



Oifig an
Rialaitheora Pleanála
Office of the
Planning Regulator

OPR Ref: MA-006-24

23rd April 2025

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

Re: Material Alterations to the Draft Blessington Local Area Plan 2025

A chara,

Thank you for your authority's work in preparing the proposed Material Alterations (material alterations) to the draft Blessington Local Area Plan 2025 (the Local Areal Plan).

As Wicklow County Council (Planning Authority) is aware, a core function of the Office of the Planning Regulator (the Office) is the strategic evaluation and assessment of statutory plans to ensure consistency with legislative and policy requirements relating to planning. This includes a requirement to make submissions on statutory plans, including any observations or recommendations the Office considers necessary to ensure the effective co-ordination of national, regional and local planning requirements.

The Office has evaluated and assessed the proposed material alterations under the provisions of sections 31AO(1) and 31AO(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act), and within the context of the Office's earlier recommendations and observations.

The Office's evaluation and assessment of the proposed material alterations has regard to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 (the County Development Plan), the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the

Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) area and relevant section 28 guidelines.

Overview

The Office welcomes the positive response to the issues raised by the Office through the recommendations and observations made in the Office's submission to the draft Local Area Plan including the commitment to prepare a Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Blessington, the introduction of objectives to support the improvement of water quality at the Poulaphouca Reservoir and the inclusion of information on implementation for all Local Area Plan objectives to facilitate monitoring.

The Office notes the material alterations include several zoning changes proposed across the plan area, which the Office accepts as reasonable.

In relation to proposed New Residential Priority 1 lands (MA 19, MA 22 and MA 24), while the Office recognises the addition of these lands 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.

The Office recognises the preparation of an LTP provides an opportunity for active travel linkages to / from and within SLO 2 (MA 19) 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.

It is critical that this evidence-based assessment informs the plan and provides a clear rationale for decision making. As such, the Local Area Plan should include a commitment to integrating the key measures from the LTP into the Local Area Plan area in the County Development Plan via the variation process under section 13 of the Act. This is addressed in MA Recommendation 1 below.

It is within this context the submission below sets out one (1) recommendation under the following theme:

Key theme	Recommendation	Observation
Integrated Land Use and Transport Planning	MA Recommendation 1	-

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(s) made by the Office in order to ensure consistency with the relevant policy and legislative provisions.

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

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, which will be prepared following adoption of this draft Local Area Plan. To ensure integration of land use and transport planning, as per RPO 8.1 and 8.4 of the RSES, 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 amendments should be made to the Local Area 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 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 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 CPO 12.13 and 12.14 of the County Development Plan.

MA Recommendation 1 – Integration of land use and sustainable transport

Having regard to the need for the integration of land use and sustainable transportation, and in particular to:

- RPO 8.1 and RPO 8.4 of the RSES for the integration of land use and transport planning;
- 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);
- CPO 12.3 to prepare a Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Blessington of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 (the County Development Plan);
- sustainable mobility objectives CPO 12.1 and CPO 12.2 of the County Development Plan;
- cycling and walking objectives CPO 12.13, CPO 12.14, CPO 12.15, CPO 12.16 and CPO 12.17 of the County Development Plan; and
- public transport objectives CPO 12.20 and 12.21 of the County Development Plan,

the Planning Authority is recommended to modify the material alterations as follows:

- (i) MA 11 to incorporate the key provisions of the forthcoming LTP 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) 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
- (iii) 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 20 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 making of the Local Area Plan under section 31AO(5) of the Act. Where your authority decides not to comply with the recommendations of the Office, or otherwise makes the Local Area Plan in such a manner as to be inconsistent with the recommendations of the Office, the Chief Executive must, in the notice letter, inform the Office accordingly and state the reasons for the decision of the planning authority.

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,

Handwritten signature of Anne Marie O'Connor in black ink.

Anne Marie O'Connor

Deputy Regulator and Director of Plans Evaluation

Designated Public Official under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015
