



## Draft Blessington Local Area Plan Submission - Report

Who are you:	State Body
Name:	Department of Education
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### File

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Planning Department,  
Wicklow County Council,  
County Buildings,  
Station Road,  
Wicklow Town

10<sup>th</sup> December 2024

**Re: Draft Blessington Local Area Plan 2025**

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to acknowledge receipt of notification of the above draft LAP. The Department of Education has examined the contents therein and would like to make the following submission.

In the context of future population trends and their potential impact on school place requirements, the department notes that this draft LAP refers to the population growth identified for Blessington in the recent draft Wicklow CDP 2022-2028. The department notes that the population scenario envisaged for Co Wicklow overall is the high NPF target of 157,500 people by 2026 and 164,000 by 2031. The plan also states that the NPF identifies Blessington as a “Self-Sustaining Growth Town” with a projected population of 6,145 by 2028. The department made its submissions to the draft CDP regarding Blessington on the basis of the potential population growth within the town and its environs between 2022 and 2031.

In terms of future population growth in Blessington, the department notes the reference to the 6,145 population figure for 2028 and the 6,313 population figure for 2031 in Table 2.1 of the draft LAP. The department also notes that Table 2.8 of the Kildare CDP 2023-2029 has a population figure of 251 for Blessington for 2028. The department is equally mindful that the current NPF review has the potential to allocate a further population projected increase that may even go beyond 6,313. Another consideration for the department is the 2031 housing target of 2,433 for Blessington as outlined in Table 2.2 of the draft LAP. Allowing for the Census 2022 average per household figure of 2.84 identified for County Wicklow, the population of Blessington could be closer to 7,000 should that housing target figure be reached.

There are six schools (five primary and one post-primary) located in Blessington town, four of these schools are within the LAP area. The department’s preference would be to expand these existing facilities (if possible) should there be a requirement for additional school places resulting from planned population increases. Therefore, the department requests the Planning Authority to examine the potential of protecting a land buffer around each of these schools to enable them to expand further if required.

In respect of primary provision, the department welcomes the reference within Blessington\_Social Infrastructure Audit to zone additional land for education for Gaelscoil na Lochanna in the event the school cannot be delivered on the current permitted site. It is expected that the capacity of this school when completed will be



able to cater for future potential needs resulting from the potential future population growth scenarios as identified above. However, the department is also mindful of potential population growth beyond 2031 and will continue to assess its requirements on an ongoing basis.

In respect of post primary provision, Blessington Community College's expansion will increase capacity to 1,000 pupils. It is expected that the capacity of this school will be able to cater for future potential needs resulting from the potential future population growth scenarios as identified above. However, the department is also mindful of potential population growth beyond 2031 and will continue to assess its requirements on an ongoing basis.

In terms of the identification of future school place requirement that necessitates the need for the reservation and acquisitions of sites for future new schools or the requirement of new sites to facilitate the relocation of existing schools, the department would like to highlight the following points.

1 - It is generally considered that schools are enabling infrastructure for housing and as such, schools should be positioned in the heart of new and expanding sustainable communities, allowing for the maximum benefit to the community inside and outside school hours. Further to this, other community facilities and amenities should also be positioned close to school facilities to allow for all community facilities be complimentary to each other for the benefit of the whole community.

2 - Sites for future schools or for the redevelopment of existing schools should be identified on appropriate and suitable land for development and zoned accordingly, with specific land use zonings. All enabling infrastructure required to develop and operate school facilities should be provided in advance of the need for such schools. This infrastructure includes road, electricity, water infrastructure, sustainable transport links, active travel networks, road safety measures and safe routes to school facilities. It should be noted that it is not within the remit of the Department of Education to develop or fund this enabling infrastructure.

The department also anticipates that additional Special Education Needs provision at both Primary and Post Primary level will be required in the future throughout the country and this may result in schools requiring additional accommodation or space to meet this growing need. The department will consult with the Council if and when additional SEN accommodation or sites for future special schools are required within specific locations. In the context of this LAP, explicit support within the plan for the provision of school accommodation for children and young people with special educational needs would be welcomed.

The department notes and welcomes Lands Zoned for Community & Education Use in the Draft LAP that three additional sites have been zoned for Community and Education in the Blessington area.

The department notes and welcomes Social Infrastructure Objective Bless24 that the council will resist developments that entail the loss of existing education lands or building and developments that would unduly constrain the ability of existing schools to expand will not be permitted.



The department notes and welcomes Social Infrastructure Objective Bless25 that the council will facilitate the provision of schools on lands zoned Community and Education (CE) and to consider the provision of schools on any land use zoning, excluding OS1 and OS2 zones.

The department notes the section Active Travel in the Local Transport Assessment that it is a Council objective to improve pedestrian infrastructure along all roads within Blessington prioritising all locations within 15 minutes' walk times of school. The department supports the development of sustainable travel links between schools and residential areas.

The department notes in the Blessington Social Infrastructure Audit that it is stated that the analysis of current and projected education needs is based on the following assumptions:

- 11.5% of the population at any given time is of primary school going age.
- 7.5% of the population at any given time is of secondary school going age.

The department currently uses an average of 10.25% to determine primary school place needs and an average of 7.5% to determine post-primary school place needs. It should be noted that these percentage figures are subject to review.

In terms of assessing current and future capacity, the Department of Education has to be mindful of potential unforeseen circumstances such as the Ukrainian crisis, which have the ability to put undue pressure on school place provision and could necessitate reassessments of school place provision from time to time. The department will engage with the Councils where the findings of an assessment require a review of existing or future school site provision within a specific location.

Finally, the department welcomes the continued engagement with the Council regarding the development of both new and existing schools, as appropriate, and emphasizes the critical importance of the ongoing work of the Council in ensuring sufficient land is zoned for this purpose.

Yours sincerely,

Mairead Garry  
Statutory Plans  
Forward Planning Section