



Oifig an
Rialaitheora Pleanála
Office of the
Planning Regulator

OPR Ref: IP-023-23

28th September 2023

Administrative Officer,
Planning Department,
Wicklow County Council,
County Buildings,
Station Road,
Wicklow Town,
A67 FW96

Re: Issues Paper for the Wicklow Town – Rathnew Local Area Plan

A chara,

Thank you for your authority's work in preparing the Issues Paper (the Issues Paper) for the proposed Wicklow Town – Rathnew Local Area Plan (the LAP), which will replace the Wicklow Town – Rathnew Development Plan 2013–2019.

The planning authority is commended for publishing an Issues Paper, engaging proactively with the public and notifying the Office of the Planning Regulator (the Office) of the intention to prepare the LAP.

In accordance with the provisions of section 31AO of the *Planning and Development Act 2000*, as amended (the Act), the Office is obliged to evaluate and assess local area plans in the context of certain statutory parameters.

The Office has set out some broad issues, relevant to the preparation of LAPs, in addition to some specific issues of particular relevance to the preparation of this LAP, under the following themes:

1. [Strategic Policy Framework](#)
2. [Development plan and core strategy](#)
3. [Zoning, compact growth and infrastructural services](#)
4. [Regeneration](#)



5. [Education, social and community amenities](#)
6. [Economic development and employment](#)
7. [Transport and mobility](#)
8. [Climate change and flood risk management](#)
9. [Environment and natural and built heritage](#)
10. [Implementation and monitoring](#)
11. [Other matters](#)

The Office's comments are offered without prejudice to any observations and recommendations as may be forthcoming from the Office at future stages of the plan-making process. They do not affect the obligation on your planning authority to comply with the relevant legislative requirements, or to be consistent with the fullness of the detailed policy context of the higher order plans and strategies and Ministerial guidelines.

1. Strategic Policy Framework

The planning authority will be aware that section 20(5) of the Act requires the LAP to be consistent with the objectives of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), in addition to the *National Planning Framework* (NPF), the specific planning policy requirements (SPPRs) of section 28 guidelines and the relevant development plan.

The LAP should consider the guiding principles of the RSES and ensure consistency with the relevant regional policy objectives (RPOs). The objectives of the LAP are also required to be consistent with any strategic development sites for the delivery of residential, employment or other uses.

In particular, the draft LAP should clearly demonstrate the role of Wicklow Town – Rathnew within the wider county and regional context. As is reflected in the Settlement Hierarchy (Table 3.3) of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 (the Development Plan) and noted in the Issues Paper, the RSES Settlement Hierarchy (Table 4.2) identifies Wicklow – Rathnew as a Key Town, that functions as a large, economically active service town providing employment, including Wicklow Port and Harbour, for the surrounding areas, includes high-quality transport links, acts as an education hub, and has the capacity to act as a growth driver to complement Regional Growth Centres.

The RSES also recognises the economic potential of the settlement to strengthen and promote economic development associated with retail and commerce, the expansion of port and harbour activities and the nearby Ashford Studios.

The Office encourages the planning authority to liaise with the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly in preparation of the draft LAP where clarity is required on the objectives and guiding principles set out in the RSES.

2. Development plan and core strategy

Section 19(2B) of the Act requires that the LAP shall be consistent with the objectives of the development plan and its core strategy. This is also a key message of the section 28 *Local Area Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2013) (LAP Guidelines).

In this regard, the Office notes that the core strategy of the Development Plan provided for a population increase of 27,233 persons over 2016 – 2028 and a requirement for 8,467 housing units and 223 hectares of residential land over the plan period (2022 – 2028).

It is important that the objectives and zoning provisions of the LAP are consistent with the core strategy for the proposed area of the LAP and the housing supply target for the settlement.

The Office notes that the core strategy of the Development Plan indicates that there is an estimated requirement of 42 hectares of residential zoned land with a significant excess quantum of lands zoned for Wicklow Town – Rathnew. In its submissions on the review of the Development Plan, this Office raised concern generally to the extent of residential zoning in a number of settlements, relative to that required to deliver the housing supply targets for the settlements.

The *Development Plans, Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2022) (the Development Plans Guidelines) provide clear guidance in terms of ensuring that sufficient housing lands/sites are provided based on the housing unit yield of land zoned for residential and a mix of residential and other uses. This is critical in terms of the ability to plan for the timely delivery of physical and social infrastructure in the right location to serve new housing development and to support compact and sequential growth.

It will be necessary, therefore, to ensure that the LAP is consistent with the Development Plan in order to comply with section 19(2B) of the Act.

3. Zoning, compact growth and infrastructural services

The Office recommends that all land-use objectives should demonstrate consistency with the objectives for compact growth under the NPF (NPO 3b / c) and the RSES (RPO 4.26), densification (NPO 35) and Development Plan objectives (CPO 4.2 and CPO 4.9).

Any provisions or standards for residential density or building height in the LAP should have regard to relevant section 28 guidelines and any SPPRs therein, including:

- *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas: Cities, Towns & Villages (2009);*
- *Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2018);* and
- *Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022).*

Land use zoning should also follow the sequential approach as set out under section 6.2.3 of the Development Plans Guidelines.

The planning authority will also need to ensure consistency with the provisions of the tiered approach to zoning under NPO 72 a-c of the NPF. In this regard, the LAP should include an infrastructure assessment for the town in accordance with Appendix 3 of the NPF and with section 4.5.2 - Settlement Capacity Audit of the Development Plans Guidelines.

It will be of critical importance to the implementation of the LAP to ensure that all lands zoned for residential and other development are serviced, or will be serviceable, during the plan period.

In this regard, the Office notes that Uisce Éireann has indicated that there is sufficient water supply and wastewater capacity to accommodate the projected growth as set out in the core strategy within the lifetime of the plan. The Office however advises the planning authority to liaise closely with the relevant prescribed authorities concerning the delivery of essential services and infrastructure.

4. Regeneration

Both the NPF (NPO 4, 6, 18a, 18b and 35) and the policy objectives of the RSES place a strong emphasis on the opportunities for urban and village regeneration to create attractive, liveable, well-designed and high quality urban places.

Further, the Development Plan policy objectives CPO 4.9 and CPO 5.6 place a firm focus on regeneration in Wicklow Town – Rathnew. In addition CPO 5.1 and CPO 5.2 also promote town centre regeneration.

The Office acknowledges and welcomes that the Issues Paper has identified specific sites for regeneration, including the Bayview Hotel and the VEHA factory, and further objectives to regenerate/revitalise key strategic parts of the settlement including, Wicklow Town Centre, Rathnew Village Centre, the Murrough area, the Port and Harbour and the Quayside/Riverside, which is generally consistent with CPO 5.6, referenced above.

In accordance with section 5.7 of the LAP Guidelines, where opportunity sites are identified, the planning authority is advised to prepare a development framework for their future development with appropriate guidance regarding layout, massing, permeability, green infrastructure and Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) etc.

The Office recommends that the LAP includes a strong policy framework to support the utilisation of existing buildings, brownfield/infill sites, and derelict and underutilised sites. Proactive land activation measures, including the planning authority's powers in respect of land acquisition/compulsory purchase, derelict sites and the vacant land, as well as intended sources of funding to facilitate key regeneration projects, such as the recently announced *Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund Scheme*, should all be considered.

Also important in this respect is the Government's *Town Centre First: A Policy Approach for Irish Towns (2022)* (Town Centre First), which policy envisages TCF Plans as central to informing the future direction of towns and the priority investment interventions supported through TCF-aligned funding streams.

5. Education, social and community amenities

'Access to quality childcare, education and health services' is a National Strategic Outcome of the NPF. The draft LAP should seek to align population growth with investment in childcare and education facilities on well-located sites, within or close to the

existing built-up areas, to meet the diverse needs of local populations. Specifically in relation to schools, the planning authority should consult with the Forward Planning and Site Acquisition and Property Management sections of the Department of Education.

The draft LAP should also give focus to the implementation of RPO 4.55 (Education) and CPO 7.15 (Education and Development) to deliver on the provision of third-level education at the Wicklow County Campus in Clermont, Rathnew and in particular, to support the development of the campus as a hub for the film industry and screen content creation sector.

The draft LAP should also have regard to the provisions for social audits under the Development Plans Guidelines (or civic infrastructure audits under the LAP Guidelines) and consider the capacity of existing facilities, including community centres, leisure, amenity and cultural facilities to serve existing and future residents. In addition, the LAP should ensure that such facilities can be easily accessed by walking or cycling infrastructure.

The planning authority's *Local Economic and Community Plan* (LECP) should inform the LAP to provide for the co-ordinated spatial planning of community services for the area. In addition, the planning authority's *Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019–2024* should also inform the LAP. In this regard, the Office acknowledges the Material Amendment to the Housing Strategy¹ in the Development Plan (included in Table 8.4), in relation to assessment of demands for Traveller accommodation up to 2024 of 80 homes (59 standard housing type and 21 Traveller-specific accommodation) and this contains provision for two new Traveller specific accommodation units in the Wicklow Municipal District within the lifetime of the *Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019–2024*. It is important that the draft LAP provides implementable objectives for the provision of accommodation for Travellers consistent with the estimated need for the Wicklow Municipal District.

6. Economic development and employment

The LAP Guidelines state that LAPs should include objectives to promote local economic development and employment growth by focusing on issues such as the creation of vibrant

¹ Amendment V3 – 129

and dynamic city and town centres where local businesses thrive and the provision of low cost accommodation for start-up businesses. This will be particularly important for Wicklow Town – Rathnew given its role as a Key Town and as an economic growth driver to complement the region and for the creation of a strong economic base consistent with RPO 4.27.

The key regional policies (RPO 4.56) and the Development Plan objective (CPO 4.56) relate to the future enhancement and expansion of the Wicklow Port and Harbour, offering both commercial and leisure opportunities.

The Development Plan also identifies key roles and functions for Wicklow Town – Rathnew, including its potential to develop as a recreation and tourism hub due to its attractive coastal location and its proximity to key destinations such as the Wicklow Mountains, Glendalough and Brittas Bay and the key attractions within the town including the Wicklow Gaol, the Murrough, coastal walks, beaches, architectural heritage, sports facilities and as a terminus of the planned Greystones – Wicklow Coastal Route. The development and implementation of this tourism potential would be consistent with RPO 4.57 and the Development Plan policy objectives CPO 11.30 and CPO 11.32.

The draft LAP should consider how it can prioritise employment and commercial sites that will contribute to the delivery of compact growth consistent with the National Strategic Objective of the NPF and will help implement the Government’s Town Centre First policy.

Accessibility is also a key consideration in selecting employment zonings and the transport provision of potential employment locations needs to be strategically considered, including through the application of the sequential approach.

The facilitation of retail facilities will also need to be considered to provide for the anticipated population growth. Regard should be had, in particular, to the sequential approach to the location of retail development and other provisions of the *Retail Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2012) and Wicklow Town – Rathnew’s designation as a Level 2 Major Town Centre and County Town Centre in the Retail Hierarchy and Strategy for County Wicklow in the Development Plan.

7. Transport and mobility

The *Climate Action Plan 2023* commits to reducing the total distance of car journeys by 20% and ensuring that walking, cycling and public transport make up 50% of all journeys

by 2030. These targets are particularly relevant to Wicklow Town – Rathnew given that almost four in five of Wicklow Town’s commuters to Dublin City and suburbs travelled by car².

An integrated approach to land use and transport planning will be central to achieving these targets consistent with the objectives and provisions of the NPF (NPO 27, NPO 33 and NPO 64, among others) and the RSES.

The RSES identifies the requirement for a Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the town under RPO 8.6. The Development Plan (policy objective CPO 12.3) also commits to the preparation of an LTP to inform the LAP in consultation with the NTA and TII.

The NTA’s and TII’s *Area Based Transport Assessment Advice Note (2018) (ABTA)* and *ABTA How to Guide Guidance Document Pilot Methodology (2021)* should be considered by the planning authority in preparing the LTP. The LTP should inform the preparation of the LAP and in particular, the zoning provisions therein. It is recommended that the planning authority liaise with the NTA and TII in the preparation of the LTP.

The LAP should also set out an ambitious (but realistic) modal shift target for the area of the LAP. The transport strategy of the LAP should also demonstrate consistency with the Avoid-Shift-Improve principle, the implementation of the Decide Provide approach and the 10-minute town concept.

The proactive implementation of the *Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (revised 2019)*, will ensure that over time, the area will better accommodate pedestrians and cyclists, in addition to public transport where available. Similarly, the implementation of the NTA’s *Permeability Best Practice Guide* will also ensure enhanced pedestrian and cycle routes within the area of the LAP.

8. Climate change and flood risk management

It is a National Strategic Outcome of the NPF to transition to a low carbon, climate resilient society. The effective implementation of climate mitigation objectives through the LAP, consistent with national and regional policy objectives will be critical to the achievement of the Government’s greenhouse gas emissions reduction target to mitigate climate change.

² Census 2016



Flood risk management is the most critical climate change adaptation measure to be addressed in the LAP, informed by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). The planning authority should ensure that it has regard to the detailed requirements and provisions of section 28 *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2009), including the staged approach to flood risk assessment and, in particular, the application of the sequential approach and the requirement to carry out the plan-making justification test.

The planning authority should overlay the flood risk zones on any proposed land use zoning maps, to illustrate the potential flood risk arising and to demonstrate how the sequential approach has been applied. The planning authority is also requested to make a copy of digital mapping data available to the Office and to the OPW to facilitate assessment. The planning authority is advised to liaise with the OPW in the carrying out of SFRA to avoid issues arising at draft LAP stage.

In accordance with NPO 57, the LAP is required to integrate sustainable water management solutions, such as SuDS. In this regard, the Office would draw the planning authority's attention to *Nature-based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas, Water Sensitive Urban Design, Best Practice Interim Guidance Document* (2022).

9. Environment and natural and built heritage

The planning authority is the competent authority for the purposes of Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment. In this regard, the planning authority is required to have regard to the revised section 28 *Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities* (2022). It should also consider the *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities* (2010).

The planning authority should ensure the LAP is consistent with objectives of the NPF concerning environmental protection (NPO 52, NPO 57, NPO 58, NPO 60, NPO 62, NPO 63, NPO 64 and NPO 65, among others), in addition to the objectives of the RSES.

In particular, the Office highlights the importance of integrating green and blue infrastructure into the LAP. Planning for green and blue infrastructure can contribute to climate change adaptation, in particular flood risk management, through nature-based

solutions. It can also make a positive contribution to climate mitigation and have positive impacts on biodiversity.

Regarding built-heritage, the planning authority should consider what location specific objectives or measures would assist in the protection or improvement of built heritage over the period of the LAP. In this regard, the planning authority should have regard to the *Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2011).

10. Implementation and monitoring

The NPF and RSES place increased emphasis on the importance of monitoring the implementation of statutory strategies and plans, as a measure of plan effectiveness and to continually update a relevant evidence base to inform future planning strategies.

The planning authority is encouraged to provide for monitoring of implementation of the objectives of the LAP, having regard to the provisions of the Development Plans Guidelines and the LAP Guidelines.

11. Other matters

The Office invites the planning authority to submit a digital copy of all mapped data in respect of the proposed draft LAP in order to better facilitate its evaluation and assessment of the plan. In this regard, all spatial data should be in the format of either Web Map Service (WMS) or shapefile format, with the relevant attribute information attached.

Summary

In summary, the Office commends your planning authority for the preparation of this Issues Paper. The Office advises your planning authority to pay particular attention to the following issues in the preparation of the LAP:

- the housing supply targets for Wicklow Town – Rathnew should be consistent with the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022–2028;
- the approach to zoning of land for residential development should prioritise housing delivery in areas close to the facilities and services of the town centre, where land is already served by appropriate infrastructure or is capable of being serviced within the plan period, and is accessible by walking, cycling and public transport;

- an Infrastructure Assessment/Settlement Capacity Audit should be prepared in respect of all land use zoning;
- a Local Transport Plan should be prepared to set out how the modal share targets in the development plan will be achieved, and to inform:
 - land use zoning objectives based on accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport;
 - transport initiatives and measures to provide sustainable mobility options for residents and visitors, and in particular to connect more recent housing developments in Rathnew with the services and amenities and reduce dependence on the private car; and
 - public realm enhancements to improve the quality of the public environment within the town by prioritising pedestrians, the heritage of the town, social and commercial activities.

The planning authority is advised to consult with the NTA and TII in this regard.

- include site specific land activation measures and targeted objectives to ensure that sites identified for regeneration, including the Bayview Hotel and the VEHA factory, and key strategic parts of the settlement including, Wicklow Town Centre, Rathnew Village Centre, the Murrough area, the Port and Harbour and the Quayside/Riverside are advanced during the plan period;
- provide a sustainable policy framework to strengthen the employment base for Wicklow Town – Rathnew as a key employment hub for the county having regard to sustainable transport objectives and the Local Transport Plan;
- provide a policy framework for the enhancement and expansion of the Wicklow Port and Harbour;
- the implementation and the delivery of third-level education at the Wicklow County Campus in Clermont, Rathnew, that will support the development of the campus as a hub for the film industry and screen content creation sector;
- the development of a recreation and tourism hub having regard to the attractive coastal location and its proximity to key destinations;



- include objectives for the delivery of Traveller accommodation consistent with the objectives of the Development Plan and the Housing Strategy; and
 - prepare an updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and include policies and objectives in relation to the implementation of SuDS and nature-based solutions as a means for managing surface water run-off at key development sites.
- The planning authority is advised to consult with the OPW in this regard.

The Office looks forward to reviewing the future draft LAP and is committed to continued positive engagement with your authority in implementation of national and regional policies at the county and local level.

Please feel free to contact the staff of the Office in the context of your authority's responses to the above, which we would be happy to facilitate. Contact can be initiated through the undersigned or at plans@opr.ie.

Is mise le meas,

Anne Marie O'Connor

Deputy Regulator and Director of Plans Evaluations
