new homes coming soon to the North end of Blessington. The GAA club is large, but other sport clubs are small by comparison and will need more land as the town grows – rugby, soccer, etc. The scouts and dance schools are struggling to pay rent, would benefit hugely from a facility they could use for cheap/free; maybe somewhere along Kilbride Road or across the bridge (near the rowing club). Many others would benefit from a new community centre or similar facility, that they could use for cheap/free, if they are deemed to provide a valuable community service.

***What is needed to improve the town of Blessington?***

Paths connecting everyone together.

***What is needed in Blessington to maximise the opportunities that may arise from the planned expansion to the Blessington Greenway?***

Holiday accommodation; equipment rental/maintenance facilities; maybe rescue services.

***How do we continue to develop the area while protecting and enhancing its natural heritage and biodiversity?***

Encourage people to walk/cycle, by building paths.

***When it comes to land use, what are the key actions we can take to reduce the impacts of climate change?***

Choose new planting carefully, to protect the existing soil and flora and fauna; encourage green development practices (perhaps make some of them conditional to get planning permission for a single home/business).

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

People are afraid to walk/cycle on busy roads, like the N81 and Naas Road.