



Blessington Local Area Plan Submission - Report

Who are you:	Private Individual
Name:	Deirdre McCormack
Email Address:	[REDACTED]
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Deirdre McCormack,



April 2nd 2024

Wicklow Planning Department

RE: Blessington Local Area Plan

Dear Members of the Wicklow Planning Department Team,

I am writing to you with my suggestions for consideration as part of the Blessington Local Area Plan Pre-Draft submission process.

As a resident of Blessington and a parent of a young family I believe that the following recommendations for inclusion in the Blessington LAP would be beneficial to the development of our town and community in the coming years.

- **The development of a multi-use sports complex with a swimming pool.**

Swimming is a life skill which has great benefits for participants both mentally and physically. It is also an accessible and inclusive sport which is open to everyone regardless of their age, physical or mental ability.

There is currently no swimming pool, public or private, in the Baltinglass MD. Residents must travel outside of Wicklow to Tallaght, Naas, Athy and even Wexford to access swimming facilities.

In 2022 the Community Pool for West Wicklow campaign brought a Pop-Up Pool to Blessington, in collaboration with Swim Ireland and Wicklow County Council. During the 12-week period that the pool was in Blessington 600 children a week attended swimming lessons. The success of the temporary swimming pool demonstrates the demand and need for the development of a permanent swimming pool in the area.

Wicklow County Council have previously indicated that a swimming pool in the west of the county would be located in Blessington and the development of said pool was included in the latest Wicklow County Development Plan.

- **The development of football and rugby pitches and a running track at the same location of a multi-use sports complex and swimming pool.**

The community in Blessington is rapidly growing and so too are the local sports clubs and community groups. Many of our local sports clubs have either outgrown their current facilities, eg Blessington AFC with over 700 members, or have no dedicated home, eg Blessington Rugby FC with over 450 families involved and no dedicated training facilities. By locating these sports facilities in the one location it will allow for a sharing of resources such as changing and showering facilities, outdoor lights, car parking, gym facilities etc. It will also encourage a greater participation in a diverse range of sports in our community.

- **The development of and allocation of lands for community gardens and allotments.**
 Community gardens and allotments are an easy, inclusive and achievable Community Climate Action which promote sustainability, help biodiversity and encourage participants to spend time outdoors. There are physical and mental benefits to gardening as well as it being an important educational opportunity for members of our community young and old. Community Gardens also encourage inclusion and cross-community participation, which are increasingly important as our community in Blessington grows.
- **The development of increased shared community spaces and rejuvenation of some current spaces.**
 At present there are very few community spaces or halls available in Blessington. One community hall has a very busy schedule and limited availability whilst the other community hall is in very bad condition and needs extensive repairs for it to live up to its full potential as a community space.
 Blessington has a wide and diverse range of community groups including parent and toddler morning groups, a breastfeeding support group, a crafting circle, an active retirement group, a fencing club, a chess club and a Women's Shed. All of these groups are in constant competition with one another for access to community spaces.
 The rejuvenation of existing community spaces and the development of further spaces in the town would be of benefit to a wide range of groups and allow the possibility for the creation of new groups and facilities for our community including a youth centre, youth café or youth club. The allocation of a dedicated space for the growing Women's Shed group would also be of huge benefit to the community.
- **The urgent expansion of Blessington Community College to at least a 1,000 pupil school.**
 Our community in Blessington is rapidly growing and our secondary school is in desperate need of expansion. Planning permission to expand Blessington Community College to a 1000 pupil school has been lodged by the KWETB with Wicklow County Council and this process is ongoing. However, close attention must be paid to ensure that the expansion of the school is in line with and will be able to accommodate the inevitable increase in the Blessington population which will occur over the next number of years.
- **A target to have all public roads in Blessington "taken in charge" by Wicklow County Council within the lifetime of the Local Area Plan.**
 There are a number of public areas, roads and footpaths in Blessington which Wicklow County Council does not currently have responsibility for the upkeep of. These include the Blessington Inner Relief Road, the footpaths surrounding the Dunnes shopping centre and leading up to St Mary's Senior National School and the footpaths surrounding the Blessington Credit Union building.
 There are ongoing issues with all of these roads and footpaths including trip hazards caused by overgrown tree roots, wobbly or broken paving and faded road markings and pedestrian crossings. The confusing road markings at the one-way road system at the side of the Dunnes shopping centre have also led to a number of road collisions and near-misses for pedestrians. There have also been frequent issues with the pedestrian crossing traffic lights on the Blessington Inner Relief Road at Deerpark.
 At present if members of the public report a broken traffic light, faded road marking or broken pavement in any of these areas Wicklow County Council are unable to directly help

with the issue and must try to contact the relevant developer or private company who has responsibility for that particular area. This can lead to delays in issues being resolved and in some cases some of these issues have gone on unresolved.

- **An increase in active travel infrastructure within the town.**

The development of dedicated cycling lanes in the town to encourage members of our community out of their cars and onto their bicycles and especially to encourage younger members of our community to see cycling as a safe option when travelling to and from school.

An increased emphasis on pedestrian safety within the town with the development of more pedestrian crossings including a crossing with traffic lights on the N81 beside the Texaco garage and a crossing before the Credit Union roundabout on the Blessington Inner Relief Road.

- **An increase in public outdoor green/open spaces and playgrounds for the use of community groups, schools and members of the community.**

During the pandemic the only outdoor space available to many people in Blessington to walk was the Inner Relief Road. The development of the new Town Park and playground in the town by Cairn Homes is a welcome addition but we must ensure that further community outdoor spaces like these are included in the Local Area Plan. As our community grows and more houses are developed in the town, we will need further spaces such as these for our schools, sports clubs, community groups and members of our community to access and enjoy.

The completion of the walk way to Glending Woods from Blessington.

- **The development of infrastructure to support an increase in public transport options for the town.**

Blessington is in urgent need of an increase in the frequency and capacity of its public transport options. The proposed changes to the 65 Dublin Bus Route under Bus Connects will see the service go from 16 services a day, approximately every 2 hours, from Blessington to Dublin City Centre, to an hourly service between Blessington and a transport hub in Tallaght. It is unclear when these proposed changes will be introduced but the Blessington LAP must plan ahead to accommodate this increase in services.

The inclusion of a park and ride facility to facilitate the residents of the surrounding towns and villages who may choose to drive to Blessington and use public transport for their onward journey into Dublin, would be beneficial. The introduction of a shuttle bus to connect the local villages such as Manor Kilbride, Valleymount, Lacken and Ballyknockan to Blessington so that residents could access further public transport options should also be considered.

The development of a bus terminal and erection of visible bus stops for Dublin Bus, Local Link and Bus Éireann services would encourage greater use of these services among the community.

- **Proactive planning to reduce the risk of flood risk zones within Blessington.**

This should include nature-based solutions such as tree planting and more green spaces to avoid a repeat of the devastating floods in the Glending estate in 2011.

- **The rejuvenation and rethinking of Blessington main street.**
 At present Blessington main street is dominated by cars and car parking spaces. Drivers must reverse out onto the busy N81 when leaving these parking spaces which can be dangerous. There are a number of businesses, homes, three playschools and two primary schools located on the main street and it is frequently busy with pedestrians of all ages. The redesign of the parking spaces along the main street along with the introduction of seating and more planting would make it a more pleasant place to visit and encourage more people to frequent the businesses located there.
- **Protection of green spaces and introduction of Tree Preservation Orders.**
 We have a number of green spaces and mature trees in the town which need to be protected and safe-guarded against future developments in the town. These include Dempsey's Lane, the Four Stone Tree, Main Street trees and trees in housing estates such as Deerpark and Burgage.
 We should also encourage the planting and inclusion of more native Irish trees along the Blessington Inner Relief Road and any future road developments in the town.
- **An audit of all missing and broken street signs and street sign poles in the town and surrounding areas.**
 These missing street signs cause a hazard to cyclists, road users and pedestrians. With the expansion of our road system and population it is essential that an audit is carried out so that any missing signs or hazards can be identified and rectified.
- **A proactive approach to dereliction in the town.**
 There are a number of derelict properties within Blessington that do not appear on the Wicklow Derelict Register. The Blessington LAP must include a proactive plan to combat dereliction and vacancy in the town.
- **Creation of a Tourism Plan for Blessington and the surrounding areas in association with Blessington Tourist Office.**
 With its proximity to Dublin and natural beauty, Blessington is an ideal location for tourists to visit. The already established Blessington Tourist Office, run in association with the Blessington Community Employment Scheme, act as wonderful, welcoming ambassadors for our town and local area. Their local knowledge and expertise are essential for the development of a Tourism Plan for Blessington and the surrounding areas.

I am happy to discuss any of the above suggestions with you further.

Kind regards,

Deirdre McCormack

Social Democrats Local Area Representative for West Wicklow