

23rd April 2025

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

**Re: Material Alterations to Variation No. 3 to the Wicklow County Development Plan
2022-2028**

A chara,

Thank you for your authority's work in preparing the proposed Material Alterations (the material alterations) to Variation No. 3 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 (the proposed Variation).

The Office of the Planning Regulator (the Office) has made a submission in respect of the proposed Material Alterations to the draft Blessington Local Area Plan 2025 (draft Local Area Plan) and intends to rely on same in respect of addressing the legislative and policy matters set out in section 31AO(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act).

The Office notes that the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 (the County Development Plan) states that after its adoption separate local area plans will be reviewed, and the proposed Variation acknowledges that these plans are subsidiary to the County Development Plan.

However, insofar as Wicklow County Council (the Planning Authority) consider it necessary to make a variation to the County Development Plan – for the stated reasons of ensuring the zoning and key development objectives of these local area plans clearly form part of the County Development Plan, and the zoning maps are adopted as part of the County

Development Plan – the Office makes this submission in respect of the proposed Variation to address the legislative and policy matters set out in section 31AM(2) of the Act.

Recommendations issued by the Office relate to clear breaches of the relevant legislative provisions, of the national or regional policy framework and/or of the policy of Government, as set out in the Ministerial guidelines under section 28. As such, planning authorities are requested to implement or address recommendation made by the Office in order to ensure consistency with the relevant policy and legislative provisions.

A submission also can include advice on matters that the Office considers would contribute positively to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. Planning authorities are requested by the Office to give full consideration to the advice contained in a submission.

On adoption of the Variation, the Office will consider whether the plan has been made in a manner consistent with the recommendations of the Office and whether the plan sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and development of the area concerned.

Overview

The Office is generally satisfied with the response to its recommendations made to the proposed Variation (draft stage) and in particular welcomes the commitment to prepare a Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Blessington.

The Office notes the material alterations include several zoning changes proposed across the plan area, which the Office accepts as reasonable, if not positive.

In relation to proposed New Residential Priority 1 lands (MA 19, MA 22 and MA 24 to the draft Local Area Plan), while the Office recognises the addition of these lands significantly exceeds the housing land required to meet population and housing targets set out in the County Development Plan core strategy, the sites are well-located in terms of proximity to the town centre, supporting compact growth and the sequential approach. In addition, MA 19 is supported by a clear policy framework (SLO 2) in respect of phasing the development of the lands in conjunction with the delivery of community and physical infrastructure, providing the basis for a long-term vision for Blessington, as envisaged by the recently published Revised National Planning Framework (February 2025).

The Office recognises that the preparation of an LTP provides an opportunity for active travel linkages to / from and within SLO 2 (MA 19 to the draft Local Area Plan) to be considered given its proximity to the town centre, community facilities and amenities, and for active travel and sustainable transport measures to be key considerations for the future development of proposed Active Open Space zoned lands under MA 30 to the draft Local Area Plan. Once completed, to ensure integration of land use and transport planning, the LTP should be integrated into the Local Area Plan area in the County Development Plan via the variation process under section 13 of the Act. It is critical that this evidence-based assessment informs the plan and provides a clear rationale for decision making. This is addressed in MA Recommendation 1 below.

It is within the above context that the submission sets out one recommendation under the following key theme:

Key theme	Recommendation	Observation
Integrated land use and transport planning	MA Recommendation 1	-

1. Integrated land use and transport planning

The Office welcomes the Planning Authority's commitment to prepare an LTP for Blessington, as proposed under MA 11 to the draft Local Area Plan, which will be prepared following adoption of the Local Area Plan and proposed Variation. To ensure integration of land use and transport planning, as per RPO 8.1 and 8.4 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA), the key provisions of the LTP should be integrated into the Local Area Plan area in the County Development Plan via a variation under section 13 of the Act, and any adjustments should be made to the County Development Plan accordingly.

The Office recognises the preparation of an LTP provides an opportunity for active travel measures and linkages to be incorporated as part of the development of New Residential Priority 1 zoned lands proposed under MA 19 to the draft Local Area Plan within SLO 2, given the sites proximity to the town centre, community facilities and amenities, and as part of the future development of Active Open Space zoned land under MA 30 to the draft Local Area Plan given its peripheral location, supporting the development of a long-term vision for

Blessington. The Office recommends additional text is included, as a minor modification, in MA 19 (SLO 2) and MA 30 to address this, in accordance with NPO 27 of the National Planning Framework (NPF).

MA Recommendation 1 – Integration of land use and sustainable transport

Having regard to the provision of a sustainable Transport Strategy and the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society including the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and in particular to:

- NPO 64 of the NPF to improve air quality through integrated land use and spatial planning that supports public transport and active travel modes;
- NPO 27 of the NPF to prioritise walking and cycling accessibility in the design of our communities;
- RPO 8.1 and RPO 8.4 of the RSES for the integration of land use and transport planning; and
- the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended, mandatory target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 51%, and the Climate Action Plan 2025, and associated actions including the National Sustainable Mobility Policy (2022) targets to reduce vehicle kilometres travelled per year and the National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (2021),

the Planning Authority is recommended to make Variation No. 3 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 with the following amendments:

- (i) incorporate the key provisions of the forthcoming Local Transport Plan for Blessington into the Blessington Local Area Plan 2025 area as a Variation under section 13 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (or any equivalent provision under the Planning and Development Act 2024);
- (ii) include new wording for the following zoning changes proposed under material alteration 2:
 - (a) MA 19 to provide pedestrian and cycle linkages through and between the New Residential Priority 1 lands and surrounding developments to improve

permeability and provide shorter and more direct access to schools, public transport, local services and amenities; and

- (b) MA 30 to provide pedestrian and cycle linkages between the Active Open Space zoned lands and surrounding developments to improve permeability and provide shorter, more direct routes to the site.

Summary

The Office requests that your authority addresses the recommendation outlined above. As you are aware, the report of the chief executive of your authority prepared for the elected members under section 13 of the Act must summarise these recommendations and the manner in which they will be addressed.

At the end of the process, your authority is required to notify this Office **within five working days** of the decision of the Planning Authority in relation to the proposed Variation. Where your authority decides not to comply with the recommendations of the Office, or otherwise makes the plan in such a manner as to be inconsistent with the recommendations made by this Office, then the chief executive shall inform the Office and give reasons for this decision.

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 plans@opr.ie.

Is mise le meas,



Anne Marie O'Connor

Deputy Regulator and Director of Plans Evaluation

Designated Public Official under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015
